

# SportsWeek

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## From the pressbox

By Dave Konopki

### Fearless Final 4 predictions

Put away those snow shovels. And don't get out that baseball equipment just yet. It's the second week in March and that means just one thing: it's time for March Madness.

This Thursday kicks off the wildest, wackiest and, for many, the most exciting two weeks of sports action during the entire year. Sixty four NCAA men's basketball teams, representing more than 20 different conferences, with one goal in common; advancing to the Final Four and earning the chance to win the national championship.

During the high school football season, I confounded the critics with a whopping 22-5 record in correctly picking the winners of games involving Dallas and Lake-Lehman. But still, there were skeptics. Then came New Year's Day, where I posted an incredible 8-1 record against the spread in picking the winners of the New Year's Day bowl games. But still, there are those who refuse to believe.

Now, the ultimate challenge. Picking the teams who will make up the Final Four. But I'm going to take the challenge a step further. Not only will I predict the participants in the Final Four and the eventual national champion, I'm going to, or at least try to, predict the winners of all 73 games leading up to the championship contest on April 4.

In the immortal words of late-night talk show host David Letterman: This is done for fun only. As always, please, no wagering. Here goes:

Although choosing which quartet of teams will make up the Final Four is more difficult than watching Nancy Kerrigan deliver a monologue on Saturday Night Live, there is a magnified sense of uncertainty and drama surrounding this year's field.

In a season which saw a different number one team in the national polls almost weekly, the national title is truly up for grabs. That point was proven this past Saturday when nine of the top 14 teams in the nation were defeated.

So in order to separate the contenders from the pretenders, we have to break the 64-team field into five categories: 1) those teams which have all the ingredients to win it all; 2) outstanding teams perhaps missing just one piece of the puzzle; 3) the "sleeper teams". Teams that may not win it all but who might make some noise before the tournament is over; 4) the "chokers". Good teams which will feel the pressure and exit the tournament earlier than expected; and 5) those teams which have as much chance to win the national championship as I do of signing a contract with the Philadelphia Phillies.

**CATEGORY 1:** Arkansas, North Carolina, Purdue, Connecticut and UMass. Any team with Glenn Robinson on its roster always has a chance of winning and that's what makes Purdue so tough. But Boilermaker coach Gene Keady's historically shoddy record (5-10) in the tournament could be too much for even Robinson to overcome. UConn's Donyell Marshall is a Robinson-like player as far as dominating a game is concerned. Question mark for the Huskies: How will they respond to a Big East semifinal loss to Providence? North Carolina has everything it takes to win a national title: great ballhandlers, balanced scoring, a proven big man, and most of all, a great coach. But keep in mind, only one team (Duke in 1992) has repeated as national champion in the past 11 years. Arkansas is probably the team with the best chance of winning it all. The talented Razorbacks have all the tools but a cream-puff non-conference schedule may come back to haunt Nolan Richardson's crew.

**CATEGORY 2:** Temple, Duke, Kansas, Louisville and Kentucky. With the exception of Louisville and their lack of a solid bench, I can't quite put my finger on what these teams lack to win the national title. Temple can't beat UMass. Duke is probably the most inconsistent top five team in the past five years. Kansas loses the Big Eight regular season title to Missouri and the conference tournament title to Nebraska. Kentucky, when they're not sending the wrong guys to the free-throw line, have had more ups and downs this year than Dow Jones. But in the end, don't be surprised if one of these teams is cutting down the nets in Charlotte.

**CATEGORY 3:** Texas, Penn, Wake Forest, Boston College, New Mexico St., and Ohio University. Look out for head coach Tom Penders and the Longhorns. They'll have their hands full in the second round against Michigan, but if they get past them, they could go as far as the Elite Eight. Don't laugh at Ivy League champion Penn, the Quakers are for real. The selection committee didn't give them any respect with an 11-seed, but they'll win the respect of the nation with first-round win over Big Eight champion Nebraska. Ohio U. drew the Hoosiers of Indiana in the first round. Look for them to give Bobby Knight and Company all they can handle.

