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SPORTS

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SECTION B



PHOTO COURTESY INDIANA PACERS

Mel Daniels, center, takes on Kentucky's Artis Gilmore, right, as Pacers teammate Darnell Hillman looks on during an ABA game in the 1970s.

Daniels enjoying life with Pacers

2-time MVP in ABA can't get basketball out of his blood

By RICK MORWICK

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Basketball has kept Mel Daniels on the road pretty much his entire adult life. And at age 62, he's still on the move.

Constantly. But he has no complaints.

Daniels likes traveling, loves his job and has an unbreakable bond with a sport he dominated as a player and has mastered as a front-office executive for the Indiana Pacers.

"I enjoy it. It keeps me involved in basketball," said Daniels, who starred for the Pacers during their ABA glory years but now plays a critical role in their NBA fortunes as director of player personnel.

A former assistant coach, interim head coach and team scout for the Pacers, Daniels travels the country evaluating young talent in a never-ending search for future Indiana players.

He attends college games throughout the season and frequently is on the road for week-long stretches in a vocation that combines his affinity for travel and his passion for basketball.

"It's something you just can't get out of your blood," Daniels said via cell phone during a recent trip to Fort Lauderdale, Fla. "I don't think there's an ex-pro athlete who wouldn't enjoy going back to his particular field of endeavor, whether it's football, baseball, basketball or whatever."

One of the greatest pro basketball players of his era, Daniels has been a part of the Pacers' organization for nearly 30 years. He joined the front office in 1986 but is best remembered by fans of the old ABA as a dominating 6-foot-9, 220-pound center who helped lead Indiana to three league championships.

A seven-time ABA All-Star and the league's first rookie of the year in 1967, Daniels was traded from the Minnesota Muskies to the Pacers before the 1968-69 season and went on to enjoy a career like few others in franchise history.

The ABA's all-time leader in rebounds (9,494) and rebounding average (15.1), Daniels earned the league's MVP award in 1969 and 1971 and was an instrumental force during the Pacers' championship seasons of 1970, '72 and '73.

A dominating inside presence offensively and defensively, he

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DANIELS



WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Third in an occasional series about former Indiana Pacers players

PREP BASKETBALL

Hardwood heat begins for boys

Each victory in postseason adds pressure

By MATTHEW GLENESK
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Each victory brings more pressure. A loss ends the season. As a week of boys basketball sectionals begins tonight, Johnson County's seven high school teams will look to win and stay alive, if just for one more day.

Coaches say preparation for the state tournament mirrors that for regular-season games. They don't want to break the routine players have grown accustomed to since November.

But they admit the realization that a loss finishes their season does play a part in how the games are approached.

"We try not to put any extra pressure on kids," Indian Creek coach Rex Wilson said. "When the tip goes off, it's just another game. If you get too focused on one-and-done, you'll get too nervous and just won't play loose."

"But our kids aren't stupid. They know it's important."

Edinburgh coach Curt Chase said the thought of a season-ending loss looms in the back of his mind, so he's not going to leave anything unsaid this week to his players.

Whiteland coach Marty Johnson said the teams that advance in the tournament are the ones that think about winning, not what happens if they lose.

"I don't think you can let the fact that it could be your last game affect your play," he said. "The teams that advance in the tournament are poised, self-disciplined and fundamentally really strong."

Three county schools (Edinburgh, Franklin and Whiteland) will serve as host sites.

Under coach Dave Clark, Franklin served as sectional hosts twice before, and on each occasion the Grizzly Cubs emerged as sectional champions. He's hoping that trend continues this year.

Chase said he believes playing in the gym his team practices in every night will be an advantage.

At Whiteland, Johnson said his players will benefit from the familiarity of their own gym and locker rooms, but accommodating the other five teams at the sectional will take the Warriors out of their normal routine. Whiteland should be helped by its bye into the semifinals.

Because the Warriors don't play until Friday, Johnson said that allows him extra time to prepare.

He's going to need it as the Warriors face Class 3A No. 3-ranked Roncalli (19-1), a team that beat Whiteland by 20 points Dec. 8.

"I think if you're going to play the team that is obviously the favorite, you want all week to prepare for them," Johnson said. "Drawing them for Friday was good for us."

INSIDE

A look at southside teams in high school boys hoops sectionals.

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STAFF PHOTO BY BILL McADAM

Franklin Community High School guard Adrian Moss drives to the basket between several Jennings County defenders Friday at Vandivier Gym. Franklin is the defending sectional champ.

WHAT'S IN A TITLE?

Johnson County's seven high schools have combined for 81 sectional championships. Below is a breakdown of how many sectional titles each school has won, with the most recent championship in parentheses:

Franklin: 46 (2006)
Center Grove: 11 (1994)

Greenwood: 9 (2002)
Indian Creek: 7 (2000)

Whiteland: 5 (2002)
Edinburgh: 3 (1975)

Greenwood Christian Academy: 0
*Greenwood Christian Academy is competing in its first IHSAA sectional this week

Center Grove, Franklin and Greenwood all play at the Class 4A Franklin Sectional, which features two ranked teams (No. 3 Franklin Central and No. 7 Center Grove).

