

Tough times for Bluegrass State teams

Louisville, Kentucky struggling to make tourney

By JEFFREY McMURRAY
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LEXINGTON, Ky.

Usually, when the calendar turns to March, fans of Kentucky's two basketball powers start wondering about the possibility of a Final Four trip.

This time, however, Kentucky and Louisville might not even make the NCAA Tournament's 65-team field even though both were ranked in the top 10 when the season began.

Kentucky has a tough schedule remaining with games against No. 11 Tennessee and No. 17 Florida and is on the bubble to make the field. A year after reaching the Final Four, Louisville is a longshot for even the conference tournament in its first Big East season.

Not counting 1991, when the Wildcats had the best record in the Southeastern Conference but probation kept them out of post-season play, it's been 30 years since an NCAA Tournament opened without Louisville or Kentucky in the mix.

"I think if neither one of them



The Kentucky Wildcats mascot, right, offers a copy of "Basketball for Dummies" to the Louisville Cardinals mascot during a Dec. 17 game at Rupp Arena in Lexington, Ky. Both teams have played poorly this season.

makes the NCAA Tournament, they'll probably drape the state in black," said Larry Conley, a broadcaster who played at Kentucky under Hall of Fame coach Adolph Rupp.

These aren't abysmal teams by any stretch. But in the Bluegrass State, where even the high school tournament sells out Rupp Arena, they might as well be.

"I've had people come up to

me and say their family's not getting along well because we're losing," Kentucky guard Ravi Moss said.

With no major professional team of any sport in the state, college basketball is the undisputed king.

Along North Carolina's Tobacco Road, four Atlantic Coast Conference teams are packed into a short stretch of basketball bliss.

But Kentuckians boast of living in the true capital of college basketball because the obsession with two big programs, only about an hour apart, reaches every nook and cranny of the state.

The state's four other Division I programs have capitalized by recruiting players hungry for a flavor of Bluegrass basketball. In fact, if the NCAA Tournament started today, the two most likely

BY THE NUMBERS

Records for the Louisville and Kentucky men's basketball teams this season:

Kentucky	Category	Louisville
18-10	Overall	17-10
8-6	Conference*	5-9
6-4	Past 10 games	4-6
42 of 334	RPI rating	71 of 334
Unranked	AP poll	Unranked

*Kentucky plays in the Southeastern Conference; Louisville is in the Big East

entries from Kentucky might be mid-majors Murray State and Western Kentucky.

Still, neither of those teams is ranked. In the latest Associated Press poll released Monday, no Kentucky team got a single vote.

"The struggles of Louisville and Kentucky are aberrations," said Murray State coach Mick Cronin, a former assistant at Louisville. "That shows you the state of the game in college basketball. With kids going to the pros left and right, it's hard to maintain stability."

Kentucky's frontcourt was decimated this year with the graduation of Chuck Hayes and attempts by Kelenna Azubuike and Randolph Morris to enter the NBA draft. Neither was picked, but Morris was reinstated with the Wildcats after a half-season suspension for his association with a sports agent.

Louisville last week faced West Virginia in a rematch of its regional final from a year ago

with only four of 13 players from that Cardinals team on the current roster. Besides departures, the Cardinals have been weakened by injuries, most recently a knee injury that will keep sophomore center David Padgett out for the year.

Coach Rick Pitino says he never expected this team to be great, but he empathizes with Kentucky coach Tubby Smith, who occupies his old job.

"Kentucky basketball is like Notre Dame football," Pitino said. "They're not happy unless they're unhappy. They want a Final Four every year. They'll take an Elite Eight, accept a Sweet 16. Anything less than that and they're miserable."

The Wildcats have won more games than any other Division I program in history but haven't reached the Final Four since their 1998 national title, Smith's first year.

Already, the "Fire Tubby" postings are showing up in Internet chat rooms, even though Smith has taken his team to the NCAA Tournament, and usually deep into it, every year he's been there.

"That's just Kentucky basketball," said Travis Ford, who played for the Wildcats and coached at Eastern Kentucky before taking a job this year as coach of Massachusetts. "You could be sitting 25-6, and they'd want to know, 'Why did you lose those six?'"

Associated Press writer Will Graves in Louisville, Ky., contributed to this report.

With free agency period looming, NFL labor talks stop

By DAVE GOLDBERG
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK

NFL labor talks broke off Tuesday three days before the start of free agency, leaving teams and players in a quandary about negotiating new contracts.

