I can't get the sound of rubber-soled gym shoes on hardwood out of my head. I close my eyes and hear squeaking. I open my eyes and hear squeaking. Four channels of NCAA hoops and four channels devoted to rubber on hardwood in an attempt to separate me from my sanity. Despite looking forward to the tourney for all it provides I need Monday to arrive. I look forward to work. I have officially gone 'Apocalypse Now' . I am Colonel Walter E. Kurtz. But despite the fact my sanity hangs in the balance the Weekend Wrap will plow through to deliver some disjointed thoughts and opinions on the NCAA tournament as well as (wait for it) its first-look at the Tribe.

It Never Disappoints

There's genius in the concept of March Madness. The marketing of the tournament lives and dies on David v. Goliath and upsets. Of course, there are fewer games that actually result in a lower seed beating a higher seed than not but the focal point of coverage is on the games that do end up with David taking down a giant.

And truth be told, with the NBA sucking out the best freshmen and sophomores each year, there's never been more parity in college hoops than there is currently. Butler played in the national title game last year and they're making another run after this past weekend. Richmond and Morehead State played for a Sweet 16 spot Saturday as well. The difference between a 13th seed and a 4th seed is nominal in many cases and when the 13th seed knocks off the 4th the tournament legend grows despite the scope of the upset actually being smaller than it was even a decade ago.

Doesn't matter though. Despite the fact that the start of March Madness isn't a national holiday doesn't mean I don't treat it as such. I look forward to it every year whether it's due to running and participating in numerous pools or getting together with people I don't get to see often enough to watch games. That's why it's so popular.

And kudos to the powers that be for giving all of us with basic cable the freedom to choose our own games to watch. Yes, I had to look for TruTV last week to locate it and I had to sweat the channel I never knew existed was in HD. But I found it and it was all good. I hate the horrific "First Four" and I hate the fact TruTV apparently only created three commercials that ran in annoying loops but I loved controlling my action as opposed to some slap-nut producer in the truck doing it.

Big Added Bonus

This tournament was made even more magical when Ohio State received the overall #1 seed and was sent to Cleveland for the weekend. The Q was sold out for certain with the Buckeyes in town and Cleveland area fans watched OSU just ball bat UT-San Antonio and treat media darling George Mason like a junior high school team Sunday in a 98-66 blowout that actually saw the Buckeyes ease off the accelerator for the final four minutes.

OSU earned an easy Sweet 16 berth and gets the pleasure of heading to Newark, NJ (apparently East St. Louis, Watts and Detroit were booked next weekend) where they get to face 4th seeded Kentucky.

David Lighty went nuts on Sunday in his hometown with a ridiculous 7-7 effort from three-point range on an afternoon where he was 9-10 overall. Lighty was way better from distance than he was on the free throw line where he went 0-2.

Jared Sullinger and William Buford also chipped in 18 points each but I'm going to tell you that the most impressive kid on the floor in my opinion is freshman point guard Aaron Craft. I love Craft's game. He's big, quick, strong and has a great handle as a raw freshman. He's also got excellent court vision and he can shoot the ball better than Buckeye fans might believe by

watching him this season.

Out on a limb is where I'll be by saying when Craft is done in Columbus he'll be regarded as the best PG to play at Ohio State and he'll be a very good NBA point guard in the mold of a guy like Andre Miller. Watch the kid play defense next weekend and tell me you don't love the effort, intensity and ability. If he can get past those freshman moments of puppy dog play where he climbs on a guys and gets excited the Buckeyes will advance past Kentucky and play for a trip to the Final Four.

I know Kentucky freshman PG Brandon Knight gets way more talk and he's tremendous, so the one matchup I'm dying to see next week is that one. It'll go a long way toward determining who wins and loses too.

Who's Surprised?

To win the NCAA tournament you need to be talented, you need to be fortunate and you need to likely win a coin-flip type game that comes down to the final seconds. That's not written in stone (as there have been some tremendously skilled teams that blew through the tourney) but it's the case more often than not.

The other thing you really need to be is smart. Or, to be more brutally honest, you can't be stone-cold Pittsburgh Panther stupid. Bobby Knight says, "Smart won't get you a win as often as Dumb will lose you a game" and the Pitt Panthers were the living, breathing example of that this past Saturday. If you haven't seen it I'm not going to recap the final seven seconds where Pitt essentially got caught with their heads up their collective asses twice. Suffice it to say that Butler played them straight up all night and earned their shot at the end.

But Pitt has a history of coming up short in post season play and it's not hard to understand why if you watch those final seven seconds.

"Pittiful!", said an AP headline.

Exactly.

Segue

Usually the NCAA championship dovetails nicely into Major League Baseball's opening week. This year it's even better for a sports fan with the Final weekend coinciding with the weekend that the Indians and most major league teams get it going for real.

