

Daily

Sports

Wednesday Night Basketball



UConn gaurd Christian Vital dunks after a steal in a game versus the USF Bulls on Sunday, Feb 23. Wednesday, Vital and the Huskies are in Hartford to host the UCF Knights. PHOTO BY ERIC WANG, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER/THE DAILY CAMPUS

MEN'S BASKETBALL: HUSKIES HOPE TO SAY NIGHT, NIGHT TO KNIGHTS

by Andrew Morrison
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Playing at the XL Center for the final time with the American Athletic Conference logo painted on the floor, the UConn men's basketball team takes on UCF for the first and only time this season on Wednesday.

It's been over a year since the Huskies (15-12, 6-8 The American) and Knights (14-12, 5-9) last squared off, a six-point UConn de-

feat in Orlando last January. Then-senior Jalen Adams had 22 points in the second half alone as UConn climbed back from a 12-point half-time deficit but couldn't complete the comeback.

Although UConn leads the all-time series 10-4, UCF has owned the matchup as of late, having won each of the last three meetings. The Knights have won three of their last five but are still reeling from a stunning 75-74 loss to last-place Tulane at home on Saturday.

See UCF, p. 10

Huskies in the Pros: A star returns to CT, injuries in the NBA, Huskies in spring

by Ben Field
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Former Husky and WNBA star Kaleena Mosqueda-Lewis is returning to Connecticut. Mosqueda-Lewis, who graduated from the University of Connecticut in 2015 after winning three straight championships with the Huskies, was traded from the Seattle Storm to the Connecticut Sun in exchange for a second-round draft pick.

"I'm really excited to start a new journey in Connecticut," she said, via a statement released by the Sun on Monday. "It was a second home for me for four years and I'm looking forward to being back!" In a league chock-full of former UConn stars, it is exciting for Husky fans to see a UConn Alumni come and play for the state of Connecticut.

Over in the NBA, Kemba Walker has been having a great year in his debut season for the Celtics. After being traded in the middle of 2019 from the Hornets, the point guard has had a great performance with the Celtics, averaging 21.8 points, 4.1 rebounds and 5.0 assists, and shooting 42.9% on field goals. His play earned him a spot in the All-Star game, where he played for 29 minutes and 10 seconds. While his play this year has been good, he has missed three consecutive games after the All-Star game with a lingering knee injury. It is unclear when he will return, but the Celtics surely miss his help, having lost a



Boston Celtics' Kemba Walker (8) goes up for a shot as Houston Rockets' P.J. Tucker, right, defends during the first half of an NBA basketball game Tuesday, Feb. 11, 2020, in Houston. PHOTO BY DAVID J. PHILLIP/AP

close game to the Lakers in his absence.

Unfortunately, injuries have impacted another UConn alum in the NBA: Jeremy Lamb, a key guard for the Indiana Pacers and a member of the 2011 UConn championship team,

was taken out of a game versus the Raptors Monday with a torn ACL, torn meniscus and lateral femoral condylar fracture.

See LAMB, p. 9

THIS WEEKEND IN UCONN SPORTS

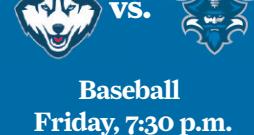
Men's Hockey



Friday
7:05 p.m.
XL Center



Women's Hockey
Friday, 6 p.m.
Chestnut Hill, MA



Baseball
Friday, 7:30 p.m.
New Orleans, LA

INSTAGRAM OF THE DAY



@fitzthefuzz
The wonderful ladies at the @uconn
#guidepuppy #fidelco

TWEETS OF THE DAY



Daniel Connolly

@DanielVConnolly

Hockey East playoff scenarios: UConn will be the No. 2 seed if it wins out over its final four games. The Huskies haven't officially clinched a playoff spot, but just need two points to do so.

UConn is home

@NoEscalators

not enough people are talking about how uconn was the clear #1 team in the country in 2009 until jerome dyson got hurt

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MEN'S



7 P.M.

XL CENTER

TV: ESPN2/ESPN2

RADIO: UCONN IMG

RADIO NETWORK

SPREAD: UCONN -8



UConn guard Crystal Dangerfield handles the ball in a game versus the UCF Knights on Saturday, Feb. 22 in her last regular season game at Gampel Pavilion. The Huskies travel to Cincinnati Wednesday to take on the Bearcats. PHOTO BY CHARLOTTE LAO, PHOTO EDITOR/THE DAILY CAMPUS

WOMEN'S



7 P.M.

CINCINNATI, OHIO

TV: SNY/ESPN3

RADIO: THE RIVER 105.9

SPREAD: UCONN -13.5

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL: HUSKIES TRAVEL TO CINCY FOR LAST TIME IN THE AMERICAN

by Jorge Eckardt
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UConn of course. However, it didn't look like that when the two teams met on Jan. 30, when the Huskies beat the Bearcats 80-50.

