

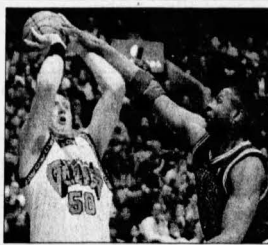
STAR SPORTS

TOP OF THE NEWS:

Grizzlies end losing streak

Bryant "Big Country" Reeves scored a career-high 28 points to end Vancouver's 23-game losing streak. Here he shoots over Minnesota's Andrew Lang in the Grizzlies' 105-103 win.

PISTONS WIN, page E3



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E SECTION

THURSDAY, APRIL 4, 1996

BASEBALL

From sandlots to lugnuts

Windsor pitcher Justin Adam is a Lansing Lugnut. The team's nickname and mascot may be amusing but Adam is very serious about his pro aspirations.

There are worse things in life than being called a Lugnut. The path to that distinction for Justin Adam began on the Little League sandlots of South Windsor.

It wound through three summers as a member of the Windsor Selects under the discriminating eye of Fr. Ron Cullen.

It culminates Friday at a Class A professional baseball opener before an anticipated 12,500 witnesses inside a brand new stadium.

Adam's a Lansing Lugnut. And sounding, because of it, like he has the patent on enthusiasm. "I'm really excited. Can't wait," says the 21-year-old right-handed pitcher. "It's a new team. A new park. It's a pretty big deal out there. Almost like they think we're big leaguers coming in. The name's a little weird, but it's catching on. Being a part of it all is great."

Adam isn't so far removed from finding out how it feels to be a real big leaguer.

He was Kansas City's seventh round draft choice in 1992. His rookie-league teammates included Johnny Damon and Jim Pittsley. Both are on the Royals' top roster.



LOYD McLACHLAN
SPORTS COLUMNIST

"Damon's going to be a star. Pittsley's rehabbing on the disabled list right now, but he's their top pitching prospect."

"You know those guys, you played on the same team with them and you think to yourself, there wasn't that much difference in talent."

"It makes you believe there's a good chance you can make it too."

A little better luck, and Adam might already be farther along the road to the majors. He's had setbacks. Break injuries that stalled his progress frustrated him.

This is the start of his fifth year in pro ball, but only his first on a full-season squad.

In 1993, he broke his left ankle playing pickup basketball.

A year later, trying to put some extra snap on a curve ball during a game, he damaged his right elbow.

"Believe it or not, both injuries happened on exactly the same day a year apart, June 6."

"I've had some adversity but right now I'm only looking at what's ahead of me, the things I can control. I'm looking at this year as being a pivotal one for me."

Pitching in the Pacific Northwest last summer, Adam finished strongly after the organization switched him from a starting assignment to relief. In his final 25 innings, he allowed two earned runs.

Lugnugs bulge

At the outset in Lansing, he'll be posted in the bullpen.

"Not a big deal for me," he reflects. "I expected it after pitching well in that role late last year."

"I want to do the best I can however they decide to use me. If you do well, they're going to move you up through the system quickly."

Adam left early for spring training, hoping extra work would benefit his arm. It worked. He felt strong early in camp.

"I wanted to make a full season roster, and take it from there."

"I worked on my location, and on a slider to use as a strikeout pitch. It came around really well."

The Royals implemented a new weight-training program throughout their system. Adam's a six-three, 190-pound believer, trusting the regular workouts will help him maintain strength and guard against a breakdown during the first 140 game test of his career.

Special test

It's a special test eagerly awaited by a happy Lugnut out of Windsor.

"Pitching this close to home is going to be a great atmosphere for me to show people what I can do," he says.

"I've been at it a while, but I don't think people here have seen or heard very much about me."

"This is like being right in my own backyard."

Lloyd McLachlan's column normally appears Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday.



Lugnut, the mascot

NHL

Leafs caught napping again

By Larry Scisnicki
Southern Newspapers
TORONTO

It's back to the drawing board for the Toronto Maple Leafs. After scoring to early leads en route to three wins on the road, the suddenly anemic Leafs spotted the Chicago Blackhawks the early 2-0 lead and reminded themselves: It's better to send the pace than chase.

Leafs fought back to a 2-2 tie before Murray Craven put the game away with a pair of goals inside five minutes over the second and third period.

