



Sport Talk

by Ron Sykes, Sports Editor

There will be no joy in Mudville, uh, er, that's San Francisco, this year. Last season the 49ers went 13-3 and were the Cinderella team that captured the hearts of football fans from the Bay area to Tokyo. But what a difference a season makes.

This year's team suffered key injuries early in the season and never recovered. At 3-5 all that was needed was a victory over the 1-7 Rams to make the playoffs. Score: Rams 21, SF 20, the scoreboard read. So what happened?

Many reasons come readily to the front, especially when things are going bad. Some so-called football fans place the blame on the young secondary, others say the strike hurt the 49ers more than other teams because if Coach Bill Walsh's complicated offensive scheme, while others put the blame to excessive injuries.

For sure they all coming had a good deal to do with the team's dismal 3-6 record. But the belief here is that the secondary had the least to do with the Niner collapse.

One year ago Dwight Hicks, Carlton Williamson, Eric Wright and Ronnie Lott were the talk of the NFL. They had become the pillars on a defense that was quite porous only a year before. Lott was named NFL Rookie-of-the-year and made all-pro at cornerback.

Since only Hicks had any previous experience and his only being one year, the Forty-niners' followers can hardly blame the secondary for the team's sudden demise. They certainly didn't all grow old and over-the-hill in one year.

The talent obviously didn't disappear. . . . Right? Game after game these young secondary defenders were put under fire simply because

of the defensive line. That's right. The Forty-niners ranked dead last in the NFL in pass rushing. And common sense will tell you that given the time any starting QB in the league will eventually pick you apart. Those defensive backs, no matter how good, can only provide cover for so long. Wright and Lott were beaten deep this year on far too many occasions. These (Lott and Wright) are two excellent defenders who suffered due to interior line problems.

Things were so bad that Walsh had to use Oregon's Jeff Stover as his starting defensive end, a man who never played one down of college football.

If the Niners are to regain their championship ways they must do two things: simply improve the defense and acquire some good running backs.

Jeff Moore, a Seattle Seahawk reject, had some good moments but he is certainly not the answer.

Houston, it is rumored, is ready to deal away Earl Campbell. If that's true then the Debartola family, who owns the Niners, should start checking their bank account. Campbell would be ideal.

With a horse like Campbell as the runner and Oregon's Vince Williams injured the last five games, the running game would then be in fine shape.

Williams, at 235 pounds, was by far the best blocking back on the team.

There may be sadness in the Bay area this year but the belief here is that the Niners will return next season. The nucleus is there, time will heal the wounds, and a trade or two should supply the missing ingredients.

Ron's playoff picks

Okay, we won't attempt to go on a milk run around the NFL, we'll leave that to good friend Ed. But for what it's worth here's a look at the playoffs or the Super Bowl tournament as some prefer to call it.

AFL

San Diego vs. Miami

Who can forget that sunny afternoon a year ago when Don Fouts and Kellen Winslow performed so admirably only to lose to Miami?

Well, this time the dynamic duo will not only seek revenge, but will find it. This is a different Charger team from that one a year ago. And the difference is that they now have confidence. Fouts is uncanny with his receivers; he knows exactly where and when they will make their breaks and he delivers on the spot. As a pure passer there's none better in today's game.

The Chargers' offense alone will be too much for the Dolphins, San Diego 33, Miami 16.

L.A. Raiders vs. N.Y. Jets

The Jets unleashed second year running back Freeman McNeill against the highly regarded Cincinnati Bengals and the ex-UCLA All-American responded with a record

208 yards rushing. And to add insult to injury the 210-pound runner

showed his versatility by throwing a touchdown pass in the second period. But the Raiders have a running back of their own in Marcus Allen. The 6-2 210-pound former Hiesman trophy winner from U.S.C. is the first non-kicker to win the scoring title in the last decade.

