

Pats' Gronkowski, Bennett top tight end duo in NFL

THE SPORTS XCHANGE

FOXBOROUGH, Mass.—Tight end Martellus Bennett was a Pro Bowl tight end two years ago in Chicago when he caught 90 passes for the Bears. His arrival in New England via trade this offseason gives the Patriots one of the best tight end duos in the game today, and maybe the best combo that Tom Brady has had to work with in his career.

Tight end Rob Gronkowski has only had a few reps on the practice field with Bennett at this early point in the process, but he's clearly looking forward to what the pair might be able to produce.

"It's great to be out there with him," Gronkowski said this week following an OTA workout. "He's another guy that brings a lot of football knowledge to the game in the meeting rooms."

"I think he's going on his ninth year so he has so much experience. He's been with a few teams, with a few coaches, and has played all around, so it's great to get so much knowledge from him and from the coaches. Going out on the field, he's a hard worker. He puts some dedication in so it's great to be with him out there."

Garoppolo 'doing great'
Quarterback Jimmy

Garoppolo might just have to be under center when the Patriots open the season on Sunday Night Football Sept. 11 in Arizona, depending on the status at that point of Tom Brady's appeal of his four-game Deflategate suspension.

If inflated the third-year backup has to play early in the season, the man he's likely to be looking for early and often with his reads seems to have confidence in the young passer's progressions New England's high-powered passing attack.

"He's doing great, definitely," Patriots tight end Rob Gronkowski said after a recent OTA session. "You can see a huge development over the last two years in the way he handles the offense now. He's doing a great job going out there, listening to coaches and just working together with the whole team."

NOTES: RB Dion Lewis (ACL) was also on the practice field Monday, his first practice with his teammates since suffering the injury early last November. He was not wearing a brace on his surgically-repaired left knee and appeared to be cutting without issue. ... G Shaq Mason practiced on a limited basis for New England's final OTA session that was open to the media, his first work in front of the press corps this spring.

Finalists named for Miss Maine award

High school softball standouts Emily Gilmore of Bangor and Karli Theberge of Hermon are two of nine who have been named finalists for the Miss Maine Softball award by the Maine Softball Coaches Association.

HIGH SCHOOL SOFTBALL

The award, given to the state's top senior, will be announced at the Senior North-South All-Star games on Thursday, June 23, at Cony High School in Augusta.

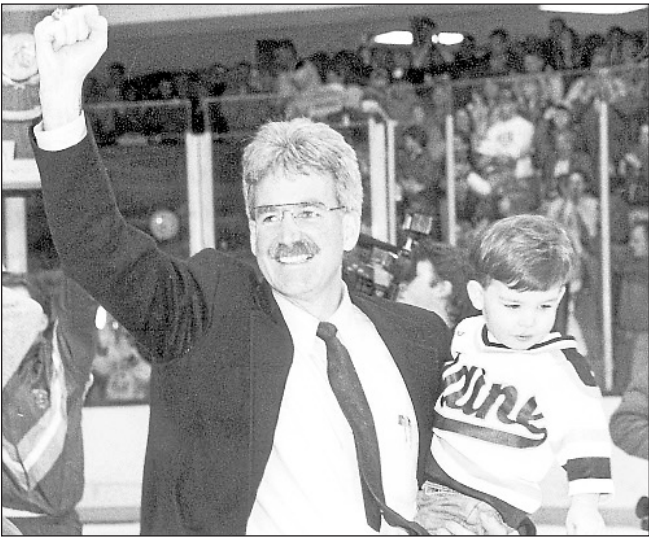
The other finalists are Madison's Aly LeBlanc, Biddeford's Kirsten Lebreux

and Erin Martin, York's Stephanie Rundlett, Scarborough's Maggie Murphy, Sanford's Jen Jones and Messalonskee of Oakland's Kirsten Pelletier.

The C-D all-star game will be held at 4 p.m., followed by the A-B contest at 7 p.m.

The coaches association also will host an Underclass Showcase on Tuesday, June 21, at St. Joseph's College in Standish, with the freshman/sophomore game at 3:30 p.m. and the junior game at 6:30 p.m.

Maine senior all-stars will compete against their New Hampshire counterparts at 4 p.m. Thursday, June 28, at Spaulding High School in Rochester, New Hampshire.



BDN FILE

A triumphant Shawn Walsh, with his son, Tyler, waves to fans at Alford Arena in Orono after the University of Maine Black Bears returned home on April 5, 1993, after winning the national men's hockey championship.

Mason

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lege's Jerry York, Michigan's Red Berenson and former Boston University coach Jack Parker gradually changed the landscape of college hockey. They groomed players to play in the NHL.

Fifty of Mason's former Spartans have worn or are wearing NHL jerseys.

Mason also was innovative. He and Berenson started a trend by having their teams play the first outdoor hockey game at Spartan Stadium in East Lansing, Michigan, on Oct. 6, 2004. It attracted 74,544, which represented the largest crowd to ever watch a hockey game.

