

Jake Perper's Writing Portfolio

Exclusive Interview: Bears Legend Mike Ditka Talks Possible NFL Rule Changes, Hot Topics and Much More (March 21, 2014) via Bears Backer: (<http://www.chicagonow.com/bears-backer/2014/03/exclusive-interview-bears-legend-mike-ditka-talks-possible-nfl-rule-changes-hot-topics-and-much-more/>)

Bears legend Mike Ditka doesn't need much of an introduction, but we'll give you one to remind you just once more of his greatness.

The 74-year-old former Bears tight end and head coach is the only individual in the modern NFL era to win a championship with the same team as a player and as a head coach. He's also the only Bear to take part in the last two championship wins (1963-player, 1985-coach).

Ditka, a former star at Pittsburgh transcended the tight end position in 1961, when he won the NFL Rookie of the Year award. Inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame (1986) and the Pro Football Hall of Fame (1988), Ditka finished his 12-year career with 427 receptions for 5,812 yards and 43 touchdowns.

Ditka isn't shy when it comes to current topics in the football world, especially about his former Bears squad, who he played for from 1961 to 1966. He really likes the direction of the Bears under second-year head coach Marc Trestman.

"I love Marc Trestman. He's got a good offense. He does some very good things on offense," Ditka said. "They need to fix the defense. They need help on defense especially in the secondary. They have to get better there."

Ditka, who earned the nickname of "Da Coach" after 11 seasons as the Bears head coach (1982-1992), compiled a 106-62 record, while winning six division titles. He never believed there was loyalty during his playing days or even during his more recent coaching days.

"There is no loyalty. If you think there is you're crazy. It's a dog eat dog world. If they think you can't help anymore they'll get rid of you especially if you have a big contract," Ditka said.

Brian Urlacher's recent comments that stated there's no loyalty with this current Bears organization after Devin Hester was let go on Mar. 6 baffled Ditka.

"Brian was a great Chicago Bear one of the greatest ever, but they don't care," he said. "If it's time to go, then it's time to go. I don't care who you are."

The Bears officially retired Ditka's jersey last season, placing him in elite company with 13 other players, including Gale Sayers and Walter Payton. But he said if they never retired the No. 89 jersey "it's not the end of the world."

"It's a nice honor," Ditka said. "If they wouldn't have retired my number it wouldn't have mattered."

Currently an analyst on ESPN's NFL Sunday Countdown during the season, Ditka worked "16 hours every day and would come home thinking about football nonstop", according to his wife Diana.

Ditka discussed the hottest topics around the league, including Lovie Smith heading to Tampa Bay to coach the Bucs.

"He [Lovie] is a good coach. He will build up that defense and get it back. He's got some good people," Ditka said. "He is a little better on the defensive side, but he will have an offense assistant who will get the job done."

Another hot topic around the NFL is the talk about getting rid of the extra point altogether or moving it

back enough to make it a challenging kick.

"If it isn't broke, why fix it? The extra point is part of football. The rules of football are good," he said. "A couple guys brainstorm about it with owners, about what? The extra points have nothing to do with hurting the football game or making it better. It's just a part of the game, and it's automatic until you miss one."

NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell also is looking into expanding the league's playoff system to add another wild-card team to each conference giving only the top team on each side a first-round bye.

"The National Football League is a great league, but it's about making money," Ditka said. "If they can make more money by adding more playoff teams, then they'll do it. There's no question about it."

NFL Draft and Incognito-Martin feud in Miami

Ditka has no problem with Missouri defensive end Michael Sam, who will become the first openly gay football player in NFL history if he gets picked up by a team during or after the draft.

"It's up to the individual. It's up to his teammates," Ditka said. "I think you live in a different world today, and it's much more acceptable than it was maybe 30 years ago."

Another controversy in the NFL as of late has been the Incognito and Martin feud down in Miami. Ditka says the Dolphins will be able to move past it.

"They have a good coach. They have a good organization," he said. "Incognito was probably wrong, but Martin handled it like a baby. He's a sissy. If he was a man he would have stuck up for himself."

The San Francisco 49ers traded for Martin earlier this month, reuniting him with his former coach at Stanford, Jim Harbaugh. Ditka doesn't think Martin will do much with his new team.

"Jim Harbaugh's a good coach. If anyone can get it out of him Harbaugh can," Ditka said. "I don't put much thought into guys like that."

Ditka isn't pleased to see longtime CBS analyst Dan Marino be let go. He thinks Marino "would be a huge addition to an NFL organization, possibly in Miami.

