Football 1976-86

In early 1976, Nevada-Las Vegas offered head football coach Tony Knap a package he couldn't refuse. That lured the popular Knap away and left BSU looking for a new coach for the first time since becoming a four-year school. Enter Jim Criner, an assistant under Dick Vermeil for Rose Bowl champion UCLA.

Thus began Criner's career as head football coach at BSU. The first season started on a frustrating note as players adjusted to a new system. The team posted a 5-5-1 record. The Broncos switched from Knap's wide open passing attack to a tailback-oriented I-formation attack on offense, and Fred Goode became Boise State's record holder for most yards gained in a single season (716). A sophomore, Goode surpassed the old single-season mark set by Abe Brown in 1969. Dee Pickett and Greg Stern quarterbacked the Broncos, aided by Terry Hutt, Mike Holton and Mitch Britzman and key defensive players Sam Miller, Chris Malmgren, Vince Mendiola, Lester McNealy, Ken West, Kirk Strawser, Kauhi Hookano and Gary Rosolowich.

The year began auspiciously with a game-opening 100-yard kickoff return by Idaho. The Broncos and Vandals played to a standoff after that. Goode rambled for 146 yards, but Idaho prevailed 16-9. However, the season finished with signs of things to come, as the Broncos blanked Idaho State 36-0 and pounded Weber State 56-31.

In 1977, the Bronco football team won the Big Sky with a 6-0 record and went 9-2 overall. In the season's third game, Knap returned to Bronco Stadium as Nevada-Las Vegas' coach, but the Broncos ambushed the Rebels 45-14 in what would be the final meeting between the two schools. Other highlights of that banner year included a 26-0 shutout of defending national champion Montana State, and a 23-16 road win at Utah State. The Broncos would have received a Division II playoff bid, but a scheduling conflict prevented them from going. On the opening day of the playoffs, the Broncos were playing the University of Idaho in Moscow, and they annihilated the Vandals 44-14. Cedric Minter, Terry Zahner and Goode rushed for a combined total of 2,185 yards for the season. Minter broke Goode's single-season rushing mark with 877 yards, and Zahner recorded BSU's first-ever 200-yard game. Meanwhile, Terry Hutt notched a 1,000-yard season in receiving, and Malmgren was named Big Sky Defensive Player of the Year.

The 1978 team went 7-4 and received the first KID Gem State Trophy as the winner of the in-state football games over the University of Idaho and Idaho State University. The award originated at KID-TV in Idaho Falls and was presented to BSU after the Broncos defeated Idaho State 16-14 and the University of Idaho, 48-10. Boise State also went undefeated in three matchups with Division I-A schools from the Pacific Coast Athletic Association (later to become the Big West), highlighted by a 30-15 upset of San Jose State. But a season-
ending injury in the fifth game to leading receiver Lonnie Hughes took away BSU's passing game and its Big Sky title hopes.

Minter ended up carrying the load, setting a Big Sky single-season rushing record with 1,526 yards. BSU's star corps of linebackers, Bob Macauley, Willie Beamon, Larry Lewis and Larry Polowski, combined for 394 tackles. Macauley earned Big Sky Defensive Player of the Year honors, while Beamon and Polowski were drafted into the NFL.

The 1978 season ended with a crisis caused by an illegal scouting incident at Northern Arizona. After Criner admitted to using poor judgment in the infraction, the Broncos had to play the 1979 season on Big Sky probation and without the help of game films. They were ineligible for the conference title and any postseason play. In spite of these handicaps, the team turned in one of its best seasons ever, with a 10-1 record (7-0 in the Big Sky). Led offensively by Zahner, Minter, David Hughes, Notre Dame transfer Kipp Bedard and JC transfer quarterback Joe Aliotti, the Broncos showed no mercy to their opponents during the season. The Broncos narrowly lost their first game to Long Beach State by a score of 9-7, but they reeled off 10 straight wins after that, including two squeakers on the road, 37-35 at Montana and 28-27 at Nevada-Reno.

