

MINNESOTA TWINS

Twins' prospects making progress



ASSOCIATED PRESS

The Minnesota Twins' Brooks Lee steals second base ahead of the tag by Toronto Blue Jays shortstop Addison Barger during the fifth inning of a spring training baseball game March 8 in Dunedin, Fla.

A look at whose stock is rising in Twins' minor league system

LA VELLE E. NEAL III
Star Tribune

FORT MYERS, FLA. — The Twins' top 10 prospect lists are volatile from year to year as players move up and down the rankings based on development, success and health.

This particular list stands out because of who is not on it.

Austin Martin is not on the list. A key component in the Jose Berrios trade with Toronto in 2021, the infielder struggled

adjusting his swing before suffering a UCL sprain last season. Now a setback with his elbow has delayed his spring for six to eight weeks as he recovers.

Right-hander Matt Canterino is not on the list. He has struck out 13.8 batters per nine innings in the minors but is sidelined following Tommy John elbow ligament replacement surgery.

Right-hander Jordan Balazovic, a former top-five prospect, is not on the list. He suffered a knee injury early last season and struggled mightily at Class AAA St. Paul once he was healthy. This season has been delayed after suffering a broken jaw during an altercation in

Fort Myers. He's throwing a live bullpen on Tuesday and is close to pitching in games.

Even Matt Wallner is not in this top 10. The power-hitting, strong-armed outfielder made it to the majors last season and his future will be determined on how he handles breaking pitches. On this list, he was edged out by someone with exciting upside.

The players who did crack this hack's top 10 definitely have upside. Most are opening eyes wider here at Twins spring training. And a handful of them should/could contribute to the major league team this season.

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BADGERS FOOTBALL

Fickell lays out spring goals

COLTEN BARTHOLOMEW
For the State Journal

Luke Fickell is still in the honeymoon phase with the University of Wisconsin football program.

He's seen the excitement inside and outside the program grow in anticipation for this

week, when the Badgers will begin spring practices. Those practices are part of the third phase in the offseason program that Fickell and his staff installed —

the first was about seven weeks of strength and speed training, and the second was more workouts along with field drills that gave players an introduction to the coaches' new systems.

Fickell warned his team this week that they're about to see a new side of coaches when spring practices begin.

"We've developed relationships with these guys ... but things are a little bit different when football adds to it," Fickell told reporters Monday. "So I've told them, 'However you've known me or known some of these (assistant coaches), there's another kind of level of intensity of which we do things.' That'll be seen a little bit more on Saturday as we continue to move forward."

Fickell's first spring in Madison brings with it a substantial shift in offensive philosophies, with offensive coordinator Phil Longo installing the Air Raid system. Fickell's all-new coaching staff will also work to blend the defensive styles that it used effectively at Cincinnati with the scheme that's made UW's defense one of the best in the nation.

UW has 15 practices scheduled over the next five weeks and Fickell

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COMMENTARY



PETER THOMSON, LA CROSSE TRIBUNE

Onalaska Luther boys basketball coach Brad Schaper embraces Isaiah Schwichtenberg after the Knights beat Kenosha St. Joseph 60-46 in the WIAA Division 4 championship game at the Kohl Center in Madison on Saturday. The game was Schaper's last after 16 seasons of leading the program.

Golden for a reason

Schaper's ability to connect makes final run a special one

MADISON — As the game prior to his Onalaska Luther High School boys basketball team's WIAA Division 4 title matchup with



TODD SOMMERFELDT

Kenosha St. Joseph on Saturday reached the second half, coach Brad Schaper entered a Kohl Center tunnel for a view of the court.

He stood there, surrounded by assistant coaches and watching the action with his arms crossed and while shifting his

weight from foot to foot.

When the clock reflected 7 minutes, 20 seconds remaining, he retreated to the Knights' designated locker room — those same assistants following him in a line.

That brought players out to that same tunnel. Junior Logan Bahr bounced a ball off the wall to himself and lofted simulated shots off to grips with what at the top. Other teammates stretched. Junior Adam Scriver rocked his sweet mustache.

After the award ceremony for Division 5 finished, Schaper reappeared before his team was unleashed onto the court. As he reached the end of the tun-



Schaper

nel, Schaper acknowledged the coaches who stood with him.

"Let's go," he said before joining his team to start a game for the final time.

