

The short off-season is long one for racing fans



Out of Bounds
Jason Snyder
sports columnist

The holiday season should bring cheer and excitement to everyone who enjoys ham and turkey, presents and mistletoe. But the beginning of the holiday season means the end of NASCAR racing for three months. Even though the off-season is short, fans can become pretty impatient waiting for the cars to take the green flag again.

The wait for NASCAR fans this off-season will seem even longer with Jeff Gordon, arguably, the circuit's most unpopular driver, dancing around with the Winston Cup Championship.

Gordon clinched the championship at Atlanta Motor Speedway last month, making him only the third driver in history to win more than three series titles, joining company with NASCAR's "King" Richard Petty and its legend Dale Earnhardt.

While Gordon's critics can't wait to see the four-time champion dethroned, Gordon's fans can't wait to see their driver climb one step closer to Petty and Earnhardt's record of seven Winston Cup Championships.

For the old fans of Dale Earnhardt, this three-month wait will be a mix of emotions and attitudes towards the upcoming season. For the first time in more than 20 years, the Daytona 500 will take place without "The Intimidator." Earnhardt meant as much to the Daytona 500 as bread means to butter. The loss of the legend leaves a bitter taste in our mouths and leaves us memories that we just can't bring ourselves to swallow.

Earnhardt will get most of the attention again this year when the cars are being fine-tuned for the "Super Bowl of Racing." But this hype will be for a different reason. It's a return to the track that took Earnhardt's life; a bittersweet moment for racing fans who can once again celebrate the success of the sport's most famous man, while mourning the fateful day when everything in racing changed.

The face of racing did change last year, but it was for more reasons than just one. A series that was once dominated by a handful of drivers at a time is becoming a series where any driver can win on any given week.

Ask Michael Waltrip, who won his first ever Winston Cup race at Daytona last year, or Kevin Harvick, who captured his first checkered flag in a car fit for a champion. Check with Elliott Sadler, Ricky Craven, or Robby Gordon, all first-time winners in 2001. They can all tell you of racing's unpredictability.

There were 19 different drivers who captured wins in 2001 and only Gordon won at least five, which is a far cry from the 13 wins Gordon needed to capture his championship in 1998.

Every weekend, there was drama on the racing tracks of America. Whether it was the tragic final turn of the Daytona 500, the photo finish of the man filling Earnhardt's shoes, the taming of Daytona by an encouraged son, or the flag-waving pride of drivers and fans alike, Winston Cup racing created memories worth hanging onto and a future that can't come too soon.

Six-month off-seasons in football, basketball, and baseball may have become commonplace for fans, but a three-month wait for NASCAR is simply unbearable.

Lions prove early losses just a fluke



PHOTO BY JEFF HANKEY

Will it or won't it? That is the question for the women's basketball team in the first game of the Winter Classic Tournament on Nov. 30 against RIT. Not everyone's eyes are focused on the ball, though. The two girls in the stands don't seem too excited about the outcome of the shot.

by Nick Nesbitt
staff writer

The women's basketball team made a solid comeback with a win against conference foe Pitt-Bradford on Wednesday. The weekend before, the Lions won back-to-back games in its annual Penn State Behrend Winter Classic Tournament on Nov. 30 and Dec. 1.

Senior Erin Phillips had the best all-around game by a Lion this season, shooting 12 of 14 from the floor and adding 11 rebounds on her way to a 28-point performance in the Lions 84-53 win over Bradford. Phillips beat the former game-high point total of 23 she set four days earlier.

Her 28 points also pushed her career total past the 1,200 point plateau as she chases Michele Madison's all-time point record of 1,409. Phillips already holds the record for most free-throws (390), free-throw percentage (83), and field goal percentage (53).

Senior Katie Weigold added 13 points,

including three 3-pointers, to the winning effort, while junior Amanda Mauser contributed 10 points. The Lions shot a blistering 55 percent from the floor, while holding Bradford to a 39 percent field goal average. The win brought Behrend's record back up to the .500 level at 4-4.

The Lady Lions had only one win - against Bluffton on Nov. 16 - before they rallied for wins over Rochester Institute of Technology and Albion to capture the Behrend Tournament.

In the first game on Nov. 30, the Lady Lions were matched against RIT in its first game of the year. Rochester was held the entire day by the Lions' great team defense as the Behrend won 71-48. Even though RIT shot 56 percent from the field, it only got 19 shots off in the first half. The Lions stuck together for a 37-22 lead at the half.

