

What's Trending

BY DAN LADD
@ZAP2IT.COM

EARLY PLAYOFF ROUNDS UNDERWAY FOR NBA, NHL

The NHL and NBA Playoffs kick in full bore this week and begin the process of deciding a champion. Sports fans enjoyed seeing never-before champs in baseball, like the World Series champion Houston Astros, and the NFL's Philadelphia Eagles earning Super Bowl rings. Many would like to see similar scenarios play out in hockey, and especially basketball. Can that happen?

Perhaps the NHL will deliver. But then again, maybe not. The two-time defending champion Pittsburgh Penguins had all but clinched another playoff berth at the time of this writing. Meanwhile, the Los Angeles Kings, who have won two Stanley Cups in recent years, were hanging on, while the Chicago Blackhawks, who have also won two, were eliminated. Perhaps this is the year of the Tampa Bay Lightning, Nashville Predators or San Jose Sharks; all who have come up short in recent seasons. And everyone's watching, and rooting for, the expansion Vegas Golden Knights.

Then there's the NBA, which seems to be more like College Football, where Alabama either wins or loses the championship every season. The assumption is that come June, no matter what, LeBron James, Kevin Love and the Cleveland Cavaliers will once again face Stephen Curry, Kevin Durant and Golden State Warriors in the NBA Finals. Some fans want this matchup, as it features what have been the two best teams for a number of seasons, and of course, many of the NBA's top players.

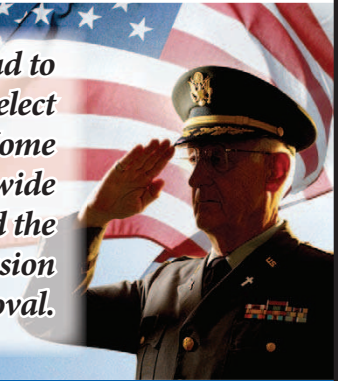
But others want a change of scenery and maybe they'll get their wish. Curry and crew haven't had an easy second half of this season. His ankle injury is one that has nagged the Warriors, who fell behind James Harden and the Houston Rockets in the Western Conference. If anyone is to overtake Golden State, it will likely be the Rockets, and the probable MVP candidate they have in Harden.

LeBron and the Cavs, meanwhile, have also fallen behind in the East, where the Toronto Raptors have taken command with the banged-up Boston Celtics not far behind. This is likely the best Raptors team yet and one that hopes to finally get past Cleveland in the playoffs; something they've been unable to do the past two seasons. The Celtics, of course, have fellow Cav but often-injured Kyrie Irving, and Jayson Tatum, whose late season productivity could toss him into the Rookie of the Year conversation. But can they overcome their injuries?

There's a lot of basketball to be played, and what the Warriors and Cavs have more than every other team out there is experience. That alone should get them through these early rounds of the playoffs and into likely matchups with top contenders where, once again, we'll see if they can be stopped in a long series.

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53rd Academy Of Country Music Awards on CBS

(Words in parentheses not in puzzle)

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(Reba) McEntire	(Kenny) Chesney	(Bebe) Rexha
(Jason) Aldean	(Lady) Antebellum	(Florida Georgia) Line
(Kelsea) Ballerini	(Maren) Morris	(Las) Vegas
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Chip and Joanna Gaines reveal how it all comes together before the final reveal of each episode in "Fixer Upper: Behind the Design," premiering Tuesday on HGTV. Go to www.hgtv.com/shows/fixer-upper-behind-the-design

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