

Sports

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C.J. Risak

Wide world of sport: a madman's hideout

EVERY YEAR at this time, the same penetrating question strikes, flooring me with its direct simplicity.

After an hour or so, my wife may loosen her hammerlock and allow me to regain my feet. But her queries continue, gushing forth in a jumbled mass of confusion and frustration.

"What is this hangup you have with sports?" she demands. "Why don't you grow up? I won't see you for the next 10 months, you know. You'll work five nights a week, until two or three in the morning, writing about some silly game. Then you'll come home and watch another game on TV."

"And don't give me that 'thrill of victory, agony of defeat' stuff either," she screams at me by the collar. "There can't be that many thrills, that much agony in high school sports."

"Tell me it's the cheerleaders — that I can at least understand."

I MULL over her question, then explain it to the best of my ability.

"OK, it's the cheerleaders," I reply with what remaining breath I possess. My grip around my throat loosens, followed by what big-time wrestling announcers would refer to as "a pause in the action."

I wait until she's calmed down before risking her wrath once again. "Now do you want to know the real reason? It's the thrill of victory, the agony of defeat."

In all honesty, I do believe my Wide World of Sports answer is as good as any. A Time magazine article on athletic milestones last week referred to sports as both "an essential industry" and "essential reverie." Americans devote an enormous amount of time and money to sports, a relatively inconsequential segment of life.

IT'S TRUE. People are starving in Africa and shooting in Lebanon, but the only death we acknowledge is the slow demise of the Detroit Tigers. Ask any sports fan on the street to spell apartheid and it's an even bet he'll ask, "Who's he play for again?"

Logic has never been any human's strong point. I'm a sportswriter, which makes me less human than most (a fact confirmed by my coach) and, therefore, less logical.

But I do try. I try to understand why Iran sends children on senseless suicide attacks. I try to understand the fear, the hopelessness, the waste of a nuclear armament. I try to understand why terrorists explode car bombs in the middle of civilian populations.

Then I hear things like the hottest movie in Beirut is "Rambo," and I'm ready to give up.

SPORTS ARE EASY. Black and white. Good guys vs. bad guys. Winners and losers. Fans can cheer lustily for their favorites, bias disappearing at their rivals.

And whatever happens on the playing field, there's always another game. Another chance or challenge. Sports are never (with English soccer a possible exception) a matter of life and death.

In the coming months, every high school athlete will experience the sweet taste of victory and the sour stench of defeat. A single moment of a game, or even a practice, could highlight a season. But each — both the "thrill" and the "agony" — will demand attention.

Sports are simple. Hard work precedes victory. That's all that need be understood. Give an honest, all-out effort, push your talent to its limit, and no matter what story a scoreboard tells, victory is achieved.

IT'S UNFORTUNATE real life can't be more like sports. Instead, the pendulum swings in the opposite direction. Recruiting scandals, drug addictions, labor strikes are frequent invaders on the sport pages, constant reminders of the nonsensical world in which we live.

A clash looms in the not-too-distant future. It's inevitable. On one hand, people see that hard, diligent work will be rewarded with victory. They believe that the simple ethic applied in sports can work in the outside world, too.

But decisive victory is rarely reached in real life. Ours is a world of mediation and arbitration. Compromise is the cure for the world's ills.

By the same measure, when the problems we face daily intrude upon sports, we're puzzled, shocked. An athlete making a half-million dollars a year risking it all by ingesting drugs, we ask: Doesn't he know any better?

Athletes are superior beings with superior talent. Drug addicts are torn and tattered, discovered roaming aimlessly on shabby city streets. No connection between the two is conceivable.

YET IT EXISTS: athlete and junkie. The real world mingling with sports. Can the two co-exist? Probably not, at least not as presently perceived.

Opposites attract, and as they do they become more alike. That, no doubt, is the future of sports. My fervent hope is that it doesn't change too much. It's one of the few escapes from a life filled with harsh realities. It's enough of an escape that I prefer to have a career on it, and treat the rest of the world like the grim sideshow, rather than vice versa.

But none of this is explainable to someone who doesn't understand the importance of enduring a vicious tackle in exchange for two extra yards.

"It's that thrill of victory and agony of defeat," I repeat to my wife, then add before she can bring me again, "and the cheerleaders look darn good, too."



BILL BREGLER/staff photographer

District gives soccer a boost

By Chris McCosky staff writer

The soccer coaches in the Farmington Public School District are ecstatic.

No, there aren't any visions of a Western Lakes championship on the horizon for this season. But hope for a strong soccer future at Farmington, Farmington Harrison and North Farmington high schools has never been more fervent.

The reason: The school district administration has agreed to allow the high schools to establish a junior varsity soccer program.

"You may not see the results this year," said Farmington coach Ed Bartram, "but we're looking forward to big things in the future. With a JV program that helps us in terms of depth, we will have more and more kids playing soccer."

The long-range view looks rosy for Farmington-area schools. But what about the immediate future? Here's a brief preseason look at the three squads.

FARMINGTON

The momentum began midway through last season. The Falcons, besieged by injuries and a lack of experience, stumbled through the first half of the season.

