

SPORTS

Rice re-injures knee, playoffs uncertain

Jerry Rice, who made an astounding return to the San Francisco 49ers 15 weeks after major knee surgery, apparently bruised the surgically repaired right knee in Monday night's game against the Denver Broncos and is uncertain for the playoffs.

Rice, the NFL's all-time touchdown and receiving leader, caught a 14-yard touchdown pass midway through the second quarter of the 34-17 win over Denver.

The wide receiver held on for the score despite taking a hard hit as he caught the ball. Rice finished the first half with three catches for 40 yards, but sat out the second half with an ice pack on the knee.

Niners general manager Dwight Clark said Rice's status is uncertain for the playoffs.

"Jerry Rice suffered a knee injury totally unrelated to the injury he sustained and completely recovered from earlier in the season," Clark said after the game. "We are going to do some imaging (MRI) and we will know more about it then."

The 49ers had planned to sit out Rice for the regular season finale at Seattle this weekend in any event because of the Kingdome's artificial turf. San Francisco will not play its first playoff game until the weekend of January 3-4.

BEARCATS WIN SPOT IN NAIA CHAMPIONSHIP GAME

By NEIL HEILPERN

The Willamette University Bearcats clawed their way at Portland Civic Stadium Saturday to earn their first spot in NAIA's national championship game next weekend.

The Salem team toppled the Sioux Falls (S.D.) Cougars, last year's champs, in a 17-7 game which held both teams scoreless in the second half.

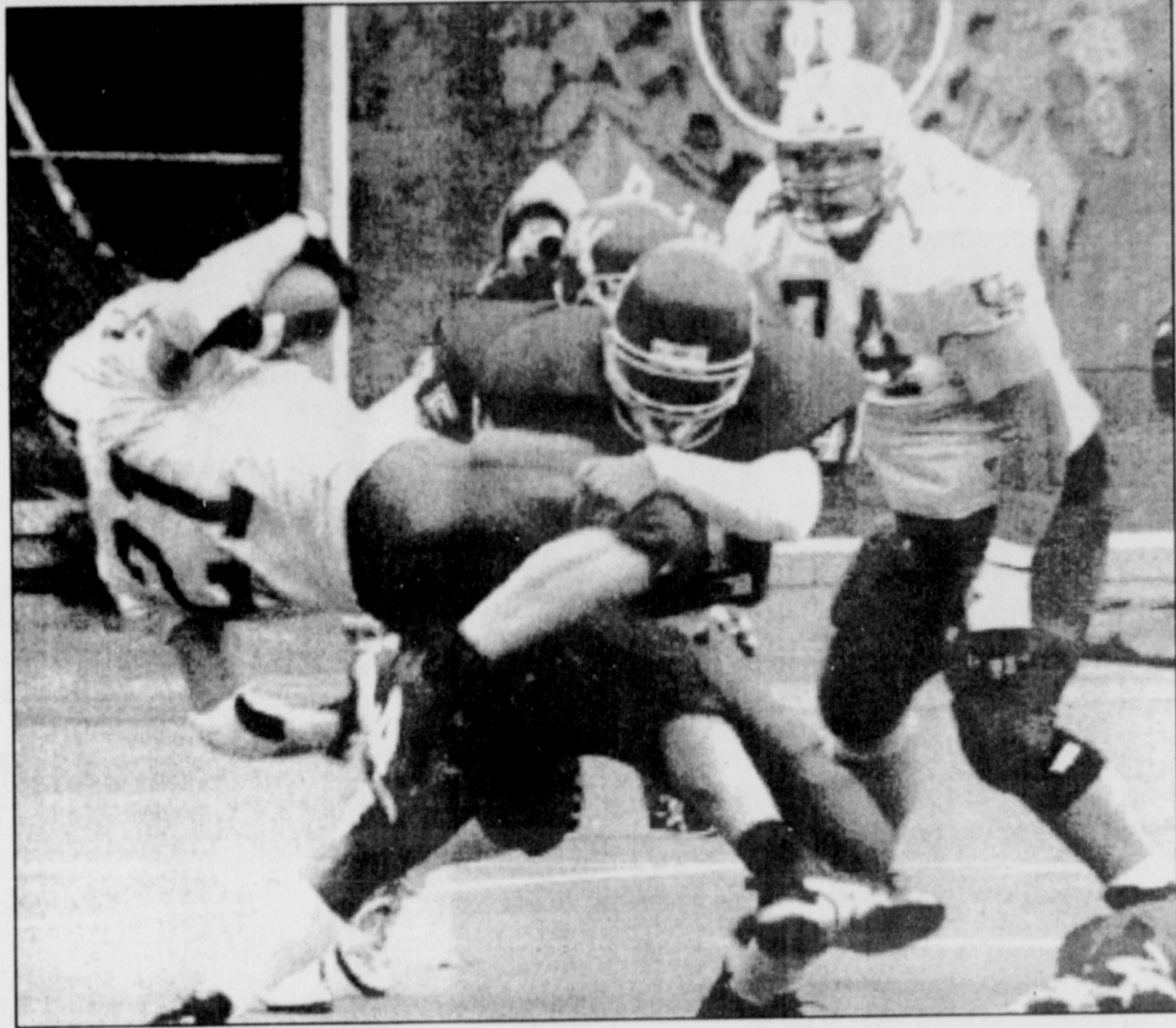
The win culminates a five year effort that has brought WU from a 1-9 season to a perfect 13-0 record. Saturday they face top ranked Findlay of Ohio, 1995 national co-champions among small colleges, in Savannah, Tenn.

Earlier in playoffs, Willamette outscored Findlay's co-champ title holder, Western Washington.

