

Cinderella evades midnight

United Press International
ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — No nicknames, no fraternities, no top ranking, no 26-game winning streak, no tag of invincibility.

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ity. No, none of those frills for North Carolina State. Just a national championship for Coach Jim Valvano and his unheralded Wolfpack.

Lorenzo Charles' slam dunk with one second left off an errant 30-foot shot by teammate Dereck Whittenburg gave North Carolina State a stunning 54-52 victory over the top-rated Houston Cougars Monday night in the NCAA championship game.

It was the first front-court basket by North Carolina State in the second half and also the only basket the Wolfpack managed to score from inside 16 feet following the intermission as the ACC school claimed its second-ever national title.

"This is a dream for me and my players," Valvano said. "It's so awesome. I'm almost speechless."

The Wolfpack handed Hous-

ton its first defeat since mid-December despite 39 percent shooting, despite being outbounded 44-34 and despite being outscored 17-2 during the opening 10 minutes of the second half. The victory came courtesy of a prayer — only the second basket of the game by Charles.

"We got the Hail Mary shot at the right spot," Valvano said. "You think that was a freak play? That's part of our emergency scoring series — the triple condensa play: unbalanced coach around left end. Our primary receiver was covered so we threw it to the tight end over the middle."

"Lorenzo up to that point hadn't been playing up to his level and then made the greatest play of his life with the stuff. You need to have some luck in the national tournament and being in the right place at the right time helps out."

North Carolina State's tenacious 2-3 zone defense held Houston to its season-low point total and forced the Cougars into their worst shooting night of their 34-game season at 38.2 percent. The Wolfpack also took everything but the "Phi" out of Houston's exclusive Phi Slama

Jama fraternity by out-dunking the Cougars, 2-1.

Thurl Bailey opened the game for North Carolina State with a dunk at the 38 second mark and Charles closed the festivities with his dunk. The only other dunk by either team in between came off an offensive rebound by Houston center Akeem "The Dream" Olajuwon with 5:06 left in the first half.

"Our goal was not to give up a dunk," Valvano said. "It has a tremendous impact on their club. We wanted to force them to beat us from the outside."

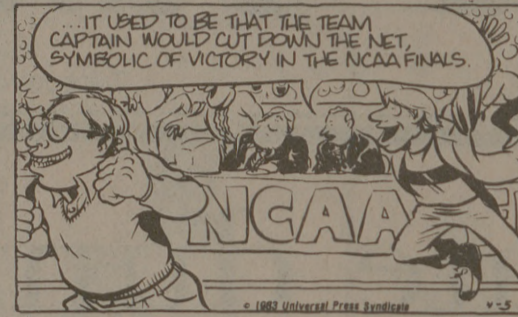
North Carolina State rose from a third-place regular season finish in the ACC and a No. 6 seed in the West Regional to win its first NCAA championship since 1974.

The 14th-rated Wolfpack extended its winning streak to 10 games in finishing the season 26-10, thus becoming the first NCAA champion with a double-figure loss column. Indiana won the 1981 championship with nine regular-season losses.

North Carolina State beat Pepperdine, No. 6 Nevada-Las Vegas, Utah, No. 4 Virginia, No. 15 Georgia and No. 1 Houston in the tournament to deliver the state of North Carolina its second consecutive NCAA championship.

TANK MCNAMARA

by Jeff Millar & Bill Hibler



Patchwork Astros open tonight against Dodgers

United Press International
HOUSTON — Big talk is in short supply as the injury-plagued Houston Astros open the season tonight against the Los Angeles Dodgers.

Astros knuckleballer Joe Niekro gets the pitching call because of Nolan Ryan's illness. He faces Dodger lefty Fernando Valenzuela.

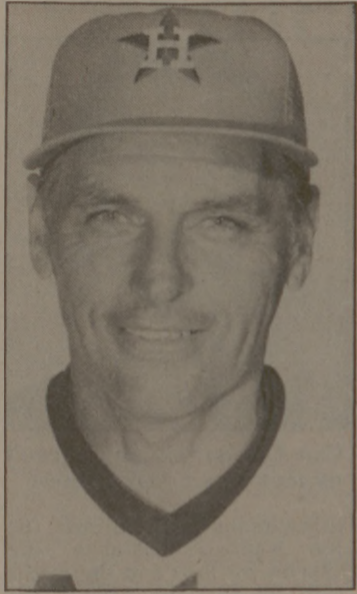
Manager Bob Lillis begins his first full season as field boss, and he does it with a projected opening-day lineup that has only three players in the same positions as at this time last year.

In spring 1982, Astros' owner John McMullen and General Manager Al Rosen boasted publicly they had the team to win the division title, but a fifth-place finish and injuries have made them take a wait-and-see attitude in 1983.

Injuries dogged the team right up to the opening bell. Lillis said on Monday he might wait until just before game time to issue a lineup.

"I'm awaiting medical reports," he said.

He wanted to see if first baseman Ray Knight can play on a sore Achilles tendon and what



Astro skipper Bob Lillis has new faces in 1983 lineup

trainers say about the condition of "other" players, whom he refused to identify.

Ryan, who was management's choice to pitch the open-

er and utility infielder Houston out disabled, relief pitcher Jose Lito has been lost for the season and reliever Mike Scott is bothered by tendonitis in his shoulder. Ryan has promised to start Jose Cruz in left field, Puhl in right field and Ashby behind the plate as the only three Astros to start a new season in the same position they did last year.

Phil Garner, last year's second baseman, is a free agent. Knight, last year's third baseman, is at first. Dickie Noles opens at shortstop, Bill Thayer gets the call at second and Marenco — who was acquired in the free-agent draft from the Pittsburgh Pirates — is in the right field.

One bright spot has been Puhl's hitting in spring training. He looks to be regaining the form that allowed him to set a National League Championship Series record in 1980 with a .333 batting average.

One surprise is relief pitcher Julio Solano. He did so well in spring training that he was kept him and capped his first one off-season from Class A to the Major Leagues.

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