

Larry Sullivan's

SPORT SIDE

'Tis That Thankful Time Of Year

Touching All The Bases: Believe it or not, Christmas is a month away. Check out the calendar yourself. 1987 is moving right along. Before we get into our Christmas rush, though, we take the time this week to celebrate Thanksgiving. With that in mind, I now present you with sports-related issues which indeed are worth being thankful.

We must first be thankful for Charlotte's George Shinn. Due to the kindness of this multi-millionaire, we are keeping pro baseball within 25 miles with hopes of someday having a major league team within similar distance. Shinn, as you know, purchased the Charlotte O's from the Crokettis last month and vowed to keep them in Charlotte. He has also already made plans to change the team name, one he insists will stick with the club when it reaches major league status, something else he is sure will happen.

Shinn is also primarily responsible for bringing another pro sport right into our backyard. Pro basketball, courtesy of the Charlotte Hornets, will make its re-birth debut here next fall. We have the fortune of avoiding all that Charlotte hassle while still being well within viewing distance of the game that is rapidly growing in spectator interest.

Thank you, George, on both accounts.

We are thankful that college institutions reflect the winning-isn't-everything attitude they like to present before the public by firing one historically highly-successful head football coach, and thinking about voluntarily releasing another, simply because each of their teams are struggling this season.

Ohio State's Earl Bruce, only the winningest coach in the Big Ten Conference, will not coach the Buckeyes next season. North Carolina's Dick Crum, the Tar Heels' most successful coach ever, is apparently on the verge of taking a similar voyage. And why? For no other explainable reason other than Ohio State and UNC are both teetering on the brink of mere 500 seasons, a level the majority of the nation's teams would love to attain.

We are thankful we are not citizens of Canada, whose only hopes of cheering for a pro sport champion rests on the outcome of, of all things, hockey matches. Whew. That's worth a double thank you.

We are thankful that the NFL's player strike is over, even though we are thoroughly confused as to why it happened in the first and what exactly it accomplished.

We are thankful for George Steinbrenner, who once again has brought levity to the sport of baseball by — read it and weep — asking Billy Martin to assume the manager's job for his Yankees for a fifth time. This team reminds me of the Abbott and Costello comedy act. Poor old Abbott. He would time and time again put his faith in his friend Costello, only to be caught every time in some sort of trap. Costello, of course, always escaped the blame by putting it back on Abbott. With Martin as Abbott and Steinbrenner at Costello, the two should take on Broadway. In a way, by performing in New York, I guess they are, and in the process, they're making the once-great Bronx Bombers a box-office bust.

We're thankful for the college basketball season that rushed upon us with a slew of special and tournament games this past weekend. And, in that same line of thought, equally thankful for ESPN, which will once again splash us with a downpour of those college contests.

We're thankful to be considered the home stomping ground of the absolute best driver on the NASCAR circuit, which, in no surprising announcement, is the honor Doodle's Dale Earnhardt captured after a million-dollar season that also saw him win the sport's point-driving title.

We're thankful for the late arrival of what is sure to be a torrid winter, allowing the most golf-afflicted of us to keep our clubs warm with use.

We're thankful for the day off from work, but not the time away from the world of sports, that the annual Turkey Day itself provides.

And, least we forget the most important, we're thankful for the day together with family, friends, and loved ones, all gathered to celebrate the real meaning of Thanksgiving. For that, we give the most thanks.

Setting The Record Straight: Look over that part in last week's column about rule changes in high school basketball for this season. Now forget the part about that five-second count. It's not right.

Actually, a player still has four seconds to hold the ball, four more to dribble, and another four to hold it, all while being closely guarded. What has changed is the forecourt hash

mark. It's now as though it doesn't exist. Used to, a player could cross that line and a new count would start. That is the part that's different about the rule. I knew that didn't sound right last week.

Speaking of differences, did you catch the playoff changes we can expect for this year?

Don't worry. I did. What it amounts to is that some 2A teams, counting those in Mooresville's Southern District VII Conference, will be allowed to continue their season even after a sectional loss. You'll recall that's where the Blue Devils ended their stellar year last season.

However, not as many teams will qualify for the playoffs. Last year, 64 2A teams earned postseason bids. This year, only 48 will do the same. Also, only three sectionals in each half of the state, down from the four staged a year ago, will take place this year.

In addition to a sectional champion, its runner-up will also advance into a preliminary regional round. These will feature eight teams. These games will be played in two days before the regional unfolds on the home court of the higher-seeded team still alive at that point.

The Western N.C. sectionals receiving three representatives this year include sectional No. 6, which features teams from the SD-7 and the Western Highlands Conference. It was Southwest Guilford of the WHC that eliminated Mooresville last year in first-round sectional play.

