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Wednesday, March 5, 2008

Sports

MacombDaily.com



INSIDE
So far, Miguel Cabrera living up to his promise — 2C

De La Salle upended by Trenton

Goal with 1:53 left in game sinks Pilots in quarterfinals, 3-2

By John Hetzler
Macomb Daily Sports Writer

WYANDOTTE — John Kleinhans and De La Salle's hockey team deflected the blows from the state's top-ranked team all night before Trenton delivered a knockout punch in the final moments.

Junior forward Camden Wojtala scored with one minute and 53 seconds remaining to derail a solid state-tournament run by Kleinhans and De La Salle and lift Trenton to a 3-2 victory in a Division 2 state quarterfinal on Tuesday at Yack Arena.

High School Hockey

"We had our game plan to keep the game close, and we were shooting for overtime," said De La Salle coach Dan Barry, whose team claimed its first regional championship, won the Catholic League crown and finished with a 17-10-2 overall record. "We thought if we could get them into overtime, we'd have a pretty good chance. One bad play, and they capitalized on it."

Wojtala scored on assists from Josh Miller and Kody Polin to ruin a stellar outing from Kleinhans, who made 28 saves for the Pilots.

"He played great," Wojtala said. "We had a ton of shots. He kept the puck out of the net, sometimes I don't know how."

Cory Denback and Aaron Leszczynski also scored for Trenton, which improved to 23-1-4 and advanced to Thursday's state semifinals.

Senior captain Dexter Jacques and senior Brandon Hempel scored for De La Salle, which rallied from an early 2-0 deficit to tie the game in the third period.

Bill Coole, David Sitarski, Jeremy Gave and Joe Arena had assists for the Pilots.

"It was a desperation game for both teams," Trenton coach Mike Turner said. "No one wanted to lose it."

Trenton started strong, scoring two goals during a 32-second stretch of the first period to put De La Salle behind quickly.

The Trojans struck first on Denback's unassisted, power-play goal with 6:52 left in the

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Macomb Daily staff photo by Ray J. Skowronek
De La Salle's Chris Clements skates up ice during the Pilots Division 2 state quarterfinal game against Trenton on Tuesday.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ CLASS B-C-D ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

ALL-STARS



The Macomb County Class B-C-D All-Star Girls Basketball First Team: From left, Kristian Hines of Fitzgerald, Leah Semik of Memphis, Tornisha Jones of Mount Clemens, Taylor Prior of Armada, and Stephanie Lee of Center Line. See Page 3C for player profiles and a complete list of the team.

Streaking Dakota to face the unknown

By Amanda Lee
Macomb Daily Sports Writer

When the Dakota Cougars face off on the ice with the Grosse Pointe North Norsemen tonight in a Division 1 quarterfinal game, the most important thing is sticking to their game plan.

"We've had a good run in the playoffs so far this season and I think it's because we had a set plan in place for the game and the guys went into those games and stuck to those game plans," said Dakota

High School Hockey

coach Dave Koons, who's Cougars have went 20-4-3 on the season thus far.

The Cougars have marched solidly through the playoffs up to this point, beating Utica (3-0) and Eisenhower (5-1) in pre-regional games and Troy Athens (3-2, OT) in the regional final.

"They've played pretty good throughout the playoffs, I mean the Troy Athens game was probably the hardest but it's supposed to get harder as you go through the playoffs," Koons said.

During their run, the Norsemen beat University of Detroit Jesuit (2-1) and Lakeview (3-0) in pre-regional games and Livonia Stevenson (2-1, OT) in the regional final.

"We've heard that they're in a tough division and we haven't played them this season so we're not quite sure what to expect," Koons said. "We have to settle into the game I guess to find out."

The fact that the Cougars finished the season so strongly is a testament to their work ethic, Koons said. When they opened the season this year they played Traverse City Central in an early scrimmage and "had their butts handed to them."

"Ever since then, they've really dedicated themselves to getting better so that didn't happen again," Koons said. "I think that was a real wake-up call for them."

