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Select a budget: Thursday, January 14, 2010

BC-MCT-SPORTS-BJT — sports editors (8800 words)

McClatchy-Tribune News Service
Sports Budget for Thursday, January 14, 2010
Updated at 2 a.m. EST (0700 Friday UTC).

TOP STORIES

Former Cardinal Jack Clark condemns McGwire and others, calls them phony and fake

BBO-STEROIDS-CLARK-1ST-LEDE:SL—Former Cardinals slugger Jack Clark apparently isn't enamored of the current hitting coach, especially in light of Mark McGwire's admission a few days ago that he had used steroids in 1998-99 when he played for the Cardinals and before that with Oakland.

Clark, who spoke whatever was on his mind when he played — he was a big factor in two National League pennants for the Cardinals in the 1980s — and occasionally when he hasn't been playing, said Thursday he was disgusted with the whole steroids issue and McGwire's now confirmed involvement in it.

"A lot of them should be banned from baseball, including Mark McGwire," Clark said.

"All those guys are cheaters — A-Rod (Alex Rodriguez). Fake, phony. Rafael Palmeiro. Fake, a phony.

"(Roger) Clemens, (Barry) Bonds. (Sammy) Sosa. Fakes. Phonies. They don't deserve to be in the Hall of Fame.

900 by Rick Hummel in St. Louis. **MOVED**

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

Cowboys' Adams blocking out penalties in stretch run

FBN-COWBOYS-SPORTSPLUS:FT—When left tackle Flozell Adams came to the Dallas Cowboys as a second-round pick in 1998, he assumed making the playoffs and deep runs in the postseason came with the territory.

The Cowboys were just three years removed from their third Super Bowl title of the decade and two years from a divisional playoff loss at Carolina.

The famed Triplets, quarterback Troy Aikman, running back Emmitt Smith and receiver Michael Irvin, and the core of the title teams were still around.

And even though the Cowboys lost in the first round of the playoffs during Adams' first two seasons, he thought it would be just a matter of time before the winning returned.

"I thought it was a trend around here," Adams says. "It's the Dallas Cowboys. But that's not the way things happened."

800 by Clarence E. Hill Jr. in Irving, Texas. **MOVED**

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#) | [PHOTO](#)

Handicapping the NFL: Ravens, Cowboys, Cardinals look ready to shake up playoffs

FBN-NFLPLAYOFFS-HANDICAPPING:DA—The Indianapolis Colts and New Orleans Saints captured the top seed and ultimate home-field advantage in their respective conferences this postseason.

But the Saints finished 13-3 with a three-game losing streak. No team that lost its final three regular-season games has ever gone on to win a Super Bowl. The Colts finished 14-2 with a two-game losing streak. It's been 42 years since a team lost its final two regular-season games and went on to win a Super Bowl.

Also, no top seed in either conference has won a Super Bowl since 2003, when the New England Patriots accomplished the feat. So don't look for a Colts-Saints Super Bowl. The two top seeds haven't met in the NFL championship game since 1993.

1950 by Rick Gosselin. **MOVED**

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#) | [PHOTOS](#)

It's difficult to know where to begin with Mark McGwire

BBN-PETERSON-COLUMN:CC—In baseball they talk of warning-track power — a would-be show of might resulting in a well-struck fly ball that falls just short of the fence. This is what Mark McGwire displayed Monday.

His soul-cleansing confession was at once an admirable, towering gesture ("I used steroids") and a disappointing hedge (but only "for health purposes"). Predictably, it has inspired a renewed outcry for baseball to conduct a toxic cleanup of its record book.

Some of that outcry can be classified as hot gas in a brisk wind. But some isn't easily dismissed. Rich Maris, son of the man whose single-season home run record McGwire broke to considerable fanfare in 1998, says he considers his father, Roger, to be the rightful standard bearer.

"I think baseball will figure it out," he told the San Francisco Chronicle.

Time will determine that.

750 by Gary Peterson. **MOVED**

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

NHL

Flyers' winning streak ends at four

HKN-FLYERS-MAPLELEAFS:PH— For the Philadelphia Flyers, two streaks came to an end against the lowly Toronto Maple Leafs on Thursday night at the Air Canada Centre.

The Flyers dropped a 4-0 decision as their four-game winning streak—and goalie Michael Leighton's undefeated stretch in regulation — came to an end.

Leighton could not be faulted too much. He was beaten on three odd-man rushes, and on a mistake by defenseman Ole-

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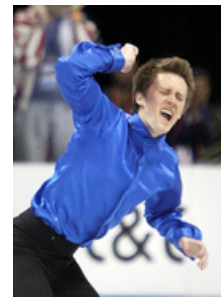
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Kristian Tollefsen, as his record slipped to 8-1-1.

Vesa Toskala (38 saves) notched his first shutout of the season and the 13th of his career.

650 by Sam Carchidi in Toronto. [MOVED](#)

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

Rangers shut out by Senators

[HKN-SENATORS-RANGERS:ND](#)—The name on the back of the jersey read “Brodeur.” The Rangers fell under the spell and never woke up.

Mike Brodeur, the third-string goalie for the Ottawa Senators and a distant cousin of the Devils’ Martin Brodeur, made 32 saves and blanked the Rangers, 2-0, on Thursday night in his second NHL start. Martin Brodeur stopped 51 shots and four in the shootout in the Devils’ 1-0 win on Tuesday at the Garden.

The Senators snapped a five-game winless streak when former Islanders defenseman Chris Campoli, left alone to Henrik Lundqvist’s right, scored off a pass from Alex Kovalev with 1:14 left in the third period, a goal that prompted Lundqvist to slam his stick on the cross bar. Chris Kelly scored into an empty net with 10.7 seconds left.

Rangers coach John Tortorella had repeatedly warned his team about a letdown after the Devils game. “I guess they weren’t listening,” he said.

600 by Steve Zipay in New York. [MOVED](#)

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

Lidstrom goal ends three-month drought as Red Wings win

[HKN-HURRICANES-REDWINGS:DE](#)— Halloween came and went. So did Thanksgiving. Then Christmas. Leaves turned. Snow fell. A new decade emerged.

And Nicklas Lidstrom still had not scored.