Bearcat Fullback Rich Rideout Scored on an eight yard sprint five minutes into the first quarter following an eight play, 75 yard drive which began on a Cougar fumble recovery by Chris Calaycay, and the Cougars kept stumbling. Brandon Folkert recovered another fumble late in the third quarter with Sioux Falls deep in WU turf, on the 11.

Late in the first quarter, WU traveled downfield in 12 plays to the 20 where Gordon Thomson's kick upped the score to 10-0.

A Cougar second quarter 93 yard



Willamette Bearcat defender Rai Washington lifted the Sioux Falls ball carrier for a "dunk-slam" in a 17-10 football game at civic Stadium to take WU to the NAIA championship match Saturday

Photo by Neil Heilpern

drive in 17 plays ended with a one yard plunge by David Ruter and successful kick for a 10-7 tally. Willamette answered minutes later with a backfield pass.

With quarterback Chuck Pinkerton temporarily out of the game nursing injuries, replacement quarterback Jay Douglass handed off to third string fullback Stephen Person. Sprinting to his left, Person pivoted, tossed and hit flanker Tim Blair for a 44 yard TD.

Thomson's kick capped the scoring for the rest of the day.

Cougar's nationally second best offensive line crumpled several times against a top rated Bearcat defense which crashed through for six OB sacks. WU tackle Jackson Baures came up with five tackles and two sacks.

A field-length fourth quarter push by the South Dakota team was thwarted by several sacks, including three by Eric Thomson costing the Cougars 33 yards. Sioux Falls' final possession ended on Willamette's 49 when a fourth and 26 desperation pass fell short.

A key factor for Willamette's five year winning streak is the holistic philosophy brought to town by Coach Dan Hawkins in 1993.

"Hawk" taught his players to build character, strength, courage, courtesy, scholastics and a sense of commitment on many levels.

NBA Eliminates Dunk Contest

The dunk contest was often slammed in recent years. Critics said all the good dunks had already been done and lamented the lack of participation from the league's best players.

The NBA, wary of an event gone stale, has decided to do away with it. For the first time since 1983, All-Star Weekend will be held without a dunk contest.

"I think it was getting to be monotonous, and maybe it's good to do something different," Charles Barkley said.

"It was the same dunk over and over. There's really nothing you could do. I think some dunkers were really good, but nobody got excited about it

because they had seen it before."

The dunk contest will be replaced by an event called "2-ball" that will team one NBA and one WNBA player from the same city in a shooting contest in which points are awarded on a sliding scale for shots taken from different spots on the court over a span of 60 seconds. The further the shot, the more points.

It doesn't sound quite as exciting as a windmill, between-the-legs, 360-degree throwdown. And it remains to be seen how the fans paying \$100 per ticket will react when the event is held Feb. 7.

"It's a big change. The NBA slam-

dunk contest is kind of a tradition, but it's been down in the past few years and the competitors have not stepped up," said Kobe Bryant, who won the dunk contest last season in Cleveland.

"I think a little change right now would be appropriate. But in a couple of years, they'll probably go back to it," Bryant said.

The league plans to unveil its "2-ball" plans at a news conference Wednesday, and no one at the league office was willing to comment Monday on the demise of the dunk contest.

Players had mixed opinions.

"It's probably something that will be missed because for a lot of fans, a

lot of little kids, that was probably the part of the All-Star weekend that they enjoy," said Shareef Abdur-Rahim of the Vancouver Grizzlies.

"Growing up, I looked forward to the slam dunk contest," Rockets rookie Rodrick Rhodes said. "But they changed the format a little bit the last couple of years and kind of screwed up the whole dunk contest."

Some of the more memorable winning dunks were Dee Brown slamming the ball through with his forearm covering his eyes, Cedric Ceballos making a blindfolded slam and Spud Webb, all 5-foot-7 of him, showing an astonishing vertical leap and making a 360-degree midair turn in 1986.

Iverson suspended for one game

The Philadelphia 76ers suspended guard Allen Iverson for Monday night's game against the Boston Celtics for missing practice a day earlier.

Sixers vice president of basketball administration Billy King announced the decision before the game, saying that Iverson had violated team rules.

"It's unfortunate, but team rules have to stand and be upheld," King said. "We look forward to having Allen back soon."

Iverson had 29 points against New York on Saturday night, but only two assists as the Knicks beat the Sixers 95-83. On Sunday, he missed practice. Philadelphia center Eric

Montross confirmed.

Iverson sat on the Sixers' bench in street clothes during Monday night's game at the FleetCenter, which the Celtics won 100-83. He declined to comment after the game as he sat in the locker room listening to music on his headphones.

"The rules have to be enforced. He happened to be the first one to step over the line," Montross said.

"I think we're all disappointed," he said. "He's our floor leader and we need to have him out there. He realizes that we need him and hopefully that will keep him in good standing in the future."


Iverson's behavior has come under scrutiny before.

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HAWKS 99, BLAZERS 90

Tyrone Corbin scored a season-high 19 points and Christian Laettner added 19 points and 13 rebounds Monday night as Atlanta won its third straight game, 99-90 over Portland.

Reserve Ed Gray added 16 points for the Hawks, who were playing their fourth road game in five nights.

Gray took over at point guard in the second quarter for the slumping Mookie Blaylock, who scored only eight points on 3-of-12 shooting.

Gray, who entered the game averaging 7.3 points, scored nine during a 16-8 run that gave Atlanta a 54-47 halftime lead.

Dikembe Mutombo had 19 points and nine rebounds for the Hawks.

Kenny Anderson scored 20 points and Rasheed Wallace added 16 for the Blazers. The Blazers have lost six straight to the Hawks, dating to Jan. 3, 1995.

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