

PSR THE PENN FALL 2012 SPORT REPORT

THE OFFICIAL SPORTS MAGAZINE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

CAN ANYONE STOP LEBRON AND THE

MIAMI HEAT?

» HEAR BOTH SIDES OF THE DEBATE

ALSO INSIDE:

» Relive the 2008 Phillies

CHAMPIONSHIP

» How Fantasy Is

RUINING FOOTBALL

» RANKING ALL 14 BCS

CHAMPIONS

» THE NFL MVP RACE





Executive Board

Daniel Lewis: Founder and Editor-in-Chief Reuben Hampton: Executive Columnist Imikomobong Ibia: Executive Columnist Dipesh Patel: Executive Columnist Nicholas Greiner: Director of Marketing

Featured Columnists

Zahed Al Saifi, Nicholas Greiner, Vincent Sangiuliano, Riley Steele, Steven Tydings, and Ian Wenik

Advisory Board

Andrew Brandt: ESPN NFL Business Analyst, ESPN Columnist, Director of Sports Law at Villanova University, and Lecturer at the Wharton School of Business

Scott Rosner: Practice Assistant Professor of Legal Studies and Business Ethics at the

Wharton School of Business

Dick Polman: Political columnist for *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, blogger for WHYY, and Professor of Journalism at the University of Pennsylvania

Special Thanks

Ken Gritter, Dick Polman, Zachary Weiner, Dave Zimmerman, Office of Student Life, and *The Daily Pennsylvanian* I thank you for reading the Fall 2012 issue of *The Penn Sport Report*, the official sports magazine of the University of Pennsylvania. I founded this student-run organization in October 2012 with a vision of connecting the sports fans in the Penn community to their favorite teams and sports. *The Penn Sport Report* also aims to bring Penn students, faculty, and staff fresh and insightful analysis about the latest news in sports, ranging from analysis of X's and O's to player and team evaluations, all across the numerous professional sports leagues. We face the challenge of presenting articles that are complex and analytical, but which are also written in a manner that is understandable and interesting to all readers.

More importantly, *The Penn Sport Report* offers Penn undergraduate students the unique opportunity to hone their journalism skills as they interview experts, compose articles, and revise their work. It has been a real pleasure to work directly with a number of writers in bringing together this first issue. The involvement and dedication of our writers are undoubtedly vital to the success of our magazine. Our articles reflect the passion of our writers for sports. We hope to spark a sense of curiosity in our readers as well as a desire to explore the subtleties of sports beyond what we discuss in our magazine.

Only two months ago, *The Penn Sport Report* was nothing more than an idea swarming in my head. Our executive board has been instrumental in transforming this vision into a reality. I greatly appreciate the efforts our executive board, our writers, and our advisors have provided in enabling *The Penn Sport Report* to become the newest magazine at the University of Pennsylvania.

Thank you again for reading The Penn Sport Report, and I hope you enjoy it.

Daniel Lewis Founder and Editor-in-Chief



ARE YOU PASSIONATE ABOUT SPORTS? WRITE FOR PSR.

All students at the University of Pennsylvania who are interested in sports are welcome to write for *The Penn Sport Report*. Visit our website at http://www.pennsportreport.org to sign up for our mailing list. A student interested in writing for the magazine should be one who is capable of creating articles that are:

ANALYTICAL ENTERTAINING INFORMATIVE

In addition, all writers must demonstrate the following attributes:

Expertise: Deep knowledge of sports and demonstrated superior writing skills

Enthusiasm: Passion that clearly comes across in each piece of work

Eloquence: A unique voice and an ability to produce engaging, high-quality articles

If you feel that you have what it takes, submit an article for the next issue of *The Penn Sport Report*!



contents

PSR

FEATURED ARTICLE:



16 Oral History: Relive the Phillies' **2008** Championship Season By Evan Spiller

OTHER MLB:

20 » The Fraud of Jeffrey Loria: How One Man Ruined Two Franchises By Ian Wenik

24 » The Dodgers, the Red Sox, and the Changing Financial Landscape of the MLB By Steven Tydings

NFL:

03 » Fantasy Football is Changing the Way Fans See the Game. By Dipesh Patel

04 » A Defense of the Much-Maligned Michael Vick By

07 » Who's This Year's NFL MVP? Four Candidates By Vincent Sangiuliano

08 » NFL Comeback Player of the Year By Vincent Sangiuliano

COVER ARTICLE:



10 Debate: Can any team actually "beat the Heat" this year?

By Imikomobong Ibia and Daniel Lewis

OTHER NBA:

13 » End the Comparisons. There Will Never Be Another Michael Jordan. By Daniel Lewis

15 » Forget the Statistics. Kobe Bryant is the King of Clutch. By Daniel Lewis

SOCCER:

23 » Lionel Messi for the 2012 Ballon D'Or Award By Zahed Al Saifi

NCAA:

25 » Ranking the 14 BCS National Champions By Nicholas Greiner

26 » The Fighting Irish: Notre Dame's Gold Still Shines By Riley Steele

28 » Pay for Play: College Athletes Deserve to Be Paid By Nicholas Greiner

FANTASY FOOTBALL IS CHANGING THE WAY FANS SEE

THE GAME

BY: DIPESH PATEL

The brainchild of Wilfred Winkenbach in the early 1960s, fantasy football was a game conceived for the hardcore football fanatic. Today, it has become a game that draws the most casual of football fans and even introduces some to the sport for the first time, one reason for the ever-growing popularity of the National Football League.

According to estimates, roughly 30 million Americans play fantasy football. It is a \$1 billion industry that is only growing.

For many participants, the appeal of fantasy football lies in the chance to be a quasi-general manager, gain bragging rights over friends, or both. It's a way of putting your money where your mouth is. It's a chance to prove your sports chops with an actual measuring stick. It has become an industry with actual "experts" like Matthew Berry and Michael Fabiano. Think about that for a second and you'd be hard-pressed not to at least chuckle.

All of this to feed our insatiable appetite for "fake" football. In short, fantasy football has taken over the football world.

So, naturally, this begs the question: Is fantasy football changing the way fans see the game?

That's sure what it seems like.

For one, fantasy football has *individualized* real football, often touted as the ultimate *team* sport. Instead of rooting for teams, we root for players. Instead of watching for the outcome of the play, we focus on how our fantasy player was utilized.

In this way, fantasy football has also diluted fandom by creating too many allegiances among football followers. By rooting for our fantasy players to succeed, we essentially become their fans, more so if they lead us to any form of fantasy glory.

It can be bittersweet to see a player on an opposing division rival team essentially win you your weekly matchup at the expense of a win for your "real" team.

Any fan worth his or her salt would never feel the slightest bit of joy in that

Guilty as charged here. As a Philadelphia Eagles fan, I shouldn't like the division rival receiver Hakeem Nicks of the New York Giants. But I do—he was a key contributor to the success of my fantasy team last year. That's a problem.

I have always believed in the school of thought that you should be a fan of only one team and despise the rest. Fantasy football has been the devil in disguise by swaying fans, including me, away from this allegiance.

And let's be honest, the best times to be a fan come just as much from



hating the opposition as they do from cheering for our favorite team or player. In sports, unlike in everyday life, it's better when there is *less* love to spread around.

Fantasy football is also perpetuating the numbers movement—think sabermetrics—that is overtaking sports analytics.

The essence of fantasy football is numbers. Each player's value is quantified into a single number, and the total of all the players' numbers in your starting lineup determines whether you win or lose in a given week.

Elsewhere, there are websites such as ProFootballFocus that also attempt to quantify the quality of a player by measuring obscure attributes, including "true air yards per drop back" or "coverage snaps per tackling opportunity."

The problem with numbers, particularly in fantasy football, is that it dehumanizes the real players.

Just ask the "real" Arian Foster of the Houston Texans how he feels about fantasy football. In 2011, while he was recovering from an injured hamstring before the start of the regular season, Foster attacked some of his Twitter followers who were more worried about his fantasy value than his actual health.

His words: "4 those sincerely concerned, I'm doing ok & plan 2 B back by opening day. 4 those worried abt your fantasy team, u ppl are sick."



4 those sincerely concerned, I'm doing ok & plan 2 B back by opening day. 4 those worried abt your fantasy team, u ppl are sick

28 Aug via Twittelator A Favorite 13 Retweet Seply

It's easy to understand why NFL players can be so sensitive. No professional athlete wants to be viewed as a mathematical chess piece.

Fantasy football reduces the world's greatest athletes to mere stocks. It ruins the integrity of the sport. Players are supposed to be celebrated for leading their teams to victory, not for earning you 30 fantasy points. Fans are losing sight of the real reason we watch a



game that is just as exciting without keeping an eye on your fantasy

Again, that's a problem.

For some, we watch football to bear witness to great athletes perform at the highest level. For others, it's the suspense of the unscripted. Or maybe it's a way of indulging our competitive desires. Yet still, for some it is the shear black and white nature of the game. Success is directly measured by wins and losses, a dynamic found nowhere else in life. There is no need for debate. It's all settled on the field. These reasons are why we love, watch, and follow the NFL.

Perhaps I am just a football purist.

Admittedly, I am not perfectly comfortable playing fantasy football. It creates too much internal conflict. I love the game for the reasons that transcend mere numbers and individual players. I don't care so much for individual statistics as I do teamwork, camaraderie, leadership, and grit—all aspects of the real sport that a fantasy version can't measure.

Football, and sports in general, is about so much more than how many fantasy points Adrian Peterson put up for me this week.

So my plea to all those hardcore football fans turned fantasy football enthusiasts, please don't lose sight of the true reason you love the

A DEFENSE OF THE MUCH-MALIGNED MICHAEL VICK

BY: DANIEL LEWIS



Michael Vick. The name itself easily elicits a strong response from football fans, animal rights proponents, and the general population alike.

There are a host of polarizing professional athletes—Kobe Bryant, LeBron James, and Tiger Woods, among others—but no current athlete has been more loved and hated than Vick.

And with the Philadelphia Eagles' 2012 playoff hopes dwindling with each week, Vick's supporters have disappeared even more guickly.

Fired only seven weeks into the season, former defensive coordinator Juan Castillo was the team's first scapegoat. The next in line on the chopping block is Vick.

Before the season, Vick believed that the Eagles were building a dynasty. Instead, the Eagles' playoff hopes are done this season, and Vick may be done as the franchise quarterback.

Vick's days in Philadelphia are clearly numbered. He is scheduled to earn \$15.5 million in base salary in 2013, the third year of his five-year, \$80 million contract. Vick's contract was unveiled as a six-year deal, but this final year voids if Vick has 35-percent playing time in any season, and he played in 77.17 percent of the snaps last season.

If Vick is on the Eagles' roster on three days after the Super Bowl, \$3 million for "injury only" will become fully guaranteed. Count on the Eagles releasing Vick before that date to save \$15.5 million in cash and free up \$12.7 million in salary cap space.

Vick and coach Andy Reid both came into this season knowing they had to perform well to survive. The pressure has proven too great for both, with Reid crumbling under owner Jeffrey Lurie's "better than 8-8" ultimatum and Vick failing to justify his large 2013 salary.

Jim Mora, Sr. once called Vick a "coach-killer." His son was the second Atlanta Falcons coach to lose his job with Vick as his quarterback. Reid will endure a similar fate barring a miracle. But it would be extremely unfair to pin these past two disastrous seasons on Vick.

While it is all but certain that Eagles will ship him out of Philadelphia at the end of the season, his performance has hardly been the reason for the team's failures this season. Although it is customary to make the quarterback the center of a team's struggles, the level of blame that has been routinely placed on Vick has been far from deserved.

Vick makes questionable throws at times and has turned the ball over at an alarming rate this season, but he carries the Eagles in so many ways and puts them in position to win each week.

But when the stadium clock hits triple-zeros and the Eagles are not the victor on the scoreboard, all that Philly fans remember is Vick's miscues.

Vick has not been the problem. The entire team is the problem.

Despite heavy criticism, he has handled the entire season with nothing but class, self-criticism, and hours in the film room. It is evident that more than a few Eagles have not given their all on the field, but Vick has been one of the select few playing with a sense of urgency, despite taking a beating every Sunday behind an offensive line missing four of



its five starters.

Instead of scorn, Vick deserves praise for routinely stepping up in the pocket before getting leveled by a defensive lineman running through the turnstile that is the Eagles' offensive line.

If last year's hit rate on Vick was alarming, this season has been off the charts. For all the battering Vick endured a year ago, opposing defenses averaged five quarterback hits in games he played last season. This year, the average is over eight quarterback hits per outing.

