

Curing big-time blues with baseball's bombers

Welcome to the bottom of the barrel. If you're a sports fan, you've hit the low point of the year. Wimbledon is over. The U.S. Open of golf is over. The NBA and NHL playoffs are ancient history.



Peter Hockaday
Two minutes for cross-checking

NFL trades are looking pretty interesting, even if they include guys named Michael Bates. The Tour de France actually stays on the television for a while, because nobody wants to risk changing the channel. There might be Atlanta baseball on TBS.

Stock-car racing is the top story on Sportscenter.

Yes, sports fans, you are at ground zero. There is nowhere to go but up.

And yet ... I can hear something in the distance. A faint "crack" sound.

It's nothing. That must be the sound of Aaron Sele breaking a bat over the head of American League All-Star manager Joe Torre, because Torre chose Andy Pettite over Sele to go to the game.

But there it is again, a little louder this time.

"Crack!"

Come on, I'm hallucinating here, right? That's just the sound of a Jackie Stiles three-pointer sizzling through the Rose Garden net in a WNBA matchup between the Portland Fire and the Los Angeles Sparks, right?

"CRACK!"

A little bit louder now. A little bit louder now. C'mon and shout with me now! It's the sound of a Home Run Derby baseball being cracked — I mean jacked — out of Seattle's Safeco Field by Sammy Sosa!

"CRACK!"

There's a shot by Barry Bonds. My oh my, that ball hit the Space Needle!

Luis Gonzalez steps up to the plate ... he strokes it ... and that ball ... will ... fly ... away! Gonzalez will ... win ... the ... contest!

Just when you thought the summer sports blues had set in, Major League Baseball went and picked you up, literally, from your seat.

There goes a shot by Alex Rodriguez ... oh, it falls just short of the wall. Well, with the wind from all those Seattle fans booing their former star, I'm surprised it got that far. Actually, A-Rod flopped in the contest after his first warm reception at Safeco Field all year. He must have been caught by surprise.

Ahhh, the Home Run Derby. It's the contest all Little League players dream of. Heck, even Mark McGwire dreams of it.

"Crack!"

There's a shot from Bret Boone, and that ball has a lot of ... hold on, Bret Boone? This year's wild card, hometown favorite and little-red-engine-that-could all wrapped up into one, Boonie didn't make a very big impression on the Home Run Derby, hitting only three bombs. Hey, Luis, can you say 63-24? Bret Boone and the Mariners can.

Oh, and Boonie also beat A-Rod by one home run. Small victories are important, too, Luis.

On another note, it's too bad first-round homers don't hold up for later rounds, because Jason Giambi would have beaten the pants off his competition after 14 homers in the first round.

"Crack, crack, crack, crack, etc.!"

That's what Giambi's first round sounded like. The man hit six home runs in a row at one point. Eventual winner Gonzalez hit six home runs in the third round and never even thought about 14.

But hey, good for Gonzo. The Diamondbacks' star has been flailing in Barry Bonds' home run shadow all season. Way to go Gonzo! The Home Run Derby means ... absolutely ... nothing.

That, of course, is the beauty of the Home Run Derby. It means nothing, just like the All-Star Game itself. But it provides something for journalists to gripe about, just like the All-Star voting.

Plus, the "cracks" of those bats are enough to cure those mid-summer blues. They should be just enough to hold you over until preseason NFL starts, anyway.

Peter Hockaday is the sports editor for the Emerald. He can be reached at phockaday@yahoo.com.

Canada honors Duck coach

Bev Smith adds an honor and a pair of assistant coaches to her growing Oregon list

By Peter Hockaday
Oregon Daily Emerald

Bev Smith seems to be doing everything alone these days.

The former Oregon basketball star recently took over as the head women's basketball coach at her alma mater, a very lonely position in itself.

Then, last week, Smith was named as the only 2001 inductee into the Canadian Basketball Hall of Fame, announced by Canada Basketball and the Naismith Foundation. The honor came after Smith led the Canadian national team for three years before taking over as the Oregon coach.

"It's a very prestigious honor," Smith said in a release.

Smith, Oregon's career leader in rebounds, assists and steals, also helped Canadian national basketball as a player. The Salmon Arm, British Columbia, native was called

Canada's "Larry Bird" by former Canadian national coach Don McCrae.