A 30 point victory is already a blowout, but if you look at the second quarter where Cincinnati outscored UConn 22-9 as an outlier, UConn's dominance is emphasized even more. In the other three quarters, UConn outscored Cincy 71-28, as it wasn't even really a competition.

See CINCY, p. 10

GOLF: HUSKIES SLOW OUT OF THE GATE AT LOYOLA UNIVERSITY INTERCOLLEGIATE

by Ashton Stansel
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petition on Monday, the Huskies ended up tied for No. 13 place out of 19 teams and shot 877, which was 13 over the par of 864. Leading the way was redshirt junior Chandler Morris, who ended up tied for No. 34 at two-over-par, after shooting one-under-par on the final day.

Morris's 218 was his lowest total for the season and included another below-par 71, his fourth of the season. Behind him was redshirt senior Drake Hull at tied for No. 46 at three-over-par. He shot par and one-under on the final two days, marking his seventh and eighth par or below rounds this season.

Behind them was Finn Boynton, a junior who struggled on the final day after a decent first two days, ending the tournament at three-over-par and tied for No. 56, 20 places further back than after Day 2. However, at a total of 220, it was still Boynton's best performance this season, and his 72 on Sunday was his first time hitting par this season. Then there were Jack Boulger and Jared Nelson, who finished tied for No. 71 and No. 90, respectively, at six and 11 over par.

Boulger got par or better for the second time this season with his 72 on Monday, while Nelson's 70 on Monday was his fifth under par of the season. Finally, there was Rodrigo Sanchez, who tied for No. 106 at plus 16.

The Huskies will be back in action next weekend when they'll play at the Fort Lauderdale Intercollegiate tournament.

After the final round of com-

THIS WEEKEND IN UCONN SPORTS

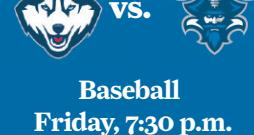
Men's Hockey



Friday
7:05 p.m.
XL Center



Women's Hockey
Friday, 6 p.m.
Chestnut Hill, MA



Baseball
Friday, 7:30 p.m.
New Orleans, LA

INSTAGRAM OF THE DAY



TWEETS OF THE DAY



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Kyrie?

POINT/COUNTERPOINT: IS KYRIE IRVING WORTH HAVING ON YOUR TEAM?

by Kevin Arnold,
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and Danny Barletta
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Kyrie Irving is back in the news this week for some unfortunate reasons. He is getting surgery on his shoulder that caused him to miss extended time early in the season and now the rest of the year playing just 20 games. Irving has immense talent, but given his history with both injuries and some questionable character flaws, we are debating whether having Irving on your team is beneficial or not.

Danny Barletta:

This one is too easy for me, because I've had Kyrie Irving on my favorite team, and it was not beneficial whatsoever. However, I am going to try to be as objective as a Celtics fan can be about Mr. Irving. He has the talent to be one of the top five — if not the top three — point guards in basketball, but he has one fatal flaw: He thinks he can lead a team, and he's proven time and time again that he cannot. Let's look at his track record. In his first three years in Cleveland, he played some great individual basketball, but the team was terrible, finishing far under .500 in every season. Once LeBron James and Kevin Love came to town, Irving was able to become a secondary guy on the team, and the Cavaliers went to three straight NBA Finals. They won one in 2016, coming back from down 3-1 to beat the 73-9 Golden State Warriors. Irving was terrific in those games, even hitting the game-winning shot in Game 7, but that was clearly LeBron's team. After losing in the Finals in 2017, Irving demanded a trade, basically saying he was tired of being



Kyrie Irving drives against Steph Curry during the 2014 NBA All-Star Game. Since, Irving has been traded from the Cleveland Cavaliers to the Boston Celtics and then signed with the Brooklyn Nets in free agency. PHOTO COURTESY OF CAVS HISTORY VIA FLICKR

in LeBron's shadow and wanted to be the main guy on his own team. He got his wish and went to the Boston Celtics, a team oozing with young talent. So Irving, being the great player he is, must have been able to lead that team to glory right? Nope. What if I told you that the Celtics went further with Terry Rozier as their point guard than they did with Irving? It's true. Irving got hurt before the 2018 playoffs, and the Celtics, led by a rookie Jayson Tatum, Jaylen Brown and Rozier, came one game away from the NBA Finals. The next year with Irving healthy, the Celtics fell way short of high expectations. Irving stunted the growth of Tatum and Brown, became a distraction throughout the season with his comments about the team and completely folded in the play-

offs against the Milwaukee Bucks. Irving is not a leader. He's a gifted basketball player but a bad teammate. I'll pass on that.

