

# The verdict is in; Fitzgerald enters NFL draft

## Heisman trophy runner-up will leave after his sophomore season

By Charles Sheehan  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

**PITTSBURGH** — Larry Fitzgerald finally made the decision everyone expected: to enter the NFL draft.

The Heisman Trophy runner-up said Monday that he would forgo his collegiate career at Pittsburgh to turn professional. His announcement came four days after he was declared eligible for the draft.

Fitzgerald, who will turn 21 in August, is projected to go early in the draft. Though the receiver played just two seasons with the Panthers, that was enough time for him to break several school and NCAA records.

"The main reason people come to college is to better your chances of making a living, and I think that my two years that I've had here, I've given myself a good opportunity to make a good living ... for myself and to support my family," Fitzgerald said.

He petitioned the NFL to allow him to enter the draft despite two seasons of play. Fitzgerald left the Academy of Holy Angels in Richfield, Minn., midway through his senior year in 2001 and transferred to Valley Forge (Pa.) Military Academy to boost his grades for college.

The NFL cleared the way for Fitzgerald to enter the April draft because he is three years past his

senior year of high school.

"I'm very confident in my ability," he said. "I know there's going to be skeptics and there's going to be people out there criticizing this and criticizing that, but all-in-all I know I can play the game of football."

The league's decision on Fitzgerald came on the same day a federal judge ruled running back Maurice Claret could also turn pro despite playing only one season at Ohio State.

In that ruling Thursday, the judge said NFL rules regarding its draft violate federal antitrust laws. The ruling overturned the league's rule barring players from being eligible for the draft before they were out of high school for three years.

The 20-year-old Fitzgerald was dominating last season. He finished a close second to Oklahoma quarterback Jason White in voting for the Heisman Trophy, nearly becoming the first sophomore to win the award.

He was the most proficient receiver in Pittsburgh history and set three NCAA records, including most consecutive games with a touchdown catch (18), most touchdown catches for a freshman-sophomore (34) and most receiving yards by a sophomore (1,672), besting Randy Moss' 1997 sophomore year. He tied the record for most games catching a touchdown pass in a season (12).

In 2003, Fitzgerald caught 87 passes and led all NCAA receivers with 1,595 yards. He had 22 touchdown catches, at least one in each of Pitt's regular-season games.

He played in all 13 games as a freshman and became a starter in his third game. In 2002, he had 69 receptions for 1,005 yards, easily surpassing Antonio Bryant, who caught a then-record 51 passes for 844 yards as a freshman in 1999.

Fitzgerald finished 128 votes behind White in the race for the Heisman. He did win the Biletnikoff Trophy, awarded to college football's top receiver, last season and the Walter Camp Award as the nation's best player.

Fitzgerald told Pittsburgh coach Walt Harris that he was going pro Thursday, when the NFL ruled him eligible.

"We have been blessed to be around such a special person and outstanding athlete in Larry Fitzgerald," Harris said. "Not only was he an unbelievable receiver, but he also set a great example of how players should respect the game."

Despite his domination at the college level, Fitzgerald usually trotted off the field without much celebration after his 34 touchdown catches.

"Not showboating on the field is the way I was raised," Fitzgerald said.

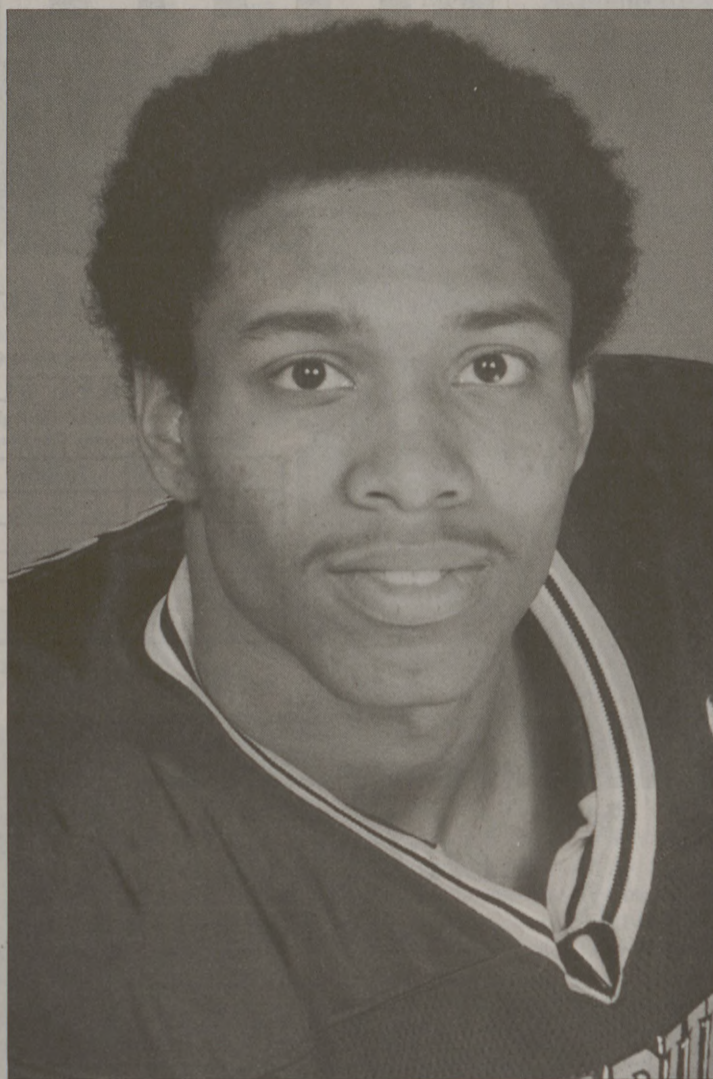


PHOTO COURTESY OF KRT CAMPUS

Pittsburgh sophomore Larry Fitzgerald declared himself eligible for the NFL draft Monday. Fitzgerald had 161 catches for 2,677 yards and 34 touchdowns in his two-year career at Pittsburgh.