The steamroller became a runaway in midseason with dominating back-to-back wins over Idaho (41-17) and Idaho State (44-0). Minter turned in his second straight 1,000-yard season, and Aliotti was the picture of efficiency, setting a BSU record with his completion percentage of almost 66 percent. Fans swore Aliotti had eyes in the back of his head, as his ability to dodge oncoming pass rushers resulted in numerous big plays. The Broncos considered the regular season finale against Cal Poly-San Luis Obispo as their own bowl game, pasting the Mustangs 56-14.

The 1979 Bronco squad had a defense that held opponents to only 12.7 points per game. The defense consisted of Randy Trautman, Willie Tufono, Doug Scott, Steve Sosnowski, Chris Bell, Curt Chandler, Randy Stewart, Ralph Esposito, Ron Chatterton, Dan Williams, Rick Woods and Ray Santucci. Santucci racked up 160 tackles on the season.

The Broncos returned to the turf in 1980 with a fierce determination to earn what was denied them in the 1979 season—a Big Sky title and a playoff bid. The outstanding backfield of Hughes, Minter, Zahner and Aliotti was called "The Four Horsemen" after the legendary backfield at Notre Dame. Led by Williams, Bell, Santucci, Trautman, Esposito, Dan Brown, Mike Bradeson, and the "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid" duo of Rick Woods and Larry Alder, the defense made the difference in many victories.

The Broncos got off to a tremendous start with a surprising 28-7 victory over Division 1-A University of Utah. The night belonged to Zahner as he rushed for 113 yards and scored two touchdowns. Aliotti proved effective in the air and on the ground. Dan Williams had 15 tackles against the Utes. More than 3,000 Bronco fans made the trip and witnessed a solid offensive performance and an outstanding defensive effort. With that enormously satisfying win, the 1980 Broncos were in the chase and returned supremely confident from their Salt
Lake City conquest.
Perhaps the first game was too easy, or maybe the Southeastern Louisiana Lions were just too good. Whatever the reason, the Broncos fell to the Lions 17-13 within the friendly confines of Bronco Stadium. The next weekend the Broncos met the Northern Arizona Lumberjacks on the road. In a down-to-the-wire 20-18 victory, Minter garnered 171 yards rushing.

The Broncos were on the road again the following week to confront the always-tough Montana State Bobcats. Again, the Broncos found the going tough at Reno H. Sales Stadium, and they fell behind at halftime 10-0. The third quarter belonged to the Broncos as Minter scored on an 18-yard touchdown run. In the fourth quarter, Zahner scored from two yards out to make it 14-10, BSU. Kenrick Camerud seemed to assure victory by kicking a 41-yard field goal to give BSU a 17-10 lead with five minutes remaining in the game. But led by quarterback Barry Sullivan, MSU drove 74 yards and scored. The touchdown was followed by a 2-point conversion, and the Broncos lost a heartbreaker 18-17.

The stunned Broncos had lost two of their first four games. Some folks saw BSU hopes for a playoff berth dimmed by the losses. However, an emotional postgame team meeting in Bozeman ignited a five-game winning streak. Once again, fans jammed the Student Union Ballroom for the BAA noon luncheons with Coach Criner and the players he brought with him. Bronco fever ran high! BSU downed Montana 44-10 and followed that with a showdown against Idaho and its new number nine ranking. A record crowd of 21,812 filed in to watch. But it was all Broncos, as Minter scored four touchdowns and went over the 4,000-yard mark in career rushing. The final: Boise State 44, Idaho 21.

Next came victories over Cal State-Fullerton (26-11) and Weber State (24-0), setting up another showdown, this one against Nevada-Reno. Division I-AA’s top two running backs, Minter and UNR’s Frank Hawkins,
squared off before another full house in Bronco Stadium. Minter won another battle with a big assist from the BSU defense, and the Broncos prevailed 14-3.

The squad then headed to Cal Poly-San Luis Obispo, but its collective mind was on a trip to Pocatello the following week for the game that would decide the Big Sky championship. The result was a stunning 23-20 upset on a last-minute field goal by the Mustangs, the eventual Division II national champions. So the journey to the Minidome was for redemption as well as a conference title. The Broncos were facing the rejuvenated Idaho State Bengals under first-year coach Dave Kragthorpe. But BSU kept ISU at arm's length in a total team effort and the Broncos notched a 22-13 win and the Big Sky championship.

