

NATIONAL DIGEST

Homer Hankies Return To Minnesota

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — The "Homer Hanky" is back. The Minnesota Twins clinched the AL Central division title on Tuesday night and on Wednesday announced the latest edition of the popular white kerchief that has become a staple of Twins playoff appearances.

The Homer Hanky was introduced in 1987 as the upstart Twins pushed toward their first World Series title in the raucous Metrodome.

This year will be the first time they're taken outdoors, however. The Twins are playing in the brand new open-air Target Field this season.

That led many in the Twin Cities to call for the team to distribute "Homer Blankies" rather than "Homer Hankies."

The hankies sell for \$2 at www.twinsbaseball.com. A portion of the proceeds raised will be donated to the Minnesota Twins Community Fund.

Twins Set Attendance Record

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — The Minnesota Twins have set a club single-season attendance record during their first season at Target Field.

The AL Central champions have drawn 3,063,327 through Wednesday's game against Cleveland. That breaks the previous record of 3,030,672 set in 1988, the year after the Twins won their first World Series championship.

The Twins have sold out 75 games at Target Field — 74 consecutively. They have four home games left in the regular season.

NCAA Suspends UNC's Burney Six Games, Williams Four

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — The NCAA suspended North Carolina defensive back Kendrick Burney six games and safety Deunta Williams four games on Wednesday for receiving improper benefits.

Both players must also repay benefits to become eligible, though the school plans to appeal the length of the suspensions. In a news release, the NCAA said Burney received \$1,353 in benefits while Williams received \$1,426 in benefits. The school said Burney must repay \$575.19 and Williams must repay \$450.67 to charities of their choice.

Both players have sat out the first two games for the wireless Tar Heels (0-2), which count toward their suspensions. The status of 10 other players remains in question as North Carolina prepares to travel to Rutgers. Among those players are NFL prospects Marvin Austin — who has been suspended indefinitely for breaking team rules — and Robert Quinn on defense, top receiver Greg Little and tailback Ryan Houston.

Both Burney and Williams were among six underclassmen who decided to return for their senior seasons instead of entering the NFL draft.

Gradkowski Gets Starting Nod At Quarterback For Raiders

ALAMEDA, Calif. (AP) — Five months after acquiring Jason Campbell to be their starting quarterback, the Oakland Raiders benched him in favor of Bruce Gradkowski beginning with this week's game at Arizona.

Coach Tom Cable announced the switch after practice Wednesday, hoping the spark Gradkowski provided in the second half of last week's 16-14 win over St. Louis can carry over for the rest of the season.

"The reasons are pretty simple," Cable said. "First and foremost is the energy and the level of intensity that was brought into the huddle when he came into the game. They way the guys responded around him. And obviously scoring points. ... That's what we're about. If we can get this thing to where we can score 24 points a game, I think we'll be very tough to beat."

The Raiders (1-1) acquired Campbell from Washington during the draft for a 2012 fourth-round draft pick. He already had a \$3.14 million contract for this season and was given a \$4.5 million extension for 2011 after the trade.

Oakland released draft bust JaMarcus Russell shortly after the deal and officially pronounced Campbell the starter before training camp opened in July. He lasted just six quarters as starter, getting benched at halftime last week.

Campbell has completed 30 of 52 passes for 267 yards, one touchdown and two interceptions this season. He has also been sacked six times.

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NHL Preseason

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SCOREBOARD

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Big 12 Teams Lurking In National Title Mix

BY JEFF LATZKE AP College Football Writer

NORMAN, Okla. — When Big 12 football fans take a quick glimpse at the top of the rankings, there's something missing.

Three weeks into the season and with seven teams still undefeated, the conference doesn't have a team in the top 5. No. 6 Nebraska, No. 7 Texas and No. 8 Oklahoma are there waiting in the wings, but each has some work to do to get into the mix for the national championship.

The presence of No. 3 Boise State and No. 4 TCU has the Big 12 in an unusual situation. Not since 2006, when Texas and Oklahoma each suffered early losses, has the league failed to have a top 5 team in the AP poll three weeks into the season.

That could start sorting itself out after Texas and Oklahoma play in Dallas on Oct. 2 and the Longhorns visit Nebraska two weeks later. If any of those three teams are still undefeated, the wins could result in a bump in the polls — and in the BCS standings, when they come out Oct. 17.

