

# LOCAL SPORTS

## Center Grove graduate Ladd to play football for U of I Greyhounds

Former Center Grove High School standout Jimmy Ladd is one of nine players who have signed national letters of intent to continue their careers at the University of Indianapolis. A standout running back and linebacker for the Trojans, Ladd was the Daily Journal's 2003 Johnson County Player of the Year. He briefly attended Purdue on a football scholarship but left the program before completing his freshman season. The 6-foot-3, 220-pound Ladd is expected to play linebacker for the Greyhounds. Roncalli senior Brandon Axum, a defensive back, has also signed a national letter of intent to play at Indianapolis.

### GYMNASTICS

## No. 3 Center Grove stays unbeaten with victory against Perry Meridian

No. 3-ranked Center Grove earned a 109.00-100.70 victory at Perry Meridian on Wednesday. The Trojans are unbeaten in six meets this season. Center Grove's Angela Blankenship edged teammate Megan Roller for first place in the all-around. Blankenship earned a score of 36.3 to Roller's 36.275. Winning individual events for Center Grove were Blankenship (uneven bars), Elaine Maurer (floor exercise) and Katelyn Fernandes (vault).

# FOOTBALL

### DETROIT

## McNabb says Owens' criticism amounts to black-on-black crime

Eagles quarterback Donovan McNabb injected a race element into his rift with Terrell Owens on Wednesday, saying the receiver's criticism amounted to black-on-black crime. In an interview with ESPN, McNabb rehased some of the low moments of his relationship with his teammate, making fun of Owens' driveway apology and bringing up the race angle.



McNABB

In November, responding to a question from Michael Irvin during an ESPN interview, Owens said Philadelphia would likely be in a better situation if Brett Favre was the quarterback instead of the banged-up McNabb. "It was like, it's unreal," McNabb said. "That's like me going out and saying, 'Hey, if we had Steve Largent. If we had Joe Jurevicius.'"

"It was definitely a slap in the face to me. It was a slap in the face because, as deep as people want to go into it, it was black-on-black crime." McNabb brought up some of the criticism he had taken through his career and said Owens was simply piling on with his statement.

"It's different to say, 'If we had Michael Vick or Daunte Culpepper or Steve McNair or Byron Leftwich,'" McNabb said of four black starting quarterbacks. "But to go straight to Brett Favre, that kind of just slapped me in the face like, 'Wow.'"

# HORSE RACING

### LOUISVILLE, Ky.

## Kentucky Derby first: America's greatest race takes title sponsor

The Kentucky Derby will have a sponsor for the first time, striking a five-year deal with a fast-food restaurant company that owns KFC, Taco Bell and Pizza Hut.

Yum Brands Inc., based in Louisville, becomes the first named sponsor of the Derby at Churchill Downs, and the race will be referred to as the Kentucky Derby, presented by Yum Brands, it was announced Wednesday.

The Yum logo will appear under the famed twin spires for the Derby on May 6 and will also be shown on a sign above the starting gate, on the jackets of the pony riders who escort the horses during the post parade, on television billboards and elsewhere around the track.

"You'll see very discreet signage. It won't look like a baseball stadium," Churchill Downs Inc., president Tom Meeker said at a news conference.

It was the latest change at the track, which spent \$121 million and more than three years reworking the grandstand, including Millionaire's Row, in what track officials said was an effort to restore the luster of horse racing. The renovations were finished in time for the 2005 Derby.

# TENNIS

### ZAGREB, Croatia

## Henman beats Gasquet again to advance at Zagreb Indoors tourney

Tim Henman of Britain reached the quarterfinals for the first time in eight months, beating third-seeded Richard Gasquet 6-4, 6-4, Wednesday at the Zagreb Indoors.

It was the second time Henman defeated the Frenchman in less than a month.

Qualifier Stefan Koubek of Austria also reached the final eight by defeating Stanislas Wawrinka of Switzerland 6-4, 6-4.

All four Croats in the draw made the second round in a boost for the home crowd. Top-seeded Ivan Ljubicic rallied past Britain's Andy Murray 4-6, 6-2, 6-3.

# Scorers

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE B1)

only played here three years. "That's because a serious knee injury wiped out all but seven games of her freshman season, a significant setback that almost certainly won't exclude her from the exclusive 1,000-point club. Her indomitable spirit and passion for the game are the reasons why.

### Rebounding from adversity

When Liffick got to Evansville, she didn't know what to expect. In high school, she started every game of a four-year varsity career that began Day 1 of her freshman season. She never missed a game, or a start, in high school, a streak of 86 contests. More remarkably, she scored in double figures in all 86.

Not accustomed to watching from the bench, Liffick wanted to play immediately at the next level but wasn't sure what her freshman role would be at NCAA Division I Evansville. She soon found out.

