

Eye on Sports

All-Star Fever is Upon Us, Avoid Contracting It At All Costs

By Dave Hoffer - *Lion's Eye Staff Writer* - deh5081@psu.edu

With the Pro Bowl and the NHL All-Star game behind us, and the NBA All-Star game this Sunday, we are officially in the midst of All-Star season. For decades, the NFL, MLB, NHL and NBA have all put their best players from their leagues on their respective surfaces for an exhibition with the best talent they possess that season. It's a tradition that many people look forward to. My question, as a sports fan who has critically reviewed each game in recent years, does the majority really care?

The NFL Pro Bowl:

The modern day Pro Bowl has been with us since '71 and long featured tight games, usually high scores (especially in recent years), and a festive atmosphere. Yes, a festive atmosphere. No intensity, no hatred, no blitzing, no physicality that makes professional football so great. Watching the Pro Bowl this year was difficult for me. While there were plenty of points put up, only two touchdowns were from 40+ yards, not exactly the most exciting of ways the best collective offense the league can strike. I just don't see how one-way football is exciting. Football has always been a warlike game of strategy on offense as well as defense. I must be in the minority though, as the TV ratings for this year were a big success, even topping Game 3 of the World Series.

Improvements Needed: Bring back blitzing. Increase end zone celebrations to create the festive atmosphere. Hold game after Super Bowl to allow the two best teams in the NFL to send their talent.

The MLB All-Star Game:

When it comes to history and all-stars, MLB

leads the pack. Holding games since 1933, MLB has always featured the best players from their respective leagues squaring off. The MLB All-Star Game, however, is a thing of the past. The 2010 game featured the worst rating the game has ever seen since ratings were tracked begging in 1967. Why are fans tuning out? Interleague play, good pitching stifling good hitting, and larger rosters have been blamed for the games decline. The latter one has created a little league mentality of "getting everyone into the game" that is problematic in managing the game to win. One thing that needs to be eliminated as a result of that is the home field advantage stipulation. It

has failed to draw ratings and still has done nothing

to make us forget the embarrassment the league suffered in 2002. The best team should receive home field advantage in the World Series not because the mandatory lone Washington National or Kansas City Royal failed to deliver a game winning RBI.

Improvements Needed: End home field advantage gimmick. Shorten roster. End each team must have one representative rule.

The NHL All-Star Game

The NHL All-Star Game has seen many transformations in its existence: All-Stars vs. Defending Champions, East vs. West, Campbell vs. Wales, North America vs. World, and most recently, Team Lidstrom vs. Team Staal. As a diehard Flyers fan and hockey fan in general, I have long had a love hate relationship when it comes to this game. While the casual fan may be intrigued by the usual high scoring and finesse play of the

all-stars, more hardcore fans seem to grow distant of the game year after year. One problem is the NHL has really never recovered from the transition from tough, hardnosed, old school hockey into Gary Bettman's vision of a faster and softer game, or "The New NHL." The all-star game is the perfect example of what a tragedy the NHL is trying to become. There hasn't been a hit thrown in the game since Jeremy Roenick threw one on Alexei Zhitnik in 2002. The bright spot is that the new format of captains picking teams like school yard hockey is intriguing but will need a few more years to see if it keeps interest in the masses.

Improvements needed: More physical. Better selection process (See Danny Briere's initial snub).

The NBA All-Star Game

With its insanely high scoring and non existing defense resembling a Washington Generals performance, the NBA All-Star Game has been around since 1951. Featuring the best in the leagues respective conferences versus on another, in recent years, it's been centered the usual suspects in the NBA: Kobe Bryant, LeBron James, Dwyane Wade, Kevin Garnett and Dwight Howard. For

me personally, it's become repetitive and tiresome to see that same faces year after year. However, they are

the elite of the NBA and that's what the game should be about. While ratings have see-sawed back and forth the past 3 years, look for a stronger number this year without competition from the Olympics.

Improvements Needed: Fresh blood cracking the starting lineup.

Collins' coaching pays off for Sixers

By Lee Burpee - *Lion's Eye Staff Writer* - lxb5012@psu.edu

Under the watchful eye of Coach Doug Collins, a young Sixers team has learned how to win. After a poor start to the season, the Sixers have gone 21-14, and have worked their way into playoff contention.

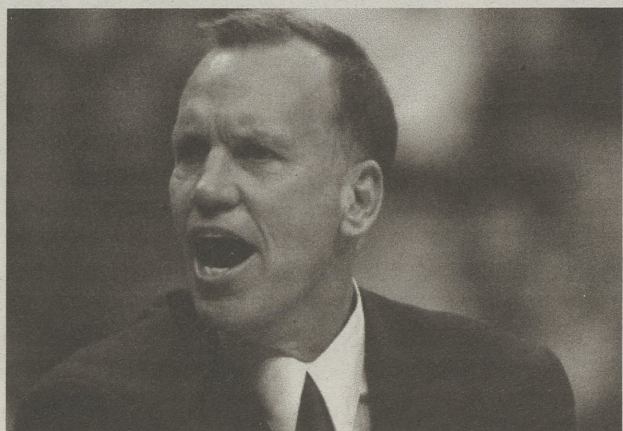
The 76ers are making serious advances in the playoff mix, at the 7th spot in the standings right now. This is a much improved record from last season at this point, when the 76ers were one of the worst teams in the conference. The 76ers new coach, Doug Collins, has done very well so far in keeping the 76ers in the playoff hunt. However, the 76ers could still use improvements for their team this season, in order to get to the playoffs. Trade rumors regarding Andre Iguodala have been a topic of discussion among many members of the Philadelphia sports media.

