

Jayhawks' Final Four run voted Kansas' top sports story

By Steve Brisendine

AP Sports Writer

Kansas grabbed plenty of headlines in 2002 with its best basketball season in years: a 16-0 Big 12 season followed by the Jayhawks' first trip to the Final Four since 1993.

That success was the state's top sports story of the year, as selected in voting by newspaper and broadcast members of The Associated Press.

The Kansas Jayhawks' season beat out the U.S. Women's Open golf tournament at Prairie Dunes outside Hutchinson for the No. 1 spot.

The Jayhawks' 33-4 season ended without coach Roy Williams' first national championship, but Williams' disappointment was for his players, not himself.

"This bunch was a heck of a basketball team, and they took old Roy for a really good ride," Williams said after the Jayhawks lost 97-88 in the semifinals to the eventual champion, Maryland.

One player's career at Kansas ended a year early, when All-American forward Drew Gooden elected to forego his senior season and jump to the NBA. His decision was the No. 5 story.

"This is a dream of mine," Gooden said at the time. He went from a talented achiever as a

Associated Press' top 10 sports stories of 2002

By The Associated Press

Here are Kansas' top 10 sports stories of 2002 as voted by Associated Press newspaper and broadcast members:

1. Kansas goes 16-0 in Big 12 regular season and reaches Final Four before losing to eventual champion Maryland in the national semifinals.
2. The U.S. Women's Open draws national attention to Prairie Dunes Golf Club in Hutchinson.
3. Kansas State's women's basketball team, featuring a starting lineup heavy on homegrown players, makes the NCAA Midwest Regional semifinals and rises as high

freshman to the Big 12's leading scorer and rebounder in his final season. "And it's so close to coming true and I want it so bad. I just want to end it there. My decision is to enter the draft and it's not a bad one. It should be only good for me and my family and the school."

Women's sports, college basketball and the state's two Big 12 schools were all well-represented in the top five.

as No. 2 early in the 2002-2003 season.

4. Kansas State's football team rebounds from a 6-6 showing in 2001, going 10-2 in the regular season as Terence Newman wins Thorpe Award as the nation's top defensive back and Ell Roberson and Darren Sproles emerge as offensive stars.

5. All-American forward Drew Gooden, the Big 12's scoring and rebounding leader, leaves Kansas a year early for the NBA.

6. Jeff Gordon remains the only Winston Cup driver to win at the 2-year-old Kansas Speedway, which continues to spark an economic revival in Wyandotte County.

7. Seward County Community College wins

the NJCAA championship in women's basketball, the first national title ever for the school in Liberal.

8. Olathe North High School continues to dominate large-class high school, winning its 38th straight game and its third consecutive Class 6A state championship.

9. Kansas' football team goes 2-10 in its first year under former Oklahoma and Kansas State assistant Mark Mangino.

10. Pretty Prairie High School ends its football season early after a number of players admit to violating the team's alcohol and tobacco policy and are dismissed, leaving too few to continue.

the first title in any sport for the school in Liberal — was the No. 7 story, with three football stories rounding out the Top 10.

Olathe North's continued domination of the state's largest enrollment class was voted the No. 8 story. The school's winning streak reached 38 games as it won its third straight Class 6A championship, its sixth in the past seven years.

Kansas' 2-10 season in Mark Mangino's first season as football coach was ranked ninth.

The No. 10 story came from tiny Pretty Prairie, in south-central Kansas.

The high school's 8-man football team had to end its season three games early, after coach C.T. Young stopped practice one day and asked any player who had violated the school's zero-tolerance alcohol and tobacco policy to step forward.

Sixteen of the Bulldogs' 23 players admitted to violations, leaving Young with no choice but to dismiss them from the team. That left Pretty Prairie with only seven players.

Still, the Bulldogs earned points — along with praise in newspaper editorials across the state — for their honesty.

"He (Young) did what he had to do and he was right," said Matt Graber, who was the second player to step forward. "The rest of the team doesn't blame him."

Kansas City Chiefs wasted great offense this season

By Doug Tucker

AP Sports Writer

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — The 2002 Chiefs must have been one of the most wasteful teams in NFL history.

