

O'Neal's thumb requires surgery; out 6-8 weeks

□ The Magic center injured by foul in pre-season game against the Heat.

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — Shaquille O'Neal must have surgery on his broken right thumb and may be out of action until just before New Year's.

The 7-foot center who led the Orlando Magic to the NBA Finals last season will undergo a minor procedure to repair a piece of the bone in his thumb on Thursday, said Dr. Richard Shure of the Jewett Orthopaedic Clinic.

"He will be out of competitive basketball for approximately six to eight weeks after surgery," Shure said after examining O'Neal on Wednesday.

An angry O'Neal said his thumb was bent back flat when he was raked across the hand by Miami center Matt Geiger on a move to the basket in the second quarter of the Magic's 106-91 exhibition victory Tuesday.

In his three NBA seasons, O'Neal has only missed three games due to injury. Last season he averaged 29.3 points, 11.4 rebounds and 2.4 blocked shots to

lead the Magic to the Eastern Conference championship and the finals for the first time.

In this case, he will be back for the majority of the regular season and playoffs. But John Geiger, the team's director of basketball operations, said: "There's no good time to have an injury."

There was no word on how the Magic will fill the spot al-

though they signed veteran Jon Koncak as O'Neal's backup in the offseason. Veteran forward Anthony Avent also could play up front.

Immediately after the game Tuesday, O'Neal criticized Geiger's move.

"I'm mad about this," he said. "It shouldn't take someone getting hurt for people to stop chopping me.

Geiger was not called on the play. In fact, O'Neal called for traveling as he went along the baseline and what looked like a dunk.

"Our game plan was to get him if he got the ball and he was in too close," said. "It was a just a moment. There was nothing about it."

Aikman most overrated Cowboy



NICK GEORGANDIS
SPORTS EDITOR

The Dallas Cowboys are a great football team. They have the most consistent running back in the league in Emmitt Smith, the best wide receiver this side of Jerry Rice in Michael Irvin and a dominating defense, that come Sunday, will become even greater and a lot more wealthy.

They also have the player who gets more unnecessary hype than any other in the league: Troy Aikman. Aikman is a perennial All-Pro quarterback who completes a high percentage of his passes, throws for a lot of yards and is on the winning sideline a whole heck of a lot of the time.

He's also what I like to call a product of the system. One of the greatest in football since the days of David Klingler and Andre Ware during the run-and-shoot hey-day of the University of Houston in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Every week, Aikman ranks among the top three quarterbacks in the league in completions, yards and touchdown passes. When you look at the supporting cast Aikman enjoys, there is no reason why he should not lead the league by leaps and bounds in every category.

He has all the time in the world to heave the ball downfield and the greatest collection of weapons — Smith, Darryl Johnston and Jay Novacek — of any offense in the NFL. Plug any other average NFL quarterback into the Cowboys' lineup, say Erik Kramer, Stan Humphries or Neil O'Donnell, and they would put up mirror-image numbers.

But put a truly great NFL quarterback into the Cowboys' offense, like John Elway or Dan Marino, and the Cowboys would be downright invincible. With the Cowboys around him, Marino could shatter his own passing records and go down as the greatest quarterback in NFL history.

A perfect example of how falsified Aikman's numbers are came last Thanksgiving when the Cowboys played the Green Bay Packers. Aikman was injured (wow,

there is a shocker), and up Wade Wilson got for Dallas. Wilson is the type journeyman quarterback if there ever was one, yet those wonderful years around him, he threw 300 yards and put it up on the board in the boys' win.

Is Wade Wilson a superstar? I don't think so. On a team scale, he probably ranks about the same as Smith at the top, as the boys sorely learned two seasons ago.

When Smith held more money, Aikman forced to step up and Man on the offense, rookie Derrick Lassie, both failed miserably.

In the season opener Monday Night Football, Cowboys were whipped by very mediocre Washington Redskins team.

The next week, they were bored to death by the Bills 13-10 — the exact Bills team they had mangled just nine months ago with much higher status the line.

When a team achieves great deal of glory, it's inevitable that some players will be better than others and counted from year to year.

Who's better than Smith? T.O. Dorsett? Who's better than Aikman?

more sure-handed backup quarterback: Wilbur Miller? Oliver Luck?

Who's the Cowboys' quarterback: Troy Aikman or Roger Staubach?

The first comparison is certainly still debatable. Smith's seems to keep getting better and better.

The second comparison for your humor, but without the Houston Oilers, like a fire without the Oilers.

The third is the often-winner's lukewarm. He wins a lot. Staubach, winner — when the game on the line, he made that won the games.

There is a difference. That difference is the son Aikman is the most rated player in the NFL.

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