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# THE EIGHTIES: SPORTS

# Child's play? Not in this decade of scandal and dark regrets

By Thomas Stinson Staff writer

Out on the field, security guards rode herd on the assembled media like wrangiers on a cattle drive, compressing a horde of 30 away from the dugout and against a wall. Asked why tight reins were required at something as pastoral as a July batting practice before a Braves game, a guard snapped, "Doan' need ya'll killin' the grass!"

Deep inside Atlanta-Fulton Country Stadium, Pete Rose, focus of this stakeout, rumbled across the manager's office of the visitor's clubhouse and grabbed from his locker a gargantuan bottle of cherry-flavored Rolaids.

"I'll tell ya' one thing," the Cincinnati manager said. "I'm leading the league in this stuff too."

A few reporters had come by to talk

baseball. But perhaps more so, we had come to satisfy our curiosities, to inspect for damage, to watch if the game's most distinguished hitter swayed in the wind as the gambling scandal that would eventually bring the storied man down boiled around him. Remarkably, as long as the conversation stayed on baseball. Rose held forth as if he'd never seen a gaming sheet in his life. In his obscene way, he was even charming. Perhaps he actually thought this too would pass.

Later in the press box, Furman Bisher rolled a baseball down the formica work table. It had come from the manager, given as a souvenir, and Bisher was passing it on. "Here," he said, "you've got kids. Right off Pete Rose's desk." It would be Charley Hustle's last local visit before baseball banished him.

This is the grit that sticks in

America's mouth as it closes the book on the 1980s. A decade that had begun with one of the unifying and emotional moments in American sports — the 1980 U.S. hockey team's unthinkable quest for the Olympic gold medal ended in a morass of scandal, fouled heroes and cynicism piled to the roof. Pete Rose was simply dragged out the back and tossed upon the high heap of a decade's dark regrets.

Canadian Ben Johnson was the most breath-taking sprinter the world had ever seen, until his admitting to steroid abuse stained him forever and placed a silent implication on track athletes everywhere. Mike Tyson rekindled a fascination with boxing's heavyweight class, the youngest champ of all time. But that interest slowly degenerated into antipathy as the fighter's dark, brooding personality

overgrew his remarkable skills.

Professional football and baseball withstood player strikes. The USFL came and went, remembered more for contracts than contact. The NCAA was never so juristic, firing off probation sentences like an overbooked traffic judge. Except for Rice University, the entire Southwest Conference felt the lash. Agents Norby Walters and Lloyd Bloom were sentenced to jail for wooing and signing undergrads. Another agent, Mike Blatt, was accused of murder.

On the celebration of Jackie Robinson's knocking down baseball's color barrier, Los Angeles Dodgers general manager Al Campanis proclaimed on national television that blacks do not have the "necessities" to manage or operate teams. Len Bias, celebrating his No. 1 draft selection by the Boston Celtics, sucked up so much cocaine that it killed him.

And Pete Rose, the game's greatest hitter, a baseball icon, was suspended after a gambling probe found him to be a compulsive bettor, even on games involving his own Cincinnati Reds.

America will never look away. It cannot. There is no bottom to the national facination with sport; and there are too many people like Nolan Ryan and Walter Payton and Wayne Gretzky and Jack Nicklaus and Julius Erving, who lent a sense of class and pride to any place they played.

But the 1980s forever changed sports for much of America, the bright times and fables of a past era hardened now into something meaner and darker, into something more contemptuous and more difficult to explain when the two-year-old who sleeps down the hall gets old enough to ask about the wrapped baseball in his top dresser drawer.

