



SPECIAL PREVIEW ISSUE

# COLLEGE FOOTBALL

**SportingNews**

**MATT LEINART**  
The nation's  
best player

**BRING IT ON!**

**USC guns for 3 in a row**

Team rankings 1-119

Bowl projections

Conference previews

**TSN's TOP 10**

1. USC
2. Tennessee
3. Ohio State
4. Virginia Tech
5. Texas
6. LSU
7. Miami
8. Michigan
9. Oklahoma
10. Iowa



BRIAN URLACHER



# JUST



19



1995 State

A close-up portrait of a muscular man with short hair and blue eyes, wearing a dark blue Nike tank top. He is standing in front of a wall with white and red tiles. The text "DO IT." is overlaid in large white letters across his chest. A tattoo of a barbed wire fence is visible on his left arm.

**DO IT.**

**NIKEGRIDIRON.COM**

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Justin Zwick and the Buckeyes are dreaming of a faraway place—the Rose Bowl, site of this season's BCS title game.

JAY DROWNS / TSN

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a-y-y-i-i-e-e-e-a-a-ahhhh!  
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That's the game the Dolphins will play with Jason Taylor—now you see him as a 3-4 linebacker, now you don't—in their new varied approach.  
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> **COLLEGE FOOTBALL PREVIEW**

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Surprise, surprise—Southern California is in prime fighting shape. Is there anyone out there who's got what it takes to take the Trojans' title belt? *By Matt Hayes*

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ON THE COVER: YOUNG AND LEINART BY ROBERT SEALE / TSN, BREASTON AND GINN BY JAY DROWNS / TSN, AINGE BY BOB LEVERONE / TSN, LEAK BY GARY BOGDON FOR TSN

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**THE NEW RIDGELINE** 



# TOKNOWLIST

7 more ways to leave your lover

1

CHASING THE TRUTH

## Junior and Jeff will race for the Cup! (Well, in theory ...)

Die-hard fans think NASCAR makes up the rules as it goes along. Those fans think that because it's true. Green-white-checked flag finishes, the "lucky dog" rule, body changes—NASCAR institutes new policies in the middle of the season all the time.

Fans also often accuse NASCAR of showing favoritism to its stars, though there's little convincing evidence, except for the time Brian France personally replaced Dale Earnhardt Jr.'s regular engine with a jet engine. Just kidding. France hired somebody to do it.

Now, making its way from cyberspace to radio waves, comes talk that NASCAR will change the rules to make sure Junior and Jeff Gordon—by far NASCAR's most popular drivers but stink bombs on the track for large chunks of this season—qualify for the Chase for the NASCAR Nextel Cup. Yes, there are conspiracy theories about an as-yet-unperpetrated conspiracy. Exactly how NASCAR would "manipulate" the rules to get those two in remains unknown (at least by those outside of the corporate headquarters).

The first theory to float up was that fans would be allowed to vote one driver into the Chase—an election Junior would win in a walk. France shot that down. Probably because he already had cooked up a simpler, undetectable scheme to get both of them in. —*Matt Crossman*

Come on, Gordo. Lighten up, Little E. You boys ain't done yet!

2

TIM BROWN

## Touching down in NASCAR

Tim Brown will become the latest former NFL star to own a NASCAR team. Jim Kelly and Terry Bradshaw own stakes in Busch Series teams, and Troy Aikman and Roger Staubach have been trying for several years to get a team started.

Tim Brown Racing hopes to field a car in the Nextel Cup Series next season. But a lot of work is ahead—including finding a driver and a crew chief. Brown will get engines and technical expertise—the key ingredients Aikman and Staubach are missing—from Roush Racing.

The presence of a minority-owned car would be a huge boost to NASCAR's diversity efforts. In searching for sponsors, Brown is targeting companies with strong presences in the African American community and hopes to raise NASCAR's profile enough to influence urban style. "It's not cool to wear a Dale Earnhardt Jr. jacket in the neighborhood," he says. "We want to make it cool."

Two steps toward cool will be the car's number and paint scheme: 81 and silver and black, just like Brown wore for 16 seasons with the Raiders. —*M.C.*



Brown

PAUL SAKUMA / AP

HAROLD HINSON FOR TSN (2)

3

YOU HEARD IT HERE

## 'The offices at AmericanAirlines Arena became so hectic and overheated, three of Pat Riley's hairs came out of place.'

—*NBA Insider Sean Deveney, page 72*

# 4

## THE BASKETBALL WORLD

### Shout it twice: USA! USA!

Which team do you prefer—USA or USA?  
 You could root for the college basketball players representing the U.S. in the under-21 world championships, currently being contested in Argentina with the championship game on Sunday. You could root for the collegians representing the U.S. in the World University Games, which begin Friday in Izmir, Turkey. You could root for them both, but how will you tell them apart? Easy—follow this guide. —Mike DeCourcy

U-21 team		WUG team
Extreme. It's one of four major men's championships—and the only one currently owned by the United States.	<b>Importance of competition</b>	Minimal. Winning is better than losing, but this is not a major event.
Phil Martelli, St. Joseph's	<b>Philadelphia college coach in charge</b>	Jay Wright, Villanova
J.J. Redick, shooting guard	<b>Mandatory Duke All-American</b>	Shelden Williams, center
<b>Curtis Withers</b> , Charlotte	<b>Underexposed big man at heart of team</b>	<b>Craig Smith</b> , Boston College
Marcus Williams, Connecticut, and Rajon Rondo, Kentucky	<b>Point guards available instead of Deron Williams, Chris Paul and Raymond Felton</b>	Chris Hernandez, Stanford, and Gerry McNamara, Syracuse



BOB LEVERONE / TSN

JAMIE SABAU FOR TSN

# 5

## DOUBLE-A BALL -15

The A's and Astros are approaching an exceptionally rare achievement. If they make the playoffs, they'll join the 1914 Boston "Miracle" Braves as the only teams to be 15 games under .500 and still reach the postseason. The Braves won the World Series that year, completing one of the unlikeliest journeys in baseball history.



CHARLIE REIDEL / AP

# 6

## A NEW BEGINNING FOR NOTRE DAME

### Look, we couldn't exactly fit the Irish into our conference previews, so you'll have to make do with this

The opener at Pitt will be tough. Week 2 at Michigan will be brutal. But the game that, more than any other, will define Charlie Weis' first season as coach at Notre Dame: a friendly late-September tussle in Seattle against Washington and new Huskies coach Tyrone Willingham. Who just happens to be the former ND coach. Who just happened to coach the Irish to a 38-3 rout of Washington last year. So if the Irish and Weis can't find a way to win in Husky Stadium ... oh, the humanity. Notre Dame's players were poorly coached and misused by the previous staff, but there's enough talent to shoot for, oh, eight wins. Yeah, the schedule is a nightmare. But if the Irish score an early upset—against Pitt or Michigan—and gain confidence and momentum, the second half of the season could be special. And Weis' first year could end in the Gator Bowl, not some useless dot.com bowl. —Matt Hayes



MICHAEL CONROY / AP

# 7

## TSN STAFF POLL

### Will Notre Dame go bowling again in its first season under Charlie Weis?

Yes 32%  
 No 68%



JOE RAYMOND / AP







# BVD

# MANUAL

*A man's guide to his skivvies*

## UNWEDGING WEDGIES



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### PRIVATE WEDGIE

A wedgie when no one else is around is nary a problem at all. There's no need to create a diversion or be subtle about the situation. Simply grab the seat of your pants (either hand will do) and yank.



### PUBLIC WEDGIE

Along with discomfort, this one heaps on a potential dose of embarrassment. Remain calm. Put your feet together. Gently take one giant step sideways. Repeat until the problem is dislodged. If asked what you are doing, casually respond that you are measuring the ground.



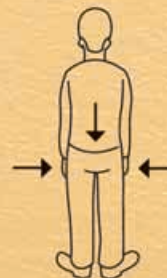
### THE LEVITATOR

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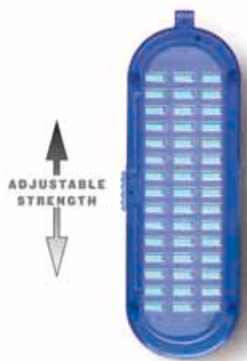
### THE BUNCH-UP

The stepbrother of the wedgie, this is almost nonexistent with BVD® underwear. Just grab any problem areas with both hands and firmly tug downward. If a bystander catches you in the act, merely pretend that you were brushing off the flaky remnants of a cheese Danish.





AIR FRESHENER TOO STRONG?

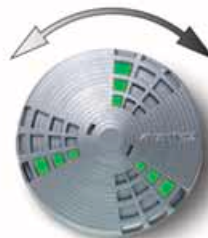


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# We're in this together

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The basics—the latest scores, statistics and headlines—still are there. But we've cranked up the interactive elements to make your experience richer.



## WHAT WE'RE BLOGGING

**MLB Insider Ken Rosenthal:** On the night Cal Ripken broke Lou Gehrig's consecutive-games record, Palmeiro handed President Clinton a letter in the Orioles' clubhouse, asking the government to help get his brother out of Cuba. It took about two years, but Palmeiro's brother and his family eventually got to the U.S. To think that Palmeiro might have lied to Congress after the government worked to help his family ... to me, that's one of the most disturbing aspects of all this.

**Sporting News Radio host Arnie Spanier:** MLB keeps Palmeiro's positive steroids test a secret for months so he can get his 3,000th hit. MLB also gets to have its Hall of Fame ceremony without problems. Tell me that doesn't stink to high holy hell. Then the O's try to make a trade with the knowledge that Palmeiro would be suspended. Didn't Martha Stewart go to jail for insider trading?

**NBA Insider Sean Deveney:** You have to figure that with five teams and 13 players involved, the trade that will bring Antoine Walker, James Posey and Jason Williams to the Heat will have quite an impact. And I am sure it will have a huge impact—on the poor worker bee who has to deal with all the paperwork over at the NBA office on Fifth Ave. Other than that, this deal is as hollow as an Atlanta Hawks victory in April.

**NFL Insider Dan Pompei:** I promise you the Fords are among the best, most stable owners in football. Would you rather have someone who changes coaches the way some men change television channels? Or an owner who monitors jockstrap allocation and destroys loyalty?



## WHAT YOU'RE BLOGGING

If Maris deserved an asterisk for his 61 in 162 vs. Ruth's 60 in 154 (and he did deserve the asterisk), what should await Bonds, Palmeiro, and McGwire—brackets, parenthesis and italics? —Posted by *BarristerBob*

I always ask about the medication I am on, what it might do to me, what the side effects are and even what other symptoms it might mask. I am just a layman, but I am careful about what goes into my body. How could these ballplayers really not know what is going into theirs, when theirs is the basis of their vocation? —Posted by *Kal Zakath*

If Pat Riley can take Rafer Alston and Damon Jones and make them starters, it's hard to argue that he won't get more from Jason Williams. Antoine Walker was an All-Star with Boston and has plenty of talent. Plug him into Pat's system and watch him shine. James Posey for Rasual Butler? Please. —Posted by *expertfl*

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# Las Vegas ARRIVALS

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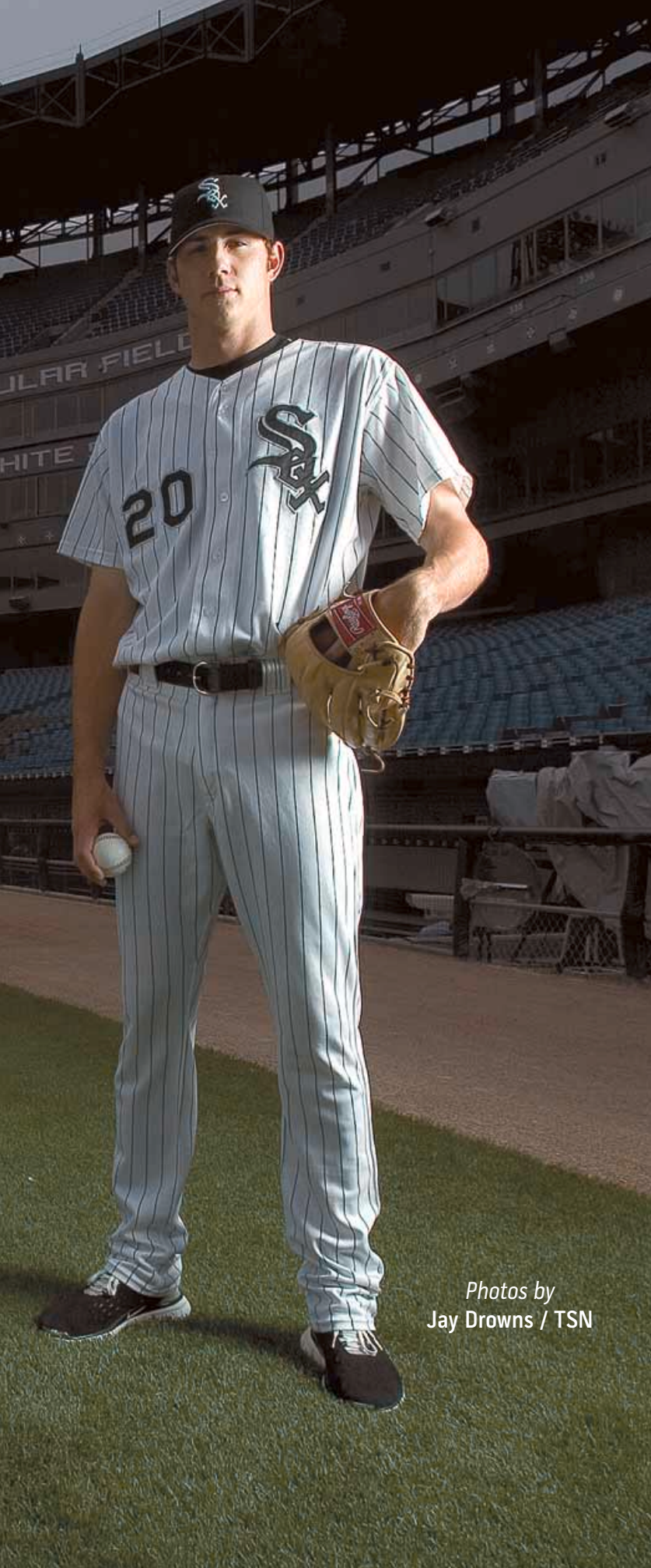




MLB

# Thrill of the hunt

**MARK BUEHRLE and JON GARLAND**  
have the White Sox's sights on a  
world championship *By Sean Deveney*



Photos by  
Jay Drowns / TSN

Two years ago, White Sox ace Mark Buehrle broke character. He spent a bit of money—OK, a lot of money—on a 1,200-acre piece of land in rural Missouri, a home complete with four-wheelers and hunting stands for deer and wild turkeys. Buehrle usually is not a big spender. He's more Jack in the Box and Bud than Chez Robert and Bordeaux. He enjoys the property, he says, because he considers it an accomplishment, something he can give back to his family in suburban St. Louis.

But Buehrle has not been able to accomplish one of his goals when it comes to his wilderness expanse: getting fellow pitcher Jon Garland, Buehrle's closest friend on the team, to suit up in oversize camouflage and join him for some deer hunting. Although Buehrle is a full-blooded Midwesterner with admitted redneck leanings, Garland is all Southern California. He has fired a gun but, he says, "never at anything that was alive. I don't think I have the stomach for that."

"You know what he's afraid of?" Buehrle says. "Shooting his foot off. That's what he says: 'I'm going to shoot my foot off.' I am trying to tell him, 'Look, you only pick up the gun when you see something you are going to shoot. And you don't point it at yourself.'"

For now, Buehrle and Garland will put off stalking big game in Missouri and deal with big games on Chicago's South Side, where the White Sox have ridden their pitching-and-defense philosophy to the top of the majors. The defense has been outstanding, with the Sox tied for the American League lead in fielding percentage and ranked fourth in double plays. The pitching staff tops the A.L. in ERA. Despite a mild post-All-Star Game slump, the Sox hold a comfortable 13-game lead in the Central Division. "Look at where we are right now and what we have been built on," says outfielder Jermaine Dye. "We're in position to do some special things."

At the forefront of those special things are Buehrle (13-4) and Garland (career-best 15-5), an odd couple of baseball buddies whose lockers at U.S. Cellular Field are side by side and who, says White Sox pitching coach Don Cooper, "are always together, always talking." (Buehrle says, "Of course we're talking. We're starting pitchers. When you're not pitching, there's nothing else to do but talk.") On the

surface, they have much in common. Both were All-Stars this season. Both turn 26 this year (Buehrle did in March; Garland will in September). Both arrived in Chicago five seasons ago with heavy expectations after brief minor league stints, and because neither of them knew how to act upon arriving in the majors, they bonded.

But the two took very different paths to this point. Garland was a 6-5 high school star, going 27-4 with a 1.22 ERA in three prep seasons. The righthander was *USA Today's* California player of the year as a senior, and he had a scholarship offer to powerhouse Southern California. He was drafted 10th overall in 1997 by the Cubs and signed for \$1.325 million. Buehrle was a pint-sized lefthander who barely broke 80 mph in high school and was cut from the team as a freshman and sophomore. He had a growth spurt, though—he's 6-2 now—and his high school coach suggested he play for Jefferson College in Missouri. After going 16-4 in two seasons there, he was chosen by the White Sox in the 38th round in 1998. His signing bonus: \$167,000.

Garland came to the big leagues with *chosen one* credentials—he was the youngest pitcher in the majors when he was called up in 2000—but it has taken him a while to live up to the expectations for him. He flashed a powerful sinker but was prone to mental mistakes. He entered this season with a disappointing 46-51 career record and had been dropped to the No. 5 starter's slot. General manager Ken Williams says he was not considering trading Garland, but the organization's patience is wearing thin.

"It's not like I wasn't trying in other years," Garland says. "It has just taken awhile for everything to come together. Coming into this year, I definitely had a sense of needing to make it happen now."

Buehrle, meanwhile, became the team's opening day starter and its ace in 2001, his first full season. He has great control of his cut fastball and changeup and has been one of the game's most consistent pitchers the past five years. Garland says he never was jealous of Buehrle but instead was more concerned about getting himself to Buehrle's level. "I have completely enjoyed watching Mark come in and have as much success as he has had," Garland says. "He's the ace, and he deserves to be. I always thought I was doing OK, but it's just that I knew I could do better."



ALBERT DICKSON / TSN

## Best of the best?

The White Sox will be counting on young aces Mark Buehrle and Jon Garland to get them into October and lead them on an extended playoff run. Entering the week, the two had better stats than the 1-2 combinations of potential A.L. playoff opponents:

Team	Combo	W-L, ERA
<b>White Sox</b>	<b>Buehrle, Garland</b>	<b>28-9, 3.07</b>
The pair has one-third of an inning of postseason experience combined (Buehrle in 2000).		
<b>Angels</b>	<b>Bartolo Colon, John Lackey</b>	<b>22-10, 3.63</b>
Colon (2-1, 4.50) has been hittable since the All-Star break.		
<b>Red Sox</b>	<b>Matt Clement, David Wells</b>	<b>20-8, 4.56</b>
There's also the Curt Schilling factor—whatever it is.		
<b>A's</b>	<b>Barry Zito, Rich Harden</b>	<b>20-12, 3.18</b>
Zito, Harden and Danny Haren are 24-3 since May 31.		
<b>Yankees</b>	<b>Randy Johnson, Mike Mussina</b>	<b>21-14, 4.18</b>
Johnson is 2-7 lifetime in Division Series and 5-1 in LCS and World Series games. —S.D.		

He has done better—much better—and the White Sox are in position to make their first trip to the postseason since 2000. Led by Buehrle and Garland, Chicago has the best starting pitching in the A.L., with playoff-tested veterans Freddy Garcia (11-5) and Orlando Hernandez (8-4) also in the rotation.

“We feel like we are capable of anything,” Dye says. “Pitching is the most important thing in the playoffs, and I would put our guys against any of the pitching staffs in the league.”

That means anything is possible. One year after the Red Sox broke a much-chronicled World Series drought in its 86th season, perhaps the South Siders are ready to break their less publicized run of championship futility that is now in its 88th season (check back in October on that).

**G**arland knew something was wrong when he went out for his start against the Blue Jays last week. First, his nose suddenly started bleeding. “That is never a good thing,” he notes. Then, warming up in the bullpen, Garland got the kiss of death—he felt great. “That always means things are going to go bad,” he says. “You never want to feel good when you’re warming up.”

Sure enough, Garland had his worst outing of the season, allowing a season-high 13 hits and seven runs. Every time he has a bad outing, Garland knows some will say he is reverting to the pitcher he was before this season. With an unopened can of Miller Lite sweating in his hand, Garland shrugs and says, “There’s nothing I can do about

that. All I can do is go home, have a drink and forget about it.”

That easygoing attitude seems to be an asset when you’re 15-5, but throughout his career, Garland has been accused of being too unemotional, of not caring enough to improve. Like any high-talent athlete who has underachieved, Garland has been excessively psychoanalyzed. “Everyone always wants answers for what is happening,” Cooper says. “No one wants to sit back and say, ‘You know what? This is a young kid, and we need to be patient; we need to let him mature.’”

On the long list of theories as to why Garland is having a breakout season, maturity seems to rank No. 1. Garland caused a stir among the White Sox last season when, after a game in which a Paul Konerko error led to four unearned runs, Garland said, “Truthfully, in my eyes, the difference in the game was the four unearned runs. Take those away and it’s a 4-4 game. What are you going to do?” Those words fed a perception that Garland was selfish and always looking to blame someone else for his failures—a perception that no longer is true.

“That, to me, is the biggest thing he’s done,” Cooper says. “He is taking responsibility. He is going out there and getting guys out in big situations, rather than waiting for something to go wrong and blaming someone else.”

Garland also is working faster, something he picked up from the game’s quickest worker, Buehrle. “He has learned,” Cooper says, “to go out there and say, ‘Hey, I am the activities director out here. We’ll go when I say.’”

Garland also is throwing more



first-pitch strikes and has cut his walks almost in half, from 3.15 per nine innings last year to 1.61 this year. He has benefited from the managing of Ozzie Guillen, who has allowed him to work through difficult situations. The defense, with newcomers Tadahito Iguchi at second, Scott Podsednik in left and big-armed Dye in right, has given Garland more confidence. And new catcher A.J. Pierzynski is forcing the starting pitchers to use the whole plate.

“He’s always been a guy who had a real upside,” says one scout. “He has good delivery, good angle to the plate. He’s pitching to both sides of the plate now. A.J. Pierzynski has really emphasized to their staff that you’ve got to pitch inside. That’s helped their entire pitching staff a lot.”

That includes Buehrle, who has a career-low 2.79 ERA and is walking just 1.45 per nine innings. “Without looking at the numbers, yeah, I would probably say this has been my best year,” Buehrle says. “Pitching for this team has a lot to do with the success I’ve had—and that the whole pitching staff has had.”

But that works both ways—the Sox know their fortunes will rest on their pitching and, perhaps, on the performances of Buehrle and Garland. The staff could carry the White Sox well into late October, perhaps even infringing on the start of hunting season. If that happens, there will be no complaints from either ace. “It’s great to see Jon pitch like this,” Buehrle says. “For a long time he was disappointed in the way things went. He’s a guy we can count on now.” **TSN**

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# Fearview

You're on the highway. You look up, and you see things in the mirror that scare the bejeebers out of you.

- The grill of a toxic waste-hauling 18-wheeler with "Born To Be Wild" painted in red and orange letters on the extra-wide black bumper.

- A small-town sheriff with a Smokey's hat and a ticket quota.

- A mom yakking on a cell phone while chauffeuring six kids to swimming practice.

You drive in the Nextel Cup Series. You look up and see things in the mirror that scare the bejeebers out of you. For instance, any of a number of racing brethren atop 3,400 pounds of racecar, having gargled from a 55-gallon drum of testosterone.

Rearview mirror?

Call it a *fearview mirror*.

There are two facets to the craft of racing through a mirror. First, the games people play, the various tricks and stunts by the men in the mirror, designed to distract, disrupt and, occasionally, dismantle the driver ahead. Second, the people who play the games.

The consensus in the garage area is simple:

For the first, the details fall into the category of "If I told you, then I'd have to kill you." This is secret stuff.

For the second, in the macho sport of racing, nobody wants to admit another driver gives him the willies. Might as well admit you don't know how to change your car's oil and you TiVo *Will & Grace*.

But stick with us. Take in some tales through the looking glass, then meet the one driver nobody wants to see in the mirror.

In NASCAR,  
dramas can  
unfold behind  
you, and  
sometimes  
objects are closer  
than they ...

**a-y-y-i-i-e-e-e-a-a-ahhhh!**

**By Mark McCarter**

*Illustration by*  
Jack Krayne / TSN

*Photos by*  
Harold Hinson for TSN

## The games people play

He can be seen on movie screens all over the country, trying helplessly to shake a pesky Volkswagen named Herbie out of his mirror. Perhaps that's what makes Dale Jarrett reluctant on the subject.

"I don't know that that's something I want to talk about," Jarrett says.

The mirror racing, he means, not his cameo in *Herbie: Fully Loaded*.

"Everybody does a little something different. I'm not going to say what I do," Jarrett says.

Points leader Jimmie Johnson says, "Sometimes you have to mess with somebody aerowise to get the advantage or get by them. It's so tough to pass at a lot of these tracks. You have to get real close to someone's bumper to loosen him up and get by. Otherwise, you'll just be stuck behind him.

"Some people use it to play games, and other people use it just to pass."

Ultimately, it becomes a mental game. It's more about the driver looking back through the mirror than it is about the driver in the mirror.

"We do what we can do to get somebody to slip and make a mistake—trying to get a nose under them getting off the corner, things like that," says Greg Biffle, a five-time winner this season.

Elliott Sadler says, "You always try to keep the guy in front of you playing some kind of guessing game—darting in and out of his mirror, making him have to check it more than once. We do stuff like that all of the time."

## The people who play the games

Just like the postpubescent movie starlet behind the wheel of Herbie, most Nextel Cup racers have mastered fearview driving.

"Everybody's good at it," Johnson says.

Carl Edwards says: "It just depends on the day. They're all usually pretty relentless."

Edwards says Biffle "is definitely a guy who'll get the job done when he's behind you."

Biffle says, "There's not any one guy I don't like to race with right now. I couldn't say I'd be more apprehensive if Tony Stewart was in my mirror more than Matt Kenseth or any of the others."

Sadler says: "Everybody does it to everybody. And the more you race somebody, the more you know who's really messing with you and who's trying to make a pass."

Like who?

"Certain guys are very aggressive all the time," he says. "Certain guys aren't going to give you a break. I'm not going to mention any names. That always has a way of coming back to bite you."

## It's old hat stuff

It's not a new phenomenon. But today's drivers are taking mirror racing to new heights. Or depths.

"We used to call it 'get under the trunk enough to where they couldn't see your nose,'" former driver Donnie Allison says.

According to Benny Parsons, the 1973 NASCAR champion who now is an NBC analyst, it was less prevalent in the previous generation. Drivers couldn't afford the time and money needed for repairs if they crashed.

"You only had a handful of people (on your team), and the business was dead-serious business," Parsons said. "If you played around and tore something up, how bad was that?"

## The king of 'em all

Used to be, the biggest case of fearview mirror came from looking back to see a Chevy bow tie on a black car, accompanied by a pair of goggles, a mustache and a demonic leer.

"Oh, Earnhardt," Parsons says when asked about the most frightening historic mirror images. "Oh, yeah. You looked up and saw the 3 car back there, you knew you were going to get hit."

Allison remembers the late Dale Earnhardt's early days.

"When Earnhardt first came into Cup racing, he was young," Allison says. "He had an awful, awful lot of potential. And he wanted to go.

"My first encounter with him was in Charlotte practice. It wasn't even in a race. He ran into me in practice. I let him know we didn't do that."

## Now here's a surprise

Stewart draws controversy even when he doesn't try, picking it up like the top of your TV cabinet collects dust.

Earlier this season, he tangled with Johnson. Then he spun Jeff Gordon, saying Gordon was a lot slower and should have moved out of his way. But it's not fair to put Stewart's face on the label of a poison bottle. He's not evil and dangerous.

In fact, Sadler says, "My favorite driver to race against is Tony Stewart. I think he gives and takes. He races you how you race him. If you're going to race him like an idiot and block him and stuff like that, he's going to race you hard. If you give and take with him and understand it's Lap 10 and we've got a 500-mile race, he's going to race you clean."

## The driver you really, really don't want to see

Well, we've taken you this far. Time to reveal the one driver every other one most hates to see looming in his mirror.

We'll let Biffle, this season's Nextel Cup victory leader, speak for the consensus. He looks up quizzically, amazed that the answer isn't absurdly obvious:

"A guy who's faster than you are."

TSN



# Where's Jason

NFL

That's the game the Dolphins will play with JASON TAYLOR—now you see him as a 3-4 linebacker, now you don't—in their new varied approach *By Kara Yorio*

Photos by  
Bob Leverone / TSN



**T**he cries of “Ja-son! Ja-son!” threaten to drown out coach Nick Saban’s news conference nearly a field away. Dolphins fans have found their defensive star, Jason Taylor, as he walks toward them for a postpractice autograph session. At 6-6 and 255 pounds, he is difficult to miss.

An hour earlier, well into one of the opening days in Dolphins training camp, it wasn’t so simple to spot Taylor. He was working on dropback moves in individual drills, towering over linebackers. Then he was working out with the linemen, blending into the pack of men more his size. And when the 7-on-7 drills started, forget it—he was everywhere.

First, Taylor lined up at end, down and on the right. On the next play, he was standing next to the linemen on the right side, but he spotted the tight end and moved away from him, to the other side. Then he was back on the right side, a step off the line and again standing up. On one snap, he rushed the quarterback. On the next, he found the ballcarrier. On another, he dropped into coverage.

It was impossible to guess where Taylor would be next. Which is precisely the idea in the 3-4 defense the Dolphins will unveil in their first season under Saban.

“(It) puts him in the best position to make plays,” Saban says of Taylor’s new role as a 3-4 outside linebacker and end when

the Dolphins use a four-man line. “His ability to do some things in coverage helps us have some (options) that we wouldn’t have if everybody identified him as a rusher all the time. He is very athletic and bright and understands

what they’d want from me. Once we talked about the things he wants to do and getting out and doing it, it’s been a lot of fun.”

It helped when Taylor was able to talk to a couple of players who have done what he is preparing to do. One was the Patriots’ Mike Vrabel, who told him the switch will take time but that it will be worth it

because he’ll be able to do much more than just rush the passer. Indeed, he’ll

have to rein in his natural instinct to move forward on every snap.

“His strength has always been going upfield, maybe getting the tackle overextended and then going up and under,” says Vrabel. “Now he may have to stop and actually take on a block. That’s a huge difference. You know, not always digging in. Maybe staying back a little bit and reading it. That’s a lot different than going after the quarterback all the time.”

That will be true even when the Dolphins are in the 4-3. Taylor says Saban’s version of the 4-3 will be “a little tighter, more disciplined” than the team’s 2004 version, which for him will mean less all-out pursuit of the quarterback and more reading of plays at the line.

**A**ccording to ends who have made the move to 3-4 linebacker, the steepest part of Taylor’s learning curve could be adjusting to

## This is ... Jason Taylor

**Childhood dream:** Play in the NBA  
**Brother-in-law:** Teammate Zach Thomas  
**Favorite book:** Bible  
**Favorite movies:** *The Godfather*, *Gladiator*  
**Favorite TV show:** *The Sopranos* ▶  
**Featured on:** *MTV Cribs*  
**Favorite type of food:** Italian  
**Charity:** Jason Taylor Foundation, benefiting South Florida children  
**Also:** Has gone on USO/NFL tours to overseas military bases. ... Once caught a 70-pound bull dolphin in the Bahamas. —K.Y.



AMY SUSSMAN / AP

the concepts easily.”

That’s fortunate because the team’s 2004 MVP has much to learn, even if Miami lines up in the 3-4 only as much as a quarter of the time, which it might. He is spending countless hours absorbing the new playbook and watching film, certainly more time than he spent learning the defense as an NFL rookie eight years ago. Taylor is excited about the new challenge, but he hasn’t always been so enthusiastic. He was pretty successful doing it the old way, making a Pro Bowl career out of chasing the quarterback from his end position. Saban convinced him he could be even better.

“People don’t want to change,” Taylor says. “They get stuck in their ways, want to do what’s easy for them—not what’s easy but what comes naturally. That was my original thinking, but it was ignorant. I didn’t know



coverage responsibilities. There's the physical aspect of backpedaling, both mastering the footwork and being in the right spot. The greater challenge, though, is being able to read play-action and draw plays, which could lead to Taylor's being caught out of position.

"Your natural instincts take over on a pure pass play or a pure run," says Falcons left end Patrick Kerney, who learned how to play linebacker in the 3-4 several years ago when Atlanta adopted the defense. "You're given a gap, you're given a way to hit a guy and get off him. That's pretty easy, but all of a sudden when you're thinking pass, you're in coverage and then you see a draw, it gets pretty confusing. You're rammed up into the tackle and you're starting to pass rush and then you realize your man is wide-open. That's the hard part."

The use of the 3-4, and the heaping of responsibilities on the team's best player, is not without risk. The defense was one of the few highlights in Miami's 4-12 season in 2004, ranking eighth in the league. But the Dolphins believe the defense can be even more effective if opposing offenses can't see what's coming as often.

"We were so basic last year, every offensive line would slide his way every time," says linebacker Zach Thomas. "Now,

a 3-4 is really like five down linemen. People think it's just three down linemen, but you've got two outside edge rushers and then three in the middle. So it's not like a 4-3 where it's only four down linemen. So you can take advantage of a lot of things. If they're sliding his way, you can blitz from the other side. You can do so many different things, (the offense has) to change it up."

In theory, it all makes sense. And Taylor is confident in his athletic ability to take on blocks, drop into coverage and perform the other physical



A new role means little standing around for Taylor.

aspects of his new job. His bigger concern is reacting to adjustments the offense might make. It's different when the "bodies are flying around," he says.

It'll be different for opposing offenses, too. They'll have to look for Taylor because he won't always be where they remember him, in pure rush mode. He's working on becoming a multidimensional threat—and that's a scary notion. **TSN**

## Keys to resistance

The Browns and 49ers are making a full-fledged switch to the 3-4 this season, and the Cowboys are expected to use it more than half the time. For each move to work, many players must learn new responsibilities. An inside look at what the key player on each of those defensive units is up against.

### Andre Carter, 49ers

Carter had a choice to make when new coach Mike Nolan installed the 3-4 defense—adapt or confront the possibility of being left without a position.

One of the team's best pass rushers but considered too light at 265 pounds to continue playing end in the 3-4, Carter chose to switch to outside linebacker. As the primary backup at both outside spots, he now must operate in space from a two-point stance rather than put his hand on the ground and beat offensive tackles off the edge.

Carter has been learning a lot—techniques to fight off blocks, how to read the pass and adjustments to his pass-rush moves to reflect the potential for increased participation in blitz packages. Carter is absorbing the nuances of the position quickly.

