No Heisman Trophy winner, just one-man gang Bruce

The Great American Meat Market opened for business at noon Sunday, for everybody but the Atlanta Falcons. They'd already done their shopping early, which was their reward for being the worst team in the National Football League. They could have had their choice of anybody in America who isn't in prison or already pledged to another team, and they took 240 pounds of linebacker named Aundray Bruce, who trained for this perilous mission at Auburn University.

They had been advised by too many leading analysts that they were sure to be embarrassed if they didn't take the Heisman Trophy winner, Tim Brown. I mean, wasn't it their obligation? The Heisman Trophy winner went sixth. Los Angeles Raiders took him.

The Falcons didn't even take the Lombardi Award winner. They left Chris Spielman of Ohio State for Detroit and took Marcus Cotton, another linebacker from Southern Cal with a name that should be right at home in the textile belt.

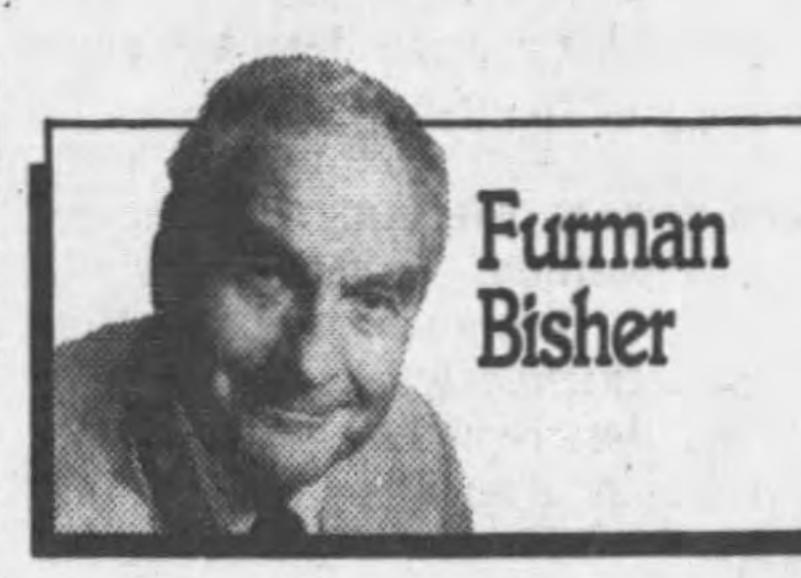
The day that Auburn beat Georgia Tech, Bruce played defense, pass receiver, running back, did everything with the foot-

ball but digest it. In olden times, they'd call him a one-man gang. When Auburn tied Syracuse in the Sugar Bowl, he was nowhere to be found. A kid who isn't used to New Orleans can get tired there in a hurry. I think he made one tackle, but otherwise he was out to lunch.

He speaks with a little stammer, which makes him all the more interesting. He keeps you excited wondering what's coming out next. Brad Nessler had him on radio and he left one deep impression when he said, "Aundray will be the best football player he can be." In between "best football player" and "he can be," that's when he had you excited.

There was a story the other day about money those dirty old agents had stuffed under his dorm door. His coach, Pat Dye, said that sounded like a fairy tale. Well, the same radio station engaged Dye in serious interview after Bruce had performed, and the subject was avoided. "Flagship stations" never dare offend a

This was the first NFL draft moved to Sunday, and numerous executives spoke sonorously of how they planned to draft. It



always came out, "We'll take the best athlete out there, no matter where he plays."

The question is, whose "best," the experts', their scouts', or the one on the rating chart? There is a place on the chart for everything but head and heart. I never heard this ESPN palm reader Mel Kiper Jr. mention either, though it was suggested some player wasn't big on going to class.

What a draft it was. One team took a 260-pound running back. They call him 'Ironhead." Other teams were drafting 225-pound linebackers. "Ironhead" is the kind of guy you want around if you're moving pianos, but carrying footballs?

