

## College Baseball

## Sour end doesn't devalue Beavers' remarkable season

By BOB LUNDEBERG  
Gazette-Times

CORVALLIS (AP) — While falling three wins shy of the ultimate goal, it's hard to contend the Oregon State baseball team's redemption tour was anything but fruitful.

Last May's bitter NCAA tournament snub triggered a record-shattering regular season that set the stage for the program's first College World Series appearance since 2013. After starting 2-0 at TD Ameritrade Park, a pair of losses to LSU abruptly ended the extraordinary run.

The Beavers finished 56-6 overall, matching Texas' 1975 team for the fourth-best winning percentage of the CWS era (1950-present) at .903. OSU's 49 regular-season and 56 overall victories are both school records.

"It's hard to explain," outfielder Jack Anderson said in a phone interview Wednesday morning. "There was just a lot of trust within our team, within our players and within our coaches that we could win every day. As the season went on and we kept winning, it just became what we expected."

OSU compiled two separate 23-game winning streaks and went 15-0 in March and May. The Beavers finished 27-3 in Pac-12 play, the best mark in conference history.

The team's only two-game skid occurred at the CWS.

"You come back and lose in the World Series, there's a lot of pain with that and a lot of disappointment with that and it's hard to reflect on the season," coach Pat Casey said. "It's just really impressive what these guys accomplished. I know how much it hurt them to lose and I want them to understand what an unbelievable run they had. And they will appreciate that."

Pitching and defense paved the way for the Beavers, who led Division I in team ERA (1.93), hits allowed per nine innings (6.27), shutouts (14) and WHIP (0.98).

Sophomore second baseman Nick Madrigal won Pac-12 player and defensive player of the year



Oregon State's KJ Harrison, right, celebrates his grand slam with Steven Kwan (4), Michael Gretler (10) and Jack Anderson (29) in the sixth inning of an NCAA College World Series baseball game against LSU in Omaha, Neb., Monday, June 19, 2017. Harrison, Kwan, Gretler and Trevor Lamach, unseen, scored on the play.

AP Photo/Nati Harnik

while junior left-hander Luke Heimlich was voted the conference's pitcher of the year. Seven different Beavers (Jake Mulholland, Max Engelbrekt, Brandon Eisert, Drew Rasmussen, Mitchell Verburg, Grant Gambrell and Mitch Hickey) recorded at least one save.

"It was a tremendous effort by all the guys that toted the rubber at one point," pitching coach Nate Yeskie said. "Nobody was selfish in the sense of what they wanted to accomplish. They put their egos aside for wanting to be a Friday night guy or wanting to be a closer. There was a genuine desire to want to win together."

"I think the bonds that are built at this level, in the college game, are pretty special and pretty unique, and I think this group certainly personifies that."

OSU opened the season 28-1, including conference sweeps of Arizona State, Arizona, Stanford and Utah.

Arizona, last year's CWS

runner-up, entered the series ranked seventh in D1Baseball.com's top 25 while the Cardinal checked in at 11th. The Utes were the defending Pac-12 champions.

OSU got off to a similar start in 2016, winning 16 of its first 18 before losing Rasmussen in a sweep at California. The Beavers never fully recovered and missed the postseason for the first time since 2008.

"So we were trying not to get too high on ourselves because of how it ended the year before," Anderson said. "But with how we went through the first three series in the (Pac-12), that showed us that we can really do some damage and make a run at this."

The Beavers dominated their first conference set, outscoring ASU 16-1 in the desert. Trailing late in its first two matchups with Arizona, OSU fought back for a pair of walk-off victories to seize control of the Pac-12 race.

Two more walk-offs against

Utah helped push the winning streak to 23.

OSU began its second 23-game march in late April and clinched the outright conference title May 12 at Oregon. It was also Casey's 1,000th career victory.

After earning the No. 1 national seed and breezing through the Corvallis Regional, the Beavers sat 52-4 entering their super regional matchup with Vanderbilt. But a firestorm was about to hit.

The morning before the Corvallis Super Regional opener, The Oregonian released a report detailing Heimlich's juvenile record. Heimlich, owner of the country's lowest ERA, requested to be excused from playing the following day.

Casey said it was among the most challenging developments of his coaching career.

"I have never been through something like that," said Casey, who just completed his 23rd season at OSU. "I've been in some tough

situations, but I've never seen anything taken to that level."

The Beavers responded like champions, blitzing Vanderbilt in consecutive games to reach the CWS for the sixth time in program history.

Jake Thompson was effective in Game 1 while Bryce Fehmel outdueled Kyle Wright, who was later taken fifth overall in the Major League Baseball First-Year Player Draft, in the finale.