"More importantly," says Nolan, "when I saw him out there working, he was excited about it, even verbalizing that, 'Hey, I love doing this. It changes up my job.' The linebacker job in the 3-4 is very versatile. Guys get to do a lot of stuff." —Dennis Georgatos

### Greg Ellis, Cowboys

Coach Bill Parcells wants Ellis to play right end in the Cowboys' new 3-4 scheme, so he'll give it a shot—even though he doesn't want to. He thinks he's too light—way too light.

According to Ellis, most 3-4 ends weigh 300 pounds. The lightest, he says, weighs 285. He weighs 270, or about 50-60 pounds less than most offensive tackles he'll play head-on. In the 3-4, he won't be able to line up on the outside shoulder of the tackle like he did in the 4-3, which gave him a better angle to use his speed and technique to get to the quarterback.

"I'm not comfortable because it's a new position and the odds are stacked against me because I'm the smallest guy in the NFL trying to play this position," he says. "For me to be successful, it's going to be extremely hard—harder than it has ever been before—because I'm undersized to play that position."

Ellis says he's trying to keep a positive attitude and an open mind. It isn't easy. "It may work out like Bill says and I might excel at that position," he says, "but we're going to have to wait a couple of games before we fill in all the blanks." —Jean-Jacques Taylor

### Kenard Lang, Browns

New coach Romeo Crennel is conducting a crash course in the 3-4, the scheme that worked quite well for him as the Patriots' defensive coordinator. For the Browns to enjoy even remotely similar success, Kenard Lang must make a successful conversion from end to outside linebacker.

Crennel doesn't like modestly sized ends, which Lang would have been, and loves big linebackers, which, at 6-3 and about 265 pounds, Lang will be. Crennel's model for the switch is Mike Vrabel, who was an expendable linebacker in Pittsburgh before Crennel got him in New England. Like Vrabel, Lang is in his ninth season. Unlike Vrabel, he has cultivated no instincts for blitzing or dropping into coverage. But he's eager to learn.

"Coach Crennel has five Super Bowl rings (three with the Patriots, two with the Giants)," Lang says. "When he asked me about the change, I said, 'When do I start?'"

Crennel is banking on Lang's nonstop motor and fierce determination to succeed. He has enough athleticism to pull off the switch and could have a career year as an edge rusher. He relishes the thought of beating backs rather than offensive tackles to the quarterback, and he welcomes the challenge of dropping into coverage against backs and tight ends.

"If I make this change successfully, I'll prolong my career and I'll be one of the few guys in the NFL to play three positions in their career," says Lang, who also has played defensive tackle. —Steve Doerschuk

## NFL teams are falling in step—hup, two, 3-4

The 3-4 defense continues to gain popularity. Seven teams made significant use of the scheme a year ago, and nine are expected to do so in 2005, including six that will make it their base defense.

2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
					Browns
					Texans
				Ravens	Patriots
				Texans	Steelers
			Falcons	Patriots	Chargers
Bills		Falcons	Ravens	Raiders	49ers
Patriots		Ravens	Texans	Steelers	Cowboys#
Jets	Patriots	Texans	Patriots	Chargers	Dolphins#
Steelers	Steelers	Steelers	Steelers	Jets*	Raiders#

—Katie Koss

\*3-4 not base defense but was used about 30 percent of the time  
#3-4 not base defense but is expected to be used at least 25 percent of the time



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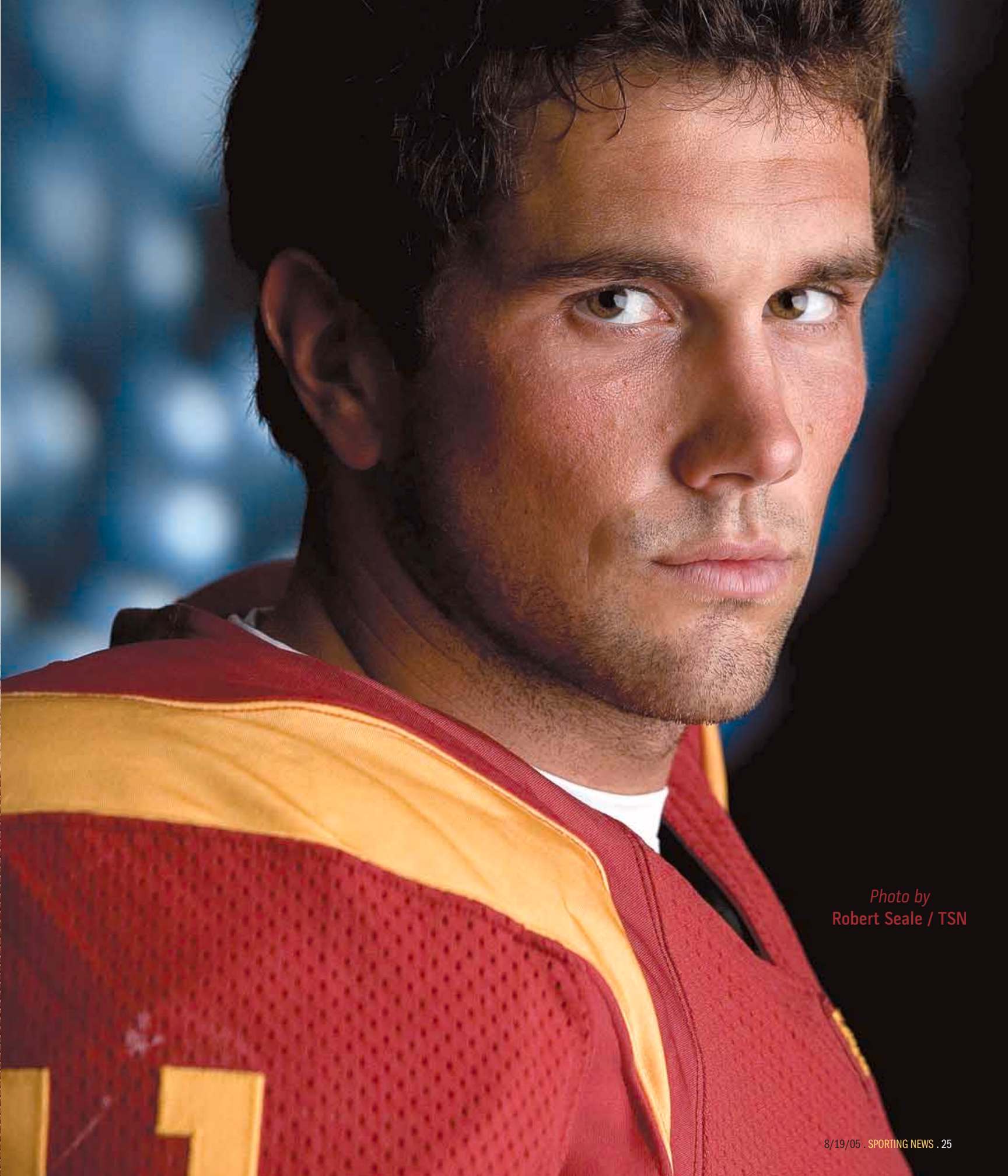
## MARVELOUS MATT LEINART

\*\*\*\*\* AND THE \*\*\*\*\*

## BIG BAD CHAMPS

AND YOU'LL FIND OUT THE HARD WAY  
THERE'S NOWHERE TO HIDE

by MATT HAYES



*Photo by*  
Robert Seale / TSN

**Y**ou want some of this? The throwdown in SoCal town. The extreme-a in Pasadena. Trading blows in the “Rose.”

“We play our game,” says Reggie Bush, “and nobody beats us.”

Ali would love this. Southern California has the title, the talent and the bravado. Who the hell cares what anyone else thinks?

*I'm a baaaaad man.*

“Really, we’re not concerned with any other team,” says quarterback

Matt Leinart. “Our focus, our goal, is to do it again.”

Like we should be surprised. The Trojans saw their coaching staff, which nurtured and developed this monster of a program until it ran on remote, get overhauled. A few star players are gone from last season, and USC isn’t as experienced defensively. But, really, who has a chance of sideswiping this ride?

It starts with Leinart, the Heisman Trophy-winning, Hollywood-scripted star who simply doesn’t miss. Come on, the guy celebrated his 22nd

birthday in May with a party at the posh Hollywood Club Mood. Celebs were invited.

Then there’s the nation’s most dynamic player (Bush), a ridiculously gifted receiving unit and a defense that seemingly becomes more talented with each season and each replacement. But as with every prizefighter, there are strengths and weaknesses. OK, maybe not *weaknesses*. How about *slight imperfections*?

**Jab, jab, jab.** It’s easy to rattle off Leinart’s record as a starter (25-1)

and Bush’s average per touch last season (10.4 yards) and the three receivers who are potential first-round picks (wideouts Dwayne Jarrett and Steve Smith and tight end Dominique Byrd). But, please, let’s not forget burly, bruising tailback LenDale White. Yeah, he has trouble getting in shape. He drags sometimes and doesn’t go full speed every carry. And ... he’s still one of the top five backs in the nation. Says one Pac-10 defensive coordinator: “When he decides there’s something in it for him, get out of his way.”



So maybe he isn't built to be an every-down back—but Bush is the nation's most dynamic player.

JOHN CORDES FOR TSN

## RANKINGS 1-119

- |          |           |            |               |          |          |          |          |          |           |           |               |           |           |            |           |           |              |            |             |
|----------|-----------|------------|---------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|-----------|---------------|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------|-----------|--------------|------------|-------------|
| <b>1</b> | <b>2</b>  | <b>3</b>   | <b>4</b>      | <b>5</b> | <b>6</b> | <b>7</b> | <b>8</b> | <b>9</b> | <b>10</b> | <b>11</b> | <b>12</b>     | <b>13</b> | <b>14</b> | <b>15</b>  | <b>16</b> | <b>17</b> | <b>18</b>    | <b>19</b>  | <b>20</b>   |
| USC      | Tennessee | Ohio State | Virginia Tech | Texas    | LSU      | Miami    | Michigan | Oklahoma | Iowa      | Florida   | Florida State | Georgia   | Texas A&M | California | Auburn    | Purdue    | Georgia Tech | Louisville | Boise State |



ROBERT SEALE / TSN

**The Trojans aren't just another pretty offense—not with Rucker and three other stud ends on the other side of the ball.**

We saw a glimpse of it in last season's national championship game, when White had 118 yards on 15 carries against Oklahoma's staunch defense—and did it with a severely sprained ankle. The USC staff was hoping Chauncey Washington would gain academic eligibility this fall and force White to get in top shape. Washington didn't make it, but White is said to be in the best shape of his career.

Why is this important? Because Bush is not an every-down back; he can't take the punishment of a 25-carry game. More than anything, his game is better suited for touches in space than grinding away between the tackles. White wears down defenses and sets up USC's dynamic play-action passing game. And for all the grief he has taken about his conditioning—he was pushing 250 pounds going into last season—White still had 1,103 yards

rushing and 15 touchdowns in 2004 while sharing time with Bush. If White were playing anywhere else, he'd be a Heisman contender.

**And the overhand.** Again, let's look beyond Leinart's gaudy numbers (71 career touchdowns in 26 starts) and the fact he could be the greatest quarterback in college football history by the end of the season. Let's look at the USC defense, a relentless unit that often sets up the offense with short fields and demoralizes opponents. The Trojans forced 38 turnovers last season and were plus-19 in turnover differential. Over the past three years, USC has a plus-57 turnover differential. "You make a mistake," says Oklahoma offensive tackle Davin Joseph, "and they're all over you."

Even the losses of tackle Manuel Wright, who was selected in the NFL's supplemental draft after

having academic issues, and cornerback Eric Wright, who had off-field problems, won't slow the unit. The defensive front—and its ability to pressure the quarterback and shield linebackers from blocks—is the foundation of the scheme. The Trojans have four ends who could start just about anywhere—Frostee Rucker, Lawrence Jackson, Jeff Schweiger and Rashaad Goodrum—and a rising star in sophomore tackle Sedrick Ellis. The back seven is fleet, aggressive and plays a gambling style that can bring big rewards because of the constant pressure supplied by the front four.

As good as the Trojans were in the back seven last year, they'll be even better this year because of their improved overall athletic ability. A prime example: Linebacker Keith Rivers, who played behind All-American Matt Grootegoed last season, has bulked up to nearly 240 pounds and is one of the fastest players on the team.

**Glass jaw.** We're not foolish enough to think losing half of a coaching staff won't affect USC. How will new offensive coordinator Lane Kiffin react to pressure situations? If Kiffin had been the coordinator last year when USC was down 13-0 in the fog and cold at Oregon State, would he have panicked and strayed from the game plan? Former coordinator Norm Chow, who now runs the Tennessee Titans' offense, didn't, and the Trojans rallied. And who will supply the emotional jolt of former defensive line coach Ed Orgeron, who's now the coach at Ole Miss?

## THREEPEAT AFTER ME?

USC is trying to accomplish what no other team has done in modern times: win three consecutive national titles. How the Trojans (36-3 over the past three seasons with a pair of crowns) stack up against the three dynasties since 1970:

### ALABAMA (1975-79)

**Record:** 54-6

**National titles:** 1978-79

**Top this:** The Tide won 28 consecutive games—a streak that lasted into the 1980 season. A loss to Missouri in the season opener in 1975—in Birmingham—cost Alabama a chance at another national title.

### MIAMI (1986-91)

**Record:** 67-5

**National titles:** 1987, 1989, 1991

**Top this:** Somehow, Miami's best team (maybe the best team in college football history) lost to Penn State in the Fiesta Bowl after the 1986 season. A win would have given the Hurricanes a fourth national title. At one point in the run, the Canes were 45-3, and two of the three losses (Penn State and Notre Dame) were by a combined five points. Miami went 11-1 in 1992, losing the national title to Alabama in the Sugar Bowl

### NEBRASKA (1993-97)

**Record:** 60-3

**National titles:** 1994-95, 1997

**Top this:** The most dominant run in the modern era. One of the three losses was by two points to Florida State in the Orange Bowl after the 1993 season. In that game, a last-second 45-yard field-goal attempt was wide left and prevented the Huskers from winning a national title. —M.H.

His halftime tirade shook a sleepy team that trailed 28-17 at Stanford and inspired the defense to allow the Cardinal to cross midfield just once in the second half.

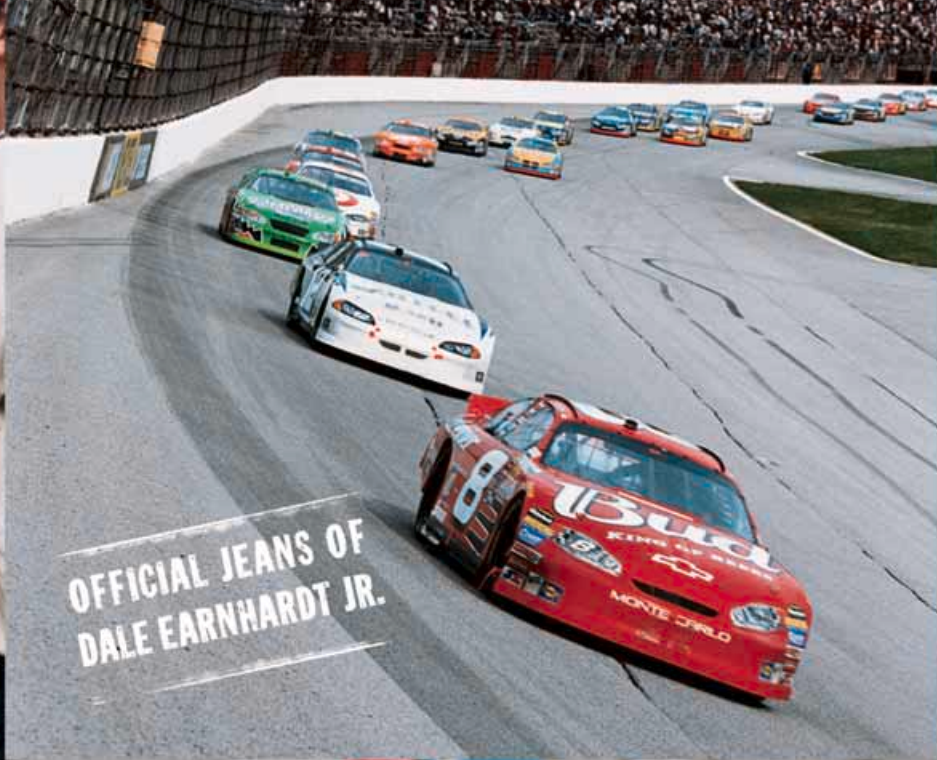
Yeah, it's nit-picking to bring up these issues. But there has to be hope for everyone else, right?

Sure there is.

Come and get it.

TSN

- 21 Bowling Green
- 22 Iowa State
- 23 Virginia
- 24 Arizona State
- 25 Utah
- 26 Alabama
- 27 UCLA
- 28 Texas Tech
- 29 Pittsburgh
- 30 Fresno State
- 31 N.C State
- 32 Penn State
- 33 UAB
- 34 Minnesota
- 35 West Virginia
- 36 Missouri
- 37 Notre Dame
- 38 Wyoming
- 39 Oregon
- 40 Southern Miss



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**T**he biggest season ever. Soak that in for a moment. All those years, all those championship teams at Texas, all that Longhorns history—none of it tops the anticipation of what could be this fall.

And now you're Texas quarterback Vince Young, the reason the hype is unbearable. The reason rabid Orangebloods have bought into these dreams, even the specter of Oklahoma looming on October 8 in Dallas can't sideswipe the momentum. Then, coach Mack Brown, a man who never has won a conference championship in 21 seasons as a head coach, ups the ante by emphatically stating, "Vince will be one of the great quarterbacks to ever play college football."

Poor Vince Young. He's a single-wing quarterback stuck in a 21st century world. And the hopes of an entire season rest on his incredible legs. Because Lord knows they can't rest on his arm.

"I'm a quarterback," Young says. "If I'm completing passes to my guys downfield, then I'm a quarterback. End of story."

It is here where this season of grandeur at Texas hits its first snag. You see, V. Young—that's what he calls himself—has 18 career touchdown passes and 18 interceptions. He's not an accurate quarterback, especially when extending beyond safe, short throws. His arm strength is average; his mechanics are ever-changing and unorthodox. Not exactly championship material.

Yet one game—that defining, exhilarating performance while beating Michigan in last season's Rose Bowl—has fueled expectations over the past seven-plus months. Too bad the Michigan game had nothing to do with Young's arm and everything to do with his ability to make

# Wing and a



41

Toledo

42

Miami (Ohio)

43

Colorado

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Maryland

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Wisconsin

# prayer

**TEXAS IS TALKING—WHAT ELSE?—  
NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP.  
BUT IT COULD BE A LOT OF—  
WHAT ELSE?—HOT AIR IF  
QUARTERBACK VINCE YOUNG  
CONTINUES TO MISFIRE.**

By Matt Hayes

plays with his legs. But give the Texas staff credit for looking beyond the biggest win under Brown and understanding that this Longhorns team has everything it needs to return to the Rose Bowl—this time to play for the national title.

Everything, that is, except Young's ability to throw.

Maybe that's why the talk all offseason was of Young's newfound passing ability. How he worked out with Tennessee Titans quarterback and friend Steve McNair and spent time with the strength and conditioning coach of Texas' baseball team to improve his throwing velocity. How the staff focused more on passing this spring in an effort to improve Young's accuracy on intermediate and deep throws. How the bulk of the offseason was built around shoring

up the one weakness on the team.

Texas has a premier offensive line, and running back Selvin Young is a faster version of Longhorns great Cedric Benson, whom the Bears took with the fourth overall pick in April's NFL draft. V. Young's receivers are a year older, and freshman Jordan Shipley—the prize of the 2004 recruiting class—has recovered from knee surgery and could have a huge season. The defensive front is a top five unit, and new co-coordinator Gene Chizik will do at Texas what he did at Auburn. And who doesn't remember the Tigers' defense the past two seasons, when it ranked in the nation's top five?

So what's left to this puzzle? Young—and his ability to throw more consistently.

"We'll let him throw all day," says free safety Jason Simpson of

Missouri, which will play Texas at home on October 1.

At this point, why wouldn't every team adopt a similar strategy? Although Young is 17-2 as a starter, both losses (Washington State and Oklahoma) were in big games against teams that stopped the run and forced Young to make plays with his arm. In those two games, Young was 14-of-37 for 101 yards combined. And no touchdowns.

It won't take long to see where this story begins or ends. Texas travels to Ohio State on September 10—a month before the annual showdown with Oklahoma—and could be out of the national championship race early. Or—if Young truly has become a more complete quarterback—the Longhorns could take the first step toward their biggest season ever.

Soak that in for a moment. **TSN**

## ★ TEXAS ★

**LAST CONFERENCE TITLE:** 1996

**LAST NATIONAL TITLE:** 1970

**STARTERS RETURNING:** 17 (seven offense, nine defense, punter)

**ALL-AMERICAN CANDIDATES:** LB Aaron Harris, OT Jonathan Scott, DT Rodrigue Wright, QB Vince Young

**THE ONE-PUNCH KNOCKOUT:** If Young had any semblance of passing ability, he'd make Michael Vick look like Joe Dailey. As it is, Young's talents are enough for Texas to beat just about anyone on its schedule. As a quarterback, he's a hell of a tailback. But will that be enough for teams that know how to stop him (Ohio State, Oklahoma)?

**THE PROMOTER:** Don King he ain't, but Texas coach Mack Brown did a fairly impressive job of selling his team to voters last year before the final poll, leading to some funky final ballots and the Longhorns' landing a BCS bowl. Texas won't get that break again. In other words, the Longhorns better win every game and leave no doubt.

**GLASS JAW:** Paging Dr. Freud: inferiority complex in Room 1. There's this theory that Texas' victory over Michigan in the Rose Bowl gave it a full tank of confidence for 2005. Yeah, well, if Team Fragile can get by Ohio State on September 10 in Columbus, we'll see how that newfound mental strength plays out in the Red River Shootout.

- |         |                   |                |                |              |                |          |     |         |      |              |                |          |              |             |             |         |                  |                |        |
|---------|-------------------|----------------|----------------|--------------|----------------|----------|-----|---------|------|--------------|----------------|----------|--------------|-------------|-------------|---------|------------------|----------------|--------|
| 46      | 47                | 48             | 49             | 50           | 51             | 52       | 53  | 54      | 55   | 56           | 57             | 58       | 59           | 60          | 61          | 62      | 63               | 64             | 65     |
| Memphis | Northern Illinois | Oklahoma State | Michigan State | Kansas State | Boston College | Arkansas | TCU | Clemson | UTEP | Oregon State | Colorado State | Nebraska | Northwestern | Mississippi | North Texas | Houston | Washington State | South Carolina | Kansas |

THE  
CONTENDERS

## COMMITTEE OF ONE

Options abound, but **ALLEY BROUSSARD** figures to win the LSU tailback job—and it could be a runaway *By Matt Hayes*

**T**hey are roommates, yet they don't talk about it. "No sense in it," says LSU running back Justin Vincent. They just know it will work out.

Auburn did it last year, right? Southern California does it, too. Who says more than one running back can't get enough carries to make everyone happy on a championship-caliber team?

Two, yes. Four? Forget it. At some point early this season, two of the four players in LSU's running backs committee will be sitting and watching. And at some point in the second half of every league game, three will be out.

It is here we introduce Alley Broussard, Vincent's roommate and the last man standing. Or at least he had better be.

"He's a load," says one SEC defensive coordinator. "I kind of hope they choose someone else."

Boy, Les Miles has it tough. His first season as coach at LSU comes with a ready-made Rose Bowl team and this burning question: Which of four talented backs—Vincent, Broussard, Joseph Addai or Shyrone Carey—should he use most? Miles says all four will play some role and the team doesn't need a go-to back.

Don't believe it; that's coachspeak. He's letting all four know the job is open to see who wants it most. Look at Miles' track record: He rode



BOB LEVERONE / TSN

★ **LSU** ★

**LAST CONFERENCE TITLE:** 2003

**LAST NATIONAL TITLE:** 2003

**STARTERS RETURNING:** 18 (10 offense, seven defense, punter-kicker)  
OT Andrew Whitworth, DT Kyle Williams

**ALL-AMERICAN CANDIDATES:** RB Alley Broussard, FS LaRon Landry, OT Andrew Whitworth, DT Kyle Williams

**BACK TO BASICS:** It's a pretty simple formula at any level: The game is won along the line. Any questions about LSU as a contender passed when defensive tackles Claude Wroten and Williams and defensive end Melvin Oliver passed up the NFL draft for their senior seasons. Although Oliver regressed some last season, he potentially is the best of the group—and Wroten and Williams likely are first-round picks.

**THIRD MAN IN THE RING:** LSU is loaded. A championship team has been placed in the lap of new coach Les Miles, but can he push the right buttons? Saban was overbearing—there's a reason he was called the "Nicktator"—but Miles can't afford to back off too far and lose control of a talented team that needs direction.

**GLASS JAW:** If LSU gets to the Rose Bowl, it's going to be behind gifted QB JaMarcus Russell—not backup Matt Flynn or freshman mouth Ryan Perrilloux.

**THE PROBLEM:** Russell, a huge talent, took a confidence hit last year because of Saban's quarterback shuffle. Can he make it all the way back?

Tatum Bell and then Vernand Morency the previous four seasons at Oklahoma State.

The issue now for Miles is getting to two—and eventually to one—from four. Addai has the best hands, Vincent the most speed and Carey the best moves. Broussard? He's a bull of a back (6-0, 233 pounds) with deceptive speed and quick feet. Given 200-plus carries, he could turn in a season worthy of the Heisman Trophy. Broussard rushed for a team-high 867 yards and 10 touchdowns last year as a part-time starter and led the SEC with a 6.1 yards-per-carry average.

"When you get your opportunity, you'd better be ready," Broussard says, "or the next guy will."

That's one way to work it out.

TSN

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Middle Tennessee

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Louisiana Tech

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Washington

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Akron

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Navy

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Wake Forest

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Illinois

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Syracuse

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New Mexico



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THE CONTENDERS

## ★ TENNESSEE ★

**LAST CONFERENCE TITLE:** 1998

**LAST NATIONAL TITLE:** 1998

**STARTERS RETURNING:** 16 (seven offense, eight defense, kicker)

**ALL-AMERICAN CANDIDATES:** CB Jason Allen, DE Parys Haralson, DT Jesse Mahelona, WR Robert Meachem, RB Gerald Riggs

**THE OVERHAND:** Here it comes; try to stop it. The Vols will grind away with a power running game behind Riggs, then throw it over the top to speedy, athletic receivers who have a stunning ability to adjust to the ball.

**THE UPPERCUT:** Erik Ainge, the onetime waif quarterback, has added 20 pounds and now looks impressively wiry. Don't laugh: He has a big-time arm and enough weapons at receiver—just like another skinny kid who took a few years to fill out. You know, some kid named Manning.

**GLASS JAW:** Tennessee hasn't covered anyone in the secondary in a decade, hence, the Vols' tendency to blitz 10,000 times a game. Yet there is hope: All-SEC safety Jason Allen moved to cornerback and will be an immediate upgrade, and two former starters at cornerback (Jonathan Hefney and Antwan Stewart) moved to safety and will give the Vols more speed in coverage.

# CAPTAIN COMEBACK

**KEVIN SIMON** has been knocked down by injury but always gets up. Now, he wants to show Tennessee's defense how to get it done. *By Matt Hayes*



BOB LEVERONE / TSN

**B**etter believe Kevin Simon knows the numbers from last season. Seventh in scoring defense, seventh in total defense. For crying out loud, Tennessee was last in the SEC in passing defense.

"Embarrassing," Simon says. "That's just not supposed to happen."

Yeah, well, Simon wasn't supposed to be around for his senior season, either. He should be in the NFL by now, using his athleticism and speed to get a fat bank and phat cachet. Instead, he's coming off his third surgery and nearly two seasons combined of downtime, all rolled into a last chance at salvaging something special.

"Kevin Simon gives this defense an identity," says longtime Tennessee coordinator John Chavis.

He had better give it more than that. UT's talented defense played without

passion and purpose last season, or as Chavis says, "without direction." That's where Simon comes in. If the defense finds itself, this team can make a Rose Bowl run.

Simon is like former Tennessee star linebackers Leonard Little and Al Wilson: an emotional, fiery leader who can lift a team mentally. There is hope Simon's return from his second major knee surgery—he also had ankle surgery in 2002—will flip the inspirational switch on a unit that badly underachieved last season.

This, the staff believes, is the last piece of the puzzle for the defense. The Vols have All-American-caliber players in tackle Jesse Mahelona, end Parys Haralson, linebacker Omar Gaither and cornerback Jason Allen. Still, they somehow gave up a total of 64 points to SEC tomato cans Vanderbilt and Kentucky last year.

"With Kevin, we have our captain back," Allen says. "The body is strong."

The heart had better pump, too.

TSN

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Hawaii

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Kent State

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Tulane

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BYU

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North Carolina

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Arizona

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Troy

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Connecticut

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South Florida

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Nevada

85

Marshall

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Mississippi State

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Baylor

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Vanderbilt

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Kentucky

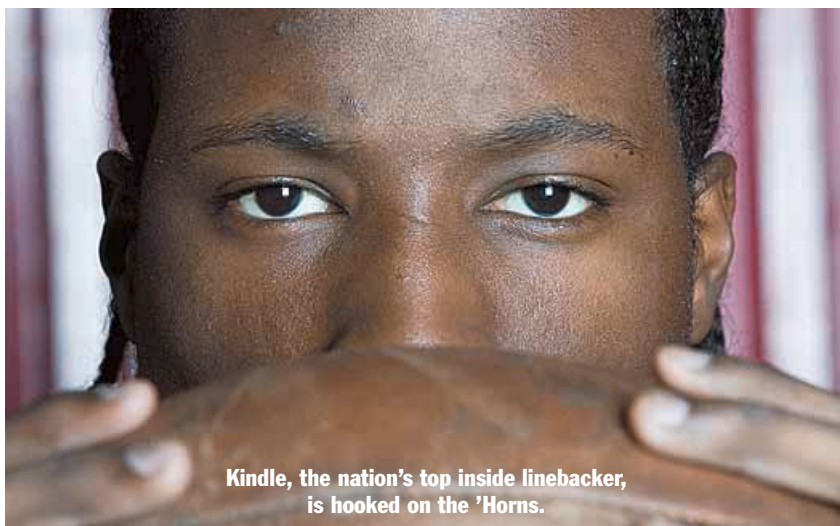
90

Eastern Michigan

 For more **Contenders** and rankings, go to page 38.

# THE FIGHT FOR BLUE-CHIPS

Texas is off to the fastest start, but Rivals.com recruiting expert Jeremy Crabtree sees several perennial contenders—including LSU, Oklahoma, Florida State, Notre Dame and USC—that could claim the title of top class of 2006



Kindle, the nation's top inside linebacker, is hooked on the 'Horns.

VERNON BRYANT

enjoyed in recent years under Nick Saban. The key to the Tigers' early haul has been the ability to land top in-state players, including the best one: Al Woods, a five-star defensive tackle from Elton. The Tigers also have landed the top player in Mississippi, defensive end Marcus Tillman of Meadville, and they are poised to do well in Texas.

#### Oklahoma.

Consecutive appearances in the national title game have allowed the Sooners to extend their reach

**T**exas coach Mack Brown doesn't like to lose. So, when the Longhorns limped to an uncharacteristic finish at No. 20 in the 2005 recruiting rankings and lost the nation's top quarterback, Ryan Perrilloux, to LSU on signing day, Brown made a decision that has left the rest of college football with a burnt-orange skid mark.

Brown, known as one of the top recruiters in the game, told his assistants to step on the gas early and secure commitments from the top players in Texas. The early push has paid off big time, as the Longhorns already have racked up 22 pledges, including 21 from the Lone Star State.

What's even more amazing is the quality of players Brown has landed. Rivals.com ranks Sergio Kindle as a five-star player, the nation's No. 1 inside linebacker, the top prospect in Texas and the No. 8 player overall. Longtime Texas high school observers call Kindle the best player to emerge from inner-city Dallas in the past 10 years. The Longhorns' other five-star commitment is defensive end Eddie Jones, the top player in east Texas. The Longhorns also reeled in 11 commitments from four-star players.

The message Brown has sent is clear: Don't mess with Texas when it comes to recruiting.

Several other programs, though, are ready to take on Texas' challenge and could land enough blue-chippers to make things interesting by signing day on February 1.

**LSU.** New boss Les Miles has continued the success

nationwide and to become involved with numerous top 100 prospects. But Bob Stoops also needs to keep his focus at home, as defensive tackle Gerald McCoy of Oklahoma City and tight end Jermaine Gresham of Ardmore are top 50 players.

**Florida State.** Nobody closed the 2005 recruiting season better than Bobby Bowden. This season's effort still is in its infancy, but the Seminoles certainly will battle for the nation's top class. Florida State's early group is small, but it includes three four-star prospects, with the headliner being Brandon Warren, a multiposition player from Alcoa, Tenn.

**Notre Dame.** The arrival of Charlie Weis has renewed excitement in South Bend. The Fighting Irish haven't gotten off to a start this good in five years, as Weis and recruiting coordinator Rob Ianello logged plenty of frequent-flier miles in the spring. The Irish already have snagged quarterback Zach Frazer, a top 100 prospect from Mechanicsburg, Pa., and James Aldridge of Merrillville, Ind., the No. 3 running back in the nation.

**Southern California.** Pete Carroll and his staff of seasoned recruiters are like lions stalking prey. The Trojans only have three commitments, but after signing the nation's top classes in 2004 and '05 and winning back-to-back national titles, they have many top 100 players giving them serious consideration. **TSN**

For more analysis from Jeremy Crabtree and all the in-depth recruiting information you can stand, visit [Rivals.com](http://Rivals.com).

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# PERFECT TEAM

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## OFFENSIVE LINE

**1. LSU**

- 2. Texas
- 3. USC
- 4. Michigan
- 5. Louisville



Other key players:  
**T Herman Johnson**  
**G Terrell McGill**  
**C Ryan Miller**

RT Brian Johnson    RG Nate Livings    C Rudy Niswanger    LG Brett Helms    LT Andrew Whitworth

## DEFENSIVE LINE

**1. N.C. State**

- 2. Texas
- 3. Miami
- 4. Tennessee
- 5. Ohio State



Other key player:  
**DT DeMarcus Tyler**

RE Manny Lawson    DT DeMario Pressley    DT John McCargo    LE Mario Williams

## LINEBACKERS

**1. Ohio State**

- 2. Florida State
- 3. Auburn
- 4. Texas A&M
- 5. UCLA



Other key players:  
**MLB Mike D'Andrea**  
**OLB Marcus Freeman**

OLB A.J. Hawk    MLB Anthony Schlegel    OLB Bobby Carpenter

# BACKFIELD

## 1. USC

2. Michigan
3. Florida
4. Texas A&M
5. Tennessee



QB Matt Leinart

RB Reggie Bush

RB LenDale White

Other key player:  
FB David Kirtman



WR Dwayne Jarrett

TE Dominique Byrd

WR Steve Smith

## 1. USC

2. Miami
3. N.C. State
4. LSU
5. Michigan

Other key players:  
WR Chris McFoy  
WR Whitney Lewis  
TE Dale Thompson

# SECONDARY

## 1. Texas

2. Ohio State
3. Miami
4. Georgia
5. USC



CB Cedric Griffin

FS Michael Griffin

SS Michael Huff

CB Aaron Ross

Other key players:  
CB Tarell Brown  
S Drew Kelson

## Matt Hayes' HEISMAN WATCH

**RB Reggie Bush, Jr., USC.** He is the nation's most exciting player—but shares a backfield with the 2004 winner.

**WR/KR Ted Ginn, So., Ohio State.** This thrill-a-minute flash is the best player in the Big Ten.

**QB Matt Leinart, Sr., USC.** He has two national titles and one Heisman already in the bag.

**RB Adrian Peterson, So., Oklahoma.** His chances could be hurt by a supporting cast that isn't as experienced as last season's.

