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Folder Title:
San Francisco 49ers Reception 2/27/90 [OA 6894] [1]

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49ERS RECEPTION / EAST ROOM
2:30 P.M. / TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 1990

IT SEEMS LIKE WE JUST CELEBRATED YOUR LAST SUPER BOWL VICTORY. AND NOW HERE WE ARE -- EDDIE DEBARTOLO, COACH SEIFERT [SEE-FERT] AND YOUR STAFF, THE PLAYERS OF THE SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS -- CONGRATULATIONS AND WELCOME TO THE WHITE HOUSE -- AGAIN.\\

((YOU KNOW, WHEN I FIRST HEARD THAT THIS OCCASION WAS IN HONOR OF ONE OF THE GREATEST VICTORIES IN AMERICAN CHAMPIONSHIP HISTORY, I COULDN'T HELP BUT LOOK AROUND AND WONDER:\\ "SO WHERE'S BUSTER DOUGLAS?"))\\\

((WE DO HAVE WITH US THE NEW CHAIRMAN OF THE PRESIDENT'S COUNCIL ON PHYSICAL FITNESS. HE'S SOMEONE WHO'S LARGER THAN LIFE, EVEN WHEN HE'S NOT ON THE BIG SCREEN -- ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER.\\

AS OUR NEW FITNESS CZAR, ARNOLD HAS JUST BRIEFED ME ON OUR GOALS FOR THE YOUTH OF AMERICA. AND I'VE VERY IMPRESSED BY THE VIGOR AND VISION WITH WHICH HE'S ASSUMED THIS MISSION.))

BUT TODAY WE'RE HERE TO HONOR THE 'NINERS. COACH SEIFERT -- I HESITATE TO CALL THIS YOUR ROOKIE YEAR. YOUR TEAM IS CARRYING INTO THE NINETIES THE TITLE THE STEELERS CARRIED IN THE SEVENTIES -- TEAM OF THE DECADE.

((OF COURSE, THIS LAST SUPER BOWL SEEMED TO HAVE BEEN OVER SOMETIME AROUND THE END OF THE NATIONAL ANTHEM.\\ IN FACT, I HAD A PUBLIC SERVICE COMMERCIAL THAT AIRED TWICE DURING THE GAME -- ONCE IN THE FIRST QUARTER, AND ONCE IN THE FOURTH.\\ AND THE FIVE PEOPLE WHO SAW IT THE SECOND TIME ARE WITH US TODAY.\\ AND ALL OF THEM WORK FOR ME.))\\

"JOE COOL" -- ALIAS JOE MONTANA -- I WAS IMPRESSED BY YOUR PERFORMANCE, BUT I HAVE TO SAY I WAS UNSURPRISED. YOU SEE, BACK IN 1979, JOE PLAYED AGAINST THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON AT THE COTTON BOWL. DOWN BY 22 IN THE FOURTH QUARTER AND SICK WITH THE FLU, JOE STILL BROUGHT NOTRE DAME BACK FOR A WIN.\\ AS A HOUSTONIAN THERE ARE SOME THINGS I DON'T FORGET, JOE.\\

WELL, NOW YOU'RE THE MVP FOR '82, '85 AND '90. AND IN SUPER BOWL TWENTY-FOUR, YOU THREW FOR A RECORD FIVE TOUCHDOWNS. COOLER THAN THE OTHER SIDE OF A PILLOW. FAIR TO SAY HE'S THE MOST ACCURATE PASSER IN THE NFL -- 70 PERCENT. NEVER THROWN A SUPER BOWL INTERCEPTION. ((IF ONLY I COULD TOSS HORSESHOES WITH THE SAME TOUCH.))\\\

AND JERRY RICE -- THREE TOUCHDOWN PASSES IN ONE GAME -- PERHAPS THEY OUGHT TO CALL YOU LONG GAIN AND WILD RICE.\\\

AND, OF COURSE, I COULDN'T FAIL TO MENTION WIDE RECEIVER JOHN TAYLOR AND TIGHT-END BRENT JONES -- EACH WITH A TOUCHDOWN TO HIS CREDIT.

AND WHAT I SAID LAST YEAR APPLIES TODAY: WHILE JOE AND JERRY HANDLED THE AERIAL ATTACK, ROGER CRAIG HANDLED THE TOUGH YARDAGE ON THE GROUND. ONCE AGAIN, ROGER'S SHOWN WHAT THE WORDS "GOLD RUSH" MEAN. AND TOM RATHMAN, YOU'VE HAD AN OUTSTANDING SEASON -- TOPPED OFF BY BULLDOZING TWO TOUCHDOWNS.

((THE ONLY THING IS, TOM, I JUST WISH YOU COULD GET OVER THIS MISTER NICE IMAGE YOU'VE RECENTLY DEVELOPED ON THE PLAYING FIELD.))\\

MIKE COFER ((COE-FER)), SEVEN FOR EIGHT\\ . . . THAT'S ABOUT AS CLOSE TO PERFECTION AS A PLAYER CAN GET.\\

THE OFFENSIVE LINE -- SUPERB. A FIVE-MAN STRATEGIC DEFENSE INITIATIVE PROTECTS JOE MONTANA.

AND HERE'S TO THE POWERS OF THE 'NINERS DEFENSE, LED BY RONNIE LOTT.\\ I UNDERSTAND THAT RONNIE GAVE THE TEAM A BOOST EVEN BEFORE THE NATIONAL ANTHEM, WITH HIS USUAL STIRRING PRE-GAME SPEECH. ((FUNNY HOW GUYS NAMED RONNIE SEEM TO HAVE A KNACK FOR "WIN ONE FOR THE GIPPER" SPEECHES.))\\

YOU HAVE ALL IMPRESSED AMERICA WITH A TRULY AWESOME PERFORMANCE. IN THE MEANTIME, WOULD YOU MIND IF I EXPRESSED MY APPRECIATION FOR THE HEROIC DENVER BRONCOS? THEY'RE TRUE SPORTSMAN.

