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Tuesday, July 27, 2004

ALEX TAM
HOLDING COURT

Strange but good week in sports

Just some thoughts about what's going on in sports globally, nationally and locally:

- Whether bicyclist Lance Armstrong is one of the world's greatest athletes is unquestionable after he won his sixth straight Tour De France title on Sunday. Armstrong's streak should be considered among the greatest achievements in sports history.

Armstrong, 32, has encountered and overcome so many obstacles in his life. In 1996, doctors revealed that Armstrong had advanced testicular cancer, which spread to his brain and lungs. He returned just three years later to miraculously capture the first of his six Tour De France titles.

This year, he battled accusations of using performance-enhancing drugs. Armstrong disproved those notions by showing he never failed a drug test. And along the 23-day, 2,106-mile Tour De France race, Armstrong encountered spectators by the bike path spitting in his direction.

Now, just being the best in an athlete's own sport is hard enough. But facing a potentially life-taking battle, false accusations and adversaries who spew saliva simply enhances his reputation as one of the toughest, most strong-willed athletes in history.

For anyone who believes cycling is not a sport, try pedaling through a country for nearly a month, faster than all the top cyclists in the world. Cycling is one of the truest tests of endurance in all of sports.

Name for me one other athlete in the past 20 years who's faced as much scrutiny and hardship as Armstrong and succeeded as much as he has.

- Despite the Eugene Emeralds holding the worst record in the Northwest League, thumbs up to baseball fans around Lane County who continue to show up and support the Class A team.

Through this past week, the Emeralds have the league's second-highest attendance, averaging more than 3,300 spectators per game.

Although it has been a frustrating year offensively — the team is ranked last in the league in batting average — the fans still appreciate good, hard baseball and know the players are trying their best.

- Saturday's New York Yankees and Boston Red Sox baseball game further showed how huge the rivalry is between the two enemies. No matter by how many games New York leads Boston in the standings (7 1/2 through Sunday), the contests are always heated.

Saturday was no different and had practically everything a baseball game could have. Drama, suspense and fighting, what more could one ask for?

A brawl in the third inning led to the ejection of several players, including New York's \$20 million-per-year third baseman Alex Rodriguez.

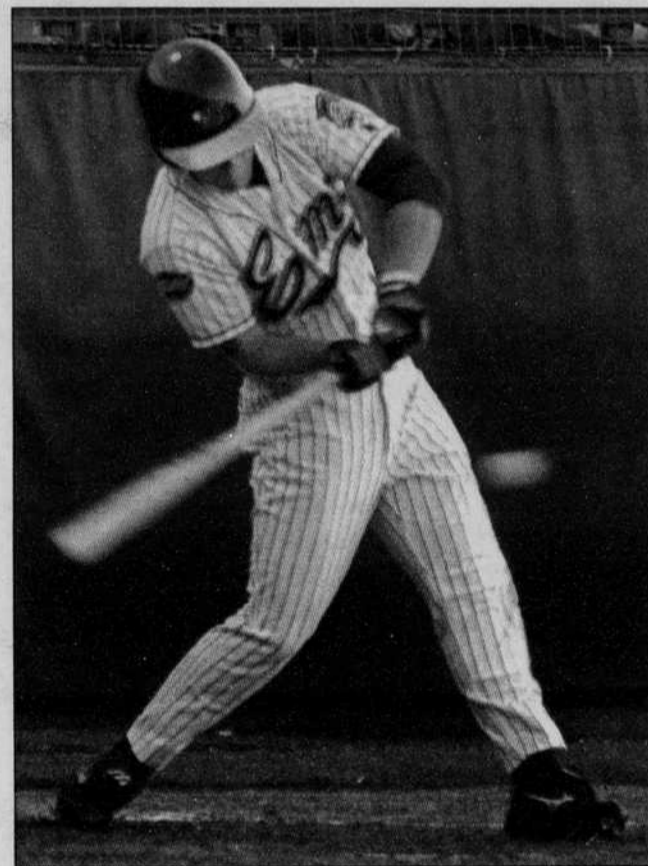
Boston committed four errors, prompting announcers to compare the quality of

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Eugene shortstop Sean Kazmar (3, left) and center fielder Matt Thayer (1, right) were driven in by a home run by Lachlan Dale (10, center) in Eugene's only win during this past week's six-game series with the first-place Everett Aqua Sox. The three players combined for seven hits and eight runs scored in the 16-3 victory this past Wednesday.

