

## Halvorsen: Leagues' top teams had a shot

Continued from Page 7  
tent, Seattle. Those teams weren't given scratch from the word go, and neither team has really been able to get off the ground since. It's true that Seattle did have a successful team in the mid-1980s and even went to the AFC championship before losing to the Oakland Raiders, but Tampa Bay has yet to pull itself out of the doldrums.

One argument could be that it is the quality of the people in the front office and on the coaching staff that inevitably make a team what it is. Look at the expansion teams of the past, like Dallas and Miami.

Dallas won slightly over 19 percent of its games in the first two years of existence before becoming a major power in the NFL about 10 years later.

Miami took six years to accomplish what no other team has ever done: go undefeated in a season and win the Super Bowl after winning only a quarter of its games in the first two years. All of this occurred without the same amount of NFL help that today's teams have received. But the rules have changed since those teams came into the league, impacted mostly by free agency.

Carolina has had four first-round draft picks in two years and has reaped the benefits of the free-agent market, and has picked up potential and peren-

nial all-stars such as Kevin Greene, Sam Mills, Eric Davis, Ragib Ismail and John Kasay. Carolina acquired 19 free agents, 14 unrestricted free agents and four players off of the waiver wire this year. Pretty good dealing by the front office if you look at it that way.

When you look past all of the little perks the newest expansion teams in the league received, it comes down to the simple fact that both of these teams have put their available talent to its full use. Carolina is far from the most talented team in the NFL, but they played tough and beat the 49ers twice. Jacksonville has even less of a talent pool to work with, but the Jaguars' persistence and attitude has led them this far.

Really, the thing that it boils down to when you look at these two teams in the championship games is that they deserve to be there, plain and simple. The powers that be — San Francisco, Dallas, Pittsburgh and Denver — all had their shots at proving that wrong but couldn't.

Now, all that those teams can do is sit back and enjoy the rest of the playoffs and wonder how they could be more like Carolina and Jacksonville.

*Ryan Halvorsen is a sports reporter for the Emerald. His views do not necessarily represent those of the newspaper.*

## Northwestern's Autry enters draft

DRAFT: Wildcats' running back Darnell Autry will skip senior season for the NFL

The Associated Press

EVANSTON, Ill. — Against the advice of his coach, Northwestern's marquee running back said Monday that he'll skip his senior year and turn pro.

Darnell Autry, the Wildcats' career rushing leader, helped raise the program from a perennial doormat to national prominence.

Despite uncertainty over his place in the NFL draft, and despite the advice of head coach Gary Barnett, Autry said it was time to go.

"Nothing is guaranteed. I feel and I know in my heart I've got the mind to succeed and get through it no matter what," said Autry, who is also an aspiring actor.

"I felt it was time to try this opportunity and I have the faith and confidence it's going to work out," he said. "I think that's the only way it can be."

"It was not based on the team's future, not based on coach Barnett's future or even my family's future. It was based solely on what I thought was best for me," Autry said.

The 20-year-old junior has rushed for more than 3,000 yards the last two seasons at Northwestern, helping it to two of the three postseason bowl games in school history.

Barnett, who reports say will interview for the vacant Detroit Lions' coaching position, advised him to stay based on information that Autry would not be one of the top 15 players selected in the draft.

Barnett released a statement from Florida, where he was at a college coaches convention.

"I recommended to Darnell that he stay in school, based on the information which the NFL has supplied to me," Barnett said. "I felt it was in Darnell's best interest to return for his senior year, however, he and

his family have decided differently, and I will certainly do anything I can to help him as he enters the draft."

Autry said he would have preferred to have Barnett's blessing but did what he felt he had to do.

At 5-foot-11, 209 pounds, Autry has a powerful and bruising running style and rarely fumbles.

He was a Heisman Trophy finalist in 1995, when Northwestern lost to USC in the Rose Bowl. In the Wildcats' Jan. 1 loss to Tennessee in the Citrus Bowl, Autry was stricken with a 101-degree fever, finishing with 66 yards and two touchdowns on 17 carries.

Autry, the Wildcats' career scoring leader, was sidelined for one game by a shoulder injury this season and still rushed for 1,386 yards and 15 touchdowns.

Autry said he was not pressured by his father to go to the NFL and said his decision was not based on fear of injury during a final season in college.

"It's a gamble ... whether you are a senior or a junior," he said.

A committee assessing his draft status told him he could be drafted between the late first round and the fifth. Despite the uncertainty, he said it was time for him to go.

Autry said the uncertainty didn't bother him because "no one knows what teams are thinking until you are drafted."

Northwestern finished with a 9-2 regular season record and a No. 15 ranking, and tied for its second straight Big Ten championship.

Autry, like most underclassmen, faced a Jan. 10 deadline to announce whether he would give up his final year of college eligibility.

He said he still hopes to pursue his acting career once his playing days are over. He said he needs another year of classes to graduate and would like to return to Northwestern to get his degree.

## UCLA softball coach will retire in June

The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — UCLA's Sharon Backus, whose 847 victories are the most of any collegiate softball coach, has decided to retire at the end of the current academic year, athletic director Peter Dalis said Monday.

At her request, Backus has been reassigned within the athletic de-

partment, effective immediately, and will not coach during the 1997 season.

Backus compiled an 847-167-3 record in 21 years at UCLA, making her the winningest college softball coach in history. She led the Bruins to nine national championships and a post-season record of 118-32.

"I've had a great career at UCLA, but it's time for a change," Backus said. "My primary reason for stepping down has to do with the illness and death of my mother in early October."

"That, plus the ongoing NCAA probe of the softball program have created a level of stress that I feel is best to put behind me at this time."

Please recycle this paper!

S T U D E N T S  
MAKE THE  
**difference!**

UO STUDENTS, HELP US FILL THE SEATS AT MAC COURT THIS SEASON! PICK UP YOUR **FREE pit pack** WHEN YOU PURCHASE BOOKS AT THE UO BOOKSTORE FOR WINTER TERM CLASSES... BRING THE PACK'S **GAME RAFFLE TICKETS** TO PAC-10 MEN'S AND WOMEN'S BASKETBALL GAMES AND WIN GREAT PRIZES!

**prizes sponsored by**

BI-MART, BURGER KING®, LITTLE CAESARS, PEPSI, U.S. BANK, UO ATHLETIC DEPARTMENT, UO BOOKSTORE, DOWNTOWN ATHLETIC CLUB

AVAILABLE WHILE SUPPLIES LAST (FIRST 10,000 STUDENTS) OR UNTIL JANUARY 31, 1997.

