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Friends say funds won't ruin Drew

PULLMAN, Wash. (AP) — Shorty Bennett may have doubted whether the gangly high-school kid with big feet had much National Football League potential.

But he says Drew Bledsoe, signed Tuesday by the New England Patriots to a six-year, \$14.88 million contract as the No. 1 pick in the 1993 draft, has always exceeded expectations.

"He was just a gangly kid who had big feet and was a little bit clumsy," said Bennett, a Whitworth College coach who conducts the Northwest Football Camp in Spokane for high school athletes.

"I couldn't have predicted he'd be a No. 1 draft pick, but in his junior and senior years he was getting big and tall and his techniques and fundamentals were clean," Bennett said. "He was starting to grow into his long legs and feet."

Patriots coach Bill Parcells said Tuesday he won't play the former Washington State quarterback until he's ready for the NFL, but Bennett doesn't think Bledsoe will be on the sidelines for long.

"He's demonstrated over the years with his talent that he exceeds all expectations of what he can do," Bennett said. "As a sophomore at Walla Walla, he bumped a senior for the starting job late in the year. That caused problems. He did the same thing at Washington State, and that also caused problems."

Bledsoe took over the starting job from two old-

er Cougar quarterbacks midway through his freshman year and held the position until leaving after his junior year to become eligible for the draft.

"My guess is at New England, he'll do the same thing," Bennett said. "He will become their starter much, much earlier than anyone expects him to. He's very, very good."

'He came back here a couple of weeks ago. I heard a couple of beeps outside my apartment and looked out and he was smiling at me with his new Porsche.'

— Mike Pattinson, WSU quarterback

Bennett is a former Walla Walla High School coach whose assistant was Bledsoe's dad, Mac Bledsoe. The senior Bledsoe, now an assistant at Yakima's Eisenhower High, helps Bennett run the annual camp, where Drew Bledsoe spent his formative years and returned this summer to coach.

Bledsoe's big-money pro football contract won't go to the 21-year-old's head, his Northwest friends say.

"He doesn't forget his roots. What we think is being standard as far as his personality goes, people back East are claiming he's the most wonderful man they've been around," Bennett said. "He's not an egotist."

"I don't think it's going to change him. Drew's a pretty level-headed kid," said Mike Pattinson, the senior quarterback who succeeds Bledsoe at Washington State.

Well, some things have changed.

"He came back here a couple of weeks ago," Pattinson said. "I heard a couple of beeps outside my apartment and looked out and he was smiling at me with his new Porsche."

Italian takes Tour lead

AVRANCHES, France (AP) — Mario Cipollini of Italy took the lead in the Tour de France today as his GB-MB squad won the fourth-stage team time trial.

Cipollini moved into a six-second lead over Belgium's Wilfried Nelissen, the leader the past two days.

GB-MG won the 50-mile time trial in 1 hour, 34 minutes, 10 seconds. ONCE was next, five seconds behind, and Motorola was third, 16 seconds.

Miguel Indurain led his Banesto team to seventh place.

Sprint specialists have dominated the first three stages over relatively flat terrain. Nelissen won Monday's stage and finishing second Tuesday to Djamilidine Abdoujaparov of Uzbekistan.

Abdoujaparov, 29, won two stages on the tour in 1991 but ended the race that year with a spectacular last-day fall on the Champs-Elysees in Paris.

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