The Red Wings’ captain finally got off the schneid and on the board Thursday night when he ended a 42-game goal-scoring drought. His power-play goal midway through the first period opened the scoring and paced a 3-1 win over the Carolina Hurricanes.

200 by Carlos Monarrez in Detroit. [MOVED](#)

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#) | [PHOTOS](#)

Panthers stop Lightning strike

[HKN-PANTHERS-LIGHTNING:MI](#)—Pete DeBoer said he had put Wednesday’s loss behind him. It’s pretty obvious many of his players had not, but what happened in the third period Thursday night should ease some of that sting.

A night after surrendering a three-goal lead in an eventual shootout loss to the Capitals, the Panthers scored a pair of goals in the third period to upend the host Lightning, 3-2, at St. Pete Times Forum.

“I’ve moved on from Wednesday night,” DeBoer told a reporter with a laugh. “You obviously haven’t.”

550 by George Richards in Tampa, Fla. [MOVED](#)

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

Blackhawks hold Blue Jackets scoreless

[HKN-BLUEJACKETS-BLACKHAWKS:TB](#)— Just like that, all is right again in the Blackhawks’ world.

Before hitting the road for a season-long eight-game trip, the Hawks decided to give themselves a little going-away present and snap their mild two-game skid.

Playing their final home game of the month Thursday night, the Hawks defeated the Blue Jackets, 3-0, before a crowd of 21,884, the largest of the season at the United Center.

Brian Campbell, Dustin Byfuglien and Duncan Keith scored, and Cristobal Huet came up big in goal with 24 saves to record his fourth shutout of the season — and the team’s NHL-leading eighth — as the Hawks avoided their first three-game losing streak of the season.

600 by Chris Kuc in Chicago. [MOVED](#)

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#) | [PHOTOS](#)

Stars falter on road again in losing to Canadiens

[HKN-STARS-CANADIENS:DA](#)— The Dallas Stars are finding out that momentum isn’t easy to stop, especially when it’s rolling downhill.

Coach Marc Crawford juggled his lineup Thursday night, and the Stars responded with more energy and some key offensive plays. But, in the end, they couldn’t grab hold of the positive force and slipped back into old habits en route to a 5-3 loss to Montreal at Bell Centre.

The Stars are 1-6-0 in their last seven games and have fallen to 12th in the Western Conference at 19-17-11. What’s worse, they are getting roasted on the road, as they are 0-7-2 in their last nine away from home and have surrendered an astounding 40 goals in that span.

500 by Mike Heika in Montreal. [MOVED](#)

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

Blues notch third win in a row by blanking Wild

[HKN-WILD-BLUES:SL](#)—The St. Louis Blues are far from calling Scottrade Center a home-ice advantage, but they’re making progress.

A 1-0 victory Thursday night over the Minnesota Wild, a club that has had its way lately with the NHL’s best, gave the Blues back-to-back wins on home ice for only the second time this season.

“We’ve got to do a lot to reclaim (home-ice advantage), but we’ve just got to chip away,” Blues captain Eric Brewer said. “There’s lots of games to play and these are teams that we need to beat.”

750 by Jeremy Rutherford in St. Louis. [MOVED](#)

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

Ducks blanked in loss to Kings

[HKN-DUCKS-KINGS:OC](#)—If only the Ducks could rewind Thursday back to its beginnings, when the day seemed so promising.

The NHL’s hottest team entered a game against the reeling Kings on a five-game winning streak and was poised to close in on their rival and insert itself firmly into the Western Conference playoff picture.

By night’s end, red-hot goalie Jonas Hiller had been given the hook, the Kings’ Jonathan Quick pitched a shutout and the streak was over for the Ducks in an odorous 4-0 loss to their rivals in front of a sellout crowd of 18,118 at Staples Center.

Instead of pulling closer to the eighth and final playoff spot, it was an opportunity blown as the Ducks (21-20-7) fell six points behind the Kings and five behind ninth-place Detroit.

400 by Eric Stephens in Los Angeles. [MOVED](#)

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

Sharks lose in shootout to Bruins

[HKN-BRUINS-SHARKS:SI](#)—It had been 1,506 days since Joe Thornton was traded from the Boston Bruins to the Sharks, and from his perspective, that was more than enough time to make Thursday night’s matchup between the teams “just another game.”

“Maybe the first time they were here and the first time I was there,” he said after the morning skate, “but now it doesn’t matter.”

Maybe not to Thornton. But it was fresh enough in the minds of the 17,562 fans inside HP Pavilion that chants of “Thank you, Boston” broke out after he scored the lone goal that enabled the Sharks to come away with a single point in a 2-1 shootout loss.

650 by David Pollak in San Jose, Calif. [MOVED](#)

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

Kings fight off Ducks in 4-0 win

[HKN-DUCKS-KINGS:LA](#)—Once again veering off in opposite directions, the Los Angeles Kings and Anaheim Ducks reversed course Thursday in a game that could have significant playoff implications.

The Kings broke a three-game losing streak that had dropped them out of the top eight in the West for the first time since Oct. 21, recording an emphatic 4-0 victory at Staples Center while shattering the Ducks’ five-game winning streak and damaging the visitors’ faint playoff hopes.

850 by Helene Elliott in Los Angeles. [MOVED](#)

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#) | [PHOTO](#)

Ericsson’s return adds body to Red Wings’ blue line

[HKN-REDWINGS:DE](#)—Red Wings defenseman Jonathan Ericsson returned to the lineup Thursday night against Carolina after missing 12 games with a bone bruise to his left knee.

“I’ve been skating now for the last week and a half,” said Ericsson, who had not played since Dec. 17. “It feels good. When you skate out there, there’s not a lot of game situations. Not a lot of battling, going hard in short spurts, things like that.”

350 by Carlos Monarrez. [MOVED](#)

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

NBA

Bulls defeat Celtics as aggressive play pays off

[BKN-BULLS-CELTICS:TB](#)—Vinny Del Negro ended Thursday morning’s shootaround sounding as much like a boxing cornerman as a basketball coach, imploring the Bulls to be the aggressors and play physically.

He didn’t specifically mean for Tyrus Thomas to practically take out TNT announcers Kevin Harlan and Doug Collins chasing a second-quarter loose ball.

