

Sports

Snake crawls out of 'retirement' to sign Oiler pact

United Press International
HOUSTON — The Houston Oilers believe Kenny Stabler, who ended his five-week retirement because of quarterback Gifford Nielsen's injury, may be ready to run the offense against Los Angeles in the team's regular season opener.

Stabler returned to Houston Wednesday from his Gulf Shores, Ala., home and met with the Oiler officials and the media for the first time since the end of last season.

The 35-year-old NFL veteran said when quarterback Gifford Nielsen tore a shoulder muscle in last Saturday's game with Tampa Bay — an injury that will sideline him for several weeks — he decided to rejoin his teammates and end his surprise retirement.

"I made up my mind a couple of days ago. I'm not sure why. I think I un-retired and retired several times. I think after Gifford got hurt I saw the Oilers needed me," Stabler said.

Coach Ed Biles said it was conceivable Stabler could be the team's starting quarterback for the Sept. 6 regular-season opener against the Rams in Anaheim, Calif.

"He can pick up the system in a few days but how he is physically is another question," Biles said.

Biles, Stabler, and Oiler General Manager Ladd Herzeg met late Wednesday night to begin Stabler's education on the Oiler's new offense system.

But Stabler, who appeared pained, said his only retirement activity — "hanging around down at the beach" — left him out of shape and overweight at 210 pounds.

"I did very little (conditioning) because I was retired. There was no reason to get in shape because I

wasn't coming back," Stabler said. Although Stabler said his retirement had nothing to do with contract negotiations, the Oilers used a two-year pact to lure the NFL all-time pass completion percentage leader back to Houston for a twelfth pro season.

Team officials would not release details of the contract, but said it was close to the terms Stabler played under last season. One report put the contract at \$750,000 for the two-year period.

Nielsen, his arm in a sling, is expected to be sidelined about a month. He hedged when asked if he expected to return to the starting slot.

"I've got to get myself well, the shoulder's got to heal and I've got to get ready to play. I want to be the No. 1 quarterback when I come back. I've put in a lot of time and I've worked hard," he said.

"I was in a situation a week ago that I've been working for for a long time. Then I had to step back a little bit. But I've got my priorities in the proper perspective. There should be no problem," he said.

John Reaves, who replaced Nielsen after he was injured Saturday's exhibition game with Tampa Bay, will probably be the odd man out when Nielsen returns. However, he put on his best face for reporters earlier Wednesday.

"I'm going to try to play well enough Saturday night (in the Oilers' final exhibition game with the Dallas Cowboys) to win the starting job," Reaves said. "I'm glad the situation with Stabler is over. I've been hearing about it for weeks. I'm glad he's coming back."

Since sending word of his retirement to the Oilers the day before he was to report to camp,

Stabler has refused to return many phone calls of Herzeg and Biles. The team officials publicly maintained a hard line, saying they did not want Stabler back if he was playing only for a paycheck.

Reportedly, Stabler was ready to rejoin the team last week but was offended by published reports quoting Biles as saying Stabler would come back on his terms.

But the Oilers softened their week when doctors told them Nielsen's injury would keep him

on the sidelines for at least four weeks. That left the team to start the regular season with only Reaves, who was out of the NFL last year and acquired by the Oilers after Stabler retired.

Herzeg maintained throughout the past month that the Oilers would not beg, but a source in Alabama told a newspaper the Oilers were making a stronger pitch for Stabler than was being publicized. Herzeg said Wednesday that he received a telephone call

the night before from a Stabler representative asking to discuss Stabler's situation.

Wide receiver Mike Renfro said he was glad to see Stabler back and thought Stabler, a freer spirit than Nielsen, would add a new dimension to offensive huddles.

"Of course, this means we'll be smelling Jack Daniels in the huddle instead of chocolate milk shakes," he said.

Running back Ronnie Coleman said being Stabler's teammate for

one year taught him that Stabler could be ready to play by the Rams game.

"Quarterbacks. They have their own little workouts anyway. They

just drop back and throw some passes. He's gonna have to get accustomed to the offense because we have a new offense this year," he said.

NL boss fines Philly manager \$1,000 for run-in with umpire

United Press International
PHILADELPHIA — Philadelphia Phillies Manager Dallas Green says the five-day suspension and \$1,000 fine slapped on him Wednesday for a bumping incident with umpire Steve Fields is "ridiculous."

