

BUFFIN

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Plus, the NBA is financially backing the league and Richard Luker, executive director of the ESPN Chilton Sports Poll, said women's basketball is drawing a 50-to-60 percent interest rating. That is pretty huge.

Many skeptics of the league claim that women's basketball will not draw interest because the games are not as physical and as fast-paced as the men's version. However, the interest ratings prove this statement false. Additionally, the women's game is progressively becoming not only more physical but fast paced. While women may not be able to dunk, many pure basketball fans are not interested in seeing only a slam dunk fest. These women epitomize the true spirit of basketball, layups, no-look passes, jump shots and good, plain defense.

What is great about women's basketball is that these women are not in the league for the money or notoriety, they simply love the game and wish to continue playing beyond college. Cline, who played at Old Dominion University, has waited since the early 1980s to play in a national league. She is now 38-years-old and has been looking forward to this day since she first proposed the idea to David Stern in 1984.

"Every day I walk out to practice, I have a big smile on my face," Lieberman-Cline said.

This is what athletics is supposed to be about, the pure enjoyment of the sport. It is not about the contract you have or how much notoriety you gain, it is all about the love of the game. Maybe the men should sit down and watch a game and see what they are missing and see what they have forgotten.

This Saturday, take a chance and sit down and watch a game. After all, if fans give the league a chance it will only survive.

Longtime caddie dies

(AP) — Jeff "Squeaky" Medlen, the wiry man with the high-pitched voice who carried Nick Price's bag to victory in the British Open and two PGA Championships, died less than a year after being diagnosed with leukemia. He was 43.

Medlen died Monday night at his home in Ohio, representatives for Price said Tuesday.

"Squeek was more than a friend to me," Price said in a statement. "He was a part of my family. He was a huge part of my success and I will always be grateful for his loyalty and devotion."

Players and fellow caddies showed their support for Medlen during his illness by wearing green ribbons containing the word "Squeaky."

Interleague play will take a while to get used to

Major League Baseball's most recent debate featuring its traditionalists and innovators materialized on the field last week as the first-ever regular season interleague game was played at The Ballpark in Arlington, between the San Francisco Giants and Texas Rangers. This game marked the end of a century-long format that only allowed such meetings in the World Series in October.

In 1994, baseball made a transition of equal notoriety when its four divisions were realigned into six, and two playoff teams were added in each league. I was leading the charge of the silent majority pleading with the Great Game's brain trust not to make these ill-fated decisions. I consider myself a traditionalist and hated to see the uniqueness of my first



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with a winning record while Texas has to face the Major League's second-ranked pitching staff (Los Angeles Dodgers) and its best offensive team (Colorado Rockies)? Not to mention the teams in American and National League West Divisions play 16 interleague games while everyone else has 15.

If I'm not too busy in November, I might call up acting-commissioner Bud Selig and offer my services as the schedule maker. But first, before I unveil my masterpiece, I have to say my piece about realignment.

Why are the Atlanta Braves in the NL East, for example, and Tampa Bay being proposed as the new NL West member? They don't exactly fit those geographic regions. Wouldn't the owners like to see a more geographically-friendly alignment? If

are playing games more often in their own time zones, there would be more prime time TV games in the home teams' cities. That translates into better TV contracts and more advertising revenue, right? Plus, it would simply make more sense, and I wouldn't have to stay up until 2 a.m. to watch a crucial Rangers game on the West Coast in September.

After realigning the leagues to my specs, the rest is simple. Each team plays 30 interleague games, one two-game series per non-league team. This way interleague play stays fresh. You don't get to see every year in your hometown, so attendance at those games will be higher than average. Plus the World Series will include two teams that have seen each other the same number of times as they have every other non-league team. Thus, fairness prevails.

Each team would then play all non-division foes eight times, splitting the four-game series home and away. This season's two-game series are ridiculous. Too often teams stroll into town and face the No. 4 and No. 5 starters and leave town with the two aces waiting for the next opponent. In a four-game series the best team will prevail, or there will be at least a split. Leave the two-game series to interleague games where match-ups aren't very relevant anyway.

And finally, division games are obviously the most important games played. They decide, or should, who goes to the playoffs and who goes home. So play more of them. Each team should play 13 games against its four division rivals. Even though some teams play more than 13 games against division foes now, it is the only way to include a fair interleague schedule while putting more emphasis on division play. It's either this, throw out interleague play completely, or play a biased schedule.

It will probably take baseball fans until October to realize the difficulty, or lack thereof, of each team's interleague schedule had a huge hand in determining the outcome of the regular season standings. Until then MLB will go on capitalizing on the novelty of interleague play as if they created multi-million dollar exhibition games.

love be sacrificed for the conformity with the postseason formats of the other major sports for the sake of revenue.

But now I have to stand up, swallow my pride and admit, well, I love the new system. It has added a new dimension of excitement to our National Pastime and created some memorable best-of-five playoff series while still achieving its main purpose — revenue. I saw this interleague play concept as the same animal when it was announced last year, but I approached it with a different attitude.

