

Sports & gambling: It's an

BY JOHN JEANSONNE
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The real killer in the NBA bad-cop scandal, as with the waves of low-down behavior lately swamping the world of fun and games, is sports officialdom's historically blind eye to reality.

Whether it is self-delusion or just wishful thinking, the jock establishment again has been caught fancying itself — more marketing itself — as a quasi-religious enterprise peopled by gods and heroes. When, in fact, it's just another human operation, with all the inherent imperfections.

"Sports commissioners and sports fans have wanted to suppress the existence of gambling and cheating," Duke University cultural anthropology professor Orin Starn said. "But this is a kind of moment of reckoning, where sports has to face up to this dark underside."

The accusations that referee Tim Donaghy manipulated NBA games is just a partial result, of course, of a moral scoreboard lately being lit up by athletic bumhood. Alongside Michael Vick's arraignment on dogfighting charges, the crippling series of Tour de France doping positives — even the murder-suicide case in the fringe sport of pro wrestling — revelations of a basketball fix moved the satirical news source The Onion to declare that Barry Bonds' apparently drug-enhanced pursuit of baseball's home run record has "somehow become the feel-good sports story of the summer."

Justin Wolfers, the University of Pennsylvania business professor who ranked NBA commissioner David Stern with a recent study identifying racial overtones in officiating, said Stern's depiction of Donaghy as "an isolated case . . . both misrepresents history and misses the point."

