

Chargers drop QB after 3 ill seasons

SAN DIEGO — The San Diego Chargers got rid of Ryan Leaf after three turbulent seasons, waiving the bad-boy quarterback on Wednesday as new general manager John Butler began reshaping the NFL's worst team.

Leaf was hailed as a savior when the Chargers took him with the second pick overall in the 1998 draft, right after Indianapolis took Peyton Manning. Instead, he quickly turned into a distraction with his poor play on the field and his boorish behavior off it.

He leaves the Chargers with a 4-14 record as a starter, having thrown 33 interceptions and just 13 touchdown passes.

Leaf missed all of the 1999 season with a shoulder injury and seemed to have gotten his career back on track when he won back the starting job last summer. But he was benched after throwing five interceptions and just one TD in the first two games. Although he started the final six games, he never did regain the respect of his teammates.

The Chargers released four other players: cornerbacks DeRon Jenkins and Darryll Lewis, running back Robert Chancey and Kevin Gogan.

"We are preparing for free agency and the draft and this allows these

players to catch on with another team," Butler said in a statement. "We wish them well."

Also Wednesday, the Chargers signed quarterback Dave Dickenson of the Calgary Stampeders to a two-year contract.

Dickenson, who had talked with several other NFL teams, had until Wednesday to agree to terms or have his rights revert to the Stampeders for another season.

Ironically, Dickenson preceded Leaf at Charles M. Russell High in Great Falls, Mont., in the early 1990s.

Dickenson, who has been plagued with injuries during his five-year CFL career, is expected to compete for the Chargers' backup job. That competition could also include Michael Vick if the Chargers take the exciting Virginia Tech quarterback with the first pick in the April draft.

The Chargers also are expected to sign a veteran NFL free agent.

Dickenson was named the CFL's Most Outstanding Player after throwing for 4,636 yards, 36 touchdowns and just six interceptions last year while leading the Stampeders to the playoffs. He completed 64 percent of his passes.

The Associated Press

Buffalo waives Flutie

By John Wawrow
The Associated Press

ORCHARD PARK, N.Y. — The Buffalo Bills have decided to cut Doug Flutie and go with Rob Johnson as their starting quarterback.

The team was set to officially announce the decision at a 7 p.m. news conference.

The decision settles a long-brewing controversy that divided the team and its fans over which of the two quarterbacks who were brought in three seasons ago should be the starter.

The Bills were forced to make a decision mostly for salary cap reasons as they had to cut almost \$8 million off their payroll in time for Thursday's 4 p.m. deadline.

By cutting Flutie instead of Johnson, the Bills save about \$3 million in cap dollars, about \$1.4 million more than they would have saved by cutting Johnson.

The decision comes after a month of speculation, ever since new Bills general manager Tom Donahoe announced on Feb. 2 that one would

have to go.

Flutie, who went 21-9 as a starter with the Bills, was one of the team's most popular players. But he turns 38 in October and that put him at a disadvantage.

Johnson, who will be 28 next month, is both younger and considered to have the much stronger arm. And, at 6-foot-4 and 212 pounds, he is considered to have the prototypical build of a potential star quarterback.

The Bills, under new coach Gregg Williams, are planning to introduce the aggressive and timing-sensitive West Coast offense this season.

Johnson's drawbacks over the last three seasons have been injuries and an inability to get rid of the ball quickly.

Johnson, 8-10 in his 18 starts with the Bills, was sacked 49 times last season — once for every seven times he dropped back to pass. He also missed three games because of a separated shoulder, and was knocked out of four of 11 starts because of injuries.

Nomar out for 2 weeks

By Howard Ulman
The Associated Press

FORT MYERS, Fla. — Nomar Garciaparra will miss at least two weeks of spring training because of an injured right wrist, the first setback in a season of great hope for the Boston Red Sox.

The two-time defending AL batting champion hopes to be ready for opening day. But if rest doesn't fix the problem, he didn't rule out surgery.

"If (the doctors) were thinking about it, they didn't tell me and I didn't want to hear it right now," he said Wednesday. "Hopefully, this works, even if there has to be rehabilitation."

The frustrating thing for the All-Star shortstop is the puzzling nature of the injury.

He and team physician Dr. Bill Morgan traced it back to Sept. 25, 1999, when Baltimore's Al Reyes hit Garciaparra on the wrist with a pitch. But Garciaparra played all of

2000 with only mild discomfort in the wrist and led the AL with a .372 average.

And last Sunday he had his normal spring training workout. Then he went to bed and, by morning, everything had changed. The wrist was swollen and he couldn't throw a ball or swing a bat.

"They tell me that's kind of important in the line of work that I do," he said with a laugh.

He wasn't in as good a mood last Monday morning.

"I was shocked when I woke up," he said. "The reason I'm concerned is because it was something that happened awhile ago and has come back."

"Since I've been here and working out and training and swinging the bat a whole lot more, it's really flared up."

He had an MRI and the injury was diagnosed as a split tendon, which isn't as severe as a tear, with inflammation.

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