Ditka Being Ditka

What is it like being Mike Ditka? Well Ditka had this to say when I asked him this question.

"Well I guess it would be the same thing that you could ask yourself. I like who I am. I like my life," Ditka said while puffing one of his signature stogies. "I like to be able to smoke a cigar. I'm not politically correct and I'm a conservative. People don't like that, fine. They don't like it, but I'm not going to change."

Ditka finished fourth overall on the Bears' all-time receiving list with 4,503 yards. Iron Mike also ranks fifth in all-time team receptions (316) and touchdown grabs (34).

Ditka splits half of his years in Naples, FL and Chicago. Golfing with his family during his down time is a big part of his life. His son Mike and wife Diana join him often on the links down in sunny Florida.

Exclusive Interview: Rookie Linebacker Jon Bostic Is Destined For Big Things In Chicago (July 19, 2013) via Bears Backer: <http://www.chicagonow.com/bears-backer/2013/07/jonbosticinterview/>

The Chicago Bears drafted linebacker [Jon Bostic](#) with the 50th overall pick in the second round of the 2013 NFL Draft.

The 6'1, 245 lb Bostic started at middle linebacker during three of his four seasons at the University of

Florida. He recorded 237 tackles, 19.5 tackles-for-loss, 8.0 sacks and five interceptions in 51 career games for the Gators.

Bostic has participated so far in a rookie minicamp (May 10-May 12), OTA's (May 13- June 6) and a mandatory minicamp (June 11-June 13) in his time in the windy city.

"I've got guys who played a lot of football in front of me. I've really been out there just trying to learn as much as I can day by day from the coaches and players."

Bears' GM Phil Emery loved the fact that Bostic was a "three-position linebacker." That played very deeply into the decision to take Bostic over a guy like ILB Arthur Brown (Kansas State) in the middle of the second round.

"I'm playing all the linebacker spots right now. In our defense you have to know all three. You have to know everyone's responsibilities. But most of the time I'm playing at Mike and Sam."

He knows that he will have to earn his stripes through his special teams play. Although he doesn't mind doing just that he should be in a fair competition with off-season acquisition James Anderson at strongside linebacker aka Sam.

"I'm really just looking to make the team and help out any place that I can. I just want to learn each and every day."

Bostic played running back and defensive back at Palm Beach Central High School in Wellington, FL. He claims the transition to linebacker in college wasn't very tough.

"The transition was actually pretty easy. I've always been a guy who liked being around the ball. I was just moving that much closer to the ball to be able to make more plays."

Starting safety Major Wright was a senior when Bostic was a freshman at the University of Florida and now they both join forces once again. He has become friends with many players on the team, but he said one player in particular he has become very close with.

"Khaseem [Greene]. Being around him, coming into together and really growing together each day we've gotten pretty close."

Bostic's father Jon was a former defensive back for the Detroit Lions (1985-1987). He loved watching football growing up. The NFL was a dream when he was a kid, but now its a reality for Jon Bostic.

"That was something that I've dreamed about since I was little. It was something I wanted to do my first time putting pads on."

Bostic earned his degree in health education and hopes to attend physical therapy school one day. He credits his parents for getting him to where he is today on and off the field.

"They have been there for me from day one. They have taught me right from wrong. They always pushed me academically and made sure I graduated from college. The athletic part basically took care of itself."

As a freshman in 2009 Bostic was a teammate of former Patriots tight end Aaron Hernandez at the University of Florida.

"It's frustrating to see some guys you've played with make a mistake and basically get themselves in trouble. You have to make sure you're making the right decisions. The NFL has done their part by basically reiterating lessons that our parents have taught us."

Bostic certainly has a bright future with Brian Urlacher out of the picture and Lance Briggs likely nearing the end of his career. He embraces the past "Monsters of the Midway" and wants to continue

the success the Bears' defense has had.

"It means a lot to play defense in Chicago. With the linebackers they've had in the past they've all done a lot of great things. I'm excited to keep the legacy going."

Bostic is thrilled to be able to get a chance to learn from seven-time Pro Bowler [Lance Briggs](#).

"He knows the defense like the back of his hand. When I'm out there I watch him and just listen to how he communicates on the field with all the players."

Prep baseball: Seacrest routed by Miami-Brito in Class 2A title game (May 20, 2014) via Naples Daily News: <http://www.naplesnews.com/news/2014/may/20/prep-baseball-seacrest-routed-by-miami-brito-in/?prepzone=1>

FORT MYERS — Seacrest Country Day's magical ride ended Tuesday, one win short of a state title. But that didn't take the luster off a wonderful season for the young Stingrays baseball team.

