

# Sweet 16

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since their early season struggles. If there's a dark horse team that can make the Final Four, it's the Bulldogs.

— One more winner? Tom Crean and Indiana. Crean was under heavy pressure after two straight seasons without an NCAA tournament win and a sluggish 5-3 start this season. But his team steadily got better, in large part because he has a wonderful senior point guard in Yogi Ferrell and two superb freshman big men in 6-foot-10 Thomas Bryant and 6-8 OG Anunoby. The Hoosiers were clearly the better team against Kentucky on Saturday, in spite of the remarkable efforts of the Wildcats' 5-9 guard Tyler Ulis, who was the heart and soul of the team.

There's also Wisconsin Coach Greg Gard, who took over from Bo Ryan early in the season as interim coach and should be receiving a long-term contract any day now after the Badgers' win over Xavier put them in their third straight Sweet 16.

— Northern Iowa was perhaps the most dramatic winner and the most dramatic loser of the weekend. The Panthers pulled out a remarkable victory over Texas on Friday when Paul Jesperson hit a buzzer-beating half-court shot for a 75-72 win. Two days later, they led Texas A&M 69-57 with 35 seconds left. But in one of the most remarkable collapses ever, they turned over the ball four times in the last 30 seconds of regulation — all in the back court — and allowed A&M to tie the score and go on to win in double overtime.

Jesperson's shot will be remembered forever at UNI. Sadly, so will the last 30 seconds of Sunday's game.

A&M's win allowed the Southeastern Conference to salvage an otherwise lost season: just three NCAA bids, with Vanderbilt getting humiliated in Dayton by Wichita State and Kentucky bowing out in Round 2.

— The biggest loser was, without question, the Pacific-12, which somehow got seven teams into the field. Just two of the seven got out of the first round, and Utah was crushed by Gonzaga in the second round. Top-seeded Oregon managed to survive against St. Joseph's, ral-

lying from down five late. If the Hawks' star, DeAndre Bembry, hadn't had an uncharacteristic 5-for-15 shooting night, the entire Pac-12 would be home watching the next round.

So where does this leave us? Two double-digit seeds — No. 10 Syracuse and No. 11 Gonzaga — are still playing, and they will face one another in the Midwest on Friday night. The Cinderellas — Stephen F. Austin, Yale, Middle Tennessee State — have all gone home. Stephen F. Austin had a great chance to advance but couldn't hold onto a 75-70 lead in the last two minutes, losing on a tip-in with a second left by Notre Dame's Rex Pflueger, who hadn't scored until that point.

There hasn't been a true Cinderella in the sweet 16 since Florida Gulf Coast made its run three years ago as a No. 15 seed. As a double-digit seed from a one-bid conference, Gonzaga could be considered one, but the 'Zags were a No. 1 seed three years ago and a No. 2 last year. Plus, the WCC has often had two bids in recent seasons. Gonzaga lost glass slipper status years ago.

This trend isn't a fluke. After Butler's back-to-back trips to the title game in 2010 and 2011, VCU's Final Four run (as an at-large) in 2011, and Ohio and Florida Gulf Coast making the Sweet 16 in 2012 and 2013, the selection committee began making a conscious effort to limit the chances of the little guys. That's why Monmouth didn't make the field this year and conferences such as the ACC, the Big 12, the Big Ten and the Pac-12 got seven bids apiece this season — taking up 24 of the 36 available at-large bids.

All four No. 1 seeds are still alive: North Carolina and Kansas advanced with ease; Virginia had to work Saturday against Butler, and Oregon escaped St. Joseph's. The most dangerous underdogs entering the weekend are Maryland, which clearly has the talent to upset Kansas if it plays to its potential; Indiana, which is athletic enough inside to compete with North Carolina; and Gonzaga, which is on a roll and could be a tough out for Virginia in the Midwest final.

Only one thing is almost certain about the weekend to come: Like the first weekend, the players will save the event from those who run it.

## Presque Isle youth wins NE foul shooting title

WESTBROOK — Eleven-year-old Faith Sjoberg of Presque Isle hit 21 of 25 free throws to capture the New England Elks Hoop Shoot championship in the 10-11 girls division Saturday at Westbrook High School.



Sjoberg

Sjoberg, the daughter of Susan and Kevin Sjoberg, finished first in a field of six and advanced to the Elks National Hoop Shoot competition, set for April 14-17 in Chicago.

Faith Sjoberg's journey to the national event started in Presque Isle where she won the middle school Hoop Shoot competition and then captured the Presque Isle

Elks Lodge Hoop Shoot title.

She advanced to the Northern District competition, winning that title on Jan. 17 and followed up by winning the Maine Elks Hoop Shoot contest on Jan. 31.

Sjoberg will be joined at the national competition with Ellie Legare who won a New England title in the 8-9 division by sinking 18 free throws. She is representing Lewiston's Elks lodge.

Alexa Eaton of Topsham placed third in the 12-13 division and T.J. Folsom, representing the Augusta lodge, was second in the 12-13 boys division. Christopher Keene of the Portland lodge (8-9 boys) and Luke Carey of Embden and the Skowhegan-Madison lodge (10-11 boys) also competed in the New England competition.

