

THE SPORTIER

Oral Roberts: History Made

As the famous saying goes, "All good things must come to an end." America's team, 15-seeded Oral Roberts University, saw their historic run come to an end. The 2020-21 Oral Roberts Golden Eagles were just the second 15-seed to make the Sweet Sixteen round of the NCAA Tournament after defeating 7-seeded Florida last weekend. Erasing an 11-point deficit, the Golden Eagles were led by their two stars, forward Kevin Obanor (28 points, 11 rebounds) and Max Abmas (26 points, 7 assists) in their comeback victory. The previous (and first) 15-seed to make it to the Sweet Sixteen was the 2012-13 Florida Gulf Coast Eagles. Dubbed "Dunk City," FGCU defeated 2-seeded Georgetown and 7-seeded San Diego State on their path to the Sweet Sixteen. FGCU unfortunately lost at the hands of 3-seeded Florida by 6 points in the Sweet Sixteen, and Oral Roberts would meet a similar fate this year. Oral Roberts held a lead from midway through the second half until about 5 minutes remaining in the game, when 3-seeded Arkansas took a 62-60 lead. Oral Roberts remained competitive, as they took the lead on an and-one by Obanor, which was followed by Arkansas taking over the lead again. With 31.5 seconds left, and the game tied at 70, Arkansas ran down the shot clock to the lowest they possibly could. With just 3.1 seconds remaining in the game, Arkansas freshman Davonte Davis threw up a short jumpshot that found its way into the net. Oral Roberts had one last shot, and with the ball in the hands of the NCAA's leading scorer, Max Abmas, they believed that they had a chance. Running down the right side of the court, Abmas stopped at the three point line, fading to the side, throwing up a shot...and it hit just **inches** away from the middle of the hoop, bouncing off the rim, allowing Arkansas to narrowly escape an upset by Oral Roberts. While in the end many were pulling for Oral Roberts, their run will forever remain historic.



Oral Roberts was just inches away from being the first 15-seed to make the Elite Eight

Baseball is Back

At 1:05 p.m. EST on Thursday, the first game of the 2021 MLB Season will kick off. In a face-off between an up-and-coming Toronto Blue Jays team against the perennially powerful New York Yankees, Thursday marks 156 days since Dodgers pitcher Julio Urias threw a 97 mile per hour fastball to strike out Rays shortstop Willy Adames. That pitch secured the Dodgers their first World Series championship since 1988. Even though it may seem like just yesterday when the Dodgers brought home their World Series trophy, a considerable amount of roster moves have been made since Game 6 of the 2020 World Series, even for the reigning champions.

Even through a very slow-moving offseason, many key moves were made to bolster aspiring contenders. Through these trades, though, a clear issue within the MLB emerged. It took until December 29th for the first major moves to be made, but the San Diego Padres struck two separate deals with two separate teams to acquire two of the top pitchers in all of the MLB. Yu Darvish, the 2020 NL Cy Young Award runner-up, was dealt from the Chicago Cubs in exchange for just one MLB-level pitcher and a bundle of prospects. Following this stunning trade, the Padres were also able to swing a deal for 2018 AL Cy Young Award winner Blake Snell from the Tampa Bay Rays. In this deal, the Padres did lose more firepower in terms of their minor league depth. They gave up three of their top 14 ranked prospects, including pitcher Luis Patino, who was ranked 3rd in their system. In the end, the Padres were able to swing two deals to significantly bolster their starting rotation and gave up relatively little in the process. As I continue with the major transactions, you may begin to see a trend.

After silence on the end of the MLB Hot Stove, the New York Mets, with new billionaire owner Steve Cohen leading the way, made their biggest move of the offseason, acquiring not only superstar shortstop Francisco Lindor, but also starting pitcher Carlos Carrasco from the Cleveland Indians. The Lindor-Mets trade had been rumored since November of 2020, yet it took until January of 2021 to complete due to the changing in ownership. Although Lindor is on the final year of his contract, it is assumed that the Mets traded for him to sign him to a long-term extension, one box that the Indians could not check off for the shortstop. The Mets, who have a depleted farm system to begin with, did have to give up two of their top 10 prospects in the deal, along with MLB-level shortstops Amed Rosario and Andres Gimenez (both of whom were previously

highly-touted coming out of the minor leagues). Still, the Mets were able to tack on not only superior talent in the infield offensively and, most importantly, defensively, but they also bolstered their starting rotation.