Seacrest fell to Miami-Brito 14-2 in the Class 2A state final at JetBlue Park.

"I told them before the game, 'No matter what happens out there today, you've made your parents proud, your school proud, the community proud and absolutely have made all your coaches proud,'" Seacrest coach Mark Marsala said. "That's the bottom line."

A young group comprised of six middle schoolers, four underclassmen and only three upperclassmen made Seacrest baseball history by winning 2-0 in the district semifinal on Monday night. But they couldn't finish the deal against a talented Brito squad.

Brito (23-8) captured its sixth state championship and first since 2006. Until this season, Seacrest had never won a regional playoff game.

Seacrest (21-9) took a 2-0 lead in the opening inning on a Tyler Lopes two-run double to deep center. The Stingrays added just one more hit over the next four innings of play after Lopes' score.

"We jumped out early," Marsala said. "Brito is a talented team from top to bottom, stronger than most of your average high school teams. We are elated with the season we had. We are elated that Pedro [Legrand] came out to join us and show these guys the way. We are looking forward to great things in the future."

After Lopes went a full seven innings for the Stingrays on Monday night, Seacrest sent freshman Josue Rivera to the mound despite the fact that he only pitched four innings coming in.

"We knew we were going to have to play perfect baseball out there. There's no question about it," he said. "Josue is a talented pitcher for us. He's been injured for most of the year. You're kind of rolling the dice a little bit, but you know in retrospect we are looking at not only today, but the future as well."

Brito's starting pitcher Hector Garcia made it through only five batters before Richard Nunez relieved him.

After Rivera allowed four runs in the first, David Dinorcia came in to toss the final three innings for the Stingrays.

"We had a really young team this year and we had to learn a lot," Lopes said. "We had to slow the game down. We had to take it one step at a time and as the year went on we started getting better."

A nine-run second inning saw Brito go through 15 batters. The scoring included a two-run triple, another run-scoring triple and a pair of two-run doubles as well as two other runs on a sacrifice fly and a fielder's choice.

“We started learning more and suddenly districts came and then we made history in regionals,” Lopes said. “We just kept going and we learned to never give up. It’s been an amazing year.”

Seacrest became the eighth team in Collier County history to make it to the state title game. St. John Neumann (1985), Lely (1989), Barron Collier (1997) and Naples (2009) are the only four Collier County teams to win state titles.

“The young team that we have, we are hoping to come back and just to get them experience out there is invaluable,” Marsala said. “Besides that we needed to make some plays out there today.”

Assistant coach Julian Gonzalez was tossed out of the game in the third inning after a solo home run by Panthers senior Mauricio Amaral. Due to FHSAA rule, Gonzalez will be suspended a minimum of two games next season.

Seacrest, who ranks first in the state for class 2A in the FHSAA Academic Team Champions standings, captured its first state title in volleyball last November. So this state runner up finish by the baseball team is nothing to be upset about for the Stingrays.

“They work hard in and out of the classroom. They have great futures in front of them,” he said. “This team didn’t care about individual stats. It was pure baseball and it was a pleasure to coach a great group of young men.”

Fifty years have come and gone, but history can’t deny the fact that Wayne Meredith played his part on the biggest stage of that time, the Olympics (Feb. 16, 2014) via Naples Daily News

[\(http://www.naplesnews.com/news/2014/feb/16/olympics-hockey-bonita-springs-wayne-meredith-on/\)](http://www.naplesnews.com/news/2014/feb/16/olympics-hockey-bonita-springs-wayne-meredith-on/)

Meredith, a resident of Bonita Springs, earned his spot on the 1964 United States Olympic hockey team in Innsbruck. The 24-year-old defenseman from the University of Minnesota tried to follow in his brother’s footsteps.

One of his four brothers, Dick, won silver in the 1956 Cortina d’Ampezzo Games and then helped the U.S. win gold for the first time ever in the 1960 Squaw Valley Games. The 1960 team was highlighted in the 2009 documentary, “Forgotten Miracle.”

“He (Dick) set the stage. He being there wanted me to get there as well,” Meredith, 74, said. “After seeing him win, one of my main goals was to make that team in ’64.”

Meredith’s road to the Olympics started in October 1963. A total of 120 candidates from two different locations, Boston and St. Paul auditioned for the team. In November, 25 players skated in 30 games over the next six weeks around the country in hopes of securing a spot. By early January 1964, the final 18 were announced, with Meredith latching on.

The team, made up entirely of amateurs, included Herb Brooks and Brooks’ brother, Dave.