**CATEGORY 4:** Arizona, Michigan, Nebraska and Missouri. It's no newflash that Arizona will exit the tourney early. In the past three years, only Lute Olson's Wildcats have been more disappointing than the Clinton Administration. While Michigan may have as much talent as any team in the dance, a serious lack of discipline on and off the court, and the inability to shoot free throws, will spell doom for the Wolverines. We already talked about Nebraska, and Big Eight counterpart Missouri, despite their 24-3 record and number one seed, hasn't earned the respect of many skeptics, including myself.

**CATEGORY 5:** Navy, Loyola, Md., Pepperdine, SW Texas St., Liberty, Rider, Tenn-Chattanooga and Texas Southern. Ahhhh, those automatic berths. Enough said.

I know, I know. That still leaves many teams, including good teams like California, Cincinnati, Indiana, Syracuse, Maryland, New Mexico, Florida, Providence, Seton Hall and Michigan State out of any category. Well space is limited but let me say a few things about those teams. First, most of those teams will not make the Sweet 16. Perhaps three will. Second, most of those teams, especially Indiana, Syracuse and Florida are very hard to gauge at this point in the season.

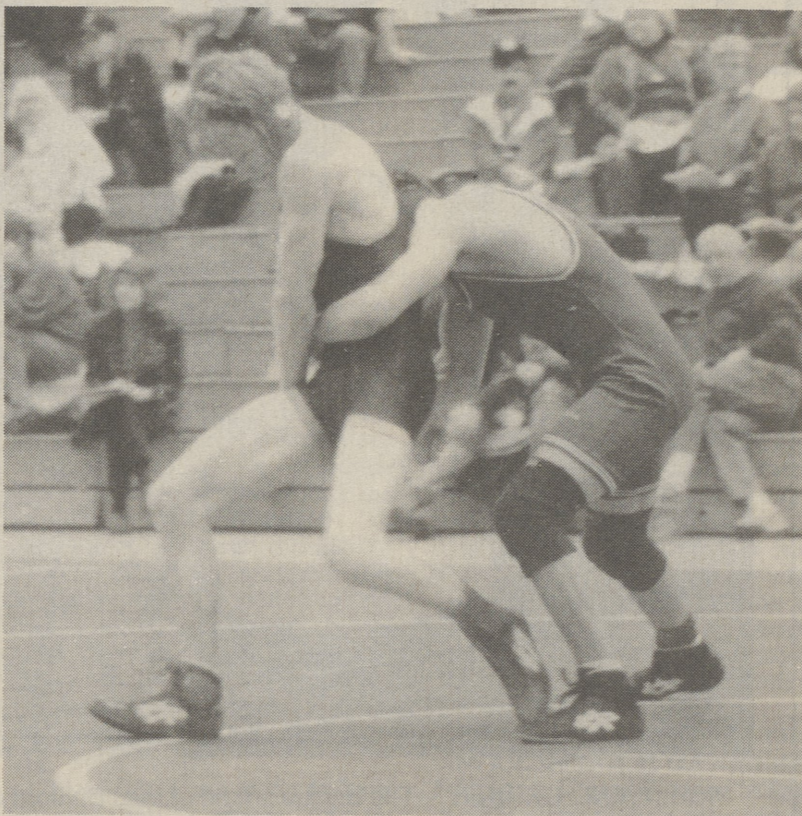
In the end, look for Syracuse (by default in a very weak West bracket), Louisville, Arkansas, "sleeper" Texas, Temple, UCONN, Purdue and Kentucky to comprise the Elite Eight.

Look for Louisville, with perhaps the best starting five in the nation, to beat Syracuse; Arkansas defeating Texas in the highest-scoring contest of the tourney; Temple's suffocating defense finding a way to stop Marshall and the Huskies, and Kentucky to outscore Purdue to set up a Louisville, Arkansas, Temple and Kentucky version of the Final Four.