The Cougars' other losses came from Detroit Country Day, Utica, Port Huron Northern and a dominating Midland team.

"I think Midland was the toughest team we played all season without a doubt. They were really strong and I think the guys learned a lot from that game because they were so strong," Koons said. "They're

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Pistons ignite in 2nd half

The Associated Press

AUBURN HILLS — Tayshaun Prince scored 24 points, Chauncey Billups added 20 points and nine assists, and the Detroit Pistons overcame a slow start to beat the Seattle SuperSonics 100-97 Tuesday night.

Seattle shot 82 percent in the first quarter on its way to a 41-28 lead, but that fell to 32 percent in the final three periods as the SuperSonics lost for the fifth

time in six games. The Pistons have won five of six and have defeated the Sonics seven straight times.

Billups' buzzer-beating 3-pointer cut Seattle's lead to 78-77 going into the fourth, and the Pistons took control with a 13-2 run to begin the period. The Sonics, who went 0-for-12 to start the second quarter, started the fourth by missing 10 of their first 11.



Up Next
Detroit at Boston
Time: 7:30 p.m.
Today
TV: Ch. 20



AP photo
Seattle SuperSonics guard Kevin Durant, right, goes to the basket against Detroit Pistons forward Tayshaun Prince in the first half in Auburn Hills.

Earl Watson's driving layup with 43 seconds left, but Amir Johnson answered with a basket at the other end.

Prince blocked Kevin Durant's shot, and Watson and Chris Wilcox both missed desperate shots before Billups clinched the game for the line.

Richard Hamilton scored 18 for Detroit. Watson had 23 for Seattle, while Wilcox and Durant added 20 apiece.

After reaching a season high for points in the first quarter on 18-of-21 shooting, the Sonics collapsed early in the second, managing just one point in the first seven minutes.

That let the Pistons pull to 42-38 after trailing by as many as 15, and Seattle's lead was just 54-53 at the half.

Favre: 'I'm just tired'

Green Bay QB calls it quits after 17 years.

The Associated Press

GREEN BAY, Wis. — After flirting with retirement for years, Brett Favre means it this time. The Green Bay Packers quarterback ended a 17-season career in which he dazzled fans with his grit, heart and rocket of an arm.

NFL

"I know I can still play, but it's like I told my wife,

"I'm just tired mentally. I'm just tired," Favre told ESPN's Chris Mortensen in a voice mail message.

Tuesday's surprise move comes just months since the 38-year-old three-time MVP set several league records, including most career touchdown passes, in one of his most successful seasons.

Coach Mike McCarthy said Favre informed him of the decision by telephone Monday night.

"He said it was time for him to hang up the cleats," McCarthy said at a news conference Tuesday afternoon.

Favre's agent, Bus Cook, also learned of the decision Monday.

"Nobody pushed Brett Favre out the door, but then nobody encouraged him not to go out that

Packing it in

NFL records (career)

Passing yards
Favre 61,655
D. Marino 61,361
J. Elway 51,475

Passing attempts
Favre 8,758
Marino 8,358
Elway 7,250

Completions
Favre 5,377
Marino 4,967
Elway 4,123

Touchdown passes
Favre 442
Marino 420
F. Tarkenton 342

Highlights
■ Nine-time Pro Bowler
■ Made All-Pro team seven times

SOURCE: National Football League

Top go-to guys

Receivers with most Favre TD catches:

A. Freeman 57
S. Sharpe 41
D. Driver 36
R. Brooks 32



door, either," Cook said by phone from his Hattiesburg, Miss., office.

Packers general manager Ted Thompson thanked Favre for 16 years of wonderful memories with the team.

"His accomplishments are legendary," Thompson said. "And it's the passion with which he played that made everyone a Brett Favre fan."

The team hasn't said when Favre might address the media.

Favre led the Packers to the NFC championship game in January, but his interception in overtime set up the New York Giants' winning field goal.