Herb was appearing in his first Olympics as a player after being the last guy cut from the 1960 team. He eventually became the famous inspirational head coach who guided the 1980 Lake Placid team to gold and the “Miracle on Ice.”

“We were all close with one another. Living together for four months will do that,” Meredith said. “I roomed with him for a couple weeks. Twelve of the 18 guys selected were originally from Minnesota.”

Meredith played with the Brooks brothers throughout his hockey career, including at the University of Minnesota and the Olympics.

"I knew Herb when I was in high school in St. Paul. We played against each other in the 1957 state hockey tournament," he said. "We met each other before we really knew each other, so to speak. We were competing then and soon after we played together at Minnesota."

The 1964 team posted a 3-5 record, beating Romania, Germany and Switzerland by a combined 17 goals. But they struggled with powerhouses Soviet Union, Canada, Sweden and Czechoslovakia, losing four in a row at one point in the tournament.

"Being there it was truly satisfying; something that has been ever since that time," Meredith said. "I wish we could have done better, but the experience was very rewarding."

Soviet Union finished a perfect 8-0, outscoring opponents 73-10 to capture gold in Innsbruck. The Soviet domination lasted nearly three decades. From 1964 to 1992, the Soviets won seven Olympic gold medals in eight tries.

"It's only been 34 years," Meredith joked. "The U.S. has won two gold medals, but never on an international rink. It is 20 feet wider and 15 feet longer, it makes for a different game on a big ice surface. The rules were different. You had to serve the full duration of the penalty and you weren't able to ice the puck."

The amateur era ended in 1988, when professional hockey players could participate in the Olympics. However, the NHL didn't allow its players to skate in the games until 1998 due to scheduling conflicts.

Meredith believes the biggest change in the Olympics is the professionalism. He referred to the amount of money Sochi forked out (\$51 billion) compared to Innsbruck (\$1 million), saying that it has become a "very expensive enterprise, maybe even too expensive."

"Today athletes are making \$10,000, \$20,000 to win a gold medal," he said. "Our weekly allowance for incidentals was \$15 a week. That was it. We would have played for nothing. We probably would have paid to play."

Prep volleyball: Seacrest becomes first Collier County team to win state title (November 16, 2013) via Naples Daily News: <http://hurricane2013.com/news/2013/nov/16/prep-volleyball-seacrest-becomes-first-coller/>

KISSIMMEE – Seacrest seized the moment on Saturday.

The Stingrays became the first volleyball team in Collier County to win a state championship.

Seacrest defeated Winter Garden-Foundation Academy in a thrilling, five-set match (18-25, 25-16, 26-24, 22-25, 15-12) in the 2A state final at Silver Spurs Arena.

"I'm very happy for the success of our team," said Seacrest coach Jan Class, who's been the head coach since Nov. 8 when Jolana Fowler was suspended by the school for not following "basic coaching protocols."

"We worked very hard the last four months to reach this goal. I'm very proud of each of these girls."

"We all just focused and buckled down," Seacrest's Valerie Gonzalez said. "At the end of the day we wanted it more. We fought hard. We never thought 'We're going to lose it' and we just kept our heads up."

Seniors Ashley Murano and Riley Gorman couldn't stop smiling as they celebrated the historic victory.

"I couldn't have wanted it any other way," Murano said.

The intensity increased to an entire new level in the fifth and final set.

Trailing 10-7, the Stingrays (26-5) scored three straight points with Emily Hancock serving. Seacrest posted five of the seven final points to win it.

For the second straight year, the Lions' season ended with a loss in the state title match.

"That was one of the best games I've ever been a part of," Foundation coach Daniel Eleutiza. "It's hard when you lose, but my girls played hard the entire time. They never quit. My girls played a masterpiece, but the problem is they did to."

After the Lions took that three-point lead, Hancock slammed the gym floor, visibly upset with herself, but she quickly bounced back.

"I get mad at myself for making errors obviously," Hancock said. "Before the last point of the game I was crying and we hadn't even won yet. It was so emotional. It all just came out of me."

Freshman Marissa Murray made a key block to put the Stingrays up 14-10, and then sophomore Madison Cilk delivered a kill to win the championship.

Gonzalez finished with a match-high 27 kills including two big kills in the final five points of the fifth set. Hancock was right there when Gonzalez wasn't, adding 21 kills.

Murano had a match-high 40 assists and three kills. Gorman was active all afternoon with a match-high 21 digs.

"It's a great way to end our senior year and our high school volleyball season," Gorman said. "We got to be a part of history, which was great."