Kevin Arnold:

For me, Kyrie is one of my favorite players in the league to watch. He's an All-NBA caliber player, with the accolades to match, who finds ways to routinely drop jaws. It boggles my mind that anyone wouldn't want him on their team. And that's the thing here, it's still a team. If you look at Irving's first all-star season in 2012-2013 he was the youngest player on the roster and averaged 22 points, five assists and shot 42% from the floor. Sure Cleveland was a sub-.500 team, but that will happen when your next best player is rookie Dion Waiters. His talent was finally put to use when LeBron came back and

they were able to play meaningful basketball games. I'll never forget seeing the two of them each drop 41 points and combine for nine made 3-pointers and 13 dimes in a Finals game. Then he got tired of playing behind LeBron and wanted a trade. I can think of someone else who demanded a trade away from a very successful team (RIP Mamba) that, instead, could've ended in more rings. Boston, while it still stings for fans, was ultimately a failed experiment. Irving has the talents to elevate a team, but not on LeBron's level. The leadership skills are lacking in some regards, even in Brooklyn, but he's not "the guy" there. He has Kevin Durant and even then Irving has dropped 50 points, not once, but twice in his limited time on the floor. If I'm the Nets, I cannot wait to see the two

of them share the court and am excited for where they can take the franchise that has long been in the gutter.

Barletta:

I'm with you; I feel Brooklyn will ultimately be a solid fit for Irving because he can reprise the role he thrived in with Cleveland. He'll be a secondary player on KD's team, which is fine as long as he accepts that role, which I think he will now that he realizes it takes more than talent to lead a team. But the fact that Kyrie has to be in that exact situation in order for a team of his to have any success is precisely the reason I don't want him on my team. He's a prima donna who whines and lashes out when things don't go his way. He couldn't accept that guys like Brown and Tatum were potential stars if they could be utilized correctly and instead threw them under the bus for being immature. Fast forward a year later and Tatum has emerged into one of the best players in the East and Brown has been playing at an all-star level. Now who looks immature? Replacing Irving with Kemba Walker was a perfect move for the Celtics because even though he's not as talented as Irving, he is such a great teammate who is letting Tatum, Brown or even Gordon Hayward be the focal point of the offense on any given night (all while still averaging 22 points). The Celtics are miles ahead of where they were last year with a worse roster on paper. The reason is chemistry, something that Irving ruined last year while Kemba is embracing it this season. Kemba wants to win by any means possible, while Kyrie only wanted to win on his terms. That's a toxic mentality that breaks a team down instead of bringing it together.

See KYRIE, p. 9

Gilson's Sports Guide: Is the Rookie of the Year race closer than you think?

by Conner Gilson
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Eleven months ago to the day, I was working the opening round of the NCAA tournament as a disc runner for The Associated Press. What that means is I basically got to sit courtside for free to watch some of the most exciting players in college basketball duke it out on the game's biggest stage. One of those names was Ja Morant.

I had heard a lot about Morant's highlight reel abilities leading up to the tourney, but seeing him in person was a whole other experience videos cannot capture. Madness, if you will. He was quicker, more under control, more athletic and, simply put, looked like a man among boys at times during the first two rounds. Because of this he was my immediate choice to win the Rookie of the Year award heading into the 2019-20 season. The only problem was I forgot about the 6-foot-6, nearly 300-pound kid from Kentucky named Zion Williamson.

Before, during and after the draft, Zion was everyone's favorite pick to win ROTY, some even going so far as to say he was a generational talent, the next LeBron James. And sure, I also had high expectations for the teenager, but something about his style of play rubbed me the wrong way. I wasn't

quite sure a big athletic body would be enough for him to fulfill the immense shoes people had already put out for him. Ja on the other hand, was different. He was ready in college, he has proven he was ready in the NBA, and now well past the halfway point of the season, he is still my favorite to be chosen as

Rookie of the Year over Zion.

lead all qualifying rookies by decent margins as well as his team. Beyond just the stats, he has already made several game-clinching plays on both sides of the floor, while also showing flashes of that insane athleticism and efficiency he displayed at Murray State. But that's the easy stuff.

