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SPORTS



PHOTO/TERRY CLARK

Charlotte Checkers wing Shawn Wheeler (left) has been successful by making the most of his limited talents.

America's team wants to be football squad of the decade

By Denne H. Freeman
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

TEMPE, Ariz. — America's Team wants to be known as the team of the decade as well.

"We've got about two weeks to enjoy this thing," Troy Aikman said, "and then everybody will be asking, 'Hey, are you guys going to do it back-to-back again?' It's a vicious cycle."

Dallas hopes to become to the 1990s what Green Bay was to the 1960s, Pittsburgh to the '70s, and San Francisco to the '80s. But two obstacles remain in the Cowboys' path. One is free agency, which could cost Dallas as many as seven starters, including Super Bowl MVP Larry Brown. The second is complacency.

"This team is not ready to look back and enjoy our three rings in four years," Aikman said. "We've still got more things to do. We still have a team that believes in each other. This thing is not over yet."

Deion Sanders, the Cowboys' \$35 Million Man, concurred.

"I came over here not to win one Super Bowl," he said. "I made a statement when I first arrived ... that I plan on seeing more Super Bowls from this team."

Counting Sunday's 27-17 win over Pittsburgh, the Cowboys now have five, tying them with San Francisco. They won two in five tries for Tom Landry, won two without losing for Jimmy Johnson, and now have their first under Barry Switzer.

Switzer, who won three national championships at Oklahoma, joined Johnson as the only coaches to win a college title and a Super Bowl. Defensive end Charles Haley earned a record fifth Super Bowl ring. Twenty-seven new Cowboys won their first,

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Bulls recall Lakers of Wilt and West

By Mike Nadel
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CHICAGO — Michael Jordan catches Scottie Pippen's pass just outside the 3-point arc. Jordan fakes a jump shot, but Jerry West won't leave his feet. Jordan fakes again. This time, West flinches just enough for Jordan to drive around him.

Happy Hairston leaves Dennis Rodman to help on defense. Jordan, however, evades Hairston and gets into the clear just outside the lane. Jordan goes airborne now, ready for one of his patented, one-handed slams.

But Wilt Chamberlain, more than 7 feet of trouble, stands in the way.

"Jordan. Wilt. Pippen. West. What athletes! It would be a great series," Bill Sharman says. "I think it would go seven games. But with Wilt in the middle, I think our team would have a slight edge."

Of course, Sharman, the old Los Angeles Lakers' coach, will

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For West Meck's Nikki Herron, basketball is worth studying

By Karl Petraroja
FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

Nikki Herron carries the same subject load as most of her fellow students at West Mecklenburg High: history, math and science.

But there's one exception. She also studies basketball.

The 16-year old junior guard is a true student of the game of

basketball.

"She knows the game probably as well as any kid I've ever coached," West head coach Becky McDonald said. "She's watched a lot of games on TV, she's smart, she watches the games and she looks at what the coaches are doing. She watches how the players react and she's played a lot of street ball. She's played a lot of ball

with the guys in the park and a lot of that you can't teach somebody."

Herron's basketball IQ shows on the court. She leads the powerful Indians in points per game (17.7) and rebounds (8.2) and is second in assists (3.4) and steals (3.1). The Indians are off to a 15-1 start, including 6-0 in the MEGA-7 conference.

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Adding fire to hockey ice

Checkers Shawn Wheeler brings experience to young team

By Herbert L. White
THE CHARLOTTE POST

Shawn Wheeler's can't fire a 100-mile-per-hour slap shot.

He can't skate rings around people.

But the Charlotte Checkers wing refuses to be out-hustled.

Wheeler is the glue that holds the Checkers together, not because of his talent, but by his ability to get the most out of it. And he's not about to be beaten out of that job.

"They can't. I won't allow that to happen because the bottom line is I have a car payment, I have to eat, I have to put clothes on my back," he

said. "If I don't work hard, somebody's going to come by and take my job."

Wheeler, who was named to the East Coast Hockey League all-star team, is doing his job quite well. He's third on the Checkers in goals with 18 and assists with 21 for 39 points. Although he's not Charlotte's most talented player, he's adept at turning grunt work into works of art.

"I don't skate as well as a Matty Robbins, and I don't have a hard shot like Bill Noren," he said of his Checkers teammates. "I've always gotten by on hard work and if I don't play hard and give 110 percent, I'm not good

enough to play on this team or any other team."

Wheeler's leadership can be seen off the ice, too. As a veteran player who doubles as an assistant coach, he's a stabilizing force on a young team. During games, he serves as a mentor to younger players who are still learning what it takes to survive in the pros.

"Shawn's got a great influence because he's a great character person, he has a tremendous work ethic, he competes and he doesn't like losing," Checkers coach John Marks said. "All those things I hope the young guys are looking at."

After some stops in the NHL, Wheeler uses his experience at

hockey's highest level to teach young players the value of hard work. It takes talent to get to the major leagues, but dedication is a main ingredient for success.

"These young guys have so much talent, people try to tell them and what to do, and they don't believe them," he said. "All I can do is lead by example. I don't shoot the puck hard, I just work hard, and they see that. I get some goals, I get some success because I work hard, and some of them are starting to pick up on that now."

Part of Wheeler's success comes from his willingness to

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PHOTO/HERBERT L. WHITE

UNC Charlotte forward Shanderic Downs is tied up by a pair of Marquette defenders during the 49ers' 79-69 win last week at Independence Arena. UNCC is a surprising 4-2 in Conference USA play, thanks in part to improved defensive play.

UNCC to the defense

49ers put the stops on Conference USA opponents

By Herbert L. White
THE CHARLOTTE POST

UNC Charlotte wasn't expected to be this good in Conference USA basketball.

The 49ers are 4-2 in the league's White Division, thanks in part to a stingy defense. And people are starting to take note.

"We've won three conference games at home and we've been playing tough," forward DeMarco Johnson said. "I think teams are going to start realizing we're for real."

UNCC didn't instill fear at the start of the season, but improved as its defensive intensity started to force opponents into mistakes. Since the 49ers embraced coach Jeff Mullins' emphasis on defense, the results have been positive.

"In practice coach has been focusing on defense," forward Shanderic Downs said. "We know some teams are going to have a lot of talent and different styles of play, so we've got to help each other. If my man beats me off the dribble, I have confidence in Alex to step over or Ponce (James) will step in and take a charge."

"Our defense has been real constant," Mullins said. "We weren't a real good defensive team in December, but we've become a good defensive team in January. I think we've got a lot of room for improvement, but certainly what we're doing is working."

UNCC's defensive turnaround is a team effort built on individual performance. A key

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PHOTO/CALVIN FERGUSON

Junior guard Nikki Herron leads West Mecklenburg in points per game and rebounding.