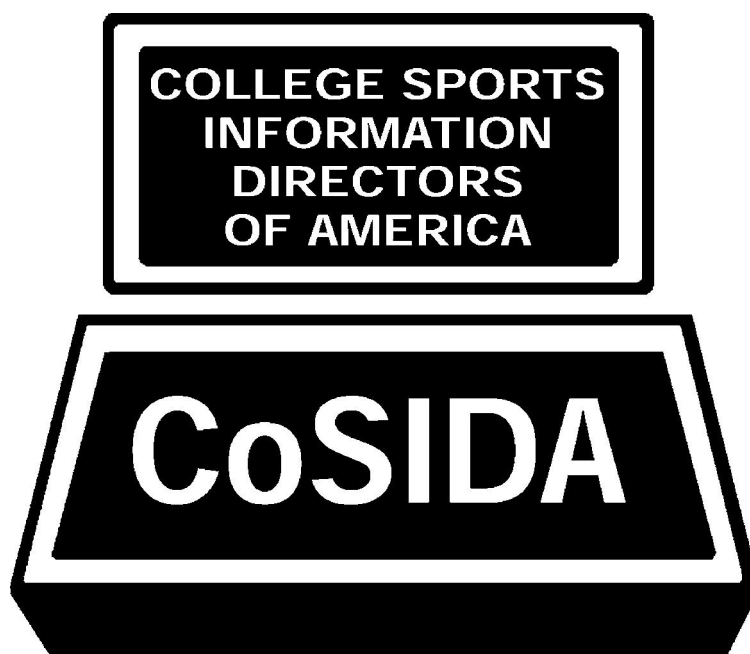


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FEATURED LISTINGS

Inside the Promise and Peril of YouTube

January 29, 2007

By Brian Morrissey

NEW YORK It is an unerring tenet of social media: After decades of delivering monologues to captive consumers, advertisers need to join the conversation. But early results of advertising on social media wunderkind YouTube have been mixed, as some users take the invitation to engage as an opportunity to lambaste brands.



After a rapturous reception for an earlier video, Dove felt the sting of YouTube criticism for a follow-up effort.

Dove felt the backlash from an ad posted this month, as did Burger King and Atlantic Records with the fall launch of DiddyTV, a channel on YouTube that elicited scathing comments and a popular video spoof for what many saw as clumsy celebrity marketing. Such stumbles, executives say, are inevitable in new media terrain like YouTube, which is trying to balance its community-driven roots with a workable ad model.

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Dove in recent months has acutely felt both the promise and peril of YouTube as an ad medium. As part of its "Real Beauty" campaign, the Unilever brand banked a certified YouTube hit with "The Evolution of Real Beauty" uploaded to YouTube in October, which has since drawn 1.8 million views and gotten four of five stars from users, making it the 31st most favorite YouTube video of all time. But the site has a fickle audience, as evidenced by a follow-up effort for Dove Cream Oil Body Wash that launched earlier this month. In a 20-second video shown on the site's front page, Grey's Anatomy star Sara Ramirez invites viewers to help Dove make a TV commercial to air during next month's Academy Awards. The reaction was not positive, judging from the one star the video has received.

Figuring out an acceptable method for advertising on YouTube is of critical importance to both its owner, Google, which paid \$1.65 billion for the site in October, and advertisers, who are eager to tap into the video-sharing phenomenon by crafting ads people elect to watch. That's the idea behind YouTube's two main ad products: "participatory video ads" that run on its front page, and the "brand channels" it sets up for advertisers. Like other videos, ad spots can be commented upon and shared.

"The users who come to YouTube are coming to engage with content," said Jamie Byrne, director of advertising strategy at YouTube. "The same principles hold true when you look at advertising on YouTube."

Yet the nature of the environment makes hits and misses inevitable. Mike Hemingway, global managing director on the Dove account at WPP Group's Ogilvy & Mather, said for brands to stand out with consumers, they need to stake out ground that will sometimes cause negative reactions. The "Real Beauty" push is designed to provoke just those sorts of reactions, he said, and the totality of the effort shows how well it's working. "You have to have an edge to get people to notice you," he said.

Sometimes that notice can get extreme. The Cream Oil spot highlights the power of placement on YouTube's

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front page. The video attracted hundreds of thousands of viewers, eventually reaching 2.9 million streams-enough to qualify it as the most popular video on the site of the month.

But all that attention came with a price in the form of scathing feedback that led Dove to shut off the comments on the video, a move that further stoked the ire of several YouTube users as inconsistent with the communal nature of the site. Without comments on the video page, several moved to the Dove channel page to voice their complaints.

"OK, you have money, so you bought your add[sic] on front page," said one. "But it ruins the meaning of YouTube-sharing videos and commenting [on] them."

One user even made a video monologue pointing to the spot as a prime example of how marketers and their agencies still don't understand how to market on sites like YouTube, running typical TV commercials with calls to action that do not resonate. "People are obviously trying to send you a message," he advised.

Byrne said YouTube encourages brands to keep comments open and learn from them. Hemingway, however, said brands still needed to keep the boundaries on discussions it provokes. "The debate there was more unexpected," he said. "It's curious that people care so much."

Sometimes that means a brand cutting its losses. In October, Burger King loudly trumpeted its partnership with Sean Combs for DiddyTV. But the intro video showing Diddy ordering food at Burger King and talking about "buying" a YouTube channel engendered such a backlash that it has since been removed entirely from the site, although DiddyTV is still running. A Burger King rep said Diddy's label was responsible for all content. A Diddy spokeswoman did not respond to messages.

The Dove and Burger King examples show the conundrum faced by YouTube advertisers in the crosshairs: How do they police their brand images without coming off as inauthentic members of the community? A promotion on YouTube of the *Superman Returns* DVD late this fall elicited chatter that Warner Home Video and its ad agency were creating fake profiles so they could subscribe to the channel and bump up its popularity ranking-in effect, gaming the system. Real Branding, the San Francisco independent behind the campaign, denied this and tracked down the source of the rumor, then had YouTube explain to him he was mistaken in his belief that Warner was cheating to raise its ranking.

"You have a vocal minority online of people who will assume the worst," said Cory Treffiletti, vp of media services at Real Branding. More than just accepting criticism, brands should in some way learn from it and respond when appropriate, he added. "Negative

feedback is fine, just don't ignore it," he said.

The uneven results highlight the fact that the hurly-burly of social media sites like YouTube are not for every brand, said Greg Verdino, director of emerging channels at Digitas. While it is easy for outsiders to pontificate that brands need to give up control, many have invested literally billions in building up their brand equity-making them understandably wary of putting it on the line.

"These types of viral distribution opportunities can go very wrong very fast," he said.

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FEBRUARY 2007 ISSUE

Newspapers shine covering the Super Bowl

By LYNN HOPPES
Orlando Sentinel

Story posted on Feb. 5, 2007

Newspapers need Super Bowls in their towns every day. If that happened, we probably wouldn't be panicking about our future. Seriously. Check out the Miami Herald today. The Sun-Sentinel in South Florida. Check out the Chicago Tribune. The Indianapolis Star. The Palm Beach Post. All had their sports editors and a bushel of staff members in South Florida for the Super Bowl and all had successful advertising sales for their newspapers.

Big events show that newspapers still have a place in our world. The word I like to use is "comprehensive". The features. The notes. The charts. The stats. The lists. The photos. The keepsake nature of the section.

The Chicago Tribune had so many ads that they had to wrap the business section with ANOTHER sports section.

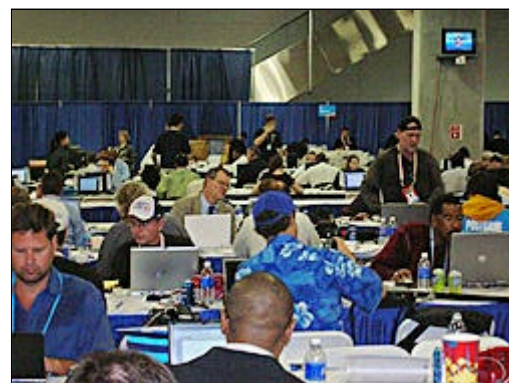
The Sun-Sentinel in South Florida was budgeting for one set of space and was given an extra 12 pages in the final few days.