"I think we were just able to trust each other and love each other through it," Anderson said. "Adversity is a thing a lot of teams go through and we were kind of able to love each other through it all."

OSU defeated Cal State Fullerton (6-5) and LSU (13-1) in Omaha before things fell apart. The Beavers were just 5 for 59 at the plate (.085) in the losses.

Florida went on to sweep its SEC rival in the best-of-3 championship series.

"I always say there are 1,000 trails, but there is only one summit," Casey said. "Only one team can stand there and it wasn't us this year. I feel for the guys because they haven't had a chance to sit back and enjoy the year, but that bond will be for a lifetime."

Most of the team will be back when the Beavers embark on another national title chase next February.

Rasmussen (31st overall, Tampa Bay Rays), infielder/catcher KJ Harrison (third round, Milwaukee Brewers), Thompson (fourth round, Boston Red Sox), infielder Michael Gretler (39th round, Pittsburgh Pirates) and Engelbrekt (40th round, Washington Nationals) were the Beavers' draftees. Only Engelbrekt is out of eligibility.

"I think everyone understands what it takes and we now have that experience under our belts," Anderson said. "The biggest thing is coming back next year with that same fire."

"As a team, the motivation will really be there to get to that next step. It's going to be a cool year; I know a lot of guys are already looking forward to it."

## NASCAR

## Earnhardt Jr. lands pole for what could be Cup finale at Daytona

By MARK LONG  
AP Sports Writer

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. — The chances are dwindling for Dale Earnhardt Jr. this season, the final shot for NASCAR's most popular driver to win a coveted Cup title.

First he has to make the playoffs, and his best opportunity at one of those 16 slots is a win Saturday night at Daytona International Speedway.

Earnhardt will start from the pole, the first time in nearly four years that his No. 88 Chevrolet will lead the field to the green flag. Next to him will be Chase Elliott, his Hendrick Motorsports teammate who has made clear that he'll pass Earnhardt to win at Daytona even though Earnhardt is scheduled to retire at the end of the year.

"We are running out of time, and I am aware of that," said Earnhardt, who is winless this season and ranks 22nd in points, well out of the playoff picture. "Yeah, this is probably our best shot to win, but we can win at other race tracks. We've got that ability to do that. It's been a very frustrating, tough year statistically."

In winning his first pole since September 2013, Earnhardt is now eligible to run a preseason race next February at Daytona.

"I'll talk to my boss and see what he has in the shed," Earnhardt quipped.

Earnhardt is on a farewell tour and admittedly afraid to miss a moment in his final, full-time season. He's feeling nostalgic — even though he's made clear he'll race a handful of Xfinity Series events in 2018 — and in two insightful visits to the media center Friday, he touched on his favorite Daytona memories. He recalled eating fried chicken at a post-race picnic to celebrate Richard Petty's 200th victory, which came with President Ronald Reagan on hand. There was the 1999 IROC race at Michigan in which Rusty Wallace inexplicably helped rival Dale Earnhardt Sr. instead of



AP Photo/John Raoux

Dale Earnhardt Jr. completes a lap during a NASCAR cup practice at Daytona International Speedway, Thursday, June 29, 2017, in Daytona Beach, Fla.

pushing Junior to the win.

He recalled spending Speedweeks as a kid in beachside hotels. "You'd have drivers in the pool after practice," he said. "That was cool for those guys to be able to do that."

Elliott welcomed being the bad guy Saturday night, if he can. But he also said Earnhardt has a different edge this week.

"I won't say he has a chip on his shoulder, but I do think he has been very, very determined this weekend on making sure his car is driving exactly like he wants it," Elliott said. "He doesn't want it good. He doesn't want it great. He wants it perfect, and I think he has made that very apparent in our post-practice meetings."

"Yes, I think he is very determined to run well here."

Earnhardt was the final driver to qualify and bumped Elliott to second. It was a strong day overall for Hendrick, with Kasey Kahne qualifying fourth. Wedged between the top Hendrick cars was Brad Keselowski, who qualified his Ford third for Team Penske.

All the attention, though, was on Earnhardt. No surprise for NASCAR's favorite son, especially this weekend.

Although Earnhardt expects to race at Daytona in the future, his trip to NASCAR's birthplace is being treated like a career finale.

The track developed a

"Daletona" mosaic in the stadium's Axalta Injector that allows fans to create a piece of artwork to commemorate what could be Earnhardt's final start at Daytona. Officials also presented Junior with a painting featuring three of his most memorable wins at the superspeedway: His July 2001 victory that came 4 1/2 months after his father's fatal crash in the Daytona 500; his July 2010 win in the second-tier series in which he drove a No. 3 Chevrolet with a throwback paint scheme; and his February 2014 win in "The Great American Race."

