

49ers' Montana needs long ball

Associated Press

ROCKLIN, Calif. — Joe Montana's personal training camp project involves gaining confidence before the San Francisco 49ers open the National Football League season.

It's not that Montana was running scared last January at Stanford Stadium, where he set several Super Bowl records while leading Coach Bill Walsh's 49ers to their second NFL title.

"Right now, Bill knows I still don't have confidence in my long passing. We're working a lot on it in practice and it's improving," the 49ers' quarterback said with the season opener 2½ weeks away.

"But the important thing about improvement is to get it done in games," Montana added. "It used to be that I'd feel I couldn't get the ball downfield far enough on some plays, so I might let it go a little too soon," Montana added.

Montana, whose 28th birthday was two months ago, was in his first season as a starter when the 49ers beat the Cincinnati Bengals in Super Bowl XVI following the 1981 campaign.

During last season, which the team finished with an overall record of 18-1, Walsh said he considered Montana at least two years away from fully maturing as a quarterback.

SWC Race

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kings, will be back to give the Mustangs a 1-2 punch that should be the envy of the nation. Make that a 1-2-3 punch with the addition of freshman Bill Jones, one of the most sought-after Texas high school stars.

While saying that SMU would have been favored, "every team should be a notch better," said Arkansas Coach Ken Hatfield.

Arkansas

Arkansas is loaded on defense, returning nine starters.

The Razorbacks led the SWC in scoring defense and total defense last fall.

Hatfield must find a quarterback to replace Brad Taylor and Danny Nutt. And he's find them in the presence of runner Greg Thomas and passer Mark Calcagni, brother of former Hog signal caller, Mark.

Razorback wide receiver James Shibest, who caught 51 passes for 907 yards and seven touchdowns, is the cream of the SWC crop.

Houston

Houston, a Cotton Bowl loser to Doug Flutie and Boston College, brings back the exciting Gerald Landry, a veer quarterback supreme.

The Cougars have swift receivers, in tight end Carl Hilton and split end Larry Shepherd, and tough running tailbacks, led by Raymond Tate.

All-America tackle prospect T.J. Turner will anchor a respectable Cougar defensive unit.

Texas A&M

Don't sell A&M Coach Jackie Sherrill's and his Aggies short. A&M closed last year and are loaded in talent positions, particularly at quarterback, where Craig Stump and Kevin Murray can produce instant excitement.

Sherrill said the final victories over the Horned Frogs and Longhorns "should serve as a good springboard for the next year. We reacted well to adversity."

On defense, A&M has nine starters returning, including pre-season first team All-SWC linebacker Johnny Holland and second team All-SWC end Rod Saddler.

Texas

Texas could be pesky if Coach Fred Akers can solve his inconsistent quarterbacking. Texas fell from No. 1 in the nation early on last season during a siege of bad offense.

Todd Dodge and Bret Stafford will be battling it out at quarterback, while redshirt tailback Charles Hunter is expected to add punch to his position.

"The way things went at the end of last year can be turned into an incentive for this year," said Akers.

NFL Cuts

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placed nose guard Bob Baumhower and offensive tackle Eric Laakso on the physically-unable-to-perform list, meaning they can not play until at least the seventh game of the season. Baumhower is suffering from knee and ankle injuries, while Laakso still is recuperating from a knee injury suffered during the fourth game of the 1984 season.

The Indianapolis Colts waived seven players, including four who started last year on one of the weakest defenses in the NFL. Those four were safety Mark Kafentzis, cornerback James Burroughs, and linebackers Greg Bracelin and Mike Humiston.

Also cut were linebacker James

Walsh has not changed his mind, Montana's performance in Super Bowl XIX and his career quarterback rating, highest in NFL history, notwithstanding.

Montana won the Super Bowl Most Valuable Player award last Jan. 20, for a second time, completing 24 of 35 passes for 331 yards and three touchdowns, and running for 59 yards and one touchdown in the 38-16 victory over the Miami Dolphins.

"Joe will continue to improve as long as he plays," Walsh said. "At some point, but hopefully not too soon, the physical erosion will cross paths with the knowledge and experience."

"But at this point, he'll improve each year, especially being within our system and playing with this group of players."

In an exhibition game Monday night against the Denver Broncos, Montana played 1½ quarters and completed 9 of 13 passes for 115 yards, including a 23-yard touchdown strike to tight end John Frank.

This summer, pre-season camp meant parting from a wife.

Montana and Jennifer Wallace, an actress-model he met last year while doing a television commercial, were married a month after the Super Bowl, and the couple expects a baby late in the NFL season.

whose team was bombed 55-17 by Iowa in the Freedom Bowl.

A non-conference schedule which includes Missouri, Stanford and Oklahoma should tell Texas where it stands.

TCU

Then there's the return of Heisman Trophy candidate Kenneth Davis at runningback and a resurgent TCU under wildly enthusiastic Coach Jim Wacker.

TCU's 8-4 record and Bluebonnet Bowl bid against West Virginia was its best in two decades.

"Who would have ever thought the little ol' Horned Frogs would be 8-1 and ranked in the Top 10 last year?" Wacker said. "That was a great experience and one we would like to continue in 1985."

Speedy quarterback Scott Ankrum, a standout at San Antonio Jay High School just two years ago, is now expected to give the Horned Frog Veer offense an added dimension.

"We're still have to completely overhaul our offensive line after graduation losses and we're not deep in the defensive front," Wacker said. "We still have an inordinate amount of speed at our skill positions. We'll have three guys in the backfield with 4.4 speed."

Baylor

The Baylor Bears have two excellent quarterbacks in Cody Carlson and Tom Muecke. Coach Grant Teaff has retooled his offense to take more advantage of their passing talents.

Freshmen running backs Charles Perry, a former Bryan High star, and Jeff Murray could contribute immediately to the Bears, who have a rugged non-conference schedule which includes Georgia and USC.

Texas Tech

Texas Tech Coach Jerry Moore has gone from the I-Formation to the "Wing-Bone" attack which was popularized by Hatfield at Arkansas last season.

However, the Red Raiders will have to depend on green quarterbacking and that can be fatal in the SWC. Sophomore signal caller Aaron Keese returns to take back his position, but he's still unproven.

Tech's defense should again be strong to keep the Raiders respectable. Tech is led by All-SWC hopeful Brad Hastings at middle linebacker.

Rice

Watson Brown's Rice Owls could be much better and still not win a SWC game in '85. Rice plays Air Force and Miami on its non-conference schedule, but the Owls' best chance for victory appears to be against Lamar.

Gross, punter Tom Orosz and defensive end Scott Virkus.

Free safety Mike Whitwell of Texas A&M was the only veteran among seven players cut by the Cleveland Browns. Cleveland also put 13 players on injured reserve, including veterans Clinton Burrell (safety), Elvis Franks (defensive end) and Willie Jones (defensive end). Veterans Keith Baldwin, a defensive end, and Bill Contz, a tackle, were put on the physically-unable-to-play list.

The Los Angeles Raiders released 15 players, among them veteran nose tackle Rick Ackerman and linebackers Mark Merrill and Darryl Bird. They also placed eight others on injured reserve, including starting inside linebacker Bob Nelson.

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