"Long term, if you have an undefeated Big 12 team, there's no doubt in

my mind they will finish ahead of Boise in the BCS and probably ahead in the polls," BCS analyst Jerry Palm said.

The same goes for TCU. With three teams in the top 10, there's enough power in the Big 12 that anyone who can run the table will move up over time.

"It's hard to go undefeated," Texas defensive end Sam Acho said. "We know that if we focus on what we have to do, everything will work out." Because of closer-than-expected wins early this season, Oklahoma and Texas have each fallen in the AP poll despite starting the season 3-0. The Sooners edged Utah State 31-24 and Air Force 27-24, with a blowout win against Florida State in between. The Longhorns fell even after winning at Texas Tech, where they had lost in three of their last six visits.

Meanwhile, Nebraska racked up perhaps the conference's most impressive win with a 56-21 rout at Washington and leapfrogged the other two Big 12 schools. Yet there's still more work to do to get into the two coveted positions at the top.

"There are some things you can't control, and that's one of them," Huskers coach Bo Pelini said. "All you

can do is play the best football you can. That's something, there's no way you have any control over. All you can control is winning as many games as you can."

But there's a scenario where even that may not be enough, Palm said.

"For a Big 12 team, it's just win all of your games. If anybody can do that, whether it's Texas, Oklahoma or Nebraska, they're going to be in the national championship discussion," he said.

"Nobody's catching Alabama or Ohio State. Nobody's catching those two. If they finish undefeated and a Big 12 team finished undefeated, then they're Auburn."

Auburn famously got left out when it went undefeated through the 2004 season, with unbeaten USC and Oklahoma teams playing for the title in the Orange Bowl.

Early on, though, the Big 12 has been holding its ground. Its 27-5 record in nonconference play is the best of any league in the country, even if some of the wins haven't been impressive. By comparison, the league was 23-9 in nonconference play and there were only four undefeated teams left at this point last year. Oklahoma State, Texas A&M,

AP Sports Writers Jim Vertuno in Austin, Texas, and Eric Olson in Lincoln, Neb., contributed to this report.

Agent: Deals Were In Place, But No Jackson Trade

SAN DIEGO (AP) — Holdout wide receiver Vincent Jackson remains the property of the San Diego Chargers despite his agent saying he had deals in place with several teams before the Wednesday deadline.

Agent Neil Schwartz said he heard from multiple general managers, whom he declined to identify, that the Chargers were asking for "wholly unreasonable" compensation for Jackson, a Pro Bowl player who had two straight 1,000-yard seasons. Schwartz said another GM told him that Chargers general manager A.J. Smith seemed to be "squatting" on Jackson.

"Archie Manning had it right about this organization," Schwartz said.

He was referring to when Manning had agent Tom Condon contact the Chargers days before the 2004 draft to ask that the team not take his son, Eli, with the first pick. Smith did anyway, then swapped Manning's rights to the New York Giants for the rights to Philip Rivers and several draft picks.

"Multiple teams have told me that they can't get a deal done with A.J. and some of the teams have referred to A.J. as 'The Lord of No Rings,'" Schwartz said. "That's how they characterized him."

North County Times columnist Jay Paris dubbed Smith "The Lord of No Rings" after Eli Manning and Ben Roethlisberger, the other members

of the Big Three QBs of the 2004 draft class, led their teams to Super Bowl victories. Rivers and Smith have yet to make it to a Super Bowl.

Smith, who has a history of hardball dealings with players, didn't return a call seeking comment. Schwartz said the legal language with one team was already drawn up and ready for Jackson to read and sign. That was a one-year deal with an option, with an average salary of more than \$9 million. Schwartz declined to identify that team. It was widely reported that the Minnesota Vikings were a major suitor.

Under terms of a deal arranged by the NFL and the players' union, Jackson had to sign a new contract

by 4 p.m. EDT Wednesday in order to play for a new team in Week 5. Now, he'll have to finish serving the remainder of his three-game suspension for violating the NFL's substance abuse policy — he pleaded guilty in February to his second DUI since 2006 — and serve a three-game suspension on the roster exempt list if he does sign.