The difference this year is that a sectional consolation game will be played between the two losers of the sectional semi-final games. The winner of that game will then join both the finalists in the sectional finale in the preliminary regional round.

The state's 1A schools, cutting their postseason qualifying number of teams from 64 to 40, will also use the preliminary regional format, while at the 3A level, the same 64-team bracket and playoff format will be used. At the 4A level, the field will consist of 32 teams, and play will be conducted the same as in the past.

The changes were made by the North Carolina High School Athletic Association. "We retained a good portion of last year's format and the schools made the changes they wanted," explained Rick Strunk, an assistant executive director of the NCHSAA. "You still have the opportunity here for a strong conference to advance two teams into regional play."

As for the sectional No. 6, Bandys' Bill Bost, one of the most successful boys basketball coaches in the state, is serving as chairman of the tournament committee. He said the tournament will be played at Mars Hill. "Those people are hungry" for a tournament, Bost stressed.

Driving Through The Fairway: Unpredictable weather and other uncontrollable circumstances have forced the postponement — not cancellation — of the annual Pro Lady Golf Tournament here.

Lou Grandmaison, my connection with the local ladies, assures me, and, in turn, I'm assuring you, that the event will be held. It has been moved from this month to early next spring. The sponsorship is still there, as is the money in the hosting LGA's budget to do this thing up right.

So you see, in golf, too, it's ladies first, which will be the case next season as their event will probably be the first real tournament to take place on the local municipal layout.

FAC Football Season Is No More As Raiders, Vikings Both Suffer Defeats

No mas, no mas! That, unfortunately, is the football situation within the Football Athletic Conference following the results of Friday night's second-round play within the state 3A playoffs.

Both of the FAC's teams that advanced beyond the first round were eliminated on foreign soil last Friday to officially wind up the prep grid season as far as the three-year-old league is concerned.

North Ireddell, the regular-season champion, bowed to Big Six Conference Kingspin, 27-7, on the woes of a rash of mistakes.

As for co-runner-up South Ireddell, the Vikings suffered a 17-7 defeat at the hands of Big Six second-place finisher Lincoln to conclude their most successful season ever.

As a result of these two games, one of this week's post-Thanksgiving third round match-ups will pit those two winners against each other for a second time this season.

West Caldwell's Warriors fashioned a 5-0 showing to claim the BSC title, while Lincoln's Wolves suffered only an in-league loss to West in finishing alone in second.

North Ireddell, riding the crest of capturing its first ever conference football title, surrendered six turnovers to contribute heavily to its demise.

Despite the defeat, the Raiders of veteran coach Charles Loves, the shoo-in to serve as the FAC's coach of the year, conclude their season at a pair of back-to-back grappling matches last week.

In marked the most wins in a single season for a Raider football team, as well as representing the most consecutive victories, 11, secured in a year. The advancement into the second round tied a school mark for postseason success.

The seasonal record reads similar for the Vikings.

As a result of their 4-2 FAC mark, South Ireddell shared the second-place spot in the final standings with Statesville and was awarded the school's third and final postseason berth.

As a result, the Vikes qualified for the playoffs for the first time in the school's 21-year history.

After winning their first-ever playoff game the previous week, South Ireddell's season drop to a close at Lincoln Friday, where a

10-point effort on the part of the hosts contributed the most damage.

For South, it ends its season at 8-4, enabling this year's team to tie the school record for most wins in a single season. Advancing into the state's second-round also set a new school standard.

At West Caldwell Friday, the Raiders endured their first real struggle of the season, made possible primarily through those six turnovers.

Four fumbles occurred during what appeared to be routine handoffs in the backfield, and the single one handing them their hardest blow came at the West Caldwell four-yard line during a drive that would have pulled North to within a touchdown.

Instead, a Warrior defender gambled the loose ball up in stride and returned it 94 yards for a touchdown to account for the final winning margin.

North Ireddell trailed, 13-0 at the half and the deficit reached 21 before junior all-county runner Michael Keaton rambled 17 yards for the guests first tally. It wound up being the lone highlight for the FAC

titleists, as West used the sixth turnover to score its final TD.

At Lincoln in another bout between a visiting FAC and a hosting BSC team, the Wolves and Vikings battled to a 7-7 tie after one half of play.

Lincolnton scored first, and South Ireddell tied late in the first half when junior Mike Hobbs hooked up with senior Gerald Childress, also an all-county selection, on a 24-yard scoring connection.

The third period belonged totally to the Wolves, who registered a touchdown and added a 40-yard field goal to construct a 10-point advantage that their defense protected throughout the final stanza.

North Ireddell and South Ireddell were two of the three FAC teams, all qualified for postseason play.

Statesville was the third, but the Greyhounds were eliminated in the first round by the same West Caldwell team that ended North Ireddell's season Friday.

