

Bears don't think Payton is finished with NFL

PLATTEVILLE, Wis. (AP) — Walter Payton's Chicago Bears teammates don't believe him when he says that this is probably his last year as a player.

"He's got a 100 years left," said linebacker Otis Wilson.

"Everybody says this is Walter's last year. I doubt it," said defensive tackle William "The Refrigerator" Perry.

"Last year? That's what he said after the Super Bowl," said wide receiver Dennis McKinnon about the Bears' 1985 NFL championship.

"I think if he goes out and has a good year and feels good he might come back for another year," is the

opinion of Payton's heir-apparent at halfback, Neal Anderson.

As he trains here for his 13th pro season, Payton is being coy.

He definitely is not using the word definitely in his comments about retirement at season's end.

But Payton said he cannot escape two major concerns — that he wants to quit on top and doesn't want to postpone too long his dream of owning an NFL franchise.

Asked what is his goal for the coming season, Payton, who turned 33 on July 25, said, "Getting out alive. I'm serious. Each year it gets harder and harder. . . .

"I want this to be my greatest year.

Athletes like Julius Erving and I have an obligation to the fans to go out on the top of our game."

The Philadelphia 76ers' "Dr. J." made it clear that last season was his last in the National Basketball Association, and each city the club visited threw him a gift-giving farewell party.

No such farewell parties are in the works for Payton, but the running back from Jackson State usually doesn't liked to follow in anyone's footsteps but his blockers.

Instead, Payton likes to do it his way, and his way is a mostly a class act with a touch of the class clown thrown in.

He took a helicopter to the Bears' Platteville training camp the past two years, and has had a large mobile home parked outside the players' dormitory.

He throws passes into a crowd of spectators here, does impersonations of Mr. T, and pulls a hair off the leg of an unsuspecting assistant coach.

Payton met this summer with Commissioner Pete Rozelle to discuss his chances of becoming the first black NFL club owner.

"The way things are going I'm in a very good position for an expansion team — in a year, year and a half, two years," he said.

McDonald hopes to regain form with Dallas

THOUSAND OAKS, Calif. (AP) — The glory days of the Rose Bowl are long gone for Paul McDonald.

The cheers of thousands after two Rose Bowl victories by his Southern California Trojans are just old echoes and now McDonald is simply trying to find a job on the bench with the Dallas Cowboys as a third-string quarterback.

He's got Danny White and Steve Pelluer ahead of him and a fast gun rookie Kevin Sweeney of Fresno State — behind him.

His football career could soon be over.

"I'll just do the best I can do," the seven-year NFL veteran said. "Whatever happens will be great with me."

The left-handed McDonald, who held the NCAA record for lowest interception career percentage and went 43 games without throwing an interception, has had his chances in the NFL.

He started all 16 games for the Cleveland Browns in 1984 and completed 55 percent of his passes despite 53 sacks. He had waited for his chance on the bench behind Brian Sipe.

McDonald completed 13 straight passes in a game against Houston and finished the year with 3,472 yards. He had 320 yards passing in one game against New England.

But he was released by Cleveland after the 1985 season. He didn't throw a pass as he sat on the bench behind Bernie Kosar and Gary Danielson.

McDonald was signed by the Seattle Seahawks for 1986, but was cut before the regular season.

Then Dallas signed him as insurance when White's wrist was cracked.

"I was disappointed in Seattle last year," McDonald said. "I felt I didn't get a chance to show what I could

do. I completed 7 of 11 passes, which wasn't too shabby."

McDonald played for Dallas offensive coordinator Paul Hackett at Southern California and Cleveland, his biggest ace in the hole when the final cuts come.

"It's a big plus for me knowing how he thinks," McDonald said. "I do have experience. I've been in big games as a starter. I know what it's like."

"I feel I can add something to the Cowboys. But it doesn't matter what I think, does it?"

"I realize I'm sort of on the bubble. But I do have a business degree I feel I can put to use in some capacity if things don't work out. I might give broadcasting a try. But I don't really know if I'm any good. I anchored a sports news show for two weeks. I found out it's not all that easy."