In an op-ed piece for Friday's New York Times, Wolfers

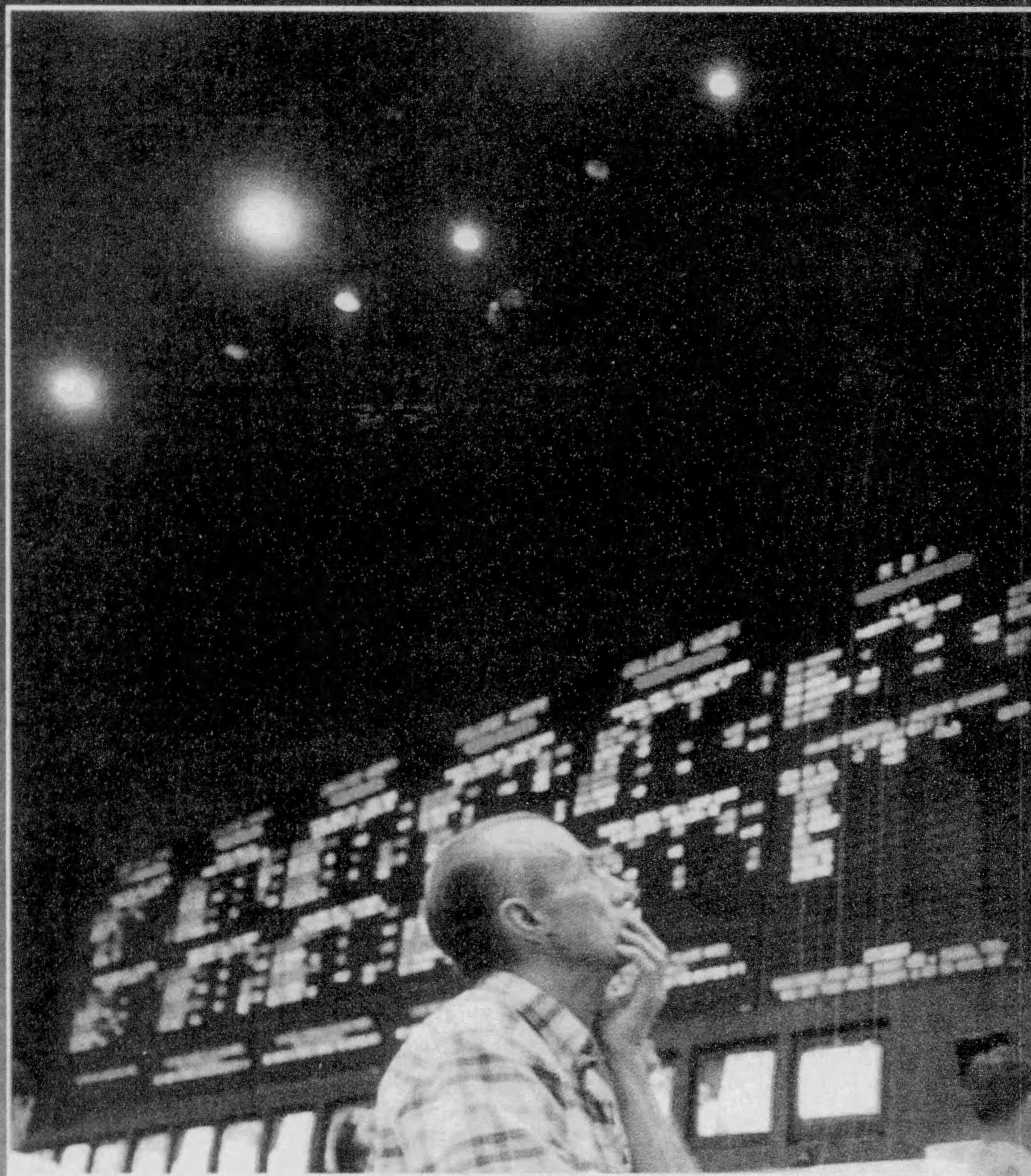
THE HOT TOPIC

WHICH OF THESE ARE MOST GAMBLER-FRIENDLY?

- Baseball
- College Basketball
- NBA
- Boxing
- NFL
- NHL
- Horse racing

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Where would Las Vegas bookmakers be without sports to bet on?



AP FILE PHOTO

wrote that while Donaghy indeed may be the only bad apple in this incident, "sports betting scandals are fairly common."

Accepting (as professor Starn does) that "you'll never eliminate cheating or betting," Wolfers' is one of many voices calling for legalization of sports

betting to bring more transparency and control.

Frank Deford, in his weekly National Public Radio commentary, judged the legalized model of Las Vegas to be "the very vaccination against sports fixing," because "Vegas goes on the alert and advises the authorities" whenever some evil genius

attempts to fudge the system, as Donaghy allegedly did.

Brandon Lang, the Las Vegas sports handicapper portrayed by Matthew McConaughey in the 2005 movie "Two for the Money," insisted in a telephone interview that "Vegas doesn't get enough credit for how it controls betting. This [NBA

referee] sort of thing will continue to happen until you take sports betting out of the hands of the corner-store bookie."

It is Lang's belief that professional sports leagues should move closer to, rather than distancing themselves from, gaming's capital. Instead, he expects tentative talk of placing

AROUND THE HORN

Ah, you can't beat fun at the old ballpark

When it comes to ballpark promotions, minor-league teams put up some major-league efforts.

■ **Political Correctness Night:** The Lowell (Mass.) Spinners of the New York-Penn League sought to offend no one Tuesday. The first baseman was to be referred to as a first baseperson. The bases were not to be identified as first, second or third

— rankings can promote feelings of inferiority — and everyone who took part in between-innings contests received participation trophies.

■ **Fenway Futures:** Head up to Beantown for a very unusual Aug. 11 twin bill at 4 Yawkey Way and watch the incubating prospects that you may someday learn to hate. The same Lowell Spinners "play host" to the



AP PHOTO

The politically correct Spinners survey Fenway Park.

Hudson Valley Renegades at noon, followed by Portland Sea Dogs against the Harrisburg Senators. Lowell and Portland are Sox farm clubs (Class A

and Double A, respectively).

