

SPORTS

Decree Sports Pundits Critique NBA Playoff Teams, Early MLB Action

By Anthony DeGregorio and Trevor Seibert
Decree Sports Editors

AD: This is the final issue of Speak Your Mind. Let's go balls to the wall on baseball and basketball!

TS: Oh yeah! Let's start with the NBA playoffs this time. I've never seen a race like the one we saw to get to the playoffs. Nobody in the East had a secure spot until the final seconds of the last regular season game. I see a lot of potential for some big upsets this year in the East. The Chicago Bulls are playing some great basketball with Ben Gordon leading the way for them lately. I see them beating the Miami Heat in the first round and the Nets handling the Pacers in the bottom bracket. What do you see with those two games?

AD: I think Miami is a much stronger team and have the experience edge over a younger Bulls team. No way will Tyson Chandler be able to shut down Shaq daddy in the paint and Wade is the second best all around player next to LeBron James in the Eastern Conference. He can handle the ball, shoot, pass, and rebound and is a tremendous defender. The Pacers have crumbled and the Nets play great team basketball. If Vince Carter plays as well as he has, they shouldn't have a problem. I think the Western Conference is a lot stronger from 1-8 and there are going to be great games in the first round.

TS: Most definitely the West should pose some great match-ups, but all I'm saying with the Miami-Chicago series is do what LSU did to Duke. Double up on Wade and allow the big-man to hurt you and they will have a chance to go seven games with the Heat this series. The bottom half of the bracket in the western division looks very good for a strong Suns team that is looking for a title shot. Yes, they have to play the Lakers in the first round, but I don't see Kobe carrying them past the first round. As for the Clippers-Nuggets, I look for the Clippers to win that series in five games, easily.

AD: This is two different scenarios. Wade isn't a J.J. Reddick, he is much better basketball player. He has more athleticism in the tip of his pinky than Reddick does in his whole body and he will find a way to score, grab at least five rebounds a game and get the ball to the big men down low. I'm calling dribble, drive and dish all game long every game. The game in the West that I'm most interested in is Sacramento going head to head with the defending Western Champion Spurs. Who do you like there?

TS: I actually like the Sacramento Kings on this one. Ant. The Spurs have played great ball all year, but the Sacramento Kings have been playing with them the last forty games. Ever since the Ron Artest trade, the Kings have gone 26-14 in their last forty games. The Spurs have gone 24-16. The Kings are playing better ball, and the Kings beat the defending champs 97-87 with Artest on the team and both teams were playing their full roster. What do you see happening there and in the series between the Mavs and the Grizzlies?

AD: I like the Spurs. Every year heading into the playoffs everyone questions whether the Spurs have what it takes to do well again and I can't see them being ousted in the first round. Tony Parker is one of the most underrated players in the league and with Manu Ginobili and Duncan they should find a way to win. I like the Mavericks in the other game. Nowitzki is having the best year of his career and with him they are playing a lot better defense and are a deeper team that has ten players averaging over 20 minutes a game.

TS: Very true, but history shows that the Spurs are never good heading into the playoffs when they are the defending champs. The last two times they came into the playoffs as defending champs, they were handled in the first round by their opponent and I don't see any reason why it won't happen again this year. I agree with you on the Mavericks pick. Dirk Nowitzki is my MVP for the season and I believe the Grizzlies don't have enough to stop this man. In the Eastern Conference's top half of the bracket I see the Pistons handling the Bucks in four games. That series won't even be close. Then the Cleveland Cavaliers, I mean LeBron James, and the Washington Wizards. I think Gilbert Arenas and Caron Butler can play well enough to beat LeBron James. If LeBron had someone

on his team besides him, I would give the Cavs the benefit of the doubt, but he can't win it by himself in the playoffs, it just won't happen.

AD: You can stick that history up your ass. That is a BS statement...teams don't care about the past.

TS: You're right, they don't care about the past, but I do, and the Spurs WILL be out in the first round. The NBA Finals are going to be one of the most exciting in years with the match up of the Detroit Pistons and the Phoenix Suns. I think that Steve Nash is going to assist the Suns in reaching the finals for the first time in a quite a few years. Even without Amare Stoudemire, they still have a legit chance at beating the Pistons in the finals because they have a man named Shawn Marion who is playing great basketball right now, but that won't be enough to beat the Detroit Pistons. They are just too good of a team to be beat. What about you?

