

Sports shorts

US fades again in exhibition loss

The pattern since last spring is familiar: The United States does well in the first half and fades as the final whistle approaches.



Nicklas Bendtner took advantage of a defense that gave up two more late goals to score his first international hat trick, and Denmark rallied to beat the United States 3-2 in an exhibition game at Aarhus on Wednesday night.

Jozy Altidore scored in the first half and set up former club teammate Aron Johannsson's goal in the second. But Bendtner tied the score for the hosts in the 83rd minute and got the winner in the first minute of stoppage time.

The U.S. is 2-6-3 since beating Ghana in its opener at the World Cup, where it was knocked out by Belgium in the second round. The Americans have given up 12 goals from the 80th minute on in their last 12 games.

Change to extra points likely in NFL

PHOENIX (AP) — Spice it up.

The NFL's duller play, the extra point, appears to be headed for some changes, perhaps significant ones, for the 2015 season.



While team owners didn't vote on any extra-point proposals Wednesday, there was so much discussion and interest in potential changes that the issue will be a main focal point for the next set of league meetings in May.

"There's a clear movement to wanting to change and change it this year," said Rich McKay, co-chairman of the competition committee and president of the Falcons.

McKay's committee will "develop alternatives and be ready for a potential vote" in two months in San Francisco.

Among the possibilities are moving the line of scrimmage back for PAT kicks; placing the ball on the 1½-yard line for a 2-point conversion; eliminating the PAT kicks entirely, requiring teams to run a play from scrimmage; and allowing the defense to score, as in college football, if the ball is turned over on a 2-point try.

"Obviously he's one of the real good players at his position in the league. But our job is to make sure he comes in and does the right things from the beginning."

— Jason Garrett
Dallas Cowboys head coach on the team's signing of DE Greg Hardy to a one-year deal worth \$13 million. Hardy was convicted in North Carolina last July of assaulting a female and communicating harassment, but the case was dismissed after he reached a settlement with the victim. He still faces a likely suspension from the NFL.

THIS DATE IN SPORTS
1944 — St. John's, coached by Joe Lapchick, cruises by DePaul 47-39 to become the first back-to-back winner of the National Invitation Tournament.

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NCAA Men's Tournament



UCLA head coach Steve Alford reacts to a call by the officials during the second half of an NCAA tournament third round college basketball game against UAB in Louisville, Ky., Saturday, March 21, 2015. UCLA won the game 92-75.

Losses mount in Sweet 16

Record number of 10-loss teams advance

By ERIC OLSON
Associated Press

The NCAA Tournament has never had so many teams with so many losses make it so far.

Six of the regional semifinalists have 10 or more losses, including three with 13. The reaction around college basketball has been a collective shrug.

There simply are more opportunities to lose nowadays.

That's because teams are playing more regular-season games than ever, and top programs are trying to schedule mostly high-caliber non-conference opponents which can enhance their resumes for NCAA Tournament selection and seeding.

"There was a time years and years ago where you'd feel like if you had 20 wins you'd get in the tournament," North Carolina State coach Mark Gottfried said. "Now it comes down to who you schedule. You may lose some games because you're playing a difficult non-conference schedule. And then in our league, it's tough night in and night out with 18 games in the ACC."

Gottfried's Wolfpack, Xavier and UCLA all have 13 losses heading into this week's games. Michigan State and North Carolina have 11 each and Oklahoma has 10.

The previous record for number of Sweet 16 teams with double-digit losses was five, last year and in 1985 and '86, according to STATS. The only other time there were even two 13-loss teams was 2000.

The NCAA has allowed teams to play as many as 31 regular-season games since 2006-07. Before that the maximum was 28. With conference tournaments, some teams



Xavier players, from left, Trevon Bluiett (5), Remy Abell (10), Dee Davis (11), and Jalen Reynolds (1) celebrate their 75-67 win over Georgia State during an NCAA tournament third round basketball game Saturday, March 21, 2015, in Jacksonville, Fla.

AP Photo/Chris O'Meara

now play 34 or 35 games before the NCAA Tournament. As of this week, 58 teams had played at least 35 games. A decade ago, only 13 teams played that many.

Other factors, ESPN analyst Jay Bilas said, are that high major teams are beating each other up in conference play, and premier programs are sought out for made-for-TV non-conference games.

Beating a heavyweight can help a lot, and losing to one might only hurt a little in the eyes of the NCAA selection committee.

N.C. State (22-13), which plays Louisville (26-8) in Syracuse, New York, on Friday, used strong non-conference schedules to get off the NCAA bubble in 2012 and 2014. This season the Wolfpack played tournament teams Boise State, Wofford, Cincinnati and Purdue before losing twice to Virginia, splitting meetings with North Carolina and beating Duke and Louisville in ACC play.