THEY'RE ALSO NUMBER TWO IN THE NFL -- A CONSIDERABLE HONOR FOR A GREAT TEAM.

BUT THE GREATEST HONOR SHOULD GO TO A FORTY-NINER WHO'S ALWAYS AT YOUR SIDE. SOMEONE WHO'S SHOWN GREAT DETERMINATION. SOMEONE WITH VALOR -- YOUR DEFENSIVE BACK, JEFF FULLER.\\\

IT'S LITTLE WONDER THAT MANY ARE CALLING THE 49ERS A DYNASTY.

YOU HAVE SHOWN US THAT TO EXCEL IN FOOTBALL, AS IN ANYTHING, A TEAM MUST BE PASSIONATELY DEDICATED TO EXCELLENCE. WHEN ASKED ABOUT THIS, JOE SIMPLY SAYS: "I SEE MYSELF AS A MAN STRUGGLING IN A BUSINESS THAT'S VERY COMPETITIVE." WELL PUT, IF A BIT UNDERSTATED.

THIS FIGHTING SPIRIT IS THE HALLMARK OF EACH AND EVERY MEMBER OF THIS TEAM, AND THE ENTIRE STAFF OF THE '49ER ORGANIZATION.

CONGRATULATIONS. YOU'RE THE BEST, BEST IN THE BUSINESS OF FOOTBALL. THANK YOU, GOD BLESS YOU AND GOD BLESS AMERICA.

# # #

THE PRESIDENT HAS SEEN

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

February 22, 1990

Chriss / Mark
Fine but I'll need a short briefing on all the inside stuff on players
FEB 22 PM 1:51

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

THROUGH: CHRISS WINSTON CW

FROM: MARK DAVIS MD

SUBJECT: San Francisco Forty-Niners Remarks

I. SUMMARY:

On Tuesday, February 27, 1990, you will speak before an audience of 200 people in the East Room at 2:30 p.m. The audience will consists of 160 people affiliated with the Forty-Niners, Cabinet members, and senior staff. Your remarks are six minutes long and will be prepared on speechcards.

II. DISCUSSION:

The proposed text is a congratulatory message for the 1990 Superbowl champions.

Sir:

Please note that a reference was added on p. 1 re the briefing you requested from Arnold Schwarzenegger prior to the 49ers event.

I suppose that, if you want, Arnold can walk in with you.

jc

Davis/Martin
Title: Montana
Feb. 21, 1990
Draft: Four

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS: 49ers RECEPTION, EAST ROOM
2:30 p.m., Tuesday, February 27, 1990

pronounce?
SEE-fert

It seems like we just celebrated your **last** Super Bowl victory. And now here we are -- Eddie DeBartolo, coach Seifert and your staff, the players of the San Francisco 49ers -- congratulations and welcome to the White House -- **again.**\\

((You know, when I first heard that this occasion was in honor of one of the greatest victories in American championship history, I couldn't help but look around and wonder:\\ "So where's Buster Douglas?"))\\\

((We do have with us the new Chairman of the President's Council on Physical Fitness. He's someone who's larger than life, even when he's not on the big screen -- Arnold Schwarzenegger.\\ As our new fitness czar, Arnold has just briefed me on our goals for the youth of America. And I've very impressed by the vigor and vision with which he's assumed this mission.))

But today we're here to honor the 'Niners. Coach Seifert -- I hesitate to call this your rookie year. Your team is carrying into the Nineties the title the Steelers carried in the Seventies -- Team of the Decade.

((Of course, this last Super Bowl seemed to have been over sometime around the end of the National Anthem.\\ In fact, I had a public service commercial that aired twice during the game -- once in the first quarter, and once in the fourth.\\ And the

five people who saw it the second time are with us today.\\ And all of them work for me.))\\

"Joe Cool" -- Alias Joe Montana -- I was impressed by your performance, but I have to say I was unsurprised. You see, back in 1979, Joe played against the University of Houston at the Cotton Bowl. Down by 22 in the fourth quarter and sick with the flu, Joe still brought Notre Dame back for a win.\\ As a Houstonian there are some things I don't forget, Joe.\\

Well, now you're the MVP for '82, '85 and '90. And in Super Bowl Twenty-Four, you threw for a record five touchdowns. Cooler than the other side of a pillow. Fair to say he's the most accurate passer in the NFL -- 70 percent. Never thrown a Super Bowl interception. ((If only I could toss horseshoes with the same touch.))\\\

And Jerry Rice -- three touchdown passes in one game -- perhaps they ought to call you Long Gain and Wild Rice.\\\ And, of course, I couldn't fail to mention wide receiver John Taylor and tight-end Brent Jones -- each with a touchdown to his credit.

And what I said last year applies today: While Joe and Jerry handled the aerial attack, Roger Craig handled the tough yardage on the ground. Once again, Roger's shown what the words "Gold Rush" mean. And Tom Rathman, you've had an outstanding season -- topped off by bulldozing two touchdowns. ((The only thing is, Tom, I just wish you could get over this Mister Nice Image you've recently developed on the playing field.))\\

Mike Cofer ((COE-FUR)), seven for eight\\ . . . that's about as close to perfection as a player can get.\\

The offensive line -- superb. A five-man Strategic Defense Initiative protects Joe Montana. And here's to the powers of the 'Niners defense, led by Ronnie Lott.\\ I understand that Ronnie gave the team a boost even before the National Anthem, with his usual stirring pre-game speech. ((Funny how guys named Ronnie seem to have a knack for "Win One For the Gipper" speeches.))\\

You have all impressed America with a truly awesome performance. In the meantime, would you mind if I expressed my appreciation for the heroic Denver Broncos? They're true sportsman. They're also Number Two in the NFL -- a considerable honor for a great team.

But the greatest honor should go to a Forty-Niner who's always at your side. Someone who's shown great determination. Someone with valor -- your defensive back, Jeff Fuller.\\\

It's little wonder that many are calling the 49ers a dynasty. You have shown us that to excel in football, as in anything, a team must be passionately dedicated to excellence. When asked about this, Joe simply says: "I see myself as a man struggling in a business that's very competitive." Well put, if a bit understated.