AD: I see Detroit riding their defense in the finals this year and winning it all. They have unbelievable team chemistry and a group of players that have been together in that system for years. I think Dallas will be the team to come out of the west, but I don't think they can beat Detroit.

Changing gears and moving onto baseball. It is no surprise to me that the Royals are at the bottom of the AL Central again with the worst record in baseball. Do you think they are the worst team in baseball or would you choose somebody else?

TS: Hell no. I would send anybody who said otherwise to a doctor if they said the Royals weren't the worst team in baseball. Hell, they are the worst franchise in any sport right now. It is utterly despicable watching this team play a game. In one of their previous games against the White Sox the only way they broke up a perfect game, was when Doug Mientkiewicz checked at a strike and the ball dribbled down the third base line. Looked like it was going foul so the Sox left it alone only for the damn thing to roll all the way to third base. It barely got there, but the perfect game was over. The Royals then proceeded to clear the dugout in a celebration of losing their tenth straight.

AD: I admit that franchise blows but my worst team in baseball this year is the Florida Marlins. Other than Miguel Cabrera and Hanley Ramirez, their hitters are unknown and the starters are inexperienced with the exception of Dontrelle Willis. I expect to see Willis get close to twenty wins but I don't see Vargas, Mitre and Moehler pitching behind him getting many wins at all this season. They have a decent closer in Borowski but without the pitching and a bunch of no name players swinging the lumber they are the worst team.

TS: I can see why you would think they are the worst team in baseball, but that's a horrible call there. Dontrelle Willis may have more wins this year than the Kansas City Royals have as a team. The Royals are THAT BAD. They suck defensively, they suck offensively, and they suck overall as a team period. This year's Royals team may rank as the worst team of all time: it's that bad watching them.

AD: I think the Red Sox are the team to beat in the east this year. Manny Ramirez has yet to swing the bat well this season yet they still have the best record in baseball at this point. Curt Schilling is showing no signs of weakness in that ankle and Beckett looks amazing on the mound. Not to mention how about the young gun John Papelbon who shows that he can do more than start games but can finish them out too. I think you will see them edge out the Yankees in a very tough division battle this year. Who do you like in that division?

TS: I definitely like the play of the Red Sox in that division so far. I picked them as my AL winner this year and I'm going to stick by that. I think that Curt Schilling will die off by the end of the year. I don't think he will be pitching as good at the end of the season, but then you will see Roger Clemens step back into a Red Sox uniform to end the season in Curt's place. Papelbon will then be thrown into the starting lineup and you will see Schilling as the closer in the playoffs. In the Central division the White Sox are continuing their great play from last year's playoffs. I like them coming out of the Central. What about you?

AD: I don't see Schilling being that bad

that they take him out of the rotation unless he gets injured and I can only hope that the Rocket decides to come back to Beantown. What a story that would be and it would add a lot of fear in opposing teams having the possibility to face Schilling, Beckett and Roger in a three game series. The defending WS Champion White Sox got off to another strong start to the season and they should win the Central. No chance of Detroit being able to keep up their winning ways throughout the season and Cleveland might be the only team to chase Chicago towards the end of the season. The White Sox pitching I think is too good and will keep them in a lot of games. With Konerko and Thome in the heart of that lineup they will be tough outs for any reliever late in the game.

TS: Most definitely, that looks like one of the weaker divisions in baseball this year, which in the end will probably hurt the White Sox's chances of repeating this season. Right now the West is a toss up with the last place Mariners a game and a half behind the first place Angels. I don't see a clear cut winner just yet, but I'm going to go with the Oakland Athletics. With the pitching staff of Zito, Harden, and Loaiza, I think that they will come out on top in one of the closest battles, top to bottom, ever.

AD: The west is the weakest division in the AL. The Angels should come out on top here. They have the best hitting in the division with Guerrero, Anderson, Cabrera, Erstad and Figgins. They are playing aggressive baseball this year so far and have stolen a ton of bases. Their starting pitching isn't great but the bullpen is solid and anchored by a great closer in K' Rod.

