

Bobcats pounce, win MAC Tourney

Ohio's Jason Preston, right, and Dwight Wilson III celebrate a win over Buffalo to earn spot in NCAA Tournament. **Page D2**



SPORTS

Section

D

Sunday, March 14, 2021

WWW.CHRONICLET.COM



JIM INGRAHAM

Joe Tait connected fans to Cavs, was true pro and legend

The death of legendary Cavs radio voice Joe Tait is the end of an era in Cleveland sports, and also a reminder of what a great era it was, thanks to Joe Tait. Joe was old school. He worked alone. Eighty-two games a season, every season. It was just Joe, his microphone and you, the listener.

My earliest memories of Joe are sitting at home and listening to the seven-game road trip



Tait

the expansion Cavs played at the start of the 1970-71 season, their first season in existence.

They started the season with a seven-game road trip. They lost them all. Then they lost eight more in a row. Then they won a game. Then they lost 12 more in a row.

By that time their record was 1-27, a winning percentage of .035.

But the Cavs kept playing the games, Joe kept calling the games and I kept listening to the games — almost all of them losses.

But Joe Tait announced each one like it was Game 7 of the playoffs. He was unknown in Cleveland when he was hired as the Cavs' radio voice, but he quickly became known.

His professionalism stood out. The team's record didn't matter. That he gave it his best shot every night did. It was a different era in sports, much different than now.

Back then, in local sports, every game wasn't on TV. In fact, very few were on TV. But they were all on the radio. That made the radio voice the fans' one consistent link to the team. Radio was king, and Joe was royalty.

It was different then. Very different. As Joe was announcing the game at courtside, you could hear the squeal of the players' sneakers and the bouncing of the ball on the floor as the players dribbled past Joe. There was no thunderous music blasting non-stop through arena speakers. No flaming scoreboards. No ear-splitting screaming and shouting, and still more pounding music, during the timeouts.

Basketball was not presented as a non-stop, assault-on-the-senses, entertainment extravaganza. It was just basketball. A basketball game. Dribbling, shooting, rebounding, defending. During the game fans in the stands could talk to each other, in normal, conversational tones. Not just talk to each other, but HEAR each other.

That's what stood out most back then. Joe's broadcasts were a one-way conversation with his listeners. There was a connection there, with Joe Tait courtside telling us all about it. Just Joe. He was his own analyst, artfully interjecting snippets of critique without missing a beat from his play-by-play. In time he developed his own catchphrases, pet sayings and signature shout-outs that he sprinkled liberally throughout his broadcast.

See **INGRAHAM, D4**



TONIGHT

WHO: Cavs vs. Hawks
TIME: 7:30
WHERE: State Farm Arena, Atlanta
TV/RADIO: FoxSports Ohio; WEOL 930-AM, WTAM 1100-AM, WMMS 100.7-FM, WNZN 89.1-FM

STATE WRESTLING



RICK TWINING / CHRONICLE

Columbia's Cole Schulke, right, beats Versailles' Lane Bergman on Saturday at the state meet.

Titles within reach

Shaun Bennett

The Chronicle-Telegram

HILLIARD — Cole Schulke continued his improbable unbeaten run through the postseason Saturday morning.

The unranked Columbia sophomore picked up two more victories to advance to the 106-pound semifinals of the Division II state tournament at Marengo Highland High.

Schulke was one of seven area wrestlers to advance to the semifinals Saturday. The Elyria trio of Nate Burnett (145 pounds), Enrique Mun-

Columbia's Schulke, 3 from Elyria among 7 from area in semis

guia (160) and Jake Evans (182) went 2-0 at the Division I state tournament at Hilliard Darby High, as did brothers Evan (152) and Ryan Bennett (106), who go to St. Edward and live in Avon. Lutheran West senior and North Ridgeville resident Donovan

Palmer went unbeaten at 160 in Division III.

"It's really a lot to take in, I haven't really soaked it in yet," Schulke said. "I honestly feel like I'm at an OAC event like when I was a kid, but this time it's a bigger prize."

Schulke opened in impres-

sive form, pinning Versailles' Lane Bergman in 1:45 in his state tournament debut.

"I knew I had to pin the kid quick just to save energy for my second match," Schulke said. "I just kept going and was able to get that pin."

Schulke, who upset a pair of top-10 state-ranked opponents to win the district title last weekend in Perry, added another highlight to his growing reel when he dominated Otsego's Trevor Wilcox — ranked No. 6 — for a 6-1 victory in the quarterfinals.

See **STATE, D3**

MARVIN HAGLER: 1954-2021

Boxing great beat Hearn

Tim Dahlberg
The Associated Press

Marvelous Marvin Hagler stopped Thomas Hearn in a fight that lasted less than eight minutes yet was so epic that it still lives in boxing lore. Two years later he was so disgusted after losing a decision to Sugar Ray Leonard — stolen, he claimed, by the judges — that he never fought again.