The Miami Herald cleared more than \$1 million in advertising and put out monster profitable special sections each day.

Like I said, we need Super Bowls in our towns each and every day.

So how did some of it look?

...



Photos by Lynn Hoppes
Pictures from the media room at Super Bowl XLI.

For information:**Jim Jenks****(E-mail), 215-854-4545****Herb Stutz****(E-mail), 928-717-2271****[Workshop materials](#)**

Our night went just fine, thanks to a convincing victory and a game that finished before 10 p.m. All of our writers, spread throughout the stadium, remained on their email throughout the game so that we could be in constant communication. Thus, all angles were covered and there was no duplication. We put out a 20-page section, thanks again to robust ad sales, and had lots of room for photos. We had one photo page with fans, and a whole page dedicated to Prince's halftime who, with photos and a music review. During the game, several staffers – from the beat writers to the pop music critic to the sports business writer to our consumer columnist – blogged on our website. We're all glad it's over and trying to forget for a while that the Super Bowl comes back in three years.

— **Brian White**, *Sun-Sentinel South Florida*

• • •

We had Martin Fennelly's column on Dungy on 1A; we were going that way no matter what happened in the game because Dungy was the story for many of our readers. We also ran the Super Bowl commercial sidebar and halftime show sidebar inside A section. We had game story and a second column that focused on the Bears on the front of Sports, along with three sidebars, including a local fans sidebar, notebook (leading with ex-Buc Booger McFarland), photo page, drive chart page and full stats inside. We were shorted on color so the photo page was black and white, but it worked as we went with the Slippery When Wet angle and focused on photos of the conditions and mistakes.



Photo by Lynn Hoppes

— **Nick Pugliese**, *Tampa Tribune*

• • •

All in all, we were very happy with our live coverage of rainy Super Bowl XLI – and most important, the bosses are happy. We had a 24-page special section. 1A took Dan Le Batard's column and Michelle Kaufman's scene piece. Our main headline on 1A was Colts Reign. Our main headline in Sports was Watershed Moment. The staff photos and headlines were all good, but the Colts didn't show a lot of emotion so I wouldn't say the photos were great. 1A displayed a nice photo of Tony Dungy being carried off the field. The display art on the Sports front (of Manning and Dungy, with Manning holding up the Super Bowl trophy in the rain) was historical, but it didn't necessarily jump off the page. I thought we covered all the bases well. We had a terrific week leading up to game day, and our deadline effort (aided by a game that ended 45 minutes earlier than we thought it would) was solid. Le Batard narrated a slide show after the game, and we had a fans slideshow as well. We passed out 100 "Colts Win" poster pages in a shameless attempt to see our paper on TV (it made the Stadium JumboTron, but didn't make much TV – in part because they were wet). Dave Barry's live blog was a big hit, with more than 50,000 original page views, and tons of reader comments. We updated the game online as it went along. Our web site kicked butt all week.

Our section had a 5-inch container by Greg Cote on the front, along with teases and an MVP box. We had our very popular Bowl Buzz on Page 2 (I would have like it further back in the section, but it wasn't doable), the Super Bowl main on 3,

and Edwin Pope on Peyton Manning on 4. We had a color page on the rain, with a Slippery When Wet headline and a weather story. We had color art of Prince's halftime show in the A section and also one with a review in Sports. We had four pages for quarter-by-quarter breakdowns (a page for each quarter – two in color). Rounding out the section were stories on Grossman, former UM players Hester and Wayne scoring TDs, Vinatieri, the Colts' maligned D, excerpts from Dave Barry's blog, traffic delays, and dueling TV columns by Glenn Garvin (commercials) and Barry Jackson (Jim Nantz/pregame/etc.). One thing I think we could have done better is cover the scalping/ticket price angle, which we thought the city reporter who wrote traffic was going to have in his story. But the bottom line is we're tickled with how the week worked out, our paper generated a lot of revenue (I'm hearing more than \$1.5 million), and we're really, really happy it's over!

— **Jorge Rojas**, *Miami Herald*

• • •

While the Indianapolis Colts poured in on the Bears during a driving rainstorm in Super Bowl XLI, the Orlando Sentinel sports team managed to stay dry in Miami and hit our deadlines at home. We had 5 writers on site at Super Bowl XLI and a staff of 13 in the office producing a eight-pages of Super Bowl coverage plus an overplay presence on our A front. Like the Colts, we entered the night with a solid plan and made enough game-time adjustments to come out with the victory. We had a couple of turnovers and some bad penalties, but the overall effort and final product was a solid win. All the pre-planning and formatting not only helped in making our product cleaner and leaner, but it also assisted in giving the writers lengths that were firmly set, allowing them to maximize the use of their time. Nothing was left to chance on the packaging and design so we did not have worry about inventing the product on deadline. Of course, we have contingency plans for disasters and the like, but within the framework of a Super Bowl, we were in solid shape. We had hoped to produce a live post-game MVP poster, however we lost our editorial position on the back page because of the flux of insurance company ads we've gotten in the wake of last Friday's fatal storms.

— **Bill Speros**, *Orlando Sentinel*

• • •

The Palm Beach Post team thankfully left the Super Bowl with all of its electronic equipment in working order. We were lucky – our auxiliary press row seats just made it under the stadium overhang. Reporters in the two rows in front of us were soaked; we experienced mild mist with an occasional gust of hard rain.

Our coverage included a 1A game-related column and rain-themed scene story, along with an inside-A photo/pullout package on the best and worst TV commercials. Sports produced a 12-page separate section, including "Scene" page, rain-themed photo page and stories on all the main subjects – Manning, Dungy, Grossman, etc.

One thing we did not do was a traditional game story, instead covering main angles with columns and sidebars and producing a Game Recap page with quarter-by-quarter breakdown, stats, grades, etc., to handle game details.

Local product Devin Hester helped us out by returning the opening kickoff; we paired a game sidebar on Hester with a story/photo package from a family party at his grandparents' house, including art of everyone watching their hero run back

Carnegie-Knight Task Force

Carnegie-Knight Initiative on
the Future of Journalism Education

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Local News Losing Out in America's Schools

Carnegie-Knight Task Force Finds Internet Has Led Teachers to Rely on National News

Cambridge, MA., January 29, 2007 — A new survey released today by the Carnegie-Knight Task Force at Harvard University shows a strong movement in America's classrooms toward the use of Internet-based news and away from the use of newspapers and television news, a trend that is virtually certain to continue.

The study also shows that teachers, as they have moved to the Internet, have switched from using hundreds of local news outlets to making use of a small number of national ones. Internet-based news in the classroom is dominated by the websites of a few top news organizations including CNN, PBS, and *The New York Times*. In fact, the classroom use of non-U.S. websites, such as BBC's, even exceeds the use of local TV or newspaper sites.

The report is based on parallel national surveys of over 1,250 social studies, civics, and government teachers in grades 5 through 12, as well as several hundred Newspaper-in-Education (NIE) program directors at daily newspapers.

The Carnegie-Knight Task Force, launched in 2005, is a group of America's leading scholars on journalism dedicated to research on policy and education issues. The report, *The Internet and the Threat It Poses to Local Media: Lessons from News in the Schools*, is the second study from the Carnegie-Knight Task Force, whose research arm is based at the Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics & Public Policy at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government.

- more -

The survey of teachers showed that half are making greater use of news today than they were a few years ago, an increase attributable to developments outside the school such as the war on terrorism and the fighting in Iraq. But not all sources of news are doing equally well in the classroom. Internet-based news has supplanted that provided by local newspapers and by national and local television outlets.”

