

## MLB League Championships full of young small & mid-market clubs

(AP) — Everybody can find something to like in this baseball postseason.

For the first time since the 1995 strike, baseball's version of the Final Four won't include any team that started the season among the top five in payroll.

And depending on the winner of the Atlanta-San Francisco series, it's possible the league championship series will play out without even one team that finished the season with a top-10 payroll.

Those numbers might have warmed the hearts of the game's most miserly owners. But commissioner Bud Selig was careful not to read too much into them.

When he picked up the phone Sunday night at his home in Milwaukee, the Braves-Giants game was playing on a TV in the background. After years of trying, Selig finally managed to shoehorn a few cost-containment measures into the most recent labor deal reached between owners and players.

But the commissioner wasn't about to claim those modest advances had yielded a new order in baseball so soon.

"I was taught many years ago that the only predictable thing about baseball is its unpredictability," he said. "And that's all this proves."

This postseason proved the Yankees' starting rotation was too old and the defending World Series champion Diamondbacks were too thin to overcome a few key injuries. Their only consolation is that a half-dozen wealthy neighbors — the Red Sox, Rangers, Dodgers, Mets, Mariners and Indians — didn't make it far enough to have their shortcomings exposed.

In what might be a more revealing sign of the times the owners of the last two AL teams standing, Minnesota and Anaheim, are trying to sell. And NL semifinalist St. Louis, long one of the sport's most stable franchises, is even now probably figuring how to parlay this postseason appearance into a few more concessions from the city to help the club build a new stadium.

"We've spent a long time, too much time, in fact, talking about off-the-field issues," the commissioner said, "and so far we've had a pretty good week on the field. I'd like to keep the focus there." Besides, the Cardinals have been through an incredible season, considering all the emotions and the heartbreak in the wake of Daryl Kile's death," Selig said. "Let their fans savor that."

Fans of the Twins as well as irony, can savor the possibility that one of the teams Selig planned to eliminate is still around.

"The country wants to see the poor teams win and play," Minnesota outfielder Tori Hunter said after his team won Game 5 of the division series Sunday in Oakland.

"I was rooting for the Angels. It's going to be a low-budget LCS. We all make minimum wage

### MLB TOP TEN PAYROLLS FOR 2002 TEAMS

TEAM	PAYROLL
1. N.Y. YANKEES	\$125,928,583
2. BOSTON	108,366,060
3. TEXAS	105,302,124
4. ARIZONA	102,820,000
5. LOS ANGELES	94,850,952
6. N.Y. METS	94,633,593
7. ATLANTA	93,470,367
8. SEATTLE	80,282,668
9. CLEVELAND	78,909,448
10. SAN FRANCISCO	78,299,835

\* These figures represent opening day payrolls. San Francisco is no longer in the Top 10.

MANDY ROUQUETTE • THE BATTALION

out there."

In a scene that could have come from the movie "Major League," Twins owner Carl Pohlad — who favored the contraction plan and still wants to sell his team — popped into the clubhouse a half-hour after the win.

"We had a bunch of young guys that played their hearts out every day. We have to win the next two rounds, and I'm not even going to talk about contraction," Pohlad said, "until then." Selig plans to wait even longer. "I'm delighted for them. It's a great story, just because of the way they're playing," he said. "I'm enjoying watching them."

"The rest of it, the history of what happened before, it's in the past now."

If only it were that simple. Baseball is set up to have a great postseason on the field, even — maybe especially — without the Yankees. But Selig & Co. ignore all the rest at their own peril. Some first-round playoff games were shuttled to the ABC Family Channel, and the truth is nearly two-thirds of the teams are still looking to cut payroll, not add players.

Enough teams have lost enough money so that some of the revenue-sharing funds will be used to cover losses, something sure to create even more resentment between the haves and have-nots. The Yankees, Mets and other big spenders who missed out on deep runs through the postseason won't take kindly to subsidizing teams doing just that while paying out the minimum wage.

## Texas' Benson ready for first Red River Shootout

AUSTIN (AP) — Last season against Oklahoma, Texas tailback Cedric Benson was on the field for all of one play — and only because Ivan Williams lost his shoe.

Williams hobbled to the sideline and Benson took his place. It was a chance for glory in one of the biggest games of the year.

"It was a quarterback sneak," Benson said Monday, laughing at his less-than-spectacular introduction to the annual Red River Shootout.

Williams returned the next play and Benson was back on the bench for the rest of the game.

There is no way that will happen again Saturday when No. 2 Oklahoma (5-0) and No. 3 Texas (5-0) meet again Saturday in Dallas.

Last year, coach Mack Brown said Benson wasn't good enough at pass blocking to help protect quarterback Chris Simms. With Benson watching, Texas ran for just 27 yards and Simms was sacked five times in a 14-3 loss.

That was the end of Benson sitting on the bench. He started the next week and ran for 131 yards in a win over Oklahoma State.

Starting with that game, Texas is 11-1 and Benson has rushed for 1,675 yards with 17 touchdowns. The only loss in that stretch was to Colorado in the Big 12 title game when Benson went to the bench in the first half with a neck injury that also kept him out of the Holiday Bowl.

Benson says he's waiting for a crack at the Sooners. "I wanted to play. I wanted to stay in there" against Oklahoma, said Benson, who estimates he's only given up one or two sacks in pass protection since.

"I was a little down about that. (But) you can't do nothing about what you can't control. I feel like I could have gotten in there and played and played well," he said.

