



A Look at a Really Rotten Year

By Rob Schultz

Fortunately, 1988 is over. It wasn't a great year. The economy was too topsy-turvy, there were horrible natural disasters, including the drought that turned many of the area's golf courses into the Mohave Desert. And the state sports scene belonged in a landfill somewhere.

Looking back, there just isn't much good to say about 1988. It all can be wrapped in the combined records of the Wisconsin Badgers and Green Bay Packers. Yuk.

Anyway, in an effort to capsule the past year, I thought of people in the news who I met for the first time and certain moments that had an impact on me. Here they are:

Lindy Infante: The Packer coach couldn't have envisioned a worse nightmare when he decided to take the job last winter. He's a smart man with an intelligent game plan. Little did he know he was inheriting a team where the majority of the players didn't have an IQ above 75.

Throughout the horrible season Infante kept his sense of humor intact. Incredibly likeable, it's no wonder Infante is immensely popular with the public and his players.

But if Infante has a flaw — and some might consider this a gift — he doesn't have a great relationship with the press. His idea of what our function should be is all wet. A good reporter, in his view, is a cheerleader. Whoops.

Throughout the season, Infante was condescending to the better reporters. Worse yet, he was virtually unquotable all of the time. That's not a good idea when your team is the worst in the league. This is one area where he should have taken notes from the very-quotable Forrest Gregg.

The press came down hard on the Packers this season, as it should have. Infante didn't enjoy much of a honeymoon. But he might have been let off easier if he got along with reporters from the start.

Pete Dye: He was nothing like I imagined him to be. Dye was present for

the introduction of his Blackwolf Run creation to the media last spring. It was like sitting in a living room listening to your grandfather tell stories.

You never get bored listening to the grand old golf architect. He told story after story and each one was incredibly funny. His best story is what the Playboy Club people did to his Briar Patch creation. He designed it with Jack Nicklaus and thought it would be a great course. But that was before the Playboy Club added the horse stables and airport. Using some spicy adjectives to make the story humorous, he said he'd rather forget he ever designed it.

Chuck Cecil: I hope this guy makes it with the Packers. He has all the intelligence and ability in the world, although he is a bit slow afoot. Cecil is so unassuming, it's hard not to like this guy. He always can be seen wearing his Idaho potato hat and a half-smile. He's the quintessential Cool Hand Luke.

But what really separates Cecil from the others is his competitiveness on the field. Never hit a receiver with your shoulders, he says. Always use your helmet. Cecil has knocked himself out so many times, he has lost count. Nobody hurts more after a loss, nobody enjoys winning more than Cecil. He's a keeper who the Packers need more of to turn the corner.

SOME MOMENTS THAT TOUCHED ME

The Greg Norman-Jamie Hutton relationship: This is what makes one think that professional sports is more than just a way for spoiled athletes to get rich.

As bad as 1988 was, the Norman-Hutton relationship made the year bright. It started with the Monona youth following Norman around during his victory at the Heritage at Hilton Head. The trip was sponsored by Thursday's Child, a group that grants the wishes of sick children.

But the relationship really blossomed when Hutton, who is suffering from

leukemia, went through a dangerous bone marrow transplant this summer. Norman has continuously kept in touch with his young friend.

Hutton isn't completely out of the woods yet. But his faith is strong, partly because of the efforts of Norman. A relationship between two classier individuals couldn't be created.

The release of Frankie Neal: Neal had the great ability, but his head, and mouth, always got in the way. Infante had no option but to cut him.

What made Neal's release significant was what he said before leaving. He tore apart the relationship between the Packers and the city of Green Bay. He said it's impossible for a black player to live there. He called it a living hell.

Neal touched upon something that everyone knew about, but have chosen to ignore. Green Bay is the dregs of the earth for a professional athlete and may be a huge reason why the Packers may never return to a spot in the winner's circle regularly. Neal's suggestion that the Packers move the organization to Milwaukee has merit.

Playing Blackwolf Run: This state may have finally hit the big time in golf. Andy North has said that Wisconsin has many good golf courses, but none are in the "great" category.

Blackwolf Run is the first that could reach greatness. Dye pulled out all the stops and created a wonderful thinking-man's course. It's beautiful, brutal and charming all rolled into one. Even though it's a tad expensive for tightwad Wisconsinites, it should be a can't-miss course each year for anyone around here who considers himself a golfer.

SOME THINGS I'D LIKE TO SEE HAPPEN IN 1989

See the UW golf course completed: Is this too much to ask? Probably. The UW athletic department is facing so many problems, they just might ice this project for the time being. That would be a disaster. Still, I'd be surprised if it's seeded this fall.

Let the city of Madison's golf course superintendents play their courses free of charge. The height of stupidity is Madison forcing hard workers like Ted Payne to pay to play his own course.

Wake up city of Madison officials, see the light.