In the coming month, the activity slowed, but moves that were highly anticipated seemed to fizzle out into very little excitement. Both MVP-caliber DJ LeMahieu (Yankees) and one of if not the best catchers in baseball, JT Realmuto (Phillies), re-signed with their ball clubs. Late in January, 2017 World Series MVP George Springer signed with the Toronto Blue Jays in a surprise move, as the Mets had been the favorites to land him due to their more central location to his hometown in Connecticut. But the biggest move of them all was yet to come, and when it did arrive, it was surrounded by a flurry of controversy.

On the first day of February, the St. Louis Cardinals added long-time trade target and star third baseman Nolan Arenado. As with the previous trades, especially those involving the Padres, the Cardinals gave up insignificant players to the Colorado Rockies, in the long run. The best player that the Rockies received was Austin Gomber, a pitcher who has the potential to slot in at number 4 in their rotation. The main reason why Arenado needed to be traded and that the deal was seemingly so one-sided was due to his contract. Arenado had signed a huge 8-year/\$260 million extension with the Rockies in 2019. This limited their spending drastically, so they needed to offload him. But even though they wanted to be free from his contract, they sent \$51 million to cover a portion of his contract in the deal. Not only is Arenado headed to the Cardinals for possibly the rest of his career (until he is 36 with his current contract), but his contract is being partially paid by the team that said they did not want to pay him. An absolute disaster on the part of the Rockies.

Now to the main event: Trevor Bauer. The 2020 NL Cy Young Award winner is very outspoken on social media and has amassed a large following on YouTube, where, in 2020, he posted videos showcasing his life as an MLB pitcher. His goal of late, has, in fact, been to build his brand in part through social media. While he has been an inconsistent pitcher in his career, only posting an ERA below 4.00 once in his 8 seasons prior to 2020, he was elite during the 2020 season. With a 1.73 ERA and 100 strikeouts (3rd in MLB), Bauer was a clear favorite for the Cy Young Award, which he did end up winning. During his time as a free agent, Bauer continued to be in the media, as he communicated with fanbases and listened to their pitches on why he should consider their team as his landing destination. On his final day of free agency, Bauer, a native of California, chose the Los Angeles Dodgers over the New York Mets. The controversy around Bauer's signing concerns his website. Bauer himself claims that his media team posted Mets shirts and other merchandise, which let fans believe that he had signed with the Mets, while, at the time, he had not yet come to a final decision. In the end, Bauer was able to get a considerable amount of money. His deal, a three-year contract with opt-outs after each season, has various salary figures. The first season reaches \$40 million, the second \$45 million, and the final season sits at \$17 million. Bauer, if he either stays for one or two seasons, he will own the largest average annual value (AAV) for a contract in history, breaking his college teammate Gerrit Cole's previously set record when he signed a 9-year/\$324 million contract with the Yankees last offseason.

The moves above are just a glimpse into what the 2020-2021 MLB offseason looked like, but it shows that the landscape of the MLB could be drastically different in the coming season. Additionally, these moves bring up the issue of teams not willing to sign their stars, likely secondary to reported pandemic-related revenue losses by teams. Since there is no true salary cap in baseball (there is a luxury tax that makes it less attractive to spend above a certain amount), teams should be spending money on their stars to make the league competitive. In just the few examples of the Cubs, Rays, Indians, and Rockies, it is clear that some teams are trying to offload their best players, or they are taking their "Moneyball" approach a perhaps too far. Either way, whether teams are making big trades with big names in a strategic manner, it is inadvertently drawing away fanbases that want to watch their teams produce the best product that they can. Unfortunately, the major markets dominate baseball, as seen with the acquisitions above. While there may need to be change within the MLB so that all teams are competitive, 2021 will be a fresh start for every team. In a 162-game season, maybe a dark horse team can end up surprising everybody.



Sources:

[ESPN](#), [ESPN](#), [Sports Illustrated](#), [San Diego Tribune](#), [MLB](#), [MLB](#), [MLB](#), [CBS Sports](#), [Sports Illustrated](#), [MLB](#), [MLB](#), [Yahoo! Sports](#), [MLB](#)