The biggest thing Ja has done for this Grizzlies team, is make them relevant again. Memphis currently sits in the No. 8 spot in the tough Western Conference with a record of 28-29.

Those 28 wins have already surpassed their total from the 2017-18 season, and they are just five wins away from passing their total from last season with 25 games left to play.

You might be questioning if this can actually be accounted to Ja or if they are just a better team this season, but the answer to that is a resounding "Ja." The Grizzlies are 1-5 without Morant on the court this season, with both their offensive and defensive efficiencies dropping without the rookie.

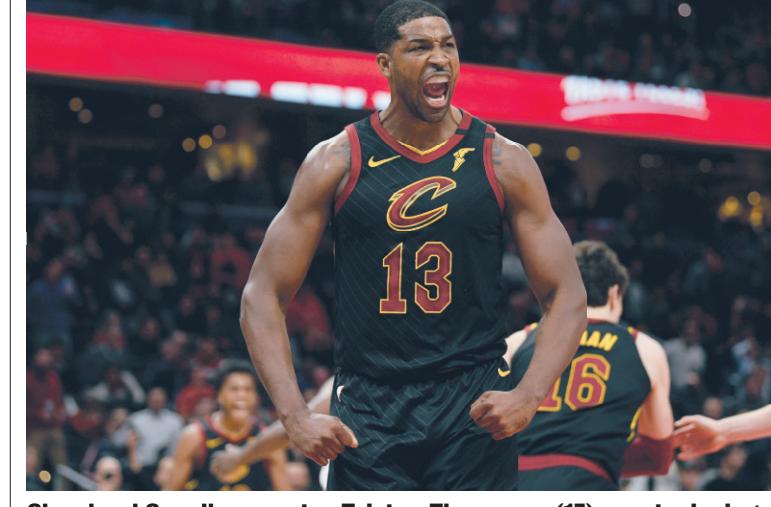
Putting his stats aside (which is what many people will gravitate toward when picking the winner), Ja has been carrying the load for the Grizzlies, and has been a true difference-maker all season. Just look at their roster without him. Do you think a starting five of Tyus Jones, Dillon Brooks, Kyle Anderson, Jaren Jackson, Jr. and Jonas Valanciunas would put up a real fight against anyone?

See ZION, p. 9

Photo courtesy of AP

Here's why: On the season, Ja Morant is averaging 17.6 points and almost seven assists per game, both of which

Hey Seanny J: Who's left in the NBA buyout market?



Cleveland Cavaliers center Tristan Thompson (13) reacts during the second half of the team's NBA basketball game against the Washington Wizards, Friday, Feb. 21, 2020, in Washington. The Cavaliers won 113-108. PHOTO BY NICK WASS/AP

by Sean Janos
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In the wake of the trade deadline, the NBA's buyout market has been active. The Rockets doubled down on their no-center system and signed big veteran wings Jeff Green and DeMarre Carroll. Markieff Morris went to the Lakers just days after Los Angeles' twin brother. Speaking of outspoken wildcards going to the Clippers, they added needed depth at point guard with Reggie Jackson. Forwards Marvin Williams and Michael Kidd-Gilchrist hit the lottery, going from the rags of the Charlotte Hornets to the riches of the Bucks and Mavericks, respectively.

The March 1 buyout deadline is coming up, but who's left on the market that could actually find minutes on a contender? There's really just one guy; I'll give you a few hints. He's a big man, he's 28 years old and he has a championship ring. Does that sound too good to be true? Well, don't get too excited, because it's Tristan Thompson.

The Cavaliers traded

for Andre Drummond at the trade deadline, edging Thompson out of his primary position and making him available. Though he isn't the most glamorous player in the league, Thompson can add a lot to a championship contender. He has proven to be healthy after a couple of injury-plagued seasons. He's averaging over 30 minutes per game, missing just four of the Cavaliers' games this season.

The Cavs have been in turmoil with the whole firing their head coach in his first season. They are anchored at the very bottom of the Eastern Conference standings, but Thompson is posting career-highs in points (12.2), rebounds (10.2) and assists (2.1) per game. Plus, he has plenty of playoff experience from his years with LeBron James. Any team with playoff aspirations in need of a quality, big-bodied, traditional center would be happy to add Thompson. So, who is out there hoping to see the Cavaliers pull the trigger and buy Thompson out?

See BUYOUT, p. 9

Sports

Photo of the Day | Group hug!



