

NFL

Expectations high for Herbert in 2021

Justin Herbert will attempt to improve on what was an unexpectedly successful rookie season in 2020 by reaching new heights in 2021.

Expectations are much higher for the quarterback and the team in 2021. The Chargers have a new coach in Brandon Staley, and a new offensive coordinator, Joe Lombardi. The Chargers rebuilt their offensive line to better protect Herbert and he'll have a bevy of weapons on offense.

Many experts have selected the Chargers as a potential surprise team to earn a playoff berth in 2021. In addition, NFL Network analyst Peter Schrager selected Herbert as a dark horse candidate for the league's MVP award.

"He's got a new coach. There's some new weapons. I look at that offensive line... they revamped this entire front five to protect this guy," Schrager said. "I think Herbert has the mental makeup. I think he's got the sizzle and the Chargers are going to be a team to watch this year because of that quarterback, Justin Herbert."

Herbert and the Chargers posted four consecutive wins to close out the 2020 season. Herbert registered a grade of 77.4 under pressure in 2020, the highest of any quarterback, according to Pro Football Focus. Herbert also threw 13 touchdown passes while under pressure, second only to Russell Wilson of the Seattle Seahawks, according to Pro Football Focus.

— *The Oregonian*

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

'Bama-Miami on opening weekend

ESPN's opening weekend of college football features defending national champion Alabama facing Miami in Atlanta and Clemson vs. Georgia in Charlotte, North Carolina.

The network also announced a six-year agreement with the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference and Southwestern Athletic Conference to continue broadcasting the MEAC/SWAC Challenge Kickoff and the Celebration Bowl matching both leagues' champions. Both games take place in Atlanta.

In anticipation of a return to normal this season, ESPN announced Tuesday its featured matchups for Labor Day weekend and the first three Saturday night games on ABC.

The pandemic caused most nonconference games to be canceled last season, along with a delayed start to the season in the Power Five conferences. This season is expected to start on time with the schedule intact and Sept. 4 as the first full Saturday of major college football games.

Alabama-Miami will kick off at 12:30 p.m. and air on ABC, followed by Clemson-Georgia at 4:30 p.m.

Notre Dame will play at Florida State on Sunday, Sept. 5, kicking off at 4:30 p.m.

The Labor Day night game will be Louisville against Mississippi in Atlanta at 5 p.m. on ESPN.

The ABC Saturday night matchups for the next two weeks of the season will be Washington at Michigan on Sept. 11 and Auburn at Penn State on Sept. 18.

— *Associated Press*

MLB COMMENTARY

Next step in the MLB to PDX movement belongs to the people

BY JOHN CANZANO
The Oregonian

A friend of mine let me know this morning that he's going to Petco Park to see the Rockies and Padres today. I've never been more envious of someone about to pay \$6 for a hot dog.

It got me thinking about Portland and Major League Baseball.

A recent Forbes piece pointed out that commissioner Rob Manfred is talking expansion again. His owners need an infusion of cash amid the pandemic. Expansion is the quickest way to provide it. Manfred

set the expansion-franchise fee in the \$2 billion neighborhood. There's another approximate \$2 billion needed to build a ballpark, bringing the total to a cool \$4 billion.

Here's the question for the Portland Diamond Project: Do your backers have the needed cash or credit, and the desire to spend it in Portland?

That's the \$4 billion question.

I've spent considerable time in recent months talking with business leaders in Portland. They're frustrated with the mess downtown and the lack of a plan to fix it.

This is much bigger than bringing a ballpark to Portland. It's about re-framing the image and condition of the most notable city in our state.

One of them, Columbia CEO Tim Boyle, sent the Oregon Department of Transportation \$145,000 to be used to clean up the highways (I-405 and Highway 26) around downtown Portland. ODOT spent \$14,000 and sent the rest back, telling

Boyle it couldn't figure out how to use it. He then offered the balance to the City of Portland. He waited a frustrating year for them, then Boyle shifted gears and gave the money instead to two charities aimed at downtown cleanup.

Said Boyle: "Others are ready to help, but we need a leader and a plan."

My colleague, Steve Duin, wrote a hopeful piece this week about modular housing units that are being used to give homeless people a warm, safe place to sleep. There's also a proposed infusion of \$240 million

from the Oregon Legislature on the horizon. But for all that, the reality remains that there are simply too many people without a safe place to lay their heads right now. Also, Portland is a glaring mess.

I'm as eager to see Portland cleaned up as you are, but something tells me it's going to take a massive private effort. One likely fueled by those frustrated business owners and developers. Also, by you and I, because if we leave this to leadership in the city and state it's just not going to get done.