They came back out with the same intensity in the second half. The Lions held their opponent to just 26 percent shooting in the second half. Not a single person on the Rochester team scored in double fig-

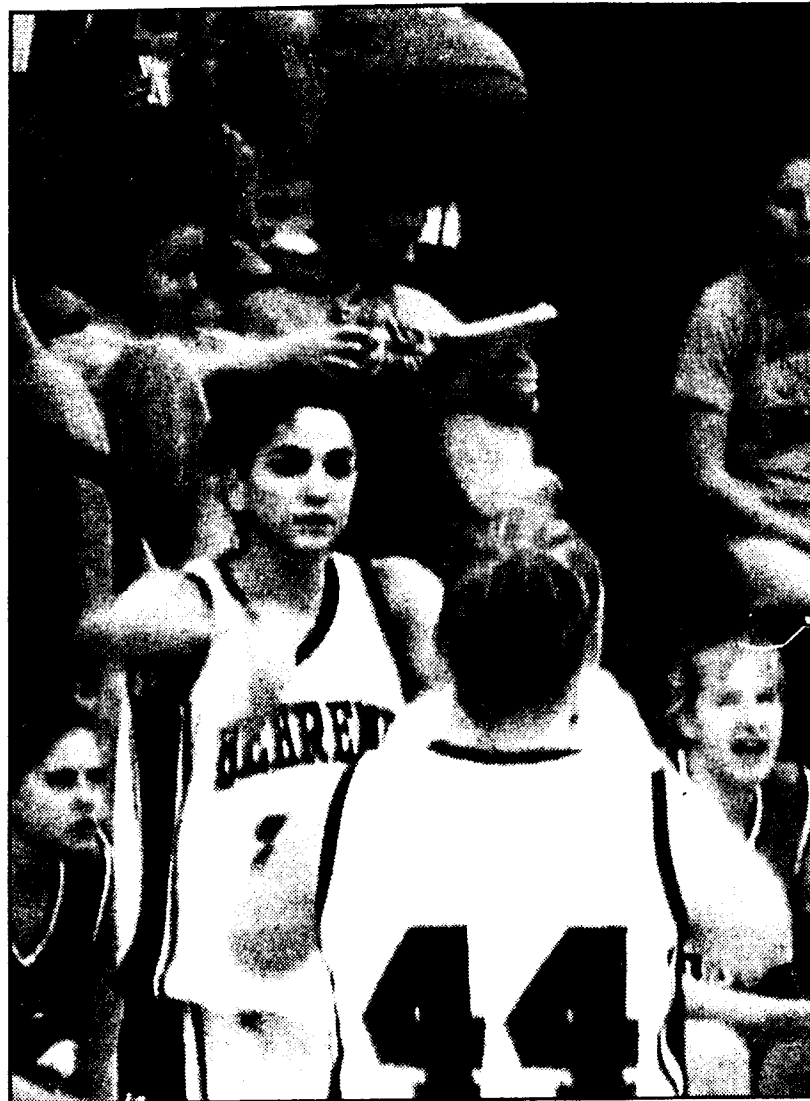


PHOTO BY JEFF HANKEY

Junior Amanda Mauser passes to sophomore Erica Mozdy in front of RIT's bench on Nov. 30. Maybe RIT should have used its second string more, as not one starter scored in double digits in Behrend's overpowering 71-48 win.

ures due to the Lions' outstanding defense. Senior Kate Costanzo had 21 points, and Erica Mozdy notched seven assists to help Behrend put Rochester away.

The Lions then faced Albion in the championship. Albion entered the game undefeated at 5-0 but that did not matter to the Lions as they won 71-64 in overtime. The Lions shot 40 percent and held the Albion team to 36 percent. The first half ended with the Lady Lions ahead by a score of 31-30. They matched Albion with 25 shots in the first half.

However, by the end of regulation, the score was tied at 60. But it was their strong 3-point shooting that got them into overtime. They shot seven of 16 from behind the arc compared to the 13 percent they held RIT to in the second half.

The story of overtime was found at the free throw line. The Lady Lions made all seven of their free throws while not send-

ing Albion to the line a single time. Phillips led the Lions with 23 points in only 27 minutes of playing time. Both Costanzo and Phillips were named to the All-tournament team. Phillips was also named the tournament Most Valuable Player.

The Lady Lions will be busy over Christmas break with some very strong competition. They host Penn State Altoona on Saturday, travel to the Sun Desert Classic in Las Vegas, Nev. from Dec. 16 through 20, and play at Buffalo State on Jan. 5.