#### HEADLINES

#### 1980

U.S. hockey team wins Olympic gold medal

#### 1981

The baseball strike: Fans miss 712 games

Fernando-mania: Valenzuela NL's top rookie

#### 1982

Tears in Tuscaloosa: Bear Bryant retires

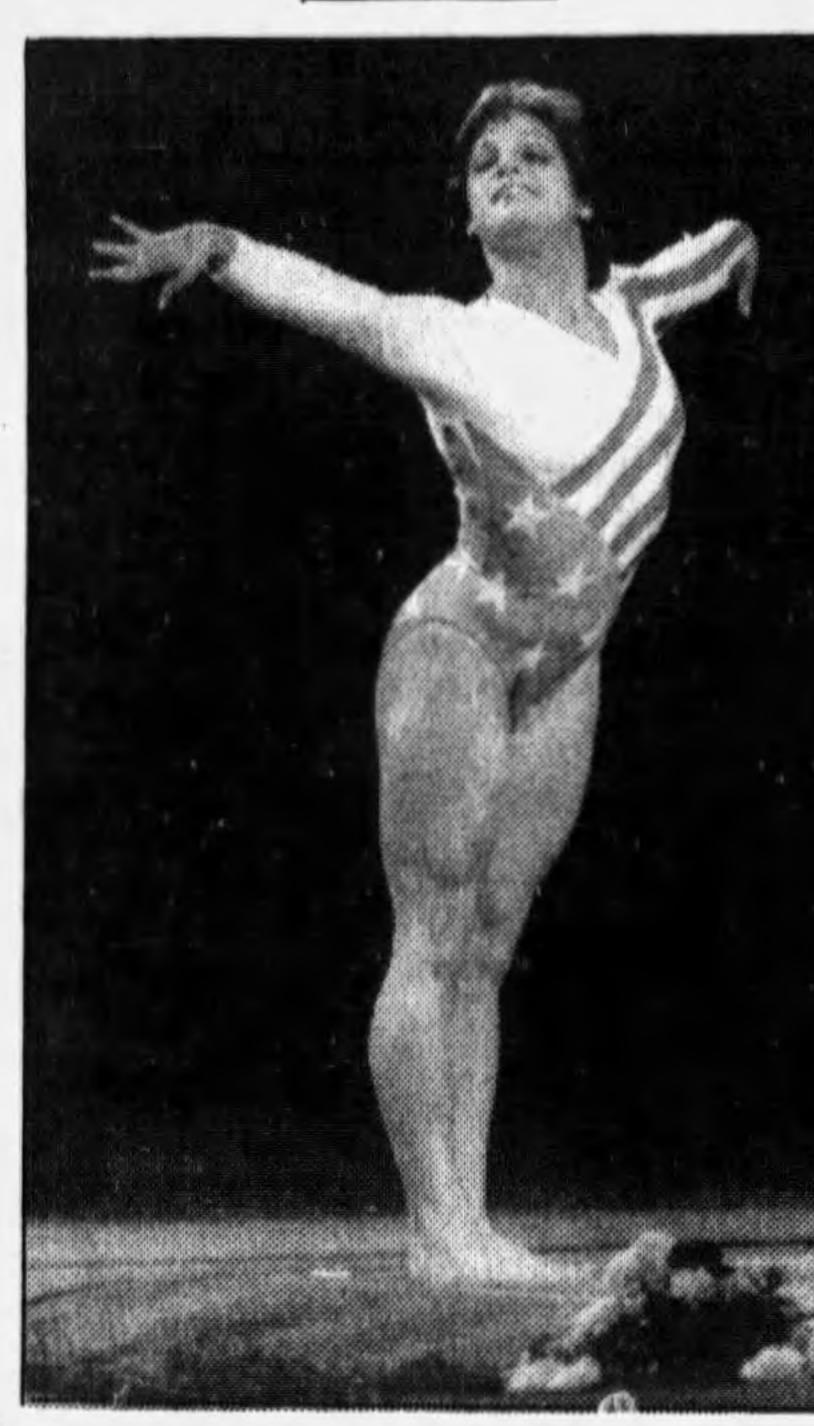
The football strike: NFL players out 63 days

#### 1983

Herschel wins Heisman, \$1.5 million USFL contract

Too much pine tar? George Brett goes berserk

### 1984



Mary Lou Retton, Carl Lewis shine in L.A. Olympics

Payton outruns Brown as' NFL's all-time rusher

# 1985

4,193! Rose passes Cobb as baseball's top hitter

Abdul-Jabbar becomes NBA's all-time top scorer

# 1986

Len Bias dies of overdose

Old man Nicklaus wins Masters at age 46

# 1987

20-year old Mike Tyson wins heavyweight title

Lemond first American to win Tour de France

# 1988

Ben Johnson stripped of Olympic gold for steroid use

# 1989

Pete Rose suspended from baseball for life

Lists compiled by Thomas Stinson

### The top 10 dramatic moments

(in no particular order)

- Lorenzo Charles's lastsecond dunk to win the 1983 NCAA basketball title.
- Larry Mize's 140-foot chip to win the 1988 Masters.
- Dwight Clark's touchdown catch as San Francisco beats Dallas in 1982 playoffs.
- Kirk Gibson's ninth-inning home run in Game 1 of the 1988 World Series.
- The final two minutes of the US-USSR hockey game in the Lake Placid Winter Games.
- Bill Buckner's Game 6 error that helped Boston lose the 1986 World Series.
- Dan Jansen's fall in the 1,000-meter race in the Calgary Winter Games. ■ Pete Rose's single in Cin-
- cinnati to break Ty Cobb's hit record. ■ Bird vs. Dominique, 4th quarter, Game 7, 1988 NBA **Eastern Conference**
- semifinals. ■ Mary Decker tripping on Zola Budd's heel in the 1984 Olympics 3,000-meter run.

