



(F1C)

C.J.
RisakOnly good news
allowed at OU

AT LONG LAST. It's official. For months, no one wanted to confirm that Stan Blackford was being terminated as sports information director at Oakland University, preferring to leave the axman's work to someone else.

Blackford's job has been in jeopardy since March, when OU athletic director Paul Hartman recommended his contract not be renewed. But it wasn't made official until Hartman's recommendation cleared the OU review board and was signed by President Joseph Champagne last Wednesday.

Blackford is out of a job for reasons that have not been made public. Those reasons may never come to light. Just finding out Blackford would not return (his contract officially expires Aug. 15) took a good deal of digging.

THAT'S BECAUSE good news is apparently all that exists at OU. It's like living in a fairy-tale world and trying to convince people that, as the song goes, Everything is Beautiful. At least everything at OU is.

In the past two years, the school has not released such information as:

- the non-renewal of basketball coach Lee Frederick's contract;
- the loss of three women's basketball starters — Anya Williams, who flunked out, Kim McCarthy, who transferred, and Maria Reynolds, who quit the team;
- two students, one a member of the wrestling team, who apparently drowned in Lake Michigan over spring break.

FREDERICK'S FIRING was discovered when an advertisement for a new coach was printed in the NCAA news. Williams and McCarthy, both starters in 1983-84, were not mentioned in the OU preseason preview. McCarthy turned up at the University of Detroit to play for her former coach at OU, Dewey Jones.

The absence of Reynolds, who lasted one game for OU and quit when she didn't start, wasn't discovered until I witnessed a game in January. The supposed drawings of the two students, Gary Nanan and Daniel Meloy, were revealed by wrestling coach Mike Ozga at the OU sports banquet three weeks after the pair were listed as missing.

Why the lack of information regarding such gloomy events? Reasons vary, according to Hartman.

For instance, Hartman said Frederick and his lawyers didn't want his firing released during the season. That proved an embarrassment for OU when the ad appeared in the NCAA News at the season's midpoint.

WITH REYNOLDS, coach Sue Kruszewski was trying to convince her to return to the team. A press release announcing Reynolds had left the team, Hartman felt, would have "shut the door on her." Yet, when Reynolds didn't return to the team after more than a month, Hartman agreed a release should have been issued.

Blackford knew what could happen. "How am I going to convince you guys," he told me, "to do a story on our soccer team if you find out I'm holding back other information?"

Blackford agonized over such a problem and made Hartman aware of it. Hartman says he agreed with Blackford, but several items he wanted to release, he couldn't.

Blackford's own non-renewal was a case in point. "The university asked me not to announce it when contracts are not renewed," Hartman said. "It's not negative publicity they're worried about. It's the rights of the individual. They don't want to say anything negative about him."

HARTMAN DID send a release to the OU public information department regarding Blackford, but OU vice president for external affairs David Rodwell vetoed it.

"In defense of Paul Hartman, he did propose a release," said Rodwell. "We don't make announcements for everybody whose contract is not renewed. It comes across as a punitive type of thing, and I don't think they need that."

"The public wouldn't be concerned with about 90 percent of them."

Yet it appears that there are problems determining who the public would be interested in.

Rodwell agreed that public figures, like coaches or department heads, would deserve an announcement if their contracts were being terminated.

But that doesn't explain adequately why certain distasteful problems are simply ignored, as if in a week or so they will disappear or be forgotten.

IT SEEMS as though the OU hierarchy — whoever will accept the responsibility for such lapses in communication — never learns. The Frederick firing was bungled badly, and the school paid for it in the press.

