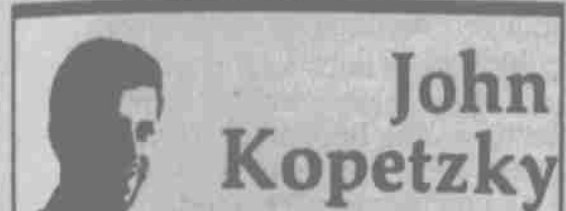


USFL's fate may depend on springtime sports fans

The people who run the United States Football League often compare themselves with the old American Football League. The AFL, brainchild of Texas oil millionaires Lamar Hunt and Bud Adams, began play in 1960 as a rag-tag poor cousin of the NFL. But in 10 years, the AFL forced a merger of the NFL, ending a suicidal bidding war.

But, lest we forget, there was another attempt to buck the NFL. And it failed dismally. Remember the World Football League? Born in 1974, the WFL died in a sea — no, make that an ocean — of red ink in the midpoint of its second season in 1975.



John Kopetzky

The first thing the USFL did right was schedule its games in the spring. While springtime football is a novel idea, it does make some sense. Trying to compete with 28 NFL teams and the college games would be too risky. Why not play in the spring and early summer?

Next, the league brought in a former ABC sports mogul, Chet Simmons, as their commissioner. Simmons knew all too well that the USFL's survival depended on television. He negotiated contracts with ABC and ESPN. The money is a far cry from the billion-dollar prize the NFL got, but still, the USFL television contracts provide capital for all teams, and more importantly, it has provided exposure.

But for any professional sports venture to be a success on the tube — and hence a success, period — it must draw well in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles; the big three TV markets. The USFL didn't do so well there.

Oh, they tried. Do you think it was an accident that Herschel Walker ended up playing for the New Jersey Generals? The Generals struggled to a 6-12 record, though, and received a lukewarm reception in the Big Apple.

George Allen's Chicago Blitz, despite being a playoff team, drew poorly in Chicago. They found it hard to challenge the 60-plus-year stranglehold

the Bears have enjoyed in the Windy City. So what happens in the off season? The Blitz head south to Arizona, and the Arizona Wranglers move to Chicago. The Blitz was a solid team; Arizona was one of the worst in the league. If a playoff team can't crack the market in Chicago, how in the world will a horrible team?

While the mess brews in Chicago, the situation has improved in New Jersey. Donald Trump bought the Generals and instantly stamped himself as the George Steinbrenner of pro football. Trump, already shelling out \$1.45 million a year for Herschel Walker, lured Brian Sipe away from the Cleveland Browns with a multimillion-dollar deal. He also brought in Walt Michaels, the popular but recently fired coach of the New York Jets to run the show.

But Trump isn't the only free spender. Edward DeBartolo Jr., whose father owns the San Francisco 49ers and who has tons of money to play with, was awarded the Pittsburgh expansion franchise. He signed Dallas Cowboys third-stringer Glenn Carano to be the team's quarterback, at half a million a year. That's a deal that has raised some eyebrows, since Carano hasn't thrown a pass in a game for three years.

DeBartolo's next coup made a little more sense. He got Mike Rozier for a million a year, and from the way season-ticket sales soared after the signing, it may pay off. But DeBartolo's team must prove itself on the field if they're to remain any kind of success.

Will the free-spending ways of Trump and DeBartolo ruin the league? Possibly. Not all the owners can afford to shell out the salaries these two can. For every Herschel Walker, Mike Rozier, or Brian Sipe that the USFL gets, the NFL will up the ante in the bidding war. Some USFL teams simply don't have the resources that New Jersey and Pittsburgh do, and they may be left out in the cold.

The AFL did much the same thing in its day. The \$400,000 contract given Joe Namath by the Jets in 1975 created a sensation and spurred talks that ended in the 1970 merger. The folks at the USFL are nuts if they think they can do the same thing.

Dream . . .

Continued from Page 12

"We have injuries all the time," Platt said. "It's going to happen, no matter who it is."

According to Scherger, a nerve in his throwing arm slipped out of the groove it's supposed to be in. Gold Sox trainers and coaches thought the muscle just needed stretching.

By his own choice, Scherger said he used a pain depressor and also had cortisone injected in his arm.

"It (the treatment) wasn't a lot of fun," he said. "But I wanted to play. I should have pushed more to see a physician."

As the arm problems persisted, Scherger's batting average and playing time dropped. While on a road trip, Scherger played in back-to-back games. In the first, he was credited with two RBIs and threw a runner out at the plate.

Two days later he was released. Scherger said the team labeled him "fit to play" and then released him. A player can't be released if he is listed as unfit to play, he said.

But Scherger accepted his release and said it was only "a mild surprise." Scherger said he now knew what it felt like to be released and see a dream become less of a reality.

"I saw a lot of friends released and the insensitivity of it all hangs with you," he said. "Your friends look at you and see themselves."

For Scherger, playing in the minors was almost like playing in the majors.

"It's just another step," he said. "The food and bats get better in the majors and the pitchers throw harder and the crowds are bigger. But the game's the same."

During his years away from Nebraska, Scherger's loyalty remained with the Big Red.

Scherger said he followed Nebraska baseball, just like his teammates followed their alma maters.

"Under the Padre uniforms were a lot of Nebraska, Oklahoma State and Texas T-shirts," he said. "Players take great pride in their schools."

When an opening occurred in the Nebraska coaching staff, Scherger said he jumped, especially because he could obtain his degree in advertising and public relations.

Because he is only 25, Scherger said he must gain the respect of the players. But all new coaches must do this, he said.

"They can respect me as a player, but they don't have to respect me as a coach," he said.

Scherger said his knowledge, timing and ability to relate to his players will help him be successful as a coach.

But in the back of his mind will always be the dream of playing more baseball.

"The player is still in me," he said. "My body and mind are geared to go out and kick it up."

But for now, Scherger admitted that he has "put the bat down," and is undecided about his future. His only present goal is to graduate, he said.



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