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GOLF

Jordan Spieth trying to become only the 6th player to complete the career Grand Slam

BY DOUG FERGUSON • AP Golf Writer

KIAWAH ISLAND, S.C. —

Jordan Spieth has a much clearer outlook now than he did the last time the PGA Championship was at Kiawah Island.

For starters, he wasn't even at Kiawah in 2012.

Spieth was in Denver that week preparing for the U.S. Amateur while trying to decide whether to turn pro or return to Texas for his sophomore year of college.

With an unclear future weighing on him, he had to face NCAA champion Thomas Pieters in the opening round at Cherry Hills and lost on the 18th hole.

Spieth headed back to school. "I wasn't in a good place back then," he said with a laugh Tuesday as he headed out for his first look at the windswept Ocean Course at Kiawah Island.

Now it's different, for a variety of reasons.

Spieth has emerged from three dark years of not winning, rarely even contending and a slide so far down the



Matt York/AP photo

Jordan Spieth hits his tee shot on the 16th hole during a practice round at the PGA Championship on the Ocean Course Tuesday in Kiawah Island, South Carolina.

world ranking that he nearly fell out of the top 100. He often says he'll always bet on himself — a reference to self-belief, not gambling — and there was a time the odds were getting pretty long.

He comes into the PGA Championship trying to become only the sixth player to complete the career Grand Slam, and this chance is as good as any since he captured the third leg in the 2017 British Open.

Spieth has finished in the top 10 in

seven of his last nine tournaments, including the last four, one of those a victory in the Texas Open for his first trophy since Royal Birkdale. He's not all the way back — what golfer ever feels that way? — but is among the leading favorites going into the second major of the year. And he believes the rough times have made him better.

"I've proven to be very human. It's kind of fun," Spieth said. "When I've been on in the past, I've won tour-

naments by eight out here, and that's obviously the goal. But the ability to shun off a bad shot and come back the next hole and make a long putt or something like that — just the grind — is enjoyable when you're on the positive momentum side of it."

Spieth isn't sure when he turned the corner. He points to a two-week stretch at Phoenix and Pebble Beach where he had chances to win on Sunday as evidence he was on the right track.

Will Zalatoris offered another example.

See **Spieth** / A7

Inside

Brooks Koepka's knee still hurting, but he will play PGA, A7

NBA

LeBron vs. Steph: Play-in game will be a superstar tussle

BY TIM REYNOLDS
AP Basketball Writer

LeBron vs. Steph. Oh, what a way to get into NBA playoff mode.

Wednesday night includes No. 10 San Antonio at No. 9 Memphis and No. 8 Golden State at the seventh-seeded Los Angeles Lakers.

LeBron James and Stephen Curry have squared off four times for championships, back in the days of those Warriors-Cleveland matchups in the NBA Finals being annual events.

They'll square off Wednesday for a slightly different prize — the No. 7 seed in the West playoffs, but it'll still be a game loaded with hype and intrigue.

"It'll be a different scenario, but another chapter in it," said Curry, the NBA's scoring champion this season for the second time in his career. "At the end of the day, you expect greatness. That's the part I've enjoyed so much about playing in the finals against him... those games that matter, it just brings out another level of intensity and excitement and a sense of urgency about it, because you know how good you have to play to win games like that."

The Lakers are still the second choice to win the NBA title, according to FanDuel, behind only Brooklyn. And they're the favorites to win the West. Problem is, technically, they're not in the playoffs yet

— and they need a win in the play-in round, Wednesday or Friday if necessary, just to get back to the postseason and have a chance to defend their championship.

James said he considers Curry the MVP of the NBA this season. He's eager to cross paths in a big-time moment with Curry and the Warriors once again, and said he'll take a play-off-game approach to the play-in.

"They've got championship DNA as well," James said. "They've been there. They know what it takes and what it feels like to be in pressure games."

Confidence among the Lakers does not appear to be in short supply. They've been



Jeff Chiu / AP

Golden State Warriors' Kent Bazemore, top, pours water on the head of teammate Stephen Curry after a game against the Memphis Grizzlies in San Francisco on Sunday.

banged up all season, were without James and Anthony Davis for long stretches and might have gotten another scare when James appeared to tweak his problematic right ankle late in Sunday's finale in New Orleans.

James said afterward that he'll be fine, ready for what comes next. He made

headlines a couple of weeks ago when he said the person at the NBA responsible for coming up with the idea of the play-in tournament should be fired. If the Lakers don't win one of their next two games and wind up missing the playoffs, his opinion of the tourney will figure to get worse.

See **NBA** / A6