The real question is will Andre Iguodala stay a 76er? Or, will he be traded? Iguodala has done very well with the team, but the 76ers could use a player that would make an impact in the post-season. One possibility is Denver Nuggets star Carmelo Anthony, who is currently on their trading block. This would help the 76ers a lot because the 76ers have not had a player on the national stage since Allen Iverson, who helped the team get to the 2001 NBA finals. The 76ers will get a lot more fans in the seats if they continue to have a great season; this would really improve if they could get Carmelo Anthony.

Sixers coach Doug Collins has made a major impact, coaching the young 76er team. Veteran leadership from Andre Iguodala and Elton Brand has helped as well. Doug Collins, a former 76er player, and has come back full circle to help the 76ers possibly get into the playoffs this year.

The 76ers had the same players before Doug Collins started to coach last year, and the team had a horrible season. Doug Collins has changed the team's chemistry, figuring out where to put players in the lineup in order to win games. On February 8, the 76ers had one of their best games this season, beating the Atlanta Hawks 117 to 83, a 34 point blowout in Atlanta. These are the type of games the 76ers need to have in order to show they are capable of making a playoff run.

The 76ers have a lot to look forward as they head down the playoff stretch. The 76ers could have a good shot at winning a playoff series against a good team because they are doing so well this season. Looking down the road in the seasons to come, the 76ers young squad should continue to develop and improve.



Phillies Preview

By Sean Morgan - *Lion's Eye Staff Writer* - sdm5219@psu.edu

The Phillies will report to Clearwater, Florida for spring training this year with one thing in mind: a parade down Broad Street in late October.

Pitchers and catchers will report a few days ahead of position players, on February 13th; among them will be the Phillies key offseason acquisition, Cliff Lee.

Cliff Lee, the most sought after player in free agency this year, decided to come back to the Phillies where he had major success in the second half of the 2009 season. Lee was traded from the Cleveland Indians to the Phillies, where he put up a 7-4 record with an ERA of 3.39. He also helped lead the Phillies to their second straight World Series, posting a 4-0 record with two complete games in the playoffs.

Philadelphia made a last second bid to acquire Lee, when the only two teams that were thought to have a shot at him were the Rangers and the Yankees. Lee was ecstatic to join the Phillies again.

"From the moment I got here, I knew it was something special... I never wanted to leave in the first place," Lee told sbnation.com.

Besides the \$120 million Lee will be getting from the Phillies, he also wanted to come back because of the fans.

"The intensity you can feel when you get in the game. Every game has an excitement to it. I don't know what the fans do to create that much more volume and excitement but there's something extra here. They don't need the teleprompter to tell them to get excited. The feeling of playing on the field feels different than anywhere else," said Lee.

Lee joins a pitching rotation that could already hold its own without him. The starting five of Lee, Halladay, Hamels, Oswalt, and Blanton give the Phillies the best starting pitching in all of baseball. It might even be the deepest starting rotation in the history of Major League Baseball.

The Phillies do have some question marks heading into spring training. With the loss of Jayson Werth to the Washington Nationals, the Phillies have some decisions to make on what they are going to do in right field.

Ben Francisco, a right-handed batter, and Domonic Brown, a left-handed batter, will most likely be platooning right field if one of them doesn't win the position in spring training.

The Phillies success will also heavily depend on how well the bullpen can perform. The Phillies re-signed J.C. Romero to a one-year contract, and Jose Contreras to a two-year contract this offseason to sure up their bullpen. They also have a designated set-up man in Ryan Madson, and a closer in Brad Lidge; both players have been shaky at times, but they are expected to do their jobs this season.

The problem lies in who else will fill the bullpen. Kyle Kendrick, Danny Baez, David Herndon, Scott Mathieson, and Mike Zagurski are just a few of the players that will be competing this spring to make the opening day roster.

The Phillies offense looks good as always. They have an opening for the fifth batter in the lineup after losing Jayson Werth, but Manager Charlie Manuel and the Phillies' personnel staff are looking to fill the void.

Players like Jimmy Rollins and Chase Utley will look to stay off the disabled list this year, and put up some big numbers; especially Rollins, who is in his last year of his contract with the Phillies. Rollins had the worst season of his career last year, playing in only 88 games and posting a weak .243 batting average.

Philadelphia fans all over are excited. John Celona, a Penn State Brandywine student, is very optimistic for the 2011 season.

"With the addition of Lee, I don't know who is going to be able to stop them this year. The Phillies have the strongest team in baseball, and I wouldn't be surprised if they win over 100 games this year. They are a lock to get to the World Series," John said.