There have been dozens of such outdoor games since then, both at the college and the NHL levels.

Mason, who has been inducted into several halls of fame, was a classy man as well as being an exceptional coach.

I enjoyed talking to him because he was always an engaging interview. He was candid, insightful and had a good sense of humor.

He cared deeply about his players and about growing the college game.

It was coaches like Mason who elevated the college game to the level it is now.

In the 2000-01 season, 20 percent of NHL rosters were comprised of college players. Now it is over 31 percent.

He had to be proud of college hockey's growth.

The Frozen Four has become an attractive event for major venues. When the 2018 Frozen Four is held at the Xcel Energy Center in St. Paul, Minnesota, it will mark the 16th time in 17 years that it will have been played in an NHL rink.

It only seemed fitting that the Stanley Cup-winning Pittsburgh Penguins tied a record for most U.S. college players on its roster (13) and set the record for most in the final (11).

Mason will be missed, but his legacy will live on.

LeBron answers critics gives Cavs life in NBA Finals

BY FRANK PINGUE
REUTERS

LeBron James responded emphatically to critics with a transcendent NBA Finals performance that not only kept the Cleveland Cavaliers' season alive but may have put a seed of doubt into the minds of the Golden State Warriors.

James and teammate Kyrie Irving scored 41 points each for a desperate Cavaliers team that took advantage of the Warriors' playing without suspended defensive stalwart Draymond Green to pull within 3-2 in the best-of-seven NBA Finals Monday night.

The 112-97 victory marked the first step in the Cavs' bid to become the only team to rebound from a 3-1 deficit in the NBA Finals and win the championship. They will host the Warriors in Game 6 on Thursday night.

"I finally did a great job of not turning the ball over and got to my spots, got my teammates involved. Just tried to put us in position to be successful," James said after Game 5.

"Obviously it's not always a bed of roses on the court for 48 minutes, but you just try to go out there and trust your keys. That's something I'm very comfortable with, and I've been comfortable with before in the past."

James, one of the greatest NBA players of all-time, had been criticized by some onlookers early in the series for failing to step up and take over in a Finals game.

But thanks to James, whose 16 rebounds and seven assists were more than any other player on the court during Game 5, the Cavaliers appear to have a legitimate chance to pull off the greatest NBA Finals escape act.

Cleveland will surely like their chances back at the Quicken Loans Arena, where they have lost once all post-season. And if they manage to force a decisive seventh game back in Oakland, all the pressure would be on the top-seeded Warriors.

"We get to go back home, and we've played well there all year," said Cavaliers forward Kevin Love. "We love



KELLEY L COX | USA TODAY SPORTS

Cleveland Cavaliers forward LeBron James (right) moves to the basket against Golden State Warriors guard Leandro Barbosa during the second half in Game Five of the NBA Finals at Oracle Arena on Monday.

playing there in front of the home fans, so this is a good opportunity for us to get one."

But the Warriors, who won a record 73 wins during the 82-game regular season, are not about to panic as the championship repeat they have targeted since the start of the season in October re-

mains one win from reality. For the Warriors, another NBA title would be the only way to crown their record-setting season.

"So we go back to Cleveland and tee it up again," said Warriors coach Steve Kerr. "But I like our position a lot better than theirs."

Rose discredits Ichiro's resume

THE SPORTS XCHANGE

Miami Marlins outfielder Ichiro Suzuki is on the verge of passing Pete Rose for overall number of hits.

MLB NOTEBOOK

Yet Rose doesn't want to hear any suggestion that his major-league record of 4,256 hits is being broken.

Suzuki is one hit behind Rose entering Tuesday's game against the San Diego Padres. But in Rose's eyes, he will remain the all-time hit king.

"It sounds like in Japan, they're trying to make me the Hit Queen," Rose told USA TODAY Sports. "I'm not trying to take anything away from Ichiro, he's had a Hall of Fame career, but the next thing you know, they'll be counting his high-school hits."

"I don't think you're going to find anybody with credibility say that Japanese baseball is equivalent to major-league baseball. There are too many guys that fail here, and then become household names there, like Tuffy Rhodes. How can he not do anything here, and hit 55 home runs (in 2001) over there? It

has something to do with the caliber of personnel."

The issue stems from Suzuki accumulating 1,278 of his hits in Japan before coming over to the major leagues. He has 2,977 hits in the majors.

Suzuki has crept up quietly on Rose's total as there has been little media talk of the accomplishment until this week.

Suzuki's chase is a big deal in Japan and each of his games with the Marlins is being nationally televised throughout the country.

"I would be happy if people covered it or wrote about it," Suzuki told USA Today, "but I really would not care if it wasn't a big deal. To be quite honest, I'm just going out and doing what I do."

"What I care about is my teammates and people close to me celebrating it together, that's what's most important to me."

Marlins manager Don Mattingly understands the debate but has seen enough of Suzuki over the years to know he's a terrific hitter.

