



NBA MVP: LeBron James has brought a new level of excitement to the NBA along with his impressive stats. GREGORY SHAMUS/GETTY IMAGES

LeBron James wins NBA MVP by landslide

'A most valuable person,' says Cavs owner Gilbert

NEW YORK (Reuters)—LeBron James of the Cleveland Cavaliers was named NBA Most Valuable Player (MVP) on Monday, accepting the honour in the high school gym that was the launch pad for his career.

James, who averaged 28.4 points, 7.6 rebounds, and 7.3 assists this season to lead the team to a franchise record 66 wins, received the award at St. Vincent-St Mary high school in Akron, Ohio where he first shot to prominence as a teenager before jumping directly to the NBA.

"This school helped me become the man I am today," he said after becoming, at 24 years and 125 days, the youngest player to win the award, which is voted on by sportswriters and broadcasters.

"You would never think someone from Akron, Ohio would be able to do the things we did growing up and what I'm trying to continue to do as a basketball player and a person."

"King" James has already played six seasons in the NBA and in two Olympics, helping the U.S. to gold in Beijing last year.

James received 109 out of a possible 121 first-place votes to beat two of his U.S. Olympic teammates—last year's MVP Kobe Bryant of the Los Angeles Lakers and the Miami Heat's Dwyane Wade.

He becomes the first member of the Cavaliers to claim the honour.

Taken with the number one pick in the 2003 draft by Cleveland, James has amassed a stack of honours including Rookie of the Year and two All-Star MVP awards.

Team success

However, it is team success the muscular 6-foot-9, 260-pound forward says he treasures most and he has his sights set on adding an NBA championship to his collection this year.

Led by an inspired James, the Cavaliers swept past the Detroit Pistons in the opening round of the playoffs and are hosting the Atlanta Hawks in the Eastern Conference semifinals.

"To be voted Most Valuable Player of the NBA is unbelievable," said James. "Individual accolades, I never really get high on them."

"This is like a team award. Individual accolades come when team success is happening."

"I'm 24 and I'm sitting up here receiving this award. I never thought it would happen this fast."

"I never dreamed about being the MVP, I always dreamed about winning championships and celebrating with teammates, but if I sit up here and say I don't enjoy this award I would be lying to you."

A gifted athlete, James has impressed coaches and teammates with a drive and relentless work ethic that has made him a dominant force at both ends of the court, leading the league this year in triple-doubles.

"There is really no doubt LeBron James is the most valuable player in the entire NBA and the entire world as far as we are concerned," said Cleveland's majority owner Dan Gilbert.

"He really is, to a lot of people, a most valuable person."

Crosby-Ovechkin delivering the goods for NHL

Marquee match-up in Stanley Cup playoffs taking place now

By KARL YU
Epoch Times Staff

Between Super Bowl XIX and XXXI, when the AFC champ was nothing but a sacrificial lamb, the NFC won 13-straight Vince Lombardi trophies. The media would dub the NFC championship game the "real" Super Bowl.

And while neither the NHL's Eastern or Western conferences has an overwhelming advantage in Stanley Cup wins—the West has gone 8-6 since the Prince of Wales and Campbell Conferences were re-christened in 1993-94—the must-see playoff series won't be in the Stanley Cup final this year.

The NHL got exactly what it wanted when Carolina edged New Jersey in Round 1 because this meant that the Pittsburgh Penguins and Washington Capitals would face one another in Round 2. Now, the NHL has a playoff series featuring its two most exciting players in the Penguins' Sidney Crosby and the Capitals' Alexander Ovechkin.

Canada's National Post referred to the tilt as the NHL's version of Magic Johnson vs. Larry Bird while a headline in the sportsbusinessdaily.com read "NHL Poised To Benefit From Penguins-Capitals, Crosby-Ovechkin."

The two stars have accounted for the NHL's last two MVP awards, with Crosby winning the Hart trophy two seasons ago and Ovechkin winning last year. Washington's No. 8 is also a nominee for the honor this year.

They were also the last two point scoring champions (Pittsburgh's Evgeni Malkin has that honor this year). Each player's Art Ross trophy coincided with their Hart trophy wins.

But the Bird-Magic battles wouldn't have been nearly as intriguing without strong supporting casts and the same goes for the current series between Steel Town and the nation's capital.

Crosby has the likes of Evgeni Malkin (another nominee for this year's Hart), offensive-minded defenseman Sergei Gonchar, veteran power forward Bill Guerin, promising youngsters Chris Kunitz and Jordan Staal, and goalie Marc-Andre Fleury.

Ovechkin isn't surrounded by slouches either; among his teammates are Norris trophy candidate Mike Green, C Niklas Backstrom, LW Alexander Semin, old sage and C Sergei Fedorov, and perhaps most importantly in the playoffs, rookie goalie sensation Simeon Varlamov.

Varlamov, who only started five



EAGERLY ANTICIPATED DUEL: Alex Ovechkin and Sidney Crosby recorded hat tricks in a highly entertaining Game 2 on Monday night. LEN REDKOLES/GETTY IMAGES

regular season games, is among the top five in goals against average, save percentage, wins, and shutouts in the playoffs thus far.