The biggest game in Luther's program history — its first with a state title on the line — was Schaper's last. And roughly 90 minutes after leading his assistants to the court, Schaper was celebrating a 60-46 victory over the Lancers and an exciting state championship.

The coach knew long ago that this season was his last, but he was adamant that the focus of every bit of success remained on the players, and it did.

"That's it," he said in the postgame press conference with Isaiah Schwichtenberg sitting to his left and Bahr to his right. "There's no more to go. 'Mission accomplished.'"

Schaper, whose 16-year career of leading the program resulted in a 221-147 record and finished with him handing a gold ball to his team, won't want this story to be about him, but it's going to be.

The Knights were here because of him. They were here because of the way he worked with his players and assistant coaches to put together a powerhouse team that won 28 of 30 games.

Schaper, of course, didn't score a point this season, but he was responsible for the plan that scored all of those points and provided all of those moments that will stick with everyone involved for years and decades to come.

"The way he has helped us as basketball players and in the

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BADGERS WOMEN'S HOCKEY

Still 'surreal' feeling

Wisconsin women's hockey celebrates title

TODD D. MILEWSKI
For the State Journal

The bus ride back from Duluth, Minnesota, on Sunday night was a lively one for the newly crowned NCAA champions from the University of Wisconsin women's hockey team.

The comparative quiet that Mark and Leslie Johnson enjoyed in their car ride home ahead of the bus was broken by seconds of disbelief in what they witnessed

hours before. "We probably said to each other 20, 30, 50 times, I can't believe this one happened," Badgers coach Mark Johnson said about the conversation with his wife. "So it's really surreal."

That's a seven-time national champion coach sounding like he was caught off-guard by the most recent triumph, gained with a 1-0 victory against Ohio State on Sunday.

UW celebrated *this one* Monday night with an event attended by hundreds at LaBahn Arena. Frozen Four Most Outstand-

ing Player Cami Kronish carried the trophy onto the ice to a loud ovation. She said she's still having trouble coming to grips with what she experienced the day before.

"I don't know how many more days it'll take," Kronish said. "But right now I just feel like I'm living in a dream."

Captain Tournant Curl, who's 10-0 in NCAA Tournament games in her career, acknowledged that the shock that seems to be widespread with the championship had to do with UW's difficult road.



AMBER ARNOLD, STATE JOURNAL

Badgers center Jesse Compher holds up the national championship trophy surrounded by teammates during a welcome home ceremony for the UW women's hockey team Monday at LaBahn Arena.

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WHAT'S ON TAP

COLLEGE

WOMEN'S LACROSSE: Nonconference—Northwestern (Minn.) at UW-La Crosse, 7 p.m.

BRIEFLY

NFL

Bullard resigns with Vikings

The Vikings and defensive lineman Jonathan Bullard agreed to a contract on Tuesday, marking the 10th free agent to agree to re-sign with Minnesota this month.

Bullard, the 29-year-old former Bears draft pick, appeared in 12 games last season. He made seven starts as an interior defender in the Vikings' 3-4 front, which they'll maintain under new coordinator Brian Flores. Bullard missed five games, including a four-game absence due to a biceps injury suffered Dec. 4 against the Jets.

The Vikings front office has retained all of last year's interior defensive linemen — Harrison Phillips, Bullard, Khyiris Tonga, James Lynch, Ross Blacklock and Ezezi Otomewo — except Dalvin Tomlinson, who the Vikings could not afford in free agency. The position's lone newcomer so far is ex-Packers defender Dean Lowry, who signed a two-year deal.

Nine other free agents have re-signed with the Vikings this month: center Garrett Bradbury, running back Alexander Mattison, kicker Greg Joseph, long snapper Andrew DePaola, quarterback Nick Mullens, offensive linemen Oli Udoh and Austin Schlottmann, outside linebacker Kenny Willekes, and tight end Ben Ellefson.

Five former Vikings players remain free agents: tight end Irv Smith Jr., cornerbacks Duke Shelley, Kris Boyd and Chandon Sullivan, and receiver Bisi Johnson.

Receiver Thomas Hennigan, an undrafted signing last year out of Appalachian State, was waived on Tuesday.

