

LeBron Tells Heat He Will Become Free Agent

MIAMI (AP) — LeBron James delivered his message loud and clear, without actually saying a word.

He's willing to leave Miami, if that's what it will take to win more championships. And what happens next will likely be up to not just the Heat, but Dwyane Wade and Chris Bosh as well.

Through his agent, James informed the Heat on Tuesday that he has decided to opt out of the final two years of his contract, a move that means he becomes a free agent on July 1. He will be able to sign with any team, including Miami, and Heat President Pat Riley said he "fully expected" James to take advantage of his early termination option.

"We look forward to sitting down with LeBron and his representatives and talking about our future together," Riley said.

The Heat have been preparing for this for some time. James,

Wade and Bosh all got six-year contracts when they teamed up in Miami in July 2010, the last time free agency was accompanied by the sort of frenzy that will envelop the league over the next few weeks. But each of those deals came with options to leave either this summer or in 2015, in part to allow both the players and the team to have financial flexibility.

James — who averaged 27.1 points this past season — was owed \$42.7 million for the next two seasons, though that seems irrelevant in the sense that he'll be getting plenty of money from the Heat or someone else for years to come. If he stays with Miami, he could sign a deal that would give the team room to maneuver within the structures of the salary cap and luxury-tax threshold.

So could Wade and Bosh, if they choose to opt out as well — and if both do, Miami would po-

tentially have plenty of cash to spend on roster upgrades. Neither has announced their plans, though both have previously said they want to remain in Miami.

"No news here yet," Wade said Tuesday.

James stayed silent as well, with agent Rich Paul being the one who informed the Heat of the four-time NBA MVP's plan. But last week, while still dealing with the sting of losing the NBA Finals to San Antonio, James expressed how enticing the idea of flexibility is to him.

"Being able to have flexibility as a professional, anyone, that's what we all would like," James said last week. "That's in any sport, for a football player, a baseball player, a basketball player, to have flexibility and be able to control your future or your present. I have a position to be able to do that. ... There's a lot of times that you're not in control of your fu-

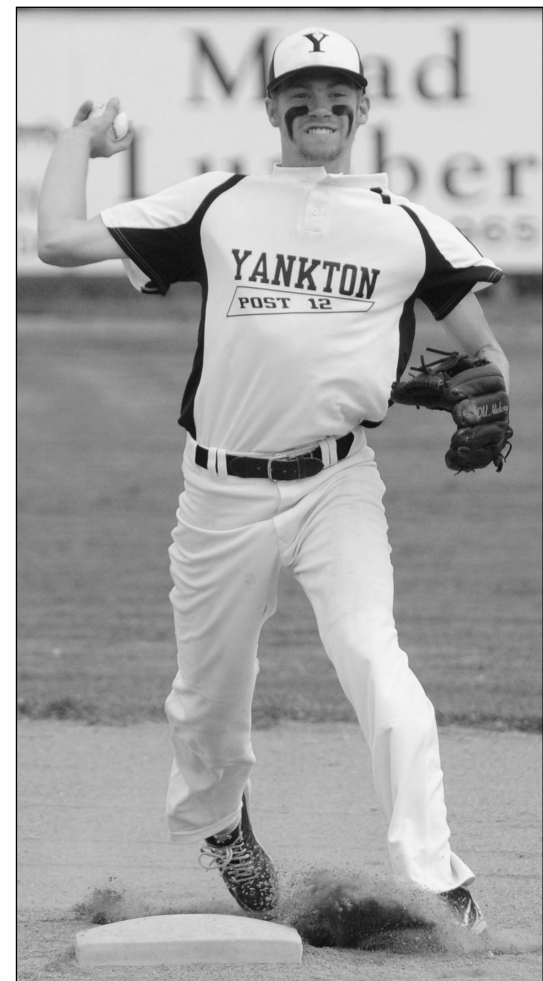
ture as a professional."

He's in control now. He turns 30 next season. He might just be entering his prime.

James said last week that he, Wade and Bosh owed it to one another to have a conversation before deciding where to play going forward. It is unclear if those discussions have taken place.

And while James opting out was largely expected, the ripple effect of the move was seen all over the sports world.

The NFL, on its Twitter account, posted a photo of James dunking a football over the crossbar at the stadium his beloved Dallas Cowboys call home, lightly asking him if he wanted to pass some time in a training camp while making his decision. And U.S. Soccer, also in a tweet, said it has a new team for him — then attached a photo of men's national team jersey bearing James' name and No. 6.



JAMES D. CIMBUREK/P&D
Yankton shortstop Austin Johnson fires to first base during the opening game of Post 12's doubleheader with Sioux Falls West on Tuesday at Yankton's Riverside Field.

