

Unlikely group reaches Final Four

Three best conferences represented in NCAA tourney semis

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Duke, Seton Hall, Illinois, Michigan.

An unlikely NCAA Final Four from the three best basketball conferences in America.

The games begin at the Kingdome in Seattle on Saturday, with Seton Hall, 30-6, meeting Duke, 28-7, in a Big East-Atlantic Coast Conference matchup that is a precursor to a proposed regular-season tournament matching the East Coast's two top conferences.

Then, it will be the Big Ten vs. the Big Ten, with Michigan, 28-7, vs. Illinois, 31-4.

Duke, the nation's top-ranked team for the first third of the season, is a 4½-point favorite in the first game, after reaching the Final Four with an 85-77 victory over George-

town, the East's top seed. The Blue Devils enter the game with Danny Ferry, in his third Final Four, wearing the mantle that Danny Manning had last year when he carried Kansas to its upset national title.

"When you're ranked No. 1 for two months, that's a lot of pressure," Coach Mike Krzyzewski said.

But it's also pressure when a team has not won a national title and is playing a team like Seton Hall, which is limiting opponents to under 40 percent shooting in the tournament.

The Pirates go 10 deep and start two Olympians — Andrew Gaze, Australia's best player, and Ramon Ramos, starting center on Puerto Rico's Olympic team. Despite getting only six points from leading scorer John Morton and none from Ramos, the second leading scorer, Seton Hall beat Nevada-Las Vegas 84-61 in

the West Regional final.

The three other starters — guards Gerald Greene and John Morton and forward Daryll Walker — are the result of Seton Hall's past failures. They were grabbed out of New York by coach P.J. Carlesimo and away from St. John's and Villanova after a 1-16 Big East season three years ago with the promise they would play immediately rather than sit on the bench.

"Us? In the Final Four? Can you believe that?" Greene said. "To think about where the program was when Daryll, John and I came here and to where it is now ..."

Michigan has the names, as in All-American Glen Rice, who shot 13-for-16 and finished with 32 points in the 102-65 rout of Virginia in the Southeast Regional final. Plus Rumeal Robinson, Sean Higgins, Terry

Mills, Loy Vaught and a host of other high school standouts.

But Steve Fisher?

"Never in my wildest dreams did I think I'd be sitting before you today as the head coach of Michigan, with a group that's getting ready to go to the Final Four," said the 47-year-old assistant who got his job only two days before the tournament started.

Illinois must play under the burden of its two wins over Michigan, 96-84 at home and 89-73 on the road.

Coach Lou Henson recognizes that, despite the euphoria of Illinois' first Final Four trip since 1952.

"I suppose I could have pulled off my sport coat and thrown it and run around kissing people," Henson said. "I really felt good. I think it's great that we're going to the Final Four."

Men's tennis hosts SMU

After splitting matches with Arkansas-Little Rock and Texas at home last week, the Texas A&M men's tennis team hosts Southwest Conference rival Southern Methodist at home today in a match scheduled to begin at 1:30.

A&M defeated Arkansas-Little Rock 5-2 last Friday, but lost its conference opener to No. 20 Texas 6-3 on Saturday.

Aggie freshman Doug Brown improved his team-leading season record to 11-5 over the weekend as he defeated UALR's Cary Rosenbaum 4-6, 7-6, 6-1 in the fourth-seeded position. Sixth-seeded freshman Blake Barsalou captured the other singles victory for A&M in the Texas match, defeating Ronnie Eddins 7-5, 3-6, 6-4.

The Mustangs feature two players that rank in the top 40 in the nation, Alex Nizet ranked 18th, and Brian Devening, 38th.

A&M counters in singles with top seed Shaun O'Donovan, ranked 54th, and second-seeded and 98th-ranked Gustavo Espinosa.

The Aggies travel to Houston on Saturday to meet the Rice Owls, which features 28th-ranked singles player Larry Pearl and a doubles team ranked 5th.

Isiah leads Pistons past Dallas 90-77

AUBURN HILLS, Mich. (AP) — Isiah Thomas scored five of his 30 points during a 9-0 second-half run and the Detroit Pistons beat the Dallas Mavericks 90-77 Monday night and became the first NBA team to win 50 games this season.

Detroit won its fifth straight, 14th in the last 15 and 14th in a row at home. Dallas had dropped 10th straight.

The game marked the first meeting between the teams since the Feb. 15 trade in which the Pistons sent Adrian Dantley and their first-round draft pick in 1991 to the Mavericks for Mark Aguirre.

Dantley scored 18 points to Aguirre's 12 in the matchup that drew virtually all of the pregame attention. But it was Thomas who ended up in the spotlight by sinking 11 of 21 shots and scoring 18 second-half points.

