

Summer pro sports delight die-hard fans

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The summer of '91 has been one sports fans dream about, and I would personally like to thank the "sports gods" for sprinkling their magic dust over the playing fields. It seems every day I turned to the sports page, a different unsung team or individual had won a championship, as well as a place in our hearts.

Our journey through the hot summer begins with the ice arenas of the NHL playoffs where the Minnesota North Stars were blazing through the top teams of the regular season. They started their quest for the Cup by handling the Chicago Black Hawks, who had the best record in hockey, and then conquered another Norris Division foe, the St. Louis Blues who had finished just one point behind Chicago, just as easily.

The next test for the pesky North Stars was the rejuvenated Edmonton Oilers and many people believed this was the end of the line for the Minnesota club. But great goal tending by John Casey and clutch scoring by Greg Gagne and Brian Bellows put the Stars in the Cup Finals. At this point, many people believed the Stars were "for real" and most everyone expected them to win the Cup. However, this fairy tale would not be complete until another surprising team would make its way to the finals.

The Pittsburgh Penguins struggled with their first round opponent from New Jersey in a seven game series and blew past the other Patrick Division finalist, the Washington Capitals, to set up a black and gold showdown with the Bruins. Boston had the best record in the Wales Conference and was supposed to handle any team from the "weak" Patrick Division, but in a fairy tale season what SHOULD happen usually doesn't, and it didn't. Pittsburgh defeated Boston and was headed for an all-american Cup final between two upstart teams.

As I said earlier, many people believed no one could cool off Minnesota so they were the crowd favorites, but the "sports gods" knew this and threw a wrench in the North Stars plans and gave Pittsburgh Sir Lord Stanley's Cup in six games, the first in franchise history.

The NHL draft shortly followed the finals and as expected Eric Lindros was named the first pick by Quebec. The 6-foot 5-inch Lindros scored 71 goals, had 78 assists in 57 games for Oshawa and is already being compared to Lemieux and Gretzky. Could it be a cinderella year for the Nordiques in 1992?

We now turn from the hard ice to the hard wood where the Chicago Bulls looked to give Michael Jordan the sweetest prize of all, an NBA Championship ring. The Bulls proved that they were the superior team during the regular season by compiling the best record in the NBA, but they knew from watching the NHL playoffs that their regular season success meant little.

The Bulls quickly showed they were ready for the second season, unlike their uptown NHL team, by destroying the

Knicks by over 40 points in game one and swept the Knicks in three games. The Bulls next victim was Philadelphia, who beat Chicago three out of four times during the regular season, but could only escape with one victory in a five game series and that was on a last second three-pointer by Hersey Hawkins. The Bulls last obstacle before the finals was two-time defending champ Detroit, but Chicago quickly put an end to their dreams of "three-peating" in a four game sweep.

Meanwhile, out west the Trail Blazers put an end to the Lakers nine year reign in the Pacific Division by having the best record in the Western Conference, and were hands-on favorites to repeat as Conference champions (mainly due to the off-season acquisition of Danny Ainge). The Blazers and Lakers both breezed to the Conference finals as if story book written, but once again the underdog prevailed. The Lakers grabbed the series in five games and were helped by some of their own off-season purchases, namely Sam Perkins and Terry Teagle, setting up the greatly awaited Magic versus Michael showdown.

Game one of the finals didn't go as planned (what new?), because the key match-up was between Perkins and John Paxon, with Perkins hitting a three-pointer in the closing moments. L.A.

had taken game one, but superb defense by Chicago and their 60 percent shooting from the floor propelled them to an easy game two victory. An overtime victory in game three at the Forum and a blowout of game four made the Bulls even stronger. If the Lakers were to send the series back to Chicago for game six, they would have to do it without starters James Worthy and Byron Scott, who both hobbled with injuries. Spirited play by Laker rookie Elden Campbell almost booked the flight, but even the "sports gods" couldn't stop the raging Bulls named Paxon, Jordan and Scottie Pippen (who made the clutch shots and gave them the championship).

Finally something went as planned. The best team in basketball proved themselves but they did it with a team effort and not with a one-man show, as is often thought of when the Chicago Bulls are mentioned.

The main character of this summer's narrative is without a doubt PGA Championship winner John Daly who won the tournament at the Crooked Stick Country Club in Indiana. Daly was called to play in the tournament the day before it started as the last alternate for a golfer who could not participate because his wife went into labor. Daly, known for his monstrous drives, came out of no where to lead the pack with a

12 under par weekend.

Baseball fans are asking themselves "What now?" as the 162-game schedule draws to a close. The Twins and the Braves are trying to go from worst to first in their respective divisions, but anything can happen in this season which has already been dubbed "the year of the streak." It's been named so because over 35 times a team has either won or lost seven consecutive games.

The American League West has been the most competitive division in baseball mainly because every team has been playing well and has a chance to finish over .500. Hats off to Cal Ripken and Dennis Martinez for what they've done this year. Ripken recently played in his 1500th consecutive game and was named MVP of the All-Star Game in Toronto for his 2 for 3 performance which included a three-run homer, propelling his American Leaguers to a 4-2 win. Martinez also deserves recognition for throwing a perfect game against the Dodgers, the 15th perfect game in baseball history.

The story book summer is almost over but the fall promises to bring more excitement with the conclusion of the baseball season and the start of college and pro football. My only advice to fall sports fans is for them NOT to believe the predictions.

PENN STATE 1991 FOOTBALL SCHEDULE

August 28	Georgia Tech (Kickoff Classic) 9 p.m. Giants Stadium
September 7	CINCINNATI 1 p.m.
September 14	at USC 9 p.m.
September 21	BYU 8 p.m.
September 28	BOSTON COLLEGE 1 p.m.
October 5	Temple 9 p.m. (*)
October 12	at Miami tba
October 19	RUTGERS 1 p.m.
October 26	WEST VIRGINIA 1 p.m.
November 9	Maryland 1:30 p.m. (+)
November 16	NOTRE DAME 1 P.M.
November 28	at Pittsburgh 11:15 a.m.

CAPS indicate HOME games

* Veterans Stadium

+ Baltimore Memorial Stadium