**RB Gerald Riggs, Sr., Tennessee.** This powerful back could reach 2,000 yards running behind an experienced line.

# ★ TSN'S ALL-AMERICANS ★

## FIRST TEAM

### OFFENSE

**WR** Steve Breaston, Michigan  
6-1, 179, Jr.

**WR** Ted Ginn, Ohio State  
6-0, 170, So.

**TE** Mercedes Lewis, UCLA  
6-6, 255, Sr.

**T** Marcus McNeill, Auburn  
6-9, 337, Sr.

**T** Jonathan Scott, Texas  
6-7, 310, Sr.

**G** Max Jean-Gilles, Georgia  
6-4, 340, Sr.

**G** Matt Lentz, Michigan  
6-6, 305, Sr.

**C** Marvin Phillip, California  
6-2, 280, Sr.

**QB** Matt Leinart, USC  
6-5, 225, Sr.

**RB** Adrian Peterson, Oklahoma  
6-2, 210, So.

**RB** Reggie Bush, USC  
6-0, 200, Jr.

## SECOND TEAM

### OFFENSE

**WR** Greg Lee, Pittsburgh  
6-2, 200, Jr.

**WR** Calvin Johnson, Georgia Tech  
6-4, 225, So.

**TE** Leonard Pope, Georgia  
6-7, 250, Jr.

**T** Andrew Whitworth, LSU  
6-7, 325, Sr.

**T** D'Brickshaw Ferguson, Virginia  
6-5, 295, Sr.

**G** Mark Setterstrom, Minnesota  
6-3, 295, Sr.

**G** Dan Mozes, West Virginia  
6-4, 280, Jr.

**C** Greg Eslinger, Minnesota  
6-3, 285, Sr.

**QB** Omar Jacobs, Bowling Green  
6-4, 224, Jr.

**RB** Mike Hart, Michigan  
5-9, 192, So.

**RB** Laurence Maroney, Minnesota  
5-11, 205, Jr.

### DEFENSE

**E** Mathias Kiwanuka, Boston College  
6-7, 261, Sr.

**E** Mario Williams, N.C. State  
6-7, 285, Jr.

**T** Jesse Mahelona, Tennessee  
6-2, 297, Sr.

**T** Kyle Williams, LSU  
6-2, 295, Sr.

**LB** A.J. Hawk, Ohio State  
6-1, 238, Sr.

**LB** Chad Greenway, Iowa  
6-4, 244, Sr.

**LB** Ernie Sims, Florida State  
6-0, 220, Jr.

**CB** Jimmy Williams, Virginia Tech  
6-3, 206, Sr.

**CB** John Eubanks, Southern Miss  
5-11, 177, Sr.

**S** Ko Simpson, South Carolina  
6-1, 199, So.

**S** Darnell Bing, USC  
6-2, 220, Jr.

### DEFENSE

**E** Stanley McClover, Auburn  
6-3, 247, So.

**E** Parys Haralson, Tennessee  
6-2, 248, Sr.

**T** Haloti Ngata, Oregon  
6-5, 338, Jr.

**T** Garrett McIntyre, Fresno State  
6-3, 250, Sr.

**LB** Will Derting, Washington State  
6-0, 228, Sr.

**LB** Brandon Siler, Florida  
6-2, 230, So.

**LB** Ahmad Brooks, Virginia  
6-4, 249, Jr.

**CB** Charles Gordon, Kansas  
5-11, 177, Jr.

**CB** Alan Zemaitis, Penn State  
6-2, 189, Sr.

**S** Jaxson Appel, Texas A&M  
6-0, 198, Sr.

**S** Nate Salley, Ohio State  
6-3, 215, Sr.

### SPECIALISTS

**K** Mason Crosby, Colorado  
6-2, 210, Jr.

**P** Daniel Sepulveda, Baylor  
6-3, 222, Jr.

**KR** Devin Hester, Miami  
5-11, 186, Jr.

### SPECIALISTS

**K** Andrew Wellock, Eastern Michigan  
5-11, 168, Jr.

**P** Brandon Fields, Michigan State  
6-6, 235, Jr.

**KR** Will Blackmon, Boston College  
6-0, 202, Sr.

ILLUSTRATION BY CHRIS CALLAN / TSN



# HELPING HANDS

Look for three young receivers to make Vick's return from exile a success *By Matt Hayes*

**M**arcus Vick was standing in the plush training room at Lane Stadium, trying to describe his year of misery when he was away from the Virginia Tech team. But the player known as much for his selfish off-field behavior as his famous last name stopped in midsentence when Josh Morgan walked by. "See this dude?" Vick said. "Everybody will want to know about him real soon."

How fitting. The guy everyone wants to talk about was passing off to the guy no one knows but who is as important as anyone to Tech's Rose Bowl aspirations. For Vick to complete his turnaround from suspended pariah, he needs Morgan, Josh Hyman and Eddie Royal.

Morgan, Hyman and Royal. Sounds like a fancy law firm instead of three sophomore receivers who could make Vick's transition much easier. A year ago, they were freshmen in over their heads playing against defending national champion Southern California in the season opener. By the end of the season, they were vital to Tech's offensive balance. Now with Vick—a considerably more polished passer than 2004 quarterback Bryan Randall—the possibilities are heightened.

Marcus is just as elusive and dynamic as brother Michael, but he has a better grasp of the passing game than Michael did at the same point in his career at Tech. Simply put, Marcus makes throws that Michael couldn't. Tech has a strong running game with tailbacks Mike Imoh and Cedric Humes, and the defense has the potential to be the best since coach Frank Beamer arrived in 1987. All that's missing is a consistent passing game.

Remember, this is essentially the same Tech team that USC quarterback Matt Leinart said matched up with the Trojans better than anyone last season, and now you're adding one of the most dangerous players in the game.

"Marcus is going to have to feel his way around early on," says Tech quarterbacks coach Kevin Rogers. "And those three receivers are going to make it easier on him."

Then everyone will know them.

TSN

<b>91</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>110</b>
East Carolina	Army	Rutgers	Indiana	Air Force	Louisiana-Lafayette	San Jose State	Stanford	Duke	Cincinnati	San Diego State	Rice	Central Michigan	Louisiana-Monroe	UNLV	New Mexico State	Temple	Tulsa	Ohio	Ball State

## ★ VIRGINIA TECH ★

**LAST CONFERENCE TITLE:** 2004

**LAST NATIONAL TITLE:** none

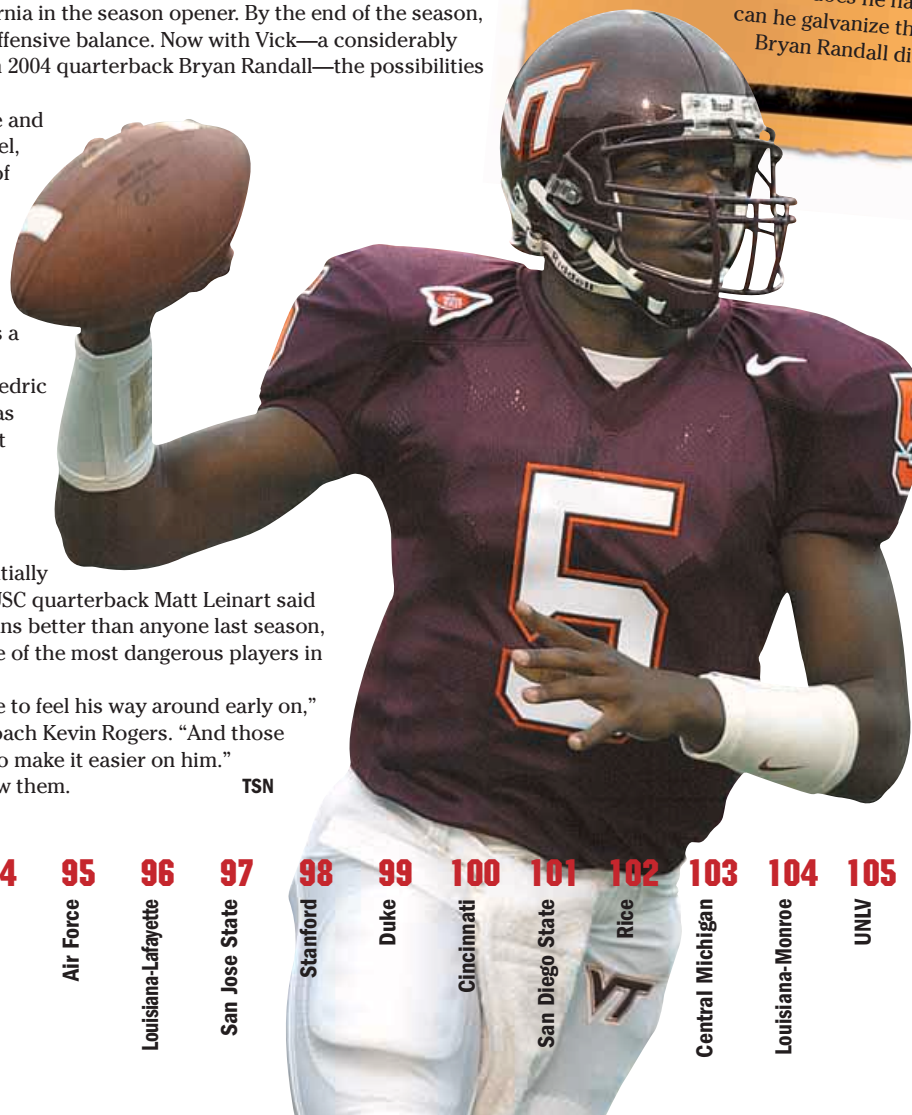
**STARTERS RETURNING:** 15 (eight offense, six defense, kicker)

**ALL-AMERICAN CANDIDATES:** LB Xavier Adibi, DE Darryl Tapp, QB Marcus Vick, CB Jimmy Williams

**STICK AND MOVE:** Meet the talented Mr. Vick. Yeah, little brother Marcus has very little experience. And yeah, the last time we saw him on the field, he was playing wideout in a useless bowl game. But there's a reason Tech quarterbacks coach Kevin Rogers has compared him with Donovan McNabb. Vick is that good and will make a nondescript Tech offense that much better.

**CASING THE RING:** After a two-year regression, the Tech defense returned last year to its attacking, tempo-dictating ways. The front seven isn't particularly big, but USC quarterback Matt Leinart says Tech had the most athletic defense the Trojans faced last season. That's an understatement—this is the fastest defense in college football.

**GLASS JAW:** OK, so Vick made it through the summer without finding trouble. But does he have the respect of his teammates, and can he galvanize the team to reach its potential the way Bryan Randall did?



BOB LEVERONE / TSN

Take one ACC championship team, add a Vick—and stir up some national title talk.



JAY LAPRETE / AP

# DECISION OF DESTINY

Smith or Zwick? Zwick or Smith? The wrong choice could bankrupt a season rich with possibilities for Ohio State. *By Matt Hayes*



JAY DROWNS / TSN

- 111 Arkansas State
- 112 Utah State
- 113 SMU
- 114 Central Florida
- 115 Western Michigan
- 116 Idaho
- 117 Buffalo
- 118 Florida International
- 119 Florida Atlantic

**T**here really isn't a decision. Look at the performance, look at the numbers, and most important, look at the wins and losses. Ohio State was a plodding 4-3 with Justin Zwick as its starting quarterback last season and a sleek 4-1 with Troy Smith, including a big victory over rival Michigan. Simple choice, right?

"Numbers don't tell the whole story," Ohio State coach Jim Tressel says. Translation: Look a little deeper, especially with the Buckeyes so close to becoming a Rose Bowl team. The defense will be better than the game-turning unit of the 2002 national championship season, and there are more dynamic skill players on offense than ever before under Tressel. The Buckeyes simply need a clear, efficient choice at quarterback.

But which one? Smith clearly outperformed Zwick last season, but Smith was working with an offense that wasn't shackled by conservative play-calling. And Smith had then-freshman star wide receiver Ted Ginn, who didn't become a focal point of the offense until midway through the season.

Remember this: Zwick beat out Smith in camp last year, and Tressel stuck with Zwick through some rough spots over the first six games before finally moving to Smith when Zwick got hurt at Iowa.

If the competition had been close in last year's camp, Zwick would have lost his job after the first loss of the season, at Northwestern. There also are Smith's off-field problems. He twice has been investigated by the NCAA, once for accepting money from a booster.

Should Tressel invest his offense in a player who hasn't proved he can stay out of trouble off the field?

"That staff is agonizing over two things," one Big Ten coach says. "What would Zwick have done under the same circumstances Smith was given, and when will Smith screw up (off the field) next?"

Simple choice, right?

TSN

## OHIO STATE

**LAST CONFERENCE TITLE:** 2002

**LAST NATIONAL TITLE:** 2002

**STARTERS RETURNING:** 18 (nine offense, nine defense)

**ALL-AMERICAN CANDIDATES:** WR/KR Ted Ginn, LB A.J. Hawk, DT Quinn Pitcock, CB Ashton Youboty

**BRAWLBALL:** Nothing fancy here, just a big ol' helping of magnificent defense. That adds up to a bunch of fourth quarter games. Like you're surprised? The Bucks are 33-6 over the past three years, with 14 of those wins by a touchdown or less.

**FLOAT AND STING:** Ginn will line up at wide receiver, tailback and quarterback and return kicks—all in the name of getting more touches. In part-time action last year (it took conservative coach Jim Tressel half a season to unleash his freshman star), Ginn touched the ball 55 times and scored eight touchdowns. That's less than five touches a game. He'll get three times that this season.

**GLASS JAW:** Josh Huston is a sixth-year senior kicker who was on his way to beating out "Mr. Automatic" Mike Nugent three years ago before an injury ended the competition. Three lifetimes later—seriously, how many years did Nugent kick in Columbus?—Huston will be thrown into a pressure situation with the game on the line, oh, every week.



## MATCH GAME

By Michael Bradley

1. Returns six starters from only the third ACC team ever to lead the nation in defense.
2. The only program in the country to have won a bowl game in each of the past five seasons.
3. Freshman receivers accounted for 86 catches, 1,472 yards and 15 TDs for this team in 2004.
4. Since 1999, it has the most return scores (54) of any program in the country.
5. Returns five starters from a defense that allowed an average of 12.2 points and 62.8 rushing yards in the final six games of 2004.
6. Has won more than two conference games just once since 1995.
7. Returning tailback duo combined for 1,838 rushing yards and 11 TDs in 2004.
8. One of only eight schools ever to play in a bowl game in eight consecutive seasons.
9. Will try to regain past form after finishing an uncharacteristic 108th nationally in offense and 109th in scoring in 2004.
10. Defense allowed more than 31 points per game for the third straight season.
11. Hopes to improve upon the 8-10 record it has the past five Novembers.
12. Expects to rotate quarterbacks after finishing 109th nationally in passing in 2004.

- |                   |                   |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| A. Boston College | G. Miami          |
| B. Clemson        | H. North Carolina |
| C. Duke           | I. N.C. State     |
| D. Florida State  | J. Virginia       |
| E. Georgia Tech   | K. Virginia Tech  |
| F. Maryland       | L. Wake Forest    |

## ANSWERS

- 1-I; 2-A; 3-K;  
4-G; 5-B; 6-C;  
7-D; 8-E; 9-F;  
10-H; 11-J;  
12-L

## MATT HAYES' TAKES

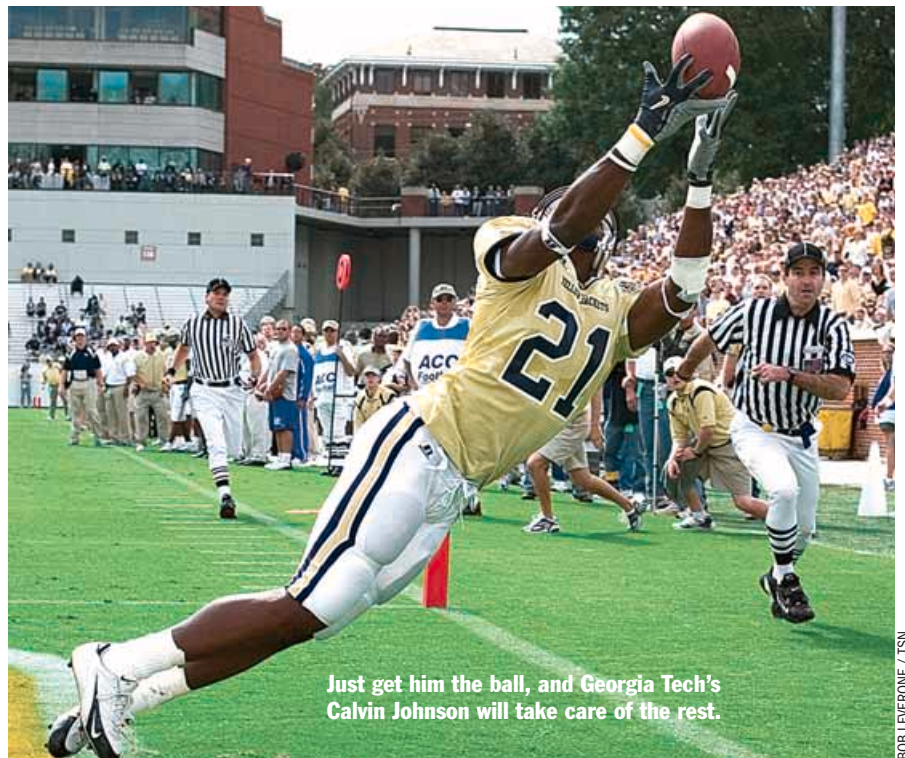
Something tells me **Maryland** won't be a bottomfeeder much longer. Ralph Friedgen is too good a coach, and QB Sam Hollenbach gives the Terps stability at the position. Plus, the Atlantic Division is wide-open. The only team I can't see winning the Atlantic is **Wake Forest**, and that's only because it will struggle defensively. ... The player or coach who will make the biggest impact: new **Clemson** offensive coordinator Rob Spence. Think of those pass-happy Toledo offenses. Now throw QB Charlie Whitehurst and athletic receivers into the mix. ... **Virginia Tech** has a better team than last year's league champions, but can it find the chemistry of 2004 that allowed it to play at an elite level with an average quarterback? I'd pay to see QB Marcus Vick make USC's defensive linemen suck wind at the Rose Bowl. ... How quickly will everyone forget about **Miami** LB Willie Williams' off-field past when he becomes the man-child everyone expects? Says one Miami staffer: "It's not even close. He's the most talented guy on defense." And that Miami defense is pretty good already. ... If I get to choose one linebacker to build a team around, I'll take **Florida State's** Ernie Sims. He's controlled mayhem, and he has a genuine dislike for anyone on the other side of

the ball. Yep, my kind of player. ... The **Virginia** administration may not think so, but if the Cavs don't win at least eight games, coach Al Groh will have some explaining to do. Here is a program with all the resources to win, but it loses to Fresno State in a bowl game. Meanwhile, Virginia Tech is rolling. ... If **N.C. State** DT DeMario Pressley finally starts playing hard, that defensive line will be special. The Wolfpack will blitz less because the front four is so dominant. Besides, blitzing would leave an already shaky secondary more vulnerable. ... Favorite player in the ACC: **Boston College** LB Brian Toal. The ultimate tough guy. With Toal, Ray Henderson and Ricky Brown, the Eagles have the most productive linebackers in the league. Key word, Virginia and Florida State fans: *productive*. ... If **Georgia Tech** ever gets consistent play at quarterback, WR Calvin Johnson will be one of the top five players in the nation.



FSU's Ernie Sims

BOB LEVERONE / TSN



Just get him the ball, and Georgia Tech's Calvin Johnson will take care of the rest.

BOB LEVERONE / TSN

# WATCH OUT FOR...

**Gaines Adams, DE/LB, Jr., Clemson.** In a retooled defense, he will play the “bandit” position, allowing him to showcase his considerable pass-rushing skills.

**Barrington Edwards, RB, So., North Carolina.** A rangy back with speed and enough power to move the pile, Edwards sat out last season after transferring from LSU.

**Charlie Jones, RB, So., Miami.** Few have arrived at Coral Gables with fatter scrapbooks—and that’s saying something. Jones has speed and strength, and if he protects the ball, he could be great.

**Chris Long, DE, So., Virginia.** The oldest son of former NFL great Howie Long, Chris is the classic snap-to-whistle player who never quits. He missed the second half of last season while recovering from mononucleosis, but now he is bigger, stronger and better.

**Ben Mauk, QB, So., Wake Forest.** A former Ohio schoolboy sensation, Mauk is mature and understands the nuances of the passing game. It won’t take long for him to unseat returning starter Cory Randolph. —Tom Dienhart



ANDREW SHURTLEFF / THE DAILY PROGRESS / AP

## 10 BEST GAMES

1.	Miami at Florida State	9/5
2.	Miami at Virginia Tech	11/5
3.	Virginia Tech at N.C. State	9/4
4.	Virginia Tech at Virginia	11/19
5.	Georgia Tech at Miami	10/22
6.	Florida State at Florida	11/26
7.	Florida State at Virginia	10/15
8.	Georgia Tech at Virginia Tech	9/24
9.	Virginia at Maryland	10/1
10.	Clemson at Maryland	9/10

UNIT RANKINGS	PROJECTED FINISH											
	Backfield	Wide receivers	Line	Overall	Line	Linebackers	Defensive backs	Overall	Special teams	Coaching	Schedule strength	
<b>Atlantic</b>												
1.	Florida State	4	3	5	2	3	1	5	2	2	6	6
2.	N.C. State	11	2	6	7	1	9	7	6	8	7	11
3.	Maryland	10	11	10	11	10	5	10	9	9	2	12
4.	Boston College	6	9	1	5	5	2	6	3	6	3	10
5.	Clemson	2	6	9	6	7	10	3	8	10	10	3
6.	Wake Forest	7	7	11	10	12	11	12	12	7	4	7
<b>Coastal</b>												
1.	Virginia Tech	8	4	3	4	4	6	4	4	1	1	9
2.	Miami	5	1	2	1	2	4	1	1	4	5	5
3.	Georgia Tech	3	10	8	8	6	8	2	5	5	8	2
4.	Virginia	1	8	4	3	8	3	8	7	3	9	8
5.	North Carolina	12	5	7	9	9	7	9	10	11	11	1
6.	Duke	9	12	12	12	11	12	11	11	12	12	4
O F F E N S E   D E F E N S E												

## TSN'S ALL-ACC TEAM

### Offense

Pos.	Name, school	Ht.	Wt.	Cl.
WR	Calvin Johnson, Georgia Tech	6-4	225	So.
WR	Lance Leggett, Miami	6-4	184	So.
TE	Greg Olsen, Miami	6-6	245	So.
T	D'Brickshaw Ferguson, Virginia	6-5	295	Sr.
T	Eric Winston, Miami	6-7	312	Sr.
G	Will Montgomery, Virginia Tech	6-3	301	Sr.
G	Kyle Ralph, North Carolina	6-4	297	Sr.
C	Patrick Ross, Boston College	6-4	295	Sr.
QB	Marcus Vick, Virginia Tech	6-0	212	Jr.
RB	Leon Washington, Florida State	5-9	202	Sr.
RB	P.J. Daniels, Georgia Tech	5-10	210	Sr.

### Defense

E	Mario Williams, N.C. State	6-7	285	Jr.
E	Mathias Kiwanuka, Boston College	6-7	261	Sr.
T	Orien Harris, Miami	6-4	302	Sr.
T	Brodrick Bunkley, Florida State	6-3	291	Sr.
LB	D'Qwell Jackson, Maryland	6-0	223	Sr.
LB	Ahmad Brooks, Virginia	6-4	249	Jr.
LB	Ernie Sims, Florida State	6-0	220	Jr.
CB	Kelly Jennings, Miami	6-0	178	Sr.
CB	Jimmy Williams, Virginia Tech	6-3	206	Sr.
S	Jamaal Fudge, Clemson	5-10	192	Sr.
S	Pat Watkins, Florida State	6-4	195	Sr.

### Specialists

K	Travis Bell, Georgia Tech	6-0	210	So.
P	Ryan Plackemeier, Wake Forest	6-4	235	Sr.
KR	Devin Hester, Miami	5-11	186	Jr.

## SCOUTS VIEWS

Observations from ACC coaches

**Boston College** is one of the scariest teams in the league. Tom O'Brien is one of the most overlooked guys in the profession. ... **Clemson's** Tommy Bowden is one of the better motivators in the game, but I'm not sure there's that needed fear/respect factor. ... If you win five games at **Duke**—that means at least two league games—you've made huge strides. I'm not sure that this Duke team is close to that now. ... **Florida State's** Bobby Bowden still understands the game as well as anyone. He's simply delegating more. One area where I think he has a problem is staff loyalty. ... It just seems as though Chan Gailey's **Georgia Tech** teams never are quite there. They have the talent, but they just can't take that next step for one reason or another. ... There's not a better game-day coach in the league than **Maryland's** Ralph Friedgen. He is a fantastic motivator. That program was a joke before he arrived. ... I think we're going to see what kind of coach **Miami's** Larry Coker is this year, as well as what kind of staff he has put together. ... **North Carolina's** John Bunting stayed the course last season. He can recruit, and the kids are starting to play hard for him. It can be done there. ... **N.C. State's** Chuck Amato's game-day decision making is still a little up in the air. It's like he can't decide what he wants to be. ... Al Groh has done some good things at **Virginia**, but when you really think about it, how much different is this team from when George Welsh was there? ... **Virginia Tech's** Frank Beamer was losing that team before last season. I think it actually woke up him and his staff. ... The biggest thing Jim Grobe has accomplished at **Wake Forest** is that the team is physical now.

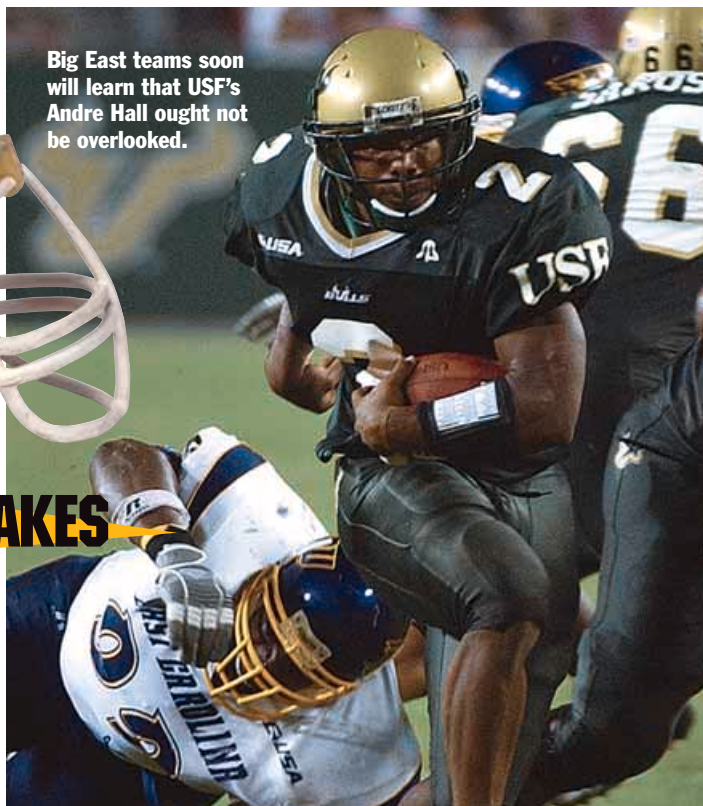


Maryland's Ralph Friedgen

BOB LEVERONE / TSN



Big East teams soon will learn that USF's Andre Hall ought not be overlooked.



CHRIS O'NEARA / AP

## MATT HAYES' TAKES

I love how everyone assumes **Louisville** will roll into the Big East and not get touched. Please, people, look a little deeper. The Cardinals have the best speed in the league, but they aren't physical. ... I like that **Syracuse** hired Greg Robinson, but if you want a hint of what's to come, check Nebraska last season. The Orange players were recruited to run the freeze option—not the West Coast offense. It's going to be an ugly transition. ... Freshman TB Jason Gwaltney is falling into a near-perfect situation at **West Virginia**: The Mountaineers need a big back, and the offensive line is physical and experienced. Translation: a 1,000-yard season for a back who could have gone anywhere. ... My favorite player in the Big East—ah, what the heck, the country: **Pitt** QB Tyler Palko. He's talented, yes, but he also has guts and guile. If I were in a 2-minute drill, I would take Palko. ... New **Connecticut** QB Matt Bonislawski isn't as gifted as Dan Orlovsky but will be the safe choice until redshirt freshman D.J. Hernandez gets better command of the offense. ... So what do you do when your team can't stop anyone and you're a year away from unemployment? Make yourself coordinator, of

course. **Rutgers** coach Greg Schiano was a fantastic defensive coordinator at Miami, but he's tackling a forest fire of problems with a garden hose. ... I wonder if **South Florida** coach Jim Leavitt ever thinks about where he could be had he accepted the Alabama job two years ago. Yeah, that's right, in the same mess as Mike Shula but without the "Alabama Man" safety net. By the way, Bulls TB Andre Hall is the most

overlooked player in the nation. How many people know he ran for more than 1,300 yards last year? ... I'm not sayin' it, but I'm sayin' it: If the Big East was prepared to give Miami a revenue-sharing deal to keep the Canes, why in the world wouldn't it do the same to land Penn State or Notre Dame? *Psst*, commissioner Mike Tranchese: Be proactive, not reactive. ... I said last year that **Cincinnati** coach Mark Dantonio would win at least seven games with the underachieving Bearcats. If he wins seven this year with a depleted roster, he'll be the next Boston College coach when Tom O'Brien leaves to take over at Penn State. Work with me on this, OK?



Pitt's Tyler Palko

## 10 BEST GAMES

1. Pitt at Louisville	11/3
2. Louisville at West Virginia	10/15
3. Notre Dame at Pitt	9/3
4. West Virginia at Syracuse	9/4
5. Pitt at West Virginia	11/24
6. Pitt at Nebraska	9/17
7. Oregon State at Louisville	9/17
8. Syracuse at Notre Dame	11/19
9. West Virginia at Maryland	9/17
10. Virginia Tech at West Virginia	10/1

## WATCH OUT FOR ...



ALBERT DICKSON / TSN

### Brian Brohm, QB, So., Louisville.

This former blue-chip recruit takes over for Stefan LeFors as the leader of the nation's No. 1 offense. In spot duty last year, Brohm completed 67.3 percent of his passes for 819 yards and six scores and was named C-USA's Freshman of the Year.

### Brent Celek, TE, Jr., Cincinnati.

He's coming off one of the most productive years ever for a Bearcats tight end, catching eight touchdowns. Celek also is becoming more physical as a blocker.

### James Hargrave, LB, Sr., Connecticut.

Hargrave showed a knack for making big plays last season, when he paced an underrated defense with 15 tackles for loss.

### Brian Leonard, FB, Jr., Rutgers.

He's a throwback who loves to crash between the tackles—and he also might be the league's most versatile threat. Leonard averaged 125 all-purpose yards last season, tops in the Big East. —T.D.

KEITH SRANKOIC / AP

# SCOUTS VIEWS

Observations from Big East coaches

**Cincinnati** didn't take too many chances defensively last year. They would much rather try to defend somewhat cautiously than to put a lot of pressure on you. But they will use their ends to get pressure up the field. ... I think

**Connecticut** RB Cornell Brockington has good speed and quickness. He was better last year than I thought he would be. He had pretty good breakaway speed. They queued everything up for last year, and it paid off. Now what? ...

**Louisville's** Bobby Petrino has a real good offensive mind, and he puts the kids in great situations. He has done a great job of recruiting. They're now competing against some of the top programs for top players. ...

**Pitt** QB Tyler Palko is a player who has all the intangibles. He just didn't make mistakes late last year. WR Greg Lee has decent speed and good hands. They got the ball to him last year in Walt Harris' system, but he's not near the level of (former Pitt receivers) Larry Fitzgerald or Antonio Bryant. ...

**Rutgers** QB Ryan Hart is hot and cold. If they had had a better quarterback last year, they would have won six games. He had good throws and bad throws. I think tight end Clark Harris is overrated. ...

**South Florida** RB Andre Hall runs hard. He's a tough kid, and he can catch the ball. They'll put him in the slot, too. ... **Syracuse** has had talent on defense the last few years, but they didn't jump out at you. They looked pretty good



UConn's Cornell Brockington

BOB CHILD / AP

physically, but they weren't good football players. QB Perry Patterson struggled big time last year. He wasn't accurate and had trouble throwing the football. ... Last year, **West Virginia** threw the ball deep and let the receivers run under it. Everybody knew it was coming. This year, they're going to run a lot more.

UNIT RANKINGS	PROJECTED FINISH										
	Backfield	Wide receivers	Line	Overall	Line	Linebackers	Defensive backs	Overall	Special teams	Coaching	Schedule strength
1. Louisville	1	2	1	1	2	2	8	2	5	1	4
2. Pitt	2	1	3	2	7	4	1	3	1	5	2
3. West Virginia	6	8	2	6	5	7	3	6	8	2	5
4. Syracuse	4	7	4	4	1	1	2	1	6	8	1
5. Connecticut	7	5	6	7	3	6	5	5	2	3	7
6. South Florida	5	3	7	5	4	3	6	4	7	4	3
7. Rutgers	3	4	5	3	6	5	4	7	4	6	8
8. Cincinnati	8	6	8	8	8	8	7	8	3	7	6

O F F E N S E      D E F E N S E

# MATCH GAME

By Michael Bradley

1. Won six of its last seven regular-season games in 2004, but seven opponents had more than 400 yards of total offense.
2. Has played in bowls four of the past five years but must replace eight starters on both sides of the ball.
3. Has shared the past two Big East titles but lost nine of 12 first- or second-team all-league performers from 2004.
4. Returns seven members of the conference's top-ranked defense and two players who have produced 1,000-yard rushing seasons.
5. Returns all top skill performers from 2004 but must shore up a defense that allowed 40-plus points five times.
6. Has seven offensive starters back from a unit that led the nation in scoring and total offense and topped 50 points seven times.
7. Hasn't posted a winning season since 1992.
8. After appearing in five straight bowl games, this school has played in just one the past five years.