McDonald has been impressive in

the Cowboys' daily, two-a-day workouts.

"It's the best shape I've ever been in," McDonald said. "I'm giving myself the best chance to do what I can do to make this team."

"I don't have a burning desire to be a starter," he said. "I'm comfortable in a backup situation. I'm still a young and healthy 29."

McDonald said his wife, Allyson, wouldn't be all that unhappy when his professional football career ends.

"My wife is disenchanted with pro football and she would like to see us settle down as a family," McDonald said. "But I still like the excitement of the sport. There's nothing like a Sunday with another NFL game on the line."

McDonald said fame is so fleeting that he can go into restaurants now without anyone recognizing him from his Southern Cal salad days.

Howe attempting to return to major league baseball

NEW YORK (AP) — Texas Rangers owner Eddie Chiles and club president Mike Stone met with baseball Commissioner Peter Ueberroth Wednesday about the possibility of drug-troubled pitcher Steve Howe returning to the major leagues.

Howe, who was suspended in 1983 for continuing problems with cocaine use, has been pitching for the Rangers Class AAA farm club in Oklahoma City since July.

"There was a meeting between Peter V. Ueberroth, Eddie Chiles and Mike Stone," commissioner's spokesman Rich Levin said. "A number of subjects were discussed, one of which was Steve Howe. There is no change in his status. He is still with Oklahoma City."

Chiles and Stone both refused comment as they left the meeting.

"The only comment I have is that we are late for our plane," said Chiles.

Howe, the National League Rookie of the Year with Los Angeles in 1980, played for the Dodgers until 1983 when he was

fined \$54,000 and suspended by then commissioner Bowie Kuhn through the 1984 season.

Jim Small, another commissioner's office spokesman, said there is no current suspension or restrictions prohibiting Howe from playing for Texas.

Howe was placed on the National League restricted list in June 1985 and then signed with the Minnesota Twins in August of that year. The Twins later released him, also for drug-related reasons.

Howe began the 1986 season with the San Jose Bees, an independent team in the Class A California League, but tested positive on a drug test and was suspended after he pitched, before his appeal of the test was resolved.

Howe was suspended by the National Association of Professional Baseball Leagues, which governs the minor leagues, in 1986, but the drug-related suspension was lifted last month and he joined the Oklahoma City 89ers.

He also agreed to participate in a drug-rehabilitation after-care program with the 89ers.

James establishing himself as top-hitter

ATLANTA (AP) — Dion James, one of the hottest hitters in the National League the last month, is reluctant to talk about his latest success.

"The last time I talked about my hitting, I went 4-for-50. I really would rather not talk about it," said the Atlanta Braves centerfielder. He has batted .398 over 30 games to raise his average from .270 to .313, sixth best in the league.

The 24-year-old left-handed hitter, acquired during the winter in a trade with the Milwaukee Brewers for outfielder Brad Komminsk, was named co-player of the week for the period ending Sunday. He batted .517 in six games in that time, with two homers and eight runs batted in.

For the season the 6-foot-1, 170-pounder had eight homers and 36 RBI going into Wednesday night's game against the San Diego Padres.

Although the Braves' leadoff hitter was reluctant at first to discuss his batting, he relented.

"You've got to believe in yourself, but there's still a long way to go," James said after the Braves defeated the Padres 12-7 Tuesday night. "I don't want to think about it. I just want to continue to hit."

As for his surprising power — he hit one home run in 1986 with Milwaukee and never more than nine in

six minor league seasons — James said, "It doesn't surprise me."

"I've always had power. It's just maturity and the knowledge of what I can do," he said. "But in the league this year, hitting home runs is no big deal, there are guys with 30 home runs and many others in the high 20s — all with a chance to hit 40."

"But I don't particularly care about my home run productivity. I care about my on-base percentage and scoring runs. That's what I'm supposed to do as a leadoff man," he added.

James has scored 60 runs, second on the club, and is sixth in the league in on-base percentage.

"Right now I've been fortunate. I've had luck on my side. I've been making good contact and finding the holes," he said.

