

A Note on Selected Named Sports Plays

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This note examines certain key team sport plays, which resulted in a team winning an important game. Because of their impact on a specific game, they have received specific designations or names, which identify them uniquely. This note considers ten such named sports plays in US amateur and professional sports.

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Introduction

Sports are an important part of every culture because they provide spectator and participatory entertainment for the masses. In the US, the most popular sports (“Most Popular Sports in the US,” 2012), in order, are: (1) Football, (2) baseball, (3) basketball, (4) ice hockey, and (5) soccer.

This note discusses selected examples of memorable sports plays, which have garnered a specific designation, or name, because they resulted in a spectacular last moment win for one team over another in an amateur or professional sport. Moreover, reference to these named plays continues years after their occurrence, with the result that the use of these names uniquely identifies the play and the game in which it took place.

Named plays in sports

In the annals of sports history in the US, there are several plays in both amateur and professional sports that have received specific designations or names because they were the key to winning a specific game (“The Most Famous Sports Plays in History,” 2012; “Can You Name the Most Famous ‘Named’ Sports Plays of All,” 2012).

The following is a selected list of ten famous named sports plays in the annals of US competitive games. It is hoped that this note will prompt a more expansive and comprehensive study of this phenomenon. They appear in chronological order, and they include football, baseball, and basketball, the three most popular sports in the US. The teams, the place, and date of each named play appear in the entry. The significance of these named sports plays is evidenced by the fact that each one has its own Wikipedia web site entry on the Internet. We have used italic typeface to indicate that these named sports plays function as a unique identifier. The ten named plays in this note include 7 for football, 2 for basketball, and 1 for baseball.

1. “*The Shot Heard ‘Round the World*” (major league baseball). This name refers to Bobby Thomson’s (New York Giants) walk-off home run off Ralph Branca (New York Dodgers) in a pennant playoff series two games to 1 by a score of 5–4 that took place at the Polo Grounds on October 3 1951.
2. “*The Immaculate Reception*” (professional football). This name, a pun on the religious term “Immaculate Conception,” refers to an AFC playoff game held at Three Rivers Stadium (Pittsburgh) in which the Pittsburgh Steelers beat the Oakland Raiders with a controversial play, which involved a collision between John “Frenchy” Fuqua (Pittsburgh Steelers) and Jack Tatum (Oakland Raiders), but it bounced off either one or both of the players, and it allowed Franco Harris (Pittsburgh Steelers) to go in for a touchdown to win the game on December 23 1972 with a score of 12–7. This game remains controversial to this day because it is unclear if it bounced off only Tatum or both. If it bounced off both, the reception would be legal.
3. “*The Catch*” (professional football). This name refers to the winning touchdown reception by Dwight Clark from Joe Montana (San Francisco 49ers) for the NFC Football championship with a score of 28–27 over the Dallas Cowboys that took place at Candlestick Park in San Francisco on January 10 1982.
4. “*The Play*” (college football). This name refers to a game between the University of California, Berkeley, and Stanford University in which California used five lateral plays to win the game November 20 1982 at California Memorial Stadium in Berkeley, California in the final moments of the game with a score of 25–20.
5. “*Hail Flutie*” (college football). The generic name for a last second possibly impossible pass play in football is the “Hail Mary Pass.” The specific one in this instance is the “Hail Flutie” pass, an allusion to the Boston College quarterback Doug Flutie who through such a pass to Gerard Phelan in the closing moments of a game against Miami University (Florida) with a final score of 47–45 on November 23 1984 in the Miami Orange Bowl.
6. “*The Drive*” (professional football). This name refers to a series of offensive plays between the Cleveland Browns and the Denver Broncos in which John Elway (Denver Broncos) tied the game in the final quarter over a period of 5 minutes and 2 seconds, and spanning 98 yards on the field. Denver won the game 23–20 with a field goal on January 11 1987 at Cleveland Municipal Stadium.
7. “*The Shot*” (professional basketball). This name refers to Michael Jordan’s (Chicago Bulls) last second, game winning shot against the Cleveland Cavaliers with a final score of 101–100 on May 7 1989 at the Coliseum in Richfield, Ohio. The expression “*The Shot*” remains a unique identifier in basketball because Michael Jordan’s game winning shot took place in professional basketball game while Christian Laettner’s game winner (see #8) occurred in a college basketball game, thereby disambiguating the two identically named plays.
8. “*The Shot*” (college basketball). This name refers to Christian Laettner’s (Duke University) game-winning shot against the University of Kentucky

- basketball team coached by Rick Pitino by a score of 104–103 on March 28 1992 in the NCAA East Regional at the Philadelphia Spectrum.
9. “*Bush Push*” (college football). This name refers to a game between archrivals Notre Dame University and the University of Southern California in which Reggie Bush (Southern California) pushed quarterback Matt Leinart (Southern California) into the end zone for the game winning play won by Southern California with a score of 34–31 on October 15 2005 at Notre Dame Stadium. Unfortunately for USC, Reggie Bush was declared ineligible and it had to vacate the victory by order of the NAA on June 10 2010.
 10. “*Statue Left*” (college football). This name refers to the so-called “Statue of Liberty Play” employed by Boise State University (Idaho) in the Fiesta Bowl Championship in which Boise State beat Oklahoma University by an overtime score of 43–42 on January 1 2007 at the University of Phoenix Stadium in Glendale, Arizona. The “Statue of Liberty” play is actually a tried and true strategy used by high school, college and professional football teams over the years. By naming this play “*Statue Left*,” its uniqueness is thereby assured. The “*Statue Left*” play merits its status as a special named play because many sports aficionados argue that this Fiesta Bowl games ranks among the greatest college games ever played.

Concluding remarks

This brief note has addressed selectively ten famous sports plays, which have received a specific name that most sports aficionados still recognize because of their significance in competitive sports. It is hoped that this initial foray into such designations will yield a more detailed and comprehensive study of this phenomenon at the national and international levels.

Bibliography

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Notes on contributor

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