#### SPORTS VIEW



## Columbia loses its place in sun

By MITCH ALBOM 1988 Detroit Free Press

I am empty. I am broken-hearted. It is Friday and all around me, college football fans are gearing up for the weekend. They wave Michigan banners. They wave Iowa banners. They talk of how Miami will beat Notre Dame, or how Notre Dame will beat Miami. They stock up on pretzels and hot chocolate.

I sit by the window.

"What's wrong?" asks a voice.

"Alone," I sigh, waving a blue and white pompon. "All revved up, nowhere to go."

I am the man without a country, the lonely soldier on a college football battlefield. I have no team. Not anymore. I used to have a team. My team made me proud. It was not a great team. Not a good team. Some say my team did not deserve to wear cleats.

**But My Team Was Special** 

But my team had a specialty. My team did one thing better than any other team in the country.

My team lost.

Over and over. Without interruption. By six touchdowns. Sometimes seven. To schools you never heard of. You gave us the lead, we gave it back. You punted our way, we fumbled

#### Some say my team did not deserve to wear cleats.

yours. My team, my alma mater, was the Columbia Lions, the school with the longest college football losing streak in the country. Until last Saturday. Last Saturday Colum-

bia won. After 44 straight losses.

My weekends are ruined.

"Don't they know this spoils everything?" ask, peeling the Columbia posters off the wall. "We had something unique going. We were leading the nation, way out front . . . "

"You were the worst," says the voice. "Exactly," I answer.

Better to be the worst than the next-toworst. Nobody remembers the next-to-worst — that is even more frustrating than being next-to-best. With the nation's longest losing streak, we were at the forefront of the news.

"Columbia lose again?" someone would ask. "Yep," someone would answer.

#### Team Was Lovable

People loved us. We were a raindrop of reality. A reminder that all in sports is not gravy and glory. You would watch UCLA nip USC, or Michigan squeak by Ohio State, and then you'd see, aha, look at that, Columbia got blown out by Colgate, a toothpaste. And all was well.

We had the perfect record. Winless. When our band played "We're BAD!" they meant it. That is, when we had a band. Usually, they were studying. Which is OK. As long as we were losing I was sure my school was concentrating on academics. In fact, the way we played, I figured our quarterback was writing his physics paper in the huddle.

But now what? Now I must wonder if our speedy little tailback is skipping classes to hit the weight room. Now I must wonder if our linemen are passing up Intro to 19th Century Literature in favor of Gatorade fights.

"Steroids," I say, packing away my blue and white ski cap. "I bet we have to worry about steroids now, too."

"Aren't you overreacting?" asks the voice. "I think not," I say I open the newspaper. Did you see this? It's a picture after last week's 16-13 win over Princeton. Look. Our fans tore down the goalposts. Can you believe that? We never tear down the goalposts. We

can't even kick a ball through the goalposts." "Well . . . " says the voice.

#### Scary Ramifications

Well nothing. I can see it now. Our star players will soon be living in condominiums on 96th street. Our coach will be driving a Corvette. Norby Walters and Lloyd Bloom, the sleazeball agents, will be booking a trip to the Upper West Side.

"And what about the stadium?" I ask, packing away the miniature Columbia footballs. "We always played in a stadium that was so far uptown you had to take the subway through Harlem to get there. Now what? I bet they build a new one, smack dead center of campus, next to the library."

"Oh, come on," says the voice,

"Probably have a dome on it," I mumble. This is my dilemma. This is my problem. How can I root for my team anymore? It is pointless to root for them to lose. I mean, 44

a special effort, even for us. It is also pointless to root for them to win.

games is five years worth of losing. That was

After all, we beat Princeton, not Penn State. What's the fun in losing to Lehigh if it isn't his-So I must find a new team. I suppose I could root for Princeton; they must be awfully bad.

But do they have another 43 losses in them? Then again, I could go the other route, and hop on some national power's bandwagon. But where's the fun in that? You can't get a ticket. You can't find parking. And every December, you have to fly someplace for a bowl game.

#### The Good Old Days

"In the good old days," I say, folding my raccoon coat, "you didn't have to go anywhere. You just looked out your dorm window, saw the eight fans staggering across campus, yelled 'DID WE LOSE?' and waited for the thumbs-up sign."

"You call that fandom?" asks the voice. "Beats wearing earmuffs," I say.

I sigh. Once we had identity. Once you could find us on the college football map - right at the bottom. Once we had a team. A beautiful

But they just couldn't leave bad enough alone.