For their final game at Gampel Pavilion this season, the UConn women's basketball team celebrated senior day by defeating UCF 66-53. THE DAILY CAMPUS

PHOTO BY CHARLOTTE LAO, PHOTO EDITOR/

Men's Basketball to take on UCF

UCF, cont. from p. 12

Redshirt junior forward Collin Smith is the only Knight in double-figure scoring this season, but four other players average seven points or more per game. UCF is middle of the pack in basically every offensive metric this season, but have been quite vulnerable on the defensive glass at times this season, averaging the second-worst rebound margin (-.8) in the conference.

As UCF comes off an embarrassing loss, UConn enters on the heels of a nice bounce-back victory over USF on Sunday. Senior Christian Vital had a game-high 24 points and became The American's all-time leader in 3-pointers made.

"It just shows the nights I was in Gampel and Werth shooting when no one was there. So to know the work is paying off, I know I got a lot more work to do, but that's definitely a nice accomplishment," Vital said after the win. "That's a nice accomplishment, but I'd rather win more games."

Since Akok Akok went down for the season with an Achilles rupture, head coach Dan Hurley has rolled out the same starting lineup in both games, with junior Isaiah Whaley taking Akok's place alongside Jalen Gaffney, James Bouknight, Josh Carlton and Vital. But with Bouknight and Carlton



UConn guard Alterique Gilbert handles the ball in a game versus the USF Bulls on Sunday, Feb. 23. Wednesday, the Huskies will take on the other Florida School, UCF. THE DAILY CAMPUS

CLOUD9'S IMPECCABLE SEASON CONTINUES

by Ashton Stansel

CAMPUS CORRESPONDENT

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Cloud9 finishes the first half of the season 10-0

Cloud9's historically dominant undefeated season is still going. The No. 1 North American League of Legends team closed out the fifth week of play with another 2-0 record, convincingly beating both CLG and Immortals en route to a 10-0 record. Their first five weeks have been a period of absolute dominance; the team has yet to lose a mid-lane tier-one turret. Zven, the team's Attack Damage Carry or ADC, has died three times in 10 games, and every player on the team has looked like the best in their position in North America. While questions still remain, there is no doubt that Cloud9 has had the best half-split in the history of North American League. If they keep this dominance up, there's no question that they will be without question the best North American team in the history of League of Legends.

LCK closes to media after coronavirus fears

Ashley Kang, a freelance reporter for ESPN who covers the LCK, reported on Tuesday that the media room would be indefinitely closed. This followed a coronavirus concern early last week after host Kim Min-ah was found to have a fever. Despite her later being cleared, officials seem to be taking no chances after Korea's recent outbreaks, which caused the National Threat Alert Level to be raised to the highest it can be.

Gen.G, T1 claim top of standings as DragonX falters

Last week, T1 once again showed why their struggling start was a fluke. They beat both Kingzone DragonX and APK Prince. While APK has had a difficult start to the season, currently sitting at 1-5 after a shaky win over the other bottom team, KT Rolster. Somewhat ironically, KT's one win of the season is over Afreeca Freecs, who are currently tied with DragonX at 4-2 and No. 3. DragonX's fantastic start to the season was damaged last week when they lost two close 2-1 series to T1 and Gen.G. While these losses are understandable given those teams' positions at the top of the standings, it was still a disappointing series of losses that mean DragonX will be looking to bounce back this week.

See ESPORTS, p. 9

Bearcats up next for Women's Basketball

CINCY, cont. from p. 12

The Huskies got 20-plus point, 50-plus percent performances from both Megan Walker and Crystal Dangerfield and got a very solid 12-point, nine-rebound game from Olivia Nelson-Ododa. However, Christyn Williams and Anna Makurat struggled, going 4-for-16 and 0-for-5 from the field, respectively.

As for Cincinnati, Antionette Miller led the Bearcats with 19 points but did so on just 7-for-22 shooting, dropping off after going 6-for-10 from the field in the first half. Ilmar'l Thomas, the team's leading scorer who is averaging 19.2 points per game on nearly 60% shooting, was held to just 12 points going 4-for-11 from the field.

Perhaps the biggest let-down game for the Bearcats was from senior guard Sam Rodgers, who despite playing all 40 minutes of the game scored just three points on 1-for-6 shooting, had three assists, three rebounds, three turnovers and four fouls.