Craven's second goal, with the tardy Leafs caught napping on a line change at 1:05 of the third, was a beauty. Sent over the Toronto blueline on a lead pass by Joe Murphy, the speedster split the defence before rifling a shot to the roof of the net for a 4-2 lead.

Probert scores

Windsor native Bob Probert scored an empty netter to make it 5-2.

It was all the Hawks needed to end their division rival's modest three-game winning streak. But home is where the heat is for the Leafs. They managed just 11 shots on goal in the first 30 minutes — including only one over a 20-minute stint midway through the game — to suffer their third consecutive loss at home.

A flurry of first period goals, including three in the opening five minutes of

MAPLE LEAFS PREVIEW

Toronto at St. Louis
(630 CFCA-AM)
WHAT: Will meet for fifth time
WHEN: 8:30 p.m. tonight
SERIES: Leafs lead 2-1-1.

ST. LOUIS (39-26-12, third in Central Division): Blues are winless in three (0-1-2) and have won just two of their last eight on home ice... Geoff Courtnall is 2-2-5 against the Leafs this season... Brett Hull has 47-34-81 totals in 54 games against the Leafs.

TORONTO (31-35-12, fourth in Central Division): Leafs are 1-0-1 at St. Louis, winning 4-3 on Dec. 30 on Mats Sundin's overtime goal... Only three of seven goal scorers against St. Louis — Sundin, Larry Murphy and captain Doug Gilmour — are still with the team. The other four — Dave Andreychuk, Benoit Hogue, Paul DiPietro and Ken Baumgartner — have either been traded or sent down.

play saw the game quickly transformed into a weary defensive contest in which the Leafs remain winless against the Hawks at the Gardens this season.

With the Leafs missing Dave Gagner (concussion-Edmonton) and the Hawks minus sparkplug Jeremy

Roenick (ankle-Anaheim), Toronto ended 74 minutes of scoreless hockey by the home team at the Gardens when Kirk Muller tip a pass by Ed Belfour at 4:41 of the first period.

It was Muller's first goal in nine games. He last scored against Calgary 25 days ago.

The teams played to a 2-2 tie in the first period. The Hawks regained a 3-2 lead after 40 minutes.

Larry Murphy had the other Leaf goal. Also scoring for the Hawks were Chris Chelios and Joe Murphy.

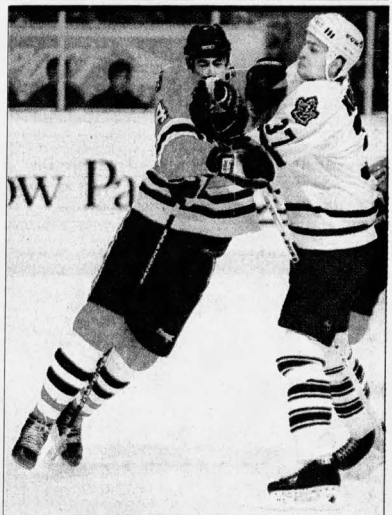
Blitzing Hawks

In the first period, the blitzing Hawks set the Leafs on their heels early with a lucky goal that darted in off Todd Wariner's pad by a startled Felix Potvin 55 seconds into the game. Chelios was attempting a thigh-high pass from the left side of the face-off circle.

Chicago went up 2-0 when Murphy, tipped Gary Suter's shot from the point under the goalie for a powerplay goal and a 2-0 lead at 3:17.

Outplayed early, the Leafs had more shots on the power play than a regular shift (2-to-1) in the first 10 minutes as Nick Kyrense drew the Hawks into a pair of penalties. Muller's long deflection of a cross-ice pass by Todd Gill eluded Belfour on the powerplay as he made it 2-1 at 4:41.

Hamilton Spectator



Toronto Maple Leafs left winger Mark Kolesar (37) collides with Chicago Blackhawks defenseman Keith Carney (4) during first period NHL action in Toronto Wednesday night. "When you get lessons are being learned and then they rise up again in a negative fashion, yeah, it's bothersome," said Toronto coach Nick Beverley of the Leafs' 5-2 loss against the Blackhawks. "The key word is discipline. Mental discipline."

Canadian Press photo: Frank Ours

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