

SPORTS BRIEFS

SPORTS

Spurs-Trail Blazers Preview

Charismatic Wins Kentucky Derby

Steelers, Stewart Reach Contract Agreement

PITTSBURGH (AP) — Some teams would want a new quarterback after the season Kordell Stewart had in 1998. The Pittsburgh Steelers aren't one of them.

Despite watching Stewart's production drop precipitously as they went 7-9 last season, the Steelers apparently have worked out the details of an extension that will run at least three more seasons.

Stewart already is set to make \$2.05 million this season and \$2.5 million in 2000, though his base salary could drop next year to reflect a signing bonus of about \$10 million.

The Steelers did not confirm Friday that a deal has been reached, although the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette reported that terms already have been filed with NFL offices in New York. The contract will not be signed until Stewart's agent, Leigh Steinberg, returns from a European vacation in about 10 days.

Stewart said several days ago that a new contract was imminent.

Coach Bill Cowher and Steelers president Dan Rooney both said recently they wanted to reaffirm their commitment to Stewart, who led them to the AFC championship game in his first year as a starting quarterback in 1997.

Stewart was buoyed during the offseason when he learned of the strong support offered by Cowher and Rooney.

"I didn't play well, but Mr. Rooney is stepping up and saying this is the guy we'd like to have, and Coach Cowher and (director of football operations) Tom Donahoe and everybody else, they want me to be here and they have all the confidence in the world in me."

Venus Williams Tops Pierce in Final of Hamburg Tennis

HAMBURG, Germany (Ticker) — After winning hardcourt titles in consecutive events earlier this year, American Venus Williams added a claycourt victory to her resume with an easy triumph over Mary Pierce of France at the \$520,000 Betty Barclay Cup.

Williams, seeded second, won the first set at love en route to a 6-0, 6-3, 63-minute triumph over the fourth-seeded Pierce, who underwent treatment for back pain while trailing 5-0 in the first set.

"I am really excited to win here in Hamburg," Williams said. "I think I definitely played one of my best ever matches out there today. I actually like playing on red clay better than green American clay because you can take a lot of balls in the air."

The 18-year-old Williams won at Oklahoma City in late February and knocked off sister Serena in the finals of the Lipton Championships in March. But she was knocked out in the second round of her claycourt season debut at Amelia Island, Florida three weeks ago.

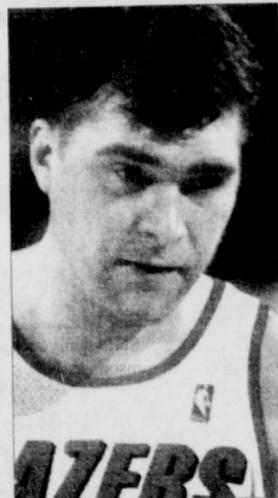
"It's so difficult to play your game against Venus because she hits so hard and you are always on the defensive," says Pierce. "She made very little unforced errors today and I thought she played very well."

The two finalists split four meetings last year, including a fourth-round win by Williams at the U.S. Open.

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The calendar might read early May, but the result of Tuesday's game between the San Antonio Spurs and Portland Trail Blazers could resound through June.

The Spurs will visit the Rose Gar-



Arvydas Sabonis

den with the two clubs in the midst of a tight battle with each other and the Utah Jazz for the best record in the NBA and homecourt advantage throughout the playoffs.

While the Blazers dominated the league for most of the regular season, San Antonio continues to peak at just the right time. After defeating Portland on Saturday, the Spurs capped the weekend with a win over Utah on Sunday.

Now, San Antonio has put itself in position to control its own destiny. By winning its final two games, the Spurs will have homecourt advantage as far as their postseason life takes them.

"No one in the league would turn that down," said coach Gregg Popovich. "Show me a coach or a team that doesn't want it and that would be a miracle. We all want home court."

Like San Antonio, the Blazers currently trail Utah by a half game. Unlike the Spurs, however, Portland does not hold the tiebreaker with the Jazz.

It needs to win both of its remaining games and a Utah loss to the Los Angeles Clippers on Tuesday to claim the Western Conference's top seed.

STANDINGS

Spurs - 2nd place, 1/2 GB, Midwest Division. Trail Blazers - 1st



Isaiah Rider

place, Pacific Division.

TEAM LEADERS

Spurs - Duncan, 21.7 ppg and 11.6 rpg; Johnson, 7.5 apg. Trail Blazers - Rider, 14.3 ppg; Grant, 10.0 rpg; Stoudamire, 6.3 apg.

SEASON SERIES

Spurs, 2-1. After winning the

first game at the Rose Garden, the Trail Blazers have dropped the last two at the Alamodome. Each game has been decided by an average of 4.7 points per game.

HOME/ROAD RECORDS

Spurs - 14-9 on the road; Trail Blazers - 22-2 at home.

Clock Runs Out on Elway

By Aaron J. Lopez

ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. (AP) — He sounded so very upbeat at the start, cracking jokes and telling stories about himself and his Denver Broncos.

Then John Elway turned to his retirement — and that's when it hit him. His face crumpled and the sobs came.

"I can't do it physically anymore, and that's really hard for me to say," the 38-year-old Elway said Sunday, pausing frequently to regain his composure as he addressed the crowd at a suburban Denver hotel.

"It's hard to walk away. I can't explain in words how much everyone has meant to me."

After dazzling fans and confounding defenses for 16 years, the quarterback made official what everyone had known for more than a week. He delayed the announcement because of the school killings in Littleton, and his news conference began with a moment of silence for the victims.

