

BIG SPRING HERALD



INSIDE
Armstrong
named male
athlete of
year for
fourth time

VOLUME 102, NUMBER 30

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 29, 2005

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50 CENTS DAILY/\$1.25 WEEKEND

Gins report processing record amounts

Ground moisture left over from record rains in 2004, plus a warm, extended growing season in 2005, proved to be excellent table-setters for this year's crops, officials have said.

By **STEVE REAGAN**
Staff Writer

Forget a White Christmas. Area cotton producers are having a White Christmas, and New Year's, and ...

It is rapidly turning into a record cotton harvest for area producers, as indicated by a sampling of local opinion.

Ground moisture left over from record rains in 2004, plus a warm, extended growing sea-

son in 2005, proved to be excellent table-setters for this year's crops, officials have said.

Howard County Extension Agent Tommy Yeater estimated earlier this year that area dryland producers may realize yields of about 1.25 bales per acre this season, up substantially from the half-bale per acre yields of 2004.

Yeater's optimism is backed up by a sampling of area ginning facilities.

Five area gins contacted

Tuesday afternoon all report busier-than-normal operations, and officials confirm that they are heading toward a record year for bale production.

Rene Beall, bookkeeper at the Big Spring Gin, reports the facility has processed 15,000 bales so far this season, with "lots more to go."

Beall estimated that the gin has about 3,000 modules still waiting to be processed. At this rate, the gin could handle more than 40,000 bales this season,

double the record, she said.

That news is echoed by Rudy Halfmann, the scale clerk at Co-Op Gin of Big Spring, who reports that the facility has processed more than 21,000 bales thus far this season. That number has already surpassed what the gin handled last year, he said.

In addition, the quality of cotton ginned so far has been "excellent," Halfmann reported.

See **COTTON**, Page 3A

3 nights are left to view lights

By **BILL MCCLELLAN**
News Editor

Three more nights. That's all that's left for this year's Festival of Lights at Comanche Trail Park.

"If you haven't been out to see the Festival of Lights, come on out. If you have been, come again," said Pat Simmons, the guiding force behind the event for the past nine years.

Upwards of one million lights greet visitors, who can access the "trail" via foot or vehicle.

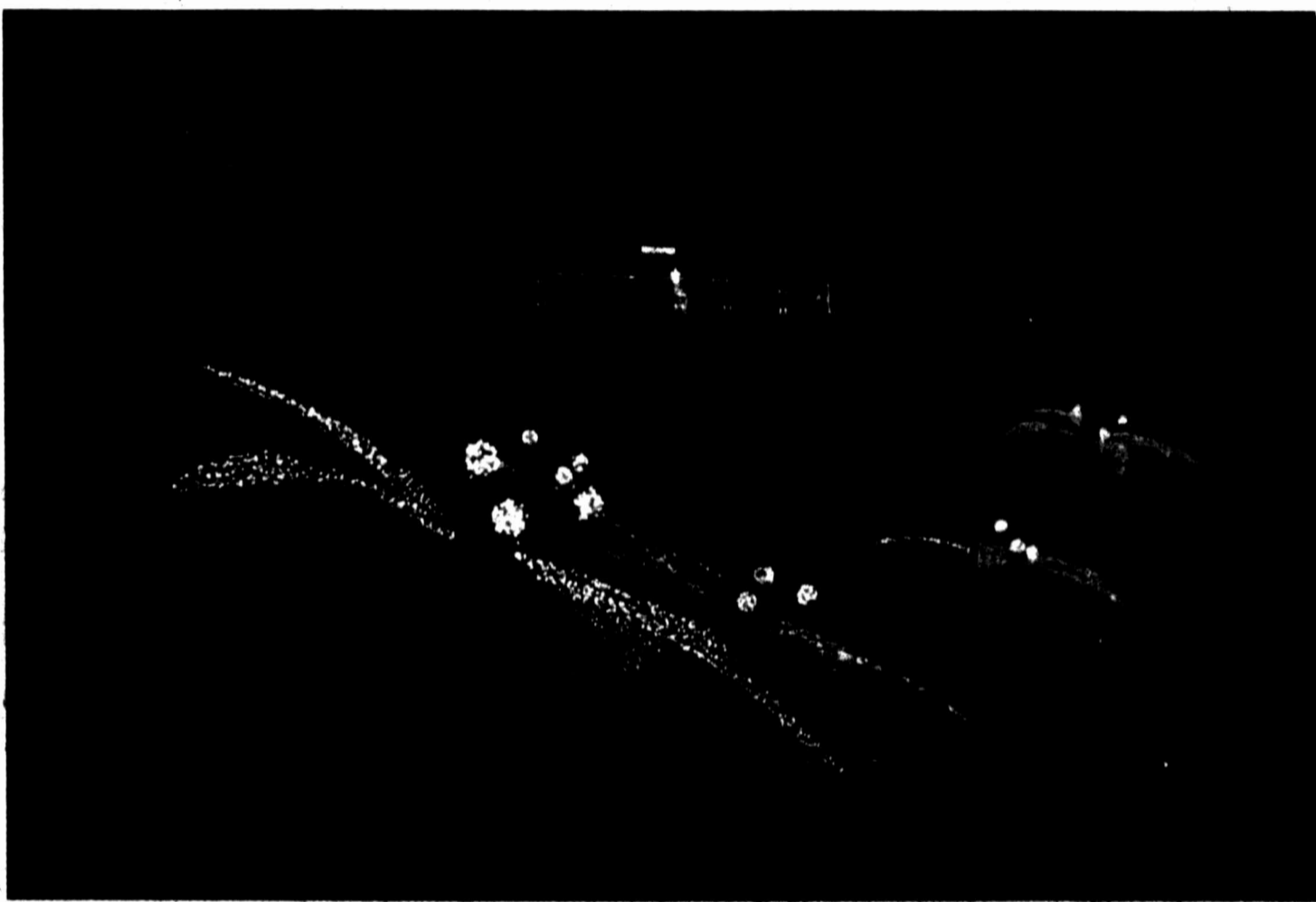
Contacted this morning, Simmons said "right at" 17,000 people have been through the Festival of Lights this year.

"I'm hoping for 20,000. We have three nights left, so it's certainly possible," she said. "So far, we've had visitors from 31 states and seven countries. It's going fantastic."

Simmons said remarks from those making the tour have been, well...glowing.

"Everyone I have talked to has said they really enjoy it. I have been told that other events people have been to like this will not hold a candle to ours," she said.

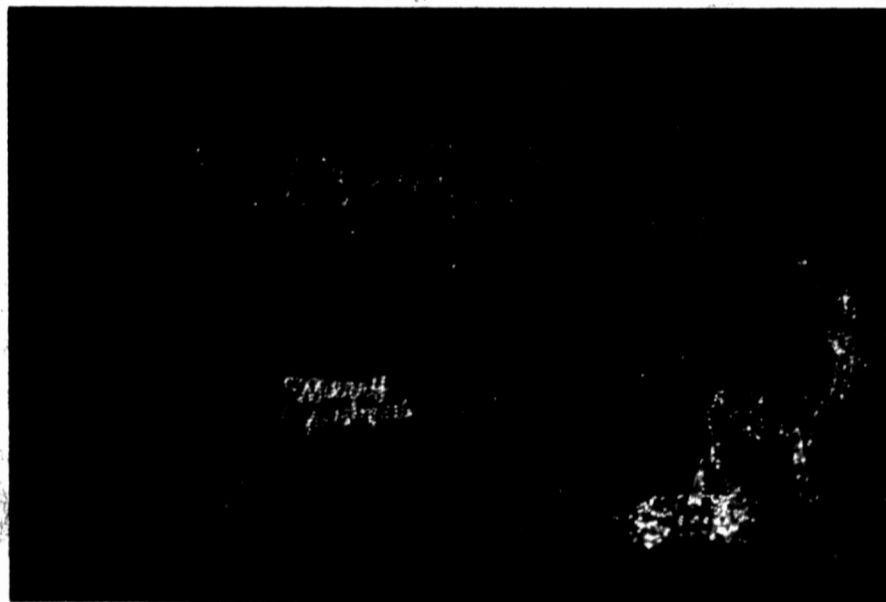
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FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

Polinsettias line the Comanche Trail Park dam with the VA Hospital in the background while a covered wagon and candy canes are just a few of the reasons to attend the Festival of Lights. In its ninth year, the Festival continues from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. each evening through Saturday. Admission is free although donations are accepted. It's best to enter off U.S. Highway 87. Use the Whipkey entrance and follow the lights.

Herald photos/Bruce Schooler



Second holiday in a week prompts some time off

By **THOMAS JENKINS**
Staff Writer

As the holiday season comes to an end, many area agencies and businesses will be closing their doors to celebrate the new year.

The city of Big Spring will close all offices, including the municipal landfill and compost facility, Monday in observance of New Year's Day. There will be no sanitation pick-up Monday.

As many people prepare to enjoy a day off for New Years, area emergency personnel will be bracing themselves for the inevitable holiday onslaught.

Local agencies, including the Big Spring Police Department, Fire Department, Emergency Medical Services and Howard County Sheriff's Office, all report the special day will be busier for them, as they pay special attention to motorists and party-goers. The police department's main office will

be closed Monday, and will reopen at 8 a.m. Tuesday.

Thanks to the way the holiday falls this year, Howard County employees won't be taking any time off. The county will close its offices Friday at 5 p.m. and is expected to reopen as usual Monday morning.

Those looking for groceries at the last minute will be relieved to know the local Wal-Mart Supercenter will be open throughout the holiday. H-E-B will also be taking the holiday

in stride, adhering to its normal 6 a.m. until midnight schedule on both New Year's Eve and New Year's Day.

If you're expecting a package in the mail, you'll be glad to know the Big Spring Post Office will be delivering mail as usual on Friday and Saturday. There will be no mail delivery Monday, however, with the post office back in action at 8 a.m. on Tuesday.

The Spring City Senior Citizens Center will keep its

hours business as usual through the holiday, holding its annual New Year's dance Friday evening. The facility will be open during its normal hours Monday.

The *Herald* office will be closed Monday, reopening at 8 a.m. Tuesday. Subscribers should receive their weekend edition papers Friday evening or early Saturday morning.

Contact Staff Writer Thomas Jenkins at 263-7331 ext. 232.

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www.bigspringherald.com

To reach us:

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Woman arrested in mom's stabbing

BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) — A Baton Rouge woman accused of trying to kill her mother was arrested after an anonymous tip led police to a drive-in restaurant in Houston, police said.

The caller said a suspicious person was hanging around a Sonic Drive-In; when police checked 22-year-old Francesca Ford's name in the national crime database, they learned that she was accused of stabbing her mother, Charlene Ford, 49.

A warrant accused France-

sca Ford of attempted second-degree murder and felony theft of an automobile.

She was driving the blue 2005 Nissan Maxima which her mother had reported stolen, Houston police spokesman Alvin Wright said. Francesca Ford is in the Harris County Jail pending extradition.

Baton Rouge police said Ford charged thousands of dollars on her mother's credit card while Charlene Ford was serving overseas with the military.

Making it right, 35 years later

GREENWOOD, S.C. (AP) — Someone who once stole some flowers from a Piggly Wiggly more than three decades ago has apparently been feeling mighty, mighty guilty.

An unsigned letter of apology was sent to the grocery store a couple of weeks ago — along with some cash.

"In 1970 I was in the store. I purchased several azaleas. I went outside to put those in the car. I picked up several that I didn't pay for. The azaleas were 39 cents each. This

bothered me for sometime. I want to make this right. Accept this \$5 for payment," read the letter.

It was signed: "A customer from years ago."

Store operator Jyll Maddox was so impressed by the letter she sent it to Piggly Wiggly's headquarters in Charleston.

"It made me feel good, knowing people realize their mistakes and want to correct them," Maddox said. "It's good to know that still goes on in the world."

Obituaries

Nelda Lucille Lee Colclazer

Nelda Lucille Lee Colclazer, 77, passed away Wednesday, Dec. 28, 2005, in Lubbock. Graveside funeral services will be held at 10 a.m. Friday, Dec. 30, 2005, at the Peace Chapel at Trinity Memorial Park in Big Spring with David Howell officiating.

Nelda was born June 14, 1928, in McCauley to Oliver and Ina Lee. She married R.V. Colclazer April 20, 1946, in Roswell, N.M. They lived in Snyder before moving to Big Spring in 1961. He preceded her in death in 2001.

She was a member of the Cactus Chapter of American Business Women of America and for several years directed the Our Little Miss pageants in Big Spring. The Cactus chapter twice named her Woman of the Year. She was employed for many years at First National Bank and retired as Customer Service Officer in 1992.

Survivors include one son, Michael Colclazer of Big Spring; two daughters, Virginia Hedges of Converse and Cheryl Hedlund and husband, Andy of Lubbock. Also surviving are a brother and sister-in-law, Charlie and Betty Lee of Granbury; six grandchildren; eight great-grandchildren; four stepgrandchildren; 10 stepgreat-grandchildren; and one stepgreat-great-grandchild.

Nelda was a kind and loving mother and grandmother. She will be greatly missed.

In lieu of flowers, please make memorial donations to Southwest Cancer Treatment and Research Center, in care of The Foundation, P.O. Box 5980, Lubbock 79408.

The family expresses heartfelt thanks to the doctors and staff of UMC, Southwest Cancer Center and VistaCare Hospice in Lubbock.

Arrangements are under the direction of Nalley-Pickle & Welch Funeral Home & Crematory of Big Spring. Online condolences can be made at www.npwelch.com.