About three weeks ago, Manager Chuck Tanner indicated he would play Albert Hall in center field after James made a couple of poor base-running decisions. But Hall re-injured a hamstring pull and James remained in the lineup.

Did that give James any extra motivation for his latest hitting tear?

"Nothing," said James. "I come out every day ready to play. I don't need any motivation. I just want to stay here in the major leagues. That's enough."

PGA championship faces problems as play begins

PALM BEACH GARDENS, Fla. (AP) — Partially-bare bumpy greens, ominous rough and potentially severe weather face the 150 pros in the 69th PGA National Championship.

The tournament, the last of the year's four Grand Slam golf events, gets started today at the PGA National Golf Club, with problems aplenty confronting organizers.

Chief among them are:

—Greens that Tom Watson, among others, called "not good."

—Probable thunderstorms, which have prompted officials to devise what they call "an evacuation plan," and lagging ticket sales. A cap of 16,000 was put on daily admissions, but officials said that on the eve of the start, less than 12,000 had been sold.

The PGA announced an in-

crease in the purse from \$800,000 to \$900,000, with a winner's share of \$150,000.

Watson, a leading contender for the top prize, made it clear he was not complaining about the greens — "we all have to play the same course," he said — but said the putting surfaces were bumpy, slow, bare of grass in some places and, in general, "not good."

It is the result of what tournament manager Jim Awtry termed "an unfortunate series of events" that resulted in the loss of bent grass on much of greens.

While Awtry insisted that "every precaution has been taken" and "evacuation plans" have been set to remove players and spectators from the course in the event of afternoon thunderstorms that are common in south Florida at this time of the year.

Large Cuban group to challenge U.S. team

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — Led by Olympic gold medalist Alberto Juantorena, 149 Cuban athletes, trainers and officials arrived Wednesday for the Pan Am Games and vowed to "keep Cuba's name and flag very high."

The group, the first wave of the largest delegation to visit the United States since Fidel Castro took over in 1959, arrived aboard a Cubana de Aviacion jetliner and was met at Indianapolis International Airport by dozens of reporters and tight security.

The Cuban delegation is expected to total roughly 600.

"We have a delegation stronger than the one that went to Caracas (in 1983), particularly the women's representatives," Juantorena said. "We expect to keep Cuba's name and flag very high."

Juantorena, winner of two track gold medals at the 1976 Olympics

and now vice president of Cuba's national sports institute, dismissed the chances of a political clash with an anti-Castro group that reportedly plans to encourage defections.

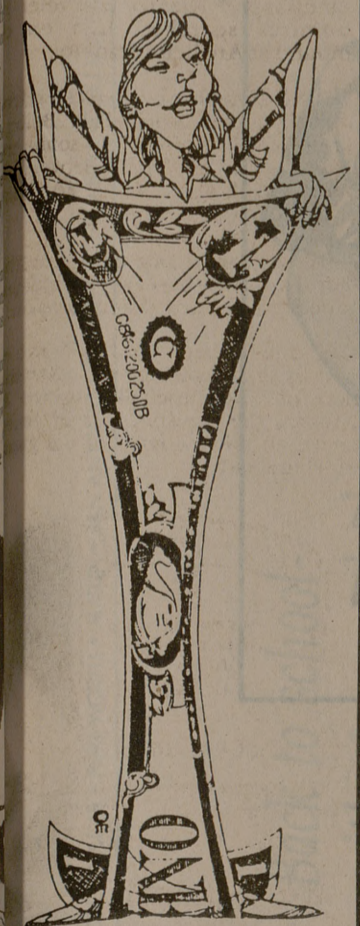
However, the head of the Cuban Olympic Committee, Manuel Gonzalez Guerra, had sent letters to Pan Am Game organizers and U.S. Olympic Committee officials expressing concern that the Cuban-American National Foundation would encourage team members to defect.

"The Telex said he was aware of the presence of the group, their plans and his belief that they intend to disrupt the games, be hostile to his delegation and work to cause Cuban athletes to 'desert,'" Mark Miles, president of the Pan Am organizing committee, said on Tuesday.

On Wednesday, however, Gonzalez said preparations were proceeding "smoothly."

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