Rivalry

The series also has a key ingredient for intriguing viewing—a dislike of each other.

The two teams have been exchanging verbal shots all season.

A couple of weeks after a meeting in October, Alexander Semin took a shot at Crosby in a Yahoo.com interview when he suggested that Crosby was overrated.

"What's so special about [Crosby]?" Semin asked.

"I don't see anything special there."

Hostilities were renewed in a game in late-February where Crosby and Ovechkin got into a tussle in what would

be a 5-2 Washington win.

"I was just skating to the bench and he pushed me from behind," Crosby told the AP.

"So I just gave him a shot back. That's hockey, and he likes to run around these days, so that was it."

Crosby also hinted that Ovechkin was a cheap player and the Russian winger resented the insinuation.

"That's my game. It's not cheap shots, it's a game moment. But he doesn't like it, it's his problem," said Ovechkin.

Both Ovechkin and Crosby scored in a 3-2 win for the Caps in Game 1 on Saturday, and in a Game 2 classic on Monday night each netted their first playoff hat tricks in a 4-3 home win for Washington.

The drama and the energy weren't lost on either star.

"I'm sure it's entertaining for people

to watch," said Crosby in the postgame interview.

"If I were to look at it from the fans point of view, obviously that would be the case but as a player you don't like seeing a player on the other team get a hat trick, it's usually not a good sign."

"It was a sick game," exclaimed Ovechkin.

"It was a sick three goals by me and [Crosby]. If I was a Capitals fan I'd be very happy right now."

Game 3 was another "sick game" as the Pens took it in OT. Ovechkin had a goal and an assist while Crosby had two assists, including one on Kris Letang's OT winner.

And you can be sure the NHL and its fans are tickled pink at having two superstars playing to their potential and against each other in the Stanley Cup playoffs.

Pacquiao, Hatton facing different futures

Mayweather Jr. next possible opponent for champ

LAS VEGAS (Reuters)—Less than 24 hours after Manny Pacquiao's stunning demolition of IBO light-welterweight champion Ricky Hatton, the two fighters looked ahead toward vastly different futures on Sunday.

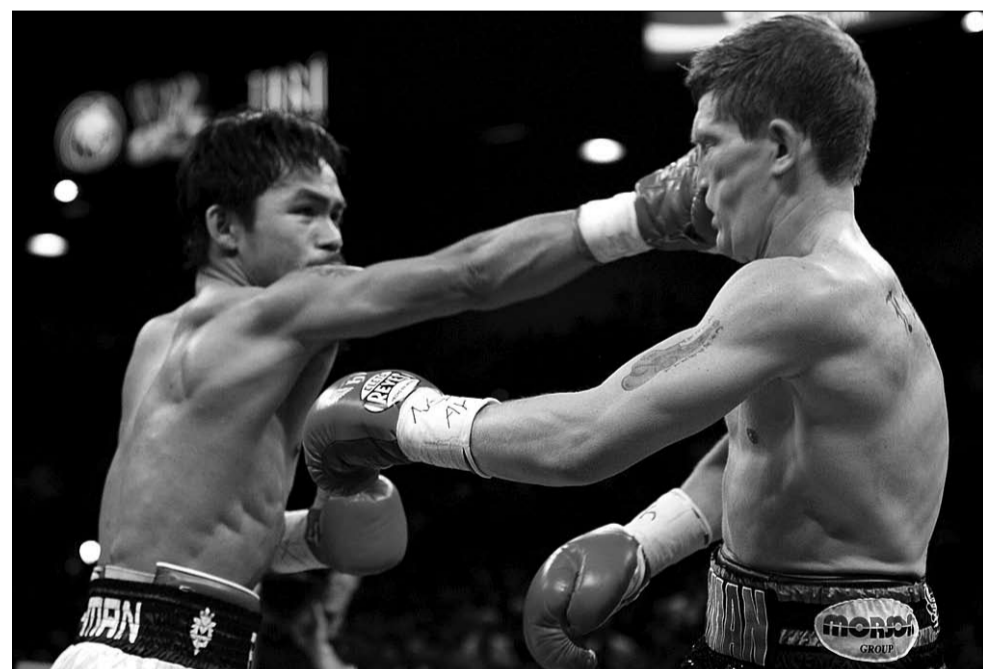
While Pacquiao can probably size up a lucrative bout with Floyd Mayweather Jr. after cementing his status as the world's best pound-for-pound boxer, Briton Hatton is likely to be considering his retirement.

Pacquiao had been a clear favorite going into the hotly anticipated fight between two 30-year-olds—a 12-round contest that promised an intriguing match-up between the Filipino's lightning speed and the Englishman's raw power.

Most pundits predicted a Pacquiao victory but the Asian southpaw's trainer Freddie Roach proved to be much more accurate with his forecast for a decision inside three rounds.

"Pac-man" Pacquiao duly delivered, twice flooring Hatton in the opening round before silencing the Briton's army of supporters with a devastating left hook and a knockout with one second left in round two.

