

SPORTS

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New Oregon coach tips his helmet to Harbaugh

By ANNE M. PETERSON
 Associated Press

Willie Taggart credits Michigan coach Jim Harbaugh for putting him on the path that brought him to Oregon. Taggart was introduced as the Ducks' coach Thursday following a 4-8 season and the dismissal of coach Mark Helfrich.

In 1994, Taggart was recruited to play at Western Kentucky by Harbaugh, who was then an unpaid assistant under his father, longtime Hilltoppers coach Jack Harbaugh.

Jim Harbaugh remained a constant in his life. He hired Taggart as his running backs coach at Stanford and was the best man at Taggart's wedding.

"Ever since I met Jim Harbaugh, my life has gone nowhere but up," he said.

Taggart's last two head coaching jobs have been rebuilding projects. He has been coach at USF for the past four seasons, guiding the team from a 2-10 record his first year to a 10-2 mark this year and a spot in the Birmingham Bowl.

Before he arrived in Tampa he spent three seasons at his alma mater, Western Kentucky, inheriting a winless program that he turned around with back-to-back winning seasons.

Taggart, 40, is the first coach Oregon has hired from outside the school since 1976. The Ducks' previous three coaches — Mike Bellotti, Chip Kelly and Helfrich — were assistants who were promoted.

"Good coaches fit just about anywhere and Willie has proven that the past couple of years," Stanford coach David Shaw said.

Harbaugh said on Twitter: "From the newest Duck fan, Congrats to @CoachTaggart & The U of Oregon! From Manatee to Eugene, I've always been your fan! Happy for you!"

Taggart was 16-20 at Western Kentucky, becoming coach when it was first transitioning to FBS. He went 7-5 in his last two seasons with the Hilltoppers and then moved to USF, not far from where he grew up in Bradenton, Florida.

It took two seasons and a change in offensive philosophy from more pro-style, West Coast schemes to a spread, but he now has the 25th-ranked Bulls rolling.



Chris Pietsch/The Register-Guard

New Oregon football coach Willie Taggart jokes with the audience during an introductory press conference in Eugene on Thursday.

SPORTS IN BRIEF

New report has more details on Russian doping

Associated Press

LONDON — A new report into systematic Russian doping details a wide-ranging "institutional conspiracy" that involved more than 1,000 athletes across more than 30 sports, including evidence corroborating large-scale sample swapping at the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics.

World Anti-Doping Agency investigator Richard McLaren said Friday the conspiracy involved the Russian Sports Ministry, national anti-doping agency and the FSB intelligence service, providing further details of state involvement in a massive program of cheating and cover-ups that ran on an "unprecedented scale" from 2011-15.

"It is impossible to know just how deep and how far back this conspiracy goes," McLaren said at a news conference in London. "For years, international sports competitions have unknowingly been hijacked by Russians. Coaches and athletes have been playing on an uneven field. Sports fans and spectators have been deceived. It's time that this stops."

McLaren said his conclusions were based on irrefutable forensic evidence, including DNA analysis proving that samples were swapped and other tests showing that doping bottles were opened.

The Canadian law professor's investigation found that 15 Russian medalists in Sochi had their doping bottles tampered with, including two athletes who won four gold medals. No names were given.

NFL to play 4 more in London

Associated Press

LONDON — The NFL will stage four regular-season games in London next year.

Teams and venues for the four games will be announced on Tuesday.

The NFL started playing regular-season games in London in 2007, and has recently played three games per season in the British capital. The league has never before played four games in one season in London.

Most of the games have been played at Wembley Stadium, but one was played at Twickenham this season.

SCOREBOARD

PREP SCHEDULE

TODAY

Girls Basketball — Astoria at R.A. Long, 7 p.m.; Warrenton at Neah-Kah-Nie, 6 p.m.

Boys Basketball — R.A. Long at Astoria, 7 p.m.; Seaside at Corbett, 7 p.m.; Warrenton at Neah-Kah-Nie, 8 p.m.

SATURDAY

Girls Basketball — Astoria at Ilwaco, 5:45 p.m.; Knappa at Delphian, TBA; Warrenton JV2 at Jewell, 11 a.m.

Boys Basketball — Sandy at Astoria, 7 p.m.; Knappa at Delphian, 4 p.m.; Melbourne Magic at Jewell, 1 p.m.; Willapa Valley at Ilwaco, 7:30 p.m.

Swimming — Andrew Nygaard Invitational, Astoria Aquatic Center, 10:15 a.m.

Wrestling — Warrenton Tournament, 10 a.m.

'It's a tough call. I think at that point of the game, there are some calls you make, and there are some you just play basketball.'

DAMIAN LILLARD | Blazers point guard, on foul call against him



Associated Press

Trail Blazers guard Damian Lillard shoots against the Grizzlies in the first half Thursday in Memphis, Tenn. Lillard had 19 points.

