Section 3 Chicago Tribune, Sunday, April 23, 1989 ★

Sanders has left mark on NFL

Barry Sanders didn't just open the door. He kicked it down.

The golden rule of not selecting underclassmen in the National Football League draft has been shattered. From now on, a freshman, sophomore or junior will be free to exercise his inalienable right to make millions of dollars. Who needs a college degree when you've got a pro contract?

All hail, Barry Sanders, upholder of the U.S. Constitution.

When Sanders, a college junior, is picked Sunday, a precedent will be set. His selection means the draft is now open to everyone, not just seniors or players who have graduated.

The Oklahoma State running back obviously decided he needs several million dollars more than a second Heisman Trophy. When the league approved him for the draft, they did it under the thin veil of his school being on probation. However, Oklahoma State coach Pat Jones countered with the real reason.

On College Football Ed Sherman

United States Football League.

Sanders isn't as picky, and with the current climate the league had no choice but to accept his application. What this means for college football remains to be seen, though college basketball seems to have survived nicely despite losing some of its top stars early.

Obviously, the college coaches are upset that the NFL didn't put up more of a fight. Both parties have enjoyed the setup for decades. The NFL uses the colleges as a free farm system. In return, the league doesn't draft any players until they've completed their eligibility.

Thanks to Sanders, that arrangement is a thing of the past.

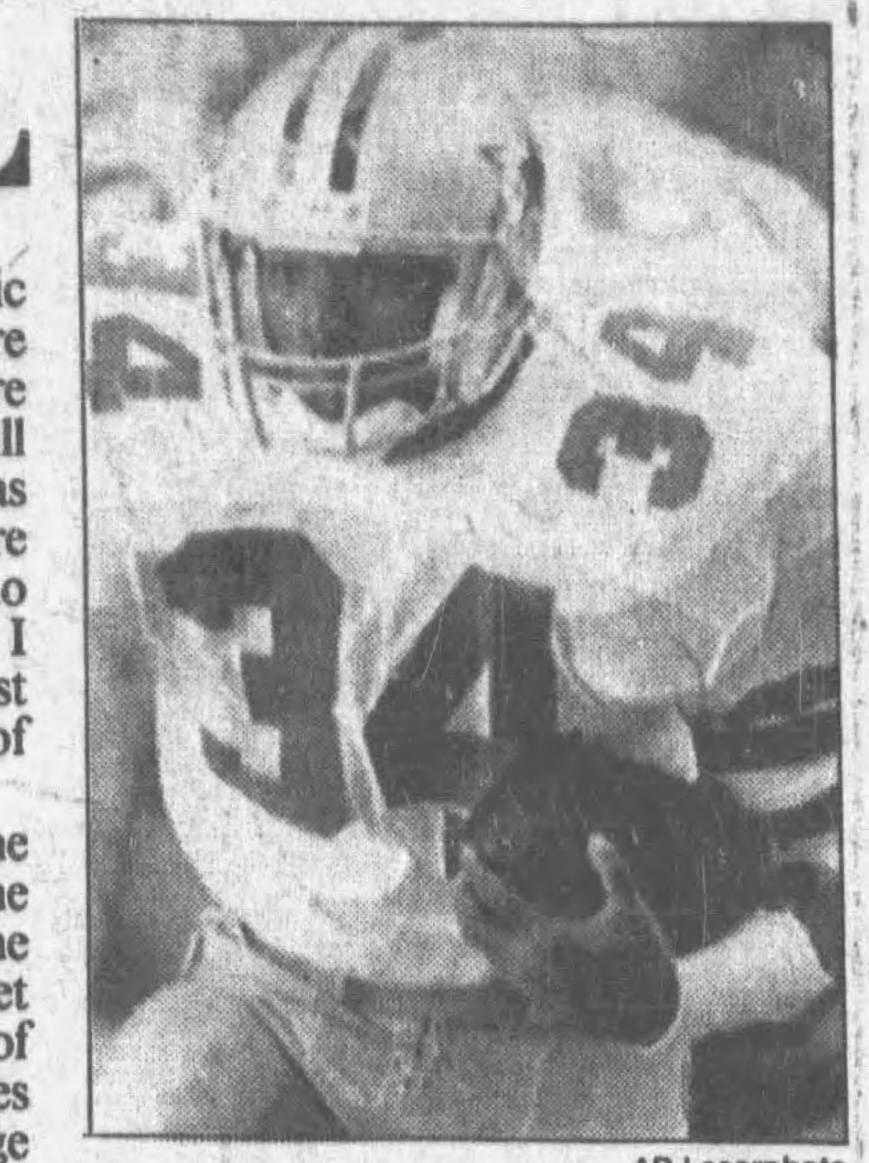
"I have no qualms with Barry Sanders," said Arkansas coach Ken Hatfield. "However, we've always had the feeling that the NFL would take the case to court if it ever got this far. Now, all of a sudden, they've backed off. We all feel a little betrayed."

physically until he's 27," Mackovic said. "When they're drafted, you're looking at four or five years before they reach their maturity level. Will they be ready at 20, 21? Not as ready as they'd be at 22, 23. There are some exceptional talents who can go into the pros early. But I don't think it's in the best interest of the overwhelming majority of players."

