

Yankee Conference football memories special

Three weeks earlier, Joe Markus had been standing in the middle of football heaven. There were 35,000 to 40,000 people in the Yale Bowl that Saturday afternoon watching the Bulldogs run all over the Huskies. Now, Markus was on a bus, in the middle of an eight-hour trip to Orono,



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When game time came, there might have been 20 people in the stands. Maybe less. "I remember seeing a guy sitting on a tractor near one of the end zones," said Markus, remembering the 1979 moment like it was yesterday. "Every now and then, some dogs would run across the field. It was a little bit different venue (than the Bowl)."

There were about 10 seconds left in what had been a scoreless first half when Maine coach Jack Bicknell — who would later go on

to coach Doug Flutie at Boston College — decided to punt. Like he had been doing all season, UConn coach Walt Nadzak sent Markus out to return the punt.

Sixty-five yards later, Markus found himself in the end zone. That day Markus totaled 145 yards in punt returns, still a UConn single-game record. The Huskies won 19-7, one of just three wins on the season. In Markus' sophomore year, UConn would post a 7-3 record, but losing seasons returned in 1981 and 1982.

Still, it was a time Markus will never forget. From seeing people dragging kegs of beer to "freebie hill" for Husky games on Saturday afternoons to visiting just about every college campus in the Northeast, those four years still give Markus goose bumps when he thinks about them.

"I loved my time at UConn," Markus said. "It was Yankee Conference football. My family used to follow me when I played at BU, UMass, Holy Cross. I got to see the campuses across the Northeast. It was a great experience. No regrets."

Markus was a jack-of-all-trades player for Nadzak at UConn. He returned punts. He returned kickoffs. He was a running back and a wide receiver. He was shifty and fast, a perfect piece in the Huskies' wishbone attack.

"I got there as a freshman. We ran the 'I' formation and we had too many good tailbacks and a good, running quarterback in Kenny Switzer. Coach Nadzak figured the best way to get all his skill people on the field was to go to the wishbone," Markus said. "So I was the back that happened to go out on third down as flanker and, of course, return punts and kicks. That's how it came about."

You can still find Markus' name scattered around the record book portion of the UConn media guide. The 138 yards rushing against Rhode Island in 1979, along with the 145 punt-return yards against Maine. The 637 yards in kickoff returns in 1981. The 124 yards rushing against Northeastern in 1981, and the 315 yards in punt returns in '82. His 12.9-yard punt return average in 1979 is still

the third best at UConn.

And on Wednesday night at the UConn-Stamford branch, you can find Markus, Rashamel Jones, Tom Penders and Rita Williams being inducted as the newest members of the UConn Sports Hall of Fame.

"I'm a little overwhelmed," Markus said about the honor. "I'm honored, I'm humbled. A little nervous, to be honest."

Markus played his high school football at Trumbull under coach Jerry McDougall. When he was a junior, the Golden Eagles lost in the first-ever CIAC state championship game to Fitch. On the bus trip home, Markus said the juniors on the team vowed to win the state title next year.

"I don't think Jerry even believed we'd do it," he said.

But Trumbull did. The team went 11-0 and edged Hamden 21-20 to win the Class LL title.

"I didn't score but I had about 150 yards (rushing)," Markus said. "We finished No. 1 in the state and No. 1 in New England." He headed to UConn in 1979, and the school was preparing to play in its first

season in the newly created Big East Conference. There was a huge groundswell to upgrade the football program to Division I.

"They had the dream to go Division I, especially with the Big East basketball coming around, that started the whole university going," Markus said. "My freshman year, we opened up with Army, Navy, Yale and Rutgers. Of course, we lost them all. The program did not have the money or the facilities (to go to Division I). To see where the program is today is just unbelievable."

After UConn, Markus went straight into the business world. For the last 25 years, he's worked for the Connelly Insurance Agency in Fairfield. There are times, though, when he quietly wishes he had thought more about continuing his football career.

"They (pro scouts) doubted my speed a little bit," he said. "Maybe I should have taken a crack at it. But that was a long time ago. I've got no regrets."

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Kuznetsova wins French for 2nd major

By **Howard Fendrich**
ASSOCIATED PRESS

PARIS — Svetlana Kuznetsova never struck Dinara Safina as a Grand Slam champion in the making when they were kids in Russia. Kuznetsova showed up for matches toting a 2-liter bottle of soda and wearing rock band T-shirts.

As of Saturday, Kuznetsova owns two major titles — and that's two more than Safina.

Far steadier, if not all that spectacular, Kuznetsova took advantage of the No. 1-ranked Safina's assorted errors and won the French Open final 6-4, 6-2. Hardly a work of beauty, the 74-minute match ended, fittingly, with Safina's seventh double-fault.

"She was too tight. She had so much pressure on her," said Kuznetsova, who also won the 2004 U.S. Open. "I just played the match. It was just one more match. ... Definitely it was a lot of emotions inside of me, but I control it."

Not at the outset: She lost the first three points and was broken in the first game. Quickly, though, the seventh-seed-

ed Kuznetsova took control, yanking Safina from side to side with the same powerful groundstrokes that eliminated Serena Williams in the quarterfinals.

More dispiriting to Safina, perhaps, was Kuznetsova's defense.

Time and time again, Safina — sister of two-time major champion Marat Safin — delivered a hard, well-placed shot. And time and time again, Kuznetsova scrambled to get the ball over the net. If the champion seems to have a cyclist's strong legs, it's because she does: Kuznetsova's father coached her mother to six world championships and her brother to an Olympic silver medal in that sport.