NBA

Knicks legend Reed dies at 80

NEW YORK — Willis Reed, who dramatically emerged from the locker room minutes before Game 7 of the 1970 NBA Finals to spark the New York Knicks to their first championship and create one of sports' most enduring examples of playing through pain, died Tuesday. He was 80.

Reed's death was announced by the National Basketball Retired Players Association, which confirmed it through his family. The cause was not released, but Reed had been in poor health recently and was unable to travel to New York when the Knicks honored the 50th anniversary of their 1973 NBA championship team during their game against New Orleans on Feb. 25.

The Knicks tweeted a photograph picturing Reed from behind walking onto the floor as his teammates were warming up for the 1970 finale, one of the most memorable moments in NBA and Madison Square Garden history.

"As we mourn, we will always strive to uphold the standards he left behind — the unmatched leadership, sacrifice and work ethic that personified him as a champion among champions," the team said. "His is a legacy that will live forever."

Nicknamed "The Captain," Reed was the undersized center and emotional leader on the Knicks' two NBA championship teams, with a soft shooting touch from the outside and a toughness to tussle with the era's superstar big men on the inside.

His accomplishments — seven All-Star selections, two NBA Finals MVP awards among them — would have warranted Hall of Fame induction by themselves. During the 1969-70 season, he became the first player to sweep the MVP awards for the regular season, All-Star Game and NBA Finals.

But his spot in history was secured simply by walking onto the floor on the final night of that season.

Reed had injured a thigh muscle in Game 5 of the series between the Knicks and Los Angeles Lakers, tumbling to the court in pain. He sat out Game 6 as counterpart Wilt Chamberlain had 45 points and 27 rebounds in a Lakers romp that forced a deciding game at Madison Square Garden.

COLLEGE MEN'S BASKETBALL

Anderson leaves FDU for Iona

NEW ROCHELLE, N.Y. — Tobin Anderson is leaving NCAA Cinderella Fairleigh Dickinson after one fairy-tale season and replacing Rick Pitino at Iona.

Iona athletic director Matt Glovaski announced the hiring on Tuesday, a day after Pitino left to take the job at St. John's of the Big East Conference.

Anderson led the No. 16 seed Knights to a win over No. 1 Purdue in the opening round of the NCAA Tournament last week, only the second time a No. 16 seed has knocked off a top-seeded team. UMBC beat No. 1 Virginia in 2018.

"Iona University represents everything my family and I were looking for in a school, a basketball program and a campus atmosphere," Anderson said in a statement. "Our goal is to build upon the tremendous tradition of Iona basketball and elevate the program to greater heights."

Iona of the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference was knocked out of this year's tournament by UConn on Friday.

ON TV

WEDNESDAY

AHL: Milwaukee at Toronto, NHLN, 6 p.m.

COLLEGE MEN'S BASKETBALL: CBI Tournament: TBD, Championship, Daytona Beach, Fla., ESPN2, 4 p.m.; NIT Tournament: UAB at Vanderbilt, Quarterfinal, ESPN2, 6 p.m.; Cincinnati at Utah Valley, Quarterfinal, ESPN2, 8 p.m.

COLLEGE WOMEN'S BASKETBALL: NCAA Division II Tournament: Catawba vs. Minn. Duluth, Semifinal, Saint Joseph, Mo., CBSN, 6 p.m.; Glenville St. vs. Ashland, Semifinal, Saint Joseph, Mo., CBSN, 8:30 p.m.

COLLEGE MEN'S LACROSSE: High Point at North Carolina, ACCN, 6 p.m.

COLLEGE WOMEN'S LACROSSE: Stony Brook at Syracuse, ACCN, 7 p.m.

COLLEGE SOFTBALL: Boise St. at Utah, PAC-12N, 5 p.m.; Kennesaw St. at Georgia, SECN, 6 p.m.

FIGURE SKATING: ISU: The World Figure Skating Championships, Women's Short, Saitama, Japan, USA, 5 a.m.

GOLF: PGA Tour: The WGC Dell Technologies, Match Play—Day 1, Austin Country Club, Austin, Texas, GOLF, 1 p.m.