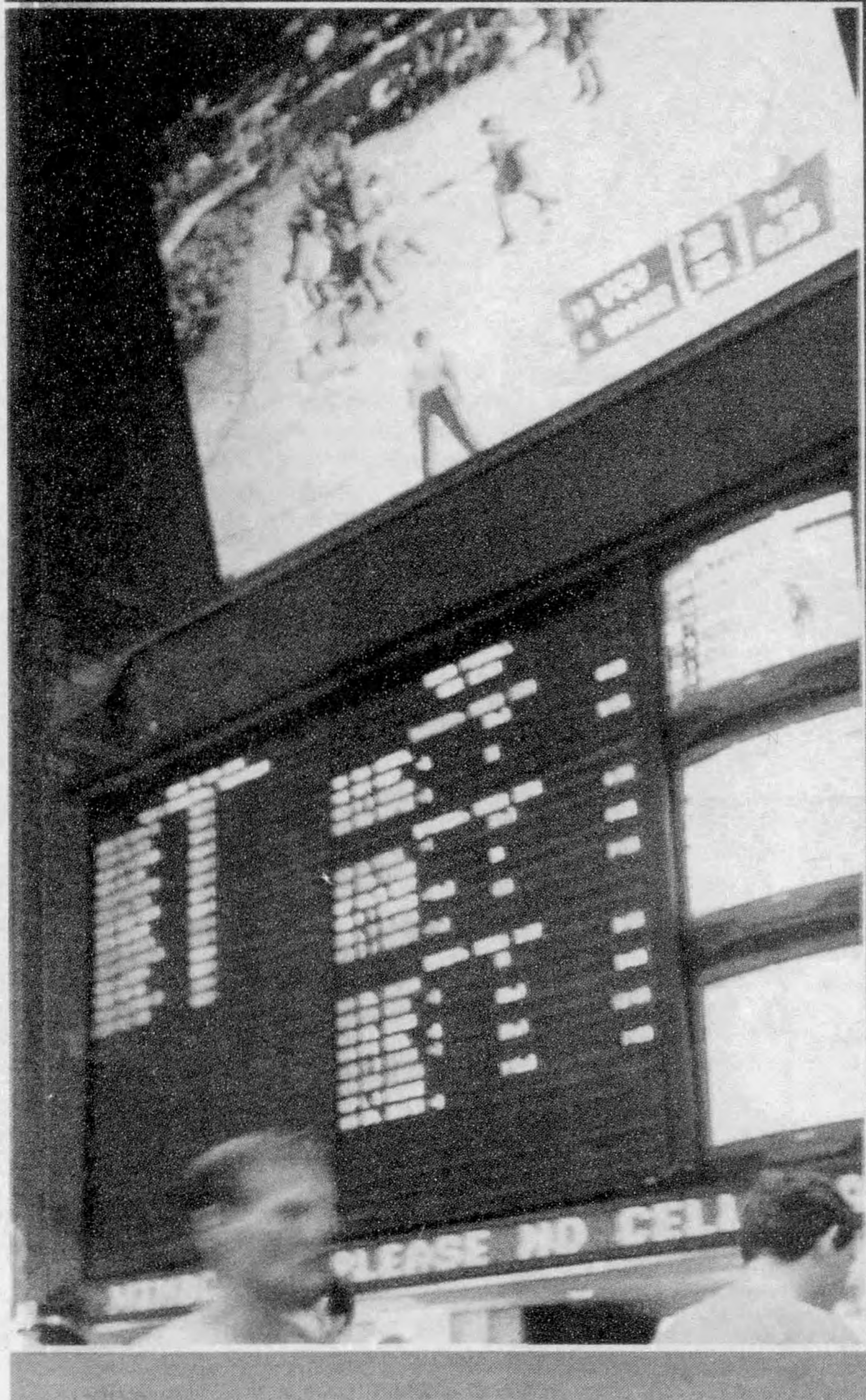
■ **One-Carat Diamond Giveaway:** The Springfield (Texas) Cardinals of the Texas League said if will give the

first 1,000 fans 21 and over cubic zirconias — but one fan would get a genuine one-carat diamond, courtesy of Justice Jewelers.

