

SPORTS

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COLLEGE
WORLD SERIESNC State's season
ended by COVID-19

OMAHA, Neb. — North Carolina State baseball players who were one win away from playing for a national championship reacted with anger and confusion to their team's removal from the College World Series because of COVID-19 protocols.

"Words can't describe this feeling," right fielder Devonte Brown tweeted. "An opportunity of a lifetime just snatched away in the blink of an eye."

Vanderbilt advanced to the CWS finals after the NCAA announced early Saturday that the Wolfpack would not be allowed to continue in the tournament. The Commodores will meet Texas or Mississippi State in the best-of-three finals starting Monday.

NC State had only 13 players available during its 3-1 loss to the Commodores on Friday. The teams had been scheduled to meet again Saturday in a winner-take-all Bracket 1 final. The NCAA Division I Baseball Committee declared that game a no-contest.

"This decision was made based on the recommendation of the Championship Medical Team and the Douglas County Health Department," the NCAA said in a statement. "As a result, Vanderbilt will advance to the CWS Finals."

Douglas County Health Department spokesman Phil Rooney said the health department did not recommend NC State's removal but told the NCAA the department would support whatever decision the NCAA made.

"This is a heartbreaking situation and I'm gutted for everyone involved and for all those that were captivated by the heart and fight of this team," coach Elliott Avent said.

— Associated Press

TOUR DE FRANCE

1st stage filled
with crashes

LANDERNEAU, France — The mass return of Tour de France fans coincided with chaos and crashes while world champion Julian Alaphilippe avoided most of the carnage to win the opening stage with a punchy attack on Saturday.

The Frenchman was involved in the first pileup caused by a fan that took down a large part of the peloton but he remained on his bike. He surged ahead of the main pack in the final steep climb leading to the finish in Landerneau, crossing the line with an eight-second lead over Michael Matthews. Last year's runner-up, Primoz Roglic, took third.

The Tour got underway from the western port city of Brest in a festive atmosphere.

The first big spill was caused by a fan who brandished a cardboard sign and leaned into the path of veteran rider Tony Martin.

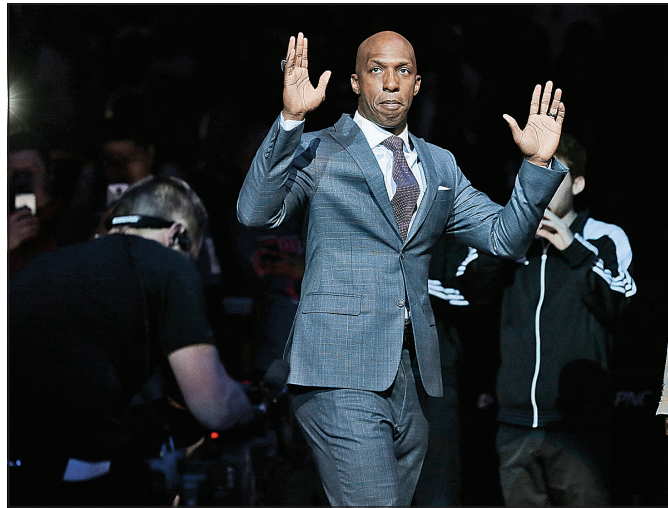
The second pileup involved dozens of competitors — including four-time Tour champion Chris Froome — riding at full speed near the finish.

Thanks to the time bonus, Alaphilippe has a 12-second lead on Matthews in the general classification, with Roglic in third, two seconds further back. Pogacar is in sixth place, 18 seconds behind Alaphilippe.

— Associated Press

NBA COMMENTARY

A case against the Blazers hiring Chauncey Billups



Carlos Osorio/AP file

Former Detroit Pistons Chauncey Billups is introduced during a game against the Denver Nuggets in Auburn Hills, Michigan. Billups was reportedly in discussions with the Portland Trail Blazers on Saturday to become the team's next coach, but a deal had yet to be finalized.

BY JOHN CANZANO

The Oregonian

The hire should have been Becky Hammon. Or even Ime Udoka. No brainers, those two. Or maybe the Trail Blazers' head coaching job should have gone to some other qualified candidate.

If general manager Neil Olshey weren't busy orchestrating the most pathetic hiring charade in state history, we might all get to wake up intoxicated by a decent sports development today.

Instead, we're stuck digesting an old rape case.

Chauncey Billups is reportedly lined up to be Portland's next NBA head coach. Try that on. The NBA franchise that could have gone with a

homegrown talent or been the first-ever to hire a woman as its head coach instead opted to hand the keys to a guy who once settled a sex-assault case out of court.