Paid obituary

Mary Jean King Jackson



Mary Jean King Jackson, 43, of Big Spring died Sunday, Dec. 25, 2005, in a local hospital. Graveside funeral services are 2 p.m. Friday, Dec. 30, 2005, in the Mount Olive Memorial Park with the Rev. Jim Binnix, pastor of Midway Baptist Church, officiating.

She was born Oct. 26, 1962, in Big Spring and married Douglas Jackson Oct. 5, 1980, in Stanton.

Survivors include her husband, Doug Jackson of Big Spring; one daughter and son-in-law, Laura Jean and Sammy Prince of Big Spring; one son, Larry Dale King of El Paso; her mother, Bonnie King and friend, Sam Pasnell of Big Spring; two brothers and sisters-in-law, George Zackery and Amy King Jr. and Johnny Mack and Sherry King, all of Big Spring; two sisters, Gloria Kolleen Panek and husband, Craig of Big Spring and Janey Brown of Houston; and four grandchildren.

She was preceded in death by her father, one sister, Rhonda Bledsoe and a daughter, Jo Beth King.

Arrangements under the direction of Nalley-Pickle & Welch Funeral Home & Crematory of Big Spring. Online condolences can be made at www.npwelch.com.

Kimberly Thompson Aiken



Kimberly Thompson Aiken, 43, died Dec. 27, 2005, in Austin following a lengthy illness. Memorial services are 2 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 31, 2005, in the Coahoma Cemetery.

She was born Dec. 22, 1962, in Pampa and moved to Coahoma in 1972. She moved to Austin in 1990.

She is survived by her husband, Larry of Austin; three stepdaughters, Leanne and Lisa, both of Austin and Laura of Brownwood; four stepgranddaughters; one stepgrandson; her parents, Carolyn and Charles Thompson of Big Spring; a brother, Jeff Thompson of Big Spring; sisters, Lisa Duggan of Big Spring and Diana Patterson of Kansas; three nieces; and one nephew.

She was preceded in death by her grandparents, Carl and Myrtle Gring of Coahoma and J.B. and Louise Thompson of Kermit.

In lieu of flowers, the family suggests donations to a favorite charity.

Suella Pool



Suella Pool, 100, of Big Spring died Monday, Dec. 26, 2005, at her residence. Graveside funeral services were 10 a.m. today, Dec. 29, 2005, at the Trinity Memorial Park Peace Chapel with Chaplain Walter McCall officiating.

She was born Oct. 1, 1905, in Burleson County and married John D. Pool in 1926 in Waco. They came to Big Spring in 1952 from Dallas. He preceded her in death in September, 1967. She was a

Methodist.

Survivors include one son, John Pool Jr. of Big Spring; one daughter and son-in-law, Betsy and Jerry Thornton of Geneva, Fla.; two granddaughters and their husbands; three great-granddaughters; one great-grandson; and a sister-in-law, Frances Wright of Slaton.

She was preceded in death by her parents and three brothers.

Arrangements are under the direction of Nalley-Pickle & Welch Funeral Home & Crematory of Big Spring. Online condolences can be made at www.npwelch.com.

Police blotter

The Big Spring Police Department reported the following activity between 8 a.m. Wednesday and 8 a.m. Thursday:

- RICKIE HAIR, 32, Hobbs, N.M., was arrested on a charge of assault on a public servant.

- HEATHER ATKINSON, 25, Hobbs, N.M., was arrested on a charge of theft and a Howard County warrant.

- CONRAD MEZICK, 41, 1105 State, was arrested on two local warrants.

- MARCUS COLE, 19, 715 Tulane, was arrested on a charge of criminal mischief.

- OSCAR MIER, 31, 1201 Mulberry, was arrested on a charge of public intoxication.

- RAY ALVARADO, 28, 432 Westover, was arrested on charges of assault/family violence and attempted injury to a child.

- ASSAULT/FAMILY VIOLENCE was reported in the 800 block of Owens, the 1600 block of 17th and the 400 block of Westover.

- ASSAULT ON A PUBLIC SERVANT was reported in the 400 block of Fourth.

- BURGLARY OF A HABITATION was reported in the 1900 block of Nolan.

- CRIMINAL MISCHIEF was reported in the 1200 block of Wood.

- CRIMINAL TRESPASS WARNING was reported in the 600 block of Gregg.

- POSSESSION OF MARIJUANA was reported in the 400 block of Fourth.

- STEALING/RECEIVING STOLEN CHECKS was reported in the 1500 block of Wood.

Sheriff's report

The Howard County Sheriff's Office reported the following activity between 8 a.m. Wednesday and 8 a.m. Thursday:

- ALFREDO LANCE CASTILLO, 20, was transferred to county jail from BSPD after his arrest on a charge of driving while license invalid.

- CORY BLAKE PAYNE 18, was transferred to county jail from BSPD after his arrest on a charge of driving while license invalid.

- THEFT was reported in the 4200 block of Old Colorado City Highway and the 200 block of Merrick Road.

- BURGLARY was reported in the 6500 block of Ratliff Road.

- DOMESTIC DISTURBANCE was reported in the 400 block of Tubb Loop Road.

- PHONE HARASSMENT was reported in the 400 block of Matt Loop Road.

Fire/EMS

The Big Spring Fire Department/Emergency Medical Service reported the following activity between 8 a.m. Wednesday and 8 a.m. Thursday:

- MEDICAL was reported in the 1800 block of North Highway 87. One person was transported to SMMC.

- MEDICAL was reported in the 1500 block of Chickasaw. One person was transported to SMMC.

- STRUCTURE FIRE was reported in the 700 block of South Scurry. It was a false call.

Take note

- HANGAR 25 AIR MUSEUM IS COLLECTING RECIPES to be included in a 2006 cookbook which will display memories of Big Spring over the years. Share your memories and your recipes. Contact the Hangar at 264-1999 for recipe forms.

- HOME HOSPICE HAS COOKBOOKS with nearly 500 recipes on sale for \$18 with proceeds to benefit Hospice House. Recipes submitted by volunteers, coordinators and owners of Home Hospice. Call Sherry Hodnett at 264-7599 for more information.

- THE HOWARD COUNTY CHILD WELFARE BOARD seeks Christmas help for the 69 children in foster care. To 'adopt' a child or family for the holidays, contact Patti Richard at 432-559-6953 or 268-4550.

- ODYSSEY HOSPICE NEEDS VOLUNTEERS to work in the office and perform patient services. For more information or to volunteer, call 263-5999.

- THE MOBILE MEALS PROGRAM that delivers meals to the elderly and homebound needs volunteers to deliver meals. If you can spare one hour per week to deliver eight or 10 meals, you are needed. About 85 to 90 meals are prepared, packaged and delivered to recipients within the city limits of Big Spring. If you can volunteer, please call 263-4016 before 3 p.m.

- ROAD TO RECOVERY, sponsored by the American Cancer Society, seeks volunteers to drive cancer patients to treatment in Midland. This requires just a few hours commitment each month. To volunteer, or to request a ride for treatment, call LaWanda Hamm at 263-7827.

- LEGAL AID OF NORTHWEST TEXAS is accepting appointments for 2 p.m. until 5 p.m. the first and third Wednesday of each month. Individuals seeking legal advice for matters concerning family law, divorce, custody and child support issues, social security cases, employment and housing may contact the office to schedule an appointment. Criminal cases are not accepted. Anyone recently served with legal documents should call the office immediately at 800-926-5630 or 432-686-0647.

Bulletin board

If you have items for the Bulletin board, contact the Herald news room at 263-7331 or email editor@bigspringherald.com

TODAY

- Kiwanis Club meets at noon in the Howard College Cactus Room. Call 267-6479.

- The Prospector's Club meets at 7:30 p.m. at 606 E. Third St. The public is invited to these meetings. For more information contact Lola Lamb at 263-3340 or Doyle and Virginia McClain at 263-8407.

FRIDAY

- AMBUCS meet at noon in La Posada Restaurant.

- Greater Big Spring Rotary Club meets at noon in the Howard College Cactus Room.

- Spring City Senior Citizen's Center country and western dance from 7:30 p.m. until 10:30 p.m. featuring Monroe Casey and the Prowlers. All area senior citizens are invited.

SATURDAY

- New Year's Eve

- Eagles Lodge Dance at 8:30 p.m. at 703 W. Third.

SUNDAY

- New Year's Day

MONDAY

Subject to change for the holiday.

- Keep Big Spring Beautiful meets at noon in the Chinese Dragon Restaurant.

- The Big Spring Cruisers club meeting at 7 p.m. in the Texas RV Park meeting room.

- District Committee Lone Star of Big Spring meets at noon at 610 Scurry.

- Take Off Pounds Sensibly (TOPS) No. 21 meets at 5 p.m. in the Dora Roberts Rehabilitation Center, 306 W. Third for weigh-in. The meeting begins at 5:30 p.m. Call 1-800-392-8677 or 263-0391 or 263-1758.

- Take Off Pounds Sensibly (TOPS) No. TX 1756 meets at 5:30 p.m. Monday in the 11th and Birdwell Lane Church of Christ. A different program is offered every week, and anyone 7 years old or older is welcome to attend. Please enter through the north-west door. Call 263-2786 for more information.

- Evening Lions Club meets at 6:30 p.m. in La Posada Restaurant.

- Howard County ARC meets at 806 E. Third in the Bingo Hall. Call 264-0674 for more information.

- Prospector's Club work night begins at 7 p.m. at 606 E. Third.

- Big Spring Chapter No. 178 meets at 7:30 p.m. at 221 Main.

TUESDAY

- Coahoma Senior Citizen luncheon is set for 11 a.m. in the Coahoma Community Center.

Weather

Tonight—Increasing clouds. Lows in the upper 30s. Southwest winds 10 to 15 mph shifting to the west after midnight.

Friday—Partly cloudy. Cooler. Highs in the lower 60s. Northwest winds around 10 mph shifting to the northeast in the afternoon.

Friday night—Partly cloudy. Lows in the mid 30s. Southeast winds around 10 mph shifting to the south after midnight.

Saturday—Partly cloudy. Highs in the upper 60s. South winds 10 to 20 mph.

Saturday night—Partly cloudy. Lows in the lower 40s.

New years day—Partly cloudy. Highs in the upper 60s.

Sunday night—Partly cloudy. Lows in the upper 30s.

Monday—Mostly sunny. Highs in the mid 60s.

Monday night—Mostly clear. Lows in the upper 30s.

Tuesday—Mostly sunny. Highs in the upper 60s.

Tuesday night—Mostly clear. Lows in the mid 30s.

Wednesday—Mostly sunny. Highs in the lower 60s.

Lottery

Results of the Lotto Texas drawing Wednesday night: Winning numbers drawn: 4-5-9-42-43. Bonus Ball: 1. Number matching five of five, plus Bonus Ball: 0. Estimated jackpot for Saturday night drawing: \$40 million.

Results of the Cash 5 drawing Wednesday night:

Winning numbers drawn: 7-14-16-17-21.

Number matching five of five: 1.

Prize per winner: \$29,899.

Winning tickets sold in: Houston.

Next Cash 5 drawing: Thursday night.

The winning Pick 3 numbers drawn Wednesday night by the Texas Lottery, in order: 3-2-8

BIG SPRING HERALD

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Around Town

- HERITAGE MUSEUM, 510 Scurry, is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Friday and from 10 a.m. until 5 p.m. on Saturday. An admission fee, which includes entry into the Pottton House, is \$2 for adults and \$1 for children.

- POTTTON HOUSE, 200 Gregg, a restored historic home, is open from 1 p.m. until 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday. An admission fee, which includes entry into Heritage Museum, is \$2 for adults and \$1 for children and senior citizens.

Two women, one pregnant, found dead; man questioned

ODESSA (AP) — Two women, one of them pregnant, were shot dead at an Odessa home Wednesday and a man was critically wounded, police said.

An emergency Caesarean section was performed on the 19-year-old, but efforts to resuscitate the baby were not successful, according to a report in today's editions of the *Odessa American*.

The other woman who died was 49 years old. A 21-year-old man was in critical condition at Medical Center Hospital, police said.

Another 21-year-old man seen running from the home was detained for questioning by police, who said no charges have been filed.

None of the names were released.

Police, who would say little, reported that they arrived on the scene shortly before noon and found several people shot inside the northwest Odessa home.

"It's psyching me out," neighbor Andy Romero told the newspaper. "I have a 10-year-old daughter who plays on the trampoline and watches her brother play basketball out here for four or five hours a day. This is a quiet neighborhood with a lot of retired people."

Man arrested in road-rage death from last year

FORT WORTH (AP) — Authorities have arrested a man accused in the death of a motorist following an assault that detectives think stemmed from road-rage.

Ariel Martinez, 30, was taken into custody Wednesday evening at a relative's house by members of the U.S. Marshals task force and the Fort Worth police fugitive unit.

Martinez is accused fatally injuring Steven "Kent" Schnable around 2:30 a.m. Thanksgiving Day 2004 at an exit along Interstate 35W.

Schnable died of a head injury Dec. 1, 2004. Investigators were still trying to determine whether he was injured when his head hit the pavement or if a weapon was used.

Authorities think the incident began on westbound Interstate 30. A passenger in Schnable's vehicle said the altercation involved a blue pickup with three occupants.

Police are trying to find the pickup they think Martinez was driving.

Candle sparks blaze at church

SAN ANTONIO (AP) — A candle left lit and unattended at an altar ignited a fire inside a church, fire investigators said.

The fire at St. Margaret's Episcopal Church began around 6:30 a.m. Wednesday. No one was in the church at the time, investigators said.

The blaze was concentrated around the altar and caused \$30,000 worth of damage.

