

John Rocker gets big ovation vs. Tigers

by Gene Guidi

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LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. — A standing ovation.

That was the reception awaiting John Rocker as the chastised reliever sprinted in from the Atlanta Braves' bullpen for his spring training debut against the Tigers on Tuesday night.

The first batter he faced, Gregg Jefferies, was surprised by the reaction of the crowd of 10,070, a record for a Braves spring training game.

"I was shocked, very shocked," Jefferies said. "It looks like the fans forgave him for what he said."

"He made a mistake, I hope he has

learned from it."

Rocker, who offended gays, women, ethnic minorities and teammates among others in a December Sports Illustrated interview, was a bit wild in his first appearance. He fell behind Jefferies, 3-0, before getting him on a 3-1 pop to third base. The next batter, Javier Cardona, grounded to third on a 1-1 pitch before Robert Fick took a called third strike on a 2-2 curve to finish Atlanta's 4-0 victory.

"It looks like everyone has forgiven him, doesn't it?" Fick said of the fan reaction. "It had to be pretty special to him to have the fans welcome him back like they did."

"I wish him luck, he's a hell of a pitcher."

Afterward, Rocker spoke briefly to an Atlanta reporter before ducking into the training room for a 45-minute workout. He sent word through the Braves that he wouldn't speak with the two dozen or so reporters who gathered around his locker in the clubhouse.

After his ballyhooed return two weeks ago, Rocker hasn't attracted as much attention.

The Braves hope to keep it that way for the rest of spring training.

"If the media chooses to start it up again, then it will," general manager John Schuerholz said. "It's a guy pitching for the first time this spring. That's all it should be."

Rocker was suspended and fined

by commissioner Bud Selig; an arbitrator reduced the suspension from the first 28 days of the season to 14 and cut his fine from \$20,000 to \$500.

Selig said the arbitrator's ruling "completely ignores the sensibilities of those groups of people maligned by Mr. Rocker."

Rumors that Rocker was headed to Montreal for reliever Ugueth Urbina have quieted while the Braves see what effect, if any, his presence has on clubhouse harmony.