Suddenly, the players began understanding first-year coach Ed Bartram's schemes and began posting victories.

The Falcons advanced to the state district semifinals before losing a gut-wrencher, 1-0, to Warren DeLaSalle.

Bartram thinks his team will carry on the winning tradition established late last season.

"Last year with the coaching change it took some time before we got rolling," he said. "The kids are coming in with a better attitude, in better condition and they are adjusting better."

Bartram expects to post a winning season. If it does happen, he said, then it may not happen for a few years.

NORTH FARMINGTON

There may not have been a more competitive 3-10-4 team in the area last year than Cathy Cole's Raiders. They lost several games by one-goal margins.

Cole built a strong defensive team last year. The problem was a lack of offense.

"Tactically, you can expect a more improved game from our team this year," Cole said. "We have been consistently working on support defensively and on passing, passing, passing."

The defense should again be strong. All-league and second team All-Area goalie Dennis McCarthy is back, as is all-league defender Paul Najjar. Starting fullbacks Monty Najjar and Joe Juliano also return.

At midfield, the Raiders return Craig Burland and Zac Belin.

Please turn to Page 2



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Dave Fraunheim (white jersey) is one of several key returnees for Farmington this season. The Falcons are hoping for a big year.

CC grad Messner nears starting role

By Brad Emons staff writer

Unless he loses his position in the next few weeks, it appears that Catholic Central product Mark Messner will start at defensive tackle for Michigan when the Wolverines open up their football season Sept. 14 against Notre Dame.

The sophomore Messner, who did not see any action last year as a freshman, apparently has the inside track on one of the tackle spots.

But as Messner has learned, no position is locked up. Coach Bo Schembechler's last conversation with the big tackle was: "Be ready to play."

"I came out of spring ball in nice position, but that can change," Messner said.

Breathing down Messner's neck for a starting job is another sophomore, 6-foot-2, 245-pound Dave Chester of Titusville, Fla.

"If Mark comes through and continues to progress like he has, he has an excellent chance to play against Notre Dame," said Jerry Meter, Michigan's defensive line coach. "In the spring, he did a fine job of adjust-

ing to his new position (from nose guard to tackle). And he knows there's competition behind him with Dave Chester, but that's good for both of them."

MESSNER HAS IMPROVED his game in two key areas — confidence and strength.

"I have more confidence in not being so intimidated by the offensive player," he said. "I can see the coaches have the faith in me, especially coaches Moeller (Gary), Meter and Vooletich (Milan)."

"People could see the ability in me, but now I'm starting to develop it, and now they see I have it."

During a Thursday morning gathering of the press, Schembechler called Messner "Our most impressive (defensive) player last year as a freshman."

"Mark is a real sharp guy whose personality is always up," Meter said. "He has a very positive attitude about himself and his ability, but he's not cocky."

Please turn to Page 2

Wolves will rebound if Rice grads produce

By C.J. Risak staff writer

It happens every few plays in practice. Paul Jokisch breaks from the University of Michigan offensive huddle and trots to his split end position. He drops into a three-point stance, glancing toward the quarterback barking signals.

Then he shifts his gaze toward the defense, looking for weaknesses, pondering his pass pattern. At once he knows it's not going to be easy, because lined up a few yards away, on the opposite side of the line of scrimmage, is Brad Cochran.

"He's the best," was how Jokisch described his Wolverine teammate. "He's the best I've run up against. His size, strength, speed — he's got it all."

The pair have been teammates a long time. Now seniors, they played football together at Birmingham Brother Rice before U-M recruited them — for different sports. Cochran's sport was football, but Jokisch was a basketball recruit.

Each has also had top-notch Wolverine careers. Disgruntled with his lack of playing time, Jokisch opted to leave the basketball team after two seasons and try out for football. Last year, his first season, he caught 10 passes for 178 yards and two touchdowns.

FEW MODERN-DAY athletes have the ability to make such a switch. Jokisch knows it. "Anybody who can make that transition should feel fortunate," he admitted.

Cochran also had problems at U-M. Like most Wolverine freshmen, Cochran didn't play much. He was dismayed, and considered transferring to Colorado.

He decided to stick at U-M, and midway through the 1983 season he won himself a starting position at cornerback. He intercepted five passes that year, four in the final three games.

A preseason all-American last year and again this season, Cochran finished the 1984 campaign with five interceptions and was second team all-Big Ten.

"The strength of our defense is our cornerbacks," said Wolverine coach Bo Schembechler. "Cochran is a bona fide all-American. He's one of the best we've ever had here."

SUCH PRAISE can build an ego, but it also applies pressure. Cochran must produce. Indeed, second-team all-Big Ten this year might be considered a disappointment.

"I played decently," Cochran said in summing up last year's performance. "I was more disappointed with the way the season went. I'd rather go to the Rose Bowl than be all-American."

Last year was U-M's worst under Schembechler. The Wolverines were 6-4, and the defense surrendered 4,118 yards (343 per game) while allowing a 62.6 percent pass completion average.

Please turn to Page 2