Somehow Vick survived an eight-game beating. However, it was only a matter of time before his style of play and poor blocking caught up, and it did when suffered a "significant concussion" against the Dallas Cowboys in week ten.

In each week's post-game press conference, Vick has had the opportunity to point the finger at his makeshift offensive line, but instead he has taken full blame for each loss. Though this admirable attitude has not improved the team's fortunes, Vick deserves credit for handle everything the right way.

After a Monday night drubbing at the hands of the New Orleans Saints, Vick failed to fall for the reporters' bait to cast blame at his teammates, instead using it as an opportunity to defend them.

"We are out there, fighting as hard as we can, giving it everything we got. I love each and every guy in that locker room. And if I could make every play right I would. And I know they would do the same."

As reporters pressed him further, noting how his offensive line has given him little time in the pocket, Vick instead criticized himself, citing how he should be getting rid of the ball quicker while also taking full responsibility for the team's weekly shortcomings.

"I am out there as a competitor trying to win. And I know I can do a better job in getting the ball out quicker. As the quarterback of this football team, I take full responsibility."

As an Eagle, Vick has been the consummate professional, exhibiting a blue-collar work ethic and displaying a subtle hint of humility in his voice. Yet there are still those who continue to root against the man for his troubled past.



Vick did sickening things, and he deserved to be punished. Dogfighting is a cruel enterprise that exists solely to entertain the bloodthirsty, the inhumane, and the greedy. Inflicting suffering onto any living creature should never be condoned.

However, no good comes from exiling him in shame and not letting him show how one can be rehabilitated after that sort of horrific behavior. If anything, animal rights proponents should root heartily for Vick, whose success builds a larger platform for the animal rights movement.

Moreover, dwelling on his past mistakes accomplishes little. Unlike many fans, Vick came to this realization during his 21-month stay at Leavenworth Penitentiary. After coming out of prison, he admitted his mistakes, became an animal rights advocate, and made no excuses for himself. He pieced his life back together, reentered football as a pariah, and showed real regret and dignity as he pursued his comeback.

In his second year with the Eagles, he eventually redeemed his career with a 2010 season of the ages that almost earned him MVP honors, showcasing the skills that the Atlanta Falcons recognized in him as they made him the first-overall pick in the 2001 draft. As the 2010 AP Comeback Player of the Year, Vick passed for over 3,000 yards and 30 touchdowns while leading them to the playoffs. More impressive than any statistic, though, was his historic six-TD performance against the Washington Redskins on Monday Night Football and his role in leading the "Miracle at the New Meadowlands," a miraculous comeback against the New York Giants.

Yet just as quickly, things disintegrated for him after his renaissance



year. In February, he will likely become the first NFL player to sign two different \$100 million contract extensions that both fell through within two years. He crashed to earth last season and has struggled with inconsistency this season, and he has become an easy scapegoat for the Eagles' dismal season.

In fact one Eagles offensive player, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, acknowledged that Vick had become a scapegoat for the team that continues on its downward spiral.

"It [isn't] Mike's fault," the player said. "He hasn't been great. He'd tell you that. But we all haven't, from the coaches on down. The line hasn't helped. They've been beat up. The play-calling hasn't helped him, either."

Former Eagles' quarterback Donovan McNabb understands all too well the turmoil that comes with being the team's signal caller, and he commented on the situation as well:

"Is this a situation where we begin to start mentioning some of the defensive players who need to be benched? Maybe the offensive linemen need to be benched. There are other people who need to be in this situation besides Michael Vick."

If Vick's concussion is as serious as many reports claim it to be, then football fans have almost certainly seen the last of the veteran as the Eagles' starting quarterback.

"Good riddance," most fans will likely say. Indeed, in this black-and-white, quick-to-judge sports world, it's easy to rip Vick. The man is a dog killer and a public villain. The Eagles gave him a second chance, and he blew it. Ship the felon out of town. End of story.



However, the easy opinion is rarely the right opinion and almost never the fair opinion.

"If you look at my life over the last year, I've been trying to do all of the right things, whether it's in the community or on the field," Vick said at the Eagles' training camp back in 2010. "I'm just happy to be in the situation I'm in. I'm blessed, and I just have to keep moving forward."

Perhaps those calling for Vick's head can take a lesson from his words. Maybe it is time for them to move forward, stop casting blame, and embrace him while he is a member of the team. Let him leave in peace.

WHO IS THIS YEAR'S NFL MVP? FOUR CANDIDATES

BY: VINCENT SANGIULIANO

The NFL MVP race is always an exciting thing to follow, but usually there is a clear-cut favorite by midseason. Although there some favorites for the title of "Most Valuable Player" this season, it is possible that one of several players could jump in and steal the award from the current favorites.

The MVP award typically becomes a very controversial topic around December. This year could be one of the first years since 2006 in which a quarterback does not win the award.

Overall, it should be very interesting come February when NFL fans will find out the recipient of the award. Here are the competitors thus far for this prestigious award:

The first candidate for the award is the reigning MVP, quarterback Aaron Rodgers of the Green Bay Packers. Rodgers started off the season slowly, throwing for three touchdowns and two interceptions in the first three games of the season.

Since then, he has thrown for 24 touchdowns with only four interceptions as he heads into week 12. He has been playing at his typical MVP level since his slow start, and sometimes it just looks like there is no stopping him. Rodgers has been very poised as of late and has comparable numbers to last season.



His quarterback rating of 107.4 is the second highest of his career, lower only than last year's 122.5. He is, though, in line to accumulate more yards than he did last year. He is far off his touchdown pace, but with a few big games, he could top his 45 TDs from last year.

It is clear that Rodgers is the most valuable player on the Packers. Without him, Green Bay would not stand a chance in the NFC. He can singlehandedly dictate a game's rhythm and tempo and has shown that he can carry his team even with Greg Jennings barely on the field.

It will be very tough for Rodgers to repeat as MVP with the increased competition this year, but if he keeps up his high level of play, he will remain right in the mix. A second candidate for MVP is Rodgers' division mate, running back Adrian Peterson of the Minnesota Vikings.

With Peterson returning unusually fast in his recovery from an ACL tear last December, many people, and even Peterson himself, would not have expected such an amazing season thus far.

Vikings coaches were expecting backup Toby Gerhart to carry the team's ground game in the early weeks and hoping that Peterson would return around this point in the season, but "All Day" has completely exceeded everyone's expectations. Through ten games, Peterson has 1,128 yards with seven touchdowns and is third in the NFL with 5.8 yards per carry.

There have been a few games this year in which Peterson was shut down by the opposing defense—games in which Minnesota was not able to come out with victories. Peterson is the fuel that keeps the Viking offense going.

He is on pace to rack up a career high in rushing yards, surpassing his 1,760 yards from 2008, and to earn his second highest touchdown total, having found the end zone 18 times in 2008.

Peterson is already a clear candidate for Comeback Player of the Year, but he deserves special consideration for this award if he continues to put the team on his back as he has done throughout much of this season. Indeed, the NFL may see its first running back MVP recipient since 2006.

The next candidate for the award is the Atlanta Falcons' signal caller, Matt Ryan. The Philadelphia local started the season on fire, posting 12 touchdowns, 1,200 yards, and only two interceptions in the first four games.

Matt Ryan was so successful in the beginning of the season that he almost seemed superhuman at times. Recently, though, his MVP stock has fallen after throwing nine interceptions in the last five games and from narrowly leading the Falcons to victories in several weeks.



November was a poor month for Ryan in that the Falcons were able to win games without any significant production from him. In two of the last three weeks, he has thrown zero touchdowns and five interceptions and the Falcons were able to win in spite of him, albeit by less than six points in each game.

Although no player, especially a MVP candidate, can be judged on only two games, his recent performance will drop his MVP status slightly. Ryan will need to play well during the rest of the season and assume leadership of the Falcons, or the votes that would have gone to Ryan early in the season will instead go to another player.

Without him they will go nowhere, and with him, they are a favorite in almost all of their games. Only time will tell if Ryan can make history and become the first Falcons' player in history to win the MVP honors.

The final candidate for MVP—as well as Comeback Player of the Year, like Peterson—is Denver Broncos quarterback Peyton Manning. At the beginning of the season, the Broncos took a huge risk investing the future of their franchise in a player who had not played in almost two years and came off major neck surgery.

If you asked Broncos G.M. John Elway how that risk turned out thus far, what would he say?

Elway deserves credit for making the gutsy decision to dump Tim Tebow and for being able to persuade Manning to pack his bags for Denver in the offseason.

Manning appears to be the frontrunner for the MVP honor at the moment. The level at which he is playing makes it seem as though he

never missed a game last season or never suffered a career-threatening neck injury.

As he prepares for week 12, Manning has thrown for 24 touchdowns, 2,700 yards, and only 6 interceptions. While these numbers fall well short of those from his previous MVP seasons, his overall play continues to exhibit his incredible skills.

Manning is leading a very young Broncos team and has made even the most fanatic Tebow fans happy with his performance.

Peyton is a commander on the field, a huge reason why he is continually considered an MVP candidate. He controls the offense, runs it masterfully, and seems to call the perfect play at every moment.

After more than a decade in the same offense in Indianapolis, he has become very comfortable with the scheme and personnel in Denver in such a short period of time.

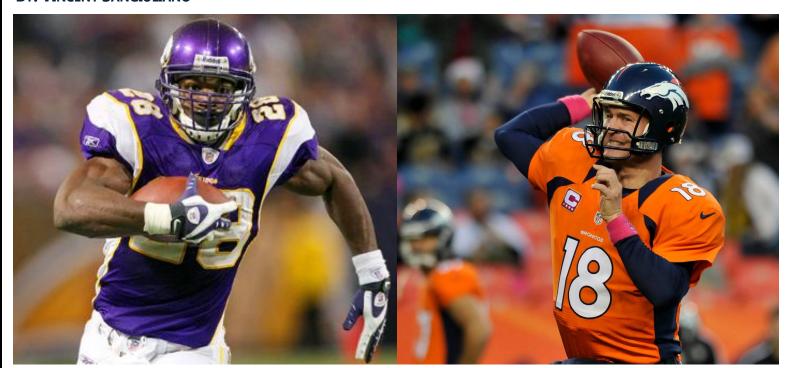
Manning is no stranger to the MVP award, and a fifth trophy to his collection would be well deserved.

These four candidates are all worthy of winning the MVP award, but the ballot is hardly limited to these players. New England Patriots' quarterback Tom Brady, San Francisco 49ers linebacker Aldon Smith, Chicago Bears' cornerback Charles Tillman, and Houston Texans' defensive end J.J. Watt are all intriguing dark horse candidates.

With plenty of games to be played and the landscape of the 2012 season still taking shape, fans will just have to wait until February to see who garners the high honor of the MVP award.

NFL COMEBACK PLAYER OF THE YEAR: TWO PLAYERS WHO WEREN'T SUPPOSED TO BE THIS GOOD THIS YEAR

BY: VINCENT SANGIULIANO



The two candidates for the 2012 NFL Comeback Player of the Year Award both had major surgeries in the offseason, leaving their fans and fantasy owners doubtful how well they would perform this year, if they would even be able to play at all.

However, Adrian Peterson and Peyton Manning, two players who have come back so strong from injuries that they are also in the running for the MVP award, have clearly put those doubts to rest.

These two players have shown all season long why they are such a crucial part of their teams. Manning and Peterson have come a long way since their injuries, but who is more deserving of this award?

Here are your two candidates for Comeback Player of the Year:

The first candidate is Adrian "All Day" Peterson, the superstar running back for the Minnesota Vikings. Last season, Peterson tore his ACL and MCL on Christmas Eve in a victory that also cost them the No. 2 draft spot to draft Robert Griffin III.

During the offseason, many fans believed that Peterson would never be the same explosive, powerful back and that he would have a season in which he would barely play.

Peterson, though, looks as though he was shot out of a cannon since the season's beginning, carrying his team to a 6-4 record despite minimal help from Christian Ponder and the passing game. Through ten games this season, Peterson has accumulated 1,128 yards on the ground, 7 touchdowns, and a remarkable 5.8 yards per carry. He leads the NFL in yards per game with 112.8 and also leads the NFL with the most runs of 20+ yards with 13.

Vikings head coach Leslie Frazier expected to have to limit Peterson's workload by using a running-back-by-committee approach with A.P. and backup Toby Gerhart splitting carries.

At this point of the season, Peterson has run using his surgically repaired right knee 195 times, which puts him on pace to just surpass his career-high in number of carries, which is at 363 in 2008. He is also on pace to surpass the 1,760 rushing yards he had in 2008.

