

Competition for starting slot improves Icer goaltending

This is the last in a three-part series examining the 1995-96 Icers.
By JIM IOVINO
Collegian Sports Writer

Considering the combined goals-against average of Icer goaltenders last year was below 3.00, it would be hard to imagine the group of netminders could do any better. But that is exactly what Coach Joe Battista thinks will be the case this season.

Returning for another year between the pipes are fifth-year senior Derek Lecours, who was a perfect 13-0 last season, and junior Jeff Crispino, who recorded a 13-6-1

mark. Added to the mix this season is freshman John Sixt, a butterfly-style goalie from Buffalo, N.Y.

Battista feels all three goalies will get ice time this season.

"I'd like to see all three get their chance at some point and see who wants it most," he said. "It's a good position to be in as a coach."

Crispino, who was hampered by a bone spur in his ankle nearly all of last season, had successful off-season surgery and is playing without pain. Despite the injury, Crispino started 21 of the team's 34 games last season, posting a 3.12 goals against

average and is scheduled to open up the season against Duquesne tomorrow night. Battista hopes a healthy Crispino will do an even better job than he did last year.

"It was tough to play Jeff back-to-back games last year with his ankle injury," he said. "He had to play through a lot of pain."

Lecours, who received little time in net until last year, is back for his fifth season with the team. He started 12 games for the Icers and recorded a 3.03 GAA last year without losing a single contest.

"Derek Lecours is one of the hardest working athletes I've ever met in my life," Battista said. "He isn't about to give up

any ice time without a battle."

Although Sixt is missing the experience the other two goaltenders on the roster have, he has been impressive in training camp and the Blue-White game, and will also get his chance to prove that he can play in the ACHA. Battista thinks Sixt still has to learn a lot, including how to handle the pressure of playing in front of crowds, before he will be able to step in and make an impact.

"This kid's got a world of potential," Battista said. "John Sixt is going to be our No. 1 goalie at some point in his career. There's no doubt about that."

Battista is going to leave it up to the goalies to see who is going to get the bulk of the playing time.

He thinks competing against each other in practice will result in a better overall goaltending situation.

But when the important games are on the line, Battista will be starting as the Icers' goaltender "whoever has the hot hand."

"We've had a good rapport with each other and everybody's pushing each other," Crispino said. "You never get a chance to relax, you always have to play your best."

Steelers-Bengals game important for both teams

By ALAN ROBINSON
AP Sports Writer

PITTSBURGH — He can hide, but Neil O'Donnell still hasn't shown he can run. Of course, neither have his Pittsburgh Steelers.

As a result, the Steelers will be looking to regain two long-missing yet integral elements — the ability to run, and to win — tonight against the Cincinnati Bengals in a possibly pivotal game in the AFC Central race.

"A lot is on the line for us," Bengals coach David Shula said. "We're playing the defending division champs, a team that was 3 yards away from going to the Super Bowl last year, a team that has beaten us I don't know how many straight times."

That's eight, coach.

Regardless, it should be a turnaround game for someone, if only because both teams took wrong turns about a month ago. After identical 2-0 starts, Cincinnati (2-4) has lost four straight and Pittsburgh (3-3) has lost three of four.

For the Steelers, that turn in the right direction must come from a running game that has mostly run aground after leading the NFL last season. They are fourth from the bottom in the NFL in per-carry average (3.5 yards) and aren't even gaining yards in the open field.

Case in point: O'Donnell, returning to the lineup after a five-week injury layoff, had nothing but green ahead of him on a pivotal fourth-down play late in a 20-16 loss in Jacksonville on Oct. 8.

But rather than scramble upfield for the first down, O'Donnell forced an incompleteness into coverage — an inexplicable play that led to an inexplicable loss.

"I don't know why he didn't run the ball," offensive coordinator Ron Erhardt said.

Neither does anybody else, as O'Donnell has hidden out from reporters since that game.

"Just looking at their record, you'd have to say they're not the same team," said Bengals guard Todd Kalis, an ex-Steeler. "You'd have to say they must be something missing there. Last year, with Barry (Foster) and Bam (Morris), you had a fresh back in the game all the time. You give a guy 12-15 carries each, compared to 20-30 carries for one guy, and by the fourth quarter, you have some pretty fresh backs."

That's hard to do when a team trails in the fourth quarter. The Steelers lost to Miami by 13 points to Minnesota by 20 and had to play catchup in Jacksonville after falling behind 14-0.

"We've got to get it going," Steelers tackle Leon Searcy said. "We've been known traditionally as a team that likes to run the ball, to pound the ball. I look around the rest of the league and see guys getting 130 yards here and 130 yards there, and I know we have the capability of doing that."

Not this season. No Steelers back has rushed for 100 yards — in contrast, Foster had 12 100-yard games by himself in 1992 — and they have 35 more passing attempts than they have rushes.

Still, for all of their talk about reviving the run, the Steelers' best chance of beating Cincinnati might be to throw. It has worked before for O'Donnell, who has 14 touchdown passes and only two interceptions while going 7-0 in his career against the Bengals.

Braves bring experience into World Series

By ED SHEARER
AP Sports Writer

ATLANTA — The Atlanta Braves have one distinct advantage over the Cleveland Indians heading into the World Series — experience.

"I'm not so sure any of that makes any difference," Braves manager Bobby Cox said yesterday. "Good playing will take care of any of that type of edge."