Firefighters accused in fire strike plea deal

SAN MARCOS (AP) — Three former volunteer firefighters accused of setting a series of rural fires have reached an agreement with prosecutors that would sentence them to probation.

Brothers Robert and Richard Hitchcock and Christopher Kierych, all 19, were arrested in July on suspicion of burning a vacant house. Prosecutors later charged Richard Hitchcock and Kierych with two additional counts of arson of a habitation in connection with other fires set earlier this year.

The three were probationary firefighters with the Maxwell Volunteer Fire Department and another Caldwell County department.

But Maxwell's fire chief became suspicious when he noticed the Hitchcocks were the first on the scene of some fires. Investigators later linked Kierych and the two brothers to three fires at abandoned buildings.

COTTON

Continued from Page 1A

In Ackerly, Irma Leal of Co-Op Gin reports that 21,634 gins have been baled as of Tuesday, about a third of the facility's expected production this season. She, too, expects this year to be a record for the gin.

Brenda Robertson, secretary at Tarzan Gin in Lenorah, reports 23,340 bales ginned thus far this season, with about the

same amount still to be processed.

Maryetta Oaks, office manager for Flower Grove Gin, reported that her facility has ginned 25,300 bales this season. She further estimated that the gin will process about 50,000 this year, a figure that would be a record.

Contact Staff Writer Steve Reagan at 263-7331, ext. 234, or by e-mail at reporter@bigspringherald.com.

LIGHTS

Continued from Page 1A

The festival is not lacking for candles, that's for sure. Dozens can be seen throughout the park and from U.S. Highway 87. The theme this year is "Candy Cakes and Cactus."

Highway 87 is the entry point, at Whipkey Drive. Visitors will pass under a gateway of lighted pointsettias.

The Festival of Lights will continue tonight, Friday and Saturday from 6 p.m. until 10 p.m.

KalidoScoops
ICE CREAM & MORE
1103 E. 11th Place
OPENING DECEMBER 30th

There is no charge, though donations are accepted.

"We've had lots of expenses this year," explained Simmons. "I ordered more than \$3,000 worth of lights and another \$1,000 of extension cords."

You can reach Bill McClellan at 263-7331, ext. 235, or by e-mail at newsdesk@bigspringherald.com

Residents of fire-swept Texas, Oklahoma mourn losses; more windy weather in forecast

By ANGELA K. BROWN

Associated Press Writer

CROSS PLAINS (AP) — Linda and Kenneth Dixon recently turned down a would-be buyer's offer for their quaint renovated farmhouse, deciding instead to stay put and fill it with new furniture.

But after wildfires charred more than 100 homes and killed five people in Texas and Oklahoma, the Dixons inspected the only thing left of their dream home: a charred, smoldering heap.

"We didn't take any clothes, and now it's all gone," Kenneth Dixon said Wednesday night while eating at First Baptist Church, where the Red Cross set up a shelter. "I didn't want to go back out there today. I just didn't want to see it again."

Severe drought, wind gusts of 40 mph and temperatures reaching the low 80s earlier this week set the stage for the fires in Texas and Oklahoma, which authorities believe were mostly set by people ignoring fire bans and burning trash, shooting fireworks or throwing out cigarettes.

The flames ripped across nearly 20,000 acres in the two states. At least 73 blazes were reported in Texas over two days, and dozens more broke out in Oklahoma.

While the wind and high temperatures eased after the outbreak of fires Tuesday, the National Weather Service predicted a return of the hazardous conditions on Saturday — prompting fears that New Year's fireworks could spark another round of fires.

"It's not going to be a good day to throw up fireworks," meteorologist Alan Moller said. "This could lead to some really nasty fires."

Cross Plains, a working-class town about 115 miles west of Fort Worth, was the hardest-hit community, losing about 50 homes and a church Tuesday. Two of the state's four deaths were reported there.

One was Mattie Faye Wilson, 67, who taught several generations of Cross Plains first-graders before her retirement, said Debbie Gosnell, a city administrator. "She was a really sweet woman," Gosnell said.

Another victim was Maudie Sheppard, a bedridden 89-year-old living with her son. He rushed home to try and save her, but it was too late, neighbors said.

Remnants of several of the burned-out houses still smoldered Wednesday evening, blanketing the air with a smoky haze and burning odor. Texas Gov. Rick Perry planned to survey the Cross Plains damage by air Thursday.

Another woman died in Cooke County, near the Texas-Oklahoma line,



A brick chimney is all that is left standing of Wilburn "Tex" Herring's home in Cross Plains Wednesday. Cross Plains' residents spent the day sifting through ashes trying to recover valuables after brush fires swept across the area Tuesday.

after she apparently fell while helping her husband pour water on the grass around their house. Texas authorities confirmed a fourth death but did not immediately release details.

The fifth death was reported in Oklahoma. Kelly Tiger, 69, collapsed and died while trying battling flames on his family's property in Hughes County. Burns covered 70 percent of his body but doctors determined that he died of a heart attack.

"I believe my father was trying to get back to us," his son, Kelly Tiger Jr., 47, said. "He saw the winds shift and the fire coming at our house. That's when he started running toward us."

The grass fires destroyed more than 100 buildings across Texas, including 73 homes, the state emergency management agency said. About

50 homes were destroyed in Oklahoma, authorities said.

This year has been the fifth driest year on record for north and central Texas, where most of the fires happened. The annual rainfall in the Dallas-Fort Worth area is about 16 inches less than the average of about 35 inches. Oklahoma has received about 24 inches of rain this year, about 12 inches less than normal.

Some residents of Mustang, just west of Oklahoma City, returned to their homes Wednesday to pick through what remained. Five homes were destroyed as the fire raced across 400 acres.

Pat Hankins watched as friends and family members pulled partially destroyed items from his home and put them on the lawn. Inside, heaps of blackened insulation lay

on top of a bed in a back bedroom lit by sunlight that poured through holes in the ceiling.

"We were planning on dying here," said Hankins, 62, of the home he has shared with his wife for 13 years. "We loved this piece of property. Whether we'll rebuild, I just don't know."

Eight homes were lost in a fast-moving grass fire in Choctaw, east of Oklahoma City.

MYERS & SMITH FUNERAL HOME & CHAPEL
24th & Johnson 267-8288

Richard Parnell, 35, died Saturday. Graveside services will be at 2 p.m. Thursday at Mt. Olive Memorial Park. The family will receive friends following the service at 529 Scott.

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EDITORIAL

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

-FIRST AMENDMENT

Opinions expressed on this page are those of the Editorial Board of the Big Spring Herald unless otherwise indicated.

Susanne Reed
PublisherJohn A. Moseley
Managing EditorBill McClellan
News Editor

OUR VIEWS

Wildfires a reminder to be cautious

The fires this week that destroyed dozens of homes and took two lives in Cross Plains — and accounted for other deaths and property loss in other parts of Texas and Oklahoma — should be a sober warning to Crossroads residents. Don't be careless.

We were fortunate when much of our area received some moisture in mid December, but with the strong winds of late, that moisture has been depleted and we are no longer protected.

The fires across north central Texas likely started from varied sources — cigarettes tossed from vehicles, controlled burns that got out of hand, children playing with matches or lighters, lightning, sparks from machinery — there are lots of reasons fires ignite. Almost all of them are preventable.

It's a good time, however, to round your family up and have a talk about fire safety. In the home, everyone needs to know to not leave burning candles unattended, to avoid using the oven as a source of heat, to be cautious with space heaters and to frequently check extension cords and cords for appliances, electric blankets and the like.

Finally, make sure you have smoke detectors in working order and that each has fresh batteries. Have a plan so that every family member knows how and where to exit the home in case of a fire.

Outdoors, it's important to take note of where you are and what you are doing. Don't burn trash in the yard — there is a burn ban in effect in Howard County, by the way — don't leave your vehicle running in high weeds or grass, be careful where you operate machinery that can cause sparks, and — do we really need to say it? — don't throw cigarette or cigar butts out the window.

What the recent fires show us is that with conditions like they are, even the smallest fire can grow into a blaze that will consume acres and acres of pasture, outbuildings and homes.

So please, be careful. You'll not only be helping protect property, but could very well be saving lives.

HOW TO CONTACT US

The Herald is always interested in our readers' opinions. In order that we might better serve your needs, we offer several ways in which you may contact us:

- In person at 710 Scurry St.
- By telephone at 263-7331
- By fax at 264-7205
- By e-mail Managing Editor John A. Moseley at editor@bigspringherald.com or News Editor Bill McClellan at newsdesk@bigspringherald.com.
- By mail at P.O. Box 1431, Big Spring, 79721

LETTER POLICIES

- The Herald welcomes letters to the editor.
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 - Sign your letter.
 - Provide a daytime telephone number, as well as a street address for verification purposes.
 - We reserve the right to edit for style and clarity.
 - We reserve the right to limit publication to one letter per 30-day period per author.
 - Letters that are unsigned or do not include a telephone number or address will not be considered.
 - Letters should be submitted to Editor, Big Spring Herald, P.O. Box 1431, Big Spring, 79721. They can also be e-mailed to editor@bigspringherald.com

The president is honoring his oath

Are critics of President Bush's electronic-surveillance practices concerned with the Constitution? Or are they just using any excuse they can find to accuse him of abusing his power?

If they are concerned with constitutional issues, why didn't they object to President Clinton's advocacy of warrantless searches — even for physical searches as opposed to electronic surveillance — for national security reasons? Other presidents have also defended the Commander in Chief's inherent authority to conduct such searches.

DAVID
LIMBAUGH

But the critics are acting like the mere suggestion of a search without a warrant is tantamount to the establishment of a police state. What they don't tell you is that the Fourth Amendment itself primarily guards against unreasonable searches and seizures. Courts have always recognized exceptions to the warrant requirement.

That warrants are not absolutely indispensable is also clear by the very terms of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act itself, which expressly dispenses with the warrant requirement in certain defined circumstances. Some scholars maintain those exceptions apply to the president's NSA surveillance of Al Qaeda, though the administration doesn't appear to be relying on that position. Instead, President Bush finds his authority in the Constitution and in Congress' de facto declaration of war following 9/11.

He is not challenging the validity of FISA but merely saying it does not limit his inherent constitutional authority as Commander in Chief under Article II to conduct such searches, when necessary, to protect national security. Congressional action, in other words, never trumps the Constitution.

"The president reminds us that he took an oath to protect and defend the United States, and that is precisely what he is trying to do."

But as for statutory authority, the president relies on Congress' passing its declaration of war following 9/11 to give him the authority to "use all necessary and appropriate force" against the terrorist enemy. Warrantless surveillance of Al Qaeda operatives, President Bush argues, is within the meaning of "necessary and appropriate force."

Some have objected that "necessary and appropriate force" cannot be construed to permit such surveillance of the enemy. There is no specific authorization for electronic surveillance in Congress's "declaration," and so Congress did not authorize it.

But as Attorney General Alberto Gonzales pointed out, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in the Hamdi case that the government could detain an American citizen captured on the battlefield for the duration of the war even though Congress' authorization to use force never mentions the word "detention."

Detention, according to Justice O'Connor's opinion, is a fundamental incident of waging war. And the NSA electronic surveillance of Al Qaeda, argues Gonzales, is "even more a fundamental incident of war" than detention.

While reasonable people can debate whether President Bush is correct in his interpretation of the law, it is extreme to conclude that he deliberately violated the law or usurped authority with his NSA surveillance program.

The president made clear that he established his surveillance program only after studied advice of legal counsel. He also briefed members of Congress, from both parties, at least a dozen times on

the program. And when the practice was publicized through a despicable, nation-damaging leak, President Bush did not deny engaging in the practice but heartily defended it.

The president's critics would be well advised to understand the distinction between constitutional criminal procedure and wartime powers. In the situation of the NSA surveillance program, as well as a host of other wartime activities undertaken by the government, the critics want to confer full-blown constitutional rights on our enemy. President Bush was adamant that his surveillance is not targeting U.S. citizens but only members of Al Qaeda or those affiliated with or supporting it.

Thank God we have a president who is mindful of his dual and sometimes conflicting obligations of protecting our civil liberties and our national security. The absence of attacks on our soil and the absence of major civil-rights encroachments of U.S. citizens since 9/11 show that he has negotiated a finely tuned balance between the two concerns. The president's critics, by contrast, seem to be concerned with civil liberties — for our wartime enemies no less — to the exclusion of national security concerns.

Seriously: Why do they always seem inclined to sympathize with the enemy?

The president reminds us that he took an oath to protect and defend the United States, and that is precisely what he is trying to do. His critics seem determined to handcuff him from honoring his oath in every way possible while simultaneously castigating him for not doing enough.

In the end, their concern is neither civil liberties nor national security but the personal destruction of a president dedicated to defending the United States of America and her citizens. In their pursuit to recapture power, all other interests must be sacrificed.

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Unsurprised to learn that they lied

The first time as tragedy, the second time as farce. Thirty-five years ago, Richard Milhous Nixon, who was crazy as a bullbat, and J. Edgar Hoover, who wore women's underwear, decided some Americans had unacceptable political opinions. So they set our government to spying on its own citizens, basically those who were deemed insufficiently like Crazy Richard Milhous.

For those of you who have forgotten just what a stonewall paranoid Nixon was, the poor man used to stalk around the White House demanding that his political enemies be killed. Many still believe there was a certain Richard III grandeur to Nixon's collapse because he was also a man of notable talents. There is neither grandeur nor tragedy in watching this president, the Testy Kid, violate his oath to uphold the laws and Constitution of our country.