MLB: Spring Training: Tampa Bay vs. Minnesota, Fort Myers, Fla. (Taped), MLBN, 5 a.m.; Miami vs. Houston, West Palm Beach, Fla. (Taped), MLBN, 8 p.m.; Baltimore vs. Toronto, Dunedin, Fla., MLBN, noon; LA Angels vs. Colorado, Scottsdale, Ariz., MLBN, 3 p.m.; San Diego vs. Cincinnati, Goodyear, Ariz., MLBN, 8 p.m.; Minnesota vs. Boston, Fort Myers, Fla. (Taped), MLBN, 11 p.m.

NBA: Golden State at Dallas, ESPN, 6:45 p.m.; Phoenix at LA Lakers, ESPN, 9:05 p.m.

NHL: Pittsburgh at Colorado, TNT, 7 p.m.; Arizona at Edmonton, TNT, 9:30 p.m.

MEN'S SOCCER: International Friendly: Ireland vs. Latvia, Dublin, FS2, 2:30 p.m.

TENNIS: Miami Open-WTA/ATP Early Rounds, TENNIS, 10 a.m.

Twins

From C1

Brooks Lee, 22, SS: Carlos Correa said during camp he wouldn't be surprised if Lee, last year's first-round pick, contributes on the major league level this season. High praise, but Lee has earned it. The switch-hitter batted .303 on three different levels in his debut season and impressed in camp before being sent out. Good thing he's a shortstop, because he can be moved anywhere if the bat warrants it.

Royce Lewis, 23, SS: Just when we wondered about his top prospect status, Lewis was called up to the majors last season and hit .300 in 12 games before suffering a knee injury for the second consecutive season. He should be ready to contribute sometime after the All-Star break and in position to flash his exciting potential once again.

Emmanuel Rodriguez, 20, OF: The Twins signed him for \$2.5 million during the 2019-20 international window and watched him explode last year with a 1.044 OPS at Class A Fort Myers before a knee injury

ended his season in June. He's healthy and has gotten a couple at-bats this spring as an extra player. His power-speed potential is intriguing, although he might slow down some as he fills out.

Connor Prielipp, 22, LHP: The Twins actually have a left-handed starting pitching prospect. Tommy John surgery in May 2021 ended his career at Alabama, but he did enough in a bullpen session and at the combine for the Twins to take him in the second round in 2022. On Saturday, he consistently hit 94 miles per hour during a minor league game (some say he can touch 97) and scouts said his slider is a legitimate out pitch. Needs to learn how to change speeds.



Prielipp

Edouard Julien, 23, 2B: He would be higher on this list if his defense was stronger, but he joined the organization with his best position in question. His bat looks major league-ready. He hit .300 with 17 homers and

67 RBI last season at Class AA Wichita. He has walked more than 200 times the past two minor league seasons combined. He hit .400 in the Arizona Fall League. And he impressed in camp before being cut. You will see him in the majors this season.

Marco Raya, 20, RHP: Raya is listed at 170 pounds. He needs to get stronger and build his endurance because he threw just 65 innings over 19 appearances and 17 starts at Fort Myers last season. The potential is tantalizing. He uses four pitches — a mid-90s fastball, a slider and curve that are out pitches and an improving changeup. He did leave his outing early on Saturday as a precaution due to shoulder tightness.

Simeon Woods-Richardson, 22, RHP: Woods-Richardson made his MLB debut last season, so he will be in the pecking order to be called up in 2023 when the Twins need a starter. He throws four pitches and is successful when he's painting the fastball, then using his above average changeup to keep hitters off-balance.

Jose Salas, 19, IF: The Twins

weren't going to trade Luis Arraez for Pablo Lopez unless they received a sweetener. The Marlins threw in two prospects, one being Salas, a toolsy switch hitter who could explode once he grows into his 6-2, 191-pound frame and taps into his power potential. He should be a good base stealer as well.

Louie Varland, 25, RHP: The former North St. Paul and Concordia (St. Paul) player went 1-2 with a 3.81 ERA over five starts last season. He throws a mid-90s fastball, slider and changeup. The Twins rotation is full at the moment. But if Varland maintains the work ethic that got him from Division II to the majors, the Twins will be forced to find a spot for him.

Yasser Mercedes, 18, OF: Mercedes is coming to America after hitting .355 in the Dominican League last summer. Already one of the toolsiest outfielders in the organization, Mercedes is projected to develop power as he fills out and gains experience. And he stole 30 bases 41 games last season. The Twins, who signed him last year for \$1.7 million, are excited to see what he will do.

