

Walter Payton highest paid in NFL

United Press International
LAKE FOREST, Ill. — Chicago Bears running back Walter Payton has signed a series of three, one-year million-dollar plus contracts that will make him one of the highest paid

players in the NFL, the team announced Tuesday. Although terms of the contracts were not disclosed, Bears general manager Jerry Vainisi said the new contract makes

Payton "one of the highest paid players" in the National Football League.

Payton's contract, reportedly worth between \$1.2 million and \$1.5 million a year, doubled his old \$400,000 yearly salary to

keep him in the league. Payton was seriously wooed by the rival USFL Chicago Blitz, which had offered him up to \$6 million over four years to jump to the fledgling league.

But Payton rejected the bid and chose to stay with the same team he has been with for his entire NFL career, since coming out of Jackson State.

"I'm glad it's over. I'm relieved," Payton said at a news conference announcing his signing. "I'm kind of optimistic about this season because of the way things have been going and the way the organization has been putting things together."

"Walter Payton stands for what the Chicago Bears symbolize: a commitment to excellence," said Bears president Michael McCaskey.

Payton's contract may surpass the reported \$1.1 million a year that San Diego Charger quarterback Dan Fouts recently signed. Vainisi added that he was optimistic the three-year agreement would not be the last between the Bears and Payton.

"We're hopeful that this won't be the last one," Vainisi said.

Payton, 29, rushed for 1,420 yards last season to close within 687 yards of the all-time rushing record held by former Cleveland Browns great Jim Brown. Only Franco Harris is closer than Payton to breaking Brown's record.

Payton recently underwent arthroscopic surgery on both of his knees but reported that he will be ready to report to the Bears this spring.

Isles sweat it out

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HICKSVILLE, N.Y. — The New York Islanders and the Edmonton Oilers, the first repeat finalists since Boston and Montreal met in 1977 and 1978, are both worried about the same thing — too much time to get rusty before they finally meet in Thursday's Game 1 of the best-of-seven Stanley Cup finals.

"Why do we have to wait until Thursday?" asked New York left wing Clark Gillies, whose aggressive play and seven goals has made him the comeback player of this year's playoffs. "I feel great now, let's keep playing."

Bryan Trottier centered for Greg Gilbert and right wing Mike Bossy, the Islanders' No. 1 line in the regular season. That line was separated midway through the Montreal series because of lack of production. Bossy responded to the shift with three straight game-winning goals and now has 17 career game winners, one short of the playoff record held by Montreal's Maurice Richard.

"What worries me is that we haven't lost to the Oilers," said Bossy. "They tell me it's

10 straight and that they only beaten us three times since they came into the NHL. I don't like that. They are too good a team for us to continue."

The other Islanders which worked hard Tuesday was the trio of center Brent Sutter, left wing John Tonucci and playoff MVP candidate Pat Flatley. That left forward Bobby Nystrom skating out a deep bone bruise on his upper shin and reseason forward Anders Kallur, who played a key role in the Washington series, skating without extra players.

Also anxious for a regular shift is left wing Bob Bourne who claims that, despite legament damage to his left knee and a separated left shoulder, he expects to return Tuesday.

Bourne's absence could help Edmonton immediately, as he is the fastest and most powerful skater. Bourne led Islanders in playoff goals last year (8 goals, 20 assists) and whether he will be able to skate at full speed when returns is questionable.

Injuries

(continued from page 13)

lower back. Once again Ward knew something was wrong, but simply thought he was getting old and sore. The doctors told him he was just having muscle spasms.

Over the next three years the condition became worse and worse. The more he stretched, the more he aggravated it.

The 6-5, 280-pound Ward got a big opportunity this past summer when former A&M football great and present Houston Gambler head coach Jack Pardee invited him to a tryout. Ward performed well enough to earn a three-year contract, but in the meantime he couldn't bend over without severe pain.

The Gamblers had a CAT scan done on Ward and found the ruptured disc. An operation was performed and he remained in the hospital for a week and then was forced to stay in bed for four weeks.

Now, two months after the operation, Ward is wearing a back brace and looking forward to working out and getting back into shape. The 25-year old Ward says he should be ready for the USFL again by January.

Because of all his injuries, Ward doesn't feel he ever had a clear shot at a football career. He feels he has to know if he can make it or not.

"A lot of people say I'm crazy to go back," Ward says, "but knowing all of this, I had something to prove to myself."

Ward has developed a matter-of-fact approach to injuries. And like Murray, he says you have to be ready for them when they happen.

"Playing football, you're going to get hurt," Ward says. "You just hope you've prepared yourself for it and that you're mentally ready. On a team nobody talks about injuries. Everybody just hopes it doesn't happen to them."

Ward, like Murray, is a fine player who has always dreamed about and planned on a professional career and Stingley is a professional. For those of you might say that injuries simply occupational hazards. But what about the teenage high school?

Bryan High football star Merrill Green says that at high school level he has no concern about the psychological problems caused by an injury and any doubts he has about his major injury, he has had to deal with minor injuries. "I just couldn't get over it," Star short says.

"The injury is such a shame to their systems," Green says, "virtually before I left eye was out of commission."

Green said he had one message for his team who could not work in preventing neck serious wher red eye (00) to 20/60 up," Green said, "so we just didn't let him play at all. I'm aware of common prod

in his career as a coach there had been a rash of injuries across the country. He decided that if he was one of his players he would


But he said he realized really felt that way, he should quit before it happened.

"I thought about it if it was really worth it for all trying to teach kids," a man said, "and a coach I have yes. Even with the risk of and permanent injury worth it to me as a coach."

Most football players feel the same way. Ward said:

"Playing football, you're going to get hurt. You just it's not you."

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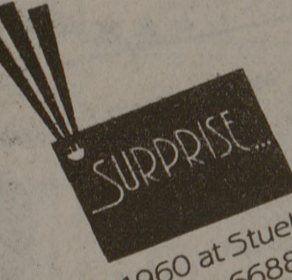
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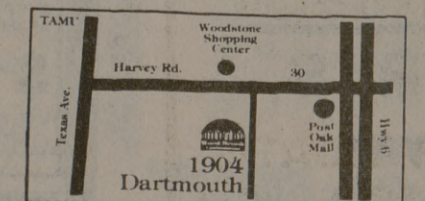
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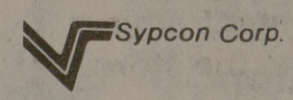
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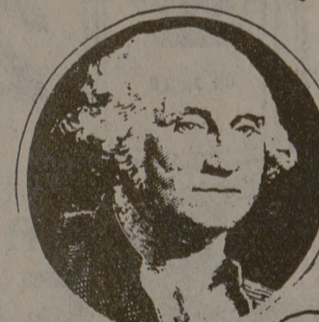
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