

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 NCAA 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 14 matchup between the Philadelphia Eagles and the New Orleans Saints 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

“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.

Philadelphia Eagles vs. New Orleans Saints Week 14 Preview

By: Eric Fenstermaker

The Philadelphia Eagles will take on the New Orleans Saints at home this week following a 14-point loss to the Green Bay Packers last week.

The Eagles are on a four-game losing streak, while the Saints have won nine games in a row. The Saints hold the No. 1 spot in the NFC, while the Eagles are struggling to stay in the playoff picture.

The Eagles have yet to score 30 or more points in a game this season. The only other team to not register a 30-point game is the New York Jets.

The Saints have done nothing but score this season. The Saints have seven games with 30 or more points, and their lowest point total this year was 24 against the Falcons.

The Saints' defense has allowed a high of just 16 points over their last five games, while the Eagles have given up at least 22 points in every game this year.

Let's examine both teams ahead of this matchup.

Philadelphia Eagles (3-8-1):

Jalen Hurts is the new face of the Eagles. After replacing Carson Wentz last week, Hurts will get the start this week.

In his first real opportunity this season, Hurts was 5-12 for 109 yards, a touchdown and an interception against the Packers.

Hurts provided a spark to the Eagles' offense when he replaced Wentz. Hurts found Greg Ward for a 32-yard touchdown pass, which was the only offensive touchdown for the Eagles.

While the Eagles have made changes at the QB position, their woes at RB haven't changed.

Miles Sanders is No. 5 in YPC this season with 5.3 YPC. However, Sanders has over 20 carries only once this season (week 2 against the Rams).

Sanders has under 15 carries five times this season, and the Eagles' offense has yet to get him involved in a big way.

After Doug Pederson said that the Eagles will look to lean more on the running games this week, this is an opportunity for Sanders to have a breakout game.

Defensively, the Eagles give up an average of 347.1 YPG, which is No. 13 in the NFL. This high total is a major reason the Eagles are No. 18 in PPG allowed (25.6).

The Eagles' rush defense has been one of the worst units in stopping the run this year. Giving up an average of 129.9 YPG, the Eagles' defense has given up the eighth most rushing yards this season.

While they give up a lot of yards on the ground, Eagles' pass defense has performed much better than their rush defense.

The Eagles give up an average of just 217.2 YPG through the air, which is No. 7 in the NFL.

Because the Saints have talented weapons like Michael Thomas, the Eagles' pass defense needs to step up in a major way.

New Orleans Saints (10-2):

With Drew Brees expected to miss another game while on IR, Taysom Hill will get another chance to lead the Saints' offense.

Taking over just three games ago, Hill has led the Saints to three straight wins, including two wins over the Atlanta Falcons.

The Saints' offense has averaged 25.3 PPG under Hill and will be looking to keep their hot streak alive against a team that has just one more win than the Saints have losses.

Alvin Kamara has anchored the Saints offensively this season.

Kamara, who leads the team in both rushing and receiving yards, has been a catalyst for this team. With 1,328 all-purpose yards this year, Kamara has been one of the main reasons the Saints have enjoyed such a long win streak.

While the Saints have an explosive offense, they also have a lethal defense.

The Saints' defense gives up an average of just 288.8 YPG, which is the lowest allowed by any team this season.

The Saints' defense gives up the fourth least passing yards per game in the NFL (212.8 YPG) and are No. 2 in rushing yards allowed per game (76.1 YPG).

This stifling defense has smothered opposing offenses and made it tough for opponents to gain any traction against them during games.

The Saints are 8-1 against NFC teams this season, with that one loss coming against the Packers, the foe the Eagles just lost to.

Prediction: Saints win 27-19, Saints (-7.5), Over 45.5

The Saints are much better offensively and defensively, and this game shouldn't be questionable.

Both teams have shifted QBs at times this season, but only the Saints have seen long-term success. The verdict is still out on Hurts right now.

The Eagles struggle to stop the run, and the Saints have a back in Kamara that will make things very difficult for the Eagles.

The matchup of Darius Slay vs. Michael Thomas could prove to be very intriguing, but it won't be enough for the Eagles even if Slay is able to shutdown Thomas.

Offensively, the Eagles have never sustained themselves longer than a drive or two, and I can't trust them. Hurts will provide a spark, but you need a pretty big one to stop the Saints, a team that looks incredible.

This matchup pits one of the NFC's best against one of the NFC's worst, and I don't see an upset occurring here.

The Saints will get another win to stay hot, while the Eagles will continue to search for answers.

The Saints will win 27-19, cover the spread of -7.5, and the total score will be over 45.5 points.