

Chip Shots

By Walt Moody

Uninformed opinions

It's amazing these days how people can spout off opinions as experts on something that they didn't see.

All they need is a fraction of something to spew off about the whole thing. Maybe it's a byproduct of what they see in politics or on SportsCenter, but being ill-informed is no excuse.

We bring this up specifically about a certain football game played last Friday night. Clarke County defeated Rappahannock County 84-0 in the regular-season finale for both teams.

The game wasn't many hours old before internet trolls began ripping Eagles coach Chris Parker for running up the score.

Were the majority of these people in attendance at the game? No, they saw the final score and drew their own conclusions.

And those opinions are without merit because they did not see what happened.

Had they been in Washington for the game, they would have seen a colossal mismatch. Quite honestly, it looked like a Pop Warner team going up against a high school squad.

But because Parker had the nerve to say before the game that he wanted to see "lots of points and a shutout" than he was the villain on a cold Friday night.

Well, take it from someone who was there — this was going to be a blowout unless Parker took some embarrassing steps to keep the score down.

For the record, Parker began sprinkling in substitutes in the second quarter. Hungarian exchange student Levi Bodnar, who had never played the game before this season, had a couple of carries in the period.

Breaking from his usual tradition of allowing his starters to play the opening series of the second half, Parker's reserves played all of the last 24 minutes with a running clock. Those reserves did not attempt a pass and still outscored Rappahannock 26-0.

At no point during the game did Clarke County drop anyone back to receive a punt. And several of those punts were shanked out of bounds. Two of those punts went for nine yards and another was 14 yards.

So basically, the entire game was played on the Rappahannock side of the field. Clarke County's opening touchdown drive of 58 yards was the farthest that the Eagles had to move the entire game.

Where Parker can be criticized is that the Eagles threw the ball eight times in the first half. Five of those were completed and four went for touchdowns.

Two of the four TD passes were short tosses in which the receiver made multiple tacklers miss on the way to the end zone (In fact, you'd probably need a calculator to add up the broken tackles last Friday). The longest of the other two were 15 yards. We're sure that a couple of the early TD passes were things Clarke County wanted to run in game conditions because the playoffs were coming this week.

You certainly can't blame the reserves, who practice just as hard as the first stringers, wanting to take advantage of their opportunity to play.

Maybe the only way the Eagles could have held down the score was to punt on first down or take a knee on every play. If you're Rappahannock, what is more embarrassing?

By my count, the Panthers had 20 players dressed for the game and several others were in street clothes on the sidelines. They had two of their better players leave with injuries during the game. To their credit, they played as hard as they could until the final whistle. They were plainly outmatched.

Going back to what Parker said what he wanted before the game, just look at the Rappahannock schedule and you'll see why. Over their previous seven games, the Panthers had been outscored 369-13.

Our question is why this Class 1 team is playing in a district where the rest are Class 2 programs, most of which have had success at the state level. That sounds like a set-up for failure. Just like the fact that Rappahannock (1-9) played unbeaten defending Class 1 champion Riverheads on Friday. Teams with poor records making the playoffs is another argument.

Just like we didn't comment on Strasburg's 69-0 victory over Rappahannock a few games ago or Gretna's 83-9 win over Chatham last week, we won't babble about something we didn't see.

Sometimes, it's better to keep your mouth shut or your hands off the keyboard.



Walt Moody is sports editor
at The Winchester Star

Chip Shots

By Walt Moody

No guarantees

The one thing you can count on in sports is that you can't count on anything.

You may think you know exactly what is going to happen and you walk out of a ballpark, stadium or gymnasium shaking your head after seeing something you never could have anticipated.

Certainly, that had to be the feeling of many spectators who walked out of Casey Gymnasium on Wednesday night.

James Wood's 52-42 overtime upset against Millbrook in the opening round of the Class 4 Northwestern District boys' basketball tournament will certainly go down as one of the biggest upsets in our area's sports history.

The Colonels entered the contest having lost all 21 of their previous games this season. Two of those losses were against the Pioneers and they weren't even close. A 78-43 loss was followed up by a 78-35 whipping a little more than a week ago.

That's an average margin of victory 39 points for Millbrook, which entered the game with an 18-4 mark.

We're sure if you asked everyone who bought a ticket for Wednesday's game what they were expecting to see, the overwhelming response would have been another easy Millbrook win.

The Colonels thought differently. This was a classic scenario that all coaches preach about to their players.

When you are the underdog, you proclaim that you always have a chance and that you have absolutely nothing to lose.

If you're the favorite, you warn your team that it can't overlook anyone, no matter what the previous results were.

A great example of this came in the 1980 Winter Olympics.

Prior to those Games, the Russian hockey team had buried the U.S. squad 10-3 in an exhibition. Just how bad was that? Think about it as a football score: Russia 70, United States 21.

We all know what happened in Lake Placid a few weeks later. Al Michaels had it right when he called it a "miracle."

The key to pulling off an upset starts in the belief that you can do it.