But that’s the kind of effort the Bulls brought to an impressive 96-83 road victory, taking advantage of a Celtics team playing without Kevin Garnett, Rasheed Wallace and Marquis Daniels.

500 by K.C. Johnson in Boston. [MOVED](#)

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

LeBron James still undecided on All-Star dunk contest

[BKN-CAVALIERS:AK](#)—With All-Star Game festivities quickly approaching, LeBron James still hasn’t decided whether he’ll participate in any of the other events — more specifically the Slam Dunk Contest.

James said last season that he wanted to bring the old-school attitude back to a contest that had been influenced far too much by props in recent years.

James said that he’s still 50-50 regarding whether he will participate. The league has begun announcing participants for the weekend-long events. TNT has announced pre-game contestants for the “dunk-in.”

DeMar DeRozan of the Toronto Raptors and Eric Gordon of the Los Angeles Clippers will face each other for a shot at halftime of the T-Mobile Rookie Challenge and Youth Jam. Fans will decide via text who goes on in that contest.

500 by George M. Thomas in Salt Lake City. [MOVED](#)

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

Clippers’ Griffin takes injury in stride

[BKN-CLIPPERS-GRIFFIN:LA](#)—With little emotion or inflection in his voice, Blake Griffin said the dreaded thought already had been in his head.

One day after the Clippers said their rookie power forward would need knee surgery that would delay his NBA debut until next season, Griffin said Thursday that the decision was “the best choice” for his nascent career.

550 by Jim Peltz in Los Angeles. [MOVED](#)

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

Heat’s O’Neal trying to get involved

[BKN-HEAT:MI](#)—There often are times when the biggest player on the Heat’s roster feels like the smallest priority in the grand scheme.

And then there are occasions like the one that transpired in center Jermaine O’Neal’s latest performance.

“I know I can still have a dominant impact on a game when I’m involved in what’s going on,” O’Neal said regarding his role with what he believes is a pick-and-roll, perimeter-based Heat team. “The question is whether or not I’ll have an opportunity to be involved on a consistent basis in a comfort zone.”

It remains a work in progress for O’Neal and the Heat (19-18), which continues a six-game trip Friday night against the Houston Rockets.

550 by Michael Wallace in Oakland, Calif. [MOVED](#)

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#) | [PHOTOS](#)

Warriors’ Curry meets Bucks’ Jennings in battle of rookie guards

[BKN-WARRIORS-CURRY:CC](#)—Most of the rookie hype that doesn’t go to Sacramento guard Tyreke Evans usually finds its way to Milwaukee point guard Brandon Jennings.

After Jennings dropped 55 on the Warriors in November, many concluded Golden State made a mistake by passing up Jennings to draft guard Stephen Curry with the seventh pick in the 2009 NBA draft. But as the season has played out, it’s looking as if the Warriors didn’t make out too badly after all, especially based on the statistics.

The two match up on Friday night at Oracle Arena.

600 by Marcus Thompson. [MOVED](#)

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

For 76ers’ Samuel Dalembert, head in the game but the heart’s in Haiti

[BKN-DONNELLON-COLUMN-HAITI:PD](#)—Before communications went dead in Haiti, Samuel Dalembert’s father, a government worker, sent an e-mail saying he was safe with two of Dalembert’s siblings. His mother and one sister live in Canada. Another sister is with his grandmother in Florida.

But there are so many others the Philadelphia 76ers forward doesn’t know about. Old neighbors. Longtime friends. Family.

On the television, he saw a street near where he spent the first 14 years of his life, a street on which he once walked barefoot, a place where, he says, “We were there for each other.” The street isn’t there anymore. He doesn’t know about the people. The 7.0-magnitude earthquake that hit Haiti on Tuesday had folded the street upon itself, rolling houses onto each other, turning a rolling hill into a roiling mess.

"I'm trying to be tough," he says. "But anybody who knows me, knows that deep inside I'm hurting."

900 by Sam Donnellon in Philadelphia. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#) | [PHOTO](#)

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

St. Mary's strong effort not enough to top No. 17 Gonzaga

[BKC-GONZAGA-STMARYS:CC](#)—Omar Samhan scored the first 11 points of the second half for the Saint Mary's College men's basketball team Thursday night. It was all he could do, really, to try to get the Gaels back into the game against No. 17 Gonzaga.

But the Bulldogs matched Samhan's effort point-for-point and with a scintillating offensive performance, reaffirmed their position as the West Coast Conference's best team with an 89-82 victory at a sold-out McKeon Pavilion.

Forward Elias Harris finished with 31 points and 13 rebounds, and guard Matt Bouldin added 22 points as Gonzaga (13-3, 2-0 WCC) beat the Gaels for the fifth straight time. Samhan ended with 31 points.

800 by Curtis Pashelka in Moraga, Calif. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

Isiah Thomas' mother, who was the focus of made-for-TV movie, dies at 87

[BKC-ISIAH-MOTHER:MI](#)—Isiah Thomas was back in his hometown of Chicago on Thursday, mourning the loss of his mother and inspiration, Mary, who died Wednesday of heart failure. She was 87.

"Nothing prepared me for the incredible sadness I feel," Thomas said by phone. "I called her every day of my adult life, and on those few days I missed, she'd call me late that night and say, 'My name's Mary Thomas, what's yours?'"

"The saddest thing for me is that I won't be able to look into her eyes anymore. I got so much comfort from those eyes, even through my toughest moments. The way she looked at me made me feel and believe I could do anything."

450 by Michelle Kaufman in Miami. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

NFL

NFL Forecast: This weekend is the best time of the playoffs

[FBN-NFL-FORECAST:CH](#)—NFL Forecast: This weekend is the best time of the playoffs

650 by Ron Green Jr. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

Picking NFL playoff games for this weekend

[FBN-NFL-PREVIEW:ND](#)—Picking NFL playoff games for this weekend

450 by Ed McNamara. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

Capsules for this weekend's NFL playoff games

[FBN-NFL-GAMES:MI](#)—Capsules for this weekend's NFL playoff games

750 by Greg Cote. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

How Jets' Mike Tannenbaum played let's make a deal to acquire Mark Sanchez

[FBN-OCONNOR-COLUMN:HK](#)—Rex Ryan was on the phone in Mike Tannenbaum's office, making the most important call of his NFL life. On a Friday night in April, a world away from a second-round playoff game in San Diego, Ryan spent 15 minutes trying to convince a nondescript safety to sign a form he had no good reason to sign.

