

GOOD CHOICE: Tyler Hansbrough turned down the NBA for one more chance to finally accomplish his goal of winning the NCAA basketball title. STREETER LECCA/GETTY IMAGES

Hansbrough makes right decision to stay

NCAA championship the most special, says Magic Johnson

DETROIT (Reuters)—Tyler Hansbrough turned his back on the NBA's riches last year for a shot at leading North Carolina to the NCAA basketball title. The decision left him an unpaid student athlete instead of a highly paid professional player for another year, but he said it was a small price to pay after the Tar Heels' 89-72 victory over Michigan State on Monday. "I'm glad I stayed, this is a dream come true," Hansbrough told re-

porters after the Tar Heels' victory at Ford Field. Talk of Hansbrough being the number one NBA pick has been replaced by debate about whether the ultra-competitive 6-foot-9 forward will even be a top 15 selection in June's draft. But he insisted he had never had a second thought about his decision to return. "A lot of people doubted me this year but looking back on things, people can say whatever they want

because now I'm part of something special that most people will never get to experience. "We didn't win last year but we got it done this year and look where we are right now." After letting the championship slip away a year ago, Hansbrough and teammates Ty Lawson, Danny Green, and Wayne Ellington resisted the lure of the NBA to return to Chapel Hill for one last shot at one of America's most coveted crowns. "That is the best decision I ever made in my life [to come back]," said Ellington, voted the NCAA tournament's Most Outstanding Player. "To experience this with my teammates and to be here, national champions, it is all worth it."

Steepest price? Hansbrough may ultimately end up paying the steepest price for the national title he coveted. The best player in U.S. college basketball a year ago, according to many scouts he was not even the best player on his own team this season. But Hall of Famer Magic Johnson said Hansbrough's decision to return is one he will never regret. The former NBA great, who led Michigan to the 1979 NCAA title, counts it as his top basketball memory ahead of Olympic gold medals and championship rings. "The NCAA championship is still the most special," said Johnson. "We were innocent kids back then. That's what makes the NCAA tournament, March Madness, so special."

A good defenseman goes a long way

By **KARL YU**
Epoch Times Staff

The 82-game marathon that is the NHL regular season is almost over and the finish line is in sight. Come this time next week, hockey playoffs will be here. One of the loose ends the league must take care of before the playoffs start is awarding the Presidents' Trophy, which goes to the team with the best regular season record. Save for the cancelled 2005 season, it has been awarded annually since 1986 when the trophy was introduced by the league's board of governors.

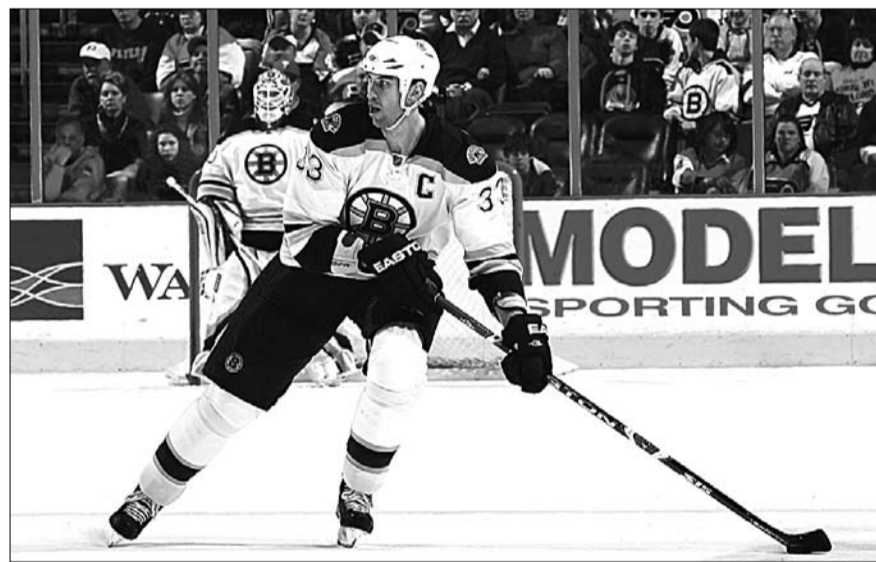
The San Jose Sharks are set to wrap it up but the Detroit Red Wings and Boston Bruins were right on their tails.

The Red Wings are in very familiar territory having taken the Trophy four out of the last six years—including last year when they complemented it with a Stanley Cup.

