

Firsts abound for Cubs, Sox and Bulls

The eyes of the sports world are fixed upon Chicago. Oh sure, Los Angeles, Boston, Detroit and San Antonio are playing for the opportunity to win an NBA Championship. And Hockeytown USA — a.k.a. Detroit — is facing off against one of the NHL's hottest young stars in Sidney Crosby and the Pittsburgh Penguins for Lord Stanley's Cup.

But these sporting sideshows pale in significance to the momentous goings on right here in Chicago, where for the first time in seemingly forever, both Chicago baseball teams are in first place going into June. If that were not enough, the Bulls overcame nearly impossible odds to win the NBA draft lottery and the number one pick.

Cubs on a Roll

The Cubs were 30-21 at press time with a half-game lead over their hated rivals, the St. Louis Cardinals. They were first in the Majors in runs scored with 291 — 11 runs ahead of the Philadelphia Phillies. The Cubs were fourth in total team on-base percentage and fourth in team batting average in both leagues. Surprisingly, the Cardinals were ahead of the Cubs in both of those statistical categories.

The Cubs were picked by everyone and their grandmother to be leading their division, but as any Cub fan knows, previous teams haven't always lived up to expectations. This year, however, the team has had solid starting pitching as well as some of the best relief pitching in baseball from Jon Leiber, Carlos Marmol, Kerry Wood and Scott Eyre. The offense has been outstanding as well. The team has shown patience at the plate like this Cubs fan has never seen before.

The addition of Kosuke Fukudome has been one of the best free agent signings in all of baseball. He has brought stability to right field, and his approach at the plate has had a team-wide affect.

If the Cubs continue to play the way they have and make a run at their first championship in 100 years, General Manager Jim Hendry will and should get serious consideration for GM of the year with coach of year honors chasing right after Lou Piniella.

Division-leading White Sox

At press time, the White Sox were 28-22 with the second largest lead in any division in baseball. They were

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The Score



leading the Minnesota Twins by three games and had recently ridden a league-best eight-game winning streak.

Even with a .248 team batting average, the White Sox find themselves in a position that not many baseball experts expected them to be in. Though they were fourth in MLB in homeruns hit, they trailed only the Oakland Athletics and Atlanta Braves in total team ERA.

The surprising start for Gavin Floyd, who twice flirted with a no-hitter, and solid pitching from Jose Contreras and Javier Vazquez have kept this team at the top of its division despite their offensive struggles at times. If Mark Buehrle can find consistency on the mound and if the team can continue to take advantage of poor play by the Detroit Tigers and Cleveland Indians, the White Sox can find themselves again where no one expected — in the post-season.

Just think, the city of Chicago could relive the glorious year of 1906 — the last time both teams made the post-season together.

Bulls Hit Jackpot

While their chances were worse than me marrying actress Jessica Alba, the Bulls won the NBA draft lottery and now have the privilege of picking first in the 2008 NBA draft on June 26. They should have had the ninth pick in the upcoming draft, but thanks to a crazy lottery and despite only a 1.7-percent chance of winning, the basketball gods smiled upon Bulls' General Manager John Paxson and his future.

The team still doesn't have a head coach and lost out on the guy they wanted in former Suns coach and now Knicks coach, Mike D'Antoni. In the meantime, Paxson is in the hot seat and the Bulls' Chairman of the Board, Jerry Reinsdorf, seems to have too much to

do with the hiring process of the team's next coach.

If that sounds like a tough situation, things just got worse for Paxson — he has to make the first pick in the draft. If you're wondering why that's a bad thing, consider that this is not a feel-good moment for Paxson and the Bulls. The safer and easier road would have been drafting in the ninth position.

That way, if the player chosen doesn't turn out to be an NBA superstar, there are built-in excuses for failure. For example, if the Bulls had the ninth pick and a team picking ahead of them chose a player that turns out to be a superstar, Paxson could say that he would have loved to have gotten that player, but he was gone when the Bulls chance to choose rolled around.