The Jets wanted to acquire Mark Sanchez the following day, and they needed Abe Elam, of all people, to allow them to do it.

Elam had signed a one-year, \$1.5-million offer sheet with Eric Mangini's Browns; the Jets had matched it, and a quirky league rule prevented any matching team from trading a player to the signing team within a calendar year without that player's consent.

But on the eve of the draft, Mangini made it clear to the friend who had just fired him four months earlier that he wanted Elam in the deal that would give the Jets the fifth overall pick, and the quarterback out of their California dreams.

1400 by Ian O' Connor in Florham Park, N.J. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

Saints defensive coordinator Williams aims to give Cardinals' Warner a jolt

[FBN-MASHEK-COLUMN:BI](#)—Gregg Williams has learned a lot about pro football from some of game's finest defensive minds.

Buddy Ryan. Dick LeBeau. Jeff Fisher. And Crash Dummies.

Wait a minute. I know what you're thinking. Fisher was a studious cornerback under the cantankerous Ryan with the Chicago Bears. The injured cornerback got a head start in coaching with the Super Bowl Shufflers. Pro Football Hall of Famers Mike Singletary and Dan Hampton. Steve "Mongo" McMichael. All the rest.

Ryan taught the "46" defense, named after ruffian safety Doug Plank. That Bears defense brought the heat. LeBeau is the architect of the zone blitz, the tactical approach to disguising pressure and dropping defensive linemen into zone coverage.

650 by Jim Mashek in New Orleans. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

Playoffs bring out the best in Kurt Warner

[FBN-CARDINALS:KC](#)—Arizona Cardinals quarterback Kurt Warner isn't sure where the retirement talk began.

"No idea," Warner says of reports circulating that he plans to hang it up after the playoffs.

Warner may be 38, but if he continues to perform at the level of last week's wild 51-45 overtime win against Green Bay, he's not going anywhere.

Except to the Pro Football Hall of Fame five years after he eventually retires.

Because of a few injury-marred seasons during 2002-2007, there was some question whether Warner—a two-time league MVP and Super Bowl MVP with the Rams in 1999 — was a legitimate Hall of Famer or someone who got hot for just a few seasons.

950 by Randy Covitz. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

Rivals in high school and mates in college, Cotchery and Rivers are rivals again

[FBN-JETS:HK](#)—Because he plays offense, Jerricho Cotchery doesn't have to worry about watching film of San Diego Pro Bowl quarterback Philip Rivers this week.

Nonetheless, Cotchery knows exactly what he would see — pinpoint passes delivered on a dime to Rivers' receivers.

That's because Cotchery has been there and done that.

The two played at North Carolina State, where Cotchery caught 21 of Rivers' 95 collegiate touchdown passes. But they will be on opposite sides when the Jets visit the Chargers on Sunday in the divisional round of the AFC playoffs.

600 by J.P. Pelzman in Florham Park, N.J. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

Yes, Peyton Manning does have a quarterbacks coach

[FBN-COLTS:BZ](#)— Frank Reich has gone from trying to become a Hall of Fame quarterback to molding one.

Reich, the former Maryland and Buffalo Bills quarterback credited with mounting two of the most memorable comeback wins in football history—one in college and one in the NFL — is the quarterbacks coach for the Indianapolis Colts. A large part of his daily responsibilities revolves around interacting with 10-time Pro Bowl selection Peyton Manning.

Reich's access to Manning usually entices a question he has heard frequently.

"The big thing with coaching Peyton is people are always asking, 'Do you really coach him?'" Reich said. "Then you laugh and say: 'Yeah, you're right. I don't really coach him.'"

850 by Edward Lee in Indianapolis. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#) | [PHOTO](#)

Chargers' Castillo expects better run defense

[FBN-CHARGERS-CASTILLO:HK](#)—Luis Castillo knows he will be in for a long, physical day Sunday when the Jets visit San Diego for their AFC divisional playoff matchup. The Jets love to run the ball and were first in the NFL at 172.2 yards per game in 2009. And the Chargers had trouble stopping it: 20th in the NFL at 117.8 yards per game.

Yet the defensive end from Garfield, N.J., says it certainly is not a hopeless task.

"We're significantly better," he said of the San Diego run defense. "It doesn't always translate in numbers. I think a lot of times it translates to not giving up the big play. There's a significant difference, obviously, because we went through so much turnover."

750 by Vinny Ditrani. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

Ravens need to be at the top of their game to beat Peyton Manning, the best of the best

[FBN-RAVENS-MANNING:BZ](#)—Pop quiz: Is there anything more difficult than facing Tom Brady and Peyton Manning six days apart in the playoffs?

Answer: Yes. Getting Philip Rivers the week after that, if you survive.

The road to the Super Bowl is lined with elite quarterbacks, and the Ravens already are familiar with the best of them.

They are just 1-4 this season against quarterbacks who have won Super Bowls. They are 2-6 if you expand the list to the San Diego Chargers' Rivers and the Cincinnati Bengals' Carson Palmer, both Pro Bowl players.

1050 Ken Murray in Baltimore. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

Old-fashioned gunfight: Who'll be left standing?

[FBN-COWBOYS-QUARTERBACKS:FT](#)—Instead of the Metrodome in Minneapolis, maybe Sunday's venue should be the O.K. Corral.

The matchup between Minnesota Vikings quarterback Brett Favre and Dallas Cowboys quarterback Tony Romo is straight out of an old-fashioned Western.

An aging gunslinger looking for one last hurrah is facing the new kid on the block looking to make a name for himself.

That Romo idolized Favre growing up and patterned his game after the elder statesman only adds to the plot — as does the fact that they have become friends over the years.

But all that will be put aside in the do-or-die gunfight that is an NFC divisional playoff.

950 by Clarence E. Hill Jr. in Irving, Texas. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

Vikings' Peterson faces his childhood favorite, the Cowboys

[FBN-VIKINGS:MS](#)—As a kid growing up in Texas, Adrian Peterson was a diehard Dallas Cowboys fan. He owned trading cards of Cowboys running back Emmitt Smith and had a poster of flashy cornerback Deion Sanders on his bedroom wall.