Sommerfeldt

From C1

classroom and in everyday life," Bahr said, "has been amazing.

"He's always there for us, always one phone call away. He's a great guy, and it meant the world to get him a state championship."

Schaper started his career with an 85-40 win over Bangor on Nov. 27, 2007, and finished it with the win over Kenosha St. Joseph on March 18, 2023. In between, he helped shape around 200 players in both basketball and life. That doesn't count the stu-

dents he has taught during his classes at Luther.

"Brad has such a likable personality," Luther athletic director Joel Babinec said. "The culture he builds, whether it is in the classroom or basketball court or any other sport he is coaching, he has a way to give people ownership and a great feeling of responsibility and worth to what they are doing."

Nine of his 16 seasons resulted in a winning record, including the final six in a row. The Knights made their first two WIAA state appearances over the past three seasons while winning 71 games and losing

seven during that span.

This championship season included Schaper's 200th victory and the program's 700th win.

But it ended in the best possible way — with Schaper handing off a gold ball to a team that had worked so hard for it.

"For so many years, we've been coming down here, assistant coach Mark Loersch, and I, and we always wondered what it would be like to be out there (on the court)," Schaper said. "There is just something about the aura of Madison. It was great when we had it in La Crosse (in 2021), and I'm

so thankful to coach (Brad) Reinhart for giving us that opportunity.

"But Madison is big stuff, and when you go through this, it validates what you've been going through and confirms that you've been doing it the right way. And these kids did it the right way, and that's the best thing about this."

It's pretty easy to make the argument that Schaper did things the right way, too.

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Badgers

From C1

The Badgers had to beat the top three teams in the country in the final three rounds. They also overcame a five-game losing streak in January and the loss of alternate captain Natalie Buchbinder to a season-ending injury.

"Our whole locker room believed we could do it but you just didn't want to think too far ahead," Curl said. "You wanted to stay present in the moment. And once you're at the finish line, it's like, we really did it. It was just a different situation than the other two I've been in and feels different."

UW-Madison Chancel-

lor Jennifer Mnookin celebrated UW's first NCAA championship since she started in the role last August and highlighted the academic success the team has enjoyed in addition to the on-ice performance.

"You've really done us proud and you've also captured the best of being student-athletes here at Wisconsin," she said.

Badgers athletic director Chris McIntosh saluted the fans for making LaBahn a tough place to play before he turned his praise toward UW coaches Johnson, Dan Koch and Jackie Crum.

"You've won a lot of championships but you represent what college athletics is supposed to be about," McIntosh said. "There are a lot of trophies

up here. But I know it's more than just that to you.

"And when I listen to you talk, I listen to you translate every moment that this team is faced with into how will it serve them in their life? How will it cause them to grow? That's more than just being a coach. That's being a mentor. That's being somebody that cares about more than just a team on the ice. And for that, I commend you."

Badgers seniors huddled in a circle after the UW band played "Varsity" to close the event. It was an emotional moment, Curl said.

"It's not my last one but it's their last time being out there, probably," said Curl, who celebrated her birthday and the championship

on Monday. "We're really grateful to have the fans and the support we get here. It's really special to celebrate with them."

Leslie Johnson dropped off her husband at the meeting place for the emergency vehicles that were waiting to escort the Badgers' bus back to campus as Sunday night turned into early Monday morning.

But Mark Johnson wasn't getting on the bus. He was boarding a Madison fire engine for a ride with his son, Patrick, a firefighter.

"He was on the biggest fire engine that they had," Mark Johnson said. "I got to pull the horns and do all that coming down East Washington. So I got a true experience."

Fickell

From C1

identified three characteristics he wants to build during the spring. Toughness, both mentally and physically, are of chief concern in spring. Fickell said he knows players can display toughness during practices, but he wants to see the discipline to continue doing things correctly repeatedly and players pushing to learn more as spring practices progress.

"Everybody wants to play," Fickell said. "When the ball goes down, it's not difficult, right? I mean, your juices, your energy starts to go and guys play. That's the nature of the guys that we've got here. The challenge is on those other days, can you come in and can you actually

have the mindset? Can you work at it? Can you do the walkthroughs? That's where I think the toughness comes in. On Day 1, Day 2, Day 3, Day 10, it's not that difficult. When you get to Day 24, you get to Day 25, are you still challenging yourself to grow mentally? Are you still challenging yourself to grow even with the workouts on the off day?"

