

# Work Samples

I feel that these articles best represent my skillset as a journalist. I attached the following four articles to demonstrate my abilities:

The first article recaps a question-and-answer session with Jason Hehir, director of the Emmy-winning documentary, "The Last Dance." I highlight the information he shared about the documentary, while also recapping the advice he gave students.

The second article is titled "Penn State Basketball: Climbing to the Tournament." This article outlines Penn State's run at an NCAAB title during the 2019-2020 season, and it compares the program's past failures to the current team's successes.

The third article is a profile of Sabrina Ionescu. I selected her to be a powerful example of a dynamic college athlete, but I also wanted to select someone still fairly unfamiliar to most in the sports world.

The last article is a preview of the week 15 matchup between the Philadelphia Eagles and the Washington Redskins (now the Washington Football Team) from 2019. This article gives an overview of the game, and it presents fans with context going into the matchup.

For podcasts & other content, please visit my website: [WWW.EricSFenstermaker.com](http://WWW.EricSFenstermaker.com)

**“The Last Dance” director, Jason Hehir, addresses students about his documentary, personal journey.**

By: Eric Fenstermaker

Jason Hehir, director of the Emmy-winning Netflix documentary, “The Last Dance,” spoke to Penn State students about the documentary’s development and gave students personal advice Wednesday.

“The Last Dance” details the Chicago Bulls’ dynasty, with a focus on Michael Jordan.

Hehir described the documentary as a “highway to the ’97-’98 season” and said that Jordan was not involved in selecting the documentary’s content.

Hehir researched by reading every book possible. This process allowed him to get stories and ideas from his subjects, along with a laugh from Jordan when recounting a description of the Bulls as a “traveling-cocaine circus.”

Hehir said that he changed the original idea of an eight-part documentary on just the 1997-1998 season into a 10-part documentary about the entire Bulls’ dynasty.

The documentary also evolved because of the unique subjects Hehir interviewed.

“We were blessed with incredible characters,” Hehir said.

Each interview was incredibly different because of the celebrities’ personalities.

“Have you ever babysat a 4-year-old?” Hehir said about Dennis Rodman, who wore wrap-around sunglasses and pajama bottoms to his interview.

Hehir said he utilized media to entertain those he interviewed, just like his mom would amuse him in church with toys and Cheerios.

Hehir later spoke about his role models and gave students some advice for moving forward.

Hehir said his inspirations include Spike Lee and Quentin Tarantino, as well as the docuseries “The Defiant Ones.”

Humility is a virtue Hehir stressed.

Hehir said humility is “knowing that you don't know anything and accepting that you don't know anything.”

“You're going in, and you're just eager to learn and just be a sponge,” Hehir said.

Hehir also said you need to take chances and embrace different possibilities.

“Say yes to every opportunity,” Hehir said. “Always say yes, because you never know.”

Hehir said it’s important to embrace the fear of failure and work hard.

“The universe is not kind to people who are not always scraping,” Hehir said.

John Affleck, the Knight Chair in Sports Journalism and Society, hosted the webinar.

The event was part of Penn State’s Journalism Speakers Forum, which hosts discussions with journalists, photographers and other media professionals for students to interact with.

Affleck asked Hehir the age-old question towards the end of the program: “Who is the Greatest of All Time - LeBron James or Michael Jordan?”

Hehir said that although James is the complete package, “Michael Jordan is, was, and will always be the greatest.”

## **Climbing to the Tournament**

By: Eric Fenstermaker

“Climb with Us” has been the battle cry of Penn State Men’s Basketball for the last few years, and it has definitely been an uphill climb. The team has not been in the NCAA tournament since 2011, and they haven’t won a game in the tournament since 2001.

Patrick Chambers has assembled a team that has plenty of strengths, and this team is doing some unprecedented things.

Penn State has one of the most impressive resumes in the country.

They have defeated Georgetown, Michigan, and Michigan State on the road, as well as defeating Iowa, Syracuse, Maryland, and Ohio State at home in the Bryce Jordan Center. This team has proved they can respond from plenty of negatives.

Penn State blew a 21-point lead against Ole Miss, but they found a way to win their next two games, which included a huge win against Syracuse. Ohio State obliterated Penn State 106-74, yet Penn State bounced back with a 14-point win against OSU just a month later.

Penn State also had a poor three-game losing streak, but, even then, they found a way to respond, and they have since rattled off 6 straight wins. This team has found a way to evolve and grow, and they have benefited from this year’s unique college-basketball landscape.

There is no one powerhouse this year in Men’s College Basketball.

While San Diego State is the lone undefeated team left, they aren’t even #1 in the country. The top-10 features plenty of surprise teams that fans haven’t recently seen that high including SDSU, Dayton, Seton Hall, and Florida State.

The top-25 features plenty of teams with six, seven, and even eight losses.

Simply put, it’s anyone’s title this year. Penn State’s best season this millennium has fallen during a time where the college landscape is the most equal it has been in a long time.

Penn State has been regarded as one of the best football schools in the country, but they have little to no acclaim when it comes to basketball success.

Just this weekend, Penn State had a sold-out, white-out game, which is huge for this program, and they earned six-point win against Minnesota in front of their loyal fans. As of now, ESPN has Penn State at #13 in the country in the AP Top 25. It is impossible to describe just how important this is for this growing program.

For a program that hasn’t been in the “Big Dance” since 2011, Penn State has continued to smash barriers over recent history. They won the NIT Tournament just a few seasons ago, and they are a lock for the NCAA Tournament this year.

