

TV HIGHLIGHTS

NBA: Nuggets-Celtics, 7 p.m., NBCSB
NHL: Capitals-Penguins, 7 p.m. NBCSN
Tennis: Australian Open, 9 p.m., ESPN2
Listings, C5

Sports

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‘I don’t think this has anything to do with coaching.’

DANNY AINGE, *Celtics president of basketball operations*

Ainge says .500 Celtics lack urgency



Remember all those parades? All that boasting? All that Boston pride owed to the fact that our teams were just better than everybody else’s?

Well, at this hour, we have only one team with a winning record, and that’s the Bruins. The Red Sox and Patriots officially became losers in 2020, and now the 2021 Celtics have lost four of five, 10 of 15, and sunk to .500, barely better than the forever-moribund Knicks.

Our patience with the Green Team is running out. They are simply not as good as they think they are. They have a couple of nice players in Jayson Tatum and Jaylen Brown, but Brad Stevens looks increasingly overrated and Danny Ainge has produced one championship in 18 years.

Whom do we blame?

The Globe’s Gary Washburn wrote Monday that

DAN SHAUGHNESSY

the team “appears to be tuning out its coach.”

That’s big-time code, right there. That’s usually what’s written before a coach gets fired.

“I don’t think this has anything to do with coaching,” Ainge said Monday.

What about you, Danny? Is it time to start ripping the president of basketball operations?

“Sure!” he said. “We’re not playing with the passion that we need. I think that’s on the players. And the players on the team are on me.

“There are things I could have done better, but I’m not going to mention names. I’ll take this responsibility. This is a team that was put together by me, and we’re not playing with enough consistency and urgency, and it’s my job to look to see what we can do to improve the team, but that’s always much harder than improving from within.”

Are changes afoot?

“Just changing faces doesn’t always change things,” Ainge said, “but it may have to come to that.”

Oooh. There’s something. The NBA trading deadline is March 25. Is it possible that the ever-patient Ainge might get fed up and do something big? He has until next offseason to take advantage of the \$28 million trade exception they acquired in the Gordon Hayward sign-and-trade.

“It’s definitely not a time to panic,” cautioned Ainge, “but it’s always a time to reflect. My job is to reflect after every game on where we stand and where our team is and how much better they can get. I know our team is better than how they are playing, and I’m confident they will play better.

“I’m not making judgments on all of my players, but I am seeing that there is a lack of consistent urgency, and some of that is our success. We started

SHAUGHNESSY, Page C3



NICK WASS/ASSOCIATED PRESS

The Celtics reportedly have begun to tune out their coach, Brad Stevens.



1961 FILE/MATTY ZIMMERMAN/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Members of the US Figure Skating Team pose before boarding a Belgian Sabena airline plane in New York.

Six decades later, remembering US figure skating’s worst day

By Kat Cornetta
 GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

“Nobody wants to skate today.”

Mary Bronson, an assistant in the office at the Skating Club of Boston, uttered those words to Globe reporter Harold Kaese on Feb. 15, 1961, after the crash of

Sabena Flight 548 killed the entire US figure skating team on its way to the 1961 World Championships.

Of the 34 skaters, coaches, officials, and family members on the flight, 10 were from Boston. The tragedy greatly impacted the sport in the US, and ended

the reign of the Skating Club of Boston as the nation’s best.

In the weeks prior to the crash, Boston-based skaters won five national championships: Senior women, men, and pairs, plus junior and novice women.

FIGURE SKATING, Page C4

BC men, Christian part ways

Guard Tabbs done for year after COVID-19 violation

By Julian Benbow
 GLOBE STAFF

With the men’s basketball program drowning in another losing season, Boston College’s decision Monday to fire head coach Jim Christian wasn’t necessarily surprising. Parting ways with five games left in the season was unexpected.

Despite a 78-132 overall record and a 26-94 record in the Atlantic Coast Conference, Christian’s seven-year run was the longest since Al Skinner (1998-2010), the winningest coach in program history.

► Harvard’s Amaker tops replacement list. C4

“I know that Jim gave everything that he had into leading our program and mentoring our student-athletes,” athletic director Pat Kraft said in a statement. “Ultimately, the program is not headed in the right direction and though I hesitate to make a midseason coaching change in any sport, now is the right time for us to look forward. We wish Jim and his family all the best in their future endeavors and thank them for their service to Boston College.”

Kraft was unavailable for comment.

Assistant coach Scott Spinelli will serve as interim head coach. The search for Christian’s replacement will begin immediately. Kraft has yet to decide whether he will handle the search himself or hire a search firm.