I've had people ask where I think the Indians finish in terms of W-L and in the Central.

Personally, I'd look for a record similar to last season. I think they lose 90 games and fight it out with Kansas City for the basement. I understand the saying, "Anything Can Happen" but you know what? I've been walking the earth for 44 years and the next time "Anything Can Happen" benefits the Indians will be the first.

The team has shaky starting pitching with more mediocrity or questions than excellence and answers. Fausto Carmona is an ace but only in Cleveland. Not because of his record but because he's flawed. He's never matched his 2007 season that came while he toiled anonymously in the very large shadow CC Sabathia cast upon him and he's an ace only in Cleveland or KC or someplace like that where real aces just don't reside for too long.

After Carmona it's a whole lotta ifs and hopes and not much more. I agree with those that think Carlos Carrasco steps up this season and establishes himself as a middle of the rotation major league starter. But even if that happens you still have a shaky ace and a 3rd starter and prayers that Mitch Talbot doesn't suck and that all the moving parts in Justin Masterson's delivery somehow get streamlined and fine tuned.

Yeah, I'm not trying to pee on the campfire but if everything goes really well I see maybe 50 wins from your top four starters.

The bullpen intrigues me though. I think it's the strength of the club actually. You build a pen back to front and the Indians have a legit closer in Chris Perez. They also have legit set up guys with some history and success behind them in Chad Durbin, Jensen Lewis (although his spring is making me really nervous), Raffy Perez and Tony Sipp. They can also throw Joe Smith at a tough righty and match up Sipp or Perez on a lefty if they need to. Honestly, I think they're okay there though I dig the fact that bullpens can be schizophrenic.

The real problem with this team is all the questions they have offensively. To wit:

1. Will Michael Brantley hit enough and get on base enough to be an effective leadoff man?

2. Do they need an effective leadoff man or will Grady Sizemore be healthy?

3. Speaking of health, how many games will Travis Hafner's shoulder allow him to play? At what level will he play?

4. Is Matt LaPorta a player or an over-hyped tease?

5. Who the hell is playing 3rd base and, out of the candidates, does it matter?

I hated seeing Jason Donald go down for a month or two with a broken hand. Not because I was excited to watch Donald so much as I was excited to get past the 'Jason Donald Experiment' at 3b for the first couple months.

I think those hoping to see Lonnie Chisenhall in Cleveland sooner rather than later are going to be disappointed as much because Donald's injury will affect that timeline as much as Chisenhall's performance in Columbus will.

The Indians are going to see if Donald is the answer there. Now they won't be getting their answer for a couple months longer than I had hoped.

That's the issue for me. The starting pitching is either mediocre or has issues while your two highest paid offensive players may never play at the level that earned their money. And even if Grady and Hafner come back and are productive, where is LaPorta, where is Brantley and where are Donald in terms of their development.

It's going to be an interesting year in that a lot of questions will be answered and the big picture will be put into better focus. It's just not going to be a winning or successful year.

But we're used to that. Which is nice.

Comic Dans

You ever get hit in the face? You know, a bad hop jumps up and hits you in the nose, you get punched or a bad pass (because you weren't looking for it) hits you as you turn, right on the nose. It usually results in blinding pain that makes you say things that would make a longshoreman blush before you gather your senses and figure out what the hell happened and what you have to do to get on with your life.

That was how I felt back in July when LeBron left. That's why I was fine that night with Dan Gilbert's letter that stupidly suggested the Cavs would win an NBA title before James and his BFFs in Miami. But I understood and appreciated the intent and the effort Gilbert made that night after we were all hit in the face.

Unfortunately, if you put me and Gilbert in a room together right now, only I would be over the entire episode and not acting like a raving asshole 9 months later. In some message board circles Gilbert is known as 'The Meddling Little Prick' (TMLP for…umm…short). He's a guy who bought his way into the Lebron-led Cavs situation and then, at the end of the day, let LeBron run and wreck his franchise.

But instead of showing that he's diligently working on fixing his team he instead gets involved in half-assed Twitter arguments with writers and anyone else who happens to belittle TMLP or his 13-win basketball team. It's beneath the owner of the team to consistently act like a douche bag and employ such lame tactics.

Hell, it's not even original what with Mark Cuban having about the same championship success doing it in Dallas and actually being funnier.

Fix the effing team Dan. Stop with the ridiculous tweets crowing about your 13-win team surpassing the 12-win projection of Kelly Dwyer. You look like you have a horrible case of short man's disease.

Quit being a tool and stock your front office with players and executives who won't make you look like a bitch either by walking all over you as LBJ did or by having their mouths move only when you stick your hand up their back.

It's bad enough the team is a national embarrassment and joke. No need for the owner to be exactly that too.

* 3/21/11 Apparently the spring Jensen Lewis is having concerned the Indians as well as reports indicate the Tribe has put Lewis on waivers as of Monday morning.

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