As things look now, Paxson is on an island. He's all alone to make the first choice. There are no excuses. There is no room for failure. The team's choice must be a player that can become an NBA superstar.

In other words, there is no lower standard than superstar for the first pick in the draft.

I understand that every drafted player has a certain level of risk involved in the selection. It is utterly impossible to know if a great college player will turn into a great professional player. Every general manager is expected to make the right selection, or it may cost him his job. It's not always fair, but that's just the way it is.

The Bulls' pick is especially crucial after a disappointing year and the lofty expectations they had entering play on opening night of the 2007-08 season.

The day after the Bulls won the lottery, Paxson didn't even sound that excited about the opportunity to take any player he wants. If I were him and my job depended on the ability of a kid around the age of 20 to turn into an NBA superstar, maybe I wouldn't be that excited either.

John, let me help you out with the ideal words NBA Commissioner David Stern should state on June 26, 2008:

"With the first pick in the 2008 NBA draft, the Chicago Bulls select guard Derrick Rose of the University of Memphis."



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Chicago Sports Schedules*

*JUNE 2008

CUBS (Baseball) Home games only		
DATE	OPPONENT	TIME (PM)
June 10	Atlanta	7:05
June 11	Atlanta	7:05
June 12	Atlanta	1:20
June 20	Chicago White Sox	1:20
June 21	Chicago White Sox	12:05
June 22	Chicago White Sox	1:20
June 24	Baltimore	7:05
June 25	Baltimore	7:05

WHITE SOX (Baseball) Home games only		
DATE	OPPONENT	TIME (PM)
June 3	Kansas City	7:11
June 4	Kansas City	7:11
June 5	Kansas City	7:11
June 6	Minnesota	7:11
June 7	Minnesota	6:05
June 8	Minnesota	1:05
June 13	Colorado	7:11
June 14	Colorado	6:05

COUGARS (Baseball) Home games only		
DATE	OPPONENT	TIME (PM)
June 5	Beloit	6:30
June 6	Beloit	6:30
June 7	Beloit	6:00
June 8	Beloit	1:00
June 13	Cedar Rapids	6:30
June 14	Cedar Rapids	6:00
June 15	Cedar Rapids	1:00
June 19	Clinton	6:30

JACKHAMMERS (Baseball) Home games only		
DATE	OPPONENT	TIME (PM)
June 11	Gary SouthShore	7:05
June 12	Gary SouthShore	7:05
June 13	Winnipeg	7:05
June 14	Winnipeg	7:05
June 15	Winnipeg	5:05
June 17	Fargo-Moorhead	6:05
June 18	Fargo-Moorhead	7:05

FLYERS (Baseball) Home games only		
DATE	OPPONENT	TIME (PM)
June 3	Gary SouthShore	6:20
June 4	Gary SouthShore	6:20
June 5	Gary SouthShore	6:20
June 11	Winnipeg	7:05
June 12	Winnipeg	7:05
June 13	Gary SouthShore	6:45

BANDITS (Women's softball) Home games only		
DATE	OPPONENT	TIME (PM)
June 6	Akron	7:05
June 7	Akron	7:05
June 8	Akron	3:05

FIRE (Soccer) Home games only		
DATE	OPPONENT	TIME (PM)
June 7	Washington, D.C.	7:30
June 28	San Jose	7:30

SKY (Basketball) Home games only		
DATE	OPPONENT	TIME (PM)
June 1	Connecticut	4:00
June 3	Los Angeles	7:00
June 7	Atlanta	7:00
June 13	Washington	7:30
June 26	Phoenix	8:00
June 28	Detroit	7:00

RUSH (Arena football) Home games only		
DATE	OPPONENT	TIME (PM)
June 22	Dallas	3:00

MACHINE (Lacrosse) Home games only		
DATE	OPPONENT	TIME (PM)
June 1	Washington	3:30
June 29	Denver	3:30