



# Sports Talk

by Ron Sykes, Sports Editor

Baseball today... football tomorrow. A strike is imminent.

The term "free agent" is misleading. And it's the free that causes concern. As all followers of professional sports know by now, free agents do not come free. They cost mucho dough. And also, in most cases, they cost compensation—compensation in the form of money or other players. Murray Chass writes that it is the teams, however, that view the "free" in free agent from that angle. Players in the NFL see the problem in another light. To them, the "free" doesn't belong in free agents because free agents in the NFL really aren't free to go anywhere. The NFL's free-agent system is worse, for players, than any of the other four major team sports. Walter Payton, the Chicago Bears all-everything running back, and undoubtedly the best RB in the NFL, is a good case in point. Payton declared his free agency this year and not one team was interested. Why?

Okay, share the wealth is good enough reason. The last time NFL players entered into labor negotiations with their employers their war cry was "freedom." They felt oppressed by the then-existing free-agent rule and wanted a new rule, one which would give them significant freedom of movement.

They were told when they ratified the new agreement, that they had won that kind of movement, but soon found out differently. Some players still can be heard screaming for legitimate free agency; the battle cry this time around is "share the wealth."

And therein lies the problem. Share the wealth. The players hope that owners will share some of that incredible wealth with them; but what is real is that owners only share with each other.

What has happened to free-agent

cy? Ed Garvey, the players' union boss, says the team have ignored the free agents, even such stars as Vince Ferragamo and Payton, because they're not interested in winning. NFL teams already make about as much money as they can and winning wouldn't bring in enough additional revenue to cover the cost of expensive free agents. So why sign free agents?

Other people contend that the asking price is too high. Draft choices in football, they point out, are too critical to give away even for star free-agents.

Whatever reason you buy, free agents just don't have much chance of leaving teams. Let's look at the results of the 1980 crop of free agents. Of 131 players who were free agents and thus eligible to move to other teams, only seven actually did change teams. And none of the seven who moved did so for compensation. In fact, only one player has moved for compensation in five years. Salaries of the players who changed teams in 1980 were increased from an average of \$55,000 to \$71,000, a 29 per cent increase. Salaries of the re-signed players rose a paltry 30 per cent, from an average of \$71,000 to \$96,000. These figures pale when placed alongside the salaries won in recent years by baseball players due to free-agency. If there is one thing threatening the attractiveness of the NFL, it's the desire on the part of some officials and owners to have a perfectly balanced league, one in which every team has a chance to wind up at .500. The draft has helped create that possibility. Free agency it its real form could counter it, prevent it from happening.

NFL owners are complacent, fat and wealthy. And for this reason they will probably encounter a strike next football season.

Michigan's Wolverines just may have the best offensive line around. To give you an idea about Michigan's line, there are these two tackles. Michigan uses the term "quick tackle" for Bubba Paris, and "strong tackle" for Ed Muransky. Paris is 6-foot-7 and weighs 270. That's quick and not strong? Well, Muransky is 6-7 and weighs 275. And these little people are joined by Kurt Becker (6-6 and 260) at one guard and Center Tom Dixon, 6-5 and 250. Michigan's favorite hunting ground is the state of Florida, where all this talent was found.

Go South, Rich Brooks, go South. And not California.

You probably know about Marcus Allen, the USC tailback who becomes eligible for the pros in 1982.

You should know about Trymaine Johnson, a wide receiver out of Grambling.

Said one scout, "Anthony Carter [of Michigan] may be great but he couldn't carry Johnson's jock. Comparing Carter to Johnson is like comparing Walter Payton to Archie Griffin."

Trojans should stay No. 1. If you thought the OSU vs. Minnesota was a comedy, then this week's Trojan vs Beavers should be a three-ring circus. USC by a landslide.

Where is he now: Gale Sayers. Until this September, Sayers served as athletic director at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale. Since then he has opened a public relations office in Chicago and has taken on some special projects for the Chicago Sun-Times newspaper.



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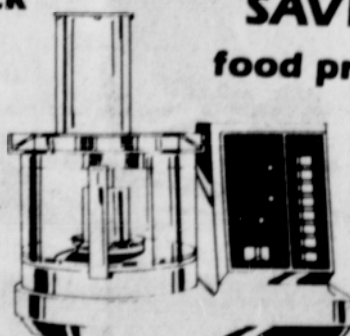
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