

Carlson

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Oilers, was unceremoniously traded and Carlson was elevated to the top spot.

Last weekend Carlson played before the hometown fans in an exhibition matchup at the Alamodome between the Oilers and the Buffalo Bills.

Carlson grew up in the city and his parents still live here. His sister, her husband and their two children live in nearby Gonzales.

Carlson's wife, Barbara, is from Kerrville. Her parents and brother live there.

The Oiler preseason football camp at Trinity University had Carlson's family and friends as frequent visitors.

"I kind of feel sorry for the rest of the guys," Carlson said at the time. "Training camp is a tough time of year because all you're doing is sleeping, eating and drinking football, especially when you're family isn't around. But I can see my family and friends because this is where I grew up."

Friends and family, occupying a prominent spot between faith and football, are important to the deeply religious, 30-year-old athlete. Carlson and his wife frequently visit San Antonio, especially during the off season.

They are building their dream home in the Hill Coun-

try, about an hour from his folks and about the same from hers. The homestead, which Carlson says "is too small to call a ranch, but too big to call a lot," will be the perfect place to indulge their love of the outdoors and nature photography.

The couple rent an apartment in Houston.

"Being raised in San Antonio was a wonderful experience," Carlson says. "It's close to hunting, big deer country, the Hill Country and great people."

"I like Houston and I've gotten adjusted to it. But it's a much faster paced city than San Antonio."

Barbara Carlson also enjoys the quiet life.

"We're not very rambunctious at all," she says. "Just about the most exciting thing we do is go out to dinner or see a movie with friends. It's like we're 50 years old."

Ironically, the high school football hero who was destined to lead the Oilers was born in the home of Cowboys country. Carlson was 5 when his parents packed up the family in Dallas and moved to San Antonio.

The couple have lived in the same house on the same street in a North Side neighborhood since 1969. Bill Carlson was an executive with Volkswagen when he retired last year. Now he's got plenty of time to attend Oilers workouts and games.

He watched every practice at Trinity, even the grueling "two-days" that started at 6:30 a.m. "It's a little tough getting out

here that early," Carlson said one day from his seat in the stands, "but it's a lot tougher on them."

Carlson's mother and wife also got out to most of the practices. Unlike many "football mothers," June Carlson says she no longer closes her eyes when beefy defensive players charge her son during a game.

But she's still not quite used to her son's new status with the Oilers.

"It does feel strange when I think that there are only 23 jobs for starting quarterbacks" in pro football, she says. "And Cody's one of them."

He didn't get there overnight. Carlson played second fiddle to Moon for seven long years before getting his big chance. Before he was drafted by the Oilers in the third round in 1987, Carlson was a star at Baylor University.

The helmet and jersey he used at Churchill are enshrined in the Texas High School Hall of Fame.

Carlson was born to be a quarterback.

By the time he was on the football squad at Eisenhower Middle School, area coaches already were talking about the tall, thin young man with the strong right arm.

Jerry Comalander, who was Carlson's coach at Churchill, says "Cody was the best," no small praise from someone who has spent more than three decades working in high school athletics.

Irvan improves; doctors predict slow recovery

SUPERIOR TOWNSHIP, Mich. (AP) — Stock car driver Ernie Irvan showed strong improvement Tuesday, responding to commands from doctors and the swelling of his brain diminished.

"Although I would take these as very encouraging signs, he still remains in terms of brain and neurological injury in critical condition," said Dr. Errol Erlandson, a vascular surgeon at St. Joseph Mercy Hospital near Ann Arbor.

"Setbacks and complications are certainly a possibility. A slow, progressive recovery would be the best we could look at at this time."

Erlandson said he was encouraged that the hospital's trauma team has not found any additional injuries since Irvan was brought in after his car slammed into a wall during practice Saturday for the Goodwrench Dealers 400.

Irvan sustained head and lung injuries in the crash and remained on a ventilator Tuesday. His lung injury has stabilized, Erlandson said.

Irvan began opening his eyes Monday afternoon after drugs given him were decreased and he responded with some body movements Monday evening.

"These are certainly not responses that we would call perfectly normal or fully responsive or conscious, but they are appropriate," Erlandson said.

Irvan's eyes were open at times and he is able to move his arms, legs and head and also to grimace. The ventilator prevents him from trying to talk, however, Erlandson said.

The only surgery done so far has been a minor procedure to make it easier for Irvan to breathe. There are no immediate plans to try to move Irvan to a hospital closer to his home in Rockwell, N.C.

Irvan, 35, and one of NASCAR's top drivers, was traveling 176 mph when he struck debris that cut a tire and sent him into the wall.

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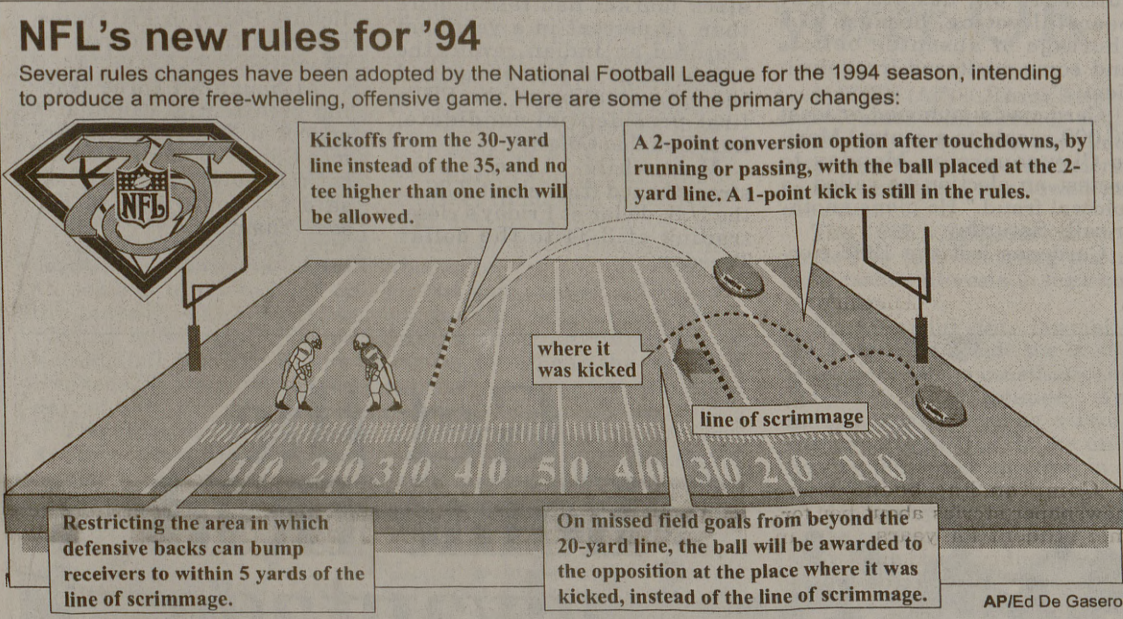
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