“Since the nation’s founding, the community story—as told by local newspapers—has been an everyday part of Americans’ experience,”” said Thomas Patterson, Bradlee Professor of Government and the Press at Harvard University, who directed the survey. “In America’s classrooms, this story is shrinking as a result of teachers’ preference for Internet-based news.”

For over 20 years, hundreds of large and small U.S. dailies have provided free or reduced rate copies of their newspapers for classroom use by students through the Newspapers-in-Education program. Touted as a means of improving students’ reading, spelling, and writing skills as well as contributing to civic education, it has also been a way to encourage students to become lifelong newspaper readers.

“In America’s schools, local newspapers are losing out to the Internet,” said Alex S. Jones, director of the Shorenstein Center and a member of the Task Force. “We need to start rethinking how the NIE program can be most effective and how to bolster local media in the classroom.”

Patterson noted that some local newspapers have attempted to counter the challenge from the mainstream national and international sites. Within the past two years, the *Denver Post* and the *Louisville Courier-Journal* launched “e-editions” of their papers for classroom use, and more recently, the *Idaho Press-Tribune* began a program that aims to get its e-edition into half of the middle and high schools within its circulation area.

The survey also finds that among teachers now making use of news, 67 percent claim “the Internet has made news use in the classroom easier and better,” and their media choices further reveal the Internet’s dominance. Fifty-seven percent of the teachers surveyed say they frequently use Internet-based news in the classroom -- roughly twice the proportion using national television news or the daily newspapers on a frequent basis.

The teachers surveyed were randomly sampled from Market Data Retrieval’s list of more than 30,000 social studies, civics, and government teachers and were contacted through the Internet over a two-month period in the fall of 2006. In addition, over 250 NIE program directors were surveyed during the same period to discover what their newspapers were doing to promote classroom use of the newspaper.

“We found that newspapers are only dimly aware that they are losing ground in the classroom,” said Patterson. “In fact, very few are making a substantial effort to promote their websites in the schools. They continue to market the hard copy of the newspaper, despite evidence that many of today’s young people are not interested in it.”

Earlier this month the Carnegie-Knight Task Force released its first report, *Mandatory Testing and News in the Schools: Implications for Civic Education*, which examined the use of daily news in the classroom and how this use is affected by standardized testing.

The Carnegie-Knight Task Force is one element of the Carnegie-Knight Initiative on the Future of Journalism Education. It focuses on developing a vision of what journalism schools can be at major universities. The Task Force aims to carry out research and create a platform for educators to speak on policy and journalism education issues. All these efforts grew out of a partnership involving the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the deans of four of the nation's leading journalism schools -- Orville Schell, Dean of the Graduate School of Journalism, University of California at Berkeley; Nicholas Lemann, Dean of the Graduate School of Journalism, Columbia University; John Lavine, Dean of the Medill School of Journalism, Northwestern University; Geoffrey Cowan, Dean of the Annenberg School of Communication, University of Southern California -- and Alex S. Jones, Director of the Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government. Carnegie-Knight Task Force members are Orville Schell, Nicholas Lemann, John Lavine, Geoffrey Cowan and Alex Jones.

Carnegie Corporation of New York is a philanthropic foundation created by Andrew Carnegie in 1911 to promote the advancement and diffusion of knowledge and understanding among the people of the United States. For more information about the Corporation, go to www.carnegie.org. The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation promotes excellence in journalism worldwide and invests in the vitality of U.S. communities where the Knight brothers owned newspapers. For more information about Knight Foundation, go to www.knightfdn.org.

The full report can be accessed on January 29, 2007 at www.shorensteincenter.org

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For Donovan, SEC Is the Best Conference

By CHRIS TALBOTT
Associated Press Writer

STARKVILLE, Miss. — Billy Donovan sounded a lot like Urban Meyer. Donovan, the Florida basketball coach, was preaching the gospel about the superiority of the Southeastern Conference. The speech was much the same as Meyer's when he lobbied last fall for the Gators to have a place in the BCS title game against Ohio State.

Meyer's team got to the big game and won the national title. Donovan won his title last season and his Gators are No. 1 again.

But the rest of the league? The SEC has only three ranked teams. Yet Donovan said it's time the nation shows the SEC some respect as a basketball conference.

The league is "by far" the best, he said. "And it clearly does not get enough respect."

Donovan's logic doesn't stray far from Meyer's: The SEC is chock full of top teams with records that are blemished because they feed on each other.

In football, the SEC not only won a national championship but also placed nine teams in bowls.

In basketball, the Gators won the national title and conference rival LSU also made the Final Four. South Carolina even won the NIT.

Donovan, speaking after his team was nearly upset by Mississippi State last week, contends that those SEC that didn't make the postseason are much better this year. Mississippi, Mississippi State and Auburn essentially all return five starters and Georgia has wins over formerly ranked Kentucky and LSU.

"These are teams that have really closed the gap from the teams that are supposed to be ranked and upper echelon," Donovan said.

Yet at roughly the same time Donovan was boosting the SEC, 600 miles west in Waco, Texas, Kansas coach Bill Self was pumping up the Big 12, which has four ranked teams. Texas A&M and Kansas are in the top 10 and Oklahoma State is No. 12. Texas Tech beat A&M and Kansas within a few days. No. 22 Texas, which has been in and out of the rankings all season, has one of the best players in the country in Kevin Durant.

The league has a three-way tie — Kansas, Texas A&M and Texas — atop the standings. And Oklahoma State and Texas Tech are part of a three-way jumble in second.

"People don't really get it nationally — our league is really good," Self said after an 82-56 victory over Baylor. "It's by far the best it's been since I've been here."

"How many leagues in America have five teams that good? I would say there would be very few, if any."

ESPN college basketball analyst Jay Bilas disagrees with both coaches. He has a West Coast bias.

"I think the Pac-10 is making a pretty good case," Bilas said. "I mean Arizona is a pretty solid team, and they're 5-4 in the league and they're seventh."

Unlike Meyer, Donovan will get to test his hypothesis. College basketball features a national playoff, which helps to eliminate persistent little problems like an undefeated Boise State.

"Right now is the start of a really important part of the year," Bilas said. "The committee says your last 10 games are important. Right now is about the time where we're hitting the last 10 games. There may be a few teams that have built up enough brownie points that they can go on a big losing skid and be OK, but there aren't very many of them."

In the SEC, 10 of 12 teams could reach or exceed 20 victories by winning 80 percent of their games through March. Ten Big 12 teams are within reach. The Pac-10 has seven teams, the Big Ten eight, the Atlantic Coast Conference nine and the Big East 12 that are a long winning streak away from consideration.

The key will be which team can put together a run.

In the SEC West, that may be difficult. So far, only one of the six teams has managed a conference road win (Arkansas) and none is above .500 in league play. Arkansas and Auburn lead the West at 3-4. Ole Miss is last, but just a mid-range jumper out of first at 2-5.

"The West is just wild right now," Arkansas coach Stan Heath said.

Donovan said the league is the deepest it has been in his 16 years as an assistant and head coach. Mississippi's Andy Kennedy said he "jumped from the frying pan into the fire" when he moved from Cincinnati of last year's hot league, the Big East, to the SEC.

And there's no question the SEC draws attention, Donovan's protestations aside.

LSU coach John Brady noted the difference between the time he was an assistant in Starkville in the 1980s and today, with Mississippi State planning to spend \$45 million on an arena upgrade and separate practice facility.

"I think there's more emphasis on basketball at every university now," Brady said. "They've redone arenas or built new arenas and there's more promotion of it. They realize you can create revenue."

Those new facilities draw better athletes and those athletes are lifting the conference.

If only the rest of the nation would take notice.

"I don't know if there's any upper echelon anymore in our league," Brady said. "Just look at the West's record. I know RPI-wise we're the No. 1 conference, but really it is a very, very hard conference."

