

Basketball

North Carolina men's coach Roy Williams retires. Page C2



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COMMENTARY: HIGH SCHOOL BASKETBALL

An unforgettable season

COVID-19 brought one-of-a-kind challenges to scheduling

Well, that was awkward. Medina County will never see another basketball season like 2020-21. COVID-19 wreaked havoc on everything from fan attendance to scheduling, leading to athletic directors, coaches and, quite frankly, us at The Gazette coming close to having mental meltdowns while trying to remain organized.

Rest assured, though, we all were thrilled beyond belief to have a season, however bizarre it may have been. There were fantastic storylines all around the county, and players were more appreciative than ever.

As usual, I tracked scores for all 48 schools in The Gazette's five-conference coverage area. The challenge of keeping accurate standings became impossible by late January, but outstanding cooperation from coaches and ADs through email filled in the holes.

There were one-of-a-kind scenarios happening everywhere, and the historian in me kept mental notes all season. The following is a recap of how the winter transpired and will no doubt raise a few eyebrows.

Without further ado, here we go ...



ALBERT GRINDLE

League races

With multiple schools struggling to stay healthy, the 10-team Great Lakes Conference decided midseason to crown champions using a wrestling-style tournament. Games were supposed to be played out through first, third, fifth, seventh and ninth place.

That happened on the girls side, which included a first-round forfeit by Fairview against Holy Name that both schools counted toward their overall records. The boys, however, changed course midway through the tournament and only acknowledged the first- and third-place games, making the rest of the standings irrelevant.

• The Greater Cleveland Conference remained traditional but still had to make midseason rulings because only the Solon girls successfully played all 12 games.

The Euclid and Mentor girls ran out

of time to play their second games with Strongsville, so the GCC ruled that Medina (9-2) and the Mustangs (8-2) would be co-champions.

The boys title was clear cut, as the rest of the league conceded once undefeated Mentor took a two-game lead over Medina.

• The Lorain County League went on pause until Dec. 15, reworked the entire schedule on Dec. 10 to have members playing each other back to back and did not permit non-league games until February. Remarkably, all 16 teams completed their 14-game league schedules.

• The Metro Athletic Conference went full steam ahead with a normal schedule, and 12 of the 16 teams completed their 14-game schedules.

• With Aurora, Cuyahoga Falls, Kent Roosevelt, Tallmadge and Twinsburg going on extended pauses, the Suburban League ruled early in the season that only the first round of league games would count. That made both National Conference races tight, as North Royalton's boys beat Brecksville on the final night for a title share and Wadsworth's girls upset Stow for an eventual three-way deadlock with Nardon.

See GRINDLE, C4



RON SCHWANE / GAZETTE

Elizabeth Stuart and the rest of Medina's girls basketball team played a home regional semifinal against GlenOak.

TIGERS 3, INDIANS 2



The Indians' Jose Ramirez loses his helmet while sliding into second base against Detroit's Jonathan Schoop.

Opening day dud

Early Cabrera homer sets the tone

Noah Trister
The Associated Press

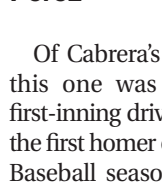
DETROIT — Miguel Cabrera hit a drive to right field, and on a snowy day at Comerica Park, it was anyone's guess where the ball would end up.

Terry Francona lost sight of it, and Cabrera was so uncertain he went sliding into second base, in case there was a play there.

"It was a good slide," Cabrera said.

Of Cabrera's 488 career home runs, this one was certainly unique. His first-inning drive through the flares was the first homer of the 2021 Major League Baseball season and sent the Detroit

Perez



NEXT UP
WHO: Cleveland at Detroit
TIME: 1:10 p.m. Saturday
WHERE: Comerica Park
PITCHERS: Zach Plesac (RHP) vs. Julio Teheran (LHP)
TV/RADIO: Bally Sports Great Lakes; WTAM 1100-AM; WQKT 104.5-FM; WMMS 100.7-FM; WEOL 930-AM

Tigers over the Indians 3-2 on Thursday. Cabrera also added a sparkling play at first base in his first time playing the field since 2019, and Matthew Boyd (1-0) beat reigning Cy Young Award winner Shane Bieber.

See INDIANS, C3

Boy, that sure looked familiar

Normally when your starting pitcher strikes out 12 and combines with two relievers for a five-hitter, it's off to Dairy Delight and hot fudge sundaes for everyone.

This may not be a hot-fudge-sundae-kind-of-season for the Indians, and not because they lost on opening day to a team that two years ago lost 114 games.

Hey, that's baseball. Every once in a while, you're going to have a day when an aging, over-the-hill slugger is going to slam an opposite-field, two-run home run through a raging blizzard off a reigning Cy Young Award winner.

For the 2021 Indians, however, it may be less about the other guys and more about themselves — more about the guys who are no longer around, more



JIM INGRAHAM

about the guys who remain and more about the ever-widening talent gap that exists between the two.

Fewer than 24 hours after their former shortstop signed a 10-year, \$341 million contract with his new employers, his old employers watched their staff ace, in the last four innings he pitched, allow one hit while striking out seven of the 15 batters he faced.

See INGRAHAM, C3

SOFTBALL

Major power

Berkmeyer hit two grand slams vs. Roosevelt

Brad Bournival
The Gazette

When Paige Berkmeyer hit three home runs in four at-bats during a preseason game, the Highland senior shortstop knew this season could be special.

What the Illinois recruit did Wednesday in a 16-3 Suburban League American Conference win over Kent Roosevelt was almost unbelievable.



Berkmeyer

Berkmeyer went 3-for-4 with nine RBIs and hit back-to-back grand slams to send softball historians racing to the state record books.

"I knew I wanted to come into this season ready to go and do the best I could because it's my senior season," Berkmeyer said. "I was not expecting that, especially not two grand slams, especially in back-to-back innings. That's crazy."

See BERKMEYER, C3

76ERS 114, CAVALIERS 94

Love returns

Veteran forward plays 20 minutes

Rick Noland
The Gazette

CLEVELAND — Cavaliers big man Kevin Love played in his fifth game of the season, while backup guard Matthew Dellavedova saw his first regular-season action since March 10, 2020.

For the 31st time in 48 games, however, the Cavs lost, this time dropping a lopsided 114-94 decision to the Philadelphia 76ers on Thursday at Rocket Mortgage FieldHouse, giving Cleveland a four-game losing streak.

Love, a 13th-year pro who has experienced calf soreness throughout the season,



Love

See CAVALIERS, C3