This season, complicated from the beginning by the unusual circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, proved to be rock bottom for Christian. After opening the season with a near-upset of No. 3 Villanova and then beating Rhode Island, the Eagles (3-13, 1-9 ACC) lost eight of their next nine, including a 101-63 beating by Syracuse that is the

BOSTON COLLEGE, Page C4

INSIDE

Aussie advance

Third-seeded Osaka sweeps into Australian Open semifinals with 19th straight victory overall. C2

Waiting to hear

Patriots linebackers could get huge boost with return of Hightower. C3

Nothing could be finer

Northeastern men’s basketball agrees to play North Carolina in Chapel Hill on Wednesday. C4

Red Sox, off a roiling winter, hurt by anything-but-routine spring

PETER ABRAHAM
 ON BASEBALL

ers Association decided to hold reporters out of spring training sites until next week as part of their pandemic protocols.

This will be a spring training defined by new rules designed to keep the players and coaches far apart but still close enough to prepare for the season.

That’s not ideal for the Red Sox.

Twenty of their current 40-man roster are new to the organization the last two seasons, and have not played for manager Alex Cora. That number will grow once two recent signees — utility man Marwin Gonzalez and righthanded reliever Hirokazu Sawamura — are added.

Spring training would usually be a perfect time and place to bond and set expectations for the coming season, but that won’t be possible to the extent it usually would be given the guidelines.

ON BASEBALL, Page C2



JIM DAVIS/GLOBE STAFF

The team Alex Cora departed after the 2019 season is far different than the one he returns to for 2021 amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Red Sox have started to assemble at their spring training complex in Fort Myers, Fla. Eduardo Rodriguez was among those who arrived on Monday, and the first workout for pitchers and catchers will be Thursday.

In normal times, the Globe would have already written a few stories from JetBlue Park, with accompanying photos of players lugging their equipment bags in from the parking lot, but those hopeful stories will have to wait.

Major League Baseball and the Play-

Better late than never for McDowell, 500

Surprise at Daytona worth the long wait

By Jenna Fryer
ASSOCIATED PRESS

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. — Michael McDowell was glued to Brad Keselowski's bumper, watching and waiting for his chance to win the Daytona 500.

Joey Logano was the leader, the laps were winding down, and yet no one had the nerve to pull out of traffic. McDowell was certain Keselowski would go for it eventually, and when he did, McDowell would play his hand.

On the final lap, Keselowski attempted to dart around Logano, but Logano threw a block on his teammate that crashed them both. McDowell stayed right where he was, flat in the gas, and drove through a crash scene for a stunning upset.

"I knew he would go for a race-winning move and my plan was to let him make that move," McDowell said. "I knew I didn't want to make my move too early, so I was committed to the [Keselowski] bumper and when he made the move, the hole opened up."

A 100-1 underdog when the race began Sunday afternoon, McDowell won

for the first time in 358 Cup starts when the checkered flag finally flew about 15 minutes after midnight. The race was stopped by rain for almost six hours and ended nine hours after the green flag waved at Daytona International Speedway.

"There's been lots of years where I was wondering what the heck am I doing and why am I doing it?" McDowell said. "I always knew if I just kept grinding that one day everything will line up and go right."

NASCAR's season opener was stacked with storylines. Denny Hamlin was trying for a record third-consecu-

tive Daytona 500 victory, and the team he started with Michael Jordan was debuting with driver Bubba Wallace.

Kyle Larson was back after nearly a year in exile for using a racial slur, and reigning Cup champion Chase Elliott was going for his first Daytona 500 win.

And all the way at the back of the field, 1990 Daytona 500 winner Derricke Cope made what he said would be his final NASCAR start. At 62 he was the oldest driver in the field, and his upset victory 31 years ago was considered the biggest in race history.

McDowell didn't take that title from Cope, partly because McDowell is a

strong superspeedway racer capable of mixing it up with the usual suspects.

"It's been a tough road for me. I've had to spend a lot of years grinding it out," McDowell said. His career has been stabilized by four seasons driving for Front Row Motorsports, a tiny Ford team capable of holding its own at Daytona.

McDowell was in the mix even before the two Penske cars derailed the finish.

"Brad was turning right, Joey was turning left and I went right through the middle," McDowell said. "It's just kind of a blur from there."



JONATHAN WIGGS/GLOBE STAFF

Jim Christian's BC teams went just 78-132 in seven seasons, finishing better than .500 once.

BC fires men's hoop coach

► BOSTON COLLEGE
Continued from Page C1

worst loss at Conte Forum in program history.

The Eagles had five games postponed due to COVID protocols, and have lost three straight since.