Gene Upshaw, executive director of the NFL Players Association, spent the past three days meeting in New York and Washington with commissioner Paul Tagliabue.

"We're deadlocked. There's nowhere to go," Upshaw said. "There's no reason to continue meeting."

The NFL acknowledged the talks had broken off and said no further discussions were scheduled. The

KEY DATES

The upcoming NFL calendar:
Friday — Veteran free agency signing period and trading period begins.
March 26 to 30 — NFL annual meeting, Orlando, Fla.
April 29 and 30 — NFL Draft
May 23 to 25 — NFL spring meeting, Denver

league said it would not extend Friday's deadline for the start of free agency.

Although the contract does not expire until after the 2007 season, this is a critical period in the negotiations to extend the 12-year-old agreement.

Talks have been going on for more than a year.

Free agency is scheduled to start Friday. If the deal is not extended, this would be the final year with a salary cap, so agents and team officials want to know how to structure contracts.

For example, if there is no extension, the salary cap is expected to be about \$95 million this season, and annual raises after 2006 in a long-term deal would be limited to 30 percent. If the deal is extended, the cap could be \$10 million or more higher.

The sides have agreed on a number of issues. The biggest one is changing the formula for the amount of money to go to the play-

ers from "designated gross revenues" (primarily television and ticket sales) to "total gross revenues," which include almost every bit of money a team generates.

They differ, however, on the percentage of revenues to be allocated to the players.

The union is asking for 60 percent, and the league's current offer is 56.2 percent.

But there are also disputes among groups of owners on that issue, too. Tagliabue has called a league meeting in New York for Thursday.

Teams with lower revenues, mostly small-market clubs, say that if the contributions to the players' fund are equally apportioned among 32 franchises, they

will have to pay a substantially larger proportion of their nontelevision and ticket money because they have less.

Owners of high-revenue teams, including the Dallas Cowboys' Jerry Jones, claim spreading the load equally would force some teams to work harder to generate new sources of money.

Another high-revenue owner, New England's Robert Kraft, says the formula does not take stadium debt into account, as he has on Gillette Stadium in Foxborough, Mass.

NFL spokesman Greg Aiello said internal revenue-sharing issues would not be discussed at the meeting.

"We're deadlocked. There's nowhere to go. There's no reason to continue meeting."

Gene Upshaw
Executive director of
NFL Players Association

• Women

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE B1)

earned the HCAC's automatic bid to the NCAA Tournament. The Grizzlies, who won the regular-season title, not only lost out on a chance to host a first-round NCAA Tournament game, they had to hold their collective breath until the at-large bids were announced.

The loss also snapped the Grizzlies' 10-game winning streak, along with their 19-game home unbeaten streak and two-year reign as HCAC tourney champs.

Franklin coach Kim Eiler and players spent the weekend anxiously awaiting the news.

"We hadn't talked about an at-large berth or anything," Eiler said. "Our goal was winning conference. We were very, very disappointed. But knowing that we get another shot to play again, and

this wasn't our last game, is incentive enough.

"This erases a little bit of Saturday. You play the whole season to get into the tournament."

Franklin's reputation and strong nonconference schedule likely factored into their selection.

The Grizzlies won the HCAC Tournament the past two years and are making their third straight trip to the NCAA Tournament. Their goal this year is to stay around considerably longer than the first round.

Last year, Franklin finished 23-6 and lost 74-60 to host Calvin College in the first round. In 2004, the Grizzlies had a first-round bye but lost to visiting Wilmington College (Ohio) in the second round.

Senior center Becky Ballard played on both teams. But she doesn't expect this year's team to finish like the other two.

"As seniors, we hope to do something," Ballard said. "You go in there every year thinking this is

our year to win a game and go far. We've failed yet to do it. Our team has more experience now.

"After losing Saturday, it made us realize we need to give it our all or we're done."

Franklin also benefited from scheduling top-tier nonconference opponents this season. The Grizzlies played three nonconference tournament teams, including No. 4 Hope College, North Park University and Olivet College.

The Grizzlies went 2-1 against those teams, defeating North Park and Olivet but losing to Hope by two points on a last-second shot.

They also defeated Kalamazoo College in the championship game of the Kalamazoo Classic.

"We tried to beef up our schedule," Eiler said. "We played Michigan teams outside our conference and tried to get teams out of conference that were within our region.

"Knowing our hard work and tough schedule, that was something the NCAA committee

rewarded us for."

Grizzlies players have spent the early part of the week trying to get healthy for Friday's game. Five players battled head colds and chills last weekend. Several spent the night before the championship game in bed with the flu.