"If I felt like coming back — and Deanna (Favre's wife) and I talked about this — the only way

for me to be successful would be to win a Super Bowl," Favre told ESPN. "To go to the Super Bowl and lose, would almost be worse than anything else. Anything less than a Super Bowl win would be unsuccessful."

Last season, Favre broke Dan Marino's career records for most touchdown passes and John Elway's record for most career victories by a starting quarterback.

He retires with 5,377 career completions in 8,758 attempts for 61,655 yards, 442 touchdowns and 288 interceptions.

"He was the prototypical gunslinger type," said Marv Levy, Pro Football Hall of Fame coach.

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SPORTS INSIDER

On the mend

Red Wings captain Nicklas Lidstrom, left, could be back by Sunday's matchup with Nashville.

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SPORTS

Wings' defense getting healthier

By Bruce MacLeod

Macomb Daily Sports Writer

DETROIT — Nicklas Lidstrom, Chris Chelios and Brian Rafalski were all on the Joe Louis Arena ice for the Detroit Red Wings practice, Tuesday.

With any luck, that look might be one that the Red Wings will soon be able to sport on game nights. All three defensemen have been sidelined for a week and a half — Lidstrom and Rafalski for more than two weeks — with injuries. All three, however, are close to returning.

Rafalski was removed from the injured reserve list Tuesday and will play against St. Louis tonight (7:30 p.m., FSN) if he doesn't have a setback in the morning skate.

Lidstrom was at practice for the first time since spraining his MCL in Denver, Feb. 18. If practice goes well this week, tonight's game might be the last that Lidstrom misses. A return for Sunday's home game could happen.

"It's a possibility," said Lidstrom. "I felt a little sluggish out there. I haven't skated for two weeks. Skated a little bit (Monday) and felt OK. So I'm hoping it's going to improve and get better the next few days so I can play this weekend.

"I thought it was going to be quicker than it has been. That's what they



Up Next

St. Louis at Detroit

Time: 7:30 p.m.

Today

TV: FSN

told me right after it happened that it takes usually about three weeks for it to start feeling better."

Lidstrom was held out of contact drills at Tuesday's practice, as was Chelios.

"Just with (Lidstrom's) presence, he makes this team better, so it was nice to see him out there," said Henrik Zetterberg.

Chelios (chipped fibula) had a setback at practice last Friday, feeling stiffness in his leg. He didn't skate with the team on the weekend, but took part in Tuesday's practice. Chelios lists himself as day-to-day.

"This time, we'll see (today) if it hasn't gotten worse, I'll continue to skate and wait until I'm ready," said Chelios.

Rafalski (groin) has felt better for a week, but has been held out to make sure that he wasn't returning too early and to improve his conditioning.

"I don't foresee anything keeping me out (tonight)," said Rafalski. "Obviously I'll make sure everything's good (Wednesday) morning, but I'm good to go."

If you put those three defensemen

on the ice, it could mean a reversal of fortunes for a Detroit squad this is 2-8-2 in its past dozen games.

"Just getting healthy is going to be a huge difference," said coach Mike Babcock. "The speed of our team without our back end moving the puck hasn't been as good. We haven't generated near the offense. Even though we've had scoring chances and shots, we haven't been that good."

Rookie will play

Although Rafalski will likely be back in the lineup tonight, Babcock said that rookie Jonathan Ericsson will definitely play tonight as well.

That means that if Rafalski returns, a veteran blue-liner will sit, likely Derek Meech, Brett Lebda or Andreas Lilja.

Babcock would not say who would be a healthy scratch.

General manager Ken Holland said that Ericsson will remain with the team in the short term.

"As soon as he's not in the lineup, we'll send him to Grand Rapids," said Holland.

Between the pipes

Dominik Hasek will make his third consecutive start tonight.

Hasek said that the coaches told him that he'd start on average two of

three games down the stretch.

Hasek, who is slated to be the Red Wings' playoff netminder, missed seven games with a hip flexor.

"We're going to let him get going, get in a groove and feel good about himself," said Babcock. "If he feels good, we feel good. Playoff time is all about goaltending."