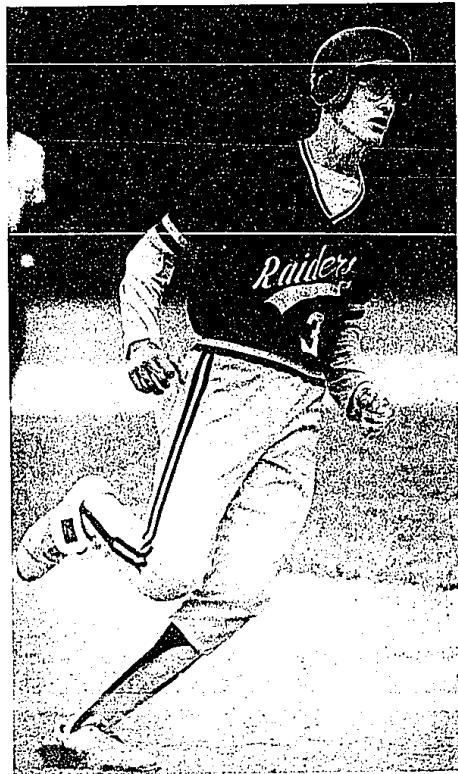
Not much has changed, it seems. There are still problems relating to the media.

"I guess we're a little paranoid with the press," Hartman said. "We don't know how they'll treat it."

And no one wants to look bad. Accentuate the positive, ignore the negative.

If the press sees the next winter saying a basketball game has been moved to the Silverdome, I'll have to remember to drive past OU on the way — just to be sure Lepley Sports Center hasn't burned down.

North exits NSL title chase



RANDY BORSI/Staff photographer

Mark Dillman had a pair of hits and knocked in a run in a losing effort Tuesday as North was tripped by Thurston 6-4.

By Chris McCosky
staff writer

The pretty young girl behind the backstop had no way of knowing what was going on between Redford Thurston baseball coach Emil Majeski and North Farmington coach Irv Horwitz.

"This gets to be so boring," said the pretty young girl behind the backstop.

What was transpiring on the North baseball diamond Tuesday was far from boring — but it was subtle excitement, not visible to the untrained eye.

North Farmington and Redford Thurston were locked in a 3-3 ballgame in the bottom of the seventh. At stake for North was a share of first place in the Northwest Suburban League. At stake for Thurston was a guaranteed share of the title.

(Thurston eventually won the game 6-3 and the title share, but North came within a sacrifice bunt and a ground out of shooting down the Eagles.)

North's first batter in the seventh — Ed Collins — hit a sharp single to left field that eluded the Thurston fielder. Collins sneaked into second. The next batter for North was the No. 9 batter Brian Bosca-

THIS IS when the wheels started turning and the subtle excitement commenced.

Majeski pulled an unusual coaching move. He decided to walk Bosca away on purpose. It goes against the standard coaching manual to give a free pass to the No. 9 batter, especially with the winning run on second and no outs. But, Majeski hasn't become one of the area's most respected coaches by following the book.

"You don't usually do that," Majeski said. "But I figured they were bunting and I wanted to set up a force at third. I figured the force would be an easy play."

Majeski's decision to walk Bosca away achieved something more important than setting up a force play. With the intentional pass, Majeski unwittingly erased the possibility of a bunt.

"I would have had Bosca away bunt, but not with my good hitters," said Horwitz. "Those guys have a tendency to bunt too hard. And with the force there, I figured we'd let them swing away."

THE WHEELS turned in Thurston's favor. Pitch-

baseball

er Chris Kloc retired the next three hitters, the first three batters in North's lineup, in a row.

Thurston came up with three runs in the top of the eighth — without the benefit of a hit — and went on to beat North 6-4.

"These kids, they are battlers," said Majeski. "They've come a long way since the beginning of the year. They really believe in themselves."

North opened the scoring in the first on a double by Eric Engle and a single by Mike Rudin.

Thurston countered with two in the third on singles by Mike Maurin, Greg George and Kloc.

Maurin, who went 5-for-3 with a pair of walks, led off the fifth with a single. He went to third on George's second hit and scored on Dave Dziobak's sacrifice fly.

DZIOBAK made two key defensive plays. He made a diving stop of a ground ball in the second inning to save a run. Then threw out Tom Cotter at the plate in the sixth after North had scored twice to tie the game.