"Ironhead" played college ball at Pitt, but the Steelers weren't interested. You'll notice that Miami never looked in the di-

rection of any of those hotshot Hurricanes either. Instead, Don Shula took the linebacker who played beside the Lombardi Award winner at Ohio State.

The former St. Louis Cardinals were having their first run in Phoenix, and that's when it came out that they have an unlisted telephone number. You gotta be kidding. That's like running an airline and keeping the schedule a secret.

You may have noticed a chart in the Sunday edition of what all the teams needed most. The only thing not listed under the Falcons were quarterback and ownership. The projection is, I guess, that Chris Miller has QB in hand, though the poor kid played less than half of the miserable season. The rest of the 1987 draft has been a bust, but such is the history of Falcon

Major need it said was linebackers. But look at this: In the last five seasons, the Falcons have drafted or traded for 14 (fourteen) linebackers. (Here's to Kirk Dodge, Micah Moon, John Harper and Thomas Benson.) Eight are gone, one is retired and five still hang on. Now Bruce and Cotton make 16, and if something doesn't

come of this, they might as well put the draft in charge of the wives.

"OK, guys, it's defense," Marion Campbell said, telling the inside story of the draft of Marcus Cotton. "We rated him high all along. We went through everything trying to stop some people last year, now we have some people to do it with."

That falls in with the "drafting the best athlete out there" cliche in the pros. No team ever drafted a player it didn't want. Nobody ever had a bad draft. Nobody but Thurman Thomas, the running back.

The telecasters had decided that Thurman was to be their close study of a firstround draft choice. The cameras visited his apartment at Oklahoma State early. Then again. And again. Even a running back from Northwest Louisiana State was drafted. And "Ironhead." Still Thomas' name never came up. Had they forgotten how great he was?

When last seen, he was frozen in his chair in Stillwater, in shock. It's devastating when your world has been built around being a first-round, and you're not, and television cameras sit in your living room transmitting your despair over the land.

Connors set vs. McEnroe ... or anyone

By Karen Rosen Staff Writer

The playing surface has changed, the roof is gone, there's rain in the weather forecast and he's playing John McEnroe in his first match at the \$500,000 AT&T Challenge. Yet Jimmy Connors remains unaffected.

"I'm long past worrying about who I play and on what day," said Connors, 35, who will open against McEnroe at 7 p.m. Wednesday. "Just come in, get out there, serve 'em up and let's get to it. We'll find out what happens when

we're out there." The Challenge, which moves to Horseshoe Bend Country Club after three tours at The Omni, starts today and continues through Sunday. Top-ranked Ivan Lendl will slide onto the Georgia clay tonight at 7 to open the event in the 6,400-seat stadium against No. 21 Amos Mansdorf. Mansdorf, who entered the field Saturday as a replacement for Tim Mayotte, defeated Connors 2-6, 7-5, 6-4 last Sunday in

No. 22 Mikael Pernfors, the Swedish Bulldog who won two NCAA championships at the University of Georgia, will play No. 11 Andres Gomez in today's second match.

The exhibition will again be an eight-man round robin with players divided into two groups. One group is primarily clay-court specialists while the other bracket features serveand-volleyers. Lendl, Gomez and Pernfors are

comfortable on clay. Other players are No. 3 Stefan Edberg and No. 31 Slobodan Zivojinovic, who replaced injured Brad Gilbert.

Other top players were unavailable. No. 2 Mats Wilander, No. 6 Boris Becker and No. 7 Miloslav Mecir had committed to a Grand Prix tournament in Hamburg, West Germany, while No. 18 Andre Agassi, the top young American player, was committed to the U.S. Clay Court Championships in Charleston, S.C. No. 5 Pat Cash could not reach an agreement with Pro-Serv, the event's promoter.

After each player faces the others in his group, the top two in each group will advance



Jimmy Connors plays in the AT&T Challenge against John McEnroe Wednesday.

AT&T Challenge

What: The AT&T Challenge, a round robin

tennis tournament. Who: Ivan Lendl, John McEnroe, Jimmy Connors, Stefan Edberg, Mikael Pernfors, Andres Gomez, Slobodan Zivojinovic and

Amos Mansdorf. When: Tuesday through Sunday.