The third and fourth sets were a grind for both teams. Seacrest trailed 19-12 in the third set, but with Gonzalez serving, the Stingrays scored seven straight points to tie it up.

Foundation held a 24-23 lead, but a bad serve tied it, and Murano won the set just two points later with an ace.

The fourth set went Foundation's way after it appeared the Stingrays were going to rally once again.

The Lions (28-4) dominated the first set, but Seacrest answered by winning the second by nine.

Foundation freshman Lauren Miller recorded a team-high 17 kills, while senior BreAnna Holder and junior Lauren Piotraczk each had 10 kills.

Pro hockey: Captain Mathieu Roy's back, Blades keep rolling – Nov. 6, 2013 (Naples Daily News):

<http://www.naplesnews.com/news/2013/nov/06/roys-back-blades-keep-rolling/>

The Everblades' captain returned Wednesday night to a team already on course.

Florida went undefeated without Mathieu Roy but still missed his leadership. Now, fully healed from off-season wrist surgery, Roy was cleared by team doctors to return to action.

The 27-year-old left winger made his presence known in the first period on his very first shift as the Everblades remained undefeated with a 5-2 win over the Elmira Jackals.

Roy delivered an impressive pass to Matthew Pistilli, who buried a power play goal for the Blades. Brandon MacLean assisted on the play.

Pistilli assisted on all three second period goals. MacLean scored first from the blue line and Jenks poked in two in front of the net.

Jackals forward Artem Demkov scored twice in the third period, one short-handed and one on the man advantage, but it wasn't enough as the Blades (8-0-0-1) simply out-played Elmira (2-4-0-0) from start to finish.

Roy put together a gutsy performance by constantly putting his body in front of the net on power plays, including the first goal of the night.

"It's always good to start the year like that," Roy said. "That's one of the plays that worked so well last year. It worked tonight, so that's good to see."

Roy is coming off a 2012 campaign where he generated a career-high 89 points (38 goals, 51 assists), leading all scorers in goals and points in the ECHL.

To get back to 100 percent, he put in plenty of work behind the scenes with the team.

"I've been skating with the guys since the start of the season," Roy said. "I've been skating a lot with the coaches at end of practice. So I should be in good shape."

Coaches and teammates are glad to have Roy back in the fold. Roy insisted his wrist felt fine and needed the usual ice after the game.

Head coach Greg Poss wants his team to be more effective on the power play and said he is happy to have Roy in the lineup because of his abilities to kill off penalties and score effectively on the man advantage.

With Roy out, Pistilli took over the reins as the leading scorer. The fourth-year Blade posted 12 points (seven goals, five assists) on the way to a being named the ECHL Player of the Month for October.

Pistilli and his teammates, who have helped the Blades rank second in goals (37) noticed how hard Roy has been working to get back on the ice.

"His conditioning is better than last year," Pistilli said. "I'm expecting to see an even better player than last year."

Poss opted to keep Roy strictly on the power play early on in the game, but Roy earned ice time often playing next to Pistilli and Jenks.

"If he wasn't 100 percent he wouldn't have been playing," Poss said. "The good thing about the wrist injury was he was still able to work on his conditioning and his leg strength. He is in great shape."

MacLean also stepped up in Roy's absence, taking on a key leadership role as one of the assistant captains. MacLean added 10 points (five goals, five assists) for the Blades.

"Everybody has been taking more of a leadership role," MacLean said. "You can't replace a Mathieu Roy, but we're happy to have him back. We're going to do the same things we've been doing."

MacLean, who leads the league with four game-winning goals, doesn't believe that his role will change that much with Roy in uniform.

"Roy is more of a quiet leader and he'll step up and say things when he needs to, but I try to lead by example," MacLean said. "Be vocal and get things going."

Pistilli is excited to see his captain don his No. 15 jersey once again. He credits the early success this season to his teammates.

"Roy was out, so we needed guys to step up. Things went well. It wasn't only me," Pistilli said. "Everyone has been stepping up. First player all the way to the last. Every night it seems to be a different guy that steps up and gets the job done. It's a full team effort."

The Blades have played tough this season despite a couple of key players getting sent up to the AHL (Danick Gauthier, Charles Landry, Kristers Gudlevskis).

“We have a real deep team. We have a lot of players that can play,” Poss said. “The competition is high for ice time. Everyone is battling hard.”

“We have to take it game by game,” Pistilli said. “We have good team spirit and everyone seems to get along together. We just got to hold strong and keep playing well.”

The Everblades acquired goalie Trevor Cann from the Colorado Eagles in exchange for future considerations.