Eiler gave players Monday off to rest and recuperate.

But players like Lindsey Roberson already are mentally preparing for the game. A senior shooting guard, she has a loftier goal than simply beating Capital.

"Everyone is playing for the same thing, to win the national tournament," Roberson said. "That's what we want to do. What we've done this season is definitely an accomplishment, but it's only prepared us for what we want to do, and that's to go far in the tournament.

"I think we (can win). We've already played nationally ranked teams this year and beaten them. I believe we can go pretty far in this tournament."

FC's Kane named league MVP

Special to the Daily Journal

Franklin College's Nick Kane on Tuesday was named the 2005-06 Heartland Collegiate Athletic Conference Most Valuable Player and heads the 12-member All-HCAC men's basketball team.



KANE

Kane, a senior center, helped lead the Grizzlies to a second-place finish in the regular-season standings and a runner-up finish in the HCAC tourney.

Kane ranked second in the conference in scoring (18.1 ppg), first in rebounding (8.5 rpg) and blocked shots (2.86 bpg) and fourth in field-goal percentage (.587). Overall for the season, he led the Grizzlies in scoring (17.9

ppg) and rebounding (8.4 rpg).

He finished his career sixth among Franklin's all-time scoring leaders with 1,568 points and fifth among the school's all-time rebound leaders with 738. He broke the school's career blocked shots mark before his senior season and had 71 blocks to finish with 255 in his career.

The Grizzlies' Dustin Marshall was named the HCAC Freshman of the Year. Marshall averaged 13.3 points per game in conference play and ranked second in the league in 3-point field goals made (2.29 per game). He also contributed 3.2 rebounds and 2.5 assists per game. Overall for the season, Marshall averaged 11 points and 2.6 rebounds per game.

Marshall was included on the HCAC Honorable Mention list along with Franklin sophomore forward Jon Neill and freshman guard Jace Redman.

Morehead State basketball coach steps down

The Associated Press

LEXINGTON, Ky.

Kyle Macy, a former Indiana high school Mr. Basketball and University of Kentucky player who spent seven seasons in the NBA, resigned Tuesday as coach at Morehead State.

Morehead finished the season with one of the worst records in the nation at 4-23 and did not qualify for the Ohio Valley Conference tournament for a second

straight year. Macy was 106-144 in nine seasons as coach.

In an interview earlier Tuesday, Macy didn't mention that he was on the verge of resigning. However, he acknowledged frustration with his young team's play.

"You're the head coach," Macy said. "Some of the stuff is out of your control, whether it's an injury, whatever the case may be. But as a coach, I was not really happy about it."

Macy was Indiana's Mr. Basket-

ball at Peru in 1975. He was a starter at Purdue as a freshman but transferred to Kentucky after that season. He played one season for the Indiana Pacers, averaging 4.9 points in 78 games in 1986-87.

Brian Hutchinson, the Morehead director of intercollegiate athletics, said he didn't ask Macy to resign but that the coach decided to step down after a conversation Tuesday.

Hutchinson expects to have a new coach in place by April.

• Money

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE B1)

Or Bank of America Stadium say about Charlotte? Or M&T Bank Stadium say about Baltimore?

Nothing, except that those firms have shelled out millions for naming rights. And the offers are just too good to refuse.

So it is with the Colts and their apparent partnership with Lucas Oil, which, according to WISH-Channel 8, has a 20-year, \$120 million deal with the franchise.

For better or for worse, the Colts and the oil name are stuck together for the long term.

What a shame. After two lame names, the city's NFL home deserves a snappy name.

Not like the Hoosier Dome, which was bland and unimaginative. RCA Dome is a bit better but still sounds corporate.

Lucas Oil Field (or Stadium, take your pick) blends the worst of both worlds, if that in fact wins up being the name. It's unimaginative and corporate and tells the world nothing about Indianapolis or the Colts.

But the partnership is obviously good for the Colts, and that's all that matters, right?

Hey, if it will help pay Peyton Manning's salary until he's old and gray, so be it. If it will help re-sign Edgerrin James while his

heart is still in the game, who cares?

If it will help Jim Irsay not miss a monthly payment on his personal helicopter, then by all means let the Colts call the stadium whatever they like.

Whatever is good for the Colts is good for the everyone, right?

So fans and taxpayers (including those who can't afford to go to games), relax. The Colts know exactly what they're doing.

What's in a name? Money. The Colts have always been all about that.

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