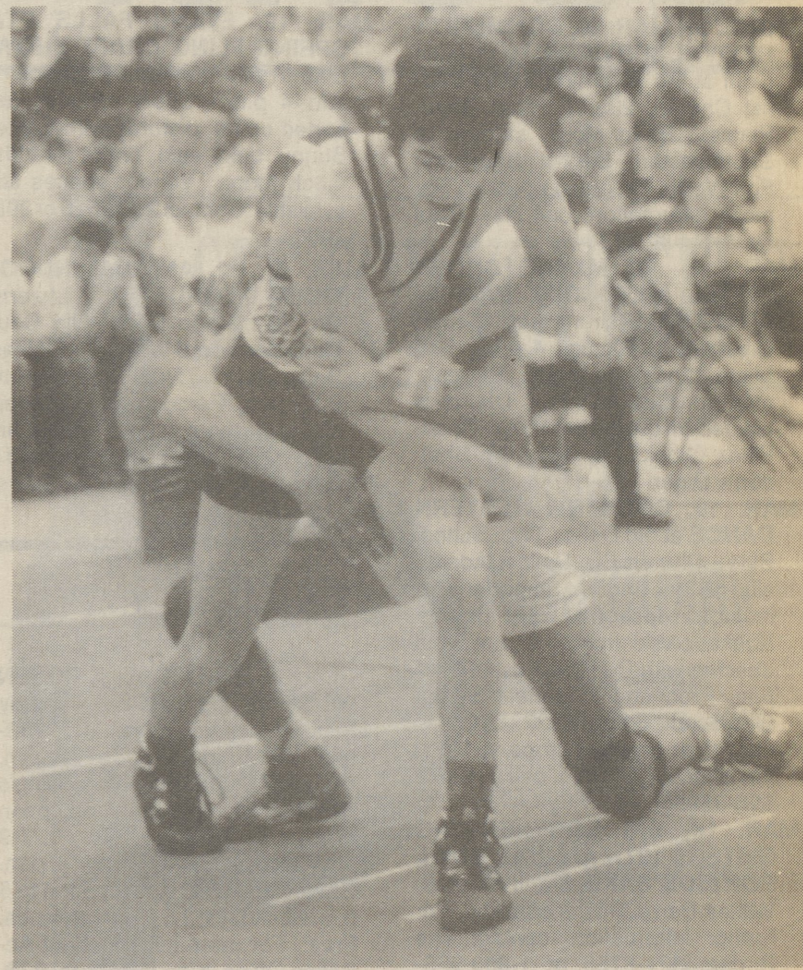
In the semi-finals, Arkansas' fast-paced offense will take its toll on the Cardinals lack of depth and Kentucky will shoot over Temple's match-up zone, setting up an all-Southeastern Conference final between the Razorbacks and the Wildcats, with Kentucky winning the national title.

Is Kentucky the best team in the nation? Probably not. Can they win it all? Who knows, especially since they'd have to beat Duke (23-5), Purdue (26-4), and either Temple (22-7) or North Carolina (27-6) in order to do so. But in this wild and unpredictable college basketball season, anything is possible.

I can almost see it now: With the score tied, 73-73, Kentucky's Gimel Martinez shoots the ball as time expires. He misses the shot but Martinez, a 70 percent free throw shooter, is fouled. Richardson calls timeout to ice the Wildcats but then play resumes, Travis Ford, who shoots nearly 90 percent from the stripe, calmly steps to the line, sinks the first free throw and...



PHOTOS BY TOM WILLIAMS  
**ESCAPE!** - Dallas High's Mike Vavrek, above, and Lake-Lehman's Mike Pitcavage, right worked to escape an opponent's hold during last week's regional wrestling tournament.



