

SPORTS BRIEFS

BASEBALL

Reds place Larkin on DL; activate Smiley

Cincinnati Reds shortstop Barry Larkin, the 1995 National League Most Valuable Player, was placed on the 15-day disabled list Tuesday with a strained left calf, which he suffered in the second inning of Monday's 4-1 interleague win over the Cleveland Indians. Larkin, who has battled a heel injury since spring training, was injured while running out a double. He left immediately and was taken for an MRI following the contest. He is expected to be out of action for two to six weeks.

Vaughn to undergo knee surgery

Boston Red Sox first baseman Mo Vaughn, the 1995 American League Most Valuable Player, will undergo arthroscopic surgery on his ailing left knee Tuesday and will miss two to six weeks. Vaughn was examined Monday by team physician Dr. Arthur Pappas, who determined surgery was needed to repair torn cartilage. Vaughn's knee locked up on him in Wednesday's 10-1 rout of Baltimore. He was able to return to the lineup, but the knee locked up on him again after he slid into home plate in the third inning of Sunday night's 10-1 romp over the New York Mets.

HOCKEY

NHL to pick Nashville, Atlanta, St. Paul, Columbus

Nashville, Tennessee, Atlanta, St. Paul, Minnesota, and Columbus, Ohio reportedly have been selected as the National Hockey League's next four expansion franchises. The Sports Network of Canada and CNN/SI are reporting that the Nashville franchise will begin play in the 1998-99 season, followed by Atlanta in 1999-2000 and St. Paul and Columbus in 2000-2001. National Hockey League officials will make their recommendations Tuesday.

Red Wings' Konstantinov unconscious

Detroit Red Wings defenseman Vladimir Konstantinov remains unconscious and in critical condition Tuesday at Beaumont Hospital in Birmingham, Michigan, but has made small steps of progress. According to a hospital spokesperson, Konstantinov has been able to make "reflex movements". His eyes were responsive to shined light, considered a positive sign by doctors. The staff has been testing Konstantinov's reflexes with monitors.

TENNIS

Wimbledon Champions gear up

It will not be an easy road for top seed Martina Hingis of Switzerland as the draw for next week's Wimbledon Tennis Championships, the third Grand Slam tournament of the season, was announced Tuesday in London. On the men's side, top seed and three-time champion Pete Sampras of the United States takes on Sweden's Mikael Tillstrom in the opening round.

Top seed Michael Chang of the United States hopes to get back on the winning track as the top seed at the \$475,000 Heineken Trophy in Rosmalen, the Netherlands.

Defending champion Anke Huber of Germany gears up for next week's Wimbledon Championships as the top seed at the \$164,250 Wilkinson Lady Championships in Rosmalen, The Netherlands. Huber, ranked eighth in the world, captured her first-ever grass-court title here last year.

SPORTS

WOODS DOMINATION WAVERS

There are a lot of reasons why it will be difficult for Tiger Woods to simply overwhelm the competition - and Ernie Els is one of them.

The sweet-swinging South African proved once again on Sunday he has the game and the mental makeup to be a major championship winner several times over.

The U.S. Open started last week at Congressional Country Club with talk of a Woods Grand Slam and it ended with new appreciation for Els and even greater respect for the special demands of the Open. Els had the patience, precision and putting to win on a course set up to meet the difficult standards of the U.S. Golf Association. Woods lacked all three.

By winning his second U.S. Open at only 27 years of age, Els joins a select group. In the 97 Opens there are now only five players who have won more than Els.

In fact, Els' performance in major championships proves he has the kind of game that holds up under the most intense pressure. He has now finished in the top 10 nine times in Grand Slam events and has been in the top 20 a dozen times in the 20 majors he had played in his career.

In fact, statistics showed that each ball hit into the rough at this U.S. Open cost players a half-stroke.

"I've been playing a lot of majors in the last four or five years and I think with experience you become a little bit more calm," Els said. "You have to be calm to win major tournaments."

"I will tell you this," said Woods, who finished 10 strokes behind Els. "I did make some mental mistakes out there that I will rectify so I'll never make them again."

Both players will contend again in a major.

BULL'S DYNASTY STRUGGLES TO STAY ON TOP

Weaknesses are always more interesting than strengths, especially in a champion.

So while this fifth title run might have been the Chicago Bulls' least dominating, it was without doubt their most compelling. Every game in the Finals but one was close.

Taken together, they revealed a dynasty moving inexorably closer to its end than its beginning.

"This was a sober one," Chicago coach Phil Jackson said, "because we had to struggle for it."

And a more memorable one than those that went before it - for that very same reason.

Last season, when the Bulls won a record 72 regular-season games and dispatched the Seattle SuperSonics in a six-game Finals series, there was still lingering debate about whether Chicago should be ranked among the greatest teams

of all time.

This season, 69 wins in the regular season and a fifth title in seven years would seem only to solidify the claim. At a minimum, anyway, the Bulls can call themselves the second-greatest team in NBA history, behind only the Boston Celtics of the late '50s and '60s, who won 10 championships in 11 years.

But nobody was talking about that after the Bulls beat Utah 90-86 in Game 6 of the Finals. Their playoff run began with a sweep of Washington and consecutive five-and-out dismissals of Atlanta and Miami. But they looked old and vulnerable along the way. Too tired, in fact, to deny that their offense was faltering, that their joints were aching and that finding the resolve to finish it out was going to be very, very difficult.

"This was a grind," Steve Kerr concurred, "but that makes this one

much better."

That would be the same Kerr, of course, who hit what proved to be the decisive shot. It was a straightaway 14-foot jumper made possible when the Jazz defense doubled on Michael Jordan. Up to that point, Kerr was a brutal eight of 24 from the field in the series, including a miss at the end of Game 4 that might have cost Chicago a chance to win that game.

In a roundabout way, that miss might also have been behind Jordan's otherworldly performance in Game 5. He was certain that the only person whose commitment to winning hadn't wavered was his own. So, even though he was dizzy, dehydrated and disoriented at moments, he kept calling his own number - and delivering.

But even Jordan recognized he couldn't shoulder the burden every minute, game after game.

JONES PREVAILS

Suddenly America again has a world-class athlete who excels in the sprints and long jump. But don't call Marion Jones the female Carl Lewis.

The 21-year-old Jones quickly deflected that moniker Sunday after winning the women's long jump to complete a 100-meter/long jump golden double at the U.S. track and field championships this week - a performance that produced the year's leading result in both events.

"It's a great comparison, but my name is Marion Jones, not Carl Lewis," she said. "I'm a different type competitor."

Basketball and track and field have been her avenues to success, just like the woman she defeated Sunday, her idol Jackie Joyner-Kersey.

Both played basketball in college, and now as the 35-year-old Joyner-Kersey nears the end of her illustrious career, Jones appears destined to take her place.

"Her presence only makes the rest of us better," said Jones.

"I've always admired her, even when she was in high school," Joyner-Kersey said of Jones, who overtook her to claim the U.S. long jump crown Sunday.

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