# Lasorda vs. La Russa

## Two surprising men whose two surprising teams clash in 'Fall Classic'

## For L.A.: Lasorda

By TIM SULLIVAN

1986 Gannett News Service LOS ANGELES, CALIF. - Tom Lasorda won't allow himself to be taken seriously. He's too much of a ham to play Hamlet, and too much the showman to show the public his

private self. The manager of the Los Angeles Dodgers often comes across as a clown, a caricature. He is, in fact, a magician, one who prèfers his

props not be too closely inspected by the

"When I start talking about the things that I do for the club, all it does is sound like I'm trying to impress people," he said after the Dodgers had advanced to the World Series. "No manager is naive enough to think that he wins the ballgames. Anybody who does is too wrapped up in his own importance.

"All I gotta do is put 'em out there. Asking me if I think this was my best job of managing is like asking me which plate of linguine I like best. There's no answer."

#### Lasorda's Impact

Nonetheless, it is easy to underestimate the manager's impact on the character of a club.

He sets a tone that carries through the clubhouse for better or for worse.

He rallies his troops or divides them. He makes players feel a part of things or apart from things. In these areas, Tom Lasorda is linguine with clam sauce, and most of the National League's remaining managers are just so many Spaghetti-O's.

Lasorda hugs players who perform. He consoles players who don't. He takes the long trips in spring training, and rides the bus in-

stead of showing up late in his own car. He will engage in a short shouting match

rather than allowing a small wound to fester. Such little things matter mightily in baseball. Major-league players are paid well and shouldn't require coddling, yet many of them are little more than children. A reassuring boss can be a comfort.

#### Three Words Tell Story

"Offhand, I can think of three words for Tommy," star pitcher Orel Hershiser said. "The first word is 'motivator.' Tommy's definitely that. The second word is, 'intensity.' Tommy definitely has that.

"And the third word that comes to mind is 'will to win.' That's what I think of when I think of Tommy - his will to win."

So what if "will to win" is three words. Lasorda never frets about language.

His is the tireless tongue of the True Believer, and his powers of persuasion have lately been prodigious. He has convinced a team of fairly ordinary ability that it belongs in "The Fall Classic," as he insists on referring to the World Series.

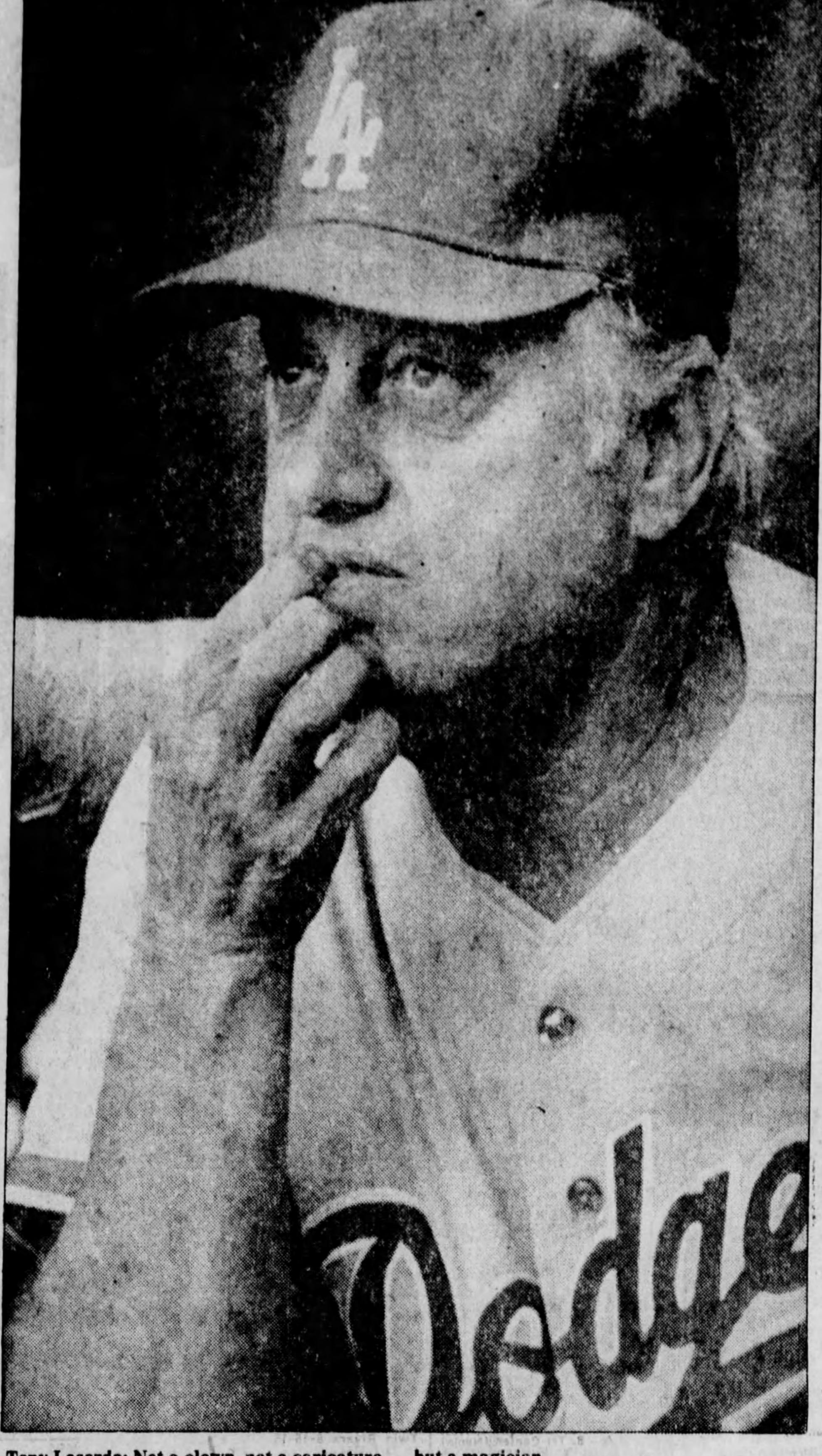
Lasorda is as corny as Kansas in August he actually spoke of David and Goliath after winning the playoff series from the New York Mets - yet his October harvest has been undeniably rich. This year's N.L. West title was his sixth in 12 years as Dodger manager, and the World Series will be his fourth.

