

## Sports

# NFL strike gives opportunity to former Oregon grid greats

By Aaron Knox  
Emerald Sports Editor

The National Football League Players' Association strike may mean a new lease on life for several ex-Oregon gridders cut during this summer's NFL tryouts.

It will if the NFL owners carry out their threat to continue fielding teams during the player walkout. In a statement issued before the regular season began,



Tony Cherry

the owners announced their intent to fill rosters with free agents and non-striking personnel in the event of a strike.

The strike enters its second week Tuesday. After a one-week hiatus to assemble temporary squads, teams return to a full slate of games this weekend.

All four television networks that carry NFL games (NBC, CBS, ABC and ESPN) have announced plans to carry the games the first week, then check the ratings and fan reaction.

If the games attract reasonable ratings, the networks will continue to televise them until the end of the strike. A clause in the networks' contracts with the NFL provides financial relief from reduced ratings and advertising revenues caused by a strike, to be paid by the owners.

Even though no football fan, player, or owner likes the prospects of a protracted strike, the timing couldn't be better for those players who found themselves out of a job when rosters were trimmed to 45 men for the regular season.

Among the hundreds of hopefuls cast loose are several Oregon alumni. Former Ducks had a particularly rough summer in 1987, as no less than four were given their unconditional release during preseason. Even those who were spared the ignominy of being cut fared poorly. But they are out of action now, regardless.

But the four who were cut — punter Mike Preacher (Chiefs camp), fullback Kevin Willhite (Packers camp), tailback Tony Cherry (2nd year, 49ers) and receiver Scott Holman (Jets camp) — are now part of the pool from which the NFL owners hope to assemble their teams.

Holman, a 1985 graduate, played one season with the St. Louis Cardinals before trying out for the Jets as a free agent. Cherry also graduated in 1985, and spent last year with the 49ers. They should be the first former Ducks to sign on, and they were the last two cut in preseason.

The mere availability of the

athletes is no guarantee the players are willing to sign on as non-union players. NFLPA president Gene Upshaw has pointed out when the strike ends and those who held out without pay return, they will likely have animosity towards those who did play. Those kinds of enemies could last longer than a player's career, which in the NFL averages 3.7 years.

Buffalo nose tackle Fred Smerlas was even more succinct. "They're dead men," he said in a wire service interview last week.

However, many players may also realize that playing during the strike is a one-shot opportunity, or feel little loyalty towards an organization to which they either haven't belonged or were only briefly associated.

Ex-Green Bay rookie defensive tackle Jeff Drost, who signed a strike-option contract immediately after being cut by the Packers, summed up the feelings of many when he was asked the reaction of his teammates. "They aren't my teammates anymore," he said.



Scott Holman

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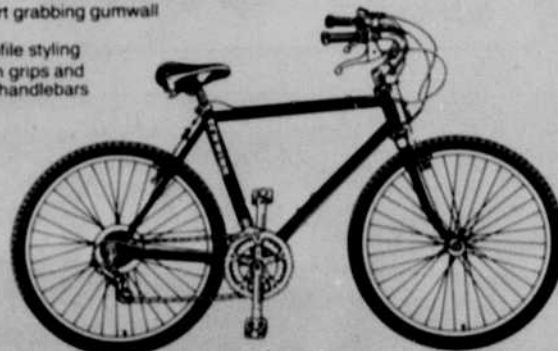
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