The Broncos were granted a home game in the first round of the NCAA Division I-AA playoffs, and they drew the powerful Grambling Tigers. On Sunday, December 7, 1980, Jim Poore reported in "The
It's showdown time for BSU, Grambling

By Jim Poore

The nervous speculation on both sides comes to an end today when Boise State and Grambling — two strangers to each other on the football field — square off in the Tournament of the NCAA's Division I-AA football playoffs.

A kickoff for the nationally televised game is scheduled for 11:37 a.m. — not 11:30, but 11:37 — at Bronco Stadium. While the game won't be a sellout, between 10,000 and 12,000 fans — a Division I-AA playoff record — are expected to file into Bronco Stadium for the game.

There are still approximately 1,000 tickets remaining, and Boise State officials said they would go on sale today at 8 a.m. at the Varsity Center.

Because the game isn't a sellout, APS will cover the cost. The game will be

Idaho Statesman that it was snowing in Boise that day and "my right knee" predicts that it "will be much colder" on game day. On Monday, the BAA fans at the noon luncheon enjoyed a telephone conference call with longtime Grambling coach Eddie Robinson. Excitement ran high as people braved the cold and stood in long lines to buy tickets. One of the best football players in the country, Trumaine Johnson, and one of the winningest coaches in college football history, Eddie Robinson, were coming to town!

December 13 dawned cold, frosty and gray. By noon, the stadium began to fill. The boisterous crowd reacted as the Tigers' "Trees of Terror" pranced onto the turf. The story of the Grambling giants insulting the slim-and-trim Broncos at the Friday night team dinner added to the intensity. Poore reported that "Grambling coach Eddie Robinson watched his team spring to an early 7-0 lead behind a darting running game and then fall victim to fumbles (four), pass interceptions (three), and a Boise State defense that rose like some great wall once the Tigers neared the goal line."

Then, the Four Horsemen took control. The Broncos' first touchdown came on an Aliotti 31-yard pass to Minter in the second quarter. With Hughes chalking up crucially needed first downs, Aliotti teamed with Zahner on a flea-flicker to split end Kipp Bedard in the fourth quarter to give the Broncos the winning edge.

Late in the fourth quarter, the weather was still foggy and cold; the Broncos and their fans relaxed and enjoyed the awful weather. The discomfort of mighty Grambling was obvious as the defensive wall of the Broncos held the Tigers' last surge just yards from scoring, preserving the Bronco 14-9 win.

Credit went to the stalwart play of the defense as linebacker Dan Brown led the Broncos with 13 tackles, while Williams, Dan Lukehart, Larry Lewis and Chatterton had eight each. Michel Bourgeau, Trautman and Esposito each had seven, and Jeff Turpin, Mike Bradeson and Santucci had six each. Woods, Alder and the rest of the BSU secondary clamped down on Trumaine Johnson and Jerry Gordon. Grambling threw for only 41 yards in the game, and quarterback Mike Williams never hooked up with his great receivers. The Broncos had earned a ticket to the Division I-AA national championship game.
December of 1980 remains among the crown jewels of all months in BSU athletic history. Several things happened that have not happened since.

The Broncos had won the Big Sky title after a roller coaster 8-3 season. And they were finally back in postseason play.

On December 13, Boise State edged heavily favored Grambling 14-9 in what is still considered the most exciting game ever played in Bronco Stadium. Certainly, it featured the loudest crowd of all time. The attendance of 17,300 seemed like 70,000 to Grambling. It was an amazing turnout on a most inhospitable day.

The sunny, 40-degree weather of the previous two days disappeared for this semifinal matchup in the NCAA Division 1-AA playoffs. The Treasure Valley was enshrouded in fog. Hoarfrost painted the trees along the Boise River beyond the stadium's north end zone. In fact, to some extent, the field was painted with hoarfrost and fans could barely make out the light towers on the opposite side of the stadium.

Over the years, the temperature at game time has dropped as the story of this game has been told and retold. The official reading was 28 degrees. That is not bad for a walk around the block, but it is pretty nippy for spending three hours outside sitting on metal bleachers.

