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C.J. Risak

Twisting road of life brings Wiska home

SETBACKS ARE ABOUT as welcome as wars.

One day the trail to career success looks as brilliant as the yellow brick road Dorothy followed to Oz. But in a seemingly short span of time — a single day, perhaps — what seemed so golden tarnishes.

Just as Dorothy's trip was derailed by flying monkeys, the road to success often wanders astray. Jeff Wiska's path to the professional football ranks has taken many steps — forward, backward and lateral. But in an occupation that often ridicules security, Wiska has at last, at least, found a spot for himself.

For the time being anyway, Wiska has got the monkey (flying or otherwise) off his back.

"WHEN I WENT INTO camp I just wanted to make the team," the giant (6-foot-4, 265-pounds) young lineman said minutes after his team, the Michigan Panthers, had played the San Antonio Gunslingers Sunday.

It seemed too modest a goal for a man who was one cut away from playing in the more talented, more prestigious NFL. The young USFL doesn't possess the caliber of talent its older brother has, so it seemed a borderline NFLer like Wiska would have no problem making it.

But life on the borderline has never been certain. The 24-year-old Farmington native starred as an offensive lineman at Redford Catholic Central before heading for Michigan State. His stay at MSU was productive — he earned second team All-Big Ten honors and was twice named to the All-Academic squad — but it wasn't all it could have been.

PART OF THE PROBLEM was a coaching switch in the middle of Wiska's collegiate career. Darryl Rogers left MSU and Muddy Waters was hired. It soon became apparent Waters was in over his head.

Wiska was picked by the New York Giants in the seventh round of the 1982 NFL draft. The Giants liked his speed (4.84 in the 40-yard dash), size and strength (465-pounds on the bench press). But despite his talent, Wiska had his deficiencies.

"When I went to New York, they told me they thought I had the ability," Wiska recalled, "but I needed to polish up my technique."

While Wiska worked on learning the technique he was never taught at MSU, he sprained a knee in practice the week after the Giants' first game. They put him on injured reserve for the rest of the season.

IT WAS ANOTHER setback, but Wiska was convinced he'd get another shot with the Giants in 1983. Until...

(Giants coach) Ray Perkins went to Alabama and (offensive line coach) Bill Austin went to the New Jersey Generals in the USFL," Wiska said. "The new staff drafted a tackle in the third round and a guard in the sixth. They decided to keep both of them."

Wiska was the last offensive lineman the Giants cut. "I was dismayed," he admitted, "but I knew I wasn't outclassed. I was confident in my ability. I knew I'd get a chance."

Kansas City, Green Bay and Detroit all contacted Wiska and said they would give him a tryout should the need for a lineman arise during the NFL season.

Wiska was in no hurry. He waited and weighed his options. The Panthers, too, had called the very day the Giants released him.

IN NOVEMBER, Wiska made his choice. He signed a two-year contract with the Panthers and braced himself for another setback. A tackle at MSU, the Giants used him at both tackle and guard. It would be different with Michigan.

"When I came to the Panthers they had four good tacklers (Chris Godfrey, (Ken) Dallimore, (Tony) Osborn and (Ray) Plincy. So he beat Wiska. So he became a backup to guards Plincy, who switched after an injury to Thom Donbrook, and Tyrone McGriff.

An injury to Plincy put Wiska into the starting lineup for the Panthers' first two games this season. He has since played part-time — 20 plays against Houston but sparingly against San Antonio — usually on special teams or in short-yardage situations.

NOT STARTING doesn't bother Wiska. "The thing is, this offensive line is the best in the USFL," he explained. "I would feel bad if our offensive line was really terrible and I wasn't playing."

If Wiska's search for football success has led him afar, he has since returned to where he began. He's not only playing pro ball, but he's playing it with a hometown team.

"I'm happy with my contract," he said, "and I'm ecstatic to play in my hometown. I'm content here. I could play the rest of my career very happily right here."

Even as a backup?

"I'm a patient person," he answered. "It doesn't matter how the other guys play, it's how well I play. I put all the pressure on myself."

"If I'm good enough, they'll find a place for me." An athletic career is tenuous at best, with setbacks as common as weak-armed quarterbacks and glow-footed receivers. But for now, for the present and perhaps a small slice of the future, Jeff Wiska can catch a brief glimpse of a glimmering, golden road. Where it leads only time — and a two-year contract — will tell.

Basford takes full-ride to U-M

By Chris McCosky
staff writer

Sarah Basford, the third leading scorer in Farmington Hills Our Lady of Mercy history, will continue her basketball career at the University of Michigan. She has verbally agreed to a full-ride basketball scholarship to the university beginning next fall.

"I committed last night," the attractive and talented Basford said in a phone interview Tuesday. "I'm real excited about it. They said I would probably play point guard, but I'm going to have to produce. How much I play depends on how good I do."

Wolverine coach Gloria Soluk said she expects Basford to step in and contribute immediately.

