

Waterfowl, squirrels abound as seasons end

With some of our hunting seasons closed, we enter the second week of the new year with four species still offering some outdoor action: waterfowl, rabbits, squirrels and quail.

To keep it all straight for you, the duck season ended in the North Zone (basically the northern third of the state) on Dec. 19, closes in the South Zone (the southern two-thirds) on Thursday, and the Ohio River Zone (a narrow strip along the Ohio River) on Jan. 21. For Canada geese, the closing dates are Jan. 28 in the South Zone and Jan. 31 in the Ohio River Zone.

A special season on light geese will open Feb. 1 and continue through March 31 for those who have a permit to take snow and blue geese and others of that species. The permits are free at any fish and wildlife area reservoir office. Other waterfowl regulations will be in effect.

The special season is being tried by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to cut the number of these birds that are said to be so numerous that they are destroying their breeding ranges in Canada.

The season on rabbits statewide closes Jan. 31.

The season on squirrels closed Dec. 31 in that part of the state north of U.S. 40, but it remains open until Jan. 31 south of that highway. Squirrels, too, have had booming reproductive success.

So what does one hunt for at this beginning of the end until wild turkeys strut their stuff in the spring?

Well, there is a pretty good slug of waterfowl in the state, and the weather man has been cooperating with plenty of surface water and the warmest December I've seen.

As of last week's waterfowl survey, Division of Fish and Wildlife biologists found some 5,000 ducks (mostly the bread-and-butter mallard) on the northern areas involved, and about 8,000 (also mainly mallards) on the more-northern southern areas.

Add the fact that birds hanging out on small surface water will boost those numbers, and you are focused on some pretty good duck hunting.

Of course squirrels are fat and sassy now, thanks to Indiana's field corn. They make delightful dishes of squirrel dumplings at this juncture, but they can be fried, too, if you steam them after frying. Note: How to make rolled-out dumplings (grandma style) will be found on my Web page, www.bayoubill.com.



'Bayou' Bill Scifres
OUTDOORS

With streams and rivers bulging with recent rains, the best bet could be a floating jump shoot for ducks and squirrels on mid-sized to larger streams and rivers in the areas where both are open. But an afternoon of gunning over blocks has some potential.

The quail? Well, you should have the services of a pretty good dead-bird dog if you are going to hunt them, but there are some birds around, albeit the annual harvest is enough to make dyed-in-the-wool bird hunters cry when compared to that of yesteryear. The bobwhite quail is such a marvelous citizen, both in the field and in the pan.

Rabbits, as you suspected, are spotty, as usual. Find good, heavy cover, and there probably are some rabbits about. This warm winter probably has kept some in a reproductive mode. Your best bet will be found at old homesteads where buildings, or ruins thereof, remain. But rabbits, like other wild critters, are where you find them.

Conservation Day

The Indiana Conservation Alliance will stage its third annual Conservation Day at the Statehouse Rotunda on the morning of Jan. 23. Member organizations set up tables that explain their conservation projects to legislators, and other citizens are invited to attend.

The organization is working to further its conservation-funding ideas to help legislators. The alliance wants \$6 million budgeted for Indiana Heritage Trust, \$6 million for the state clean water program and \$1 million for farmland protection and lane use.

Watching eagles

Eagle Watch programs will be staged at Patoka Reservoir (phone 812-685-2447) today and at Cecil M. Harden Lake (phone 765-344-1884) on Feb. 10.

"Bayou" Bill Scifres' outdoors column appears Saturdays in the Daily Journal. Comments can be sent to P.O. Box 699, Franklin, IN 46131.



Roger Federer plays in the men's final against Marcos Baghdatis at the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne, Australia, on Jan. 29.

Federer aims for Grand Slam again

By JOHN PYE
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MELBOURNE, Australia

All the brilliant numbers came down to a simple equation for Roger Federer: He was two sets shy of a Grand Slam season.

Federer returns to Melbourne Park as the overwhelming favorite and defending Australian Open champion, one of three majors he won while compiling a 92-5 record.

Four of his losses were against second-ranked Rafael Nadal, including the French Open final when he won the first set before going down in four.

Federer was the first man since Rod Laver completed his second Grand Slam — winning all four majors — in 1969 to make the finals in all four majors in a single season.

But that was not quite good enough for the 25-year-old Swiss star. Federer skipped his regular-season opener at the Qatar Open, deciding he need a breather.

"You have to look at the big picture," he said. "I wanted to have a life, you know, have Christmas and New Years and come here rested and not exhausted already."

"For me, it was most important to come to Melbourne in the mood to win the Australian Open, not come here and feel like it's a pain." He did some work in Dubai, then arrived in Australia a week earlier than usual.

After a patchy first match back, coming within two points of defeat against Radek Stepanek, Federer advanced to the final of

the Kooyong exhibition tournament with a convincing win against 2005 Australian Open champion Marat Safin.

He figures three matches is all the fine-tuning he needs.

"I'm probably playing again on Rod Laver Arena," he said. "I play so well on that court, and with my experience and the way I finished the season and the way I'm coming into this, I don't see why I should be vulnerable. It's going to be really tough for people to beat me here."

Federer got no favors in the draw Friday. His third- and fourth-round opponents could be U.S. Open semifinalist Mikhail Youzhny and former No. 1 Juan Carlos Ferrero, while last year's surprise finalist, Marcos Baghdatis, looms as a quarterfinal rival.