However, to the Broncos, this day was tailor-made. It is not that BSU was any more accustomed to playing in this weather than Grambling, but, Grambling did not know that. The Broncos were handed a tremendous psychological advantage. Coach Jim Criner and his staff had worked on the weather angle all week. Final exams had just ended, so the team was able to practice at 11 a.m. each day to mirror Saturday's kickoff time accommodating ABC-TV's regional telecast. Many of the players were shirtless by the end of practice, adopting the frigid weather as their own.

The better, stronger Tigers arrived thinking only of how badly they were going to beat the little Broncos. The boasts were relayed to fans and BSU players via TV, radio and the newspapers.

By game time, all Grambling players could think about was the cold. It just looked cold out there — that light gray fog, the frosted trees, even the white uniforms worn by the Broncos. (The Tigers, given the option, chose to wear their home jerseys.)

Grambling's big guns were quarterback Mike Williams, brother of NFL quarterback Doug Williams, All-American wide receiver Trumaine Johnson and future...
Dallas Cowboy defensive back Everson Walls. It would not be their day. The psychological edge took effect early in the game. The Tigers dominated the Broncos in the first quarter, bulldozing BSU on their second possession with a 59-yard touchdown drive.

Grambling, consumed with thoughts of that cold, hard pigskin, let the ball get away three times in the first half. Two of the fumbles were by Johnson. Although the BSU offense was smothered by the Tigers, late in the half they did cash in on one of the Bronco defense's takeaways. A scrambling Joe Aliotti found tailback Cedric Minter alone 31 yards away in the end zone to knot the game at 7-all.

Most of the third quarter was spent on Boise State's side of the 50-yard line, as the Bronco defense turned back threat upon threat while the offense merely survived.

Then the third period ended, and the stadium erupted. It was a moral victory. Yes — the Broncos were still tied with Grambling and its legendary coach, Eddie Robinson. A sudden surge of confidence bulged every stocking cap and blue helmet. On the second play of the fourth quarter, Aliotti handed off to tailback Terry Zahner. The Tigers squeezed in to play the run. Zahner tossed back to Aliotti, and there he was — wide receiver Kipp Bedard all alone downfield. Bedard caught Aliotti's pass at the 20. Walls caught Bedard at the 10, and Bedard carried him into the end zone to complete a 63-yard scoring play. Suddenly it was Boise State 14, Grambling 7.

I was handling the stadium announcing at that time, and from that touchdown on, I would have been better off in the stands. No one could hear the public address system over the incredible roar.

Grambling appealed to the officials to quiet the crowd — this from a team that two weeks earlier had played rival Southern University before a full house at the Superdome in New Orleans. BSU was penalized for delay of game. Still the Broncos played the rest of the contest with their backs to the wall. Twice the Tigers were inside the BSU 10; twice they were repelled.

With 38 seconds left, Aliotti danced out of the back of his own end zone, taking an intentional safety to give the BSU defense better field position. Trailing now 14-9, Grambling would still need a touchdown to win. But Rick Woods ended the game with an interception. Grambling had dominated in first downs, 21 to 11. Grambling had rushed for over 300 yards. Grambling had held the Broncos to 228 total yards. But the Broncos were going to Sacramento with its 50-degree "heat."

On December 18, after a cross-country call to wish my parents a happy 32nd anniversary, I boarded the United flight to San Francisco with the team and other members of the media. With the Camellia Bowl game between BSU and Eastern Kentucky approaching, one can imagine the serious conversations taking place between the players.

At about 35,000 feet, I received a tap on the shoulder from behind. In the next row back were

**THOSE WHO STAY... WILL BE NATIONAL CHAMPIONS**
Minter, freshman Jeff Caves and sophomore Ron Harvey.

"You've always had a moustache, haven't you?" asked Minter.

"No, I've only had this one a year and a half. My first year on TV I didn't have one," I replied.

"Hmm. I don't remember you without the moustache," said Minter. "I can't imagine you without one.

"Tell you what, Cedric," I said. "If you guys win the national championship Saturday, I'll shave it off."