This and that

Zetterberg filmed a commercial for the league (to be shown during the playoffs) on the Joe Louis Arena ice surface before Tuesday's practice.

"It's fun," said Zetterberg. "It's the first time. It's going to be fun to see how it will work and how much they will show it." ... Dan Cleary (broken jaw) practiced with the Red Wings for the third time, Tuesday. ... With Darren McCarty scheduled to leave Grand Rapids for Detroit at the end of his conditioning assignment, Monday, the Griffins are commemorating his stay with the team. The first 1,500 fans at tonight's game in Grand Rapids will receive a McCarty poster. ... The Red Wings are having a \$1 concession promotion during March. Tonight's game will feature \$1 popcorn and will be followed later in the month with \$1 hot dogs, ice cream sandwiches and pretzels.

Rodney predicts he'll be ready by opening day

By Jim Hawkins

Journal Register News Service

KESSIMMEE, Fla. — It took less than 10 minutes — 15 tosses to bullpen coach Jeff Jones from 60 feet away, to be exact — but those could turn out to be 10 of the most important minutes of the spring.

Fernando Rodney, shut down for more than a week because of recurring tendinitis in his right shoulder, played catch at Marchant Stadium at 9 a.m. Tuesday morning, then, with a smile, predicted he will be on the mound in an exhibition game in "a couple of weeks" and ready to go on Opening Day.

The Tigers and their fans can only hope. "If nothing happens, I'll be ready," Rodney declared. "I felt good today. Loose. This was a big step. I feel ready to go."

"We'll see," said manager Jim Leyland, who isn't going to rush Rodney — or take his availability for granted. "If Fernando

Rodney is on the roster and healthy, that gives us one more quality major league pitcher in the house."

And right now, with Joel Zumaya sidelined until midseason, Francisco Crueceta still absent from camp because of immigration problems, Clay Rapada on the shelf because of tendinitis in his shoulder and long shot Matt Mantei officially retired, the list of candidates for the opening in the Tigers' bullpen is dwindling. "Nobody is at the head of the class, by any means," Leyland admitted Tuesday. "There is no leading candidate. We're going to throw 'em out there and see what we think."

That is why so much attention has been focused on Rodney's arm. "I know it is very important for me to be in the bullpen," he said. "Last year, I had a lot of things: Shoulder, neck, everything. I want this year to be like 2006. When I tried to throw before, I know my arm wasn't 100 percent. Now my muscle feels 100 percent."

If all goes according to plan, Rodney will gradually increase the number and distance of his throws to strengthen his arm, then throw a bullpen session next week and pitch batting practice after that.

Tigers Notebook

Robertson likes second start

New contract. New baby. New Nate? No Tigers starter made greater strides than Nate Robertson during 2006. And none was more disappointing last season than Robertson at 9-13.

"Nate is one guy who might have felt the extra month the season before," Leyland noted. "He needs to be able to turn the page a little bit when things don't go right. He doesn't turn the page quickly enough sometimes."

On Tuesday, Robertson didn't have to turn the page. Well rested after six hours sleep — the most he has gotten since his son, Wyatt, was born last week — Robertson shut out the Houston Astros for the first three innings of the 11-10 Tiger loss.

"I'm happy with my outing, but it's a little early to get too excited about anything or praise anything," Robertson said, realistically. One thing Leyland won't buy is the oft-heard argument that Robertson's record has suffered because of a lack of run support.

"I don't play that game," Leyland said. "That's just the way it is. That's life. 'I don't want to hear any pitcher say, 'I don't get any runs.' If we score four runs, give up three. If we score two, give up one. If we don't score any, shut 'em out."

Porcello on fast track

First-round draft pick Rick Porcello will make his second and possibly final Grapefruit League appearance of the spring in a split-squad game against the Pirates in Bradenton today.

There was some thought given to letting Porcello start the game, but the Tigers didn't want to put extra pressure on the kid.

"He's the ultimate prospect," Leyland said. "He belongs in big league camp. He's one of the best-looking pitchers in camp. He's special. Everybody knows it."