If anything, the Vikings offense has leaned on A.P. more than ever before, and he has never been more important to his team's success.

Besides Peterson, the other main candidate for Comeback Player of the Year is Peyton Manning, quarterback for the Denver Broncos.

After a very risky spinal fusion surgery, Peyton Manning himself thought he might be headed for retirement, and the Indianapolis Colts agreed with him by cutting ties with him after drafting the promising Andrew Luck.

Soon after Manning was released by the Colts, the Broncos took a big risk by signing Manning to a five-year deal, hoping that he still had plenty of life in his game.

Just ten weeks into the 2012 season, the Broncos' gamble has paid off. Manning thus far has a completion percentage of 68.5%, the second highest of his career, and 2,975 passing yards, which puts him on pace to set a career high, surpassing his 4,700 from 2010. He also has 24

touchdowns, which puts him on pace for the second-highest total of his career, behind his 49 TDs in 2004. He has also churned out a quarterback rating of 106.2, second only to his 121.1 rating from 2004.

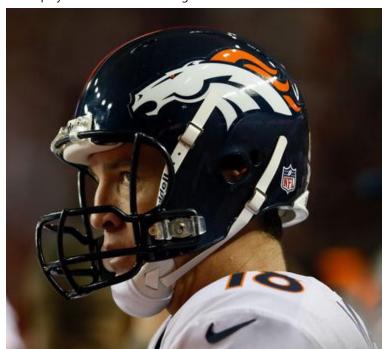
After such a career-threatening surgery, Manning has still able to throw one of the league's fastest and tightest spirals to the spots where the ball needs to be. His throws downfield still have just the right amount of touch, and he is still able to fit balls in tight windows. His arm durability is also strong as ever, having thrown over forty passes in a couple of games and having had one game in which he had over fifty attempts.

Manning has yet to have a game this season in which he has not thrown a touchdown and has played virtually mistake-free aside from one early season loss to the Atlanta Falcons.

During the offseason and preseason, Manning was performing drills in which he could barely throw beyond 20 yards, and most of his balls hung in the air and came out wobbly.

Manning has made one of the greatest comebacks in league history, returning after nearly 20 months away from the game and numerous surgeries on his neck. He has performed at a level that no one—not even he himself—could have expected.

Peyton is playing the way to NFL fans have grown accustomed for the past decade, taking command of the offense, changing the plays at the line as always, and slinging the ball around the field. Manning deserves this award if he can keep up his great pace, but he will need to outplay Peterson in the coming weeks.



Both Peterson and Manning have come a long way since their injuries and may have even improved during their time off the field. When the time comes for the NFL experts to select a winner for the award, it will be far from easy.

Who would have thought that two players usually under MVP consideration would also be the leading candidates for the Comeback Player of the Year Award?

2013 NBA FINALS DEBATE:

HEAT UP THE QUESO, 'CAUSE MORE CHIPS 'A COMIN'.

By: IMIKOMORONG IRIA

After watching the opening month of the NBA season, I have come to a few realizations: the New York Knicks should force Amar'e Stoudemire to come off the bench, the Washington Wizards are the worst team in the NBA with or without John Wall, the L.A. Lakers will be the L.A. Lakers later rather than sooner, and no one can beat the Heat.

Yes, I did say that and I will repeat it again for good measure: No team in the NBA can beat the Miami Heat.

Before I start getting emails from people saying that I am an idiot, let me clarify. On any given night, even the best team in the NBA can lose to the worst. The talent level in the NBA and the pride of individual players is simply too high for any team to roll over to a superior foe.

That being said, when the playoffs roll around and the schedule shifts to a first-to-four-wins series, the most talented teams usually rise to the top. When I say that no team in the NBA can beat the Miami Heat, I mean that in a best out of seven series, no team can beat the Heat four times. Sure, maybe you can make the argument for your favorite team, but deep down you are likely as nervous as the rest of the league of the most talented team in the NBA.

Let's begin with the obvious facts first. The NBA is unique in that so much of a team's success relies on its stars' production. The general rule for title contention is that a team must have two superstars to have a legitimate chance to win a championship, though there have been a few exceptions, such as the Detroit Pistons in 2004 and the Dallas Mavericks in 2011. The Heat have two superstars and three top-20 players in the NBA: LeBron James, Dwayne Wade, and Chris Bosh.

Yet, it all starts and ends with LeBron, LeBron, and more LeBron.

Any NBA fan can see the greatness of LeBron, although some simply choose to deny it. LeBron is in the midst of his ninth season and is only 27 years old. He is in the prime of his career, even though he has already won three MVP awards.

James is the most talented player of our generation. There is no legitimate debate as to whether he is the best, and he is the most physically gifted basketball player this side of Wilt Chamberlain. He should and is more than qualified to win the Most Valuable Player Award every year, but he does not because of voter fatigue.

The only question mark surrounding LeBron was whether he was mentally tough and clutch enough to lift a team to a championship. He proved his doubters wrong with one of the best playoff performances by anyone in the history of the game. His Player Efficiency Rating (PER), generally thought to be the best statistic at



quantifying player's overall performance, was 30.34, well above the league average of 15.00 and All-Star player score of 20.00.

In June, James trekked into the post more often and went to work on a smaller Kevin Durant. KD, or anyone else for that matter, simply could not stop LeBron from having his way in last year's playoffs. LeBron improved dramatically during those playoffs, and the scary part is that LeBron is still getting better in all aspects of the game.

LeBron's improvements this season are already visible in just a handful of games. Though LeBron has returned to shooting three-pointers, his three-point percentage resides in the upper echelon of the league at almost 45%. He is hitting treys at such a high rate while attempting threes a game. In fact, these impressive numbers belong to a player most fans still feel is a below average shooter.

Playing mostly power forward in the Heat's small ball lineup, LeBron's rebounds are also up to 9.1 per game, a rate that currently exceeds his second-highest rebound average by more than a one full rebound.

Perhaps most importantly, LeBron's game has matured to the point that he is making fewer careless mistakes, as evidenced by his careerlow 2.0 turnovers per game.

It is still very early in the season, but this new LeBron seems like the perfect fit for this small ball Heat team.

Of course, it would also be foolish to overlook the other players on his stacked Miami squad.

Dwayne Wade may be slowing down and struggling with injuries, but he is still the second-best player on floor every night when the Heat are playing an opponent not named the Lakers or the Thunder. He is picking his spots better than ever and can still take over a game at will.

Often overlooked and considered Miami's "third wheel," Chris Bosh has finally found his groove on this Heat team. As the center of the small-ball team, Bosh is having the finest season of his career. His PER is more than five points from last season's 18.9, and his points and rebounds are up significantly as well.

In addition, the offseason additions of Ray Allen and Rashard Lewis are providing exactly what the Heat needed: shooters to space the floor with the Big 3 on the court.

The shooters are filling their roles to perfection. Ray Allen is shooting 52% from three, while Rashard Lewis is shooting 53%. Shane Battier, Mike Miller, and James Jones are all shooting 43% or higher. The Heat are the highest-scoring team, the best shooting team, and the best three-point shooting team in the league.

With LeBron or Wade bringing the ball up, the other on the wing ready to receive the ball, Bosh in the high post ready to slip the screen and hit a long two, and two almost interchangeable shooters at the corners, how the hell does anyone defend this team?

Surely, other fans will suggest that a select few teams are equipped to beat this Miami Heat team. These teams, though, have glaring weaknesses.

The San Antonio Spurs can no longer rely on veteran savvy to outwit teams in the playoffs, as made clear by their colossal defeat at the hands of the Oklahoma City Thunder last spring. The Thunder themselves are coming off trading one of their key cogs and have not figured out how to regain their offensive identity.

The Lakers were forecasted to be the Heat's prime challenger come June, but they fired a coach five games into the season and have one of the weakest benches in the league. They are also the second-worst free-throw shooting team in the league (68%), and the hack-a-Howard method can be employed at any time, eliminating the Lakers' big size advantage inside with Dwight Howard.

Relative upstart contenders like the Memphis Grizzlies, Los Angeles Clippers, and the Knicks have either yet to prove that they can win deep into the playoffs or have giant question marks such as team chemistry, coaching, and the return of injured players.

The rest of the Eastern Conference is very shallow. Wouldn't you take the top five teams in the Western Conference over the second team in the East?

Let's say the world does not end on December 21 and in approximately seven months, the NBA crowns a champion. The Heat will be standing on the podium with Dictat—I mean, Commissioner-David Stern giving the golden ball to LeBron and the Heat.

2013 NBA FINALS **DEBATE CONTINUED:** THE L.A. LAKERS ARE THE PERFECT THREAT TO THE MIAMI HEAT.

BY: DANIEL LEWIS

Nine months away, it is easily the sexiest of the potential 2013 NBA Finals matchups—the Los Angeles Lakers vs. the Miami Heat.

While some NBA pundits rightfully refuse to cross off the Oklahoma City Thunder from their list of contenders, odds are on the Lakers meeting the Heat for the title-deciding series next June.

The Heat took the Larry O'Brien Trophy this summer, and it looked like the LeBron Era was finally about to begin. Even after signing sharp shooters Ray Allen and Rashard Lewis, though, the Heat have quickly lost their status as unquestionable championship favorites.

After acquiring Dwight Howard and Steve Nash as well as bringing in Antawn Jamison and Jodie Meeks, the Lakers appear, on paper, the perfect team to beat the Heat.

As constructed, the Lakers have the potential to be more dangerous than Miami because Lakers G.M. Mitch Kupchak has assembled an incredibly well-balanced squad. Indeed, the Lake Show will boast a starting lineup featuring players in the following conventional roles: the ball distributor, the shot-creator and scorer, the wing defender, the inside post presence, and the defensive and rebounding anchor.

The Lakers have elite players to cover all aspects of the game. Even In fact, Howard instantly transforms the Lakers into the perfect anti-



with a roster featuring four potential Hall-of-Famers, they are not duplicating their skills anywhere. Like the Boston Celtics back in 2008, L.A.'s starters complement each other's strengths and cover any real weaknesses.

On the other hand, while they have clearly learned to play well together, the Heat still struggle at times because their two best players—a versatile combo-point-forward and an isolation penetrating shooting guard—have similar tendencies and skill sets.

Even worse, Miami has no real inside post-presence, whereas the Lakers have the most dominant pivot man in the Association.

L.A.'s formidable frontcourt provides an intriguing counterbalance to a Miami team that lacks anything significant in the frontcourt aside from Chris Bosh, who is closer to a stretch-four than a legitimate inside presence. Udonis Haslem defends and rebounds well, but he has seen his role and minutes diminish because of age and injuries.





small-ball team and thus an anti-Heat team. Every single conference finalist last year—Boston, Miami, OKC, and San Antonio—ran small-ball lineups with power forwards masquerading as centers and swingmen sliding into the frontcourt as fours, and none more often than the Heat.

While these nontraditional lineups add more speed and dynamism to the floor, Howard would absolutely slaughter them.

He simply cannot be defended by the likes of Chris Bosh, Kevin Garnett, or Serge Ibaka. Moreover, unlike former Lakers center Andrew Bynum, Howard is able to prevent teams from simply increasing the pace to tire him out or try to run past him. With his freakish athleticism, D12 is arguably the best transition big man in the history of the game.

Just the fact that King James could end up spending thirty-plus minutes defending Pau Gasol is reason enough to worry; if so, LeBron would certainly wear down over a best-of-seven series.

This glaring matchup problem makes Miami playing a true center essential, since the gimmickry of a small-ball lineup might not prove nearly as effective against L.A. Playing Bosh at the five would all but ensure that Dwight will build a house in Miami's paint. We saw what Roy Hibbert did to the Heat in last year's playoffs, and Miami would only fare worse against Howard.

Thus, Howard's presence will force Miami to abandon its positionless style of basketball and play a traditional center such as Joel Anthony to be able to slow D12 down in the interior.

Given the current group of big men in Miami, it would only detract from the team's offensive capabilities given how Anthony is a black hole on offense.

If the Heat are unable to sign a free-agent center—a task that is all but impossible at this point in free agency—they are going to have a tough time competing against the Lakers.

As a result, the Heat would likely have to play a lineup featuring the offensively challenged Anthony at center. This lineup change would push Shane Battier to the bench, eliminating the sort of spacing threat that gave James and Wade so much room to penetrate into the paint in the playoffs last spring.

Even more, Howard makes the Lakers into a terrific defensive team down-low that can keep Miami's slashers out of the paint.

