

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH  
**SPORTS**

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*Cardinals, baseball put on a happy face as trouble abounds*

Cardinals owners made a goodwill gesture Tuesday when they invited Hall of Fame selection Ozzie Smith to throw out the first pitch on opening day. How sweet that the Cardinals want to heal old wounds.

The next day, the team began its valiant fight in the Legislature for funding of its new ballpark, hailed as key to the revival of downtown.

Tell me another one, maybe about Horton hatching the egg or Shrek getting the babe. Baseball isn't a fairy-tale world these days. Recent stories are likely to induce bad dreams.

A couple of weeks ago, Commissioner Bud Selig declared that Major League Baseball could run the Montreal franchise this year if plans for contraction bogged down. This freed Expos owner Jeffrey Loria to pursue his quest to buy the Florida Marlins from John Henry. How convenient for Loria.

Loria's offer freed Henry to pursue purchasing the Boston Red Sox in a group that includes former Padres owner Tom Werner, former Orioles and Padres President Larry Lucchino and The New York Times Co., owner of the Boston Globe. How convenient for Henry that Sox owner John Harrington accepted his group's bid, though it was less than one from lawyer Miles Prentice. Harrington said Prentice lacked secure backing; Prentice accused MLB of interfering with the bidding process.

This week brought news that the financing firm of Twins owner Carl Pohlad, bachelor No. 2 in the contraction game, made a \$3 million short-term loan to Selig's Milwaukee Brewers in July 1995. The transaction appears to violate a league rule that no club, owner or any other member of a club "shall, directly or indirectly, loan money" to anyone from another club without approval of the commissioner and the other clubs.

After former commissioners expressed outrage, Selig said he believed there was an understanding among owners that such loans were allowed. Conspiracy theorists wonder if the contraction plan could be part of Selig's payback to Pohlad. The contraction settlement could earn Pohlad \$150 million for a team valued at \$99 million and for which he paid \$38 million for Pohlad. How convenient for Pohlad.

These events have transpired while the owners and players should have been working on a collective bargaining agreement. The owners' circle is closed and complete, which makes a standoff with the players almost inevitable. One of two things could happen to break that standoff.

First, the circle could collapse. It's headed that way in the court of public opinion and in the Minnesota courts, which have the upper hand in blocking contraction — for the time being.

Second, the circle could be broken. Rep. John Conyers, D-Mich., called for Selig's resignation but backed off if the commissioner would delay contraction plans. Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, D-Mass., said in a TV interview that he endorsed a review of baseball's antitrust exemption. Stripping baseball of its privilege, though, would require a lengthy debate in Congress and the requisite court battles.

Amid this negative PR, the Cardinals approach the Legislature. The team already has fallen behind schedule, as it hoped to have the bill ready on the first day of the legislative session Wednesday. In this atmosphere, the stadium won't fly.

In the meantime, collective bargaining sits there like a tomato rotting in the sun. The sides were scheduled to meet today to schedule meetings. Given contraction, ownership swaps and the commissioner's problems, that would constitute the first measurable progress since the agreement expired Nov. 7. A work stoppage grows more unavoidable by the day.

And the Cardinals want us to believe that baseball can clear its plate for Ozzie to throw out that first pitch April 1? The April Fool's joke will be on those who believe it.

U.S. FIGURE SKATING CHAMPIONSHIPS

**At 30, Eldredge is oldest and still America's best**

**Goebel and Weiss also qualify for Salt Lake Games**

BY VAHE GREGORIAN  
Of the Post-Dispatch

LOS ANGELES — By winning his sixth U.S. Figure Skating Championship on Thursday night at Staples Center, 30-year-old Todd Eldredge became the oldest man to win the event in 68 years.

"And I don't even have gray hair yet," said Eldredge, who thus qualified for his third Olympics.

"To all those people who said I was too old ... too bad for them."

Joining Eldredge at the upcoming Salt Lake City Games will be second-place finisher Tim Goebel and third-place finisher Michael Weiss, the two-time U.S. champion who qualified despite what seemed to be a problematic skate. He fell once, stumbled another time and stayed up only with a hand on the ice a third time.

His explanation of the generous rendering?

"The judges know what I'm capable of doing," Weiss said, inadvertently speaking to the way in which figure skating competitions deviate from the sports decided by such quaint means as performance.

Whether this group can challenge for a gold medal with international judges determining their performances is another question.



Todd Eldredge leaps to his sixth U.S. Figure Skating Championship on Thursday night, qualifying for his third Olympics.

See Skating, D6

**O'Hare agrees to binding arbitration**

BY VAHE GREGORIAN  
Of the Post-Dispatch

Short track speed skater Tom O'Hare and his attorneys have invoked a clause in the U.S. Olympic Committee constitution enabling them to submit his dispute to binding arbitration.

"The arbitration now takes precedent in every facet of this," said Mike Moran, USOC assistant executive director. "The American Arbitration Association will set a date, time and place for this

hearing, and I would imagine it would be fairly soon."

Moran expects the matter to be dealt with in Colorado Springs, Colo. The USOC's list of eligible athletes is due to the International Olympic Committee by Jan. 28.

O'Hare's accusation is a "conspiracy to fix" a race that bumped him from the U.S. team. A source close to the situation said O'Hare's complaint asks for him to be placed on the Olympic team. His petition also seeks to have Apolo Ohno — a favorite to win

multiple Olympic medals — and Rusty Smith banned from the team for breaking U.S. Speedskating's code of conduct.

O'Hare, a native of St. Louis, appeared entrenched in a position to qualify for his second Olympic team entering the 1,000-meter final race at the speed skating trials last month. He failed to advance, though, and was bumped from the team by winner Shani Davis.