"Manny's unbelievable," Roach told



OUCH! Manny Pacquiao's fist connects with Ricky Hatton's face in Sunday night's short three-round bout. GABRIEL BOUYS/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

reporters after Pacquiao improved his career record to 49-3-2 with 37 knockouts. "He makes me look good."

"He's the best fighter in the world. He's in his prime and he's on top of his game. Anyone in the world, he can beat."

The undefeated Mayweather Jr., who announced last Saturday he would come out of retirement, will meet Mexico's

Juan Manuel Marquez in a non-title welterweight fight on July 18.

Possible match-ups

The winner would be a natural opponent for Pacquiao but Roach instead singled out possible match-ups with WBA welterweight champion Shane Mosley and WBO holder Miguel Cotto.

"I think he [Mayweather] is scared of Pacquiao," Roach said. "If Cotto wants to come down a few pounds or if Shane Mosley wants to come down a few pounds, we can make that happen."

Hatton, who had never previously lost at his natural weight of 140 pounds, was left flat on his back for several minutes at the end of last Saturday's fight before being helped on to his feet.

The 30-year-old was taken to hospital to have a precautionary brain scan, which, according to his father Ray, revealed no damage.

"He's perfectly all right," Ray Hatton told BBC Radio Five last Sunday. "They've checked him out. He's had all the tests and everything and he's not got a mark on him."

Asked about his son's likely future in boxing, Hatton replied: "We will support him in whatever he does and we'll leave that with him."

Shortly after the much-hyped bout had ended with Pacquiao's stunning left hook to Hatton's jaw, the Englishman's assistant trainer Lee Beard said there would be no rushed career decision.

"The one and only focus right now is Ricky's health," Beard told reporters. "Only he can make that decision and it's all about what he wants to do."

Hatton, whose only other defeat was a 10th-round knockout by Mayweather Jr. in Las Vegas in December 2007, has a career record of 45-2 with 32 knockouts.

Barcelona to face Manchester United in Champions League final

Last-gasp equalizer breaks Chelsea hearts amid refereeing controversy

By RAHUL VAIDYANATH
Epoch Times Staff

"It is a disgrace," exclaimed Chelsea striker Didier Drogba as he stormed off the field after Barcelona reached the Champions League final with a 1-1 draw at Stamford Bridge.

The Blues had three legitimate penalty calls denied as Norwegian referee Tom Henning Ovrebo took charge of his first Champions League semifinal. And while Barcelona played a third of the game down a man after Eric Abidal was sent off,

this game will be remembered for how an inexperienced referee can literally decide the outcome of the game.

After a scoreless draw in Barcelona last Tuesday in which Chelsea was given credit for their resolute defending, the second leg was delicately balanced to be a dynamite match.

Chelsea's Ghanaian midfielder Michael Essien opened the scoring in the ninth minute with an unbelievable volley that struck the crossbar and bounced in.

But Barcelona knew that they didn't need to win the game to make

it to the final. A draw would now suffice.

Barcelona's chances were few and far between. And goalkeeper Victor Valdes turned in a heroic performance as he turned away Chelsea's attacks.

Didier Drogba had a terrific match, terrorizing Barcelona's two stand-in central defenders. He was brought down by Eric Abidal in the box and a penalty should've been awarded. But Ovrebo turned a blind eye. This after failing to see a handball off a Florent Malouda shot earlier.

In the 93rd minute of play, Andres Iniesta fired home a blast from the top of the 18-yard box to square the match.

But more controversy would follow as Chelsea's Michael Ballack

fired a rebound, which deflected off a Barcelona arm. Ballack was furious as he screamed at Ovrebo, flailing his arms madly.

Barcelona advance in amid very unsavoury scenes at Stamford Bridge as Ovrebo, a 42-year-old psychologist by day, faced waves of abuse.

"I can fully understand my players' emotions with loads of adrenaline in their bodies," said Chelsea manager Guus Hiddink in a post-match interview with Sky Sports.

"We were so disappointed... Three other situations where it [call for penalty] is so clear. It is an injustice."

"I won't tell you what we really feel."

United finishes Arsenal job

On Tuesday, Manchester United

left no doubt in Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger's mind as to which team is superior.

On a night where Wenger was hoping for a major triumph to justify his master plan, Cristiano Ronaldo and company were just too good for a young, inexperienced Gunners team.

Arsenal knew they had to play the perfect game to overcome a deficit that was fortunately only one goal after a dismal performance at Old Trafford last Wednesday. But instead young defender Kieran Gibbs's slip allowed Ji-Sung Park to score United's first goal.

Then Ronaldo fired in a long free-kick to make it two. The game was essentially over at this point and it was arguably over after Park's goal.

But just to show how good they are, United put together a counter-attacking move that should be shown in training videos going forward. Ronaldo scored United's third goal after an awesome transition attack with Wayne Rooney and Park assisting.

The Gunners got one back on a Robin van Persie penalty kick but it was too little too late. The bad news for United is that Darren Fletcher will miss the Champions League final due to the red card he received for a tackle on Cesc Fabregas that led to the penalty kick.

Nevertheless, Manchester United deservedly progressed and the final in Rome in three weeks time will feature Europe's two best teams—Barcelona and Manchester United.