Today's schedule: 7 p.m. Lendl vs. Mansdorf, followed by Pernfors vs. Gomez. ■ Where: Horseshoe Bend Country Club in

Roswell. TV: Thursday through Saturday on USA Network, tape-delayed at 11 p.m. Sunday live on ABC at 4 p.m.

to the semifinals. A coin flip will determine the

"To win on clay, you have to beat the guys who stay back as well as beat the guys who attack," said McEnroe. "It's a good contrast."

McEnroe, ranked No. 15, will be playing his first match on clay this year against Connors, ranked No. 4.

"We've played so much in the past, a lot of great matches," said McEnroe. "The first match is difficult. It comes down to just going out there and competing. It's conceivable I could lose that match and still get to the semifinals. That's the beauty of this event."

The ugliness is the potential for rain. Showers are expected off and on today, but the weather is supposed to clear Wednesday and Thursday. The forecast is partly cloudy on Friday with chance of thundershowers on Saturday.

Clay courts are easier than hard courts to dry off and prepare.

The Prudential-Bache Grand Champions, the first event of the year on the men's 35-andover circuit, will begin Wednesday at noon at Horseshoe Bend. The Grand Champions, a 12man round robin, takes the place of the fourteam doubles event which filled out past AT&T Challenges. Some of the matches will be played on the stadium court, while others will be on a satellite court.

Defending champion Tom Gullikson, twin brother Tim, Vijay Amritraj, Roscoe Tanner, Bob Lutz, Eddie Dibbs, Harold Solomon, Jaime Fillol, Hank Pfister, Colin Dibley, Ross Case and Sherwood Stewart will compete.

ment in June.

live interview.

weeks ago to represent Georgia in

the annual Boston Shootout tourna-

Mills' dad denies saying he

didn't want son at Kentucky

From Wire Reports

denied Monday that he told the

Lexington Herald-Leader he no

longer wanted his son to play at

Kentucky or that his son might not

honor his letter-of-intent with the

tucky) for four years," Mills told

WLEX-TV in Lexington during a

Mills as saying that he was so tired

of the controversy surrounding the

"We intend to be there (Ken-

The Herald on Monday quoted

LEXINGTON, Ky. — Claud Mills

ESPN's draft coverage was its best production

For the first time in the nineyear television history of the NFL Draft on ESPN, draftniks didn't have to shake up their midweek routine to watch the drama unfold. They were rewarded.

Sunday's seven-hour extravaganza was the cable network's best presentation, in spite of Sports Illustrated's Paul Zimmerman, one of ESPN's many analysts.

It was the first year ESPN presented recaps of individuals' careers in the same format as updates during games, by framing the live action with the information.

Switching to different sites around the country also worked well. ESPN showed the growing frustration of Oklahoma State's Thurman Thomas at Thomas' apartment after he watched his name slide farther and farther down the board, Tennessee's Anthony Miller receiving his call from San Diego, the emotional relief of Craig Heyward and his mother when the Pittsburgh running back was chosen by New Orleans, and the best tidbit of all: Roger Twibell reporting from Phoenix that the Cardinals have an unlisted number because of a lawsuit over season tickets.

If a star emerged from the telecast, it was the quick-witted Chris Berman, who cracked after the hefty Heyward was chosen: "Eight restaurants in New Orleans are declaring open house tonight."