Hagler

One of the great middleweights in boxing history, Hagler died Saturday at the age of 66. His wife, Kay, announced his death on the Facebook page for Hagler's fans.

"I am sorry to make a very sad announcement," she wrote. "Today unfortunately my beloved husband Marvelous Marvin passed away unexpectedly at his home here in New Hampshire. Our family requests that you respect our privacy during this difficult time."

Hagler fought on boxing's biggest stages against its biggest names, as he, Leonard, Hearn and Roberto Duran dominated the middleweight classes during a golden time for boxing in the 1980s. Quiet with a brooding public persona, Hagler fought 67 times over 14 years as a pro out of Brockton, Mass., finishing 62-3-2 with 52 knockouts.

"If they cut my bald head open, they will find one big boxing glove," Hagler once said. "That's all I am. I live it."

See **HAGLER, D5**

COLLEGE BASKETBALL: BIG TEN TOURNAMENT



Ohio State's Duane Washington Jr. shoots over Michigan's Eli Brooks on Saturday in the second half of the Buckeyes' win in Indianapolis.

Survival vs. rival

OSU hangs on, beats Michigan, reaches final

Michael Marot

The Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Ohio State guard Duane Washington Jr. just wanted a second chance at his home-state team.

On Saturday, the former Michigan prep star made sure it counted.

He scored 24 points, grabbed six rebounds and had four assists, helping the ninth-ranked Buckeyes fend off a frantic finish by the fourth-ranked Wolverines for a 68-67 victory and a trip to the Big Ten Tournament title game.

"This rivalry means a lot to a lot of our guys, a lot of our Ohio guys," Buckeyes coach Chris Holtmann said. "Even guys like E.J. (Liddell), who has seen what it means to our fans. Duane feels

TODAY

WHO: No. 9 Ohio State vs. No. 3 Illinois
WHAT: Big Ten Tournament championship
TIME: 3:30 p.m.
WHERE: Lucas Oil Stadium, Indianapolis
TV/RADIO: CBS; WEOL 930-AM, WKNR 850-AM

that, he knows what this game means to our fans. It's not football, we understand that. But Duane understands it."

It sure wasn't easy. For the third straight day, the Buckeyes nearly blew a double-digit lead in the second half.

Michigan (20-4) scored the final seven points and Mike

Smith had a chance to win it with a long jumper with two seconds left. Instead, it bounced off the back of the rim and time expired in a scramble for the ball.

The Buckeyes (21-8) play No. 3 Illinois today, seeking their first title since 2013.

For Washington, it was pure joy. After scoring a career-high 30 points in a 92-87 loss to Michigan on Feb. 21, Washington immediately started talking about a rematch. And he didn't disappoint, making 5 of 10 3-pointers.

"Today we needed him big, huge and he produced," Liddell said after scoring 18 points. "That's why he's a big-time player."

See **OSU, D2**

BROWNS ANALYSIS: FREE AGENCY

Cincy's Lawson should be No. 1 pass-rush target

General manager Andrew Berry will make a million — give or take — decisions during free agency. He must decide what positions to target, which players he prefers, how much money he will offer and how high he's willing to go.

All while 31 other teams pursue the same players.

Free agency is too diverse for there to be one right solution to the complicated puzzle, but here's the blueprint I'd recommend for Berry as the negotiating period starts Monday. Signings can become official Wednesday at 4 p.m. as the league year starts.

The first order of business for Berry and the Browns is finding a starting defensive end to pair with All-Pro Myles Garrett.

A strong pass rush changes a defense and games, especially when it comes from the front four and without a blitz. Coordinator Joe Woods sent a fifth rusher only 21.3 percent of the time in 2020, 30th in the league. So philosophically that demands a dominant defensive line.

Not that it should've been necessary, but the Super Bowl was a timely reminder that an effective pass rush can stop even the most high-powered offense. Taking advantage of a Chiefs offensive line decimated by injury, the Buccaneers made life impossible for quarterback Patrick Mahomes, who was harassed all game. Kansas City never established



SCOTT PETRAK

anything, and the Bucs were relentless as they blew out the defending champs.

Olivier Vernon isn't the flashiest defensive end and he'd go through sack droughts, but he proved to be reliable, tireless, sturdy against the run and capable of stringing sacks for the Browns. But he's 30 years old, is a free agent and won't be ready for the start of the season after his Achilles tendon ruptured Jan. 3 in the regular-season finale.

So Berry has no choice but to find a replacement, and he should shoot for a playmaker. The free agent options will be plentiful, so it's up to Berry to match the player, the contract and the fit in Woods' 4-3 scheme.

Tampa Bay's Shaquil Barrett and Pittsburgh's Bud Dupree may be the most talented, but they're more natural as outside linebackers in a 3-4 and will cost too much, especially after Garrett signed a five-year, \$125 million extension in July. It wouldn't be wise to devote another \$18 million or \$20 million to the other end, despite the importance of the position.

See **BROWNS, D4**