

SPORTS



<< NETS ADD FIREPOWER
Signing Griffin figures to make a strong offense even more explosive. B5

BLUE DEVILS ADVANCE
Duke routs Boston College in its first Tuesday ACC tournament appearance. B2

INSIDE

BASEBALL: NATIONALS PONDER OPTIMAL LINEUPS IN SPRING

In backing Soto, Turner could be made to order

TREA TURNER

BY JESSE DOUGHERTY
THE WASHINGTON POST

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla.—Spring training lineups don't often become regular season lineups. But when the Washington Nationals rolled out a top three of Victor Robles, Juan Soto and Trea Turner last week—

TUNE IN

SEASON OPENER
Mets at Nationals
April 1, 7:05 p.m.

and then did it again—it seemed like one possible way to get the most out of a generational hitter.

Whether it's the way the Nationals will choose come April remains to be seen. A pressing offensive question is how they'll optimize Soto in an order that drops off after him and Turner. The 22-year-old Soto led the sport in a whole list of advanced statistics in 2020, drawing comparisons to Trea

Williams's production at the same age. Now, heading into Soto's third full season, the key is giving him the maximum number of chances to tilt the scoreboard. Protecting him with Turner, the team's next best hitter, could be a good start.

"I wouldn't read into it too much," manager Dave Martinez said on March 3, the first time he used Robles, Soto and Turner in that order. "It was vice versa last year, for the most part. Trea hit in front of Soto and they did well together. But I just want to see what this kind of looks like."

The truth is that lineup construction—and lineup protection, to a lesser extent—is better for bar-side debate than predicting outcomes. Its effect on games has never quite matched the oxygen or ink it receives.

Old-school lineup thinking followed a familiar pattern: a fast lead-off hitter; a second hitter who makes a lot of contact; a third hitter with the rare combination of contact and power; a fourth hitter (or "cleanup" batter) who uses power to knock everyone in; then a fifth hitter with enough power to "protect" the cleanup guy and keep pitchers from walking him with no consequence.

The (not-so)-new-age-thinking, though, is pretty simple on its face: Get your top hitters as many at-bats as possible.

Speed and a high on-base percentage are still preferred characteristics for a lead-off hitter. And there are, of course, dozens of wrinkles beyond that.

But it's all rooted in the idea that teams get a fixed number of plate appearances per season, and those should largely be handed to the most productive hitters. Think of Mike Trout, maybe one of the top players ever,

SEE NATIONALS, B6



MATT GENTRY / THE ROANOKE TIMES

Virginia Tech's Cordell Pemsil (back left) as Wabissa Bede (3) last played on Feb. 27.

MEN'S BASKETBALL

Hokies are rusty but ready to play

ACC QUARTERFINAL CONTEST WILL BE THEIR FIRST GAME IN 11 DAYS

BY MARK BERMAN
ROANOKE TIMES

COVID-19 issues won't keep the Virginia Tech men's basketball team from playing in the ACC quarterfinals Thursday.

Virginia Tech had to cancel its final two regular-season games last week because of contract tracing and quarantining. But the Hokies are "healthy" and "practicing well" for the ACC Tournament at the Greensboro Coliseum, coach Mike Young said Monday on the ACC Network's "Packer and Durham" show.

"We are looking forward to getting to Greensboro and representing Virginia Tech and Southwest Virginia," Young said on the television show.

"We're healthy. We've been healthy. This contact tracing, it's an animal. We continue to get nicked up by it."

Tech, which last played a game two weekends ago against Wake Forest, is experiencing its second layoff in as many months because of COVID-19 concerns

SEE HOKIES, B5

SCHEDULE

ACC TOURNAMENT

At Greensboro, N.C.

Tuesday's first round

Pittsburgh 79, Miami 73

Duke 86, Boston College 51

Notre Dame 80, Wake Forest 77

Wednesday's second round

Syracuse vs. N.C. State, noon

Pittsburgh vs. Clemson, 2:30

Duke vs. Louisville, 7 p.m.

North Carolina

vs. Notre Dame, 9:30 p.m.

Byes into quarterfinals:

Virginia, Florida State,

Virginia Tech, Georgia Tech



JUAN SOTO

VICTOR ROBLES

PHOTOS BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Ravens' Jackson may be the next QB to cash in

BY JONAS SHAFFER
THE BALTIMORE SUN

PRO FOOTBALL

BALTIMORE—The Ravens' most important player and the team's top front-office official spent time together a few weeks ago.

Lamar Jackson, the NFL's 2019 Most Valuable Player, and Eric DeCosta, the Ravens' third-year

general manager, talked about a lot: the organization, Jackson's family, their shared goals. They also discussed how one of the team's most important contract negotiations might play out, and what a new deal might look like.