This fighting spirit is the hallmark of each and every member of this team, and the entire staff of the '49er organization. Congratulations. You're the best, best in the business of football. Thank you, God bless you and God bless America.

CHRISTINA'S COPY

3A's P.2 P. Jim Kelly

Davis/Martin
Title: Montana
Feb. 19, 1990
Draft: Three

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS: 49ers RECEPTION, EAST ROOM
2:30 p.m., Tuesday, February 27, 1990

It seems like we just celebrated your **last** Super Bowl victory. And now here we are -- Eddie DeBartolo, coach Seifert and your staff, the players of the San Francisco 49ers -- congratulations and welcome to the White House -- **again.**\\

((You know, when I first heard that this occasion was in honor of one of the greatest victories in American championship history, I couldn't help but look around and wonder:\\ "So where's Buster Douglas?"))\\\

S.I. 1/29/90 pg 72

Today we're here to honor the 'Niners. Coach Seifert -- I hesitate to call this your rookie year. Your team is carrying into the Nineties the title the Steelers carried in the Seventies -- Team of the Decade.

Washington Post 1/29/90 Pg C12

((Of course, this last Super Bowl seemed to have been over sometime around the end of the National Anthem.\\ In fact, I had a public service commercial that aired twice during the game -- once in the first quarter, and once in the fourth.\\ And the five people who saw it the second time are with us today.\\ And all of them work for me.))\\

From Dave

"Joe Cool" -- Alias Joe Montana -- I was impressed by your performance, but I have to say I was unsurprised. You see, back in 1979, Joe played against the University of Houston at the

S.I. 12/18/89 pg. 46

S.I. 12/18/89 pg. 46

Cotton Bowl. Down by 22 in the fourth quarter and sick with the flu, Joe still brought Notre Dame back for a win.\\ As a Houstonian there are some things I don't forget, Joe.\\

S.I. 2/5/90 pg. 21

Well, now you're the MVP for '82, '85 and '89. And in Super Bowl Twenty-Four, you threw for a record five touchdowns. Cooler than the other side of a pillow. Fair to say he's the most accurate passer in the NFL -- 70 percent. Never thrown a Super Bowl interception. ((If only I could toss horseshoes with the same touch.))\\\

S.I. 1/29/90 pg. 59

S.I. 12/18/89 pg. 46

And Jerry Rice -- three touchdown passes in one game -- perhaps they ought to call you Long Gain and Wild Rice.\\\ And, of course, I couldn't fail to mention wide receivers John Taylor and Brent Jones -- each with a touchdown to his credit.

Wash. Post 1/29/90 C/12

And what I said last year applies today: While Joe and Jerry handled the aerial attack, Roger Craig handled the tough yardage on the ground. Once again, Roger's shown what the words "Gold Rush" mean. And Tom Rathman, you've had an outstanding season -- topped off by bulldozing two touchdowns. ((The only thing is, Tom, I just wish you could get over this Mister Nice Image you've recently developed on the playing field.))\\

S.I. 1/1/90 pg. 31

Steve Cofer ((COE-FUR)), seven for eight\\ . . . that's about as close to perfection as a player can get.\\

The offensive line -- superb. A five-man Strategic Defense Initiative protects Joe Montana. And here's to the powers of the 'Niners defense, led by Ronnie Lott.\\ I understand that Ronnie gave the team a boost even before the National Anthem, with his

S.I. 1/29/90 pg. 60

Jerry Walker 49er Staff

S.I. 19.72
1/29/90

usual stirring pre-game speech. ((Funny how guys named Ronnie seem to have a knack for "Win One For the Gipper" speeches.))\\

You have all impressed America with a truly awesome performance. In the meantime, would you mind if I expressed my appreciation for the heroic Denver Broncos? They're true sportsman. They're also Number Two in the NFL -- a considerable honor for a great team.

But it's little wonder that many are calling the 49ers a dynasty. You have shown us that to excel in football, as in anything, a team must be passionately dedicated to excellence. When asked about this, Joe simply says: "I see myself as a man struggling in a business that's very competitive." Well put, if a bit understated.

Newsmakers 1989 invitation

This fighting spirit is the hallmark of each and every member of this team, and the entire staff of the '49er organization. Congratulations. You're the best, best in the business of football.

Thank you, God bless you and God bless America.

# # #

T'S FINAL

Davis/Martin
Title: Montana
Feb. 21, 1990
Draft: Four

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS: 49ers RECEPTION, EAST ROOM
2:30 p.m., Tuesday, February 27, 1990

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((We do have with us the new Chairman of the President's Council on Physical Fitness. He's someone who's larger than life, even when he's not on the big screen -- Arnold Schwarzenegger.\\ As our new fitness czar, Arnold has just briefed me on our goals for the youth of America. And I've very impressed by the vigor and vision with which he's assumed this mission.))

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This fighting spirit is the hallmark of each and every member of this team, and the entire staff of the '49er organization. Congratulations. You're the best, best in the business of football. Thank you, God bless you and God bless America.

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

February 23, 1990

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

THROUGH: CHRISS WINSTON

FROM: CHRISTINA MARTIN

SUBJECT: Briefing Material on Selected San Francisco 49ers

Eddie DeBartolo -- Owner
- Owner since 1977. Father owns the Pittsburgh hockey team.
- Shopping Mall developer.

George Seifert -- Head Coach
- This time last year, Seifert was relatively unknown and was assistant coach.
- First San Francisco native to coach this team.
- As a child, he used to sell 49ers programs.

Joe Montana -- Quarterback
- Threw five touchdowns for a Super Bowl record in Super Bowl XXIV.
- Named Super Bowl MVP in '82, '85, '90.
- Has never thrown a Super Bowl interception.
- Considered the NFL's most accurate passer. The majority of league quarterbacks average around 60% while Montana is at 70%.
- Montana was drafted 82nd in 1979 from Notre Dame. Today he is the highest-rated NFL quarterback ever.
- Montana has set Super Bowl records for most passing yards in a game (357), most career Super Bowl passes without an interception (93), and the highest career completion percentage in the Super Bowl (65.6).