"Prime Time," Peterson said, referring to Sanders' nickname. "Oh yeah."

Why Sanders?

"Just the type of player he was," Peterson said. "He was just one of a kind. Offense, defense, special teams, he did it all. His blazing speed, he was just a one-of-a-kind type player."

Peterson has been called the same thing as an NFL running back, but he admits being star-struck when he met some of his former idols.

650 by Chip Scoggins in Minneapolis. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

Gaither's ankle injury raises questions for Ravens

[FBN-RAVENS:BZ](#)—Ravens left tackle Jared Gaither was with the offensive line when it began warm-up drills Thursday, but his movements were slow and careful as he tried not to put too much pressure on his right ankle. He did not look like a player who was two days away from playing the biggest game of the year.

After practice, Gaither wasn't interested in discussing how his ankle felt, or whether he'll be able to play Saturday against the Colts.

"I feel awesome, how about that?" Gaither said over his shoulder, heavy on the sarcasm, before hobbling to the training room and declining to comment further.

1000 by Kevin Van Valkenburg in Baltimore. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

After 26 years, Baltimore is over old team and embracing Ravens

[FBN-COLTS-HISTORY:BZ](#)— For years, Tom Guy bled blue and white. For seven seasons, he played clarinet in the Baltimore Colts' Band. But on Saturday, as Guy wheels his purple Dodge van into the parking lot at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis, where the Ravens and Colts will meet in an NFL playoff game, the Ravens' fan will be marching to a different drummer.

"It's time the Colts got a good, old-fashioned spanking," said Guy, 48, of Hampden, Md. "If (the Ravens) win, holy mackerel, they might have to shut the city down and close schools. It'd be like a blizzard."

850 by Mike Klingaman in Baltimore. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

Chargers' offense will be facing a worthy opponent

[FBN-JETS-CHARGERS:LA](#)—Breaking down the San Diego Chargers-New York Jets matchup in the AFC divisional playoffs:

This game pits San Diego's outstanding pass offense and New York's smothering pass defense. A matchup to watch is Jets

cornerback Darrelle Revis on 6-foot-5 Vincent Jackson, who's six inches taller. But Jackson is quick to say that height differential between receivers and defensive backs is often an exaggerated edge. He says he can count on one hand the number of jump-ball fades the Chargers have thrown in recent years, passes that can take advantage of those size mismatches.

550 by Sam Farmer in Los Angeles. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

A chess match, but physical

[FBN-RAVENS-COLTS:LA](#)—Breaking down the Baltimore-Indianapolis matchup in the AFC divisional playoffs:

The last time the Colts played a home game they were 14-0 and, to the disappointment and frustration of their fans, opted to rest Peyton Manning for most of the second half of a loss to the Jets. Now the pressure is on Indianapolis to prove it was the correct choice to sit players. In some ways, the pressure on the Colts at 14-2 is greater than it would have been at 16-0, because just about everyone thinks they should have fought hard all the way through.

450 by Sam Farmer in Los Angeles. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

Vikings putting money in the Brett Favre bank

[FBN-VIKINGS-FAVRE:MS](#)— Brett Favre didn't learn he had supposedly guaranteed a Vikings playoff victory Sunday over Dallas by turning on the television, scanning the Internet or even reading a good old-fashioned newspaper. Rather, the quarterback found out about his "guarantee" when he received a few calls from his home in Mississippi. He wasn't amused.

"First of all I'm not guaranteeing anything, and the last thing I ever want to do is be bulletin-board material," Favre said Thursday. "Of course, I gave the Cowboys a ton of respect. They deserve it. They are playing outstanding. They are playing—and I'm speaking NFC — as well if not the best maybe in the league. San Diego, obviously, would argue that. How could I sit there and say, 'Well, next week possibly (we) could be home?' That very well could be true, could be over, for both teams. I'm sure people want to take it (as) he's guaranteeing a victory."

950 by Judd Zulgad in Minneapolis. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#) | [PHOTOS](#)

Cowboys' Ratliff and Ware selected to All Pro team

[FBN-COWBOYS-ALLPRO:DA](#)—Jay Ratliff, a tight end at the start of his collegiate career, joined the ranks of elite NFL defensive linemen Thursday.

Ratliff and Cowboys defensive teammate DeMarcus Ware, the pass-rushing outside linebacker, were named first team All Pro in media voting conducted by The Associated Press. It marked the first time the Cowboys' defense has had multiple first-team selections since 1996, when cornerback Deion Sanders and safety Darren Woodson were honored.

This was Ware's third selection. He was delighted to receive the recognition in what has been an injury-plagued season but was more pleased for Ratliff.

600 by Gerry Fraley in Irving, Texas. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

Leslie Frazier says he'll discuss Seahawks experience at a later date

[FBN-VIKINGS-FRAZIER:MS](#)—Leslie Frazier spent four-plus hours last Saturday interviewing for a job that by all accounts already had been filled. But the classy Vikings defensive coordinator didn't feel Thursday was the appropriate time to elaborate on what happened in his discussions with the Seattle Seahawks.

"It's probably better that I don't go there," Frazier said. "There would be a time I'd love to talk to you about it."

Frazier, who also interviewed for the Buffalo Bills coaching job last week, met with Seahawks chief executive officer Tod Leiweke in the Twin Cities even though there were multiple reports that Southern Cal coach Pete Carroll had an agreement in place to take over in Seattle. Carroll was named to the job on Monday.

400 by Judd Zulgad. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

Jets' Mark Sanchez needs to maintain low-turnover mission

[FBN-GLAUBER-COLUMN:ND](#)—It has taken a few stern reminders from his head coach and offensive coordinator, but Mark Sanchez finally gets the idea: Better to play it safe and live to see another play than throw an interception and watch your team lose.

The Jets' rookie quarterback has learned his lesson well, as evidenced by his vastly reduced interception numbers in recent weeks. That stat is music to Rex Ryan's and Brian Schottenheimer's ears: In his last six games, Sanchez has just six picks, and zero INTs in his last three games. It's no accident the Jets are 5-1 in those games. And two wins from going to the Super Bowl.