# Strange, but true

- Mr. Potato Head: In a 1987 Eastern League baseball game, Williamsport catcher Dave Bresnahan faked a pick-off attempt at third base by errantly throwing a potato into left field. When the runner broke for home, assuming that was a ball rolling around in the infield, Bresnahan pulled the real ball from his glove and tagged him out. Bresnahan was charged with an error, fined \$50 and released the next day.
- Strike up the band: With Stanford leading archrival California 20-19 with four seconds to play on Nov. 20, 1982, the Stanford band assembled in the Cardinal end zone for a post-game victory performance. Cal received the final kickoff, pulled off four laterals and Kevin Moen charged the final 10 yards through the oblivious band members to win the game 25-20, leveling trombonist Gary Tyrell in the process.
- Thanks, I'll just have a beer: When San Francisco Giants fans arrived at Candlestick Park for the 1989 season, they found concession stands offering tofu hotdogs and yogurt.
- Nice game, let's give him a hand: The morning of the 1980 NCAA basketball final, Louisville center Wiley Brown sat down to eat breakfast and removed his prosthetic thumb from his right hand. Inadvertently left on the table, the thumb was subsequently thrown out with the morning trash. Brown and some teammates later retrieved it from the garbage and the senior from Hogansville, Ga., had eight points and seven rebounds that night as Louisville defeated UCLA for the title.



1989: Pete Rose in Atlanta.

## Herschel Walker's best little fibs

"I haven't signed any contract." — Feb. 18, 1983

"There was really no offer. I've heard \$16.5 million, \$15.5 million but there never was an offer." - Feb. 18, 1983

"I did not sign a contract. I haven't seen a contract and I don't expect to see one until next year when my eligibility is up." — Feb. 19, 1983

■ Walker later admitted to signing a contract worth \$5 million with J. Walter Duncan, owner of the New Jersey Generals, on Feb. 17, 1983. On Feb. 23, he withdrew from the University of Georgia and began practicing with the Generals Feb. 25.

# Top 10 stories in Georgia

- Bulldogs win 1980 national championship.
- Larry Nelson wins 1986 U.S. Open.
- Bobby Dodd dies.
- Vince Dooley retires from coaching.
- Herschel Walker wins the Heisman Trophy.
- Bill Curry leaves Tech for Alabama.
- Larry Mize wins the 1988 Masters.
- David Croudip dies of cocaine overdose.
- Jan Kemp wins discrimination suit against Georgia.
- **Evander Holyfield** becomes top heavyweight challenger.

### Words to the wise, and otherwise

"I don't believe it's prejudice. I truly believe [blacks] may not have some of the necessities to be, let's say, a field manager or perhaps a general manager. I don't say all of them but how many quarterbacks, how many pitchers do you have that are black?" - Al Campanis

"It's a good thing Brian was a third child or he would have been the only one." — Kathy Bosworth, mother to The Boz -



**Chuck Tanner** 

"Do you believe in miracles? Yes!" — Al Michaels

"I just know when I'm right, no man in the world can beat me. I'm immortal now." — Mike Tyson

"When the Braves win the World Series, we'll have the biggest ticker tape parade down Peachtree Street in the history of our nation." — Chuck Tanner

# The decade's dubious achievements

- The "Anyone Wanna Jog It Back to Hopkinton" Liar's Award: Rosie Ruiz. Suspicions arose when the 1980 Boston Marathon champ finished and wasn't sweating. Ruiz later confessed to hopping a subway for most of race.
- The "Dale Carnegie Prize for Perpetual Perkiness" Part I: Bobby Knight. Irked at the officiating, the Indiana basketball coach heaved a folding chair across the floor into the wake of a Purdue fast break in 1985.
- The "Dean Smith Thanks You on His Knees" Oh-Oh Award: Georgetown guard Fred Brown. His mistaken last-minute pass to North Carolina's James Worthy gave the Tar Heels the 1982 NCAA basketball title.
- The "Moving Van? What Moving Van?" Jerk Award: Robert Irsay. The Colts owner secretly moved the team out of Baltimore offices on a snowy March 1984 night. Next stop: Indianapolis.
- The "Dale Carnegie Prize for Perpetual Perkiness"



