

St. Louis Cards rebuild bullpen

ST. LOUIS (AP) — Right-handers Joey Hamilton and Al Levine finalized their one-year contracts Monday with the St. Louis Cardinals, who are rebuilding their bullpen.

Hamilton gets \$850,000, of which \$350,000 is guaranteed. He can earn an additional \$500,000 more in performance bonuses.

Hamilton, 32, was 4-10 with a 5.27 ERA in 124 2-3 innings last year with the Cincinnati Reds and rejected a salary arbitration offer from the team. He appeared in 39 games, including 17 starts, after making the team as a non-roster player in spring training.

Levine, 34, gets \$950,000, of which \$600,000 is guaranteed. He can make \$400,000 more in performance bonuses.

Levine could fill some of the innings taken last year by Dave Veres and Rick White, who left St. Louis as free agents.

St. Louis also lost right-hander Luther Hackman, traded to San Diego for Brett Tomko. The Cardinals also did not make an offer to right-handed starter Jamey Wright.

Levine was 4-4 with five saves and a 4.24 ERA in 52 appearances over 63 2-3 innings last year, his fourth season with the Anaheim Angels. He was not on the Angels' postseason roster and was not offered a contract after the season.

Levine has a career record of 18-23 with nine saves and a 3.91 ERA. He has pitched in 288 games, all but seven in relief, and has worked in 50-plus games each of the last four years.

Big 12's 'Bottom Six' hopeful of cracking upper tier

By STEVE BRISENDINE
AP Sports Writer

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — The coaches of the Big 12's best teams have long been fond of touting the conference's top-to-bottom toughness.

The coaches of the traditional also-rans are starting to chime in, too.

"I think this year you're going to see more balance," said Texas A&M coach Melvin Watkins, whose Aggies are off to their first 8-3 start since 1987. "The bottom teams have gotten better. We, being one of those teams, hope to make some noise in the conference season."

So does Kansas State, which played well at home but went 0-10 on the road last season. At 8-4, the Wildcats are just four games away from matching last season's win total. Even more telling is that coach Jim

Wooldridge has sometimes dressed his team down after victories.

"I think the team is showing signs of being better than what we've had the last two years," Wooldridge said Monday during the Big 12 coaches' weekly conference call. "I really think we could be substantially better."

That sort of confidence, said Oklahoma coach Kelvin Sampson, proves him — and his peers at the Big 12's other power programs — right.

"Coaches are the best diplomats in the country. They should put us in international diplomacy," said Sampson, whose team was at No. 9 when the latest rankings by The Associated Press were issued Monday.

"Most of the time we're just saying the right thing," Sampson said. "But this year it's not coachspeak. It's not diplomacy. It's

the truth."

Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, Oklahoma State, Texas and Texas Tech are generally considered the top six teams in the conference, with Nebraska, Iowa State, Kansas State, Colorado, Texas A&M and Baylor in the bottom tier.

Headed into the conference season, which began Monday night when No. 14 Kansas played at Iowa State, the numbers bear out Sampson's contention.

Every team in the Big 12 has a winning record and at least seven victories. Iowa State and Oklahoma State are 10-1, and only Nebraska (7-4) has a winning percentage lower than .667.

Overall, the Big 12 is third — behind the Southeastern Conference and the Atlantic Coast Conference — on the latest approximation of the NCAA's Rating Percentage

Index (RPI).

That level of early-season success, Nebraska coach Barry Collier said, means each team still has a chance to make some sort of postseason tournament — which, in turn, means more motivation to fight for every possible victory.

"Because of the postseason possibilities for one through 12, it's going to be difficult," Collier said. "You're going to have to bring it every night." That level of competition will continue to pay dividends beyond this season, Collier said.

"From year to year, the players will get tougher," Collier said. "These great challenges do prepare you. I think we really look for the whole group to rise as we compete against one another."

Kansas and Oklahoma set the tone for this conference season by reaching the Fi-

nal Four last year, Collier said.

"They've kind of dragged everybody up," Collier said. "I think that has made kids respond to our league. They want to go where they can be successful individually, but they also want to be around good basketball programs."

Baylor coach Dave Bliss was a bit guarded in his optimism on Monday, though.

"Obviously, as a member of the bottom six you always hope for more balance," said Bliss, whose team is off to an 8-2 start. "But this year, some of the teams in the top six, because of injuries, haven't played as well as they will when they get everyone back."