"She was able to do all things on the court," McCrae said. "If there were extended statistics kept, Bev would have been in the top three in all categories."

As a player, Smith led Canada to a fourth-place finish at the Olympics in 1984. As a coach, Smith led the team to a 10th-place showing at the Olympics in 2000, as well as a silver medal at the Pan Am Games in 1999.

Smith has also had coaching and playing stints in Italy and British Columbia. Her longest job so far has been with the Canadian national team.

"It feels like I've been selected to another team," Smith said. "There are a lot of important and historic people in the Hall of Fame who have made a big difference in Canada basketball."

Among the notable feats which led to her election, Smith is second all-time in Oregon scoring and the only Duck female athlete to be

named a first-team All-American. She was the Northwest Basketball League player of the year three times and still holds eight Oregon records.

The cherry on top

After she shut the door on Canadian basketball with her induction to the Hall of Fame, Smith finished her preparations for the start of her Oregon coaching career by naming her final two assistants.

Smith appointed Allison and Mike McNeill, a husband and wife team, to her remaining coaching vacancies. The McNeills will join Dan Muscatell, an assistant under former coach Jody Runge, on the bench with Smith.

Both McNeills come from the same background as Smith. Allison, also a Salmon Arm native, was an Oregon player at the same time as Smith, and a coach at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia.

The McNeills bring 36 years of coaching experience to the Oregon bench.

Wild card Ivanisevic wins Wimbledon

WIMBLEDON, England — During the final game, Goran Ivanisevic began to cry, his fragile psyche frayed by three hours of tense tennis and a decade of heart-wrenching frustration at Wimbledon.

He kissed the ball. He crossed himself. He violently shook his left arm, trying to relax. But twice he double-faulted one point from victory, too nervous to put his serve in play.

As Ivanisevic's duel with Pat Rafter reached its climax, each point brought yet another deafening roar from the most boisterous crowd to attend a Wimbledon final. Finally, on the fourth championship point, Ivanisevic slapped a service winner and the title was his.

The popular Croat fell in a heap in disbelief and rolled over, his face buried in the Centre Court lawn that had bedeviled him for so long. In a match likely to rank with the most memorable in Grand Slam history, three-time runner-up Ivanisevic finally won Wimbledon on Monday, outlasting Rafter 6-3, 3-6, 6-3, 2-6, 9-7.

"I think I'm dreaming," said Ivanisevic, 29. "Somebody is going to wake me up and tell me, 'Man,

you didn't win.'"

With seven-time champion Pete Sampras sidelined by a fourth-round upset, Ivanisevic emerged as an improbable successor. The tournament was his 48th major event, the most ever for a first-time Grand Slam champion, and he became the first wild card to win a major men's title.

"This is what I was waiting all my life," he said.

Ivanisevic speaks in amusingly mangled English, his head-spinning self-analysis and rich baritone enhancing the comedic effect. But there was nothing funny about his defeats in the 1992, 1994 and 1998 finals.

Hampered by a sore shoulder that will require surgery at the end of the year, he came to this year's tournament with his career in an 18-month freefall. He needed a wild-card invitation because his ranking had tumbled to 125th.

But his big serve blossoms on grass, his favorite surface. He won Wimbledon on his 14th try, and he did it before a crowd of 13,370 that rocked the cathedral of tennis.

Because rain washed out most of Saturday's schedule, the men's final began on a Monday for the first

time since 1922.

Finals are typically sold out in advance, but 10,000 tickets went on sale 2 1/2 hours before the match.

As the result, the stands were filled with a younger, noisier crowd than usual, with many fans likely attending Wimbledon for the first time. They sang, chanted, cheered double-faults and turned Centre Court into a kaleidoscope of flags, inflated kangaroos, face paint and clown hats.

For once, the only suits were in the royal box.

"I don't know if Wimbledon has seen anything like it," Rafter said. "I don't know if they will again. It was electric."

"So many Australian fans and Croatians, like a football match," Ivanisevic said. "The crowd was just too good."

The atmosphere was similar when rain forced Wimbledon to play on the middle Sunday in 1991 and 1997, but the staid tournament had never staged a final like this.

Support for the two players was even, just like the match. They played the longest fifth set of any final, dating back to 1877.

The Associated Press

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