

Questions surround renegade league

By R.L. BYNUM
Staff Writer

Spring football is nothing new. Up until now, it has meant those off-season practices of college football programs, capped by a single-intra-squad game.

But this spring, a group of adventurous businessmen will launch a professional league that will play football during the unseasonable March to June period.

The United States Football League won't have to compete for gate receipts with the well-established NFL like the ill-fated World Football League did. Without that burden, football junkies who can now feast on 11 months of football should be able to support the 12 USFL franchises. Their only competition will be basketball and baseball.

As the story seems to be in all sports,

television will be the stabilizing force of the league. Before it even signed its first player, the USFL had put together a lucrative contract with ABC and ESPN (which is owned by the league's commissioner, Chet Simmons).

ABC will pay \$20 million over two years for a Sunday game-of-the-week, while ESPN will telecast live games every Sunday and Saturday at a biannual cost of between \$14-16 million.

Further legitimizing the league are the proven winners that it whisked from the NFL's coaching fraternity. Successful coaches wooed by the challenge of molding their own teams have gained some measure of success for the league. Among them are: George Allen (Chicago), Chuck Fairbanks (New Jersey), Red Miller (Denver) and John Ralston (Bay Area).

The USFL is a hot subject with some col-

lege coaches, particularly Michigan Coach Bo Schembechler, because of its initial notion of holding a college draft in the middle of December. Schembechler threatened to bar USFL scouts and coaches from Wolverine practices if the idea was carried out.

Commissioner Simmons cooled the issue by moving the draft to January 4, allowing every college team to first finish its season.

Schembechler, who hasn't offered many kind words about the league, still believes that the league will lull his seniors away from their final semesters — and their degrees. It should be a concern for him, considering a recent study in *Sports Illustrated* revealed that more than 40 percent of the Wolverines in the NFL didn't graduate.

The league has, in theory, covered themselves on that issue also. Public Rela-

tions Director Lorraine Ragusbo said that each franchise will "encourage its players to finish (school) during the (USFL's) off-season.

"We will be providing a college incentive program where we will help with expenses," she said. "Upon completion of the degree, there is talk of naming scholarships after the players at their former colleges."

Ragusbo said the USFL would only sign players after they have completed their four years of college eligibility, even if a student-athlete is able to finish his academic load. Thus, if a player is red-shirted for one season and is an academic senior, the USFL will not sign him until he either plays or decides to bypass his extra season of eligibility.

Although the league has signed a handful of NFL and Canadian Football League veterans like quarterback Greg Landry, the
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