In the playoffs and especially during the NBA Finals, fans saw LeBron and D-Wade routinely refusing to settle for outside shots. Unfortunately for them, Howard is the one big man who can prevent them from relentlessly attacking the basket as they did against the Thunder.

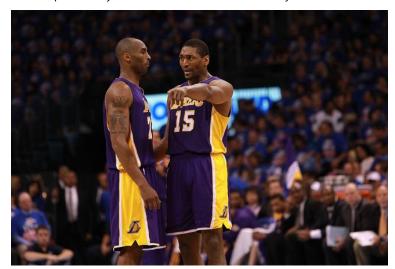
A three-time Defensive Player of the Year, Dwight can defend the paint, intimidate dribble penetrators, and send back shots at the rim. He can accomplish these tasks without fouling either, having averaged only 2.2 fouls per contest against the Heat last year as a member of the Orlando Magic.

It is apparent why James has posted his lowest scoring numbers against Orlando over the past few years, and it was not because Ryan Anderson was covering him.

The Lakers are also perfectly suited to beat the Heat for other reasons on defense.

Although Nash is a defensive sieve, the Lakers' weakest defender would play against one the Heat's supplemental weapons in Mario Chalmers. Nash's biggest defensive limitation is playing on the ball, one that is mitigated by the fact that Chalmers was in the bottom five in usage rate last season with LeBron and Wade dominating the ball.

The Lakers also have a solid stable of defenders for slowing down LeBron, particularly Metta World Peace and Kobe Bryant.



While World Peace has a lost a step defensively, he still possesses the size, strength, and attitude to match up against LeBron and prevent him from singlehandedly taking over games. Bryant, too, can be a lockdown defender and can contain Wade if he puts in the effort, especially if Nash can dominate offensive possessions to help Kobe conserve energy for defense on Wade.

Overall, the trades of Howard and Nash to the Lakers quickly changed the landscape of the NBA. The team's slow start notwithstanding, the Lakers have gone from candidates for an early playoff exit to title favorites, and the Heat have suddenly become the underdogs.

Expect the Lakers to raise their 17th banner at Staples after the season.

END THE COMPARISONS. THERE WILL NEVER BE ANOTHER MICHAEL JORDAN.

By: Daniel Lewis

Hall-of-Famer Scottie Pippen set off a firestorm last May when he compared LeBron James to Pippen's own teammate with the Chicago Bulls, Michael Jordan.

Pippen anointed King James as "the greatest player" ever.

More recently, Charles Barkley made his stance clear: "LeBron James is just bigger, stronger, faster. That's the only difference."

The NBA has been looking for the next Michael Jordan since the last of Jordan's championships in 1998. It is clear, though, that the time has come to call off the search.

LeBron James is no Michael Jordan. James has been the first to affirm it. No amount of championships, points, or assists will ever place LeBron on the same pedestal as Michael. Remembering Jordan as anything less than the greatest ever is both foolish and outlandish.

Not only did Michael Jordan play a game of basketball so beautiful that it defied physics, but he racked up numbers and accolades that put him in a league of his own.

Six NBA titles. A 72-win season. Five MVP awards. Ten-time member of the All-NBA First Team. Nine-time member of the All-Defensive First Team. Fourteen NBA All-Star Game appearances. Ten scoring titles.

He used every ounce of his competitive fire to beat down his opponents. He carried the full responsibility of achieving victory, and he would have it no other way.

Pure talent combined with unprecedented determination is what made MJ into a legend, and it earned him six rings in a career abbreviated by retirement.

Nobody is going to be the next Michael Jordan. Nobody. Ever.

The comparison is moot.

Most basketball fans would agree but nevertheless continually compare successors including Kobe Bryant, Dwayne Wade, Allen Iverson, and Tracy McGrady to His Airness.

Indeed Jordan for many years now has been the universal measuring device in appraising greatness among basketball players.

While such statements create some level of hype surrounding these players, the shadow of Jordan's legacy has obscured their true greatness and hindered fan's appreciation of them.

"Michael's greatness has warped the way we evaluate and interpret the careers of today's superstars," Scott Leedy of the Hardwood Paroxysm asserts. "No one is allowed to succeed on their own terms: they must succeed on his."



"No one is allowed to succeed on their own terms: they must succeed on his."

- Scott Leedy, Hardwood Paroxysm

Leedy continues by delving deeper into this topic, claiming that the shadow of Jordan has destroyed LeBron's reputation since he cannot live up to Jordan's legacy.

"A lot of the criticism [of LeBron] centers on [sic] the same tired, unoriginal and uninspired refrain: "Michael Jordan NEVER would have (fill in the blank here)."

There is no doubt we have all heard these statements before.

"Jordan never would have teamed up with two other superstars."

"Jordan never would have quit on his team in the playoffs."

"Jordan never would have choked in a big game like that one."

In reality, though, LeBron receives criticism when he should be hearing praise, especially after earning his first ring in June.

Does anyone remember Jordan failing to score a single basket in the final 7½ minutes of the Bulls' victory over Indiana in Game 7 of the 1998 Eastern Conference Finals? Or Jordan passing to Steve Kerr for the game-winner in Game 6 of the NBA Finals against Utah in 1997?

Of course not. Jordan's legacy has already been immortalized and his game encrusted with gold—and deservedly so. But his flaws and mistakes have been forgotten.

And it is impossible for any player to match someone who has been deemed perfect, despite the fact that LeBron has been otherworldly.

Thus, it is time for LeBron to be LeBron and for Kobe to be Kobe. They cannot be Michael Jordan. They should be evaluated solely on their own merits, not on legacy of His Airness.

FORGET THE STATISTICS. KOBE BRYANT IS THE KING OF

CLUTCH.

By: Daniel Lewis

Ask any coach, general manager, or player-or almost anybody who watches basketball.

What current NBA player would you have take the final shot with a game on the line?

Every time, Bryant wins the vote. In fact, in a general-manager poll last season, he earned 79 percent of the vote, his ninth consecutive blowout.

They say Kobe's clutch play is overrated. They say that the statistics show that he misses far more late shots than he makes.

More specifically, they point out that in the final 24 seconds of a game, Bryant has managed to hit a field goal a paltry 31.3 percent of the time, lower than the likes of Carmelo Anthony (47.7 percent), Chris Paul (45.2 percent), Dirk Nowitzki (38.5 percent), and even LeBron James (33.3 percent).

However, these statisticians fail to account for how these players cherry-pick when they try to take the game-winner, passing on all but the most favorable opportunities.

Time after time, LeBron passes up open shots in end-of-game situations in which he could have carried his team, but he instead surrenders the ball to his teammates. Why? He is scared. Kobe, meanwhile, never backs down from the final shot, even if it is far from the perfect look.

The Black Mamba himself understands that the statistics are meaningless.

"If somebody had their life on the line, and they've got their options on who they want to save their life - tell me who you're going to pick?" Bryant asked. "You're going to look at the stats first?"

Sure, Anthony nailed a jump shot over LeBron to win a regular season game in 2009 and carried his team to an exciting victory over the Chicago Bulls in 2012. LeBron single-handedly brought his team to the NBA Finals with a fourth quarter massacre against the Detroit Pistons in 2007 and hit a Hail Mary three pointer against the Orlando Magic in 2009 Eastern Conference Finals.

But can anyone even count Kobe's game-winners? Exactly.

The truth is that no current NBA player has a crunch-time resume with half the excitement or sheer bulk that can compare to that of Bryant.

But then the critics argue that we only remember the good and ignore the bad.

Perhaps. However, some moments are more important than others. His plays and shots have won championships. Melo's few clutch shots have not come in the NBA Finals, with a championship at stake.



Is Kobe clutch? The debate rages on. But with the number of teams I've seen him kill for over a decade, I am definitely not going to bet against him anytime soon.

Truth is, if you are rooting against the Lakers, and Bryant has the ball in the final seconds of a close game, you are probably holding your breath. He is the definition of clutch.

He knows ball belongs in his hands because the clutch moments belong to him. He is cool, polished, fearless, and ruthless. He steps into the pivotal moments of a game with a mental toughness that is unrivaled.

In all, Kobe knows the real reason why this clutch argument against him continues to persist.

"People kind of get bored with things that I've done, so they try to find new ones to talk about or try to find numbers to justify certain things. That's what happens when you win. I remember Magic and Michael [Jordan] going through similar things. Hey, the talk before was that I couldn't do it without Shaq. Well I did that. And then I did it again. Now it's something else. They're always going to come for something else. But I win. We win."





2008: THE YEAR THE PHILLIES WERE GOING TO WIN THE WORLD SERIES—AN ORAL HISTORY

BY: EVAN SPILLER

Collective memory is a notoriously hazy entity, deeply subject to the events that follow. Nixon won 49 of 50 states in the 1972 election. But go out and ask people how their community felt about the president. Chances are you won't find too many stalwarts for Tricky Dick.

In the case of the 2008 championship Philadelphia Phillies, a remarkably similar legend emerges. Three baseball fans—Dick Polman, a Penn professor, political blogger, columnist for *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Dave Zimmerman, a process server from Northeast Philadelphia, and Ken Gritter, a bartender at Smokey Joe's Tavern—were interviewed for this piece. They remember a historically awful team, revived by a new stadium and manager, that came together perfectly in 2008. They remember a feeling of confidence in a talented group of players. And they remember that they really thought the Phillies could win it all.

For the most part, their memory of concrete details was accurate. Footnotes have been added to correct verifiably untrue facts. As for the intangible emotions that accompanied the season, nobody knows. And, really, nobody cares. Victory is what Philadelphia remembers.

HISTORY:

- **P:** Before the 2008 Phillies, no sports team had won since the '76ers in 1983. It had been a quarter of a century since any team had won a championship.
- **G:** Philadelphia Phillies...hold the record for the most losses of any professional franchises. They've had over ten thousand losses. For many years and years and years, they were horrible.
- **Z:** They're the Phillies. They let us down a lot.
- **P:** They were in the World Series in 1993. And that was a fantastic team
- **G:** Then they hit—yeah, they were down for a little bit in the late '90s.
- **Z:** They had a few bad seasons. And then [manager] Charlie Manuel got here.
- **P:** I was a baseball writer for one season. A very long time ago during their long, long period of mediocrity...specifically 1991. And they played in that awful stadium—The Vet. With very bad Astroturf.
- **Z:** The Vet was pretty much a shithole.
- **P:** There were mice in the press box. Just a very unwholesome place to be.
- **Z:** But once they got Citizens Bank Park it all started to come together again.
- **G:** The Park drew people.
- **Z:** It seems to me like every seat in that place is great. You can be sitting down low or up high. Everything seems to be close to the field.
- **P:** It was such a fabulous place to watch a ballgame.
- **Z:** People were really starting to enjoy baseball again in the city.
- **P:** That helped the Phillies get a revenue stream that they really needed. They never had enough money to attract a lot of free agents who were good.
- **G:** As they got better and better...Now they draw three million people a year, every year. That gave them a whole lot more economic flexibility.
- **Z:** And they just started to turn things around.
- **P:** They got some good management finally after a long period in which they were not getting it. So you put the two together, and they started winning division championships. They won their division championships in 2007. They were blown out in the first round. I think by the Colorado Rockies...you could see they were putting together a nucleus. Chase Utley was injury free. We had Howard at first base who

- was just moving into his prime. Jimmy Rollins was hitting consistently and obviously fielding so well. We picked up Werth. They got him cheap. Utley was hitting 30 homers a season.
- **G:** Chooch [Carlos Ruiz]...was a very consistent defensive catcher.
- **Z:** And they were always together, hanging out together. It was just the chemistry the team had together...They brought the fans in with them. That was the thing about Citizens Bank Park. It was so enclosed that you could spend time with the players to go over and get some autographs. It was such an intimate thing. I think that's what brought baseball back to the city of Philadelphia. It was the whole vibe of these guys. And how great they treated the fans.
- **P:** And they started getting some quality pitching.
- **Z:** We had the best closer in the game. Brad Lidge was ridiculous.
- **P:** It was like lightning in a bottle. We just happened to catch Lidge right in the exact moment where everything was working together.¹
- **G:** [45-year old] Jamie Moyer was a free agent signing.²
- **P:** I always felt confident watching [Moyer] out there. I knew that if he was having a bad day, it was because physically, he was having a bad day. It wasn't anything upstairs...You need someone like that on the pitching staff. Cole Hamels was a young phenom that year.
- Z: Cole Hamels was a stud.
- **P:** A good pitching staff has a blend of the young and the older.



