

Big winners today have an odd way of bowing out

BY RON RAPOPORT
LOS ANGELES DAILY NEWS

WOODLAND HILLS, Calif.

This doesn't mean Jimmy Johnson is going to try out for the White Sox, does it? Or maybe—I'm just free associating here—coach the Rams?

If Johnson really is looking for a new challenge, mean.

Listen, one more season like the last one and Chuck Knorr might be more than happy to turn over his parking place to him.

And to leave a note in his desk drawer saying, "All right, now let's see how much of a genius you are."

I'll say one thing for guys quitting sports while they're at the top of their game. The sure don't do it the way they used to. Joe DiMaggio, you'll remember, left baseball not because he

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had lost a step, but because he was afraid that some day he might. Sandy Koufax walked out on the Dodgers because he was concerned about the possibility of hurting his arm.

But now we have men leaving games they dominate because of factors having nothing to do with their performance. First, Michael Jordan quit the NBA after leading the Chicago Bulls to three consecutive championships, and now Johnson has left the Dallas Cowboys after coaching them to back-to-back NFL titles.

In a way, it's too bad Jordan and Johnson didn't lose once in a while. Maybe then, it would have been harder for them to walk away. It's not as if basketball has

superstars to spare or football can afford to throw away its finest coaching talent.

Actually, I was very sympathetic to Jordan's retirement. In less than two years, he had dragged the Bulls on his back to their second and third NBA titles, dealt with the frenzied respect to his participation in the Olympics, grieved over his father's murder and had his habit for high-stakes gambling exposed.

If anybody needed some time off from the rigors of a game he excelled at, it was Jordan, although his thirst for the public spotlight certainly didn't remain in abeyance for long.

As for Johnson, who did you say the owner of the Cowboys was, again? Somewhere, Al Davis is smiling and saying to himself, "And they call me a mediator?"

The only similarity to Davis and Cowboys owner Jerry Jones, of course, is that they both have more than one Super Bowl ring. Jones is as open, affable and available as Davis is cloistered and conspiratorial. When Davis fires a coach, it certainly isn't after writing diatribe comments in a bar.

From the moment Jones bought the Cowboys, it was clear he simply loved being the center of attention. Even after the disastrous 1993 season that was his first as owner, Jones was responsive to every interview request. Nobody could accuse him of jumping on the bandwagon; he was down in the mud helping to build it.

But aside from that, the Cowboys' success was very much a product of Jones' vision. He gave Johnson his first job as an NFL

head coach—and had his sanity questioned for doing so—and he became the most hated man in Dallas for firing living legend Tom Landry.

After that, Jones opened his pockets and gave Johnson everything he needed in terms of personal and financial resources. He had a right to think he deserved a fair share of the credit for the team's success. Johnson, it appears, disagreed.

But the Cowboys are not the first business organization to be done in by its own success. People often unite in struggling toward a common goal only to end up squabbling over the rewards after achieving it.

Beyond this, though, it is likely that Johnson truly does look forward to a year away from football. The fervor the Cowboys inspire in the hearts of the citizens

of Dallas has to be wearing at times and the irony is that winning makes things worse, not better. Many a coach has learned to his regret that hell hath no fury like a spoiled fan.

Maybe what the retirement of first Jordan and now Johnson shows is that certain sports figures ought to be given the occasional sabbatical. They need to take a year off to decompress and observe the fray from the outside. Then when they do come back, it will be with new enthusiasm and refreshed new endings.

So here's to the Rams checking in with Johnson over the next few months, and here's to Jerry Jones' embarkation on the really interesting part of his ownership of the Cowboys. I wonder if he's talked to Tom Landry lately.

READERS' ROUNDUP

Heels bring many questions, comments

To the Sports Editor:
I wish you "sports fans" would grow up! If I didn't know anything about Carolina's basketball season, I would have thought the record was 10-25 this year instead of 28-7. And someone even requested that the athletics director fire Dean Smith. Get real! I thought only NCSU had fair-weather fans. As evident by his overall record, Smith is doing something right or he wouldn't have been coach for 30-plus years. Let us also not forget that Coach Smith teaches something far more important than winning basketball game—he teaches values, morals, character and prepares his players for life after basketball.

So, to the fair-weather fans of Carolina basketball: Go jump on someone else's bandwagon if you are not satisfied (I hear State needs a few fans). To the loyal fans: Yes, the BC loss hurt, but we will get over it and we'll have a fine club next year, just as we did this year. And last but not least, to all those Carolina bashers: Enjoy while you can, but remember that practice starts Nov. 1.