"Deal," said Minter.

Knowing that something so insignificant as my moustache would be the farthest thing from the players' minds, I dismissed the entire conversation from my mind.

December 29 dawned in Sacramento much the way December 13 had dawned in Boise. It was foggy, but it was 20 degrees warmer. The field at Hughes Stadium was in poor condition from the wide array of high school and junior college games played there during the fall. But a little paint from the creative grounds crew made it look as green as possible for ABC's national telecast.

The game was a donnybrook, aslugfest, a classic. The first half was dominated by defense with Boise State taking a 14-10 lead at intermission. Allotti lofted a 5-yard fade pass to Bedard for one score, and fullback David Hughes plunged in for the other from a yard out.

The BSU offense came out firing in the third period and gobbled up huge chunks of yardage on the way to a 24-16 lead. Minter scored on a 1-yard run, and Kenrick Camerud kicked a 24-yard field goal. By this time Hughes Stadium was bathed in sunlight, which may have been seen as a bad sign for the fog-loving Broncos.

Eastern Kentucky pulled out all the stops. First, the Colonels intercepted a pass and scored after a short 14-yard drive to narrow the gap to 24-22. With three minutes left, BSU stopped a fake field goal attempt by EKU. But with 55 seconds remaining,

**1980 Championship Team**

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<th>No.</th>
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disaster struck. "Woody!" screamed free safety Larry Alder to Woods as the ball sailed over their heads and into the hands of David Booze. Suddenly, it was 29-24, EKU. This was it for the BSU seniors — 55 seconds remaining in their careers. They had endured a national championship-caliber 1979 season that saw them banished from Big Sky title contention and postseason play by probation for an illegal scouting incident in 1978. They considered the 1980 title their destiny, and it was about to slip away.

Aliotti, limping noticeably from an ankle injury suffered the previous week, went to work with favorite receiver Bedard. Consecutive passes of 19, 13 and 34 yards swiftly took the Broncos from their own 20 to the EKU 14 with 35 seconds still remaining.

Then — three straight incompletions. BSU faced fourth and 10 with 20 seconds left.

Aliotti dropped back to pass, and EKU's star noseguard Buddy Moore came charging through. But Moore slipped on the loose turf and fell, and Aliotti used the purchased time to scramble far to the right. He looked and looked and looked, and he let fly, hoping his career-high day would end at 358 yards instead of 344.

Attention turned to the ball's destination: a finally open Duane Dlouhy in the left corner of the end zone. Catch made — 31-29. National championship secured, with 12 seconds to spare.

As Eastern Kentucky lined up for its final last-gasp play, I looked over at the Boise State bench. Sitting together were Aliotti, Minter, Hughes and Zahner, touted that season as BSU's "Four Horsemen" backfield. They tried to hold back the tears as they spent their final triumphant seconds in uniform together.

The wild celebration on the field was followed by a celebration at the Sacramento establishment run by linebacker Ray Santucci's mother. Minter found me. "OK, Tom, what about that moustache now?" "Oh very funny — ha ha ha. Hey, that was a whale of a game today," I said, quickly diverting the subject to the 199 all-purpose yards he had rolled up in the game that afternoon. "What I really felt good about was my blocking," he said. Vintage Cedric Minter.

Two nights later, everybody was back in Boise. A huge airport crowd had welcomed the team home, and the salutes to the new national champions continued to run strong. I had just finished my 6 p.m. TV sportscast, and we were in a commercial break. The studio door opened, and in walked Criner, Bedard, and Minter to be interviewed on the "Treasure Valley Tonight" talk show that followed our newscast. A grinning Minter pointed emphatically to his moustache.


When the commercial break ended, Brock seized the moment. "Tom, I understand that you promised Cedric Minter you'd shave off your moustache if they won the championship game." I looked blankly at her. I looked blankly at the camera. "Well, uh, we were just, uh, joking around on the plane down and uh..." I stammered.