- **G:** They started out well. I don't remember precisely their record after forty games or at the All-Star break. I don't remember exactly their record. They were consistent.
- **P:** The Mets were really the favorite that year.
- **G:** The Mets were used to beating up on the Phillies.

² Jamie Moyer was actually acquired in a trade with Seattle.



This statement is completely accurate. Brad Lidge, in fact, did not blow a single game that season. He recorded a 1.95 ERA and 41 saves, ten more than he would have in any season since.

- **P:** The Phillies and Mets had a big rivalry, as they still do. The big thing in Philly culturally is that we always feel we're in the shadow of New York. So the way that carries over to baseball is really rooting hard against the Mets.
- **G:** It's a reflection of the New York-Philadelphia rivalry.
- **Z:** [Carlos Beltran in the preseason] was talking about how the Phillies have no chance. He was with the Mets. That's when Jimmy Rollins came out and said we're going to be the team to beat. The Mets were always the top team.
- **P:** This was during the period where Jimmy Rollins was very cocky about the Phillies doing well...I think people in Philadelphia liked his attitude. It was like a break from the past.

SEASON:

- **P:** And [the Mets] started really well. And Philadelphia—they were playing well...[but] for a lot of the season, the Mets had the upper hand.³
- **Z:** Anyone but the Mets.
- P: I seem to remember they hit a bad patch [in June].
- **Z:** They had a nine-game losing streak.⁴
- **P:** It used to be the culture in Philadelphia with the Phillies...that all the years in the '90s, particularly with the exception of '93, when the team went bad around June, or what was called the June Swoon, that people of Philadelphia, their immediate reaction would be, "Here we go again." Or, "Oh boy. I knew this was going to happen." You know. Fatalism. I seem to remember that people didn't have that same sense of dismissal and dread.
- **Z:** They played their asses off. And they were the team that would be down 6-1 going into the sixth or seventh inning, where back in the early days, you would leave the game. But knowing how confident these Phillies teams were, you'd stay and watch them, just because they would fight to the end.
- **P:** [Midseason starting pitcher Joe] Blanton was a good pickup because the thing about him—and it's a shame he's gone now—Blanton was a reliable 5 2/3, three earned runs, six hits, too many pitches and then he's gone kind of starting pitcher. He would just get you into the sixth inning.
- **Z:** I think Joe Blanton was the biggest mistake the Phillies ever made.
- **G:** Blanton pitched well for them.
- **G:** In September, I think the Mets went ahead briefly.
- **Z:** It was a very scary time because we thought the boys weren't going to get into it. The Mets were on a high...You thought the Phillies were

- going to let you down again.
- **P:** Then [the Mets] started doing what they've been known for doing, which is fading down the stretch.
- **Z:** Then, the Phillies ended up coming back and taking it.
- **P:** It was just sort of a double pleasure...Apparently there was something in their makeup or chemistry that was working against them. At the same time, our makeup and chemistry was working for us. It's hard for me to remember too many specifics about September besides that. Beyond checking the standings and seeing the slides and seeing the rise almost like two lines on a chart intersecting. One up. One down.

NLDS:

- **Z:** I just felt very confident once they got to that point.
- **P:** The first step is always the most nervous making. You realize you've got two hurdles to get to the World Series. Milwaukee—I don't even remember who they had. Here's what I remember from that series. I remember one thing from that series. Werth hit a titanic home run in Milwaukee. It must have gone over 420 feet. Helped win a game.

NLCS:

- **Z:** I worried about the Dodgers a little bit because they had a lot of bats.
- **P:** What was fabulous about that, what I remember more than anything else, what everybody remembers, they get to Dodger stadium. There was a guy off the bench for us. Matt Stairs. A big guy who looked like a hockey player. He hit this titanic home run. It had to be about thirty rows deep. It was at a very key moment.
- **G:** He was a journeyman pinch hitter. And he happened to get a big hit at the right time.
- **P:** The guy could hardly run. He couldn't field...And so he would just—as he put it at the time—he swings hard at everything...It just took off. It was just one of those balls that as soon as it hits the bat, you know. It just had that lift.
- **Z:** And then after that, he became a folktown hero. 40-something years old. Coming off the bench. And then he becomes a hero in Philadelphia.
- **Z:** The Phillies just dominated that series.

WORLD SERIES:

P: I never took Tampa Bay seriously as a baseball team. Maybe because they were from Tampa Bay and only got ten thousand people

⁴ It was actually a six game losing streak, part of a 3-11 slump at the end of June.



³ Until the end of the season, the Phillies were actually doing better than, or as well as, the Mets. After 40, 80, 120, and 162 games, the Mets were 21-19, 39-41, 64-56, and 89-73. Meanwhile, the Phillies were 22-18, 43-37, 64-56, and 92-70, respectively.

in the stands for a game.

Z: Tampa Bay. There were no worries in my mind about that team. They had a young pitching staff that was a little bit scary. We had the rainout in that one game. But there was little doubt in my mind that the Phillies were going to win the World Series.

P: This is what you're going to have to fill in from other people. All I remember from the World Series was the [fifth] game before it was called they were sliding around on mud. And it was like when are they going to call this? This is ridiculous.

And then coming back to finish the game. They ended up picking up in like the sixth inning. And what I remember was. If I'm not mistaken, the very first guy—it might have been Pat Burrell—hit a ball that we all thought was going out. It hit off the top of the farthest just to center field railing. He ended up on second or third. And that kind of set the tone. The game was tied at the time. And I thought, "Oh my God. This could really happen."

They got the two outs. The batter was a big left handed pinch hitter who used to be on the Red Sox. And, finally, he strikes him out. I'm watching it in my house with wife. The most non-baseball fan in the world. But she loves Philadelphia. She has a lot of civic pride. She likes it when Philadelphians are happy. So she came down to watch from the seventh inning on. She never does that. And she was completely caught up in it.

So we're sitting there, and when the batter struck out, Lidge fell to his knees. And he like beseeches the heavens with his arms.

"So we're sitting there, and when the batter struck out and Lidge fell to his knees. And he like beseeches the heavens with his arms."

G: I was at Tip O'Leary's. Havertown. Everybody was jumping up and down. Just like we were at the stadium....The whole region was going crazy.

Z: I was at a bar in Northeast called Real's with about 20 of my friends...It was a just unbelievable experience. Beers being thrown all over the place. It was one of the greatest experiences of my life.

Bars all empty. There were girls lifting up their shirts. Climbing up poles.

P: We were going crazy like we were ten years old. We live in Center City just a couple blocks from Broad Street. Within two minutes, it sounded like a riot outside. It was a seasonably warm night. And we open the windows. It was just like...cars honking, people screaming. We took our dog over to walk with him over to Broad Street. We sort of joined this impromptu celebration. Half the people were drunk. Average age: twenty-two-ish. Everybody was blasted. It was great.

Z: When they won the World Series in 1980, I was 11. When they won it this time, it was the craziest. I was with my brothers and my friends. It was the greatest experience of my whole entire life. I'm still looking forward to this season. I think we're going to do it again.



"When they won it...It was the greatest experience of my whole entire life. I'm still looking forward to this season. I think we're going to do it again."

THE FRAUD OF JEFFREY LORIA: HOW ONE MAN RUINED

TWO FRANCHISES

BY: IAN WENIK

A few short weeks after the 2012 World Series ended, the Miami Marlins rocked the baseball world when they traded away Jose Reyes, Josh Johnson, Mark Buehrle, John Buck, and Emilio Bonifacio to the Toronto Blue Jays, shedding over \$163 million in future salary.

Fans and media roundly criticized Marlins owner Jeffrey Loria for pushing forward with the deal just one year after opening Marlins Park, which was built using \$608.8 million of public funds from the city of Miami and from Miami-Dade County.

Fox Sports' Ken Rosenthal wonders "how Loria can face the people of South Florida...better he just sell [the team]."

Well, Ken and the people of South Florida should have seen this one coming a long time ago, because Miami is not the first city in which Loria has crippled a baseball franchise.

Talk to the citizens of Montreal.

In 1999, Loria purchased what ultimately amounted to be a 94% stake in the Montreal Expos.

His first act? Demanding the construction of a new publicly funded stadium, Labatt Park, to replace the cavernous, obsolete Olympic Stadium. Where have we heard that one before?

In an attempt to drum up public support for his planned downtown stadium, Labatt Park, Loria went on a spending spree before the 2000 season, acquiring reliever Graeme Lloyd, starting pitcher Hideki Irabu, and first baseman Lee Stevens. The three's salaries combined to equal almost half of the previous season's payroll.

On-field success did not follow, though, as the Expos finished 67-95, good for fourth place in the NL East. All three were gone by the time Loria sold the team in 2002.

Loria was desperate to scrounge up public funding to support his grandiose vision of a downtown stadium. However, Premier of Quebec Lucien Bouchard shot down his dreams after rightly pointing out that the city would be not finished paying debt service on Olympic Stadium until 2006. In a rare moment of perspective, Bouchard refused to allow funds from the province of Quebec to fund a stadium in an area where "[they] are forced to shut down hospitals."

With no publicly funded stadium on the horizon, Loria quickly got to work gutting the Expos of any value they had.

Loria failed to come up with a contract that would provide the Expos with local television coverage or an English-speaking radio affiliate before the 2000 season, crippling the team's access to non-Francophones in the region.

By 2001, attendance had plummeted to fewer than 10,000 fans a game,



by far the lowest number in baseball. A few individual games even dropped under the 3000 mark.

Without a single marketable player outside of superstar outfielder Vladimir Guerrero, the Expos no longer held any appeal to the city of Montreal. After the 2001 season, the Expos, along with the Minnesota Twins, quickly became a candidate for contraction.

In the span of three short years, Jeffrey Loria took over the Expos with visions of a new ballpark and instead promptly led them to the brink of destruction.

What did he do for an encore? He disappeared.

During the 2002 owners meetings, Loria sold the Expos to a partnership of the 29 other Major League clubs to the tune of \$120 million, essentially selling the team to the commissioner's office. He promptly used those profits to acquire the Marlins from John Henry for \$158.5 million, with the remaining \$38.5 million dollars covered by a no-interest loan from the league.

In a final parting shot to the city of Montreal, Loria took everything he could from the Expos on the way out, moving the team's front office staff, on-field staff, and even their computer equipment with him to Florida.

In the aftermath of the franchise's disemboweling, one anonymous official commented, "No matter how you slice it, [Loria] is pure evil."

Baseball fans know what happened next for the Expos.

After two years of above .500 finishes, Guerrero left town after the 2003 season for Anaheim. Two years later, so did the Expos, arriving in Washington, D.C. just in time for spring training in 2005.

In Miami, history has essentially repeated itself.

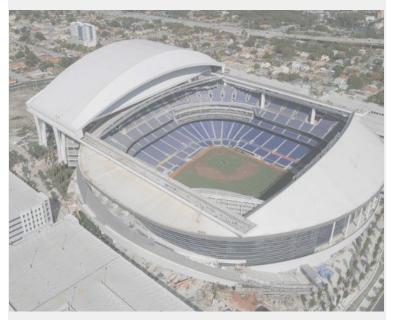
Though the Marlins won the World Series in 2003, Loria's second year of ownership, he immediately followed that period of success with his trademark fire sale, jettisoning Mike Lowell, Josh Beckett, Luis Castillo,



and Juan Pierre. Loria cried poverty due to the lack of a stadium deal.

However, despite operating with baseball's lowest payroll, leaked financial records have shown that, during the 2008 and 2009 seasons, Loria's Marlins actually turned a profit of \$33 million dollars, while receiving almost \$92 million in revenue sharing, the most in baseball.

By the time these documents were released in 2010, though, construction had already begun on Marlins Park. Miami Mayor Manny Diaz and the Miami-Dade County Commission had already taken the bait on Loria's con, hook, line, and sinker.



Marlins Park was supposed to be a symbol of change for Miami fans, an end to the constant fire sales and years of dwelling in baseball's cellar.

But perhaps fans should have known that something was amiss when the Albert Pujols megadeal fell through because of Loria's refusal to include a no-trade clause.

While Pujols did not fall for Loria, others did, including pitcher Mark Looks like we are stuck with him, too.

Buehrle, who feels just as betrayed as the fans.

"Just like the fans in South Florida, I was lied to on multiple occasions," Buehrle said. "But I'm putting it behind me."

The Marlins' spectacular implosion this year was the perfect cover for Loria to treat his roster like the paintings he trades by profession and start one of his famous fire sales.

Where does baseball go from here?