But O'Hare — and three other witnesses to the race — told the Post-Dispatch

that it was clear the race wasn't above board.

He asserts that Ohno, who had won the first 17 events of the trials and had never before lost to his good friend Davis, intentionally allowed Davis to win. Moreover, he contends Ohno boxed out Ron Biondo in order to help Smith secure a place as an individual skater.

Ohno has acknowledged not skating his hardest but said it was to conserve himself for the Olympics.

**Scott Mellanby (right) set the tone with his fight with Dallas' Sami Helenius four minutes into the Blues' 5-2 victory Saturday.**



JAMES A. FINLEY / THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Blues get right mix of toughness, restraint**

**Veteran leadership knows where to draw the line**

BY DERRICK GOULD  
Of the Post-Dispatch

ANAHEIM, Calif. — Doug Weight got his shot in, the Blues got a four-minute power play and enforcer Reed Low issued a few elbows to answer San Jose's Shawn Heins on Tuesday.

But, they wondered, was it enough?

Heins put himself on the tracks of the Blues' aggression Tuesday late in the second period by leveling Weight near the end line. Weight whacked the Sharks defenseman on the shin pad and Heins then back-checked Weight to the ice, holding him there.

A skirmish ensued, with Mike Keane and Chris Pronger leading the charge to defend Weight, whose 31 assists were the second most in the NHL on Thursday. Heins received a

**Up next**  
at Pittsburgh, noon Saturday  
KDNL (Ch. 30)

double-minor for roughing. The Blues scored on the power play.

Then it was over. No dropping of gloves. No reciprocal shove on San Jose's star, Teemu Selanne. Just Low and his brief conversation with Heins in a corner. The Blues, who have made roughness part of their recent winning streak, let it go.

See Blues, D6

**Rams work to retain key free agents**

**3 starters and 3 top reserves are on list**

BY JIM THOMAS  
Of the Post-Dispatch

**Rams prospective free agents**

With a talent-laden roster, a highlight-reel offense and a sparkling won-lost record, coach Mike Martz likes to say that the Rams are at a special place in time.

There are pragmatic reasons why this is so, too, because of free agency and the salary cap.

"It doesn't matter who the player is, it's the same story every year," said Jay Zygmunt, Rams president of football operations. "There's a reason why we have only 25 players left from our (1999) Super Bowl team: It's very hard to keep players. And that's just not a Ram problem. That's a problem for every team in the league."

It's a problem that is magnified for highly successful teams. Once free agency begins, competing teams raid their rosters, usually overpaying to get that talent.

The Rams learned this firsthand following their Super Bowl championship two years ago. Two offensive line starters who were unrestricted free agents signed elsewhere: tackle Fred Miller (Tennessee) and center Mike Gruttadauria (Arizona). Jay Williams, the Rams' third defensive end in 1999, signed with Carolina as an unrestricted free agent.

Two Rams backups received offers as restricted free agents. The Rams matched Miami's offer to offensive tackle Ryan Tucker, but chose not to match New Orleans' offer to linebacker Charlie Clemons.

This season, the Rams have 12 players scheduled for unrestricted free agency and four players slated to become restricted free agents. Those 16 players represent 30 percent of the 53-man roster.

See Rams, D6

**UNRESTRICTED**

DE Chidi Ahanotu

LB O.J. Brigrance

LB London Fletcher

WR/PR Az-Zahir Hakim

RB Robert Holcombe

DE Cedric Jones

OT Rod Jones

QB Paul Justin

DE Leonard Little

DL Sean Moran

WR Ricky Proehl

TE Jeff Robinson

**Unrestricted free agents:** Four or more years of NFL experience. Can sign with any team, no strings attached.

**RESTRICTED**

WR Damon Griffin

FB James Hodgins

OL Cameron Spikes

RB Justin Watson

**Restricted free agents:** Three years experience. Rams can match outside offers if they make a qualifying offer.

**EXCLUSIVE RIGHTS**

LB Dustin Cohen

S Willie Gary

WR/KR Yo Murphy

S Nick Sorensen

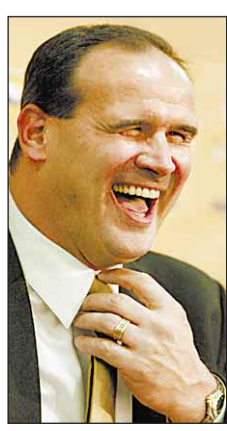
**Exclusive-rights free agents:** Fewer than 3 years experience. Rams have exclusive negotiating rights if they make a minimum qualifying offer.



Keeping DE Leonard Little is the Rams' top priority.

**INSIDE**

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- 5 COLLEGE BASKETBALL:** Phillip Gilbert of East St. Louis scores 20 points to lead Bradley.



**Tice takes over Minnesota Vikings**

Mike Tice (left) is the new coach of the Minnesota Vikings, and one of his first moves might be controversial.

The St. Paul Pioneer Press reported on its Web site that Tice plans to hire George O'Leary as an assistant. O'Leary quit five days after being hired as Notre Dame coach when he was found to have lied on his resume.

Tice pledged a quick return to success for the Vikings after a 5-11 season. **D6**

**PRO RESUME**

**Player:** Seahawks 1981-88, 1990-91; Redskins 1989; Vikings 1992-93, 1995  
**Assistant coach:** Vikings 1996-Present

**Cards ticket prices will remain unchanged**

Individual tickets to Cardinals games will remain unchanged for the 2002 season, the team announced Thursday.

The top price remains \$47 for a diamond box seat. The low price is \$9 for seats in upper terrace reserved or standing room.

Individual tickets go on sale Jan. 26.