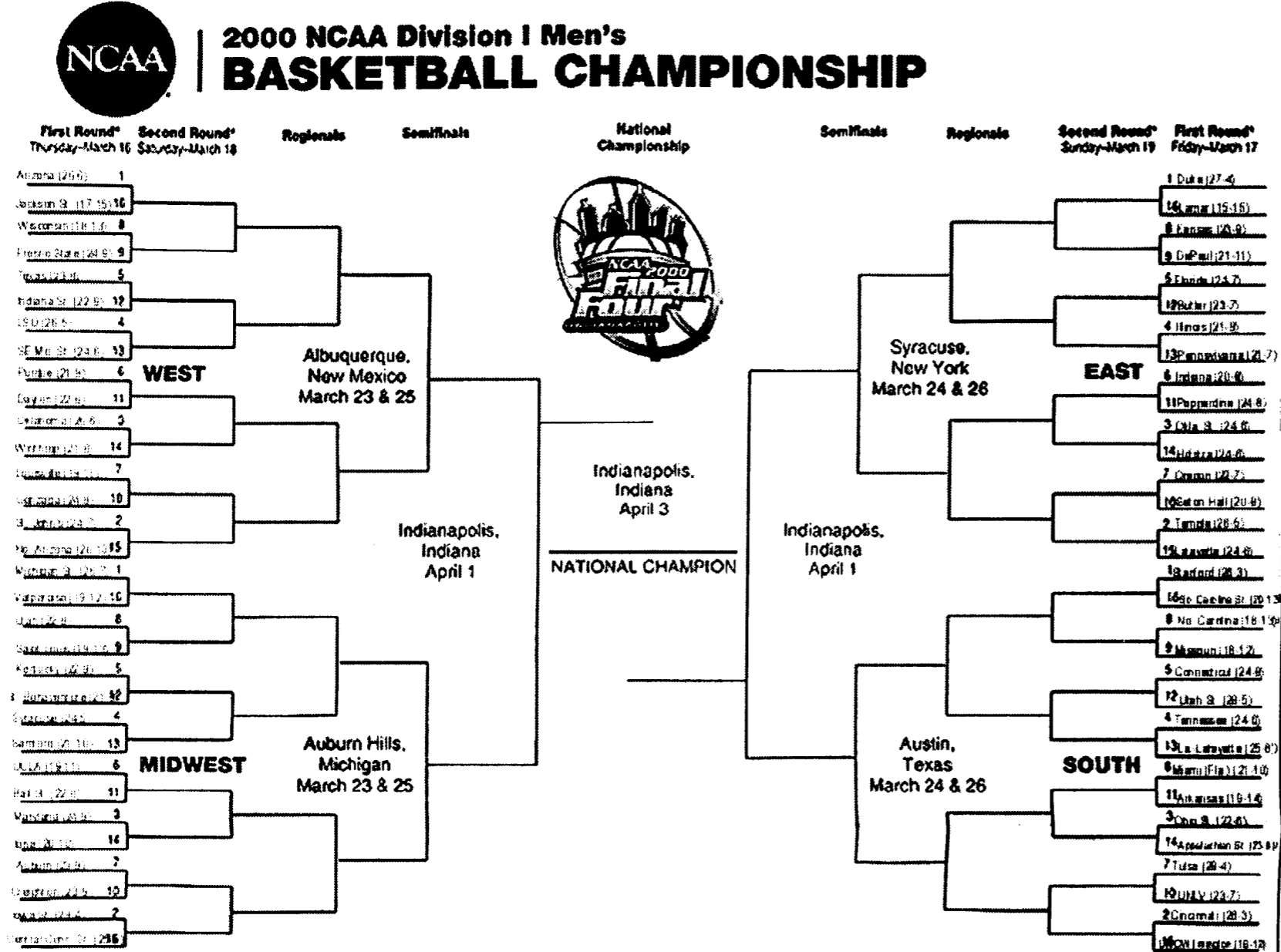
"We're trying to get our team in shape with as little controversy as possible," manager Bobby Cox said. "Everyone is willing to give people a second chance, and this is his."



Atlanta Braves pitcher John Rocker pitches against the Detroit Tigers at Walt Disney World in Lake Buena Vista, Florida.

TMS PHOTO

MEN'S NCAA DIVISION I BRACKET



INTRAMURAL ROUNDUP

Intramural Modified Softball

Entries: Deadline is Friday, March 24, at 4:00 p.m.

Entry Fee: \$2.00 will be charged to your student account

Divisions: Men's Women's and Coed

Tournament: Round robin. Top two teams will advance to a single elimination championship bracket.

Time and Place: Matches will be played Monday thru Thursday beginning around 4:30 p.m.

Notes: League play will begin around Tuesday, March 28. There is a MANDATORY captains meeting on Monday, March 27, at 5:30 p.m. in the Erie Hall classroom.

White Water Rafting

The Office of Intramural and Recreational Programs will be sponsoring a white water rafting trip in Ohio, PA.

When: The trip is Saturday, April 29. Transportation will be provided. The trip will leave around 7:00 a.m. and will return sometime in the evening.

Cost: \$25.00 per person, which must be paid at the time of registration. Lunch will be provided. Wetsuits will be available for \$10.00 each and are required.

Registration: Deadline is Friday, March 24 at 4:00 p.m. You MUST register at the IM office and at the time of registration you MUST have: Student ID, payment in full (non-refundable), driver's license to verify you are 18, and you will be asked to sign a waiver

Give From the Heart!

Blood Drive

Wednesday, March 22
11:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
at the Reed Commons

Blood Donors must be at least 17 years old, weigh at least 110 lbs. and be in general good health. Please eat well before you give.

The Community Blood Bank is THE SOURCE for blood in Erie County. Help your family, friends & neighbors - donate blood today!

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