One More Season

Kozak, Wirth Return To Spitfire After Year At MMC

BY JEREMY HOECK
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Four years ago, Jess Wirth convinced her friend Karlee Kozak into playing fall softball for Yankton High School.

Three years later, those persuasive efforts went the other way. Kozak, who already signed to play at Mount Marty College, coaxed Wirth into joining her.

It only made sense. They were already linked together as middle infielders and close friends.

"I'd say she had a big part in that, yeah," Wirth said, with a smile, when asked before Tuesday night's doubleheader at Riverside Park what influence Kozak had on her college decision.

"I knew I wanted to keep playing, but it made it easier having someone else there."

Both now 19 years old, they are in the middle of their final season with the Yankton Spitfire, two months after completing their freshman seasons with Mount Marty. In both cases, Wirth and Kozak have played key roles in their team's performances.

"She was thinking about going somewhere else, but I was hoping we could play together for a few more years," Kozak said Tuesday.

Wirth, from Yankton, and Kozak, from Tyndall, have long been joined by their similar play — both are smaller infielders with some pop in their bats, and as Spitfire head coach Robin Wirth



ABOVE: Jess Wirth of the Yankton Spitfire swings at a pitch during the first game of Tuesday's softball doubleheader against the Sioux Falls Diamonds Showcase at Riverside Park.
LEFT: Karlee Kozak, left, of the Yankton Spitfire lofts a deep fly ball to left field during the first game of Tuesday's softball doubleheader against the Sioux Falls Diamonds Showcase at Riverside Park.

JEREMY HOECK/P&D

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Post 12 Earns 20th Victory

Yankton Takes Opener To Go To 2-0 In Region Play

Yankton Post 12 earned its 20th victory of the season and went to 2-0 in region play with a doubleheader split with Sioux Falls West on Tuesday at Riverside Field.

Yankton took the opener, a region game, 3-1 on the strength of Lane Sawatzke's three-run home run in the fourth. West claimed the nightcap, a non-league game, 12-1.

In the opener, Landon Withrow, Sheldon Gant, Colin Muth and Adam Walter also had hits.

Tanner Termansen picked up the victory, striking out five and allowing an unearned run.

In the nightcap, Austin Johnson had a single to score Sawatzke for Yankton's lone run. Brad Ulmer, Withrow, Muth and Ben Cameron also had hits.

Will Steward took the loss, with Greg Hauer throwing in relief.

Yankton, 20-4, travels to Vermillion for a single game today (Wednesday) at 5 p.m. at Prentis Park. Post 12 hosts Sioux Falls East in a doubleheader on Thursday at 2 p.m., with both games counting as region games.

Arizona St. Hires Indiana's Tracy Smith As Coach

TEMPE, Ariz. (AP) — Tracy Smith, who led Indiana to back-to-back Big Ten championships and to the Hoosiers' first College World Series appearance last year, has been hired as Arizona State's head coach.

Athletic director Ray Anderson on Tuesday announced the hiring of Smith, who replaces Tim Esmay.

The 48-year-old Smith was head coach for nine years at Indiana, where he won more than 40 games each of the past two seasons and led the Hoosiers to back-to-back Big Ten championships.

Arizona State was 33-24 overall this season and was third in the Pac-12 at 19-11. The school has won five national championships, fourth-most among all schools, but none since 1981. The Sun Devils' last CWS appearance was in 2010.

Big Ten Advocates Four-Year Scholarships

BY LUKE MEREDITH
AP Sports Writer

The Big Ten said Tuesday that it supports guaranteed four-year scholarships and improved medical coverage for its athletes.

The league announced in a statement signed Tuesday by its 14 presidents that it proposes working within the NCAA structure to provide greater academic security for its athletes by guaranteeing scholarships for four years, even if an athlete can no longer compete or has left for a professional career.

The Big Ten also said the NCAA must do "whatever it takes" to compensate athletes for the full cost of their college education as defined by the federal government — rather than just tuition, fees and room and board.

The conference also said it would

like to review the NCAA rules on medical insurance and provide more consistent coverage.

"We have an obligation to protect their health and well-being in return for the physical demands placed upon them," the league said.

The NCAA has been sued by a number of former athletes over compensation issues challenging the organization's bedrock of amateurism.

Big Ten commissioner Jim Delaney testified last week at an antitrust trial against the NCAA filed by former UCLA star Ed O'Bannon.

The league said Delaney conveyed sentiments long supported by the conference and its members, and the Pac-12 and SEC have recently released statements closely mirroring the Big Ten's proposals.

The Big Ten also reiterated its oppo-

sition to a "pay-for-play" system for football and men's basketball players, arguing that compensating those players will "skew the overall academic endeavor" for all of its students.

The league said that using the revenue generated from football and basketball players to compensate those athletes would force member schools to reduce funding or even eliminate some non-Olympic sports while creating "intolerable" inequities.