"He could come quick, or it might take a little longer. You know you've got a real nice package — but you can't open it yet."

Regardless of what happens this spring, Porcello will start his first professional season at Class A Lakeland. Next stop: Double-A Erie.

After that, who knows? It is possible he could make at least a cameo appearance at Comerica Park late this summer.

Short hops

Non-roster rookie outfielder Wilkin Ramirez belted a two-run homer Tuesday, giving him two HRs, seven RBI and .545 average in 11 at-bats this spring. "He's got power and he's got speed, that's a nice combination," Leyland said. "He's crude, but he's got talent. Give him 500 at-bats two years in a row (in the minors) and you might have something."

Todd Jones was ripped for six runs in the fourth inning, but don't be alarmed. "Closers are never good in spring training in the third and fourth inning," Leyland said. "That's been going on for 100 years and it'll go on for another 100 years. He was getting his work in — and today, it didn't work."

Rapada, a left-hander who caught Leyland's eye early in training camp, still hasn't appeared in an exhibition game because of shoulder tendinitis. "I like him a little bit, but obviously he's behind," Leyland admitted.

Mantei, who complained of pain in his shoulder after pitching on Sunday, told the Tigers on Tuesday that he is retiring and the team gave him his release. "I don't want to sound cold, but I think he's doing the right thing," Leyland said.

Izzo breeds a winning feeling in March

Strong showing in Big Ten tourney could lead to a three seed Sunday.

By David Birkett

Journal Register News Service

EAST LANSING — For Michigan State, there's an air of confidence that comes with playing in March.

bolstered by past NCAA tournament success, the Spartans feel almost invincible in college basketball's money month.

On Sunday, they turned the calendar with a dominating 103-74 victory over Indiana, and this week they travel to Illinois and Ohio State for crucial road games that will greatly influence their NCAA seeding.

With two wins and a strong showing in next week's Big Ten tournament, 17th-ranked MSU (23-6, 11-5) could get as high as a three seed on selection Sunday. With two losses, the Spartans could fall to a seven.

"We're a March team," co-captain Travis Walton said. "That's what you come here for. You know that you're going to go to NCAA tournaments and

it's going to be a great outcome, and if not it's a problem."

Since Tom Izzo took over as head coach 13 seasons ago, MSU is 51-25 in March and April, a .671 winning percentage.

While that's actually slightly lower than his overall win rate (70.3 percent), Izzo said players believe in the program's March magic.

"Our players brought it up" before the Indiana game, Izzo said. "Really what it is, it's a way to say OK, we got to let those two losses (at Iowa and Penn State) go because they bothered all of us. They bothered every fan of Michigan State, they bothered me. They bothered us all, but we got to let them go."

"And I think our players believe because of the success we've had in March over the years. When those old guys came back (for a reunion last month, the talk was about) the NCAA tournament, the NCAA tournament."

Mathematically, MSU was eliminated from conference-title contention with last week's loss to Wisconsin. Realistically though, the Spartans have been focused on bigger-pic-

ture goals since road defeats at Purdue and Indiana in mid-February.

They expanded their playing rotation to give freshmen Chris Allen and Durrell Summers more minutes, worked to cut back on their No. 1 nemesis turnovers, and finally seemed to gel against the Hoosiers, when they shot 78 percent in the first half and Izzo praised their sometimes-fleeting chemistry.

"We're going to build on that," Izzo said. "We got a chance to have still one of the greatest years record-wise in the history of this school and that's where we've refocused."

Said guard Drew Neitzel, "We're out of the Big Ten regular season, but we got a couple big road games and if we can get those and have a lot of momentum going into the Big Ten tournament we could be dangerous."

Tourney talk

Izzo said he has no feeling for what seed MSU will get when the brackets are announced next week.

"The only good news to that statement of I don't know is I don't care,"

Venezuelan Cabrera showed greatness from early on

— KISSIMMEE, Fla. The first thing you notice about Miguel Cabrera is how big he is. And I don't mean fat.