The Testy Kid wants to do what he wants to do when he wants to do it because he is the president, and he considers that sufficient justification for whatever he wants. He even finds lawyers like John Yoo, who tell him that whatever he wants to do is legal.

The creepy part is the overlap. Damned if they aren't still here, after all these years, the old Nixon hands — Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld, the whole gang whose yearning for authoritarian government rose like a stink over the Nixon years. Imperial executive. Bring back those special White House guard uniforms. Cheney, like some malignancy that cannot be killed off, back at the same old stand, pushing the same old crap.

Of course, they tell us we have to be spied on for our own safety, so they can catch the terrorists who threaten us all. Thirty-five years ago, they nabbed a film star named Jean Seberg and a bunch of people running a free breakfast program for poor kids in Chicago. This time, they're onto the Quakers. We are not safer.

We would be safer, as the 9-11 commission has so recently reminded us, if some obvious and necessary precautions were taken

at both nuclear and chemical plants — but that is not happening because those industries contribute to Republican candidates. Republicans do not ask their contributors to spend a lot of money on obvious and necessary steps to protect public safety. They wiretap, instead.

You will be unsurprised to learn that, first, they lied. They didn't do it. Well, OK, they did it, but not very much at all. Well, OK,

more than that. A lot more than that. OK, millions of private e-mail and telephone calls every hour, and all medical and financial records.

You may recall in 2002 it was revealed that the Pentagon had started a giant data-mining program called Total

Information Awareness (TIA), intended to search through vast databases "to increase information coverage by an order of magnitude."

From credit cards to vet reports, Big Brother would be watching us. This dandy program was under the control of Adm. John Poindexter, convicted of five felonies during Iran-Contra, all overturned on a technicality. This administration really knows where to go for good help — it ought to bring back Brownie.

Everybody decided that TIA was a terrible idea, and the program was theoretically shut down. As often happens with this administration, it turned out they just changed the name and made the program less visible. Data-mining was a popular buzzword at the time, and the administration was obviously hot to have it. Bush established a secret program under which the National Security Agency could bypass the FISA (Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act) court and begin eavesdropping on Americans without warrants.

As many have patiently pointed out, the entire program was unnecessary, since the FISA court is both prompt and accommodating. There is virtually no possible scenario that would make it diffi-

"Either the president of the United States is going to have to understand and admit he has done something very wrong, or he will have to be impeached."

cult or impossible to get a FISA warrant — it has granted 19,000 warrants and rejected only a handful.

I don't like to play scary games where we all stay awake late at night, telling each other scary stories — but there's a reason we have never given our government this kind of power. As the late Sen. Frank Church said, "That capability could at any time be turned around on the American people, and no American would have any privacy left, such is the capacity to monitor everything: telephone conversations, telegrams, it doesn't matter. There would be no place to hide." And if a dictator took over, the NSA "could enable it to impose total tyranny."

Then we always get that dreadful goody-two-shoes response, "Well, if you aren't doing anything wrong, you don't have anything to worry about, do you?"

Folks, we KNOW this program is being and will be misused. We know it from the past record and current reporting. The program has already targeted vegans and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals — and, boy, if those aren't outposts of al-Qaida, what is? Could this be more pathetic?

This could scarcely be clearer. Either the president of the United States is going to have to understand and admit he has done something very wrong, or he will have to be impeached. The first time this happened, the institutional response was magnificent. The courts, the press, the Congress all functioned superbly. Anyone think we're up to that again? Then whom do we blame when we lose the republic?

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Great! Another Christmas toy with batteries

By JIM MATEJA

(KRT)
Was a gas/electric car under your tree this Christmas?

Hope batteries were included, because it's one thing to search for a couple alkalines on Christmas Day, quite another to hunt for a nickel-metal-hydride pack.

Also hope Santa deposited it in the garage and not in the living room. Hybrids may conserve fuel and reduce emissions, but they do little to ensure the cleanliness and longevity of your car-pet.

Unless you have spent a great deal of time under a rock, you must be aware that no other segment of the market has gotten as much attention as hybrids.

Environmentalists, as well as motorists who panicked when gas prices touched \$3, made hybrids the vehicle du jour for 2005. Gas prices in 2006, or at least the fear of where they are headed, no doubt will influence hybrid interest.

As the year draws to a close, couldn't pass up the opportunity to spend some time in one of those hybrids everyone made such a fuss about.

We tested the 2006 Honda Civic. Honda first offered the hybrid in the 2003 model year, and for this model year all Civics, hybrid included, got a major redesign.

The sheet metal is a little more distinctive, though still somewhat bland. The car tested was pastel blue. It looked like a couple boxes of Pampers should be included. While a pleasant and peaceful color, can't expect too many men will go for a baby blue sedan — whether it conserves petrol or not.

But the new look is secondary to the new mileage and the fact the '06 Civic hybrid offers better mileage — 49 m.p.g. city and 51 m.p.g. highway — than its predecessor — 48/47.

Mileage is higher because Civic's 4-cylinder gas engine borrowed the cylinder deactivation system from the V-6 Accord hybrid.

Accord shuts off 3 of 6 cylinders to conserve fuel; Civic shuts off all 4 and relies on battery power between 25 and 35 mph. It also shuts off all cylinders when you coast.

You may never obtain the optimum 48/51, but you'll still do better than the 30/40 in the gas-powered Civic sedans with their 1.8-liter 4-cylinders. Have to say, however, that 30/40 is pretty good.

If higher mileage, greater driving range and

fewer stops at the pump are your primary concerns, you'll do well to check out the Civic hybrid.

But keep in mind that 48/51 rating on the window sticker is an estimate, not a blood oath or money-back guarantee that this is the mileage you will obtain.

There are a few factors to consider before taking the plunge and putting a hybrid in your garage.

While the '06 Civic hybrid delivers 1 more m.p.g. city, 4 more m.p.g. highway than the 2005, it has a base price of \$21,850, or \$950 more than in '05.

And that \$21,850 is \$2,790 more than the comparable gas-powered Civic EX sedan.

So sometime over the next 36, 48 or 60 months — whatever your term of payments — you have to hope the extra mileage will offset the \$950 — not to mention the \$2,790 — in increased costs.

That \$2,790 premium would buy 930 gallons of gas at \$3 a gallon or 1,395 gallons at \$2 a gallon. Something to consider.

Civic is powered by a 1.3-liter, 90-horsepower 4-cylinder gas engine and 158-volt electric motor that produces 20 h.p. In 2005 the hybrid offered a 5-speed manual and continuously variable automatic with an unlimited number of gear ratios. For '06 the manual was dropped.

Though with only a combined 110 h.p., Civic is fairly lively. The hybrid starts and stays in gas mode until you reach about 25 mph and then electric takes over.

Travel at a slow, steady pace on level pavement and the cylinders on the gas engine deactivate at about 25 and you operate in electric mode until about 35 mph, sometimes a few mph more before the gas mode takes over if you gently press the pedal.

The longer in electric, of course, the longer you are consuming zero fuel and not only obtaining maximum mileage, but also shooting zero pollutants into the atmosphere.

On the highway or interstate, electric mode comes back into play when you need a power assist to pass or merge.

You don't feel gas to battery or battery to gas transitions. If it weren't for a couple of gauges in the dash that call attention to dual-mode power, most motorists wouldn't know when in gas or battery or both.

One gauge shows miles per gallon at the moment. The needle ascends when speed slows, retreats when speed rises. Another gauge shows

when the battery is assisting the gas engine and how much charge is left in the battery pack. The batteries recharge while driving and don't need to be plugged into a socket. The batteries are expected to last eight years or 100,000 miles.

While the hybrid helps conserve fuel, there are a couple of gripes. One is that to provide optimum mileage, the hybrid rides on 15-inch, low-rolling-resistance radials. To reduce rolling resistance, the treads and sidewalls are stiff and have less give over anything on the pavement or the pavement itself, for that matter. A step up from what Fred Flintstone had to live with, but a step down from the common flexible radial.

And though the battery pack and electric motor make the car only 75 pounds heavier than the gas version, it feels like more in the wheel.

Comfort is sacrificed as well as handling. You'll be able to travel farther before refueling in the hybrid, but not necessarily in total comfort. Ride is a bit harsh, handling more than a bit vague. And the seats, front and rear, are more than just a bit stiff and unforgiving. You also don't have pinpoint response to steering input.

If coming out of a cushy family sedan, you must test-drive this vehicle more than just around the block to determine how stiff a ride you can tolerate before signing on the dotted line.

Also, the battery pack is between the rear seat and the trunk, which robs rear seat leg and trunk room. Decent, but not deep, luggage space in the trunk. But to have enough room for your feet when riding in back, you'll have to rest them under the front seat.

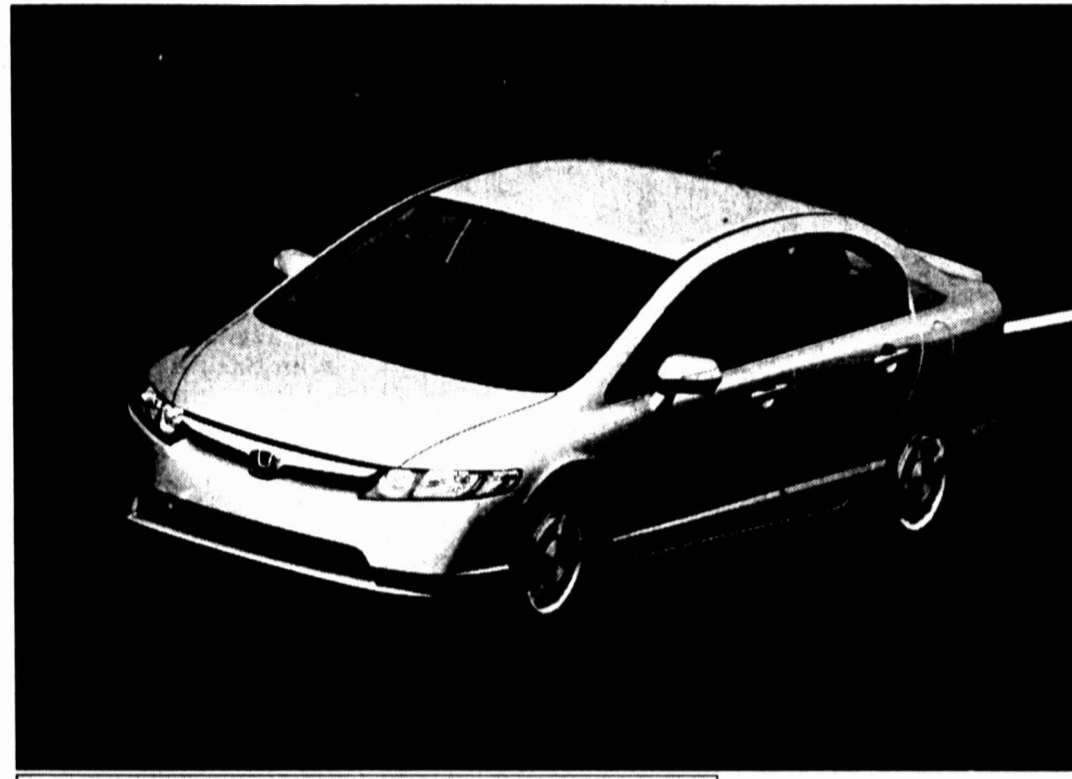
However, you won't want for cup or water bottle holders or power plugs, and there's an ample supply of small trays in the dash and center console as well as under the console armrest.

The standard equipment list is extensive: side-curtain air bags; anti-lock brakes; power mirrors with integrated turn indicators; tinted glass; automatic climate control; power windows and door locks; cruise control; tilt and telescoping steering column; remote fuel filler door/deck lid releases; a pair of power plugs; and AM/FM radio with CD and MP3 players.

A navigation system is optional at \$1,500, but a power moonroof isn't offered. You can get one in the gas-only version. Honda expects to sell



KRT photo
If higher mileage, greater driving range and fewer stops at the pump are your primary concerns, you'll do well to check out the 2006 Honda Civic Hybrid.



2006 Honda Civic Hybrid

PRICE AS TESTED: \$21,850 — add \$550 for freight

WHEELBASE: 106.3 inches

LENGTH: 176.7 inches

ENGINE: 1.3-liter, 90-h.p. 4-cylinder gas engine and 158-volt electric motor

TRANSMISSION: Continuously variable automatic

MILEAGE: CITY — 49 m.p.g.

HWY — 51 m.p.g.

THE STICKER — \$21,850 base

PLUSES:

- The car is redesigned for '06.
- Gas/electric provides mileage greater than a gas-only sedan while spitting fewer emissions into the air.
- Hybrid means significant driving range and a mileage rating higher than that for '05.
- Combination of gas and electric means very good power.

MINUSES:

- Low rolling-resistance tires are very firm, and so is the suspension.
- Premium of \$2,790 over the gas-only Civic.
- Its appeal is tied to price of gas.

cles they'll assemble and the number of parts and components they'll need based on that number. They also produce or order from suppliers the items they'll need for that number of vehicles. That includes the engines, the seat fabric and carpeting in specific colors, as well as exterior paint colors.

Next summer, factories start what's called "build-out," having dealers order what cars in what colors and with what features they want for the rest of the year based on what's left in the parts bins.

The sooner you order, the more likely you are to get what you want, but once build-out begins, you'll have to take what's left — the colors, fabrics and options that those ahead of you didn't want.

Amy E. Reese
D.D.S., P.C.
432-267-4102

28,000 Civic hybrids in '06, up from 24,000 in '05. "The only thing that will keep us from selling more is limited inventory from Japan," said Honda spokesman Sage Marie. The original did not set a breakneck sales pace, however.