## Roddick-led U.S. beats Austria

By Howard Fendrich  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

**UNCASVILLE, Conn.** — Patrick McEnroe made one thing perfectly clear when he replaced his brother John as U.S. Davis Cup captain in 2000: He wanted a roster of players eager to play in the event.

And he hoped to assemble a team in the truest sense, rather than a collection of individuals.

Led by Andy Roddick, a formidable U.S. team completed a 5-0 first-round sweep of Austria on Sunday. The players' camaraderie and passion for Davis Cup, not just their tennis talent, impress their captain.

"There's a lot of frivolity with this team. They have a good time. They get along well. It's not anything that we talk about. It is real," McEnroe said.

"The bottom line is you have to be great tennis players. We all know that. But the fact that the guys enjoy it and like being around each other, and like being part of a team in a sort of a broader concept, is refreshing."

This group is pretty solid when it comes to the bottom line, too. Roddick powered his way to two straight-set victories and set a record by hitting serves at 150 mph, the doubles team of twins Bob and Mike Bryan breezed through their match, and Robby Ginepri became the first U.S. rookie in Davis Cup history to win after dropping the first two sets.

"It excites Patrick, like it does the rest of us, that we have a pretty young core of guys who are very willing and very eager to play," said Roddick, who beat Jurgen Melzer 6-4, 6-2 on Sunday. "So I only see our team getting better as the years go on."

First, though, the Americans will try to get to the semifinals by beating Sweden at home in April. Sweden advanced by knocking off defending champion Australia 4-1. The Swedes have won the Davis Cup seven times, including a 5-0 vic-

tory over the United States in the 1997 final.

"We are going to be tested against them," McEnroe said. "But I certainly like our chances, especially playing at home."

He's trying to lead his team to its 32nd Davis Cup title — and first since 1995. That's the longest drought for the country since the 11-year gap between victories in 1926 and 1937.

In the 1995 final against Russia, Pete Sampras won two singles matches and the doubles. He also helped win the 1992 title, while Andre Agassi was on three Davis Cup championship teams.

But both played only sporadically later in their careers, with Agassi last a member of the team in 2000. John McEnroe cited an inability to get those two stars to play Davis Cup regularly as a reason for stepping down after just 14 months as captain.

"When I first started this, the only question I was asked is, 'How come Sampras and Agassi don't play?'" Patrick McEnroe said Sunday. "I said, 'Well, I am interested in the guys that want to play.' Because those are the guys you are going to build around."

Roddick is not a bad place to start. He likes to play for his country, and he likes to be around his teammates. Oh, yeah, and he ended last season ranked No. 1.

Roddick and the Bryans got matching buzz cuts Thursday and traded good-natured banter during Davis Cup news conferences. Ginepri kept his long locks, but he did join the other players for raucous pingpong games.

And being close in age surely helps foster their closeness: Roddick and Ginepri are 21, the Bryans are 25.

The Austrians took note of their opponents' all-for-one attitude.

"They seem very together. They are all close friends," Melzer said. "They enjoy playing Davis Cup, and if they compete like this the whole way, they can win it."

## Nash

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high school times and unusual form, but his successful coaching techniques transformed them into top-ranked swimmers. Holmes said Nash is a type of master motivator, getting the athletes to achieve many things they thought they couldn't.

**"There's no magical thing Mel does — he just does what he does really well."**

— Jay Holmes  
A&M men's swimming and diving assistant coach

"Mel really coaches the individual and the person, not just the athlete," Holmes said. "There's really no magical things Mel does — he just does what he does really well."

Senior Josh Hill has experienced the benefits of being coached by Nash. Hill has dropped a considerable amount of time off his personal bests and owns the fifth best time in A&M 200-yard backstroke history. Hill said Nash was a big deciding factor for him when choosing which school to sign with four years ago.

"Mel seemed committed to

keeping the team as a family," Hill said. "He really gives us a strong sense of team-being, whereas other schools seem to focus on individuals."

Away from his "family" at the pool, Nash has a family that is just as involved with the swimming program as he is. Carol Nash, his wife, is administrative director and head counselor for an Aggie swim camp the two host every summer. Their two children, Kathryn and Mel II, have participated in many of the camps and swim competitively.

Carol said the key to keeping a strong family and relationships has been doing as much as possible together at the pool as well as away from it.

"We've never tried to keep everything separate," Carol said. "It's always been part of our life — pretty much swimming 24 hours a day."

It's hard to escape Mel Nash without hearing a story, such as a thriller about Germany before the fall of the Berlin Wall, or a bittersweet one about the 1976 Olympic trials or a delightful one about the women's team finishing in the top 10 in 1986. He seems to have an endless supply of stories. But there's one story that Nash loves to tell above all others. It is the story of how a young man and his wife came to fall in love with a school 25 years ago. And how does this story end? Nash said he doesn't have the answer to that yet, but does know that the ending will be good.

"I love A&M," Nash said. "This is home for us. We're not done here yet."

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