

1-29-1992

Super Bowl Disappointment Again - Michelle Akers UCF and USA Soccer Superstar

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Recommended Citation

Crepeau, Richard C., "Super Bowl Disappointment Again - Michelle Akers UCF and USA Soccer Superstar" (1992). *On Sport and Society*. 221.
<https://stars.library.ucf.edu/onsportandsociety/221>

SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE
January 29, 1992

It was one more of those Super Sundays that seemed to fall short of expectations. But then most have. And more to the point, with all the hype, how could it be any other way?

The dismantling of the Buffalo Bills by the Washington Redskins last Sunday in Super Bowl XXVI, or 26 for those non-Romans out there, was by most accounts not a very Super game. But let me dissent slightly from that view. First, if you are a Washington Redskin fan it was a Super Sunday.

But even if you are not a Skins Fan there was much to admire in this game. First, the preparation by Joe Gibbs and the Redskins coaching staff was near perfect. The Washington defense totally shut down one of the strongest offenses in professional football. Thurman Thomas and Andre Reed were made to disappear as offensive factors for the Bills, and Jim Kelly was a man under seige most of the day. The play of Darrell Green, Wilbur Marshall, and a host of other Washington defenders was among the best you will ever see. It was a Super Defense for the Super Bowl.

The Washington offense, after a slow start, were in high gear very quickly. They scored 17 points in the first half, all in the second quarter, and would have had more had the officials not called back one touchdown in the first quarter. Once Mark Rypien and the Washington coaches got a look at the Buffalo defense there were no mysteries. The key was the offensive line who performed about as well as an offensive line could. They were blowing the Buffalo defense two and three yards back on each play, and totally frustrating the Bills pass-rushers who tried in vain to reach Rypien.

The great play of the offensive line was in part a reaction to having been described as lard butts by one of the Buffalo defensive coaches. The Skins ran and passed nearly at will, and the Buffalo defense looked in turn confused, frustrated, and overpowered. This was a Super offensive performance for Super Sunday.

This was not a close game, nor was it a boring game. For those who like to see something near perfection in sport this game had it. The Washington Redskins are one of best teams to ever win the Super Bowl, and Joe Gibbs now joins the elite of the NFL coaching ranks. In that respect at least, it was a Super Sunday.

The Super Bowl has more than its share of hyperbole. Tomorrow at the UCF Arena all the superlatives one can think of would not be hyperbolic, at least not at half-time when Michelle Akers-Stahl is honored by having her sweater and number retired. Those who follow UCF soccer, or who read the news of the United States Women's Soccer team winning the World Championship will recognize the name. She is the World's Greatest Woman Soccer player. She was MVP of the World Tournament, scored ten goals, including both goals in the U.S. 2-1 victory in the final over Norway.

Some in Central Florida and the UCF community will remember Michelle Akers as the greatest athlete in the history of the University, and the first World Class athlete to attend UCF. She earned All-America honors in 1984, '86, '87, and '88, missing the 1985 season with a bad knee.

I remember very well the first time I saw her out on the soccer field in action. One look, and you knew that you were watching a world class athlete. Her body, especially her legs, were long and muscular, built for both power and speed. Built for soccer. Her body control was a thing of beauty, as she moved this way and that with ease, and even moved more than one way at once. Her intensity was beyond anything you would normally see in a college athlete, and she radiated confidence. She saw the entire field, seemed to know where everyone was and more amazingly where everyone was going to be, and she could spot the ball on a dime.

Grace, beauty, confidence, intensity, power, vision, speed, presence, all those marks of a truly great athlete were obvious as soon as you saw Michelle Akers glide across the grass, cut to goal, and slam the ball past the goalie. I know I have never seen a better athlete in action, and I have seen only a very few as good.

But don't take my word for it. The great Pele after watching Michelle at the World Championships said, "I like her because she is intelligent, has presence of mind, and is often in the right position. She's fantastic." She is also the Pele of Women's soccer.

In addition to her MVP at the World Championship, Michelle received the Golden Boot Award as leading scorer of the tournament. At UCF she holds numerous records including career goals -52, career assists-30, career points -134. In 1988 she

received the Heisman trophy of Women's Soccer, the first ever Hermann Award, and the Addis/ISAA player of the year. She was Soccer America's Player of the Year in 1987, and was also named ESPN's Woman Athlete of the Year.

Unlike most World Class Athletes Michelle Akers-Stahl has not become a millionarie. But she has made good use of her talents to earn a degree, travel the world, and continue to compete. Now at age 25 having undergone seven arthroscopic knee operations in the last seven years, she continues to play at the top of her chosen game. She plays because she loves the game, and no doubt because she loves the feeling of those near perfect moments that come to athletes of her talent and skill. She plays without lawyers or agents. What a wonderful story.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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