

West All-Americans win it big in tournament

By Howard Ulman
The Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — Win or lose in the NCAA tournament Final Four, Michigan State has a bright future. Its two top recruits, Zach Randolph and Marcus Taylor, starred in the West's run-and-gun victory in the McDonald's All America High School game Wednesday night.

The West outscored the East 146-120 as Randolph won the game's MVP award with 23 points and 15 rebounds and Taylor, a

point guard, had 14 points, six rebounds and three assists.

Their next stop: Indianapolis, to watch the Spartans play Wisconsin in the NCAA semifinals Saturday.

It was a record-shattering night at the FleetCenter featuring 24 of the top high school seniors in the country chosen by a seven-member committee and an advisory panel of scouts and media.

The 146 points broke last year's mark set by the West in a 141-128 victory. And the crowd of 18,624

was over 3,000 more than the biggest previous crowd of 15,527 set in 1982 at the Rosemont Horizon outside Chicago. The first McDonald's game was played in 1978 in Philadelphia.

On Wednesday night, the fans saw a game of sprinting players, quick shots and enough alley-oops and dunks to fill a highlight show.

The West's DeShawn Stevenson, who will attend Kansas, led all scorers with 25 points as he hit 12-of-19 shots in just 25 minutes. He

won the slam-dunk contest Monday night.

Darius Rice, a nephew of NFL wide receiver Jerry Rice, led the East with 24 points, making 9-of-18 shots in 24 minutes. The Mississippi high schooler is leaning toward Kentucky.

There were 254 shots in the four-quarter, 48-minute game. The West went 67-for-137 from the field, the East 49-for-117. The West also had a massive advantage off the boards, out-rebounding the East 84-54.

The West led 37-32 after one quarter and 74-63 at the half. It scored the first 10 points of the fourth quarter on 3-pointers by Taylor and Alton Ford, who plans to attend Houston, a dunk by Travon Bryant and a layup by Chris Duhon.

The West led 106-85 after three quarters, and Randolph and Taylor made sure the East wouldn't come back, scoring their team's first seven points of the fourth period for a 113-87 advantage.

NBC, WWF tag team up for new XFL football league

By Seth Sutel
The Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Two years after losing the National Football League, NBC is getting back into football — with a highly unusual partner.

The TV network said Wednesday it is joining with the World Wrestling Federation, the marketing machine that turned body-slams into hot TV fare, to launch a no-holds-barred "extreme" football league.

The WWF announced plans for the eight-team XFL league last month, but investors shunned the idea, sending the company's stock plummeting.

NBC's announcement that it plans to televise the XFL's games and make a major investment in the league gave the WWF's shares a boost Wednesday.

The companies insist that the

league will be a real sport, not entertainment programming like WWF wrestling, in which chair-smashing, outrageous antics and bizarre story lines are the preferred tools for luring viewers.

The league's games are to begin next February, right after the NFL's Super Bowl.

There will be several changes to traditional football to soup up the game, however, including eliminating the "fair catch" rule, shortening halftime to 10 minutes, and placing microphones in huddles, in locker rooms and on the sidelines.

Whether it's real football will likely be a subject for debate. But NBC's motivations are clear in partnering with Vince McMahon. The chairman of World Wrestling Federation Entertainment Inc. turned wrestling into a smash success on TV, in live events, and even in

book publishing.

"In Vince McMahon, we're getting the best marketer in America," Dick Ebersol, head of NBC sports, said. "We're very interested in riding the success wave of the WWFE."

NBC is taking a 50 percent stake in the venture and has agreed to broadcast games on Saturday nights. NBC is also paying \$30 million to acquire a 3 percent stake in the World Wrestling Federation.

The deal marks a break from traditional sports broadcasting deals, under which networks place bids for the rights to show games. Prices for those rights have escalated sharply in recent years, leading NBC to opt out of the \$18 billion deal the NFL negotiated two years ago with the other networks.

When McMahon announced the formation of the XFL in early February, investors were put off by the

estimated development costs of about \$100 million. The company's stock fell 25 percent that day.

This time, with a major media company in as a 50-50 partner, the reception to the XFL project was far more friendly. Merrill Lynch analyst Seth Weber, who downgraded WWF stock in February, called the NBC deal "good for both sides."