If Marlins Park had not been constructed, contraction would have been a viable option. Loria's shiny new toy takes that option off the table, though some have suggested moving the budget-conscious Tampa Bay Rays, a team searching for a new stadium of their own, to take the Marlins' place.

Despite public pressure to sell the team, Loria has insisted that he committed to building a franchise winnina Miami, a statement that almost no one believes.

It seems that the city of Miami is, sadly enough, stuck with Loria and a losing team for the long haul.

Coincidentally enough, a sculpture donated Loria named Solomon" resides Penn's campus, sitting on the entrance to Locust Walk from 36th Street.





THE DODGERS, THE MARLINS, AND THE CHANGING FINANCIAL LANDSCAPE OF THE MLB

BY: STEVEN TYDINGS

On August 25, 2012, Major League Baseball changed forever. The only problem is that hardly anyone realized it.

At the time, the Boston Red Sox were in the midst of a horrible stretch of baseball. They had lost 87 of their last 152 games dating back to September 1, 2011 and were well on their way to another disappointing season. Their team had mutinied against the manager, and team's brass had a number of large contracts that were undermining their budget.

Meanwhile, the Los Angeles Dodgers were slowly making their way back to relevancy. The team had finally come out from under the abysmal ownership of Frank McCourt and had been sold for \$2 billion, a record amount for a professional sports team. Furthermore, they continued to battle for the pennant with their bitter rivals, the San Francisco Giants.

These factors led to one of the most important trades in MLB history. The Red Sox traded Adrian Gonzalez, Josh Beckett, Carl Crawford, and Nick Punto for James Loney and four prospects from the Dodgers. While the deal may have seemed like an ordinary blockbuster, it was, due to one large factor: money.

The Red Sox had not only dealt three large name players in Gonzalez, Beckett, and Crawford, but had unloaded the large contracts that went with it. Boston had given up over \$260 million in contracts to the Dodgers without paying any of the remaining salaries. There was no deal like this before. It was a trend-setter.

This deal was made possible by the fact that MLB is the only major professional sports league without a salary cap. Furthermore, unlike the NFL, all contracts are guaranteed. A major advantage is given to the larger market teams, who can spend more money and take advantage of free agency because they bring in more money.

Around the turn of the century, more and more teams have begun to sign players to contracts at increasingly exorbitant prices. Teams have become burdened by these large contracts, such as the Texas Rangers' \$252 million agreement with Alex Rodriguez in 2001. Although the Rangers were able to deal Rodriguez's contract as the Red Sox did a decade later, they still had to pay \$67 million of the remaining contract three years later.

Returning to the Adrian Gonzalez trade, the Red Sox were able to get out of three of their large contracts—without paying a single dollar. The Dodgers were more than willing to absorb the contracts, despite the fact that they also gave up multiple their top prospects.

In its 2011 Collective Bargaining Agreement, the NBA added an amnesty clause that allowed teams to remove one of their contracts from the cap records without any ramifications. The Red Sox were able to receive the same salary relief, but they did not need a lockout to achieve it, as teams in the NBA did.



This trade sets the trend for future teams to get out of contract obligations. When management hands out a contract that goes bad, there is now clear precedent on how a team can get out of their dumber decisions without any of the costs. With more teams like the Dodgers getting richer owners and television deals, teams are able to absorb contracts and let the smaller market or less financially savvy teams out of their mistakes.

On November 17, the Marlins were able to take advantage of this new financial precedent. After spending over \$100 million just an offseason ago, the Marlins were able to relief themselves of all their large contracts by trading over \$160 million in remaining obligations to the Blue Jays in the form of Jose Reyes, Mark Buehrle, and Josh Johnson.

The Marlins have been known for selling off their players the year after winning championships. However, this time, they made the deal after finishing well below .500 and a year after opening their new stadium. The Marlins had been criticized for their contracts they handed out in the 2011 offseason, but now they were able to completely circumvent their financial commitments while still receiving taxpayer money to pay for their new stadium.

In the past, the New York Yankees have always been the poster child for reckless spending in MLB. Now, the Dodgers, Red Sox, and Marlins are displaying how a team can make poor financial decisions and avoid dealing with any consequences.

It is only a matter of time before teams give out similarly awful contracts, and the Dodgers and Yankees are waiting to bail out these teams.

Growing up, we are taught that bad things happen to people who do bad things. However, on August 25, 2012, the Dodgers and Red Sox displayed that you can get large rewards for foolish contracts, and this new precedent has changed MLB in the process.

LIONEL MESSI FOR THE 2012 BALLON D'OR AWARD

BY: ZAHED AL SAIFI

The soccer world has run out of superlatives to describe the diminutive Argentinean genius known as Lionel Messi.

Messi has never failed to dazzle millions of fans around the world with his weekly magical performances. In fact, he has elevated his level of play to such a degree that it would be nearly impossible for any soccer player to emulate his feats in the near future.

This year has been no exception for Messi, as he produced yet another stellar season and is touted as the favorite to claim the FIFA Ballon d'Or award for the fourth consecutive year.

Before providing the reasons for why Lionel Messi should be crowned as the winner of this award, it is important to give an overview of this prestigious individual accolade.

prestigious individual award, the FIFA Ballon d'Or.

sports journalists from around the world line up to cast their votes for the player who they believe was the most consistently stellar over the to his name in a single league season. course of a soccer calendar year.

On November 29, the FIFA Soccer Committee and experts from France Soccer magazine announced that the three players shortlisted for the award were Barcelona's Lionel Messi and Andres Iniesta as well as Real Madrid's Cristiano Ronaldo.

This list did not surprise many soccer fans, as all three of these players had stellar seasons in which they shattered personal records and helped their respective teams claim silverware.

However, as always, the pundits were quick to center the attention on Messi and Ronaldo and fuel the ongoing debate about which of the two is more deserving of the award.

It is quite unfair actually that Andres Iniesta, MVP of Euros 2012 and winner of UEFA Best Player in Europe Award, has not received the same acknowledgment as both Messi and Ronaldo. However, it is truly difficult for him to compete with the modern-day legends of the game.

Real Madrid's coach Jose Mourinho recently claimed that the Ballon d'Or winner has already been decided and that the award has been fixed by UEFA to ensure that Lionel Messi wins it for the fourth time in a row.

"The Ballon d'Or has already been given. When the heads of football speak and make the campaign, there is nothing you can do."

Mourinho's statements have absolutely no basis. While Messi is certainly in the lead to claim this year's award, he hardly needs any help from anyone. His performances speak for themselves.



La Liga Records

The month of December is typically the time of year when fans around Messi was at his brilliant best last season, becoming the first player to the world anxiously anticipate the unveiling of soccer's most ever reach the mark of 50 goals in a single season and was recognized as Marca's Pichichi trophy winner.

This award is annually presented by the soccer governing body to the He scored a total of 35 goals in Barcelona's home league matches, best performing soccer player in Europe. Coaches of European soccer setting the record for the highest number of league goals scored in clubs, captains of international teams, and as a litany of ninety-six home games. He also became the youngest La Liga player to ever score 150 career goals and the first player to ever have eight hat-tricks

> However, the manner in which Messi scored his goals was astonishing, particularly in the numerous "man of the match" performances that he produced over the course of the campaign.

> Furthermore, Messi showcased his selflessness by scoring 20 of his Liga goals from collective play and assisting fifteen of his team's goals, putting him only two assists behind than La Liga's top assister Mesut Ozil—an incredible achievement for an attacker.

> Though Ronaldo's achievements in the league are commendable, scoring 46 goals and 12 assists, he still remains in the shadows of

	Total Games	Goals	Assists
Lionel Messi	37	50	15
Cristiano Ronaldo	38	46	12

Champions League Records

The Champions League was no different for Messi, as he garnered a number of achievements and set a laundry list of records:

He became the all-time top scorer of the competition in a single season with 14 goals to his name.

He became the first ever player to be named as the top scorer of Europe's most prestigious competition for four consecutive years.

He became the first player to ever score five goals in one match.



He became the youngest player to score 50 goals in the competition.

He became the top scorer in the knockout stage of the competition, adding to his previous tally to bring it to a total of 26 goals.

Aside from this list of achievements and despite Ronaldo's stellar play, the statistics from the Champions League show Messi's superiority.

	Total Games	Goals	Assists
Lionel Messi	10	14	5
Cristiano Ronaldo	9	10	3

Individual and Team Awards and Club Records

Some fans would argue that Messi did not help his team claim any major silverware last season, whereas Ronaldo was a key reason why Real Madrid captured the La Liga title and why his team was able to break the record of 100 Liga points in a single season.

However, the Ballon D'or is about individual success, and Messi was clearly superior in this regard, breaking record after record and setting the world alight with mesmerizing performances.

Though Barcelona did not lift a major trophy last year, Messi was able to lead his team to four titles: Club World Cup, Copa Del Ray, Spanish Super Cup, and the Uefa Super Cup.

Furthermore, Messi was awarded the European golden shoe for his goal scoring feats, and French publication L'Equipe recognized him as the 2011 "Champion of Champions," putting him above many other inspiring sports figures.

With respect to his club records, Messi is the first player in Barcelona's history to score 73 goals in a single season; yes, 73 goals. He is also Barcelona's all-time leading goal scorer in official matches, having earned 250 goals for his club since his debut.

Moreover, Messi has shown no signs of slowing down this year, as he has already scored 28 goals this season and is one goal short of surpassing Gerd Muller's record of 85 goals in a calendar year. He has also helped Barcelona to their best-ever start in La Liga's history; they sit atop the league 11 points ahead of their archrival Real Madrid.

It is impossible to describe Messi's achievements. In fact, simply noting down his goal-scoring records and honors does not serve him justice.

The soccer world must appreciate the greatness of this young prodigy. He is at the top of the soccer world, and he deserves to receive the FIFA Ballon d'Or award on January 7.

"It is impossible to describe Messi's achievements. In fact, simply noting down his goal-scoring records and honors does not serve him justice...The soccer world must appreciate the greatness of this young prodigy."

RANKING THE 14 BCS

NATIONAL CHAMPIONS

BY: NICHOLAS GREINER

With only two more years of computers and polls deciding the top two teams in the country, it seems to be an appropriate time to look back on the 14 previous BCS National Championships.

With eight title winners and only one title game loss, the SEC has clearly been the most dominant conference in recent history. However, does the SEC boast the best team ever to win a BCS title? Where does USC's vacated national title rank among the group?

Fans of each school that has earned a ring will tell you that their team was the best of group. Using a mixture of statistics and analysis, let's settle this debate once and for all.



Record: 12-2

Best Regular Season Win: 48-7 vs. #9 Virginia Tech

The only national champion to lose multiple games, LSU fell to Kentucky and Arkansas in two triple overtime games. Matt Flynn led the offense while Glenn Dorsey led the defense. The Tigers had seven players drafted that following year as Les Miles became the second coach to win a championship at LSU in a five-year span.

No. 13 - 2006 Florida Gators

Record: 13-1

Best Regular Season Win: 23-10 vs. #9 LSU

Heisman winner Troy Smith was held to only four completions by the Gator defense in the championship game. Ohio State totaled only 82 yards of offense in the 41-14 loss. Tim Tebow threw for two touchdowns in the title game. Three All-America defensive players led the charge behind coach Urban Meyer.

No. 12 - 1998 Tennessee Volunteers

Record: 13-0

Best Regular Season Win: 22-3 @ #7 Georgia

This team featured 16 NFL players. The running back stable included Travis Henry and Jamal Lewis. Peerless Price amassed almost half of Tennessee's passing yards and touchdowns. The defense gave up more than 20 points just three times. But with three games decided by four or fewer points including an overtime game against Florida, this championship almost never was.

No. 11 - 2000 Oklahoma Sooners

Record: 13-0

Best Regular Season Win: 31-14 vs. #1 Nebraska

The Sooners cruised to a national championship, only winning by single digits three times. The road was difficult, as Heisman runner-up quarterback Josh Heupel faced teams ranked in the top eight on four different occasions. A dominant performance in the championship game to deny Florida State a second-straight title capped off a great season for Bob Stoops and company.



Record: 14-0

Best Regular Season Win: 56-17 vs. #18 South Carolina

Superman Cam Newton helped the Tigers win seven games by single digits en route to Auburn's second national title. Defensive tackle

Nick Fairley anchored a defense that held the speedy Oregon offense to just 19 points in the championship game. It took six wins over top 25 teams for the high-powered Auburn offense to navigate through their 2010 schedule.