- |                |                  |
|----------------|------------------|
| A. Cincinnati  | E. Rutgers       |
| B. Connecticut | F. South Florida |
| C. Louisville  | G. Syracuse      |
| D. Pittsburgh  | H. West Virginia |

## ANSWERS

- 9-B; 7-E; 4-B; 5-F; 6-C; 1-D; 2-A; 3-H;

## TSN's ALL-BIG EAST TEAM

### Offense

Pos.	Name, school	Ht.	Wt.	Cl.
WR	Greg Lee, Pitt	6-2	200	Jr.
WR	Tres Moses, Rutgers	5-10	191	Sr.
TE	Clark Harris, Rutgers	6-6	250	Jr.
T	Travis Leffew, Louisville	6-4	301	Sr.
T	Charles Spencer, Pitt	6-5	330	Sr.
G	Dan Mozes, West Virginia	6-4	280	Jr.
G	John Glass, Rutgers	6-5	300	Sr.
C	Jason Spitz, Louisville	6-4	308	Sr.
QB	Tyler Palko, Pitt	6-2	220	Jr.
RB	Cornell Brockington, Connecticut	6-0	192	Jr.
RB	Andre Hall, South Florida	5-10	205	Sr.

### Defense

E	James Wyche, Syracuse	6-6	267	Sr.
E	Adam Roberts, Cincinnati	6-3	275	Sr.
T	Craig Wilson, West Virginia	6-1	295	Jr.
T	Montavious Stanley, Louisville	6-2	321	Sr.
LB	H.B. Blades, Pitt	6-0	245	Jr.
LB	Brandon Johnson, Louisville	6-5	218	Sr.
LB	Stephen Nicholas, South Florida	6-3	225	Jr.
CB	Josh Lay, Pitt	6-2	195	Sr.
CB	Joe Porter, Rutgers	6-0	198	Jr.
S	Jahmile Addae, West Virginia	6-0	205	Sr.
S	Anthony Smith, Syracuse	6-1	187	Sr.

### Specialists

K	Josh Cummings, Pitt	5-11	180	Sr.
P	Adam Graessle, Pitt	6-4	220	Jr.
KR	Larry Taylor, Connecticut	5-6	161	So.



## MATT HAYES' TAKES

How hard will Glen Mason kick himself when **Minnesota** RB Laurence Maroney runs for 2,000 yards this season? Maroney was misused for two straight seasons—having to share time with Marion Barber—and still reached 1,000 yards each year. ... If I were **Michigan** coach Lloyd Carr, I would want every starter on defense to get a mysterious “shoulder” injury in preparation for Week 1 and the guy pressed into duty to perform like QB Chad Henne did last season. Can a defensive coordinator get a “shoulder” injury, too? ... Here’s the best part about **Ohio State** super sophomore WR Ted Ginn: Everyone forgets about WR Santonio Holmes, a stud who’s going to have a gigantic season while everyone doubles Ginn. ... **Iowa**’s supposed great linebackers won’t mean spit unless the revamped front four can keep those 300-pound offensive linemen off Chad Greenway and Co. DTs Matt Kroul (6-3, 256) and George Eshareturi (6-3, 284) are undersized and lack experience. That’s a bad combination. ... Ron Zook, meet the physical and punishing Big Ten. Now ditch that sissy offense, and recruit some tough linebackers at **Illinois**. ... Why can’t **Purdue** win close games? It’s not a mental hurdle or bad breaks that have caused the Boilers to lose 14 games by a touchdown or less over the past three years. It’s the lack of a consistent running game. You close

out games by jamming the ball down a defense’s throat—not with a five-wide offense. ... So, Joe Paterno wants Michael Robinson as his quarterback at **Penn State**? Fine, then use the spread option—not a run-based play-action attack that will make Robinson look like Chris Rix. ... If were Terry

Hooppner and **Indiana** would have asked me to interview for its coaching job, I would have looked at the depth chart and realized this talent-depleted team gave up 51 points to Ken-freakin’-tucky. Then I would have said, “I’ll take Miami



**Minnesota’s Laurence Maroney**

(Ohio) for another season, thank you.” ... Even before Barry Alvarez’s announcement that he’ll retire after this season, I thought **Wisconsin** was going to be the surprise team in the league. There’s young talent on the defensive line, and head coach-in-waiting Bret Bielema has a fantastic defensive mind. Throw in Colorado transfer RB Brian Calhoun, and the crawl-ball Badgers will be playing on New Year’s Day again.

**With only one defender to beat, Ohio State’s Santonio Holmes will put up huge numbers.**



TSN

## MATCH GAME By Michael Bradley

1. The top rusher in 2004 had the fewest yards for the school’s leader since 1987.
2. Followed a plus-11 turnover differential in 2003 with a Big Ten-worst minus-10.
3. Hasn’t produced a Big Ten rushing champion since 1965.
4. Has gone a combined 3-7 the past three Novembers.
5. For the first time, this school has won at least 10 games in three straight years.
6. Returns 20 starters and doesn’t have to play Michigan or Ohio State.
7. One of four BCS schools not to have a winning record in each of the past 10 seasons.
8. Has lost its road opener five consecutive years.
9. Can make it three consecutive seasons with at least six wins for first time since 1929-31.
10. Hopes an influx of talent can revive an offense that failed to average 20 ppg the past two seasons.
11. Has ranked in the national top five in rushing in each of the past two seasons.

- A. Illinois
- B. Indiana
- C. Iowa
- D. Michigan
- E. Michigan State
- F. Minnesota
- G. Northwestern
- H. Ohio State
- I. Penn State
- J. Purdue
- K. Wisconsin

## ANSWERS

1-H; 2-E; 3-A; 4-K; 5-C; 6-J; 7-B; 8-D; 9-G; 10-I; 11-F

## TSN's ALL-BIG TEN TEAM

### Offense

Pos.	Name, school	Ht.	Wt.	Cl.
WR	Steve Breaston, Michigan	6-1	179	Jr.
WR	Ted Ginn, Ohio State	6-0	170	So.
TE	Charles Davis, Purdue	6-6	260	Sr.
T	Zach Strief, Northwestern	6-7	335	Sr.
T	Jake Long, Michigan	6-7	338	So.
G	Mark Setterstrom, Minnesota	6-3	295	Sr.
G	Matt Lentz, Michigan	6-6	305	Sr.
C	Greg Eslinger, Minnesota	6-3	285	Sr.
QB	Drew Tate, Iowa	6-0	185	Jr.
RB	Mike Hart, Michigan	5-9	192	So.
RB	Laurence Maroney, Minnesota	5-11	205	Jr.

### Defense

E	Loren Howard, Northwestern	6-4	280	Sr.
E	Ray Edwards, Purdue	6-6	270	Jr.
T	Gabe Watson, Michigan	6-4	331	Sr.
T	Quinn Pitcock, Ohio State	6-3	295	Jr.
LB	LaMarr Woodley, Michigan	6-2	268	Jr.
LB	Chad Greenway, Iowa	6-4	244	Sr.
LB	A.J. Hawk, Ohio State	6-1	238	Sr.
CB	Alan Zemaitis Penn State	6-2	189	Sr.
CB	Ashton Youboty, Ohio State	6-1	188	Jr.
S	Bernard Pollard, Purdue	6-2	226	Jr.
S	Nate Salley, Ohio State	6-3	215	Sr.

### Specialists

K	Garrett Rivas, Michigan	5-9	216	Jr.
P	Brandon Fields, Michigan State	6-6	235	Jr.
KR	Ted Ginn, Ohio State	6-0	170	So.

## WATCH OUT FOR...

### Terrell Jordan, RB, Sr., Northwestern.

The Wildcats love to run from their spread attack, and Jordan has the size (5-10, 200) and speed to be their next 1,000-yard rusher.

### Justin Ostrowski, DT, So., Wisconsin.

The defensive line was ravaged by departures, but the Badgers can turn to Ostrowski. He has added size and strength; now he must prove he's aggressive and fearless.

**Blake Powers, QB, So., Indiana.** He is a big, strong passer with a decent arm, and he works well from the pocket—just like Ben Roethlisberger, who played for Terry Hooppner at Miami (Ohio).

### Kaleb Thornhill, LB, So., Michigan

The brother of former Spartans star linebacker Josh Thornhill, Kaleb needs to get physical while manning the middle. He has the strength and tenacity to attack blockers and the speed to make plays on the perimeter.

### Derrick Williams, WR, Fr., Penn State.

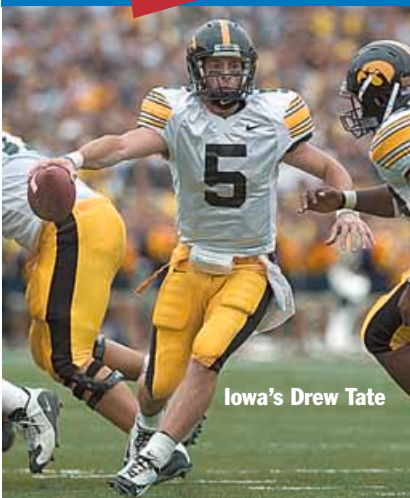
His speed and creative skills make him the most touted of Joe Paterno's recent recruits. Look for Williams to provide some big plays, and his presence should create opportunities for others in the offense. —T.D.



ALBERT DICKSON / TSN

## SCOUTS VIEWS

Observations from Big Ten coaches



Iowa's Drew Tate

JAY DROWNS / TSN

If you (mess up) the Florida job, that's like screwing up the Notre Dame job. How can you do that? Am I afraid of facing (Illinois') Ron Zook? Not a bit. ... I think Terry Hooppner will bring **Indiana** along slowly but steadily. And that wasn't always the case under the previous coaches. ... **Iowa**

QB Drew Tate is a cocky guy. He's uncanny in his ability to avoid the sack. He's the ultimate competitor. He has great field awareness and can find that guy who's open. ... **Michigan** doesn't show up every week. I think they're pompous, over-recruited, arrogant-type kids. Who has better players: Michigan or **Ohio State**? Michigan. The Michigan kid has more talent, but the Ohio State kid plays harder. ... **Michigan State** always has been knocked for not playing smart, but they have gotten more disciplined under the new coaching

staff. They can play with anybody, but they are like a yo-yo. ... I think **Minnesota** has a good system for Bryan Cupito. But if you put him under the burden of having to win it by throwing 50 times a game, that wouldn't be the right thing. ... **Northwestern** is a hard-nosed team. They always have been under Randy Walker. He won't have it any other way. ... **Ohio State** is not a top five team. Why? Because they don't have a proven tailback. I don't think that much of RB Antonio Pittman.

... Can **Penn State** catch the ball? Can they run it? They just haven't been able to do a lot on offense in recent years. ... **Purdue** is a notch down on defense from where they were a few seasons ago when they had all of those guys drafted in the NFL. ... **Wisconsin's** John Stocco is an OK quarterback. But Barry Alvarez gets the best out of his players, which isn't something every coach can say.

## 10 BEST GAMES

1. Texas at Ohio State	9/10
2. Ohio State at Michigan	11/19
3. Iowa at Ohio State	9/24
4. Michigan at Iowa	10/22
5. Iowa at Purdue	10/8
6. Iowa at Iowa State	9/10
7. Purdue at Penn State	10/29
8. Michigan at Michigan State	10/1
9. Notre Dame at Michigan	9/10
10. Bowling Green at Wisconsin	9/3

UNIT RANKINGS	PROJECTED FINISH										
	Backfield	Wide receivers	Line	Overall	Line	Linebackers	Defensive backs	Overall	Special teams	Coaching	Schedule strength
1. Ohio State	4	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	2	4	9
2. Michigan	1	1	1	1	3	2	4	2	1	5	6
3. Iowa	5	5	3	5	7	3	3	4	3	1	2
4. Purdue	2	3	7	3	2	4	7	5	6	2	8
5. Penn State	11	10	5	10	4	6	2	3	8	7	11
6. Minnesota	6	8	4	6	9	7	8	9	7	6	1
7. Wisconsin	9	7	8	7	8	5	5	6	9	3	5
8. Michigan St.	3	4	6	4	6	9	6	7	4	9	3
9. Northwestern	8	6	11	8	5	8	9	8	11	8	4
10. Illinois	7	9	10	9	10	11	10	10	5	11	7
11. Indiana	10	11	9	11	11	10	11	11	10	10	10

O F F E N S E | D E F E N S E |





## WATCH OUT FOR...

**Thomas Clayton, RB, Jr., Kansas State.** Bill Snyder traditionally has liked to lean on the ground game. With Darren Sproles gone, there are lots of carries to be had, and Clayton figures to get many of them. Unlike the jitterbug Sproles, Clayton, who began his career at Florida State, is a straight-ahead sort who can get physical.

**Alex Ligon, DE, Jr., Colorado.** His added size and strength will make him more effective against the run. But it's as a pass rusher where Ligon, who's explosive off the edge, figures to make his mark.

**Ryan McBean, DT, Jr., Oklahoma State.** He's quick, fast and stronger than he was when he arrived from junior college.

**Milan Moses, WR, So., Iowa State.** The brother of former Cyclones standout receiver J.J. Moses, Milan has speed and sticky hands. Plus, the talent around him should create room for him to operate. —T.D.



MICHAEL MCNAMARA / TSN

## SCOUTS VIEWS

Observations from Big 12 coaches

**Baylor's** Guy Morriss won't finesse on offense or defense, especially on defense. Sometimes it works; sometimes it doesn't. ... **Colorado** QB Joel Klatt is a gritty guy, but there probably are a lot of other quarterbacks better than him in the league. ... **Iowa State** QB Bret Meyer's throwing has gotten better, but it isn't consistent. He'll pull the string on some balls. ... **Kansas** likes to mix it up on defense and pick its spots to gamble. But there have been some people who have exposed them. ... I think **Kansas State** dropped off on defense last year. The line and linebackers weren't as good as in years past. They have some issues at safety. ... I think **Missouri's** secondary was average last year,

and I don't see major changes. We thought they did a good job of hiding it last year, if that's possible. ... In the past, **Nebraska's** quarterbacks seldom checked the play because they were going to line up and knock your block off. It's a different mind-set now. ... **Oklahoma** has received a lot of national attention in recent years. Maybe some of those kids recruited the last few years don't understand where Oklahoma was before Bob (Stoops) got there. ...

**Oklahoma State** will run a one-back, shotgun, no-huddle spread offense. The old staff just wanted to run it down your throat. Do they have the personnel? ... If **Texas** is in a tight game or gets behind, can they pass and catch it? They went to the Rose Bowl, but I don't know if they've taken that next step. ... **Texas A&M** will run a little bit of everything on offense. ... When you play **Texas Tech**, you'd better be prepared for anything because Mike Leach will make adjustments in a hurry. And you'd better be able to adjust in a hurry.



Texas Tech's Mike Leach

PAUL INSELY / TSN

UNIT RANKINGS	PROJECTED FINISH										
	Backfield	Wide receivers	Line	Overall	Line	Linebackers	Defensive backs	Overall	Special teams	Coaching	Schedule strength
<b>North</b>											
1. Iowa State	4	4	9	5	5	11	9	9	12	10	3
2. Missouri	6	11	8	9	9	10	11	11	11	9	11
3. Colorado	8	9	3	6	8	3	2	3	1	5	1
4. Kansas State	10	5	10	10	10	7	8	8	10	4	9
5. Nebraska	11	6	6	8	3	9	6	7	6	7	2
6. Kansas	5	10	11	11	11	8	10	10	8	8	8
<b>South</b>											
1. Texas	2	3	1	2	1	2	1	1	4	3	6
2. Oklahoma	3	8	5	4	7	6	4	6	2	1	4
3. Texas A&M	1	2	2	1	2	1	5	2	3	6	5
4. Texas Tech	7	1	4	3	6	4	3	4	5	2	12
5. Oklahoma St.	9	7	7	7	4	5	7	5	9	12	10
6. Baylor	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	7	11	7
	OFFENSE					DEFENSE					

## 10 BEST GAMES

1. Texas at Ohio State 9/10
2. Oklahoma vs. Texas (Dallas) 10/8
3. Iowa at Iowa State 9/10
4. Texas at Texas A&M 11/25
5. Texas A&M at Oklahoma 11/12
6. Iowa State at Missouri 10/15
7. Oklahoma at UCLA 9/17
8. Colorado at Miami 9/24
9. Texas A&M at Clemson 9/3
10. Texas Tech at Texas 10/22

# MATT HAYES' TAKES

I know **Colorado** coach Gary Barnett has been to three of the past four Big 12 title games. But if the Buffaloes don't win it this year, he's gone. Think about it: He's the last man standing from that recruiting mess—including the school's president, chancellor and athletic director. ... I love how everyone is dismissing **Kansas State** this year. Suddenly, all those years of nine- and 10-win seasons don't mean squat. If QB Dylan Meier finally plays to his potential, the 'Cats will win the North Division. But that's one hell of an *if*. ... How good would **Texas** be if Reggie McNeal were playing quarterback for the Longhorns instead of Texas A&M? Then again, we wouldn't be able to make fun of Mack Brown every October. ... I know, I know; **Missouri** coach Gary Pinkel snuffed QB Brad Smith's creativity last season and that's why the Tigers weren't playing in

the Big 12 title game. That, or the Tigers are the most undisciplined team in the conference. Take your pick. ... Big 12 breakout player: **Texas A&M** freshman TE Martellus Bennett. Think Kansas City Chiefs star Tony Gonzalez. ... **Texas Tech** will beat either **Texas** or **Oklahoma**. And heaven help me if it's Texas, especially if the Sooners beat the Longhorns again in October. I may have to convince Sporting News Radio to pipe in the local Austin sports talk shows 24/7 if that happens. ... Settle down, **Nebraska** fans. You're still a year away. QB Zac Taylor will be an upgrade, but at some point, freshman Harrison Beck will get a shot at the job. ... Think **Oklahoma** has learned to cover the deep ball yet? If it hasn't, that little tussle in



Texas A&M's Reggie McNeal

ROBERT SEALE / TSN

Pasadena (at UCLA) on September 17 will be loss No. 1. ... If I needed a first down on third-and-short, I would give it to **Iowa State's** Stevie Hicks, the most underrated back in the nation. Few outside of Ames know of him, but I can guarantee the NFL does. Says one league scout: "He's Eddie George with speed." Then again, a lot of guys might look like Eddie George with no Texas and Oklahoma on the schedule—for the second straight season. ... Don't be foolish, **Oklahoma State**: Play QB Bobby Reid over team favorite Donovan Woods. Reid is a better thrower and runner, and Woods will be a fantastic receiver once he's forced to play the position.



Mr. Underrated—Iowa State's Stevie Hicks

ALBERT DICKSON / TSN

## TSN's ALL-BIG 12 TEAM

### Offense

Pos.	Name, school	Ht.	Wt.	Cl.
WR	Jarrett Hicks, Texas Tech	6-4	209	Jr.
WR	Todd Blythe, Iowa State	6-5	210	So.
TE	David Thomas, Texas	6-3	245	Sr.
T	Jonathan Scott, Texas	6-7	310	Sr.
T	Davin Joseph, Oklahoma	6-4	312	Sr.
G	Tony Palmer, Missouri	6-2	325	Sr.
G	Will Allen, Texas	6-6	315	Sr.
C	Adam Spieker, Missouri	6-3	310	So.
QB	Reggie McNeal, Texas A&M	6-2	206	Sr.
RB	Adrian Peterson, Oklahoma	6-2	210	So.
RB	Cory Ross, Nebraska	5-6	195	Sr.

### Defense

E	Brian Smith, Missouri	6-3	225	Jr.
E	Larry Birdine, Oklahoma	6-5	251	Jr.
T	Rodrique Wright, Texas	6-5	305	Sr.
T	Larry Dibbles, Texas	6-2	285	Sr.
LB	Rufus Alexander, Oklahoma	6-1	225	Jr.
LB	Brian Iwuh, Colorado	6-0	225	Sr.
LB	Thaddeus Washington, Colorado	5-11	250	Jr.
CB	Cedric Griffin, Texas	6-2	193	Sr.
CB	Charles Gordon, Kansas	5-11	177	Jr.
S	Jaxson Appel, Texas A&M	6-0	198	Sr.
S	Michael Huff, Texas	6-1	205	Sr.

### Specialists

K	Mason Crosby, Colorado	6-2	210	Jr.
P	Daniel Sepulveda, Baylor	6-3	222	Jr.
KR	Willie Andrews, Baylor	5-10	190	Sr.

## MATCH GAME

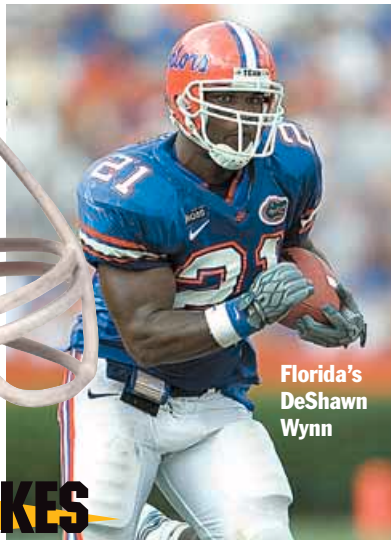
By Michael Bradley

1. Has been ranked in the top three in 29 straight polls and has fallen from the top 10 just once since Oct. 7, 2000.
2. Finished 2004 ranked in the top 25 for the first time since 1995.
3. Led the Big 12 and finished third nationally in pass defense in 2004 but returns only three defensive starters.
4. Has played in four bowls over the past five years after appearing in only four before that stretch.
5. Returns its starting quarterback and eight other offensive starters from a unit that had only four interceptions in 2004.
6. Finished last in the Big 12 and 113th nationally with a minus-15 turnover margin last season.
7. Has the only coach in the country to have won at least nine games in each of the past nine seasons.
8. Has scored in 197 consecutive games dating to 1988, the longest streak in the conference.
9. Will try to engineer a turnaround with a mammoth 31-player recruiting class.
10. Returns three defensive backs after leading the Big 12 with 19 interceptions in 2004.
11. Didn't go to a bowl game last year for the first time since 1992.
12. Led the Big 12 in turnover margin (plus-17) and was second nationally last season.

- A. Baylor
- B. Colorado
- C. Iowa State
- D. Kansas
- E. Kansas State
- F. Missouri
- G. Nebraska
- H. Oklahoma
- I. Oklahoma State
- J. Texas
- K. Texas A&M
- L. Texas Tech

## ANSWERS

- 1-H; 2-L; 3-F;
- 4-C; 5-K; 6-A;
- 7-J; 8-B; 9-G;
- 10-D; 11-E;
- 12-I



Florida's DeShawn Wynn

ALBERT DICKSON / TSN

## MATT HAYES' TAKES



With good health (and better coaching), Brodie Croyle will take the Tide to high places.

BOB LEVERONE / TSN

Steve Spurrier's first year back in college football will look a lot like his first with the Washington Redskins: good defense, bad offense. But somehow he will get seven wins out of **South Carolina**. ... I wish I could watch **Kentucky** QB Andre' Woodson play for Spurrier. Woodson is big (6-5, 230) and has a strong, accurate arm. Unfortunately, he'll get lost in the muck that is UK football. ... If **Alabama** QB Brodie Croyle stays healthy—and Mike Shula's coaching doesn't give away a game or two—the underrated Tide will be playing for the West Division title when the Iron Bowl rolls around. ... It looks as though Thomas Brown will get the majority of the carries in **Georgia's** crowded backfield and Danny Ware will play some at H-back.

Big mistake. When Ware was healthy last year, he was fantastic. He has a rare combination of speed, size and attitude. ... It's not going to happen overnight, but Ed Orgeron will get **Ole Miss** to its first SEC title game. His strong recruiting ties in California and Florida will be key. ... **Auburn** DEs Stanley McClover and Quentin Groves look a lot like former Florida State stud DEs Reinard Wilson and Peter Boulware. Fast, aggressive, intimidating. McClover and Groves will combine for 20-plus sacks. ... Last year,

**Tennessee** coach Phillip Fulmer brought senior QB C.J. Leak to SEC media days. He barely played in 2004. This year, Fulmer brought senior QB Rick Clausen. Let me put it this way: Erik Ainge clearly is the best quarterback on the roster, but Fulmer likes to throw a bone to loyal seniors. ... Who has the safest job in the league? **Vanderbilt's** Bobby Johnson, of course. No. 1, he doesn't have to report to an athletic director (things are done differently at Vandy, people). No. 2, who else is Vandy going to get? ... Surprise player of the year: **Florida** RB DeShawn Wynn. This guy ran over Miami S Sean Taylor two years ago but hasn't been heard from since. Wynn will thrive in new coach Urban Meyer's offense—and Meyer's no-nonsense attitude will rub off on Wynn. ... **LSU** must find a way to better take advantage of WR Xavier Carter. He's the fastest player in the nation. Yep, faster than Reggie Bush and Ted Ginn. But Carter still is a long way from understanding the game.

UNIT RANKINGS	PROJECTED FINISH										
	Backfield	Wide receivers	Line	Overall	Line	Linebackers	Defensive backs	Overall	Special teams	Coaching	Schedule strength
<b>East</b>											
1. Tennessee	3	5	4	4	1	4	2	1	6	2	1
2. Florida	1	3	3	2	2	3	4	2	4	4	3
3. Georgia	5	4	2	3	6	6	1	5	1	3	5
4. South Carolina	8	8	7	8	8	9	6	7	5	1	7
5. Vanderbilt	10	11	11	11	12	7	11	11	12	11	11
6. Kentucky	12	12	12	12	11	12	12	12	9	12	8
<b>West</b>											
1. LSU	2	1	1	1	4	5	5	6	2	5	2
2. Auburn	9	2	6	5	3	1	8	4	3	7	9
3. Alabama	4	6	9	6	5	2	3	3	8	9	6
4. Arkansas	11	9	5	9	10	10	7	9	7	6	4
5. Mississippi	7	7	8	7	9	11	10	10	10	10	10
6. Mississippi St.	6	10	10	10	7	8	9	8	11	8	12

O F F E N S E | D E F E N S E

## 10 BEST GAMES

1. Tennessee at LSU 9/24
2. Florida at LSU 10/15
3. Tennessee at Florida 9/17
4. Auburn at LSU 10/22
5. Florida vs. Georgia (Jacksonville) 10/29
6. Georgia at Tennessee 10/8
7. Alabama at Auburn 11/19
8. Auburn at Georgia 11/12
9. Florida State at Florida 11/26
10. Florida at South Carolina 11/12

## WATCH OUT FOR ...

**Jay Cutler, QB, Sr., Vanderbilt.** He gets lost because he plays for the Commodores, but pro scouts know all about Cutler's toughness, moxie and know-how. If only he had talent around him.

**Marcus Harrison, DT, So., Arkansas.** He was a load in the interior last season as a true freshman. Once Harrison develops more moves, his plays behind the line will increase—as will his profile.

**Arron Sears, OT, Jr., Tennessee.** He often gets overlooked when folks gush about the Vols' impressive front wall, but Sears may be the best of the lot. He's a road grader who brings versatility to the unit.

**Patrick Willis, LB, Jr., Mississippi.** The coaches think he will have a big impact patrolling the middle of the defense. Willis' combination of speed and strength means he rarely will come off the field. And playing for defense-minded Ed Orgeron will make Willis better.

**Brandon Brooks, WR/KR, Sr., Alabama.** He stands just 5-5, but Brooks is electricity in a can. And that's just what the Tide's moribund offense and special teams need. —T.D.

## SCOUTS VIEWS

Observations from SEC coaches

The honeymoon is over for Mike Shula at **Alabama**. He has to show that his team is on the verge of playing for the SEC championship. ... I think Houston Nutt manages the game well, but **Arkansas** never looks like it will take the next step in the evolution. ... Two years ago, **Auburn's** Tommy Tuberville was a dolt. Now, he's a genius. He does a good job getting his kids motivated to play. ... I'm still a little suspicious about **Florida** QB Chris Leak's running the spread option. He's more of a pocket, pro-style passer. How will his accuracy and confidence be shaken after getting hit play after play? ... After four years of David Greene, a very coachable quarterback, we're going to see how patient **Georgia's** Mark Richt can be with D.J. Shockley. ... If Rich Brooks doesn't show improvement at **Kentucky**, he won't be around next year. At least the two previous coaches made it interesting. ... I don't think any team in the country has as much talent at wide receiver and running back as **LSU**—and that includes Southern Cal. ... Whatever **Mississippi** does at quarterback, it has to run that offense through Vashon Pearson. He's a heck of a back, a strong runner with deceptive speed. ... If **Mississippi State's** Jerious Norwood played for LSU, he'd be one of the most hyped running backs in the nation. ... I think Steve Spurrier is going to have problems at **South Carolina**. It's hard to recruit there because there's no history and he



Tackle Jesse Mahelona never lets the Vols' defense rest.

ALBERT DICKSON / TSN

doesn't have the best recruiting base. ... **Tennessee** will be as good defensively as they have been in the last decade, and that's saying a lot. I love Jesse Mahelona at tackle. ... I don't think Bobby Johnson is going to get it done at **Vanderbilt**, but that doesn't mean he's not a talented coach.

## TSN'S ALL-SEC TEAM

### Offense

Pos.	Name, school	Ht.	Wt.	Cl.
WR	Courtney Taylor, Auburn	6-2	204	Jr.
WR	Andre Caldwell, Florida	6-1	195	Jr.
TE	Leonard Pope, Georgia	6-7	250	Jr.
T	Andrew Whitworth, LSU	6-7	325	Sr.
T	Marcus McNeill, Auburn	6-9	337	Sr.
G	Max Jean-Gilles, Georgia	6-4	340	Sr.
G	Cody Douglas, Tennessee	6-4	330	Sr.
C	Mike Degory, Florida	6-6	306	Sr.
QB	Chris Leak, Florida	6-0	195	Jr.
RB	Gerald Riggs, Tennessee	6-0	217	Sr.
RB	Alley Broussard, LSU	6-0	233	Jr.

### Defense

E	Parys Haralson, Tennessee	6-2	248	Sr.
E	Stanley McClover, Auburn	6-3	247	So.
T	Kyle Williams, LSU	6-2	295	Sr.
T	Jesse Mahelona, Tennessee	6-2	297	Sr.
LB	Brandon Siler, Florida	6-2	230	So.
LB	Omar Gaither, Tennessee	6-2	230	Sr.
LB	Travis Williams, Auburn	6-1	207	Sr.
CB	Jason Allen, Tennessee	6-2	202	Sr.
CB	Demetric Webb, Florida	5-11	190	Jr.
S	Ko Simpson, South Carolina	6-1	199	So.
S	Greg Blue, Georgia	6-2	214	Sr.

### Specialists

K	John Vaughn, Auburn	6-1	201	Jr.
P	Eric Wilbur, Florida	6-2	192	Jr.
KR	Skyler Green, LSU	5-10	195	Sr.



ALBERT DICKSON / TSN

## MATCH GAME

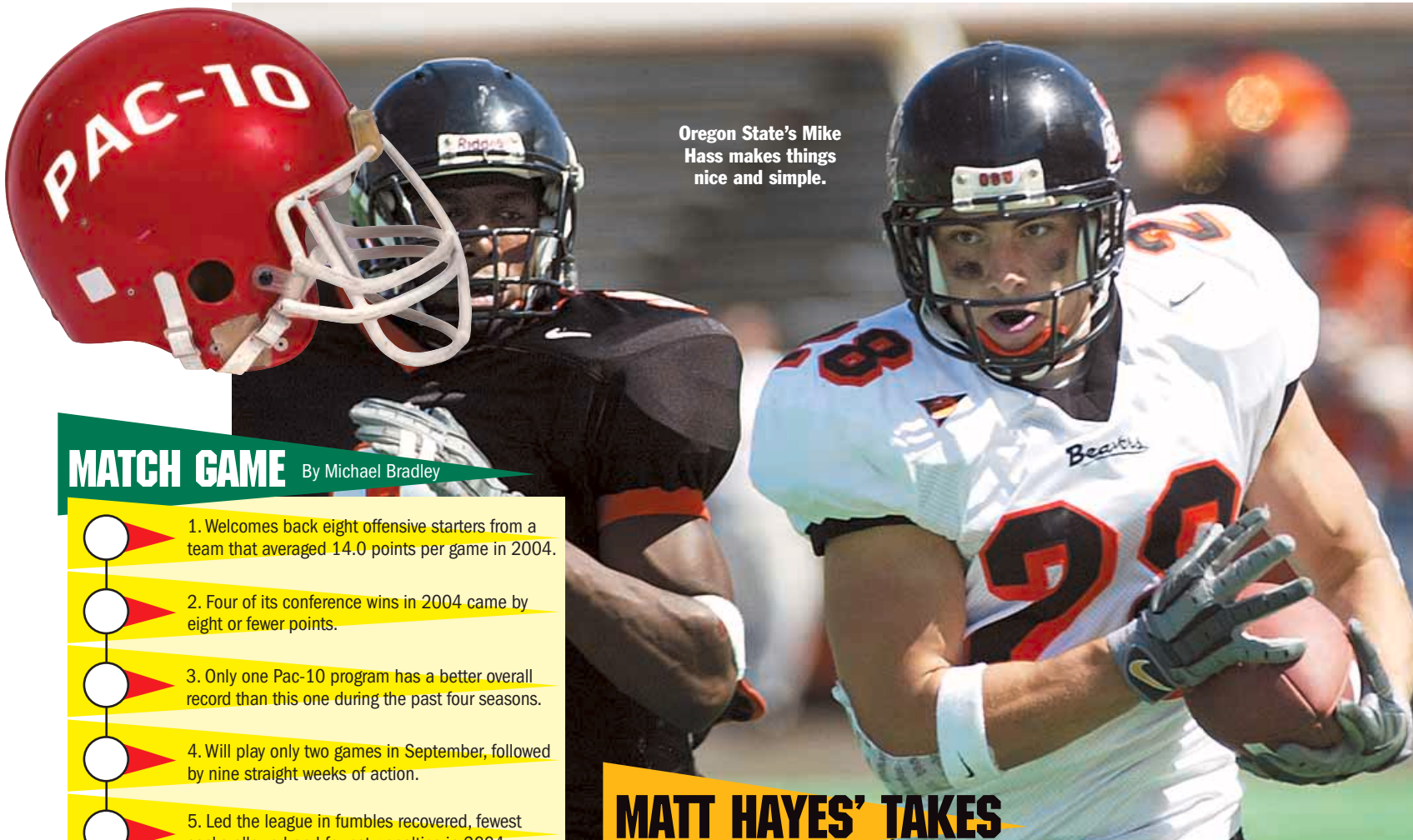
By Michael Bradley

1. The streak: a school-record 16 straight bowl games. The schedule: includes six 2004 bowl teams.
2. Has won more than one conference game in a season once over the past 10 years.
3. Returns nine starters from a defense that ranked first in the SEC and second in the nation.
4. Led the SEC in passing offense, passing touchdowns, passing attempts and completions in 2004.
5. Returns the top three rushers from the SEC's best ground offense.
6. Has run off eight consecutive seasons with at least eight wins for the first time in school history.
7. Has 18 starters back but lost its top passer and top rusher—and he's the same guy.
8. Will try to rebound from its first losing season since 1996.
9. This team's coach is the only man in SEC history to post 12 straight seasons of nine or more wins.
10. Returning players produced just 9 percent of the rushing yards and 12 percent of the passing yards in 2004.
11. Hasn't averaged 20 points per game since 2000.
12. Ranked 12th in the SEC in total offense and total defense in '04.

