

GAMECOCK SPORTS

San Francisco dynasty headed straight for Hell



DAVID CLONINGER
Who Else?

Break out the red and gold hankies, folks, because the great 49ers dynasty is about to end. Loyal readers of this column know that yours truly is a big San Francisco fan and no one is torn more by this shocking development than me. It saddens me deeply to say that, yes, the mighty 49er organization is on the way out. As if this wasn't bad enough, the perpetrators behind such a dastardly act are not free agency, retirement or the National Football League, but the 49ers own front office, led by former coach Bill Walsh of all people. After a season that saw just about every long-standing 49er record crumble to the ground, Walsh and the rest of the cigar-smoking jerks in

the front office have crassly announced they will let go of quarterback Steve Young and wide receiver Jerry Rice if their contracts cannot be negotiated to fit the salary cap. What? I'm no expert, but after the season that just took place, this is hardly the news that will keep fans coming back. Let's examine the history. The 49ers, under the guidance of head coach Bill Walsh and his newly innovated West Coast offense, became one of the most storied franchises in NFL history in the 1980s and '90s by winning five Super Bowls and featuring a slew of Pro-Bowlers, All-Stars and MVPs. Led by an unsung draft pick quarterback named Joe Montana, the 49ers won their first Super Bowl in 1981 and picked up two more in 1984 and 1989. In 1990, Walsh stepped down, handing the reins to George Seifert, who promptly marched the 49ers back to the 1990 Super Bowl, beating the Denver Broncos 55-10. Five years later, Seifert and a veteran quarterback named Steve Young blasted the San Diego Chargers to win their fifth Super Bowl, the

first NFL team ever to accomplish the feat. After such a 20-year period of dominance, (16 straight seasons with at least 10 wins, seven straight playoff appearances, 19 straight years with an offensive player in the Pro Bowl, the 49ers came crashing down in 1999 with a horrendous 4-12 record, breaking all the previously mentioned records. Of course, even though the Niners finished in the cellar, they did have an excuse. They lost Young in week 3 due to his fourth concussion in three years which forced backup Jeff Garcia into the role of starting quarterback. Although Garcia led the 49ers to victory over AFC Champion Tennessee in Nashville, the season was a disaster after that game, thanks to an eight-game losing streak. Now, with Young cleared medically to play and Rice saying he wants to end his career with the team on which he has always played, the front office has fudged on asking the two All-Pro's to come back, despite that generous promise. Never mind the fact that Young, a two-time NFL MVP, Super Bowl XXIX MVP, the highest-rated passer in NFL history and the man who still

took the Niners to victory after Montana left, has been the heart and soul of the team for the whole decade. Never mind the fact that Rice is the greatest wide receiver of all time, pulling in so many awards that he had to build an extra garage to his home in order to keep them all. Never mind the fact that both of the players are willing to renegotiate their contracts to stay in San Francisco. Finally, never mind the fact that every other star (Kevin Gogan, Lee Woodall, Charles Haley) has been traded or retired already, and the team is a shell of what it once was. Do Walsh and Company really think the team can win without its two biggest stars? Apparently, they do. This reminds me of how the Boston Red Sox let go of Babe Ruth. The result: Boston got money and Ruth went on to become the greatest player the game has ever seen. While the Ruth Yankees won countless pennants and World Series titles, the Sox haven't won a championship since 1918. Now, Broncos coach Mike Shanahan is say-

ing his team will gladly take Young if he is released. If this happens, Young will continue his trend of throwing for 3,500 yards a season while the Niners will be left in the cold with a bunch of rookies, stumblebums and never-were players. And why? Why will Walsh, who supposedly loved his 49ers more than life itself, not sacrifice his life and limbs so his team can sign its two biggest stars and at least attempt to become a winning program? Because of money. Money's too tight to ensure at least six wins for the Niners by signing Rice and Young, but it is loose enough to give Walsh and the rest of the big execs a six-figure salary. Money's too tight to give a couple of old veterans a last gift—a retirement present with the team they rode to glory with, but is it too tight to buy Walsh and his family new cars? Money can't buy happiness. No, maybe not. But it damn sure can buy two players who will lead the best team in the history of professional football to one last shot at a win. Any questions?

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