Had a deal been done before the deadline, Jackson would have been placed on the Commissioner Exempt list for three games, retroactive to Game 2. That essentially would have rolled six games worth of suspensions into four games.

Those suspensions seem to be moot because Schwartz said it's

unlikely Jackson will play this season under terms of the team's contract tender.

"Not now, not ever," Schwartz said. "Again, it's up to the Chargers. He's got nothing with Norv Turner. He loves the city of San Diego. He loves catching the ball from Philip Rivers."

Said Rivers: "I wish him all the best. I'd love to get the opportunity to throw to him again but if that's not the case, I want it to work out for him."

Turner declined comment. "It's been the same since we started camp. We get the guys ready who are here," the coach said. Jackson's original five-year contract expired after last season. But because this is an uncapped year, he would have needed six seasons to become an unrestricted free agent.

Unhappy over not receiving a long-term deal in the offseason, Jackson refused to sign the one-year, \$3.268 million contract he was tendered as a restricted free agent. When he and holdout left tackle Marcus McNeill didn't sign their tenders by June 15, the Chargers were entitled to offer them 10 percent of their 2009 salaries, essentially cutting \$2.5 million off the tenders. If either reports this year, it would be for the final six games in order to accrue a season toward unrestricted free agency.

BURNS

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loved, captivate the nation while chasing Roger Maris' single-season record of 61 home runs. Bonds bulks up, and so do his home run numbers, and soon he has surpassed not just McGwire's new single-season mark but Hank Aaron's career total of 755 as well.

That's the advantage Burns and Novick have in dealing with the more modern era: The viewer already knows, without being told, why Bonds reported to the Giants 20 pounds heavier one spring. Or what was meant when a trainer agreed to do whatever Clemens asked. (Viewers will also chuckle at the reference to disgraced Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich, lashing out at Cubs fan Steve Bartman for interfering with a foul ball.)

When they show photographs of McGwire and Jose Canseco together, it's understood that they will both eventually leave the sport in shame, destined to be the stars of former U.S. Sen. George Mitchell's investigation into steroid abuse in baseball.

"Having dealt with more than 150 years of baseball history, we tried to put it in a little bit of perspective," Burns said. "In my mind, this is not the worst baseball scandal ever."

NASCAR

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thousandths of an inch, less than 1/16 of an inch, happened as a result of the wrecker hitting the rear bumper when it pushed the car into winner's circle," Childress said.

"The rear bumper was also hit on the cool down lap by other drivers congratulating Clint on his victory. That's the only logical way that the left-rear of the car was found to be equal at the tech center. We will appeal NASCAR's ruling and take it all the way to the NASCAR commissioner for a final ruling, if need be."

Bowyer's car passed its initial inspection at New Hampshire on Sunday, but was taken by NASCAR back to its North Carolina research and development center for a more thorough examination. It was there that NASCAR found the rear end of

the car had been manipulated.

The development came a day after NASCAR called in RCR officials to warn them that Bowyer's Chase-clinching car from the Sept. 11 race at Richmond had nearly failed inspection because its back end was very close to the mandated limits. Pemberton said that earlier warning played a part in the punishment.

Although the issues on the car at Richmond and the car at New Hampshire were not exactly the same, the infractions were in the same area of the car. Childress said his team had addressed NASCAR's issues before Sunday's race.

"I am confident we fixed the area of concern and the New Hampshire car left the race shop well within the tolerances required by NASCAR," Childress said.

Speaking at an appearance Wednesday at the NASCAR Hall of Fame before the penalty was announced, Bowyer said he was

aware his car was under scrutiny but pleaded ignorance as to what could be wrong with the Chevrolet.

"I have no idea. I show up on Friday, I bring my helmet, my HANS and I get in the car," Bowyer said. "Anything that happens Sunday to Friday, I don't know. I know we won the race this weekend and it was a lot of fun. We led the most laps and won the race and the guys work hard in the shop to bring fair, fast race cars."

"Aside from that, I don't know what's going on."

NASCAR sets very strict templates that the teams must follow in building their race cars. Although the cars are built to be equal, crew chiefs can and do make alterations in certain parts of the design for strategy and driver preference.

Teams also have historically pushed the limits in an effort to gain a technical edge on the race track. Since NASCAR ramped up its penalties for cheaters over the past

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