Christian was in the first year of a two-year extension he signed in 2018. While there were rumblings a year ago that his time at the Heights might be running out, then-athletic director Martin Jarmond chose to bring him back for another season amid the uncertainty — along with the unknown finan-

cial ramifications — of the pandemic.

Christian was optimistic that the backcourt of Wynston Tabbs and Jay Heath would give the Eagles enough firepower. Instead, BC's offense is 10th in the conference and doing nothing to mask easily the ACC's worst defense.

Tabbs's campaign also ended on Monday, as the school announced the sophomore guard will miss the remainder of the season due to a violation of the university's COVID-19 protocols. Tabbs, BC's second-leading scorer, has not played since the

Eagles resumed following their five postponements.

Christian had two players move on to the NBA: Jerome Robinson was drafted by the Clippers in 2018 and now plays for Washington, while Ky Bowman landed with the Golden State Warriors as an undrafted free agent in 2019 and now plays for the Clippers G-League affiliate.

The height of his tenure came with both in 2017-18, when the Eagles won 19 games, reached the third round of the ACC tournament, and went to the National Invitational Tournament — their first postseason appearance since 2011.

That was Christian's lone winning season, however, and BC's last NCAA appearance remains in 2009, Skinner's next-to-last season.

BC has spent more than a decade trying to rebuild its basketball program after an ugly split with Skinner in 2010. The largest takeaway over that time has been that to be successful in a conference as competitive as the ACC, the university will have to make a deeper investment in the program.

The school is expected to take at least one step by building a new practice facility for men's and women's basketball. The programs currently share Power Gym at Conte Forum with the volleyball team.

In the meantime, the Eagles still have a season to finish. They travel to face Georgia Tech on Wednesday.

"I am confident that our student-athletes will compete hard down the stretch in this most unusual year with our full support," Kraft's statement read. "We will begin a national search immediately to find a new leader of our young men on the Heights."

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Who will emerge as BC's next men's coach?

By Joe Sullivan
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

There are five obvious targets for Boston College athletic director Pat Kraft to consider as he searches for a successor to fired men's basketball coach Jim Christian:

- Tommy Amaker turned Harvard from a bottom-feeder in the Ivy League to a perennial favorite. His 14-season record with the Crimson is 251-139, with four NCAA Tournament appearances. He has ACC connections, having played at Duke, and also coached at Seton Hall and Michigan.

- Howard Easley is an assistant at Michigan who played on some outstanding BC teams from 1990-94. The Wolverines are tracking toward a No. 1 seed in the NCAA Tournament and have an outstanding recruiting class slated to arrive next year. Easley has an NBA background, too, including 12 years as a player and coaching positions with the Clippers, Wizards, and Knicks.

- Dennis Gates is the head

coach at Cleveland State, where in his second season he has the Vikings leading the Horizon League. He has an ACC connection as an assistant to Leonard Hamilton at Florida State for eight years. He also was an assistant coach at Marquette, Cal, Northern Illinois, and Nevada. His wife, Jocelyn, is senior associate athletic director and senior woman administrator at BC.

- Porter Moser is the head coach at Loyola of Chicago, where he crossed paths with Kraft. Moser took the Ramblers to the Final Four in 2017-18, and this year's team has been in the national polls. He's a disciple of the late Rick Majerus, and his teams play like Majerus's, with great defense and precision half-court offense.

- Mark Schmidt has seemingly done the impossible at Saint Bonaventure, making the Bonnies a perennial contender in the Atlantic 10. He seems pretty entrenched there — this is his 14th season — but he played at BC for Tom Davis and Gary Williams in the '80s.

Northeastern men add game at Tar Heels

By Christopher Price
GLOBE STAFF

The Northeastern men's basketball team will face North Carolina in Chapel Hill on Wednesday.

The Huskies (9-7, 8-2 CAA) and Tar Heels (12-7, 7-5 ACC) made the connection after UNC's conference home games against Clemson (Jan. 12), Miami (Feb. 8), and Virginia Tech (Feb. 16) were postponed due to COVID-19 safety protocols.

For UNC, three earlier nonconference games at the Smith Center were canceled due to the shortened schedule in addition to the three ACC games, which were postponed and have not yet been rescheduled. Roy Williams said on Monday's weekly

ACC coaches call that the Tar Heels checked with "probably seven or eight programs that are having problems with COVID themselves" in search of one willing to travel to Chapel Hill for an extra game.

"It's not an easy situation, because I'm not going to go back and play them there next year," Williams said.

The Huskies postponed four games from Jan. 30 to Feb. 7, and saw their first competition since Jan. 24 when they split with Towson last weekend.

