



WHOLE LOT OF SHAKIN NOTHING, GOING ON.

By Kerry Schmidt March 15, 2009

I have said for the last 2 -3 columns that there is not much happening. Well, after scouring 3 newspapers, two magazines and extensive on-line googling of ESPN, MLB, NBA, et al, I must try to make something out of not much. So, here goes.

Someone yelled, hey, MLB is in spring training. Who cares! Find me one thing that is exciting in spring training, other than A-Rod's steroid lump being removed.

Given that he makes 4 mil a month, I think it is apropos that the player who will take his 3<sup>rd</sup> base spot until the steroids clear up is Corey RANSOM.

He will make about as much money in the 4-6 weeks he plays as A-Rod makes per game!

The other great "news maker" was the Red Sox's Jonathan Papelbon calling Manny Ramirez a "cancer" while on the Sox. Papelbon went on to continue his "cancer comments" to several media outlets over several days.

Hard to make Manny look like the class act as he simply said, "that's fine. I've simply moved on," as compared to Papelbutt who made an ass out of himself.

Hey, Manny may well be a jerk, but why spout off on past history.

Also, news was that there are "many empty seats" – USA TODAY – at this year's spring games. Overall, attendance is down 12% from last year. The Angels, down 46%, Tigers, 41% and Mariners, 34% "lead" the losses.

Of course, the economy is the main reason, but some say "there is just not that much interest this year." Teams have been offering lower priced tickets, and many teams are giving away free tickets to some games.

And for the regular season, the Blue Jays are selling upper deck seats for all home games for \$95! That's \$1.17 per game! But the downside is it's Toronto. Other teams are also already coming up with regular season discounts.

Most teams report that the games are only "about half" full, compared to sell outs in years past.

OK, yes, March Madness is just about here. And that is something that many really look forward to. However, we won't know the 65 teams that will partake until after today, so not much too really talk about until then.

The only real comments on this is issue are about how, why, et al, which teams are chosen.

Yes, all the major conferences' playoff winners automatically are in.

But then something akin to the mess that is the BCS comes into play.

Teams from "not so prominent conferences," their teams' playoff champs are also automatically in.

Some conferences and their tournament winners that are "IN:" Chattanooga, Southern conference; Cleveland State, Horizon (never heard of that one); East Tennessee State, Atlantic Sun; Gonzaga, West Coast; North Dakota State, Summit; Morehead State, Ohio Valley; Northern Iowa, Missouri Valley – that fits, Iowa in Missouri; Portland State, Big Sky and Radford of the Big South.

Toss in Robert Morris – is that the same guy who plays for the Redskins – Northeast; Siena, Metro Atlantic and Virginia Commonwealth, Colonial.

And some Kentucky school from the Sun Belt conference.

And after today, there will be at least another 10 – 15 virtual no names going to the dance.

The only occasional aspect of this is that usually every year, at least one of those schools – most in the number 13-16<sup>th</sup> seeds, will upset some big name, high seeded school.



But given that all of those small schools get automatic bids, that means some name teams with good records will be left out.

Last year, 4 of those small teams had losing records, but got in via automatic bids.

Again the economy: every one of college basketball's 12-top rated conferences saw attendance fall this year.

One very interesting side note took me back to a fantastic time, was a look at the finals of MM in 1979.

The whole season culminated in the championship game between Michigan State, led by effervescent Ervin "Magic" Johnson and the very shy and reticent Larry Bird.

Besides being the most dominant two players that year, the whispered side notes were the "great white hope," against "another black superstar."

Johnson's razzle-dazzle style and many humorous comments were in stark contrast to the quiet Bird.

The longest quote one got from Bird was, "I'm just a guy." And when asked re how his broken thumb was, he answered, "broke."

30 years later, that Championship game remains television's highest-rated college basketball game ever!

With Magic's behind the back passes and assorted spin moves never seen, combined with Michigan State's zone, created a game that was one-sided and thus did not live up to the anticipated bonanza. Magic had a great game, and Bird had an "off game," as Magic's MS defeated Bird and Indiana State, 75-64

After the game, Magic, full of smiles and quotes, helped cut down the nets.

Bird? He walked off the court and wept into a towel for over 10 minutes. Then he showered, dressed and took his gym bag into the trainer's room, where he stayed for 38 minutes.

Mel Daniels, an assistant coach, finally told waiting reporters, "he's a sensitive guy." Sic. He added that "it will take time for him to accept this. When the time does come, he'll accept you guys. But now....give him his space."

I remember the anticipation of the game and watching every minute.

I can't imagine any single title game ever being touted as that one.

As we all know, Bird and Magic continued their heated rivalry in the NBA for years. In fact, in the 11 years after they entered the NBA, the championships were won 9 of those 11 times by either Boston or L.A. The Lakers won 5, Boston 4.

During many of those years, the two were "not close," but as their careers wound down, they did a commercial together, and ended up becoming pretty close friends.

That game was NOT about two teams. It was about two individuals, who were diametrically opposite of each other.

But as different as they were, there was not a more competitive pair to be found. Though Magic won more, Bird was the most intense, focused and hard a player as basketball has ever seen.

Magic? Well, he reinvented basketball. A 6'7" guard (most guards were about 6'1 or 2 back then.)

And in his first year, Magic led the Lakers to the title. With Kareem sitting at home with a badly sprained ankle, Magic started at CENTER, and ended up playing all five positions, scoring 42 points, grabbing 19 rebounds and passing out 14 assists to go with 9 steals, as they defeated the 76'ers in Philly in game six.