JOANNA MURPHEY
Farmville

This is a tough time for Tar Heels fans. After losing in the second round for the first time in 14 years, we again must watch Duke make another Final Four while we fans are constantly taunted about another Tar Heel choke. Don't fret, just read through the sports page, flip through the Sunday sports channels and look through both the past and future.

We Tar Heels fans can watch a N.Y. Knicks team finish through the top of the NBA with Hubert Davis playing a key role. The Bulls are still giving Scott Williams much playing time in their quest for a fourth straight title—their first without a certain other departed Tar Heels alumni. We also could've witnessed George Lynch scoring 30-plus for a Lakers team as he filled the lane with James Worthy. Next we can swing to Seattle and watch a George Karl team with Sam Perkins finish in the upper echelon in the west. Others may watch Kenny Smith in Houston, J.R. Reid in San Antonio, Larry Brown in Indiana. The list goes on and on.

While we fans are enjoying former Tar Heels continuing their incredible success in the NBA, try and find a former Duke player. The only place you'll find one on a winning team is Cleveland, where Danny Ferry sits on the bench watching Brad Daugherty. And with their returning freshmen, sophomores and juniors, the Heels are likely to extend their winning streak over Duke. In addition we can enjoy our football, women's soccer and women's basketball teams. So Tar Heels fans can still cheer as loudly as anybody.

JEFF LANE
Raleigh

After reading Bobby Padgett's letter in the March 27 Sports Forum, I nearly got sick.

Where does this so-called "Carolina Fan" get off saying fire Dean Smith? Boston College was due to win, and I congratulate them. Carolina also was due to finally lose a game it was supposed to win in the NCAA tournament! In Padgett's letter, he points out all the negative things about Carolina's season. Do you know, Mr. Padgett, how many Division I programs would be grateful for a 28-7 season? Do you realize it's just a game? Do you also realize you're criticizing freshmen who were in high school a year ago?

Mr. Padgett, do you really think Carolina had a different coach it would have beat B.C.? No! B.C. played better and de-

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served to win.

MIKE FISHER
Wake Forest

I hope the Dean Smith critics are satisfied! He's always said that teams shooting three-pointers don't win games, and he proved that with the final shot in the Boston College game.

His game plan was really this: strategically place his four 7-footers under the basket with Zwick acting as a decoy. Williams would lob the inbound to Montross, who would immediately lower the ball to the floor for two dribbles and then with an amazing vertical leap of two inches get over the ball bouncers off the rim into the hands of Salvadori, who throws up a two-handed hook shot while also being fouled... but Wallace was there for the rebound and he took a vicious foul as his slam dunk bounced off the rim.

All three 7-footers were awarded foul shots and stood at the line side-by-side, each with one hand on the ball. Shooting in unison, they made both attempts and beat B.C. by three. Wow! Talk about an exciting six seconds. But wait! Next year Dean has three incoming 8-footers. That'll show you skeptics.

E.J. MENKE
Dudley

Caulton Tudor's column on March 23 was certainly appropriate in explaining why we had to watch Boston College play instead of UNC.

UNC never showed a high level of intensity with the possible exceptions of the Duke games and the Devils, because I don't think there were any during the ACC or NCAA Tournaments. The team did not have a strong senior leader with George Lynch gone, and this season if they had been willing to put petty jealousies aside for the good of the team. After all, they blasted Duke twice. There is no question about which is the better team, which makes it even worse. It appears that Dean Smith stonewalled it all season, never admitting that there were any personal problems, and it caught up with him. Even he proved to be fallible, running into something that he could not handle.

JOE BLACK
South Plains

Langford shows his ignorance — again

To the Sports Editor:
I'd like to know how many others despise Bob Langford's writing. His article "CBS hopes to get a Final 4 assist" on March 22 was atrocious.

Long ago, after only two or three readings, I decided never to read his column again. However, being an avid sports fan, the title led me to believe I could learn something about the Sweet 16 teams and the NCAA Tournament so I read it. He's still writing the same old garbage.

How can the sports editor let him get away with ravings such as: downgrading small schools on TV "dinky" markets; Kansas is a "square state"; that stinkin' Big East basketball; and his blabbering "CBS. An example of ignorance." No one who watched Michigan play Foyeprime could have rooted for the Wolverines. Anyone who knows anything about sports knows it was the Wolverines vs. the Wave.

