



## NOTES ON THE SCOREBOARD

By Kerry Schmidt 06-26-2005

Addendum to last week's column.

I received over 50 e-mails, more than for any other column. Virtually all of them agreed with the point I was making, except for one very vociferous objector, whom I'll call "C." C did not use a name (I would not have printed it anyway), just signed the e-mail "The right way."

Basically, C said America was all about winning, and that losing was a sign of failure. C said that coaches and parents were justified in "doing anything and everything, whatever it takes, to make these kids a winner," and added that the age of four or five was the right time to start. I did not dignify the comments with a response.

Tulane. Down here, the locals were at a fever pitch for the Green Wave, but they completely imploded. Blowing the 7-run lead was painfully reminiscent of their only other CWS appearance in 2001, when they were leading Stanford 8-0 and lost 13-11. Life goes on.

On a bright note.

We all too often read about greedy athletes asking for more money.

Denver Broncos' Nick Ferguson forfeited his \$50,000 bonus by not attending the off-season workout program. His reason? "I promised my mother I would finish my degree, graduate, so I kept that promise."

Ferguson went back to Georgia Tech this spring and finished the 15 credits he needed for his degree in business administration. He said Coach Mike Shanahan understood and allowed him to go. "All I had to sacrifice was my bonus, but it was worth it. I have \$50,000 worth of smiles."

This feel good story was reported, but you had to dig deep to find it. Had he done something wrong, it would have made headlines.

Another bright note.

According to NBA executives, Greg Oden, "the next LeBron James," is projected to be the No.1 draft choice in next summer's draft, after he graduates from high school.

Millions of dollars await.

Not so fast. Oden has said he will "definitely" go to college. Indiana, Michigan State, Duke and others are after him. Very refreshing.

More NBA.

According to Neilson, the TV ratings for the first four games of the NBA finals were off 17%. But for the last two, both nail-biters, the ratings were considerable higher.

Yes, you have two "small market" teams, no Lakers as in years past.

But if you are a purist of the game, you watched some of the best basketball played in years.

Today, virtually an entire generation has grown up watching "street basketball," wherein it's about the individual, the behind-your-back, wrap-around, 360 degree spin and slam dunks.



## OFF THE WALL SPORTS

---

Not in this series. Detroit is the No. 1 defensive team in the league and San Antonio is the second.

Usually, you can watch an NBA game and maybe see 5-6 blocked shots total.

In last Tuesday night's 6<sup>th</sup> game, there were 11 blocks and eight steals in the first quarter alone. Those flashy type sprints to dunk are met with either a block or a foul, one where you are slammed on your backside.

It is fundamentals! Team play! It is great to watch, since it pretty much has been a lost art. Each of these two teams EARN every point they make. Good stuff.

Speaking of the NBA, you may have noticed that with the collective bargaining agreement set to expire June 30, the two sides got together and had a deal in four days. Unlike the NHL (I can't remember what that is, but whatever...), who cancelled an entire season and is still nowhere near agreement, the NBA realized the potential consequences of a lockout/strike and quickly came to terms.

The major issues were over an age limit – the league wanted a minimum age of 20, and settled for 19 and one year removed from high school – and the length of guaranteed contracts – reduced from seven years to six.

You don't have to be a Harvard lawyer to figure out that canceling any/all of a season would be a disaster of epic proportions. Thus, they showed common sense and left the idiot label for the hockey pucks, RIP.

A quick note on the pucksters. The Chicago Blackhawks hired a new GM who promptly fired the coach, saying he did not win enough. Hard to win when you don't play!

Try hiring a new coach when you don't know if you will have a season.

The 19-year age limit takes effect after next season. That means high-schoolers after this year's draft will likely spend a year in the Continental Basketball League, which, in effect, is like a minor league for the NBA.

And, "most importantly," said Commissioner David Stern, "it will keep NBA scouts and agents out of high school gyms."

In last year's draft, seven high school players were taken in the first round, and some say 4-6 may be taken this final year.

Thus, the "phenoms" will have to wait one year to buy their Hummer, pimp it up, and get a million dollar crib.

Another news flash of curiosity in the NBA is that Zen Master Phil Jackson is returning to coach the Lakers with Kobe still entrenched therein.

According to Jackson's book which came out after the tumultuous 2004-05 season, Zen Man had some blunt comments about Kobe, the biggest of which was "I won't coach this team next year if (Kobe) is still here. He won't listen to anyone. I've had it with that kid." Kobe, in response, said "He's just trying to sell books, I'll leave it at that."

So, Jackson returns to a team that has a me-first superstar and, because of Kobe, no Shaq and not much talent.

An Ebok is a mythical character that lived alone in a dark forest and was said to have psychic powers. Oddly enough, Ebok is Kobe spelled backwards.

As a long standing Lakers' fan, I wonder why perhaps the best coach in basketball wants to come back to a team that has no chance of winning much of anything. Other than the fact that he gets \$10 million a year and his girlfriend is the owner's daughter.



# OFF THE WALL SPORTS

---

Could be an interesting year for the NBA. At least there will be a year. NHL? No one will notice any difference if they have a year or not.