

## THE YEAR THAT, REGRETTABLY, WAS

Who doesn't like lists? Writers like them 'cause they're easy and typically strike a chord with readers. They're interesting and are most likely to get folks talking.

Generally speaking, readers like them, we think/hope, because we live in a culture nowadays of shortened attention spans and an obsession of sorts with ranking and categorizing stuff.

You probably *hated* the list that preceded this page.

With all due respect to the Olympic sport athletes and teams that achieved so much this past calendar year mostly outside the mainstream, nine of our top 10 stories of this past year at Purdue cover in the shadow of the biggest: The terrible, embarrassing year endured by its two flagship sports.

Football and men's basketball's double-dozen — two 12s in the 12-team Big Ten's standings — is the school's scarlet letter, the cross it must bear until things get better. It's difficult to get that stench off, and it might be a long, hot summer.

Some fans say they're tired of



being told to "be patient," though I'm not sure anyone has explicitly told them to be, whether it be coaches, administrators or media, this particular member having often written things like, "It will/might/can take time," which is something entirely different than telling people how to be.

But unrest is inevitable following the sort of calendar year that mercifully ended with Purdue's bouncing from the Big Ten's basketball tournament in March.

The results were the same: Last place for Purdue football and Purdue men's basketball alike, though dissimilar. Football was blown out of the water in a new beginning that got off to as brutal a start as could have been imagined; men's basketball's 12th-place finish was the bottoming out of a two-season downward spiral for a well-established and accomplished program.

There are few common denominators between the two programs' path to success, or back to it, and there are no guarantees those paths will be found.

If Morgan Burke told you, or Darrell Hazell told you, or Matt Painter told you, or anyone told you, that, "This will happen, and it will be awesome," then they'd merely be speculating or blowing smoke. None of those men will say anything like that with any degree of certainty, nor can they credibly. Again, there are no assurances.

In the meantime, when there's nothing left to say, people have to say something — the alternative being, what, cyanide pills? — and if fans are going to take offense to platitudes, then it's a clear reflection of their angst. It's a feeling stoked by a year in which all who witnessed it might prefer to be mind-wiped, for their recall to be restored to its original factory settings.

Winning matters.

It's not all that matters at this level of sports, but it tops the list.

Obviously.

No one at Purdue feels differently, and if anyone associated with the school has said anything to suggest they do, that is unfortunate and misguided.

No one at Purdue sat around between the start of September and mid-March saying after every loss, "There's more to life than sports. The sun will come up tomorrow. Let's all go have a picnic!"

It's important to win, as Purdue has done not all that long ago in both sports, despite the scorched-earth pictures being painted by some of the hysterical among us.

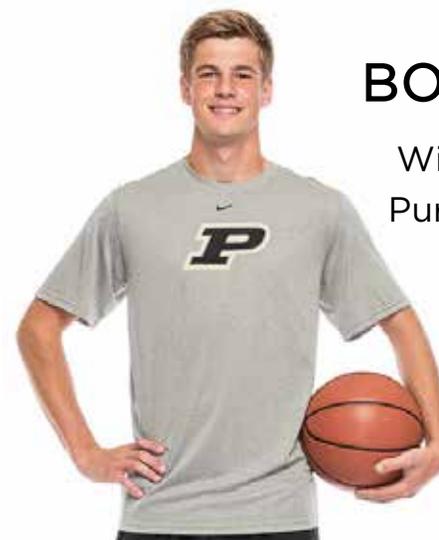
It's crucial that the Boilermaker athletic department's two most-cared about sports do more of it starting in September.

If they do, our list 12 months from now might look a lot different and be much more palatable to our readers.

If they don't, look out below. **\*\*\***

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