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Battle vs. cancer races on

By Terry Frei
 Denver Post Staff Columnist
 Denver Post

Article Last Updated:02/06/2007 12:19:42 AM MST

In June 2002, 76ers general manager Billy King appeared at a lemonade stand in the front yard of the home in suburban Philadelphia, said hello to the young girl proprietor, bought some lemonade and made a contribution.

The young girl was 6-year-old Alexandra Scott.

Two days before her first birthday, "Alex" had been diagnosed with neuroblastoma, a children's cancer. In ensuing years, through numerous surgeries, many sieges of chemotherapy, stem-cell transplants and experimental treatments, she gave those around her a lesson in bravery, perseverance and even perspective.

The first time King visited her, she was holding her third annual Alex's Lemonade Stand, raising money for pediatric cancer research - not really for her, but for others. On that day alone, she raised \$12,000 and donated it to the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

King helped see to it that Alex Scott was honored as the 76ers' Hometown Hero award winner at the 2002-03 season opener, a night when Allen Iverson scored 35 points in a win over the Knicks. King kept coming back to Alex's Stand the next two years.

Alex died in August 2004. She was 8.

Today, the 76ers' Hometown Hero award, handed out at every home game, is named after her. Two weeks ago, King was honored with the Alex Scott Crystal Cup at the inaugural "Lemonade Ball" in Philadelphia, and the gala raised \$475,000 for the Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation.

"He was one of the first ones we called to be on our board of directors," Alex's mother, Liz Scott, said Monday from the Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation office in Wynnwood, Pa. "We thought maybe he wouldn't have enough time or be hesitant to commit, but he right away said he would, and he's gotten more and more involved ever since."

I've contributed and been on the mailing list for a while, and I thought about Alex more over the past few weeks, unashamedly in part because of a horse racing connection. I'm upfront about being moved by Barbaro's struggle for life and shaken by his death. I know others believed the human passion for an equine story was much-ado excess, but I still don't understand why they simply didn't move on to those things that interest them more - such as those discussions over who might be the Rockies' fifth starter, or the always-compelling semantic debate over whether golfers are athletes.

When Barbaro died, I also thought of another famous horse whose career ended prematurely because of injury, 2005 Preakness and Belmont winner Afleet Alex, and again about the little girl who - coincidentally, but providentially - was his namesake.

After finishing third in the Kentucky Derby, Afleet Alex won the final two legs of the Triple Crown. Soon after his Belmont win, he was found to have a hairline fracture in his left front cannon bone. He recovered from that, but other problems sprang up, and in December 2005, his owners - five down-to-earth friends from the Philadelphia area - announced the colt's retirement. He is at stud at Gainesway Farm in Lexington, Ky., and his first offspring, a colt, was born Jan. 21.

Before and during the 2005 Triple Crown campaign, Afleet Alex's owners were instrumental in calling attention to, and supporting, Alex's Lemonade Stand. Alex was gone by then, but her picture and her battle were one of the major story lines of that Triple Crown season.

"We were wondering if we would be able to keep this going without Alex," Liz said. "But with Afleet Alex, we were able to take it to a whole new level, and millions of people were able to hear about our daughter and keep the cause going."

In Monday's mail, I received my latest newsletter from Alex's Lemonade Stand. The foundation raised \$5 million in 2006, about \$1 million of it coming from more than 1,000 Lemonade Stands run by children from coast to coast. Among the many grants awarded was one for \$100,000 to Denver Children's Hospital. The Englewood-based Big O Tires is one of the foundation's major sponsors.

"If you saw this in a movie, you'd say, 'Oh, come on,'" Liz Scott said. "I still am just amazed at the generosity of people and how kids especially have grabbed onto this and continued it."

The foundation's website is www.alexslimonade.org.

Advertisement

Feb. 1 [Reality Check](#)

The Benefit of Many Winners

By [John V. Lombardi](#)

Now that the college football season is finally past, the headlines have abated, and all eyes are on the professional extravaganza of the Super Bowl, we might take a look at that hardy perennial argument: college football bowl games vs. a possible national championship tournament. Those of us who find ourselves in the college football environment often discover that our friends and relatives, colleagues and students, eagerly engage this question.

Triggered in part by the endless controversy over the [Bowl Championship Series](#) (BCS) selection process and nurtured by the extravaganza of the NCAA's Division I college basketball tournament, many observers champion a revision of big time college football's bowl system to construct a championship process for the teams in Division I-A, following the model of the [NCAA Division I-AA tournament](#). (I know the official NCAA designations are Bowl Division and Championship Division but old habits die hard.)

The drama turns on that desperate American need to establish who is Number *One* in everything every year. Whether best dressed, best movie, best college, best hot dog, or best college football team, Americans cannot abide the possibility that Number *One* is an irrelevancy among high quality products, and that the difference between any Number *One* and the Numbers *Two* through *Five* or more is likely to be minuscule and accidental. Still, we love our Number *One*.

So the first knock against the bowl games is that they do not produce a real champion but a constructed champion. For those who do not follow these things, the current system uses a variety of rankings by computers, by coaches, and by sports writers to determine which two teams play for the title of National Champion in a bowl game. The rest of the teams, in more or less descending order by the ranking system, get bids to participate in less significant bowl games. All the bowl games are played after the regular season ends beginning in early December and continuing until early January, with the title bowl game played at the end of the sequence, this year on January 8.

Many people are not aware that the college football bowl games do not belong to the NCAA but rather are commercial enterprises of the bowl venues (the stadiums and communities that house them) that negotiate with the football conferences. The current bowl championship system emerged as the premier football conferences and the major bowl venues developed a system to permit a final game between the two highest ranked teams in the nation in a format that would generate the most interest and money. By every measure of interest, participation, ticket sales, advertising, and television revenue, the current big-time bowl system is a huge success.

However, because the top level of competition is structured by rankings derived from computer and expert polls, many object that the top two ranked teams may not be the best because the rankings are mathematical or opinion based and may not actually pit the very best contenders against each other as might happen to some extent in a tournament format. Hence, the Number *One* crowd argues for a Division I-A football tournament.

In contrast, Division I-AA, which is made up of conferences and institutions that support football at a somewhat

reduced scale and with significantly reduced expenses, concludes its season with a football tournament that pits teams selected by conference and by various other criteria against each other to produce a final game between presumably the two best teams in Division I-AA in America. This activity is controlled by the NCAA on behalf of the conferences and institutions in this division.

So which is best? A reasonable academic response might be: Who cares? But as many pure academics have discovered, many people really care. So let me offer a perspective on these competitions.

The money is important, but truth be told, the money is really significant mainly for the top bowls. Even then, while [these bowls pay out a good sum](#), the money almost always goes to the conference, not the institution, and the conference shares the revenue among its 10 to 12 members. Twenty-two bowls pay between \$750,000 and \$1.65 million; five pay between \$2 million and \$6 million, and the five BCS bowls pay out at \$14 million to \$17 million. Although the payday is important for the top bowls, only the top 10 meet or exceed the likely cost of participation. The rest of the Division I-A teams participate for the value of the experience because the money does not fully compensate for the cost of competing in the bowl game.

The impartiality of a tournament for establishing the best of the best among football teams is not quite as effective as we might imagine. In the case of Division I-AA, of the 16 participants in that football tournament, 8 participants are selected as a result of winning their conference. The remaining eight participants are chosen by a committee from the remaining members of those conferences and from among 49 other teams in Division I-AA. While the committee is surely wise in its choices, it is no more wise than the people and computers who select the participants in the Division I-A bowl games, and the Division I-AA tournament may or may not include the truly best teams competing for the position of Number *One*.

