

Cameron crazies turning on Blue Devils

The Associated Press

DURHAM, N.C. — That the crazies in Cameron Indoor Stadium booed a bunch of basketball players isn't news. The flash is that they booed their own Duke basketball team.

True, they weren't the lusty, echoing boos that might be heard in a professional arena. But they were audible. And they were just some of the reactions after the Blue Devils fell to their fifth straight loss, 77-60, to North Carolina State.

"Hey, Marlo," one of the pep band's members yelled to another. "Just 240 more days until football season."

In front of the band, the percussionist banged his drum slowly, although it had to hurt because he was using his forehead.

The student section, generally the last bastion to fall when times get tough at Duke, was beginning to get surly Wednesday night.

Some of them were pointing a finger in the direction of interim coach Pete Gaudet, who is replacing Mike Krzyzewski as he continues his rehabilitation from back surgery.

Others were taking out their frustration over the losing streak at individual players. One student vented his ire at reserve guard Kenny Blakeney.

"Give it up, give it up," the student screamed, worried that if Blakeney held the ball much longer, he'd give it up to the Wolfpack.

Still others are trying to figure out who the Blue Devils will face in the National Invitation Tournament and where they'll be traveling.

"It's like everyone around here expects us to win in Cameron. We expect to win in Cameron," Duke guard Jeff Capel said. "It seems like the weight of the world is on our shoulders. In some ways, I feel like

we're letting down Duke basketball tradition."

The focus of all the despair is a Duke team long accustomed to success but very short on chemistry. Three freshmen are trying to find their niche with a junior and two seniors. In the locker room, the Blue Devils didn't hear the disparaging comments, and they weren't making any, either.

"At some point, it's got to come together," said forward Cherokee Parks. "This is definitely not typical of our team, with Coach K or without Coach K."

Parks also said defense used to be the catalyst for Duke's attack. In their last three games, the Blue Devils have been burned by Randolph Childress of Wake Forest, Cory Alexander of Virginia and Ishua Benjamin of N.C. State. In each instance, the three players made up for a slow first half with a strong second half.

With Alexander, his effort helped the Cavaliers overcome a 23-point deficit and take a double-overtime victory.

"One of the things that teams feared in us is our defense," Parks said. "It seems like teams can't wait to get on offense to play against us. Individually, we've just got to step up and play a lot tougher."

Especially frustrating to Capel is the two national championship banners that hang among others that chronicle the team's achievements in Cameron. They represent a history that this year's team is finding difficult to maintain.

"I can't speak for the whole team, but for me it does," said Capel when asked if losing in the face of past successes bothers him. "It's just weird. I've never been in a situation where I've lost two games in a row. Now, we've lost five in a row, and I think it's at a point now where our team is questioning 'Can we win?'"

Hockey's restart should teach baseball a lesson



JIMMY DeBUTTS
Sports Editor

This is the year Cal Ripken should break the consecutive games-played record. He may not get a chance to fulfill that incredible accomplishment this year if the owners bring in scrubs to play. It's bad enough that last year was never finished, and I don't think fans are going to shell out big money to see replacement players.

Now that hockey has solved its labor dispute, maybe Major League Baseball can work out its differences before spring training starts.

Regardless of what some owners think, no real baseball fan wants to see replacement players in games that count. The lack of a labor agreement ended play last season and the chances of several players to break long-standing records.

Ken Griffey Jr., Frank Johnson and Jeff Bagwell put up tremendous numbers, but they, as well as the fans, were cheated from the opportunity to see if they could establish new records.

Baseball shot itself in the foot in 1994. Young players had sparked interest in baseball at a time when basketball and football were quickly becoming the nation's pastimes. Baseball couldn't afford to lose any popularity.

With the loss of the World Series, football and basketball took the fan support that would have gone to baseball. Although I have lost just about all interest in baseball, I still love to watch Griffey put one in the upper deck or Big Frank battle Clemens.

If management and the players can't come to an agreement fans won't be the ones struggling. The hockey and basketball playoffs will get fans through the spring, and the NFL will start training camp in July, so I won't cry if people making a minimum of \$100,000 don't work.

Baseball is losing fan support and money by suggesting that replacement players could be just as entertaining as the superstars. The players and management have to decide that the fans are the people to make happy. If they don't, by the time they reach an agreement, there will be no fans lining up to pay admission.