Jerry Rice -- Wide Receiver
- (6,364) reached 6,000 career receiving yards in just five NFL seasons.
- (66) The team's all-time touchdown receptions leader.
- (70) Surpassed teammate Roger Craig as the all-time 49ers total touchdowns leader.
- Regarded as the best receiver in the league.

John Taylor -- Wide Receiver
- Participated in Pro Bowl as Punt Returner.

Brent Jones -- Tight End
- o This is his first full year as a starter.
- o Noted for his "good hands".

Roger Craig -- Running Back
- o Set records in the NFL as the first person to run over a 1,000 yards and recieve passes over 1,000 yards both in the same season.
- o Superior running back whose trademark is his high kick when he runs.
- o First person in NFL to ever accomplish two touchdown catches over ninety yards.
- o Craig caught last year's winning touchdown pass in the remaining seconds of the game.

Tom Rathman -- Fullback
- o Leading pass catcher in league among running backs with over 50 catches to his credit.

Mike Cofer -- Kicker
- o Last year and this year was the leading kicker in the NFL in regards to scoring.
- o Holds the 49ers record for most field goals attempted and made.

Ronnie Lott -- Safety
- o (48) exceeded all-time team-leading interception total of 47.
- o (617) set all-time team-leader in interception return yardage.

Jeff Fuller -- Safety
- o As a result of a tackle during the first game played after the earthquake at Stanford Stadium Fuller was critically injured. He was paralyzed and not expected to walk again. He has since recovered partially and is up and walking with diminished use of his right arm. He has attended most of the team's games and was on the sidelines during the Super Bowl.

The joke on Page two "And Jerry Rice -- three touchdown passes in one game -- perhaps they ought to call you Long Gain and Wild Rice" is in reference to Rice's excellent separation ability (Runs faster and farther when ball is airborne.) and is a play on "Long Grain and Wild Rice".

February 16, 1989

MEMORANDUM TO CHRISTINA MARTIN

FROM: JIM KLUG

SUBJECT: 49er BACKGROUND INFORMATION SUPER BOWL STATS

I. 49er TEAM HIGHLIGHTS:

A. 1989-1990 Season

1. Beat the L.A. Rams 30-3 in the NFC title game.
2. Beat the Minnesota Vikings in the divisional playoffs 41-13.
3. Bill Walsh resigned as head coach after 10 years, and was replaced by defensive coordinator George Seifert.
4. San Francisco maintained the league's 4th rated defense during 1989.
5. Total attendance in 1989 at 16 regular-season 49er games: 987,342
6. The three teams San Francisco met in this year's playoffs they beat by exactly 100 points.

B. Previous Super Bowl Scores

1. In Super Bowl XVI, 1982, San Francisco beat the Cincinnati Bengals 26-21.
2. In Super Bowl XIX, 1985, the Niners beat the Miami Dolphins 38-16.
3. In Super Bowl XXIII, 1989, the Nines beat the Cincinnati Bengals 20-16.
4. San Francisco beat the Denver Broncos in 1990 Super Bowl XXIV 55-10.

C. 1990 Super Bowl XXIV

1. The Nines became the first team to win consecutive Super Bowl championships since the Pittsburgh Steelers won two straight to end the 1970's and start the 1980's.
2. Three T.D.'s caught by last year's MVP Jerry Rice, one by John Taylor, one by Brent Jones. Fullback Tom Rathman rushed for two T.D.'s and Roger Craig for one.

3. Former Steeler QB Terry Bradshaw was ridiculed early on for predicting that the 49ers might be ahead of the Broncos by 55-3 at halftime: As it turns out, he wasn't that far off!
4. Denver got an idea of what was in store for them when - 20 minutes before kickoff - the huge air-filled Broncos helmet deflated right in the middle of the field.
5. The 55-190 score was the largest point differential in Super Bowl history.

D. Super Bowl XXIV Statistical Review

1. First Quarter
   a. 49ers: Rice 20 yard pass from Montana (Cofer kick)
   b. Broncos: Field Goal of 42 yards by Treadwell
   c. 49ers: Jones 7 yard pass from Montana (Cofer kick failed)
2. Second Quarter
   a. 49ers: Rathman 1 yard run (Cofer kick)
   b. 49ers: Rice 38 yard pass from Montana (Cofer kick)
3. Third Quarter
   a. 49ers: Rice 28 yard pass from Montana (Cofer kick)
   b. 49ers: Taylor 35 yard pass from Montana (Cofer kick)
   c. Broncos: Elway 3 yard run (Treadwell kick)
4. Fourth Quarter
   a. 49ers: Rathman 3 yard run (Cofer kick)
   b. 49ers: Craig 1 yard run (Cofer kick)
5. Total Attendance: 72,919

E. Miscellaneous 49er Facts

1. Since 1981, they have been a .650 home team and a .770 road team.
2. Over the past two postseasons, the Nines have won all six of their games by a combined score of 208-54. In those games, the Niner defense allowed only four touchdowns.
3. After SUper Bowl XXIV, the 49ers "decided as a team" that they would be the first to win three straight and five Super Bowls.

II. JOE MONTANA:

A. Professional Career

1. Considered the NFL's most accurate passer. The majority of league quarterbacks average around 60% while Montana is at 70%.
2. Montana is both the most accurate passer in terms of completion percentage and the quarterback with the lowest percentage of interceptions who has ever played in the NFL.
3. In 1987, Montana lead the NFL in passing, and threw a team-record 31 touchdowns. In one game, he set a league record by throwing 22 straight completions.
4. Montana has acquired the nicknames of "Joe Cool" and the "January Man" (the later for his performances in post-season play.
5. Over the past two post-seasons, Montana has thrown 19 touchdown passes with only one interception.
6. In the first halves of the 49ers three 1989-90 postseason games, Montana completed a total of 46 of 58 passes (79.3%), nine touchdowns and no interceptions.