Zimmerman tried to get in a Heyward dig, too, but almost stepped over the censor line. After it was noted Heyward would be an asset to the Saints: "What did you say? He would be an 'ass-set?' "

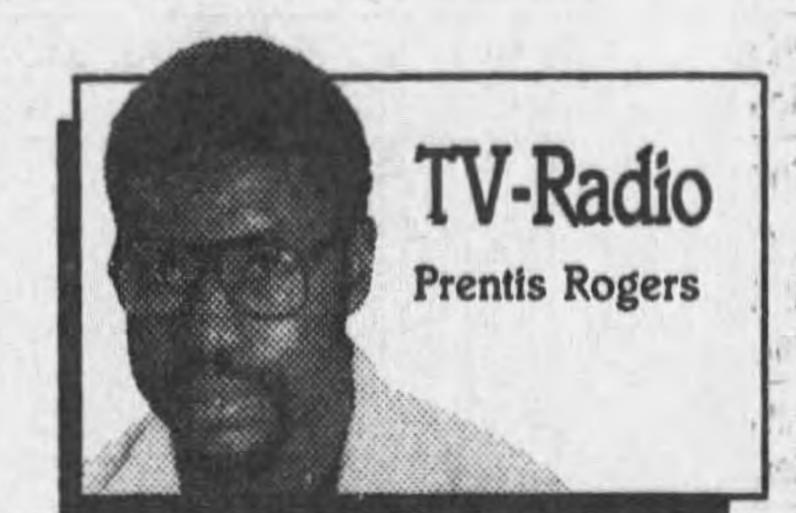
Berman quickly cut him off and reminded Zimmerman they were on a family show. He later had to cut Zimmerman off again when the sports writer started to suggest fans don't know anything about talent evaluation.

Tom Jackson, the third member of the crew, said of the Falcons' Aundray Bruce, "He's not going to make the Falcons (a great team). What he has to guard against is being lackadaisical the first couple of years when the team is going to struggle."

Newcomer Joe Theismann had some interesting things to say, and Mel Kiper Jr. and Bob Ley enhanced the telecast, too. Ley had one of the day's better lines when he said of the Cardinals: "Their draft picks have been rated 'R' for rotten."

AROUND THE DIAL: The criticism Vin Scully and Joe Garagiola. NBC's No. 1 baseball team, received last season apparently was taken to heart. Garagiola, who reportedly is on the last year of his contract, had done his homework for Saturday's Cubs-Pirates game and gave quality commentary. Plus he was back on target with one-liners. Said Garagiola of Cubs pitcher Al Nipper: "He has about seven pitches, and you have to take off your shoes off to give him the signs."

On the other hand, Marv Albert's pregame show, which is usually illuminating, should have taken more initiative on the Tommy Herr-Tom Brunansky trade between St. Louis and Minnesota and explored



the rationale behind the deal from the Twins' standpoint. Scully and Garagiola wondered on the air about that end of it. ...

CBS's camera work during the final two rounds of Saturday's Simon Brown-Tyrone Trice IBF welterweight title fight was top-notch, especially the closeups. One of the better shots came when Trice was knocked down at the end of the 12th round. As he sat on his stool tryingto regroup, his wife Natalie was tugging frantically at his leg in an effort to perk up her battle-weary husband. . . .

ABC's Gary Bender, or whoever was supposed to instruct him in the production truck, gets the head-inthe-sand award during Sunday's Olympic trials for the men's marathon. Bender offered no apology or explanation when Jack Whitaker's piece on the course layout had all sorts of audio and video problems on its first attempt. Moments later, the feature was tried again and went off without a glitch. . . .

The Hawks' lackluster performance in the regular-season finale Saturday against Washington disgusted a lot of people, but none more so than announcer John Sterling, who made no attempt to disguise the fact he was flabbergasted by the Hawks' play. No one could accuse him of being a homer that night. For a moment, things got a little testy in the WGNX (Channel 46) booth when analyst Butch Beard offered poor mental preparation as a reason for the Hawks' performance, to which Sterling acidly replied: "That's a cliche. I'm not buying it. ... That's not a good-enough

It was not an exceptional weekend for graphics, but one that stood out was on NBC during the Cubs-Pirates game in which catcher Mike Lavalliere was quoted as saying on the 1988 pennant race: "Whatever is going to happen is going to happen when it happens, regardless of what happens." Yogi Berra couldn't have said it better....