No. 8 - 2003 LSU Tigers

Record: 13-1

Best Regular Season Win: 34-13 vs. #5

Georgia

The first BCS national champion to lose a game, LSU fielded a defense that led the way for the team. Allowing 11 points per game and only once giving up more than 14 points, Nick

Saban's first national championship team featured four quarterbacks that would play in the NFL. Matt Flynn, JaMarcus Russell, Joseph Addai, and Dwayne Bowe were all backups on a deep LSU offense.

No. 7 - 2011 Alabama Crimson Tide

Record: 12-1

Best Regular Season Win: 31-10 @ #12 Florida

Last year's national champions never came in at No. 1 in the rankings. Five of the top 35 selections in the 2012 draft came from this team, and even more of Alabama players are projected to be drafted this coming May. The only time quarterback A.J. McCarron and the Crimson Tide offense scored less than 20 points was in their loss to #1 LSU. Nick Saban earned revenge against his former team in the BCS title game, earning his third title in eight seasons. Alabama set a BCS-era season record by allowing only 8.2 points per game.

No. 6 - 1999 Florida State Seminoles

Record: 12-0

Best Regular Season Win: 30-23 @ #4 Florida

Todd Bowden earned his second national championship for coaching an incredibly balanced team. With four defensive starters that would become first day draft picks and coordinator Mark Richt's offense scoring 37.5 points per game, the first team in NCAA history to hold the No. 1 spot from preseason to the national championship in all three polls rolled through the competition.

No. 5 - 2008 Florida Gators

Record: 13-1

Best Regular Season Win: 51-21

vs. #4 LSU

Both offensive coordinator Dan Mullen and defensive coordinator Charlie Strong went on to become college head coaches. Tim Tebow and Urban Meyer earned their second national championship in three years. Four AP All-SEC First Teamers helped the Gators outscore opponents by 30.7 points per game.



No. 4 - 2005 Texas Longhorns

Record: 13-0

Best Regular Season Win: 25-22 @ #4 Ohio State

A 70-3 Big 12 Championship win over Colorado perfectly explains the season Vince Young's Longhorns had in 2005. Texas ran roughshod through the competition, averaging 50.2 per game on their way to victory over the defending national champion USC Trojans. It took a touchdown with 19 seconds remaining on the clock to down the Trojans. A total of 24 future NFL draft picks were on Mack Brown's championship roster.



No. 3 - 2009 Alabama Crimson Tide

Record: 14-0

Best Regular Season Win: 32-13 vs. #1 Florida

Nick Saban earned his second national championship with as many teams. One of the more dominant teams in recent memory, the Crimson Tide won as Heisman trophy winner Mark Ingram and future Heisman-winner Trent Richardson took pressure off quarterback Greg McElroy. Rolando McClain, Mark Barron, and Javier Arenas anchored an Alabama defense that held opponents under ten points on six different occasions.

No. 2 - 2004 USC Trojans (Officially no champion)

Record: 13-0 (Officially 11-0)

Best Regular Season Win: 23-17 vs. #7 California

The only vacated championship used to belong to Pete Carroll and the Trojans. Heisman trophy winner Matt Leinart and future Heisman trophy winner Reggie Bush led the team's high-powered offense. This team also contained 18 future first-day draft picks including Clay Matthews, Steve Smith, Winston Justice, and Lofa Tatupu.

No. 1 - 2001 Miami Hurricanes

Record: 12-0

Best Regular Season Win: 49-27 @ #14 Florida State

Beating opponents by 32.9 points per game and defeating ranked opponents consecutively by a score of 124-7 were only a couple of this team's accomplishments. 13 first-round draft picks came from this Hurricanes team. Frank Gore was the third-string running back behind Clinton Portis and Willis McGahee. By halftime of the championship game, Miami led 34-0.

THE FIGHTING IRISH: NOTRE DAME'S GOLD STILL SHINES.

BY: RILEY STEELE

"Cheer, Cheer for Old Notre Dame"

These words, taken from the fight song of the University of Notre Dame, never seemed as appropriate as they did over the past two decades. Since 1988, fans of the Fighting Irish have clamored, hoped, cheered, and of course, prayed for a return to dominance, a return to glory. It has been 24 years since Notre Dame has won a national championship in football. 24 long, unusual years.

Irish fans have seen the likes of Bob Davie, Tyrone Willingham, and of course, the "schematically advantaged" Charlie Weis come and go, coaches hired and then dismissed faster than you can say "BCS." Not only has it been a long wait since the Irish last won a title, it has also been an arduous one, filled with disappointment, bitterness, and even tragedy.

Following the 2009 season, Brian Kelly was hired as the head coach of Notre Dame football. At the first press conference after his hiring, Kelly said, "There's the football coach, and then there's the football coach at Notre Dame."

At the time, even though it had been 21 years since Notre Dame last won a title and the program had not been to BCS bowl game since 2006, the aura of Notre Dame still existed. The legacy was still there. And neither seemed to be going anywhere.

Entering the 2012 season, Notre Dame seemed to be going nowhere fast. After two 8-5 seasons under Kelly, Irish fans and critics alike were expecting another mediocre season. At Notre Dame, a school with a football team so revered it has its own television contract and an 85,000-seat stadium, average is not acceptable, and it has never been.

Still, here were the 2012 Fighting Irish, a team prepared to start its



season with the toughest schedule in the nation, without a clear-cut starting quarterback, and with more questions than returning starters.

The "Old Notre Dame," the Notre Dame of the 1970's and 1980's, the Notre Dame that featured greats such as Tim Brown, Tony Rice, and Joe Montana, the Notre Dame that was coached by legends such as Knute Rockne, Lou Holtz, and Ara Parseghian...well, that Notre Dame seemed long gone. Notre Dame had accepted a new normal, a new standard, and this "new" Notre Dame was rooted in mediocrity.

Perhaps the most outspoken critic of the Fighting Irish football program is world-renowned sports journalist, Rick Reilly. An 11-time National Sportswriter of the Year, Reilly made it clear that "[he] once loved Notre Dame Football," but, as he put it, "[he] grew up." In an article that was published on ESPN less than a month before the beginning of the 2012 season, Reilly wrote the following:

"When did I quit on Notre Dame? When it quit on itself."

"You are not royalty anymore, Notre Dame. Turn in your tiara."

"And with Kelly throwing the QB job up for grabs again, instead of just handing it to Tommy Rees once his one-game suspension is up, this season looks like 7-5 to me, with L's to Michigan State, Michigan, Oklahoma, Pittsburgh and you don't even want to know what USC will do to the Irish in the Coliseum. Cue the DentDoctor.com Bowl."

At the time, Reilly stood by his comments, as did other college football fans. But nearly three weeks later, a funny thing happened: the season began, and Notre Dame was not losing.

First Navy, and then Purdue. Both battled the Irish, and both lost. Still, nobody thought it necessary to talk about a team that had only

escaped Purdue on a late field goal. The biggest storyline of the first two weeks of the Irish season was that they opened up in Ireland and had managed to keep college kids sober enough to defeat the Midshipmen by 40 points.

It seems that the turning point of the season for the Fighting Irish may not have come in a game at all, but on a less-than-normal Wednesday in mid-September. As the Irish prepared for their upcoming game against Michigan State, a team ranked tenth in the nation at that point, senior linebacker Manti Te'o was informed that both his grandmother and girlfriend had passed away. A four-year starter on the Irish defense, Te'o could have chosen to fly back to his native Hawaii to be with family and friends in his time of need.

The next several days could have singlehandedly defined Te'o's career at Notre Dame, had it not been for the events of the rest of the season. The Saturday following the tragic news that struck, Te'o recorded 12 tackles, deflected two passes, snagged an interception, and led the Irish to their first victory over a top-10 team in seven seasons.

For the first time since 2005, Notre Dame was 3-0.

A week later, the Irish returned home to face their hated rivals from Michigan. Over the past decade, any Irish fan will tell you that of the three most painful moments that they had experienced, two had come at the hands of Michigan quarterback Denard Robinson, who led the Wolverines to last-second victories over the Fighting Irish in both 2010 and 2011.

Returning to play at home for the first time since the death of his grandmother and girlfriend, Te'o played inspired football, picking off two Robinson passes in a 13-6 Irish victory. After the game, there

was not a dry eye in the stadium, and every person in the student section at Notre Dame Stadium was wearing a Hawaiian lei to honor

At 4-0, the Irish seemed to be rolling.

But surely they would stumble. The Irish were led by redshirt Freshman quarterback in Everett Golson. His inexperience would certainly get in the way. And Te'o and his defense were playing at a superhuman rate. Clearly it would be impossible for the Irish to win out. They still had to play Stanford, at Oklahoma, and at the preseason No. 1-ranked team in the country, USC. At best, maybe



Notre Dame would finish 10-2, if they were lucky.

Eight weeks later, the Irish were 11-0. Ranked No. 1 in the nation for the first time since the BCS format was instituted, the Irish just had to defeat a USC team that was without its senior starting quarterback Matt Barkley and that had already lost four games after being ranked No. 1 to start the season.

If they won the game, the Fighting Irish would be headed to South Beach to play for the national championship. Three months ago, most college football fans assumed that the roles would be reversed: it would be a mediocre Notre Dame team coming into Los Angeles to try and spoil USC's chances of playing for a title.

Unpredictable might be the only word to describe the situation.



With a strong defensive stand, led by none other than the Heisman candidate Te'o, the Irish escaped L.A. with a berth in the National Championship game in early January. After the game, Irish players and

fans rejoiced in glory, at least in their return to it.

Gone are the days of 3-9 or even 8-5. Relevant? Somewhere, Rick Reilly is cringing at the thought that he, somehow, could have been so painfully wrong.

It hasn't been pretty; the past 12 games have been the complete opposite. But with the best defense in the country, a powerful running game led by Theo Riddick, a blossoming young quarterback, and solid coaching on all fronts, the Fighting Irish have restored order to the college football world.

Their mission is not over. At Notre Dame, teams are measured by the number of championships they win, not by how many games are played. Though there is over a month between the Fighting Irish's last game and the national championship game against Alabama or Georgia, Notre Dame will be ready when it takes the field in Miami on January 7.

Remember when Rick Reilly said the Irish would lose to Michigan State, Michigan, Oklahoma, Pittsburgh, and of course, USC? They came, they saw, and like the leaves on the trees that adorn the Notre Dame campus, they fell.

The echoes have been awakened once again. The Golden Dome shines bright, the helmets of the Irish players glisten, and although "the odds may be great or small," it seems that, like olden days, "Old Notre Dame will win over all."

The echoes have been awakened once again. The Golden Dome shines bright, the helmets of the Irish players glisten, and...it seems that, like olden days, "Old Notre Dame will win over all."

PAY FOR PLAY: COLLEGE ATHLETES DESERVE TO BE PAID.

BY: NICHOLAS GREINER

One of the oldest debates surrounding college sports concerns whether or not the athletes should be paid. Those in favor of payment cite the sums of money brought in by star players in professional sports such as football, basketball, and baseball. Those against the idea say that the scholarship is a form of payment already.

That is where settling this debate needs to begin. How much does an athlete really make for the school, and what is the value of the scholarship?

According to *The New York Times*, some experts calculate that the average value of a scholarship awarded to a college athlete falls about \$3,500 short per year of meeting the cost of college life. It was not until two years ago that colleges had the option of offering four-year scholarships.

In addition, a student could have his or her funding cut because of an injury or a number of other reasons that could possibly warrant the



loss of a scholarship. This situation forces athletes every year to withdraw from school or figure out another way to pay for their education.

Plans made by the NCAA to offer a \$2,000 stipend in order to cover the costs of college were rejected by the universities that claimed it would cause budgetary problems. The stipend may be implemented in the future, but for now, it is off the table.

The rules on student athletes are incredibly stringent. An athlete who accepts a free meal from a family friend or fan can face the wrath of the NCAA. Yet with the big business of college sports growing each year as schools find more ways to make big profits off their "student athletes," the athletes fall further and further behind.

Another downside of the current rules is that they force talented high school students to enter college when they could make money straight out of high school. Talented artists can sell paintings for a living and never go to college, but talented basketball players must attend college for one year before they can profit from their talents.

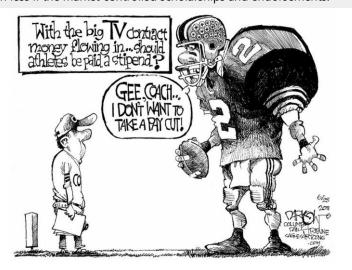
Of course, there is one alternative that is becoming more popular with top players. Basketball players can choose to play a season overseas until they become eligible for the NBA draft.

