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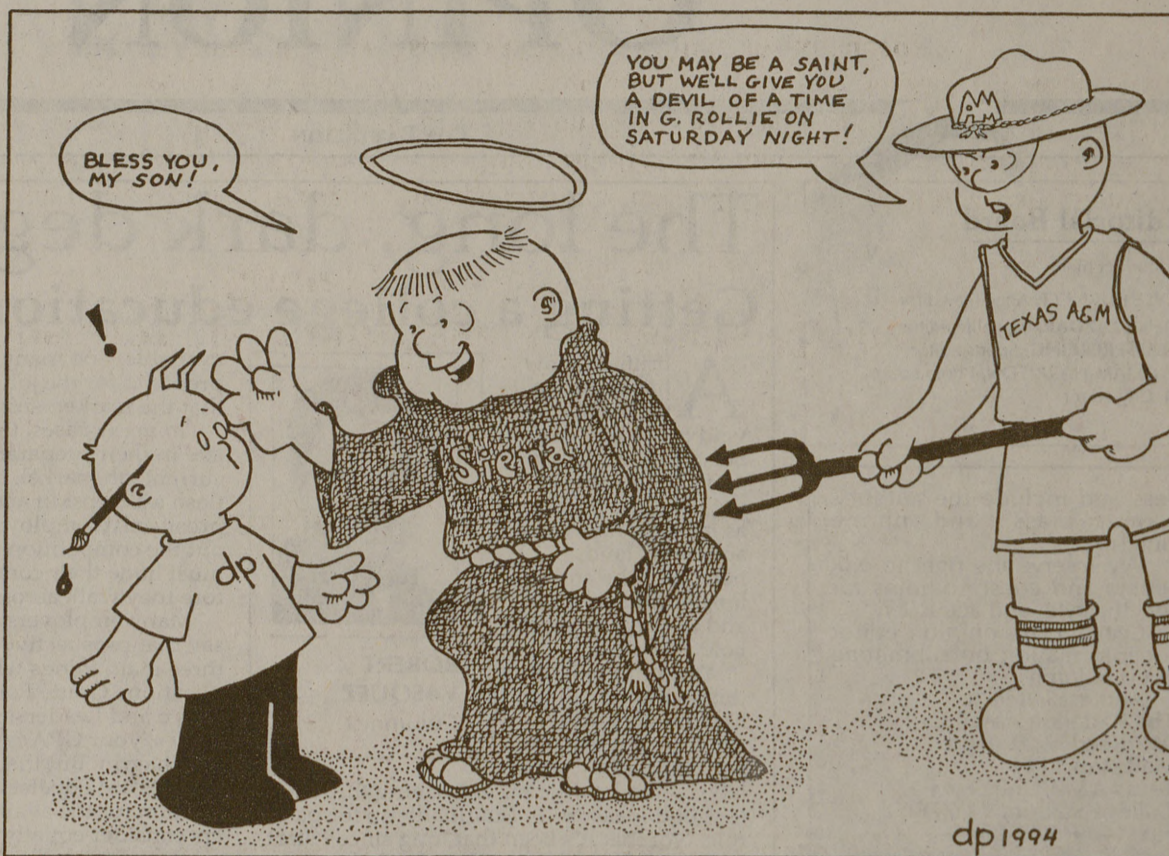
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Cowboys' Smith 'ready' for 49ers

The Associated Press

IRVING — Dallas running back Emmitt Smith, whose separated right shoulder has caused speculation about how effective he will be against the San Francisco 49ers on Sunday, pronounced himself close to 100 percent healed.

Smith said Thursday, "If the coaches are ready to call my number 30 times on Sunday, I'm ready. It will take a broken leg to keep me out of there."

"I've taken all the electrodes off and all that other stuff," Smith said. "I don't need it. I've been practicing and feeling good."

Asked if he had taken any hits on the shoulder, the NFL's MVP said, "Nope. You don't have to hit anybody in practice."

Smith said he won't take any pain killers for the shoulder on Sunday.

"That's a good way to really hurt it," he said. "You could really damage a shoulder that way."

Smith, who lost a fumble on Sunday in a 27-17 playoff victory over Green Bay, said it didn't happen because of his hurt shoulder.

"I just lost the ball," he said. "Sometimes that happens."

There were two other major injury concerns for the Cowboys defensive linemen Charles Haley and Russell Maryland.

Haley, a former 49er who calls Sunday's game "my Super Bowl," was having back problems again. He hasn't been practicing.

Haley, the Cowboys top pass rusher, has missed one game and parts of others this season because of disc problems.

"I would expect him to be ready to play but I don't think he'll get much work this week," said Dallas coach Jimmy Johnson. "He has a lot of soreness. Prior to last week's game he felt the best he has in four or five weeks."