Cincinnati runs a very heavy starter rotation, similar to



UConn guard Christyn Williams holds the ball while being guarded during a game versus the UCF Knights on Saturday, Feb. 22. Williams and the Huskies will play in Cincinnati Wednesday for the last time as a member of the American Athletic Conference. THE DAILY CAMPUS

UConn, with four players averaging over 30 minutes per game. The Huskies, who have had just six players play in every game this season when fully healthy, still just have three

players who are averaging over 30 minutes per game.

The last time these two teams played, eight players saw game action for the Bearcats, and just six of them were on the

court for over five minutes.

All-time, the Huskies are 21-0 versus the Bearcats, dating back to their first matchup in January of 2006, Cincinnati's first year in the Big East Conference. They didn't play each other in the 2006-07 season but have played at least once every year since, sometimes up to three times per year.

In the short term outlook, these last three games really don't mean much, seeing as the Huskies have already clinched the regular-season conference championship. However, in the big picture, UConn has a chance to go undefeated all-time in the American Athletic Conference because of their move to the Big East next season. With just a handful of games remaining between the regular season and the conference tournament, a loss would not only cause them to fall just short of that historic accomplishment, but could also impact their NCAA tournament seeding as well.

Tip-off is scheduled for 7 p.m. and can be watched on SNY or ESPN3.

Tristan Thompson buyout possibilities

BUYOUT, cont. from p. 11

Houston Rockets

The Rockets are taking the small-ball era to the next level, inventing "micro-ball." They traded away Clint Capela and added Robert Covington, Green and Carroll to their stock of wings that already consisted of P.J. Tucker, Danuel House and Thabo Sefolosha. They've been hoarding wings with incredible size that can stretch the floor to throw out into lineups with James Harden and Russell Westbrook in lieu of a traditional center. They still have Tyson Chandler, but at this stage in his career, he can't be relied on to play many quality play-off minutes.

So why would a team that just traded away a traditional center want to add another one? Well, they'd do it to simply hedge their bet on their unconventional system. If the standings stay the way that they are through March and the first half of April, the Rockets will draw a first round play-off matchup with the Jazz and a potential second round matchup with the Lakers. Both teams have All-Star big men in Rudy Gobert and Anthony Davis, with the Lakers also able to pair Davis with titans Dwight Howard, JaVale McGee, Kyle Kuzma, Markeff Morris and, oh yeah, LeBron James.

If the Rockets get absolutely bodied by these colossus teams when their perimeter centric, drive-and-kick system fails, Thompson will allow them to change their strategy mid-series back to a more traditional style. Is Gobert effortlessly rolling to the rim? Davis doing whatever he wants to Covington and Tucker? LeBron throwing lob after lob to Howard and McGee? Thompson provides a big body with good instincts near the basket that can prevent these things from happening.

He wouldn't have the large sal-



Cleveland Cavaliers' Tristan Thompson (13) and Kevin Love (0) celebrate after they defeated the Miami Heat in overtime in an NBA basketball game, Monday, Feb. 24, 2020, in Cleveland. PHOTO BY TONY DEJAK/AP

ary against the cap that Capela had, so there won't be pressure to give him minutes if their 3-pointers are falling. But he'll give Houston the flexibility to adjust if they aren't.

Los Angeles Clippers

The Clippers have two players on their roster over 6-foot-8-inches. They have the 22-year-old 7-footer Ivica Zubac, who plays 17.9 minutes per game, and Mfiondu Kabengele, who bounces back and forth from the G-League. Like the Rockets, the Clippers are in desperate need of some height.

Though the lumbering big man Zubac is the starter, the Clippers play Montrezl Harrell 28.2 minutes per game and opt to close out games with the 6-foot-7 center. They take pride in their ability to put totally switchable lineups on the court, with defensive specialist Patrick Beverley, lockdown superstar wings Kawhi Leonard and Paul George and other 6-foot-8 forwards like Maurice Harkless, Marcus Morris and JaMychal Green. But for all of the great defenders that they can have on the court at once, how many of them are big enough to

man-up Davis?

Aside from AD, who is the the scariest matchup nightmare for the Clippers, the Western Conference playoffs will also feature Gobert (7-foot-1), Nikola Jokic (7-foot), Steven Adams (7-foot) and Kristaps Porzingis (7-foot-3). Thompson is only 6-foot-9, but he plays much bigger. If signed by the Clippers, he'd already lead the team in rebounds per game by over 2.5.

The Clippers have been sliding lately, losing four of their last six. Though they have a slew of talent with Leonard, George, Harrell, Beverley and Lou Williams, they still seem a piece away. That piece is a player like Thompson.