- A. Alabama
- B. Arkansas
- C. Auburn
- D. Florida
- E. Georgia
- F. Kentucky
- G. LSU
- H. Mississippi
- I. Mississippi State
- J. South Carolina
- K. Tennessee
- L. Vanderbilt

## ANSWERS

1-K; 2-L; 3-A;  
4-D; 5-G; 6-E;  
7-B; 8-H; 9-J;  
10-C; 11-I;  
12-F



Oregon State's Mike Hass makes things nice and simple.

## MATCH GAME

By Michael Bradley

1. Welcomes back eight offensive starters from a team that averaged 14.0 points per game in 2004.
2. Four of its conference wins in 2004 came by eight or fewer points.
3. Only one Pac-10 program has a better overall record than this one during the past four seasons.
4. Will play only two games in September, followed by nine straight weeks of action.
5. Led the league in fumbles recovered, fewest sacks allowed and fewest penalties in 2004.
6. Has had three straight winning seasons for the first time since a six-season run from 1947-52.
7. Hasn't had an All-Pac-10 defensive lineman since 1991.
8. Will start a new quarterback but has its top six receivers from 2004 back.
9. Five of its first seven opponents played in bowl games last season.
10. Will try to regain its 2003 form, when it was second in the league in defense, after finishing 10th last year.

## MATT HAYES' TAKES

I can't wait to see **Cal** QB Joseph Ayoub run Jeff Tedford's offense. Anyone called the *White Michael Vick* has to be one heck of a player. ... There's no better blitzing linebacker than **Washington State**'s Will Derting. He's fast, athletic and one bad dude. And, by the way, he played half of last season with a broken wrist—an injury a trainer once told me was the most painful to play with. ... Let's hope **UCLA** gets its quarterback situation straightened out, if for no other reason than to get TE Marcedes Lewis more involved in the offense. Nothing quite like a tight end with speed who can stretch the field. ... New offensive coordinator Gary Crowton has completely changed the **Oregon** scheme. The Ducks will be primarily a one-back, three-wide offense. And if that one back is talented freshman Jonathan Stewart (see: Peterson, Adrian), USC is going to have problems in the Autzen Zoo on September 24. ... Check out **Arizona State** TE Zach Miller: fearless, fantastic hands and a solid blocker—the best tight end in the Pac-10. And that's saying plenty, considering Lewis and USC's Dominique Byrd will be first-round picks in the next NFL draft. ... Someone please tell me how star freshman WR Patrick Turner is going to play ahead of WRs Steve Smith and Dwayne Jarrett at **USC**—and potential stud Whitney Lewis, if he's academically eligible. Yet, coach Pete Carroll has been raving about Turner. This embarrassment of riches is really sick. ... **Oregon State** WR Mike Hass isn't a burner, but he gets open and catches the ball—a simple yet vastly overlooked combination. ... This isn't the year **Arizona** makes a move under coach Mike Stoops—not with road games against Utah, USC, Cal and Arizona State. But Stoops already has proved he can bring blue-chip recruits to Tucson (QB Willie Tuitama), which is the start of the turnaround. ... **Washington** will be among the top half of Pac-10 defenses (DT Manase Hopoi is a beast), which will lead to the Huskies' winning games the way new coach Ty Willingham did in his first season at Notre Dame: by playing physically on defense, protecting the ball on offense and getting a few breaks. The Huskies led the nation with 42 giveaways last year; they'll be under 20 this season.

- |                  |                     |
|------------------|---------------------|
| A. Arizona       | F. Stanford         |
| B. Arizona State | G. UCLA             |
| C. California    | H. USC              |
| D. Oregon        | I. Washington       |
| E. Oregon State  | J. Washington State |

## ANSWERS

1-I; 2-H; 3-J;  
4-F; 5-A; 6-C;  
7-D; 8-B; 9-E;  
10-G.

## SCOUTS VIEWS

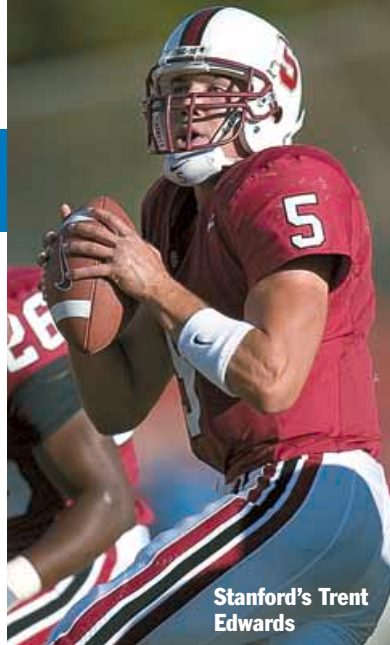
Observations from Pac-10 coaches

**Arizona** is heading in the right direction. They have a pretty decent base of players, and they keep adding pieces. ... **Arizona State** QB Sam Keller is not Andrew Walter yet, but he's a good quarterback. He's young, but give him time and he'll do well. ...

**Cal's** defense is not very aggressive, but it is fundamentally sound. They zone blitz when they have to. If you have to fade back and use five-and-seven-step drops, they'll kill you. ...

**Oregon** has always been one of the most talented teams in the league. Why they never perform the way they should is left up to speculation. ... For some reason, **Oregon State** can always rise up and play solid. You can never discount them. They do a good job recruiting junior college players, and once the season starts, they come together. ... **UCLA** has a wealth of talent, but they have to get it done.

TE Mercedes Lewis is hard to deal with because he's a big target who can work inside or outside. ... I don't think losing Norm Chow is going to hurt **USC** much. He's a great coach, but the guys underneath him are good coaches, too. Lane Kiffin, their new guy, has grown up a lot. ... **Stanford** has a lot of young talent, at least offensively. I thought they would be



Stanford's Trent Edwards

ROBERT SEALE / TSN

better than they were last year. I think Trent Edwards has a chance to be a really good quarterback. He has all the tools. ... **Washington** has a poor level of talent. They're a long way from being competitive. It's going to take a lot of time to turn it around there. ... **Washington State** will be pretty solid across the front seven after being so young last year, but it will be thin in the defensive backfield. Josh Swogger got some experience last year at quarterback, but they have some other people to push him now. They'll surprise some people if they stay healthy.

UNIT RANKINGS	PROJECTED FINISH										
	Backfield	Wide receivers	Line	Overall	Line	Linebackers	Defensive backs	Overall	Special teams	Coaching	Schedule strength
1. USC	1	1	1	1	1	3	1	1	1	1	1
2. California	4	8	2	4	4	7	5	4	5	2	10
3. Arizona State	3	2	3	2	3	2	2	2	3	4	9
4. UCLA	2	3	4	3	5	1	3	3	2	8	3
5. Oregon	5	7	8	7	2	10	7	6	10	3	5
6. Oregon State	9	5	5	6	9	4	8	7	6	9	2
7. Washington St.	6	4	6	5	7	5	6	5	4	6	7
8. Washington	10	9	10	10	10	8	9	10	8	10	6
9. Arizona	8	10	7	9	8	9	4	8	9	7	4
10. Stanford	7	6	9	8	6	6	10	9	7	5	8

O F F E N S E | D E F E N S E

## 10 BEST GAMES

1. USC at California	11/12
2. UCLA at USC	12/3
3. USC at Oregon	9/24
4. California at Oregon	11/5
5. Oklahoma at UCLA	9/17
6. USC at Notre Dame	10/15
7. Arizona State at UCLA	11/12
8. Fresno State at USC	11/19
9. UCLA at Washington State	10/15
10. California at Washington	9/10

## WATCH OUT FOR...

### Kevin Brown, DT, Jr., UCLA.

He's quick off the ball and always keeps his feet moving. Combine that with his strength and it's easy to envision him being one of the Pac-10's best linemen.

**Michael Bumpus, WR/KR, So., Washington State.** He might lack the thrill-a-minute hypertalent of Reggie Bush, but Bumpus is sneaky fast as a return man and receiver. Watch his numbers grow.

**Marshawn Lynch, RB, So., California.** He watched J.J. Arrington rush for 2,018 yards last year. Now, it's Lynch's turn. His speed, acceleration and change-of-direction ability could make him even more effective than Arrington was—if a passing game emerges to take the pressure off him. —T.D.



D. ROSS CAMERON / AP

## TSN's ALL-PAC-10 TEAM

Offense			
Pos.	Name, school	Ht.	Wt. Cl.
WR	Mike Hass, Oregon State	6-1	209 Sr.
WR	Dwayne Jarrett, USC	6-5	195 So.
TE	Mercedes Lewis, UCLA	6-6	255 Sr.
T	Sam Baker, USC	6-5	290 So.
T	Ryan O'Callaghan, California	6-7	340 Sr.
G	Roy Schuening, Oregon State	6-4	317 So.
G	Fred Matua, USC	6-2	305 Jr.
C	Marvin Philip, California	6-2	280 Sr.
QB	Matt Leinart, USC	6-5	225 Sr.
RB	Reggie Bush, USC	6-0	200 Jr.
RB	Maurice Drew, UCLA	5-8	198 Jr.
Defense			
E	Frostee Rucker, USC	6-4	255 Sr.
E	Kyle Caldwell, Arizona State	6-3	253 Jr.
T	Manase Hopoi, Washington	6-4	285 Sr.
T	Haloti Ngata, Oregon	6-5	338 Jr.
LB	Spencer Havner, UCLA	6-4	236 Sr.
LB	Jon Alston, Stanford	6-1	220 Sr.
LB	Will Derting, Washington State	6-0	228 Sr.
CB	Antoine Cason, Arizona	6-1	180 So.
CB	Justin Wyatt, USC	5-10	180 Sr.
S	Darnell Bing, USC	6-2	220 Jr.
S	Jarrad Page, UCLA	6-2	220 Sr.
Specialists			
K	Justin Medlock, UCLA	6-0	185 Jr.
P	Tom Malone, USC	6-0	190 Sr.
KR	Reggie Bush, USC	6-0	200 Jr.



## MATT HAYES' TAKES



Memphis' DeAngelo Williams

MARK WEBER / THE COMMERCIAL APPEAL / AP

OK, let's get this out of the way: There's no way **UAB** star QB Darrell Hackney is 240 pounds. (260?) There, I said it. I feel better now. ... I love

**Memphis** RB DeAngelo Williams, but two quick things: He is NOT a Heisman Trophy contender, and he might not be the best tailback in his own conference. Tyler Ebell, a UCLA transfer, will give an already strong **UTEP** offense more firepower in a loaded backfield. ...

**Houston** QB Kevin Kolb fell off the radar last year after a big freshman season because the Cougars' pass-blocking was horrible. Coach Art Briles (think Mike Leach) has retooled the line, and Kolb will have Houston pushing UTEP for the West Division title. ... Former MAC members **Marshall** and **Central**

UNIT RANKINGS	PROJECTED FINISH										
	Backfield	Wide receivers	Line	Overall	Line	Linebackers	Defensive backs	Overall	Special teams	Coaching	Schedule strength
<b>East</b>											
1. UAB	2	4	1	2	3	10	10	6	6	5	9
2. Southern Miss	5	3	5	4	1	11	1	3	1	2	1
3. Memphis	4	7	10	7	2	1	3	1	9	3	4
4. Marshall	10	10	4	8	7	12	4	8	7	12	8
5. East Carolina	12	11	8	11	12	5	8	10	3	10	7
6. Central Florida	9	8	9	9	9	7	9	12	11	4	10
<b>West</b>											
1. UTEP	3	1	2	1	4	6	2	2	4	1	12
2. Houston	1	2	6	3	6	2	6	4	12	8	6
3. Tulane	6	5	3	5	10	8	5	7	5	7	11
4. Rice	8	12	12	12	8	4	12	9	2	6	3
5. Tulsa	7	6	7	6	5	9	11	11	8	9	2
6. SMU	11	9	11	10	11	3	7	5	10	11	5

O F F E N S E | D E F E N S E

**Florida** won't have much of an impact in Year 1. But Herd CB Chris Hawkins, a North Carolina transfer, will push **Southern Miss** CB John Eubanks for the claim of being the league's top cover corner. ...

**Southern Miss** has moved Trevis Coley from free safety to linebacker

in an effort to shore up a unit that has been the foundation of the Golden Eagles' stature as a C-USA heavyweight. But Coley (6-2, 216) is undersized, and the other starters (twin brother Kevis Coley and Gerald McRath) fall well below the talent standard of previous units.

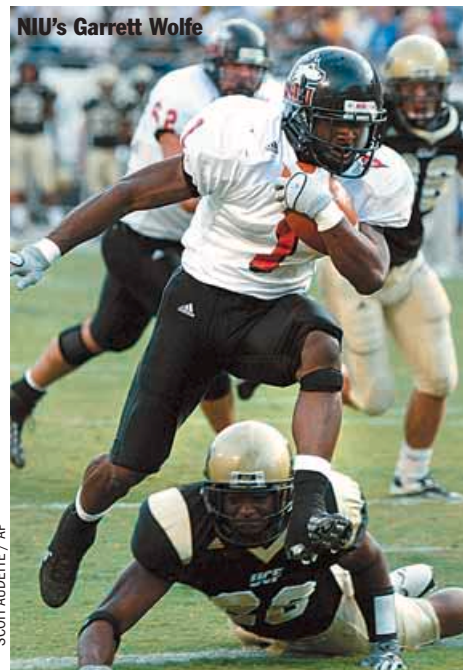


## MATT HAYES' TAKES

Let's see: Omar Jacobs (**Bowling Green**), Bruce Gradkowski (**Toledo**), Josh Betts (**Miami**) and Phil Horvath (**Northern Illinois**). Yeah, I think the MAC still is churning out big-time quarterbacks. ... Search your satellite

dish package for a **Northern Illinois** game and watch mighty mite TB Garrett Wolfe. He's 5-7, 174 pounds, and he flat-out brings it. He ran for a MAC-high 1,656 yards last season, and three line starters return. ... **Toledo's** highly productive offensive system gets more help with the return of former All-MAC TE Andrew Clarke, who missed last season with a hip injury. That's good news for Gradkowski, whose young receivers need time to get comfortable. ... **Central Michigan's** Brian Kelly is one of the best coaches in the MAC, but you could roll all three directional Michigan schools into one team and it still wouldn't win the league. I would love to see Kelly get a shot at a school where he could recruit blue-chip athletes. ... Don't expect **Ohio** to run that grind offense from coach Frank Solich's Nebraska days. It's a different league, and Solich wants a multiple scheme. In other words, Ohio will look more like Nebraska in Solich's last season, when

the Huskers used the passing game as more than a changeup.



SCOTT AUDETTE / AP

UNIT RANKINGS	PROJECTED FINISH										
	Backfield	Wide receivers	Line	Overall	Line	Linebackers	Defensive backs	Overall	Special teams	Coaching	Schedule strength
<b>East</b>											
1. Bowling Green	1	1	2	1	5	5	5	3	5	1	3
2. Miami	6	6	6	6	2	1	1	1	2	6	5
3. Akron	10	4	11	8	12	4	3	7	3	9	9
4. Kent State	12	10	9	11	1	10	4	4	9	10	10
5. Ohio	7	8	10	9	3	7	8	6	8	7	2
6. Buffalo	9	12	7	10	8	12	10	11	11	12	12
<b>West</b>											
1. Toledo	2	2	4	2	9	2	7	5	7	3	11
2. Northern Illinois	3	7	1	3	6	3	2	2	1	2	4
3. E. Michigan	5	5	5	4	7	8	12	10	6	5	7
4. C. Michigan	4	9	3	5	4	6	11	8	10	4	6
5. Ball State	11	11	12	12	10	9	6	9	12	8	1
6. W. Michigan	8	3	8	7	11	11	9	12	4	11	8

O F F E N S E | D E F E N S E



## MATT HAYES' TAKES



Wyoming's Dusty Hoffschneider

MICHAEL SMITH / LARAMIE DAILY BOOM / AP

**Colorado State** coach Sonny Lubick can preach all he wants about the running game, but if QB Justin Holland can't take care of the ball and be more efficient, the Rams will struggle again. ... Check out **Wyoming** NG Dusty Hoffschneider. He's 5-10, 257 pounds (that's being generous), but he plays like a 6-6, 330-pounder. He's a fire hydrant of a run stuffer who goes hard every play. ... A quick scouting report on new **Utah** QB Brian Johnson, from a guy who probably knows something about him: "He has incredible poise," says Florida coach Urban Meyer, who led the Utes to the Fiesta Bowl last season. ... RBs Lonta Hobbs and Robert Merrill are a fantastic combo, but if **TCU** coach-defensive guru Gary Patterson doesn't figure out a way to stop teams, the Horned Frogs will fall further in a significantly

UNIT RANKINGS	PROJECTED FINISH										
	Backfield	Wide receivers	Line	Overall	Line	Linebackers	Defensive backs	Overall	Special teams	Coaching	Schedule strength
1. Utah	8	8	6	8	4	3	4	3	3	6	6
2. Wyoming	7	4	3	5	5	7	2	5	1	2	2
3. TCU	2	5	5	3	1	2	5	2	2	3	8
4. Colorado State	3	3	4	2	9	5	3	6	9	1	3
5. New Mexico	5	6	1	4	2	4	1	1	5	5	5
6. BYU	1	2	2	1	3	1	9	4	7	7	4
7. Air Force	4	9	7	7	8	6	7	7	6	4	7
8. San Diego St.	6	1	8	6	6	8	8	8	4	8	1
9. UNLV	9	7	9	9	7	9	6	9	8	9	9

O F F E N S E | D E F E N S E |

tougher league. ... Easy, **BYU** fans. Bronco Mendenhall is the right man for the program. Just enjoy fabulous WR Todd Watkins for one more five- or six-win season, and things will begin to turn around in 2006. ... The more I think about our pick of **Air Force** as No. 7 in the league, the more nervous I get. An experienced offensive line and a motivated coach usually translate to wins.



## MATT HAYES' TAKES

I hear **North Texas** coach Darrell Dickey wants to get 45 to 50 carries combined for TBs Jamario Thomas (2004 NCAA rushing leader) and Patrick Cobbs (2003 NCAA rushing leader who missed last season with a knee injury). If that happens, the Mean Green's conference win streak will stretch to 32. ... Howard Schnellenberger's fire and brimstone attitude at **Florida Atlantic** is fun and all, and more times than not it translates to solid teams. But what happens when he's directing a team gutted by graduation? Last in the Sun

Belt—which, of course, means No. 119 in the nation—is no way to go through life. ... I know, it's **Louisiana-Monroe**, but trust me: Watch QB Steven Jyles. Let's put it this way: Earlier this summer, he was named to the Sun Belt's all-time team in celebration of the league's 30th anniversary. Hey, not everyone gets named to the all-time All-Sun Belt team, pal. ... The **Troy** defense—specifically MLB Lerverne Johnson—will be fantastic. But the Trojans better find some offense before that October 4 game at North Texas. Three starters return from last year's unit that was the worst in the league—its highlight coming when an *offensive lineman* picked up a fumble and scored in an upset victory over Missouri.



## MATT HAYES' TAKES

I wasn't a big fan of **Fresno State** QB Paul Pinegar the first two years of his career mostly because he played poorly in big games. Last year, he led the Bulldogs to wins over BCS teams Washington, Kansas State and Virginia. OK, I'm sold. But can he beat Boise State? ... This Jerry Glanville experiment at **Hawaii** sounds good. That is, until the unit continues to give up points by the bushel. Hawaii recruits for its offense—as it should. Don't go expecting miracles from a good former NFL

defensive coordinator/head coach. ... I'm beginning to think Chris Petersen is never leaving **Boise State**. The only head coaching jobs that seem to interest the best offensive coordinator in the country are Boise State's (if coach Dan Hawkins left) and Oregon's. ... **San Jose State's** Dick Tomey offered a refreshing contrast to stodgy, stoic coaches when he was at Arizona. We'll see how gregarious he is when he's coaching a team completely devoid of talent. ... How long will Hal Mumme hysteria last when **New Mexico State** begins the season with six losses? Don't expect big things yet, Aggies fans, especially with a nonconference schedule that features UTEP, Colorado, New Mexico and California.

UNIT RANKINGS	PROJECTED FINISH										
	Backfield	Wide receivers	Line	Overall	Line	Linebackers	Defensive backs	Overall	Special teams	Coaching	Schedule strength
1. North Texas	1	4	3	3	8	5	6	6	4	1	1
2. Mid. Tennessee	3	2	1	1	1	2	3	2	3	5	2
3. Troy	7	7	6	7	4	1	1	1	1	2	5
4. La.-Lafayette	5	5	2	4	2	4	5	4	6	7	7
5. La.-Monroe	2	1	4	2	3	8	4	5	5	6	6
6. Arkansas State	4	8	7	6	5	3	2	3	2	4	8
7. FIU	8	3	5	5	6	6	7	7	7	8	4
8. Florida Atlantic	6	6	8	8	7	7	8	8	8	3	3

O F F E N S E | D E F E N S E |

UNIT RANKINGS	PROJECTED FINISH										
	Backfield	Wide receivers	Line	Overall	Line	Linebackers	Defensive backs	Overall	Special teams	Coaching	Schedule strength
1. Boise State	2	1	2	1	1	2	2	2	1	1	1
2. Fresno State	1	4	1	2	2	1	1	1	2	2	2
3. Louisiana Tech	3	3	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	5	5
4. Hawaii	5	5	5	5	6	5	5	5	5	3	6
5. Nevada	4	2	6	4	5	4	6	4	6	6	9
6. San Jose State	7	7	7	7	4	8	4	6	4	7	8
7. New Mexico St.	8	9	3	6	7	6	7	7	7	4	3
8. Utah State	9	6	9	9	8	9	8	8	9	9	4
9. Idaho	6	8	8	8	9	7	9	9	8	8	7

O F F E N S E | D E F E N S E |



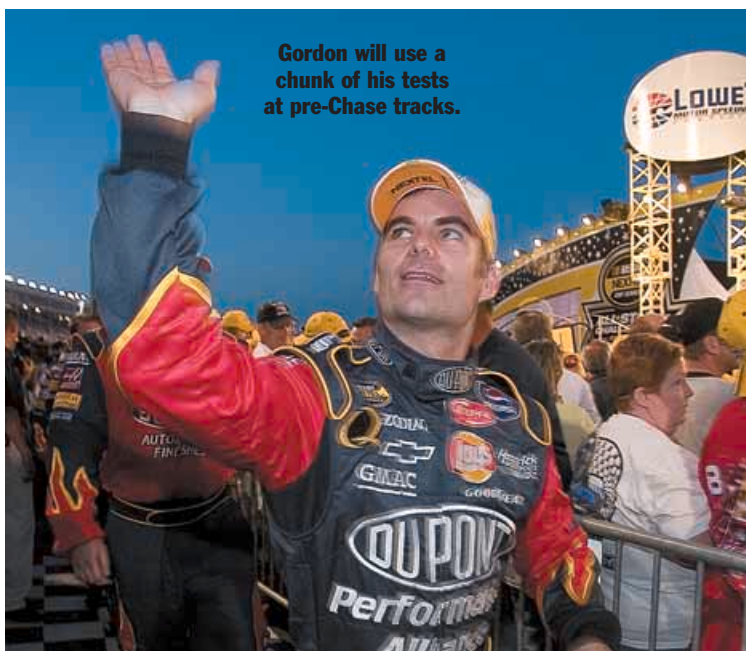
# INSIDER LEE SPENCER

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Give up on Jeff Gordon? Not me.

## Expect Gordon to make a wonderful run



Gordon will use a chunk of his tests at pre-Chase tracks.

BOB LEVERONE / TSN

**A**s Dale Earnhardt Jr.'s hopes of gaining a spot in the Chase for the NASCAR Nextel Cup evaporated in a wreck Sunday at Indianapolis, Jeff Gordon's chances grew when he finished ahead of all six drivers he was battling for the final two spots.

It's hard to believe it has been almost a decade since Gordon won his first of four Cup championships. It's also hard to believe that the driver once known as Wonder Boy turned 34 last week. But what's blowing the minds of many race fans is Gordon's 14th-place position in the standings, 523 points out of first and 87 points out of the final spot in The Chase.

In 12 full seasons on the tour, the only time Gordon missed a top 10 finish was 1993, when he was the Rookie of the Year. That's a dozen

### History lesson

Jeff Gordon's consistency at the five upcoming tracks is reason to believe he'll gain a spot in the Chase for the NASCAR Nextel Cup.

Track	Average finish
Watkins Glen	12.5
Michigan	10.2
Bristol	11.9
California	11.4
Richmond	14.3

consecutive trips to the stage of the Waldorf-Astoria at the championship banquet.

This year will be no different. Gordon's natural driving ability is second to none in NASCAR, and he is in his prime. There's little to stop

him from adding to his 72 victories and 54 poles.

"You go along thinking we had this or that happen or we had a bad weekend," Gordon says. "You don't panic. But when it adds up week after week after week, you say we've got to get ourselves together here—or not let these bad races affect your confidence and make things even worse. We readjusted our test schedule. We looked at a lot more notes in greater detail."

Yes, there is a game plan. Gordon has won at each of the five tracks that remain before the Chase begins. Certainly, he can turn things around Sunday at Watkins Glen, a road course where he leads all drivers with four wins. He had transmission problems this season at the other Cup road course, Sonoma, and Gordon says the team is "getting back to basics" by returning to a standard gearbox that the team relied on three years ago. "It will give up speed, but we'll gain reliability," he adds. Gordon is savvy enough to know that a team must walk before it can run.

Despite having won two races at Michigan, Gordon says, "We stunk there" in June. That's why the team planned to test there this week.

Bristol? Gordon has five victories and four poles at Bristol, considered by some to be the most treacherous track on the circuit. Still, the team will test there later this month.

When the tour swings out to California Speedway, Gordon's confidence will be high. He has won three of the 10 races in front of his home-state crowd.

Finally, there's the regular-season finale, at Richmond, the make-or-break race for drivers on the bubble. Although Gordon has two victories and leads all current drivers with four poles there, the team still will burn a test.

Sure, it's unlikely that Gordon will add a fifth Cup trophy to the case this year, but this much is certain: He has a chance—and he will never give up.

TSN

## speedreads



HAROLD HINSON FOR TSN

What's more important—winning the rookie title or getting seat time? **Carl Edwards**, who cost himself a shot at the rookie award by driving in 13 races last season, is proving that the correct answer is seat time. Rookie of the Year may boost a resume, but getting up to speed quickly is best.

Give Ray Evernham credit for signing Jeremy Mayfield and Kasey Kahne to long-term contracts. Now the challenge is to find a driver who has the right personality to complement his teammates in the shop and on the racetrack for Evernham's third squad.

Engineer Brian Whitesell was instrumental in merging the Nos. 24 and 48 efforts at Hendrick Motorsports. Since switching to the Nos. 5 and 25 at the start of the season, it appears Whitesell's magic is working with the HMS youth movement.

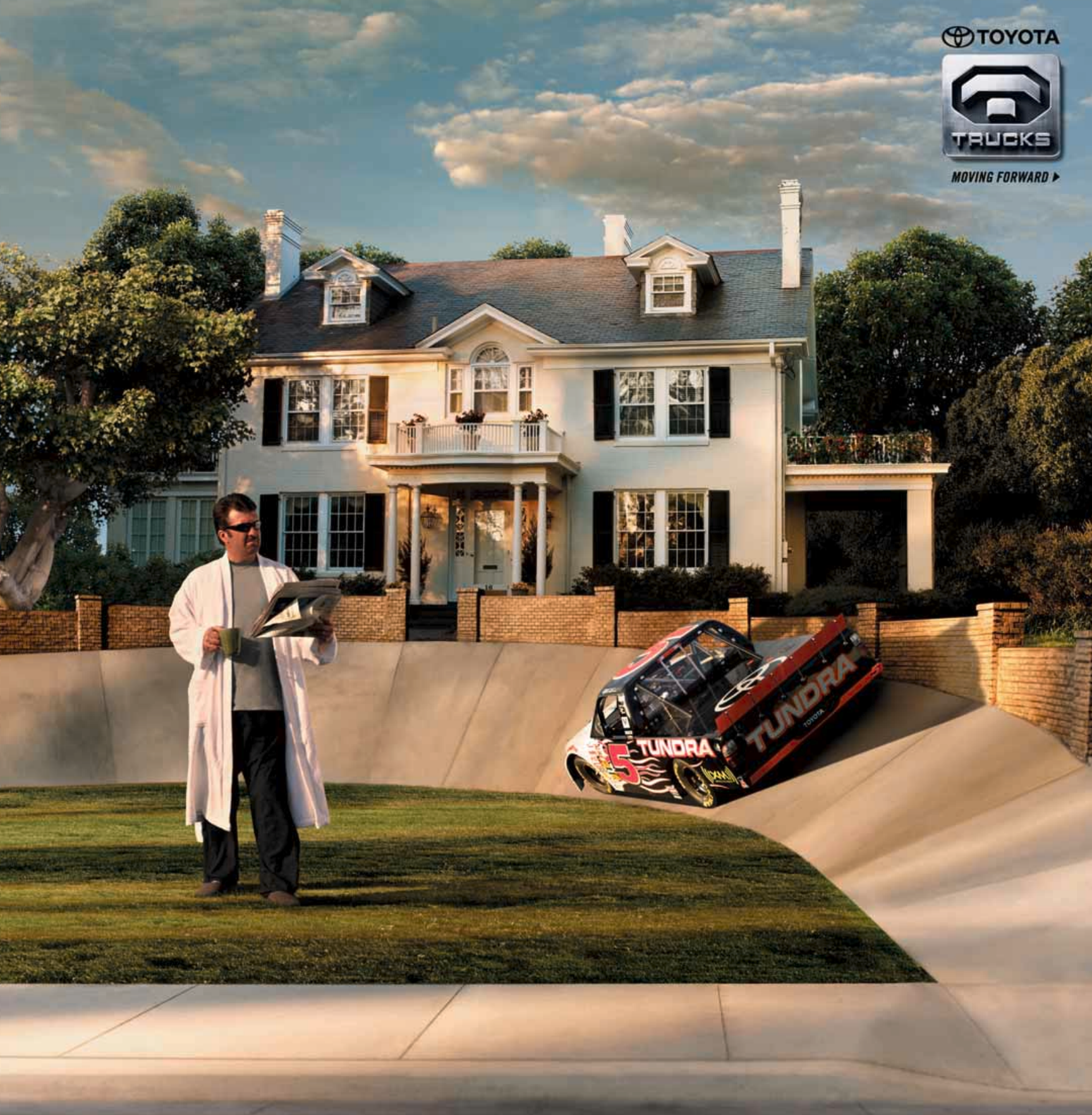
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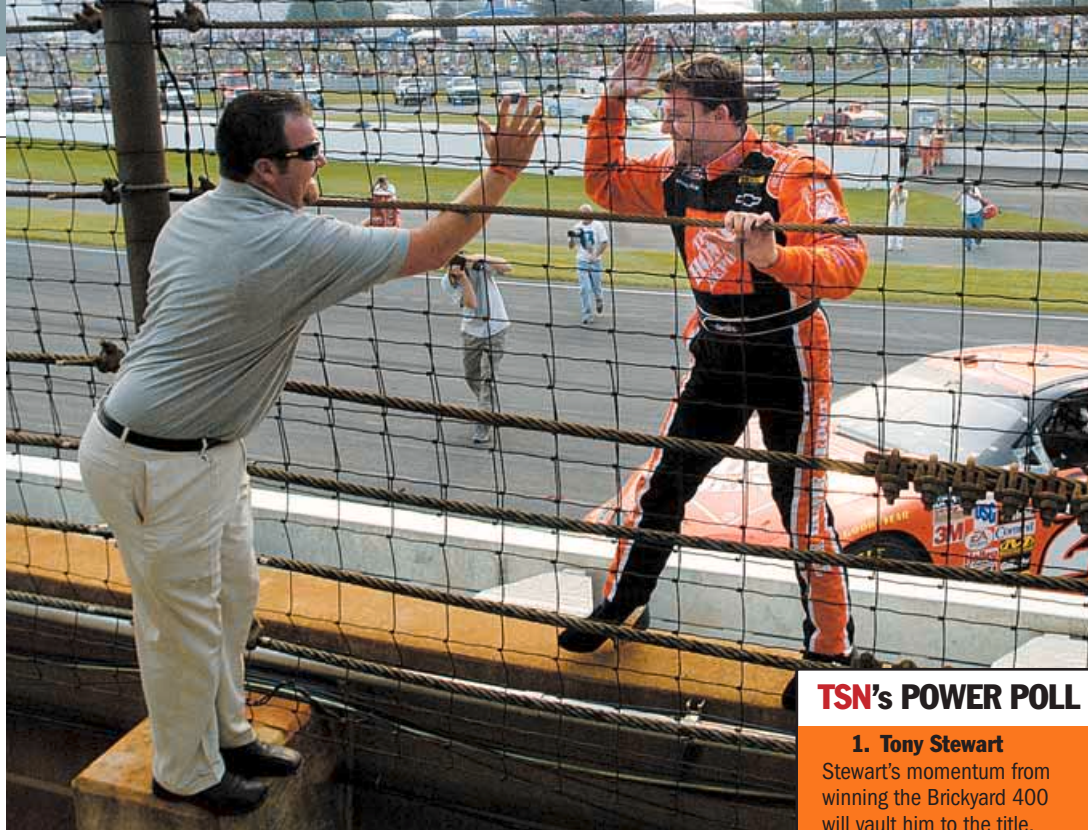
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# INSIDE DISH

Preparation paid off in qualifying for Indianapolis for Robert Yates Racing. Yates' **Elliott Sadler** spanked the field and qualified with a lap of 184.116 mph, nearly three-tenths of a second faster than second-place **Jeremy Mayfield**. The fabricators spent four months massaging the car body, and **Doug Yates** and his crew worked on the Indy engine for two months. But the best medicine very likely could have been **Robert Yates'** decision to give his crews a six-day weekend preceding the Brickyard. It's hard to beat rest and relaxation. Sadler's success didn't continue in the race: With 10 laps to go, Sadler thought a tire was going flat, but the team found that was not the case. The miscue dropped Sadler to a 32nd-place finish, which knocked him from ninth to 12th in the standings. ➤ There has been a rash of tire problems this season, but in an attempt to avoid tire problems at the October 9

Kansas City race, Goodyear set up a tire test recently with Mayfield, **Kevin Harvick** and **Tony Stewart**. After running a variety of tire combinations, the drivers were unanimous that the tire codes raced in Chicago were the most comfortable. "We ran 60 laps on a set," Harvick says. "The tires will be fine." ➤ NBC commentator **Wally Dallenbach** will return to Busch Series competition this weekend at Watkins Glen behind the wheel of Harvick's No. 33 Chevrolet. Dallenbach, who has tested there, said, "I found out I was a little bit rusty." Dallenbach drove the Rolex 24 in February at Daytona; his last NASCAR event was a Busch race last year at Homestead. ➤ Rumors persist that Roush Racing's **Matt Kenseth** is the top choice to replace **Rusty Wallace**, who's retiring, in the No. 2



DOUG MCSCHOOLER / AP

**Tony Stewart** has won four of the past six races, but the effect of winning in front of a home-state crowd at Indianapolis goes beyond thrusting the No. 20 team into the points lead. There's little doubt that winning at Indy will propel Stewart to his second Cup title. "We've found some things that are really working for us now, and that puts the pressure on everyone else to catch up with us," Stewart says. He has a 75-point lead over **Jimmie Johnson**, who was transported to a hospital for observation after he took a vicious hit when he cut a tire.

