

Sports

Chicago fans lose big with Collins, McMahon departures

By MARK ANDERSON
Staff Writer

Some of the hot air went out of the Windy City this summer. It seems as if Chicago's sports enthusiasm bubble has had a slow leak for the last three months.

After years of losing at everything, Chicago has finally become a winning sports town. The fans are starting to get over the notion that their teams are actually out to lose games and that any success is just an accident that will be dealt with immediately.

So while they savored the fact that the Cubs were in first place (a rarity), Chicago fans put the Bears and Bulls on the back burner, only awaiting the quality seasons sure to follow. But as soon as they let their guard down, got complacent as coaches like to say, that old loser logic ("If it ain't broke, break it") struck again.

The reason sports are successful is because every so often they create a "feeling." Fans are on a never-ending search for these highs. They can come from a victorious moment or a whole season, but just as often they come solely from the beauty of the game.

Chicago fans were robbed this summer of two men who gave them those "feelings," Doug Collins and Jim McMahon.

Collins' only crimes were that he took the Bulls farther than they had ever been and compiled the best winning percentage of any Bulls' coach in history. Bulls' owner Jerry Reinsdorf, who had obviously been studying at the Dallas Cowboys Firing Camp, shocked everyone with first Collins' firing and then his lack of explanation. "Philosophical differences" was the only thing he could say.

"What? Collins wanted to win and Reinsdorf didn't?" fans said. It took several weeks of explaining (by the press, not the management) to make the move seem sane. It may actually make the Bulls a better team.

But the point is, by replacing the exciting Collins with the laid-back Phil Jackson, Reinsdorf robbed the fans of those "feelings." The happiness of seeing the Bulls beat Cleveland in the playoffs went to a higher level when television showed Collins racing around the court in sheer joy.

He was a public relations darling: a hometown boy (All-America at Illinois State), a snappy dresser (he introduced fish ties to the NBA) and an articulate speaker (Bulls' biggest endorser behind Jordan). He was also young and energetic (How many coaches could show at the NBA Old-Timers game that they could still beat most of their players one-on-one?).

Collins was a winner outside the record column, which made it harder for Chicago to say good-bye.

McMahon's story is similar. His major crimes were winning 32 of the last 35 games he started for the Bears and leading them to a Super Bowl victory. Coach Mike Ditka's only remarks on the trade hardly satisfied anyone.

"Jim can still play championship football. I really think he needs a change of scenery. I think he needs to get away from Mike Ditka," said Ditka.

That kind of evidence makes it even harder to rationalize the trade. Eventually, the facts and figures guys explained that McMahon probably would have left after this year and both parties will be better off this way. But McMahon was more than just a name in the transactions column.

Leaving plenty of shell-shocked Mormons in his wake, he stepped off

the plane as a brash rookie with a full head of hair. Soon, he lost the hair and added a headband and a distinctly unquarterback-like flair for throwing his body around. Then came head butts with his lineman, an earring and a Super Bowl ring.

But most of all, he spoke his mind and acted from his heart. In a sports

page filled with drugs and deception, he was a refreshing presence. Unlike many outspoken figures, he rarely hurt others with his actions; more often, they were an inspiration. He was a constant at charity events and usually served to fire the Bears up rather than disrupt them. His impact on the team was immeasurable.

It was sad to see him go in such a small way. The 1985 Bears would have been fan favorites if they had finished 8-8 because they were one of the most exciting combinations of personalities football has ever seen.

Yet, it seems as though Ditka has slowly dismantled that squad by removing those who would steal the

spotlight from him. McMahon may have been Ditka's final triumph.

But no matter what he does, Ditka will never be able to be what McMahon was: the soul of the Bears in the 1980s.

Fortunately, Chicago fans were able to give back some of those "feelings" McMahon gave them over the years. When he returned to Soldier Field as a

Charger, he was the center of what *Sports Illustrated* called "a giant love-in."

So as two "feelings" ceased to be felt by Chicago fans this year, the search continues. Where will the next one come from? Who knows? Maybe the Cubs will finally win the pennant ... Nah!

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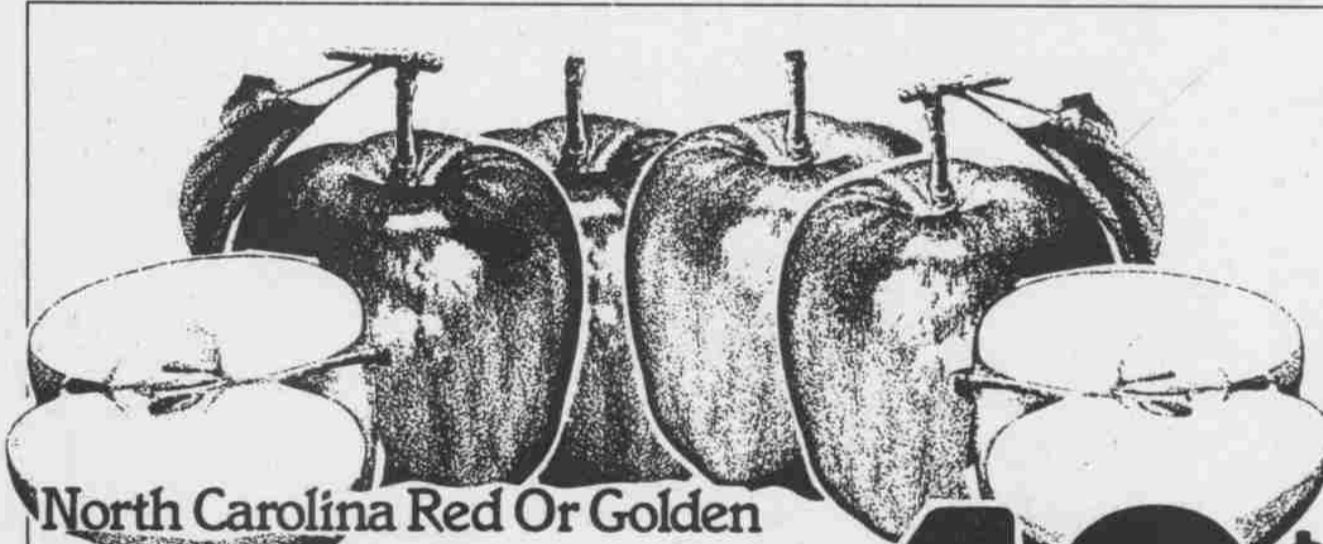
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	Record	Points	Last Week
1. Notre Dame (37)	1-0-0	1,463	1
2. Michigan (15)	0-0-0	1,440	2
3. Miami, Fla. (5)	1-0-0	1,360	3
4. Nebraska (3)	1-0-0	1,303	4
5. Auburn	1-0-0	1,249	5
6. Oklahoma	2-0-0	1,121	8
7. Clemson	2-0-0	1,073	10
8. Colorado	2-0-0	1,065	9
9. Arkansas	0-0-0	1,035	7
10. Illinois	1-0-0	953	11
11. Syracuse	1-0-0	900	14
12. West Virginia	2-0-0	713	17
13. Southern Cal	0-1-0	647	13
14. Pittsburgh	2-0-0	598	23
15. Washington	1-0-0	514	—
16. Alabama	0-0-0	508	19
17. Tennessee	2-0-0	492	—
18. Houston	1-0-0	470	22
19. N.C. State	2-0-0	394	25
20. UCLA	0-1-0	365	6
21. Louisiana State	0-1-0	310	21
22. Texas A&M	1-1-0	168	15
23. Washington State	2-0-0	157	—
24. Iowa	0-0-0	135	—
25. Mississippi State	2-0-0	120	—

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