Tim Bobosky
Freelance Photographer



Tim Bobosky Freelance Photographer

Eugene third baseman Lachlan Dale blasts his 10th home run of the season during the Emeralds' 16-3 win this past Wednesday. Catcher Colt Morton matched Dale four innings later with his 10th home run.

Eugene Emeralds fall in ninth inning

The Emeralds extend their losing streak to six games, the longest this season

ALEX TAM
SPORTS EDITOR

A brief glimmer of the offense's potential was put on display by the Eugene Emeralds.

However, that short-lived hope lasted just one game this past week.

Eugene (13-25 overall) sits last in the West Division of the Northwest League and also holds the league's worst record. The Emeralds lost Monday night to Yakima 6-5 to continue their five-game losing streak, which is the longest of the season. Eugene has lost the first three games of the five-game series against Yakima.

Their most recent victory came on Wednesday when the Emeralds drubbed first-place Everett Aqua Sox 16-3 at home in front of a crowd of 3,692 at Civic Stadium.

The total runs scored matched the highest offensive output of the season when Eugene defeated Boise 16-1 on July

9. Unfortunately, after that game, a similar trend occurred as the Emeralds lost their next three games and five of their subsequent six games.

"I think it's just not enough faith in our pitchers and the pitchers don't have faith in our hitters," Eugene's designated hitter Tom Vincent said. "Some days we hit and don't pitch and vice versa, but we just have to take it from here."

Vincent has been a part of the offensive struggles thus far for the Emeralds. The Australian native, who is batting .100 with three home runs and nine RBIs in 22 games, though, played a big role in the 16-run onslaught that occurred Wednesday.

For the first time ever in his career, Vincent slugged a grand slam as part of a seven-run eighth inning. Eugene combined for 11 runs in the seventh and eighth innings of that game, while sending a total of 18 batters to the plate.

Vincent, who has admitted to struggling with his hitting so far, said it was a relief to finally produce on offense after striking out three consecutive times that game.

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Hayward plays host to Junior Olympics

Standout young athletes descend on the University for six days of track and field competition

ALEX TAM
SPORTS EDITOR

Young athletes from all over the country are gathering for the largest track and field event in Eugene's history.

A total of 5,657 athletes ranging from eight to 18 years old will compete at the 2004 USA Junior Olympic Track & Field Championships at Hayward Field beginning today. More than 7,500 events will take place over six days of competition, which end Sunday.

The athletes qualified for the meet after

finishing in the top three in each of their respective Regional Championships. There were 16 Regional Championships spanning around the country from Oregon to New England to Florida.

"This is the first time (the Junior Olympics) has ever been held in Eugene, or Oregon for that matter," co-Event Director Tom Jordan said. "We have had the Olympic Trials, USA Championships and NCAA Championships, so this is the last major event that we have never hosted before."

Eugene was selected to host the meet after beating out three other cities in 2001 at the USA Track & Field Convention in Mobile, Ala., said Jordan. The co-hosts of the event, the Oregon Track Club and Track City Track Club, along with representatives from Lane County and the Convention & Visitors Association, made their

pitch at the convention and brought the meet to "Tracktown, USA."

"Eugene has a reputation as a very supportive town for track and field," Jordan said. "This is an opportunity to show 5,657 young athletes — most of whom have never been to the Northwest — how supportive we can be." Today's first day of competition will kick off with the heptathlon at 8 a.m., while the day ends with the 1,500 meter race walk.

Two of those athletes, who will compete in the race walk events, traveled over 3,000 miles to compete at the Junior Olympics. Maine natives Lauren Forgues, 16, and Matthew Forgues, 12, are siblings and have competed in multiple Junior Olympics. This is Lauren's second entrance, and Matthew's third.

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