

Rams Making Noise Again Behind ‘Havoc’ Defense

BY HANK KURZ JR.
AP Sports Writer

RICHMOND, Va. (AP) — The surge comes almost every game, usually in the second half. That's when VCU's relentless "Havoc" defense that the Rams employ for 94 feet often takes its toll and the Rams gain the upper hand on another worn out opponent. Sometimes, though, the intensity of the press that overwhelms a team at the start. The Rams (17-5, 8-2 Colonial Athletic Association) had to replace four starters from last year's team that reached the Final Four, but they haven't sacrificed anything on defense — even with the largely new cast. Coach Shaka Smart's team is second nationally in steals with an average of 10.2 per game, fourth in turnover margin at plus

six, and 14th in scoring defense, allowing an average of 58.3 points. And in the same way that watching speed on film doesn't prepare an opponent for what it's like in person, familiarity doesn't seem to help teams prepare to handle the Rams' pressure. In the Rams' annual meeting with Richmond, the Spiders had 10 of their 17 turnovers by half-time, but trailed only 47-45 with 11:03 to play. Thereafter, they shot 1 for 13 from the field, turned the ball over seven times and saw a close game end in a 73-51 defeat. The Rams outscored the Spiders 20-4 in a span of less than seven minutes to put the game away, leaving Richmond coach Chris Mooney hoping fatigue wasn't a factor for his team. "I don't want to think that that was the case, but it very well could have been," he said.

Conference rival Old Dominion, which plays the Rams two and often three times a season, arrived at the Siegel Center on Jan. 21 averaging 14 turnovers. The Monarchs, with senior guards, trailed just 38-35 with 14:33 to play, but made just three field goals and had 12 turnovers the rest of the way and lost 61-48. On the night, ODU had 25 turnovers, and in one stretch of the second half, went 10 minutes without making a field goal. In two key stretches of the game, Monarchs coach Blaine Taylor said, "we were trying a little bit too hard, just trying to keep the game tight, and that getting tight really slowed us down to where we made a miscue here and there." Or a whole bunch of miscues, which helps the Rams mitigate their offensive shortcomings. "It's as easy as we get more shot

attempts when we turn teams over and we need that because we're not the highest percentage shooting team," Smart said. The Rams are so confident that they will wear a team down, they look for the signs. "We can see them. They're over there grabbing their shorts, breathing heavy," senior swingman Bradford Burgess said. "We can tell that the game is taking an effect on them. "They're missing shots, their shots are short, they're turning the ball over. When we see that, we have to get even more aggressive to take advantage of their getting tired." VCU's "Havoc" defense gained national acclaim last season when the Rams knocked off Southern Cal, Georgetown, Purdue, Florida State and Kansas to reach the Final Four. Smart said teams can psyche

themselves out trying to prepare for something they don't see often. "I think it can be somewhat of a self-fulfilling prophecy for other teams if they work and work and work for two, three days on beating the press and they really dwell on not turning the ball over," the third-year coach said. "It can be what we call an avoidance goal. Sometimes if you set avoidance goals, you end up doing exactly what you want to avoid." Even, perhaps, if you have just reinforced those goals at halftime. Freshman Briante Weber played just 20 minutes against UAB, but had four of VCU's 14 steals. He had four more against Old Dominion. Weber is the kind of player Smart always hopes to have in duplicate.

"Defensively, he's the definition of wreaking havoc," Smart said. "And just overall as a member of our program, he is an unbelievable energy giver. Every program, team or company has energy givers and energy takers. Briante is probably the best energy giver I've ever coached." Through 22 games, Weber has more steals, 55, than field goals, 47. The Rams had an eight-game winning streak earlier this season, and will take a six-game roll into Saturday's game at Georgia State trying to keep building toward another postseason push. "We've got a chance," Burgess said. "The way we're playing, anything is possible."

