

HERMISTON



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Prep rodeo returns to region

In this 2016 file photo, Pendleton's Calgary Smith runs down his calf on his way to a 12.71-second time in tie down roping at the Intermountain High School Rodeo in Hermiston. The Intermountain team hosts its annual doubleheader rodeos this weekend with action beginning at 9 a.m. on Saturday and 8 a.m. on Sunday at Farm-City Arena. Three members of the Intermountain boys team are within nine points of each other atop the all-around standings with Heppner's Kolby Currin in first, Smith in second, and Pendleton's Phoenix Everano in third.

Boston Marathon

Ben Beach eyeing record 50th straight finish

By KYLE HIGHTOWER
Associated Press

BOSTON — Ben Beach was a scrawny 18-year-old who had never run more than 5 miles before he started training for his first Boston Marathon in 1968.

A half-century later, at age 67, the Bethesda, Maryland, resident has a chance to set a standard by becoming the first person to complete 50 consecutive trips down the city's hallowed course.

The current Cal Ripken of the Boston race is one of just 81 people who have current streaks of at least 25 consecutive trips down the 26.2-mile Boston route. Only nine have a streak of at least 40.

But Beach's love affair with the event actually began on a whim. He was a high school senior flipping through radio stations in his bedroom at a Massachusetts boarding school when he came across a broadcast of the 1967 marathon. The race was run in low 30-degree weather and sleet. Set to attend Harvard the following year, he perked up.

"The whole idea of running 26 miles in that kind of weather just kind of appealed to my senses — the bizarre," he said. "I just said to myself that day ... I'm gonna run that."

He signed up in 1968. He walked inside the staging area "that reeked of Bengay." The field of 1,014 that year was mostly men, plus a handful of women who had signed up a year after Katherine Switzer became the first woman to officially enter.

Beach, who had consumed a steak the night before and run 20 miles only two days prior, said he was naive about marathon prep back then.

"You got in line for the doctor and when you got up to the front ... the doctor puts a stethoscope to try to determine if you could make it to the Prudential Building (finish line)," Beach said. "I don't know if anybody got turned down or what."

He did finish, in 3 hours, 23 minutes, and after waiting in line to use the only available shower went up to the cafeteria for a bowl of beef stew. He didn't finish that, but did get down four glasses of milk.

"I was lucky that I didn't collapse in a heap," he said. He wasn't sure he'd ever do it again.

"In fact, my initial feeling was 'I've done it, that's it,'" he said. "But at some point over the next few weeks or months I think I decided I ought to go back... It went better than anything I could have imagined."

James Fallows, a friend of Beach's at Harvard, ran the race with him the following year and again in 1970.

"I had no idea that I was witnessing the beginnings of something historic," Fallows said. "It was like having been on hand to see the planting of the seed that became a giant sequoia."

It was around Year 10 that Beach said it really started to become a streak. It was also around the time — in 1977 —

that he met Carol, his future wife, at a road race.

She said his drive to run was an instant attraction.

"He makes it easy," Carol Beach said. "You'd think I was dating a professional football player back then. I was so psyched to date a guy that's run the Boston Marathon."

Now 37 years of marriage later, he counts her as the streak's sustainer.

"She's always understood how important it is to me," Beach said. "She understands something about the mind of a marathoner ... I'm sort of a creature of habit."

There have been both early and recent challenges to the streak continuing.

The first time was on just his fourth race in 1971. He had a knee injury and was just passing the third mile when it started to give him trouble.

But he was able to push through it and finish.

But the last 10 years have become particularly challenging following his diagnosis for a movement disorder called Dystonia in 2002. The ailment causes involuntary and uncontrollable muscle contractions and cramping.

At first it wasn't too debilitating because of the large mileage base he had built up over the years. But 10 years ago as he aged and his training began to tail off, it finally caught up with him.

In 2002, he finished the course in 3:07:50. By 2012, his time had ballooned to 5:55:22. That was twice his best time ever in Boston of 2:27:26 in 1981.

The 2012 finish was also the start of five straight years of finishing above five hours. That included 2013, the year he passed former record-holder Neil Weygandt's streak of 45. He crossed the finish line on Boylston Street in 5:31:21 last year.

Those flirtations with the six-hour mark are more relevant after race officials notified runners in 2015 of a change in streak recognition. Beginning with the 2016 race, only participants who completed the course before the official clock cutoff at six hours would have the continuation of their streaks recognized by the Boston Athletic Association.

That policy was relaxed for 2016, but it's back in effect for this year.

"Last year went better and I'm hoping this year will as well. But you never know," Beach said. "A lot can happen between Hopkinton and the Hancock building."

Though his health will certainly play a role in where the streak goes from here, he said Johnny Kelley's record of 58 total Boston finishes has always been in the back of his head.