Boston Celtics

The Celtics have needed a better center all season long. At the trade deadline, people saw it as a likely destination for Drummond and Capela, but they were dealt elsewhere. It is currently unclear whether Brad Stevens and Danny Ainge are content rolling with Daniel Theis, Enes Kanter and Robert Williams (when healthy). Aside from the backup point guard spot with Kemba Walker missing time with a sore knee, center is clearly their biggest positional need.

Like the Clippers, it feels like the Celtics are just a piece away. Jayson Tatum is playing his best basketball ever, Walker has slid into Kyrie Irving's spot and fixed the chemistry issues with equal-or-better production, Jaylen Brown has shaken off the label of "overpaid," Gordon Hayward has proven to remain valuable post-compound fracture and Marcus Smart has developed his offensive game enough to be a threat on that end of the floor. Theis and Kanter have been fine at best in the center role, and Robert Williams hasn't been healthy enough to establish himself minutes. Thompson could be the missing piece for a team lacking a quality five.

LEAGUE OF LEGENDS RECAP

ESPORTS, cont. from p. 10

Despite loss, hopes high for Team Liquid

The start of the season has not been kind to North America's four-time-in-a-row champions, Team Liquid. An abysmal start to the season was made worse by visa issues that kept the team's new jungler Broxah out of the country for the first four games. And while their Week 5 started poorly, finishing out the first half of the split with a loss to Evil Geniuses, the team did manage to put on a performance against Dignitas that was very impressive. Dignitas drafted an aggressive team composition with Pantheon for top laner Huni, but Team Liquid's coordination finally showed through as they won a few fights early that secured all the momentum they'd need to win the game.

Europe's standings close headed into the second half

As the second half of Europe's split begins, the standings are far closer than in North America. Currently, Fnatic, Misfits, G2, and Origami are all tied at 7-3, while MAD Lions and Rogue are just behind them at 6-4. Even the team below them, Excel Esports, is 5-5. This means that the playoff race is still incredibly close as teams head into the last four weeks. This week, G2 once again lost, this time in a bloody game to MAD Lions that saw top laner Wunder end up at 0-5-3. Fnatic's 2-0 week has brought them into the tie, as Misfits lost a game to Rogue and Rogue lost a game to Fnatic. These games against other top teams could end up being critical, as the tiebreaker for playoffs is their record against each other. Were Rogue to tie with Misfits in the end, their 2-0 record might make all the difference.

KYRIE: YES OR NO?

KYRIE, cont. from p. 11

Arnold:

Alright, c'mon. It's a bit over-the-top to blame everything that went wrong on one player. Yes, he was the most talented player on the roster and deserved to be the center of attention, but there's more to it than him being a "prima donna." You mentioned Jaylen Brown. He came right to Irving's defense at the beginning of this season. "Kyrie, a lot of the blame was undeserving," Brown told Brandon Robinson, reported by NY Daily News. "It wasn't his fault that certain guys couldn't take a step back. It wasn't his fault. That was the front office and coaches' fault." Marcus Smart was another to quickly defend Irving and said, from the same article, "To come into a situation knowing this is a group of guys that had something going before I come here. How will I fit in? He didn't want to disrupt that. That says a lot. This is Kyrie Irving we're talking about, and he's talking about coming in and not disrupting us." Irving's former teammates obviously hold no grudge against him for his time in Boston and even wished him the best in Brooklyn. Irving also has a history of some mental health issues, issues that were blown out of proportion when he had an "episode" on a team trip to China. The NBA is full of acceptance toward Demar DeRozan and Kevin Love when they share their battle stories with mental health problems, but Irving is automatically relegated to the villain. He's human like the rest of us and isn't even 28 yet.

He's going through growing pains and may have finally started to figure things out when he signed with the Nets. "I don't have to be perfect for anyone here, nor do I have to be perfect for the public," Irving said, as quoted in the article. "So I'm not here to dispel any perception, I'm just here to be myself."

Rookie of the Year: Zion or Ja?

ZION, cont. from p. 11

No. Ja is one of the only reasons this team has been able to win as many games as they have thus far, and should they make the playoffs, he will be the sole reason for that as well. The intangibles paired up with his stats and knack for winning when he has no right should be enough to earn him that Rookie of the Year award.

Now let me now tell you why Zion should not get it to really drill home my point.

What Zion's been able to do thus far is impressive. In the 12 games he has played he is averaging 23 points and seven rebounds en route to a 7-5 record. He's been able to use his body incredibly well to bully smaller players in the paint while also showing off a very respectable 3-point shot.