## Knights, Mounts shut out for states

By DAVE KONOPKI  
Sports Writer

On the surface, it might seem as though the Lake-Lehman Black Knights wrestling team would be better off pretending the 1994 PIAA Class AA Northeast Regional wrestling championships never took place.

But in the long run, co-coach Tom Williams knows the experience gained by the Knights during the tournament may prove invaluable.

Despite sending nine wrestlers to regionals and advancing five to the semi-finals, the Knights fell short in their quest to send a wrestler to this weekend's PIAA Class AA State Championships in Hershey.

The showing at regionals ended the Knights' season on a bitter-sweet note. Lehman may have failed to advance a wrestler to state's, but the team, which was decimated by injuries to key performers this year, still managed to win the District 2 Class AA title.

Back Mountain rival, Dallas, which sent a trio of grapplers to regionals, suffered a couple of close setbacks and also failed to advance wrestlers to the state

tourney. The Mountaineers are coached by Steve Kaschenbach and assistant coach Bill Janosky.

Lehman began the regional tournament on a strong note Friday night, advancing five wrestlers to the semi-finals and placing themselves within three points of the lead in the team standings.

On Saturday, the roof fell in.

"It was like a snowball rolling downhill," said Williams, who shares coaching duties with Phil Lipski. "Things started out bad on Saturday and just kept getting worse as the day went on. We got some breaks during the district tournament, but we didn't get any breaks, and we didn't create our own breaks at regionals."

With seven of the nine regional qualifiers being underclassmen, Williams hopes his younger wrestlers will learn from the experience.

"We just have to keep things in perspective," Williams explained. "Our goal every year is to take some kids to the state tournament. We didn't reach that goal this year but we have to look at some of the positive things that happened this year. I don't think anyone would have thought we

could win the district championship with all the injuries we had this year. Hopefully, we can use this as a learning experience."

The Knights got off to a slow start in the semis when sophomore Matt Raczkowski (103 pounds) was pinned, John Morgan (119) lost by technical fall and Mike Stuart (125) suffered a rib injury and had to default his match. Senior Burt Morgan (130) came within two points of advancing to the finals, dropping a 10-8 decision to Cassidy Shults of Warrior Run. John Wood, who won the district title at 145 pounds, dropped an 11-4 decision to Brett Schadel of Line Mountain.

Dallas senior Mike Vavrek (145) who suffered a heartbreaking one-point loss in the district final, came up short in his bid for a state berth, but had an outstanding tournament nonetheless. Vavrek demolished his first-round opponent, 15-0, and then met defending state runner-up Brad Gilbert of Benton, in the semi-final. Vavrek gave the highly-touted Gilbert all he could handle before dropping a 13-7 decision. Gilbert went on to easily win the

regional title.

In the consolations, Dallas freshman Mike Metz (103) dropped a tough 1-0 decision to Jeremy Edwards in the quarterfinals. Edwards also eliminated Lehman's Raczkowski, handing him a 2-0 defeat in the semis. Also in consolation quarterfinal action, Lehman freshman Joe Halowich (112) dropped a 19-6 decision, Lehman sophomore Mike Pitcavage lost a close 10-8 decision and Dallas's outstanding junior Aaron Gingo (145) dropped a tough 5-2 decision to Andy Gemberling of Warrior Run.

Lehman-heavyweight Vito Pilosi was the lone local winner in the consolation quarterfinals. The junior defeated Mountain View's Dan Borrelli, 3-0, before losing to Crestwood's Bill Langin in the consolation semi-finals, 3-1. Ironically, Pilosi defeated Langin the week before in the district title match and that win gave Lehman the Class AA team title.

The Black Knights suffered two tough losses in the consolation semis when John Morgan was disqualified following a controversial illegal slam and Wood suffered a shoulder injury and was forced to default.