Larger sports markets won't understand the angst here. Fans in other cities won't easily relate. But you and I get it. The Billups era already feels doomed.

The franchise looked past a line of candidates who would have probably offered to summit Mount Hood barefoot. It came up instead with a tone-deaf misfire of a hire who will arrive with a pile of questions.

Where's owner Jody Allen on this one? How about All-Star guard Damian Lillard? I believed the report that Al-

len wanted to give Hammon strong consideration. Figured it was a done deal. I've applauded Lillard for his leadership. In the end I'm wondering if Olshey really is running the franchise unchecked these days.

Olshey wanted Billups so badly that he put on blinders weeks ago and raced toward the outcome without considering the collateral damage.

He didn't bother to interview some other qualified candidates, including the homegrown Udoka. Didn't fit his desired outcome.

It's petty, disappointing, self-serving stuff. But that's essentially a summary of the Olshey era, folks.

See **Blazers** / B3

Surf Ranch founder and 11-time world champion surfer Kelly Slater does a slashing turn off a wave during the Jeep Surf Ranch Pro on June 20.

Allen J. Schaben/Los Angeles Times

BY ELLIOTT ALMOND

The Mercury News

LEMOORE, Calif. — An overheated day in the Central Valley found the greatest surfer in history walking barefoot around a sprawling facility that manufactures a perfectly sculpted wave.

Kelly Slater, 49, was in his element at the Jeep Surf Ranch Pro, the last competition before the Summer Games in Japan.

An unexpected turn of events has led to the possibility that the 11-time world champion will enter a new arena next month in Tokyo, a twist that could draw more attention to an outdoor adventure sport making an Olympic debut.

Slater is on standby after injuries to America's two qualifiers this year left an opening for the team's famous alternate.

A lot has to happen before Slater can paddle for gold at Tsurigasaki Beach in Chiba, Japan. But his presence would add a celebrity vibe to the waves.

"I don't want to make it that way," Slater said. "But if that is what it is I'll take my spot."

Surfing was a niche sport for Slater's generation well before Olympic officials saw the need to attract X Games crowds to energize flagging viewership.

"Not to minimize it, it is more for kids in the future," Slater said of the Olympics.

Slater failed to qualify by the slightest margins in

the 2019 World Surf League finale in Hawaii. Now his status depends on the recoveries of Olympic qualifiers Kolohoe Andino and John John Florence.

Andino has resumed training at a surf break near his San Clemente home while still recovering from two ankle sprains.

Florence, a two-time world champion from Hawaii, injured his left knee in early May during a competition in Australia. Florence had surgery to repair the damage and needs recovery to go well to compete in Japan.

Slater saw Florence on a paddleboard on the North Shore of Oahu last week with a brace on the injured knee. He said Florence was not kicking with his left leg "so it makes me think he is in pain or really, really protecting it just to be careful."

Slater and others worry about long-term damage if Florence tries to surf the small waves of Japan 12 weeks after the injury.

See **Slater** / B3

MLB COMMENTARY

Sticky stuff should just be the start for baseball

BY TIM DAHLBERG

AP Sports Columnist

The four Cubs pitchers were checked one by one as they left the mound Thursday night, and all passed inspection. Getting a grip on the baseball didn't seem to be an issue at Dodger Stadium, where the visiting hurlers combined to throw the seventh no-hitter of the season in the major leagues.

Somehow, they managed to do it without hitting even one batter, laying to rest — for

one night, at least — one of the lamest excuses offered up by pitchers desperate to keep putting sticky stuff on the ball. The idea that professional pitchers can't control where the ball goes without super glue on it is about as preposterous as saying teams can't get three outs in an inning without using a shift.

The same night in Florida, Boston pitchers took a no-hitter of their own into the eighth inning in a game the Red Sox would lose 1-0 to Tampa Bay.

Professional hitters on both teams combined for a grand total of six hits while striking out 19 times.

And on Friday, Phillies pitcher Aaron Nola tied a major league record set 51 years ago by Tom Seaver by striking out 10 Mets in a row.

Not even a week into Rob Manfred's crackdown on cheating pitchers, it's pretty much business as usual across the big leagues.

See **MLB** / B3

Chris O'Meara/AP

Boston Red Sox relief pitcher Darwinzon Hernandez has his equipment checked for foreign substances by umpires Mark Ripberger (90) and Tom Hallion after being taken out of the game against the Tampa Bay Rays on Thursday in St. Petersburg, Florida.