700 by Bob Glauber. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

Big Yard is Jerry Jones' big success

[FBN-GALLOWAY-COLUMN:FT](#)—For those still clinging to long-ago history, a Dallas Cowboys' successful season is defined by only one thing:

Super Bowl title, or it's a bust of a year.

Except, of course, 1996 seems so long ago yesterday. That's because it was.

Football-wise, the Cowboys are doing what they haven't done since the Clinton first term. That qualifies as success, but to what degree will be a continuing fandom/media debate, depending on what happens Sunday and maybe beyond.

Meanwhile, there's Jerry Jones.

Nobody in the entire national scope of the jock kingdom is having a better year.

950 by Randy Galloway in Fort Worth, Texas. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#) | [PHOTOS](#)

Colts defensive ends Freeney and Mathis will be tough on home turf

[FBN-PRESTON-COLUMN:BZ](#)—Ravens offensive tackles Michael Oher and Jared Gaither won the battle last time, but the Indianapolis Colts won the war.

Round 2 begins Saturday night when Gaither and Oher meet Colts defensive end Dwight Freeney and Robert Mathis in an AFC semifinal, only this time the game will be played at Lucas Oil Stadium instead of in Baltimore.

Advantage: Mathis and Freeney.

"I've never played in Indianapolis Stadium," said Oher, the Ravens' rookie right tackle who will match up against Mathis. "But I did play in all the SEC stadiums, and they are pretty loud, too. There is nothing you can do about the crowd noise. Being on the road in the NFL is a big help to the home team. You just got to focus in on the ball."

950 by Mike Preston. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

Off-maligned Flozell Adams holds the key to victory for Cowboys against Vikings

[FBN-TAYLOR-COLUMN:DA](#)—This week, it's not about the sexy names. This game is not about Tony Romo. Or Miles Austin. Or Felix Jones.

It's not even about Brett Favre or Adrian Peterson.

This game is about Flozell Adams.

If the Cowboys' veteran left tackle controls All-Pro defensive end Jared Allen, the NFC's best pass-rushing defensive end, the same way he did Philadelphia's Trent Cole the last two weeks, then Tony Romo will have a big game and the Cowboys will win.

If Adams can't handle Allen, then the Cowboys' season will end because Allen can dominate a game and disrupt an offense.

700 by Jean-Jacques Taylor in Arlington, Texas. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#) | [PHOTOS](#)

Haley confident Crennel will help Chiefs' defense

[FBN-CHIEFS:KC](#)—The Chiefs have tried this before. They've hired respected defensive coordinators to come to Kansas City to help fix their forlorn defense.

It didn't matter. Through Greg Robinson, Gunther Cunningham and Clancy Pendergast, the Chiefs have been unable to play consistently good defense, or at times avoid playing horrendously bad defense, the last nine seasons.

Still, coach Todd Haley was insistent that this time, things would be different with the latest Chiefs defensive coordinator, Romeo Crennel.

900 by Adam Teicher in Kansas City, Mo. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

Giants name Perry Fewell defensive coordinator

[FBN-GIANTS-FEWELL:HK](#)—After a day of yes he is, no he isn't, the Giants finally made it official Thursday night: Perry Fewell is their new defensive coordinator.

Fewell, 47, spent the bulk of the past four seasons coordinating the Buffalo Bills' defense before being named interim head coach for the final seven games of the 2009 season. He spent five seasons as Tom Coughlin's defensive backfield coach in Jacksonville.

"I am ecstatic to come to work for the New York Giants," said Fewell, who prefers the 4-3 setup the Giants' personnel best fits. "It's a good football team with good defensive players, and it's a franchise known for defense."

500 by Vinny DiTrani. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

Packers facing free-agency issues because of collective bargaining agreement

[FBN-PACKERS-ADV15:MW](#)—Before the Green Bay Packers can start riding a wave of optimism into the 2010 season, they may have to navigate some rough waters this off-season.

There is uneasiness everywhere in the NFL due to an impending end to the salary cap and a significant change in the rules of free agency. In Green Bay, it is pronounced because of the large number of players whose contracts expire, and it threatens to ruffle the transition into next season.

"There is uncertainty there, and that makes personnel decisions even harder," coach Mike McCarthy said in his season-ending news conference. "So we'll just continue to work through it and obviously always make the best decisions in the best interests of our organization. But the uncertainty really is where we're at."

1050 by Tom Silverstein in Green Bay, Wis. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

Could Michael Vick be an option for Rams?

[FBN-RAMS-VICK:SL](#)—As the Philadelphia Eagles headed into the offseason following last weekend's wild-card loss to Dallas, quarterback Michael Vick made it clear what he wanted in his future.

"Everybody wants to be a starter in this league, and everybody wants to play," Vick told the Philadelphia Inquirer. "That should be your goal. The ambition you should have is to want to be great. ... I know I can still play at a high level."

All of which is no surprise to Eagles coach Andy Reid.

"That kid, the changes that he made this year in his life, I was impressed with," Reid told Philadelphia reporters. "And his desire to be a No. 1 guy in this league, I'd be disappointed if he didn't feel that way."

950 by Jim Thomas in St. Louis. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

Al Davis to meet with Raiders coach Tom Cable

[FBN-RAIDERS:CC](#)—Tom Cable arrived at Raiders headquarters Thursday as the team's head coach. He exited the building just after 7 p.m. PST with a backpack slung over his right shoulder, jumped in his truck and drove past reporters without commenting on whether he remains coach.

Cable was supposed to meet with managing general partner Al Davis to discuss the direction of the Raiders for next season and beyond, including whether Cable will be around in any capacity.

300 by Steve Corkran. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Texas' McCoy answers his doubters

[FBC-TEXAS-MCCOY:DA](#)—For Texas quarterback Colt McCoy, some wounds heal quicker than others.

While his injured right arm should be 100 percent in about two weeks, McCoy has struggled with fan criticism about not returning to the Citi BCS National Championship Game. He played five snaps before he was hurt.

On a conference call Thursday as he accepted the Manning Award for the nation's top quarterback, he tried to answer any doubters.

250 by Chuck Carlton. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

Chow decides to stay at UCLA

[FBC-CHOW:LA](#)—Offensive coordinator Norm Chow is excited to be at UCLA, repeating that several times during a conference call to announce he would not be leaving to coach at USC.