There aren't many teams in the NHL—and professional sports for that matter—like the Detroit Red Wings who delivered the "1-2 punch."

Of the 22 winners that have won the Presidents' Trophy, only six have gone on to take home the Stanley Cup. The Red Wings are the only team to win the Trophy and the Cup in the same year two times (2002 and 2008). The 1990 Bruins and 1995 Red Wings lost in the Stanley Cup final after Presidents' Trophy-winning seasons.

While the teams taking both honors in the same season—Detroit, Colorado, Dallas, New York Rangers, Calgary, and Edmonton—are seemingly an unrelated bunch, they do share something in common if you go up and down their rosters—high-scoring defensemen.



IMPOSING PRESENCE: Zdeno Chara headlines the league's best defense in Boston. CHRIS MCGRATH/GETTY IMAGES

History lesson

During Detroit's two Presidents' Trophy and Stanley Cup-winning seasons, defenseman Niklas Lidstrom was front and center.

In 2001-02, Lidstrom scored nine goals and added 50 assists for 59 points, earned a +/- rating of +13 during the regular season, and in the postseason he scored five goals and added 11 assists for 16 points in 23 games. He won the Conn Smythe trophy as the playoff MVP.

Last season, Lidstrom scored 10 goals, set up 60 more for 70 points, and was an astounding +40. He added an additional 13 points in the playoffs during the Wings' Stanley Cup drive.

Many remember defenseman Ray Bourque as a Boston Bruin, but No. 77 won his only Cup as a member of the Colorado Avalanche back in 2000-01 when he had 59 regular season points

and another 10 points in 21 playoff games.

People will always wonder if Dallas Stars winger Brett Hull actually kicked the puck in the net to win the 1999 Stanley Cup, but either way Dallas's Sergei Zubov was instrumental, scoring 51 points in the regular season and another 13 points in the playoffs with a +13 rating.

One big reason the New York Rangers erased a 54-year Cup drought in 1994 was D-man Brian Leetch, who had 23 goals and 56 assists for 79 regular season points, and 11 goals and 23 assists for 34 points in the playoffs. Leetch was also named the Conn Smythe trophy winner.

The 1989 Calgary Flames were only one of a few teams to win a Stanley Cup at the old Montreal Forum, and Al MacInnis did more than his share to ensure the triumph.

Like Leetch for the Rangers,

Calgary's No. 2 had over 70 points in the regular season and over 30 points in the postseason, adding a Conn Smythe to boot.

The Edmonton Oilers had an embarrassment of riches, not only with Gretzky, Kurri, and Messier et al., but also with Paul Coffey on defense.

During the 1986-87 regular season Coffey had 67 regular season points, followed up by 11 points in 17 playoff games. Not surprisingly, the Oilers were the best team at the end of the regular season and the playoffs too.

Bourque was also on the 1990 Bruins team that lost to the Oilers in the final and Lidstrom was on the 1995 Wings team that was swept by New Jersey, so high-scoring defensemen have been known to help Presidents' Trophy winners make the finals at the very least.

Chara and the Bruins

The 2008-09 Boston Bruins have watched the Red Sox, Patriots, and Celtics win titles recently and would obviously like to do their part for the city.

While there are some good D-men on the Sharks (Dan Boyle with 57 points) and the Wings, you have to like Boston's Zdeno Chara.

Although the Boston blue-liner doesn't have as many points as Boyle or Lidstrom, he does have offensive skill (17 goals, 30 assists for 47 points) and stands a mammoth 6-9 and weighs 261 lbs.

And if that isn't enough, the team also has Dennis Wideman with 13 goals and 36 assists.

If you like the trend, two good defensemen with or without the Presidents' Trophy would bode well for Boston's chances at winning the Stanley Cup.

FC Porto puts dent in Manchester United's drive for five trophies

Red Devils facing the fight of their lives in Portugal

By **RAHUL VAIDYANATH**
Epoch Times Staff

Manchester United is barely hanging on to its quest for the quintuple—five trophies in one season. With an extra-time goal last Sunday to snatch all three points in the Premier League's marquee match-up with Aston Villa and a 2-2 home draw with Porto in the Champions League on Tuesday, it's going to be nail biting all the way to the end.

The trophy haul began last December when the Red Devils took home FIFA's Club World Cup in Japan by defeating Liga de Quito 1-0 on Wayne Rooney's second half goal despite having Nemanja Vidic sent off.

On March 1, United beat Tottenham Hotspur 4-1 on penalties to win the Carling Cup.