B. Super Bowl Performances

1. Threw for a Super Bowl-record five touchdowns in Super Bowl XXIV (20, 7, 38, 28, and 35.)
2. Named Super Bowl MVP in 1982, 1985, and 1989.
3. Montana has yet to throw a Super Bowl interception.
4. Montana led the greatest drive in Super Bowl history - pushing the 49ers 92 yards in 11 plays against the Cincinnati Bengals in Super Bowl XXIII.
5. Montana has set Super Bowl records for most passing yards in a game (357), most career Super Bowl passes without an interception (93), and the highest career completion percentage in the Super Bowl (65.6).
6. Against the Broncos in Super Bowl XXIV, Montana completed 22 of 29 passes for 297 yards and established Super Bowl records with five touchdowns, no interceptions, most career completions, and most total yardage.

C. College Career

1. Montana was drafted 82nd in 1979 from Notre Dame. Today he is the highest-rated NFL quarterback ever.

2. Down by 22 in the fourth quarter and sick with the flu, Montana brought Notre Dame back for a win over Houston in the 1979 Cotton Bowl.

D. Quotes on Montana

1. "Give Joe Montana time to throw, and his performance will approach perfection."
   - S.I., Jan. 1990
2. "What Unitas was to the '60s and Staubach to the '70s, Montana is to the '80s."
   - S.I., Dec. 1989
3. "He has the accuracy of Price Waterhouse, and, as 49er broadcaster Wayne Walker once said, he's 'cooler than the other side of the pillow.'"
   - S.I., Dec. 1989
4. "Montana, 33, has reached a proficiency even he didn't know he had. This year his passing is far and away the league's best and his career best (he's first in NFL history in the category.)"
   - S.I., Dec. 1989
5. "Joe Montana's the greatest quarterback who ever played the game. Joe Montana is not human."
   - Cris Collinsworth, Cincinnati Bengals

III. OTHER INDIVIDUAL 49ers:

A. The 49er offensive line:

1. Left tackles Bubbu Paris (300 lbs.) and Steve Wallace
2. Left Guard Guy McIntyre
3. Center Jesse Sapolu
4. Right Guards Bruce Collie and Terry Tausch
5. Right Tackle Harris Barton

B. Just as Montana lifted the San Francisco offense in the postseason, 30-year-old free safety Ronnie Lott has elevated the defense. He has become the 49ers most stirring pre-game speaker.

C. Five 49ers have been together nine years and played on all four Super Bowl teams:

1. Joe Montana
2. Keena Turner
3. Eric Wright
4. Mike Wilson
5. Ronnie Lott

D. Key team players:

1. Jim Burt #64 - Nose Tackle
2. Roger Craig #33 - Running Back
3. Ronny Lott #42 - Safety
4. Matt Millen #54 - Linebacker
5. Joe Montana #16 - QB
6. William "Bubba" Paris #77 - Tackle
7. Tom Rathman #44 - Fullback
8. Jerry Rice #80 - Wide Receiver
9. John Taylor #82 - Wide Receiver
10. Keena Turner #58 - Linebacker
11. Steve Young #8 - QB

IV. 49er EXCERPTS FROM MAGAZINES AND NEWSPAPERS:

A. "Greatest team ever? Offensively, yes. San Francisco has the perfect scheme and the perfect cast to execute it."

B. "We are sailing in uncharted water with these San Francisco 49ers. We are seeing them put up numbers that we've rarely seen. We are seeing power football, defensive brilliance, and execution so precise it's scary."

C. "Always waiting in the shadows, like an assassin behind the door, is the 49ers long passing game."

D. "Damn, we're pretty good!"
- 49er Coach George Seifert watching his team beat the Rams 30-3.

E. "The Niners' offensive system, put in ten years ago by then coach Bill Walsh and refined by his successor, George Seifert, has reached a frightening level of proficiency."

F. "Montana carved up both teams (Vikings and Rams) with crosses and slants and quick outs. He gave them the slow death."

G. "In a sport where long-term greatness is all but obsolete, the Nines are still going strong near the end of their decade of dominance."

H. "The way the 49ers travel is absolutely luxurious. The team usually flies on widebody jets; most players have two or three seats to themselves to stretch out. Each player receives the equivalent of three first-class meals on cross-country flights. Once on the ground, the majority of the players get single rooms; most other NFL teams double up every player."

I. "Before this month, the San Francisco 49ers were the reigning world champs of football and the NFL team of the 1980's. Now, the 49ers are full-blown legends."

J. "San Francisco should be nominated by acclamation as a legitimate contender for the Best Team Ever!"

K. "They are playing at a level that no team in the NFL can match right now."
- Bronco Coach Dan Reeves

L. "Today the 49ers put the Broncos on a Rocky Mountain Low."

M. "At the next Pro Football Hall of Fame enshrinement in Canton, Ohio, it would not be a bad idea to induct the entire 1989 San Francisco team so the players can enjoy the game's ultimate honor while they are still around."

N. "Denver won the toss, but San Francisco elected to brutalize the Broncos."

O. "The Denver Broncos lied. They didn't show up after all."

V. PAST SPORTS ILLUSTRATED COVERS AND HEADLINES ON 49ers:

A. "Joe Knows Super Bowls"

B. "The Storm"

C. "No Mercy"

D. "Joltin' Joe"

E. "And the Beat Goes On"

F. "Looking Super"

Davis/Martin
Title: Montana
Feb. 21, 1990
Draft: Four

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS: 49ers RECEPTION, EAST ROOM
2:30 p.m., Tuesday, February 27, 1990

It seems like we just celebrated your last Super Bowl victory. And now here we are -- Eddie DeBartolo, coach Seifert and your staff, the players of the San Francisco 49ers -- congratulations and welcome to the White House -- again.\\

((You know, when I first heard that this occasion was in honor of one of the greatest victories in American championship history, I couldn't help but look around and wonder:\\ "So where's Buster Douglas?"))\\\

((We do have with us the new Chairman of the President's Council on Physical Fitness. He's someone who's larger than life, even when he's not on the big screen -- Arnold Schwarzenegger.\\ As our new fitness czar, Arnold has just briefed me on our goals for the youth of America. And I've very impressed by the vigor and vision with which he's assumed this mission.))