So after two days of false reports, speculation and maneuvering, Chow and USC transition from "will he?" to "what happens now?"

1000 (with trims) by Chris Foster and Gary Klein in Los Angeles. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#) | [PHOTO](#)

Duke's Cutcliffe appears set to be named new coach at Tennessee

[FBC-TENNESSEE-CUTCLIFFE:RA](#)—Jilted by one coach and rejected by two others, Tennessee has likely found a new football coach in Duke's David Cutcliffe.

Multiple media outlets, including the Knoxville News Sentinel, cited unidentified sources in reporting that Cutcliffe will be made the Volunteers' new coach, barring what the Knoxville newspaper called Thursday night "a last-second snag in negotiations."

After only one turbulent season, Volunteers coach Lane Kiffin jumped from Tennessee to Southern California on Tuesday, prompting a search that appears to have led to Cutcliffe, a longtime Tennessee assistant who has breathed life into Duke's

dormant football program the past two seasons.

400 by J.P. Giglio. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

Holtz jumps ship: East Carolina coach heads to South Florida

[FBC-EASTCAROLINA:RA](#)—After five seasons with East Carolina, and almost as many chances to leave, Skip Holtz said goodbye to the Pirates on Thursday and accepted the head coaching job at South Florida.

He inherited a football program in 2005 that was coming off a 3-20 two-year stretch. Holtz leaves ECU with two consecutive Conference USA titles, four straight bowl appearances and a 38-27 record.

In the past three years, Holtz was in the mix for jobs at Syracuse, West Virginia and Cincinnati (twice) but remained in Greenville.

“I’m glad he stayed my whole career,” ECU senior defensive end C.J. Wilson said. “We all knew he had other opportunities. I’m happy for him but sad that he’s leaving ECU.”

750 by J.P. Giglio. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

Pro or college coach? It’s about knowing your identity

[FBC-HUNT-COLUMN-ADV15:MW](#)— Hank Raymonds likes to tell the story of how Al McGuire once thought about leaving Marquette for the Milwaukee Bucks and the NBA.

McGuire’s idea was to coach the Bucks for maybe a season or two and then become the general manager.

The problem, if one could actually call it a problem, was that McGuire was too honest with his employer. In a quaint reflection of the era, and of the man himself, McGuire asked Marquette for permission to leave.

Permission, of course, was denied.

Raymonds laughs about it now, especially if he’s asked what kind of a pro coach his old boss would’ve made.

650 by Michael Hunt in Milwaukee. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#) | [PHOTO](#)

As Kiffin shows, value of loyalty disappears in college football

[FBC-ROBERTSON-COLUMN:MI](#)— Perhaps Lane Kiffin’s act will play better in Hollywood than it did in Knoxville.

Time will tell. But for now, his arrival at Southern California was as awkward as his departure from Tennessee.

Kiffin left Volunteer country practically being chased by pitchfork-wielding and tomato-throwing fans. His introduction in Los Angeles also was met with hostility because USC fans don’t believe he has enough star power to fill college football’s most glamorous job.

It’s the most curious turn on the coaching carousel so far during the firing/hiring season. Which part is more weird—Kiffin abruptly resigning after less than 14 months at Tennessee or USC athletic director Mike Garrett choosing Kiffin as the man to replace Pete Carroll, who left the Trojans after winning two national titles in nine seasons to revive the NFL’s awful Seattle Seahawks.

750 by Linda Robertson in Miami. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#) | [PHOTOS](#)

East Carolina has several options to replaced departing Skip Holtz

[FBC-TUDOR-COLUMN:RA](#)—While it will be difficult for East Carolina to find another Skip Holtz, the Pirates will have a chance to approach impressive candidates for their football coaching vacancy.

The program is again established as a winner, and the fact that athletic director Terry Holland opened the right doors to find Holtz works in the school’s favor.

With the start of recruit signing only days away—Feb. 3 — it’s logical to expect a quick decision. It’s likely that Holland will put a high priority on finding someone with previous head coaching experience, but it’s not out of the question that he’ll seriously consider assistants with long histories of success.

400 by Caulton Tudor. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

BASEBALL

Abiding by new payroll rules, Marlins reach long-term deal with pitcher Johnson

[BBN-MARLINS:MI](#)—That didn’t take long.

Two days after pledging to raise payroll, the Marlins locked up pitcher Josh Johnson to a long-term deal, reaching agreement on a four-year contract that pays \$39 million. The deal was confirmed Thursday by the pitcher’s agent, Matt Sosnick.

“To know where I’m gonna be the next four years, you can’t really put it into words,” Johnson said. “Hopefully I can throw the first pitch in the new ballpark. Not too many people can say that.”

Johnson is the first Marlins pitcher to have a long-term contract since Jeffrey Loria took over as owner in 2002.

600 by Clark Spencer in Miami. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

Mets’ Beltran says general manager Minaya knew of his knee surgery

[BBN-METS-CONTROVERSY:ND](#)—Forced to defend himself from accusations made by his own team, Carlos Beltran responded Thursday night by saying the Mets not only knew about his surgery, but general manager Omar Minaya went so far as to wish him luck the day before he went under the knife.

In a statement released by agent Scott Boras’ office, Beltran’s words make it seem that the biggest problem here was a lack of communication within the Mets’ front office rather than insubordination by the centerfielder and his agent.

Hours after assistant general manager John Ricco told reporters on a conference call of the Mets’ disappointment in Beltran and his agent for ignoring their request to delay the surgery on his right knee, Beltran said no one from the Mets even made such a request until he was already being operating on.

550 by Jim Baumbach in New York. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

Mets’ Wright says give Carlos Beltran chance to explain his side of surgery controversy

[BBN-METS-BELTRAN:ND](#)—Just like everyone else, David Wright was blindsided by Carlos Beltran’s knee surgery. And just like the organization and its fans, Wright is “interested” in hearing Beltran’s reasoning for having surgery.

“Obviously, it’s frustrating,” Wright said Thursday. “My teammates along with the fans and I’m sure the front office, it’s a frustrating process to have to go through with these injuries.

“Hopefully we have some more details, exactly what happened, why, why now, so we can make a decision and move forward.”