With just under two months remaining in the soccer season and two pieces of silverware in the bag, United is chasing the two most important trophies—Champions League and Premier League.

There is also the small matter of the FA Cup. Manchester United will contest the semifinals against Everton on April 19.

While they are favoured to retain their Premier League title—they lead Liverpool by one point with a game in hand—their Champions League crown took a minor blow on Tuesday, as the anticipated revenge against FC Porto didn't go so well.

Porto knocked out the Red Devils five years ago in the round of 16 and went on to win the Champions League under Jose Mourinho's guidance.

Soccer pundits feel that United was given a very generous Champions League draw by facing Porto in the quarterfinal stage, but more importantly, avoiding Barcelona, Chelsea, and Liverpool until the final.

"Thankfully we're still in the tie." United's defense was shaky all match long against Porto, as Rio Ferdinand sat and watched from the stands.

United was fortunate to be gifted a goal as Porto defender Bruno Alves made a no-look back pass which Rooney intercepted and calmly chipped a shot past the keeper in the 15th minute.

Manchester United was looking like a shadow of the team that had two trophies in the bag. But as the second half got underway, United took charge and took the lead in the 85th minute.

Carlos Tevez and Rooney must have a magical understanding of each other's game. Tevez ran onto Rooney's clever back flick and fired high into the net past Porto keeper Helton.

For the time being all looked better, but in the 89th minute, another case of poor defending bit United. Gary Neville and John O'Shea left Mariano Gonzalez unmarked on the far side of goal.

Gonzalez managed to control the cross and avoid van der Sar with his shot. Porto had stung United once again, leaving Sir Alex Ferguson's team with a major obstacle to climb in Porto next Wednesday.

Manchester United basically needs to beat the Portuguese team to keep alive the drive for five.

"It's going to be difficult for us now. It will be a difficult game in Porto, that goes without saying," Ferguson told a news conference.

"Apparently, we will have to be the first English team to win there, but we are going to have to do it. This club has always set firsts so this is a chance for us to be first again."

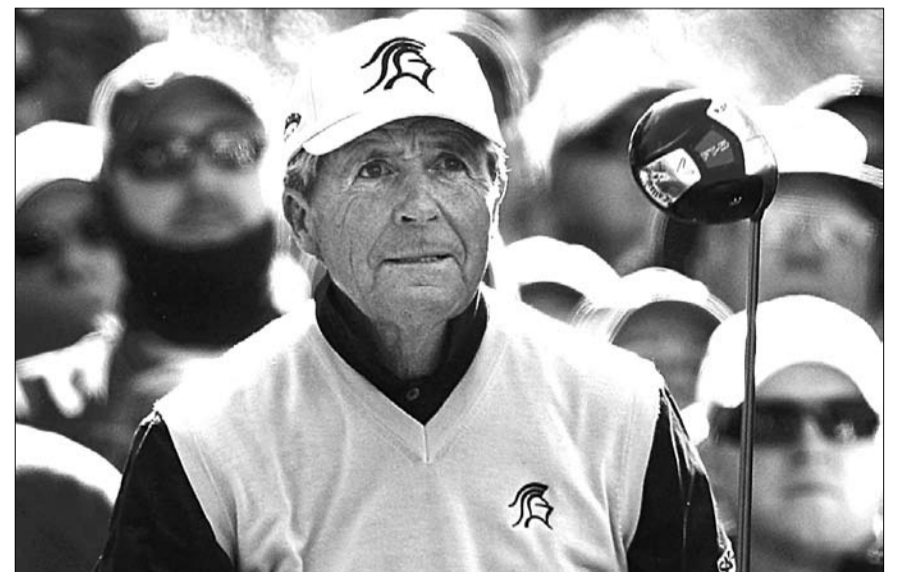
In the Premier League, only eight games remain for United including a Manchester derby and a visit from Arsenal.

Other Champions League action

Bad day at the office
On Tuesday, Emmanuel Adebayor's spectacular bicycle-kick goal gave Arsenal a precious 1-1 draw on the road to Villarreal. The Gunners suffered a double-injury blow as former captain William Galas suffered knee ligament damage and goalkeeper Manuel Almunia injured his ankle. Both starters are likely to miss the return leg next Wednesday in London.

In Wednesday's action, Chelsea stunned Liverpool 3-1 at Anfield. Serbian defender Branislav Ivanovic scored two goals from headers off corner kicks.

Barcelona routed visiting Bayern Munich 4-0, thanks to two goals from Lionel Messi. "They're a good team, three very good forwards. They've got a good away record."



