

Sports

Nothing special, just the NBA



Loyd Brumfield
Sports viewpoint

The Lakers and Celtics again this year? YUCK!!! Seeing as how this is my final go-round on the sports editor circuit, I thought I'd make my final Bluff column something special — something unique and original, something that people would remember, something that would make people say, "Wow, his last column was a doozy!"

Unfortunately I can't think of anything unique or original so we'll just have to settle for the NBA playoffs.

Maybe some good will come of my final effort. Maybe I'll get one last chance to slam those weirdos on the Opinion Page.

But for now, let's talk basketball.

Of course, the trend here is Lakers, Celtics, Lakers, Celtics, ad infinitum, ad nauseum.

Maybe this year things will change. The Detroit Pistons are on the rise, as are the Atlanta Hawks. The teams of the Western Conference are also quite strong, especially Portland and Denver, teams that have benefited from late-season hot streaks.

And for those fans of Texas basketball (yes, the sport does exist), the Dallas Mavericks and Houston Rockets will square off in a best-of-five series starting Thursday at Reunion Arena in Dallas.

This guarantees that at least one Texas team will advance to the second round.

As a bonus for Texas fans, the San Antonio Spurs will get in on the act this year, nabbing the eighth and final spot in the Western Conference playoff chase.

Too bad the Spurs have to play the Los Angeles Lakers in the

first round. Like I said, at least one Texas team will make it to the second round.

Things should be interesting this year. This just may be the season that neither Boston nor LA make it to the finals.

But hey, I also thought the A&M baseball team would beat Texas.

But back to the playoffs. We've got quite a few decent match-ups in the first round, so let's take a look at them, shall we? Well, let's do it anyway.

First the good stuff. Here's how the Western Conference best-of-five games stack up.

HOUSTON vs. DALLAS
Game one Thursday at 7:30 p.m. in Dallas.

This should be a dandy, easily the best opening-round series of either conference. Both teams are suffering from late-season collapses, and both should be hungry for playoff glory.

The Rockets want the fans and everyone else involved with them to forget their lackluster season. The Mavs want people to forget their lapses in the season's final weeks when they let the Midwest Division title slip away.

It'll be a battle of bruised egos and the team that shows the most heart, something both teams lacked during the regular season, will prevail. Rockets over Mavs, three games to two.

SPURS vs. LA LAKERS
Game one Friday in Los Angeles at 9:30 p.m.

Well, the Spurs are an up-and-coming team thanks to Alvin Robertson and Greg Anderson. They should give the Lakers all the trouble they can handle, right? Heck, after the Lakers all retire they'll move into rest homes, right? Spurs in a big upset, right? Give me a break. Lakers over Spurs, three games to one.

UTAH vs. PORTLAND
Game one Thursday in Portland at 9:30 p.m.

This should be an exciting series too. The Jazz were hot at the end of the season and the Trail Blazers have been hot all year.



Give the edge to Portland, though. This is a team that can put a string of championship runs together in the future. Karl Malone and Mark Eaton give Utah two talented big men, but the Blazers' speed and team play should do the Jazz in. Blazers over Jazz, three games to two.

SEATTLE vs. DENVER
Game one Friday in Denver at 9:30 p.m.

Seattle was the surprise contender in the playoffs last year, beating both heavily-favored Dallas and Houston before bowing out to the Lakers. Denver, however, has simply been the best team in the NBA down the stretch. The Nuggets' momentum should carry over, and look for a quick exit by the Sonics, who were awesome at home but lame on the road. Nuggets over Sonics, three games to one.

And now for the Eastern Conference.

NEW YORK vs. BOSTON
Game one Friday in Boston at 7 p.m.

Last year the Celtics limped into the playoffs and barely beat everyone they played. This year they are healthy and coming off a strong season finish. The New

York Knicks are in the same position, and could take a game in this series with a little luck. When in doubt, though, count on the evil spectre of Larry Bird. Celtics over Knicks, three games to none.

WASHINGTON vs. DETROIT
Game one Thursday in Detroit at 7 p.m.

The Bullets, thanks to little Tyrone Bogues and new coach Wes Unseld, played tough the last half of the season. The Pistons showed flashes of brilliance but were inconsistent at times. However, Isiah Thomas, Vinnie Johnson and the gang should rise to the occasion and win in the clutch. Pistons over Bullets, three games to two.

