

Summer Roundup: Sports world keeps on rolling

Josh Lewis
Sports Editor

Covering the sports beat for a campus newspaper can be a frustrating task, especially during the summer when the sports world seems to speed up at a dizzying pace and there's no paper to write for. The summer of 2006 was no different, with lots of developments taking place in the pro world and here at home.

Soccer's World Cup occupied the sports stage for five weeks in June and July, with 32 countries battling for the sport's ultimate prize. In a tournament chock-full of yellow cards and shameless whining and fake injuries (much of it from Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo), the Italians came out on top with a 2-1 shootout win over France in the final. My only question is, who taught Zinedine Zidane to head-butt like that? More importantly, the Italians finally found the secret to winning: throw a few games, make a little money, and hope to God your players have the intestinal fortitude to rise to the occasion.

Also in June, the Carolina Hurricanes took advantage of Dwayne Roloson's sprained knee to win the Stanley Cup in seven-game defeat of the Edmonton Oilers. The Oilers, forced to start little-used backup Jussi Markkanen, managed to fight back from a 3-1 series deficit before losing Game 7 3-1. What can the Oilers learn from this? Well, teaching Ty Conklin how to handle the puck would be a start. Wait, they traded him to Columbus. Good job Kevin Lowe!

Later that month, the St. Louis Blues picked defenseman Erik Johnson first overall in the NHL draft. More importantly, Flyers GM Bobby Clarke once again demonstrated his incompetence by forgetting the name of his first-round pick at the podium. Come on Bobby, is it really that hard

to remember Claude Giroux? He's not even European.

Clarke looks like Einstein, however, compared to Islanders owner Charles Wang. He's the guy that signed goalie Rick DiPietro (he of one career playoff victory) to a ludicrous 15-year, \$67M contract that will keep him on Long Island until age 40. What happens if DiPietro, 24, blows out his knee in the first game of this season? His salary counts against the Isles' salary cap for the next 15 years. The owner's name may be pronounced "Wong", but I'm calling him Wang after this absurd deal.

The Toronto Blue Jays continued their annual tradition of staying in the playoff race until late July before collapsing down the stretch. Don't be fooled though; this is a young team which has all the tools to dominate in the near future. When players like Alex Rios, Aaron Hill and Gustavo Chacin get another couple of years under their belts – and A.J. Burnett pitches a full season – the Jays will be downright scary. For now? Catcher Bengie Molina, who may be wider than he is tall, deserves a medal for his triple against the Anaheim Angels on August 17. He did get a standing ovation from his teammates.

In the Canadian Football League, Toronto Argonauts quarterback Damon Allen became pro football's all-time leading passer on Labour Day against the Hamilton Tiger-Cats. It's hard to think of a more deserving player than Allen, who at age 43 is in his 22nd CFL season. Those who suggest Allen shouldn't be inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame because he spent his entire career in Canada need a good smack to the side of the head.

Way to go Damon.

Rugby Season in Full Swing

Josh Lewis
Sports Editor

The UPEI women's rugby squad is off and running after two positive results to start the season. The team managed a 20-20 tie with defending champion StFX in its season opener Sept. 9 before hammering the Acadia Axewomen 27-0 the following Saturday.

The men's Division 1 and 2 squads opened Sept. 10 with narrow losses to the X-Men, going down 23-13 and 19-17 respectively. Results from last weekend's games were not available at press time.

Thomson relishing captain's role on young team

Josh Lewis
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The hopes and dreams of UPEI's men's soccer team will rest squarely on Matt Thomson's shoulders this season. Thomson, who replaces outgoing CIS Player of the Year Ryan Anstey as captain of a very young Panthers squad, doesn't feel the pressure.

"It's more of an honour than a responsibility," says the fifth-year midfielder. "The responsibility comes in getting these young guys accustomed to the league. We have only two returning starters, myself and (midfielder) Jamie Marchbank, so we'll have a very young crop of players. Some are first-year players who are older, so we're not so much young but inexperienced."

That doesn't faze Thomson, though. "National championship," he says firmly of his expectations for the team. He doesn't understand other AUS coaches who have told coach Lewis Page that they simply "want to make the playoffs."

"That's it?" he wonders. "Why not go further?"

The Panthers narrowly missed making the final at the CIS championship, hosted by UPEI, last season, eventually finishing fourth.

Despite the plethora of newcomers, Thomson stresses the importance of building on that success. "We have a few subs from last year that are still with the team. They need to take that experience and pass it on to the youngsters."

Thomson has been a key part of the squad since his first season in 2002, when he scored the famous overtime goal to win the AUS championship. He says the experience has definitely improved him as a player.

"I was a rookie that year and if I hadn't scored the goal, who knows what would have happened. Confidence is big, especially in this league. Confidence breeds courage and fearlessness and the willingness to work harder."

For the first time, however, he finds himself as the leading man, being counted on not only to produce on the field but to educate his young teammates in the ways of the competitive jungle known as the

Atlantic University Sport conference.

That ability, he says, is evidence of Page's gift for teaching his players.

"Jamie and myself could probably teach them as well as Lewis could, because he really passes on his knowledge to the players."

Thomson believes it's no fluke that Page is entering his seventh season as Panthers coach.

"It's a combination of his understanding of the technical aspect of the game and his ability to teach it. He also has a great willingness to learn and to apply that to his coaching."

Page is currently in Germany, meeting with coaches and teams in that country. He will return to the sidelines for Saturday's home game against Cape Breton.

The captain knows he must carry the load, but he expects to have a solid supporting cast.

"I'll tell you exactly who we need to step up. Besides myself, there's Jamie Marchbank, he'll be a key midfielder. We also have two guys who I expect to make a huge impact, (keeper) Tim Kalinowski and Paul Craig, both good young players."

The first-year Kalinowski will compete with third-year Andrew MacSwain for the starter's job. "Lewis has some very difficult decisions to make," reports Thomson. "They'll probably share the job at first, and I imagine he'll go with the hot hand."

For Thomson, it all comes back to confidence. The Panthers' success will hinge on his ability to pass it on to his teammates.

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