

Bush giving Heisman back still doesn't change history

By Jared Shanker

REMEMBER when, on that cold December night in 2005, Vince Young

walked up to the podium in an expensive Italian suit at the Downtown Athletic Club in New York? Remember when Young graciously received the Heisman Trophy, fighting back tears as he thanked friends and family for all their support?

No? You don't remember that? Oh wait, that's right. You wouldn't remember it. Because it never happened.

Reggie Bush, the explosive, once-in-a-lifetime talent who had a highlight reel the length of "Titanic" and made Pac-10 defenders look like 10-year-old defenders, won the 2005 Heisman. Yesterday, though, Bush decided to forfeit his Heisman amid spec-



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ulation the Heisman Trust was going to strip him of it later this week after a four-year NCAA investigation into the USC athletic program found that Bush received improper benefits while at USC. The Trust is considering giving the award to the 2005 runner-up, Young, who said he would take the trophy if offered.

My question now becomes what does Bush giving away his Heisman prove?

The answer is simple: nothing. Bush was the best player on any college football field in 2005, 2004 and 2003. When Bush finally won the Heisman in 2005, he won with a total of 2,541 points, second most in the 74-year history of the award.

Young may have gotten the last laugh in the national championship game, but Bush was the best in college football according to 784 writers, pundits and former Heisman winners — the second most first-place votes ever.

But Bush did the right thing — not because the award was tainted, but because it was becoming a distraction to his NFL team, the

New Orleans Saints, and more importantly, it prevents the Trust from "vacating" his Heisman.

There isn't an uglier word in sports than "vacate." Not for athletic programs or players but for fans, historians and record books. Are we supposed to just remove Bush and his jaw-dropping array of jukes, leaps and spins from our memories? Are we to no longer recognize Bush as one of the most dominant players of the decade?

The possibility of vacating records doesn't just stop with Bush, though. USC will almost undoubtedly be stripped of its BCS national title from 2004 — the same year the Trojans went 13-0 and won eight games by more than 30 points, including a 55-19 dismantling of Oklahoma in the national championship game.

Does anybody really have the gall to argue the Trojans weren't the best team in 2004? Yeah, Auburn went 13-0, too, but few argued in Auburn's favor unless it was to play devil's advocate or — more likely — show the ineptitude of the BCS system. The

Trojans were a Goliath that had no David. Now, they're a king without a crown, and the 2004 season might as well have never been played.

Legendary coach Bobby Bowden trailed Joe Paterno by just one win in early 2009, but an NCAA ruling forced Florida State and Bowden to vacate 14 wins from 2006-07, drawing a curtain on the race between the two.

Did Bobby Bowden not coach his Seminoles to 14 victories that year? (Maybe Jimbo Fisher did, but that's a different story.) And what do you tell the teams that lost to the Seminoles that year? They don't get the win. It's as if those 60 minutes were meaningless, because as far as the NCAA is concerned, there is no winner or loser — just a vacated victory.

It's a good thing Bud Selig and Major League Baseball aren't following in the NCAA's footsteps. There's little doubt that some of the game's greatest players of the last three decades spent more time sticking needles in their butt rather than busting it in the

weight room. The way to deal with them, though, is not to strip them of their accomplishments. The only thing worse than Barry Bonds breaking Hank Aaron's home run record would be for MLB to refuse to acknowledge Bonds played 22 seasons.

Everybody knows Bonds is the all-time home run leader, and that he cheated the game. But to erase every performance-enhanced dinger isn't the way to go, though.

Bonds, much like Bush, captivated the sports world in the early part of the last decade. His shame should be attached to his accomplishments, not revoked entirely. Let us decide how to contextualize Bonds', Bowden's and Bush's accomplishments.

Sports can't rid itself of its history, no matter how it was written. And vacating does more than taking games from the win column.

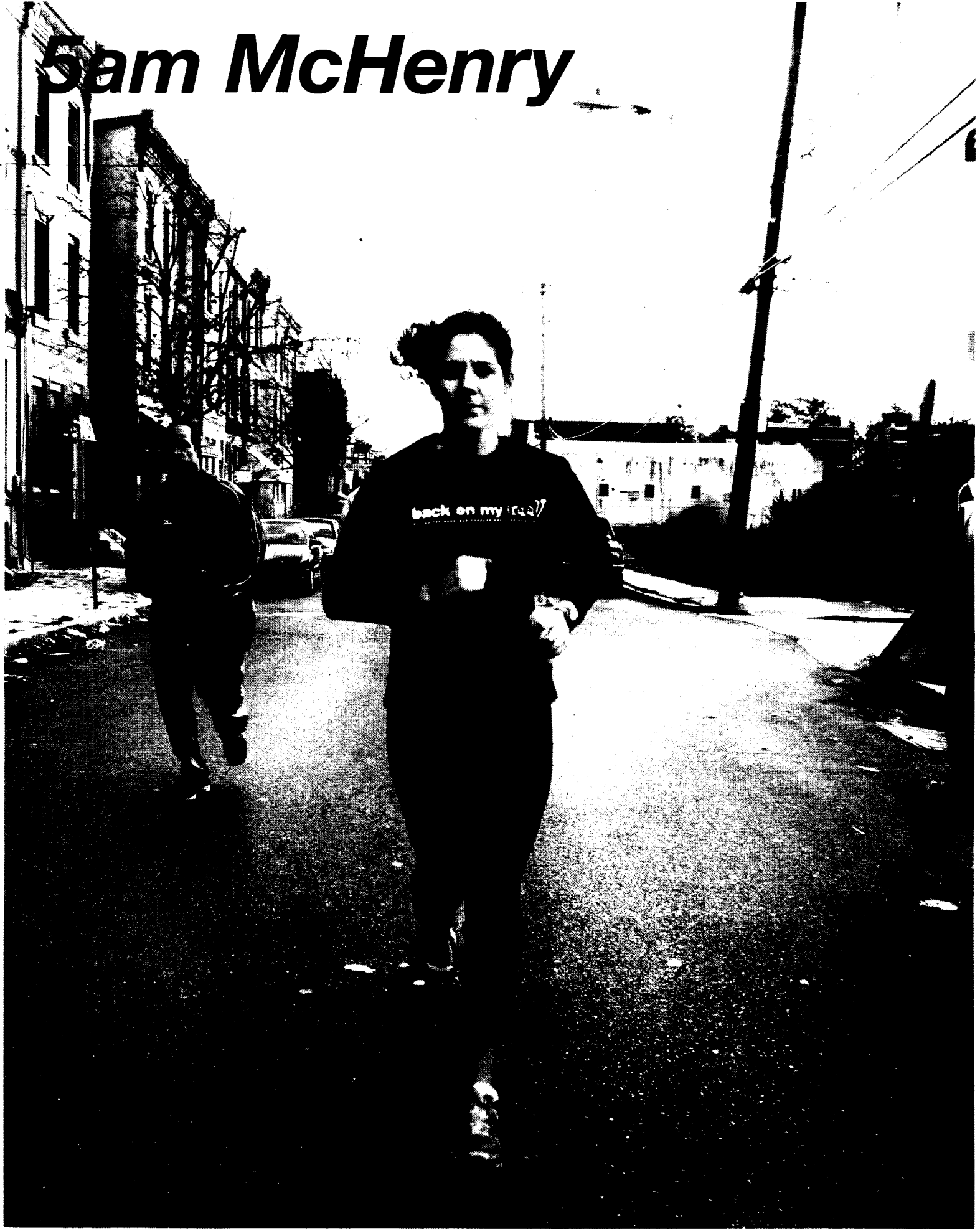
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