If a top high school football recruit suffers a career-ending injury during his sophomore year of college, he will never see a dime for the work he has put in on and off

the field during both his two years of college and during his high school career.

Had he instead invested that time at even a minimum wage job, he would at least have some financial benefit. Assume that this athlete had put forth four hours of effort, six days a week, for the past five years in order to make it to his level. Working at a minimum wage job, he would have accumulated over \$45,000 had he spent those hours working instead of practicing football.

Now most people will correctly point out that some sports are less popular than others in college and that those athletes would probably earn less if the market controlled scholarships and endorsements.



So how would a system paying athletes actually work? Would each sport make the same amount of money or would each sport be able to award money based on the amount of revenue generated? Should certain athletes earn more money than other teammates?

Most people would agree that athletes deserve to have a certain standard of living in college. Too often we see college athletes who are nationally renowned living in poverty or close to it, such as members of the Fab Five.

The rules do not allow for any additional financial support to athletes who come from disadvantaged backgrounds, often causing less fortunate players to live in harsh conditions.

Companies such as Nike and Reebok exist to turn a profit. The goal of universities should be to educate the youth and foster growth endorsement deals while in college, while still prohibiting them from receiving university money beyond what their scholarships already allow.

"Talented artists can sell paintings for a living and never go to college, but talented basketball players must attend college for one year before they can profit from their talents." Under this system, the star college quarterback will still make more than the backup kicker, as the case would be if he were to go on to play in the NFL. Athletes in sports generating more money will still be paid more than athletes who play sports that are less popular.

Athletes in niche markets such as Baylor women's basketball, Duke lacrosse, Northwestern women's lacrosse, or Boston College hockey would still have an opportunity to make money.

However, to assume that all sports are created equal is a fallacy in most cases.

Revisiting the Fab Five, if Chris Webber and Jalen Rose had been able to sign shoe deals while still playing at Michigan, then they would have had warm clothes for the winter and would not have had to worry about when they would see their next meal.

At the same time, scholarships should represent a four-year commitment to which the universities are bound. If a star player suffers an injury, his or her endorsement deals may vanish, but at least he or she will have the opportunity to finish college.

This rule might cause athletic departments to cut some sports; however, the trade-off is a favorable one. It seems fairer to guarantee most college athletes a four-year education than to make all players hope they stay healthy and able to produce on the field of play.

With billions of dollars entangled in March Madness and BCS bowl games, surely there are a few thousand dollars in it for the athletes. Covering the costs of living seems to be the smallest way for companies such as Nike and Adidas to reward the athletes

After all, their numbers and jerseys are profitable, and these companies make money off all the top players. Everyone else in the college sports industry is getting paid, and the players that make that market possible deserve to be paid too.

REFERENCES:

The Penn Sport Report does not claim ownership of any images posted. Credit for images is posted when the author is known. No copyright infringement intended. Apologizes in advance if a photo has been displayed without the proper credit.

The Penn Sport Report also does not claim any ownership rights in the text, files, images, video, sounds, works of authorship, or other materials that you submit to the magazine (collectively, "Content"). After submitting Content to this publication, you continue to retain all ownership rights in such Content. By submitting Content to the magazine, you hereby grant to us a license to use, modify, publicly perform, publicly display, reproduce and distribute such Content for any purpose without compensation to you. The license to us is nonexclusive, fully paid, royalty-free, sub-licensable, and worldwide.

Cover

LeBron James: NBA Media Ventures

Table of Contents

LeBron James and Dwyane Wade Photo:

Philadelphia Phillies Photo: John G. Mabanglo/European Pressphoto Agency

Fantasy Football is Changing the Way Fans See the Game.

Arian Foster Photo: AJ Guel/AJ Guel Photography

Hakeem Nicks Photo: US Presswire

Paul Bond. "What Fantasy Football Means to Hollywood." The Hollywood Reporter.

Ray Vichot. "History of Fantasy Sports and Its Adoption by Sports Journalists." NEWSGAMES.

A Defense of the Much-Maligned Michael Vick

"Philadelphia Eagles – Player Contract Information," Rotoworld.

"Philadelphia Eagles Postgame Quotes," NewOrleansSaints.com.

Jeff McLane. "Michael Vick's days in Philadelphia appear to be numbered." The Philadelphia Inquirer.

Kevin Patra. "Donovan McNabb defends Michael Vick as Eagles' QB." NFL.com.

Michael Vick Photo: 4UMF News

Michael Vick Press Conference Photo: Larry French/Getty Images

Michael Vick Throwing Football Photo: Associated Press

Michael Vick vs. New York Giants Photo: Al Bello/Getty Images

Michael Vick with Reporters Photo: Lindsay Barnett/Los Angeles Times

Who is This Year's NFL MVP? Four Candidates

Aaron Rodgers Photo: Benny Sieu/US Presswire Matt Ryan Photo: Ronald Joseph/Atlanta Falcons Staff

NFL Comeback Player of the Year: Two Players Who Weren't Supposed to Be This Good This Year

Adrian Peterson Photo: Ochocinco News Network Peyton Manning Photo: Ron Chenoy/US Presswire

2013 NBA Finals Debate: Heat Up the Queso, 'Cause More Chips 'A Coming.

Miami Heat Big 3 Photo: TJMS/WTLC

"NBA & ABA Single Season Leaders and Records for Player Efficiency Rating," Basketball-Reference.com

"NBA & ABA Single Season Playoff Leaders and Records for Player Efficiency Rating," Basketball-Reference.com

2013 NBA Finals Debate Continued: The L.A. Lakers Are the Perfect Team to Beat the Miami Heat.

Carlos Chalhoub. "Style of Play of Point Guards," Basketball-Statistics.com.

Dwight Howard Photo: Maxwell Ogden/Los Angeles Lakers Staff

Kobe Bryant and Dwight Howard Photo: Jayne Kamin Oncea/US Presswire

Kobe Bryant and Metta World Peace Photo: Ronald Martinez/Getty Images

LeBron James and Kobe Bryant Photo: Mike Ehrmann/Getty Images

End the Comparisons. There Will Never Be Another Michael Jordan.

Michael Hiestand. "Charles Barkley: LeBron James is better than Michael Jordan." USA Today.

Michael Jordan Photo: Jeff Cormier/Getty Images

Scott Leedy. "Escaping the Shadow: Moving Past Michael Jordan." Hardwood Paroxysm.

"Scottie Pippen: LeBron May Be Greatest Player Ever, Michael Jordan Best Scorer." The Huffington Post.



Forget the Statistics. Kobe Bryant Is the King of Clutch.

Adrian Wojnarowski. "Kobe full of fuel for title drive." Yahoo! Sports.

John Paulsen. "Who is best in the clutch? (Hint: It's not Kobe.)." The Scores Report.

Kobe Bryant Airplane Photo: Harry How/Getty Images Kobe Bryant Photo: Rick Bowmer/Associated Press

2008: The Year the Phillies Were Going to Win the World Series—An Oral History

Brad Lidge Photo: Jerry Lodriguss/*The Philadelphia Inquirer* Cole Hamels Photo: Matt Gelb/*The Philadelphia Inquirer* Philadelphia Phillies Photo: Michael Heiman/Getty Images

The Fraud of Jeffrey Loria: How One Man Ruined Two Franchises

"Mark Buehrle: Marlins Lied to Me." ESPN.com.

"MLB Approves Mega-Deal between Blue Jays and Marlins." TSN.com.

Charles Rabin. "Miami-Dade Challenging \$1.7 million of Marlins Expenses at New Ballpark." The Miami Herald.

Jeffrey Loria Photo: Marc Serota/Getty Images

Ken Rosenthal. "Owner Loria Should Just Sell Marlins." FoxSports.com.

King Solomon Photo: Linguistic Data Consortium/University of Pennsylvania

Mark Buehrle and Jeffrey Loria Photo: Associated Press

Marlins Park Photo: Miami Marlins Staff

Michael Levesque. "Expos Front Office Implodes." BaseballAmerica.com.

Richard Griffin. "Griffin: Miami Marlins Set to Be a Huge Bonanza for Loria." TheStar.com.

Tommy Craggs. "MLB Confidential: The Financial Documents Baseball Doesn't Want You To See, Part 1." Deadspin.com.

The Dodgers, the Marlins, and the Changing Financial Landscape of the MLB

"Selig Gives Blessing to Mega-Merger." ESPN.com.

"Toronto Blue Jays – Cot's Baseball Contracts," Baseball Prospectus.

Adrian Gonzalez Photo: Stephen Dunn/Getty Images

Dylan Hernandez and Steve Dilbeck. "Adrian Gonzalez trade completed; a Dodgers-Red Sox blockbuster." Los Angeles Times

Lionel Messi for 2012 Ballon the D'Or Award

"FIFA Ballon d'Or 2012 Nominees: Lionel Messi, Cristiano Ronaldo and Andres Iniesta Named In Short-list." CaughtOffSide.com.

"Messi's Magical Season for 2011/2012," FC Barcelona News.

Lionel Messi and Ballon D'Or Photo: Scott Heavey/Getty Images

Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo Photo: Associated Press

Lionel Messi Photo: Sky Sports

Ranking the 14 National BCS Champions

BCS Logo: Michael Welp/NBC

Reggie Bush Photo: Associated Press

Tim Tebow Photo: Bill Frakes/Sports Illustrated

The Fighting Irish: Notre Dame's Gold Still Shines.

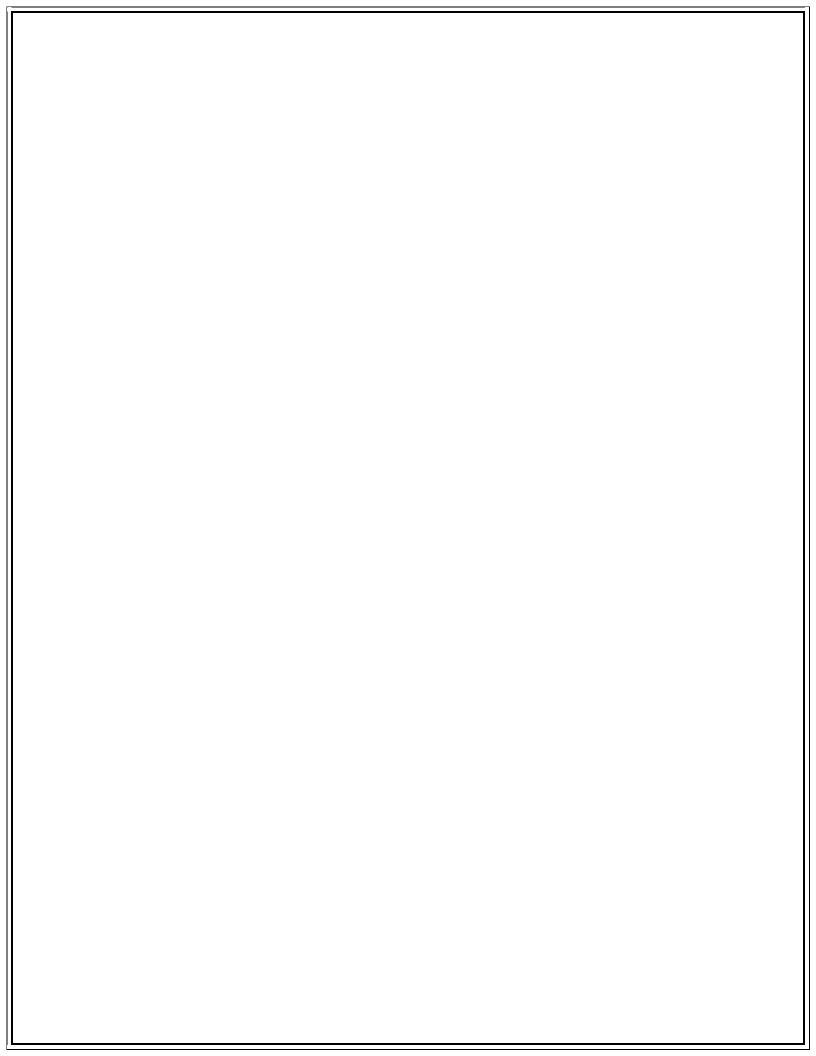
Manti Te'o Photo: Darron Cummings/Associated Press

Matt Cashore/US Presswire

Rick Reilly. "Demoting Notre Dame," ESPN.com.

Pay for Play: College Athletes Deserve to Be Paid.

Cartoon: John Darkow/Columbia Daily Tribune Money Photo: Sarah Cwynar/The New York Times





www.pennsportreport.org www.facebook.com/thepennsportreport www.twitter.com/pennsportreport