Lamar Stevens could be an NBA-draft pick – the first since former teammate Tony Carr – and this team has plenty of studs that can contribute. Watch out for this team. They have plenty to prove to the world, and they are just going to continue to climb towards a championship.

## **Sabrina Ionescu: A Generation-Defining Athlete**

By: Eric Fenstermaker

The entire sports world erupted when Virginia went from a loss against a 16 seed to a victory in the championship over Texas Tech. However, could you name the 2019 NCAAW champion?

Could you name even five total players that competed in the NCAAW Tournament? Often, the accomplishments of fantastic female athletes are overlooked. One such athlete, who still doesn't get the accolades she deserves, is Sabrina Ionescu.

Sabrina Ionescu was drafted yesterday with the #1 overall selection in the 2020 WNBA Draft by the New York Liberty. She was a standout sensation at Oregon, and Ionescu has dominated the NCAAW landscape for the last four years.

The 5'11" senior would have been the easy choice to go #1 in the 2019 NCAAW Draft, but she decided to return to school for the 2019-2020 season. Unfortunately, her dream of a title opportunity was slashed by COVID-19.

Oregon has never won an NCAAW title, and they have also never been in the championship game. Ionescu could have easily chose to go to the WNBA early, but she chose to return to school to bring a title to Oregon. She wanted to represent her university and leave a lasting legacy on her school.

Being such a gifted athlete, Ionescu had an opportunity this year to lead Oregon to a place they have never been before, but she didn't get the chance due to COVID-19. She, like many other seniors, lost her opportunity at March Madness glory due to the worldwide pandemic.

So, how does Ionescu's collegian career end? She leaves behind a legacy that won't easily be replicated. In four seasons, Ionescu scored 2,349 points.

During her incredible senior season, Ionescu shot 43.8% from the field and 42.2% from three-point range. She averaged 19.6 PPG, 7.4 RPG, and 8.2 APG. Ionescu, a versatile triple-double machine, continued to capitalize on an amazing career during each and every game.

Ionescu joins teammates Satou Sabally (#2 overall selection) and Ruthy Hebard (#8 overall selection) as first-round picks in the 2020 WNBA Draft. Ionescu is an extremely talented athlete. She is not only a great player but also, she is a great person and leader.

While she won't get the acclaim she should, Ionescu has the ability to be a sensation for years to come. Every so often the sports world gets a figure so potent that he or she could change the entire landscape of the sport. Ionescu is that figure.

Now, I'm not saying that Ionescu will be the equivalent of Kobe Bryant or Michael Jordan, but she has the potential to be an incredibly iconic figure. Ionescu does it all: shoot, rebound, pass, lead, etc.

She has very few flaws, and she possesses the charisma and personality necessary to lead those around her. Ionescu is everything that you could want in a prospect and more. She will be a

generation-defining athlete, and fans of the WNBA should be excited to see such a tremendous player blossom before their eyes over the coming years.

## Philadelphia Eagles vs. The Washington Redskins

By: Eric Fenstermaker

The Eagles are coming off a major comeback win against the Giants to take on the Redskins. The Eagles need to keep winning to keep their division-title hopes alive, and they face a weak Redskins team this week.

The Eagles should have plenty of momentum going into this game, but it will still take a complete team effort to emerge with a win. Can the Eagles go 2-0 against the Redskins this season?

Here's what to watch for tomorrow:

**1 – Comeback Carson:** Doug Pederson said that Eagles' win over the Giants was "Carson Wentz's best performance of his career." Without most of his top options, Wentz went for 325 passing yards and 2 touchdowns on 33 passes. Wentz performed well on a game-winning OT drive to seal the victory, and he showed great flashes of his excellence. This season hasn't been easy for anyone on the roster, but if the Eagles want to make a playoff push, it has to start with Wentz.

**2 – Big bad Boston:** With running backs like Jay Ajayi, Miles Sanders, and Jordan Howard on the roster, the Eagles got their spark in the rushing game from someone else: Boston Scott. Scott rushed for 59 yards on 10 carries, and he also secured a key rushing touchdown late in the game. Eagles fans have been screaming for the run game to get going, and Scott was a welcomed addition to a lackluster offense. The Eagles need to emphasize the run game over the next three games, so could Scott be the answer?

**3 – TE1:** Zach Ertz had his best performance of the season against the Giants. He finished with 91 yards and 2 touchdowns on 9 receptions, and he hauled in a key touchdown in OT to win the game. The Eagles have had major under performance this season from their WRs, and they have needed dynamic play from their TEs to carry them. Ertz is a top-3 TE in the league, but he needs to continue to have performances like this if the Eagles are serious about a playoff push.

**4 – Sketchy secondary:** The Eagles' secondary worries me greatly. Darius Slayton and DeVante Parker combined for 12 receptions, 313 yards, and 4 touchdowns in back-to-back games. Slayton and Parker are good - but not elite - receivers. The Eagles can't continue to get burned by average receivers. I don't care who it is, but someone back there has to stop someone. If the offense sputters, the defensive woes will just put them further behind.

**5 – History:** The Eagles have won their last five games against the Redskins – including their week one win – but the Redskins hold the all-time lead 86-78-5. The Redskins don't have anything to play for, but the Eagles do. Can the Redskins stop their division rivals from getting closer to the playoffs, or will the Eagles make the next step towards a Super Bowl run?