

PROFILE

This Lemon is no lemon

by Dick Baltus

**Goodness,
get a load of
that thing, sitting
up there like some
monolithic tribute to**



About the only thing Steve Lemon doesn't make look easy is weightlifting.



the sequoia; a lifesize replica of El Capitan. Look at the way it rests on those broad shoulders, a fire hydrant on a freeway. Wait, it stirred. Ooh, it's getting all red and bulging out even more. Oh no, run; it's alive.

Yep, he's changed folks. They sent Steve Lemon down to Stanford to go to school and play football, and after just one year he came back equipped with a neck — "The Neck" — and a fresh supply of polysyllables.

Oh, he's still a nice guy, still the kind of guy you'd like to take home to meet your mother. But now he has "The Neck," and if he wanted to wear a St. Christopher he'd have to hang it from a hula-hoop. And he has "The Thighs" to match. And now he says stuff like "In other words" and "As such" and "In general," not one single "You know" or "I mean" or "Like, um."

He acts just like a college student now. He looks like the football player he is — "I've added body mass," he says. "I look bigger, but I don't weigh that much more" — but he acts like a college student, one year and a whole other world wiser than he was at Gresham High School, where he graduated in 1980 as, perhaps, the finest student-athlete ever to wear the blue and white.

Now he is back at Gresham, slapping fresh paint on the walls that once bore posters imploring him and his Gopher teammates to "Maul the Mustangs" or "Ground the Eagles."

And he's back in the weight room getting ready for season No. 2, adding bulges to The Neck and inches to The Thighs. My how you've grown. The last time we saw you . . .

"When I look back," he says, "I think high school was pretty fun. The kids who say they can't wait to get out are crazy. I kind of sensed in high school that it was fun and that it was going to be tough coming out."

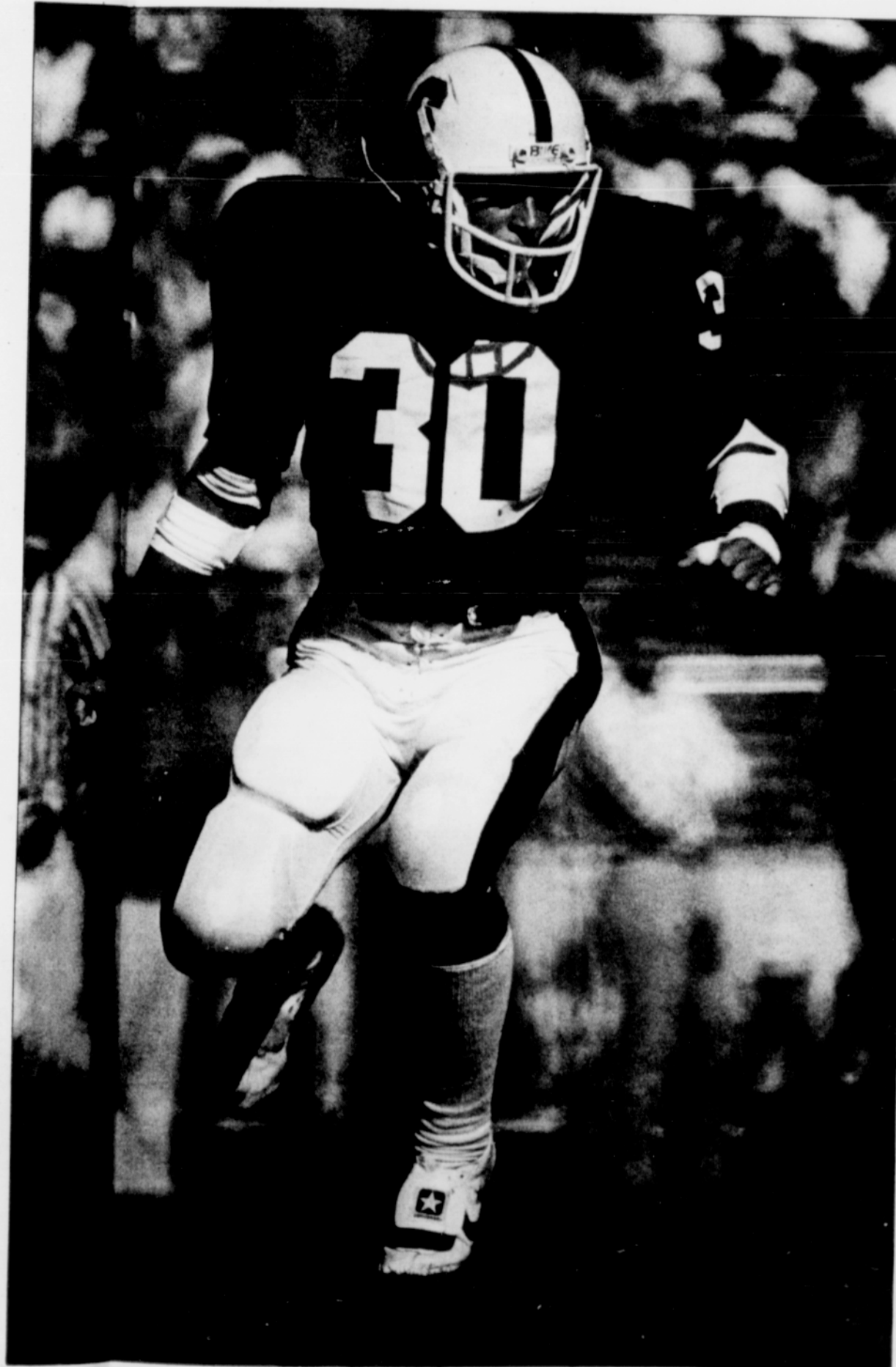
But surely not for Steve Lemon. This was The Boy Most Likely To Succeed, if they still did that bit. This was the star, three-sport athlete, the No. 2 GPA in the school, the No. 1 HUNK, the student body president. How could anything be tough for him?