CLEVELAND vs. CHICAGO
Game one Thursday in Chicago at 7 p.m.

Cleveland performed far above expectations thanks to a tenacious Mark Price. Chicago rode the wave of Michael Jordan, but he wasn't enough to propel this sometimes excellent, sometimes mediocre team. It should be a great series, though. Bulls over the Cavaliers, three games to two.

MILWAUKEE vs. ATLANTA
Game one Friday in Atlanta at 6:30 p.m.

Milwaukee just isn't the team it used to be. You know, the one that always gave everyone fits in the playoffs. Atlanta is another one of those good-bad teams, but the Hawks should find a groove in the playoffs. Dominique Williams should be enough to carry Atlanta to victory. Hawks over Bulls, three games to one.

Well, there you have it, my last and longest column. And this is just the first round; more fun is soon to follow. As for the finals this year, well, any number of teams could make it. Portland, Denver, Los Angeles, Dallas and Houston all have the horses in the West, while either Boston, Detroit or Atlanta will surely conquer the East. But, sigh, Lakers vs. Celtics in the finals.

Rats, and I didn't even get a chance to knock the Opinion Page.

LA Rams, Broncos have good drafts despite criticisms

NEW YORK (AP) — The NFL draft was half over when several analysts declared that Detroit, Cleveland and Philadelphia had a good draft and the Denver Broncos Los Angeles Rams a bad one.

A day later, another analyst declared that the Broncos and Rams had prospered.

If it takes three years for football people to accurately determine if a draft is successful, it didn't stop coaches, personnel directors and general managers from declaring their drafts an unqualified success.

The one exception was Jim Finks, the candid general manager of the New Orleans Saints.

"Average. Based on my experience, average," said Finks, who in two years has turned New Orleans from a team that went 20 years without a winning record to one whose regular-season mark of 12-3 in 1987 was second-best in the NFL.

"Ask me two years from now, and I'll be able to tell you better."

Yet, Finks and the Saints may have done better than most in filling needs, snaring running back Craig "Ironhead" Heyward of Pitt and wide receiver Brent Perriman of Miami in the first two rounds.

If the 250-270-pound Heyward can keep himself away from New Orleans' numerous restaurants, he should provide insurance for Rueben Mayes, who has knee problems. Perriman, who runs the 40-yard-dash in 4.4 seconds, could be the deep receiver the team needs.

The Rams, with five picks in the first two rounds because of the Eric Dickerson deal, went for speed, a departure for a team whose coach, John Robinson, likes a heavy-duty running back who can carry the ball 30-35 times a game.

But instead of Heyward or Brad Muster of Stanford, they used their first pick on Gaston Green of UCLA, less durable but a breakout threat and a hometown pick. In fact, four of the five top choices were from the

Pac-10 — Green, wide receiver Aaron Cox of Arizona State, defensive back Anthony Newman of Oregon and wide receiver Willie "Flipper" Anderson, Green's UCLA teammate.

But Robinson wasn't the only coach to break a pattern.

Two who have repeatedly said they hate taking offensive linemen on the first round — Ray Perkins of Tampa Bay and Bill Parcells of the New York Giants — each did it.

Perkins took Paul Gruber of Wisconsin. The Giants chose Eric Moore of Indiana, following up with another offensive lineman, John Elliott of Michigan in the second round.

That belied their reputation as a team that takes the best available athlete and enhanced their tradition of "flood drafts," to shore up one needy area.

Super Bowl champion Washington also drafted according to pattern — that is, other than the predictable Bobby Beathard trades, there was no pattern.

The Redskins used their first pick — the final one of the second round — on a kicker, Chip Lohmiller of Minnesota, ostensibly because he can kick without a tee and is good in cold weather. Then they traded up in the third round to take Mike Oliphant, a kick returner from powerhouse Puget Sound.

The less successful teams claimed they were following the model of recent Super Bowl winners like the Redskins, Giants and Bears.

Jerry Vainisi, the vice president for personnel of the Detroit Lions and a former Chicago general manager, had what appeared to be one of the better drafts.

Vainisi's biggest coup was the deal that brought him an extra second-round pick, the 29th of the draft, for swapping one place — from second to third — with Kansas City in the first round.

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