But today we're here to honor the 'Niners. Coach Seifert -- I hesitate to call this your rookie year. Your team is carrying into the Nineties the title the Steelers carried in the Seventies -- Team of the Decade.

((Of course, this last Super Bowl seemed to have been over sometime around the end of the National Anthem.\\ In fact, I had a public service commercial that aired twice during the game -- once in the first quarter, and once in the fourth.\\ And the

five people who saw it the second time are with us today.\\ And all of them work for me.))\\

"Joe Cool" -- Alias Joe Montana -- I was impressed by your performance, but I have to say I was unsurprised. You see, back in 1979, Joe played against the University of Houston at the Cotton Bowl. Down by 22 in the fourth quarter and sick with the flu, Joe still brought Notre Dame back for a win.\\ As a Houstonian there are some things I don't forget, Joe.\\

Well, now you're the MVP for '82, '85 and '90. And in Super Bowl Twenty-Four, you threw for a record five touchdowns. Cooler than the other side of a pillow. Fair to say he's the most accurate passer in the NFL -- 70 percent. Never thrown a Super Bowl interception. ((If only I could toss horseshoes with the same touch.))\\\

And Jerry Rice -- three touchdown passes in one game -- perhaps they ought to call you Long Gain and Wild Rice.\\\ And, of course, I couldn't fail to mention wide receiver John Taylor and tight-end Brent Jones -- each with a touchdown to his credit.

And what I said last year applies today: While Joe and Jerry handled the aerial attack, Roger Craig handled the tough yardage on the ground. Once again, Roger's shown what the words "Gold Rush" mean. And Tom Rathman, you've had an outstanding season -- topped off by bulldozing two touchdowns. ((The only thing is, Tom, I just wish you could get over this Mister Nice Image you've recently developed on the playing field.))\\

Mike Cofer ((COE-FUR)), seven for eight\\ . . . that's about as close to perfection as a player can get.\\

The offensive line -- superb. A five-man Strategic Defense Initiative protects Joe Montana. And here's to the powers of the 'Niners defense, led by Ronnie Lott.\\ I understand that Ronnie gave the team a boost even before the National Anthem, with his usual stirring pre-game speech. ((Funny how guys named Ronnie seem to have a knack for "Win One For the Gipper" speeches.))\\

You have all impressed America with a truly awesome performance. In the meantime, would you mind if I expressed my appreciation for the heroic Denver Broncos? They're true sportsman. They're also Number Two in the NFL -- a considerable honor for a great team.

But the greatest honor should go to a Forty-Niner who's always at your side. Someone who's shown great determination. Someone with valor -- your defensive back, Jeff Fuller.\\\

It's little wonder that many are calling the 49ers a dynasty. You have shown us that to excel in football, as in anything, a team must be passionately dedicated to excellence. When asked about this, Joe simply says: "I see myself as a man struggling in a business that's very competitive." Well put, if a bit understated.

This fighting spirit is the hallmark of each and every member of this team, and the entire staff of the '49er organization. Congratulations. You're the best, best in the business of football. Thank you, God bless you and God bless America.

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

February 23, 1990

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

THROUGH: CHRISS WINSTON

FROM: CHRISTINA MARTIN

SUBJECT: Briefing Material on Selected San Francisco 49ers

Eddie DeBartolo -- Ownwer

George Seifert -- Head Coach
- This time last year, Seifert was relatively unknown and was assistant coach.

Joe Montana -- Quarterback
- Threw for a Superbowl record five touchdowns in Super Bowl XXIV.
- Named Super Bowl MVP in '82, '85, '90.
- Has never thrown a Super Bowl interception.
- Considered the NFL's most accurate passer. The majority of league quarterbacks average around 60% while Montana is at 70%.
- Montana was drafted 82nd in 1979 from Notre Dame. Today he is the highest-rated NFL quarterback ever.
- Montana has set Super Bowl records for most passing yeards in a game (357), most career Super Bowl passes without an interception (93), and the highest career completion percentage in the Super Bowl (65.6).

? think this figure is too high

Jerry Rice -- Wide Receiver
- (6,364) reached 6,000 career receiving yards in just five NFL seasons.
- (66) The team's all-time touchdown receptions leader.
- (70) Surpassed teammate Roger Craig as the all-time 49ers total touchdowns leader.

John Taylor -- Wide Receiver

Brent Jones -- Tight End

Roger Craig -- Running Back

Tom Rathman -- Fullback

Mike Cofer -- Kicker

Ronnie Lott -- Safety

- (48) exceeded all-time team-leading interception total of 47.
- (617) set all-time team-leader in interception return yardage.