Andy Roddick or Ivan Ljubicic are semifinal candidates. Nadal also has a tough draw on the other side, having a tricky opener against Robert Kendrick, a possible third-round match with Andy Murray and either James Blake or Lleyton Hewitt after that. And that is before possible showdowns with No. 3 Nikolay Davydenko or David Nalbandian.

Federer already has enough entry rankings points to ensure that by the end of February he'll break Jimmy Connors' record of 160 consecutive weeks at No. 1.

More important to him, though, is he'll know by Jan. 28 whether he is set up for another shot at the season Grand Slam.

"If I win here, it gets very interesting," he said. "I'll know in a few weeks if that's a goal that I can give myself or not."

Southern traditions raise cash for camp

NASCAR, country music unite for kids' group fund-raiser

By TERESA M. WALKER
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NASHVILLE, Tenn.

NASCAR and country music. Cars and guitars. Gasoline fumes and heartbreak.

The combination is irresistible: two industries with Southern roots that have grown into national institutions.

"It's the same demographic. It's the same fan. It's the same person," NASCAR driver Kyle Petty said Friday. "Why can't we put them together? For 20 years for some reason, no one's been able to really put country music and the NASCAR community together."

Now they have. Sound & Speed in Music City features two days of auctions, autographs, racecars and concerts with drivers and singers to raise money for the Victory Junction Gang Camp for children with life-threatening illnesses and the Country Music Association's Hall of Fame. The event ends today.

With Petty and country singer Vince Gill as co-chairmen, the star power is impressive.

Singers include Trace Adkins, Joe Nichols, Aaron Tippin, Jo Dee Messina and classic stars Brenda Lee and Mel Tillis. Both Petty and his father, Richard, and Michael Waltrip, Ryan Newman and Jamie McMurray are among the drivers attending along with Darrell Waltrip and Bobby Allison.

"They're coming on their own dime," said Pattie Petty, who co-founded the camp with her husband in honor of son Adam, who died in May 2000 during practice in New Hampshire. "It's two days they're giving of their time. We don't have very many days off. For them to do that is impressive on the talent side."

Petty said music agent and promoter Don Light suggested creating a fund-raiser for Victory Junction, which opened in 2004, and for the Hall of Fame, which moved to a new building in 2001.

Is there a limit to Giants' patience with slugger Bonds?

By RAY RATTO
SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE

There are so many questions that adhere to the underside of the dreadnought that is the Barry Bonds Amphetamine Extravaganza that the one getting less attention is the endgame.

Namely, how much more public humiliation and brand shame the San Francisco Giants can bring upon themselves by trying to extract the last available dollar out of the left fielder's husk.

The answer so far has been, "More embarrassment than you have to give," because that last dollar seems so very important to managing general co-dependent Peter Magowan, faithful sidekick Larry Baer and the investor/underlings.

And when the "Mark Sweeney Did It" story plays itself out, the answer may still be the same. It is a hell of a valuable dollar, after all.

But this new development, leaked by someone in a position to know to the New York Daily News' T.J. Quinn (who may be named after a trendy Indianapolis night-spot but is one of the most reliable reporters on the Bonds/BALCO story), puts Bonds in a poor light even for those folks who believe that he never violated the sanctity of the field or the clubhouse.

He reportedly tested "yes" for amphetamines. He subsequently reportedly tested "yes" for hurling a teammate in front of the speeding train, a transgression that helped complete the discrediting of Rafael Palmeiro.

That's a tough one for the baseball-first crowd to work around, and since that was the only constituency away from his own team he could still claim, he may finally be out of P.R. rope.

Weird, huh? Bonds skates through all the allegations about his own performance-enhancing drug use but goes down because he allegedly claimed that the drug was in Sweeney's locker? How can that possibly be?

Then again, with Bonds, anything was, is and will always be possible. Perhaps even the discovery of Magowan's last nerve, although we must still doubt that the mythical nerve actually exists.

COLUMN

Nobody ever found a unicorn, Atlantis or D.B. Cooper, either.

There are a number of delicious questions still to be answered about the Quinn story, and we should pose them here just for clip-and-save purposes:

- Given that Major League Baseball was supposed to know the test results from the Class of '06, was MLB the source, and if so, why? To embarrass Bonds?

- Given that the contract talks had stalled, were the Giants the source? Bonds allegedly told a number of other Giants players he had tested positive, so the team cannot claim ignorance.

- Given that Bonds had included Sweeney's name and that the news had reached the union, could a teammate or ex-teammate angry at the breach of clubhouse etiquette have been the source?

- And the timing? Why now, if the positive test had happened months ago? Who benefits from ratting Bonds out in January for a transgression in June or July?

- Does Bonds' decision not to contest the positive test serve as tacit admission that the public face of baseball's drug scandal felt himself too bulletproof for even the most minimal caution level?

- Is there something too bizarre for words in Bonds allegedly turning in Sweeney's name while former trainer Greg Anderson was in prison for not turning in Bonds'?

- Does Bonds' statement saying that Sweeney never gave him anything mean anything given that nobody ever claimed Sweeney gave him anything, but that Bonds allegedly took the offending substance out of Sweeney's locker?

- How much harder must it be to give Bonds the benefit of the doubt?

- Does he get it at all?
- Do his supporters get it at all?
- Do the Giants get it at all?
- Are you as sick of the word "allegedly" as we are?

Ray Ratto covers sports for the San Francisco Chronicle. Send comments to letters@thejournalnet.com.

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