

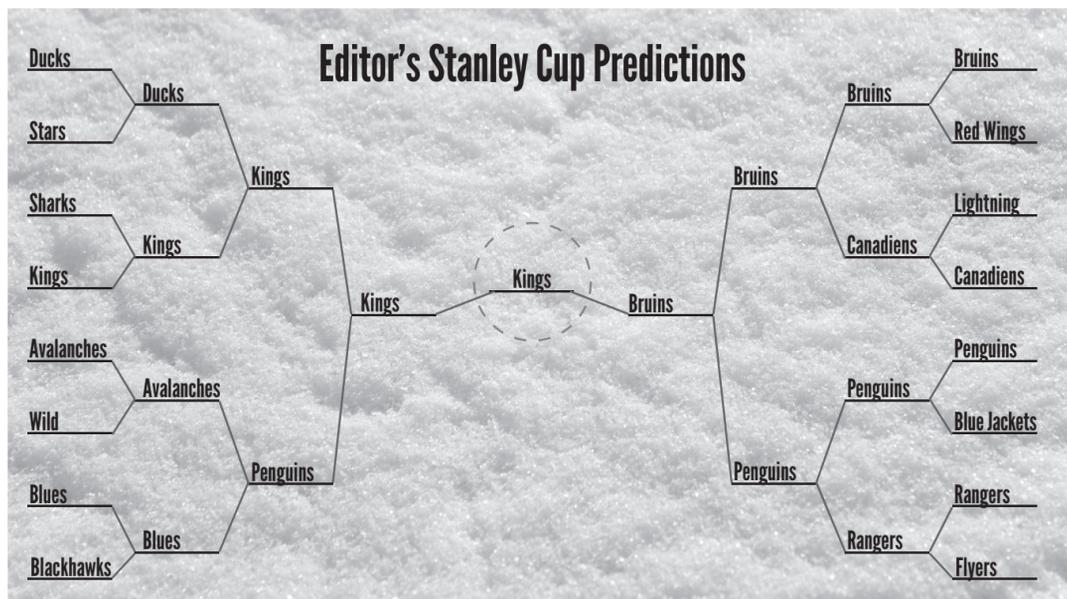
INBOX | Sports editor Jonathan Rembold answers reader questions

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Pittsburgh Penguins vs. Boston Bruins: Zdeno Chara vs. an adorable ice-ready penguin. Crosby's terrible beard vs. crazed Boston sports fans. This is too close to call for me and I think it will go to seven games. Never mind guys, I flipped a coin and the Boston Bruins will play in the Stanley Cup Finals!

Los Angeles Kings vs. Boston Bruins: This series will be incredibly physical and it will seem old school. These teams have players with quick tempers and even though there isn't a natural rivalry, bad blood could develop quickly during the Cup Finals. A long series with some low-scoring games and I see the Los Angeles Kings hoisting Lord Stanley's cup after the sixth game.

Hopefully that answered your question, and in case you couldn't tell, I researched thoroughly and looked to science, teamwork and hockey to get these answers, so basically what I am saying is take these picks to Vegas because they are rock-solid.



Cardinals deserve fans' respect

BY DAVID LEMON
Staff Reporter



COMMENTARY
David Lemon

As many of you don't know, I grew up in a split home. That is, my father is a St. Louis Cardinals fan and my mother is a Chicago Cubs fan. I understand what it's like to 'dislike' a team because they are your rivals or 'dislike' a team because, well, they are the New York Yankees and statistically, they win a World Series every four or five years.

Throughout the past year, my beloved Cardinals have been the subject of an abundance of sports press claiming to loathe everything Cardinals baseball.

All this loathing makes me smile because it means we're winning and your team is losing.

The MLB season is more than two weeks in and we now can see some grapefruits of offseason labor — pun intended. My job isn't to make someone love the Cardinals through this piece — rather, it is my civic duty as a baseball writer to ensure people respect them because much of the Index readership is not from St. Louis. Sure, several professional articles have been written trying to convince the populous not to hate the Cardinals, but I'm going to prove you have to respect a team such as the one from St. Louis.

