

# Columnist gives his choices for the best teams of the decade

The sports staff at *The Gamecock* has a problem. No, I mean, besides the fact we're overworked, understaffed and underpaid.

Here it is, 24 days into the 1990s, and we haven't even done a "best of the decade" column. Whether it's too late or not, I've decided we must have one. But instead of the usual "best plays or events of the decade," I've decided to go with "The Best Teams of the 1980s." Catchy, huh? Here they are.

**College Football:** I know it's a despised word around here, but the University of Miami, Florida is the undoubted choice for team of the decade. Three national championships, four all-American (now professional) quarterbacks and who knows how many Hurricanes drafted into the pros. Schnellenberger, Johnson and, soon, Erickson, are names to be revered in college coaching. Pro? Ask Jimmy Johnson about that one.

**Professional Football:** Niners. Need I say more. I grew up with the Steelers as the "Kings of the NFL," but the crown was gratefully passed to the San Francisco 49ers in the 1980s. Three Super Bowl appearances was enough, but three Super Bowl victories iced the cake for the best team in the decade award.



BRANT LONG

Pep Talk

If Joe Montana to Jerry Rice isn't the best combination in NFL history, it's in the top three. On Sunday, the Niners could equal the Steelers four Super Bowl victories and become not only the team of the '80s, but the team of the half-century.

**College Basketball:** This is a tough category. There have been many champions through the 1980s and many great teams, but the decade's best has to go to our Metro Conference rival Louisville. Metro, you scream. What about the ACC? What about them?

Let me run down some Cardinal stats from the 1980s: two national championships, six Metro Conference championships, five Metro players of the year, four NCAA final four appearances and a Metro Conference winning percentage (since 1975) of 79 per-

cent. Add to that, the Cards have been in either the NCAA or NIT tournament every year except the 1986-87 season, and you get a champion. Denny Crum has done a fabulous job at the helm, and this year's team looks to be a shoo-in for the conference title.

**NBA Basketball:** This one is easy — the Los Angeles Lakers. The latter half of the decade belonged to them. Magic, Worthy, Scott and of course the great one, Kareem are names that are synonymous with champions and All-Stars.

Five NBA Championships in the 1980s. Besides the obvious stats, the Lakers win basketball games, and in an exciting fashion. Their quick, fast-paced offense was not only effective, but fun to watch.

Two final images to leave you with. First, picture Kareem, at any arena in the country, receiving gifts and ovations on one of the greatest careers in NBA history. The second image just sticks out. NBA play-offs against Detroit. A tight game going on at The Forum in Inglewood, Calif. The ball is sailing out of bounds but Magic chases it down, throws it back in and dives to the floor. James Worthy takes the pass and makes an easy dunk for two points, and the

momentum that led to an NBA title. The Celtics were close runners-up for this honor.

**Major League Baseball:** I really have no idea where to start for this honor. Only the Dodgers have won two series titles in the '80s, but were they the team of the decade? I would have to say so. Lasorda, Valenzuela, Hershiser, the boys in blue play the game well.

A close second are the N.Y. Mets for the miracle season in 1986. I know it's only one year, but that year truly was a sight. Extra innings in the LCS and then a slow roller going through the Red Sox's Bill Buckner's legs to save a series game that eventually led to the championship. This title is still foggy because of the number of good teams over the decade.

**NHL Hockey:** The N.Y. Islanders and Edmonton ruled in the early '80s, but only the Oilers kept up the winning. With Gretzky, they were unbeatable. Without him, they're still good.

Well, there you have it, ladies and gentlemen, the best teams of the decade. Now that the '90s are here, the sports staff will keep our eyes open for some new teams to take over these slots and vie for the awards in the year 2000. Until then, have a nice decade.

## Baseball's richest man

By The Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — The San Francisco Giants like the way Will Clark swings a bat. They're willing to pay him \$20,000 for every hit he gets.

The San Francisco first baseman signed a \$15-million, four-year contract on Monday that makes him the highest-paid player in baseball history.

"When you play like a Hall of Famer, you get paid like a Hall of Famer," Giants general manager Al Rosen said in announcing the deal.

Last summer, Manager Roger Craig called Clark "a hitter who comes along about once in a decade." He's also the most expensive one to come along since the Cincinnati Red Stockings began paying its players in 1869.

"Fifteen million dollars is an unbelievable number, and I don't

think you can feel any better than I feel right now," Clark said.

He batted .333 for the National League West-champion Giants in 1989, with 23 home runs and 111 RBIs, 104 runs and 196 hits. He was second in batting to San Diego's Tony Gwynn, third in RBIs behind teammate Kevin Mitchell and St. Louis' Pedro Guerrero, tied New York's Howard Johnson and Chicago's Ryne Sandberg for the NL lead in runs scored.

Clark's average was the highest for any Giant since Willie Mays batted .347 in 1958, and was the first Giant with consecutive 100-RBI seasons since Willie McCovey drove in 126 in 1969 and 1970. Through four major league seasons, Clark has a .304 average with 98 homers and 352 RBIs.

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