A. The sooner the better if a certain color and interior are important, because if it isn't in stock, you'll have time to order. Automakers plan production months ahead of time: the number of vehi-

Q & A

Q. What's the best time of year to purchase new 2006 car? A certain color and interior are important.

— J.M., Chicago

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Home safety

Tips to help extinguish candle fires

Common sense is key to preventing bedroom fires

Metro

Every bedroom should be a sanctuary from the outside world, where people feel safe and secure. However, research shows half of home fire fatalities occur between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m., with most victims asleep at the time of the fire.

While no one wants to think about hidden dangers lurking around the house, many potential fire hazards go undetected because people simply do not take steps to fire-proof their home.

"Most home fires, especially bedroom fires, can be prevented," said Pat Martin of the Sleep Products Safety Council, or SPSC. "Many bedroom fires are caused by child play, misuse or poor maintenance of electrical devices, careless use of candles, and smoking in bed."

Most potential hazards can be addressed with a little common sense. For example, be sure to keep flammable items like bedding, clothes and curtains at least three feet away from portable heaters or lit candles, and never smoke in bed. Also, items like appliances or electric blankets should not be operated if they have frayed power cords, and electrical outlets should never be overloaded.

While these measures are easy for adults to address, curious children need to be educated about the dangers associated

with fire.

"Fires and burns are leading causes of injury and death to children," said Chief Mike Love, a fire marshal with the Montgomery County, Md. Fire and Rescue Service. "Unfortunately, many of these fires are started by children themselves. Two thirds of bedroom fires are started by children playing with matches or lighters."

Parents and caregivers can take the mystery out of fire by teaching that matches, lighters and candles are tools, not toys. If they suspect that a child is playing with fire, parents should check under beds and in closets for telltale signs like burned matches. Matches and lighters should be stored in a secure drawer or cabinet.

Adults should also remember to:

- Install and maintain a working smoke alarm outside of every sleep area, and remember to change the battery at least once a year.
 - Designate two escape routes from each bedroom, and practice them regularly.
 - Teach everyone the "Stop, Drop, and Roll" technique in case clothing catches on fire.
 - Avoid storing old mattresses in the home or garage.
- Parents can find free firesafety educational games along with other interactive resources on www.safesleep.org.

Metro

The past decade has seen an increase in candle usage, with candles now flickering in seven out of 10 households in America. For many, candles are an inexpensive way to add atmosphere and romance. However, experts report that home candle-related fires also have increased substantially, and warn that magic moments could quickly turn tragic unless proper precautions and common sense are used.

According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), an estimated 18,000 home candle fires were reported in 2001 (the most recent year for which statistics are available), resulting in an estimated 190 civilian fire deaths, 1,450 civilian fire injuries, and \$265 million in direct property damage.

"People should always keep in mind that a lit candle is an open flame," said Marty Ahrens of the NFPA. "That means that, if left unattended, or used carelessly, candles have the potential for disaster. These days, many people are using candles as part

of their décor, but from a practical standpoint, some home interior decorating ideas are completely unsafe."

"Most candle fires result from simple carelessness," said Tim Bowen, a claim manager at MetLife Auto & Home. "However, a little common sense can prevent fires from occurring and save lives."

According to the NFPA, the following tips can help consumers stay safe:

- Consider your children and pets. An adventurous toddler, a puppy's wagging tail, or a cat jumping onto the mantle could cause lots of trouble. Never use candles where they could be knocked over by anyone, including children or pets. Store candles, matches, and lighters up high, out of the reach of children, and never allow teens or children to have candles in their bedrooms.

• Keep things on a level playing field. Make certain candles are placed on stable pieces of furniture and in sturdy holders that won't tip over. Candles should fit in their holders securely and the holders

should be made from material that won't burn.

• Keep candles away from other combustibles. Candles can easily cause many objects to ignite. Wood paneling and paperwork are obvious targets, but even a curtain in front of an open window can pose a hazard, given the right breeze.

• Avoid greenery. It can catch fire and spread very quickly. Avoid using candles in floral arrangements.

• Quality counts! Fire is not the only candle-related concern. Candles can damage a house when they "burn dirty," which means that they put out smoke into the air, which will be drawn to — and stain — walls and ceilings. "It can make the room look as though it had been damaged by a fire in another room," said Bowen. "But unlike a fire, which is sudden and unexpected, this type of damage takes place over a period of time, and may not be covered under your insurance policy." Always be sure to use name-brand, quality candles that burn safely.

• Holiday candle usage is a special concern,

because December is the peak month for candle fires in homes, with almost twice the average number of incidents reported. Of these fires, the leading type involves holiday decorations. "Many fires occur when items, such as greenery or other decorations, come into contact with lit candles," said Ahrens. "Always consider fire safety when using candles as part of your holiday decorating."

To avoid getting burned, MetLife Auto & Home offers a brochure called "About...Fire Safety," which is part of its award-winning Life Advice® series. It contains information about candle safety as well as a number of other fire-related subjects, including how to plan an escape route, seasonal safety tips, and safety information related to heating a home. The brochure is available by visiting www.lifeadvice.com.

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Top books for young readers

Metro

Part of encouraging children to read involves exposing them to a variety of books. Here's a list of just a few popular children's books good for young readers.

"Where the Wild Things Are," by Maurice Sendak. This Caldecott Medal-winning picture book is about a boy who becomes angry and goes to "where the wild things are."

"Miss Nelson is Missing," by Harry Allard. Miss Nelson's class misbehaves constantly. That all changes when a substitute teacher, Ms. Viola Swamp, scares them into being model students.

"Green Eggs and Ham," by Dr. Seuss. While just about all of Dr. Seuss' whimsical rhymes can entertain, this classic

about Sam-I-Am and his taste for green eggs and ham is definitely a winner.

"Where the Sidewalk Ends," by Shel Silverstein. Poet, songwriter and artist, Silverstein presents a collection of quirky observations and clever poetry that will capture the imaginations of little readers everywhere.

"Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs," by Judi Barrett. Children will laugh out loud from this tale of a tiny town called Chewandswallow, where it rains a variety of foods three times a day.

"The Velveteen Rabbit," by Margery Williams Bianco. An enchanting tale of the love between a child and his stuffed rabbit, who magically comes to life.

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Page 1B
Thursday, December 29, 2005

Armstrong, Sorenstam AP Athletes of Year

Other cyclists had no chance against Lance

By JIM VERTUNO

AP Sports Writer
AUSTIN — Lance Armstrong takes fewer bike rides these days. He even describes himself as out of shape since retiring after his seventh consecutive Tour de France victory in July.

But he remains unbeatable.

Armstrong was honored Wednesday as The Associated Press Male Athlete of the Year for the fourth straight year. He is the only athlete to be selected by sports writers four times since the honor first was awarded in 1931.

Armstrong received 30 of the 83 votes cast. Heisman Trophy-winning running back Reggie Bush of Southern California was second with 23 votes, and Indianapolis Colts quarterback Peyton Manning was third with eight, followed by tennis star Roger Federer and golf's Tiger Woods with seven each.

"It's nice to win," Armstrong said. "I'll never win again."

No, he won't. Not unless his new hobby of kiteboarding — yep, think of a small surfboard or ski attached to a kite — becomes a mainstream sport.

"I may have to take up golf," he said. "Take on Tiger."

Also Wednesday,



Lance Armstrong celebrates his seventh Tour de France victory with his children Luke, Isabella and Grace on the Champs Elysees in Paris on July 24.

Annika Sorenstam was selected as the AP Female Athlete of the Year.

The 34-year-old Armstrong retired after deciding there were no more mountains to conquer on his bike.

"I'd hoped to go out on top," he said. "As a sportsman it's really hard to do, to time it right."

The Texan calls his 2005 season "a dream." His final Tour was another

dominant performance — he won by the comfortable margin of 4 minutes, 40 seconds. Stepping off the winner's podium for the final time, his goal was to kick back "with a beer, having a blast" and play with his three young children from his first marriage.

But it wasn't long before things turned sour.

See MALE, page 2B

Another year, another award for Annika

By DOUG FERGUSON

AP Golf Writer
Annika Sorenstam is linked with Babe Zaharias again, although this has nothing to do with competing against men.

The Swedish golf star turned a season that had all the trappings of a struggle into another year of superlatives, becoming the first woman in 19 years to capture the first two legs of the Grand Slam, winning 10 times on the LPGA Tour and twice putting the teenagers in their place.

No one is close to her in women's golf.

And she was a landslide winner as the AP Female Athlete of the Year, making Sorenstam the first golfer since Zaharias (1945-47) to win the award three straight years.

"I am flattered and honored to be chosen by so many different editors," said Sorenstam, who received 47 of 81 votes cast by AP newspaper and broadcast members.

Danica Patrick, the rookie race car driver whose fourth-place finish at the Indianapolis 500 was the best ever by a female, received 17 votes. Maria Sharapova got five votes for becoming the first Russian-born tennis player to reach No. 1, while Wimbledon champ Venus Williams and 16-year-old golfer Michelle Wie each got four votes.



Annika Sorenstam reacts after hitting a birdie on the second green during the U.S. Women's Open Championship at Cherry Hill Country Club in Cherry Hills Village, Colo. on June 25.

Lance Armstrong was voted Male Athlete of the Year for the fourth straight year.

Zaharias won the AP Female Athlete award six times in her career, one of those years in track. As badly as Sorenstam has beaten up on her competition this decade, maybe it's time for her to try another sport.

"When Annika comes to

play, Annika comes to win," Lorie Kane said. It wasn't as easy as it might have looked.

Before she played in her first tournament, Sorenstam filed for divorce from her husband of eight years, a distraction that lingered until it was finalized in August. But she found refuge

See FEMALE, page 2B

Texas returns to Rose Bowl looking for title

By JIM VERTUNO

AP Sports Writer
BEVERLY HILLS, Calif. — A year ago, Texas came to California feeling unwanted in the Rose Bowl, sniffed at by their West Coast hosts as the swaggering braggarts who bumped the Pac-10 out of the "Granddaddy" of bowl games.

Things certainly have changed with their return.

Texas is being welcomed with open arms, or least as warmly as could be expected in the hometown of Rose Bowl opponent Southern Cal, and the only thing everyone's talking about this year is the matchup unbeaten college football titans.

"It's the matchup everybody wanted since last year," Longhorns coach Mack Brown said before his team broke for

Christmas break in Austin. "The two teams have the responsibility to make sure the game lives up to its billing."

The Longhorns finished practice on Dec. 22 with instructions for the team to meet at its hotel by Wednesday night. Practice resumes Thursday morning and the ceremonial pregame countdown begins with both teams being welcomed at Disneyland.

Tens of thousands of Texans will be pouring into the Los Angeles area over the next week to give Hollywood a distinctive burnt-orange hue.

Many of them came last year

for the novelty of watching their team playing in the Rose Bowl. They hope this trip will end with undisputed national championship in 36 years.

Last season, the Longhorns supplied much of the annual Bowl Championship Series controversy when Brown pleaded for his team to get in and the Longhorns leapfrogged ahead of California.

It upset the college football purists as it meant the Rose Bowl wouldn't get its traditional Pac-10 team. Mother Nature didn't seem too pleased either, dumping a week of rain and chilly temperatures on the area.

It wasn't until quarterback Vince Young guided the Longhorns to a thrilling 38-37 victory over Michigan — decided on the final play by a wobbly kick off the right foot of Dusty Mangum — that the debate finally settled down.

The Longhorns hadn't even left the field when they started talking about coming back.

"We all said our ultimate goal was to get back there and win," defensive tackle Frank Okam said. "You could see each piece of the puzzle fitting into place. The biggest piece is still sitting out there and that's the national championship."

Last season, the Trojans played in the BCS title game in the Orange Bowl in Miami, 2,700

See ROSE, page 2B

'Huskers survive late scare

By ERIC OLSON

AP Sports Writer
SAN ANTONIO — The Nebraska Cornhuskers gave Bill Callahan a celebratory shower on the sideline and reveled in their Alamo Bowl victory as the final seconds ticked off the clock.

The excitement began spilling onto the field, but there was one not-so-small problem: The game wasn't quite over.

In a wild and nearly miraculous ending, Michigan's Chad Henne started the last play with a short pass to Jason Avant to the Wolverines' 49. Seven laterals up and down the field followed before the play fizzled out with Titus Brothers shoving Tyler Ecker out of bounds at the Nebraska 13 — finally securing the Cornhuskers' 32-28 victory Wednesday night.

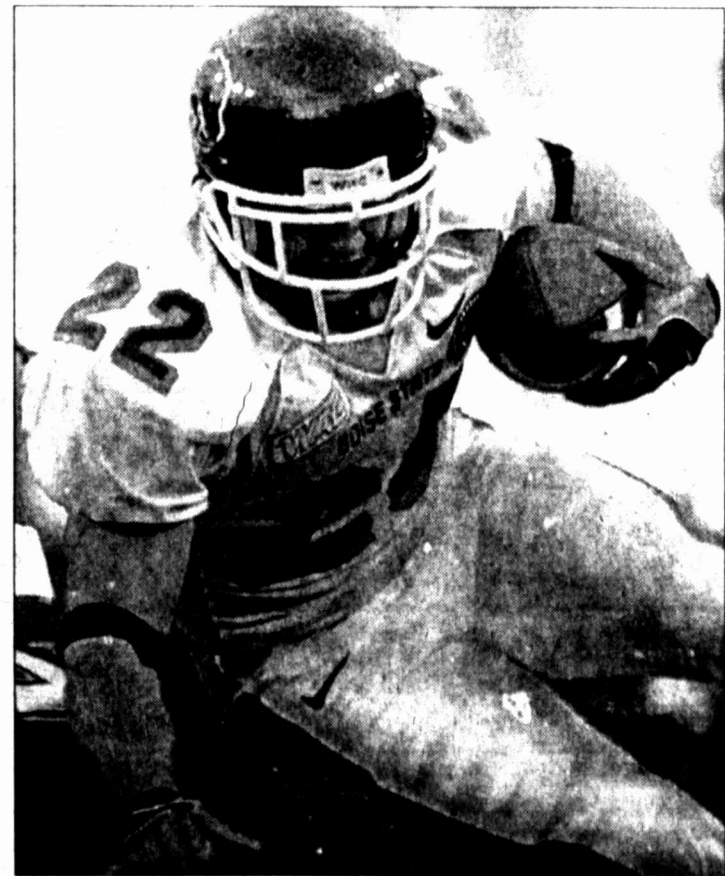
"I thought the game was over," Callahan said, "but evidently it wasn't."