Jeff Fuller -- Safety

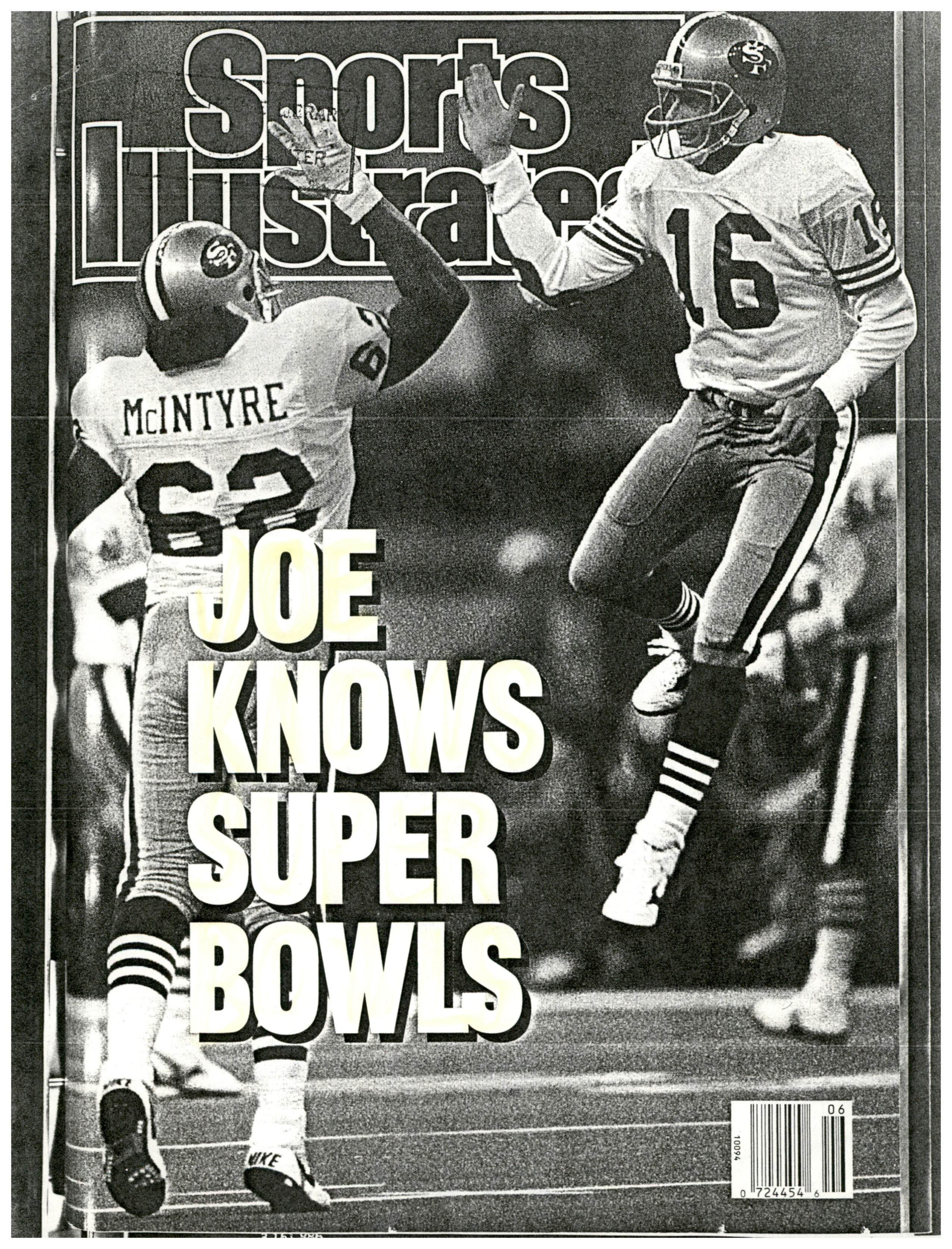
- As a result of tackle during the first game played after the earthquake at Stanford Stadium Fuller was critically injured. He was parlysized and not suppose to walk again. He has since recovered partially and is up and walking with diminished use of one his arms. He has attend most of team's games and was on the sidelines during the Superbowl.

The joke on Page two "And Jerry Rice -- three touchdwon passes in one game -- perhaps they ought to call you Long Gain and Wild Rice" is in reference to yards covered and is a play on "Long Grain and Wild Rice".