"As long as I'm physically able I'd go back the next year because again it's in my blood," he said. "I'm not on a suicide mission here, though. If it really looks like I'm putting myself in serious risk, then I think I'll have the common sense to say it's been great, but all good things must come to an end."

NBA

Will he or won't he? Nurkic's return still uncertain

By ANNE M. PETERSON
Associated Press

PORTLAND — Portland center Jusuf Nurkic's availability for the opening game of the Trail Blazers' playoff series against the Golden State Warriors remains uncertain.

Nurkic has missed seven games with a non-displaced right leg fracture.

There had been speculation the 7-footer known as the Bosnian Beast could return for the playoffs. He was seen shooting during warmups for the past two regular-season games, and he's walking with no apparent limp.

But Portland coach Terry Stotts said Friday that his status for the first-round opener in Oakland on Sunday was "undetermined." He said it would likely be a game-day decision.

"I feel better and I've made good progress, but we still haven't decided if I'm going to play," Nurkic said.

Nurkic, traded to Portland on Feb. 12 from the Denver Nuggets, was averaging 15.2 points, 10.4 rebounds and 1.9 blocks in 20 games with the Blazers.

"Completely different team with him in there. So it changes everything. Obviously if he plays I'm sure I'll be on him some. I foresee the game probably being a smaller game if he doesn't play, whereas if he plays it turns into a bigger game," Golden State's Draymond Green said following practice on Friday. "It changes everything whether he's in or out."

Since his arrival in Portland, Nurkic has been embraced by Portland fans. He's credited with boosting the team as it made a final push for the playoffs: The Blazers finished in the



AP Photo/Steve Dykes, File

In this March 30, 2017, file photo, Portland Trail Blazers center Jusuf Nurkic dunks the ball during the fourth quarter of an NBA basketball game against the Houston Rockets, in Portland.

eighth and final playoff spot in the Western Conference, clinching a spot ahead of the Nuggets with two games left in the regular season.

Before the All-Star break, the Blazers were 23-33 and it looked as if they were headed to the draft lottery in the offseason.

Enter Nurkic. Portland went 18-8 following the break and finished at .500. In a short time he seemed to develop chemistry with Portland's starting backcourt duo of

Damian Lillard and CJ McCollum, and with Nurkic in the starting lineup, Portland was 14-5.

When Nurkic scored 28 points with 20 rebounds at home this season against Philadelphia, Stotts spoke about how fans had taken to the newcomer: "Nurkic fever? Why not?"

On the court afterward, Nurkic smiled when he was told about the coach's comments. The crowd roared and a catchphrase was born.

Ten things to watch in NBA playoffs

By TIM REYNOLDS
Associated Press

With the NBA playoffs starting Saturday, here's 10 things to know before the second season begins:

LEBRON IN FIRST ROUNDS

Good luck, Indiana. LeBron James not only never loses in a first-round series, but the man rarely loses first-round playoff games, period.

He's played in 51 first-round games. His teams went 2-2 in his first four, and are 42-5 since — including 17-0 since May 6, 2012. James hasn't played in a Game 6 in a first-round series since 2008.

James has been part of 131 wins so far in his playoff career, tied with San Antonio's Tony Parker for the most among active players.

More milestones await James in these playoffs, too.

If Cleveland makes a deep run, he may take over the No. 1 spot on the all-time career playoff scoring list. He enters this postseason No. 4 at 5,572 points — behind only No. 3 Kobe Bryant (5,640), No. 2 Kareem Abdul-Jabbar (5,762) and No. 1 Michael Jordan (5,987).

Another landmark for James comes Saturday in Game 1 against Indiana, when he makes his 200th playoff appearance.

MVP CANDIDATES COLLIDE

Mr. Westbrook, meet Mr. Harden. No, the Maurice Podoloff Trophy — otherwise known as the MVP trophy — won't automatically go to the winner. But this will be the rage of the Oklahoma City-Houston first-round series, with presumptive MVP front-runners Russell Westbrook and James Harden set to lead their teams into the postseason.

Westbrook averaged a triple-double this season, 31.6 points, 10.7 rebounds and 10.4 assists for the Thunder. Harden averaged 29.1 points, 11.2 assists and 8.1 rebounds for the Rockets.

Including playoffs, Harden and Westbrook have faced off 16 times, each player walking away a winner in eight of those. Westbrook has posted five triple-doubles in those games, including two this season.

THE SPURS REMAIN FANTASTIC

San Antonio is in the postseason for the 20th consecutive year. That's now tied for the third-longest such streak in NBA history.

Philadelphia went 22 consecutive

times from 1950 through 1971. Portland made 21 straight trips from 1983 through 2003, and Utah got 20 appearances in a row from 1984 through 2003.

But that doesn't tell anywhere near the whole story of the Spurs' consistent excellence.