#### Tale of Drowning Man

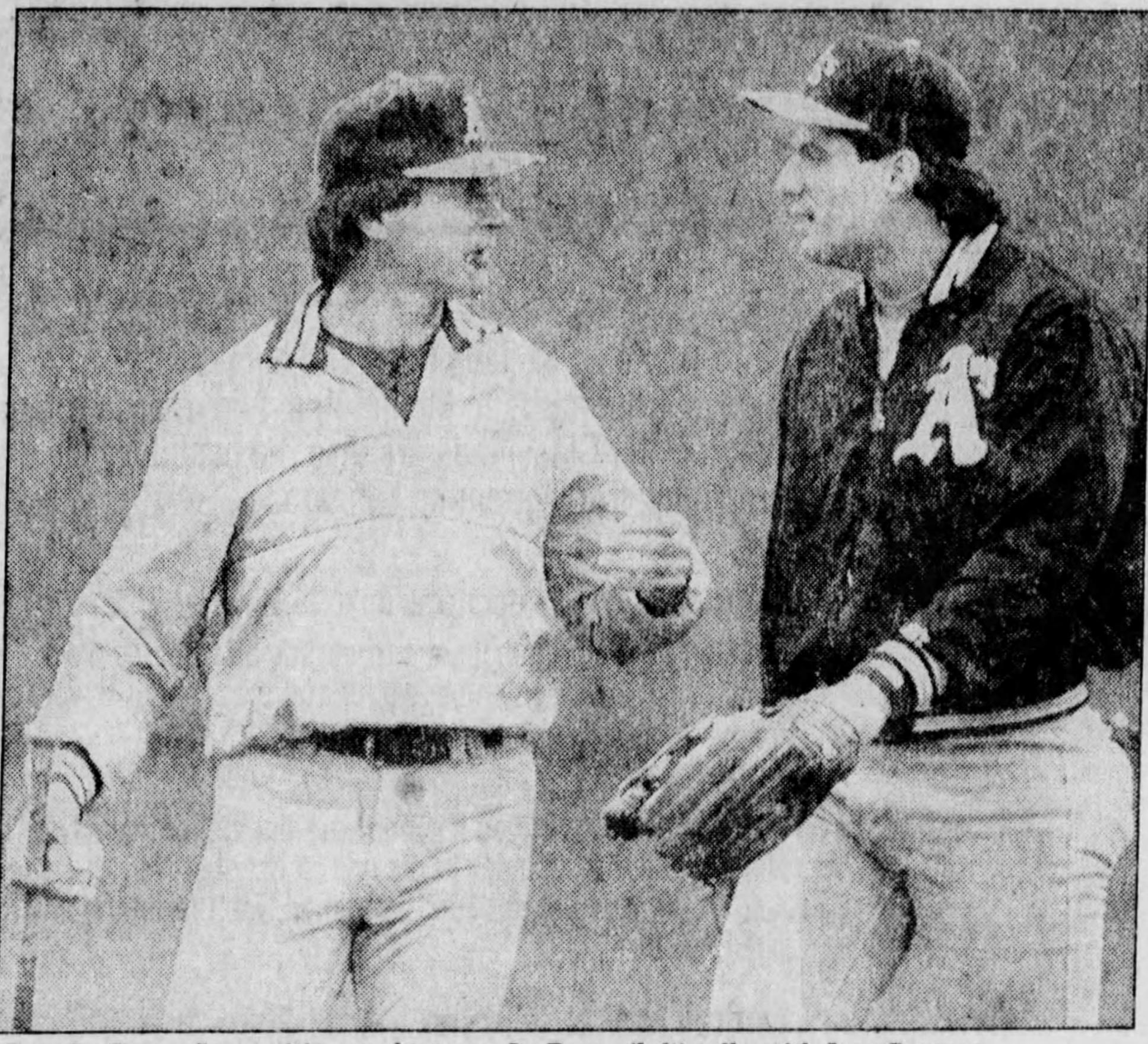
"Before the game, I told the team that we're just like the guy whose boat capsized a mile off shore," he said. "He swam to within one yard of shore and then drowned. He should have drowned when the boat capsized. It's worse when you get so close and don't make it. That's why I told our guys: 'We're only a yard away. We can make it."