It's obvious that he knows nothing about basketball and should stick to writing about women's tea parties. He's sick!

GERRY HUBBELL
Raleigh

State stadium story gets top story

To the Sports Editor:
Thanks for telling it like it is! In the article in The N&O on March 22, "NCSU wants city to help pay to renovate ballpark," I saw writer Debbie Sykes did one fine job. Not only did she give us the correct facts, but her presentation and research of background history was impeccable.

Her interview with Athletics Director Todd Turner was complete and factual. It touched all bases—a real grand slam! She gave us exactly the picture that now exists.

There is a group called "Friends for NCSU Baseball" who are promoting and selling season tickets and encouraging programs for better facilities to enhance the future of baseball for Wake and the university. Todd Turner and the university need our help and support.

After all, N.C. State baseball is a first-class, nationally ranked program, one of Raleigh's few these days. Our nationally recognized coach, Ray Turner, and his program deserve better facilities, and the citizens of Raleigh need another source of revenue.

JOHN WARD
Raleigh

Day at Smith Center a hard one to forget

To the Sports Editor:
Attending an event at the Dean E. Smith Center at UNC is similar to a "Chinese fire drill." On Friday, March 18, I decided to attend the NCAA wrestling events. The starting time was noon. I arrived at the Center at 11:30 a.m. only to be told by a parking attendant that I had to go to University Mall and pick up a student bus.

At University Mall I drove around for one-half hour looking for a parking spot. There were no signs or people directing anyone to a pick-up zone. I walked to a corner of the parking lot where about 50 people were standing. Here there was another half-hour wait for a bus to arrive. About ten people found two cabs, which never returned. When I finally got on a bus the driver stated the delay was the result of a "lunch break."

These delays resulted in my paying \$10 for a ticket to see minutes later. It appears that there were about one thousand people waiting for bus boarding. Many people were very confused about the area; they should be in for boarding their proper bus. Again there were no signs, no loud-speaker directions, just a mess. It took over one hour to board a bus to reach University Mall.

I was very disappointed with my first experience attending a UNC event, especially since I live only 20 minutes from the Center. I suggest that the university seek advice from an "Old Salt" Marine Corps Platoon Sergeant from World War II vintage. These leaders moved masses of troops from ship to shore in landing operations as efficient as 100 men by then people attempting to watch an event at the Dean E. Smith Center at UNC at Chapel Hill.

ARTHUR RITCHKO
Durham

A tough shadow to shake for coach

To the Sports Editor:
They're the inevitable part of a bright sun. Some are warm and feel supportive. Others are harshly cold—they let you know, "I'm

here." They are shadows.

In the rugged beauty of eastern Tennessee, a talented coach can now embrace his wife and 7-year-old son and forget the shadows that were ominous only days ago. The shadows that cry out, "you're not Al [McGuire], and you didn't win the big one."

I remember the Thursday evening when my alma mater lost to Duke by 10. That defeat did not anger me.

It was the shadow that didn't let go. As well written as Tom Harris' March 23 article on the Warriors was, one arrow stuck and didn't die: How can a former coach, away from his employer for 17 years, still hang around and expect his counterpart to be himself?

It made next season a no-win hassle, daunted by the loss of three seniors. With O'Neill's departure comes the scavenger hunt for a replacement who must accept the shadow. Recruits will be lost. And what could've been a respectable '94-95 (15-18 wins) becomes a mystery.

I don't think this mystery can take on a shadow's quality. Yes, some of my alumni want no less than 1977 renewed. Ask a quality coach like Joe B. Hall about sickos like that, and of 13 years playing second fiddle to a ghost named Adolph.

But maybe the shadow himself can send in the shadows. The Jesuits that have brought Marquette academic respect are motivated by spiritual surrender to God in all things. A hymn their students sing at Midnight Mass on week-ends happens to be "Only a shadow."

Our shadow doesn't need to send his reprise—only read its lyrics. And if he does, he'll realize the best way to support Marquette's next coach is to be there... by not being there.

A major university like ours that has given its basketball grads go to Harvard Law and Chicago Med schools can do just fine moving on. It can thank Kevin O'Neill for fulfilling his contract (and then some) and wish him well in Knoxville. And it can ask for space for professionals who dare to live in the here and now.