With last week's losses, the FAC football season officially draws to a close.

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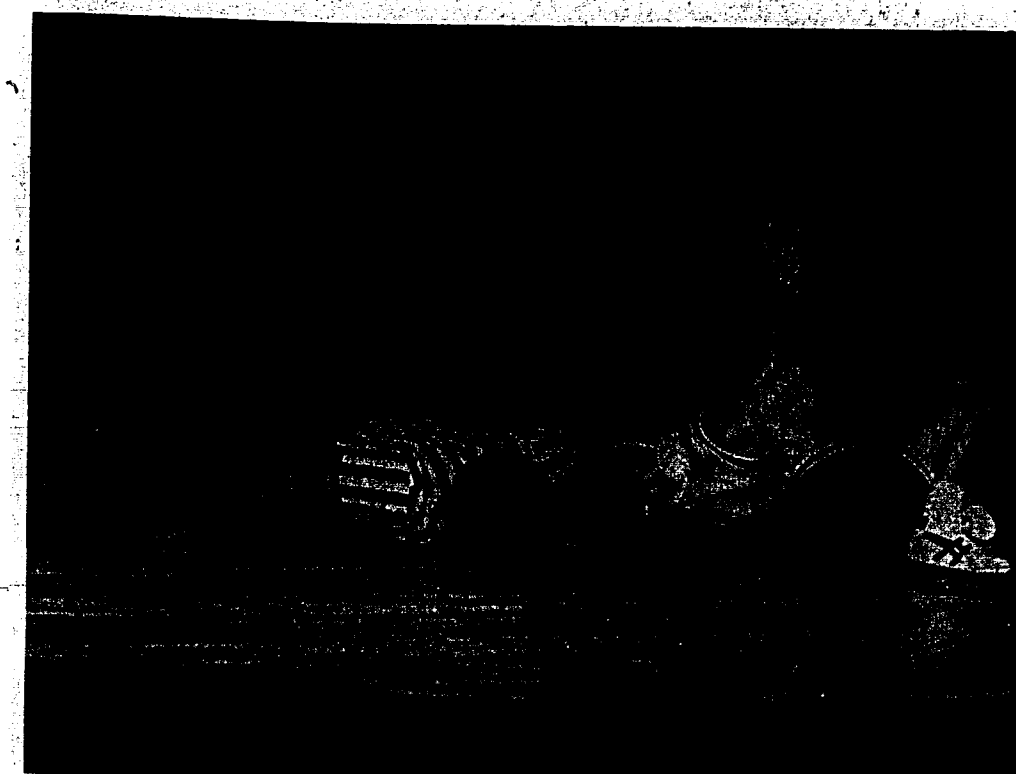
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Referee Receives Ground-Level View Of Templeton's Eventual Win By Pin

Guests Pin Two Defeats On Imps During First Week Of BCC Wrestling

One was over almost before it started, and the other went down to the wire.

Such was the first-week wrestling experiences that Mooresville's Junior High Red Imps faced during a pair of back-to-back grappling matches last week.

The Imps played host to them both during a hectic week of Bi-County Conference opening activity, entertaining Statesville on Tuesday and following that by welcoming in West Lincoln on Wednesday afternoon.

Neither affair particularly pleased the locals, even though the second was much more appealing than the first.

In that opener, the Imps were pinned in all but one weight class to suffer a 7-6 loss to the powerful Statesville Bulldogs. A perfect scoring in a wrestling match is 78 points.

The following afternoon, the match was decided on the final heavyweight bout, one that, like the overall decision, went against the Imps in a 42-30 loss to West Lincoln.

"We just won't mention what

happened to us against Statesville," summoned Barclay Marsh, the Imps head wrestling coach. "We just weren't prepared for their kind of power. Against West Lincoln, we were hurt by forfeits in three weight classes, which meant the difference in the match."

The Imps take the 6-2 overall and BCC record into this week's short-term slate, one that will once again find them matching mat mechanics against this time host Statesville.

"We're going to make some changes in our strategy against Statesville this time," acknowledged Marsh. "I don't think they'll beat us that had a second time."

While no Imps recorded wins in the match against Statesville, with only one of them was able to take their opponent into the third period, such wasn't the case against West Lincoln Wednesday.

Through all but the final match, the hosts used seven wins to build a 39-36 advantage before that final-class pin was worth the winning six points to West Lincoln.

Mooresville won two of the first three decisions, and closed out the match by winning three of the final four, but, as Marsh pointed out, 18 points were dished out in forfeits and only six were received, forcing the Imps to overcome a 12-point deficit in that department alone.

In the West Lincoln affair, 78-pounder Brandon Alexander opened the encounter with a second period win by pin. Sean Templeton, at 98 pounds, cornered a first-period win by pin.