"We won't recruit a player if we don't think she can help us immediately," Soluk said. "We recruit on the basis of that player's potential to play immediately. We think Sarah will be a great player for us."

The University of Michigan women's basketball program has been beset with problems in recent years. Last year the team finished with a 4-26 record. But, neither Basford nor Soluk is worried about the team's history. Both see a bright future for the Wolves.

"I know a lot of people are saying the program is a loser, but I don't feel that way. They have gotten a lot of good recruits. They should be much improved next year. I'm real happy. I know if I went far away I'd get homesick. And you can't beat the education I'll get," she said.

AMONG THE recruits Basford spoke of were the state of Ohio's Player of Year, Kelly Benitelli, Class D all-stater Shawn Brown, and one of the top women players out of Indiana.

"We had a terrible season last year, a tough conference," Soluk said. "But, the Big 10 is a tough conference. We are starting to put some money into our program now, as is evidenced by our

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— Sarah Basford
Bound for U-M

excellent recruiting year, and really, our future is bright. I think we are about three years away right now."

Basford, an All-Area and all-state performer last season, was one of the most sought-after senior players in the state, getting offers from more than 100 schools. She narrowed the field to eight: Michigan, Boston, Georgetown, Kansas, Wisconsin, Missouri, DePaul and Western Michigan. She visited the first five before choosing U-M.

At Mercy, Basford played on state championship, city championship, Catholic League championship and three Central Division championship teams. She scored 734 points (3rd best all-time), dished out 169 assists (3rd best), made 120 steals (7th best) and pulled down 251 rebounds from her guard position.

She was one of many outstanding players produced by coach Larry Baker at Mercy.

Basford possesses a picture-perfect jump shot and was as graceful a player as Mercy ever produced. As Baker said, she was a winner. Basford is the second Mercy standout to attend U-M. Diane Dietz just finished up her successful, four-year stint with the Wolves last season.

Basford is expected to sign an official letter-of-intent April 11.



Sarah Basford, Mercy's third all-time leading scorer, has verbally agreed to a full-ride basketball scholarship to the University of Michigan.

BILL BRESLER/staff photographer

On your mark Runners ready for big seasons in 1984

By Rich Swenson
staff writer

FARMINGTON HIGH SCHOOL has a tradition of producing fine track and field teams, and this year should be no exception.

Last year, the Falcons won the Western Lakes Activities Association Lakes Division. They are expected to be strong again this season, despite losing a number of last year's stars to graduation.

Gone from last year's squad are Pete Brown, league champ in the shot put and discus, all-division high jumper John Clappison, division half-mile champ Doug Jenkins and the school's record holder in the low hurdles, Erik Hilgley.

But new stars have developed this season, and they are expected to keep the Falcons in the fight for the league crown.

"I see us contending for the division championship again this season," Farmington coach Dave Catherman said. "There are still a lot of question marks, but we've had some very good workouts and a lot of enthusiasm from our kids."

THE FALCONS' strengths this season will be in the hurdles, high jump and long and middle distance races, Catherman said.

Senior Greg Copal leads the hurdles. Second to Hilgley in all the rankings last year, he should pick up the slack left by Hilgley's graduation.

"We have a very strong hurdles team," Catherman said. "Greg may be the school record holder by the end of the season. He's that good."

Senior Tim Berry and junior Greg Fournier are expected to give Copal excellent support.

Leading a strong contingent of high jumpers is junior sensation Al Haren, who has cleared the 6-foot mark. Seniors Dave Weems and Dan Lemm, who have both jumped 5-10, give the Falcons depth. All three placed in the conference meet last season.

THE LONG AND middle distance

boys track

runners also should be contenders this season.

"We were very young and inexperienced last year. But the cross country team had an outstanding season, and we expect our distance crew to do a very good job."

Juniors Bruce Kerr and Dave Dunneback and sophomores Brian Lawton and Erik Krall head the distance runners. Junior Dwayne Krall and senior newcomer Tim Carruthers lead the half-milers.

The sprint team has some top-notch returnees from last year, but the Falcons may have to find some new faces if the team is to excel in the sprints.

"We have quality but not quantity this year."

THE FOUR BEST sprinters are Imus, juniors Mike Forge and Brian Looser and sophomore Chris Mineweaser.

Last season, Imus, Forge and Looser combined to become division champions in both the 440 and 880 relays.

Farmington should also do well in the pole vault. Senior Jeff Lawton and junior Dan Clappison, who both placed in the division last season, pace the Falcons' attack. Catherman believes both will clear 12 feet this year.

If Farmington has a weakness, it's in the throwing events — shot put and discus — especially after losing Brown.

"We had the best thrower in the area last year. Now we're starting over, but we have young and eager kids."

Haren and sophomore Dan Parillo are the Falcons' top hopes. Newcomers John Tureaud (junior) and Craig Pettermark (sophomore) should also contribute.

FARMINGTON HARRISON

The Hawks may well be the most improved team in the WIAA this season. After two seasons at the bottom of

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