Allen, in an abbreviated season, scored 11 touchdowns. Both Richard Todd, N.Y., and Jim Plunkett, Raiders, are capable quarterbacks. But the Raiders are stronger in both the offensive and defensive lines. In fact the Raiders offensive line is awesome. The average a little under 270 across the line. This is it: Bruce Davis—in his fourth year from UCLA stands 6-6 and 280 pounds . . . left tackle.

Dave Dalby—Dalby is the oldest and smallest of the offensive line. At 6-3 and 250, the successor to Jim Otto, they are the only two ever to play center for the Raiders.

Curt Marsh—6-5 and 270 and awesome. Marsh, the second year man from Washington, is rapidly gaining a reputation as a fierce blocker. Marsh, who made the '81 NFL all-Rookie team, is solely responsible for putting Gene Upshaw

on the bench.

Mickey Marvin—Right guard, 6-4 and 275. The man from Tennessee, in his sixth year, is also a terrific blocker.

Henry Lawrence—The best is saved for last. The 6-4 right tackle out of Florida A&M is the best player on the offensive line. Henry weights in at 270 and blocks a ton. Raiders 17, Jets 10.

NFL

Green Bay vs. Dallas

This one will be held in Texas Stadium, a place where the Cowboys seldom lose.

The Green Bay offense is hitting on all pistons, while the Cowboy offense behind the injured Danny White is sputtering. Tony Dorsett is unhappy, while John Jefferson and James Lofton are dancing and doing high fives with the Green Bay fans.

Take Green Bay in a close one, 20-19.

Washington vs. Minn.

The Redskins are for real. And all the small men of the world can rejoice each time Redskin wide receiver Al Garrett catches a pass.

Garrett, 5-7, had a spectacular af-

ternoon against the Lions. The mighty mite, from some small college that is hard to pronounce and even harder to find, caught six Theisman aerials for 188 yards and three TDs.

Minnesota is lucky to be here and even luckier to be playing in the weaker NFL. Take the Redskins in a cakewalk.

NCAA Game Of The Week

Georgetown 97, Syracuse 92

Before 31,327 hungry fans in the Carrier Dome, Georgetown freshman Michael Jackson scored 31 points to lead the Hoyas over ninth-ranked Syracuse.

It was a crucial contest for the 19th ranked Hoyas as it was their conference opener. Syracuse down by 21 at halftime made a brilliant second half run and closed the gap to four. When the flashy, 6-1, Jackson took charge, bringing the Hoyas home.

Frazier-Page fight scheduled for TV

Larry Frazier has one hurdle to cross before his scheduled bout with WBC's second-ranked contender, Greg Page, on February 12th.

Frazier, who is ranked number 17, will meet Ishaq Hussein Thursday night in Seattle's Paramount Theater. "I first got to beat this guy Hussein," Frazier said. "If I don't beat him, there's no Page, no big TV money."

The pro-boxing card will be Seattle's first since 1981 and features five bouts. The card is promoted by Thad Spencer of Portland, former Pacific Northwest Golden Gloves Champion and number-one-ranked

heavyweight contender.

Frazier, 32, is looking for his 21st knockout in 25 fights. He is managed by Mike Morton and makes his home in Portland. If he gets past Hussein, Frazier will meet Don King's Greg Page. The Frazier-Page fight will be televised by ABC-TV.

Hussein was born Leroy McCarthy Timothy in the Dominican Republic and emigrated to Berkshire, England in 1966. He turned pro in 1975 and, fighting under the name of Tshaka, defeated Iron Man Cliff Fields in 1980 for Great Britain's National Boxing Council title. He moved to Southern



LARRY FRAZIER

California in 1982. His fight in this country was a controversial loss to Eddie Lopez in California. He holds a 30-8-0 lifetime record.

Three additional 10-rounders grace the card: lightweights Irish Randy McNurlin and Happy Jimenez; lightheavyweights Greg "Mutt" Haigen and Joey Perez.

Junior middleweights Robert Villaired of Seattle and Mark Williams of Portland will meet in a special four-rounder to complete the card.

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