**Bobby Knight** 

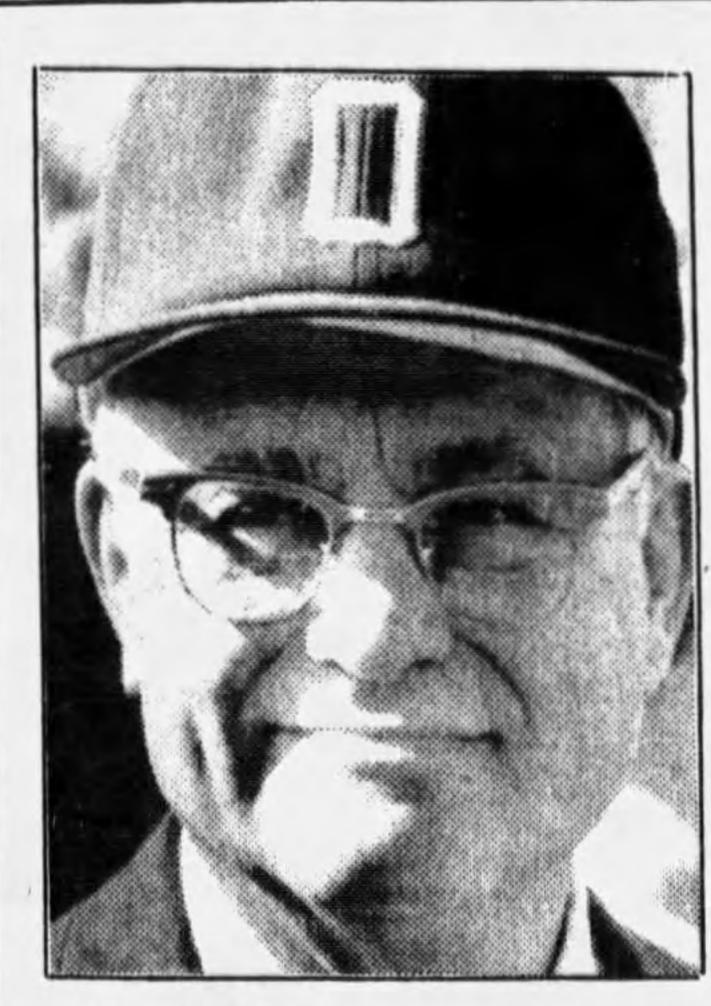
- Part II: Bobby Knight. Irked at a technical foul, the Indiana basketball coach withdrew his team from the floor while playing a Soviet team in 1987.
- The "Well, Maybe Just One More Round" Award: Sugar Ray Leonard. By last count, he retired in 1982, unretired in 1984 to beat Kevin Howard and then retired immediately after the fight, unretired again in 1988 to beat Donny Lalond and Roberto Duran. No way he'll ever fight Marvin Hagler again. Nooooooo.
- The "Who Killed Jona-

than Livingston Seagull?" Award: Toronto Police Department. The New York Yankee outfielder Dave Winfield made a warm-up toss Aug. 4, 1983, in Toronto's Exhibition Park and got arrested for it. The ball struck and killed a passing seagull and mobilized Toronto's finest, who took Winfield into custody after the game and booked him downtown. Authorities later dropped charges after Winfield pleaded his remorse that "one of the fowls in Canada is now no longer with us." ■ The "Dale Carnegie Prize

for Perpetual Perkiness" Part III (and retired): Bobby Knight. After John Feinstein wrote the 1987 bestseller "A Season on the Brink" about life inside the tumultuous Hoosier program, Knight blasted the author's ethics for, among other things, quoting Knight's coarse language verbatim and not writing enough about the players. The next time Feinstein tried to cover an Indiana game, he was denied credentials.

# They retired

Kareem Abdul-Jabbar Bjorn Borg **Steve Carlton Julius Erving Chris Evert Larry Holmes** Reggie Jackson Pete Rozelle **Barry Switzer** 



**Woody Hayes** 

Deaths

#### **Walter Alston** Len Bias David Croupid **Bobby Dodd Bart Giamatti George Halas Woody Hayes** Dick Howser Flo Hyman **Bobby Layne** Joe Louis **Pete Maravich** Roger Maris **Billy Martin** Jesse Owens Satchel Paige **Tim Richmond** Sugar Ray Robinson **Art Rooney Red Smith Jerry Smith Bill Veeck** Johnny Weissmuller

Dick Young

Secretariat

# Upset of the decade

- Villanova 66, Georgetown 64
- April 1, 1985, NCAA final Game of the decade

■ US 4, USSR 3

- Feb. 22, 1980, Lake Placid, N.Y.
- Player of the decade ■ Wayne Gretzky

# Name of the decade

Ramsey Dardar defensive lineman, LSU

# **Shooting stars**

- Or, as Andy Warhol said, everyone's famous for 15 minutes. ■ Eddie "The Eagle" Edwards: Flew low, vanished fast.
- Brian Bosworth: The Boz is now The Was.
- Jim Craig: Goalie today, goner tomorrow.
- Gerrie Cooney: Did he ever, ever hit anyone? ■ Charles Kerfeld: Punk rock pitcher, nihilistic ERA.
- The USFL: Spring football is still a bad idea. ■ Ralph Sampson: He played like Delilah.
- William Perry: Dare to be fat. ■ Gerry Faust: Are there any Irishmen in Akron?
- Mitch "Blood" Green: Hey, get a career, pal.
- Joe Charboneau: He's only a song back in Cleveland.