Xavier (23-13), which plays Arizona (33-3) in Los Angeles on Thursday, lost nine games in the Big East. That conference sent six teams to the NCAA Tournament, and Xavier is the only one still standing.

"I think it's great that the Big East has been able to test us with some really tough teams," center Matt Stainbrook said, "and I think

the fact that we've grown as a team together has made us really special at this point."

UCLA (22-13), which plays Gonzaga (34-2) in Houston on Saturday, might be the most charmed of the 13-loss teams. The Bruins won their tournament opener over SMU thanks to a 3-point goaltending call on the final play, and in their second game they drew a 14th-seeded UAB team coming off an upset of Iowa State. A No. 14 hasn't won more than one game in the tournament since 1997.

Double-digit loss teams meet in Syracuse on Friday when Michigan State (25-11) takes on Oklahoma (24-10). The Spartans lost to heavyweights Duke, Kansas and Notre Dame before they were beaten six times in the Big Ten. Oklahoma wouldn't have 10 losses if it weren't for, as Bilas said, "slipping on banana peels" against Creighton and Washington.

As for North Carolina (26-11), which plays Wisconsin (33-3) in Los Angeles on Thursday, there's no shame in what it did against the nation's second-toughest schedule.

"They played Kentucky, they played Virginia twice, they played Duke twice, they played Notre Dame twice. That's why they have 11 losses," Bilas said. "It's not because they (stink)."

Prep Softball

Heppner splits at home

East Oregonian

HEPPNER — Rain caused a late start and early finish to Wednesday's action at the Heppner Tournament, but thanks to five-inning contests all teams managed to play their scheduled games.

The hosting Mustangs split their games, beating Clatskanie 2-1 before falling to Knappa 12-0.

Heppner (1-2) opened with a run in the bottom of the first inning against Clatskanie, then earned their first

See SOFTBALL/2B

College Baseball

T-Wolves swept in regional openers

East Oregonian

WENATCHEE, Wash. — The Blue Mountain baseball team dropped back below .500 with a pair of losses to Wenatchee Valley on Wednesday to open NWAC East Region play.

The Knights (8-4, 2-0 East) benefited from Kyle Blankenship's complete game on the mound in a 4-1 win in the opener, then got the better of nearly every BMCC pitcher for a 10-7 win the night cap.

The Timberwolves (8-10, 0-2) used eight pitchers in the second game — three during WVC's six-run fourth inning — with only Grant Klopmeier and Jonathan Boyer lasting more than one inning.

Blankenship was the model of efficiency in the opener, and faced 34 batters while

See T-WOLVES/2B

NBA

Trail Blazers snap losing streak with comeback

By KAREEM COPELAND
Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY — Damian Lillard refused to let the reeling Trail Blazers lose their sixth consecutive game Wednesday night.

Portland was on the verge of exactly that, trailing by 10 points in the fourth quarter, when the third-year point guard from nearby Weber State decided to attack the basket again and again and again.

Lillard finished with 23 points, 12 assists and eight rebounds and the Blazers beat the Utah Jazz 92-89.

"I don't think it's a big win like we just beat Golden State or something like that, but it's a big win because of the five-game losing streak," Lillard said. "It came down to the last few minutes of the game



AP Photo/Rick Bowmer

Portland Trail Blazers' LaMarcus Aldridge, left, and Damian Lillard (0) celebrate in the fourth quarter of an NBA basketball game against the Utah Jazz on Wednesday in Salt Lake City.

and we haven't been great in that timeframe, closing games the last month or so.

"But with the losing streak, on

the road, against a team that's been playing well, it's a big win in that way."

After a two-point first half, Lil-

lard scored eight points in the third quarter and 13 points in the fourth. LaMarcus Aldridge added 19 points and nine rebounds.

"He's a dynamic player," Jazz guard Trey Burke said about Lillard. "He wasn't the only guy we were worried about and he took advantage of that."

Portland ate away at the 10-point deficit with Lillard attacking the basket, including a transition layup and a free throw for an 87-86 lead with 91 seconds left in the game. Lillard said their pick-and-roll game with a small lineup spaced the floor and opened the paint for his drives.

The Jazz closed the third quarter with a 15-2 run to take a double-digit lead.

"We needed a win and there was satisfaction we found a way to win even after we didn't shoot the ball well for most of the game," Blazers coach Terry Stotts said. "For us, it was a gritty win and we did it a little unconventionally and I think it's

See BLAZERS/2B