

# The Sweetest Seven Days

*Sometimes everything comes together to create one magical week for a sports fan*

The debate has been played out in many a sports bar across the country: what is the best sports week of the year on the American calendar? Before tackling that question, let's get its easy-to-settle-on twin out of the way: the worst sports week of the year. Actually, it lasts over several weeks: the February lull between the Super Bowl and the beginning of the NCAA basketball tournament. There is a reason *Sports Illustrated* puts out its swimsuit issue around then.

A case might be made that late October is the annual summit of the sports calendar, when the World Series is played, the NFL and college football seasons have taken shape, and the NHL and NBA seasons are just starting. However, if you factor in other popular North American spectator sports, the balance shifts toward the early spring. Occasionally the sports gods serve up such a week-long buffet for couch potatoes that it leaves no room for debate. April 1–8, 2007, presented such a convergence: Sports fans were treated to the men's and women's college basketball Final Fours, opening day of Major League Baseball, key NBA matchups, crucial NHL games, a men's and women's golf major, a men's and women's tennis near-major and, for added garnish, a NASCAR race, an IRL race and the world swimming championships.

It's not just that men's sports, women's sports, college sports, pro sports, team sports and individual sports were all on display that week. It's that in most cases each of these sports served up the best it had to offer. Consider the men's Final Four, where Florida successfully defended its national championship against Ohio State. The fact that storied basketball programs UCLA and Georgetown were in the semifinals added to the flavor.

On the women's side, Pat Summitt's Tennessee team re-established its position atop college basketball with a win

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by Bob Latham

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over surprising Rutgers (yes, there will be more on this to come).

The opening night of major league baseball featured the defending World Series champion St. Louis Cardinals against the New York Mets. April 1 provided a match-up in the NBA between the teams that would finish with the best records in the league, the Dallas Mavericks and the Phoenix Suns, featuring the players who would finish first and second in the MVP bal-

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loting, Dirk Nowitzki and Steve Nash.

The NHL was in an all-out fight in both conferences for Stanley Cup playoff position in the last week of the regular season, including a final-game showdown on April 7 between the two most venerable NHL franchises in the league, the Montreal Canadiens and Toronto Maple Leafs, for the last playoff spot in the Eastern Conference (though both would miss out).

Men's golf offered its signature event, the Masters, and the drama of upstart Zach Johnson against Tiger Woods looking for his 13th major was compelling. It is a testament to Woods that "the kid," as Johnson was regarded before his breakout moment, is the same age as Woods. Women's golf held one of its majors, the LPGA Kraft Nabisco, won by 18-year-old Morgan Pressel, who became the youngest women's major winner ever. She celebrated by jumping in the pond next to the 18th green with her grandmother, Evelyn Krickstein. Pressel's uncle is former top-10 tennis player Aaron Krickstein, which brings us to the next sport on that week's calendar.

Men's and women's tennis featured the finals of the Sony Ericsson Open. The women's final between a rejuvenated Serena Williams and Justine Henin was spectacular. Guillermo Canas knocked out Roger Federer on the men's side (before losing himself in the final to Novak Djokovic). The absence of Federer in the first week of April may have been the only blemish in an otherwise perfect complexion of sports greatness for the week, a week that also saw Michael Phelps win his seventh gold medal at the World Swimming Championships.

So what is the legacy of one of the greatest weeks in sports? A week so full of riches would have its place on the mental mantel of every dedicated American sports fan, right? Wrong. What the sports gods giveth, they also taketh away.

Plus, this is America, with its unique ability to inject the absurd into an otherwise glorious moment in time. And absurdity, thy name is Don Imus. Absurdity, thy hair is Don Imus. The image we will take away will likely be a goofy talk show host, fired for his comments on the Rutgers women's basketball team, or perhaps the critically injured governor of New Jersey, Jon Corzine, who was in an automobile accident on his way to try to sort out the Imus ordeal.

Is there a way to keep the Imuses of the world from screwing up our enjoyment of sports again? Perhaps. Here is what I propose. Let political commentators like Imus, if that is indeed what he is, stick to politics and stay out of sports. In return, sports commentators can (and should) stay out of politics. And if and when another week like April 1–8, 2007, rolls around, it can be remembered for the many top-quality sports events over seven days, rather than for being April fools' week. ■

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