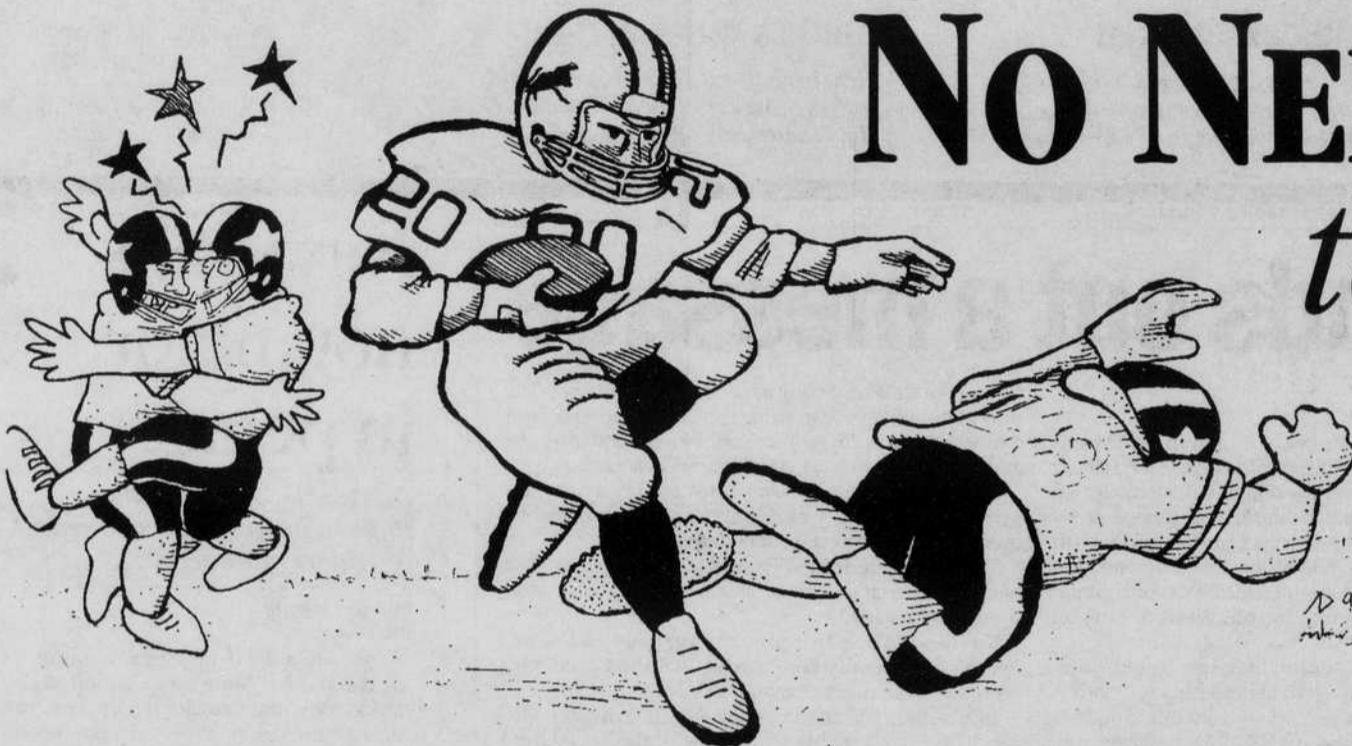


PERSPECTIVES

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No Need to Run



Barry Sanders' premature retirement is the latest in a disturbing series of superstar exits

All right, this is getting ridiculous. First, Michael Jordan. Then, Wayne Gretzky and John Elway.

Now? Barry Sanders. Instead of computers crashing as the new century nears, professional sports and their fans are the ones suffering.

Maybe the four aforementioned superstars retired precisely because of the infamous 2000 bug — they didn't want their paychecks irretrievably lost in the mix or scheduled flights to their next arenas nixed.

All millennium madness aside, sports stars are calling it quits at an alarmingly rapid rate.

Jordan's and Elway's retirements were expected and Gretzky's was imminent, but Sanders' Wednesday announcement was shocking.

One season removed from becoming just the third player in NFL history to rush for more than 2,000 yards, Sanders, in his prime at age 31, wrote in a released statement "My desire to exit the game is greater than my desire to remain in it. I have searched my heart through and through and feel comfortable with this decision."

This from a man who probably would have broken Walter Payton's career rushing record this season, needing

1,458 yards — an average season by Sanders' spectacular standards — to eclipse Payton's mark of 16,726 yards.

Apparently, Sanders' desires do not include being widely recognized as the greatest running back of all-time by claiming one of the NFL's revered records.

That is, until some young stud like Terrell Davis proved once again that records are, after all, made to be broken.

Regardless, Sanders' decision to walk away after just 10 seasons while still at the pinnacle of his craft is startling.

There are whispers that it is all a hard-bargaining ploy, Sanders being unhappy with his Detroit Lions' losing ways and wanting out but knowing the Lions would never let him go under normal circumstances.

But let's at least assume for a minute that Sanders' exit is legit, and he won't come back a few years from now like Jordan or resurface in a different uniform (Barry, just don't change to No. 45).

Is this — the retirement of a star athlete while still young and peaking — a precursor to what awaits in the 21st century?

With salaries, endorsements and all-around incomes mind-blowingly high for superstars today, more athletes can afford to retire young and enjoy their wealth.

Such practices are not too uncommon in the business world, where brilliant, young entrepreneurs routinely get out of the game early after making their millions, make that billions.

Perhaps Sanders is genuinely burned out, if not physical-

ly, then emotionally. There is no telling the toll the rigorous, violent NFL can take on an athlete's psyche. Especially when he or she is losing as much as Sanders' Lions do.

Maybe Sanders just doesn't feel like going to war any more, even if he is tantalizingly close to what the media had already pinpointed as what would be his greatest victory.

Refreshingly, Sanders may just be that rare athlete who doesn't care about personal glory. As a rookie, he did refuse to reenter a game for the mere purpose of securing the league rushing title.

If Sanders' decision does prove to be final, his early retirement is as awe-inspiring, head-scratching and jaw-dropping as were his invigorating, something-where-there-was-nothing runs.

Both are indeed unrivaled.

Even with Dominik Hasek, the Buffalo Sabres' "Dominator" of a goaltender, trying to snag a little of the spotlight by revealing that he will announce today his intentions to retire after next season.

For the sake of fans everywhere, the retirement virus must be contained.

Contained to those who really are in need of the 'ol extended vacation.

Tim Pyle is the Emerald's editor in chief.

Opinion



Tim Pyle

the rd chronicles: door job



Oregon Emerald

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