■ **Phillip Wellman Returns:** The Chattanooga (Tenn.) Lookouts of the Southern League got so much publicity when the Mississippi Braves manager wiggled out during his rant last month, they're welcoming him back this week with open arms — and a rosin bag giveaway. Wellman's tirade — during which he crawled on his belly and hurled a rosin-bag grenade style — has received more than 2 million hits on YouTube.

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an NBA franchise in Sin City — “A 24-hour town meets the 24-second clock,” Deford said — to dry up now.

“Because sports betting is still illegal in every state except Nevada,” Lang said, league commissioners are “backed into a corner,” unable to embrace the fact of sports

wagering.

“There’s no getting around the hypocrisy on the stance leagues take,” Lang said. “They know that TV ratings are what they are because of gambling. Let’s not be naive. Without betting on sports? Let’s put it this way: They wouldn’t be building stadiums; they’d be

building bleachers.”

Interestingly Starn was reminded during a just-completed trip to China that the NBA is ahead of other pro U.S. leagues in its worldwide salesmanship effort. “And a lot of the shiny global marketing of the NBA, as with sports in general,” he said, “has really been predicated on this image of pure competition and excitement and the thrill of the game.

“That’s why this [Donaghy investigation] is a threat to the brand, because part of the aura of the brand is the idea of fair and open competition. It’s a threat to the profitability of sports. The whole idea of cheating cuts against this idealized idea that we have of sports, as a kind of a battlefield of honor: May the best man win, with no help from chemicals or fixing by the refs.”

The whole truth, though, is closer to what famous British detective-story writer Agatha Christie said: “Where large sums of money are concerned, it is advisable to trust nobody.”

During an interview this past spring, former mob boss Michael **Franzese**, who has traded the life of dragooning athletes into shaving points for a job of lecturing players on betting’s dangers, said he repeatedly warns pro and college jocks, “Your sport is popular because people are gambling on it.”

Starn said, “I don’t see betting as essential to the existence of sports. But betting is a force of nature, and there are certain sports in which betting has become a major driver of interest.”

The only answer is for sports leaders and aficionados to compartmentalize: Agree that great athletic feats can be divine but that not all the actors are angels. Such a clear-eyed approach would arm everyone for improved oversight, and better prepare all for the inevitable skulduggery.

And now, Paul, let's meet the Mets

David Letterman had an Amazin' show Thursday night. And now, here's his Top-Ten list: “Things You Never Knew About the New York Mets” (As presented by 10 members of the Mets):

10. **Paul Lo Duca:** “Team forfeited Sunday’s game because we were all reading ‘Harry Potter.’”
9. **Shawn Green:** “‘Mets’ is short for ‘metrosexuals.’”
8. **Carlos Delgado:** “We all carry Blackberries so we can blog on the field.”
7. **Jose Reyes:** “During month of May, all we did was bunt.”
6. **John Maine:** “Proud to be in the

same city as our favorite talk show host, Conan O’Brien.”

5. **Aaron Heilman:** “We always give 110 percent, except on Tuesdays, when we give 111 percent.”
4. **Lastings Milledge:** “For one season in the ‘80s, every player on the team was named ‘Mookie.’”
3. **Marlon Anderson:** “Our stadium nacho cheese is made with pine tar.”
2. **Tom Glavine:** “Blew entire budget signing David Beckham.”
1. **David Wright:** “We’ve really bonded since watching ‘Oprah’ as a team.”



SPORTSBLOG

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BASEBALL

Pete's Rosey outlook

In case you're wondering, Pete Rose considers himself an optimist. If the odds are 50-50, he sees a glass half full.

How do I know? In the course of a 12-minute interview with Rose in the back corner of a memorabilia store here in Cooperstown Friday, I asked him to estimate how much he was going to make from signing autographs this weekend.