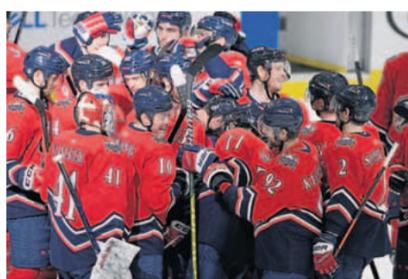
One topic that wasn't broached, however: the hard numbers on a potential extension, one that would make Jackson one of the NFL's highest-paid players.

"We haven't really gotten into the actual contract proposals, negotiations, things like that,"

DeCosta said during a virtual NFL scouting combine news conference Tuesday.

The Ravens are "confident and committed to trying to get a long-term deal done," DeCosta said, while acknowledging that it "may take a little time."

SEE RAVENS, B5



NICK WASS / THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Washington Capitals teammates mob Jakub Vrana after his overtime goal.

Vrana rescues Capitals after late collapse against Devils

BY STEPHEN WHYNO
AP HOCKEY WRITER

PRO HOCKEY

DEVILS
CAPITALS

4
(OT) 5

goal lead to the New Jersey Devils with a horrendous third period Tuesday night before Jakub Vrana's second of the game in overtime gave them a 5-4 win. They'll

gladly accept the two points to keep pace with the East Division-leading New York Islanders but don't want to sweat out too many more like this.

"That is not acceptable, what we showed there in the third period," said Vrana, who scored in the second period at 4-on-4 and now has 10 goals

this season. "We did not play even close to what we can play. That was disappointing, but at the end of the day we won the game and we take that."

The Devils, who lost eight of their previous 10 games, tilted the ice and outshot the

SEE CAPITALS, B6

COMING UP >> UMW HOSTS ITS FIRST SPORTING EVENT IN NEARLY A YEAR

SPORTS



«SCHERZER STAYING HOT
Ace strikes out nine in leading the Nationals over the Phillies in start of road series. B2

RETURNING TO RICHMOND
Washington Football Team and city agree for team to practice there for a week. B5

INSIDE

PATH TO CROWN OPEN FOR TITLE-LESS FRANCHISES



UTAH JAZZ'S DONOVAN MITCHELL



PHILLY 76ERS' JOEL EMBIID



DENVER NUGGETS' NIKOLA JOKIC



MILWAUKEE BUCKS' GIANNIS ANTETOKOUNMPO



ATLANTA HAWKS' TRAE YOUNG

PHOTOS BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

With LeBron James out, several rising talents have a chance to become the new face of the league.

Young Turks ready to rock NBA royalty

BY TIM REYNOLDS
AP BASKETBALL WRITER

In this NBA, this much is already clear: There will be a new champion.

A lot of first-time champions, too.

The second round of the NBA playoffs start on Saturday night, and nowhere to be found are the franchises that have combined to win almost two-thirds of the titles awarded in league history. There are new faces, like a Phoenix team that's in the second round for the first time since 2010, Brooklyn for the first time since 2014, Atlanta for the first time since 2016.



ASHLEY LANDIS / ASSOCIATED PRESS

LeBron James couldn't carry the Lakers to the second round.

Plus, when the NBA gets down to its final eight teams, there will be no more than eight players—and

SEE NBA, B3

TUNE IN

NBA PLAYOFFS

Second round opening games (Best-of-seven series)

Saturday, 7:30 p.m.:

Milwaukee at Brooklyn (TNT)

Sunday, 1 p.m.:

Atlanta at Philadelphia (ABC)

Monday, 10 p.m.:

Denver at Phoenix (TNT)

(Utah to play winner of L.A. Clippers/Dallas series, TBA)

'It's me': Williams rekindles the fire

VETERAN RALLIES TO REACH FRENCH OPEN'S FOURTH ROUND

TENNIS

BY SAMUEL PETREQUIN AND ANDREW DAMPF
AP SPORTS WRITERS

PARIS—Even a 23-time Grand Slam champion needs to remind herself now and then how to play winning tennis.

Serena Williams employed verbal motivation to help her recover from a 4-1 deficit in the second set of a 6-4, 6-4 victory over fellow American Danielle Collins in the third round of the French Open on Friday.

Yelling, "C'mon," and "Move your feet," Williams started dominating again with big serves and crushed returns that the 50th-ranked Collins had no answer for.

"That felt really good
SEE TENNIS, B6



CHRISTOPHE ENA / ASSOCIATED PRESS

Serena Williams bounced back from a slow start to beat Danielle Collins.

