

Peete devastated by late pick Ryan still throwing like he's a rookie

NEW YORK (AP) — For Rodney Peete, the quick pick came a day too late.

The Heisman Trophy runnerup from Southern California was the second player taken Monday in the NFL draft — on the second day.

Peete expected to go in the first two rounds of the draft on Sunday. Instead, he watched seven quarterbacks taken ahead of him and lamented: "A day that was supposed to be one of the most exciting days of my life turned out to be the most devastating."

But when the draft resumed Monday, he was the second player taken — albeit on the sixth round, chosen by the Detroit Lions one pick after the Los Angeles Raiders had taken another quarterback, Jeff Francis of Tennessee.

That made Peete the ninth quarterback to go although some scouting books had him rated second behind Troy Aikman, the top overall pick.

"I went from devastated to disappointed," said Peete, who may have lost \$800,000 over four years by going from the second round to the sixth, one agent estimated.

Also among those chosen was Byron Sanders of Northwestern, who was taken by Chicago on the ninth round. He is the older brother of Barry Sanders, the Heisman Trophy winner from Oklahoma State who was the third player taken — by Detroit — in the first round.

And Detroit took Jason Phillips of Houston, leading receiver in college football last season, with the second

pick of the 10th round.

Peete, however, remained the day's biggest name, just as Don McPherson of Syracuse — last year's Heisman runnerup — was when he was taken last year on the sixth round by Philadelphia.

Peete is black, as are McPherson and Terrence Jones of Tulane, who became the 11th quarterback taken when he went to San Diego with the final pick of the seventh round. Both were rated above many of the quarterbacks taken above them and there was some suggestion that race had played a factor.

But Peete didn't bring that up, and David Cornwell, the NFL's director of minority relations, said he didn't think it was a factor in view of the success in the past few years of such black quarterbacks as Doug Williams, Randall Cunningham and Warren Moon.

"I talked to a lot of black personnel people and the feeling was that he wasn't rated as highly as a lot of people thought he was," Cornwell said. "A decade ago, I think you could say it, but I don't think it's the case now."

Willie Peete, Rodney's father and a running backs coach for Green Bay, called his son the best quarterback in college football and suggested bias and the fact that he was a coach's son might have been a reason.

"I have some questions, I have some real hard questions that I don't know if anyone can answer," the senior Peete said. "For some mysterious reason, many NFL teams

hesitate to draft a coach's son. Maybe because coaches have a problem keeping things secret."

"I know as things go along, you hear negative things about people. That's what happened to Rodney."

Asked about racial bias, Willie Peete replied: "I hope not, not in 1989. If there is, it's too bad. We're in really bad trouble."

The main rap against Peete was his lack of arm strength and the fact that he seemed to fall off at the end of the season, notably in Southern Cal's game against Notre Dame and in the post-season all-star games.

But both Peete's father and his agent, Leonard Armato, said judging him by those games was a mistake.

"The teams that passed him up made a big mistake," Armato said. "He's always been a winner and I'm sure he will be again. His true talent will show out in the end."

In fact, his quickness and his ability to see the field should be an asset in the run-and-shoot offense being installed in Detroit by Mouse Davis, the new offensive coordinator and the man who originated the concept. He is certainly quicker than the Lions' three quarterbacks — Chuck Long, Eric Hipple and Rusty Hilger — and the run-and-shoot doesn't require quarterbacks to throw deep very often.

"I'm excited about going to the Lions," Peete said. "I couldn't be going to a better team or a better situation."

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Nolan Ryan is closer to his first Social Security check than he is to his rookie card. He's striking out the sons of batters he fanned years ago. Yet, he's come close to no-hitters in two of his four starts this season.

Is there any way to explain him? "Doesn't he know he's not supposed to throw the ball that hard at that age," said Bud Harrelson, a former teammate who retired at 36. "He's making the rest of us look bad."

So what if he's four days older than the vice president of the United States. So what if no one's ever thrown a no-hitter at his age. The 95 mph on Ryan's fastball mean a lot more than the 42 candles on his last birthday cake.

Unlike every other player in baseball history, age is enhancing Ryan's skills, not diminishing them.

"I don't know how many more chances I'm going to get," he said Sunday after coming within two outs of his sixth no-hitter, "but the way I've been throwing, it's certainly not out of the question that I'll get another shot."

After 23 seasons in the major leagues, his future is just as interesting as his past.

In his past are five no-hitters, more than Sandy Koufax. Only three others have thrown three.

In his past are 10 one-hitters, including Sunday night's against Toronto, and that's one short of Bob Feller's record. On April 11, Ryan took a no-hitter into the eighth against Milwaukee. Last year, he came within two outs of a no-hitter against Philadelphia.

"I haven't gotten bored with no-hitters, yet," he said.

No one's ever bored when Ryan's on the mound. Even the opposition can't believe what he does.

"He has a God-given talent," Toronto's Tom Henke said after watching Ryan's performance, a 4-1 victory over the Blue Jays with 12 strikeouts. "I can't think of anyone who throws as hard now as when they started."

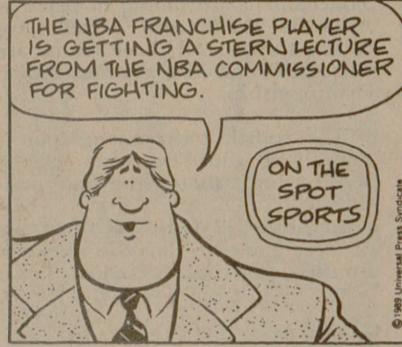
Henke is 31, what used to be an old age for pitchers. He doesn't think he'll be pitching at Ryan's age. "I'll be laying bricks," he said.

While everyone else is stunned, Ryan takes his arm for granted.

"I don't think I've done anything other people haven't done. I was blessed with a good arm and body. I've had good mechanics and a good conditioning program."

TANK McNAMARA

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