Let's first answer the question of why we love baseball so much and why we hate teams. Baseball is a child's game and we

love competition and the past. We cling to youth and the essence of the game itself. We hate teams because they always beat our favorite team, they are geographically closest to our chosen team and the team we hate always wins.

Now that we've started to hate the Cardinals a little more, let's talk money. Baseball is an incredibly lucrative business with NBC Sports noting that Major League Baseball could haul in more than \$9 billion dollars this season. For the first time during 15 years, the New York Yankees don't have the largest payroll, as that title reigns with the LA Dodgers this season at \$235 million.

Where does the Cardinals' payroll rank out of the 30 teams in Major League Baseball? Not even in the top 10 — They are No. 13 with a \$111 million. They're actually closer to the Astros payroll (\$44 million) than the Yankees payroll (\$203 million), according to a recent Deadspin article that came out on Opening Day.

Some of the loathing might be starting to peel away, and we're just scratching the surface. Let's talk about fulfilling dreams of becoming a Major League Baseball player because we all play and watch baseball for the love of the game. The minor leagues have been around more than a century, but the farm systems we know and love today actually were thought up by Cardinals field manager, general manager and club president Branch Rickey during the early 1920s. He came up with idea to promote players from Class D to Class AA as their talent improved instead of trading them around to help them develop as players.

To this day, the Cardinals have one of the greatest farm systems in the game, giving young players ample chances at earning a big

league spot throughout the regular season. Just think about all the young talent the Cardinals have on their major league roster right now. They are the fourth youngest team in the majors with the average player age at 27.4. The starting 5 hurlers for the staff, their average age is 25.6. If you replace Wainwright with the 'sixth starter' Carlos Martinez, the average age is 23.6.

Currently, the Cardinals are battling a slow start at the plate with many of the "veterans" in their everyday line-up not hitting well. I'm using the word veterans loosely because really only three batters are vets, those being Holliday, Molina and Peralta with Craig straddling the line. Molina is the only vet consistently producing at the dish thus far. That means the youngsters have had to come through, especially Wacha, Wong and Adams. This leads me to the people who recognize talent and the business side of the game, the management.

During only his third year of coaching in the major leagues, Mike Matheny already has led the Cardinals to back-to-back NLCS appearances snagging one pennant last year with many sports analysts think the Cardinals will be back in the CS this year too. Just four days ago, the Cardinals franchise extended General Manager John Mozeliak's contract through 2018. Mozeliak followed in the footsteps of longtime successful GM Walt Jocketty in 2007 who is now the GM for the Reds. Not surprisingly, after his arrival as GM during 2008, the Reds have had three 90-win seasons with him.

The club owner, Bill DeWitt Jr., with his son as the club president, are worthy of shout outs because of the revenue the Cardinals bring into the community especially with the installation of the first phase of "Ballpark

Village." For those of you who don't know what that is, it's a hub of restaurants, a beer garden, the Cardinals Hall of Fame and a massive open central court with the Fox Sports Midwest studio within the confines as well. I like to call it baseball tailgating before and after the game.

The reason I discuss this is because I wholeheartedly think no other team, and no other city for that matter, creates a beautiful culture around a baseball team like the Cardinals. I respect many teams and organizations in the major leagues that bring joy and happiness to players, fans and communities.

I love what the Tampa Bay Rays do with 'so little' money each year and the same goes for the Oakland Athletics. I love the Cleveland Indians and how they are turning their organization around, also with low salaries. When we start talking about the Marlins, the Yankees, the Phillies and the Dodgers, that's where we have problems. The Miami Marlins have an unfortunate ownership and management that made a joke of the game two years ago signing great players and dishing them out just to pay off team debt. I shouldn't mention that gaudy green stadium, but that's also unfortunate.

The Phillies fans have created a culture that's depressing, they have the third highest payroll and haven't had much success the past two seasons at all. The Yankees and Dodgers speak for themselves with ludicrous amounts of cheddar and I'm not talking about fastballs — money, I'm talking about money.

I can prove with one point why I do not respect some teams, but the point is I can show you thousands of reasons why you should respect the well-oiled machine that is the "Birds on the Bat." Happy 2014 baseball season, everyone.

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