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The Biggest Rivalries In Sports

By Pat Stevens

>From college football to Major League Baseball, rivalries between teams have always added

excitement to fan experience. Many teams are old rivals, while others have developed a competitive intensity more recently. What teams have been fighting it out for some time? Rivalries are at the center of many fan's lives. Here's a quick look at some classic ones.

College football has some of the most talked about rivalries in all of sports. To begin with, you have the heated battles between the Texas Longhorns and the Oklahoma Sooners. Being in neighboring states, they compete for regional bragging rights and often the same recruits. Over the years, there have been many classic match-ups between the two teams.

One of the biggest rivalries in college football history is between Big 10 powerhouses Ohio State and Michigan. These teams, that are usually nationally ranked, are so well matched and competitive that the winner is often determined in the final minutes and sometimes the final seconds of the contest. Consequently, when these two teams play, the game often determines which remains in the National Championship picture and which is out.

The South features the tough competition between the Alabama Crimson Tide and the Auburn Tigers. From the days of Alabama's legendary coach Bear Bryant this has been one of the most talked about match-ups on the gridiron. Both schools are in the same state and are highly competitive with each other year in and year out. There have been many close, tight-knit games over the past century to prove it. The Tennessee Volunteers also have an active rivalry with these two teams but nothing compares to the legendary hard fought battles between the Tigers and the Crimson Tide.

On the west coast, there is the University of Southern California (USC) and the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) rivalry. This competition has been dominated recently by the success of Southern California and the strong teams they have produced over the last couple of years. Recently USC has taken to the field with Heisman Trophy winners Matt Leinhardt and Reggie Bush, giving the Trojans the edge. This next year we may see a shift in power with UCLA coming to the forefront.

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The National Basketball Association has had the classic battles of the Lakers and the Celtics. For decades these two teams fought back and forth to determine who would take home the NBA crown. There were the great match-ups in the 60's and 70's of Wilt Chamberlain and Bill Russell, which are legendary in the history of the NBA.

The 80's hosted memorable post-season contests between the Lakers' Magic Johnson and the Celtics' Larry Bird. Their respective teams, with Bird running the court and dishing off to Robert Parrish for a slam dunk or Kareem Abdul-Jabbar working the ball inside only to pass back to Johnson for three, produced some of the greatest moments in NBA history and will be talked about for decades to come.

The meetings between the Chicago Bulls and New York Knicks produced another fine rivalry. Michael Jordan with his extreme athletic ability was the catalyst for tough contests in which the Knicks sometimes surprised the team from the Windy City; although the majority of the time Jordan and company were on the plus side in these contests.

Every season a tandem of college basketball teams always stand out as among two of the best in the nation. In North Carolina both on and off the court, one college basketball rivalry dominates the region. The University of North Carolina and Duke, both members of the highly competitive Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), are located only 8 miles apart. Both schools possess myriads of faithful fans that have traveled Tobacco Road year after year to see their teams fight for victory.

Since 1990, the two clubs have a combined for a total of eleven Final Four appearances. Those who follow the ACC certainly recognize the high profile contests that have defined their rivalry. The Duke Blue Devils and North Carolina Tar Heels are synonymous with big name games, some of which they have won and others they've lost.

Off the court, these two teams also battle it out by attempting to recruit some of the most talented players in the nation. The Tar Heels and Blue Devils often court the same players, with coaching staffs jousting with each other for the finest players available. NCAA National Championships are the hallmark of both these schools. If you enjoy excitement and hardcore college basketball at its best, Duke and UNC are your ticket.

In Major League Baseball, there is perhaps the greatest rivalry of all sports. The New York Yankees and the Boston Red Sox have battled each other on the diamond since the early twentieth century. The rivalry became heated in 1920 when the Red Sox sold the game's greatest player, Babe Ruth, to the New York Yankees. From that point on, the Yankees dominated the rest of Major League Baseball, going on to win 26 World Series; while Boston, after Ruth departed, was unable to capture a single crown.

Some people began to call Boston's championship drought the "curse of the Bambino." The trade of Babe Ruth, who was also known as the "Bambino," was supposedly the reason why Boston couldn't win a championship. But that all changed in 2004 when the Boston Red Sox were able to come back from three games down in the American League Championship Series and defeat the New York Yankees, and then go on to sweep the St. Louis Cardinals in the World Series.

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This was what Red Sox fans had been waiting for, and now they're hopeful that they will never have to hear about "the curse" again. This has been one heck of a rivalry over the years and odds are that it will continue to be one of the best in sports.

When there's an intense rivalry between two teams it's always magnified by fan enthusiasm. The fans are what make two teams want to compete harder against each other, but it takes exciting, hard-fought games to get the fans interested. Most great rivalries are not built on one or two good contests, but over decades of excellent games.

There is no set number of games that teams must play in order to generate a rivalry. The fans and players together are the ones who decide what makes an ongoing, classic rivalry. But one thing is for certain, there is nothing better than watching two, evenly matched rivals battle it out until only one is left standing.

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League Has Significant Rivalries?

By Larry Woods

The National Football League or the NFL is the biggest professional football league in the United States. The NFL has thirty-two teams that are based in a variety of cities across the country. Originally known as the American Professional Football Association when it was formed in 1920, the Association assumed the name "National Football League" in 1922.

At first, the most popular way people enjoyed their football was by watching their favorite college team play but the focus of the country changed in 1958. That NFL game went into overtime and captured a number of new fans who found that they enjoyed the professional football league just as much as if not more than their college football teams. Due to the rising popularity of professional football, the NFL merged with the American Football League in the 1960's to form what is now the National Football League.

Over the years, some friendly and some not-so-friendly rivalries have come about due to a number of circumstances. These rivalries can be categorized into three separate groups. The first is the 'intradivisional', which is a rivalry between teams in the same NFL division. The second is

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interdivisional, which is a rivalry between teams in the different divisions but in the same conference. The third is the `interconference', which is a rivalry between teams in different conferences. Many times fans will hear sportscasters refer to team rivalries as "divisional rivals", "division rival" or "conference rival" instead of including the appropriate prefix.

For example, in the AFC North, there is a rivalry between the Baltimore Ravens and the Cleveland Browns based on the when the team's owner, Art Modell, moved the Cleveland Browns franchise to Baltimore. Fortunately for Cleveland Browns fans, the "Dawg Pound" and its colors remained in Cleveland. The Cleveland Browns were reactivated as a NFL team in 1999. The "Dawg Pound" fans waited for their revenge and got a taste in 2001 when the Browns won against the Ravens after only four games.

Another famous rivalry began in the AFC East when the Buffalo Bills owner, Ralph Wilson, wasn't allowed to base an AFL team in Miami and went on to establish the Buffalo Bills as a charter member of the AFL. The Buffalo Bills and the Miami Dolphins have maintained a rivalry based on this history since 1967. This particular rivalry has had a number of key moments that continued to fuel their contention over the years including playing against each other in the ultimate game of the football season– the Super Bowl.

Larry Woods is a sports writer for

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