FINAL MASTERS: South Africa's Gary Player won the Masters in 1961. DAVID CANNON/GETTY IMAGES

Gary Player says 52nd Masters will be his last

AUGUSTA (Reuters)—South African Gary Player said this week's U.S. Masters, his record 52nd appearance at the year's opening grand slam event, would be his last.

The 73-year-old, a three-time winner of the Green Jacket, said his 2009 tour of Augusta National Golf Club would mark his last appearance at a regular major championship.

"I am getting old," Player, winner of nine majors on the regular tour and nine more on the senior tour, told a news conference on Monday.

Player, whose 1961 triumph at Augusta marked the first Masters victory by an international player, said the course, now playing at 7,435 yards, was getting too long for him.

"I'm hitting the ball so short now I can hear it land," he joked to reporters.

"And the hole seems about the size of a Bayer aspirin."

Player, who also won in Augusta in 1974 and 1978, has won each of the four major championships for a career grand slam.

"This will be my last major I play on the regular tour," said Player, a short game master and fitness fanatic.

"I'm very grateful and thankful for the career I've had."

Player said he would enjoy every minute of this year's tournament and had no regrets about stepping away.

"I prefer ranching to golf," he said, referring to his farm back home in South Africa.

Fourteen-year-old Keys wins WTA Tour debut

MIAMI (Reuters)—Fourteen-year-old American Madison Keys won on her WTA Tour debut with a 7-5, 6-4 first-round win over Russian Alla Kudryavtseva at the Ponte Vedra Beach championships on Monday.

Keys fought back from 2-5 down in the opening set to upset Kudryavtseva, ranked 81st in the world.

Keys, who made her professional debut at the \$25,000 Challenger at Fort Walton Beach this month, becomes one of the youngest players to win a WTA match.

Mary Joe Fernandez holds the record, notching her first victory at 13 years seven months, according to the WTA.

TENNIS RANKINGS		MEN'S GOLF RANKINGS	
Women	Men	Name	Avg. Points
Name	Points	Name	Points
1. (1) Serena Williams (U.S.)	9,132	1. (1) Tiger Woods (U.S.)	9.83
2. (2) Dinara Safina (Russia)	8,951	2. (2) Phil Mickelson (U.S.)	8.37
3. (4) Elena Dementieva (Russia)	7,561	3. (3) Sergio Garcia (Spain)	7.28
4. (3) Jelena Jankovic (Serbia)	7,290	4. (4) Geoff Ogilvy (Australia)	6.43
5. (6) Venus Williams (U.S.)	7,042	5. (5) Padraig Harrington (Ireland)	5.86
6. (5) Vera Zvonareva (Russia)	6,720	6. (12) Paul Casey (Britain)	5.55
7. (7) Ana Ivanovic (Serbia)	5,174	7. (6) Vijay Singh (Fiji)	5.52
8. (10) Victoria Azarenka (Belarus)	4,670	8. (10) Henrik Stenson (Sweden)	5.12
9. (8) Svetlana Kuznetsova (Russia)	4,308	9. (7) Robert Karlsson (Sweden)	4.94
10. (9) Nadia Petrova (Russia)	3,840	10. (8) Camilo Villegas (Colombia)	4.84
11. (11) Agnieszka Radwanska (Poland)	3,606	11. (9) Kenny Perry (U.S.)	4.79
12. (12) Caroline Wozniacki (Denmark)	3,430	12. (11) Steve Stricker (U.S.)	4.29
13. (13) Marion Bartoli (France)	3,224	13. (14) Lee Westwood (Britain)	4.23
14. (14) Alize Cornet (France)	3,139	14. (13) Anthony Kim (U.S.)	4.20
15. (15) Flavia Pennetta (Italy)	3,040	15. (15) Jim Furyk (U.S.)	4.13
16. (16) Dominika Cibulkova (Slovakia)	2,675	16. (16) Ernie Els (South Africa)	4.09
17. (17) Zheng Jie (China)	2,501	17. (17) Rory McIlroy (Britain)	3.96
18. (18) Patty Schnyder (Switzerland)	2,487	18. (18) Stewart Cink (U.S.)	3.63
19. (20) Amelie Mauresmo (France)	2,354	19. (19) Mike Weir (Canada)	3.59
20. (21) Anabel Medina Garrigues (Spain)	2,325	20. (20) Martin Kaymer (Germany)	3.40

Rankings as of Apr. 6, previous rankings in parentheses