TUNE IN

THE FRENCH OPEN

At Roland Garros, Paris
Through June 13
(8 a.m.—MASN2;
noon—NBC)

Alexander, Dukes slay another dragon

OKLAHOMA THE LATEST TO FALL AS JMU NEARS CHAMPIONSHIP SERIES

COLLEGE SOFTBALL

WCWS

JAMES MADISON

2

OKLAHOMA

1

BY CLIFF BRUNT
ASSOCIATED PRESS

OKLAHOMA CITY—James Madison has done it again.

A day after stunning top-seeded Oklahoma, the Dukes beat No. 5 Oklahoma State 2-1 on Friday night in the Women's College World Series.

After claiming the two wins against Big 12 teams within an hour of their campuses, the unseeded Dukes—champions of the

Colonial Athletic Association—are one victory from reaching the best-of-three championship series.

Odicci Alexander pitched complete-game victories in both contests. She threw 129 pitches against Oklahoma, then 95 more against the Cowgirls.

She's looking for more.

"Rest up, just keep embracing each and every one

SEE JMU, B3



SUE OGRÖCKI / ASSOCIATED PRESS

JMU pitcher Odicci Alexander tags out Oklahoma State's Scotland David in the seventh inning Friday.

PEÑA SHRUGS OFF EARLY GAFFE, LEADS FREDNATS TO WIN

FROM STAFF REPORTS

LOW-A EAST

Bryan Peña could have packed in early Friday night. The Fredericksburg Nationals starting pitcher grooved a first-pitch strike that Delmarva's Andrew Martinez deposited over the

SHOREBIRDS
FREDNATS

left-center field fence for an early 1-0 Shorebirds lead.

Instead, the 21-year-old dug in deep. The result was a 5-2

FredNats victory at the new Fredericksburg stadium.

Peña (1-0) pitched seven quality innings, allowing two earned runs on three hits and a pair of walks while striking out five. He did surrender another home run to TT Bowers in the

seventh inning, but by then his teammates had given him a solid lead to work with.

Cole Daily knotted the game at 1-1 in the fourth inning by driving in Telmito Agustin. Then Joe Randa's fly ball to right field was misplayed, al-

lowing Junior Martina and Daily to score. Jake Boone and Allan Berrios contributed insurance runs with RBI singles in the sixth and eighth innings, respectively.

The teams will square off again Saturday at 6:05 p.m.

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2020-21

Best Auto Parts Supply

WINNER

BEST OF BEST

2020-21

Best Collision Center

SPORTS



« HE'S A FREE MAN
Browns decide they've had enough of WR Beckham, give him his release. B2

BOUND FOR C-USA
Liberty is among the new recruits that will bump up their conference affiliation. B5

INSIDE

AUTO RACING

Hendrick's, Gibbs' shadows loom over final four drivers

BY JENNA FRYER
AP AUTO RACING WRITER

CHARLOTTE, N.C.—NASCAR's championship has come down to a pair of Hall of Fame team owners, two Chevrolets against two Toyotas, racing in the Arizona desert for the sport's top prize.

Rick Hendrick, the winningest team owner in NASCAR history, is sending Kyle Larson and reigning Cup champion Chase Elliott to Phoenix Raceway on Sunday

in search of a 14th title for mighty Hendrick Motorsports.

Joe Gibbs, a member of both the NASCAR and Pro Football Hall of Fames, will counter with Denny Hamlin and Martin Truex Jr. Gibbs has won five previous Cup championships (and three Super Bowls) but none with Hamlin or Truex.

It is a winner-take-all conclusion at sold-out Phoenix,

TUNE IN

NASCAR CUP SERIES CHAMPIONSHIP

Phoenix Raceway, Avondale, Arizona Sunday, 3 p.m. (NBC; WFLS-FM 93.3)

XFINITY SERIES >> Fall finals are the norm for driver's family. B5

where Elliott's victory a year ago clinched the first Cup championship for NASCAR's most popular driver. Hendrick

favorite behind nine-race winner Larson and its on-track domination this season: Alex Bowman's win Sunday at Martinsville Speedway was the fourth in a row for Hendrick and 16th through 35 races.

But Bowman's win triggered tension that should carry through the week and into Sunday's finale. Hamlin, a Virginia native and five-

time Martinsville winner, was spun from the lead by Bowman to the surprise pleasure of what should have been Hamlin's home crowd.

When he later drove his car to the frontstretch to prevent a Bowman victory celebration—Hamlin flipped both middle fingers at Bowman through his windshield—the crowd drowned out his interview over the public address system with resounding boos.