The Lady Lions will try to avenge their disappointing loss to Penn State Altoona in last year's conference tournament title game. They will play some of the best teams in the country at the Sun Desert Classic in Las Vegas.

BCS playoff system not so Swift, as usual

By Sam Donnellon
Knight Ridder Newspapers

In his satire, "A Modest Proposal," 18th century English writer Jonathan Swift's solution to Irish poverty and overpopulation was a ghastly but calmly stated plan:

Eat the children.

The strength of the satire is its naive, even benevolent, tone, which seduces readers into following the author's rigorous logic until the horrifying conclusion.

"Having turned my thoughts for many years upon this important subject, and maturely weighed the several schemes of other projectors, I have always found them grossly mistaken in their computation," Swift wrote before laying out his tongue-in-cheek plan.

I imagine an author of the increasingly infamous Bowl Championship Series saying something like this while "fixing" college football a few years ago.

Come to think of it, I think I once saw that quote on Bud Selig's wall, too. He is a big fan of history, you know.

The difference is that Bud really doesn't have a plan, and the Bowl Championship Series is not meant to be a satire.

In fact, four years after its inception, the organizers of the BCS still think it's a good idea.

Which, as we now seem to discover annually, makes it as bitterly laughable as Swift's proposal.

Proponents of the BCS will breathe easier if Tennessee beats LSU this weekend. Then, its top-rated team, Miami, will play its second-rated team, Tennessee, for the national title in the Rose Bowl, and rancor in the land will be minimal until next year at this time, when these last few messy weeks are likely to be played out all over again.

And if LSU wins? Oh baby, cover your ears. According to Jerry Palm, who charts this stuff on a Web site, neither Colorado nor Oregon can push past third-rated Nebraska in Sunday's final BCS rankings unless some poll voters change the order they placed the teams from this week to next. The Buffaloes trampled then-No. 2 Nebraska two weeks ago, 62-36, and beat

Texas in the Big 12 championship Saturday, yet find themselves crunched into fourth place in the BCS ratings game.

"Such a radical change in the polls involving teams not playing, whether it is done to benefit Colorado or Oregon, would be unprecedented this late in the season and would call into question the whole integrity of the process," Palm wrote Monday. "On the other hand, there will certainly be people who say that having a team play for the national title when it could not qualify to play for its conference title would also call into question the integrity of the system."

What's wrong with that, you ask? Isn't that a possibility at almost every Final Four?

Yes, and that is basketball, where even the best teams are expected to lose a handful of games during the season. Comparing it to football is, well, like comparing babies to beef.

Plus, to get to that point in hoops, a conference also-ran has to beat a slew of conference champions. The Huskers might reach the championship game because they were lying in whirlpools last weekend while others in the top rung risked rankings, sometimes by playing head-to-head.

Top-rated Miami was tortured by its perennial nemesis, Virginia Tech, but survived.

Florida was dumped by Tennessee.

Oregon was trying to lock up the Pac-10 against rival Oregon State.

Nebraska? Pass the Tostitos in the Fiesta Bowl, please.

They sat and watched. Now, thanks to the grand plan, initiated in 1998 instead of a college playoff system, and revised last season, the Huskers might make a national championship game even though they did not win their division, and thus could not play in the Big 12 championship game.

Unfair? They sure think so in Colorado, where, over a two-week span, the Buffaloes beat Nebraska, then avenged an early loss to Texas with a 39-37 win in Saturday's Big 12 title game.

That's two wins over Top 5 teams in two weeks for Colorado. Championship material stuff for the Buffs, if not for this:



PHOTO BY ERICH SCHLEGEL/DALLAS MORNING NEWS

Texas Longhorns' quarterback Chris Simms fumbles as he is sacked by Colorado's DeAndre Fluellen at Texas Stadium during the Big XII Championship game Saturday in Irving, Texas. Colorado, despite beating Texas and Nebraska, finds itself in fourth place in the BCS Standings behind Miami, Tennessee, and Nebraska.

They lost to Texas earlier this season, 41-7. That's a wider margin than the Buffs' rout of Nebraska.

And... the Buffs' 24-22 loss to Fresno State?

Those two losses negated any chance for Colorado to play its way into the situation that Nebraska saw its way through. And think what might have happened had that Virginia Tech receiver not dropped a two-point conversion in Miami's 26-24 win Saturday...