After baskets by Sam Perkins and Dantley cut the Pistons' lead to 66-64 late in the third quarter, Detroit's Vinnie Johnson hit two free throws and Thomas made a 3-pointer to make it 71-64 at the end of the period.

Thomas opened the fourth quarter with a basket and John Salley

added a dunk to boost the lead 75-64. Morlon Wiley scored for Dallas but another 3-pointer by Thomas made it 78-66 with 9:58 remaining. Dallas never got closer than 10 points the rest of the way.

James Edwards added 14 points for Detroit. Joe Dumars had 12 and Bill Laimbeer 10. Rolando Blackman led Dallas with 23 points and Derek Harper scored 13.

Dallas led for most of the first half. The Mavericks were ahead 30-23 after one quarter and scored the first five points of the second period as Detroit failed to score for almost three minutes.

The lead was 39-28 three minutes later when Edwards hit three straight baskets to pull the Pistons within 39-34. Wiley made a basket for Dallas, but Detroit scored nine of the final 11 points in the half, tying the score 46-46 on two free throws by Dumars.

Aguirre scored the first four points of the third quarter and Thomas added a short jumper as Detroit took a 52-46 lead. Dallas cut the deficit to two points four times but couldn't pull even and Detroit took a seven-point lead into the final period.

Cable boxing series coming to Texas

FORT WORTH (AP) — Cable television's latest national boxing series will plug into Texas in mid-May and eventually turn its lights on some of Fort Worth's top professional fighters.

SportsChannel America's Pro Boxing Tour will visit Corpus Christi on April 10, one of three preview shows before the series makes its "official" weekly debut Monday, May 15.

SportsChannel America is a partner with NBC-TV, which is not only seeking to compete against ESPN but also gearing up for the network's coverage of the 1992 Olympics.

Forty cards of the boxing package will be promoted by a group headed by Dan Duva of Main Events Inc. The site coordinator for half of those 40 events, including eight projected for Texas, is boxing manager Lester Bedford of Fort Worth.

"This is a boon for Texas boxing. It's almost dead right now," Bedford said. "This is kind of a farm system for NBC. They're looking to build fighters on SportsChannel and move them over to NBC. And if you can't get to network television, you can't make any money in boxing."

Judge won't stop free agency plan

NEW YORK (AP) — Judge David Doty has told the NFL Players Association that he won't stop the new system of free agency under which 130 players have changed teams in the past six weeks.

But the federal judge presiding over the antitrust suit filed by the union at the end of the 24-day strike in 1987 did not specifically validate the new system as a way for the league to satisfy antitrust requirements. He didn't mention that subject at all.

In a decision made public Monday, the Minneapolis-based federal judge denied an injunction filed by the union of the owners' so-called "Plan B."

He based it on his ruling in July 1988, in which he held that outright free agency, which the union is seeking, could hurt competitive balance and "would work a wholesale subversion of the collective bargaining process."

"The court would have to depart from its previous rulings in order to grant plaintiff's motion," Doty wrote. "The court declines to do so."

Under the new system, each team was allowed to protect 37 players, with the others on the roster to become unconditional free agents, regardless of whether they were under contract.

As of Monday, 130 of the 619 unprotected players had changed teams, at an average of 78 percent increase in salary, according to Management Council figures. Doty's ruling came on a less liberal plan — one that would allow teams to protect 40, 42 or 44 players, depending on their records.

But Doty noted that more than 1,000 players still were subject to the compensation and right of first refusal that has bound them to their teams. The union is seeking free agency for all players at some point in their careers, a fact of which Doty made mention when he wrote:

"The new system is similar in that the majority of NFL players are subject to the same restraints contained in the previous system."

For example, All-Pro defensive end Bruce Smith of Buffalo, a protected player, was tendered a \$7.5 million, 5-year contract offer by Denver last Friday. As with the old system, he will revert back to the Bills if they decide by Friday to match the offer; if not, the Broncos will owe the Bills two first-round draft choices.

Union officials were quick to point out that Doty did nothing to change

Douglass leads St. Louis into NIT title showdown

NEW YORK (AP) — Monroe Douglass scored 25 points, nearly double his average, as St. Louis moved within one victory of its first National Invitation Tournament championship in 41 years by beating Michigan State 74-64 Monday night.

The Billikens, 27-9, will meet the winner of Monday night's other semifinal, between St. John's and Alabama-Birmingham, in the NIT final on Wednesday.

St. Louis, which came back from halftime deficits of 20 and 12 points, respectively, to defeat New Mexico and Wisconsin in the tournament, reversed that pattern against Michigan State.