Engle led off North's sixth with a single and promptly scored on Bob Chwalik's long triple. Cotter's single scored Chwalik. Mark Dillman then singled to left. The ball scooped past the left fielder and Cotter dashed homeward. Dziobak's relay throw beat him to the plate by three steps.

Thurston (6-3 in the NSL, 12-4 overall), after escaping the seventh, took advantage of a hit batsman and four walks to score three runs in the eighth.

Cotter, who left the game with the bases loaded and one out in the eighth, pitched a strong game. He allowed six hits and struck out 13.

Kloc was equally effective, scattering 11 hits and fanned eight. It was the second time Kloc has defeated North.

North is now 4-5 in the conference and 11-6 overall.

The pretty young girl behind the screen didn't know it, but she saw one heck of a ballgame.

Pitching hoists Hawk 9

John Herrington has said all along that if his Farmington Harrison baseball team got any kind of pitching it would win its share of games.

In the last four ballgame, 26 innings, the Hawk pitchers have allowed just four runs. Until the fourth inning Monday, the Hawks had put together a string of 21 scoreless innings.

Needless to say, the Hawks won those four games. They blanked Farmington 9-0 Friday, won the Southfield-Lathrup Invitational Saturday defeating Southfield 11-0 (five inning mercy) and Lathrup 4-0, then the Hawks defeated Livonia Churchill Monday 9-4.

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Grid playoffs
are expandedBy Chris McCosky
staff writer

The Michigan High School Athletic Association's Representative Council voted last week to expand the high school football playoff format to include 64 teams, 16 from each of the four enrollment classes.

A computer-based point system will still be used to determine which teams qualify for the playoffs. There are four regions in each class and four teams will qualify in each region.

"I think it's real good," said Farmington Harrison football coach John Herrington, a vocal proponent of playoff expansion. "It takes a lot of the pressure off coaches to win every single game and still worry about all the other teams in the region."

The former playoff system, a target of heavy criticism from the Michigan High School Football Coaches Association, took in 32 teams total, eight per class, two per region.

LAST YEAR the Representative Council (the MHSAA's rule-making body) ruled against a proposal to expand the playoffs to 128 teams, 32 per class.

The 19-member council convened Monday through Wednesday of last week in Cadillac and voted 10-9 to expand the playoffs. The council was armed with a MHSAA survey, taken among the 713 member high schools earlier this year. The results of the survey indicated that 63.8 percent of the schools offering football were in favor of a 64-team playoff system.

One of the biggest concerns of those against expansion was scheduling the extra playoff games.

"There's an empty Saturday on the 1985-86 calendar that falls between the date previously set for the semifinals and finals," said MHSAA assistant director Lonnie Lowery. "That's when we'll play the added playoff game this year. We'll go back and re-evaluate the system after the 1985 season."

On gymnastics...

The Michigan High School Athletic Association's Representative Council also took action on another issue of relevance to prep sports in Observance.

The council was asked by the MHSAA committee on gymnastics to consider a ruling that would prohibit gymnasts from competing outside the prep schedule during the three-month season (January through March).

The ruling would, in effect, force club gymnasts — those that compete in United States Gymnastics Federation meets — out of high school competition.

But the representative council ruled last week that it was solely up to the individual school districts to decide whether or not to allow gymnasts to compete at both high school and USGF levels simultaneously.

— Chris McCosky

Next year, the three playoff rounds will be played Saturdays Nov. 9, 16 and 23 with the championship game Nov. 30.

According to MHSAA officials, the added playoff date will be scheduled one of two ways after next season: either by beginning the season one week earlier, or by dropping the ninth date of the schedule for the teams that qualified for the playoffs.

HERRINGTON SAID that the new system would not bring a complete halt to the complaints.

"You're still going to have the fifth place team (in each region) complaining that they should get in," the successful Harrison coach said. "I would have liked to see them add a few at-large berths. There are still flaws in the system, but nothing is perfect. I'm happy with this."

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