2022 PREVIEW 2023

Staying grounded

Polarizing Wentz ready to rediscover form, find stability with Commanders

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION ROBERT CONN/THE WASHINGTON TIMES, ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTOGRAPHS

By Mitchell Paoli
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

ASHBURN | The tattoo on Carson Wentz's right biceps is a reminder to keep him grounded. Inside the inked outline of the Virgin of Guadalupe is a quote from Christian symbol recounting Job reads "Proverbs 35:6" — a Bible passage exhorting followers to put their trust in God and lean into the greater plan.

The Scripture, the first of five religious-themed tattoos the quarterback has gotten over the years, is his favorite. But he also finds it to be the most challenging.

Especially after his last few years.

"As a guy, as a man, you want to be playing, you want to have control," Wentz told The Washington Times. "That's how I'm wired. But that's where faith comes into play.

On Sunday, Wentz will start for his third team in the last three seasons. Coincidentally, the new Washington Commanders quarterback will first face the Jacksonville Jaguars — the franchise that helped end his time in Indianapolis and is coached by Doug Pederson, who drafted Wentz with while with the Philadelphia Eagles. As fast your's regular season came to a close, Wentz and the Colts suffered a meltdown against the NFL's worst team and missed the playoffs. The Colts traded the 29-year-old to Washington months later.

Over the last few years, there has been arguably no player more polarizing than Wentz. To the Commanders, the North Dakota State product is the solution to a problem it has been unable to solve for decades. To Colts owner Jim Irsay, Wentz was a "mistake." Some stats suggest he settle as an above-average quarterback.

» see WENTZ | B8

70-110: Record of Washington's 15 starting quarterbacks since 2010. Only Alex Smith and Kirk Cousins have winning records in that time.

Jaguars won't be a pushover to start new era in Washington

By Mitchell Paoli
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

ASHBURN | Scott Turner was jokingly asked Thursday what he made of the upcoming "Brandon Scherff revenge game" Sunday's season-opener, after all, will feature the return of the former Washington All-Pro guard to FedEx Field when he now suits up as a member of the Jacksonville Jaguars.

The Washington Commanders offensive coordinator, though, came ready with a quip of his own.

"I thought it was the Andrew Norwell revenge game," Turner said, referencing — you guessed it — the Jaguar turned-Commander guard.

Washington's first game of the year contains no shortage of storylines, even as a showdown between teams that were 7-10 and 3-14 flashes with a season ago.

Outside the guard swap and Scherff revenge game, there's a coincidence all players signed in free agency — Washington's Carson Wentz faces his former coach Doug Pederson, hired this offseason to lead a Jaguars rebuild after successfully doing it in Philadelphia alongside the quarterback. All eyes will be on Wentz to see how he responds after a brutal Week 18 loss to Jacksonville as a member of the Colts last year, paving the way for a trade.

But most notable of all: This will be the official beginning of the Commanders era, months after the club rebranded from the temporary Washington Football Team in February.

» see NFL | B8

Sept. 11 Jaguars 1 p.m. TV Fox	Sept. 18 @ Lions 1 p.m. TV Fox	Sept. 25 Eagles 1 p.m. TV Fox	Oct. 2 @ Cowboys 1 p.m. TV Fox	Oct. 9 Titans 1 p.m. TV CBS	Oct. 13 @ Bears 8:15 p.m. TV Amazon	Oct. 23 Packers 1 p.m. TV Fox	Oct. 30 @ Colts 4:25 p.m. TV Fox	Nov. 6 Vikings 1 p.m. TV Fox	Nov. 14 @ Eagles 8:25 p.m. TV ESPN	Nov. 20 @ Texans 1 p.m. TV Fox	Nov. 27 Falcons 1 p.m. TV Fox	Dec. 4 @ Giants 1 p.m. TV Fox	Dec. 18 Giants TBD TV TBD	Dec. 24 @ 49ers 4:05 p.m. TV CBS	Jan. 5 Browns 1 p.m. TV Fox	Jan. 8 Cowboys TBD TV TBD

SPORTS

"I REMEMBER **WHERE I STARTED** AND JUST THE WHOLE JOURNEY. YOU REMIND YOURSELF OF THAT EVERY DAY. THE FACT THAT FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO YOUR FIRST ALL-STAR GAME, IT'S **A JOURNEY,** AND YOU'RE STILL ON THAT JOURNEY IN YOUR LIFE AND ON THE COURT FOR THAT TO HAPPEN. **NEVER LET MYSELF GET TOO BIG-HEADED** ON THAT FRONT. ...

... THAT'S HOW I LIVE MY LIFE. SO EVERYTHING ABOUT IT IN TERMS OF THE **APPRECIATION AND GRATITUDE** FOR EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENS, ALL **THE EXPERIENCES** THAT YOU HAVE, EVERYTHING THAT YOU GO THROUGH, YOU **KEEP YOU GOING** ON THAT, AND USUALLY **GOOD THINGS HAPPEN** BECAUSE YOU APPRECIATE EVERYTHING NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS."