TBS host Craig Sager had the weekend's best interview. Darryl Dawkins was the subject, and he hasn't lost any of his flair with the media. When asked by Sager if he was involved with drugs, the former NBA center replied, "Who are you, Perry Mason?" In a serious moment, Dawkins admitted his life is being threatened, but wouldn't elab-

BITS AND PIECES: "Frontline," the news magazine on WPBA (Channel 8), will air a program tonight at 9 called "American Games, Japanese Rules." One segment that features American baseball players in Japan includes Steve Hammond, a graduate of Collins High in College Park who is now back in Atlanta. . . . Golden State Warriors general manager Don Nelson will make his TBS debut as an analyst in Friday's New

York-Boston NBA playoff game.

Memphis St. players lose their appeals

By Chris Mortensen

Former Atlanta sports agent Jim Abernethy expressed regret when he learned that the NCAA on Monday denied an appeal for eligibility by two Memphis State basketball players he signed last year, Sylvester Gray and Marvin Alexander.

"I definitely have a sense of regret because I feel like those two guys have been punished enough," said Abernethy. "If I had to do it all over again, I never would have signed those guys, especially Gray. He was just a sophomore, and looking back, I don't really think he knew what he was doing when he signed."

Gray and Alexander, a junior, were declared ineligible when they confirmed to Memphis State officials details of a Dec. 16 report in the Atlanta Constitution that they had signed with Abernethy in August.

Memphis State appealed for the eligibility of Gray and Alexander because they had cooperated with the school's investigation, and because the school believed they had paid a sufficient penalty by missing most of the 1987-88 season.

The NCAA eligibility committee did not agree that the penalty was severe enough. It "felt these young men knew what they were doing and that the NCAA could not encourage or condone the violation of the principles of amateurism," said NCAA assistant executive director Janet

Earlier this year, NCAA assistant executive director Steve Morgan said the NCAA would be moving back to a harder stance on athletes and agents.

Finch said Gray and Alexander, the team's two best players, would attempt to play professional basketball next season.

NCAA sources said three major factors worked against Gray and Alexander:

Less than a month after signing a contract with and receiving money from Abernethy, the players signed the NCAA student-athlete affidavit, stating they were eligible to play and had not broken any rules.

■ The NCAA does not wish to jeopardize a year-long Chicagobased federal grand jury investigation into 50-60 former college athletes' involvement with agents Norby Walters and Lloyd Bloom The student-athlete affidavit and the preservation of amateur athletics is the foundation of the U.S. Attorney's case, sources

They did not come forward when the NCAA announced a conditional amnesty program for athletes who signed with agents. Neither did any other athletes.

Top prospect MacLean turns his back on Tech for UCLA

By I.J. Rosenberg Staff Writer

Georgia Tech's recruiting efforts in basketball came up empty again Monday as 6-foot-10 forward Don MacLean of Simi Valley, Calif., considered one of the nation's top 10 prospects, signed with UCLA.

MacLean had narrowed his choices to Tech and UCLA and at one time was reportedly leaning toward the Yellow Jackets.

The Jackets must now look elsewhere to salvage the recruiting year. They hope to sign 6-9 center Maurice Brittian of Hutchinson (Kan.) Junior College, the most valuable player in the junior college national tournament.

Strickland of McNair headed for Temple on basketball grant

From Staff Reports

Turning down late recruiting bids by several Southern schools, McNair High School's Mark Strickland signed a basketball scholarship Monday with Temple University. The 6-foot-8 Strickland is considered one of the best raw talents in the state, but was somewhat to attend any of the summer camps last year.

Grant, who averaged 16.3 points | FINELAWN #1 161/2 ** and 10.7 rebounds for McNair (18-8) and was named second-team Class AAA all-state, was one of 10 players chosen during open tryouts two

recruitment of his son, Chris, tha "I don't even want Chris to go to Kentucky, I really don't." underpublicized because he failed to attend any of the summer camps | FESCUE SOD

*Per Sq Ft. Pick up at the Farm

Now you know more. Read Sunday's Perspective for a variety of viewpoints.

> The Atlanta Lournal THE ATLANTA CONSTITUTION