I hope there will be a real baseball season this year. There are millions of fans who have waited nine months to see baseball and are sick of the fighting between management and the players. I want to hear the crack of the bat, the smell of beer and peanuts and a drunken Harry Carey singing "Take Me Out to the Ballgame."

Niekro and Braves could be close to deal if strike continues

The Associated Press

ATLANTA — Phil Niekro and the Atlanta Braves, involved in a messy divorce 12 years ago, are courting again as a result of the major-league players strike.

Niekro, less than three months shy of his 56th birthday, said Wednesday that he has been contacted by a National League team to discuss his availability as a strike replacement.

The Atlanta-Journal Constitution reported Thursday that the team is the Braves.

"I would certainly listen, see what's available and what the deal is," Niekro said by telephone from his home in Flowery Branch, Ga., on the shore of Lake Lanier. "My arm feels better now than it has in 10 years."

He said he expected to meet with representatives of the team today.

"What more natural development could there be?" Braves general manager John

Schuerholz told the newspaper.

Niekro retired after the 1987 season with a 318-274 record after spending 18 of his 22 major-league seasons with the Braves. He was released in October 1983, played four more seasons in the American League and returned to the Braves for one farewell start.

"There's a lot of possibilities in life. I've never looked at the age factor. They did," Niekro said. "With a knuckleballer, it's completely different than in power pitchers. I throw a knuckleball at the same speed I did 20 years ago. It still dances."

Spring training opens in four weeks, and baseball owners have said they will go ahead with the season using replacement players, paying them a minimum \$628.42 per day. The regular players went on strike Aug. 12.

Niekro would say only that the team he has talked with is a National League team

and that he was asked if he and his brother Joe, 50, also a former major-league pitcher, were interested in playing.

"His ears are open," Niekro said of his brother.

He said it is too early to comment on the chance of drawing the ire of former and current major-leaguers by crossing their picket line.

"All I know is there's some interest, and I'm interested in sitting down and listening," he said.

Niekro managed the Colorado Silver Bullets, the women's professional team, last season. Joe Niekro was pitching coach. Both have said they would return for another season.

"I threw for a half-hour, 45 minutes every day last year in batting practice," Phil Niekro said. "I'd also start fooling around throwing knuckleballs and sinkers, and you start thinking. ... It's like riding a bicycle."

Sanders, Marino named most valuable by NFLPA

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Detroit Lions running back Barry Sanders and Miami Dolphins quarterback Dan Marino were chosen by their fellow players as the most valuable NFL players this season.

They gained the honors in voting by the National Football League Players Association.

Sanders led the NFL in rushing with 1,883 yards and Marino threw for 4,453 yards and 30 touchdowns.

Sanders' teammate, Mel Gray, who led the league in returning kickoffs with 1,276 yards, was voted top special teams player in the NFC.

Reggie White, who helped the Green Bay Packers finish fourth in league defensive efficiency, and Bruce Smith of the Buffalo Bills, who had 10 sacks, were voted defensive linemen of the year.

Another Dolphin, Richmond Webb, who anchored a line that allowed the fewest sacks and led the AFC in total yards per game, was

picked as offensive lineman of the year. William Roaf of the New Orleans Saints was selected No. 1 NFC offensive lineman.

Ken Harvey of the Washington Redskins was the top linebacker in the NFC and the San Diego Chargers' Junior Seau and Kevin Greene of the Pittsburgh Steelers tied for the honor in the AFC. Seau had 155 tackles, and Greene led the league with 14 sacks.

Others getting top honors in the voting by nearly 90 percent of NFL players were:

- AFC Special Teams Player, Eric Metcalf, Cleveland Browns.
- AFC Offensive Rookie, Marshall Faulk, Indianapolis Colts.
- AFC Defensive Back, Rod Woodson, Pittsburgh Steelers.
- AFC Defensive Rookie, Antonio Langham, Cleveland Browns.
- NFC Offensive Rookie, Errict Rhett, Tampa Bay Buccaneers.
- NFC Defensive Back, Deion Sanders, San Francisco 49ers.
- NFC Defensive Rookie, Bryant Young, San Francisco 49ers.

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