Putting aside his ego

Curry admired by teammates for his humility as a superstar

By Jake McCallt
ASSOCIATED PRESS

Jordan Poole knocked down a buzzer-beater from almost midcourt when Stephen Curry made a point to catch his gaze, and that celebratory stare down told so much about the veteran guard's pride for his young teammate.

Curry was filled with joy for Poole bringing an ice-dropping shot from distance he would had it been him, the superstar who already has more than his share of bynames from way, way back. That's Sellers Steph — never one to let his ego get in the way of Golden State's success.

Curry still did plenty while scoring 29 points to lead the Warriors to a 107-88 Game 2 NBA Finals victory against the Celtics on Sunday night, evening the best-of-seven series at one game apiece as it shifts to Boston for Wednesday's Game 3.

He applauded Poole for maintaining momentum going into the final period.

"That was obviously a big shot to get the crowd into it," Curry said. "Just the energy he brought in the third quarter that we had."

The 34-year-old Curry emphasized the importance of state of reflection — not to mention humility — in the lives of these young children — while also somehow keeping his mind acutely focused on the moment right in front of him.

» see CURRY | B9

NBA FINALS
WARRIORS VS. CELTICS

Game 1	Game 2	Game 3 Wednesday	Game 4 Friday	Game 5 Monday	*Game 6 June 20	*Game 7 June 23
Celtics 116, Warriors 108 Celtics lead, 1-0	Warriors 107, Celtics 88 Series tied, 1-1	at Boston Time: 9 p.m. Television: ABC	at Boston Time: 9 p.m. Television: ABC	at Golden State Time: 9 p.m. Television: ABC	at Golden State Time: 9 p.m. Television: ABC	at Golden State Time: 9 p.m. Television: ABC

*-If necessary
AP-AP Graphic

Horford's success reminds fans of Wizards' failures

THOM LOVERRO
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

If you are a Wizards fan, you probably don't need to be reminded of the more than 40 years of failures that have made cheering for this NBA franchise such a long and often joyless slog.

Maybe you're sitting in your favorite bar watching these NBA Finals between the Golden State Warriors — who, from 1994 to 2013, were essentially the Wizards — and the Boston Celtics, who have enjoyed the Larry Bird era, the Kevin Garnett era and now the Jayson Tatum era all while the Wizards have had one long era of mediocrity.

You are sitting there, watching the game with strangers, who, as is often the case in such atmospheres, bond together watching sports on television. Someone asks who your team is. Then you wish you were home, watching alone, where you didn't have to share your embarrassment.

That alone is painful enough. But if you are a true Wizards fan, well-versed in the minutiae that have kept this franchise from climbing out of its grave, it has to be doubly painful to watch Al Horford in a Celtics uniform.

It's not anything you haven't

» see LOVERRO | B9

NATIONALS

Strasburg set to make his season debut on Thursday

By Jacob Gatto Meyer
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

In his first rehab start last month, Nationals ace Stephen Strasburg didn't look like a force. He didn't look like a dominant pitcher.

Strasburg struggled in the short outing, allowing three runs and walking four in 2⅓ innings. But, in reality, no one cared about the results of that start. The only thing that mattered was that Strasburg, who has barely pitched since winning the MVP award after the Nationals' 2019 World Series victory due to multiple injuries, was healthy.

Strasburg's health is more than just healthy. After two dominant outings in the minor leagues, the star right-hander and the Nationals believe he is ready to hop back into Washington's starting rotation. Manager Dave Martinez told reporters Tuesday that Strasburg's minor league rehab assignment is over and that he will make his season debut on Thursday.

"I'm not going to put any limitations on him," Martinez

Nationals pitcher Stephen Strasburg hops pitched just 2⅓ innings since the start were the World Series in 2019.
ASSOCIATED PRESS

» see NATIONALS | B9

SPORTS

Capitals star in midst of stunning late-career renaissance

Vintage Ovechkin

Will the Great 8 catch the Great One? Alex Ovechkin (cap, 700 career goals, third on the all-time list behind Wayne Gretzky (894 goals, 1,487 games) and Gordie Howe (801 goals, 1,767 games), if Ovechkin plays every game moving forward and keeps a pace of 50 goals per season, he would enter 2.25 games on a Tuesday. Gretzky's pace would be same time during the 2024-25 season. Ovechkin's career high in goals per game is 0.75, which he had in 2008-09. With that projection, the retired Ovechkin could catch Gretzky in mid-way through the 2023-24 season.

Ovechkin's next five opponents

Date	Opponent	Career goals
Friday	@ St. Louis Blues	58 goals in 2.75 games (0.50)
Saturday	@ Minnesota Wild	57 goals in 2.17 games (0.50)
Monday	Boston Bruins	57 goals in 2.50 games (0.48)
Jan. 25	@ New York Islanders	40 goals in 0.17 games (0.05)
Jan. 28	Vancouver Canucks	0 goals in 2.50 games (0.45)

Leading the league: Ovechkin has scored the Alexander Ovechkin Trophy, awarded to the NHL's top goal scorer, a record nine times. He could have seen it his rookie year but lost out to the Ducks' Jonathan Cheechoo by four goals, and he was a goal short in 2009-10. The trophy was first handed out following the 1936-37 season to Toronto Maple Leafs' Gordie Drillon, who scored 26, with 42 goals. Alfredo de Gaetano's longest

Goals by season

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION ROBERT CONN, ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTOGRAPHS, SOURCE: HOCKEY REFERENCE

By Jon Cecil Meyer
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Peter Laviolette believes Alex Ovechkin can play into his 40s.