A cold, wet practice field on Thursday made Johnson extra cautious.

Maryland, who suffered a severe sprained ankle two weeks ago in the regular season 10-7 victory over the New York Giants, has been practicing.

But Johnson said, "You can see he's having some problems with his ankle. There's a chance he might be available to play. We'll have to wait and see. Leon Lett will start at (right) tackle and there's a possibility that Russell could play in the game."

Playoff-perfect Aikman versus 49ers' Young

The Associate Press

IRVING — The Dallas Cowboys have a cozy comfort zone when Troy Aikman starts a playoff game for them. He's never lost one.

Aikman will take a 4-0 record as a playoff starter into the Cowboys' game against the San Francisco 49ers for the NFC championship Sunday at Texas Stadium.

Dallas coach Jimmy Johnson said Aikman has the confidence of a player "who has accomplished everything that you can accomplish as a quarterback."

"He can go into any game and not have something hanging over his head that he hasn't achieved something that needs to be achieved," Johnson said. "I think it's important that he has that kind of confidence. It's important with any quarterback."

Johnson said Aikman was a rare player.

"I think a quarterback can win in college who might be lacking in an area or two," Johnson said. "You can overcome their deficiency with some players around him or by being a dominant team."

"I think in professional football all your skills are tested. Do you have the physical skills? Do

you have the commitment? Do you study it? Do you do all the things that you have to do to be an outstanding quarterback? Troy has them all."

It wasn't long ago that Johnson and Aikman were feuding over differences in philosophy. The arrival of offensive coordinator Norv Turner helped the coach and his quarterback get on the same page.

"Norv relaxed Troy," wide receiver Michael Irvin said. "He was perfect for him."

Running back Emmitt Smith said, "Norv's offense is perfect for me. And it's just right for Troy."

"Getting the ball to the receivers on the run was the kind of offense I needed," Aikman said. "I can't give enough credit to Norv."

Now Aikman and Johnson are friends, with Aikman going over to Johnson's house for advice on raising tropical fish. Aikman recently left in the middle of the week to fly to New York appear on the David Letterman show. It didn't bother Johnson.

"If Troy wants to go back this week he can go," Johnson said.

Aikman won't be going, but it shows the solid relationship between the coach and his quarter-

back.

The duel between Aikman and the 49ers' Steve Young should be one of the highlights of the game.

"It could be exciting," Aikman said. "We have a rivalry but we're also good friends. That should make for an intense battle. Steve is the most athletically gifted quarterback in the league."

The Cowboys beat San Francisco 30-20 last year to advance to the Super Bowl and Aikman earned MVP honors in the 52-17 victory over the Buffalo Bills for the league championship.

"I think it raised a lot of people's opinions about me," Aikman said.

Aikman feels Young has had more pressure put on him than he has received.

"I was a first-round draft pick and people had their expectations but at least I didn't have Roger Staubach for a teammate," Aikman said. "It's not like Steve and Joe Montana. Even winning a Super Bowl probably won't silence the critics."

Aikman does feel a little pressure going into Sunday's game.

"Last year nobody expected us to win," he said. "The expectations are a little higher this year. We're expected to win the Super Bowl."

Buffalo Bills' no-huddle offense getting nowhere quickly

The Associated Press

ORCHARD PARK, N.Y. — The Buffalo Bills came to life when they went to the hurry-up offense. They just haven't been getting where they want in a hurry recently.

While the Bills are the only NFL team this season not to be hindered by the 40-second play clock, their no-huddle attack hasn't been rolling over opponents. The Bills haven't used it exclusively, either.

Faltering offense a concern as Bills meet Chiefs in AFC championship

The Kansas City Chiefs are preparing for a large dose of the no-huddle in Sunday's AFC championship game.

"They'll do that hurry-up offense, that's for sure," Chiefs cornerback Jay Taylor said. "That's 80 percent of their offense. You just play in a two-minute mode the whole game. Where the two-minute game is usually the short-

est part of your game, now it becomes the majority. That's all it is."

"The idea is not necessarily to confuse the defense as much as get you tired, cause you to make a mistake. We played it well last time. As the game goes on, you get into a groove on defense just like the offense."

Several times this season, particularly in a 23-7 loss at Kansas

City Nov. 28, the Bills never got into a groove. They gained only 43 yards rushing and had four turnovers. The Chiefs blanketed them for the final 53:56.

"That's one we'd like to put back and not look at," Bills quarterback Jim Kelly said. "It was our bad play that got us in trouble."

"Ever since I've played against the Chiefs, it was always a game we won, we had to have a top notch day. Neil Smith and Derrick Thomas are as quick as you'll find as pass rushers. The key to the game is slow them down."



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