The Braves aren't loaded with experience as 10 players have combined for 71 appearances, most in Atlanta's Series losses to Minnesota in 1991 and Toronto in 1992.

That seems like a lot, though, compared to Cleveland's total of 28 World Series games by six players, obviously all with other teams.

Cox said the butterflies will remain for anyone in any sport no matter how many times they have been involved in championship competition.

"They never go away," he said. "If they're not there, then maybe you better look into something else to do."

The most successful Braves as far as World Series go have been second baseman Mark

Lemke, who was in line to be the Series MVP had the Braves beaten the Twins in '91, and pitcher John Smoltz, who has a 1-0 record in four starts with a 1.95 ERA in 27 2-3 innings.

Lemke has appeared in 12 games with a .326 average and six RBIs. He hit .417 against the Twins, driving in four runs. He had three triples in four at-bats over a two-game span.

He also sees no advantage from Series experience.

"Once it starts, it starts," Lemke said. "It's baseball. It may be a little more pressure packed, but you still go to play the game. Whoever comes out and plays the game the way it's supposed to be played and does the things necessary to win is going to be on top."

The Indians' top Series performers are right-hander Orel Hershiser, who has a 7-0 postseason record including the playoffs, and reserve catcher Tony Pena, who hit .409 and drove in four runs for the St. Louis Cardinals in the 1987 World Series against Minnesota.

Hershiser, pitching for the Los Angeles Dodgers, had a 2-0 record and 1.00 ERA in two complete games against Oakland in 1988. David Justice of the Braves and Eddie Mur-

ray of the Indians hope to improve on disappointing Series numbers.

Justice's 13 games are the most by any player on either team. He has a .217 batting average with three homers and nine RBIs, driving in five of those in 1991's Game 5.

Murray appeared in 12 games for Baltimore against Pittsburgh in 1979 and Philadelphia in 1983. He has a .196 average with three homers and five RBIs.

Besides Smoltz, five other Atlanta pitchers have played in the Series. Steve Avery has an 0-1 record in four games, Tom Glavine a 2-2 mark in four, Kent Mercker one scoreless inning of relief in two games, Mark Wohlers 2 1-3 scoreless innings of relief in five games and Alejandro Pena a 1-1 record and 1.74 ERA in five games in relief. Pena's Series victory came when he beat Oakland for the Dodgers in 1988.

Shortstop Jeff Blauser and Rafael Belliard have each appeared in 11 World Series games for Atlanta, Blauser hitting .233 and Belliard .375, going 6-for-11 with four RBIs against the Twins. Belliard was a defensive replacement in four games against the Blue Jays.

Politically incorrect postseason for baseball

By DOUG FERGUSON
Associated Press Writer

Her hero, Mickey Mantle, died this year and her beloved Dodgers were swept out of the playoffs by the Cincinnati Reds. What could possibly be worse for Suzan Shown Harjo?

Try a World Series that features the Cleveland Indians and Chief Wahoo against the Atlanta Braves and the Tomahawk Chop.

"It's sort of like drive-by racism, with bullets for an unintended victim," said Harjo, director of the Morning Star Institute in Washington that promotes Native American cultures and traditions.

American Indian groups have vehemently protested the use of Indian nicknames, mascots and, worst of all, the chanting and whooping they say is demeaning to native cultures.

In a season already filled with

replacement spring training and a season cut to 144 games because of the strike, baseball fans who find the nicknames and images offensive are getting the worst of both worlds.

"I was listening to the radio and one of the sports commentators said, 'When they do the Tomahawk Chop, which Indians are they cheering for?'" said Ray Apodaca of the Administration for Native Americans. "I expect to see a lot of things that are going to be offensive in characterizations."

Chief Wahoo belongs to Cleveland, a red-faced, smiling Indian who adorns everything from hats to shirts to placards that fans wave. Cleveland had a huge symbol of Chief Wahoo outside old Cleveland Stadium; he didn't make the move to Jacobs Field.

There were some protests of the symbol during playoff games.

"There's not really much to say

that hasn't already been said," said Indians vice president Bob DiBiasio. "As long as Mr. Jacobs owns the team, Chief Wahoo will be our logo."

Chief Noc-A-Homa used to banter about a teepee beyond the outfield fence in Atlanta's Fulton County Stadium. The mascot left before the 1986 season because of a salary dispute with the Braves.

Now, the Braves are known almost as much for the Tomahawk Chop as they are for having the best pitching staff in baseball. Who can forget Braves owner Ted Turner, Jane Fonda and former President Carter doing the chop during the 1991 playoffs?

"It constitutes an unwarranted attack on us as a people in the same way that little black Sambo was an affront to African-Americans and the Frito Bandito was an affront to Chicanos," said Harjo, a native Oklahoman and member

of the Cheyenne-Arapaho tribe.

"America can survive and flourish without its racists toys."

Cleveland got its nickname in 1915 during a newspaper name-the-team contest. Indians was suggested because of Louis Francis Sockalexis, a Penobscot Indian who was the first Native American to play pro baseball.

The Braves, who first played in Boston, were once owned by John Ward and James E. Gaffney, "chieftains" in the Tammany Hall organization. The team was called Braves because they worked for these chiefs, not because of any Indian association.

If the names were supposed to be harmless, some feel the actions are not.

"A lot of negative reaction is in the way the image is portrayed," Apodaca said. "It's offensive to see people dressed in chicken feathers."

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