## TSN's POWER POLL

1. **Tony Stewart**  
Stewart's momentum from winning the Brickyard 400 will vault him to the title.
2. **Jimmie Johnson**
3. **Greg Biffle**
4. **Rusty Wallace**
5. **Mark Martin**
6. **Kurt Busch**
7. **Jeremy Mayfield**
- ▼ 8. **Ryan Newman**
9. **Dale Jarrett**
- ▲ 10. **Jamie McMurray**

Penske Racing car. Sources say Kenseth is sponsor Miller Brewing Co.'s first choice. Kenseth and his wife, **Katie**, are good friends of Penske driver **Ryan Newman**. ➤ GM Racing needs to get its house in order. NASCAR didn't appreciate Joe Gibbs Racing's bringing a 2006 Monte Carlo that was unprepared to get through the on-track portion of NASCAR's approval process to Atlanta last week. The car didn't make a target speed, and the team had to borrow springs from rival Ford, which had the Wood Brothers auditioning the new Fusion. "We dropped the ball," JGR team manager **Jimmy Makar** says. "There's really no excuse." NASCAR agreed to allow JGR and **Bobby Labonte** to return to Atlanta on Tuesday in an attempt to get the Monte Carlo up to speed.

## NASCAR's north-of-the-border strategy

It's no secret NASCAR has heavily recruited Hispanic drivers, hoping that would make its product more appealing to race fans south of the border. Now, NASCAR is ready to proposition fans north of the border, where open-wheel racing still is the preferred form of motorsports.

Ontario native and 2003 Champ Car World Series champion Paul Tracy has been enlisted to entice both Canadian and open-wheel fans as he attempts to qualify for the GFS Marketplace 400 August 21 at Michigan International Speedway. Tracy is scheduled to test the No. 33 with Richard Childress Racing this week, and other Canadians might not be far behind. Patrick Carpentier's name has been mentioned as testing with a Busch Series team, and Pete Shepherd III, 19, is one of the finalists in the Roush Racing Gong Show—a competition for a full-time ride in the Craftsman Truck Series in 2006.



JEFF CHIU / AP

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## INSIDER STAN McNEAL

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It's not cool to be a fan when you're in this business. But I happily admit this: I root for Todd Jones, one of the most special regular dudes in sports.

## Jones has a story you've got to love

**T**odd Jones likes to say he's just a guy passing through the game. And in some ways, he is the classic journeyman, pitching for seven teams in the past five years, one of dozens of relievers trying to hold down a job in the major leagues.

But Todd Jones is far more than just another guy. To begin with, not many guys have lasted 13 seasons in the majors, recorded more than 200 saves and pitched in an All-Star Game. What really sets Jones apart, though, is this: He's the only guy in the majors who can beat deadline during the day and save a game that night. Shortly after noon last Thursday, he turned on his computer, IMed his editor and said, "Start the clock." Time to write. Fifty-three minutes later, his column popped into my e-mail inbox (you can find it on page 60). That night, I turned on the Cardinals-Marlins game, and there was Jones, being summoned with the tying run on third and two outs in the eighth. A nice play by his second baseman got him out of the inning. Two routine grounders and a strikeout finished off the Cards in the ninth. For those scoring at home, that was 22 saves and 28 columns for the year.

Closing is as different from columnizing as the salaries for the

### speedreads

Firing Lee Mazzilli was like plugging a leak with a napkin. If Peter Angelos really wants to improve the Orioles, he should consider firing himself.

One aspect to the Rafael Palmeiro story that wasn't surprising: **Jose Canseco** saying he has started on a sequel. Hey, if all those blowhards threatening to sue haven't done so by now, why shouldn't he cash in again?

Gary Sheffield, just say no every now and then. The reporters might not like it, but your teammates would.



After several down years touched off by a stint in Colorado, Jones again has become one of the league's best relievers this season.

two jobs would suggest, but one trait helps Jones in both: his preparation. Although the majority of relievers pay cursory attention to scouting reports, Jones studies them as closely as most starters do. He has been known to pull out a cheat sheet on the mound when facing an unfamiliar hitter. As a writer, he reads, observes, contemplates and questions—all of which make him a standout, no

matter what topic he's tackling. He doesn't duck tough issues (he has written about gays in the clubhouse, steroids and Pete Rose) and he can be funny ("sportswriters are the guys who wore blue socks in gym class"), but his strength as a writer—and, for that matter, as a person—is his direct approach. He doesn't waste words or pitches. A proud product of the South—raised near Atlanta and residing in Alabama—Jones is as down to earth as Georgia clay. "We do what we do," he tells his two kids when they want something because the neighbor down the street got it.

When Jones started writing his "Closer" column for the *SPORTING NEWS* five years ago, he actually *was* a closer. His career stumbled in 2002 where so many other pitchers' careers have tumbled, at Coors Field. He admits the place got to him, and it took awhile—until last year, in fact—to regain his confidence. He pitched well for the

Reds last season but struggled after he was traded to the Phillies. Now 37, he's enjoying one of his best seasons. Jones ranks second among N.L. relievers with a 1.29 ERA, is holding opponents to a .194 batting average and has blown only two saves since moving into the closer role in late April.

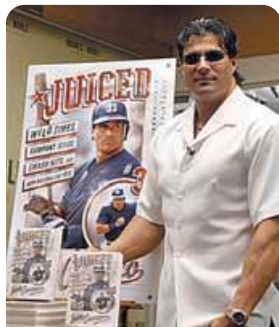
Jones says the biggest difference is an improved cutter. Marlins pitching coach Mark Wiley says the righthander's stuff has been better than advertised. "He throws four quality pitches for strikes and with good late movement," Wiley says. "I told him that I thought it was amazing he hasn't been closing all these years." Teammate Brian Moehler says Jones has been on something of a mission after not getting the job offers he felt he deserved in the offseason. Jones said in May that he was feeling good this year. In June, he talked about covering the All-Star Game for the *SPORTING NEWS*.

"As a writer or a pitcher?"

"As a pitcher," he replied, a hint of indignation that the question was asked. But recognition hasn't knocked down his door. Jones got barely a sniff of consideration for the N.L. All-Star team even though his numbers were among the best for relievers. Recently, a story got back to Jones about a general manager who was talking about the Astros' and Marlins' postseason chances. The guy said he favored the Astros because the Marlins "don't have a closer." Soon after, Jones closed out a tight victory against that G.M.'s club.

Jones grins as he tells this story. As both a pitcher and a writer, he knows it's a good one.

TSN

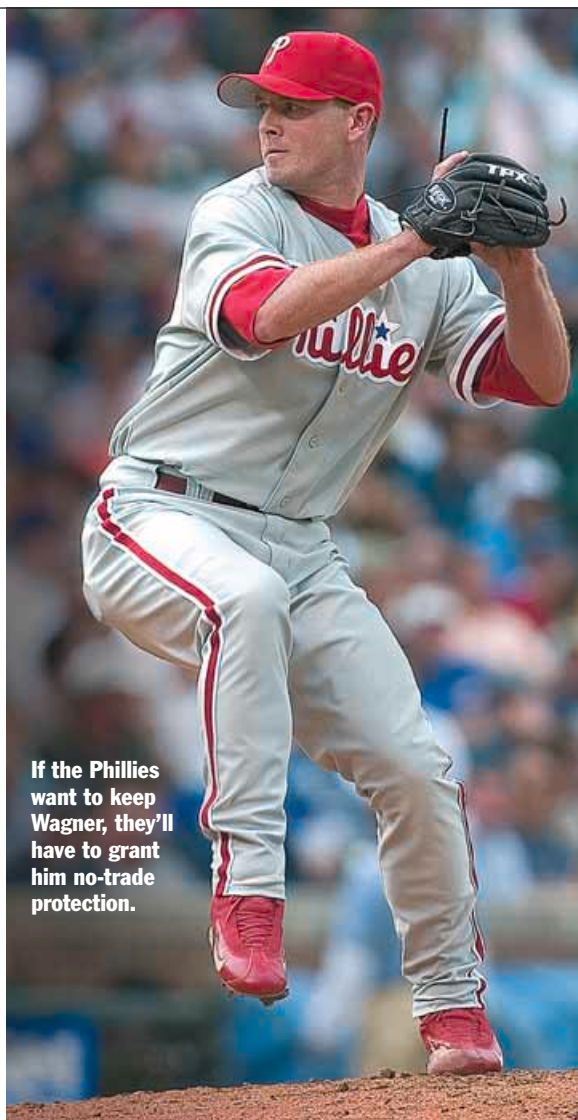


MARY ALTAFFER / AP

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# INSIDE DISH

White Sox manager **Ozzie Guillen** might have pumped up his players by saying it was an insult for others to think the Sox would wheel and deal before the trading deadline, but the club went hard after Phillies closer **Billy Wagner**. The Phillies, however, had no intention of giving him up. Considering closer **Dustin Hermanson**'s history in big games, the Sox should continue to look for an upgrade. > If the Phillies want to keep Wagner beyond this season, they might have to do two things: extend his contract by the end of August and grant him total no-trade protection. Wagner says the latter is a must with whomever he signs his next contract. > From the statheads-got-this-one-right department: Why have the Nationals fallen so dramatically in the N.L. East? Their once majors-leading record in 1-run games has taken a hit—just as stat analysts predicted. Headed into the week, the Nats had lost their past 13 1-run decisions, putting quite a dent into what had been a 24-8 mark when they led the division. > No one on the White Sox has bought more into their team-first play than 2B **Tadahito Iguchi**. His willingness to give himself up to move over runners has been crucial to the Sox's success—impressive considering how much Iguchi struggled in spring training. After watching him in March, one scout said he didn't think Iguchi would make it in the majors. > Mariners RHP **Felix Hernandez**'s first start did nothing to dispel the talk



If the Phillies want to keep Wagner, they'll have to grant him no-trade protection.

JAY DROWNS / TSN

that he is one of the best pitching prospects in years. But that doesn't mean bringing up the 19-year-old was a good idea. Pitching to major leaguers is a lot more stressful on an arm than working in the minors. Remember that if Hernandez develops arm problems next season. > One to watch in the Orioles' managerial race: A's bullpen coach **Bob Geren**. He has Class AAA managing experience and, more important, got his first coaching job from **Ed Kenney**, the Orioles' director of baseball administration. > Don't be surprised if Dodgers RHP **Derek Lowe** is bothered by a thumb blister the rest of the season. He gets the blister because of the way he grips his sinker but says he won't try a different grip until spring training. He has tried a protective substance to avoid the problem, but that hurts his command. > No wonder the Padres can't win; they can't score. Before a rare offensive outburst of three homers in one game last week, they had gone 320 at-bats without a homer, the longest streak in the majors. > The Astros should watch RHP **Roy Oswalt**'s pitch counts closely after he cited a case of "dead arm" late last month. He was fourth in the majors in pitches thrown after his last start and had thrown at least 99 in each of his past 10 starts. > For someone with a reputation for being a jerk, **Ken Griffey** sure hasn't been acting like one. When a man collapsed during a Reds game last week, the Reds had his 6-year-old grandson spend the rest of the game in their bullpen. Immediately after the Reds' victory, Griffey encouraged the youngster to participate in the team's postgame high-fives. "We play a game.

What he was going through doesn't compare. It was important that the little guy not be by himself," Griffey told *The Cincinnati Enquirer*. > Orioles SS **Miguel Tejada**'s consecutive games streak was up to 867 when the week began. Keep it up, Miggy, and you'll reach **Cal Ripken** in 2016. —S.M., *MLB.com correspondents*

## PARALLEL PATHS

October 22—the start of the World Series—is just over two months away, but it's never too early to think about potential matchups. One scenario pits two clubs that have traveled similar roads in 2005: the A's and the Astros.

■ Both teams were 15 games under .500 in late May.

■ Their turnarounds coincided with either the return of an injured player or, in the Astros' case, the return to form of an injured player: Bobby Crosby for the A's, Lance Berkman for the Astros.

■ Both are built around their rotations. Roger Clemens, Roy



DAVID J. PHILLIP / AP

Oswalt and Andy Pettitte are among the N.L.'s top five in ERA. The A's Rich Harden is emerging as the A.L.'s best pitcher, Barry Zito has relocated his curve, and Dan Haren took an eight-game winning streak into the week.

■ Both have a leading contender for Rookie of the Year: closer Huston Street for the A's and center fielder Willy Taveras for the Astros.

■ Both have a significant nemesis. The A's, don't forget, can't get past the first round of the playoffs. The Astros can't beat the Cardinals—they've lost nine of 11 games against St. Louis since last year's NLCS.

**Berkman has sparked the Astros since returning from knee surgery; Crosby has bounced back nicely from broken ribs.**



JOHN CORDIS FOR TSN



**THE CLOSER** Todd Jones

**Players understand there's no getting around testing**

In case you didn't hear, Major League Baseball's drug testing policy is working. The sport got hit right in the face last week with something it had hoped to avoid: A star failed a drug test. Funny, now you're not hearing much about the policy's validity.

I didn't have my first test of the season until late July. One day, the Marlins were notified that tests would be administered. The next day, the head trainer received a list of guys who had been randomly picked by computer. I was on the list. It's not a rookie thing or a star thing as to who takes the test. And even after you're tested, you're not home free. You have to test every time the computer spits out your name. So, believe me, there's no conspiracy. Barry Bonds and Rafael Palmeiro go by the same testing rules as everyone else.

Once you're picked, you're asked to take the test at that time. Saying no is the same as a positive test, so no one says no. Our procedure probably isn't any different from most. A guy is waiting for you in the bathroom. You bring a form of ID and fill out paperwork. He then watches you take the test. That's the tough part.

What if you can't go? You wait. On the day you're tested, the club has no say till you're done. You stay near the bathroom and drink plenty of fluids. You're excused from batting practice or whatever until you can give a sample. So far, I

haven't heard of a guy missing a game.

When the steroids stuff first broke, I wrote that I thought 5 to 10 percent of guys had used them. At the time, I believed that wholeheartedly. I guess I was wrong.

I expect Congress is going to grandstand and force MLB to stiffen the punishment. And I think most players would be in favor of commissioner Bud Selig's plan of 50 days for the first violation, 100 for the second and a lifetime ban for the third—just give guys a window to get their act together

and flush stuff out of their systems.

I contend that players were caught with steroids that had been in their bodies for a while. They could have taken them before the lay of the drug-testing land changed. If baseball proposed that the new penalties would go into effect on January 1, 2006, I believe all the players would vote to ratify.

For generations, we players never had to answer to anyone. As long as we played well, no one cared what we did. That has changed.

You might think, the heck with waiting till January—let the players pay for what they've already done. No matter what your opinions are on the issue, I can't fault you. Like most players, I think we just don't know what to think or do.

*Todd Jones is a reliever for the Marlins. E-mail him at [tjones@sportingnews.com](mailto:tjones@sportingnews.com).*

**When the steroids stuff first broke, I wrote that I thought 5 to 10 percent of guys had used them. I guess I was wrong.**

**A.L. EAST**



**BALTIMORE ORIOLES**

The club is hopeful that interim manager **Sam Perlozzo** can inject energy into a club that lost 28 of the final 37 games in **Lee Mazzilli's** tenure. Perlozzo is a solid baseball man and has a good relationship with the players. ... 1B **Rafael Palmeiro's** positive steroids test clouds his future with the club past this season. Palmeiro has contemplated returning for 2006, but given the negative publicity surrounding the test results, Palmeiro might not be asked back. ... Perlozzo likely will lower expectations for LHP **Steve Kline** and put less pressure on the struggling reliever. Kline's contract (signed through 2006) makes him difficult to trade. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** RF **Sammy Sosa's** recently altered batting stance has helped him somewhat. He now can hit average fastballs; he was overmatched against them before. But he still can't catch up to good fastballs, and he continues to struggle against sliders, especially when he gets impatient at the plate. —Gary Washburn

**BOSTON RED SOX**

The club expects hard-throwing rookie RHP **Jon Papelbon** to bolster the bullpen down the stretch. He has been primarily a starter in his professional career. Making Papelbon a reliever also will keep him from throwing too many innings this season, something the organization has set as a goal. ... This season has been a battle for RHP **Wade Miller**, who is coming off of a rotator cuff injury, but he has been able to keep the Red Sox in games. Miller usually gets better the longer he pitches; the opposing team's batting average the third time through the order is 100 points lower than its average the first time through. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** Don't judge SS **Edgar Renteria's** offense merely by statistics. He has tremendous baseball smarts and instincts, and he constantly is adjusting to what the defense is doing. He'll bunt if the third baseman is playing too deep, and he moves runners over. Renteria needs to be observed on a regular basis to be fully appreciated. —Ian Browne

**NEW YORK YANKEES**

Unable to find an upgrade in center field, the team apparently will give **Bernie Williams** the bulk of the starts there, despite his defensive shortcomings and his .236 average in July. **Tony Womack** and **Bubba Crosby** also will get some spot starts in center. The club returned CF **Melky Cabrera** to Class AA. ... SS **Derek Jeter** has a sore hamstring, but he hasn't gotten rest because the only other player on the team who can play shortstop is 3B **Alex Rodriguez**. **Rey Sanchez** (vertigo, cervical sprain) is on the D.L. and isn't improving. ... RHP **Aaron Small** has pitched well as a fill-in starter and will gain a bullpen job once RHPs **Carl Pavano** and **Jaret Wright** return. Small isn't a strikeout pitcher but eats innings and has some experience. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** Newcomer **Alan Embree** believes a mechanical flaw contributed to his struggles with the Red Sox. The Yankees like Embree's potential as a lefthanded specialist because of his mid-90s fastball, biting slider and solid cutter. —Mark Feinsand

**TAMPA BAY DEVIL RAYS**

LHP **Casey Fossum** has begun using a bloop pitch nicknamed the "Fossum Flip." One recent flip came in at 46 mph. Fossum plans to use the pitch at least once a game just to keep it in hitters' heads. ... LHP **Mark Hendrickson** says better mental preparation has fueled his recent turnaround. Hendrickson had been in danger of losing his spot in the rotation. ... **Travis Lee** is among the best fielding first basemen in baseball. One reason is anticipation: He expects bad throws from infielders, which allows him to make tough plays around the bag.

**SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:**

The club has altered LHP **Scott Kazmir's** warmup routine to help him overcome first-inning struggles. Kazmir now sits down after throwing 10 pitches in the bullpen, as though he's sitting down after an inning, then sits again after 10 more pitches. The experiment seems to be working; Kazmir has been much sharper early. —Bill Chastain



DAVID DUROCHIK FOR TSN

**TORONTO BLUE JAYS**

LHP **Gustavo Chacin** twice has been named the A.L. Rookie of the Month, including for July (5-0, 2.97 ERA). His consistency is uncharacteristic for a player with such little experience. ... RHP **Dustin McGowan** struggled in the first inning of his first two big-league starts but settled down, keeping his team in the games. He is filling in until RHP **Roy Halladay** or LHP **Ted Lilly** returns from the D.L. ... DH **Shea Hillenbrand's** numbers have declined steadily since his hot April. He's providing little protection hitting cleanup behind CF **Vernon Wells**. **SEE A DIFFERENT**

**GAME:** RHP **Brandon League** has made just two appearances in the last month, as pitching coach **Brad Arnsberg** has been working on the side with League to try to get him comfortable using a higher arm slot. He has struggled with the adjustment. League can throw in the high 90s, but Arnsberg would sacrifice some of League's velocity for better location. —Spencer Fordin

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## A.I. CENTRAL

### CHICAGO WHITE SOX

The club added a 12th pitcher last week, recalling RHP **Jon Adkins** from the minors. With the starters not going as deep into games lately, Adkins can serve as an extra middle-relief option and prevent two other relievers, LHP **Neal Cotts** and RHP **Luis Vizcaino**, from being overworked. ... RHP **Brandon McCarthy** has returned to throwing more over the top, and the results at Class AAA Charlotte have been good. A lower arm slot made McCarthy's pitches flatten out. Because of his 6-5 height, using more of an overhand release works to McCarthy's advantage.

**SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** Vizcaino's struggles early this season originally were attributed to a career-high 60-pitch effort in the third game of the season when the White Sox had run out of relievers in extra innings. But a lack of work was the main reason. Now that he has been throwing almost daily, he has better life on his fastball and is more confident when he challenges hitters. —*Scott Merkin*

### CLEVELAND INDIANS

C **Victor Martinez's** revival is a key reason for the Indians' offensive surge. Martinez hit only .236 in the first half of the season but batted .400 in his first 23 second half games after he started exercising patience and using the entire field more effectively. ... Manager **Eric Wedge** changed his lineup after DH **Travis Hafner** returned from injury. SS **Jhonny Peralta** is hitting third, Hafner fourth and switch-hitting Martinez fifth. Wedge likes the righthanded-hitting Peralta batting behind CF **Grady Sizemore** and OF **Coco Crisp** and ahead of the lefthanded-hitting Hafner. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** RHP **Bob Wickman's** blazing fastball is long gone, which means the closer's sinker and slider—which are thrown at varying speeds—are now his bread and butter. That means he must hit his spots or he will get hit—witness his blown save last week when he gave up two ninth-inning home runs to the Yankees. Given his greatly reduced margin for error, Wickman has been exceptional this season. —*Jim Molony*

### DETROIT TIGERS

RHP **Sean Douglass** followed his worst start of the season with his best, allowing one run in eight innings against the Mariners last week. Douglass' success since joining the rotation has been surprising to some, but he pitched with great consistency in spring training. Douglass' low-90s fastball has a deceptive motion, and he consistently hits the corners of the plate. Barring a late collapse, he has the inside track on a rotation spot next season. ...

SS **Carlos Guillen** is driving the ball better, and his swing suggests he is gaining strength in his surgically repaired right knee. His range in the field doesn't seem to be affected by the knee. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** CF **Nook Logan** is the team's only threat to steal, but manager **Alan Trammell** likes to put men in motion when Guillen is batting. Guillen has good bat control, and he gets runners into scoring position. That sets up DH **Chris Shelton** and RF **Magglio Ordonez**. —*Jason Beck*

### KANSAS CITY ROYALS

G.M. **Allard Baird** must make the acquisition of a top-grade starter a priority before next season. RHP **Zack Greinke**, forecast as the No. 1 starter, has been an inconsistent puzzle. RHPs **D.J. Carrasco** and **Kyle Snyder** still are unproven, and RHP **Jose Lima** might be headed elsewhere. ... RHP **Leo Nunez**, optioned to Class AA last week, has some work to do. Hit hard lately, he wasn't relying enough on his fastball, and a lack of focus hurt his control. But he remains a potential closer with a bright future.

**SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** 3B **Mark Teahen**, a lefthanded batter, has been an opposite-field hitter since he was a kid; if he pulled the ball in backyard games with his brothers, it would land on the roof and roll into a gutter. But Teahen is gradually learning to turn on pitches and drive the ball more. The Royals believe pulling the ball will give Teahen more power and run production. —*Dick Kaegel*



SEAN GALLAGHER / TSN

### MINNESOTA TWINS

The lineup has lacked power and speed all season; manager **Ron Gardenhire** is trying to remedy the speed problem by making SS **Jason Bartlett** and 2B **Nick Punto** the regular double-play combination. Both players can make things happen on the bases. Neither is a home run threat; each began the week with two homers. ... RHP **Joe Mays** believes he has gained command of his curveball after not having it for most of the season. Mays discovered a new release point for the pitch while working in the bullpen between starts.

**SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** A change in hand position at the plate seems to be working well for 3B **Michael Cuddyer**, a righthanded batter. He had three home runs last week and has looked more confident at the plate lately. Cuddyer has brought his hands closer to his body and higher, near his face. The new position keeps his hands from extending too far behind his back shoulder before his swing. —*Mark Sheldon*

Toronto's Johnson covers plenty of ground.

ANDRES LEIGHTON / AP



## STATSCAPE

Determining a player's defensive ability is difficult whether you're using your eyeballs or a stat sheet. When you see a diving catch, you might wonder whether the dive could have been avoided with better positioning or a better jump. But traditional defensive statistics, such as fielding

percentage, are flawed indicators, too. Players can avoid errors by avoiding chances.

As a result, statheads have been trying to concoct better fielding metrics for years. One of the best and most accessible is zone rating, compiled by STATS Inc. STATS divides the field into 22 zones, assigns them to infielders and outfielders and has reporters tabulate the proportion of batted balls that are turned into outs in each fielder's area of responsibility. A fielder's zone rating can go down even if he doesn't commit an error.

Zone rating isn't perfect. Infielders' zone ratings are based strictly on ground balls; a player's ability to range after popups isn't captured, nor is a first baseman's prowess in scooping throws. Outfielders' ratings include some subjectivity by the reporters because assigned zones are larger for fly balls than for line drives. Still, a fielder's zone rating can give fans a reasonable idea of his range.

The majors' best and worst zone ratings, by position, among active everyday players this season:

POS.	BEST	WORST
1B	Todd Helton, Rockies .923	Richie Sexson, Mariners .799
2B	Mark Grudzielanek, Cardinals .883	Jose Castillo, Pirates .775
SS	Jack Wilson, Pirates .885	Russ Adams, Blue Jays .760
3B	Melvin Mora, Orioles .815	Mark Teahen, Royals .683
LF	Reed Johnson, Blue Jays .931	Manny Ramirez, Red Sox .749
CF	Jeremy Reed, Mariners .951	Ken Griffey, Reds .815
RF	Geoff Jenkins, Brewers .901	Bobby Abreu, Phillies .820

Over a full season, major league left fielders will, on average, see 367 fly balls and line drives hit into their zone and catch 318 of them for a zone rating of .867. Based on the percentages in the chart, Johnson would catch 342 and Ramirez would catch 275. Now what the Red Sox need is a rule allowing a second DH in the lineup.

By Steve Walters. E-mail him at [swalters@loyola.edu](mailto:swalters@loyola.edu).

## PLAYER OF THE WEEK

### Dan Johnson, 1B, Oakland A's

Johnson followed the *Moneyball* mantra of power and patience, hitting .400 (10-for-25) with four home runs, five walks, six RBIs and nine runs. The rookie hit safely in all seven games and homered in each of the last four, helping the surging A's go 6-1. Johnson began this week with a .330 average and 10 homers in 191 at-bats and a .974 on-base/slugging percentage. —*Conor Nicholl*

CHARLIE RIEDEL / AP



# A.L. WEST

## LOS ANGELES ANGELS

RHP **John Lackey** has rounded out his repertoire with a changeup and a cutter-slider hybrid. Those two pitches and his fastball and curve have been effective this season, and Lackey has become one of the rotation's more stable pitchers. ... Recently recalled 1B **Casey Kotchman** has gone back to hitting the ball where it's pitched rather than trying to hit home runs, and his production has improved accordingly. Kotchman will be **Darin Erstad's** backup and pinch hit. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** The Angels don't have a lot of power and need to manufacture runs. After a rough July in which the team's average with runners in scoring position was more than 70 points lower than its average in the first three months, manager **Mike Scioscia** juggled the lineup. He moved SS **Orlando Cabrera** from sixth to second to take some pressure off, switched Erstad from second to third and moved RF **Vladimir Guerrero** from third to fourth. —Mike Scarr



## TEXAS RANGERS

**Phil Nevin** has gotten off to a strong start with his new team. His greatest value might be as a righthanded-hitting DH because he helps balance the lineup. An injury to DH **Greg Colbrunn**, the ineffectiveness of OF **Richard Hidalgo** and the struggles of 1B **Mark Teixeira** from the right side had left the Rangers susceptible to lefthanded pitching. Nevin has the pop to help give the team a dynamic offense. ... Trading RHP **Chan Ho Park** provides LHP **C.J. Wilson** with the chance to establish himself in the rotation. So far, Wilson has struggled mightily. The team wants him to trust his quality stuff and not worry so much about pitching to the weaknesses of hitters.

**SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** Closer **Francisco Cordero** has looked sharper of late because he's mixing in a changeup with his fastball and slider. When clubs had to worry only about the fastball and slider, Cordero was somewhat vulnerable. Just giving opponents the changeup to think about helps him. —Robert Falkoff

## OAKLAND ATHLETICS

1B **Dan Johnson's** rapid development might lead to his moving up in the order. Six of his 10 home runs have come since the All-Star break, and Johnson's knowledge of the strike zone soon might have him protecting cleanup hitter 3B **Eric Chavez**. ... The addition of RHP **Jay Witasick** has given the A's three top-notch setup men. With RHPs **Justin Duchscherer** and **Kiko Calero** also at his disposal, manager **Ken Macha** will be able to keep the trio fresh. Another newcomer, **Joe Kennedy**, provides a second lefthander in the bullpen, allowing Macha to play the righty-lefty matchup game more often. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** LHP **Barry Zito** made a mechanical adjustment before his August 4 start at Minnesota, slightly bending forward early in his delivery to maintain better balance and keep from falling toward the right side of the mound in his follow-through. The result: better command of his fastball and better fielding position upon his release. Zito beat the Twins, allowing four hits in eight innings. —Mychael Urban

## SEATTLE MARINERS

The original plan was for RHP **Felix Hernandez**, perhaps the top prospect in the game, to pitch in the minors until September. But with the Mariners' having all but locked up last place, they looked to the future and recalled Hernandez, 19. He lost his big-league debut to the Tigers but allowed only one run in five innings. Hernandez throws in the mid- to high 90s and has a sharp curveball. He held Class AAA hitters to a .196 average before the promotion. Hernandez battled nerves in his first start, but manager **Mike Hargrove** praises Hernandez for his overall calm demeanor. If he performs well the rest of the way, Hernandez could be the staff ace in 2006. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** With so many young players in the lineup, the team probably won't run as much as it did earlier in the season. Putting on a hit-and-run play with a rookie is risky. The team also has lost two of its top hit-and-run players: **Dan Wilson** is injured, and LF **Randy Winn** was traded to the Giants. —Jim Street

# N.L. EAST

## ATLANTA BRAVES

The team wants C **Brian McCann** to devote himself to a weightlifting program in the offseason. He already has shown a big-league swing, and the Braves want him to fill out his 6-3, 210-pound frame. That could help him drive the ball more and keep him from wearing down. ... The addition of **Macay McBride** gives the bullpen a second lefthander, which should ease the burden on LHP **John Foster**. Foster will continue to be the top lefthanded option, but he has had poor command lately. ... New RHP **Kyle Farnsworth** gives the club the reliable setup man it was lacking. Known for his 100-mph fastball, Farnsworth also has shown a good changeup and slider. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** **C Johnny Estrada** is providing solid defense and throwing out more basestealers than he did last season. He has a strong arm and has been helped by a staff that does a good job of holding runners on. Last season, RHPs **Jaret Wright** and **Russ Ortiz** were easy to run on. —Mark Bowman

## FLORIDA MARLINS

1B **Carlos Delgado** (hand) likely will be out until mid-August. Veteran **Jeff Conine** is a capable defensive replacement, but Delgado's impact on the lineup is huge. He hits for power and average and keeps pressure off LF **Miguel Cabrera**. ... LHP **Ron Villone**, obtained from the Mariners, is more than a situational reliever. A former starter, he can be used for multiple innings. ... Look for IF **Lenny Harris** to be used as a pinch hitter earlier in games as the team becomes more aggressive in an effort to make up ground in the standings. Harris also is a double-switch option to come in and play third base. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** Tempo is critical for high-energy LHP **Dontrelle Willis**. Willis gets into trouble when he speeds up his pace between pitches. He is being encouraged to take a deep breath and wait a second or two before getting into his high-kick delivery. When he speeds up his pace, Willis tends to let his arm angle dip, which leads to wildness. —Joe Frisaro



## NEW YORK METS

3B **David Wright's** rapid development prompted manager **Wille Randolph** to move him from seventh to sixth to fifth in the order. If Randolph wants to experiment in September, he can put Wright in the No. 3 spot and move CF **Carlos Beltran** into the No. 2 spot. ... The infield defense has been appreciably better with **Miguel Cairo** at second instead of **Kazuo Matsui**. Cairo has made three errors at second this season. When Matsui (knee)

gets healthy, the only reason Randolph might play him extensively is to try to showcase him for an off-season trade.

### SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:

Beltran is a natural righthanded hitter who says he has become more comfortable batting lefthanded because he does it so often. The numbers say different; he's hitting .324 righthanded and .251 lefthanded. But Beltran recently has started to swing better from the left side, more often hitting pitches on the outside part of the plate to left field. —Marty Noble

## PHILADELPHIA PHILLIES

1B **Jim Thome's** continued throwing difficulty has delayed his return from an elbow injury. Though he says he feels good when he hits, the team wants him at full strength before activating him and has scrapped plans for a rehab assignment. ... Coaches think the reason for RHP **Vicente Padilla's** amazing turnaround is between his ears. They say he has stopped worrying about what might happen and simply trusts his 96-mph moving fastball. ... LHP **Billy Wagner** wasn't traded at the deadline because the Phillies still are in the playoff race and want to retain their closer beyond this season. Wagner says he'd like an extension by the end of the month or he'll test the free-agent market in the winter. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** The discomfort in C **Mike Lieberthal's** right knee is hurting him in all aspects of his game. The knee aches on defense when he stands to throw to second base and when he blocks the plate. On offense, he's having trouble keeping his balance on opposite-field swings. —Ken Mandel

## WASHINGTON NATIONALS

In need of another player such as IF **Carlos Baerga** who could come off the bench and be a successful pinch hitter, the Nationals optioned OF **Marlon Byrd** to Class AAA New Orleans and promoted OF **Matt Cepicky**. Byrd hit only .143 in July, with no extra-base hits. Cepicky has some pop and some success as a big-league pinch hitter. ... OF **Ryan Church** says his swing hasn't been the same since he came off the D.L. last month for a sprained ligament in his rib cage. He feels acute pain in his right collarbone and shoulder when he bats, and he is vulnerable to inside fastballs. Church has struck out looking several times recently. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** SS **Cristian Guzman** has gone back to the hitting approach he had when he was with the Twins. Guzman now is trying to chop the ball on the ground and use his speed. He hit .263 in the first week of August. That helped lift his batting average from the low .180s near the end of July to .190 at the start of the week. —Bill Ladson

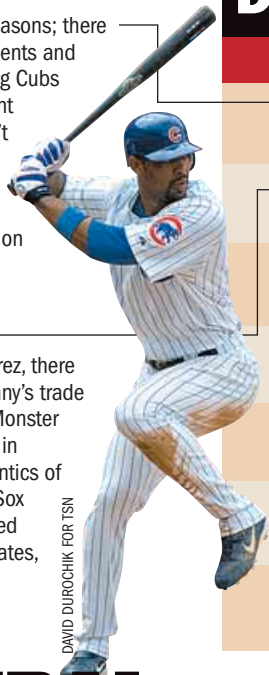
■ The rivalry has turned rougher in recent seasons; there have been beanballs, benches-clearing incidents and shouting matches between toothpick-chewing Cubs manager Dusty Baker and sunglasses-at-night Cardinals manager Tony La Russa. "But it isn't really a rivalry until an elderly bench coach gets slammed facefirst into the ground," Cubs shortstop Nomar Garciaparra says. Besides potential mayhem, the focus will be on MVP hopefuls Albert Pujols and **Derrek Lee**.