The damage was done. The next evening I was bare-lipped, and I stayed that way until a year later when Minter returned from his first season with the CFL's Toronto Argonauts. He mercifully gave me "permission" to grow it back. For good!
The defending national football champions had another sterling season in 1981. The team was again 10-3 on the season and 6-1 in the Big Sky. The Broncos started out with three home games, defeating Bobby Hebert and the Northwestern State of Louisiana Demons 32-20 and the Rhode Island Rams 33-8, but losing in their first conference game against Idaho State, 21-10, BSU's first loss to ISU in 10 years. Quarterback Tim Klena guided the Broncos back into the win column against Northern Arizona, but broke his thumb a week later in the first quarter at Montana. That brought untested French-Canadian quarterback Gerald DesPres off the bench for the next five weeks.

But Boise State kept winning as DesPres received great support from a running game that featured sophomore Rodney Webster, who amassed 1,139 yards on the season. The Broncos carried an 8-2 record into the Kibbie Dome for the

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**In Any Language, DesPres Saved the Day**

*By Jim Poore*

*The Idaho Statesman*

Gerald DesPres, Boise State's newest Canadian Rifle—Eric Guthrie quarterback of the 1971 Camellia Bowl team was the other—was ready to talk. But somebody thought it might be wise if his United Nations interpreter was by his side. So the call went out for Michel Bourgeau. DesPres is no dummy. He's not shy and he doesn't shun interviews. You take him to McDonald's and he could order "one large cheeseburger" with the best of French-speaking tourists. It's just that right now he needs an interpreter for the heavy stuff. "Bourgeau, Bourgeau, where's Bourgeau?" the cry went out among DesPres' Boise State teammates when it was known the press wanted to talk to the new Boise State quarterback.

If he were holding court in his Quebec homeland, his answers would have been a symphony of flowing French. But he wasn't at home; he was in the University of Montana locker room and he was fresh from leading BSU to its 27-13 Big Sky victory over the Grizzlies.

"Every chance we have, we talk," said Bourgeau, Boise State's 6'4, 240 pound noseguard. "We're both French and language is very important to us. I'm glad to have Gerald up here. We can get down together and talk." Most of the time when they talk football, it's been about Bourgeau's exploits at noseguard. Just a month ago, DesPres was Boise State's fourth-string quarterback. Saturday afternoon, DesPres found himself the team's No. 1 quarterback when Tim Klena injured his right thumb. Klena flew to Boise Saturday night to have the thumb X-rayed.

But against Montana it was apparent that when DesPres spoke, this time everybody—and not just Bourgeau—listened. Sometimes what they heard didn't make sense, like the first series of 1-2, 1-2, but then a protective player stepped in to help him out a bit. If it was Bill Murray playing the role B.D. in *Doomesbury Joins the Big Sky* it would have been funny. But DesPres was dead serious. After all, he wasn't getting his experience in the fourth quarter with the Broncos way ahead. He was getting on the job training on the initial road trip this fall.

"Sometimes I got in game, I not remember," DesPres said, on his own without Bourgeau's help. "I call a play, 27 C. A player (Dennis Brady) said to me, 'This is not a good play,' and he say, 'Change it for an audible.'"

Only when DesPres says "audible" it comes out "hodiele." "I change it and it was a good play," DesPres continued. "We get first down."

DesPres admits that playing football in English while thinking French presents difficulties. "It's tough learning system here. I
final game of the regular season, needing a win over Idaho for another Division I-AA playoff bid. Klena returned to the lineup impressively, completing 19 of 32 passes for 334 yards. Most of the hookups were to wide receiver Kipp Bedard, who moved through Idaho's various coverages for 11 catches, 206 yards, and two touchdowns. With the help of Bedard, Klena, and a school-record 100-yard kickoff return by John Broadous, BSU burst out to a 35-14 lead — then held on for an exhausting 45-43 decision, the Broncos' fifth straight win over the Vandals.

Bedard's 206 receiving yards gave him a total of 1,108 for the year and set a single-season record, breaking Mike Holton's mark of 1,060 yards, set by the former Borah star in 1974.

Ray Santucci, the senior from Concord, California, became BSU's leading career tackler in the Vandal game with 10 stops, giving him 332 for his career. Early in the second-half of the game, Santucci passed Doug Scott's old mark of 325.