Even the other Tigers players and the coaches have commented on it.

His official dimensions, 6-foot-4 and 240, just don't do him justice.

The next thing that strikes you is how young he looks. Just an overgrown baby. A big teddy bear.

Then there is the boyish smile that never seems more than a moment away. He looks happy.

"When you're that good, you should be having fun," Jim Leyland noted as the Tigers went down in wind-blown defeat, 11-10, to the Houston Astros on Tuesday.

"That's one thing I really like, that I didn't know about him: I love his enthusiasm," the Tigers' manager added. "That might be the No. 1 thing I like about him — besides hitting home runs."

For Miguel Cabrera, 24 and already rich beyond his wildest dreams — with much, much more to come — baseball is child's play.

Finally, there is the unmistakable sound when his bat strikes the ball.

The sound of power. The sound of 138 home runs, 513 RBI and a .313 average after less than five full years in the big leagues.

Life is good for the kid from Maracay, Venezuela, who was discovered and signed by Tigers execs Dave Dombrowski and Al Avila nine years ago, when both worked for the Florida Marlins.

The Marlins beat the Yankees and Dodgers to the punch, signing Cabrera for \$1.8 million, at the time a record for a foreign-born amateur player — but chump change compared to what Cabrera stands to bank now. He is a world-class hitter whose statistics after five years invariably draw comparisons with legends such as Mays, Mantle and Aaron.

He reminds Leyland why, early on, he decided to become a manager — and why other wannabes become sports writers.

"He's one of those guys who doesn't

come around very often," Leyland said. "He's more gifted than most."

Dontrelle Willis, Cabrera's teammate first in Florida and now in Detroit, sums up the Tigers' new slugger in four words: "A lot of highlights."

In Florida, Cabrera was the big gun. Here, sitting side by side with batting king Magglio Ordonez, 500 HR candidate Gary Sheffield, Carlos Guillen and Edgar Guillen, Cabrera is, in his words, "one of the guys."

He definitely likes it better this way. "A dream come true," Cabrera calls it. He's not a pampered prima donna. He's definitely not a sulking superstar. And, most important of all, Cabrera says he would like to remain a Tiger for a long time to come.

Watching Cabrera on the field and in the clubhouse, laughing and care-free, you would think the last thing on his mind is money. And it may be. Why should he worry? He's going to get his — if not from the Tigers, then certainly from someone else. And a lot more than the \$11.3 million he is making this year.

The Tigers, at this juncture, are only assured of Cabrera's services through 2009. But they would like to

PILOTS: 'Pefect goals' were De La Salle's downfall, coach says

Continued from Page 1C

first.

Leszczynski followed moments later with a goal off assists from Scott Henezar and Denback to give Trenton a 2-0 lead with 6:20 remaining in the period.

De La Salle cut into its deficit when captain Dexter Jacques scored with

2:46 left in the first, and the Pilots went into the intermission trailing 2-1.

Neither team scored in the second period.

With Kleinhans — whom Barry called the team's "savior" this season — leading the way, De La Salle's defense turned away several good scoring chances by the Trojans.

COUGARS: Group of seniors give Dakota best chance at win

Continued from Page 1C

still in the playoffs too."

Keys for a Dakota win come with seniors Ed Lewis, David Demick and Josh Agrusa on offense, Ken Kolb, Aaron Agrusa and Todd Nichter on defense and Paul Savage in goal.

"I think the greatest thing we've had going for us all season is this group of seniors who have put in four years in this program and really understand the system," Koons said. "They've really led the team on both sides of the puck and a lot of the success they've had is be-

cause of them."

In the end, win or lose, Koons said he is proud of his team and has faith that whatever the outcome they'll put forth a superb effort.

"The whole coaching staff is very proud of them," he said. "They have worked hard all season. They've han-

dled everything we've thrown at them and they deserve everything they've won."

"They've earned a lot of respect from all of us I think," he said.

The Cougars and the Norsemen face off at 8 p.m. today at the St. Clair Shores Civic Arena.