On a cloudy afternoon with the temperature in the low 50s, Kuznetsova also delighted spectators by showing off her soccer skills, juggling a tennis ball off her right foot and knee for several seconds. Her best work came with her racket, and she broke back at love to make it 1-all, then again to go ahead 5-3. Safina began that eighth game with a double-fault and rolled her eyes.

As mistakes accumulated, she muttered to herself or smacked her left palm with her racket.

On match point, Safina's second serve hit the net tape and popped up, sailing beyond the doubles alley.

"I was, like, 'Oh, my God. Double-fault,'" Kuznetsova said.

When Kuznetsova would allow herself to imagine winning the French Open, she always pictured herself dropping to the clay in joy. But the anticlimactic way this one ended didn't call for such a celebration. Instead, Kuznetsova simply turned to make eye contact with her coach and supporters in the stands, then walked to the net for a handshake and kisses on the cheek.

At the other end of the court, Safina covered her forehead with her left hand — disbelief written all over her face — then spiked her racket.

"I was a little bit desperate on the court," said Safina, who appeared to be fighting tears late in the match and during the on-court trophy presentation. "Didn't stay tough mentally."



Svetlana Kuznetsova, of Russia, smiles while holding the trophy after defeating fellow Russian Dinara Safina in the French Open tennis finals Saturday in Paris.

UConn waits on NCAA probe

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NCAA rules, have 90 days to respond to the allegations laid out in the official letter of inquiry. They may, however, request additional time.

The matter, it seems, could be settled next month or, more likely, could drag on into the fall semester.

Calhoun does not seem too worried about potential repercussions. Speaking some two weeks ago at a

Greater Danbury Chamber of Commerce event, he seemed to believe the school would be cleared.

"After 37 years, my record with the NCAA is clean," the coach said. "And you'll see very shortly it is still clean."

Those words echoed his thoughts immediately after the allegations were first levied. On March 27, while his team was making its run to the Final Four, Calhoun said

his intentions were honorable.

"I truly believe in what we've intended and tried to do as a program," Calhoun said at the time. "If we've made mistakes, someone else will judge that for us."

Calhoun, 67, also doesn't seem to be running away from the perceived controversy. He is entering the final year of his contract and is slated to begin negotiations on an extension soon.

Summer Bird wins Belmont as Mine That Bird fades late

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closer, began to do just that when he made a four-wide move on the turn and had the lead after running 1 1/4 miles. But there was still a quarter of a mile to go and perhaps the rigors of the Triple Crown began to catch up with the gelding.

"I thought I had it won when I got to the quarter pole," Borel said. "He just got outrun. I've got no excuses."

Summer Bird, who covered the distance in 2:27.54, returned \$25.80, \$9.30 and \$4.70. He also insured that Ice would be celebrating his 35th birthday Saturday in style. Ice, a native of East Liverpool, Ohio, has only been training horses on his own for a little more than a year, won his first Triple Crown race in his second start.

He ran Summer Bird in the Kentucky Derby and he finished sixth, beaten 13 lengths at odds of 43-1. But Ice didn't lose faith in his colt and brought him right to Belmont, where he had two workouts and had plenty of time to get used to the new surroundings.

He also got a new rider in Desormeaux, who had been living his own private Belmont agony with six mounts and no wins in New York's biggest race. And two of the losses came with a Triple

Crown on the line. He rode Real Quiet in 1998 and lost the Belmont by a nose to Victory Gallop and then he was on the heavily favored Big Brown last year only to have to ease him in the stretch.

"Last year, it was like swallowing a spoon sideways," Desormeaux said of Big Brown's embarrassing defeat. "Tim had this horse breathing fire today."

Summer Bird, like Mine That Bird, is a son of 2004 Belmont winner Birdstone. After a mile in the race, he had one horse beaten but Desormeaux could feel he had plenty of horse. However, when he saw Mine That Bird making his move ahead of him, Desormeaux was concerned.

The colt eased those doubts when he unleashed a powerful kick into the stretch. While Mine That Bird's stride began to shorten late, Summer Bird's got stronger with every step he took.

"When Summer Bird made that move on the turn," said jockey Edgar Prado, who rode Mr. Hot Stuff, "no one was going to catch him."

The other major disappointment in the race belonged to Charitable Man, who was unbeaten (2-for-2) at Belmont but finished a non-threatening fourth.

Ice said the colt will be

sent back to his home base in Louisiana before he and owners — retired doctors K.K. Jayaraman and his wife Vilasini. — make a decision on what's next.

"I'm just still taking this all on," said Ice, who was an assistant for 15 years for three trainers — including Desormeaux's brother Keith — in Louisiana before going out on his own. "Right now, I've got a Belmont win and no one can take that away from me."

The Triple Crown season ended the way it started — with an upset. Mine That Bird was all but discounted in the Derby, but won at 50-1 odds — and his 6 1/2-length winning margin was the largest in 63 years.

Two weeks later, Borel was obligated to ride Rachel Alexandra in the Preakness for new owner Jess Jackson, and the filly beat Mine That Bird by a length.

"He might have been a hair higher today coming in here, just a little more amped up," Mine That Bird trainer Chip Woolley said, "but overall he was the same horse I led up in the Derby. He ran a great race and just got beat."

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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