While most would think that James Wood had a snowball's chance in Hades, the team had a different outlook.

"Truthfully we felt coming in, we had a great week of practice and thought we had a chance," James Wood forward Ben Smith told correspondent Jim Laise after the game.

Certainly Wednesday, it was pretty evident from the start that this one was going to be different from the previous two games. The fired-up Colonels led early and frustrated the flat Pioneers.

Then the belief grows. The score was tied at the end of the first quarter (11-11) and at halftime (19-19). The last time the two teams had played James Wood had been down 50-17 at the break.

The Colonels proved their mettle by rallying to tie the game at the end of regulation and dominated overtime by outscoring the Pioneers 10-0.

Usually in a colossal upset, someone is going to have to play the game of their lives. (Think Jim Craig in 1980).

That happened for the Colonels. Smith, a sophomore, scored a career-high 27 points. He was an offensive force from the start on Wednesday.

Junior Lavaughan Freeman joined him with a career-high 22 rebounds. Freeman, a lanky 6-foot-3 leaper, also affected many of the Pioneers' drives to the baskets.

The result marked the second time in less than a year that a No. 7 seed had pulled a huge upset in the district tournament. Handley did it in baseball last season, stunning Sherando 8-6 after the Warriors had beaten the Judges by a combined 24-3 in two regular-season games.

The lessons learned are simple and why sports are great — miracles can happen and nothing is guaranteed.

Secretariat broke every Triple Crown record, but lost three races in his three-year old season. The 1927 Yankees lost 44 times. Buster Douglas put out Mike Tyson's lights and the 2018 University of Virginia basketball team became the first No. 1 seed to lose an NCAA Tournament game (by 20 points to UMBC).

If the stars align, you can be on either side of a miracle — that's something you can count on.



Walt Moody is sports editor
at The Winchester Star

Chip Shots

By Walt Moody

Jumping the shark

In television, they have a phrase to describe when a series has reached a point in which it is irretrievably past its best and something outlandish has been introduced that signifies the downward spiral to come.

You've heard it — "Jump the Shark."

It comes from when a once great series "Happy Days" had "The Fonz" jump over a shark on water skis — wearing his trademark leather jacket, no less. While "Happy Days" was already in decline, this episode added the exclamation point.

We've modified the phrase a little and now use it whenever something has lost its way or has run its course.

After the last couple of weeks, maybe the concept of the VHSL's Spring Jubilee has strapped on the skis.

Thanks literally to some water (this time from the skies), the Spring Jubilee has been a scheduling disaster. Rain has forced numerous site and time changes, postponements and sheer inconvenience for nearly everyone involved.

As we sit here this morning, the baseball and softball championships have yet to be completed. They were moved back a week because of the weather.

Is this just a worst-case scenario or not?

Look, we understand the concept of the Spring Jubilee. You try to get everybody in the same place. Logistically, it's easier for the VHSL and you can get cities to bid on hosting things which creates income. And obviously, it's worth it financially to those communities to host the folks from out of town to eat at their restaurants and stay in their hotels.

But these cities don't always have the athletic facilities needed, especially when something goes wrong.

Is this really fair to the athletes who have dedicated themselves in hopes of playing for a state title?

For an example, let's look at the event in which a local team participated — boys' tennis.

Late last week, Handley's Class 4 title match against Hanover switched sites and had three different starting times over the span of two days.

Once that was finally settled, they had to play the match on three courts at Virginia Tech's indoor facility, a fine venue. But the lack of courts (the other three at the facility were being used for girls' title matches) altered the way both teams had played all season.

Every high school tennis match begins with all six singles clashes starting at once. Yet in the most important match of the season, that format is altered.

While it may not have affected the outcome this time (Handley cruised 5-0), it certainly could have caused some problems.

Swap out the final and insert the Judges' semifinal win over Blacksburg in the same setting. In that match, Handley's No. 4, 5, 6 players won quick matches to give the Judges a 3-0 lead. A nearly three-hour marathon win at No. 1 gave Handley the key point in a 5-2 victory.

If the two teams had played on three courts, Blacksburg could have led 2-0 with wins at No. 2 and 3 and that would have put extreme pressure on the match at No. 1 and those to follow. Leading 3-0 and trailing 2-0 is an entirely different scenario.

Plus, who knows how much time it would have taken since the match at the Slaughter Tennis Pavilion took about four hours.

Unlike maybe the outside fields, tennis is a sport where you know that rain will immediately make the courts unsafe and that you need backup facilities lined up and an alternative schedule ready. That doesn't seem to be that difficult.

The bottom line is that state finals need to be held in places that not only have the best facilities but are prepared for the worst.

If that means breaking up the Spring Jubilee concept, then so be it. The athletes and their family and friends (who shell out \$10 per ticket) deserve better and to not have the schedules monkeyed around with graduations having just happened or looming.

Even "The Fonz" would give that an "Ayyyyy."



Walt Moody is sports editor
at The Winchester Star