Prep volleyball: Gulf Coast makes history, advances to 7A state title match (Nov. 14, 2013) via Naples Daily News: (<http://www.naplesnews.com/news/2013/nov/14/prep-volleyball-gulf-coast-makes-history-to-7a/>)

KISSIMMEE — Gulf Coast advanced one step closer to its ultimate goal — a historic state title.

The Sharks faithful stood on their feet for the entire match informing the opposing fans “We can’t hear you” for most of their 7A semifinal match at Silver Spurs Arena on Thursday.

Gulf Coast was heard loud and clear, pulling out a victory over Lutz-Steinbrenner in five sets (25-19, 26-24, 16-25, 24-26, 15-11) to become the first Collier County team to advance to the state final.

“It was awesome. We’re so excited. It’s the first time we’ve been here, and I’m so proud of them,” Gulf Coast coach Christy Wright said. “We know anytime you lose the third and fourth set, it’s hard to win the fifth set, but we’ve done it all year and we did it today.”

The Sharks (23-8) will play the Oviedo Lions on Friday at 5 p.m. Oviedo beat St. Thomas Aquinas (21-25, 25-21, 33-31, 27-25) won in four sets. Fans can watch the title match online at bhsnlive.com.

St. John Neumann in 2000 and Naples in 2006 were the only previous Collier County programs to make it to the state semifinals, but both lost.

Wright wants her team to go into the Oviedo match the same way it’s gone into every match all season.

“We’re not supposed to be here. Nobody looks at us and is scared,” she said. “Every team we’ve beaten has looked bigger than us. They’ve looked scarier than us in warm-ups. We know we can beat anybody.”

Warriors fans taunted Sharks players often. Yelling their names and singing lyrics from Miley Cyrus’ “Wrecking Ball” in an attempt to distract them.

Steinbrenner fans even heckled Sharks senior outside hitter Mackenzie Allen, shouting “Miley Cyrus” at her because of her signature pigtails.

Allen, who added 27 kills, embraced the Warriors’ rowdy crowd, “I was just thinking ‘I hope you know it makes me laugh. It doesn’t mess me up.’”

The final set started with a Gulf Coast point, which was the case in every set on the afternoon.

The Sharks’ Kenzie Ackerman had 58 assists, including a ridiculous pair of saving hits to earn a 13th point in the final set.

In the end, Quarles and Allen overpowered the lengthy Warriors (23-4). Quarles, who lifted her team to victory with a match-high 31 kills, saved her best for last.

Quarles recorded a match-winning kill to send her team to the title match as the arena turned electric.

Gulf Coast led 2-0 after two sets, but fell in the third set after getting dominated due to a couple of big offensive runs by the Warriors.

In a back-and-forth battle in the fourth set, Steinbrenner eventually edged the Sharks.

Steinbrenner went into the final set very upbeat and excited about the opportunity to complete the comeback.

On the flip side, Gulf Coast seemed down, but Wright said “We’re not a team that gets overly excited. We just want to play.”

The Warriors made history all season much like Gulf Coast, serving as a team that simply wasn’t supposed to be there.

“We got to extend our postseason so much further than we ever have before. Even though we end on a loss,” Steinbrenner coach Laura Stegenga said. “Even though it’s hard to lose, they should be extremely proud of themselves.”

Junior outside hitter Avery Bradshaw posted a team-high 29 kills, while Rachel Mathison and Lauren Heldt each contributed 16 kills for the Warriors.

Q & A With Bears Hall Of Fame Running Back Gale Sayers (April 16, 2012) via Bears Backer:

<http://www.chicagonow.com/bears-backer/2012/04/q-a-with-bears-hall-of-fame-running-back-gale-sayers/>

This man doesn’t need much of an introduction, but we will give him one anyway.

Gale Sayers came into the National Football League in 1965 as the fourth overall pick out of the University of Kansas. He brought the nickname, “The Kansas Comet” with him to the NFL.

He was recognized as an All-American twice at Kansas.

In 68 games with the Bears from 1965-1971, he ran for 4,956 yards and 39 touchdowns on 991 carries. He also reeled in 112 receptions for 1,307 yards and nine touchdowns in that span.

He took eight returns back for scores (six kickoffs and two punts) during his career in the NFL.

He holds the NFL records for most touchdowns in a rookie season (22 in 1965), most touchdowns in a game (6, tied with Nevers and Jones), highest career kickoff return average (30.6), and most return touchdowns in a game (2, tied with many players).

He was voted to the Pro Bowl four times ([1965](#), [1966](#), [1967](#), [1969](#)), to the All-Pro team five times (1965–1969) to the NFL 75th Anniversary All-Time Team and to the NFL 1960s All-Decade Team.