Another perspective on these end-of-season events evaluates the odds of participating. Division I-AA has 106 football teams that compete in their conferences with the hope of participating in the tournament. The tournament field, however, has space for only 16 teams, which means only 15 percent of the eligible football teams have a shot at a postseason experience. As a result of the tournament format, only two teams can participate in the championship final game, and of course, only one emerges as a winner. When it is all over, in Division I-AA, only one football team and its fans can celebrate a victorious end of season achievement. We have one winner to be sure, but we have 105 losers.

Division I-A, however, has 119 teams eligible for a postseason bowl game. This past season, 32 bowl games provided opportunities for 64 teams to have an end of season competition on national television. Over half of the NCAA Division I-A football teams had a shot at winning a postseason final game. At the close of the bowl games, 32 teams, or 26 percent of Division I-A, returned to their campuses winners with a trophy from a postseason bowl game. Clearly the college teams in Division I-A have a much better chance of participating in a postseason event and securing a triumphant return than do the teams in Division I-AA who are stuck with a tournament.

Postseason football is also significantly about the event, the engagement of alumni, friends, donors, legislators, trustees, students and fans in an extravaganza of enthusiasm and good cheer about the campus's team. It should be a fine party. The postseason event offers the possibility of a televised activity highlighting the university campus, its spirit, its enthusiasm, and of course its ability to be a winner. This potent form of advertising helps universities seeking the visibility that translates into high rankings in popular opinion polls and the value of these celebratory moments are significant in recruiting students and obviously student-athletes.

When we have a bowl game to look forward to, we can plan and organize around the event for maximum alumni, student, fan and donor impact. We can establish the transportation and housing packages, we can create appropriate pre- and postgame events, and we can produce effective publicity. The better the bowl game, usually, the longer time we have between the receipt of a bowl bid and the actual game, but in any case, we can focus all our postseason activity around this final event and make sure everyone has a fine time.

In Division I-AA however, with the disadvantage of a tournament format, the postseason event is exceptionally difficult to organize. Even if we defy the odds and become one of the 16 tournament schools, we do not know how to

focus our event planning. If we focus on the first game of the tournament, the only one we can be sure we will play, we can have a good time but everyone will know it is not the main event, which is the final game. They will wonder if they should save their trip time and money for the next game in the tournament, assuming we win the first one, or take the even longer odds bet on our getting into the final game.

For those who last to the final game of the tournament (two teams) their athletes and all the accompanying student support people will have had a very long football season with four postseason contests. While this is a lot of extra games, it only affects 16 teams at the beginning and two at the end. In the bowl scenarios, the postseason is indeed extended chronologically into early January, but only for one extra game (the bowl), even though 64 teams will have a one-game postseason appearance.

If they bet on our getting into the final game, but we do not make it, then those fans, friends, donors and students who waited will not have any post-game event, even though we made it to the semifinals. If we do get into the final game, we have only a limited time to organize and deliver a significant event, and the attendance is often severely limited because people have not anticipated this highly unlikely result. Worse yet, among all those 106 Division I-AA teams, only one goes home a winner and only two can claim to have participated in a real, end of season, event.

The Division I-AA tournament also costs the institutions money and the more successful the team, the more money it costs. While the NCAA allocates funds for the team and various other expenses, they do not pay for the band, they pay only for a few VIPs, and they do not pay for the parties. As a result, if we go all the way, and if we support each game as if it might be the last one we play, we accumulate financial losses as we succeed in the tournament. In Division I-A, in the top 10 bowls or so, the teams and conferences make money by attending the bowl.

The rest of the bowls pay a reasonable amount, but not enough to cover the cost of participation, so the teams in these bowl games lose money — but then again, they only lose on one game and they get an event worth having for the expenditure. They get a party, they get to mobilize their fans, and they have a 50 percent chance of ending the season as a winner. They will be on television, their potential recruits for next and subsequent years and high school students considering applying to the campus will see the event and the campus highlighted.

With all that, I tell our athletics director we should try to invent and participate in a Division I-AA bowl game. Unfortunately, this is not likely to happen. The NCAA likes the I-AA tournament because it controls the tournament. The football winner-take-all crowd likes the tournament because in spite of its selection defects, it appears to create a *Number One*. The possible venues for Division I-AA bowl games are more likely to bid on yet another Division I-A bowl rather than take on the regulatory and revenue risk of trying to create a high quality Division I-AA bowl property.

So the reality check here is that we are not likely to get any improvement in the end of season activities for our division for quite some time. The moral of the story is that Division I-A should continue to develop, refine, defend, and market their terrifically successful and institutionally rewarding bowl games.

John V. Lombardi, chancellor and a professor of history at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, writes *Reality Check* occasionally.

The original story and user comments can be viewed online at <http://insidehighered.com/views/2007/02/01/lombardi>.

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Friends to the end...of the pregame intros

UCLA and USC players are enemies between the lines but some, such as Afflalo and Pruitt, are close once game ends.

By Ben Bolch
 Times Staff Writer

February 6, 2007

Among those who called to congratulate Gabe Pruitt on Saturday after USC had knocked off then-No. 9 Oregon was something of a surprise well-wisher: UCLA guard Arron Afflalo.

Then again, gracious gestures are nothing new when it comes to Trojans and Bruins who have been close for years.

Former UCLA standout Jordan Farmar once gave USC swingman Nick Young a set of SAT study guides and brought him to Westwood to shoot baskets on a recruiting visit.

But there is nothing friendly about the cross-town rivalry that will resume Wednesday when No. 2 UCLA plays host to No. 19 USC at Pauley Pavilion, where the Bruins have romped to consecutive 21-point victories over the Trojans.

"It is serious when we're on the court," Afflalo said of his camaraderie with Pruitt. "He wants to beat us and I want to beat them."

The last two UCLA-USC games played at Pauley have been one-sided, with Afflalo and Farmar combining for 56 points while shooting 51.4% (18 for 35). By comparison, Pruitt and Young have combined for 24 points while shooting 23.1% (nine for 39).

"The two times we've played there, it's been embarrassing losses," said Young, a junior swingman who is lamenting that he won't have an opportunity for payback now that Farmar is a rookie with the Lakers.

Young said that after the Trojans' last two games at Pauley, with the sting of defeat still fresh, Farmar had shown compassion, telling Young to keep his head up. But once summer rolled around, decorum gave way.

"In the summertime," Young recalled, "it would be, 'What happened to y'all?' He would rub it in more."

Afflalo also delivered a verbal jab during his recent conversation with Pruitt, telling the USC junior guard that he would lock him down on Wednesday.

Pruitt and Afflalo began playing against each other on club teams in the seventh grade before joining forces at Compton Centennial High as freshmen. Pruitt was the point guard and Afflalo the shooting guard until the players switched positions as sophomores.

Nearly every day after school, they would go to Afflalo's home to lift weights or to the YMCA to work out.

"We were really good friends," Pruitt said. "We were always together."

Pruitt said he considered going to the same college as Afflalo until Pruitt transferred to Westchester High after his sophomore year and Afflalo committed to UCLA.

"I thought it would be a good opportunity to go to USC and play against him and have that rivalry going," Pruitt said.

Young and Farmar were rivals in high school, Young playing for Reseda Cleveland and Farmar for Woodland Hills Taft in the West Valley League. But they played together on the same club team and became roommates on the road.

"We talked about girl problems and basketball," Young said. "He was just a really cool person."

Young was especially touched one Christmas when Farmar gift-wrapped a set of study guides and delivered them. Young still needed a passing score on a standardized test to gain his college eligibility.

"He wrote something in there like he had used the guides and all he wanted was to see me do better in life," Young said. "It was something nobody ever did for me. It was different."

Young could have used a defensive study guide in the opening minutes at Pauley last year, when Farmar elevated over him for one of his three three-point baskets on the way to a game-high 15 points during the Bruins' 66-45 victory.

"I haven't talked to him in a while but every time we see each other, it's cool," said Farmer, who is averaging 5.5 points and 2.1 assists in 16.6 minutes a game for the Lakers. "We were rivals in high school, played in the same league, and USC-UCLA is a big rivalry too. We won most of the time."

