

Brew Ball

Contributed by Matt Capristo & Nate Smidt

A Sports Point-Counterpoint

Topic One: First Impressions for UWM Men's Basketball Nate Smidt: Personally, I think the player with the most talent and most upside will be riding the bench, as Torre Johnson is ineligible for the season due to transfer issues. Sam Mauldin looked as solid as he possibly could with a knee injury which we're all praying and hoping heals quickly as he is the only player listed over 6'7". Although somewhat streaky at times, Ricky Franklin has a lot of buzz going on around him. There is a lot of young talent and unknown transfers, and I think Panther basketball will surprise the Horizon League and pull out a much better finish than seventh as the pre-season coach's poll predicted.

Matt Capristo: I agree that we are going to do a lot better than the so-called "experts" predicted. We have some incredible talent on our team, unfortunately I didn't see that at Panther Madness. I liked the fact that this year they decided to do scrimmages so we could see some of these guys in some kind of a game situation. They looked sloppy and they were not shooting well in shoot-around or in the scrimmage I believe my boy Ryan Thornton missed 3 long balls, most of which were wide open shots. Now, I realize that Panther Madness is the earliest date in which the NCAA allows teams to get together and hold official practices, so they will get better. However, November 1st is not that far off and they have some work to do, but I know they will be ready. NS: Their first two games are scrimmages on November 1st versus UW-Parkside and November 6th versus Edgewood, so I'm hoping these "beat down" exhibitions will prepare them for the regular season. MC: Let's hope it's enough because it's all they've got.

Topic 2: Previewing the Milwaukee Bucks NS: The Bucks are a team full of youth. The only players on the Bucks with over 5 years of experience are Ruben Patterson, Michael Redd and Brian Skinner. They also have a whole new face to the team with the new additions of Steve Blake, Lynn Greer, Ha-Seung Jin, Mike Harris, Damir Markota, Chris McCray, David Noel, Brian Skinner, Ruben Patterson and Charlie Villanueva. That leaves only 6 players from the '05-'06 squad and all six of those players are highly effective. Unfortunately, Andrew Bogut will be out for 6-8 weeks with a leg sprain, but from what I saw, Dan Gadzuric has improved his offense with a mid range jumper and a few post moves. Larry Harris also improved the front court with a defensive presence by bringing in Brian Skinner. Charlie Villanueva has a bright future and T.J. Ford was very expendable. Villanueva looks like he has improved his game all the way to behind the arc. The only real question marks the Bucks have is the man running the point and the man running the bench (Terry Stotts). Boy, I bet Larry Harris wishes he would have made a bigger run at Flip Saunders. Hopefully, Mo Williams can have a breakout season. If he does, watch out for this team, because on any given night, one guy can explode and win a game for them ranging from Redd, to Villanueva and even Charlie Bell. MC: I'm going to read a quote from Bill Evans of ESPN.com: "In a city known for suds, the Milwaukee Bucks have engineered a "Microbrew" lineup - good enough to satisfy the masses, but not likely to win a blue ribbon". I think that accurately describes the Bucks this season. On paper, the Bucks look promising, but there are a lot of unknowns and not a whole lot of experience. Out of the projected starting five, the total NBA experience is 13 years six of which belong to Michael Redd. He had a career year last season becoming only the second Buck to shoot over 2,000 points in a season averaging 25 points per game. Charlie Villanueva adds some talent at the power forward position and will eventually develop into a very good player for the Bucks. I think they can hold their own but after barely backing into the playoffs last season they're going to have trouble doing the same with revamped teams in Chicago, Boston, and Orlando.