Selig Expects Expanded Playoffs To Start This Year

BY RONALD BLUM
AP Sports Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Commissioner Bud Selig expects baseball to expand its playoffs this season. Players and owners have already agreed to add an additional wild-card team in each league, but are still deciding whether it would take effect this year or in 2013. Selig said there are scheduling issues to be worked out — once they are, the new 10-team format would begin with a one-game playoff. "I really believe we'll have the wild card for 2012, this year," Selig said Friday night in Chicago at a White Sox fan festival. "Clubs really want it. I don't think I've ever seen an issue that the clubs want more than to have the extra wild card this year." "We're working on dates right now. That'll all take place. It looks to me like we'll have it because I've told everybody we have to have it. It'll be exciting. One-game playoff, it will start the playoffs in a very exciting manner," he said. A little more than two months before opening day, Major League Baseball hoped to put an end to uncertainty. Add a bat or an arm to compete for that extra wild card? No telling whether that makes any sense.

"That's the last thing on my mind," Cleveland Indians manager Manny Acta said this week. "I'm trying to win my division and I can't be concerned about that stuff. But the more the merrier. "It gives us and everybody else a better chance to make the playoffs. But it's not on my mind because you don't build a system or build a team counting on the commissioner is going to change the playoff format," he said. MLB and the players' association have reached a consensus that ties for division titles will be broken on the field under the new playoff format, a person familiar with the talks told The Associated Press. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because a deal hadn't been finalized. Since 1995, head-to-head record has been used to determine first place if both teams are going to the postseason. But with the start of a one-game, winner-take-all wild-card round, the sides agreed that the difference between first place and a wild-card berth is too important to decide with a formula and a tiebreaker game would be played. Negotiators plan to talk again next week and decide by March 1 on whether the extra round will begin this year. "I think most clubs at this point no matter who you are are focused on trying to win a division," Detroit Tigers general manager Dave

Dombrowski said. "If that doesn't work, then you make your adjustments." Under the new format, whenever it begins, the non-division winners in each league with the two-best records will be the wild-cards, meaning a third-place team could for the first time win the World Series. Being able to finish third and still go to the postseason could create more of an opportunity in the AL East for teams other than the rich New York Yankees and Boston Red Sox, or in the AL West, where the two-time champion Texas Rangers and Los Angeles Angels have spent big bucks to improve. In the AL Central, Kansas City general manager Dayton Moore watched Dombrowski add Prince Fielder to his already formidable batting order this week. "We're focused on putting the best team on the field we can to compete to win the Central. That's the first goal," Moore said. "If that appears to be unattainable, we'll evaluate what we need to do to improve the team to continue to strive for that goal. If it becomes apparent that's not going to happen, you begin to focus on the wild card. You want to get in the playoffs any way you can and take your chances there." AP Sports Writers Rick Gano and Tom Withers contributed to this report.

Glenn

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alled. "I felt like coach Glenn is a great man, and I got to meet Marquise Williams (USD's new defensive line coach), so getting to know them made me reconsider." It was a during an official visit to Vermillion on Jan. 15 that Wiseman recommitted to USD. In the transition period between decommitting and his recommitment, Wiseman visited North Dakota. It was on that same trip back home to Missouri that Wiseman and his father swung through Vermillion and first met Glenn. "I got a good vibe from him and the other coaches," Wiseman said. "They told me to take as many officials (visits) as I could, and that when I was ready, they'd be there." Among the other notable high school recruits likely to officially sign next Wednesday are Ricky Reeves, a 2-star defensive back from Midwest City, Okla., and Jordan Roberts, a running back from Sheridan, Wyo. Reeves, ranked No. 130 at his position by ESPN, had been reportedly pursued by FBS schools, while Roberts was scheduled to visit the University of Wyoming this weekend. To this point, USD has also three transfers, highlighted by Jasper Sanders, a 2-star rated running back from Butler Com-

munity College (Kan.). The other announced transfer is D.J. Wakes, a safety from Butler CC, while Devin Taverna, a safety from Palomar Community College is already on campus. Those three transfers will likely see action immediately for the Coyotes, who graduated 23 seniors from the 2011 roster and

begin play in the Missouri Valley Football Conference in 2012. Saying that USD has to "step it up a little bit" for recruiting in the Missouri Valley, Glenn also pointed out that the previous recruiting classes were successful — specifically referencing wins at Minnesota and home against Eastern Washington.

With a handful of recruits scheduled for visits this weekend, the process will literally go right down to the wire for USD. "When you get to the finish line, you're about on all fours and crawling for it," Glenn said. "By this time, you're about ready for a cleansing breath."



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