"A lot of great things have happened here," he said. "A lot of drivers have made their careers here. It is something to be proud of if you are in the industry. It is a pretty fun race track."

He hasn't gotten too emotional yet. But he expects the weight of walking away to hit him during the finale at Homestead-Miami Speedway in November.

"I'm not having any anxiety about the end coming," he said. "I feel pretty good about that. I feel pretty good about my decision. I haven't had any second guesses or regrets about that. So, I don't believe I will have any anxiety as it starts to get closer to Homestead. I just don't want to miss anything. I don't want to miss a moment that I should take in. I don't want to miss opportunity to let people know how much they mean to me, everybody in the industry means to me."

## NBA

## Pacers trade all-star forward Paul George to Thunder

By JON KRAWCZYNSKI  
AP Basketball Writer

Paul George has a new home, and Russell Westbrook has a new star teammate.

The Indiana Pacers have agreed to trade George to the Oklahoma City Thunder for Victor Oladipo and Domantas Sabonis, said two people with knowledge of the details. The stunning deal gives Westbrook, the newly crowned NBA MVP, some serious help next season and makes the already rugged Western Conference even more daunting.

The two teams came together on the trade Friday just hours before the free agent market was set to open. It is not expected to be finalized until the moratorium ends, but that didn't stop the rest of the league from reacting about the newest dynamic duo to form.

The entire league expected George to be on the move after he informed the Pacers of his plans to leave as a free agent next summer. That forced Kevin Pritchard, who was recently elevated to take over basketball operations after Larry Bird's abrupt resignation, to find a trade before losing him for nothing. Pritchard called George's decision "a gut punch," but didn't panic. He resisted offers on draft night, when many analysts said he would get the best package, and waited



George

until just before the free agent market's opening bell.

Paul George traded? No surprise.

To the Thunder to team up with Westbrook? That was a stunner.

The trade was first reported by ESPN.

George could have been in line for the so-called "Supermax" extension — a five-year pact worth about \$205 million — with Indiana this summer, had he been voted onto the All-NBA team this offseason.

He wasn't, though if he is an All-NBA player next season — which is certainly possible with the numbers he could post playing alongside Westbrook — George would be eligible for a huge payday again. And the irony there is that if he is set on joining the Los Angeles Lakers in 2018, as has been reported for some time, George would miss out on that massive extra windfall.

George is the second Eastern Conference All-Star from this past season to join the already-loaded Western Conference in the last few days. Jimmy Butler was traded by Chicago to Minnesota on draft night.

But the West just keeps getting tougher and tougher. The Wolves grabbed Butler, the Houston Rockets traded

for Chris Paul to pair with James Harden and the Warriors locked up two vital championship pieces in Steph Curry and Shaun Livingston just after the market opened Saturday.

Thunder GM Sam Presti then went all-in in a manner he has yet to do in Oklahoma City, putting two of the league's best athletes together to make a run at Golden State. George's defensive versatility and shot-making alongside Westbrook's explosiveness and competitive intensity creates an imposing tandem.

George broke his left leg in a gruesome scene while playing with USA Basketball in Las Vegas in 2014, which prompted fears he would never be the same. Those fears were most unfounded, since George has better than ever in the last two seasons — averaging 23.1 points and 7.0 rebounds in 2015-16, and following that up with averages of 23.7 points and 6.6 rebounds this past season.

Indiana will be Oladipo's third team, after starting his career in Orlando and spending last season in Oklahoma City. He's averaged 15.9 points per game in his four pro seasons, on 43 percent shooting and returns to the state where he starred in college for the Hoosiers.

Sabonis started 66 games as a rookie last season with the Thunder, averaging 5.9 points.

## BRIEFLY

## Lingmerth leads at PGA Quicken Loans National

POTOMAC, Md. (AP) — David Lingmerth knows he won't have to shoot 20-under par for the week to win at tricky TPC Potomac. After two near-flawless rounds in the Quicken Loans National, he was halfway there.

The 29-year-old Swede

shot his second straight 5-under 65 on Friday to extend his lead to two shots over Geoff Ogilvy. Ogilvy played in the first group off the 10th tee and also shot 65.

Lingmerth won a Web.com Tour event on the punishing Washington-area layout in 2012. On Friday, he used his reliable fade off the tee to avoid trouble and set up birdie opportunities. He's gone

34 straight holes without a bogey and he finished his round with a birdie from 7 feet.

Daniel Summerhays shot 68 and was alone in third, four shots back.

**Sale In Progress**  
Saager's Shoe Shop  
**Up to 50% Off**  
Milton-Freewater, OR