Topic Three: Can anybody stop the Bears MC: Last Monday night, I went through a progression like most people did in reference to the Bears-Cardinals game. It started with thinking, "There is no way the Bears can lose this game," to "I can't believe the Bears are losing this game," to "The Bears lost this game," and finally, "How did the Bears win this game?" I'm going to throw a number at you: 9.8. That is how many points per game the Bears are on pace to give up this season. That is 157 points for the season which is 3rd lowest in the history of the NFL and ahead of the 1985 Championship Chicago Bears by a couple touchdowns. The defense is amazing and has scored more points than some offenses around the NFL this season. In a game where Rex Grossman had six turnovers - most of them in Bears territory - the defense (led by my MVP candidate Brian Urlacher) kept the game manageable and held a potent Arizona offense to field goals when they should have scored touchdowns. There is no stopping the Bears. NC: Holding the Seahawks to six points in a game was impressive. However, 9.8 points per game against opponents such as the Packers, Lions, Vikings, Bills and Cardinals is not that impressive. The Bears have the ability to go 14-2, only losing to the Giants and the Patriots. Those are truly the only viable possibilities. Even when the Bears go 14-2, I will still not be impressed, because 12 of those 14 games, by season's end, will be against teams with a less than .500 record. Fine, give the Bears a bye in the 1st round and home field advantage, yet the Bears will get rocked by either the Panthers or the Seahawks (in a game where Shaun Alexander will actually be playing.). For Rex Grossman, the six turnovers were absolutely ridiculous. I smiled after one, chuckled after three, burst out laughing after five and felt embarrassed for him after six. How does that happen to a starting quarterback in the NFL? These weren't even close either and were mostly his own fault. His interceptions were pitiful - not even close. If Grossman has those kinds of games against the likes of the Cardinals, I can't imagine what's going to happen to him when he faces a mediocre defense. And on to Brian Urlacher, this goes back to the argument, what does MVP mean? I am a huge advocate of it NOT being the best player on the best team. Ask yourself this: "Is Brian Urlacher the Most Valuable Player on his team?" Maybe. "Is Brian Urlacher more valuable than Steve Smith? Donovan McNabb? Even Tiki Barber?" No! Urlacher's stats aren't even all that impressive. No touchdowns, no interceptions, an average of 8 tackles per game and one forced fumble. Urlacher looks good on the field because he is in the middle of everything (obviously, at middle linebacker) and the likes of Mike Brown,

Tommy Harris, Adewale Ogunleye and Nathan Vasher open up other opportunities for Urlacher. The Bears defense can set all the records, throw up amazing stats all they want, but if this were “buy-sell”, I would sell the Bears winning a Super Bowl this year. MC: They do have an easy schedule. Their remaining 10 opponents have a combined record of 23-32 and only two of those teams were in the playoffs last year. At worst the Bears will go 15-1. They have a great shot at going 16-0 – losing only to New England. If only because even with the year Tom Brady is having, he has to ability to step it up in big games and pick apart a team. Once you get to the playoffs your worst match up will be against the Panthers. It's obvious that if the Bears have a weakness in defense it's against the pass but only because they are so good against the run. Edgerrin James was held to 55 yards on 36 attempts, that is horrible and nobody, not Shaun Alexander, not Tiki Barber, is going to be able run against this team. You have to beat them through the air and the Panthers have the best shot of doing that. As far as Urlacher for MVP, why not? The MVP award shouldn't be based simply on stats. It’s not necessarily the best player on the best team, it is the player that means the most for this team and Brian Urlacher is that man. Without Urlacher in the middle of everything, that defense falls apart. He is the core, the leader of what has the potential to go down as one of the best defenses in NFL history. Now, I only said he is a candidate because Donovan McNabb and Tiki Barber are also great candidates who also raise their teams up from being 8-8 teams to playoff teams. Furthermore, only 3 defensive players have won the MVP award in NFL history – the last being Lawrence Taylor in 1986. Now what puts the Bears over the top from being a 16-0 regular season team to a 19-0 Super Bowl winning team is Rex Grossman. I think he got a little exposed last week. With those six turnovers, he was trying to make too much happen too quickly. He was playing like Brett Favre was all of last year. His team was behind, he got overconfident and tried to force plays. That will not fly in this league. Lovie Smith needs to sit him down and talk with him, because let’s face it: Rex is a young quarterback with little experience. If he calms down in the pocket, trying to just move the ball and not always go for the big play, you combine a powerful offense with a dominating defense and this team will be doing a new Super Bowl Shuffle come February. NS: Rex Grossman is no Trent Dilfer. MC: You’re right. He's better.