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Thursday, Oct 14, 2004

San Francisco 49ers

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Posted on Mon, Oct. 04, 2004

York and Donahue lead team further astray with each week

By **Tim Kawakami**
Mercury News

Now it's not only salary-cap hell for the 49ers. It's hell, period.

Hot flames and bitter wind. Lost souls, pitchforks and eternal damnation, or the closest cursed approximation the NFL offers.

Welcome to Monster Park, the new coliseum of the doomed.

This used to be where Joe Montana, Bill Walsh, Ronnie Lott and Jerry Rice made history and created a virtual NFL Eden by the Bay.

And, certified by Sunday night's desolate 24-14 loss to the St. Louis Rams, now it's home to the wretched, the pitied and the accumulated football sins of John York and Terry Donahue, who have meant well but led poorly.

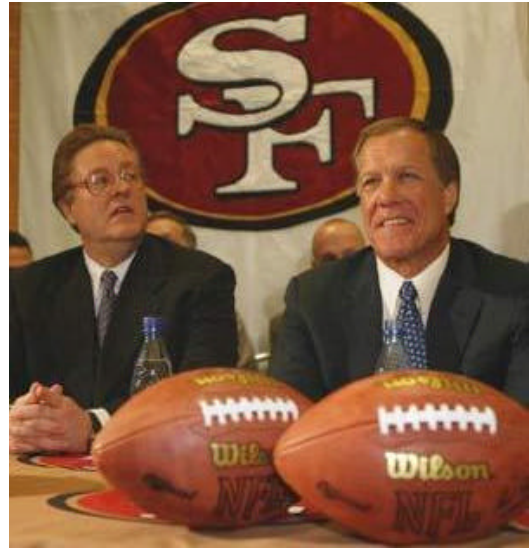
Now it's the home of a team that might not win a game.

``The frustrating thing is knowing that we're so much better than we're showing on the field," veteran fullback Fred Beasley said. ``And to be 0-4 . . . It hurts when we can't show it."

All due respect to Beasley, but the most painful thing might be something far worse: Maybe the last two horrendous defeats, including last Sunday's 34-0 loss to Seattle, are true indicators of who the 49ers have become, how lost they are and how far away they are from rising again.

The 49ers deserve to be 0-4 not only because they got stomped up, cut to pieces and gobbled up by a very mediocre Rams team. The 49ers deserve to be 0-4 not

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Dr. John York (49ers Director/Owner's representative) and Terry Donahue (49ers General Manager) have presided over the decline of the 49ers. **[Week 4 game photos](#)**

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only because they went into the fourth quarter without a score, extending their scoreless streak to seven quarters, an unheard-of statistic in the modern age of 49er-dom.

They deserve to be ranked at the bottom of the league because that's exactly where York's vision and Donahue's decisions have driven them.

What's wrong? "I couldn't tell you, man," Beasley said. "We go into every game with a plan of what we're going to do, and it always backfires."

York and Donahue, as we know, are committed to each other and committed to fiscal sanity and the acquisition of young talent.

Everybody knew this year was going to be tough after the 49ers discarded Terrell Owens, Jeff Garcia, Garrison Hearst and others.

But it should not have been this bad. There is no way anybody should do anything to an NFL franchise that produces football this bad, where an irrelevant fourth-quarter touchdown pass from Tim Rattay to Curtis Conway causes a mini-burst of jubilation on the 49ers sideline.

The shutout was prevented. But the lights were still shut out.

"I don't think I've ever celebrated scoring like that in a situation like that," Coach Dennis Erickson said. "I'm just happy we started moving the football and got some positive things going in the second half."

Beasley, who joined the 49ers back when they were still thinking of winning titles, just shook his head when the shutout-buster was mentioned. No, he was not going to celebrate a score that made it 24-6 that came after seven quarters of silence.

"All that matters is winning," Beasley said. "Scoring a touchdown is meaningless if we don't get a victory."

It does go back to York and Donahue, two men who are not clueless or evil but who seem to bring out the worst tendencies in each other.

York is a businessman who likes to hear his own opinions validated by his employees, and Donahue is very good at making sure his boss feels validated.

Together, they wanted to make the 49ers younger and faster, and they wanted to get far away from the Eddie DeBartolo-Carmen Policy era. Walsh's time as general manager under York was the bridge from era to era.

Together, York and Donahue have done some smart and necessary things to fix the 49ers' bloated salary structure and get a draft system in place.

But in the past two weeks, it has all fallen apart the way things always fall apart when upper management has lost its way.

On Sunday, every failure piled on top of the next, hopelessly higher and higher, until almost everything positive was obscured:

There's no new stadium, they have no dominant players, no inspiring personalities, no credible direction and, for the longest time, no points.

Recent first-round picks Rashaun Woods (who got his first catch and first touchdown reception in the late going Sunday), Kwame Harris, Mike Rumph (who broke his arm) and Andre Carter (who did not suit up yet again with a back problem) have not yet proven to be reliably productive.

The defensive line is a black hole. Donahue continues to constantly shuffle the deck from week to week on the waiver wire, and the result is that the linemen are too light, too brittle, too little, too late.

On Sunday, Rams Coach Mike Martz, who is famously disdainful of the run, called 36 running plays, which gained 174 yards, including 121 by Marshall Faulk.

It's York and Donahue. Donahue and York.

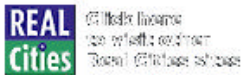
There is nowhere to point but at these two men, who remain unable to put a team on the field that can compete, win or score intermittently.

But York and Donahue were not available to discuss any of those issues, or any issue at all, after the game.

They were invisible, so we had to assume they were letting the score, and the 0-4 record, talk for them.

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