"The amateur model is not broken, but it does require adjusting for the 21st century. Whether we pay student-athletes is not the true issue here. Rather, it is how we as universities provide a safe, rewarding and equitable environment for our student-athletes as they pursue their education," the league said.

Freshman Steadies Vandy In 1st Outing In 5 Weeks

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — If Vanderbilt wins the national title at the College World Series, the Commodores will be able to point to not one but two improbable contributors.

John Kilichowski's turn came in Monday's 9-8 win over Virginia. The 6-foot-5 freshman left-hander pitched perfect sixth and seventh innings, and made a kick save — and a beauty — on a ground ball to keep the Cavaliers from tying the game in the eighth.

Kilichowski was limited to 20 innings this season because of back problems, and he hadn't pitched since May 17.

"We talked as a group about trying to get a Tyler Campbell from the pitching staff that hasn't been in there yet that could pick us up, and Johnny certainly did that," Vanderbilt coach Tim Corbin said.

Campbell is the third baseman who has starred as the replacement for Xavier Turner, who was ruled ineligible Friday for violating NCAA rules.

Kilichowski said he wasn't as rusty as one might think for not having appeared in a game since getting one out against South Carolina five weeks ago.

"I do pitch. I pitch in scrimmages all the time," Kilichowski said to reporters. "So I haven't pitched in a game, but that's as much of a game as there is. It's just you guys aren't there for it. We

treat it like a game. We have hitters. They're calling balls and strikes. We have a guy back there calling them, and it's as serious as any game, and I take them like that."

Kilichowski entered the game at the start of the sixth with his team leading 9-7 after Virginia got 13 hits off Walker Buehler and Jared Miller. Virginia's Joe McCarthy hit a hard comebacker that Kilichowski redirected with his cleat. The ball went to shortstop Vince Conde, who barely threw out McCarthy. One run scored on the play, but the tying run also would have come in if Kilichowski hadn't gotten his foot on it.

"It happened so fast. You throw it, you hear the sound of the bat, and all of a sudden it's under your foot," he said. "I'm just trying to be a shield out there. Whatever I can do. If I have to put my chest in front of it, I have to put my chest in front of it."

RUN, RUN, RUN: Vanderbilt went into Game 2 of the finals with 14 stolen bases, tied with Miami in 1985 for second most in a CWS. The Commodores needed three steals to match the record 17 by Oklahoma State in five games in 1955.

The Commodores were 14 for 19 on steals in the CWS and 26 of 33 in the NCAA tournament.

CLOSE GAMES: Vanderbilt's 9-8 win over Virginia on

Rangers Bring Back 1B Carlos Pena 13 Years Later

ARLINGTON, Texas (AP) — Carlos Pena is back in the major leagues with the team that drafted him in the first round quite a while ago.

Pena rejoined the Rangers on Tuesday, a week after signing a minor league deal and going to Triple-A Round Rock, and 13 years after making his major league debut with Texas. He was the 10th overall pick in 1998.

"God is good, man. Here I am, where it all started for me and it's truly very special," Pena said the home series opener against Detroit on Tuesday night, when he was batting sixth and playing first base. "Just to think back where it all started. ... This is

crazy. I was looking at a picture I had of my first at-bat ever and it was with a Rangers uniform. My wife sent it to me this morning."

The Rangers designated first baseman/outfielder Brad Snyder for assignment when they purchased the 36-year-old Pena's contract from Round Rock.

Since losing Prince Fielder and Mitch Moreland to season-ending injuries, Snyder was splitting time at first base with Donnie Murphy. Neither Snyder nor Murphy had played first base in the major leagues before this season.

"We just brought in a first baseman to play first base, and he has a presence," manager Ron Washington said.

"He may be a little older, but he has presence. Throw something in the wrong spot, and he will hurt you. He knows how to play around that bag. He knows what to do, he knows where to be. It's second nature to him."

In seven games at Round Rock, Pena hit .333 (8 for 24) with one home run.

The only person to go longer between games for the Rangers was Sammy Sosa, who made his major league debut for Texas in 1989 and then played his final season there in 2007.

Fielder had a cervical fusion of the C5 and C6 disks in his neck last month. Moreland

had ligament reconstructive surgery and bone realignment in his left ankle Monday, and the team said he went home to Mississippi.

Fielder and Moreland are expected to be ready for spring training next season.

After playing 22 games for the Rangers, Pena was traded to Oakland that winter. He has also played for Detroit, Boston, Tampa Bay, the Chicago Cubs, Houston and Kansas City. He was an All-Star in 2009 with Tampa Bay, when he had an AL-high 39 homers.

Pena went to spring training with the Los Angeles Angels, but was released March 23 after hitting .139 in 20 spring games.