

Scoreboard

USA TODAY/ NFCA COLLEGE SOFTBALL POLL FOR MAY 8

1. WASHINGTON
2. ARIZONA
3. UCLA
4. Oklahoma
5. ARIZONA STATE
6. Fresno State
7. LSU
8. S. Mississippi
9. CALIFORNIA
10. STANFORD
11. Alabama
12. OREGON STATE
13. Michigan
14. CS Fullerton
15. Iowa
16. OREGON
17. La.-Lafayette
18. Long Beach State
19. Notre Dame
20. Nebraska
21. Mississippi State
22. Florida Atlantic
23. Illinois-Chicago
24. Oklahoma State
25. South Carolina

NBA

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Shaquille O'Neal was as dominant in the NBA's Most Valuable Player balloting Tuesday as he has been all season for the Los Angeles Lakers.

He came within one vote of becoming the first unanimous choice for the award.

The 7-foot-1 center, who led the league in scoring and field goal percentage, received 120 of 121 votes from a panel of sports writers and broadcasters.

His 99.2 percentage was the highest for any player since the league introduced the award in 1955-56. Michael Jordan received 96.5 percent of the vote in 1995-96.

CHICAGO (AP) — This time, Elton Brand is going to have to share.

The No. 1 pick in last summer's draft will share the NBA's Rookie of the Year Award with Houston's Steve Francis, the No. 2 pick last summer, a league source confirmed Tuesday.

The award will be announced Thursday.

It will be only the third time a pair of rookies will share the award. Jason Kidd and Grant Hill were co-winners in 1994-95, and Dave Cowens and Geoff Petrie shared in 1970-71.

Brand, the 1998-99 consensus college player of the year, said from the day he was drafted by the Chicago Bulls he wanted to win Rookie of the Year. And it wasn't just about adding to the collection in his trophy case.



Best Bet

NBA Playoffs, Suns vs. Lakers
7:30 p.m., TNT

Sports

Wednesday

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Oregon Daily
Emerald

Twilight hazy for Johnson, Fein

Nat Johnson and Steve Fein still have time to get NCAA marks; and Oregon is already hot on the recruiting trail

By Robbie McCallum and Scott Pesznecker
Oregon Daily Emerald

Nat Johnson sprinted down the runway, hitting his steps and taking off just before his toes crossed the board. His 6-foot, 4-inch frame flew through the air, and when he landed, he'd flown farther than he had in a long time.

That's how Johnson's season shaped up to be in the early going, with a leap of 23-8 3/4 that was rivaled only in his 1998 season.

Throughout his Oregon career, the senior has been a dependable Pacific-10 Conference scorer. Now, nearing the end of his collegiate tenure, he still is.

Yet this season could have been — and still could be — more for Johnson. He still has Saturday's Oregon Twilight and next weekend's Pac-10 Championships to notch an NCAA mark in the long jump or triple jump.



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Steve Fein finished second in the Washington Dual but picked up a Pac-10 mark in the race (3:49.57).
Azle Malinao-Alvarez Emerald

Raising mound won't stop home runs

Changing the mounds is not the answer to the overpopulation of home runs; it's expansion and young pitching

By Matt O'Neill
Oregon Daily Emerald

Some people say there is too much of a good thing in major league baseball these days — home runs.

The home run race in the summer of 1998 was fun. McGwire and Sosa going down the wire trading homers brought baseball back into the hearts and minds of millions of Americans.

But now the long ball barrage has gotten out of control.

When utility infielders and career .220 hitters are knocking the ball out at record pace, there needs to be something done.

One proposed remedy is to raise the pitching mound from 10 inches to 14 inches high. As a result, the outcome will hopefully give the pitchers an added advantage they haven't experienced since the 1968 season when Bob Gibson had a league-leading earned run average of 1.12.

In 1969, when the mound was lowered to 10 inches to where it stands today, Gibson's ERA went up a whole run to 2.18, and that's when there were only 20 teams as opposed to 32 now.

The changing of the mound is not the answer because it will be only a temporary fix.

Right now, baseball is in the middle of yet another home run boom. At the current pace, 2.6 per game, last season's record for home runs in a season (5,528) will be easily surpassed.

That mark was set by an average of 2.3 homers per game.

Something definitely needs to be done because the home run does not mean as much as it did 10 years ago. There are only two pitchers who have a fighting chance to have good numbers year in and year out. Unfortunately, Randy Johnson and Pedro Martinez can only pitch every five days.

Martinez has been one of the most

dominating — if not the most dominating — pitchers in recent times. When he doesn't throw for the Boston Red Sox, the team is a very pedestrian 12-10, as opposed to 5-1 when he is on the mound.

As for Johnson, he is only one of three pitchers to be 6-0 in the month of April. He has also won every regular season start since Aug. 31, 1999.

Other than those two, pitching is pretty thin around the league. The defending World Champion New York Yankees, which has two former Cy Young Award winners on its staff, has a team ERA of 4.00.

While the Atlanta Braves, the National League's World Series representative, has a team ERA of 3.27.

Even Greg Maddux, who in his most dominating Cy Young days had an ERA under 1.70 in two consecutive seasons — 1.56 in 1994 and 1.63 in 95 — boasts an inflated average of 2.98 this season.

The main culprit of these bloated numbers can more closely be attributed to the expansion of the 1990s and not the height of the pitching mounds.

Yes, raising the mounds may give the pitchers an added advantage, but the fact that 18, 19 and 20-year-old kids are being rushed to the big leagues years before they are ready will ultimately negate any edge the raised mound could offer.

Major League hitters like Tony Gwynn, Ken Griffey Jr. and Barry Bonds will always be able to get to

and exploit the holes in a young pitcher's arsenal. These players have been in the league for a number of years and have consistently produced against some of the best pitchers, so there is reason to believe that they will destroy some Joe Rook's 92 mile-per-hour fast ball at the belt.

Some of the best hurlers appear almost human compared to their previous performances. Maddux is on one of the best teams in the league, and he hasn't been the dominating force he once was.

Not only is it youth that is helping with the power going around the league, it is the fact that the new parks are being built to cater to the long ball. Enron Field has already yielded 24 homers in 13 games while it took the Astrodome 18 games (until May 11) to allow that many.

In San Francisco, the Giants built their park to play into Bonds' hands. The right-field porch is only a short 309 feet away, and McCovey Cove and the San Francisco bay is only a little beyond that. Bonds has already sent one into the water and hit a total six round trippers at home.

The only one of the three new parks that is not built for home runs is Comerica Park in Detroit. The Tiger pitchers have a huge outfield to play with and are not afraid to throw a curve or a change-up when they are behind in the count.

In the future, Detroit may get all the top free-agent pitchers to sign with them, but Comerica may scare off a lot of big hitters, even Tiger slugger Juan Gonzalez is hedging on signing a long-term deal because of the ball park.

But that is the exception and not the rule. So at least in the foreseeable future the balls will keep flying, and records will continue to be broken.

Even the height of the mound will not change that.



Matt O'Neill