

SPORTS

With NBA over, baseball fails to fill sports void

Is it just me or has anyone else noticed the incredible void in the sports world after the conclusion of the NBA season?

I think the fact that the NBA Draft was such a big event speaks to the magnitude of boredom that die-hard sports fans are experiencing. Now I know what you're thinking: "What is he talking about? Baseball provides for summer sports entertainment."

Well ... I don't know if entertainment is the word. Even baseball players will say that they can't watch any games they're not playing.

Currently, the baseball season is in its thousandth game and it seems like the teams still have a million left to play. Who cares if the cellar-dwelling Mets win a game against the first-place Giants? The National League races primarily already are determined — we can count out nine of the 14 teams in the division races.

And in the American League, nobody seems to want to win those divisions, especially the AL West. Let's take a team like California. They are 10 games under .500, but the Angels are still only nine games out of first place. Doesn't make much sense, huh?

Other teams such as Chicago, Houston or Montreal in the NL, recordwise, are having relatively successful seasons, but they can start looking ahead to next year. With 60-plus games left, they have no chance of winning.

Not only does the season frustrate me, but the pace of the games do as well. It's not so much that games take three hours to play; I've sat through football games of the same length. The little things get to me, like the amount of time it takes to put in a relief pitcher.

First the catcher will visit the mound, then the pitching coach will make the trip. I wonder what takes place in these conversations. Everyone viewing the game knows exactly what is going on, but the managers feel a need to painstakingly prolong matters.

And please don't let a runner be on first base. The starting pitcher will throw to first so often to hold the runner, when in actuality it's just a stalling tactic.

How many times does the pennant race depend on the final day of the regular season? I only can think of isolated seasons, but football always has its share of teams fighting for playoff spots. I'm counting down the hours until Buffalo at Detroit kicks off the NFL preseason this Friday. With all this excitement generated from baseball, I'm bound to explode.

While looking in USA Today last week, it showed that the top five televised sports events of the past year were all NFL games. (To my surprise, none of the Final Four games were listed.)

The evidence is overwhelming: baseball is losing its appeal. America's pastime might just be past its time.

UNC-Nike agreement still not a done deal

By John C. Manuel
Sports Editor

To just do it or not to just do it. That is the question perplexing UNC athletic officials this week in the wake of Athletic Director John Swofford's agreement with sports shoe giant Nike.

Swofford announced July 20 that the University had reached an agreement with Nike to outfit all 26 North Carolina varsity athletic squads with shoes, equipment and apparel. This would include the men's basketball team, thus ending a 32-year relationship between Dean Smith-coached teams and Converse.

But apparently Swofford, Smith and football coach Mack Brown are the only members of the athletic department with a working knowledge of the agreement.

Chancellor Paul Hardin, who would have to approve a contract, told the Board of Trustees on Friday, "I have seen no contract, so there isn't one."

Swofford, Smith and Brown were all unavailable for comment. Financial

terms of the Nike deal were not disclosed, but Nike Public Relations Manager Keith Peters said the shoe company hoped to sign a four-year contract.

Peters emphasized that the deal involved more than just the basketball team.

"I'm sure there are things that still need to be resolved," he said. "Our agreement is for us to supply as much footwear and apparel as we humanly can to teams."

"Obviously, there are some teams for which we do not make footwear or apparel, and it's my understanding that those sports are free to go out for sources from other manufacturers. At some point, I think it will be up to the coaches to decide if our product is appropriate."

Materials the Beaverton, Ore.-based giant does not make include lacrosse sticks, baseball bats, gloves and helmets, Peters said. "I think there will be some sports we'll be able to accommodate and some that we won't."

Zachary Albert contributed to this article.

Wenstrom looking for a job with Celtics at summer camp

By Justin Scheef
Staff Writer

WHITE PLAINS, N.Y. — Almost four months ago, Matt Wenstrom celebrated a national championship with his Tar Heel teammates. But now, like most graduating seniors, the 7-foot-1 center is looking for a job.

Wenstrom's search brought him to the Boston Celtics' summer league team, composed of young NBA players, rookies and free agents.

The Celtics competed in the Doral Arrowwood N.Y. Summer League at the Westchester County Center last week, hosted by the New York Knicks. The Milwaukee Bucks, New Jersey Nets, Washington Bullets and Philadelphia 76ers also sent squads to the camp.

The summer league provides players an opportunity to prove themselves in the professional ranks. Hubert Davis, who finished his UNC career in 1992, did just that last summer in the league, averaging 21 points for the Knicks.

Wenstrom started his summer by participating in a NBA pre-draft combine in Chicago in June. After being passed over in the draft, Wenstrom joined the Celtics for the free-agent camp.

A highly touted All-American coming out of high school, Wenstrom encountered high expectations early in his North Carolina career. But the Katy, Texas, native never lived up to his lofty billing. That's why playing in the camp was important to Wenstrom.

"Coming here, when I did get in the game, I had to play well, show them what I had so they could look and try to assess my abilities," Wenstrom said. "It's hard coming out of college with no stats. So I did have something to prove."

Wenstrom had a chance to prove himself with the pros last week. On July 21, Wenstrom was a key factor in lifting Boston over Washington. In 17 minutes of play, the 250-pound center scored 15 points on 4-of-5 shooting, hit all seven of his free throws, snared six rebounds and made two steals.