## Baseball clinic Saturday for 8-13 year old players

By DAVE KONOPKI  
Sports Writer

The Dallas Senior High School baseball team and program staff will be holding a baseball player's clinic for all boys ages 8-13 at the Dallas Middle School gymnasium on Saturday, March 19. The clinic will run from 8:30-11:30 a.m. for players ages 8-10 and from 12:30-3:30 p.m. for players ages 11-13. All players in Back Mountain Baseball are encouraged to attend and the clinic is open to the general public.

The clinic staff consists of Dallas veteran head coach Jack Wolensky, a former Dallas High School standout who enjoyed a fine college career at Lock Haven University; Dallas freshmen head coach John Konopki, Jr., a former Dallas standout who played shortstop on the state championship Luzerne County Community College team in 1980; Dallas freshmen assistant coach Mark Konopki, a former Dallas High

School star and college All-America who played baseball at Old Dominion University before a four-year career in the Boston Red Sox organization, and Dallas assistant coach Scott Francis, a stellar Dallas athlete who played baseball and football at Johns Hopkins University and later played in the Atlanta Braves organization for two years.

Also, Dallas volunteer assistants John Wertman and Jason Cadwalader will be on hand. Wertman was a catcher for Dallas in the mid-1980's and Cadwalader is a former Lake-Lehman starter. In addition, many current Dallas players, including Brian Brady, Rich Butcofski and Mike Viglone, will be instructors.

The clinic will cover all aspects and fundamentals of baseball, including hitting, pitching, base-running and fielding. The players will participate in a variety of different stations, including a solo-hitter, pitching machines, soft-toss stations and a Jugs machine. Cost for the three-hour clinic is

### BMT Baseball final tryouts March 20, softball tryouts Saturday, March 19

Back Mountain Baseball, Inc. will hold final baseball tryouts on Sunday, March 20 from 1-5 p.m. Tryouts are for all players ages 8-12 who are not on a major league roster and did not try out on March 12. However, any 12-year-old who is currently not on a major league roster is encouraged to attend this tryout, even if he was present on March 12. Anyone interested in playing major league baseball must try out at least once.

National and American league tryouts will be held simultaneously at these times: 12 year old, 1:00 p.m.; 11 year old, 1:30 p.m.; 10 year old, 2:00 p.m.; 9 year old, 3:00 p.m.; 8 year old, 4:00 p.m.

Softball tryouts will be held Saturday, March 19 at the Dallas Township school, next to the Little League fields. For times and details, call Dave Konopki at 283-5532 or Mary Wright at 675-0751.

All players are reminded to bring their gloves, and bats if desired, and should wear gym shoes. All managers and/or coaches must be present.

\$15 and all proceeds will go to the Dallas Baseball Booster Club to help defer the cost of the high school team's trip to Virginia in late March. Anyone interested in attending the clinic should contact Jack Wolensky at the Dallas Middle School or call Dave

Konopki at 283-5532. All checks should be made payable to the Dallas Baseball Booster Club.

The Back Mountain Baseball tryout, originally scheduled for March 19 at the middle school, has been rescheduled for Sunday, March 20.

### BMT wrestlers at North Bradford

The Back Mountain Wrestling Club recently attended an elementary wrestling tournament hosted by the North East Bradford wrestling club. Pictured above are the top four place finishers in their weight classes. Left to right, Adam Gumari, Jonathan Schutz, Matt Davis, Mikey Stolarick, Gregory Kostrobala, Adam Brown, Tyler Droppers, Lewis Spurlin, Brett Larson, Jonathan Bird, David Spurlin, Dennis Brown, Zack Raguskas.



### Crossin 8th grade tourneys slated

The Luzerne County Recreation Department will hold its 12th Annual Frank P. Crossin 8th Grade Boys and Girls Basketball Tournament, March 19-20 and 26-27.

Both the boys division, consisting of 16 teams and the girls division, consisting of eight teams, will be played at the Luzerne County Community College Gym in Nanticoke, March 19-20 and 26-27.

For more information, contact John Powell, Sports Program Coordinator, at 825-1802, Monday through Friday, 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m.