Extra players and some coaches from both teams were on the field as the play finished.

"I'm thankful we didn't get penalized," Callahan said. "We thought the game was over, but the ball was still going down on the field. We were very fortunate we stayed alert and made the play to end the game."

The win over the 20th-

See ALAMO, page 2B



Boise State's Jeff Carpenter fights for yardage during a first half run against Eastern College. Boston College defeated Boise State 27-21 in the MPC Computers Bowl at Bronco Stadium in Boise, Idaho, Wednesday.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL BOWL SCHEDULE		
2005-06 Bowl Schedule	OT	
Bowl Championship Series	Motor City Bowl	Charlotte, N.C., Dec. 31, 10 a.m.
Fleets Bowl	Memphis 38, Akron 31	ESPN2
Notre Dame vs. Ohio State	Champs Sports Bowl	Liberty Bowl
Tempe, Ariz., Jan. 2, 3:30 p.m.	Clemson 19, Colorado 10	Tulsa vs. Fresno State
ABC	Inlight Bowl	Memphis, Tenn., Dec. 31, noon.
Sugar Bowl	Arizona State 45, Rutgers 40	ESPN
Georgia vs. West Virginia	MPC Computers Bowl	Houston Bowl
Atlanta, Jan. 2, 7:30 p.m. ABC	Boston College 27, Boise State 21	TCU vs. Iowa State
Orange Bowl	Alamo Bowl	Houston, Dec. 31, 1:30 p.m.
Florida State vs. Penn State	Nebraska 32, Michigan 28	ESPN2
Miami, Jan. 3, 7 p.m., ABC	Emerald Bowl	Cotton Bowl
Rose Bowl	Georgia Tech vs. Utah San Francisco, Dec. 29, 3:30 p.m., ESPN	Alabama vs. Texas Tech
USC vs. Texas	Holiday Bowl	Dallas, Jan. 2, 10 a.m., Fox
Pasadena, Calif., Jan. 4, 7 p.m. ABC	Oregon vs. Oklahoma	Outback Bowl
Non-BCS Schedule	San Diego, Dec. 29, 7 p.m., ESPN	Iowa vs. Florida
New Orleans Bowl	Muskegon City Bowl	Tampa, Fla., Jan. 2, 10 a.m., ESPN
Southern Mississippi	Minnesota vs. Virginia	Gator Bowl
Arkansas State 19	Nashville, Tenn., Dec. 30, 11 a.m., ESPN	Louisville vs. Va. Tech
GMAC Bowl	Sun Bowl	Jacksonville, Fla., Jan. 2,
Toledo 45, UTEP 15	UCLA vs. Northwestern	ESPN
Las Vegas Bowl	San Francisco, Dec. 30, 1 p.m., CBS	Capital Bowl
California 35, Brigham Young	Independence Bowl	Washington, D.C.
26	South Carolina vs. Missouri	Capital Bowl
	Baton Rouge, La., Dec. 3, 2:30 p.m., ESPN	Capital Bowl

Male

Continued from page 1B

In August, barely a month after he stepped into the Parisian twilight, the French sports daily L'Equipe reported that six urine samples Armstrong provided during his first Tour win in 1999 tested positive for the red blood cell booster EPO.

It was the most serious challenge to the legacy of an athlete who survived testicular cancer, which spread to his lungs and brain, to become one of the most inspirational athletes of his generation.

Armstrong angrily denied the charge, saying he felt like the victim of a "setup" in a long-standing feud with the French media.

"The latter part of the year with the rumor, that was a nightmare," Armstrong said. "Fortunately, sports fans see through it."

By September, he was happy again and announced his engagement to rocker girlfriend Sheryl Crow. But his competitive side was creeping up.

He created a stir when he said he might come out of retirement, mostly to win the Tour again in one last, grand taunt at the French. But he quickly retreated from that

idea. "It was fairly serious, but I didn't realize how much play it would get," Armstrong said. "My fault. In hindsight, I shouldn't have done it."

He isn't spending much time looking backward anymore. It's all about what lies ahead.

He founded the Lance Armstrong Foundation in 1997 and is ready to dedicate his time to lobbying for money for cancer research and survivorship programs.

"Cancer and what all can be done there, not just in the world of health care, but if it's education or political, this is a very real issue," Armstrong said. "We're at an interesting time in medical research. That would be a serious rush for me if I could effect change there."

"The initiatives to effect change will come out of the foundation," he said. "The think tank is there."

Armstrong points to rock singer Bono's lobbying for help for the world's poor and AIDS-stricken as a prime example of the power celebrity can bring to an issue.

He also realizes that battles involving politics and money could be much more difficult than anything he faced on the bike. He figures he won't be doing it alone, though, noting the 60 million "LiveStrong" yellow

bracelets the foundation has sold since 2004.

"I know not all 60 million bought them because of a connection to cancer, but a lot of them did," he said. "When you consider that army, there's a powerful force for change."

"It is a challenge," he said. "But ultimately it has a reward."

In the meantime, Armstrong is settling into a life of not having to train every day or watch everything he eats. But even that can't last too long — he's put on about 10 pounds and says that's enough because "I'm out of shape."

Two days before Christmas, he went on a two-hour mountain bike ride on his Central Texas ranch. It was on a retreat to a coastal resort in Mexico when he tried kiteboarding, something he says "I never could have done" when he was still competing.

He also recently finished shooting a cameo role in the upcoming movie "You, Me and Dupree," with Owen Wilson and Kate Hudson. Just like his spot in the movie "Dodgeball," Armstrong plays himself.

Now he says it might be time to branch out in his acting.

"No more being me," he said. "I want to play like a crazed killer, something out of 'Pulp Fiction.'"

Alamo

Continued from page 1B

ranked Wolverines gave the Cornhuskers (8-4) three straight wins to end a season for the first time since 1999.

"We've been through quite a bit of adversity this year, and to culminate this season with this type of victory feels very good," Callahan said. "It feels good and it's something we want to build on as we go into the offseason."

If Nebraska returns to national prominence next season, the Cornhuskers will remember the Alamo — especially the frantic final play that was reminiscent of the ending of the 1982 California-Stanford game where the Cardinal band stormed the field as Cal lateraled its way to victory.

Zac Taylor threw a 13-yard touchdown pass to Terrence Nunn with 4:29 left, then Nebraska survived Michigan's lateral-filled, game-ending play.

"This puts us back on the map," said Cory Ross, who ran for 161 yards.

The Huskers are 13-10 in Callahan's two seasons after beating Kansas State, Colorado and Michigan. They haven't been in the Top 25 since the end of the 2003 season.

That year saw Frank Solich get fired with a 9-3 record amid athletics director Steve Pederson's fears that the program was slipping into mediocrity.

Callahan was 5-6 last season, and the Huskers missed a bowl for the first time since 1968. After a 4-0 start this season against undistinguished competition, the Huskers found themselves 5-4 and in jeopardy of not making a bowl again.

Then came wins over Kansas State, Colorado and Michigan.

Henne threw three touchdown passes and also ran for a score. His 7-yard scramble with 11:40 left gave the Wolverines (7-5) a 28-17 lead.

But Nebraska used a long punt return and a turnover to end Michigan's season with another disappointment. The Wolverines, ranked as high as No. 3 in September, finished 7-5, with their losses coming by a combined 21 points.

"We just didn't finish," Michigan running back Mike Hart said. "That's been a problem all year."

Ross highlighted his night with a 31-yard touchdown that pulled Nebraska to 28-25 with 8:08 left. That score was set up by Cortney Grixby's 28-yard punt

return to the Michigan 38. "It was a huge hole that Greg Austin set up for me," Ross said of his touchdown. "It was there. There wasn't anything crazy I had to do other than run."

The Huskers took the lead after Henne fumbled and Ola Dagundaro returned the ball to the Michigan 17.

Three plays later, Taylor connected with Nunn for his third touchdown pass and second to Nunn.

Michigan drove to the Nebraska 18, but Zackary Bowman tipped away Henne's fourth-down pass to Mario Manningham.

"The turnovers were really monumental," said Michigan coach Lloyd Carr, whose team lost two fumbles and had an interception. "The offense was outstanding in the first half. We gave our offense some opportunities but didn't capitalize on it."

Taylor was 14-of-31 for 167 yards with two interceptions. He was sacked four times and hit hard on many other occasions.

"We don't like to see him take hits," Callahan said. "He's a courageous young man. He stays right in there in the pocket. There's flurry all around him, he stays as calm as any quarterback I've coached."

Female

Continued from page 1B

inside the ropes, adding a few more tournaments than usual, and winning at an alarming rate.

"Golf has been my savior, there's no doubt about that," she said.

Sorenstam won the first three tournaments, giving her five straight LPGA Tour victories dating to the end of 2004 to match the record set by Nancy Lopez. And when that streak ended, another began at the majors.

She lapped the field at the Kraft Nabisco Championship, winning by eight shots. She easily won the next major, the LPGA Championship, by three shots over Wie. At the time, Sorenstam had won six of her eight tournaments, and she looked unbeatable.

But her hopes of a Grand Slam evaporated in the mile-high air of Denver when Sorenstam had a three-putt bogey and a four-putt double bogey in a span of four holes in the third round. The letdown was obvious as Sorenstam went into a mini-slump during the summer, although that didn't last long.

"This year, I won some big ones," she said. "Maybe in the summer, I was a little shaky at times. But you know, I dug deeper and I came back when I needed to."

I'm very proud of that."

Despite unparalleled success, Sorenstam needed to deliver a few reminders of who rules women's golf.

She was an afterthought at the Samsung World Championship when Wie made her professional debut. With all eyes on 6-foot teen from Hawaii, Sorenstam opened with a 64 and wound up winning by eight shots.

"I want to play well when everyone is talking about someone else," she said. "I'm very competitive."

Then at the season-ending ADT Championship, 19-year-old rookie Paula Creamer challenged Sorenstam on a drop and then challenged her integrity. Sorenstam responded by zipping by the teenager over the next three days, and closing out the year with her 10th victory.

Sorenstam's game is more sound than it is spectacular, but it is no less intimidating. Her scoring average (69.33) was 1 1/2 strokes better than anyone else. While she had 10 victories, no one else had more than two. She shot under par 74 percent of the time; the next best was 55 percent.

Sorenstam and Zaharias first were mentioned together two years ago, when Sorenstam played at the Colonial and became the first woman to compete on the PGA

Tour since Zaharias in 1945.

That was the first year the 35-year-old Swede won the AP Female Athlete award, and while Sorenstam won two majors and completed the career Grand Slam that season, it seemed as though she would forever be associated with testing herself against the men.

That's no longer the case. Sorenstam is dominating golf far more than Tiger Woods has on the PGA Tour. Among the many records she set this year was becoming the first LPGA Tour player to sweep the major awards five straight years — player of the year, money title and Vare Trophy for the lowest scoring average.

"I believe people have a better overall feeling for who I am," she said. "I think they accept me and my competitive nature, after seeing me at Colonial. I am always trying to find different ways to take my game to a new level." Having flirted with the idea of early retirement, Sorenstam now has won 43 times in the last five years, and her 66 career victories have put her in range of a record few people thought would ever be touched — the 88 career victories by Kathy Whitworth.

The question now is how far she can go. Texas players say they won't be intimidated by a Trojans team that boasts two Heisman Trophy winners in Reggie Bush and Matt Leinart and is being mentioned among the great dynasties in college football history.

"I don't know why people think this game is going to scare us," said Young, who passed for 2,769 yards and 26 touchdowns and also leads the team with 850 yards rushing.

He finished second to Southern Cal tailback Push in this year's Heisman balloting.

"We're not going to be scared," Young said.

points per game. They won their first Big 12 championship since 1996.

Rose Bowl officials made several appearances at Texas games during the regular season, including the Longhorns' 52-17 drubbing of then-No. 8 Texas Tech back in October, in anticipation they would return.

Meanwhile, Texas kept an eye on the Trojans and their 34-game winning streak.

"When the rankings came out in the preseason, that's something that we thought about that would be fun to do at the end of the year," senior tight end David Thomas

Rose

Continued from page 1B

miles and three times the way. With the Trojans practicing and playing within a few miles from home for this one, the Longhorns expect a circus of celebrities and media hype around the game.

"It's going to be a Super Bowl-type atmosphere," defensive end Brian Robison said.

The Longhorns earned their Rose Bowl berth by going 12-0 for the first time in school history. They started the season ranked No. 2 and kept pace with No. 1 Southern

cool to both go undefeated and play each other."

not a part of the University of Texas."

Last-gasp shot sinks Rockets

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — The New Orleans Hornets got enough balance throughout their lineup to beat Tracy McGrady and the Houston Rockets — barely.