COLLEGES

However, don't tell that to the agents. With Sanders going into the draft early, the coaches believe the problem with agents will only get worse. They envision thousands of rby Walters-Lloyd Bloom clones trying to persuade young college players to take the money now instead of later.

Next year, what's to stop an agent from advising Pittsburgh's sensational running back Curvin Richards, who will be only a sophomore, that he should go pro? And does Major Harris really have anything more to prove after three years at West Virginia?



AP Laserphoto The NFL snubbed Herschel Walker, so he picked the USFL.

he goes in the third round, sixth round or isn't even drafted at all. Then where is he? Agents already have a bad enough name as it is. It's going to get even worse if they start dealing with the younger Sanders' decision poses many problems for college football, but in the long run, who can blame him? What if he played for free at Oklahoma State this year and got injured as a senior? He'd be left with nothing. "I think people should make their own decision," Walker told the Dallas Morning News. 66 yards on 14 carries. Forty-three "Whether he's ready or not [for the NFL], he should decide for himself."

Irish football squad goes for a test drive

By Joseph Tybor Chicago Tribune

NOTRE DAME, Ind.-Watching Notre Dame Saturday was like viewing a fine car on the showroom floor.

You really don't know how it will perform until you take it on the road and test it in real conditions but one look tells you it's loaded.

Barely three months after winning the national championship, the Irish unveiled their 1989 edition during the annual Blue-Gold Game and showed an abundance of talenteven though it was only to themselves and their fans.

Notre Dame loses only six starters from the championship team because of graduation. In addition, Tony Brooks, the Irish's secondleading rusher last year, withdrew from school because of persona problems and is a question mark; but there was no void in the back field of either squad on Saturday. In front of 25,694 fans on a mild spring day, Rodney Culver, who will be a sophomore in the fall, ran for three touchdowns to lead the Blue team to a 21-8 win over the Gold. Culver, a 6-foot, 219-pounder who can play tailback or fullback, ran for of those yards came on six carries during an 80-yard, 16-play drive in the first quarter. Culver, who received offensive player of the game honors, was

among players (most of them running backs) singled out afterwards by coach Lou Holtz.

He called fullback Anthony Johnson, who carried nine times for 47 yards for the Blue team, "the most underrated player ever;" had encouraging words for Kenny Spears, a sophomore in the fall, who carried 10 times for 58 yards for the Blue; and continued to heap praise on Ricky Watters, who has switched from flanker to tailback this spring.

"Even my wife said to me he runs different than he did last fall," Holtz humored reporters. "It's no great sign to be able to see the sun or no great feat of hearing to hear the thunder, but when my wife said Ricky Watters improved, that's pretty noticeable."

There was an attempt to split the first-string talent between the squads. Quarterback Tony Rice, sure to be a Heisman candidate this year, played for both. Holtz's biggest challenge will be motivating the substantial talent he has to reach beyond complacency and try to meet the expectations of a repeat championship season.

"The NFL is letting him in because of the Constitution," Jones

In other words, the league knew it had no legal motive to keep Sanders out of the draft. So they let Sanders in, hoping other underclassmen won't follow.

But they will. With the door wide open, look for college football to experience what college basketball has been going through for years. Michael Jordan was only a junior when the Bulls picked him, and Isiah Thomas and Magic Johnson pursued higher education for only two years before turning pro.

"I think you'll see six or seven underclassmen come out every year," said football agent Steve Zucker. "It'll be just like basketball."

Herschel Walker tried to test the NFL after he won the Heisman Trophy as a junior in 1983. He applied for the draft, though he submitted a list of teams he wanted to join. The NFL denied the request, and Walker bolted to the rival.

Hatfield thinks the pros should pay a price if they grab a college underclassmen.

"There's no doubt we're in the business of preparing the young man to be the best he can be in education and football," Hatfield said. "I haven't noticed the NFL giving any money back to the colleges when they draft a player whose eligibility isn't up. They should give something back to the schools."

The bigger issue, though, isn't money; rather, it's whether college underclassmen are ready for the NFL.

Illinois coach John Mackovic has experience from both sides, having served as head coach for the Kansas City Chiefs. He's not even sure a player is sufficiently prepared for the pros after playing four years of college ball.

"In my opinion, a football player doesn't fully mature mentally and

Spring brings a fresh crop of backup QBs to Illini camp

By Linda Young Chicago Tribune

CHAMPAIGN-Nobody wants Jeff Kinney to quarterback the for a Blue touchdown. A healthy George, of course, needs no help. Saturday, the junior capped spring drills by drill-

"I would be surprised if Barry Sanders did not get some encouragement to go pro," Mackovic said. "I'd be surprised if he made the decision arbitrarily. The agent problem already is a big one. Now we're going to have to be more on guard against outside forces."