Last-second call, game goes against Trail Blazers

By CLAY BAILEY
 Associated Press

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — Longtime Memphis Grizzly Marc Gasol carried the team throughout the game. The team's newest member closed out an unexpected win.

Gasol scored 36 points, but it was a pair of free throws by reserve guard Toney Douglas with less a second left that closed out Memphis' 88-86 comeback victory over the Portland Trail Blazers on Thursday night.

"We gave them everything we could. We just threw the kitchen sink at them," said Memphis coach David Fizdale, who watched his team overcome an 11-point deficit in the final 5 minutes. "I don't know if we got lucky or what."

Douglas' last-second free throws gave him 11 points, including the game's final six to

UP NEXT: BLAZERS

- Portland Trail Blazers (12-12)
- Indiana Pacers (11-11)
- Saturday, 4 p.m. TV: CSNW

seal Memphis' fifth consecutive victory. The Grizzlies have won 12 straight that either went to overtime or were decided by five points or less.

"I wish I could tell you," Gasol said when asked about Memphis' ability to pull out close games. "We just keep fighting. You've seen it in many games now where we just don't let go of the rope."

Gasol was 13 of 24 from the field, including 4 of 6 from outside the arc. But Douglas, signed by Memphis this week because of injuries, took over down the stretch. The guard scored on a 19-footer with 34 seconds

left, then converted two pairs of free throws in the last 20 seconds.

CJ McCollum led the Trail Blazers with 24 points, and Damian Lillard had 19. Evan Turner had 15 points and 10 rebounds.

Portland held a 79-68 lead after Al-Farouq Aminu scored inside with 5:28 left. But Memphis clicked off a 14-2 rally, Gasol collecting nine points in the stretch capped by a 30-footer from Troy Daniels with 1:35 remaining.

The game settled into a one-possession contest at that point, including four ties. Portland center Mason Plumlee split a pair of free throws with 7 seconds left, and the Grizzlies pushed the ball down court. Douglas' pump fake drew a foul from Lillard with a half-second remaining.

"It's a tough call," Lillard said. "I think at that point of the game, there are some calls you make, and there are some you just play basketball. You can't be as technical about it."

Down the stretch they come in NFL season

By BARRY WILNER
 Associated Press

And down the stretch they come.

The Cowboys already are in the playoffs. The Patriots and Seahawks almost certainly will qualify soon, too. Believe it or not, Raiders fans, your team is about to end its 13-season drought.

As for the rest, well, the scramble is on. Here's what's ahead in the frantic final four weeks of an already unpredictable season:

AFC

It would seem that the wild cards will come out of the West, by far the best division in football. Whether it's Denver, Kansas City or Oakland, those teams will provide quite a test for the North or South winner in the first round of the postseason.

Whoever wins the West almost certainly will have a first-round bye,

too. After the Chiefs' win Thursday night and their sweep of Oakland — plus a win over Denver in their pocket — they hold most of the cards in the division.

Defending Super Bowl champ Denver (8-4) has the toughest road with games against Tennessee, New England, Kansas City and Oakland.

The other bye figures to go to the Patriots — no surprise there. It would be the seventh straight year New England was off for the first weekend of the playoffs.

The other two divisions are murky, with the South a tossup.

Houston has led the division all season, but is in the midst of a major swoon, its offense unreliable, its defense banged-up. Indianapolis has Andrew Luck back, and he could be a difference maker, but losing its best defender, linebacker D'Qwell Jackson to a four-game suspension, is damaging to a mediocre unit.

Tennessee, a team to watch out for in 2017, must play Denver and Kansas City before finishing with the Jaguars and Texans.

NFC

Dallas has so separated itself from the rest of the conference that not only can it secure the East title with a win at the Giants on Sunday night, it also can nail down home-field advantage throughout the playoffs if Detroit and Seattle lose.

Let's pencil in the Cowboys as the top seed, then sit back and watch an intriguing race for the other bye between the Seahawks and Lions.

Detroit (8-4) almost is as much a surprise as Dallas, but it hasn't yet convinced folks it will win the North. Its final three games are at the Giants and Cowboys, then hosting the Packers (6-6) on New Year's Day. Green Bay won the first meeting, and Aaron Rodgers has been playing lights-out.

But give Detroit its due: No team has been more impressive in close games, Matthew Stafford is having his best season, and its plus-6 turnover margin is among the NFL leaders.

The Packers, who must navigate through three divisional games to finish the schedule after hosting Seattle on Sunday, look more like a wild-card chaser.

Seattle (8-3-1) might have the league's most talented roster when everyone is healthy. That's hardly the case now, and losing perennial All-Pro safety Earl Thomas for the rest of the season is damaging.

The good news for the Seahawks is their offense, while streaky, has playmakers such as Russell Wilson — also in the midst of an MVP-caliber year — Jimmy Graham and Doug Baldwin, plus, at last, a threat at running back with Thomas Rawls' return to the lineup.