David West was one of six players in double figures and made a jumper with 1.8 seconds remaining in the Hornets' 92-90 victory Wednesday night.

"I knew I was going to get that shot. It's a shot I've made before many times," said West, who had 15 points. "I took my time and hit it."

McGrady scored a season-best 38 and Stromile Swift had season highs with 26 points and 13 rebounds, but the Rockets lost their fourth straight.

Wesley, who rotated over to defend West's shot, said the Rockets wanted to make the

Hornets take a jump shot and not allow the ball inside.

"I can't see us defending it any differently," Wesley said.

J.R. Smith led the Hornets with 16, Rasual Butler had 15 — 13 in the fourth quarter — and Desmond Mason scored 13. Speedy Claxton had 14, and rookie Chris Paul scored 11 and added a career-high 15 assists, including on the game-winner by West.

Butler, averaging just 5.3 points, hit three straight 3-pointers during a 13-1 run that gave the Hornets an 86-77 lead with 4:12 to play.

He added another jumper with 2:22 left for a 90-84 advantage.

"After I hit my first couple of shots, I knew I had it going a little bit," Butler said.

The Rockets tied it at 90 on two free throws by McGrady with 12 seconds remaining. New Orleans went without a timeout and Paul drove and found West open for his jumper.

"In the fourth quarter, we really showed our resilience and our confidence in one another," Hornets coach Byron Scott said.

The Hornets forced the tempo in building a 12-point first-quarter lead and led by as many as 11 with about 5 minutes left in the second quarter.

McGrady and David Wesley led a run that allowed Houston to cut the margin to 51-47 at halftime.

McGrady and Swift helped the Rockets open a nine-point lead late in the third, when the Hornets were unable to play their preferred faster pace.



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Tomorrow's Horoscope

BY HOLIDAY MATHIS

The Sagittarius moon is largely in shadow — tomorrow brings the new moon in Capricorn. Also in shadow are some of our emotions. The gap between what happens and our reaction to it is larger than usual. We need time to process feelings and also time to ignore them in favor of dealing with a task that is demanding attention.

ARIES (March 21-April 19). It's funny how you're always able to attract attention just when you want to be left alone. Use that principle to your advantage. Gain control of your powers of attraction by being aloof.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20). Personal questions persist. Ask your heart, and it will answer you with a hunch, a telling mental image or an uncomfortable feeling in your body. This is the way your heart talks to you, telling you the truth of a situation.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21). Adventure continues to keep you on your toes. You could even get addicted to the action-packed pace. Eliminate the existing energy drains in your life in time to take advantage of a dynamite opportunity coming your way.

CANCER (June 22-July 22). The stars favor your nonconformity. You're romantic when you're supposed to be practical, passionate when level-headedness is all around you. Your way gets results.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22). Last night's dreams were mad! Your subconscious works in the funniest ways. But your brain must know what it's doing — today you're much more in touch with what's right for you and

how to go about accomplishing it.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22). Finances improve with the help of an outside party. Also, you'll get terrific ideas while out walking — it's as if someone is whispering them in your ear. Believe what you hear.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 23). Financial matters improve. You're not exactly soaking in a hot tub of \$20s, but the future is bright. Twenty-dollar bills aren't really sanitary, anyway. A friend helps plan for this windfall.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 21). Your typical approach simply won't work in your current atypical relationship problem (and expecting it to be futile). Change tactics to change another's behavior.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21). Your admiration is reciprocated — ask out that special someone. If there is no one you are interested in at this time, it's a rare time indeed! Are you being honest with your heart?

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19). A situation that feels crucial is not such a crisis after all. Think of it more as an "incipient crossroads." Thoughtful decisions are the norm for you, but now it's time to go with your gut.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18). Fairy tales can come true, it can happen to you ... or to your best friend. Instead of being overly generous with what is rightfully yours, stake your claim.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20). To bad you can't learn other people's lessons for them! Alas, running interference for someone else only delays his or her mastery of life skills for dealing with adversity.

CANCER 2006 ASTROLOGICAL HIGHLIGHTS: Childhood returns! It's your year to get back the magic, the dreams and the big ideas about what you're going to be when you "grow up." Spend the next three weeks brainstorming every chance you get about the changes you're going to make. By February you are able to lay a foundation or take a first step toward that fanciful, foolish, utterly immature and totally-worth-doing endeavor!

New friends in March could include a romantic tie that keeps you guessing. The sweet way you show your affection brings adoration. But don't be too available either. Your work needs you, and besides, you're more attractive when also very in love with a project, hobby or cause. Your family is an interesting group, to be sure. In July, loved ones are in the public eye, and you have a chance to be, too. Also, you contribute to your legacy in some very significant way. Some form of birth figures into the equation. This could be an actual child or the launch of a business, birth of a brilliant plan, invention or work of art. From a financial standpoint, the best time to invest is now, in July and in November.

CELEBRITY PROFILES: Morning news stalwart Katie Couric possesses an innate warmth and power that makes all her interview subjects — and her millions of fans — respond freely to her. A fearless Capricorn who will not stop until she reaches the top of her game, Couric will soon make the leap from daytime to the male-dominated world of nighttime network news.

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THURSDAY

Table with 16 columns (WFAA, KMD, UNI, KPEJ, KOSA, KTLT, KWES, WTBS, KMLM, KOCY, DISC, AMC, SPIKE, TNT, BET, DISN, ESPN2, ESPN, SCIFI) and 7 rows (6-12 PM) listing TV programs and channels.

DENNIS THE MENACE



OH, HI, MRS. MITCHELL. DENNIS COULDN'T FIND HIS DOCTOR KIT, SO WE'RE PLAYING PSYCHIATRIST INSTEAD.

THE FAMILY CIRCUS

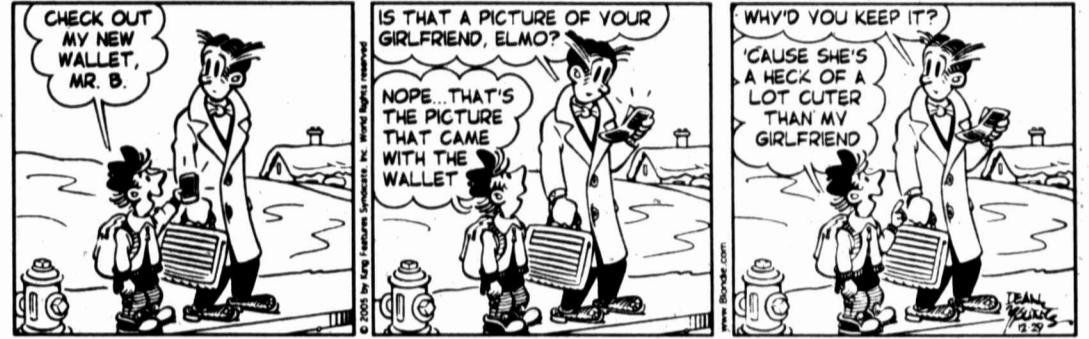


"I'm not sure I'd be any good at that."

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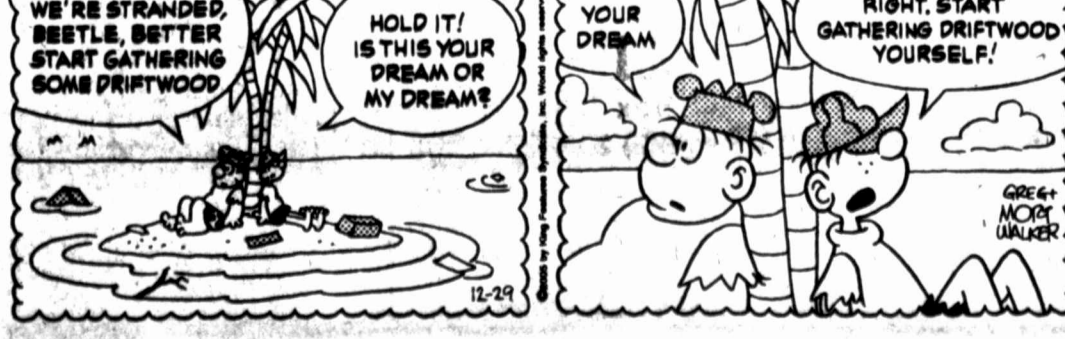
THE OTHER COAST



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This Date In History

Today is Thursday, Dec. 29, the 363rd day of 2005. There are two days left in the year. Today's Highlight in History: On Dec. 29, 1845, Texas was admitted as the 28th state. On this date: In 1170, Archbishop Thomas Becket was murdered in Canterbury Cathedral in England. In 1813, the British burned Buffalo, N.Y., during the War of 1812. In 1851, the first American Young Men's Christian Association was organized, in Boston. In 1890, the Wounded Knee massacre took place in South Dakota as some 300 Sioux Indians were killed by U.S. troops sent to disarm them. In 1913, the first movie serial, "The Adventures of Kathlyn," premiered in Chicago. In 1934, Japan renounced the Washington Naval

Treaty of 1922 and the London Naval Treaty of 1930. In 1940, during World War II, Germany began dropping incendiary bombs on London. In 1975, a bomb exploded in the main terminal of New York's LaGuardia Airport, killing 11 people. In 1989, playwright Vaclav Havel was elected president of Czechoslovakia by the country's Federal Assembly, becoming the first non-Communist to attain the post in more than four decades. One year ago: President Bush assembled a four-nation coalition to organize humanitarian relief for Asia and made clear the United States would help bankroll long-term rebuilding in the region leveled by a massive earthquake and tsunamis. Today's Birthdays: Actress Inga Swenson is 73. ABC newscaster Tom Jarriel is 71. Actress Mary Tyler Moore is 68. Actor Jon Voight is 67. Country singer Ed Bruce is 65. Rock musician Ray Thomas is 64. Singer Marianne Faithfull is 59. Jockey Laffit Pincay Jr. is 59. Actor Ted Danson is

58. Actress Patricia Clarkson is 46. Comedian Paula Poundstone is 46. Rock singer-musician Jim Reid (The Jesus and Mary Chain) is 44. Actor-comedian Myro Clark is 39. Actor Jason Gould is 39. Movie director Andy Wachowski is 38. Actress Jennifer Ehle is 36. Rock singer-musician Glen Phillips is 35. Actor Kevin Weisman is 35. Actor Jude Law is 33. Rapper Pimp C is 32. Actor Mekhi Phifer is 31. Actor Shawn Hatosy is 30. Actor Diego Luna is 26. Country singer Jessica Andrews is 22. Thought for Today: "The wise man must be wise before, not after." — Epicharmus, Sicilian Greek comic poet (? - c.450 B.C.)

Answer to previous puzzle

Crossword puzzle grid with letters filled in.

Newsday Crossword HIGH SCHOOL DAYS by Randall J. Hartman Edited by Stanley Newman www.stanxwords.com

- ACROSS: 1 Astonishes, 5 Trips around the track, 9 Take action at an auction, 14 "I smell ___!", 15 Nautical adverb, 16 Casual, 17 Kicking back, 18 Wherever you are, 19 Hosni's predecessor, 20 AARP member, 23 Prominent pachyderm feature, 24 Traditional knowledge, 25 Pollen spreader, 28 Former JFK visitor, 29 Pose a poser, 32 Permission, 34 Cast forth, 37 Mauna Loa output, 38 Future first-stringers, 42 Himalayan legend, 43 Uprising, 44 Folk-blues singer, 47 Rolling Stones label, 48 Vermont hrs., 51 Hr. fraction, 52 Scandinavian capital, 55 Donnybrook, 57 Second-year pro's bad luck, 61 Computer command, 63 Renown, 64 Annual checkup, 65 Amadeus star, 66 Compared to, 67 Give as a reference, 68 Ghosts writer, 69 Sensible, 70 Jurassic Park beast, 7 Be responsible for, 9 Raging fires, 10 Actress Skye, 11 Jazz magazine, 12 NAFTA, 13 ___ capita income, 21 Giraffe cousin, 22 Writer Levin, 26 Green feeling, 27 LAX info, 30 Sign of success, 31 The King and I actress, 33 Skirt feature, 34 Bad mood, 35 "___ Maria", 36 Letterman nickname, 38 Luke Skywalker, for one, 39 Spoon, fork and knife, 40 CD-___, 41 Gunky stuff, 42 ___ Kippur, 45 Billboard list, 46 Bat wood, 48 Magic potion, 49 Capitol group, 50 Spicy cuisine, 53 Art workshops, often, 54 Cornhusker State city, 56 Throw out, 58 Without repetition, 59 Middle East sultanate, 60 Russo of Tin Cup, 61 Upsilon follower, 62 Difficulty

Crossword puzzle grid with numbers 1-70.

That's Racin'

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Making headlines

Reviewing the top-five news stories of the season

By DAVID POOLE
Knight Ridder Newspapers

What was the biggest story in NASCAR in 2005? There were several candidates for that position, but when it came down to making that call we wound up really considering only two.

One involved a driver who seemingly reinvented the part of himself that even he knew needed work. The other involved a car owner who seemingly reinvented the definition for success for the sport's multiracial teams.

Who got the call? Read on in this second of our two-part review of the season's top stories.

5. 10 - (8 + 24) = UH OH

Neither Jeff Gordon, driver of the No. 24 Chevrolets, nor Dale Earnhardt Jr., in the No. 8 Chevys, made the 10-driver Chase for the Nextel Cup, leaving NASCAR without its two most popular competitors in the 10-race championship "playoff."

This, of course, was not NASCAR's fault. But it was still the sport's problem.

Gordon won three of the season's first nine races. But then he went into the worst slide of his career. Gordon averaged a finish of 30.3 in a six-race stretch beginning at Richmond in May, the worst average finish in any six-race stretch in his career.

