

San Francisco offers Cherry new contract

By Janean Chun
Of the Emerald

Thousands of kids, and their parents, have stopped him for his autograph. "It doesn't affect me," he says. "It's flattering... but no big deal."

Who is this? A rock singer? A television star? An MTV veejay?

No, it's University senior Tony Cherry, former Duck football standout. Cherry was drafted last spring by the San Francisco 49ers, who recently were eliminated from the National Football League playoffs by the New York Giants.

The 49ers were victims of their own inability to run the football, registering only 29 yards on the yard compared to the Giants' 216.

San Francisco receiver Dwight Clark was even quoted after the playoff loss as saying, "Our running game — we couldn't get back to the line of scrimmage."

Cherry, a successful tailback at Oregon, was released by the 49ers in October after playing just five games, but San Francisco asked him back for the 1987 season and offered him a new contract with a \$10,000 increase next year.

He is currently in Eugene to finish his degree in telecommunications at the University.

In 1985, his last season at Oregon, Cherry became the third rusher in the history of the Ducks to pass the 1,000-yard mark. His 1,006-yard senior season is second only to Bobby Moore's (Ahmad Rashad) 1,575 yards in 1971.

Cherry had five 100-yard games and 10 touchdowns during the 1985 season and earned first-team all-Pac-10 honors as a running back. He also received the Clark Trophy, which is awarded to the team's most improved player.

Cherry was an obvious candidate for the NFL and expected to be drafted between the fifth and 10th rounds. When he heard he was drafted by San Francisco in the ninth round, he was, "happy, relieved. It got kind of hairy there. It was almost the 10th round."

In the 1986 pre-season game against the Los Angeles Raiders, Cherry made his first NFL touchdown. "It happens like it usually happens. It was

just regular. It didn't sink in until after the game, when I sat down and thought about it. It was nice," he says.

And in the final pre-season game against the Los Angeles Rams, he made another touchdown. This time he spiked the ball. "That was fun," he says, laughing. "I always wanted to do that."

Yet Cherry remains level-headed in a profession where it is easy to get carried away by fame.

"I don't know, it's pretty much just football to me — just another step. And I felt I deserved it because I did well in college.

"I was never in awe of anybody, but I did stop a couple of times and say, 'I'm here.' I saw it as the highest point a man can go. You know, it's professional. But it seemed the same, just another team.

"Whenever I get on the field, it doesn't matter what level it is, the job's got to be done. The opponent is the enemy; I have to elude him. I have the ball — I have to score."

Cherry also spent some time off the field with the famous 49er players. During a break from summer camp, he attended a barbeque at Ronnie Lott's uncle's house with Lott and Roger Craig.

"Everyone thinks they're head cases just because they're professional athletes," Cherry says. "It doesn't make much sense to me. I mean, they were good enough to get there. They're just human beings and they play football. It's that simple."

Cherry made the final 45-man cut for the 49ers because two other running backs, Bill Ring and Wendall Tyler were on injured reserve.

Then Wendall Tyler came off injured reserve and went on the required NFL waiver wire.

The waiver wire runs 24-hours throughout the entire NFL. A scout for any team can read the players' names by computer and can pick any player up.

Tyler, who has a no-cut contract, was not picked up, so Cherry was released.

"I just got caught up in a numbers game. They didn't want to lose me, but no one picked Wendall up because of his knee (Tyler went through knee surgery last year), his age — he's 31-years old, and his salary — \$500,000 a year. It's a business. They like to get rid of

that kind of thing, especially with his being that old.

"They (San Francisco) said, 'What can we do? We can't pay both of them. We have to pay Wendall.'

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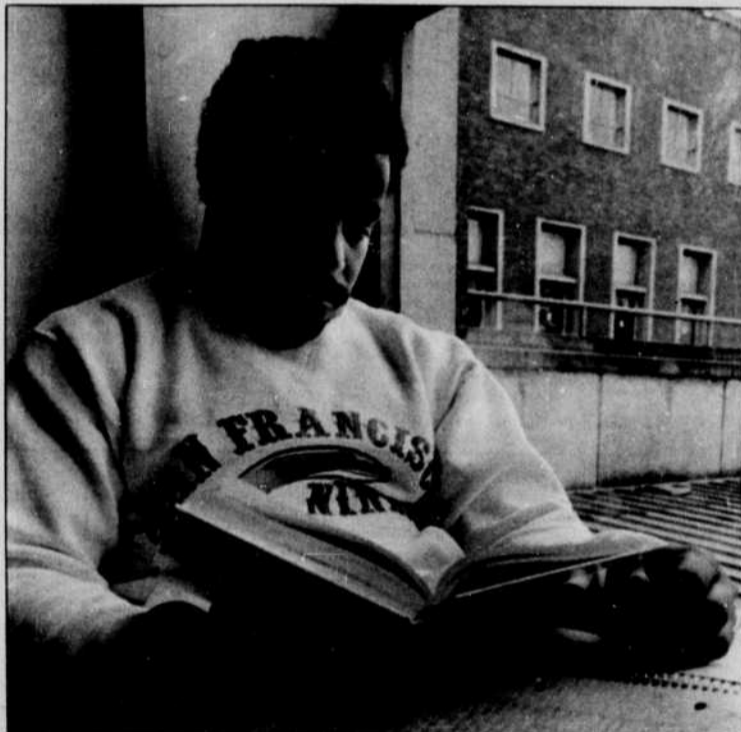


Photo by Michael Wilhelm

Former Oregon football standout Tony Cherry may be hitting the books right now to complete his degree in telecommunications, but a new 1987 contract offer from the San Francisco 49ers will most likely put him back on the gridiron soon.

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| M.C.A.T. (test is April 25) \$170 Saturdays, 9am-12 noon, 1pm-4pm February 14, 21, 28, March 7, April 4, 11, 18 (break during Spring vacation) 7 sessions, 6 hours each | |