The Spurs haven't just had an NBA-record 20 straight winning seasons — they've won at least 60 percent of their games in each of those seasons. That streak is eight seasons longer than any other NBA franchise ever posted, and also the longest in any North American major pro sport (the Montreal Canadiens and San Francisco 49ers had winning percentages of .600 or better in 16 consecutive seasons).

BUSY IN BOSTON

Sports fans will be sufficiently busy in Boston over the next few days.

Bulls at Celtics on Sunday. Ottawa at Boston in the NHL playoffs on Monday. Bulls at Celtics on Tuesday. Senators at Bruins on Wednesday.

Oh, let's not forget the Boston Marathon on Monday — and of course, the annual Patriots Day game coinciding at Fenway Park that morning, with the Red Sox playing host to the Tampa Bay Rays.

FINALLY, THE POSTSEASON

Greg Monroe has played in 538 regular-season games. Markieff Morris, 448 regular-season games.

Combined, they have zero playoff appearances.

That will change this weekend. Monroe and Milwaukee will play Toronto, Morris and Washington will play Atlanta.

No active player had more games without a playoff appearance than Monroe. Once he plays this weekend, the active leaders in most-games-but-no-playoffs become Omri Casspi (499 after this season) and DeMarcus Cousins (487).

There will also be playoff debuts for two referees. Brent Barnaky and Matthew Boland are the newcomers in the pool of 37 refs selected to work first-round games. Boland has more than 800 regular-season games in 15 years on his resume, Barnaky more than 400 in parts of eight seasons.

HELLO AGAIN

The first game of the playoffs will look like the first game of the regular season for some clubs.

Washington visited Atlanta in Game 1 for both teams back in October, and Atlanta will visit Washington for Game 1 of their playoff series Sunday. And

"I love being here," he said. "I appreciate what the city is doing for me. I just want to give them back something."

Even while he was rehabbing from the injury, Nurkic endeared himself to fans by pouring cups of water over the heads of teammates when they appeared in post-game TV interviews.

Nurkic's arrival in Portland wasn't just good for the Blazers, it was good for the big man, too.

Taken with the 16th overall pick by the Chicago Bulls in 2014 but sent to Denver in a draft-night deal, he was hampered last season by a knee injury.

At the start of this season, Denver looked to use both Nikola Jokic and Nurkic at the same time in a big starting lineup. But the experiment never jelled, and Jokic got the bulk of the minutes while 22-year-old Nurkic averaged fewer than 18 minutes with eight points per game.

Energized in Portland, he became the first Trail Blazer to average 15-plus points and 10-plus rebounds in his first 20 games with the team since Mychal Thompson in 1978.

After his injury was announced, Nurkic vowed he would do what he could to return as quickly as possible.

"If it doesn't hurt I'm going to be back. It's not a question," he said. "I'm going to do my part, work every day like I do, and try to be back."

On Friday he hadn't changed his tune.

"If it was up to me, I'd play right now," he said.

AP Sports Writer Janie McCauley contributed to this report.

FAREWELL, THE TRUTH

This postseason will mark the end of Paul Pierce's career.

He's been used sparingly by the Los Angeles Clippers this season, getting into just 25 games. And he might not have much of an on-court role — if any — in the playoffs, though his leadership and playoff experience will surely be valued.

Pierce has played in 163 playoff games, mostly with Boston, the franchise with whom he got his first and so far only ring in 2008.

ELDER STATESMEN

The oldest two playoff-bound players this season are Vince Carter and Manu Ginobili.

Odds are, they'll be on the court together in the Memphis-San Antonio series. The 40-year-old Carter is still a key part of what the Grizzlies do, and the 39-year-old Ginobili — possibly in his final season, though speculating about his retirement has sort of become an annual tradition in San Antonio — plays about 19 minutes per game off the Spurs' bench.

UPSET WATCH

No. 1 seeds almost always beat No. 8 seeds in the opening round. Turner Sports analyst and longtime NBA star Reggie Miller seems to think there's a chance that might not hold up this year.

He indicated he wouldn't be shocked if Chicago gave Boston all it wants in the first round. "If you're Chicago, you think, hey, Dwyane Wade and (Rajon) Rondo have won championships, Jimmy Butler has gone deep in the playoffs before. We have playoff savvy and we know how to win," Miller said. "I think this is a great matchup for Chicago."

VEGAS SAYS ...

The oddsmakers in Las Vegas are showing Golden State as a huge favorite to win the NBA title — 1-2 odds as of Thursday, far ahead of 7-2 second choice Cleveland.

San Antonio is the 9-1 third choice, and Boston is showing up in the sports books at 20-1 despite entering the playoffs as the No. 1 seed in the Eastern Conference.

The long shot? Obviously, that would be Golden State's first-round opponent, Portland — 300-1 right now to win it all.