The Billikens, who won the NIT in 1948 in one of their 13 previous appearances, opened a 34-15 lead with 3:52 left in the first half as Douglass scored 11 points and backcourt partner Charles Newberry added eight.

Douglass, averaging 13.1 a game, added 14 more in the second half. Newberry, averaging 6.5, finished with 16 and Roland Gray had 15.

Ken Redfield led Michigan State, 18-14, with 21 points and reserve guard Kirk Manns added 20, 16 in the second half. Steve Smith, the Spartans' leading scorer who had a career-high 34 points in a quarterfinal victory over Villanova, missed his first eight shots and scored but two points.

Michigan State came back to score the final eight points of the first half, closing the gap to 34-23 at halftime.

The Spartans cut further into the St. Louis lead early in the second half. Manns hit a three-point play and a jumper as Michigan State cut the deficit to 41-35 with 13:53 left.

Gray responded with a 3-pointer 22 seconds later and Douglass hit two jumpers in less than a minute, helping St. Louis rebuild the margin to 50-37 with 10:47 left.

Another three-point play and a 3-point goal by Manns helped Michigan State get within eight with 8:51 to go, but the Spartans could get no closer.

wording of last year's decision, in which he wrote at one point: "... The court finds it probable that the players will prevail at trial and that at least some of the players are likely to sustain irreparable harm if they are not immediately permitted to sign with other NFL clubs ..."

Doty's new decision reprinted that section, prompting Dick Berthelsen, the union's general counsel, to observe: "This is basically a Xerox of last year's ruling."

The suit itself remains in limbo.

The 8th Circuit Court of Appeals will hear arguments the week of May 8 on an NFL motion on Doty's ruling that his declaration of a bargaining "impasse" does away with the league's labor antitrust exemption.

Management Council spokesman John Jones said Monday that if the court rules in the league's favor, "it invalidates the union's case up to this point."

Both sides have said privately that it will take a court decision to get the two sides back to the bargaining table.

Recent acquisitions unlikely factors in late-season surge by battered Celts

BOSTON (AP) — One day, Boston Celtics' fans figured, Larry Bird would be back. He would be the man to turn around Boston's losing season. Who would be a more likely savior?

Would you believe Kelvin Upshaw, Ed Pinckney and Joe Kleine?

You better.

Upshaw had been a guard with Albany in the Continental Basketball Association, after being cut by the Miami Heat in January. Pinckney and Kleine were substitutes with the Sacramento Kings.

Instantly, they got the Celtics' rolling as the stretch drive to the NBA's playoffs gained speed.

With the likelihood fading that Bird, who underwent surgery on both heels Nov. 19, will return this season, the newcomers on the bench have become a source of hope for Celtics' fans.

"All three new people have fit in very well," Coach Jimmy Rodgers said Monday. "Often times, when you bring a new guy into a system, you wonder how far you're going to have to backtrack and wait for a guy

just to become familiar and feel comfortable."

"All three, Kelvin, Eddie and Joe, have caught on to everything. That's a big plus."

Pinckney credited the veterans with smoothing the transition.

"When we first came, Kevin (McHale) and Robert (Parish) and Dennis Johnson made it very easy," he said. "If something goes wrong on the court, they don't get all bent out of shape. They just point you in the right direction."

The Celtics were 24-28 on Feb. 23, the day they traded guard Danny Ainge and forward Brad Lohaus to the Sacramento Kings for Pinckney, a leaping, running forward, and Kleine, a backup center they had needed for years.

Since then, they are 11-4.

The Celtics were 29-30 on March 9, the day they signed Upshaw after finding him playing with the Patrons of the CBA.

Since then, they are 6-2.

The Celtics now are 35-32, three games over .500 for the first time this season. They are 1½ games be-

hind Philadelphia, where they play Tuesday night, in the race for the seventh and next to last playoff spot in the Eastern Conference. The seventh-place finisher probably will face New York, rather than Detroit or Cleveland, in the first round.

It seems unlikely that Bird, who hasn't practiced with the Celtics since March 9 because of swelling and discomfort in his right foot, will be ready for the playoffs.

A foot injury that will sideline McHale for the second straight game Tuesday night and a wrist problem that required surgery and will keep guard Jim Paxson out for the rest of the season, make the roles of Pinckney, Kleine and Upshaw more important.

With the Celtics, Pinckney, who started Sunday in place of McHale, is averaging 10.8 points, Upshaw 8.0 and Kleine 6.4.

"It's fun to be out there when the game means something," said Upshaw, a rookie who played nine games with Miami before being cut Jan. 31.

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