The Broncos thus moved on to the NCAA 1981 quarterfinals, where they defeated Jackson State in Mississippi, 19-7. The game was a perfect effort by BSU. The Broncos scored on their first possession behind Klena, who moved the Broncos 81 yards in nine plays, with
Rodney Webster picking up 49 yards on the ground. Robert Farmer secured the touchdown on a 1-yard plunge.

The Broncos later took advantage of the first of five Jackson State fumbles in the first half when cornerback Curt Wardhaugh recovered a mishandled Tiger punt at the BSU 48. Klena hit three straight passes to Bedard and Ron Harvey to move the Broncos to the Jackson State 12-yard line. John Broadous then took the ball in from the 12 on a sweep.

Jackson State's lone touchdown came in its first possession in the second half. From then until the middle of the fourth quarter, the game became a defensive struggle. With 10 minutes remaining, Bronco Dave Blackburn downed a punt on the one-foot line, and on the Tigers' first play, linebacker Dan LeBeau dropped Keith Taylor in the end zone for a safety. The Broncos scored a final time with six minutes left when Jackson State unloaded with a bomb that safety Rick Woods intercepted on the Bronco 18. Woods ran the ball back 73 yards to the Tiger 9-yard line. Kenrick Camerud kicked a 27-yard field goal to give the Broncos their final 12-point lead. So it was home to Boise for a huge rematch against their foe from the national championship game a year earlier — the Eastern Kentucky Colonels.

Approaching snow and cold did not keep 20,176 fans from the game. What a Christmas present a victory would have made! But that December 12 afternoon the Broncos fell 23-17 to end another dream season.

Jim Poore told the story in the Statesman:

When the snow swept down from the direction of Bogus Basin Saturday afternoon, maybe somebody was trying to tell all those people huddled in Bronco Stadium something. Maybe it was saying it's time to break out the Johnny Mathis Christmas album and curl up in front of the fire as he tells you all about the chestnuts you're supposed to be roasting in front of you.

Maybe it was saying, football's over in Boise this year, folks. Maybe the snow was saying, it's time for other things.

Time to move to basketball.

Time to see what Dave Leach has this year.

Time for all the young players — Scott Baker, Greg Sutton, Rodney Webster, Kevrette Johnson, Kim Metcalf, Robert Farmer, Gerald DesPres, Tim Klena, Jeff Caves, Paul Unger, Brian Hauenstein, Glenn Simonton, Ron Harvey and the rest — to pack it in for next year when the team they're going to be a part of may be the most awesome in Boise State's history.

Time for Eastern Kentucky to go on and fulfill the destiny they feel is theirs, just like Boise State felt last year.

Time for Idaho State to have a run at seeing how well it can do against the Colonels.

Time for Boise State's veteran players — Duane Dlouhy, Kipp Bedard, Dennis Brady, Randy Trautman, Jim Valaile, Jeff Greenough, Ray Santucci, Chris Bell and Rick Woods — to go onto other things.

I think it is easier to say it's time for those things than it is to have lived through your final time on Lyle Smith Field Saturday afternoon.

The last time. That's one thing Rick Woods, the spectacular strong safety from Boise High School wasn't quite prepared for after Boise State lost 23-17 to Eastern Kentucky in the Division 1-AA semifinals.

"We had a team meeting after the thing and coach Criner had the seniors get up and we were talking and he told us some things,"
said Woods in the Boise State locker room after the game. He stopped to let the emotion of the moment pass. "I came back to my locker and I looked at Larry Alder and I realized it would be my last game. I realized it would be our last game together and I sort of burst out bawling."

Alder and Woods. Butch and Sundance from their days at Boise High School. Separated at last. Both have someplace to go next fall — Woods, undoubtedly, to the pros. Alder back as a fifth-year senior. Alder will return to a team that is stocked with returning talent. There are players on the sidelines who have been red-shirted — like sophomore Carl Keever, the former Oregon State linebacker who came home to play and former Boise High star Paul DiLullo, who started at fullback at USC in 1980 and is waiting to play next year.