"A lot of it has to do with health as you get older, but right now, he's still strong. I could see that happening," the Capitals coach said in a radio interview earlier this season.

Well, from the way Ovechkin is performing in his age-36 season, playing into his 40s — a tall task for any hockey player — seems likely.

After a down 2020-21 campaign, Ovechkin is on pace to have one of his best seasons ever. He's scored 32 goals this season — five of which were shot in 20-6-8 and spur the top of the standings. Between chasing down records, scoring (and assisting) at an elite pace, leading the NHL in All-Star voting, having the No. 1 jersey in the league and being a midseason candidate for the Hart Trophy — Ovechkin looks to be up — again — the prime of his career.

"He's the same old, best-in-the-world type of player," said teammate TJ Oshie. "He's just more consistent this year."

Only 34 games into the season, it's too early for Hart Trophy predictions. But so far, Ovechkin is on pace to be one of a handful of players, along with Edmonton stars Leon Draisaitl and Connor McDavid, in contention for the league's most valuable player award — which Ovechkin hasn't won since 2012-13.

The three players represent the top three point-getters in the NHL. As of Thursday afternoon, McDavid and Draisaitl were tied for the lead with 53 points, while Ovechkin is in third with 50. Ovechkin, a

» see CAPITALS | B9

OLYMPICS

U.S. rips anti-doping agency, pays off dues

Board absence, decisions criticized

By Ebbe Pells
ASSOCIATED PRESS

DENVER | The U.S. government paid its remaining $1.3 million in dues to the World Anti-Doping Agency but delivered a brusque reminder to officials in Canada calling its absence from the regulator's top decision-making boards a "very state of affairs."

WADA announced having received the money Thursday, and President Witold Banka called the release of the funds a sign of support from the U.S. government.

But a pair of letters written by the director of the White House drug control office, Rahul Gupta, and obtained by The Associated Press, revealed the money was given despite major misgivings about both the way WADA operates and the agency's standing within the agency.

The government has been critical of WADA for not moving urgently enough to reform itself in the wake of the Russian doping scandal that has upended international sports for most of the past

» see WADA | B9

NFL WEEK 18 WASHINGTON AT GIANTS 1 P.M. SUNDAY (FOX)

End nears for quirky, generic brand name

Washington Football Team era was tumultuous on, off the field

By Mitchell Paoli
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

ASHBURN | Taylor Heinicke joked when he was out of the NFL, people would ask what team he wanted to play for. He'd reply any — well except "for the team with no name," the quarterback said.

Sure enough ...

"Here we are," Heinicke smiled.

Years from now, Heinicke will be the answer to a fun piece of trivia: Which quarterback started the most games for the NFL franchise briefly known as the Washington Football Team?

This week, Washington announced it will unveil a new name and logo on Feb. 2. Some fans of the unvanished "Washington Football Team" moniker — which was a placeholder until a nickname hasn't been officially ruled out — but the franchise's president, Jason Wright, also says in a team-produced video available online that fans will soon get to see the "new name and logo in action."

The team that became the Washington Redskins was founded in 1932 in Boston. Years later, the name was changed to the Boston Braves. The name was changed to the Redskins the following year and it moved to Washington in 1937. Many American professional and collegiate sports teams had nicknames with American Indian themes.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

» see NFL | B8

TENNIS

Vaccine skeptic Djokovic detained as he fights deportation from Australia

Three-time defending Australian Open champion Novak Djokovic is awaiting to see if he will have a chance to win a 10th title and a record 21st Grand Slam singles titles. He is fighting his deportation.

By Jon Pye
ASSOCIATED PRESS

Locked in a dispute over his COVID-19 vaccination status, Novak Djokovic was confined to an immigration detention hotel in Australia on Thursday as the No. 1 men's tennis player in the world awaited a court ruling on whether he can compete in the Australian Open later this month.

Djokovic, a vocal skeptic of vaccines, had traveled to Australia after Victoria state authorities granted him a medical exemption to the country's strict vaccination requirements. But when he arrived late Wednesday, the Australian Border Force rejected his exemption as invalid and barred him from entering the country.

A court hearing on his bid to stave off deportation was set for Monday, while the 34-year-old Serb and defending Australian Open champion was forced to wait it out in Melbourne at a secure hotel used by immigration officials to house asylum seekers and refugees.

The tournament begins on Jan. 17. Djokovic is hoping to overtake rivals Rafael Nadal and Roger Federer in the record books and win his 21st Grand Slam singles title, the most by any player in men's tennis.

Djokovic's securing of an exemption so that he could play triggered an uproar and allegations of special treatment in Australia, where people spent months in lockdowns and endured harsh travel restrictions at the height of the pandemic.

» see TENNIS | B9