## Hockey

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her pro career, which included two years with the Boston Blades in the Canadian Women's Hockey League before joining the Pride.

"Seeing all of those shots enables you to learn so much more about the game," she said. "You learn how to read players as well as different situations. It absolutely helped me get where I am today. I'm very proud to be a Black Bear," she said.



Ott

Ott said being named the league's best goaltender was quite an honor. It was chosen by the NWHL's Writers Group comprised of 50 journalists who cover the league.

"It's incredible to be recognized by the writers. I definitely attribute my suc-

cess to my team," said Ott. "Our team had a phenomenal year. We definitely had the best defense corps in the league, by far. We took care of our own zone and transitioned to offense. That carried us."

Her defense corps included 2014 United States Olympians Gigi Marvin, chosen the league's top defenseman, and Kacey Bellamy, sister of former UMaine winger Rob Bellamy.

The Pride also featured two forwards who were 2014 U.S. Olympians in league Most Valuable Player Brianna Decker and regular season scoring champion Hilary Knight.

In addition to the Pride and the Beauts, the league also consisted of the Connecticut Whale and New York Riveters. Each team played 18 regular season games.

She said the average salary in the league was between \$14,000-\$15,000. She supplements her income by giving goalie lessons.

"I'd have to say the league was a complete success,"



LINDA COAN O'KRESIK | BDN

University of Maine football player Bruce Johnson runs a three-cone drill as he is timed by NFL scouts Bo Taliaferro (center) with the Buffalo Bills and Frank Ross (left) with the New England Patriots during "Pro Day" inside the Mahaney Dome on Monday in Orono.

## Scouts

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"We went at it, man: Six days a week, twice a [day]; massages, two-a-days, speed work, strength work, mobility — all types of stuff. It definitely prepared us," Bates said.

He started the day by doing 18 repetitions on the bench press (225 pounds), then went 33½ inches in the vertical jump and 9 feet, 10 inches in the standing broad jump. He reportedly clocked a 4.7 in the 40-yard dash.

Participants also ran shuttle run, a three-cone drill and another agility exercise. Bates, Johnson and a few others also took part in position-specific drills.

Bates said he has been working hard on improving his speed to help with the transition to linebacker.

"By the end of [training for running], I was pretty sound with technique, and I felt great coming out of Tampa getting here, [doing] linebacker drills and kind of having that ability to open my hips and show the scouts that I can play that position: Drop [in coverage] and catch the ball," he said.

Bates is scheduled to do private sessions with the Colts and the Vikings later this week. But he isn't look-



LINDA COAN O'KRESIK | BDN

University of Maine football player Mike Kozlakowski runs a three-cone drill for NFL scouts during "Pro Day" on Monday inside the Mahaney Dome in Orono.

ing too far ahead.

"I just try to focus and stay mentally sharp on what I had to do and try to perform my best and stay in tune and try to impress some guys," he said.

Johnson was the biggest man among the nine former UMaine players who were put through their paces. The 6-foot-3, 302-pound center is coming off his second straight appearance on the All-CAA first-team.

He has spent the last 14 weeks training with former Baltimore Ravens lineman Adam Terry.

"I thought I came out here, turned a lot of heads,"

said Johnson, who has been refining his techniques.

"At the end of the day, you're not really going to run 40s on the football field, especially an offensive lineman, so my positional work was key today," he said.

Johnson cranked out 27 reps in the bench press, went 9-2 in the broad jump and leaped 32 inches.

The large gathering of scouts was not lost on Johnson, who has been talking with some NFL team representatives.

"We've got 10 scouts here today. We must be doing something right," he said. Harasymiak said that in

Ofori turned in the best vertical leap (37 inches) and shared the top broad jump at 10 feet, 1 inch.

"He's kind of opened some eyes because of this," said UMaine head coach Joe Harasymiak.

"For us two years ago he was unbelievable. He could do everything they wanted him to: He's a big corner, he's long, he's athletic."

All Ofori wanted was another chance.

"Today was basically my first time talking to the scouts and everything," he said. "That's all I need, just [to have them] open the door."

UMaine graduate Mike Kozlakowski also believes his best football is still ahead of him.

The 6-3, 240-pound defensive end missed all but one game in the 2013 and 2014 seasons with a torn biceps (one in each arm). Last fall, he was fifth on the team with 50 tackles (11½ tackles for a loss).

On Monday, he cranked out 27 repetitions on the bench press (225 pounds), broad jumped 10-1, and had a 30½-inch vertical leap.

"My body feels great right now," Kozlakowski said. "I'm just hoping for my shot, that I can show them that I'm healthy and ready to go."

He likely would project as a pro linebacker because of his size.

"I feel like I'm ready to play any position they ask me," he said.



LINDA COAN O'KRESIK | BDN

Axel Ofori, a former University of Maine football player, hits 37 inches in a vertical jump drill during "Pro Day" on Monday at the Latti Fitness Center in Orono.

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