The Trojans (17-3) and Flashes (20-2) are favorites to contend for the title but were drawn on the same side of the bracket.

The two will face each other in the semifinals if both win their games Wednesday.

Clark said being drawn opposite of the sectional's two ranked teams is a bonus but doesn't ensure the defending sectional champions of a clear path to the final.

For that to happen, Franklin will first have to get by Decatur Central (8-14) tonight and Southport (9-11) on Friday.

Franklin (10-10) has won seven of its past 10 games, and senior Adrian Moss said the team's confidence has been

(SEE PRESSURE, PAGE B3)

Top-rated college linebackers hoping for huge NFL payday

By MICHAEL MAROT
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

INDIANAPOLIS

Patrick Willis and Paul Posluszny grew up in different worlds.

One considered attending the Naval Academy and representing his country on the battlefield if he couldn't become the next Western Pennsylvania kid to star at Linebacker U. The other dreamed of creating a better life for his siblings in the South.

Now their divergent paths have crossed here, at the NFL's scouting combine, where the award-winning linebackers are vying to become first-round picks in April's NFL draft.

"It would be a blessing, especially the way I grew up," Willis said, when asked what he would do with his riches. "It would help me take care of those who helped

me along the way and make sure that if I have children they won't have to go through what I went through."

Willis endured the kind of childhood experiences no youngster should.

The real-life nightmare began when his mother left home, abandoning her four children and forcing them to fend for themselves with an uninterested father. Willis was 4 years old.

Two years later, Willis was cooking meals for his siblings, and by age 10, Willis was working in Tennessee's cotton fields with his grandmother, earning \$110 per week. The money went to his dad so he could pay the family's bills.

As a teenager, the situation worsened. When Willis learned his father was abusing his sister, Ernicka, he turned him in to

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AP PHOTO

Mississippi linebacker Patrick Willis runs the 40-yard dash Monday during NFL scouting combine drills at the RCA Dome in Indianapolis.

Judge upholds police reports against Colts runner Rhodes

The Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS

Affidavits by a police officer who arrested Dominic Rhodes can be used in the drunken-driving case against the Indianapolis Colts' running back, a judge on Monday ruled.

Rhodes' attorney, Jim Voyles, argued during a hearing that there were inconsistencies between the affidavit the officer wrote soon after arresting Rhodes on Feb. 20 and a supplemental report filed later.

Marion Superior Court Judge Barbara Collins turned down that motion but allowed Rhodes to keep his driver's license pending future hearings.



RHODES

Rhodes faces misdemeanor drunken-driving charges after a state trooper reported pulling over his GMC truck about 3 a.m. for going 81 mph in a 55-mph zone of Interstate 65 on the northwest side of Indianapolis. Police said a test found his blood-alcohol level was 0.09, just over Indiana's legal limit to drive of 0.08.

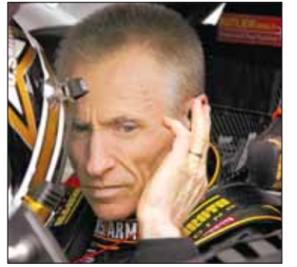
Rhodes did not speak with reporters as he entered and left the courtroom Monday.

The judge set a March 28 pre-trial hearing in the case.

David Wyser, chief trial deputy for the Marion County prosecutor's office, said he believed the material in both affidavits was admissible in court, as supplemental reports from police officers were common.

"They don't like what's in it

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AP PHOTO

Veteran driver Mark Martin prepares to put on his helmet before Sunday's NASCAR Nextel Cup race, the Auto Club 500, in Fontana, Calif.

Martin having time of his life

48-year-old driver 'comfortable' with Cup points lead

By JENNA FRYER

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CHARLOTTE, N.C.

Mark Martin spent the past two years waffling on his future in racing. Now that he's found the perfect situation, he really doesn't want to change his mind again.

But from his perch atop the Nextel Cup points standings, Martin knows sticking to the plan might be easier said than done.

"I'm very comfortable with what I've laid out, but I've learned never to say never," Martin said Monday. "I am the happiest man in racing right now with the best job in all of motorsports. That's where I am today."

What's at issue, though, is where Martin will be one month from now.

He's scheduled to spend March 23-25 in Lake City, Fla., racing late models with his son, Matt, and NASCAR newcomer Ricky Carmichael. That will be a world away from Bristol (Tenn.) Motor Speedway, where the Nextel Cup Series is scheduled to roar on without Martin for the first time since Nov. 22, 1987, a streak of 621 consecutive races.

Martin has been trying for two years to ease his way out from behind the wheel. But racing is all he's ever known, and for as hard as it is to picture a NASCAR without Martin, it's even harder for him to imagine not having it in his life.

So he settled on a limited schedule with Ginn Racing of 23 races this season, just enough to keep his competitive juices flowing and not so many as to run the 48-year-old ragged.

Only problem is, Martin is off to the best start of his 25-year career.

He almost won the Daytona 500, losing at the line to Kevin Harvick in a controversial photo finish, and was fifth Sunday at California Speedway to give him season-opening top-five finishes for the first time in his career. It's put Martin on top of the points standings for the first time

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