Impressing coaches with her skills and work ethic, Liffick earned a starting nod at the outset. She started the first seven games of her college career and averaged 10.9 points.

Then fate dealt an unexpected, and unprecedented, blow to a player who had never had a significant injury.

During practice, Liffick tore the ACL in her left knee. The injury not only ended her season, it happened after she'd already played the minimum number of games to qualify for a medical redshirt.

The threshold was six, so she could only play three more years. She was determined to make the most of them.

Liffick had reconstructive surgery and spent the rest of the season and off-season rehabilitating. She did have fears that the injury would have lingering effects and render her less effective.

But she rehabbed diligently, spent the summer getting back in shape and refining her skills and returned in time for the start of her sophomore season.

She's been back in the starting lineup ever since.

"I've heard stories about people who've had problems coming back from their knee surgeries, but I was very confident," Liffick said. "(The doctor) said, 'If it hurts, that means it's getting better.' So I kept pushing it



PHOTO COURTESY UNIVERSITY OF EVANSVILLE  
Whiteland Community High School graduate Megan Liffick looks to drive to the basket during a recent University of Evansville women's basketball game.

and pushing it, and I think that's what helped me get back. "No matter how much it hurt, I kept fighting through it."

Cullop, a former standout player at Purdue, still marvels at Liffick's resolve, a quality that also helps her excel on the court.

"I've never seen anyone keep such a positive attitude through such a tragic event and bounce back and just play even hungrier," Cullop said. "It's tough when you tear your ACL to keep a positive attitude. It's so easy to say, 'Woe is me,' and Megan never did that.

"She was always very strong for our team." And her knee is as strong as ever, as evidenced by the fact she's averaged double figures throughout her career.

One of the top 3-point shooters in the MVC, Liffick averages a team- and career-high 16.7 points per game. She's

made 36 of 85 3-point shots this season (42.4 percent) and is one of league's most complete players.

"I can't even tell that I had (surgery) now," Liffick said. "I have a scar, but I can't feel it anymore. My sophomore year rolled around, and I was fine."

### Driven to win

For Liffick, playing isn't about scoring points. It's about winning, something she didn't experience a lot of in high school.

Her contributions notwithstanding, Whiteland never had a winning season during her career. The Warriors were on the cusp of turning a competitive corner but never got around it.

Liffick desperately wanted a different result in college.

Her wish was granted. Evansville hasn't won a conference championship or qualified for the

NCAA Tournament since Liffick arrived. But the Aces are in the midst of a fourth-straight winning season.

And they are confident of advancing to the postseason, which will happen if they win next month's MVC Tournament.

Evansville is in second place in the league standings. In light of the MVC's competitive reputation, the Aces also could earn an at-large NCAA bid with a strong finish.

Injuries are still taking a toll, but Evansville has won three straight games and six of its past eight overall.

"This year, of all the years I've been here, is our best chance to do it," Liffick said of the Aces' NCAA ambition. "We started off a little bit slow, but I think we're peaking at the right time."

And winning with frequency, which she never experienced in high school.

"Coming in, I didn't know how much I would score and that kind of stuff," Liffick said. "I just wanted to win."

"And now that I'm coming upon 1,000 points, it's awesome. It means a lot more to me, too, because I know I've worked hard coming back from my knee and basically just had three years here."

### Lasting legacy

With nine regular-season games and the conference tournament remaining, Liffick's career isn't quite over. But when it is, the Aces will have a void to fill.

She's not only been a primary scorer, she's a complete player who rebounds, defends and handles and distributes the ball. She's the team's third-leading rebounder (4.9 per game) and its leader in steals (30).

She's also an emotional leader whose impact was felt from Day 1.

"It's sad that it's going to be coming to an end after this year, because it's definitely been a joy," Cullop said. "She's got a positive attitude, a great work ethic, and obviously you love coaching someone with those skills. So, yeah, we're going to miss her a lot next season."

"But I'm so happy for Megan that she was able to get through the ordeal with her knee and come back and be the player that is today and contribute so much to our program. She's definitely put her stamp on this program."

For Liffick, it's all been a dream come true for a player whose goal since childhood was to play Division I basketball.

"It's something every kid dreams about," Liffick said. "It's beneficial knowing that hard work pays off. I've been working my entire life for this. "It means a lot."

# Pacers

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE B1)

Bryant, who averaged 43 points in 13 games in January, was 8 of 24 from the field and 8 of 9 from the foul line. He made only 2 of 8 3-point attempts and was limited to 13 points at halftime.

He averages a league-high 36 points and was coming off a 40-point outing Tuesday night in a 130-97 win at New York.

"It's tough when that guy comes in," Pacers coach Rick Carlisle said. "It's like inviting an assassin to a gathering of living presidents. You just know that he can go for a zillion on you. He's a great, great player."