Afflalo, who poured in career highs with 22 points and nine rebounds as a freshman to lead the Bruins to a 90-69 victory over USC at Pauley, said there's no mystery as to why the Bruins have been so successful against the Trojans in Westwood.

"It's home-court advantage, that's all it is," he said. "Our gym is a tough place to play, especially when we're playing well. Our crowd gets behind us and sometimes it's tough to keep up."

A victory over the Bruins on Wednesday would have special meaning for Pruitt, who sat out the Trojans' 71-68 triumph over UCLA last season at the Sports Arena because of a knee injury.

But win or lose, Pruitt says he knows he can always call Afflalo to talk about more important things than the outcome of a college basketball game.

"The rivalry has nothing to do with our friendship," Pruitt said. "We don't let the rivalry get in between it."

Times staff writer Mike Bresnahan contributed to this report.

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PARTNERS:





Posted on Tue, Feb. 06, 2007

IN MY OPINION

Election, debate not needed: Manning NFL's poster boy

By GREG COTE
gcote@MiamiHerald.com

This was afterward, when elation, relief, exhaustion, redemption and so many other brand-new emotions all were laying claim to Peyton Manning's mind. The newly minted champion and Super Bowl MVP was speaking on the phone with a buddy when Tony Dungy, on a call himself, walked over to Manning with some urgency and held out his cellphone to the quarterback.

Manning motioned to let his coach know that, sorry, but he was already *on* the phone.

"No, you need to take this call," Dungy half-mouthed, half-spoke the words.

George W. Bush was calling.

Your politics don't matter at that point. Everybody talks about the Super Bowl ring you get to wear, but the Super Bowl ring you get to answer is one that will stick with you, too.

"It was the President," Manning relayed the story Monday morning, smiling. ``So I hung up the phone."

Of course, a media wiseguy had to ask which caller he had hung up on.

"On my buddy," the quarterback confirmed to warm laughter in the day-after conference room.

What Manning and his Indianapolis Colts accomplished Sunday night in that rain-soaked 29-17 dispatch of the Chicago Bears at Dolphin Stadium will show itself in a thousand ways now, but seeing "The White House" on the caller ID is a pretty fair pinch-me moment for starters.

You want a sense of magnitude for what Manning has become overnight after nine NFL seasons? More people watched Super Bowl XLI on Sunday than voted in the last presidential election.

Maybe that figures, since most any neutral observer would have to agree Manning has had a better year than the president. But the sheer numbers tuned in lend physical weight to the power of one game -- this one game -- to effect an ultimate, instant makeover on one's reputation.

NEW POSTER BOY

Manning is as close as we have to Mr. America today. He is the fresh prince of King Sport. Two days ago he was flawed. He was missing something. We doubted him, or at least wondered. Now he is perfect. Complete.

They don't hold a ceremony for this, but it has happened in every way that matters and makes sense:

The baton has passed from Tom Brady to Manning.

America's Quarterback no longer is the dimpled heartthrob with the model looks and movie-star girlfriends.

America's Quarterback is an ordinary-looking guy with an extraordinary arm, a Louisiana drawl, a wife named Ashley and a glass-of-milk image.

Brady fit in People magazine or GQ.

Manning is somebody Norman Rockwell might have painted.

He might not have all that much charisma in the usual sense, but there is something about him even more rare and precious: Humility.

As deftly as he picks apart defenses, Manning works to efficiently spread credit to teammates. It doesn't make for great quotes. But it makes for a pretty great teammate.

He resists all invitations to preen a little now, to needle or tweak those who said he "couldn't win the big one." He says instead, "I don't play that card." Because he knows. He knows he isn't a different or greater quarterback than he was before Sunday; that only the perception of him is different, and greater. He knows that to dramatize now the importance of the ring -- that great players are defined by championships, and all of that drivel -- would be unjust to Dan Marino and so many others he respects.

Super Bowl-winning quarterbacks have included Trent Dilfer, Mark Rypien, Brad Johnson, Doug Williams, Jeff Hostetler and other lesser lights. Does anyone care to nominate that any of them rise in stature above Marino for the jewelry on their hand?

Manning knows better. Dungy, too.

"Anybody who felt like he needed a Super Bowl win to know how great he was -- that didn't make a lot of sense to me," Dungy said of Manning (but could have meant Marino, too).

PERCEPTIONS

It matters in forming or changing broad perceptions. Now that Manning, a month shy of 31, has won the elusive championship, we line everything else up for him. The Hall of Fame is now judged a given. The all-time records, most of them held by Dan Marino, with Brett Favre chasing, are now earmarked Manning's future property as well.

We are allowed to wonder now, for the first time, if, in Manning, we are watching someone who in 10 years might be widely regarded as the greatest quarterback in history.

A Super Bowl victory can do that for your rep as surely as it gets the president on the line, and the same is true for how Dungy is now perceived -- as the first black head coach to win a Super Bowl. He gently deflects questions that would liken him to Jackie Robinson or Arthur Ashe, honored by the company, humbled by it. His pride is deep but hasn't an ounce of braggadocio to it.

The Colts are America's Team now if we could assign the title by likability. What's not to like?

They're from the Midwest heartland. The worse thing you can say about Manning is he's so nice. Marvin Harrison is the anti-T.O. No one is getting arrested possessing six unlicensed guns including two assault rifles. And Dungy leads with benevolence.

There is something about Dungy so rare in NFL head coaches. Serenity.

"He makes me comfortable seeing him with that comfortable look," Manning said Monday. ``Whether it's fourth-and-1 in the Super Bowl or a preseason game against Cincinnati, he has that same face. His calming presence really spreads throughout this team."

The head coach and quarterback almost always are going to be the prominent faces of a Super Bowl champion, but it has taken 41 years of these games to provide us a coach-QB duo this likably grounded, and this resolute in deflecting the praise each has so well earned.



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Signing Day no-names can still find fame

Cutler atop list of the low-rated who made it big



Jay Cutler (6) exceeded expectations at Vanderbilt. BILLY KINGSLEY / FILE / THE TENNESSEAN

By CHRIS LOW
Staff Writer

Published: Tuesday, 02/06/07

There are college football fans, and then there are college football recruiting fanatics.

Their version of Christmas is just around the corner, Wednesday to be exact.

We know it as National Signing Day.

The anticipation is something to behold, much like an 8-year-old restlessly turning in bed and ultimately peeking out at the tree on Christmas morning.

Only these presents don't come covered in wrapping paper.

They come in the form of stars as awarded by the various recruiting services.

The ones everybody wants are five-star prospects. The four-star prospects are equally coveted.

But if you get a sprinkling of three- and even two-star prospects in your signing class, don't stress.

More than a few of those guys have done just fine in the Southeastern Conference over the years.

In fact, you could put together an All-SEC team of those guys just between 2003 and 2006, and *The Tennessean* has.

Several on our recruiting no-name SEC Dream Team are playing in the NFL, and several more are headed that way after big seasons a year ago.

Here are a few nuggets to consider before getting too caught up in how many stars a player has coming out of high school and where he's ranked at his position:

- Six of the SEC's top 10 tacklers last season were three-star prospects or lower coming out of high school.
- The guy who led the SEC in sacks last season, Arkansas' Jamaal Anderson, with 13, was a two-star prospect recruited as a 205-pound receiver.
- The guy who led the SEC in interceptions last season, Florida's Ryan Smith, with eight, started his career at Utah, where he signed as a two-star prospect and was unranked at his position.

- Alabama's Simeon Castille and Georgia's Tra Battle weren't far behind Smith with six interceptions apiece. Castille was a three-star prospect, and Battle wasn't ranked anywhere.

Welcome to Football Recruiting 101.

There's no such thing as a sure thing, and players defy the ratings odds all the time.

Vols' methods work

Tennessee Coach Phillip Fulmer said where a player is rated matters little in the Vols' recruiting process.