Elway, master of the last-minute comeback, becomes the third superstar to leave his sport since January, joining Michael Jordan and Wayne Gretzky.

"The over-under in the locker room yesterday was how many times I'd cry," Elway said through his husky, choked voice. "I took the under."

Then, after crying some more, he added, "I lost the bet."

Elway, wearing a blue-and-silver ribbon on his suit jacket in memory of the shooting victims, was joined on the stage by Broncos coach Mike Shanahan and team owner Pat Bowlen.

Elway's wife, Janet, and their four children sat in the front row. The children smiled at their dad's jokes and remained poised when he broke down. Janet, however, cried as her husband spoke.

"For 16 years, the family life has focused around me and football, and it's time it focuses around them," Elway said. "I couldn't ask for a better mom and dad and a better wife. I'm tough to live with. Thank God she's still with me."

When asked what he'd miss most about Sunday afternoons, Elway said, "I'll never be able to fill the void of playing a football game."

Mariners Slugger Ties Record

By Jim Cour

AP SPORTS WRITER

SEATTLE (AP) — Lost in the shuffle of last year's home run chase and overshadowed by Jose Canseco's power surge this season, Ken Griffey Jr. still has a lot of drama left in his bat.

On Friday night, the Seattle Mariners' slugger became the 12th American League player and 18th in the major leagues to hit grand slams in consecutive games.

He had a chance to become the first player to hit a grand slam in three straight games but he lined out to pitcher Thomas Davey with the bases loaded in the sixth inning of Saturday night's 9-3 loss to Toronto.

The last player to get consecutive slams was Sammy Sosa in the midst of his pursuit of the home run record with Mark McGwire last July 27-28.

Griffey's second slam in two nights came off Toronto left-hander Graeme Lloyd's first pitch in the eighth inning, lifting the Mariners to an 11-9 victory. It was much more than Griffey was aiming for.

"I'm just looking to stay out of the double play," the Mariners' All-Star center fielder said. "That's the biggest thing in that situation, staying out of the double play and giving your team a chance."

Griffey's big game — 2-for-5 with five RBIs — followed his two-homer, six-RBI game Thursday night, a 22-6 win over Detroit.

His six RBIs against the Tigers tied his career high and his 11 RBIs in consecutive games set a Mariners record.

"I don't worry much about that," Griffey said. "The main thing is the two wins."

The 29-year-old Griffey didn't

come close to the 70 home runs McGwire hit last season, or even the 66 Sosa had. But he did hit 56 for the second consecutive year and he had nine in the first month this season, one behind Tampa Bay's Canseco, the major league home run leader.

Now, in his 11th season, he's moved past Yogi Berra into a tie for 47th on the all-time homer list with Johnny Mize at 359 — or 396 behind Henry Aaron's career mark of 755.

Not bad for a player who was mired in a 1-for-18 slump before Thursday night's game with Detroit. Chili Davis, now with the New York Yankees, gave Griffey some advice in Griffey's rookie season in 1989, something he always remembers in those rare times of trouble at the plate.

"I was something like 1-for-16," Griffey said. "Chili came up to me and said, 'I had a stretch when I was 10-for-90. Don't worry about it, kid. You'll be fine.'"

The usually unemotional Griffey celebrated after Friday night's slam. As the ball cleared the Kingdome wall in right center, he lifted his arms in the air while rounding first base and broke out in a big smile as he reached the Mariners' dugout.

"It was just emotion from coming from behind," said Griffey, who was 1-for-9 in his career against Lloyd before then. "Anytime you come from behind, it gives the team a lift."

Griffey's 12th career grand slam gave the Mariners a modest three-game winning streak and brought them within one game of .500. Until now, it's been another tough season for the Mariners, who were a disappointing third in the AL West last year, but they overcame 6-1 and 7-3 deficits to win their last two.

Patriots Confirm They're Staying in Massachusetts

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BOSTON (May 3) — Two days after ending stadium talks with Connecticut, the New England Patriots said they plan to stay in Massachusetts.

For the first time since owner Robert Kraft scrapped one of the richest stadium deals in sports history Friday, the team publicly ended speculation it might be sold or moved.

"We look forward to a long future in Massachusetts," team spokesman Stacey James told The Boston Globe on Sunday. "The New England Patriots are not for sale."

Kraft declined to elaborate Sunday, saying only that he ended talks with Connecticut because it was in the "best interest of the fans."

On Friday, Kraft informed Connecticut Gov. John Rowland he was walking away from a \$380 million offer of a new stadium that some analysts estimated could have been worth up to \$1 billion over 30 years.

The team doubted a stadium could be built by 2002 as promised and ended the talks before a Sunday dead-

line that allowed Kraft to withdraw without penalty.

That move came less than three days after Massachusetts legislative leaders presented their own proposal, a deal that would pay \$70 million for infrastructure near a new Foxboro stadium. The NFL also lobbied to keep the team in Massachusetts.

Until Sunday's statement by James, however, the team still hadn't said it would stay in Massachusetts where it began in 1960 as the Boston Patriots.

The Massachusetts deal hampered out Tuesday night by Gov. Paul Cellucci, Senate President Thomas Birmingham, House Speaker Thomas Finneran, members of the Boston business community and NFL representatives, still needs approval.

"What some thought was a Hail Mary pass was completed for a touchdown," Birmingham said Sunday. "I expect the Senate will adopt it soon because we passed a virtually identical bill last year. And since we all negotiated in good faith, I expect we will all keep our word."



MOVIES NIGHTLY WITH WEEKEND MATINEES

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