His No. 40 jersey is retired by the Chicago Bears. The Hall of Famer, who was inducted in 1977 is named the No. 22 best player of all-time by the NFL in their top 100 list.

I had a chance to catch up with Gale this past week and he talked about his playing days, if his relationship with teammate Brian Piccolo was portrayed correctly in *Brian’s Song*, his foundation ([Gale Sayers Center](#)) and much

more.

[Here's the interview](#) with Bears legend Gale Sayers.

Q: What do you miss most about now compared to when you were playing football? What part of the game do you miss the most?

A: Today's players are walking corporations. Its much bigger business today and players are instant multi-millionaires. There is much more pressure on today's players as well. When I played most players had part time [jobs in](#) the off season. When I played the fans probably had easier access to players. I miss the closeness I felt to the fan base when we played at Wrigley. The fans were so close to the field it made for a unique experience.

Q: What was your fondest memory during your football years?

A: Its hard to say what my most fond memory is, but playing at Wrigley before we moved to Soldier field was special.

Q: Was it a tough decision to retire at the time that you did?

A: I had no choice to retire. My knees made the decision for me. I no longer had the explosiveness you need to get away from people. As a running back, the decision is probably easier than say quarterback, because we rely so much on our speed, and maneuverability. Once you lose that, you should retire as a running back.

Q: Do you think with the technology today, you would have been able to continue playing?

A: I probably could have extended my playing career with today's technology, but I don't have any regrets. I was still acknowledged for my skills by being elected to the Hall of Fame, so things still worked out great. I also got a head start on my [business career](#) at a young age for an athlete.

Q: How realistically was your relationship with Brian Piccolo portrayed in [Brian's Song](#)?

A: The producers of Brian Song did a very good job of portraying my relationship with Brian Piccolo. It was not normal for black and white players to be room mates during [training](#) camp back in the sixties. We had no problem with it though and the movie accurately portrayed our friendship.

Q: Obviously football is much different now from when you played, what do you think is the main reason for that? Do you think a specific rule has changed the game as of late?

A: I think the league is trying to protect players so much more than when I played. Now you cant hit a player a certain way or you get fined or suspended. It took a lot more to get fined or suspended when I played. On the field suspensions and fines were rare when I played. Violence was much more accepted as just part of the game.

Q: Talk a bit about your foundation. What exactly is the idea behind it? When and why did you start the foundation?

A: We started the Gale Sayers Center in 2006. Our goal is to provide much needed after school programs like mentoring, computer technical training and public speaking classes. We know that the more time students spend in school the better they do personally and academically.

Q: What is the biggest event you've done with it?-I see you have the Golf Classic coming up on May 12 in Michigan and the Evening With the Stars in Niles on Aug 18, what are those events all about?

A: Our biggest event is our annual fundraiser "An Evening With the Stars". We invite other celebrated athletes from all different sports to join us in raising money for our charity. We have a tremendous group of Hall of Fame caliber athletes who attend the event each year. Last year Mike Wilbon of ESPN hosted the event and we honor athletes who we feel are good role models for today's youth. Last year Richard Dent, Paul Warfield, Willie Davis and Anthony Munoz attended. It was a great turnout but we can do even better in getting the word out about our event and cause. We are excited to be working with Gossip Genie this year and we hope to reach more potential donors. The golf event is a first for our organization and we are excited to have a less formal fundraiser that is focused around golf. More importantly it gives us another opportunity to reach our target audience.

Q: What can Bears Backer do for your foundation?

A: The best way Bears Backer can forward our cause is by letting people know we are out there trying to change the lives of some of the Chicago's neediest children through a lot of one on one after school programs.

Don't forget to like the [Gale Sayers Center](#) on [Facebook](#) and follow all of the Center's [tweets](#).

KEYS TO THE GAME AGAINST CLEVELAND (April 13, 2012) via Tampabaystorm.com:
<http://www.tampabaystorm.com/news/detail/keys-to-the-game-against-cleveland>

The Tampa Bay Storm (2-2, 2-1) play host to the defending American Conference East Division Champion Cleveland [Gladiators](#) (3-1) tonight at 7:30 p.m. at the Tampa Bay Times Forum.