From their couches, Nebraska might already have been catapulted into the title game.

There's got to be a better way. There is. It's called, "The Way It Was."

That wasn't perfect, but it sure made New Year's Day interesting most years. In

fact, last Saturday - with all those ranked teams playing each other, but not necessarily in order - had the feel of Jan. 1, only without the headache.

That might come Saturday, should Tennessee lose to LSU, which it nearly did the first time the teams played this year. Then, instead of eliminating all the debates about No. 1 and bowl matchups, the BCS ratings will have inspired such unwanted offspring.

You can hear it already: Bumbling Championship System. Bickering Chaotic System. Beyond Common Sense.

The BCS didn't start out as satire. But even Swift would be hard-pressed to create the delicious chaos it has inspired.

Going to Memphis to study basketball ethics

by Steve Jacobson
Newsday

All of this is legal and according to the rules. Whether it is immoral or fattening is in the eye of the beholder. These are the rules of college basketball.

The setting is the University of Memphis, the institution formerly known as Memphis State. That's the school with the zero graduation rate for basketball players, the school that brought John Calipari to coach after one successful coach, Dana Kirk, was sentenced to a year in prison for tax evasion amid allegations that he passed money from boosters to players, and another coach, Tic Price, resigned after admitting an affair with a student. It's never too late to do the right thing.

The player is Dajuan Wagner, who scored 100 points in a game last season for Camden High School in New Jersey. Calipari has identified him as the right thing for the institution.

Wagner, a 6-2 guard, made it clear early in the recruiting he would favor a college that gave a scholarship to his best friend, Arthur Barclay, a teammate one year ahead at Camden who didn't qualify academically. Barclay got the scholarship. The Memphis assistant athletic director, Bob Winn, said Barclay completed 24 credits as an ineligible freshman and has played in each of the team's seven games as a power forward.

Milt Wagner, Dajuan's father, a star at the University of Louisville and a former NBA journeyman, was hired as coordinator of basketball operations even though he doesn't have a college degree. Shortly afterward, Dajuan committed to Memphis and Calipari. Athletic director R.C. Johnson was quoted in *The New York Times Magazine* last week as saying he was concerned about Wagner's lack of a degree and conceded that Calipari probably wouldn't have wanted him if not for Dajuan, but "I think it's part of recruiting, and it's not illegal." The NCAA confirms that hiring the father to get the son violates no rules.

"Memphis didn't invent this," said Mike Glazier, who is sort of a town-tanner in college sports. He is a former quarterback at Indiana University and briefly the Kansas City Chiefs who is hired as a lawyer by schools to prevent and correct violations. The classic precedent was Larry Brown taking on Ed Manning as assistant at Kansas in order to get Danny Manning, who led Kansas to an NCAA championship.

"It's a good question why that's accepted," Glazier said. "The NCAA doesn't have jurisdiction over who a coach hires. Assistant coaches aren't charged with education outside of basketball."

Wagner probably is well qualified to coach, and in combination with Calipari, who coached the New Jersey Nets for three years, the pair is attractive as conduits to the NBA.

Thinking our temples of education should be repositories of ethical and moral thinking must be outdated, like old milk. But just a minute, there's more.

Last July, Dajuan... they call him Juanny... and two friends were charged in Camden with aggravated assault on a classmate. They were convicted of simple assault. There's no rule about recruiting a player on probation.

Faced with Memphis' education record, Calipari made a radio appeal and a fan donated laptops to the athletic department, which makes them available in a study room in case athletes want to do schoolwork.

That's within the rules. Calipari met with Memphis-based Federal Express, which offered each player a summer internship at \$20 an hour. The NCAA said that was acceptable as long as players actually showed up.

Ultimately the question becomes whether the player wants to be in college. The better the player the less likely he is to stay. Players who are Wagner's height seldom go directly to the NBA from high school. According to the account by Stephen Rodrick in the *Times*, Wagner showed up for the university president's meeting with athletes just before she finished. Rodrick asked Dajuan what courses he was taking. He replied, "Man I don't even know; wherever they tell me to go, I go."

Memphis won five of its first seven games. Freshman Wagner is leading the scoring with an average of 22.7 points. Season tickets to the 20,000-seat Pyramid have reached a record 17,400. The student allotment of 5,000 free tickets were going unused in the past and have been reduced to 2,500 seats. Those have been unfilled this season even though the national champion pom-pom squad alone is worth attendance.

Whatever happened to the idea that the university sports program did not exist to entertain the community?