WINSLOW/TOWNSON / AP

■ Before Manny Ramirez, there was **Carl Everett**. Manny's trade demands and Green Monster bathroom breaks pale in comparison with the antics of Everett, a former Red Sox outfielder. Everett butted heads with his teammates, his manager and even umpires (literally).

DAVID DUROCHIK FOR TSN



## Dream week

August 11-17

**THURSDAY, 8/11**  
Cardinals at Cubs

**FRIDAY, 8/12**  
White Sox at Red Sox

**SATURDAY, 8/13**  
Twins at A's

**SUNDAY, 8/14**  
Diamondbacks at Braves

**MONDAY, 8/15**  
Yankees at Devil Rays

**TUESDAY, 8/16**  
Rangers at Indians

**WEDNESDAY, 8/17**  
Padres at Marlins

■ One or both of these teams has reached the postseason every year since 2000, and this series will have major wild-card implications. By the way, Oakland's **Rich Harden** is looking a lot like last season's Johan Santana.



M. DAVID LEEDS FOR TSN

■ The Braves always seem to know exactly when to let a pitcher go, and one of their recent offseason losses is the Diamondbacks' offseason, well, loss. Russ Ortiz is a \$33 million lesson Arizona learned the hard way.



BOB LEVERONE / TSN

■ Tampa Bay has won six of the first eight meetings this season, but the embarrassment doesn't stop there for New York. D-Rays manager Lou Piniella recently caught Yankees G.M. Brian Cashman pulling **Hideo Nomo** from a Tropicana Field dumpster.

■ They might not look pretty—their physiques or their WHIPs—but Texas closer **Francisco Cordero** and Cleveland closer Bob Wickman get the job done.



DAVID DUROCHIK FOR TSN

■ Tune in to find out whether Brian Giles and Co. can lose all three games of the series and still gain ground in the N.L. West. —Chris Bahr

## N.L. CENTRAL



### CHICAGO CUBS

With **Jerry Hairston** (elbow) out, **Jose Macias** and **Jeromy Burnitz** will share center field duties. Macias' natural position is center. Burnitz usually plays right but has experience in center. **Corey Patterson** is another option, but the Cubs think he has more work to do on his swing at Class AAA. He is making progress and has tinkered with his stance, lowering his hands and becoming less rigid. ... SS **Neifi Perez** still will play a lot, even with the return of **Nomar Garciaparra**. Perez is strong in the field, and the team wants to protect Garciaparra, who missed three-plus months with a groin injury. ... RHP **Kerry Wood** pitched only out of the stretch in his first relief appearance so he could get used to coming in with runners already on base. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** Since becoming the closer, RHP **Ryan Dempster** has limited his repertoire, throwing only fastballs and sliders. If he overthrows the slider, he gets in trouble. Dempster hasn't gotten in a groove because there have been limited save situations. —Carrie Muskat

### CINCINNATI REDS

The club has three relievers—RHPs **Matt Belisle** and **Jason Standridge** and LHP **Randy Keisler**—who primarily were starters in the minor leagues. Their on-the-job bullpen training has been aided by the presence of such veteran relievers as RHP **David Weathers** and LHP **Kent Mercker**; both have plenty of advice to give. ... The players have adopted interim manager **Jerry Narron's** policy of doing the little things it takes to win; the players' acceptance of Narron, and the club's 14-8 second half record entering the week, might be strengthening Narron's case to keep the job on a permanent basis. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** New 3B **Edwin Encarnacion** had four errors in his first 16 big-league games this season and 19 at Class AAA. Most of the errors have come on throws; he tends to let his front side open up and throw sidearm, which affects his accuracy. The Reds have him taking extra ground balls before batting practice to address the issue. —Anthony Castrovino

### HOUSTON ASTROS

RHP **Ezequiel Astacio** originally was paired with backup C **Humberto Quintero**, but **Brad Ausmus** now is catching for Astacio. Manager **Phil Garner** thinks Astacio benefits from Ausmus' veteran expertise. In his past three starts, all with Ausmus behind the plate, Astacio has allowed three total earned runs. The club wants to find out whether Quintero will hit well enough to eventually start, but Ausmus will catch most games with the team in the wild-card race. ... **Chris Burke's** move from second base to left field has gone well, thanks to a lot of extra work. Burke, however, doesn't provide the production of a typical corner outfielder—he had one homer in his first 221 at-bats. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** LHP **Andy Pettitte** is a year removed from elbow surgery and is enjoying a resurgence. He gives credit to his newfound changeup, which he had abandoned early in his career when he put an emphasis on his power pitches. Now Pettitte has a third quality pitch to go with his cutter and curveball. —Alyson Footer

### MILWAUKEE BREWERS

RHP **Tomo Ohka** has been streaky recently, as opponents seem to have keyed in on his cut fastball. He could be replaced in the rotation by RHP **Rick Helling**. ... 3B **Wes Helms** has the league's best average as a pinch hitter, but he isn't as effective as a starter. He hasn't given manager **Ned Yost** any reason to reconsider the lefty-righty platoon of **Russell Branyan** and **Bill Hall** at third base. ... RHP **Julio Santana** recently had two losses and a blown save in five appearances. His workload might be an issue, but Santana says he feels fine. He pitched in Japan last season and played winter ball in the Dominican Republic. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** LF **Carlos Lee** is an excellent baserunner. He carefully picks his opportunities and led the team in stolen bases until Hall passed him last month. But he can do more than steal. Lee (6-2, 240), the cleanup hitter, is instinctive on the basepaths and has helped give No. 5 hitter LF **Geoff Jenkins** more run-scoring opportunities. —Adam McCalvy

### PITTSBURGH PIRATES

Rookie **Brad Eldred** is prone to strikeouts because he chases off-speed pitches, but he provides the club with the kind of power potential in the middle of the order that had been missing without 1B/OF **Craig Wilson**, who isn't expected back from a hand injury until September 1. Eldred has taken over for **Daryle Ward** at first base. ... OF **Michael Restovich**, who rarely played as OF **Matt Lawton's** backup, will platoon in right with **Jody Gerut**. The team likes Restovich's power ability and wants him to play winter ball to make up for his lack of at-bats this season. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:**



GENE J. PUSKAR / AP

Rookie CF **Chris Duffy** quickly is establishing himself as a defensive stalwart. Duffy has outstanding closing speed, takes good routes to the ball and has an above-average arm. Duffy also has a good knowledge of the game. He watches his pitchers closely when positioning himself, and he works on defense as well as his hitting during batting practice. —Ed Eagle

### ST. LOUIS CARDINALS

3B **Scott Rolen** learned a lesson from his first comeback from shoulder surgery: He no longer will push himself to return before he is ready. Rolen, who has been making slow progress since going back on the D.L. in late July, could begin swinging a bat this weekend. ... LHP **Ray King** has been much more effective with the bases empty than with runners on. That is a distressing trend because for the Cardinals to be successful, they need a fully effective King working out of the bullpen. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** RHP **Chris Carpenter** relies on getting ground balls with his sinker and cutter, and he has a major advantage with those two pitches—they look almost identical coming out of his hand. The sinker breaks down and in to righthanders, and the cutter moves down and in to lefthanders, but hitters can't tell which one is coming at them until the last moment. —Matthew Leach

# N.L. WEST

MLB.com

## ARIZONA DIAMONDBACKS

RHP **Jose Valverde** seems to have struck a positive emotional balance and has regained the form he showed in 2003, when he posted a 2.15 ERA and 12.7 strikeouts per nine innings. Initially, the Diamondbacks had asked Valverde to tone down his antics on the mound, but he seemed to lose his edge, so the club told him to be himself—to a degree. ... The Diamondbacks will try to use **Tony Clark** and top prospect **Conor Jackson** in a platoon at first base. Clark is having a great season, but Jackson will start against lefties and in some favorable matchups against righties. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** 2B **Craig Counsell's** value can't be reflected in numbers alone. With **Chad Tracy** moving from first base to right field, Counsell didn't need to be told to be more aggressive on pop flies hit to shallow right. Because it is easier to come in rather than go back on balls, inexperienced outfielders such as Tracy tend to play deeper and have a tougher time getting to popups. —Steve Gilbert

## COLORADO ROCKIES

The Rockies will closely watch CF **Cory Sullivan**, who missed last season because of elbow surgery and has a slight build (6-0, 180). Manager **Clint Hurdle** believes Sullivan is holding up fine, but the club will try to avoid starting him more than four straight days. Sullivan has good speed but needs to better take advantage of it by improving his plate discipline. ... The team's near trade for Red Sox prospect C **Kelly Shoppach** seemed to spur C **JD Closser**, who went on an offensive tear at the start of August, showing the gap-to-gap hitting the Rockies had expected from him. He had seven hits over a four-game stretch, including four for extra bases. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** **Aaron Miles** lost his starting job to 2B **Luis Gonzalez**, but Miles' style might be better suited to coming off the bench late in games. His aggressiveness and ability to put the ball in play could make him a good fit in a pinch-hitting role. —Thomas Harding



JOHN CORDES FOR TSN

## LOS ANGELES DODGERS

When **Wilson Alvarez** returns from the D.L., he will be a long reliever rather than a replacement for **Kelly Wunsch** as the situational lefthanded reliever. Alvarez's shoulder cannot handle daily appearances. RHP **Elmer Dessens**, the current long reliever, will move into a late-inning role. ...

**Jason Phillips** has accepted his move from catcher to first base. He threw out just 14.6 percent of would-be basestealers and was replaced by **Dioner Navarro**. Phillips still is in the lineup because he is a more consistent run producer than 1B **Hee Seop Choi**. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** Injuries have forced manager **Jim Tracy** to overuse his reserves, in particular IF **Olmedo Saenz** and OF **Ricky Ledee**. Their bodies cannot withstand daily punishment, so Tracy has had to ration their use, further complicating lineup decisions. IF **Jose Valentin**, back from the D.L. and willing to play the outfield, offers another option. —Ken Gurnick

## SAN FRANCISCO GIANTS

RHP **Tyler Walker** is expected to move back to middle relief, where he has been the most effective, after RHP **Armando Benitez** (hamstring) reclaims the closer job. The hard-throwing Walker has been hot and cold as Benitez's fill-in. ... Look for switch-hitting OF **Todd Linden**, the Pacific Coast League's home run leader, to be called up soon. Already a solid fielder, he needs to play every day in the majors to improve as a hitter. ... Newly acquired CF **Randy Winn** has provided a spark as the No. 2 hitter and has played good defense. He could be an outfield mainstay for the next few years. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** Long a free swinger, IF/OF **Pedro Feliz** saw his average plummet late in the first half of the season as pitchers were taking advantage of his tendency to pull everything. He has been spreading the ball around more of late and is not fishing for breaking balls off the plate as much. Feliz also is showing more patience at the plate, even with two strikes. —Rich Draper

## SAN DIEGO PADRES

Acquired from the Mariners at the trading deadline, C **Miguel Olivo** made an instant impression, displaying the power and speed that make him a favorite of scouts. Manager **Bruce Bochy**, who likes Olivo's tools and attitude, says Olivo, **Robert Fick** and **David Ross** will split catching duties while **Ramon Hernandez** (left wrist) is out for five or six weeks. ... **Mark Sweeney** has played well in a platoon with **Xavier Nady** at first. The lefthanded-hitting Sweeney hit .340 in his first 34 games at first and could start to get the bulk of the playing time. **SEE A DIFFERENT GAME:** Unable to apply pressure on his right middle finger because of a strained tendon, RHP **Adam Eaton** made an adjustment to his slider grip. He changed the positioning so the seams wouldn't cause friction against the finger. Eaton wasn't feeling any discomfort with the new position but was struggling with his release point. Eaton, who recently was moved to the bullpen, wants to return to the rotation. —Lyle Spencer



## UMPIRE SCHOOL

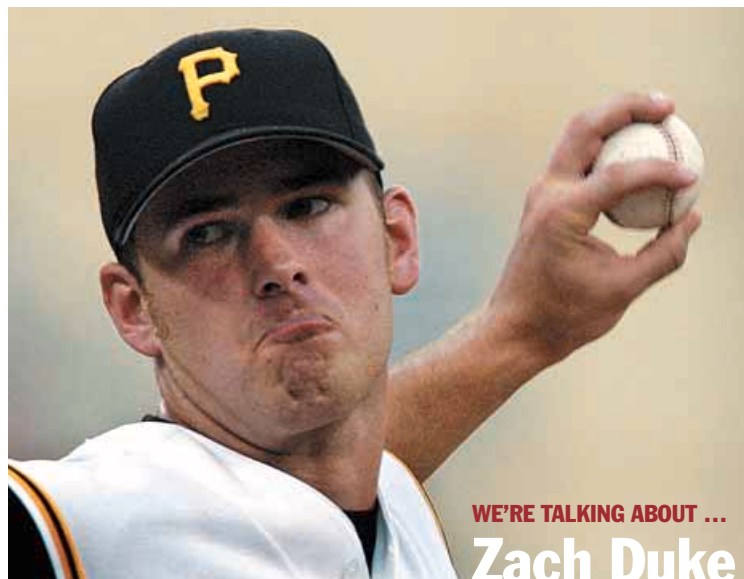
### The situation

A batter hits a fly ball down the right field line toward the foul pole. The right fielder leaps and prevents the ball from going into the stands in fair territory. In the process, the ball deflects off his glove, passing in front of the foul pole, and goes into the stands in foul territory. The batter

claims that because the right fielder deflected the ball in fair territory and prevented it from going into the stands in fair territory, the hit should be ruled a home run regardless of where the ball landed in the stands. Is he right?

### The call

No; the batter gets a double. Rule 6.09(h) says that if a fair fly ball is deflected by a fielder into the stands or over the fence into foul territory, the batter gets a double. If the ball is deflected into the stands or over the fence in fair territory (provided the fence is 250 feet or more from home plate), the batter gets a home run. If the fence is less than 250 feet away, he gets a double. —William Drennan



## WE'RE TALKING ABOUT ...

## Zach Duke

KEITH SRANKOIC / AP

Duke, a 22-year-old Pirates rookie, had a lot of folks buzzing last week after he beat Tim Hudson and the Braves in Atlanta. He is 5-0 after seven big-league starts and is the first Bucs rookie starter since Jim Nelson in 1970 to begin a career with four consecutive victories. Duke, a lefthander, also was the National League rookie of the month for July.

### On his early success:

**Duke:** "I'm just trying to absorb it all and take it for what it is. I'm not a guy who gets complacent. I'm always looking to the next start."

### On Duke's advanced skills:

**Major league scout:** "He's the kind of pitcher who could be at the top of a rotation without being a power guy. His fastball is sneaky. He uses both sides of the plate. He has a really good change. He's extremely poised for his age. He's further along than (fellow lefthanders) Noah Lowry, Brad Halsey, Randy Wolf and those types of pitchers when they broke in. He's close to Jeff Francis even though Francis has a full season under his belt."

### On how Duke looks from the opposing dugout:

**Braves manager Bobby Cox:** "He's as good as they come. He knows what he's doing, man."

### On Duke's emerging as a stopper:

**Pirates outfielder Jason Bay:** "Every team has a guy, a John Smoltz or whoever, that they turn to, and he seems to be that guy for us."

—Staff and wire reports

## INSIDER DAN POMPEI

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Peyton Manning's arrow is pointed up—even if his numbers end up going down.

## Even at the top, there's room for improvement

The challenge for Peyton Manning in 2005 is not unlike the challenge Orson Welles faced after *Citizen Kane*. Or the challenge Neil Armstrong faced after Apollo 11. Or the challenge Tolstoy faced after *War and Peace*.

Top that.

Throwing for 50 touchdown passes or putting up a 125 passer rating probably aren't achievable goals for the Indianapolis quarterback. But being a more effective QB in a more efficient offense is. In other words, Manning could be a better player even if his numbers don't reflect it.

Colts coaches put together a tape from last season that showed the touchdown passes that could have been. They came to the conclusion that Manning could have had another 17 touchdown throws—66 total—if every play had been executed perfectly. If Manning throws for 66 this year, I'll tattoo a horseshoe on my forehead (hey, might be an improvement).

The chances are excellent Manning won't get within 15 touchdown passes of his total last year. His previous season high was 33 in 2000. And it's likely defenses will look at Manning's 31 touchdown throws in the red zone last season and adjust to make those passes more perilous. Manning dutifully will take what he is given.

"If we come out this year and if Edgerrin (James) and Dominic (Rhodes) have 30 touchdowns between the two of them and we're winning games, that's really what it's about for me," Manning says. "I get paid to get us into the end zone and

help us win."

Last season, four of Manning's 10 interceptions came in the red zone. That explains why his red zone passer rating was only 89.0.

According to STATS Inc., that ranked 20th among quarterbacks with at least 20 attempts. Manning wasn't even the highest ranked family member in the red zone. That honor went to kid brother, Eli, who had a 90.5 red zone passer rating as a rookie for the Giants.

"I know that's one thing he's conscious of going into this season, making sure we score points in the red zone every time,

even if it means kicking field goals—not throwing away opportunities and fumbling away opportunities in the red zone," Colts coach Tony Dungy says.

Although Manning's touchdown total isn't likely to go up, his completion percentage could. Manning completed 67.6 percent of his passes last season, third in the NFL behind Tampa Bay's Brian Griese and Minnesota's Daunte Culpepper. Colts quarterbacks coach Jim Caldwell believes Manning can complete 70 percent of his passes. But if that happens, it likely will mean a decrease in his yards per attempt. Last year, Manning led the NFL at 9.2 yards per attempt.

Those who know Manning best say the 29-year-old still is improving. "I just noticed the other day how much better he's gotten with touch on the ball," Colts president Bill Polian says. "He's a lot better with that, even from a year ago."

Says Manning, "My body feels good; my arm feels good. I am a firm believer that experience is your best teacher. You can learn every year, every game."

Toward that end, Dungy believes Manning can improve on the details—the precision of his steps, his handoffs, the execution of play fakes and the like. "He does it better than most—most who have ever played," Dungy says. "But he's trying to improve it. He has a great capacity to look at his

**This season could be better than the last for Manning if he sees red more effectively.**

season objectively in the offseason."

Before last season, for instance, Manning

### By any standard, Manning measures up

Peyton Manning's 2004 season was the most impressive year ever by a quarterback statistically. His NFL-record passer rating of 121.1 was 8.3 points higher than the previous best, Steve Young's 112.8 in 1994. Manning's 49 touchdown passes were another record.

Some have argued that Dan Marino's 1984 season or even Bert Jones' 1976 season were more impressive if other factors are considered.

It's true the rulebook never has been more accommodating to passers. But the reason the rules became more accommodating was to offset more sophisticated defenses. Nuclear physics isn't as complicated as some of today's nickel defenses. Players of bygone eras never saw anything like the blitz packages Manning regularly faces.

So a good argument can be made that Manning's season was the best ever using any criteria to evaluate it.

thought he needed to improve on throwing to his left. He worked diligently at it, and he ended up throwing for 632 more yards and eight more touchdowns to his left side in only 19 more attempts. Manning also improved his left-side passer rating from 90.2 to 117.2 and his left-side completion mark from 63.7 percent to 67.5, according to STATS Inc.

He'll probably make similar improvements this season. Just don't look for those improvements to show up in the record book. **TSN**



JAY DROWNS / TSN

The Patriots could end up with two rookies starting on their offensive line. First-round pick **Logan Mankins** is a good bet to beat out **Russ Hochstein** to replace LG **Joe Andruzzi**, who signed with the Browns. In addition, third-round pick **Nick Kaczur** might have what it takes to unseat RT **Brandon Gorin**, who was good enough to start for the Super Bowl champions last year. So far both rookies have impressed coaches with their ability to grasp the scheme and apply the techniques they have been taught. ➤ Picking the most improved player in Falcons camp is easy: It's WR **Michael Jenkins**. Coaches say Jenkins looks like a different player in his second season. A first-round pick last year, Jenkins is running routes and catching the ball more like a pro. His confidence has given him a presence on the field that was missing last season. Before camp, Jenkins was promoted to the starting lineup at

the expense of **Peerless**

**Price**. The former Bill wasn't happy about the demotion but didn't squawk too much after coaches showed him game tape to explain their decision. Price has been on notice

since the start of the offseason,

when he was told he needed to be a model team member or else. ➤ The Colts moved **Joseph Jefferson** to safety from cornerback in reaction to S **Mike Doss**' being suspended for the first two games of the season, but it's looking more and more like the move will be permanent. The coaches like Jefferson's grasp of the defense and his instincts, and they believe he has the body to play the position. Coach **Tony Dungy** thinks Jefferson could be a playmaker at safety. If Jefferson continues to improve, don't be surprised if Doss stays on the bench after his suspension. The team offered him around the league after Doss was arrested for firing a handgun in the air, and



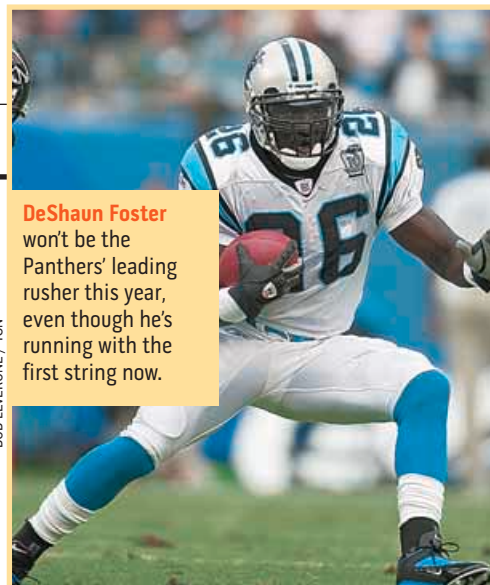
JAY DROWNS / TSN

The Bears' **Brian Urlacher** is like no other linebacker, so it figures that his diet would be pretty unusual. None of this Atkins stuff for him—Urlacher altered his diet this offseason, attempting to consume as many carbs as possible. And we're not talking just fruits and vegetables, either. We're talking pastas and breads, the kinds of foods that are anathema in the Atkins craze. Urlacher says he made the change at the suggestion of team nutritionists. The results have been encouraging, as he's maintained his weight of 255 and reported to camp feeling strong and energetic after battling injuries in 2004. In fact, Bears coaches say Urlacher had one of the best offseasons of anyone on the team.

his superiors have been disappointed with the one-time second-round pick's lack of discipline on and off the field. ➤ The Panthers hope WR **Rod Gardner**, whom they acquired from the Redskins for a sixth-round pick shortly before training camp opened, can help fill the hole left by **Muhsin Muhammad's** departure. The Panthers played their cards well in the Gardner deal, waiting until the Redskins had to make a deal in order to clear cap space to sign draft picks. The Saints and Seahawks also were in the bidding, but Gardner preferred to be traded to the Panthers because he went to Clemson and saw more opportunity with the Panthers. Gardner had a say in the deal because he had to redo his contract to make the

trade work. It also helped that the Panthers were willing to give him a one-year deal, which gives him a shot as a free agent after the season. The Saints were

interested in a two-year deal.



BOB LEVERONE / TSN

**DeShaun Foster** won't be the Panthers' leading rusher this year, even though he's running with the first string now.

The trend away from two-a-days and consecutive practices in pads is a good one. Welcome to the 21st century, NFL.

# INSIDE DISH

## speedreads

Call me crazy, but I see the wisdom in giving Matt Millen a contract extension as president of the Lions. He got off to a rough start but has slowly stocked the team with a lot of exciting young talent. Millen finally has the Lions headed in the right direction—why change now? What a lot of fans don't understand is a lack of continuity often can be more difficult to overcome than poor decisions.

The Eagles badly need Brian Westbrook, but they would be misguided to cave in to his demands—especially with a certain flamboyant wide receiver pining for a bigger slice of the pie.

Looking for more of Dan Pompei's opinions and analysis as camps heat up? Check out his new *SportingBlog* on [sportingnews.com](http://sportingnews.com).

NFL

AROUND THE **NFL**

Focus:

**Problem spots**

Only the Chiefs and Colts allowed more passing yards in the NFL than the Chargers last season, but San Diego's secondary is playing with a swagger, its confidence growing with each interception during team drills. In their second year in the 3-4, the corners and safeties are understanding how to better work together and trust one another. ... Right defensive end figured to be a problem area for the Eagles even before projected starter **Jerome McDougle** was shot in the stomach. For now, replacing McDougle, who can resume training in roughly five weeks, on the first unit is **N.D. Kalu**, who is better suited as a third-down pass rusher and is coming back from a torn ACL. Another option is **Hugh Douglas**, who is entering his 11th season but came to camp in great shape. Don't be surprised if DT **Darwin Walker** moves outside on early downs. ... Erratic guard play was a big reason for the Browns' offensive collapse last season, but newcomers **Joe Andruzzi** and **Cosey Coleman** look

like they will be upgrades. Andruzzi is a meat-and-potatoes type who can handle any blocking assignment on the left side. He is savvy and efficient, and he also adds leadership because of his experience with the Patriots. Andruzzi is bonding with new neighbor LT **L.J. Shelton**. Although Coleman is a mauler, he has better athleticism than most

right guards. He and RT **Ryan Tucker** should form an imposing right side, as long as Coleman gives consistent effort. That was a problem for him with the Bucs. ... The Jaguars still don't know who will start at right cornerback, a major worry considering the team's questionable pass rush. **Kenny Wright** has been mostly a backup in his career, and rookie **Scott Starks** lacks size (5-8, 172). The hope was **David Richardson** would assert himself in his second year, but he

has struggled early in camp and looks like a better fit as a backup. ... So far, the Packers' guard position has been a disappointment. The club knew it would be tough to replace **Mike Wahle** and **Marco Rivera**, and it needs more from free-agent acquisitions **Adrian Klemm** and **Matt O'Dwyer**. The coaches also have been working in **Atlas Herrion** and **Grey Ruegamer**. Herrion, who

**Take it away**

The Broncos finally might be taking steps toward improving their takeaways after averaging only 20.7 the past three years. Even in noncontact drills, defenders are attempting to strip the ball, including after the backs and receivers are well clear of the line of scrimmage. An improved pass rush also has led to an increase in tipped balls at the line, which have been converted into interceptions.

**Nobody's got the right stuff**

The Cowboys don't have a right tackle they feel comfortable starting right now. **Kurt Vollers** has done a good job when asked to start, but the Cowboys prefer him as a backup because his weaknesses get exposed when he plays regularly. **Jacob Rogers** struggled as a rookie to make the shift from left to right tackle but did an excellent job in the offseason program and is playing with greater technical proficiency. Still, he lacks experience. **Torin Tucker**, who showed up overweight at the May minicamp, now is in good shape and has greatly reduced his mental errors. He has the size (6-6, 315) the Cowboys want but isn't a nimble athlete.



ROBERT SEALE / TSN

offensive line concerns with his good play early in camp. He's athletic enough to do many of the things the team asks of its linemen on running plays, such as making downfield blocks, and he's holding his own as a pass protector. ... Nothing in the first week of training camp convinced the Buccaneers that their kicking game will be better. During one two-day stretch, Ks **Matt Bryant** and **Todd France** were 1-for-6 in a drill that calls for the kicking team to take the field, set

spent last season on the practice squad, has been impressive at times but needs to be more consistent. ... Dolphins coach **Nick Saban** likes beefy defensive linemen, especially on the interior. But injury problems and inexperience have left **Vonnie Holliday** (6-5, 290) and **Jeff Zgonina** (6-2, 285) as the top tackles. If they end up playing a lot, opponents will run right at the Dolphins and wear them down. ... RT **Kevin Sampson** has eased some of the Chiefs'

up and attempt a field goal in what would be the final seconds of a half. The team tied for last in the league in field-goal percentage (62.5) last year. ... The Bears should give up fewer sacks this season, given the arrival of free-agent RT **Fred Miller**, who has allowed **John Tait** to switch sides and shore up the left tackle spot. The team's new offensive scheme also won't feature as many seven-step drops.



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# INSIDE THE AFC

## Moving to the left is right for Wiley

New Jaguars DE **Marcellus Wiley** was a bust with the Cowboys last year, recording three sacks despite playing every game and starting 15. Wiley says much of his problem stemmed from coach **Bill Parcells'** moving him from left end to the right side. Wiley, who had 23½ total sacks in 2000 and '01, is back at left end and is competing for the Jaguars' starting job. Wiley has size (6-4, 275) and quickness, but he must unseat **Paul Spicer**, whose work ethic and familiarity with the system make him the favorite.



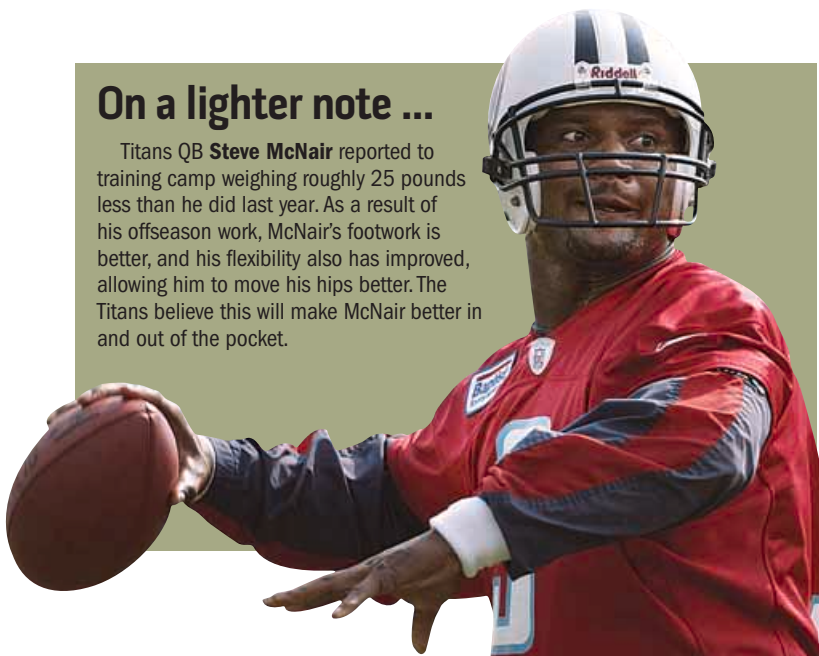
ROBERT SEALE / TSN

The longer **Will Shields** is sidelined with back ailments, the more uncertainty the **CHIEFS** face at right guard. Shields missed all of the offseason practices, and none of the replacements are on par with Shields. **Chris Bober** is the most athletic, but **John Welbourn** is more physical. ... **STEELERS** NT **Casey Hampton**, who missed most of last season with a torn ACL, has lost weight trying to ease the stress on his right knee. Hampton is the key to Pittsburgh's 3-4 defense because he usually occupies two blockers in the middle, creating space for the inside linebackers. ... **BRONCOS** DE **Courtney Brown** dislocated his left elbow, which will keep him out for up to six weeks. **Marco Coleman** will get the first chance to replace Brown, who was starting to round into shape after a foot injury ended his 2004 season. Coleman, 35, is a strong run defender but struggles as a pass rusher. He usually is replaced in passing situations. ... Under pressure to be the **BROWNS'** No. 1

wideout until **Brayton Edwards** is ready, **Antonio Bryant** was sensational in early practices. He used his size (6-1, 188) to position himself for catches in traffic and also got open on a variety of routes. Bryant has forged a bond with QB **Trent Dilfer**. ... After backup C **Wade Smith's** potentially season-ending arm injury, the **DOLPHINS** signed veteran G **Frank Middleton** (6-3, 330) to bolster the line's depth. Middleton, who started the first seven games of 2004 for the Raiders before a quadriceps injury, is considered a mauler and an adequate pass blocker. ... The **BILLS** want their tight ends to be a bigger part of the passing game. **Mark Campbell** and **Tim Euhus** are good receivers, but they focused more on blocking last year. With quality receivers on the outside, Campbell and Euhus will have chances to make plays underneath against single coverage. ... **COLTS** WR **Brandon Stokley's** dislocated shoulder puts his availability for

## On a lighter note ...

Titans QB **Steve McNair** reported to training camp weighing roughly 25 pounds less than he did last year. As a result of his offseason work, McNair's footwork is better, and his flexibility also has improved, allowing him to move his hips better. The Titans believe this will make McNair better in and out of the pocket.



MARK HUMPHREY / AP

## A steal who makes steals

The Jets think rookie CB **Justin Miller**, a second-round pick, has first-round talent. Miller's stock dropped after he was arrested before the draft, but he has been an interception machine in practice, combining excellent ball awareness and good hand-eye coordination. Miller, who played only three seasons at Clemson, still is raw in some facets of the game. He has the talent to start, but coaches must discover whether he's mentally ready.



JULIE JACOBSON / AP

the regular-season opener in question. In the meantime, veteran **Troy Walters** will step in for Stokley as the No. 3 receiver. Walters lacks size (5-7, 172) but has good hands and outstanding quickness. ... The **RAIDERS** released veteran SLB **Travian Smith** after it was decided that a knee injury would prevent him from playing this season. Smith's replacement, **Tyler Brayton**, is younger, bigger and more skilled than Smith, though not as fast or experienced. Brayton should develop into a solid pass rusher. ... **RAVENS** rookie DE/OLB **Dan Cody** suffered a potentially season-ending knee sprain. Losing him is significant because the team expected Cody to be one of its top pass rushers on third down—so much so that it cut former Pro Bowl OLB **Peter Boulware**. The team now might re-sign Boulware to replace Cody. ... Releasing backup NT **Ethan Kelley** last week left the **PATRIOTS** thin behind starter **Vince Wilfork**. In an emergency, the club probably would move DE **Ty Warren**, who played some nose tackle as a rookie, over center and bring

**Rodney Bailey**, **Jarvis Green** or **Marquise Hill** off the bench to take Warren's end spot. ... **CHARGERS** CB **Quentin Jammer**, the No. 5 overall pick of the 2002 draft, largely has failed to live up to expectations. He had trouble tracking deep balls and was uncertain in knowing where his help was. Jammer has been noticeably better so far in training camp. He is blanketing receivers, running his assignments with confidence and making interceptions. ... The **TEXANS** are alternating repetitions at left tackle between **Seth Wand** and **Victor Riley**. Riley, who joined the Texans as a free agent, must make the transition to the left side after spending his career at right tackle. Wand has made obvious strides from last year, when he struggled with the pass rush, but he still is young. ... Look for **BENGALS** RBs **Rudi Johnson** and **Chris Perry** to be on the field often at the same time. Johnson's tough inside running and Perry's receiving skills and quickness to the outside will keep defenses off-balance.