The current figures to be stronger in the World Series with Oakland. The American League champions would appear to be the most powerful team in baseball, and perhaps the strongest since the 1976 Cincinnati Reds. The A's may be a bigger challenge than even Tom Lasorda can manage. Maybe not.

"We could save people a lot of money," Lasorda said. "A lot of people spend a lot of money to go to Our Lady of Lourdes in France to see miracles. But all they have to do is come to Dodger Stadium and watch us."



Tony Lasorda: Not a clown, not a caricature . . . but a magician.



Tony La Russa: Superstitious and intense, La Russa (left) talks with Jose Canseco.

## For the A's: La Russa

By TOM PEDULLA

1988 Gannett News Service OAKLAND, CALIF. - Tony La Russa was holding his battered Oakland Athletics cap at his side during a recent radio interview.

The questioner eyed the green-and-gold cap, which had two long, scar-like tears on either side, and finally asked the manager, "Are you superstitious?"

"Are you holding a microphone?" La Russa replied without missing a beat.

The manager of the American League

champions is very superstitious. "I'm not changing that hat," he added. "If

anybody touches it, we'll go to war."

#### Cap Saw 108 Victories

La Russa had worn the cap through 108 victories, including a 104-58 regular season that was the best in A's history.

The same unsightly cap sat atop his head Saturday night, when he led the A's into the World Series for the first time since 1974. This stickler for detail, this zealous worker

who spends hours of preparation on the job, this lawyer-turned-manager who seemingly holds meetings to decide the time, date, and place of the next meeting, has not lost the human touch. "I know there's a human side to Tony a lot

of managers don't want players to see; he's a caring person, period," said 17-year, veteran Don Baylor, who is in his first season with Oakland.

"More than anything, he's a players' manager," rookie shortstop Walt Weiss said.

Players do not offer a higher compliment. It is their way of saying the manager cares about his players and understands their moods and motivations.

#### Touch of Magic

La Russa is no ordinary manager. His touch since he was hired to pilot the A's midway through the 1986 season has been magical.

"Probably the key has been getting Tony," General Manager Sandy Alderson said of the team's rapid rise. "If you go back 21/2 years to when we signed him, we had the worst record in baseball. We still have a lot of the same players. It takes somebody like Tony to make sure it happens." "Our club gets together to talk a lot,"

La Russa said. "Our pitchers talk to Duncan; our hitters talk to Jim," referring to pitching coach Dave Duncan and third-base coach Jim Lefebvre.

#### Prepares Himself Well

La Russa doesn't overlook his personal preparation, either.

"When I go into a game," he said, "I want to be as ready as I can be to make the right call. I sit there and watch seat-of-the-pant managers and a lot of times your gut is right. But there are a lot of times when you help your gut by having a little enlightened view."

Lefebvre has been involved in pro baseball for more than 25 years. He hasn't seen any like La Russa.

"Tony is the most intensely focused manager I've seen," Lefebvre said. "From the first pitch on, he does not miss a moment of the game. He is totally prepared for every aspect of the game. There will not be any surprises from the other team when Tony is in the

He had shown similar intensity during his triple-A career, including playing for and later managing the Iowa Oaks in Des Moines. A Common Goal

There is a relentlessness to La Russa that

the A's reflect. "What we did early," he said, "is we got everybody together and decided we had a common goal. We wanted to play well. We wanted to win 95 to 100 games." Through the twists and turns, the highs and lows of the 162-game season, La Russa kept reminding his players of that goal. "If there's time left in the game, we know

we have the ability to come back and he won't let us forget that," Weiss said. "He always reminds us to keep plugging away and if we're winning to keep adding on."