"It's hard to compare, but it's a lot of hits no matter how you slice it," Mattingly told reporters.

"We've had a number of Japanese players come over and be really successful. To say it's minor-league and major-league numbers, that's not quite fair."

"The fact is that he's going to have 3,000 hits here, and to have all of those hits in Japan, too, tells you how special he is. The hits over there are hits against good quality pitching, basically major-league-caliber players, so they're legitimate for sure."

Suzuki had three hits and scored three runs in Monday's 13-4 trouncing of the Padres to raise his season average to .350.

San Diego is starting left-hander Drew Pomeranz on Tuesday and Mattingly wasn't committing to Suzuki being in the starting lineup.

Pirates ace on 15-day DL

The Pittsburgh Pirates placed ace Gerrit Cole on the 15-day disabled list and recalled fellow right-hander Jameson Taillon to start Tuesday's game against the New York Mets.

Cole suffered a right triceps strain in Friday's contest against St. Louis and exited one batter into the

third inning. Tuesday's move is retroactive to June 11.

The 25-year-old Cole is 5-4 with a 2.77 ERA in 12 starts for the Pirates this season.

Taillon, who was recalled from Triple-A Indianapolis, is receiving his second look at the Mets in seven days. The 24-year-old allowed three runs on six hits in as many frames to receive a no-decision in his initial contest versus the New York Mets.

Cubs sign lefty Matusz

The Chicago Cubs signed left-hander Brian Matusz to a minor-league deal.

Matusz, 29, was traded by the Baltimore Orioles to the Atlanta Braves in late May. The Braves designated him for assignment and later released him.

The Cubs plan to look at Matusz as a possible starting pitcher. He has been assigned to Triple-A Iowa.

Matusz went 27-41 with a 4.85 ERA in 279 career appearances (68 starts) with the Orioles. He fared much better as a reliever than a starter until bottoming out this season with an ERA of 12.00 in six innings prior to the trade to Atlanta.

Sharapova appeals 2-year ban for doping

REUTERS

LONDON — Five-time grand slam champion Maria Sharapova is seeking to have her two-year doping ban wiped out or reduced as she lodged an appeal with the Court of Arbitration for Sport on Tuesday.

The 29-year-old Russian was banned by the International Tennis Federation earlier this month following a positive test for the banned drug meldonium during January's Australian Open.

"In her appeal to the CAS, Ms. Sharapova seeks the annulment of the Tribunal's decision to sanction her with a two-year period of ineligibility further to an anti-doping rule violation," sport's highest tribunal said in a statement.

"Ms. Sharapova submits that the period of ineligibility should be eliminated, or in the alternative, reduced."

The statement added that her case had been expedited and a ruling would be made by July 18 at the latest, which means Sharapova still harbors

hopes of competing at the Rio Olympics in August provided her ban is reduced to time already served.

The former world number one was named in Russia's official entry list for the Olympics tennis tournament.

Sharapova had called the ITF's ruling "unfairly harsh" as an independent tribunal had found that she had not intentionally violated anti-doping rules.

Meldonium was added to WADA's list of banned substances at the start of the year after mounting evidence that it boosted blood flow and enhanced athletic performance.

The World Anti-Doping Agency said in a statement on Tuesday that it reviewed the tribunal's decision and confirmed it would not be using its independent right to appeal to CAS.

About 180 athletes have tested positive for the drug, manufactured in Latvia and common throughout eastern Europe, since January.

Sharapova stunned the sporting world in March when she announced that she had tested positive for meldonium, a component of a product named Mildronate which she has taken since 2006 for health issues.



Sharapova

Madawaska to face Stearns in softball final

MADAWASKA — Desiree Belanger slammed a two-run triple to lead the No. 3 Madawaska Owls by the No. 10 Highview Christian Academy Knights 10-5 in a Class D North softball semifinal Tuesday.

Madawaska advanced to Wednesday's championship at 7 p.m. against top-ranked and defending champion Stearns of Millinocket at

Coffin Field in Brewer.

Aspen Cote added two singles and two RBIs for 11-4 Madawaska.

For the 9-9 Knights of Charleston, Megan McDonald, Michaela Hill and Cassidy Burns each had singles. **Highview 020 101 1 — 5 3 4 Madawaska 004 015 x — 10 8 3**

McDonald, Hill (5) and Burns; Dugal and Nadeau

Fullmer

Continued from Page B5

The 22-year-old Fullmer had four saves in 2015 to tie for the team lead. He was 1-1 with a 3.75 ERA over 57½ innings. He appeared in 21 games, including 20 relief appearances.

He said he has gained confidence over the past few years that he will take into his pro career and will main-

tain his aggressive mindset.

"I'm going to attack the hitters the best I can," said Fullmer, who considers his slider his bread-and-butter pitch.

He also throws two- and four-seam fastballs that run in the high-80s velocity-wise along with a splitter.

He said it doesn't matter to him whether he is a closer or a reliever.

"I'm just very thankful to be getting the opportunity," he said.

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