

The day
Hollywood
turned
Badger red

Rose Bowl 1994

By TOM MULHERN

I was there when the University of Wisconsin football program hit rock bottom — and the view was surprisingly good.

My first Badger football game was in 1969, when I was 11 years old. The Badgers played Syracuse in the third game of the season and lost 43-7, their 23rd consecutive game without a victory.

I used to laugh when people with short memories talked about Don Morton's final game in 1989, when fewer than 30,000 fans showed up for a loss to Michigan State, as the low point in program history. At least they won two games that year.

As I sat inside Camp Randall Stadium for the first time, I had no recollection of the Badgers' last victory. It had come in the final game in 1966, a 7-6 win over Minnesota. But I did remember listening on the radio when the Badgers tied Iowa, 21-21, the following year, and thinking, at least it's something.

It was the only pause to the steady drum of the losing beat during the 23-game streak.

To appreciate what it meant to UW fans to witness the incredible 1994 Rose

Bowl victory over UCLA, it helps to understand what it was like to watch the Badgers get crushed by the Orangemen that long-ago day.

My buddy and I left our seats in the fourth quarter, as fans were filing out of the stadium, to sit in the top row of the upper deck, to see what it was like. You could see most of Madison from up there, but you couldn't see all the way to Pasadena, Calif. Nobody could.

After scoring its sixth touchdown, Syracuse went for two points, just to rub it in. That's the way opposing teams treated the Badgers back then. A final indignity.

Predictably, a free-for-all broke out. Both benches emptied as I watched from the upper deck.

Going into that game, there was anticipation the streak would end, thanks to a glimmer of hope in losses in the first two games. The spirit was supposed to be returning to the football team.

I missed the historic moment by a week. In the next game at home against Iowa, the Badgers fell behind 17-0 in the third quarter. In the press box, Glenn Miller, the sports editor and columnist for the State Journal,



scribbled in his notes the expected lead for his column the next day.

Miller had been in his job for two years and nine months, but had yet to cover a UW victory. He had a knack for seeing a game through a fan's eyes. "We just can't win a football game," he wrote in his notes. "And that's all there is to it."

Then, the unimaginable happened. The Badgers erupted for 23 straight points. For the first time in 1,057 days, they won a game.

The fans, who couldn't control themselves, stormed onto the field with a little more than a minute left, before being ushered back to the sidelines.

When it was over, thousands of delirious fans rolled onto State Street and up to the Capitol. A State Journal reporter compared it to old movies of the American liberation of Paris.