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Entire generation of figure skaters lost

► FIGURE SKATING
Continued from Page C1

Back then, the cup given to the skating club with the best results, the Harned Trophy, was just as coveted as a national title. At those 1961 national championships, the Skating Club of Boston captured the hardware for the seventh time in 12 years.

That progress was stymied when Flight 548 circled Brussels Airport in three failed attempts to land, eventually plunging to the ground 2 miles from the airport and exploding upon impact. Debris from the plane killed a farmer near the site and caused another to lose his leg.

At a commemorative event at the brand-new Skating Club of Boston facility in Norwood on Saturday evening, Tenley Albright, the 1956 Olympic gold medalist, spoke from the club's trophy room to an audience gathered on Zoom.

"I am sitting in this trophy room, thinking of the trophies that would be here had this tragedy not happened," said a choked-up Albright.

But it wasn't just skating trophies that the group would have amassed.

Maribel Owen, known as Little Maribel, was a senior at Boston University at the time of the crash, studying to be a teacher.

Bradley Lord, the surprise US men's champion that year, had taken the year off from what is now BU's College of Fine Arts.

Owen's pairs skating partner, Dudley Richards, was a Harvard graduate, juggling skating with a burgeoning real estate career.

Owen's sister, Laurence Owen, had been accepted by Radcliffe, and her teachers at Winchester High School touted her remarkable writing ability, especially for poetry.

"They were just extraordinary people, and what happened to them was inconceivable," said former Watertown resident Patricia Shelley Bushman, who spent nearly a decade researching the crash for her book "Indelible Tracings: The Story of the 1961 US World Figure Skating Team."

"These people would have accomplished so much in the Olympic arena, but also in their non-skating lives."

The crash's most well-known victim was Maribel Vinson Owen, Maribel and Laurence's mother, who accomplished just as much off the ice as she had as a competitive skater.

A Winchester native, Owen won the US women's title nine times and the US pairs title four times between 1928-37. During her skating career, she became the first woman to write for the sports section of The New York Times, and contributed coverage to the Globe. A Radcliffe graduate, she also wrote three books and was a single mother to Laurence and Maribel while coaching at a variety of rinks from Cambridge to Worcester.

One of her former pupils, Paul George, spent a portion of Saturday's commemoration likening Vinson Owen's coaching style to that of Bill Belichick.

"Among coaches, Maribel was a general manager," said George, recalling how she not only had high expectations and brutal honesty, but demanded much from her students' decorum and education off the ice as well.

Much like Belichick, the Vinson Owen coaching tree touched generations of skaters after her untimely death at just 49 years old.

Worcester native Frank Carroll, who coached Olympic medalists Michelle Kwan and Evan Lysacek, among many others, is a branch of that tree. He was skating at the Garden with the Ice Follies the day of the crash, and a Globe report remarked that he was in a daze at the news of his former teacher's death.

Years later, he still struggles with the loss.

"It was so sensational, so devastating, that I blocked it out of mind," Carroll said at the Skating Club of Boston event.

Later, he said, when he was coaching, "I couldn't call up Maribel and ask her what I was doing wrong. She was dead, and I wasn't going to be able to call her again."

The crash also claimed the

lives of Gregory Kelly, who had placed fourth at the National Championships in 1961, and his sister Nathalie, his chaperone on the trip and an Ashland High teacher.

In addition to Saturday's event, the Skating Club of Boston marked the 60th anniversary of the crash by raising more than \$12,000 for the US Figure Skating Memorial Fund, which was created following the crash.

Over the last six decades, the fund has given millions to skaters to use toward training and education.

"Losing [the team] significantly changed our club for several decades," said club executive director Doug Zeghibe. "When you have that firsthand connection to the tragedy, which several of our members still do, it is very important to keep the memories alive and mark these occasions."

While one is hard-pressed to find physical memorials to those lost to the tragedy at places besides the Skating Club of Boston and the Vinson Owen Elementary School in Winchester, documents from the weeks following the crash suggest that that could be by design.

During Saturday's event, George read from those documents that suggested that the Memorial Fund was a "living memorial, rather than . . . memorials of marble."

But the most haunting memorial could be the photo that newspapers ran on their front pages in the days after the tragedy, of the entire US delegation on the steps of their plane with a "US Figure Skating Association" sign. The group was focused on their competitive fate, not imagining that they might never get there.

"When I look at the famous picture of our team boarding the flight, I see how vivacious and energetic they are to get to the World Championships," said Albright, who was coached by Vinson Owen during her Olympic career.

"At the time, we really felt numb. We didn't want to believe it. But that we can talk about it now; it helps us heal."



AP PHOTO

The wreckage of a Sabena Boeing jet airliner is still smoldering after it crashed near Brussels, Belgium, killing the 17-member US skating team and their coach in 1961.