

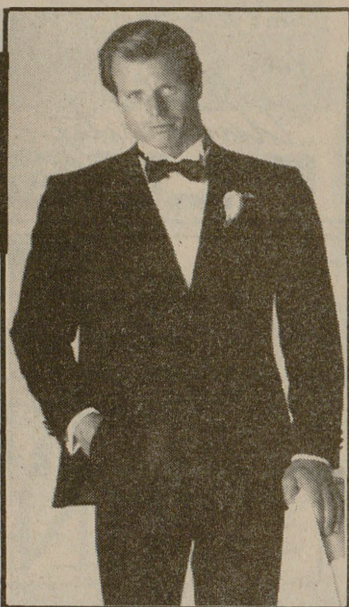
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49ers reflect on 3rd Super Bowl victory

Walsh will remain with 49ers but may retire from coaching

MIAMI (AP) — Still savoring the victory that made him the second winningest coach in Super Bowl history, Bill Walsh had bad news for the rest of the NFL Monday: Even if he steps down as coach, he will continue working to keep the San Francisco 49ers on top.

"I don't necessarily have to coach to keep the 49ers at or near the top of the league," Walsh said as he basked in the last-minute, 20-16 victory over Cincinnati that gave the team its third NFL title in the '80s.

The victory stamped San Francisco as unquestionably the team of the decade.

"People with the right chemistry all participate together and are involved in the decisions. We have worked well together for years."

Walsh's news conference Monday was an opportunity for the 57-year-old coach, now second in Super Bowl victories to Pittsburgh's Chuck Noll, to get a few things off his chest.

He put in a none-too-subtle plug for defensive coordinator George Seifert as his successor if he decides to give up coaching and move into the front office after meetings later this week with 49ers owner Edward DeBartolo Jr.

And sometimes with tongue in cheek, sometimes not, he took jabs at impatient NFL owners; "mercenary" player agents and the Bay Area media, harsh critics when the 49ers were 6-5 and faltering this season.

But the criticism faded as the 49ers went on to win seven of their last eight, including Sunday's victory on a 92-yard drive in three minutes, capped by Joe Montana's 10-yard pass to John Taylor with 34 seconds left.

That pass may have given Walsh the opportunity to leave on top, although he still seems to be wavering.

Ironically, he had served as the team's president as well as coach until after last season, when DeBartolo stripped him of the presidency after a 36-24 loss to Minnesota in the playoffs following an NFL-best 13-2 season.

"Now that we've won this game, it would be far easier to do it," Walsh said.

"But I don't want to leave and then come back nine days later and say I've changed my mind."

That was the feeling of Jerry Rice, who earned the game's MVP award by catching 11 passes for 215 yards.

The yardage was a Super Bowl record; the number of catches tied one.

"Right now, we feel like Bill is going to come back," Rice said. "I feel Bill is still competitive and not ready yet to give up the game."

"And when you're getting paid \$1 million a year..."

Walsh, who has one year left on a contract due to pay him \$1.3 million next season, laughed at that reference.

But he only half laughed about some other things that came up — like owners and agents.

"This is a competitive game. There are a lot of people — especially the owners — who have lost sight of the fact that there are 28 entities," Walsh said.

"A lot of owners don't realize you can't win every year. They come from businesses where they've had continued success and there's no competition."

"So a lot of coaches get fired unfairly or prematurely by owners who don't understand the dynamics of the game."

Walsh seems to have patched things up with DeBartolo after the two barely spoke for six months over differences ranging from player personnel to Walsh's personal life.

As for agents, Walsh suggested that they distract players from the goals of a team.

"It's different working with some of today's athletes — probably because of the agents," he said.

"They get very mercenary. We like to feel we're a team, but agents sometimes move the players away from that concept. I blame the agents for that more than the players."

As for Seifert, Walsh seemed prepared to give him a present beyond Sunday's Super Bowl victory, which took place on the assistant's 49th birthday.

"He's had offers," Walsh said of the man who has been with him every year but one since 1977.

"He'll be a head coach next year. At least I hope so. He certainly deserves it."

Oldest rookie fulfills dream

MIAMI (AP) — Figure the odds on this one.

Pierce Holt, a pass-rushing lineman for the San Francisco 49ers, played one year of high school football at Rosenberg, near Houston.

Not even a junior college offered to see more of him in uniform.

He went to work. He farmed. He drove a fork lift. He got a job in a make-ready shop of an auto dealer. He was an inspector for a mortgage company.

That went on for three years. By then, he had gotten married and had a daughter.

He decided to attend college and play football again at age 22.

He'd grown from the 180-pounder in high school. He was 240 and in decent shape from weightlifting and pickup basketball games. But who wanted him?

What possible skills could he have? He made no waves in high school. A Division II school accepted him. He enrolled. He played four seasons in the defensive line. A son was born to his wife and him.

Pro scouts were on his trail. The no-talent prep player turned out pretty good. He was the Division II defensive player of the year as a senior.

"Half of the scouts were concerned about my age," he told sportswriters in Miami for the Super Bowl. "The other half didn't care. They just wanted a player."

San Francisco drafted him in the second round. And that, in capsule form, is how Holt, who turned 27 on New Year's Day, became the oldest rookie ever to appear in a Super Bowl.

Holt was born in Marlin, Texas, grew up in Rosenberg, and starred in college at Angelo State. He was always a Dallas Cowboys fan, he said.