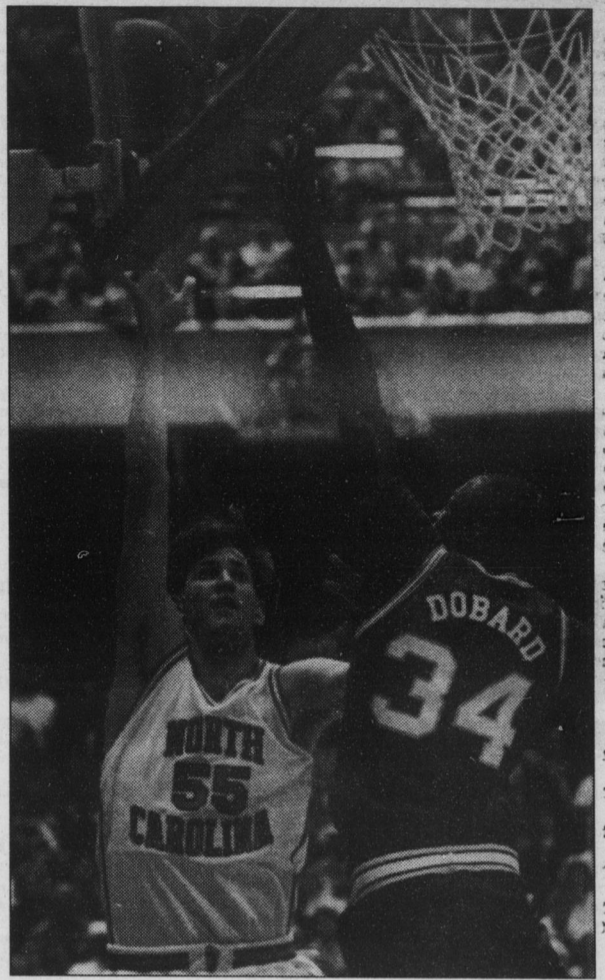
"I don't think that I played above myself that night," Wenstrom said. "I think I had a solid game. I rebounded well, and I shot well from the field, which I think I can do consistently."

Wenstrom was relatively quiet for the rest of the week, his time limited by the presence of the Celtics' first-round draft pick, center Acie Earl of Iowa.

Wenstrom still had time to get in the face of Knick Jack Haley after the journeyman center dealt him a hard foul. Wenstrom picked up a technical foul in one of the confrontations.

If Wenstrom does not make the Celtics squad, he said he may head for Europe or play in the Continental Basketball Association.

Head coach Chris Ford said Boston wanted to give Wenstrom a chance to show what he could do since he didn't get that much playing time at UNC.



Former UNC center Matt Wenstrom is trying to latch on with the Boston Celtics

"He played pretty well at rookie camp, which earned him a spot here at this 10-day camp," Ford said. "It's an opportunity not only to be seen by us, but by five other teams who are participating here and maybe he'll get invited back to the big camp in October."

Hubert rolls on

UNC alumnus Hubert Davis, who called New York reporters "sir" last year as a rookie with the Knicks, led the

New Yorkers in scoring and ovations. Davis averaged 23.4 points at the camp. A fan favorite since hitting a key 3-point bucket in the playoffs against Charlotte, Davis got the loudest applause of any player at Doral.

Davis said he didn't feel left out of the UNC national championship ("I had my chance," he said, referring to a 1991 Final Four trip), but he said he taped and watched every UNC game of the 1992-93 season.

'Buffet Killer' and 'Big Cookie' highlight football media guide

The 1993 UNC football media guide is out this week. Media guides, produced by the sports information departments of college programs, serve as major tools of the trade for sports writers, providing a wealth of information.

Aside from team records and reviews of the past season, the UNC media guide provides "Notes On ..." select players throughout the player-profile section. This year's model has some interesting selections.

Take redshirt sophomore Russell Babb's entry. The reserve offensive lineman has some interesting advice for college-bound students with which I must: "Do not, under any circumstances, buy a Nintendo or Sega."

Babb goes on to write that the title of his autobiography would be, "Another Day, Another Buffet." Again, I can relate.

This buffet motif appears again in the media guide in the notes on offensive guard/center Shawn Hocker. Last year, I nicknamed Hocker "Loogie," but his teammates have given him a far superior moniker: "Buffet Killer." He lists his favorite food as, "Free (or bulk)," and his hobby is "Searching for the ultimate buffet." Sounds like my kind of guy. Hey Shawn, let's do lunch.

Apparently, senior co-captain Rick Steinbacher has. The inside linebacker follows Hocker's lead in the hobby department, listing "Following Shawn Hocker on his never-ending quest to find the world's ultimate buffet," as his favorite way to spend leisure time. I

wonder if new strength and conditioning coach Jeff Madden knows about this.

Hocker's sobriquet of "Buffet Killer" wins top honors for humor on this year's team. But for accuracy, no nicknames beat the one the Tar Heels have given Peach Bowl defensive MVP Bracey Walker. He's called "Stalker."

Defensive linemen Greg Black and Troy Barnett enjoy several nicknames each. Black responds to "G-Money," "Big G" (he is 290 pounds), "G-Force,"

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Headed for Overtime
John C. Manuel
Sports Editor



The following get technical fouls:
1. San Diego Padres
One more time. Trading Greg Harris for a minor-league catcher was pathetic.
2. Vince Coleman
Children shouldn't play with firecrackers.
3. Danie Bichette
Rockies RF misplayed two hits into inside-the-park homers in two days.

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