

## Saints' victory over Cowboys revives fond memories of WFL

Written by Jerry Byrd

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After last week's 34-31 overtime loss to the New Orleans Saints, the Dallas Cowboys find themselves in a familiar position going into the final week of the regular season.

Win or go home.

The Cowboys face the Washington Redskins in Washington Sunday night with the NFC East title on the line.

With a loss, the Cowboys will finish 8-8 and miss the playoffs for the second straight year in Jason Garrett's second full year as head coach.

The first time I saw Garrett, he was 8 years old and he was standing behind his father, Jim Garrett, in the lobby of a Birmingham, Ala., hotel on Sept. 18, 1974, while his daddy was telling his Houston Texans (who had just been moved to Shreveport by the World Football League) to check out the situation before moving to a "rinky dink place like Shreveport."

I was the sports editor of the Shreveport Journal at that time, and had flown to Birmingham to cover "our" team as soon as I learned of the move. Garrett was suspended by WFL commissioner Gary Davidson and former Saints assistant coach Henry Lee Parker, the WFL director of football operations, flew to Birmingham for a one-night stand as head coach and named Marshall Taylor the head coach a few days later, probably because he was the only assistant who didn't have long-standing ties to Garrett.

"They can list all the reasons not to play on one side, and reasons they should play on the other," Parker said. "And the reasons they should play will be longer. If they play, they might be paid."

The folks at Legion Field in Birmingham didn't know what to call the visiting team, so they put "Louisiana" on the scoreboard. Birmingham won the game, 42-14, but when Birmingham came to Shreveport later in the season, Taylor's Shreveport Steamer turned the Birmingham Americans every which way but loose, 31-0. Former Boston Patriots and Syracuse fullback Jim Nance ran for 126 yards and Paul Gipson ran for 117, and quarterback David Mays passed for 137 as the Steamer out-gained Birmingham 529 yards to 149.

Financially, there is no comparison. No matter how badly they are playing, the Cowboys are making plenty of money. So are the Saints, and every other NFL team. But that wasn't the case in the first and only WFL season. "There are some men on this team who don't have enough money in their pockets to buy a cup of coffee, who don't know how they're going to get home," Taylor said of the Steamer players. "But they stuck in out."

"These guys paid the price," said former Boston Patriots and Syracuse fullback Jim Nance.

"Some of them are going to lose cars, houses...but we've done our part."

Up to the end, Taylor was confident that the WFL would find ways to make it go. But then he got the message from commissioner Chris Hemmeter on the telex from league headquarters. "The World Football League announced today it has terminated operations." There were a few more paragraphs, but they didn't matter. For the Shreveport Steamer and all of the other WFL teams, it was the end of the World.

That won't happen with the National Football League. Teams will come and go, rise and fall, but the league will go on.

Jerry Byrd is the former sports editor of the Bossier Press-Tribune and an award-winning columnist. Check out a few hundred of his columns on [www.jerrybyrd.com](http://www.jerrybyrd.com). You can contact him by E-mail at [jbsportswriter@comcast.net](mailto:jbsportswriter@comcast.net)

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