TS: They are going to have to score A LOT of runs to make up for that lack of starting pitching they got going on there. I don't see them

finishing above .500 this year. The NL East is looking like it's going to be the story of the year. Can the Braves keep their streak alive or is it all over for their reign of that division?

AD: I like the Mets' chances to come out of the East in the National league. They had some good off-season acquisitions picking up Delgado and Wagner. They have been getting the job done so far and I don't see them slowing down. They have the best lineup from top to bottom in the NL. Xavier Nady has been roping hits all over the ball-park and with great hitters like Delgado, Floyd, Beltran and Wright batting around him they should have the power to go all the way to the Finals this year.

TS: Wow! The Finals might be a little far fetched there; I believe that the Braves will do it again this year. I have no reason to believe that something is going to stop them. Sure the Mets are playing great ball, but they always find a way to choke in big games. Pedro and company will be a wild card team and probably be ousted in the first round by the NL Central champs, the St. Louis Cardinals. The Cards haven't started the season out very well, but that is the aura of this team. They never start out strong, but they end strong. Pujols is the best player in the major leagues, and with Eckstein, Edmonds, Rolen, and Encarnacion at the plate, they are a tough team to pitch around. Then you have three great starting pitchers in Carpenter, Mulder, and Suppan. Suppan might not be playing well just yet, but he's tough. Don't forget his complete game shutout in game 7 of the NLCS in 2004.

AD: The Cards won't be able to take the Central again this year and Suppan is junk! He has a career losing record and should be in playing for a team that needs a crappy starter to

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NCWC Honors Student-Athletes For 2005-2006 School Year

Ashlee Bass and Jon Dyer earned NCWC Athlete of the Year awards at the 41st annual Department of Athletics ceremonies at the Dunn Center.

Featured speaker was Frank Ross, a scout for the Charlotte Bobcats of the NBA, who was on hand to recognize student-athletes from NC Wesleyan's 13 varsity sports.

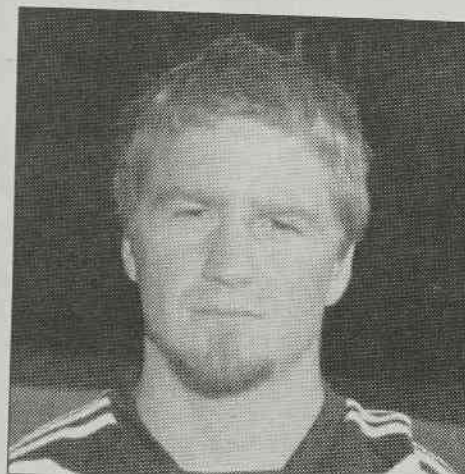
Bass, a sophomore, was recognized after earning All-Conference, All-Tournament and Co-Most Valuable Player honors in softball. An infielder, she led the Bishops (20-18) to a fourth-place finish in the USA South Conference regular season and an appearance in the tournament semi-finals. Her .500 batting average earned her the batting title.

Dyer, a senior mid-fielder, tied for the team lead in scoring with 10 goals for Bishops (14-5) and he was an All-Conference, All-Tournament, and All-Region selection. As team captain, he led his squad to its second consecutive regular season USA South championship and a runner-up finish in the conference tournament.

The student-athlete awards were presented to Libby Fulford and Blake Rice. Fulford, a sophomore exercise science major, compiled a 3.93 grade point average last semester. A pitcher on the softball team, Fulford provided one of the season's highlights on April 9, when she tossed a no-hitter in a 2-0 win over Averett. She earned All-Conference, All-Tournament, and Co-MVP honors.

Rice, a member of the conference championship baseball team, won the award for the second consecutive year. Rice has maintained an overall 3.7 grade point average during his scholastic career, including two semesters in which he turned in a perfect 4.0. A junior mathematics major, he was a First Team All-Conference selection and the 2006 USA South Pitcher of the Year after tossing a NCWC record nine complete games and one no-hitter.

Editor's Note: Readers may turn to the NCWC athletics webpage for a team-by-team list of winners in the sportsmanship, scholar-athlete and MVP categories.



Jon Dyer



Ashlee Bass