Well, it couldn't. Or if it was, he made it look like it wasn't. He went to Stanford and started five games in the defensive secondary as a freshman. Hey, nuthin' to it. And he didn't even flunk any classes. A frosh, a football-playing frosh, a football-playing frosh playing football and studying Petronius and Plato, not to mention playbooks, at prestigious Stanford University, didn't have the decency to flunk a class.

"Academics didn't go too badly," Lemon says. "I learned what to study and what not to study. The first term I was reading everything and I was thinking 'My God, I don't have time to do all this.'"

Guess who found the time? You got it.

Now Lemon has to prove himself all over again. No big deal, everyone else has to, also. Nobody has a position sewn up and all that jazz. Lemon is used to it. He had your basic baptism under fire last year when he was thrown into a star-



"Juice" junked his nickname and his old No. 22 when he became a Cardinal.



Lemon painted his alma mater during summer break. Or was it vice versa?

ting assignment as strong safety against Oklahoma, as in OKLAHOMA; you know, where the wind and the football players come whipping down the plains.

"I hate to think about playing freshmen, period," says Chuck Detwiler, secondary coach at Stanford. "But without ever having played a down, Steve came in against Oklahoma and did just a tremendous job for us. He intercepted a pass, caused a fumble and had about eight unassisted tackles. I was probably more nervous than he was."

Probably. But Lemon's initial year wasn't all Horatio Alger material. At times, he played like the freshman he was. And one of those times came on regional TV.

"When we played Washington, through no fault of his own, he didn't have a great game," Detwiler says. "Rather than have him continue to get intimidated I sat him down for a while. That helped him."

Going into spring drills, Lemon was battling junior Kevin MacMillan, from Grant High School in Portland, and senior Pete St. Geme for the starting job this fall. Coming out, it was just Lemon and St. Geme.

"MacMillan has some kind of congenital (count the syllables in that one) hip defect," Lemon says. "We run this drill where they throw the ball at our legs and if Kevin gets hit, his hip pops out. I started most of the spring because he got hurt, but during our second to the last scrimmage I screwed up and didn't play well so going into fall St. Geme was listed ahead of me. But I think it all comes down to what happens in the fall. He'll go in as the No. 1 guy, but as far as I'm concerned the job is wide-open."

And to that end, Lemon spent his summer with the weights. He worked at the school until 4 p.m., then worked out, usually for about four hours. He could have gotten by on three hours, maybe even two. Paris Hancock, his girlfriend, thinks 15 minutes would have done the trick. But four hours is what Lemon chose to get by on. And he didn't do it because it made his day — because it didn't.

"The games are fun," he says. "Sometimes you look back and some of the other things that happened were fun. But it's more of a job than it ever was in high school."

"People think athletes are so lucky to get scholarships.

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