"I think the top six is still the top six," Bliss said. "But there are a lot of us trying to get our teams back to get into that first division."

Kansas State dominates Central Florida

MANHATTAN, Kan. (AP) — With two players out because of the flu and a bad back, Kansas State coach Jim Wooldridge worried before his team's game against Central Florida.

But Kansas State got solid minutes from two bench players to beat Central Florida 71-59 Monday night to give Wooldridge his best nonconference record in three years.

"It wasn't an easy game for us to win," Wooldridge said. "We were undermanned and the dynamics of our team changed. But the guys that had the minutes played well."

Forward Matt Siebrandt sat out the game with the flu and guard Jarrett Hart missed his second

straight game with a back injury.

But freshman forward Marques Hayden scored 16 points and had 10 rebounds in his first start and Tim Ellis scored 14 to give Kansas State its seventh straight win.

"They are playing awfully well right now," Central Florida coach Kirk Speraw said. "They've got great balance, a great mix between perimeter and post."

The streak is the longest since 1998 when Kansas State (9-4) also won seven. The Wildcats are off to their best start since starting 11-2 in 1998. All that came after a 2-4 start, the worst since 1968.

After leading 43-33 at halftime, the Wildcats started the second half shooting 1-of-10, letting the Golden

Knights cut their lead to only four points with 7:06 left.

"I really felt like we struggled to find a rhythm," Wooldridge said. "We didn't shoot the ball very well."

Central Florida (9-5) stayed close before Gilson DeJesus and Tim Ellis made back-to-back layups to put Kansas State up by nine with 3:02 left.

Kansas State made 5-of-6 free throws in the final two minutes to seal the win.

Kansas State had four or more players in double figures for the seventh straight game. Gilson DeJesus added 16, Frank Richards had 11 and Pervis Pasco had 11 points and 15 rebounds.

Ed Dotson led Central Florida with 18. Dexter Lyons and Troy Lindbeck added 10 each. The Golden Knights' leading scorer, Ray Abellard, who was averaging 18.9 points a game, was scoreless.

"Our leading scorer didn't play much," Dotson said. "They played a lot harder."

Kansas State, which led by as many as 15 in the first half, made its first six shots of the game and took an early 17-9 lead.

"We dug ourselves a big hole," Speraw said.

"It's hard to scramble from behind when you are on the road. It was difficult to come back."

Kansas State opens Big 12 play against Texas Tech Saturday.

Mavericks come on strong to defeat the Nuggets

DALLAS (AP) — Raef LaFrentz finally had the kind of game that coach Don Nelson had been expecting from him.

The backup center had 16 points and 11 rebounds — both season highs — to help the Dallas Mavericks to an 86-71 victory over the Denver Nuggets on Monday night.

After missing 13 games due to a sprained ankle, LaFrentz struggled with his confidence when he returned from the injured list at the end of November.

Nelson also recently criticized LaFrentz's effort and his inability to provide a spark off the bench.

"I thought that Raef took a major step toward being the player that we hope that he is," Nelson said. "We needed him tonight. There was no question that we needed something from somebody."

LaFrentz said hitting some early shots boosted his confidence.

"I've been working hard the last week and tonight I felt pretty good," LaFrentz said. "Some shots fell and it turned into a pretty decent night."

Dallas improved to 17-2 at home and 28-5 overall, waiting until the fourth quarter to put away the team with the worst record in the Western Conference.

Michael Finley had 19 points and Dirk Nowitzki recovered from a two-point first half to finish with 18 as the Mavericks overcame their sluggish start and improved on the league's best record.

"They're a tough team to play against," said LaFrentz, who was traded by Denver to Dallas last season. "You have to work hard against them because they like that slow type of game."

Ex-Maverick Juwan Howard had 22 points and 14 rebounds to pace the Nuggets, losers of 12 of 13 overall and seven in a row to Dallas.

Denver, which has scored 100 points only once this season, set a season low for points by a Dallas opponent. The Nuggets committed 24 turnovers, the most by a Dallas foe this season, and the Mavericks capitalized with a season-high 27 points off those turnovers.

"Turnovers kill you," Howard said. "Of course, when you're playing a good team like the Mavericks, they find a way to score off those turnovers. That's the difference in the game."

On Saturday, the Mavericks routed Philadelphia 102-83 in a nationally televised game. But the Mavs were unable to summon the same kind of effort until the second half against the Nuggets, who fell to 7-26.