Should things fall into place, next year's Boise State team will have a good chance to be back on the I-AA playoff field — despite the greater number of teams in the reorganization. But that is next year. 40

Jim Criner's last year with the Broncos (1982) started strongly with three straight wins, hit some bumps in mid-season and finished on an upnote with three straight victories. BSU went 8-3 overall and 4-3 in the conference, with the biggest win coming during that final surge in a 30-10 drubbing of the Utah State Aggies in Bronco Stadium. The Bronco win on a cold November 13 afternoon saw Webster run for 143 yards and Mark Jensen hit three field goals. According to the accounts, "Utah State's offense was flattened, sacked, and generally gored by a Boise State defense that saw red all afternoon." The afternoon belonged to the defense and John Rade had one of BSU's most dominating individual defensive performances in memory. Rade recorded a school record eight tackles-for-loss, piling up 35 yards in quarterback sacks. Rade later went on to a successful career with the NFL's Atlanta Falcons. The Broncos lost 19 seniors at the end of the season, including offensive standouts: guard Jon Zogg, receivers Ron Harvey, Randy Mayo and John Broadous, and defensive backs Alder and Jeff Turk.

After the 1982 season, Criner was hired away by Iowa State, and defensive coordinator Lyle Setencich became head coach. The Broncos were 4-3 in the Big Sky and 6-5 overall in Setencich's 1983 debut season. With Hazsen Choates and Gerald DesPres at quarterback, and Webster and Dave Maloney in the backfield, the Broncos were still a force to be reckoned with. But the Broncos let some close games slip away in the fourth quarter, despite a generally potent offense and stingy defense.

The biggest win of 1983 came on October 21 in Bronco Stadium against Montana State when the Broncos destroyed the Bobcats 42-0.

The Broncos had a tough offensive line that included Steve Despot, Scott Baker and John Kilgo. Paul Unger, Ray Stephens, Chuck Butler, Keever and newcomer Markus Koch bolstered the defensive team, which was led by Michel Bourgeau.

The 1984 Broncos team had a contingent of sophomore players who would go on to Bronco fame. Included in that group were
defensive players Koch, Lance Sellers, Jimmy Ellis, Mike Johnson and Chuck Compton to support seniors Keever, Jim Voulelis and Glenn Simonton. The offense had talent, too, including Tom DeWitz, Steve Despot, Ty Ogata, Ron Love, Pat Fitzgerald, John Kilgo, Jon Francis, Kim Metcalf and Eric Andrade. The Broncos opened against two Division I-A teams, Cal State-Fullerton and Fresno State, and fell to both. But they rebounded with a five-game win streak and ended up 6-5. Linebacker Carl Keever received 1-AA Kodak All-American honors for the second time, and Francis rushed for more than 1,000 yards that season. He joined Minter, who three times had rushed for 1,000 yards, and Webster who had twice broken the 1,000 yard mark. Leading receiver for the Broncos was Metcalf with 46 receptions for 778 yards. DesPres closed out his career in sixth place on the all-time passing list with 3,332 total yards.

The 1985 season opened in Salt Lake City at the University of Utah, and the Broncos fought the Utes to the wire behind perhaps the finest performance of Koch's career. But Utah won it on a field goal in the fading moments, and BSU started the season 2-3. Then the Broncos won five of their last six games to go 7-4, the best mark of the Setencich era.

Francis recorded another 1,000-yard season and was joined on the All-Big Sky squad by Despot, Koch and center Dan Smith. Wide receiver Tony Hunter and safety Phil Bartle were among others turning in banner seasons.

The 1986 defense was the best at BSU in 16 years, yielding an average of only 269.3 yards a game. Ellis, Sellers, Pete Kwiatkowski, Maury Moore and Rex Walters all made All-Big Sky. But a knee injury to Chris Jackson in the season opener put the star tailback out for seven games, and the Bronco offense suffered. BSU scored a school record 74 points against outmanned Humboldt State on the first game ever played on Bronco Stadium's new blue turf. But the team could not muster much firepower otherwise, with DeWitz and return man Chris Truitt the other all-conference players.

Four heartbreaking losses by a touchdown or less spelled Bronco football's first losing season since becoming a four-year school, forcing Setencich's resignation.

More football on page 214.

Left: Jon Francis