

# 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 11 matchup between the Philadelphia Eagles and the Cleveland Browns from the 2020 NFL season. 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 defeated Penn State 106-74 early in the season, 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 ways 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 the highest-ranked team in the country.

The top 10 features plenty of surprise teams that fans haven’t recently seen there including Dayton, Seton Hall and Florida State.

The top 25 is filled with 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 when the college-basketball landscape is the most level it has been in a long time.

Just this weekend, Penn State had a sold-out, white-out game.

As of now, ESPN has Penn State at No. 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 team 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 (as of right now) for the NCAA Tournament.

Lamar Stevens could be an NBA-draft pick – the first since former teammate Tony Carr – and this team has plenty of players that can contribute.

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

By: Eric Fenstermaker

The entire sports world erupted when Virginia went from a loss against a 16 seed just a season before to a victory in the NCAA championship over Texas Tech.

However, could you name the 2019 NCAA champion? Could you name even five players that competed in the NCAA Tournament?

Often, the accomplishments of fantastic female athletes are overlooked.

One such athlete is Sabrina Ionescu.

Ionescu was drafted yesterday with the No. 1 overall pick in the 2020 WNBA Draft by the New York Liberty. She was a standout sensation at Oregon, and Ionescu has dominated the NCAA landscape for the last four years.

The 5'11" senior would have been the easy choice to go No. 1 in the 2019 NCAA Draft, but she decided to return to Oregon for the 2019-2020 season. Unfortunately, her dream of a title opportunity was eliminated by COVID-19.

Oregon has never won an NCAA title. 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.

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? In four seasons, Ionescu scored 2,349 points.

During her 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 joins teammates Satou Sabally (No. 2 overall selection) and Ruthy Hebard (No. 8 overall selection) as first-round picks in the 2020 WNBA Draft.

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.

Ionescu does it all: shoot, rebound, pass, etc.

Ionescu is everything that you could want in a prospect and more.

## **Cleveland Browns vs. Philadelphia Eagles Preview**

By: Eric Fenstermaker

The Philadelphia Eagles are coming off a bad loss against the New York Giants, and the Eagles will go on the road this week to face the potent Cleveland Browns.

Aside from the last two weeks, the Browns have put up a minimum of 32 points per game (PPG), and the Browns have one of the most balanced offenses in the NFL.

This is the beginning of a very tough stretch for the Eagles, who currently lead the NFC East, but not by much.

Let's examine both teams ahead of this matchup.

### **Philadelphia Eagles (3-5-1):**

For the first time all season, Carson Wentz completed a game without a turnover, and this was only his second game this year without an interception. However, Wentz was still outplayed by Daniel Jones.

Wentz has struggled since his MVP-level 2017 season. This season, Wentz has shown major areas of concerns, namely his decision-making and his inability to determine when to throw the ball away.

The Eagles need to focus on running the football first and passing second.

Miles Sanders has averaged above 4 YPC every game this season except for one, and he has been a bright spot for this poor offense. The Eagles need to make Sanders the focal point against the Browns.

The Browns have the No. 7 ranked rush defense in the NFL allowing an average of only 4 YPC. The Eagles will need to make sure they find a way to stop the Browns from slowing down Sanders.

Defensively, the Eagles have their work cut out for themselves.

The Eagles' defense has given up 14 rushing touchdowns this season, which is tied for the third worst in the NFL.

The Browns have two dynamic running backs in Kareem Hunt and Nick Chubb. The Browns' rushing corps averages 5.1 YPC, which is tied for the third best in the NFL.

Hunt and Chubb will be looking to rack up huge games against the Eagles' porous run defense.

### **Cleveland Browns (6-3-1):**

While the Browns love to rack up huge gains on the ground, the Browns struggle to throw the ball down the field.

The Browns have the second worst passing yards in the NFL with 1,766 (just 62 yards above the Jets). Baker Mayfield has just 15 passing touchdowns this season, which is tied for 15<sup>th</sup> best in the NFL.

While Mayfield is missing Odell Beckham Jr. (out for the season with a torn ACL), he still has plenty of solid weapons to throw to including Jarvis Landry and Austin Hooper, in addition to both Hunt and Chubb.

Mayfield needs to step up and throw well, but this is a tough matchup as the Eagles have given up the 8<sup>th</sup> fewest passing yards this season (2,131).

Defensively, although the Browns have a solid run defense, their pass defense isn't too impressive.

The Browns' defense ranks 10<sup>th</sup> in the NFL in YPR allowed (10.7); however, the Browns' defense has given up 18 passing touchdowns, which is the 8<sup>th</sup> worst in the NFL.

The Browns defense needs to force Wentz to make poor decisions and create turnovers.

### **Prediction:**

#### **Browns win 30-16, Browns (-3.5), Under 47.5**

The Browns rushing attack will bury the Eagles, and the Browns should be able to find a way to move the ball down the field. I don't trust the Eagles' defense, and I don't think the Eagles can slow down either Chubb or Hunt enough to be successful.

Carson Wentz showed signs that he can play without turning the ball over, but that shouldn't be something he should be praised for. Rather, it should be expected. If the Eagles can get the ground game going, they could put up a fight.

In the end, the Eagles just loss embarrassingly to the Giants, and the Browns are even better. The Browns' strengths match up well against the Eagles, and I think Mayfield will be successful enough to win.

I expect Hunt to have a huge game, and I think Sanders will be unable to crack 75 yards on the ground.

I like the Browns to win and cover the spread, but I think the total score will be under 47.5 points.