

Kuceris' Baseball Korner

N.L. picture: Braves, Astros, Giants win

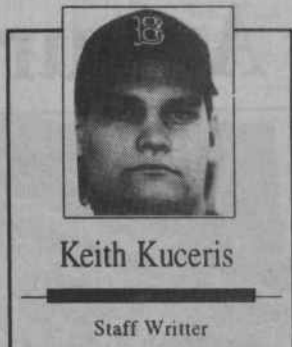
The American League has produced a World Series winner for three years in a row, so National League teams have an incentive for winning one of their own this season.

The Atlanta Braves and Philadelphia Phillies, NL pennant winners for the past two years, will renew their rivalry in the realigned NL East. Revenge should push the Braves to the top of their division with the Phillies close behind them. The Montreal Expos, Florida Marlins and pathetic New York Mets will follow the Braves and Phillies.

The Atlanta Braves are still the strongest team in baseball, but as we have seen in the past, having the best team on paper doesn't mean anything come October. Ted Turner hopes the recent acquisition of former Baltimore reliever Gregg Olson will be the nail in the coffin he wants all other teams put in. Olson will mop after potential Cy Young winners Tom Glavine, John Smoltz, Steve Avery and last year's winner Greg Maddux. Offensively, the Braves will miss the bat of slugger Ron Gant, but feel confident in their young talent. Outfielder Tony Tarasco, infielders Ryan Klesko and Chipper Jones, and catcher Javier Lopez are the future of this team.

The Philadelphia Phillies may have traded away pitchers Terry Mulholland and Mitch Williams, but they still have Curt Schilling, Danny Jackson, Tommy Greene and Ben Rivera. These starters will give the ball to newly acquired Doug Jones in the late innings this year. Philadelphia's new reliever will continue where the "Wild Thing" left off. I don't know if this is such a good idea. Any team consisting of tough-guy players Lenny Dykstra, John Kruk, and "Dutch" Darren Daulton isn't only a scary team, but a pretty good team also.

The Montreal Expos may have lost their ace in 15-game winner Dennis Martinez, but as always, this team will contend because of its expert personnel, who will have their work cut out for them if outfielders Marquis Grissom and Larry Walker can't stay healthy. The Florida Marlins are really



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Staff Writer

an expansion team this season, but they sure look like one.

The New York Mets should apply for expansion status. This would give them a legitimate reason for being such a bad team. Dallas Green's team may not be quite as bad as they were last year, but I'm not complimenting them either.

The NL Central should be conquered by the Houston Astros. Astro pitchers Doug Drabek and Greg Swindell had less than impressive records last season, and somehow Houston still had the NL's second best team ERA. Add strong seasons from pitchers Pete Harnisch and 15-game winner Darryl Kyle, and you're looking at another team from Texas capable of making it to the Fall Classic.

The Chicago Cubs are my pick to follow the Astros in this new division. How can you not love a team who has a devoted cheerleader by the name of Harry Carey. This guy is older than dirt, but still finds time to cheer on a team that hasn't won a World Series title for as long as just about anyone can remember.

Cincinnati Reds owner Marge Schott dismantled a team that won the World Series only a few years back. The Reds were 73-89 last season, and received much less attention than their troubled owner, or her dog, received. Cincinnati lost both Chris Sabo and Bip Roberts, but are still in possession of Barry Larkin, Kevin Mitchell, Hal Morris, and Roberto Kelly. This isn't a bad team, they just have a bad owner.

The St. Louis Cardinals are really

bad. They only have one good starter in Bob Tewksbury, and are lacking a power hitter and a decent closer in the bullpen. Even Ozzie "The Wizard of Oz" Smith can't come up with enough magic to transform this team into a contender. No wonder St. Louis fans are hoping for an NFL football team.

Pittsburgh Pirates manager Jim Leyland is still mourning the loss of Barry Bonds, Doug Drabek, Bobby Bonilla, John Smiley and Jose Lind. The Pirates were pretty good back in those days. The key word here is "were".

The NL West will be won by the San Francisco Giants this season. Sure, they lost Will Clark to the Texas Rangers, but they still have sluggers Barry Bonds and Matt Williams. These guys can do it all. I bet they can even pitch 10 times better than Jose Canseco did.

The Los Angeles Dodgers may contend in this division if pitchers Orel Hershiser, Ramone Martinez and Greg Swindell can bounce back from a disappointing 1993. The Dodgers will also need Darryl Strawberry to be a factor if they are going to contend this season. Will Strawberry be healthy? Even Tommy Lasorda doesn't know the answer to this question. However, Lasorda does know that he has himself a great player in DeShields, and an even greater player in last years NL Rookie of the Year, Mike Piazza.