# Based on size, U.S. was ninth in Olympics

Much of the sports news during the Olympics focused on the race for medals between the Soviet Union and the United States. However, if laurels were to be given to nations which earned the greatest number of medals per million population, the leaders (according to my calculations) are as follows:

Medals per million population Nation East Germany Bulgaria ..... New Zealand. South Korea . West Germany ..... Soviet Union ..... United States New Zealand, of all the democratic nations,

appears to do the best job of fielding superb athletes in the Olympics. - William G. Jamison, R.R. 1, Box 100A, Bernard.

NBC's MTV-type coverage of the Olympics was awful. Just when I would get interested in one sport their coverage would switch to another, or worse yet Bryant Gumbel or some other anchor.

In contrast, The Register's Marc Hansen was bringing us consistent and meaningful coverage of Olympic wrestling. Thanks Marc for not forcing Iowans to grapple with NBC in order to keep tabs on our sport. - James C. McElroy, 2115 Friley Road, Ames.

### LETTERS

I note with interest NBC's concern about smaller ratings than expected for the Olympic Games. Part of the problem is that the countries are not allowed to send their best athletes (with the exception of the Eastern bloc where athletes are employed by the by the state.) As the Soviets and East Germans clobber the rest of the field in medal count. The [International] Olympic Committee is still insisting that only "amateurs" [be] allowed to participate. It is not fair. In many cases it's like sending the Roosevelt Roughriders against the Washington Redskins.

The United States and other western countries should demand an open Olympics where the best athletes from each country can compete. Unless the rules are changed I would seriously consider withdrawing from the Games. - Richard Helfenstein, 201 S.W. 42nd St., Des Moines.

Hawk fan says: Let's make Iowa a role model in sports

I have a few thoughts that I would like to share with my fellow Iowans concerning Coach Hayden Fry's "disappointing" season. We have been given an excellent opportunity to show the nation what is so special about Iowa. Faced with a rare, unspectacular early

season, the grumblings of discontent are sounding from Hawkeye "faithful." Questions State. concerning Coach Fry's judgment, recruiting ability and even his current effectiveness as a major college coach are making the rounds with fans and media.

I, for one, would like to stand up for all that Coach Fry has accomplished here in Iowa, on and off the field. And more importantly, would like to stand up for honor, integrity and most of all loyalty, all of those things which we Iowans pride ourselves upon, and offer to the world as our image of Iowa and rural America.

Coach Fry has brought a winning football program to Iowa, he has also brought national media attention, new image, highly profitable Hawkeye merchandising, and a horde of black and gold ambassadors to the nation. He has recruited fine young men with integrity on the gridiron. Names like Chuck Long, Mike Flagg, Bill Happel, Marv Cook and Chuck Hartlieb come to mind, just to name a very few. Coach Fry himself has managed to complete one of the best Big Ten records recently, and has done it with honor and integrity. Coach Fry's athletes certainly do not come to enjoy sun, sand and illegal payments, which makes Coach Fry's accomplishments even more remarkable. It is a fact that while Hayden Fry is not "Jesus Christ," Coach Fry most certainly is, and will always be, an Iowa coaching legend. I propose that we treat him as such, and avoid an unfortunate incident 'Fultz, Iowa State University, Ames.

such as Earle Bruce's wrongful firing at Ohio

Let's show the nation that winning is admirable, but it isn't everything in the state of Iowa. If we must lose football games occasionally, let us do it gracefully and with honor. thereby sending a message loud and clear to our coaches and athletes, that you're "not just another piece of meat in the Hawkeye state. - M.E. Brightman, Box 16126, Des Moines.

#### Reader doubts that God is exclusively a Hawkeye

Well, I can leave this life. I've seen it all now. And when I do depart I'll be able to go up to Heaven, go through the Pearly Gates, and confirm something that the most recent Des Moines Sunday Register told me: God is a Hawkeye fan.

I know that may come as a shock to some people, who thought that God was supposed to be loving to all. But it must be true.

I, however, am a doubter and would like to pose a question: Why aren't the Hawkeyes undefeated and ranked number one in the country if God has a "spot of black and gold hext to his heart?" And, why is it that the Hawkeyes just escaped with a 10-3 win over Iowa State?

I guess I'll have to ask him when I get there and see Him waving his Hawkeye penhant Or, I guess, I can just read The Register. That's some investigative reporting. - Aaron