"That's not to say a five-star guy's not going to be a great player, but we've all seen those guys not make it, and we've seen the guy from a little small town that nobody heard about become a great football player," Fulmer said.

Fulmer, long considered one of the country's best recruiting head coaches, insists that he doesn't feel any pressure to take a player just because he's highly rated.

"We're going to make the decision independently," he said. "I didn't know anything about where our guys were rated until just a couple of days ago when somebody handed me something from everybody in the league. I said, 'Well, that's pretty good. We've got some guys that everybody else thinks is pretty good. I hope they're pretty good.'"

There's no question that recruiting ratings can provide a gauge for how a program is going to fare. They're just not foolproof.

With actual game tape being passed around on the Internet, not to mention the advent of high school combines and all-star games, it's easier now for analysts to evaluate prospects. But players can fly under the radar coming out of high school for all sorts of reasons. Poor academics can play a role. So can playing at a small school or playing out of position. Injuries are another factor that can adversely impact a player's rating.

Feeling the snub

Some players are viewed as too small or too slow. Others are considered "tweeners," where for instance they might not be fast enough to play defensive back, but not big enough to play linebacker.

And, then, there are simply flat-out whiffs.

Former Vanderbilt quarterback Jay Cutler was told by Big Ten programs Indiana, Purdue and Illinois that he wasn't good enough, and most of the recruiting interest he received, period, was at safety.

Finally, about a month before signing day, Vanderbilt offered him as a quarterback, and the rest is history.

Cutler was the No. 11 pick in the NFL Draft last year, taken by the Denver Broncos.

Former Alabama linebacker DeMeco Ryans was a three-star prospect when he signed with the Crimson Tide. There were 38 other inside linebacker prospects rated above him by Rivals.com. The Tide's chief competition was Troy State, and all Ryans did this season with the Texans was win the NFL's Defensive Rookie of the Year award by the Associated Press.

Former Georgia cornerback Tim Jennings didn't have a Division I-A scholarship offer until signing day in 2002. The Bulldogs lost out on a few guys late and then turned to Jennings. He wound up starting for three and a half years and was a second-round pick by the Colts last year.

Bennett is big-time

Vanderbilt's Earl Bennett was unranked nationally as a receiver by rivals.com in 2005. His only other official visits were to Kentucky and Southern Miss. Nobody in the SEC has caught more passes than him the last two seasons.

Mark Anderson led the Bears with 12 sacks this seasons as a rookie. When he signed with Alabama in 2001 out of Tulsa's Booker T. Washington High, he weighed 210 pounds and wasn't seriously recruited by either Oklahoma or Oklahoma State.

It's difficult to find a better all-around and more consistent receiver in the SEC the last two seasons than South Carolina's Sidney Rice. He had a great frame (6-4), great leaping ability and played against stiff competition in high school.

But coming out of Gaffney, S.C., in 2004, he was deemed a step slow. Thus, there were 54 other receivers rated ahead of him by Rivals.com.

The list goes on and on.

So remember, come Wednesday, don't sweat the two- and three-star guys.

Published: Tuesday, 02/06/07

Tuesday, February 6, 2007

Female athletes play many roles

By MARCIA C. SMITH
The Orange County Register

The game clocks tick. Seconds run up in tiny steps of tenths and hundredths on stopwatches beside tracks. Seconds leap in minutes beside the tennis court. Seconds race down in shot clocks and periods on the scoreboards above basketball games.

For all athletes, time, counting up or slipping away, begins with pistols fired and tipoffs, passing silently and running out with buzzers.

But for female athletes in their 30s, the biological clock is all alarms, ringing and beeping and shrilling without the relief of a snooze bar.

As thousands of female athletes, their coaches and athletic directors across the country mark the 21st National Girls and Women in Sports Day on Wednesday, Southern California women's sports might as well throw a baby shower.

Two of the area's most high-profile female athletes - Lisa Leslie, the Sparks All-Star center and three-time WNBA MVP, and Lindsay Davenport, a former top-ranked tennis player and Wimbledon and U.S. Open champion - aren't playing.

They're pregnant. They don't have typical offseason workouts. They have wombs. They haven't announced retirement, just that they're both expecting in June.

Leslie, 35, who is married to former Air Force basketball player Michael Lockwood, will miss the 2007 WNBA season. Davenport, 30, who lives in Laguna Beach with husband and former USC tennis player Jon Leach, has suspended her tennis career.

Celebrating motherhood might not fall within the party guidelines for National Girls and Women in Sports Day, but this year it should.

"When Lisa first told me the news and I saw the happiness in her face," Sparks teammate Tameka Johnson said, "I was like, 'You go, girl!' She has done so much for women's basketball, giving a sport to so many young girls, and now she is doing something for herself by bringing a life into this world."

Johnson, 24, the 2005 WNBA Rookie of the Year, will represent the Sparks at a National Girls and Women in Sports Day clinic this weekend. She is in the prime of her career but says she hopes to start her own family one day.

"Look at all the things women can do now as athletes and as people," she said. "Women are so strong, handling careers and babies, and I know it's a struggle to have just one of those things."

This sports day is more than about rallying everyone from the Girl Scouts of America to the Women's Sports Foundation to rejoice in women's sports accomplishments, the survival of women's pro sports leagues and the endurance of Title IX ensuring young female athletes of their sports opportunities.

The day is about balance, not just between boys and girls, but between a sports career and an outside-of-sports life.

The day is about freedom, not just for women athletes to be able to do what men athletes do, but for women athletes also to be able to do what women have always done.

The day is mostly about having choices and being free to make those necessary for a balanced life.

Leslie and Davenport exercise that freedom. They chose sports yesterday, motherhood today and maybe both tomorrow.

Leslie has said that she would like to return to the U.S. Olympic basketball team for the 2008 Summer Games in Beijing.

Though tennis champion Steffi Graf didn't carry a racket into competition after carrying children, Davenport has yet to announce retirement. She could compete again, though she is not expected to return to the court.

Since the last National Girls and Women in Sports Day, 2004 Olympic gold medalist pitcher Jennie Finch of La Mirada had a son, Ace, in May, with husband and Arizona ballplayer Casey Daigle. Father and son were in the stands when Finch re-entered the circle at Irvine's Bill Barber Park to start a U.S. National Softball Team tour.

USC basketball player Brynn Cameron is expected back on the court for the Trojans in 2007-08 after redshirting this season for the birth of Cole Cameron Leinart, born in October to the junior forward and her former boyfriend, Heisman Trophy-winning USC quarterback Matt Leinart.

UCLA junior outside hitter Becky Mehring of Huntington Beach (Marina) redshirted in 2005 to have a child. She played this season for the Bruins, who reached the NCAA semifinals.

Even before Leslie, Davenport, Finch, Cameron and Mehring, there were notable others who became mothers and came back as athletes.

Olympic basketball gold medalist Sheryl Swoopes had a son, Jordan, in 1997. Olympic track and field gold medalist Marion Jones gave birth to a son in June 2003. American sprinter Evelyn Ashford had a daughter in 1985. All returned to competition.

The American beach volleyball team that took fifth at Sydney in 2000, Annett Davis and Jennifer Johnson Jordan, spent the 2001 season on maternity leave. Both have since returned to the AVP sand, their husbands minding their children courtside.

When the WNBA formed in 1996, riding the women's sports success at the 1996 Atlanta Games, the league's marketing campaign centered around the motto, "We Got Next."

This week's activities surrounding National Girls and Women in Sports Day might show how female athletes have earned the next chance on the playing field.

But the day should also remind women of what else they've got next: their futures as athletes and as mothers.

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NCAA crack down

NCAA is cracking down on dribblers who get an edge by palming the ball

BY JOHN O'CONNOR

TIMES-DISPATCH STAFF WRITER

Tuesday, February 6, 2007

An experienced men's basketball official who regularly works Division I games in the Mid-Atlantic Region says he called palming violations a couple of times per season through most of his career.