**CORRESPONDENTS:** Baltimore, Mike Preston; Buffalo, Allen Wilson; Cincinnati, Chick Ludwig; Cleveland, Steve Doerschuk; Denver, Lee Rasizer; Houston, Megan Manfull; Indianapolis, Mike Chappell; Jacksonville, Bart Hubbuch; Kansas City, Adam Teicher; Miami, Jason Cole; New England, Michael Felger; New York, Rich Cimini; Oakland, Steve Corkran; Pittsburgh, Gerry Dulac; San Diego, Kevin Acee; Tennessee, Jim Wyatt.



# NFL INSIDE THE NFC

The **SAINTS'** secondary has transformed from a weakness to a strength. CBs **Mike McKenzie** and **Fakhir Brown** are playing at an extremely high level. New FS **Dwight Smith** gradually is gaining confidence as a playmaker in the team's scheme and has the instincts to play all over the field in nickel and dime packages. ... **REDSKINS** QB **Patrick Ramsey** looks more confident than ever. His passes usually are sharp, he has better command of the offense, and he's doing a better job of reading defenses. Ramsey's arm remains strong, and he has a better feel for when to make touch passes. ... **RAMS** rookie LG **Claude Terrell**'s surprisingly solid play contributed to **Rex Tucker**'s move from left guard to right tackle. Terrell (6-2, 343) has a wide frame that makes him a punishing run

blocker, yet he has displayed quick feet that have made him difficult to get around in pass-rushing drills. ... The **GIANTS** don't believe the knee and hip injuries WR **Plaxico Burress** has suffered early in training camp are serious, but any practice time he misses is significant. Burress skipped most of the team's offseason program, so he has had almost no time to work with QB **Eli Manning**, and their timing hasn't been great early in camp. ... If **PACKERS** rookie QB **Aaron Rodgers** continues to perform the way he did the first week of camp, the backup position will be his. Rodgers reported late because of a contract holdup yet picked up things quickly and has been outperforming **Craig Nall** and **J.T. O'Sullivan**. Rodgers still is honing his footwork but is very decisive and accurate with his throws. ...

**CARDINALS** FS **Ifeanyi**

**Ohaleta** lost his starting job when the team signed free agent **Robert Griffith** but remains an important cog as the chief nickel back and will be called upon to cover slot receivers. So far, Ohaleta has looked good in that role. ...

The **PANTHERS** have been bringing along first-round pick **Thomas Davis** slowly, but with FS **Mike Minter** (knee) banged up, Davis likely will get some work at strong safety with the first team. Davis also has been getting some first-team work at linebacker in third-down

## Switching sides

The Seahawks' **Marcus Trufant** is back practicing after offseason shoulder surgery but is working at right cornerback, not the left-side spot he manned last season. The move allows newcomer **Andre Dyson** to play on the left, where he played with the Titans. The switch also allows Trufant to better protect his right shoulder because it now becomes his outside shoulder when supplying run support. Coaches say the move isn't permanent, though it could be if Trufant and Dyson continue to play well in this setup.



ALBERT DICKSON / TSN

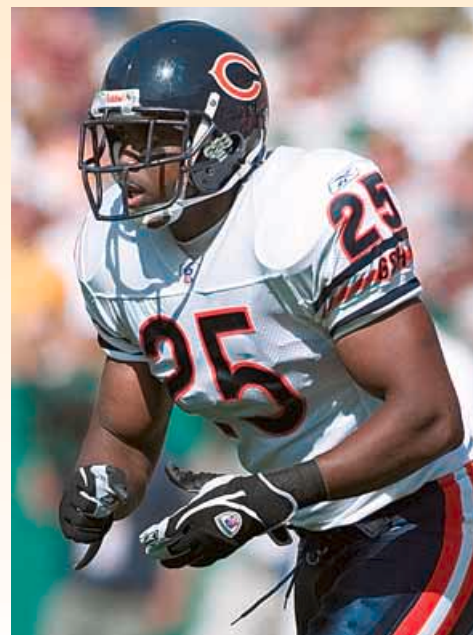
## Living up to his number

No. 1 overall pick **Alex Smith** seems to be grabbing hold of the 49ers' starting quarterback job. From the outset of camp, Smith has gotten the bulk of the repetitions with the first team and has looked sharp. He seems to have a good command of coordinator **Mike McCarthy**'s version of the West Coast offense.

MICHAEL ZAGARIS FOR TSN

## The Bears' bull market

The Bears may be thin at cornerback, but they're deep at safety. The team moved **Mike Brown** from free to strong safety in the offseason, in part because he's stout against the run. But **Bobby Gray** is making a push with his good play. Using Gray, a powerful hitter against the run, at strong safety would allow Brown to play free safety and current FS **Mike Green** to be the nickel back. That would help ease concerns about CB **Jerry Azumah**'s recent hip injury.



JAY DROWNS / TSN

packages because the Panthers want to take advantage of his speed. ... Despite having **Charles Rogers**, **Roy Williams** and **Mike Williams**, who were taken with top 10 picks in the past three drafts, **LIONS** coach **Steve Mariucci** says three-receiver formations won't be a staple. Mariucci is a firm believer in running the ball and thinks the ground game could be adversely affected by such a move, though he's willing to change if the results dictate it. ... **COWBOYS** sixth-round pick

SS **Justin Berault**, a long shot to make the roster a couple weeks ago, has caught the coaches' attention. Berault has been an aggressive hitter in practice and shown good range despite having ordinary speed. He's also excellent in run support. ...

Following a brief holdout, **FALCONS** WR **Roddy White** quickly impressed the team with his burst, confidence and jumping ability. The rookie made CB **DeAngelo Hall** look bad in a one-on-one drill. ... Only a week into camp, **Dontarrious Thomas** appeared to be far ahead of

**Raonall Smith** in the battle for the **VIKINGS'** weakside linebacker job, mostly because Thomas is making fewer mental mistakes than Smith. ... **BUCCANEERS** rookie WR **Larry Brackins**, hampered by an injury early in camp, has fallen way behind the other wideouts in the race for roster spots. Brackins is raw and has much to prove. ... With WR **Todd Pinkston** (Achilles') out for the season, **EAGLES** WR **Greg Lewis**, who has Pinkston's speed but not his height, will start outside opposite **Terrell Owens**. Rookie WR **Reggie Brown** primarily will be used in the slot; he has shown great toughness.

MICHAEL ZAGARIS FOR TSN

**CORRESPONDENTS:** Arizona, Kent Somers; Atlanta, George Henry; Carolina, Pat Yasinskas; Chicago, Mike Mulligan; Dallas, Jean-Jacques Taylor; Detroit, Tom Kowalski; Green Bay, Tom Silverstein; Minnesota, Kevin Seifert; New Orleans, Jeff Duncan; New York, Ralph Vacchiano; Philadelphia, Mark Eckel; St. Louis, Jim Thomas; San Francisco, Dennis Georgatos; Seattle, Clare Farnsworth; Tampa Bay, Roy Cummings; Washington, Paul Woody.

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## INSIDER SEAN DEVENEY

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The Cavaliers. The Pacers. The Pistons. How's that for three good reasons the moving-and-shaking Heat won't win the East?

## Big moves won't turn up the Heat enough

In the course of a day last week, the offices at AmericanAirlines Arena became so hectic, so overheated with activity that word is three of Pat Riley's hairs came out of place. That's the price you pay when you agree to give Shaquille O'Neal \$100 million and you acquire three starting-caliber players for Eddie Jones and a pair of spare parts. And you do it all with time for a nap before dinner.

Despite the flurry of activity that brought Antoine Walker, Jason Williams and James Posey to Miami, though, a frosty fact hangs over the Heat: It's hard to envision Miami getting much further than it did last season, not with the Pacers back at full strength, not with the Pistons preparing to add veteran help off the bench and not with the Cavaliers having such a bang-up offseason. The Heat still has one more shot to add talent with its full midlevel exception, and how it uses that money could be a make-or-break decision.

Miami's plan calls for Williams to play point guard, with Dwyane Wade at shooting guard, Posey (or, possibly, a player to be signed) at small forward, Udonis Haslem at power forward and O'Neal in the middle. Walker would be the sixth man. That's a better lineup than last season's, and with O'Neal heading into the twilight of his career, there's no doubt the Heat must do all it can to win now.

But it won't be good enough to win the East, even in the unlikely event that the addition of Walker and Williams—known as much for boneheaded antics as for their talent—creates no chemistry problems. The Heat sorely is lacking in

3-point shooting. Williams and Walker are very willing to take 3-pointers, but, mind you, that's much different than being able to make 3s. Williams is a career 31.5 percent shooter from beyond the arc, and Walker is at 32.6 percent. O'Neal is at his best when he is surrounded by quality perimeter shooters. The Heat has none.

Miami also lacks the backcourt defense to stop the likes of Detroit's Chauncey Billups and Richard Hamilton, who killed the Heat last postseason. If Cleveland goes



BILL KOSTROUN / AP

Williams and Walker shoot 3s; they just don't make them.

with a big backcourt of Larry Hughes and LeBron James or if the Pacers go with Jamaal Tinsley and Ron Artest, the Heat will face similar problems. Miami hopes adding Williams will induce the team to run more. But Williams' reputation for running the fast break is overblown, thanks to his trick-passing past. He's turnover-prone and prefers to pull up for jumpers rather than attack the rim. Besides, no team with a big lug such as O'Neal in the middle truly can be a running team.

Ultimately, even with all the tinkering the Heat has done, Miami's championship hopes will rest with the same thing they did last season: health. The Heat will need the cosmic forces of injury to nip other top teams in the East and clear a path to The Finals, much as injuries to Wade and O'Neal torpedoed the Heat's chances at beating the Pistons last season. The flood of early-August personnel moves was nice but not enough. TSN

### speedread

The Blazers wasted no time getting started on their youth movement, cutting Derek Anderson and Nick Van Exel. Portland finally seems to understand the value of rebuilding and has one of the league's best young groups and a good young coach in Nate McMillan. The next step is moving Darius Miles.



The qualifying option is a one-year salary that can be offered to fifth-year players by the teams that drafted them. It's rarely used—C **Michael Olowokandi** played his final season with the Clippers on such an offer—but after finishing the one year, players are eligible to become unrestricted free agents. The agent for Sonics F **Vladimir Radmanovic** has hinted that his client might sign the qualifying offer, and with no teams rushing to extend offers to Bulls F **Tyson Chandler** and C **Eddy Curry**, they, too, could be forced into taking qualifying offers. But most teams don't want to engender the kind of bad feelings that can come from forcing a player into such a corner. ➤ Knicks PG **Stephon Marbury** confirmed last week that coach **Larry Brown** wants to use him at shooting guard. Assuming Brown thinks **Jamal Crawford** is a shooting guard, too, the Knicks appear to have a very large hole at point guard and no money to address it. ➤ New Heat PF **Antoine Walker** was lucky Miami was interested in him and that he got \$54 million over six years from the team. One general manager says Boston would not have re-signed Walker for anything more than the midlevel exception, adding, "There really wasn't anyone else interested in him, from what I have heard." ➤ Warriors SF **Mike Dunleavy** is a favorite of vice president **Chris Mullin**, but a league source says Golden State is open to trading Dunleavy. That's because Mullin has done a terrific job in stocking the roster with talent. The Warriors need to get G/F **Mickaël Pietrus** on the floor more—he has offensive potential and already is a vastly superior defender to Dunleavy.

INSIDER **MIKE DeCOURCY**

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If O.J. Mayo truly wants to juice up the NBA, he must learn to conquer challenges.

## A worthy place to bide some time


**H**e is so good, he will redefine the initials *O.J.*

That's how good O.J. Mayo is.

Unless you are among the hopeless addicts who showed up at the Reebok ABCD Camp or the Big Time tournament or the USA Basketball Youth Development Festival—and congratulations, if you are—you probably have not yet seen Mayo play this game. So you read about him and wonder whether he's as good as has been described in print. And he's not. He's better.

Mayo is a 6-4 point guard who will be a junior at North College Hill High in Cincinnati. He has been among the nation's most famous high school players since he was a seventh-grader starring for a Kentucky high school. With his size, strength, athleticism and skills, he almost certainly will be the No. 1 overall pick when he enters the NBA draft.

But what route will he follow to get there? Mayo has said he will be

 For more college basketball analysis from Mike DeCourcy, go to [sportingnews.com/cbasketball](http://sportingnews.com/cbasketball).



Mayo is a can't-miss kid, but college would make him better.

BOB LEVERONE / TSN

fine attending college now that the NBA passed a rule mandating draft entrants be at least 19 and one year beyond high school graduation. Mayo will reach that age before finishing high school, but the one-year-out requirement will force him to occupy himself until June 2008.

Mayo could play a year at a prep school. He could work a year with a personal trainer, avoiding formal competition. He could earn excellent money overseas, plus more from a shoe company endorsement. He could sue the NBA, but the suit would face a tough climb given Maurice Claret's failure in a similar case against the NFL.

Or, Mayo could play in college.

Which is what he needs.

There is so little about the game that Mayo does not do exceptionally well. He changes direction at full speed. He is a spectacular shooter. He gets open with moves others can't conceive. He is a superb, unselfish passer.

The problem is competition. His high school games mostly are a joke; North College Hill won its state tournament games by an average of 29.5 points. His loaded club team, the D1

### speedread

The organization behind the NIT began its lawsuit against the NCAA last week. Its case suggests the NCAA Tournament represents an illegal monopoly and some NCAA Tournament teams would, if given the choice, play in the NIT. That's like saying there are those who would prefer ALPO to a New York strip. Even a basset hound knows better.

Greyhounds, only rarely encounter worthy competition.

The Greyhounds did lose to Greg Oden and the Spiece Indy Heat in Las Vegas at the Big Time tournament championship, a game that featured more likely future pros than many Final Four battles. That gave Mayo a dose of what college basketball would be like. But college crowds would be larger, the pressure greater, the opposition more sophisticated. Opponents have time to scout you in college. For Mayo to become the best player he can be, he needs that. He already has conquered the overmatched and unprepared. Many, many times.

There is a common belief among college coaches that Mayo will avoid the risk of injury or exposure in college and choose prep school. That would provide no benefit; by the time he finishes his senior year at North College Hill, he will have played against high school kids for six years. Insurance could protect him against a college injury that would end his career or damage his draft position.

And exposure? Not a chance. He's too good.

He is so good, in fact, that some day the initials *O.J.* will not be an easy punch line on late-night television or morning drive radio. They once again will be spoken with a sense of wonder and awe. **TSN**

New Southern California coach **Tim Floyd** isn't worried that being at a "football school" will hinder the building of his program. He points to success at Texas and Florida as the model of what can be accomplished if basketball takes advantage of what football provides. Floyd is selling opportunity to recruits. The Trojans have only four players returning and did OK in salvaging the 2005 recruiting year, but none of their recruits will scare away future prospects. ➤ Denver C **Yemi Nicholson** is catching the attention of NBA scouts. One who saw him at a summer camp says Nicholson has few bad habits. He went from averaging 7.5 points as a sophomore to 18.1 points as a junior. Nicholson should keep Denver in contention for the Sun Belt title and an NCAA Tournament bid. ➤ **Fran Fraschilla**, who coached the African entry in last month's Global Games, was



impressed with 6-8 PF **Ahmet Gueye** of Senegal, a Hawaii recruit who represented Team Texas and made the all-tournament squad. Fraschilla says Gueye is "a man." ➤ Baylor recruit **Henry Dugat** was among the Global Games' pleasant surprises. He can play either backcourt position, is a fine shooter and should become a strong defender. PF **Kevin Rogers**, another Bears recruit, also had his moments. Baylor's next major recruiting project will be competing against elite programs for PF **Darrell Arthur**, a top 10 prospect from Dallas. ➤ Evansville coach **Steve Merfeld** would like to take his team to England—and play no games. Merfeld says about a third of the school's students study at the university's overseas campus in Grantham, England. Basketball players can't get there during the regular academic year, so Merfeld would like to take them next summer just for study and travel.

# PLAYACTION



BY ROGER KUZNIA

No matter how much time you spend preparing for your fantasy draft, you will have questions about some players, whether they be related to talent level, injuries or contract situations. A look at three burning questions as the season nears.

**Q:** If I draft Priest Holmes, when should I take Larry Johnson as insurance?

**A:** Holmes is coming off a knee injury that cost him half of last season, so it's imperative you get Johnson to cover your hide. If you're in a 12-team nonkeeper league, take Johnson in the seventh or eighth round. If you do it sooner, you might miss out on some players at other positions who immediately can fill starting roles. But if your draft is heavy on running backs early, consider taking Johnson in the sixth.



Owens

JAY DROWNS / TSN

**Q:** Where does it make sense to draft the Ravens' defense?

**A:** First, you're a smart cookie if you want the Ravens' D. It tied for the league lead in defensive touchdowns (six) last year with the Bears, and it boasts excellent playmakers in Ray Lewis and Ed Reed. Figuring that your first six selections will be used to fill starting spots at quarterback, running back and wide receiver, take the Ravens in the seventh or eighth round, depending on the size of your league.

**Q:** Terrell Owens and Javon Walker are in camp. Should their unhappiness with their contracts affect their draft status?

**A:** No! Once the season starts, it will be business as usual for these players. Most players want to win, and their focus must be on the football field in order to achieve that. If anything, wanting a larger contract could make each work harder. Both are elite receivers, and it would be foolish to pass on them because of contract issues.

## A quick mock-up

This is how our panel of experts fared early in the first of our mock drafts:

### FIRST ROUND

1. RB LaDainian Tomlinson (Team 1)
2. RB Shaun Alexander (Team 2)
3. RB Edgerrin James (Team 3)
4. RB Priest Holmes (Team 4)
5. RB Julius Jones (Team 5)
6. RB Willis McGahee (Team 6)
7. RB Deuce McAllister (Team 7)
8. RB Corey Dillon (Team 8)
9. RB Clinton Portis (Team 9)
10. QB Peyton Manning (Team 10)
11. RB Domanick Davis (Team 11)
12. RB Jamal Lewis (Team 12)

### SECOND ROUND

13. RB Kevin Jones (Team 12)
14. RB Tiki Barber (Team 11)
15. RB Ahman Green (Team 2)
16. WR Terrell Owens (Team 9)
17. WR Randy Moss (Team 8)
18. RB Rudi Johnson (Team 7)
19. WR Torry Holt (Team 6)
20. WR Chad Johnson (Team 5)
21. QB Daunte Culpepper (Team 4)
22. RB LaMont Jordan (Team 3)
23. RB Curtis Martin (Team 2)
24. WR Marvin Harrison (Team 1)

### THIRD ROUND

25. QB Donovan McNabb (Team 1)
26. WR Javon Walker (Team 2)
27. RB Brian Westbrook (Team 3)
28. WR Joe Horn (Team 4)
29. RB Tatum Bell (Team 5)
30. RB Steven Jackson (Team 6)
31. WR Andre Johnson (Team 7)
32. TE Tony Gonzalez (Team 8)
33. TE Antonio Gates (Team 9)
34. WR Reggie Wayne (Team 10)
35. WR Hines Ward (Team 11)
36. WR Laveranues Coles (Team 12)

**Running with backs:** Not shockingly, 11 out of the top 12 picks were used on running backs.

Tomlinson and Alexander were easily 1-2, and Holmes slipped to No. 4 only because of injury concerns. After James, the values are similar, so it's not a reach to go for the youthful Jones or McGahee over more established veterans.

**Manning at 10?** Chances are 49 TDs won't happen again, but getting 35 from any QB is difficult. In most drafts, someone will take Manning earlier. If you pick him, keep in mind you'll take a big hit at other positions later—Team 10 settled for Ahman Green as its No. 1 back in Round 2.

**Finally, we go wide:** Owens at No. 16 starts the run of elite receivers, but Team 8 got a steal in Moss, the only wide receiver who can perform like a top-tier back. Considering the quality of backs available here, a team can even afford to take Moss late in the first round.

**Jordan over Martin?**

Speaking of new Raiders, Jordan is fresh after playing behind

Martin for four years and ready to bust out in an offense that caters to his skills. Martin's age (32) offsets his 2004 rushing title.

**Getting tight:**

Going for Gonzo and Gates this early seems questionable, but they are such elite tight ends that they perform like No. 1 receivers. However, the Cowboys' Jason Witten, who has similar potential, lasted until Round 6.

**Snapping McNabb:** He is the last quarterback worth drafting this early. After him, the next six are a dime a half-dozen. The next one to go was Trent Green, near the end of Round 5. —Vinnie Iyer

## TOP 10

### Late-round values



Davenport

JAY DROWNS / TSN

1. Najeh Davenport, RB, Packers.

2. Eric Shelton, RB, Panthers. His power running style makes him a perfect fit in Carolina. He'll slide into a prime spot if DeShaun Foster gets injured again.

3. Kyle Boller, QB, Ravens.

4. Ben Watson, TE, Patriots.

5. Vernand Morency, RB, Texans. He's more than insurance for Domanick Davis owners. Morency could steal a healthy chunk of the Texans' backfield work.

6. Reggie Williams, WR, Jaguars.

7. Gus Frerotte, QB, Dolphins.

8. Michael Jenkins, WR, Falcons.

One of these years, Michael Vick is going to find a wide receiver he likes. At 6-4, Jenkins is not hard to find.

9. Samie Parker, WR, Chiefs.

10. Jeff Garcia, QB, Lions. Garcia is one of the few backup quarterbacks worth a look. His season could mirror Kerry Collins' 2004. —Rob Hurtt

BOB LEVERONE / TSN



BEN MARGOT / AP



BOB LEVERONE / TSN



To view the rest of the mock draft, go to: [fantasysource.sportingnews.com/football](http://fantasysource.sportingnews.com/football).

# SQUEEZEPLAY



BY CHRIS BAHR

The dog days are here, and you're at a crossroads as your team is starting to slip further from contention. Do you turn your attention to fantasy football, or do you reload for one last push? Let me tell you why you should choose

the Rocky Balboa approach ("I ain't going down no more!") and fight until the end:

In early August last year, I was fuming over my pathetic 11th-place performance in our TSN experts league, and I put the rest of my life on hold as I focused solely on finishing in the top three. Psychotic? Slightly. But it paid off. I finished in a second-place tie, took home a few bucks and patched up my pride.

So what can you do this late in the game?

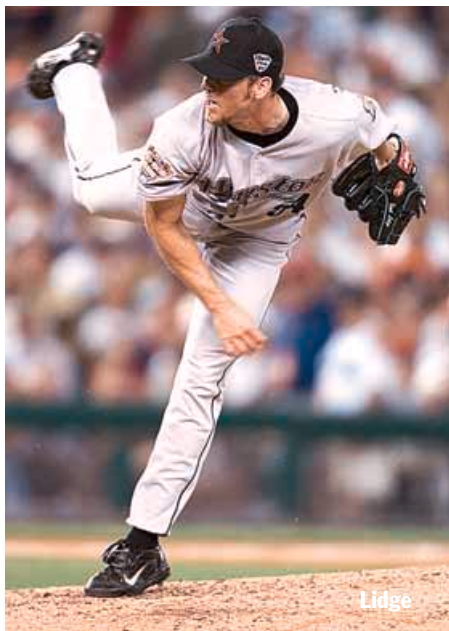
**Identify your strengths and weaknesses.** If you

have an abundance of bats but need wins, deal a top hitter for a premier starter. Conversely, trade a starting pitcher if you're way over your innings limit. Punting a 5x5 category now is a viable strategy. For example, Brad Lidge could land you the homers you need in a trade, and you won't miss Lidge's saves if you're hopelessly near the bottom of the pack anyway.

**Scour the waiver wire.** Some owners will get lazy or even quit altogether, so your persistence will pay off. Plenty of talented hitting and pitching prospects are going to be called up in the coming weeks, and they can be just as valuable as players you had hoped to land in trades. Injuries still will strike, so also be ready to pluck utilitymen who become starters.

**Know your competition.** Look over your fellow owners' rosters with a three-part agenda: How can they help you? How can you convince them you can help them? How can you move and stay ahead of them? It is just as important to keep an eye on those behind you in the standings as it is to target those above you.

There's no better feeling than rising from last place and finishing in the money. I must note, however, that the bucks I won promptly were spent on a dinner to appease my neglected wife.



Lidge

ALBERT DICKSON / TSN

## This week in fantasy baseball history



AP

How fantasy would have sounded ... in 1962.

**August 8:** Dodgers shortstop Maury Wills steals his 59th and 60th bases as he continues to challenge Ty Cobb's modern-day record of 96, set in 1915. Wills' steals, batting average and scoring ability make him a candidate to be one of the top three players taken in fantasy drafts in 1963.

**August 9:** The expansion Mets lose to the Giants, 7-1, to drop their record to 30-83. Not one Mets starting pitcher can be found on an active squad in an N.L.-only league despite there being only 10 teams in the N.L. Bob L. Miller, today's loser, now is 0-8. The rest of the four-man rotation—Roger Craig, Jay Hook and Al Jackson—is a combined 20-42. Swingman Craig Anderson checks in at 3-13.

**August 12:** Pirates stopper Elroy "The Baron" Face, a gutsy 5-8, 155-pounder, chucks up his 17th save and continues to reward the 5x5 owners who dared to take him in the early rounds because of his ability to close games. Major League Baseball doesn't officially recognize saves, but SPORTING NEWS tracks them for its Fireman Derby, giving fantasy owners another stat to ponder when making lineup decisions. —Brendan Roberts

## 5 IN YOUR FACE

**1.** Apparently new Braves reliever Kyle Farnsworth is known for more than his party habits, inconsistent pitching and body slams of opposing players. As I pulled up to a construction site the other day, I heard one worker tell the other, "Get your head out of your Farnsworth."

**2.** A hearty boo to any fantasy owner who would veto a trade simply because it would improve a fellow contender's team. What's next? If your neighbor's new paint job makes his house look nicer than yours, are you going to get out some sandpaper?

**3.** Fantasy owners were so excited to track the wheeling and dealing at the trading deadline, but I've seen more action at my Uncle Morty's poker table.

**4.** Scouting report for Vladimir Guerrero: susceptible to curveballs away. Scouting report for Sammy Sosa: susceptible to any pitch in the catcher's vicinity.

**5.** We're not sure what's worse—Corey Patterson's striking out 17 times in 22 games in the minors or Class AAA Iowa manager Mike Quade's "accidentally" spelling Corey with a "K." —B.R.



Sosa

BOB LEVERONE / TSN

**We heard that** Will Dusty Baker ever figure out how to properly manage a pitching staff? He nearly cost his team a win against the Giants last month and inflated Carlos Zambrano's fantasy stats in the process. Baker kept Zambrano in the game in the eighth inning even though Zambrano had been hit hard and had thrown 112 pitches through seven. Someone please buy Dusty a clue.

—Paul Welch, Purcellville, Va.



Zambrano

JAY BROWNS / TSN



# DAVE KINDRED

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Who wants to live to be 100, anyway? Pass the Raffy Juice!

## Palmeiro is a different kind of baseball legend

When the Orioles scheduled “Rafael Palmeiro Day” in celebration of the slugger’s 3,000th hit and his advance toward the 600-home run level—where he would join Henry Aaron and Willie Mays as the only men to reach both those numbers—it seemed the right thing to do.

It’s not likely that many people outside of Baltimore changed vacation plans to be at Camden Yards on August 14. Palmeiro’s career had been built in silence, with no sensational records, no World Series heroics, no self-absorbed theatrics. Until he pointed a finger at those congressional bloodhounds and said, “Period,” Palmeiro might have been best known as the only professional athlete hunk endorsing Viagra.

That moment of unequivocal denial on Capitol Hill changed everything. Certainly, the contrast in demeanor helped Palmeiro. Shamefaced Mark McGwire squirmed like a man with terminal jock itch. Sammy Sosa developed a previously unknown aversion to speaking English. Jose Canseco denied the validity, if not the veracity, of his own words. Rafael Palmeiro, handsome and elegant, pointed a finger and said, “I have never used steroids. Period. I don’t know how to say it any more clearly than that. Never.”

With that declaration on March 17, with his condemnation of Canseco for having written that he injected Palmeiro with steroids, and with the story of his family’s escape to America from “the communist tyranny that still reigns over my homeland of Cuba,” Palmeiro gained national attention that his work in baseball had never earned. He moved from anonymity to respect. He became a first-ballot lock for the Hall of Fame.

And now?

Now we know that the Palmeiro “period” might better have been a comma followed by “except on special occasions, such as days that end in ‘y.’”

No player ever has fallen more quickly from favor. Period.



Palmeiro’s reputation has taken a hit, but sentiments could change by the time he is eligible to be elected to the Hall of Fame.

Raffy’s day has been called off. Most likely, his first-ballot election to Cooperstown won’t happen, either, though it’s not nearly as black and white an issue as many would make it. It’s a gray area.

The use of most steroids without a doctor’s prescription has been illegal in the United States since 1991. Other sports and the Olympics banned steroids as performance-enhancing drugs. But only in 2002 did baseball put steroids on its banned-substances list, and only last year did it test for steroids. Anyone who used steroids without a prescription after 1991 was committing a criminal act. He might have known the use was unethical. Until 2002, however, he was not violating any rule of competition in Major League Baseball.

Mark McGwire, instead of squirming, should have said, “Yeah, I used steroids. Wouldn’t you? Look, they wanted us to, or there’d have been rules against it.” He could have mentioned pitchers in their late 30s and early 40s who maintained the velocity of their 20s. In this Hitters vs. Pitchers scenario, a *Mad* magazine reader thinks of the “Spy vs. Spy” cartoon, in which

everybody is out to get everybody by whatever means necessary.

Yes, baseball’s statistical history has been distorted by steroids. Is that reason enough to keep Cooperstown’s doors shut against players who dominated their era? The numbers are skewed up, and no one will ever mistake Rafael Palmeiro for Henry Aaron or Willie Mays. The numbers also appear to be steroided up: At age 25, Palmeiro hit a home run every 42.7 at-bats; at 37, a home run every 12.7 at-bats. In 1990, he led the league in *singles*. In 1993, his first full season with Jose Canseco as a teammate, Palmeiro jumped from 22 home runs to 37. He hit 95 home runs in his first seven seasons; after Canseco’s arrival, Palmeiro hit 99 in three seasons.

It is yet true—if sadly true—that Palmeiro played under the prevailing rules. Think of Ty Cobb. Under his day’s rules, he had 4,189 hits. What if he had played his entire career with a live ball? Would he have had 5,000? Maybe 3,000? Just as McGwire and Barry Bonds did stuff in their time that thousands of other big leaguers failed to do, so did Palmeiro rise above the crowd.

Maybe Canseco’s claim that 80 percent of players used steroids was hyperbole. But it’s naive to think that only a few players did it. Palmeiro’s body wasn’t cartooned up. But who said it needed to be? A singles hitter doesn’t need to be a weight-lifting Paul Bunyan to add the 25 feet that makes him a home run hitter. And the well-documented health risks mean little to the obsessed competitors at the game’s highest level. The old pitcher Jim Bouton recently told the *Boston Globe*, “If there was a pill that guaranteed a pitcher 20 wins but took five years off his life, we would take it.”

Incentives of victory, celebrity and wealth cause people to do strange things.

They might even cause some people to lie to Congress.

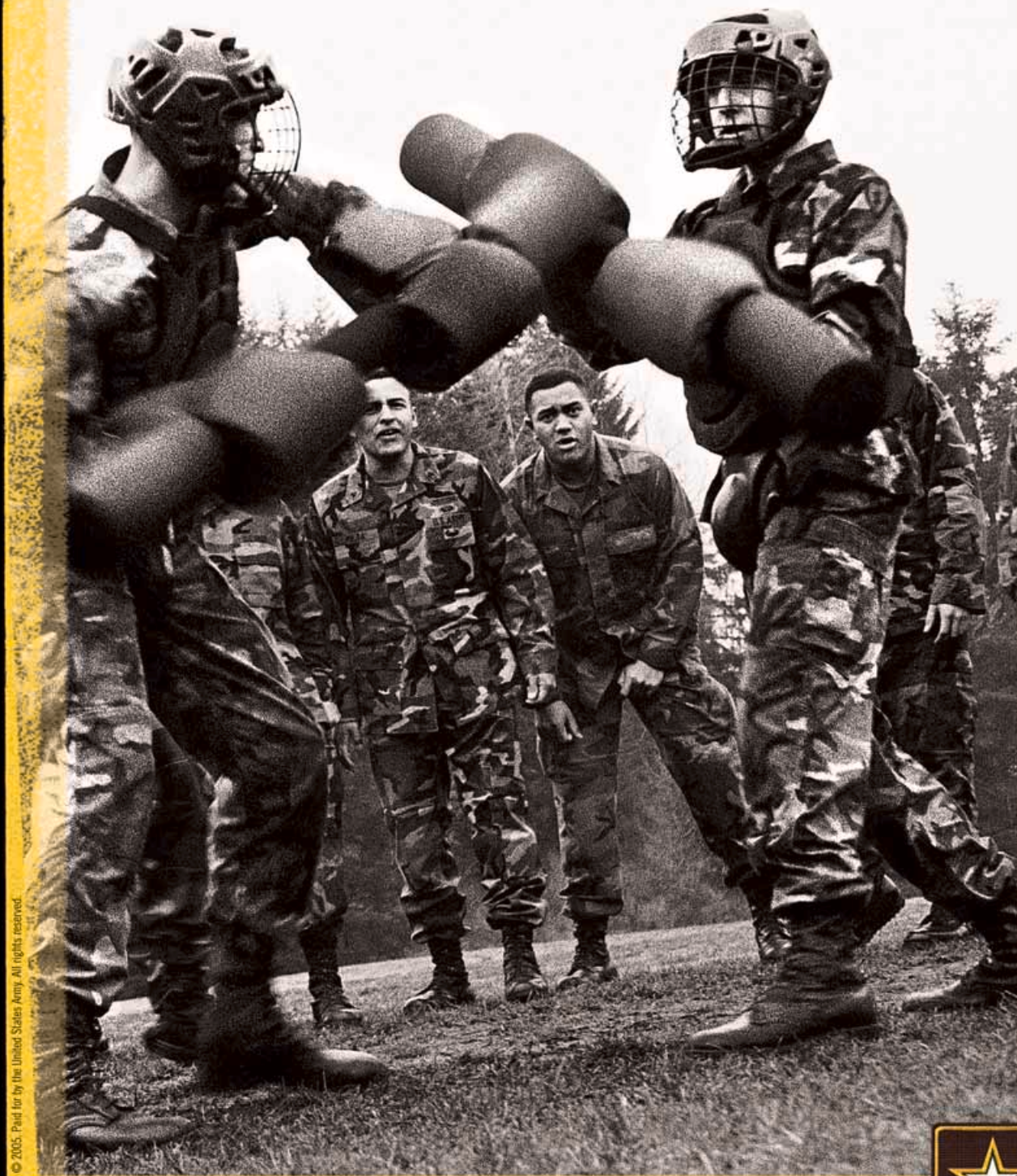
TSN

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Sergeant Derek Brame. 11B Infantry.

**IT'S NOT ABOUT MAKING THE TEAM.  
IT'S ABOUT MAKING THE TEAM STRONGER.**



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Pugil stick fighting is just one of the many challenges you'll face on your way to becoming a Soldier. It's a drill that requires strength, agility and stamina. It teaches a simple lesson to all who experience it – when an entire team is counting on you to win, that's exactly what you do.



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