"They never showed much interest," Holt said. "One scout came out. I never saw a coach. It kinda irritated me because I was a defensive tackle in a 4-3 and the Cowboys ran a similar defense."

"I always pictured myself playing next to Randy White. But I'm ecstatic over the way things turned out, especially after the season they had."

The 49ers employ Holt as a situation pass rusher. He's even a late bloomer in that role after missing the first eight games with a toe injury.

Yet he evolved into everything the 49ers envisioned. Otherwise, he wouldn't have lined him up in the Super Bowl against toughie guard Max Montoya of the Cincinnati Bengals.

What lured Holt back to football anyway?

Some of his jobs didn't pan out. High interest rates and drought ruined his father's farm, was sold. He foresaw a limited future in repairing trucks for his father-in-law. Fork lifting didn't create tangles.

"I didn't know how, but somehow I wanted to get back and play the game."

Holt tried first to interest University of Houston coach Bill Yeoman. But Yeoman learned from the NCAA that Holt had only one year of Division I eligibility remaining because he was already 22 years old.

"That kinda knocked me down a notch," Holt said.

The only patch lay at a Division school. Holt could play four years at that level.

Holt tried Angelo State. "I talked to the coach on the phone and told him how earnest I was. Either that cinched it or he was in dire need of a player."

Holt applied himself there. He made 11 tackles and one sack in his freshman debut. He became an academic All-American (3.25 GPA). He needed ambition or tenacity.

Straight out of high school, he attended Wharton Junior College for one semester, a round-trip drive of 60 miles. Back home at 2 p.m., he drove 60 more miles to and from Houston to operate a fork lift. He made for a full day.

Holt knew the so-called real world before he entered the NFL. His perspective is shaped by a background of physical labor, rejection and tough times.

"It prepares a guy to roll with the punches. To never give up. It gives you some resilience."

Those thoughts sustained Holt during rehab. "I kept thinking I've come this far. It's been damn hard to get here. I've traveled a different road. I don't want this injury to stop me."

It didn't. Nothing has. Pierce Holt made it to the Super Bowl the hard way. And the longest, most routine about way on record.

Bengals deal with end of fairytale year

MIAMI (AP) — The Cincinnati Bengals can't accept a storybook season without a fairytale ending.

The Bengals thought they had completed one of the most dramatic turnarounds in NFL history when Jim Breech's field goal gave them the lead with 3:20 to play in the Super Bowl.

But San Francisco's Joe Montana fashioned a little legend of his own, leading San Francisco on a 92-yard touchdown drive for a 20-16 victory Sunday.

"We came so close to the top of the mountain and to lose this way really hurts," quarterback Boomer Esiason said.

The Bengals lost in an uncharacteristic way — their defense let them down when it mattered most.

After Breech's third field goal put the Bengals ahead 16-13, Montana drove the 49ers to the winning touchdown with just 34 seconds to play.

The nearness of a championship left the Bengals with an empty feeling, despite their turnaround from a 4-11 record last year to 14-5.

"We were 34 seconds away from a great victory," Esiason said. "The next thing you know, we're using all the losing cliches you can use."

Safety David Fulcher, who came within a couple of steps of knocking down the winning 10-yard touchdown pass to John Taylor, sounded bitter.

"Would you sound bitter if you lost a game you thought you should have won?" he said.

Cincinnati's offense has needed saves from its defense throughout the season. The defense preserved a season-opening victory over Phoenix with a goalline stand, throttled a last-minute drive by Philadelphia, and used a pass interception in the closing minutes to stop Pittsburgh and open the season 3-0.

They had chances in the Super Bowl, but let them slip away.

Cornerback Lewis Billups dropped an interception in the end zone in the fourth quarter with the Bengals leading 13-6. Montana cashed in quickly, hitting Jerry Rice with a 14-yard touchdown pass on the next play.

"It was up on me so quick," Billups said of the pass that went through his arms in the end zone. "I still think I could have made it."

The loss left the Bengals 0-2 in Super Bowl appearances. Only two other teams have played in more than one Super Bowl without a win

—Denver at 0-3 and Minnesota at 0-4.

Coach Sam Wyche said he was crushed Monday morning when the reality of the loss finally hit him. He said he turned on the television and

saw the celebration in San Francisco.

"I think it hit me this morning. I think it hit me when we came and how we came from a year ago," he said. "I think many of the players don't understand the difference between winning and losing this game, yet."

Super Sunday notable for excitement, not riots

MIAMI (AP) — A great final quarter saved a bad week. And so Super Bowl XXIII, shoved briefly off the sporting world's stage by television pictures of angry young blacks, exited Miami still a star.

For openers, the NFL turned a tidy \$16.8 million profit from the game, which under the league's revenue-sharing plan, translates into a \$600,000 bonanza for each club.

For seconds, overnight Nielsen ratings showed that the game was seen in 65 percent of American households. Both were big improvements over last year's disappointing numbers.

But most important, Super Bowl XXIII delivered drama enough to be remembered for the game, not for a mugging in Miami.

"The events earlier in the week were and remain a real tragedy," said NFL spokesman Joe Brown. "We were asked several times what we — the NFL — were going to do about it."

"But the fact is," Browne continued, "that once the game was over ... the tent was closed and the local leaders were in charge, just as they are in charge, properly, for the other 51 weeks of the year."

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