National League President Chub Feeney told Green in a telegram the suspension and fine was "for your language and actions, including making physical contact with and removing the hat (and kicking same) of umpire Steve Fields."

Green and shortstop Larry Bowa, whom Feeney fined \$500, were ejected in the ninth inning of Monday's game with Atlanta by second base umpire Fields after he ruled Bowa missed second base during an apparent inning-ending double play.

"I'm quite upset," Green said. "I would accept what's fair. Some things shouldn't be condoned. I think my actions were possibly a cause for suspension. (But) I think five days and a \$1,000 fine is ridiculous."

Tuesday, Feeney had suspended Green indefinitely pending a review of the tapes of Monday night's incident. The five-day suspension included Tuesday night's game, meaning Green could manage the team again Sunday.

Green said he was "leaning against" an appeal of the suspension because "baseball is screwed up enough this year," but added "I am not certain of what course I will take."

The bumping incident was sparked after Bowa fielded a hard grounder by Dale Murphy, appeared to touch second to force Chris Chambliss and threw to first for the out on Murphy. Instead, Chambliss was ruled safe and pinch runner Ed Miller scored from third on the play.

"If somebody in the National League office looked at the films and thought I was deliberately bumping Fields, I don't know what they are seeing," Green said. "I did make contact but it was not malicious. I was mainly trying to protect my player. I am no long-time offender of umpires' rights. I respect them more than many, but I'm losing respect for some people in the game."

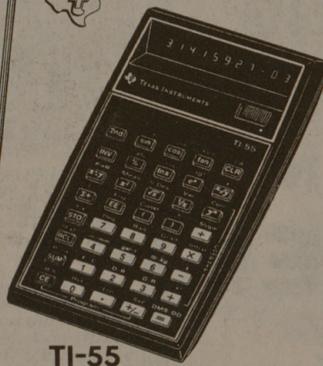
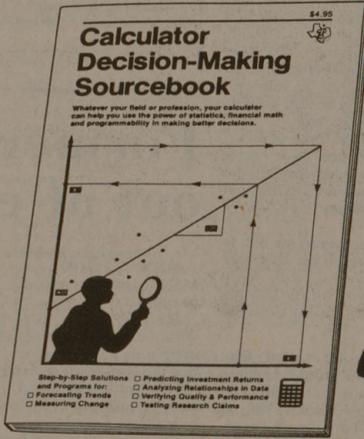
Fields' call permitted the Braves to take a 5-4 lead, but the Phillies tied it in the bottom of the ninth and eventually won in 13 innings.

Phillies General Manager Paul Owens said he was "surprised and upset at the severity of the suspension and fine."

"When you consider Dallas' (Green's) record," he said, "five days is too long." Feeney told Bowa he was fined

\$300 for "actions and language" directed toward Fields, \$100 for throwing equipment and \$100 for returning to the dugout after his ejection from the game.

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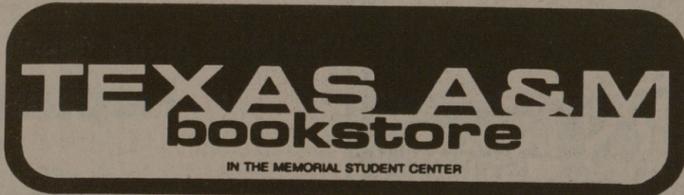
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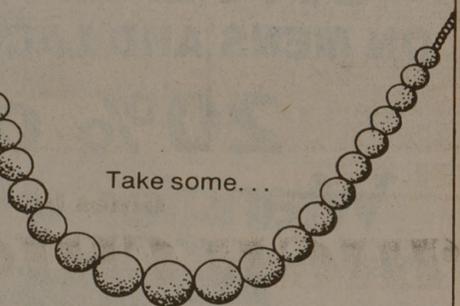
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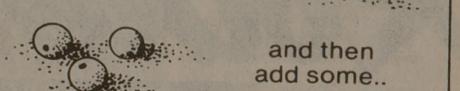
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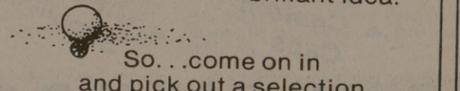
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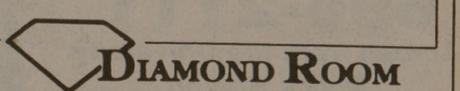
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