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EVERETT COLLECTION

MY 3 SENSE

Endgame coaching defies hoops logic

FRIDAY, THE night after "Final Jeopardy!" was played alone — two contestants had "finished in minus" — it was back to "Beat The Clock," followed by "The Gong Show."

On ESPN's SEC Network, LSU was up three, nine seconds left when Auburn was allowed to dribble and pass before making a game-tying 3 with one second left in regulation. LSU coach Johnny Jones later said he only briefly considered fouling before that shot.

With seconds left in OT, and Auburn up three, Auburn coach Bruce Pearl allowed LSU to dribble into position where it could take a 3, only this one, at the buzzer, missed. Auburn won a game that, as matter of practical application of strategy, it should have lost — but then tried to return LSU's favor.

At the end of regulation and OT, neither courtside commentator, Brad Nessler or Sean Farnham, was moved to ask the simple question, "Why?" They're in large company.

Stunning. Thirty-five years after the



NBA added the 3-point shot, 29 years part of NCAA games, the highest-paid, biggest-stakes coaches are still in denial; they refuse to foul, refuse to force opponents into a super-duper long-shot position, preferring to grant them a reasonable, thus frequently successful shot to tie the game.

Jack Alesi, the longtime Xavier High coach — his kids Sunday were beaten by three by Christ The King for the CHSAA championship — and a go-to guy on matters of basketball common sense, sees it succinctly and clearly:

"It shouldn't be a matter of opinion or a coach's 'philosophy.' It's not even debatable," Alesi said. "Where would a coach, down three with two, three, four seconds left, rather be? At the foul line, shooting two? Or be given a half-decent chance to tie the game with a 3?"

"The only sensible explanation is that they don't practice that situation, which is a sensible explanation that doesn't make a lot of sense."

ALLEY OOPS: Auburn coach Bruce Pearl and LSU coach Johnny Jones (inset) both refused to foul while up three in the closing seconds, which betrays common sense, writes The Post's Phil Mushnick. AP (2)

WEEKEND Bests/Worsts:

Best Interview: Villanova soph **Josh Hart**, on FS1, Friday, after barely beating Providence. Playing 29 off-the-bench minutes, Hart was two-ways terrific, including 7-for-10 on field goals. But he refused credit, claiming his teammates are so good that on offense he's the beneficiary of defensive neglect. Way to go, Mr. and Mrs. Hart!

Incidentally, if your NCAA Tournament rooting interests are in any way predicated on good, well-coached, two-way, ball-movement team ball — other than Kentucky — **Jay Wright's Villanova crew** is

A real Hart-warming moment

good on the good senses.

Worst Interview: FS1's Big East Tournament pregame dived into deep, self-serving promo mode, Saturday, bringing in attitude-enriched young female foul-mouth — it's a living! — **Katie Nolan** to pump her new FS1 show, "Garbage Time."

FS1 got what it deserved. Nolan's not only was a forced, uncomfortably unfunny session, the come-on clip of her show was so loaded with bleeped-out expletives, anything that might

have been even grin-worthy was lost. It's painful to watch someone with sports knowledge and a TV presence paint herself into a professional, pop-culture corner.

Best Performance On All Fours: On TVG/MSG, Kentucky Derby-anticipative American Pharoah, **Victor Espinoza** up and **Bob Baffert**-trained, won the \$750,000 Rebel Stakes at Oaklawn by a cruising 6 lengths. Saturday's 11/16th (the Derby's 1 1/4) was on a sloppy track against six others — at

least a dozen fewer than generally go in the Derby.

Best Save: The endless ending to Sunday's VCU-Dayton — and CBS' inability to show two big inbounds plays down the stretch — was made endurable by **Jim Spanarkel's** alert, no-silly-talk, miss-nothing, consider-the-circumstances analysis.

Best Bet: As of Friday, **Russell Westbrook** became a lock to win NBA MVP. Friday, **Mike Francesa** said Westbrook won't finish higher than fourth. Take Westbrook, plus the three.

Amazin'ly silly sign language

SATURDAY on WPIX/SNY, new Met **Michael Cuddyer's** home run flew directly over a sign that read, "Michael C. Solomon, MD. Solomon Urology." If only it had been hit by **Billy Sample**. ... That was young dues-payer **Scott Braun**, current MLB Network factotum, who called SNY's weekend Mets' telecasts. Not bad, either.

➤ ESPN's **Michelle Steele**, previewing Saturday's Yale-Harvard, cited both team's terrific defenses as per average points allowed. Think she understood that such numbers are mostly produced by teams' deliberate, clock-killing offenses? Neither do I. Few do.

➤ Although Harvard-Yale American Sports Net (MSG here) play-caller **Carl Reuter** spoke of the great traditions of the Ivy League, and although the Harvard Crimson were identified in score graphics as the team in red, Harvard was the team in black.

➤ You have the right to remain silent. You have the right to say nothing rather than anything to allow the pictures to tell the story. During Purdue-Penn State, ESPN's **Mike Tirico**: "Purdue on the run, with a chance to get back in this game." Penn State was up four, 16:35 left.

➤ CBS' **Jim Nantz** has earned enough trust and job security to not be another NCAA TV panderer. Saturday he said Maryland's **Dez Wells** starred at Xavier before transferring, leaving it at that. No mention Wells left under ugly circumstances, including a four-game ban for his lead role in a still-infamous brawl near the end of a game vs. Cincinnati.

➤ Did NBC's **Dan Hicks** get word to start weaning audiences off **Tiger Woods**? Saturday he called **Jordan Spieth** "the young American superstar." Soon, maybe, but not yet.

➤ As a TV/radio fellow who attended the Big East Tournament put it, "Nice to be in the Garden for basketball and hear school bands instead of loud rap and heavy metal from the p.a. system."

➤ Ex-Titans star RB then one-year Jet **Chris Johnson** last weekend was wounded, his pal killed, in a 4 a.m. drive-by. Police called Johnson "uncooperative." Really? As a student-athlete at East Carolina, he was listed as a communications major.

➤ Final score from last week: ESPN 236 NFL scoops, NFL Network 236 NFL scoops. Combined total scoops: 236.

➤ Even by **Gus Johnson's** "Scream Your Way To TV Stardom" standard, after Providence tied Villanova, Friday, Johnson breached the border of three exclamation points hysteria: "And we're tied!!! At 6!!!! With 12 seconds to go!!! Time out, Villanova!!! What a game!!! This is the Big East Tournament, folks!!! On Fox Sports One!!!"

While Johnson sounded as if FS1 would next cut to commercials, it didn't. Sudden, awkward silence followed, as if Fox's crew was frozen, perhaps staring to see if Johnson had fainted.