They squandered a great running game, frittered away a record-smashing return unit and have nothing to show for breaking a 64-year-old NFL record with only two lost fumbles.

The worst defense in the league — and team history — negated the Chiefs' all-time best offense.

Running back Priest Holmes, cut down by a hip injury in the 14th game, personally broke 10 team records. With 2 1/2 games left, the NFL rushing leader needed just three touchdowns and 143 yards from scrimmage to erase two of the league's most respected standards.

First-year player Marc Boerigter, who connected with Trent Green on a team-record 99-yard touchdown pass play on one of his eight scoring catches, emerged as a homerun-hitting wide receiver.

Dante Hall, a personal project of

coach Dick Vermeil's, sprang to the front of the league as a kick returner. He's headed for the Pro Bowl with a team-record 90-yard punt return among his credits.

Yet, it was all for naught. Crafted and coached by coordinator Greg Robinson, this was the most ineffectual defense the Chiefs have put on the field since a young Lamar Hunt first began writing checks on his daddy's oil money to establish the American Football League.

A perfect blend of wretchedness and excellence, it's no wonder the Chiefs were 8-8.

While the offense was setting a team record with 467 points and 6,000 net yards, the defense was setting records by giving up 399 and 6,458.

With Green clicking on a team-record 61.21 percent of his passes and Holmes rushing for a team-record 1,615 yards before his injury, the offense rolled up a Chiefs-record 343 first downs.

But sometimes confused by Robinson's complicated scheme, the

defenders — ranked 32nd among 32 NFL teams throughout the season — gave up team-records with 367 first downs and 4,396 yards passing.

There were four games where the Chiefs scored 30 or more points and lost. Double-digit leads had a habit of being gobbled up in the fourth quarter. It's not often any franchise has its all-time best offense and worst defense show up in the same year.

Anchored by Pro Bowlers Will Shields at right guard and Willie Roaf at left tackle, the offensive line was one of the best in the league. Lucky as well as good, they did not lose a single game to injury.

Yet, it's easy to dream. In successful reclamation projects in Philadelphia and St. Louis, Vermeil's teams made big breakthroughs in their third year, with the Eagles reaching the playoffs and the Rams going all the way to Super Bowl victory.

And next season will be his third in Kansas City. The popular belief is with a robust retooling of the defense and perhaps a change in coordinators, the

Chiefs should be in position for a serious Super Bowl run.

Safety Jerome Woods, whose season-ending leg injury in an exhibition game was damaging, will be back. So will first-round pick Ryan Sims at defensive tackle; he hardly played at all before an elbow injury shelved him.

The Chiefs figure to shop the free agent market for a shutdown cornerback and another nickel back; draft speed at linebacker; find another pass rusher; and a replacement for punter Dan Strzyzinski may also be a good idea.

But even if they manage to contort their salary cap and turn the league's worst defense into just NFL average, there are no guarantees the offense will remain as potent. It may be unrealistic to even hope it will.

The Chiefs insist Holmes' injury is not career-threatening. Nevertheless, how much longer can anybody hold up under such a pounding?

Will the offensive line remain healthy and intact? Will Green remain as healthy and effective?

Denver Nuggets take tenth loss in a row

DENVER (AP) — Desmond Mason scored 23 points and Gary Payton 21 as the Seattle SuperSonics handed the Denver Nuggets their 10th straight loss, 79-77 on Monday night.

Mason had eight points in the third quarter and Kenny Anderson six points in the final period to help the Sonics hold off the Nuggets.

Anderson finished with 12 points. Anderson's jumper from the corner made it 73-67 with 2:13 left, and Mason's two free throws gave Seattle a 79-73 lead with 7.2 seconds

remaining.

Rookie Nene Hilario scored on a dunk and was fouled with 4.8 seconds left. He missed the free throw, and Juwan Howard put back the rebound, but the Nuggets could get no closer.

Hilario led Denver with 21 points, and Howard had 19 points and 15 rebounds.

The Sonics were without their second-leading scorer, Rashard Lewis, who was sent back to the team hotel before the game, suffering from the flu.

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