"The thing I admire most about Kobe Bryant is the way he competes. He competes at the highest of high levels."

Bryant didn't get much help. The Lakers (24-21) shot only 30 percent from the field and had only one other player, backup Devean George, score more than 10 points. He had 12.

"We didn't hit any shots tonight," Bryant said. "They just outplayed us. I've been double-teamed like I was tonight before, so that's nothing that we haven't seen. "But I'm beginning to think that this is the formula for playing us, and other guys are just going to have to step up and make their shots."

Besides shutting down Bryant, the win was encouraging for the Pacers in light of debilitating circumstances.

Already missing three starters with injuries, the Pacers took another blow late in the second quarter when starting guard Stephen Jackson landed on his back on a drive to the basket. He had to be helped off the court by teammates Scot Pollard and David Harrison.

Jackson's right hip appeared to take the brunt of the blow. He was taken to an area hospital for overnight observation.

Carlisle said X-rays revealed no broken bones, but the extent of Jackson's injury was unknown. His availability for Saturday's home game is uncertain.

But Jackson's departure didn't slow the short-handed Pacers, who were without Jermaine O'Neal (groin), Jamaal Tinsley (elbow) and Austin Croshere (concussion).

Indiana never trailed after going up 30-28 with 6:14 to play in the second quarter.



AP PHOTO  
The Pacers' Peja Stojakovic, right, puts up a shot over the Lakers' Devin Green during the fourth quarter of Wednesday's game in Indianapolis.

Jackson left with 2:15 remaining in the half, but the Pacers were up 41-34 at the time and didn't let up the rest of the way.

Stojakovic led five Pacers in double figures. Fred Jones had 16 off the bench. Danny Granger had 14 off the bench, and David Harrison had 10 off the bench.

Jeff Foster, who started at power forward, had 15 points and matched Stojakovic with a game-high 13 rebounds.

"We definitely needed the win," Jones said. "We have to keep showcasing our talent off the bench and play well every game. We've got to put our failures behind us."

"We have to continue to use our individual abilities and come together as a team."

Los Angeles coach Phil Jackson wasn't so much impressed by the Pacers' performance as he was disappointed by his team's play.

"I don't think the Pacers had too much to do with us losing tonight," said Jackson, whose team shot 30 percent from the field. "I think it was ourselves that beat us."

"We just couldn't get it together as a ball club."

# Cubs

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE B1)

and staying off the mat."

Seniors Brad Gallagher (119 pounds, 35-0), Michael Reese (160, 34-0) and Cody Johnson (215, 36-0) all stayed undefeated, and freshman Colton Cassel (103 pounds), senior Jordan Fish (112), senior Danny Cooper (125), sophomore Jae VanHorn (130), junior Stuart Riessen (152) and senior Phil Glasser (171) also each won two matches each.

Hasseman spent much of the day worrying, though. Junior Donnie Nelson (145, 19-3) couldn't wrestle because he had strep throat and missed the regional.

But other wrestlers filled the void.

"I thought the kids stayed together as a team," Hasseman said. "We had to face adversity without Donnie and had to handle it."

"He's been sick quite a few times this year. But we really need him next week. I hope he gets better."

But Hasseman and the Cubs wrestlers know they have a big task ahead of them next week. They lost to Bloomington South in wrestling semestates in 2002-03 and 2003-04 by one point each time. Now they plan on getting over that hump and advancing to their first state finals since 2002.

"We're going to need to have our 'A' game next week," Hasseman said. "It's not going to be like our last match. Every point, every stalling call, every little thing will matter."

"Our team is going to be young next year. We lose a lot of seniors. I'd like to see our seniors get to state."

Bob Hasseman  
Franklin wrestling coach after regional victory

"I want to go back to state. Our team is going to be young next year. We lose a lot of seniors. I'd like to see our seniors get to state."

### CG's season ends

Center Grove's comeback attempt fell short in a 36-29 regional semifinal loss to Plainfield. The Trojans finished with an 18-12 record.

Center Grove, which trailed 36-19, had wrestlers Shelby Mappes (152 pounds) and Joel Crump (160 pounds) win the final two matches, but the 17-point deficit was too much to overcome.

Trojans coach Rusty Cullop was disappointed, admitting afterward he would have liked to have faced county rival Franklin in the championship.

"If we could've turned any match around in that meet, we could have won," he said. "We had a couple of close matches."

After leading Center Grove to its first regional trip in school history, Cullop wants to see the Trojans come back more often.

"We'd like to make this trip commonplace and come back every year," he said. "We've got the kids coming back to do that. I'm excited about next year."

"We definitely needed the win. We have to keep showcasing our talent off the bench and play well every game. We've got to put our failure behind us."

Fred Jones  
Indiana Pacers guard after Wednesday's win against the Lakers

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