

Will the U.S. Olympic men's basketball team win gold?

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A medaling bunch

In the history of the Summer Olympics, four athletes - three men and one woman - share the record of having won the most gold medals (9) in the Summer Games:

ATHLETE	SPORT
Carl Lewis	Track & Field
Mark Spitz	Aquatics
Paavo Nurmi	Track & Field
Larissa Latynina	Gymnastics

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SECTION C



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AP / EUGENE HOSHIKO

Kobe Bryant and the U.S. basketball team, playing against Australia, have much to prove in the Olympics.

U.S. has a lot to lose if it's not as good as gold

The Olympics begin this weekend, and perhaps no team has more pressure on it than the United States basketball squad.

BILL REYNOLDS



Kobe. LeBron. Dwyane Wade. Jason Kidd. Carmelo Anthony. Coach K. All of them. They have everything to lose, not just the gold medal.

They are supposed to be the best players in the world. They also live in that intersection where fame

meets celebrity, thus they are not just basketball players, as financially rewarding as that might be. They are cultural icons, the reason they are in endless commercials and have the kind of cachet that makes them known around the world.

They also are supposed to be the best American players in the American game, right?

The game that not only was invented here, but the game that we've brought to the rest of the world for decades now.

But this is not 1992, and this is not the Dream Team, back when Bird, Magic, Michael and the rest of the gang went to Barcelona and

played glorified exhibition games against teams that all but genuflected before them, and then wanted autographs afterward.

Those days are as gone as Bird's career.

Basketball is no longer as American as Thanksgiving, and we no longer dominate it the way we once did. The 2000 Olympics, eight years after the Dream Team, was the first clue. The U.S. Team, composed of NBA players, beat Lithuania by only two points and then topped France by 10 in the finals in a close game.

Lithuania? France? What exactly in the name of

James Naismith was going on?

The basketball world was changing, that's what.

The first cataclysmic sign of that happened two years later — in Indianapolis, of all places — when the U.S. Team came in sixth in the World Championships. Sixth. That ignominious performance was followed by the Olympics in Athens in 2004, in which we got crushed by Puerto Rico in the opening round, then were eliminated in the semi-finals by Argentina and came home with the bronze medal.

Say it wasn't so, Bill Russell.

SEE REYNOLDS, C3

NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS

All hands on deck

C.J. Jones needs to step forward in tonight's exhibition game

BY SHALISE MANZA YOUNG
JOURNAL SPORTS WRITER

FOXBORO — Preseason games can be make-or-break time for a player like C.J. Jones.

A receiver who has never quite caught on in the NFL, Jones spent all of last year on the New England Patriots' practice squad and has looked good in training camp thus far.

But the Patriots have some guys named Moss, Welker and Gaffney at receiver, leaving precious few spots for a player like Jones.

The Packers reportedly have traded Brett Favre to the Jets. Story, Page C2

Beginning tonight against the Baltimore Ravens (7:30, Gillette Stadium), Jones and some of the others players on the bubble for New England will get the chance to show the coaching staff whether they have what it takes to make the cut on Aug. 30, when teams must name their 53-man roster.

"I'm just trying to come out and make some plays, make sure I'm doing my job and just come out and have a good game," Jones said this week. "I hope (to) come out injury-free and hope everything comes out well."

The Patriots have 18 training camp sessions under their belt, and coach Bill Belichick and his staff certainly grade players on those. But preseason games give a different, and sometimes more meaningful, means of evaluation.

"I couldn't put a percentage on it, but they are important," Belichick said. "It is a composite of all the practices and the games. Certainly the games carry a lot of weight. ... You put it all together. Some players practice better than they play, and some players play better than they practice. I don't want to minimize the 18 practices we've had out here and say 'well, they don't mean anything.' They mean a lot, but the games mean a lot as well."

While Jones is certainly aware that for him, these games are akin to the Super Bowl, he said he won't be putting extra emphasis on them.

"I just go out and play. I don't even think about depth chart," he said. "When I get a chance, an opportunity to go out, I just make the plays and hope it's a good play and make sure I know my plays so I can play fast and just help the team."

Playing fast is something Jones has been working on, thanks to Randy Moss.

"He's a good teacher. He's a real good teacher," Jones said. "He shows us a lot — in the meeting rooms, on the [blackboard]. He knows the plays. We have these little games we play with the routes and stuff like that, and if you don't know it he'll make sure you know it."

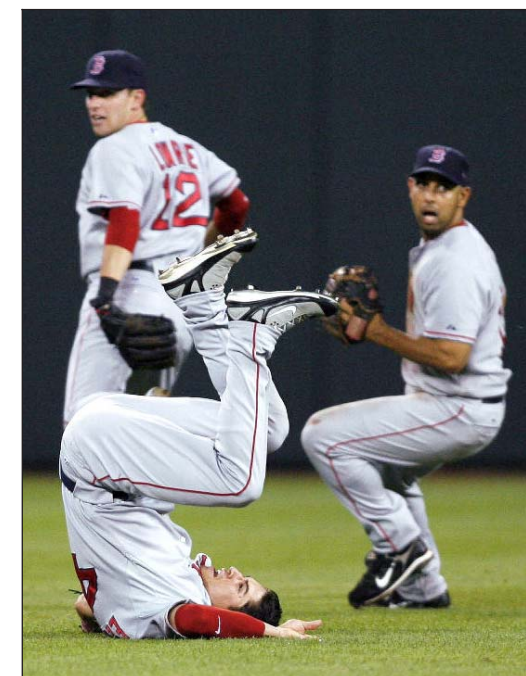
SEE PATRIOTS, C2



THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / GRETCHEN ERTL

Patriots free-agent wide receiver C.J. Jones hauls in a pass out of the reach of cornerback Mike Richardson during a recent practice at Foxboro.

RED SOX



AP / ED ZURGA

Red Sox center fielder Jacoby Ellsbury tumbles after making a spectacular catch in the fifth inning last night.

Bats have Wakefield's back at last

Boston finally comes through with some run support for hard-luck starter Tim Wakefield, who subdues the Royals in the series finale.

BY SEAN McADAM
JOURNAL SPORTS WRITER

KANSAS CITY — Quality starts and pats on the back are nice, but Tim Wakefield is like anyone else — he'd like a win for his troubles once in a while.

For much of the year, they've been tough to come by. Wakefield went into last night with a more-than-respectable ERA (3.77), 15 quality starts and the fourth-lowest batting average against in the American League.

What he didn't have much of were victories — just six in 22 outings — a number that in no way reflected how well he's pitched this year.

So it was fitting, finally, that the Sox erupted for eight runs in the span of three innings to give Wakefield an 8-2 win over the Kansas City Royals and a relatively fret-free night.

"He's pitched so well," said Terry Francona in praising his veteran knuckleballer. "But you're human — the guy's been giving everything he has. I think everybody in the dugout was happy" when they got runs for him.

Even that took a while, however. While Wakefield was limiting the Royals to one hit over the first four innings and retiring 12 of the first 13 hitters he faced, the Sox weren't doing much against Royals starter Luke Hochevar.

Boston loaded the bases with one out in the first, but Mike Lowell lined into an inning-ending double play and Sox then mustered just one hit over the next three innings.

But in the fifth, they broke through. With Alex Cora (single) and J.D. Drew aboard, Jed Lowrie drilled a booming double over the head

RED SOX	8
ROYALS	2
NEXT GAME	
Tomorrow at Chicago	
8:11 p.m.	

SEE RED SOX, C5