

Technology helps stat-keepers

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INDIANAPOLIS

Three laptops, a printer and a web of wires at center court serve as the epicenter of Conesco Fieldhouse during Indiana Pacers games.

It's where David George and Jon Glesing sit and track every play and record every statistic.

TV and radio personnel rely on continuous printouts provided by the Pacers' stat crew to pass along to their viewers and listeners.

Fans in the stadium are instantaneously updated on the scoreboard through a touch of a button on Glesing's screen.

"It's all very technical," George said.

Before the use of computers, statisticians compiled all the stats with pen and paper.

"During those days, there were five guys doing the job that two do today," George said. "One guy took minutes, the other kept track of points, and so on. Each had their own statistical category. The old-timers say we're spoiled."

Neither Glesing, who works in the marketing department for Hat World, nor George, who is studying for an education degree, can thoroughly explain the ins and outs of the complicated computer program they use to keep the stats. They just know how to use it.

That wasn't always the case. Before the 1994-95 season, the NBA was switching to a new program. Glesing, who had served as an assistant sports information director at a small college, contacted the Pacers about a statistician's position.

"They told me they were switching to a new program and asked if I could run it," Glesing said. "I hadn't

even seen it and I said, 'Sure.'"

The Pacers sent Glesing, 39, to a training seminar conducted by the NBA, where all the stat crews learned the new system.

Statisticians have to pass a written exam. The exam features hypothetical basketball situations and asks whether the correct statistical action occurred.

Tests are administered every two or three years, said George, 37.

George and Glesing also work any college basketball games that are played at Conesco Fieldhouse. But colleges use a different computer program than the NBA.

Both George and Glesing work at Indianapolis Colts games as well and are yet again exposed to more software.

"It's high-tech stuff," George said. "I can't explain a lot of it to you. But trust me, I know what I'm doing."

RACING

CONCORD, N.C.

NASCAR revamps its annual All-Star race

NASCAR continued to tinker with its races Tuesday by revamping the format of the annual All-Star event to make it more exciting and easier for fans to follow.

The Nextel All-Star Challenge now will be run in four 20-lap segments, and the field has been expanded to include at least one more driver.

The announcement came one day after NASCAR tinkered with its title-deciding Chase for the championship system, and the sanctioning body acknowledged that all the changes could initially confuse longtime fans.

"The changes to the Chase, as well as the All-Star event, were a collaborative effort that we put forth to make it easier for the fans to understand," said Steve O'Donnell, vice president of NASCAR's racing operations.

The All-Star event, run annually at Lowe's Motor Speedway, will now be a total of 80 laps with breaks between each segment. There will be an optional pit stop after the first segment, and a 10-minute break after the second segment in which teams will be allowed to work on their cars.

There will be a mandatory pit stop after the third segment, setting up one final 20-lap dash to the \$1 million grand prize.

• Stats

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE B1)

George and Glesing say one of their biggest challenges occurs when a ball is shot and players continuously tip the ball around the basket fighting for the rebound.

At the 11:01 mark of the second quarter of Saturday's game against New York, there was a flurry of action around the rim.

A missed shot followed by failed tip-ins, with the basketball being batted around like a beach ball, tests the stat crew.

George's speech turns into something that resembles an auctioneer as Glesing's pen flies around the screen. Once the sequence is finished and they can take a breath, they let out a satisfying growl and flex.

"Bring it on!" Glesing said.

Glesing and George like to have fun with their job. Both are lifelong basketball fans, get to watch their favorite NBA team from close range and sometimes become part of the action themselves.

In 2005, Houston Rockets guard Jon Barry passed the ball into the post to a waiting Yao Ming. Ming dropped the pass, picked up the ball and made the basket.

George didn't credit Barry with an assist. During a timeout, Barry approached the scorer's table.

"You shorted me on an assist," Barry told George.

"Sorry," George responded. "Maybe if Yao hadn't dropped the ball."

Barry said he understood. He only brought it up because he had incentives in his contract regarding assists.

Good-natured ribbing with players aside, George and Glesing can't be as vocal as they'd like to be. Because they are working at the scorer's table as official NBA employees, they can't cheer.

"You're a big Pacers fan, but you can't cheer," George said. "You have to try and maintain your composure while you're here. You can't yell at the officials like you'd like to or stand up and cheer. That's the hardest part."

Another challenge is paying attention to players coming out of the huddle after a timeout.

In the NBA, players aren't required to check in at the scorer's table. They can come and go as they please.

This became a problem Saturday night when O'Neal entered the game in the third quarter without Glesing or George noticing. Once the game resumed, O'Neal was fouled and was about to shoot free throws. As Glesing went to record the stat, he noticed he still had O'Neal on the bench.

"Whoops, there's a hiccup," he said.

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FOOTBALL

ALAMEDA, Calif.

Raiders get young with new coach Kiffin

The Oakland Raiders hired 31-year-old Lane Kiffin as their head coach Tuesday to rebuild a three-time Super Bowl champion that fell to the NFL's worst record this season.

Kiffin, the offensive coordinator at Southern California, became the youngest head coach in club history and the NFL's youngest in several decades. Though Kiffin has just one season of experience as an NFL assistant coach, owner Al Davis didn't hesitate to put him in charge of his franchise.

"I'm extremely excited about this opportunity and where I see this place going," Kiffin said at the Raiders' training complex. "It's a historic franchise that has had greatness and has fallen on tough times, but we will bring it back to where it was before. We will do that through hard work. I'm prepared to roll up my sleeves and go to work."

Davis fired Art Shell after the season.

TENNIS

MELBOURNE, Australia

Roddick prepares for Federer in semifinals

Andy Roddick was ruthless, treating his close friend like little more than warmup fodder for his semifinal showdown with Roger Federer.

The 2003 U.S. Open champion flattened Mardy Fish without blinking Tuesday, making only four unforced errors in a 6-2, 6-2, 6-2 quarterfinal win at the Australian Open.

"I played pretty flawless, I thought," Roddick said. "I feel good going into the semis."

Roddick said he could remember making more errors in one game than he had in the entire match against Fish, who lived with him in Boca Raton, Fla., for a while and went to his high school.

"I tried my best to kind of put our friendship to the back of my head," Roddick said. "You know, it's always difficult. It's a weird, weird situation."

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