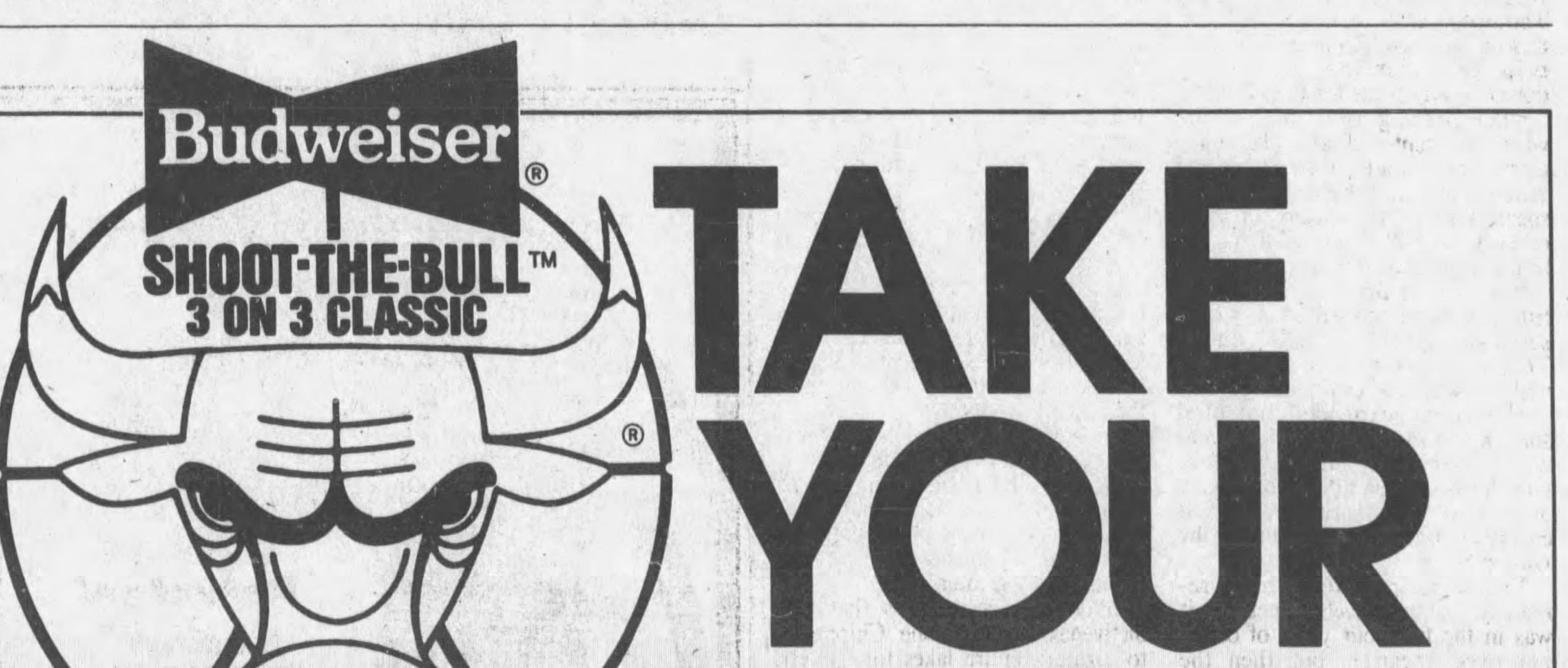
Zucker says he won't deal with underclassmen, but he doesn't think the same could be said for the rest of his colleagues.

"An agent will tell a kid, 'You're going to go in the first round,'" Zucker said. "Then all of a sudden.

At least that's what it says in the Constitution.

"I personally believe you don't have complacency if you wrap up last year, pass out the scrapbooks, and do it all over again," he said.

"That's exactly what we're trying to do. Our players will get their championship rings today and that's the end of it. It's over."



University of Illinois in 1989least of all Jeff Kinney.

If he does, it will mean something bad has happened to starter Jeff George, and that, at this point, is unthinkable in the Illini camp.

But if for any reason George ever does come out of a game, Kinney, a redshirt freshman from Wheaton North, wants to be the one to go in.

Kinney made his case for the No. 2 spot here Saturday, spending time with both the first unit, the Blues, and the reserve Whites during the Blue squad's 34-0 spring-game victory.

Kinney hit 3 of 5 passes for 53 yards, including a 39-yard strike to Elbert Turner. Meanwhile, Jason Verduzco, also a redshirt freshman, had a miserable afternoon, throwing four interceptions, including one that strong safety Quintin Parker returned 35 yards

ing 16 of 21 passes for 295 yards, including a 65-yard touchdown to Mike Bellamy. George, a secondteam all-Big 10 pick last year, picked up right where he left off last fall, finding Steven Williams with a 33-yard strike that led to the Blues' first touchdown and a 53-yard completion to freshman Godfrey Danchimah that set up the second of Doug Higgins' two field goals.

"I really wanted to have a good day just to show the coaches I could do the job," said Kinney, who did just that.

Said coach John Mackovic: "Jeff's had some up-and-down days during the spring but he's shown that he's moving along and is in a position to make some of the plays that we'd like our quarterbacks to make. I was pleased with several of the things he did with the ball. He showed some poise under pressure."

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