The Colorado Rockies added two quality veteran players in Ellis Burks and Howard Johnson, but what they really needed to go after was pitching. In fact, they should of gone after a whole pitching staff.

Are things looking up for this San Diego Padre club? Probably not. Management will just disappoint fans some other way. Fans know how to make this team a contender again. They want Steve Garvey back, and they want him back now!

Well, there's the NL picture. Hopefully, your favorite team will be a legitimate contender this season.



Nick Nolte and Shaquille O'Neal co-star in 'Blue Chips,' coming to Columbia Friday.

'Blue Chips' hits Columbia Friday

From Staff Reports

A once great fictional college basketball team is the center of a new Nick Nolte movie, "Blue Chips," which comes to Columbia Friday.

The movie offers a remarkable supporting cast of basketball stars, including Shaquille O'Neal, Anfernee "Penny" Hardaway, Matt Nover, the Celtic's Hall of Famer Bob Cousy, former Milwaukee Bucks' All-Star Marques Johnson, NBA all-time great Larry Bird and famous coaches Bobby Knight, Rick Pitino and George Raveling.

Other members of the cast include Mary McDonnell, Ed O'Neill, J. T. Walsh and Alfre Woodard.

Nolte plays Pete Bell, head coach of the Western University Dolphins, former national champions who have slipped out of the national rankings in recent years. Under pressure, Bell and the school's athletic director, played by Cousy, begin a search for players who can turn their ailing program around. His devil's choice involves the search for "Blue Chips" — the cream of the high school basketball crop, the players every college program covets.

Playing Bell's bona fide "blue chip" prospects are O'Neal as Neon Bodeauz of New Orleans, Hardaway as Butch McCrae from a parochial academy in Chicago, and Matt Nover as Ricky Roe from the Indiana corn-

fields.

Director William Friedkin's affection for the game led to his demands for realism. In the central roles of the "Blue Chip" recruits, the filmmakers decided to hire athletes who had some acting ability rather than actors who would perform on the court with lesser skill.

"I wanted to look at the players in this film and know that these guys are really playing," Friedkin said. "I wanted there to be no doubt that you are watching great athletes in competition."

"The competition in this movie had to be at a very high level," said Executive Producer Ron Shelton. "We couldn't settle for average athletes. We needed college players who could hold up their end of a game against O'Neal. The result was that some of the best basketball played anywhere this summer was played for our movie."

The players were divided into two teams of college all-stars, coached by Kentucky's Rick Pitino and USC's George Raveling, along with a third team coached by Indiana basketball legend Bobby Knight. Prior to the games, the players spent a week practicing at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles under the direction of former NCAA Championship coach Pete Newell and Dallas Mavericks' scout Dick Baker.

To prepare for his role, Nick Nolte spent two weeks inside and outside of the gym with Knight. He also studied the motivational style of the late Jim Valvano and soaked up tips on game strategy from Pete Newell, the film's technical advisor among others.

"Coaching is really a moment by moment decision-making process; there's no blueprint," Nolte said. "The key to coaching is being able to use your imagination. Read, react, create. You also have to prepare, do your homework, get the basics down. What separates the master craftsman from the average coach is his creativity. It's a thinking man's game."

Among other basketball notables making appearances are Syracuse University head coach Jim Boeheim, former UNLV coach Jerry Tarkanian, former University of California coach Lou Campanelli, NBA scout Marty Blake and sportscasters Dick Vitale and Todd Donoho.

The participation of individuals like Knight, Raveling, Pitino and others, who are still active in the college game, is evidence that the themes addressed in "Blue Chips" are of importance to the majority of coaches who run clean programs.

First written 12 years ago by Ron Shelton, "Blue Chips" dealt with themes of corruption, morality and ambition that have been at the heart of much of Friedkin's work.

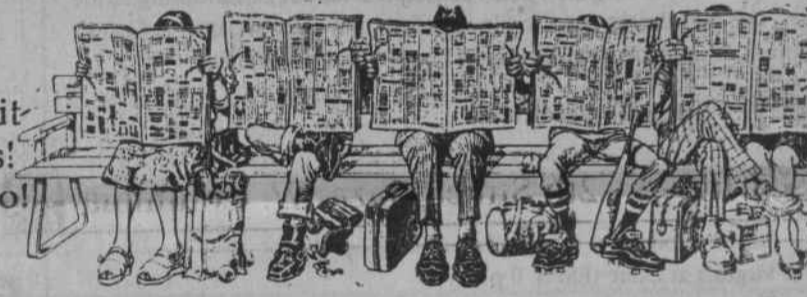
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