300 by Jim Baumbach. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

Costas thinks McGwire is fooling himself

[BBO-COSTAS-MCGWIRE:SL](#)—Bob Costas landed the first televised interview with Mark McGwire after he admitted

using steroids and human growth hormone during his home run record-setting baseball career. And he left with the belief that McGwire has convinced himself of something that isn't logical — that his performance wasn't enhanced by the substances.

Costas said he believes McGwire was genuine in his remarks that they only helped him overcome injury, not gain physical advantages. But Costas added "that is different than saying I agree with everything he said. ... I think he genuinely believes that if he could have stayed in one piece, with the legitimate hard work he did and his natural ability he still would have done all this."

900 by Dan Caesar in St. Louis. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

Haiti earthquake hits home for Orioles' Felix Pie

[BBA-ORIOLES-HAITI:BZ](#)— Orioles outfielder Felix Pie said he immediately felt a deep sadness when he heard about Tuesday's catastrophic earthquake that rocked Port-Au-Prince, Haiti.

His emotions quickly turned to worry for his extended family, many of whom live in the Caribbean nation that is considered the poorest in the Western Hemisphere.

"It's very sad, and you start, like, worrying. I know my mom has family in Haiti and my pop, too," Pie said. "But my mom called me and told me not to worry, that my family over there is OK. And my pop called me to tell me the same thing."

400 by Dan Connolly and Jeff Zrebiec in Baltimore. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#) | [PHOTOS](#)

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Holtz jumps ship: East Carolina coach heads to South Florida

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750 by J.P. Giglio. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

BOXING

As Pacquiao-Mayweather fails, boxing proves its own worst enemy

[BOX-DWYRE-COLUMN:LA](#)—As Pacquiao-Mayweather fails, boxing proves its own worst enemy

800 by Bill Dwyre in Los Angeles. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

SOCCER

Philadelphia Union busy at top of MLS draft

[SOC-MLS-DRAFT:PD](#)— Oregon State striker Danny Mwanga is the Philadelphia Union's first-ever draft pick.

Mwanga, the Pac-10 player of the year as a sophomore, was chosen first overall by the expansion Union at Thursday's Major League Soccer SuperDraft at the Pennsylvania Convention Center.

Mwanga, 6-2, 175, was born in the Democratic Republic of Congo. He posted a team-high 14 goals and added two assists in 18 games for Oregon State last fall.

"I can honestly say that today was probably the best day of my life," Mwanga said. "I cannot leave this stage without thanking you, the Philadelphia Union fans.

"This is a place that I know that I can excel and I know that with Peter's help, he can mold me to become a better player."

800 in Philadelphia. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

Philadelphia Union slowly taking shape in soccer world

[SOC-FORD-COLUMN:PH](#)— Just as you were recovering from the exciting news that Fred was coming to Philadelphia, they opened the doors to the ballroom at the Convention Center on Thursday for the Major League Soccer SuperDraft.

Say this for the league, which welcomed the Philadelphia Union with the first pick in Thursday's draft: The show ran on time, parading a succession of college and developmental players across the stage for their fleeting moment on national television.

Some of them might even become successful professional soccer players, which is certainly what Union team manager Peter Nowak has in mind for the three young men he selected in the first round.

850 by Bob Ford in Philadelphia. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

Wake Forest defender is top pick for Quakes

[SOC-MLS-DRAFT-QUAKES:SJ](#)—The Earthquakes talked about acquiring a big-time goal-scorer for the 2010 season.

But when Wake Forest's Ike Opara became available Thursday in the Major Soccer League draft, San Jose didn't hesitate to use the No. 3 overall pick on one of the country's best young defenders.

The club could afford the move because it is close to completing deals on four international players, general manager John Doyle said Thursday. The team is waiting for league approval on deals involving a striker from South America and Europe, as well as a European midfielder.

550 by Elliott Almond. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

SKATING

Quad debate sizzles before U.S. Figure Skating Championships

[FIG-SKATING:GT](#)—Johnny Weir isn't buying the hype about the quad toe loop, an eye-popping, four-rotation jump that has turned figure skating upside down, with the possibility of high scores and a climb toward the podium as well as downgraded marks and a tumble into mediocrity.

"You don't have to out-quad somebody," he said. "You have to out-skate somebody."

250 by Brian Gomez in Colorado Springs, Colo. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#) | [ARCHIVE PHOTO](#)

U.S. Championship's split schedule another hassle for figure skating

[FIG-SKATING-COMMENTARY:TB](#)—Figure skating has a scoring system only a computer could love.

The judging accentuates the negative by nitpicking performances and demands technical requirements that lead to tediously repetitive routines.

As if that hadn't damaged the sport enough, here comes another turnoff:

This year, the U.S. Championship that begins Friday in Spokane, Wash., will drag across two weekends—with three dark days in the middle — to satisfy NBC's programming demands.

Not only has that forced many cash-strapped fans and media to make a choice about which part to attend — pairs and men this weekend, ice dance and women next — it has created a conundrum for the men and pairs skaters who do well enough to earn a spot in the Jan. 24 exhibition.

750 by Philip Hersh. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

SNOWBOARDING

Injured snowboarder is in the spirit

[SNOW-INJURY:LA](#)—Danny Davis wasn't alone on his history-making halfpipe run here the other day, his journey on the board bolstered by the vibe of a close friend, almost riding shotgun.

Nor was Hannah Teter truly running solo when she steeled to take on the icy pipe, preparing to drop in and chase a spot at the Olympics in Vancouver next month.

Kevin Pearce wasn't in Mammoth. But the severely injured and hospitalized snowboarder has found a safe place, deep in the hearts and minds of his friends and colleagues in the tight snowboarding community.

1050 (with trims) by Lisa Dillman in Mammoth Lakes, Calif. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#) | [PHOTOS](#)

SPORTS AND MEDIA

He gets with the programs

ERSKINE-COLUMN:LA—He gets with the programs

750 by Chris Erskine in Los Angeles. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

COMMENTARY

Sideline Chatter: watch that type pad

[SIDELINECHATTER:SE](#)—Sideline Chatter: watch that type pad

450 by Dwight Perry. MOVED

[TEXT](#) | [HTML](#)

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