Key 1: Keep Wasil upright

Tampa Bay's quarterback Stephen Wasil had a tough time last week dealing with the pressure against New Orleans. He completed only 25-47 pass attempts. However he was able to throw seven touchdown passes, however he had three interceptions. The Storm as a team were only two of six on third-down conversions. The Gladiators are coming off a 41-24 beat-down of the Orlando Predators on Easter Sunday. The Gladiators defense came away with 6.0 sacks, two interceptions and two fumble recoveries. The Storm didn't allow a sack last week, but the Gladiators front has been relentless this season. They need to keep Wasil upright in order to stay in this one.

Key 2: Pressure Gladiators QB Dutton

The Storm needs to stop the Gladiators pressure up front and they also need to get pressure on the defensive side of the ball. Gladiators quarterback John Dutton is completing 65.4 percent of his passes this season. He has tossed 24 touchdowns compared to just six interceptions. His offensive line has protected him very well this season allowing a league low one sack. With ample time the two-time ArenaBowl Champion and former ArenaBowl MVP could scorch the Storm's defense. Pernell Phillips, Paul Griffin and Steve Octavien have all collected sacks and will be looked upon to provide that pressure. The Storm has racked up eight turnovers this season, but five have come on special teams. The Storm need to get pressure on the veteran Dutton or they could be in for a long night.

Key 3: Get Off To a Fast Start

It's essential to get the home crowd into the game and what better way to do that than to start off the game fast. The Gladiators are allowing an AFL low 41.5 points per game and 240.5 yards per game.

The front four is tied for third in the AFL with seven sacks, paced by Drew Berubee (four TFLs and three sacks) and Tim Cheatwood who has forced two fumbles in four games. The Storm was only able to score 14 points in the first half last week and it ultimately hurt them in the end. With dangerous wide receivers for the Storm in Prechae Rodriguez, Chandler Williams, Amari Jackson and Michael Lindsey, they need to take advantage of the talent and get points on the board early on.

Greg Sasser Thrives in Environment He Loves (September 26, 2011) via Tampaspartans.com:
<http://tampaspartans.com/article.asp?articleID=3106>

Senior forward Greg Sasser knew he wanted to play soccer since he was a little kid. "It was the first sport I started playing at age 5." Sasser attended Jesuit High [School](#) in Tampa, so he knew playing for the University of Tampa was a goal he wanted to achieve after graduating high school.

"I chose to play at UT for a variety of reasons. For one, I am from Tampa and I love it here, the weather is amazing," said Sasser "Also, UT soccer is one of the best Division II [programs](#) in the nation and I wanted to play for a team that was committed to winning."

Choosing UT was a no brainer for Sasser. In three seasons with the Spartans so far, Sasser has appeared in 51 games, docking over 1200 minutes on the field. Sasser has scored nine goals, added eight assists, four goals coming as game winners.

Sasser added goals against [local](#) foes, St. Leo and Florida Southern on the road last season. But he said his favorite field to play on is Pepin Stadium, the home of the Spartans. "I love playing on our field, our fans make it a great atmosphere and the location of it being in between all of the dorms makes it really unique."

He has passions for other sports like football, basketball and wakeboarding, but says he loves the passion for soccer, especially as a striker. "Striker, no doubt about is my favorite position." "The feeling you get after scoring a goal for your teammates is unmatched."

His favorite memory at any level came in his freshman year at UT. The Spartans made it to the national final four in Division II. Sasser says he enjoyed that season the best because it was his best "statiscal season."

"Out of the three seasons I have had here, not including this past season, we had our most successful season in going all the way to the national final four, and there were so many great memories on all of the roadtrips we took getting there. Playing in front of the thousands of fans that were at the national semifinals game was an incredible experience."

The Spartans finished last season, 14-7-1. They fell to Rollins in the first round in the South Region bracket. Sasser [credits](#) head coach [Adrian Bush](#) for consistently keeping the team motivated.

Sasser likes coach Bush's "enthusiasm for the game." "He [Bush] used to play on the same field we do now, and so he has been through everything we have, so he really knows how we are feeling and he knows how to fire us up for a game and make sure we are prepared to play our opponents."

Sasser believes this season is too early to be called over, "we have gotten off to a bad start and it has put us into a hole, so I am excited to see if we can break out of our slump and turn things around."

With Sasser's passion for the game of soccer, the team is in better hands. His favorite part of being on the team is "the intensity that comes with being in a soccer match. Stepping on that field and laying it all out on the line in front of all the fans really gives me a rush of adrenaline that nothing else does."

Sasser wants to finish up his final season at UT strong, he doesn't believe he will be playing soccer professionally after graduation.

"In five years I would love to picture myself relaxing on a beach, already retired and loving life. But seriously, I'll probably be working here in Tampa, I am a [finance major](#) so most likely I'd be working for a bank or something of that sort."