RICH AGNELLO
Raleigh

N&O needs to go on fact-finding mission

To the Sports Editor:
The inaccuracies I've seen on your sports pages lately are appalling. On March 13, Jim Leyland was identified as the Cincinnati Reds manager. On March 20, a story on Wake Forest's loss in the NCAA Tournament mentioned Kentucky as Wake's opponent. Under "NCAA Tournament Tidbits," Tom Gola, who led LaSalle to the 1984 NCAA championship, was said to be under 6 feet. Tom Gola was 6'6" and was one of the first men of that size to play guard at the college level. He went on to a professional career with the Philadelphia Warriors.

LONNIE STUART
Raleigh

The official word: Teams were 'homed'

To the Sports Editor:
I am a retired basketball official who worked more than 1,500 games, and I would like to comment on something very disturbing to me. Why would the NCAA assign officials from North Carolina to work a Duke tournament game? Better yet, why would any official ever accept such an assignment? This is exactly what happened in both the Marquette and Purdue games. There were several high-impact calls in both games that went a long way in determining the outcome.

As a neutral observer and lover of the game, Marquette and Purdue appeared to have gotten "homed."

ROBERT W. SEHMER
Knightdale

Quotes of the Week

Jason Kidd's announcement that he was leaving Cal for the NBA had all the suspense of a 'layup.'

C.W. Nevius
San Francisco Chronicle columnist

"All the fans were yelling for me to jump in the water, so I went in. Anything to please the coach. I only wish Dinah could have been there to jump in with me. I really think in spirit she was."
— **Donna Anderson** of Pinehurst, who jumped into the lake after winning the LPGA Dinah Shore tournament.

"Let me tell you something. Those people who want to preserve Tiger Stadium and keep it for their grandchildren have lost their marbles. If they had to live or work in some place new and modern, or some old and run-down shack, where do you suppose they would want to live? It wouldn't be no rundown shack."
— **Spunky Anderson**, Detroit manager, on Tigers owner Mike Ilitch wanting to build a new stadium, and the plan being opposed by the Tiger Stadium Fan Club.

"It's another way to lose a game."
— **Jack Pardo**, Oilers coach, on the new two-point conversion rule in the NFL.

"His playing days are over. It's almost gotten to the point that it is annoying to hear it."
— **Jerry West**, Lakers general manager, on talk that new Lakers coach Magic Johnson will play again.

"They tell us to drink lots of water and take our vitamins. When we're down here in the sun all day. What are we going to have to do next? Bring our own water?" — **Expos outfielder Larry Walker** after Montreal trainer Don McClain saved \$1,000 by not ordering vitamins, normally available to players, along with sun-tan lotion, aspirin and other items during spring training.

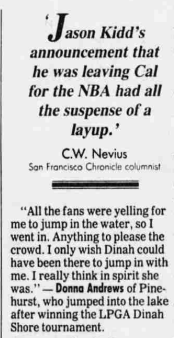
"Real men don't wear no mask."
— **Sherman Douglas** of the Celtics, who refused to wear a face mask after having his nose broken by an errant elbow from the Knicks' Charles Oakley.

"The ball went farther than I ever went on a vacation as a kid."
— **Gene Gettemo**, Cardinals' trainer, on an estimated 470-foot home run by the Rangers' Juan Gonzalez against St. Louis.

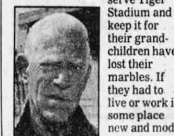
"It feels like you've got someone sitting on your crotch. I can't breathe. I can't stand it when you get into a run-and-gun game there. You go up and down the court twice and say, 'Whoa, slow down.'"
— **Glen Rice**, Miami forward, on playing in Denver.

"Probably, he's going to win a couple of championships now just what Michael [Jordan] is out in New York, they're tough. They want winners, and I think Patrick will get them a couple before he gets out."
— **Larry Bird**, on Knicks center Patrick Ewing.

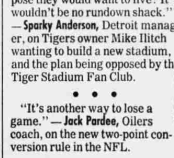
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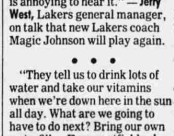
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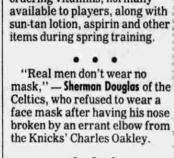
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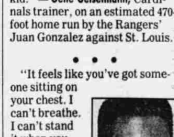
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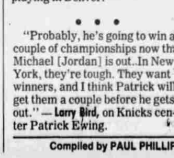
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