Even today, many consider that the greatest single feat by one player.

Quite likely, we may well never see such a great rivalry between two of the greatest college, then pro, players again.



# OFF THE WALL SPORTS

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Wilt and Bill Russell are the only pair that come close, but neither had the “charisma” about them and the history dating to the “magic” college title game.

Well, that went on for awhile. I had not planned on saying much about that game and following years, but the more I researched it, the more I remembered, and I knew I had to re-tell that one game story, a game that transcended into 13-14 years of professional greatness.

Still on basketball. Last Monday’s USA TODAY had a major headline: “Celtics, Lakers are kings of court and cash.”

The gist of the story was that both are great teams and that both had the cash to spend on big payrolls.

Well, they were only half correct. They erred quite a bit concerning the Lakers.

Boston has by far the largest payroll, at 105 million. But the Lakers are only 7<sup>th</sup>, with a total of 78 million. Also, 11 other teams are within 3-5 million of the Lakers, so while these two teams do have a very long history – see 30 years ago, Magic and Bird, and before, Wilt and Russell – and again the last few years, the part about L.A. also spending 9-figure bucks was quite misleading. Backing up a minute, Connecticut’s men’s basketball coach, Jim Calhoun, was vilified recently by the state’s politicians.

During a press conference, bloggers, tweeters – I have not freaking idea what they are, but apparently they are a new form of “shorthand” blogging, or something, Calhoun was questioned on how he could justify his \$1.6 million salary. When some of the above blogwetters, whatever, got caustic, saying he should refund some of it, Calhoun briskly said, “Not a dime back.”

Thus, some state politicians, including the governor, chastised him for not just his salary, but for his way of declining to give some back.

Talk about – AGAIN – more double speak by politicians. Each and every year, those pols automatically give themselves a 6% raise plus a cost of living increase!

And while they have never been asked, I can assure you that every one of those damn politicians, if asked, would give “Not a single dime back.”

Buffalo signed TO for – just one year. At \$6.5 million.

The Bills’ second year QB, Trent Edwards, said he pushed to get TO. He added that he would be a great asset for the team, one that finished 25<sup>th</sup> in the league in total yards.

Hopefully, for Edwards, it may make his stats better. He had 14 TD’s and 12 Int’s last year. He may do OK with TO, as long as he does not force TO to go over the middle and stretch to actually catch a ball.

I’ll, for some reason, give the NFL some ink. Fighting is up 28%. “Surprise, surprise,” as Gomer Pyle would say.

NHL’s front office says they need to cut down on this, “especially the fights that occur on the opening game face off.” Hey, you gotta love that. Hell, about the only reason people watch hooockey if for the fights, so now they can turn off the TV right after the face off.

Finish with the most important and interesting sport. Football.

The NFL players will have their own “draft” today. Actually a vote.

They will elect a new executive director for the NFLPA, replacing the deceased Gene Upshaw. The four finalists are former players Trace Armstrong and Troy Vincent, and attorneys David Cornwell and DeMaurice Smith. If I had a vote, both lawyers would be shoved so far into the dung pile they would never get out.

But, whoever gets the position, they will already have a very full plate.

The owners have cancelled the current CBA agreement, which gives the players 60% of gross revenue, and they took away the salary cap after 2009.

Thus, 2010 will be the first salary cap free season since the early 90’s. Then, come 2011, who knows. We could well see another walkout/strike/lockout.



# OFF THE WALL SPORTS

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And on top of all this, the retired players, the ones who took the beatings and spilled the blood so the current ones could make the big bucks, they are organized and will demand that they get some attention, especially in the insurance area, and in increased pensions. **AS THEY DAMN WELL SHOULD!**

Upshaw's salary was around \$16 million, so you can see partly why the final four want the job so badly.

So badly that infighting, accusations, secret emails released to the media, mud-slinging, and all sorts of stuff that regular politicians use when running for office.

I read several articles on the web and in papers, covering thousands of words.

Not enough time, or interest on your part, to get into it all, but the new Director will have the task of keeping the NFL what it is today. Far and away America's favorite sport.

Several former players have chimed in, most of them very critical of at least one of the choices, and Joe Delamiellerue, a Hall of Fame guard, who was a staunch critic of Upshaw.

Kicker Matt Stover is in his 17<sup>th</sup> years as a player rep. Each player has a vote, and as Stover goes into "that room" in Maui on Sunday, "I will do my best to represent the players and pick the one that has the best ability to represent the players, to work with the owners to get a new CBA in hand."

The NFL has been so smooth for over 20 years, that it may end up being a shock to the fans who don't remember the lock out and strike shortened seasons of 1982- players out 57 days, only 6 regular season games and a 16 game playoff, then '87, players walked, for 25 days, resulting in three games with replacement players.

Some estimate that a strike/lockout in 2011 could cost the owners \$1.6 billion.

No matter what, somehow the NFL needs to settle this before any of the above happens.

Remember in 1994, when MLB struck, no WS. It took over 8 years for MLB to get back to where it was.

And the idiotic NHL. On strike for an entire season. They have yet to get back anywhere near where they were before that strike.

We can only hope that common sense prevails, to save America's sport.

But then, we're dealing with greedy, asshole billionaire owners and millionaire players who, well, who knows what they are like.

Just talking about this last bit of crap, I am in desperate need of my single malt. At least 6 fingers!