Benson finished last season with a UT freshman record of 1,053 yards and 12 touchdowns.

This season, he has three 100-yard games, including 208 yards against North Carolina.

Benson's success has prompted yearlong second-guessing of Brown's decision to sit him against the Sooners.

Brown admits that hindsight suggests he should have played Benson. Still, he insists, coaches thought they were doing the right thing at the time.

Besides Benson's blocking problems, Williams had just gained 152 yards in a 42-7 victory over Texas Tech. Benson had come off the bench for a total of 186 yards in the first four games.

"Going into that game Ivan was playing great and Cedric wasn't as ready to play against the blitz," Brown said Monday. "Sitting there on Thursday before the game, we didn't think he was ready to handle all the things he needed to handle."

But Oklahoma stuffed Williams and everything else Texas tried to do on the ground that day. And Brown wasn't going to call on the freshman to bail out an offense that managed one field goal.

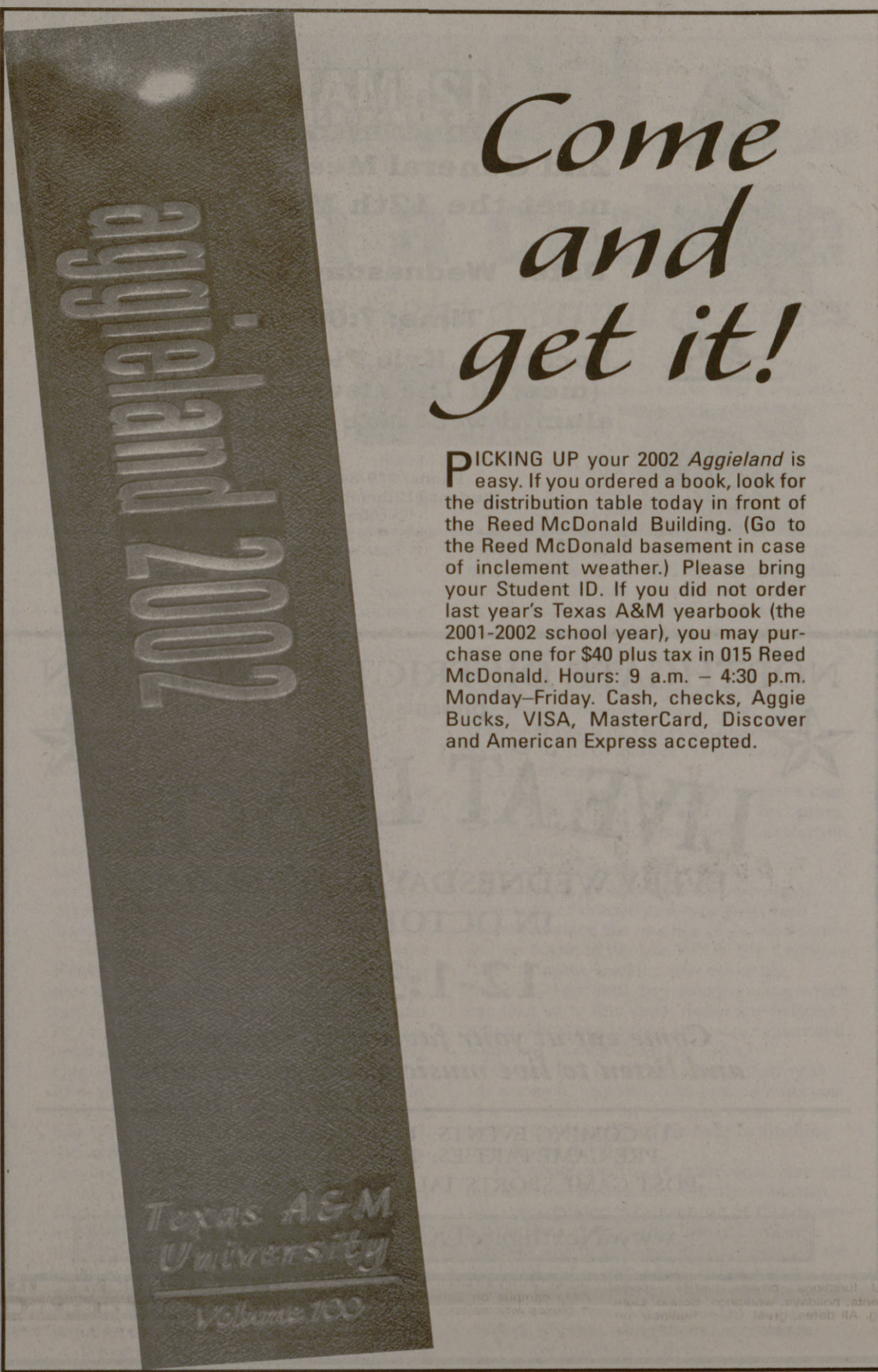
"Should we have forced it more? Maybe," Brown said. "Because he did real well against Oklahoma State the next week."

The pageantry and passion surrounding the annual rivalry is one of the highlights of the college football season. The game is held at the same time as the State Fair of Texas and the Cotton Bowl is evenly split between Longhorns and Sooners fans.

Benson said he was impressed by the crowd and the atmosphere surrounding the game last year. But he has little experience to draw on for what the game is like.

"It's a grudge match," Benson said. "I got a sense of what it means, not of what it's like on the field."

"I think he will take this game kind of personally," Baker said. "He wants to show how talented of a back he is."



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