

The Final Four: The Four big stories of the week in the sports world! Saturday February 22nd

This is Caesar Wilson of C Z Sports, here to discuss four of the biggest events in sports and give my opinions on these topics.

1. The Houston Astros Cheating Scandal

If you haven't heard by now, the Houston Astros organization engineered a system that allows their batters to gain a significant advantage by knowing when a fastball pitch is coming versus an off-speed pitch (Curveball, slider, etc). The system was player driven, and was centered around the use of their center field camera in Minute Maid Park. They were able to see the signals from the catcher to the pitcher, which relayed back to the Astros dugout, where they would code their signs with banging on a trash can. MLB Commissioner Rob Manfred granted the Astros players immunity from any punishment as long as they cooperated and laid out the details of the scheme. The Red Sox fired Manager Alex Cora, who was on the Astros staff during the scandal, and the Mets did the same with recently signed Carlos Beltran, while the MLB suspended Astros Manager AJ Hinch for the season, fined their team five million dollars, and striped them of their first and second round draft picks in the 2020 and 2021 drafts.

Despite those punishments, other MLB players as well as fans want more discipline on the Astros, including stripping the Team of the 2017 World Series pennant. Players such as Trevor Bauer, Nick Markakis, Mike Trout, and more have voiced their displeasure on how the punishment was handled, and I for one agree. It's ridiculous for a team to have a clear advantage over the rest of the league and not have steeper consequences. It took the Astros seven games to beat the Yankees in the ALCS, and another seven to beat the Dodgers in the World Series with this advantage. I know it's in hindsight now but if they didn't have this scheme implemented then they would have most likely lost to the Yankees and not have even appeared in the World Series. Some players are upset with former Astros Pitcher Mike Fiers for spilling this information to MLB reporter Ken Rosenthal, like retired Hall of Fame Pitcher Pedro Martinez who said and I quote "Whatever happens in the clubhouse stays in the clubhouse and Fiers broke the rules." Red Sox legend David Ortiz was also critical of Fiers and said that he looked like a 'Snitch' for exposing the scandal. I do believe that Fiers was coming from a place of bitterness rather than genuine concern for the game of baseball, and him exposing the organization after he's had his 'success' with the Astros doesn't make him a hero, just the messenger of the problem.

That being said, there is still a lot more content that hasn't been surfaced yet in this story, so we will see how it develops over the coming weeks and months, but hopefully there will be more punishments added soon for the Astricks.

2. The NFL's New CBA Proposal

NFL Owners accepted the negotiating terms on a new collective bargaining agreement on Thursday. The NFL Players Association released a memo on some of the big changes involved in the new CBA including via ESPN:

- The elimination of any game suspensions strictly for positive marijuana tests.
- A reduction in the number of players subjected to testing for marijuana.

- "Gambling definitions" that ensure players receive a portion of gambling revenue brought in by the league.
- Alterations to training camp, including the "introduction to a 5-day acclimation period," a limit of 16 days in pads and a limit of four joint practices in a three-preseason games scenario.

With that also includes an increase in roster size from 53 to 55, with the game day roster increased from 46 to 48.

All of these new rules help these players with less strain on their bodies and more money coming in from the gambling revenue. If this proposal ended there I believe it wouldn't be a question if this got passed. However the big kicker comes in from the new schedule under the new CBA. With this proposal, the NFL would expand from a 16 game to a 17 game schedule within the next four years, as well as a seventh playoff team added to each conference. Players are worried about their health as they take enough punishment in a sixteen-game season, however the NFL would make up for it by taking away a preseason game, improvements in drug and discipline policy, and an increase in league revenue going towards players.

I like most of the changes in the CBA like the increase in revenue for players, and the reduction in marijuana testing. I don't know if I can get behind the 17 game season however since it dilutes the significance of games in a season and can cause more injuries for top tier players. The seven team playoff also gives the regular season less significance when part of the appeal of the NFL is how important regular season games are for seeding and winning your division. Part of the reason for a decrease in ratings during the NBA and MLB regular seasons is because of the quantity of games in a season gives those who are more casual to the sport a reason to just wait till the postseason comes. I understand that the owners would get more money with this move so it works for them, but for the players and fans, I don't think that will fly. I expect something to be tweaked in the proposal on Tuesday when the NFLPA votes.

3. Deontay Wilder vs Tyson Fury II

World Heavyweight Titleholder Deontay Wilder will go toe-to-toe with Tyson Fury in a rematch from their draw in 2018. Fury outboxed Wilder for most of the fight, but two late knockdowns by Wilder, including one in the 12th round, boosted the judges scorecards enough to make it a draw. Since then both men have won their last two fights, Wilder by 1st and 7th round knockouts, and Fury with a TKO and Unanimous decision.

This will be an interesting fight, but I see it playing out in a similar fashion. Fury will show his defensive prowess early on, but eventually Wilder will find a couple of big overhead strikes. Wilder has improved his technique since the last fight while still having that same power, and while Tyson Fury says he's improved his power since switching trainers, it's still yet to be seen if it translates in the ring. I'm going with Wilder by a KO in the 10th round (You heard it here first).

4. The Cavs dysfunctional locker room

John Beilein resigned from his duties as Cleveland Cavaliers head coach on Wednesday. Beilein was a legendary college coach who spent 12 seasons with Michigan and took the program to two National Title appearances. His time in Cleveland however was doomed from the start, as there were reports that the team tuned out on Beilein in September during training camp. Beilein didn't connect with the team and it seemed as if the players wanted Beilein to get fired. There was also the controversy of Beilein calling his players 'thugs' during a film session, then Beilein attempting to rectify the problem by saying he meant to say 'slugs', but still apologized for his choice of words. J.B Bickerstaff will take Beilein's place as the Interim Head Coach.

The Cavs are a dumpster fire to say the least. The players have chosen a victim mentality and decided to blame their new coach without even giving him a chance to implement his system. There wasn't a guarantee that Beilein would've succeeded, but giving up on a guy this early shows the mindset of the Cavs players. You got to look at guys like Kevin Love and Tristan Thompson and ask why are they feeding into this toxic culture as veterans who have won a championship before. Both players were looking for a trade, and I understand why, but sabotaging possessions in the game and angrily throwing the ball at teammates isn't going to boost trade value. The young players probably think it's ok to act like this going forward which is going to further the Cavs problems. I think this offseason needs to be one where the Cavs clean house in the front office and on the court, and have their actual 100% reset after LeBron.