I was looking forward to last Thursday's historic game for months. I absolutely couldn't wait to see Barry Bonds in a real game instead of the 1995 Home Run Contest. Then, two days later, the San Diego Padres came to town. Ken Caminiti vs. Juan Gonzalez, Tony Gwynn hitting at The Ballpark, two playoff teams that got the opportunity to play out their World Series dreams from last season — this was awesome. The real stuff that makes baseball great.

It seems the rest of the country shared my anticipation and early acceptance of this radical addition to baseball. Attendance at the opening games of each interleague series this weekend shattered the 1997 average MLB attendance, increasing it by an incredible 43 percent. Every game eclipsed average numbers for this season, headlined by the Boston Red Sox's visit to Shea Stadium in New York. The Mets were drawing an average about 19,000 fans per game and saw 45,000 pass through the turnstiles Friday, an increase of 136 percent.

After everything was said and done, Darryl Hamilton stepped into the batter's box against Darrin Oliver and laced a single into centerfield. Suddenly this circus took on the look of a regular season game; a game that could ultimately keep one of these teams out of the postseason. I'm afraid my jubilation over interleague play was premature. After careful examination of the evidence presented to me by the commissioner-less baseball front office, I have come to the conclusion that this idea may ruin baseball.

Is it fair that the powerhouse Cleveland Indians and Chicago White Sox, both of whom the Rangers could be competing in a Wild Card chase with, don't play a single interleague game against a National League team



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SPORTS BRIEFS

Ags finish 30th in Sears Director's Cup

Texas A&M University finished the year in 30th place in the Sears Director's Cup which determines the top universities in terms of sports each year.

The Aggies began the spring 54th place before jumping up places based on the performance of the baseball, men's and women's golf, men's and women's tennis and men's and women's track teams. These teams advanced to the NCAA playoffs their respective sports.

Stanford, with a record in national championships, was the overall Division I champion with a record 1,084.5 points in the 1996-97 title marked the 19th straight year for Stanford to take home the trophy.

The Aggies finished 16th in the 1995-96 standings, the highest finish for A&M.

Houston loses out on hockey bid

HOUSTON (AP) — Houston was passed over Tuesday in its bid for an NHL expansion franchise, but the owner of the city's minor-league hockey team says he is not giving up.

Aeros owner Chuck Watson, who bid for an expansion team with business partner Bob McNair, says their efforts to bring major-league hockey to Houston will depend on a November referendum. Mayor Bob Lanier is seeking voter approval for a new arena for the NBA Houston Rockets and an NHL franchise.

"If the city doesn't support a new arena, it is like saying the Rockets can leave in 2003 and that they aren't interested in hockey or basketball in Houston," Watson said.

The NHL on Tuesday tentatively approved expanding to Nashville, Tenn.; Atlanta; Columbus, Ohio; and Minneapolis-St. Paul in the next four years. Houston and Oklahoma City lost out.

Wide receiver Monk retires from NFL

WASHINGTON (AP) — Quietly, Monk went about becoming one of the best wide receivers in NFL history. Just as quietly, he retired on Tuesday, more than a year after catching his final pass.

Monk, who failed to sign with the NFL team last season, played 12 seasons with the Washington Redskins, and one each with the New York Jets in 1994 and the Philadelphia Eagles in 1995.

"I had a good career, a great time and it's time to move on and do other things," the 39-year-old receiver said. "I felt like I couldn't have performed (last year), it wasn't just the opportunities weren't there. Things just weren't the same."

Monk, who set several NFL records that have since been broken, still has one — catching at least one pass in 183 consecutive games. His last reception came on Dec. 12, 1995 — a 36-yard touchdown from Rodney Peete in a 20-14 loss to the Chicago Bears at Soldier Field.

Sampras avoids big hitters in draw

WIMBLEDON, England (AP) — There are few big servers in Pete Sampras' way as he seeks his fourth Wimbledon title in five years. But there is another Swede in his path.

Tuesday's draw presented the top seed with a favorable bracket but a potentially tricky first-round match against Mikael Tillstrom of the All England Club, with the tournament to start Monday.

On the women's side, top-seeded Martina Hingis, 16, could become the youngest Wimbledon singles champion of the century. She faces a field that will be without injured Steffi Graf, but two intriguing tests could await en route to the semifinals — Jennifer Capriati and Lindsay Davenport.

Blue Jays release outfielder Sierra

TORONTO (AP) — The Blue Jays experiment has ended for Toronto Blue Jays.

The Blue Jays released much-traveled outfielder on Monday and recalled infielder Tomas Peeters from Triple-A Syracuse.

The 31-year-old Sierra hit .208 with one homer and five RBIs in 14 games for Toronto. He signed a minor-league contract with Syracuse on May 11 and was called up by the Blue Jays on May 23.

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