Hamlin blamed the backlash on

SEE NASCAR, B5



PHOTOS BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

KYLE LARSON (Odds: +250)

Car: No. 5 | Team: Hendrick Motorsports
'21 season: Wins: 9 | T5: 19 | T10: 25
'21 playoffs: Race wins: 4 | State wins: 5
At Phoenix (14): Wins 0 | T5: 5 | T10: 8

CHASE ELLIOTT (Odds: +700)

Car: No. 9 | Team: Hendrick Motorsports
'21 season: Wins: 2 | T5: 14 | T10: 20
'21 playoffs: Race wins: 0 | State wins: 3
At Phoenix (11): Wins: 1 | T5: 4 | T10: 7

DENNY HAMLIN (Odds: +800)

Car: No. 11 | Team: Joe Gibbs Racing
'21 season: Wins: 4 | T5: 12 | T10: 19
'21 playoffs: Race wins: 1 | State wins: 0
At Phoenix (32): Wins: 2 | T5: 15 | T10: 19

MARTIN TRUEX JR. (Odds: +850)

Car: No. 19 | Team: Joe Gibbs Racing
'21 season: Wins: 2 | T5: 18 | T10: 24
'21 playoffs: Race wins: 2 | State wins: 5
At Phoenix (31): Wins: 1 | T5: 5 | T10: 13

PRO FOOTBALL

Rodgers: Allergy prompted choice

PACKERS QB USED OTHER TREATMENTS RATHER THAN VACCINE

BY BARRY WILNER
AP PRO FOOTBALL WRITER

Green Bay Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers said Friday he sought alternative treatments instead of the NFL-endorsed COVID-19 vaccinations because of an allergy he has to ingredients in two of the FDA-approved shots.

Speaking on SiriusXM's "Pat McAfee Show," Rodgers said: "I'm not an antivax, flat-earthier. I have an allergy to an ingredient that's in the mRNA vaccines. I found a long-term immunization protocol to protect myself and I'm very proud of the research that went into that."



Rodgers

Rodgers, who has been tested daily as part of NFL protocols for the unvaccinated, came up positive for the coronavirus on Wednesday. He said he didn't feel well on Thursday but was much better on Friday.

He can't rejoin the Packers for 10 days, missing Sunday's game at Kansas City. Rodgers must have a negative test to return to the team on Nov. 13.

Rodgers noted that on the CDC's website, "it says should you have an allergy to any of the ingredients, you should not get one of the mRNA vaccines. So

SEE RODGERS, B2

UMW teams eager to shake off rust, return to court

WHENEVER Riley Welch tuned in to a college basketball broadcast last winter, the enjoyment of watching the game he loves was tempered by wistful nostalgia.

Welch attends the University of Mary

POINT AFTER

Steve DeShazo



Washington. The Eagles, like many NCAA Division III schools, canceled the 2020-21 winter sports season due to the

coronavirus pandemic. That also happened to be Welch's senior year.

"It was kind of like the FOMO feeling—staying at home when all your friends are going out," Welch said this week. "You feel like you're missing out on the party. It was fun to watch col-

lege basketball, but it makes you miss the game when you can't be part of it."

To its credit—something that can't often be said—the NCAA felt the athletes' pain and bestowed on them an extra year of eligibility. Welch,

SEE DESHAZO, B3

'Cats' season ends in disappointing fashion

MOUNTAIN VIEW TAKES RIVERSIDE TO FIVE SETS BUT SUFFERS DEFEAT

BY STEVE FRANZELLO
FOR THE FREE LANCE-STAR

It was hard for Mountain View senior Nalani McBride to hold back the tears after Thursday's heartbreaking 3-2 loss to visiting Riverside in the Region 5D volleyball quarterfinals.

PREP VOLLEYBALL
5D QUARTERFINALS
RIVERSIDE 3
MOUNTAIN VIEW 2

The Commonwealth District player of the year and her teammates appeared well on their way to their 28th victory of the season without a loss after winning the match's first two sets.

But securing a victory



McBride

Wildcats never delivered a knockout punch, even with a big lead in the fifth and final set.

Led by all-Dulles District middle blocker Zoe

means putting away your opponent for good, and unfortunately for coach Drew Wine's squad, the

Thomas and outside hitter Kendall McDaniel, the Rams (17-7) ended Mountain View's most successful season ever with a 23-25, 20-25, 25-22, 25-22, 15-13 win and advanced to Saturday's regional semifinal matchup against Stone Bridge.

"This is a season to remember," said an emotional McBride. "Nobody wants to go out this way,

SEE WILDCATS, B6

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