Zion's downfall for me, however, is that small sample size of 12 games and what it means for the rest of his season. Not only is the 37 games max he can play too small to truly be considered for the award, but it will not allow



Memphis Grizzlies guard Ja Morant, right, shoots as Los Angeles Clippers center Ivica Zubac defends during the first half of an NBA basketball game Monday, Feb. 24, 2020, in Los Angeles. PHOTO BY MARK J. TERRILL/AP

the whole story to be told.

There were moments in Ja's first couple seasons in the league where he looked downright unstoppable. But after those couple months, Morant got a little tired, and more significantly, teams

started to figure him out a little bit more. That is what should and most likely will happen to Zion over the rest of the season: teams mixing up their game plan a little bit to focus on shutting down one of the team's hottest

players. It's only a matter of time before defenses will find a way to manipulate Zion's tendencies to force him into much tougher offensive situations while they continue to exploit his defensive shortcomings on the other end. The only reason teams haven't already begun to do that is because the Pelicans have a very complete roster, another reason Zion sits behind Ja in my book.

Lonzo Ball, Jrue Holiday, JJ. Redick, Brandon Ingram and Derrick Favors. That is the Pelicans starting five if you take Zion out of the picture. Not too shabby if you ask me. So, the only real way I can see Zion overtaking Ja is if by some miracle the Grizzlies lose out and drop out of the playoffs while Zion leads the Pelicans to the No. 8 seed past the Blazers and Grizzlies. But in all honesty, even as a Pelicans fan, I don't necessarily see that happening.

Are both players having excellent seasons in their own right? Yes. Could there be MVP debates in the future? Hopefully. But are there Rookie of the Year conversations now? Not in my book. Chalk Ja's name up for me.

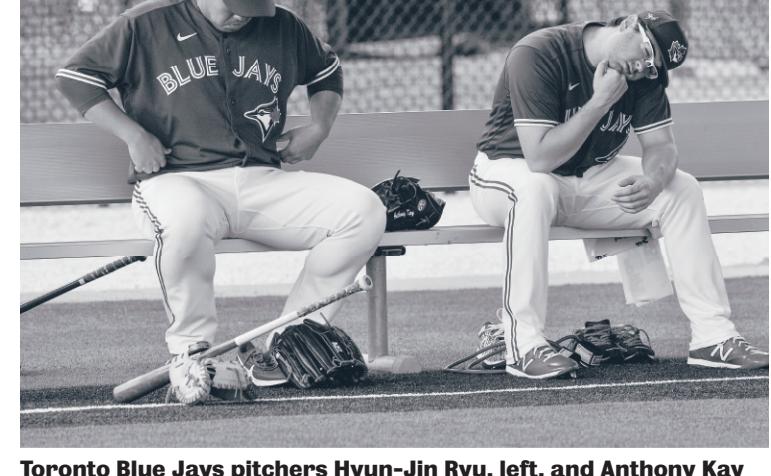
UConn baseball alums starting seasons up

LAMB, cont. from p. 12

Lamb was having a solid year with the Pacers, averaging 12.5 points, 4.3 rebounds, 2.1 assists and 1.2 steals, while shooting 33.5% from the 3. As a key player in the Pacers push for homecourt advantage in the playoffs, he will be missed.

Meanwhile, in the MLB, spring training has started up, meaning that many of our favorite former Huskies take the field for the first time this year. Nick Ahmed, the two-time gold Glover fresh off a four-year contract extension, took the field as a shortstop for the Arizona Diamondbacks on Sunday, and in three at-bats, recorded two hits and an RBI. In addition to MLB players, spring training al-

lows us a glimpse at the minor leaguers who went to UConn, and how they are making their way up the baseball ranks. Anthony Kay, drafted by the Mets in 2016, was traded to the Blue Jays this past year, and debuted for them in Spring Training, with an era of nine over two innings. John Andreoli, drafted in 2011 by the Chicago Cubs, played for the Red Sox this year in spring training, recording six at-bats with a two base hit and one run. Notable Huskies in the MLB, such as George Springer, Matt Barnes and Scott Boerg, have not played in spring training so far this year, but being important members of professional teams, we will surely see more of them come the regular season.



Toronto Blue Jays pitchers Hyun-Jin Ryu, left, and Anthony Kay get ready to throw to live batters during full squad workouts at the team's spring training baseball complex in Dunedin, Fla., Wednesday, Feb. 19, 2020. PHOTO BY STEVE NESIUS/THE CANADIAN PRESS VIA AP