Establishing togetherness is another area of focus, and each of the team's training sessions this winter started with a competition to establish the mentality of pushing one another to be better. The last is establishing a fast play speed.

"When guys are confident in what they're doing, when they believe in the people that are around them, they know the whats

and the whys, they play really fast," Fickell said. "So gotta work on our toughness, we got to make sure we're together, and then we got to play with speed."

Spring practices are the first time Fickell's staff has coached together in full. Fickell is challenging his assistants to evaluate the roster while not overloading players with new schemes to the point that they play slow.

"It's not just the players' toughness, it's the coaches," Fickell said. "It's the coaches' mental toughness and their ability to understand, 'OK, what do we have and what do we need to do to be successful?' Because we can't think that we're just going to be smarter than every other coach. 'Oh, well, we got this scheme defensively, we got the scheme offensively

and that's going to correct and mask everything.' No, the reality is still it's about players."

UW has an open practice scheduled for April 22, and by that point Fickell believes the team will be on its way to building its identity. The schematic changes to UW's system and the infusion of new talent from the transfer portal kept fans buzzing this winter, and Fickell embraces the attention on the program.

"People ask, 'Well, how do you handle expectations?'" he said. "There's nothing greater than having expectations. Let's just be honest, I mean, the internal pressure, the things that are put upon yourself, you get to find out who you are, you know? It's much better than the other way, I know that. So we love it, I love it."

BASKETBALL

NBA				
EASTERN CONFERENCE				
	W	L	Pct	GB
x-Milwaukee	51	20	.718	—
x-Boston	49	23	.681	2½
Philadelphia	48	23	.676	3
Cleveland	45	28	.616	7
New York	42	31	.575	10
Brooklyn	39	32	.549	12
Miami	39	34	.534	13
Atlanta	35	36	.493	16
Toronto	35	37	.486	16½
Chicago	34	37	.479	17
Washington	32	39	.451	19
Indiana	32	40	.444	19½

Orlando	29	43	.403	22½
e-Charlotte	23	50	.315	29
e-Detroit	16	56	.222	35½
WESTERN CONFERENCE				
	W	L	Pct	GB
x-Denver	48	24	.667	—
Memphis	44	27	.620	3½
Sacramento	43	28	.606	4½
Phoenix	38	33	.535	9½
L.A. Clippers	38	34	.528	10
Golden State	37	36	.507	11½
Dallas	36	36	.500	12
Minnesota	36	37	.493	12½
Oklahoma City	35	36	.493	12½
Utah	35	36	.493	12½
L.A. Lakers	35	37	.486	13
New Orleans	34	37	.479	13½
Portland	31	40	.437	16½

e-San Antonio	19	52	.268	28½
e-Houston	18	54	.250	30
x-clinched playoff spot				
x-eliminated from playoff contention				
Positions 1-6: Qualify for playoffs				
Positions 7-10: Play-in tournament				
Monday's results				
Charlotte 115, Indiana 109				
Chicago 109, Philadelphia 105, 2OT				
Minnesota 140, New York 134				
Golden State 121, Houston 108				
Memphis 112, Dallas 108				
Utah 128, Sacramento 120				
Tuesday's results				
Washington at Orlando, (n)				
Cleveland at Brooklyn, (n)				
Detroit at Atlanta, (n)				
San Antonio at New Orleans, (n)				
Boston at Sacramento, (n)				

Oklahoma City at L.A. Clippers, (n)

Wednesday's games

Denver at Washington, 6 p.m.

Golden State at Dallas, 6:30 p.m.

Indiana at Toronto, 6:30 p.m.

New York at Miami, 6:30 p.m.

Atlanta at Minnesota, 7 p.m.

Houston at Memphis, 7 p.m.

Philadelphia at Chicago, 7 p.m.

San Antonio at Milwaukee, 7 p.m.

Portland at Utah, 8 p.m.

Phoenix at L.A. Lakers, 9 p.m.

Thursday's games

New York at Orlando, 6 p.m.

Cleveland at Brooklyn, 6:30 p.m.

Charlotte at New Orleans, 7 p.m.

Oklahoma City at L.A. Clippers, 9:30 p.m.