Also garnering pins for the hosts were Mac Guin, at 167 pounds, and Fred Brown at 185 pounds.

JJ Gray, at 105 pounds, outwrestled his foe for a decision, while Kevin Burchette, at 155 pounds, collected a forfeit because his opponent was overweight. The two still wrestled, though, and Burchette finished as the winner.

After squaring off against Statesville for a second and final time this week, Junior High will enjoy an extended Thanksgiving break before resuming BCC mat action upon returning from the holidays early the following week.

SD-7 FAC Dot All-Piedmont Team

The Southern District VII and Football Athletic Conference definitely made their presence felt during the selection of players earning all-Piedmont football honors last week.

Of the 24 players collecting first-team accolades from the Charlotte Observer, seven hail from either the SD-7 or the FAC, which house Mooresville Senior High and South Ireddell High, respectively.

Though neither the Blue Devils nor the Vikings are represented among the top 24, the teams weren't left out altogether.

Mooresville fields a second-team defensive player in senior safety Tod Alexander, while South Ireddell runningback Omar Lenster, a junior, earned honorable mention status as a ball carrier.

The SD-7 earns the right to boast the most, as it is the home circuit of the top-vote getter among the top 24 players receiving coveted all-Piedmont honors.

Maiden's Robby Holloway, one of only two juniors on the offensive team, has earned the player of the year nod after a regular-season that featured 189 carries for 1,327 yards.

23 touchdowns, and eight two-point conversions. His 154 points leads all Observer-area players in scoring.

South Point head coach Jim Biggestaff, responsible for a one-season team turnaround from an 0-10 record last year to a second-round appearance in the state 3A playoffs this season, has been acknowledged as the Piedmont's top coach.

Holloway, relied on more this season than originally planned after senior Derek Ikard suffered a season-ending injury, is one of six players combined from the SD-7 and FAC to make the all-Piedmont first offensive unit.

The others are North Ireddell's Michael Keaton, a junior runningback; West Ireddell's David Stamey, a senior receiver; North Surry's Kelly Holder, a senior quarterback; Newton-Conover's Brad Killian, a senior receiver; and Bunker Hill's Mark Allen, a 310-pound senior lineman.

On defense, North Ireddell's Tim Bedmond, a senior linebacker, is the lone first-team member from either local league.

North Ireddell, West Ireddell, and North Surry are members of the FAC, while Newton-Conover and

Bunker Hill represent the SD-7.

Of those teams, North Ireddell, Newton-Conover and Bunker Hill all advanced into this past weekend's second round of statewide postseason play.

Mooresville's Alexander leads the way among defensive backs listed on the all-Piedmont second team.

The two-time all-Ireddell County team choice is also a solid selection to repeat as an all-SD-7 performer.

As for South Ireddell's Lenster, he was the leading vote-getter among running backs receiving honorable mention. The all-county runner is also expected to receive all-conference honors, as his efforts have been instrumental in helping carry the Vikes to their most successful season ever.

Coaches in the 12 Piedmont-area league covered by the Observer nominated the players who were considered for their regular-season showings only. Those receiving the most number of votes were then assigned first-team status.

The Observer announced the list of players earning all-Piedmont first and second team status, as well as those making the honorable mention list, last Thursday.

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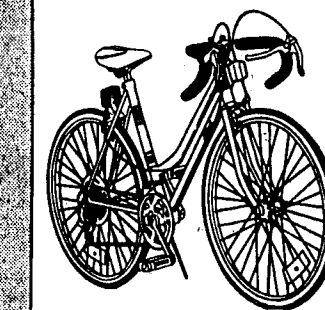
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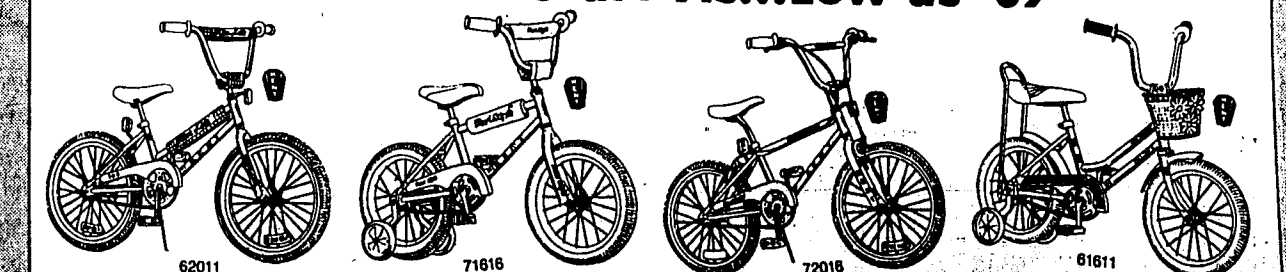
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