That increased to about a half-dozen last season, he estimates. This season: approximately 10 times by mid-January, says the official, who requested that his name not be used. Dribblers' skill hasn't faded. The NCAA Rules Committee before the 2005-06 season asked its officials to start cracking down on ball-handlers who in recent seasons have gradually gained an edge on defenders by carrying the basketball rather than legally bouncing it.

Last season, the rule was enforced to a greater extent than previous years, though not as much as the NCAA desired. This season, officials are paying even closer attention, per NCAA direction.

"It has been one of those rules violations that crept up on everybody over the years," said Hank Nichols, the supervisor of officials for men's college basketball and a former official who worked 10 Final Fours. "In some cases, it gave a blatant advantage [to the ball-handler]."

To its officials, the NCAA designated palming as a point of emphasis last season, and did so again this season since there has been no significant reduction in the practice, according to the NCAA. The NCAA recognizes palming as placing "the defensive player at a distinct disadvantage while according the dribbler a sizeable advantage inconsistent with the spirit and intent of the rules."

Dribblers are adjusting. Said David Gonzalvez, the University of Richmond's primary ball-handler: "At the beginning of the season, almost every time I got in the game I [was called for palming] the ball. I would get in, and it would be a turnover. . . . I definitely had to change that."

The old-school rule interpretation involved hand placement. Dribblers used to be required to keep hands on top of the ball, not on the side of it, or below it. As the game evolved, dribblers repositioned their hands to the side of the ball, or even under it, particularly when employing cross-over or hesitation moves. That allowed offensive players greater control of the ball, illegal control. Officials very rarely called the violation, before last season.

"They're doing a better job with it this year," Nichols said of his officials.

Two other college officials said they look for dribblers "stopping" the ball. The NCAA preseason directive states "When the ball comes to rest in the dribblers' hand, by rule, the dribble has ended. Continuing to dribble after the ball has come to rest in the hand is a violation and must be called."

The NCAA does not keep statistics that track the number of palming violations called per season, according to



Davidson's Stephen Curry, son of ex-Virginia Tech great Dell Curry, dribbles against The Citadel in a manner contrary to NCAA rules. Dribbling must occur with the hand on top of the ball, not on the side or underneath.
AP

Heather Perry, the associate director of playing rules administration. But any college basketball observer who regularly attends games or watches them on television this season appreciates that officials are calling palming more frequently. According to the veteran official who estimates he has called palming 10 times by mid-January, officials are trying to be sensible about enforcement.

"We're not going to call it when a [dribbler] is in the backcourt by himself. We're not going to call it when [a dribbler] is going east-west," he said. "If [a dribbler] beats a guy to the basket while palming the ball, we'll call that."

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If They Don't Post It's a Shame

A Growing Chorus of Bloggers Chronicles the Nats, Who Are Reading

By Barry Svrluga
Washington Post Staff Writer
Tuesday, February 6, 2007; E01

The e-mail popped in, and Chris Needham took a minute to digest it. The sender was easily identifiable: Stan Kasten is the president of the Washington Nationals, the baseball team about which Needham comments almost daily via his blog.

Needham had just published an entry titled "StanSpeak," in which he took the liberty of "translating" Kasten's words for the club's fan base, a smart-alecky but smart look at what the man who runs the club might really be thinking.

Needham opened the e-mail cautiously. *He knows about this?*

"I had suspicions that they read this stuff," Needham said. "But when a suspicion becomes a reality, it's surreal."

The surreal part might not be that team executives read and comment about sites such as Needham's "Capitol Punishment," but that nearly two dozen people -- some who grew up in the District, some who grew up in Omaha, some who are Web masters and some who are lawyers -- spend five or 10 or (gulp) 20 hours a week producing blogs devoted to the Nationals. The team has been in town for just two seasons. It has finished in last place both years. Yet the opinions and analyses flying in the "Natosphere," as the bloggers call it, are deeper and more diverse than for many clubs that have been around far longer.

"This was kind of a chance to get in on the ground floor as a baseball fan here," said Brandon Kriner, who authors the "Curly W" blog with a friend and co-worker. "It colors outside of the lines of the work" done by newspapers and television.

If the "Natosphere" is still developing, it's doing so at a rapid pace. There are sites that link to even the most minuscule news items involving current and former Nationals, such as "District of Baseball." There are sites that break down OBP and OPS and VORP (Value Over Replacement Player) with the precision and statistical acumen that would make devoted members of the Society for American Baseball Research proud, such as "Banks of the Anacostia." There are sites with impressively deep knowledge of the Nationals' minor league system ("Nationals Farm Authority"), sites whose authors attend Nationals events toting still and video cameras ("Just a Nats Fan"), sites that have taken to interviewing Kasten and other executives ("Nats320") and sites that debate the moves of General Manager Jim Bowden (pick one).

And lest any one of them think they are operating in a vacuum -- as Needham once did -- they are not.

"It's part of the world, as it has been for the past few years, and it's becoming part of our world," Kasten said. "It's one of the wonders of the Internet. You listen to [Washington Capitals owner and AOL executive] Ted Leonsis talk about it. It's the community you create. So anyone who is a fan, a customer, who finds additional ways to engage in your product, that's a good thing, even on those days that what they're saying isn't completely positive or, in some cases, accurate."

For the most part, the bloggers' feelings about each other are positive, even as some of their most spirited dialogue is on each other's work. Almost all of the 15 or so active Nationals blogs link to the others. They have interviewed each

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other. They comment on each other. They have even arranged meetings, including baseball-watching parties on the side of the garage of Cathy Taylor, a 34-year-old married mother of two who lives in Falls Church, works as a Web master in the District and operates the "Just a Nats Fan" blog under the name "Miss Chatter."

"It's a fairly close-knit community, to some degree," said Jeff Foust, whose blog is "District of Baseball." The group organized a tailgate on the last day of the 2006 season. "I could go up to somebody and say, 'Hi, I'm Jeff,' and they say, 'Oh, District of Baseball.' We know each other before we know each other."

And, as within any community, there have been arguments.

"There are starting to be factions now," said Kriner, of the "Curly W" site. "Some of the bloggers have really been taking this to another level, seeking out interviews with Stan Kasten and Jim Bowden. I think it represents something of a sea change for us. . . .

"My view is that everyone has a very different motivation for why they write. People seem to get upset when other people suggest that they are somehow doing things incorrectly. But this blogging thing is changing, and you have to be cognizant that you're publishing something that people can read and react to."

Needham, 28, who grew up in Upstate New York, works on Capitol Hill and lives in Alexandria, started "Capitol Punishment" shortly after the announcement in September 2004 that the Montreal Expos would move to Washington. The Expos, he said, were "kind of a great fog." He did a lot of writing for his job as an analyst, and he wanted an outlet to learn about the team, do some more creative writing and, as he said, "avoid boring my girlfriend to tears."

More than two years later, he said, "Capitol Punishment" receives a few hundred page views per day in the offseason, perhaps 700 a day when news is happening during the season. The objective isn't terribly high-minded -- "I'm not afraid of the quick, cheap one-liner," Needham said -- but it is almost always amusing and analytical, mixing statistics with personal takes on the team's moves to go along with top 10 lists, suggestions for holiday gifts for team members, whatever comes to mind.

"Absolutely hilarious," Kasten said.

Late last month, Kasten sent Needham another e-mail saying simply, "Call me." The blogger, phone-to-phone with the president, whose words he had made a hobby of parsing. "He's an honest broker," Needham said. "But I had no idea what he wanted. I want to make a few jokes at his expense and not change."

So Needham called. Kasten's beef: Needham wasn't on the list to renew his partial season ticket plan. So no, "StanSpeak" did not die.

"It's pretty amazing to be able to do these sorts of things, to develop your voice and have people react, especially the people who run the team," Needham said. "It'll be interesting to see how that continues or where it would develop."

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