"It's good to be the hunted because it keeps us on our toes,"

Finley said.

Dallas won despite shooting 41 percent from the field and missing 12 of 15 from 3-point range.

Nowitzki went 1-for-6 from the field in the first half, then scored six points during a 10-2 third-quarter run as the Mavericks pushed the pace and went ahead 59-52.

"We wanted to speed it up a little in the third quarter and get our style of play," Finley said.

Dallas held a 64-59 advantage after three quarters, and began the fourth quarter with a 9-2 run capped by LaFrentz's tip-in with 9:17 to play for a 73-61 edge.

Nowitzki's three-point play with 5:58 remaining gave Dallas an 82-64 lead, and Denver did not pull closer than 13 points.

The Mavericks trailed throughout the first half, allowing the Nuggets to slow the tempo. Dallas rallied to tie it at 40 on LaFrentz's corner jumper with 3.8 seconds left in the second quarter.

Kansas gives Iowa a big loss

By CHUCK SCHOFFNER
AP Sports Writer

AMES, Iowa (AP) — Leading rebounder Wayne Simien was out with a dislocated shoulder. Reserve Moulaye Niang was back home in Senegal. Shooting guard Kirk Hinrich went 2-for-11.

It should have been a long, tough night for Kansas. Thanks to Nick Collison, it was a breeze.

Behind Collison's career-high 31 points, No. 14 Kansas began defense of its Big 12 championship by handing Iowa State its worst loss ever in Hilton Coliseum, 83-54 on Monday night.

No one answered the challenge

with more gusto than Collison, a senior from Iowa Falls, Iowa, who made the most of his final college game in his home state.

Collison made 11 of 15 shots, including a 3-pointer, in topping his previous best of 28 points against Missouri last season. He also grabbed eight rebounds, made four steals and blocked a shot.

"This was great for me," Collison said. "I don't think it could have gone any better my last time playing here, to walk off the court with a smile on your face, a big win like that with a lot of your friends and family in the crowd. It was a lot of fun."

bowling results

Thursday Night Mixed League January 2, 2003 The Grannies and The Gramps over The Blind Team 3-1 Sunamerica over HoJo's 3-1 Pirate Electric split with Not Again 2-2 Three Men & A Little Lady over Blind Team 4-0 Weis Oil over Lucky Horseshoes 3-1 Women's high game: Laura Wing-196 Women's high series: Diana Nichols-537 Men's high game: Aaron Thompson-222	Men's high series: Kevin Vonkoehnen-538 Team high game: The Grannies and The Gramps-839 Team high series: The Grannies and The Gramps-2301 League Standings: No. 1 Sunamerica; No. 2 The Grannies and The Gramps; No. 3 Weis Oil
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Sports in brief

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. (AP) — Upon further review, the officials working the NFC wild-card game in San Francisco botched the final play of the game as much as the New York Giants.

The NFL's director of officiating apologized to the Giants, acknowledging that they were denied the chance to kick a potential game-winning field goal because the officials failed to call pass interference penalty on a comical final play.

The refs ruled correctly that New York had an ineligible receiver downfield. But they did not throw a flag when Rich Seubert was yanked to the ground as he tried to catch a pass near the end zone after the Giants bungled the field-goal attempt.

IRVING, Texas (AP) — Cowboys coach Bill Parcells made his first moves with his staff, hiring Maurice Carthon as offensive coordinator and keeping Mike Zimmer as defensive coordinator.

NEW YORK (AP) — Eddie Murray is certainly headed to the Hall of Fame. With more than 500 home runs and 3,000 hits, there's plenty to put on his plaque.

So, will he have any company this summer in Cooperstown? All-time saves leader Lee Smith and all-around second baseman Ryne Sandberg hope so, and All-Star catcher Gary Carter could be real close when the election results come out Tuesday.

Brewster All-Star Booster Club

January 7 -January 14, 2003
Tuesday, Jan. 7 - High School Basketball at Herndon
6:30 p.m. & 8 p.m.
Wednesday, Jan. 8 - Gifted Seminar "Academic Bowl"
at NWKESC (6-8)
Thursday, Jan. 9 - Junior High Basketball at Rexford 3
p.m.; 5th & 7th Grade Girls Scoliosis checks
Monday, Jan. 13 - WKLL Basketball Tourney at
Brewster 5 p.m.
Tuesday, Jan. 14 - WKLL Basketball Tourney at
Brewster 3 p.m.

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