

Getting ready for the races



ANDY HEINTZ/Colby Free Press

Colby swim club members warmed up for the Northwest Kansas League swim meet on Friday at the city pool. The meet will run through Saturday.

Forecasting parakeet predicts World Cup game

SINGAPORE (AP) — A crowd of soccer fans leans forward as Mani, Singapore's World Cup-forecasting parakeet, creeps out of his small wooden cage and chooses between two white cards — one hiding the flag of the Netherlands, the other Spain.

If the bird's many new believers are right, Holland will win its first World Cup championship Sunday. Mani grabbed a card in his beak Friday and flipped it over to reveal the Dutch flag.

The 13-year-old parakeet has become a local celebrity after its owner, M. Muniyappan, claimed Mani accurately forecast the World Cup's four quarterfinal games and Spain's semifinal victory over Germany.

Mani joins Paul the octopus, who has correctly predicted the winner of every World Cup match played by Germany, as overnight stars as interest in soccer's biggest tournament peaks and gamblers look for any edge to pick winners.

Muniyappan, an 80-year-old fortuneteller, said Mani has helped him predict the future for five years at a table in front of a restaurant in the Little India

neighborhood, but this year's World Cup is the first time the parakeet has attempted to forecast the outcome of sports competitions.

"People usually want help picking the lottery numbers, or when to get married," said Muniyappan, who was born in India and moved to Singapore in 1953. "Then gamblers started asking about the World Cup."

Muniyappan said about 30 people a day now pay for his psychic powers, up from about 10 a day before Mani shot to fame.

Singapore's ethnic Chinese, Malay and Indian populations, especially the older generations, often seek out fortune tellers for advice about health or their children's marriage and job prospects.

For 10 Singapore dollars (\$7), Muniyappan and Mani can see into your future. Ali, a 31-year-old customer, said he was having financial problems and wanted to know when his luck would improve.

After burning incense under pictures of Hindu gods, Muniyappan said Ali's fortunes would turn in

Cleveland's superstar leaves team for Miami

When the months of suspense peaked, LeBron James delivered a few words that rocked the NBA and changed two cities and franchises.

At 9:27 p.m., James, looking nervous and somewhat unsure, finally announced his plans from a small stage in Greenwich, Conn.

"This fall, and it's very tough," James said to a national TV audience. "I'm going to take my talents to South Beach and join the Miami Heat."

In Florida, there was rejoicing. In Ohio, only heartbreak and tears — then anger.

The most wanted man in league history decided Thursday night that it was time to leave the comforts of home to chase a championship.

The two-time MVP, a player with supreme skills but without a title, decided to join forces with fellow superstars, good friends and U.S. Olympic teammates Dwyane Wade and Chris Bosh — a dominant threesome that could rule the league for years to come.

"I can't say it was always in my plans, because I never thought it was possible," James said of this union with the two All-Stars, players he has known for years. "I've looked forward to it. Those are two great players, two of the greatest players that we have in this game today. You add me, and we have a really good team."

Landing James was a huge victory for the team president Pat Riley, who was able to corral the top three stars in an unprecedented free-agent class and now must resist the temptation to leave the front office to coach them.

James' announcement ended weeks of speculation and capped a multi-ringed media circus in this age of social networking that spun out of control. It also concluded a somewhat embarrassing courtship of a player by cities, celebrities

and franchises who fawned over the 25-year-old who doesn't have a finals win on his resume.

New York, Chicago, New Jersey, Los Angeles and every other NBA spot came up short, finishing out of the money.

So did Cleveland. As it always does.

This time, losing was tainted with bitterness.

Once James shared his secret, fans poured out of the same downtown bars and restaurants that have thrived during these tough economic times. A few set fire to his No. 23 jersey while others threw rocks at the 10-story-tall billboard featuring James with his head tossed back and arms pointing skyward.

"We Are All Witnesses," the mural says.

This was something Cleveland never thought it would see.

Cavs owner Dan Gilbert was as upset as anyone. He posted an open letter to fans on the team's website ripping James and told The Associated Press he believes James did not play up to his abilities in Cleveland's second-round loss to Boston.

"He quit," Gilbert said in a

phone interview. "Not just in Game 5, but in Games 2, 4 and 6. Watch the tape. The Boston series was unlike anything in the history of sports for a superstar. ... People have covered up for him for way too long."

Not Gilbert, not anymore.

"As you now know, our former hero, who grew up in the very region that he deserted this evening, is no longer a Cleveland Cavalier," Gilbert wrote. "This was announced with a several day, narcissistic, self-promotional build-up culminating with a national TV special of his 'decision' unlike anything ever 'witnessed' in the history of sports and probably the history of entertainment. Clearly, this is bitterly disappointing to all of us."

Cleveland could offer James \$30 million more than any team, but that wasn't what interested James this time. He was willing to make less for something else — a title. Maybe a bunch of them with the 28-year-old Wade and 26-year-old Bosh in their primes.

Meanwhile, in Cleveland, fans so accustomed to disappointment, were let down again — this time, by one of their own sons.

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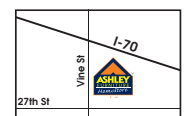
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