Doubts about the project remain. There have been numerous efforts in the past, all unsuccessful, to take on the NFL. NBC itself flirted with the idea in 1998 with Turner Broadcasting as a potential partner.

CBS also looked into the idea after losing the NFL contract six years ago, but found the proposition too risky because of high costs, cold weather and difficulty in attracting top talent.

Neal Pilson, who oversaw CBS sports operations at the time and now heads his own consulting

firm, said he remains "skeptical" about the XFL plan.

"I understand what NBC is trying to achieve. I appreciate the power of their promotional ability, and what you may have here is a test of whether promotion can create demand," Pilson said. "I guess we're going to find out."

NBC and WWF officials say they expect to find enough talent from college players and amateurs to fill their ranks. They pointed to Super Bowl MVP Kurt Warner, who started as a grocery stocker, as an example of the kind of talent pool that could be available.

"There are thousands and thousands of players in America who want to and can play professional football," Ebersol said. "We don't expect problems finding players."

NFL commissioner Paul Tagliabue had no comment on the XFL.

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Horoscope by Linda C. Black

TODAY'S BIRTHDAY (March 30). This year managing money wisely makes you more secure from now on. Turn down a friend's request for funds in April. A group can provide what's needed in May. The profit inflow is clogged from around May through June. Friends reaffirm your leadership and bolster your confidence around August. A secret message could lead to a canceled trip around November. A pleasant surprise from a friend brightens December. Stick to your budget in February and get your team to do the same.

To get the advantage, check the day's rating: 10 is the easiest day, 0 the most challenging.

ARIES (March 21-April 19) — Today is a 6 — You and your team should get together. Figure out how to solve the next problem. You shouldn't have to pay for everything yourself. If there's not enough money or answers to go around, don't worry. Gather information for a while instead.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20) — Today is a 6 — Somebody has good ideas about what you should do next. This person may not be right, even though he or she may outrank you. Don't let anybody push you around. Stick up for your position. Don't do something you know won't work.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21) — Today is a 5 — You may have things figured out, but new data throws you off balance. The real truth will stay the same, but your perspective is changing. So, forget what you thought you knew, for a while, so you can learn even more.

CANCER (June 22-July 22) — Today is a 6 — You're ready to go, but you don't have enough money to do what you want. You could tap an older person for a loan or a donation, but that could take a while. Instead of getting frustrated, brainstorm with your group for more ideas.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22) — Today is a 6 — You should do well working with a partner, in a career-related matter. You may not get all the way, but don't give up. A breakthrough could come soon, if you and this other person keep pushing. Don't ever take 'no' for an answer.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22) — Today is a 6 — You'll probably have to work and won't be able to travel. If you can set things up that way, you'll be more successful. Actually, if you can postpone traveling for a few days, do it. Take care of a problem that's in front of you, instead.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23) — Today is a 6 — You may feel like going into your savings account to buy a gift for somebody you love. If it's a toy, the person can do without it. Even if it's something this person really needs, you should wait. You may find a better deal, soon.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21) — Today is a 6 — You and your partner should talk things over. You don't have enough information to reach a good decision, yet. Something that neither of you knows about could be out there. Gather more data before you decide. Better safe than sorry.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21) — Today is a 5 — You're not doing what you'd like to be doing, but that's OK. You should be in a good mood. You're mastering new skills, and that will make a difference. Don't fret if you make mistakes. Just clean up the messes and keep on keeping on.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19) — Today is a 6 — If you're facing a big household expense, don't fret. If you continue with your studies, you'll be able to afford it soon. Besides, you could do some of the work and save your cash. You may have talents that haven't been tapped, yet.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18) — Today is a 6 — You may not come up with the answer you're seeking, but don't feel foolish. Sometimes the best thing is to delegate the chore to somebody with different skills. Reaching will be relaxing and could also help you achieve the results you're after.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20) — Today is a 6 — You may feel unsure of yourself. Instead of pushing, possibly in the wrong direction, move slowly. Watch and listen. Don't make a big deal of little mistakes and don't try to move too quickly. Calm down and take your time. Better late than never.

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