He still had a chance to slip into the top 10 in the 26th race at Richmond, but finished a desultory 30th. Gordon did rally behind new crew chief Steve Letarte with four top-10 finishes, including another win at Martinsville, in the season's final five races to try to build some momentum for 2006.

A crew chief change certainly seemed to knock Earnhardt Jr. off course, too. He began 2005 with Pete Rondeau on the pit box after a swap of teams within Dale Earnhardt Inc., Earnhardt made it into the top 10 briefly with four top-10 finishes in a six-race stretch in the spring, but fell to 18th after a 42nd-place finish at Sonoma and never got back, despite winning a race at Chicagoland Speedway in July.

Fans of other drivers don't like to hear that it's important to the sport for Gordon and Earnhardt Jr. to be in the competitive mix, but that doesn't make it any less true.

4. CALL HIM "FLIPPER"

Carl Edwards showed signs of promise when he ran 12 Nextel Cup races at the end of the 2004 season, but nobody could have expected all he managed to accomplish in 2005.

Edwards won four Cup races in his first full season on the circuit, made the Chase and finished third in the standings, just 35 points behind champion Tony Stewart. Edwards, 26, also won five races and rookie of the year honors in the Busch Series.

Along with all of that, Edwards' upbeat attitude and infectious enthusiasm made him a lot of fans and helped new sponsor Office Depot get a warm and successful welcome into the sport.

Edwards' back flips off the doorsill of his



ROB GOEBEL/KRT
Tony Stewart climbed the infield fence after winning the Allstate 400 in August.

car after a victory wouldn't come off as good as they do if they didn't fit right in with the exuberance he shows after enjoying success. Edwards wasn't perfect — he got a little too aggressive for some of his fellow competitors at times — but if he keeps improving at the rate he did in 2005, look out.

3. LAWYERS, CONTRACTS AND AGENTS. OH, MY!

Jamie McMurray said he'd go from Chip Ganassi Racing to Roush Racing no later than 2007. Kurt Busch said he'll go from Roush to Ganassi under the same timetable. Both make it clear they'd like to move sooner, and that's how it happens.

As the business of NASCAR gets bigger, contracts that bind drivers to teams become more relevant. It used to be that contracts were informal, at best. Then, there was a time when the owners seemed to hold almost all of the cards in making the deals.

Now, drivers are hiring people to work — and rework — their deals for them. Agents are nothing new in professional sports, of course, but only recently has their influence become as strong in NASCAR.

2. TONY LITE

It's been said before, but the great irony of the 2005 Nextel Cup season was Tony Stewart climbing fences to celebrate victories with fans.

Not because, as Stewart put it, he's "too old and too fat to be climbing fences." Because until 2005, it seemed Stewart's attitude mostly put barriers between himself and the fans. They haven't all been torn down, but now Stewart is at least trying to get over them occasionally.

There are things about Stewart that haven't changed since he won his first title in 2002. He's still an incredibly gifted driver to whom competing is just as necessary and to whom winning is no less important than breathing. He still has strong opinions about how things ought to be regardless of whether custom and convention dictate otherwise.

What changed is that Stewart relocated a part of himself that he'd been cut off from. He spends more of his time away from the track now in his hometown of Columbus, Ind., liv-

ing in the house he grew up in. That Tony Stewart, the kid who grew up racing go-karts and dreaming of winning at Indianapolis Motor Speedway, is once again part of the picture that Stewart presents to the public.

If what grows out of that is more of the maturity and balance showed in 2005, his second career title could be just the start of a Stewart era in NASCAR.

1. ALL JACKED UP

Notwithstanding Stewart's consistent excellence, with 19 top-10 finishes in the season's final 22 races, the year's biggest news was made by the people he beat in the Chase for the Nextel Cup.

Roush Racing put all five of its teams in the Chase, a signature accomplishment in an era when multiracial teams define stock-car racing's top series.

Greg Biffle's emergence as a championship contender began early in the season, and Carl Edwards won two of the final four races to charge back into the hunt late. They wound up tied, 35 points behind Stewart, with Biffle getting second for the season because he won six races to four for Edwards.

Cars owned by Jack Roush swept the top four spots in the season's final race at Homestead-Miami Speedway, with Biffle edging Mark Martin for the team's 15th race victory of the year. Martin, who won a points race at Kansas and the Nextel All-Star Challenge, finished fourth in the final standings. Matt Kenseth won one race and was seventh in the standings. Kurt Busch won three races and finished 10th after being suspended for the season's final two races. Busch's team finished eighth in car owner points — giving Roush five of the season's top eight teams.

Roush cars had 61 top-five and 93 top-10 finishes in 180 races entered. The five teams collected a total of nearly \$38 million in official winnings.

Carl Edwards

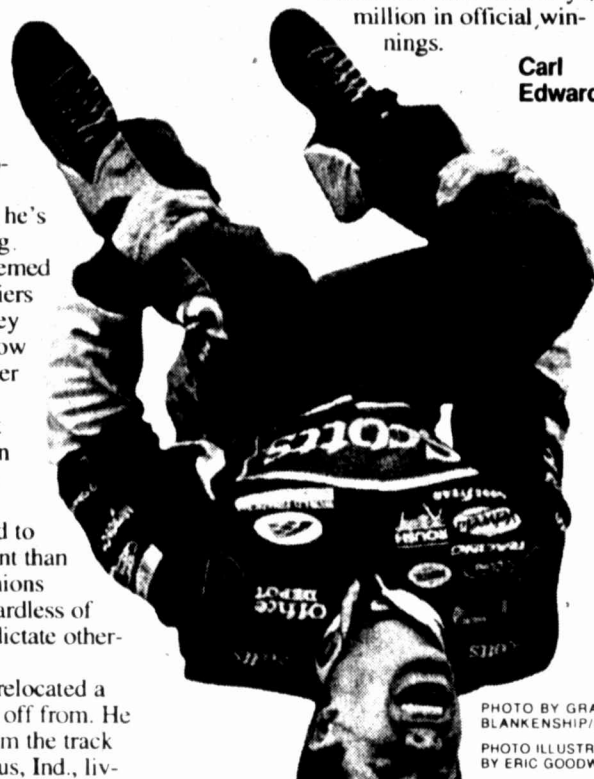


PHOTO BY GRANT BLANKENSHIP/KRT
PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY ERIC GOODWIN/KRT



Gifts motorsports fans of all kinds would enjoy

If I were truly Santa Claus, and not just someone sadly well qualified to be his stunt double, here's what I would have left on my journey around the motorsports world:

■ For fans of all racing, a done deal with all sponsors on board to allow Tony Stewart and Danica Patrick to spread their racing wings.

Stewart gets a chance to pursue his dream of winning the Indianapolis 500, driving a car fielded by the Rahal-Letterman team Patrick drives for in the IndyCar Series. Joe Gibbs Racing lets Stewart miss the start of the Coca-Cola 600, if necessary, with him starting the 600 whenever he gets there to gain what points he can. He could still make the Chase for the Nextel Cup anyway.

In return, Patrick drives a stock car prepared by the Gibbs team in the Nextel Cup race at Chicagoland Speedway on July 9. The IndyCar series does not have an event

that weekend. The Home Depot sponsors the whole deal.

■ For NASCAR chairman Brian France, all rights to my idea of giving drivers a 500-point bonus for his first victory in the 26-race "regular season" and again in the Chase. As long as that's an idea somebody outside of NASCAR came up with, it's got no chance. But the "Poole Rule" really would put more emphasis back on winning races and fix most of what's wrong with the Chase, which is still better than what came before it.

So from now on, it's officially the France Rule.

■ For Kansas City, Atlanta and Charlotte, a decision on the NASCAR Hall of Fame. I know I've said it was a done deal for Kansas City. Three months ago, that's how it seemed to me and a lot of others in the sport. But I honestly think it since has become a legitimate three-

horse race.

All of the ties with the France family that originally had the decision tipping toward Kansas are still there, but the corporate money behind Atlanta's bid and the fact that Charlotte just makes so dang much sense make for compelling cases, too.

A decision has been promised for the first quarter of 2006. Well, my birthday is in March.

■ For ESPN, the courage to push NASCAR to move Darlington Raceway's Cup date back to Labor Day weekend. When ESPN returns in 2007, wouldn't it be a great if the Southern 500 came back with it? California's second race goes into the Chase and Kansas gets a second Cup race where Darlington is now in May, so NASCAR isn't tempted to make the idiotic call to move the all-star race there.

A track that now has a Chase date would lose it. I think that's going to happen anyway. At least if the Southern 500 returns it won't be totally in vain.

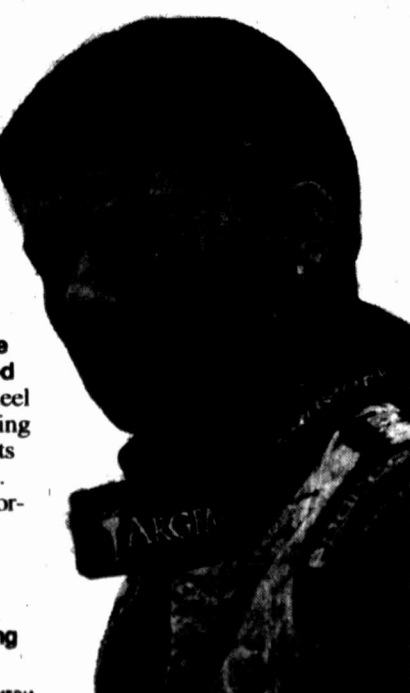
■ Petty Enterprises fans? Nothing.

They've already got their gift for the year — hope. Driver Bobby Labonte and crew chief Todd Parrott tested the No. 43 car at Kentucky Speedway last week. With team manager Robbie Loomis on the case, too, there's more reason for optimism among Petty fans than there has been in a long time.

■ In drag racing, lumps of coal for the people standing in the way of Bruton Smith's desire to purchase the National Hot Rod Association. As long as open-wheel racing keeps squabbling, drag racing has an opportunity to strengthen its position in American motorsports. But that window won't be open forever.

David Poole believes that racing fans would love to see Danica Patrick run a Nextel Cup race in exchange for Tony Stewart running in the Indianapolis 500.

PHIL SEDGWICK/WICK MEDIA



PHIL SEDGWICK/WICK MEDIA

PHIL SEDGWICK/WICK MEDIA

POLL POSITION

THIS WEEK'S QUESTION

Which Cup team has made the best moves in gearing up for the 2006 season?

Cast your vote at:

www.thatstracin.com

LAST WEEK'S QUESTION

What is on your holiday wish list for NASCAR this year?

Number of votes: 4,496

Driver	No. of votes	Percent
A championship for my favorite driver/team.	1,930	43%
A safe and competitive 2006.	1,087	24%
A stable set of rules.	1,051	23%
A win for my favorite driver/team.	308	7%
A decent run for my favorite driver/team.	120	3%

STOP 'N' GO

Kvapil replaces Hamilton Jr. at PPI

Travis Kvapil, who recently lost his Nextel Cup ride when Penske Racing South folded its No. 77 team, was named last week as the new driver for the PPI Motorsports No. 32 Chevrolet for the 2006 Cup season.

Kvapil, the 2003 NASCAR Truck Series champion, replaces Bobby Hamilton Jr., who spent the 2005 season and part of 2004 with the Cal Wells III-owned team based in Hickory, N.C.

"I believe (Travis) will be a strong addition to our organization, especially under the tutelage of crew chief James Ince," Wells said. "The two of them, along with the new crew we have assembled, have the ability to reach the goals set forth by this organization."

"We have experienced some unfortunate setbacks over the last two seasons, and I am determined to get PPI Motorsports back in contention for race victories in 2006."

Hamilton Jr. was not immediately available for comment. He has said repeatedly he had one year remaining on his contract with PPI.

"I want to thank Bobby for his efforts over the past year-and-a-half," Wells said. "I wish Bobby nothing but the best as he pursues his options for next season."

Kvapil, a native of Janesville, Wis., had two top-10 finishes with Penske's No. 77 Dodge team this season while competing for rookie of the year honors.

Since joining the Cup series in 2000, PPI has two wins, three poles, 10 top-fives and 26 top-10 finishes. The team also owns multiple titles and victories in off-road and open-wheel racing.

— Jim Utter



Travis Kvapil will drive the No. 32 car for PPI Motorsports next season.

Kyle Busch to race Busch Series in 2006

Lowe's and Hendrick Motorsports recently announced Nextel Cup driver Kyle Busch will drive the No. 5 Lowe's Chevrolet in every NASCAR Busch Series race in 2006.

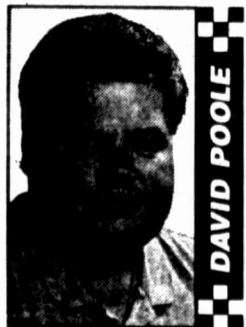
"It's good to be back in the Lowe's Chevrolet and back full time in the Busch Series," said Busch, who was named the series' rookie of the year and finished second in the championship standings in 2004.

The 20-year-old's six career Busch Series victories have all come in the No. 5 Lowe's Chevrolet, including a win at Lowe's Motor Speedway in May. Busch drove a partial Busch schedule last season while competing full time in the Nextel Cup Series, where he won twice and claimed Rookie of the Year honors.

Busch will continue in the No. 5 NASCAR Nextel Cup Series car in addition to his new Busch Series duties for Hendrick Motorsports.

Chad Walter, who was named as crew chief of the No. 5 team in September, will return to lead the No. 5 team in what will be its fifth season of Busch Series competition.

— That'sRacin.com



DAVID POOLE

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