Rose danced around the question, saying it was hard to estimate because it was raining out. Trying hard to change the subject, he said, “I hope it doesn't rain all weekend. I hope it doesn't rain on Sunday. It would be terrible to have that big crowd sitting in the rain,” referring to the Hall of Fame induction ceremony.

I told him the weather report I heard called for a 50-50 chance of rain. “I'm an optimist, though,” he responded. “A 50-50 chance means there's 50 percent it won't rain.” Based on his wide smile, the betting reference was not lost on him.

So, for today, you could say Pete Rose is betting on sun. — **JIM BAUMBACH**
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hit 27 for the Mud Hens this season and celebrated his promotion with a dinger Tuesday against Chicago in his second 2007 game in the Show.

“I want to play this game as long as I can, until they rip the jersey off me,” Hessman told mlb.com just before his promotion.

Now, he just needs to learn the standard Bull Durham major-leaguer quote (paraphrased): “I'm just happy to be here; want to give 110 percent and help the team anyway I can.”

— **NORM COHEN**
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HOT LIST

This week's most-viewed sports stories on **NEWSDAY.COM/SPORTS**

1. **Marbury** comes out of his shell
2. **Falcons** would have suspended Vick if NFL didn't
3. **Mets** have lots of questions as deadline nears
4. **Jets** enter training camp with great expectations
5. **Julio Franco** was unhappy with Mets role



Michael Vick

Glove story

Keith Hernandez offered a fascinating tidbit on SNY during Wednesday night's Mets-Pirates game.

It turns out Alex Rodriguez — currently having a fairly good season in the Bronx — asked for and received one of Hernandez's game-used baseball gloves. Apparently A-Rod collects mitts from Gold Glove winners or something. Hernandez said during the telecast that he gave Rodriguez the last glove he used — with the Indians in 1990. He didn't charge A-Rod for it.

Off the air, Hernandez said all this happened only a month or so ago. He said A-Rod had been asking him for years for a glove, sometimes when he had seen Hernandez during inter-league games.

Hernandez said he didn't mind parting with it. But he said if his final glove had been used as a Met, the team he left after the 1989 season, he would not have given it up.

Hey wait... Is it possible A-Rod is planning to move to first base later in this career?

— **NEIL BEST**
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The rookie

Crash Davis is alive and well and playing in Detroit — and he's going by the name of Mike Hessman.

Fans of the movie “Bull Durham” will remember Davis as the career minor leaguer who pursued his dream but settled for an obscure home run record.

Hessman, called up from Toledo by the Tigers on Monday, has spent most of the last 11 years in the minors, accumulating 250 home runs. The 29-year-old rookie had already

WOMEN'S HOOPS

Rough reunion

They were the Malone and Stockton of women's college basketball a few years ago — and on Thursday they were on the court together again. This time, on opposing teams.

That was apparent when 6-2 Liberty center Janel McCarville was on the receiving end of a hard shove from 5-8 Connecticut Sun point guard Lindsay Whalen in the fourth quarter. McCarville, who was having a career night, spun and shouted, “What was that?”

That, Janel, is what becomes of friendship when playoffs are on the line. The Liberty (10-13) and Sun (13-12) scrapped til the final seconds, when the Sun came out on top, 79-75. McCarville came to the Liberty after two forgettable years with the Charlotte Sting and hasn't tasted the postseason since her years at the University of Minnesota. Whalen has been with the Sun all four seasons of her pro career.

In 2004, McCarville and Whalen led Minnesota to the NCAA Final Four with their potent high-low combination: Whalen's outside shooting and McCarville's interior power.

Each put on a show Thursday in Connecticut. McCarville scored a career-high 24 points and added 10 rebounds and four steals. Whalen scored 20 and had 9 rebounds, 8 assists and 4 steals.

After the game, they walked to the sidelines together, chatting and smiling. They face again today at 4 p.m. at the Garden, with the Liberty on a five-game losing streak and struggling to return to playoff contention and the Sun already there.

— **KAREN BAILIS**