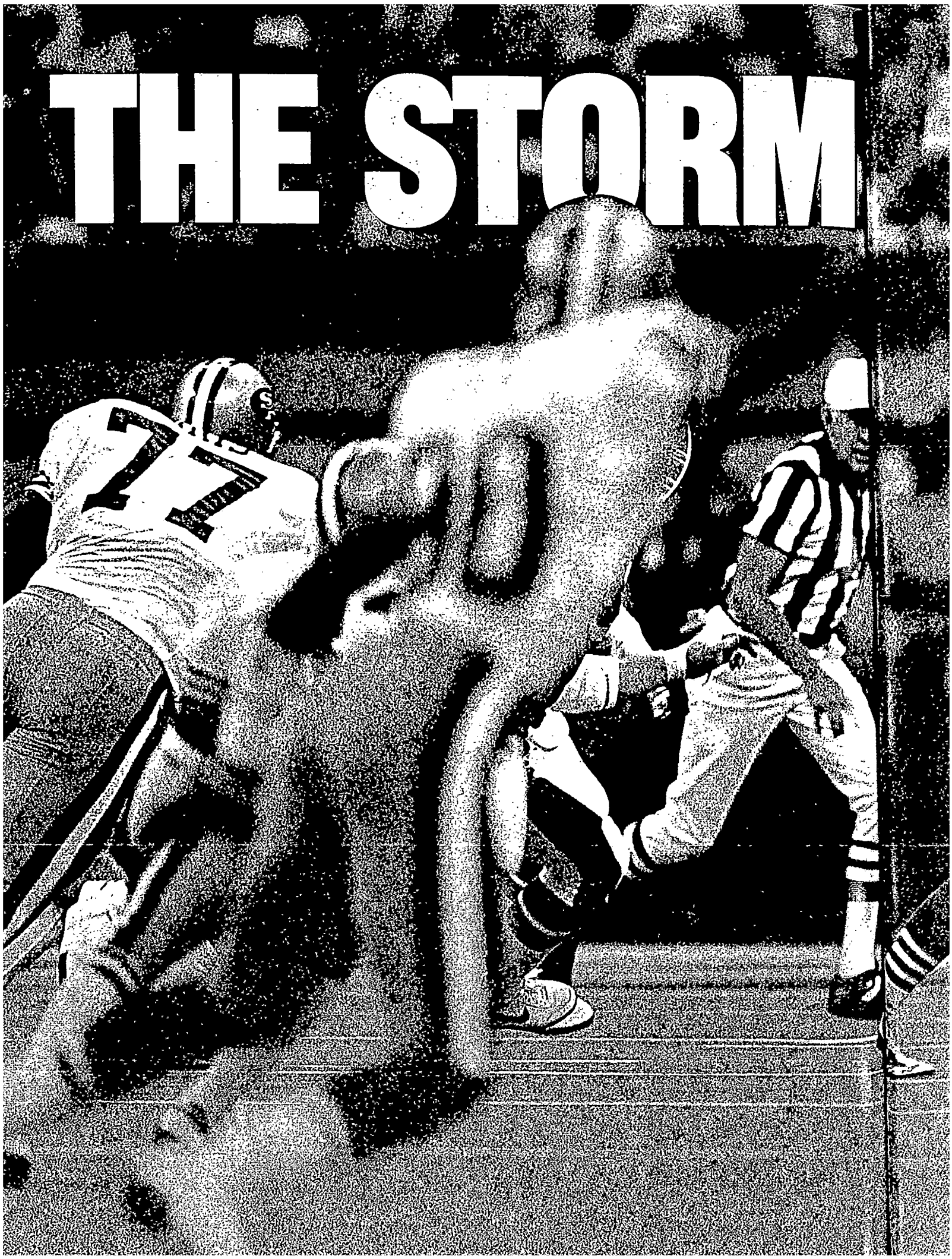
Jeff fuller
defensive back

Stamford Stadium
NE Patriots
1st play
from scrimmage
faded

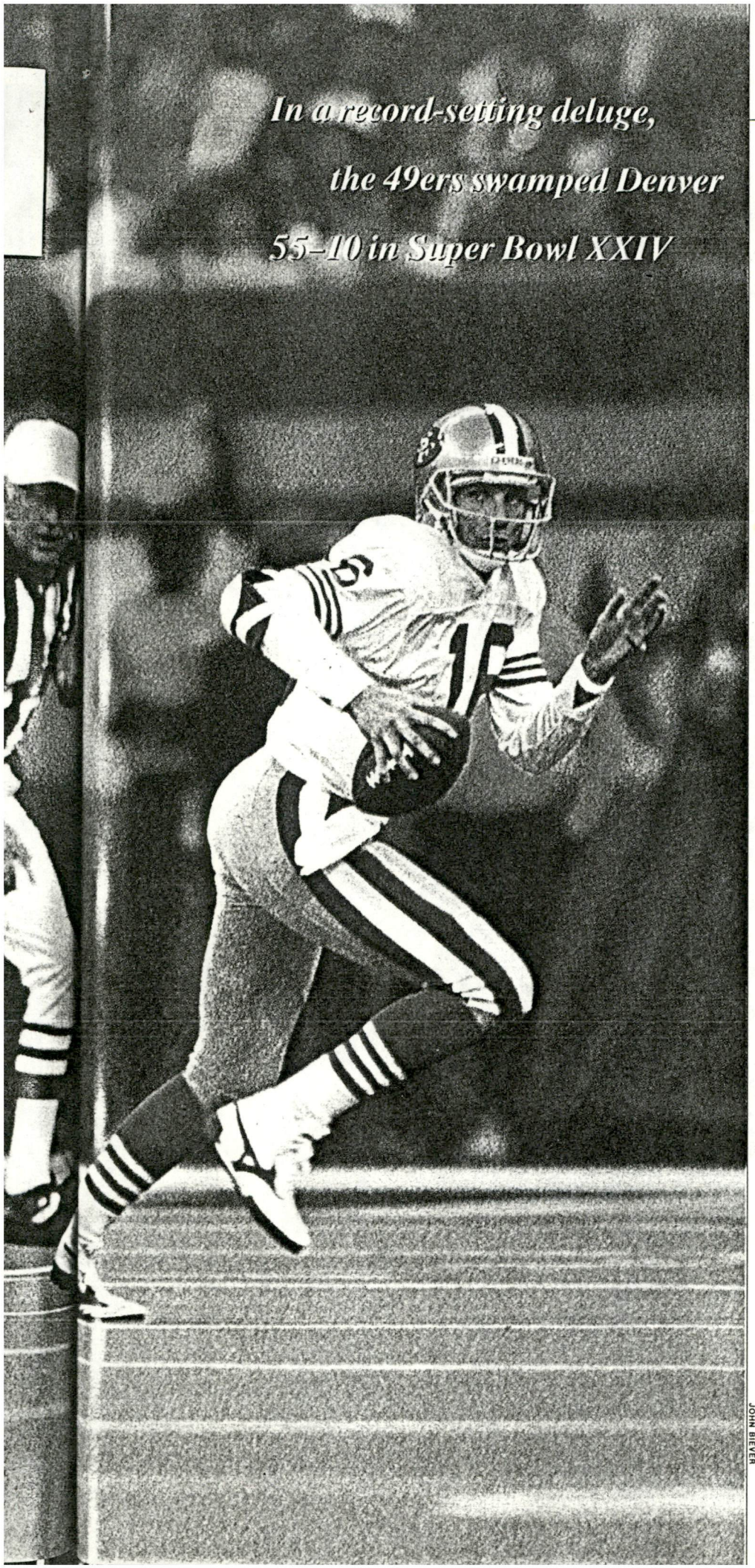
sidelines


Sports Illustrated
McINTYRE
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JOE KNOWS SUPER BOWLS
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THE STORM



In a record-setting deluge, the 49ers swamped Denver 55–10 in Super Bowl XXIV



JOHN BIEVER

Montana had no trouble spotting Rice in the wide-open spaces of the Bronco secondary.

BY PAUL ZIMMERMAN

ROOM 5072—JOE MONTANA'S room—Hilton Riverside and Towers, New Orleans, Super Bowl Sunday, 10:15 p.m. Bob Woolf, Montana's agent, puts through a call to another of his clients, Larry Bird. After two rings, Bird picks up the phone and says, "55–10, Joe Montana."

"Wait a minute," says Woolf, laughing. "I'll let you speak to Joe."

Montana, who threw for a Super Bowl–record five touchdowns in the San Francisco 49ers' shellacking of the Denver Broncos in Super Bowl XXIV and collected the MVP award, gets on the line. "Hey man, how's the foot doing?" says Montana.

"Looks like you're moving a lot better. Yeah, I know, we're homing in on five championships. One more, man. Hey, I'll be watching you. You, too. Take care."

Montana hangs up and dials the hotel operator—again. He has been trying to get through to room service. This is his party. Downstairs, the official 49er affair is in full swing, but that's not his scene: wall-to-wall backslappers, many of whom wrote him off three years ago, two years ago, last year.

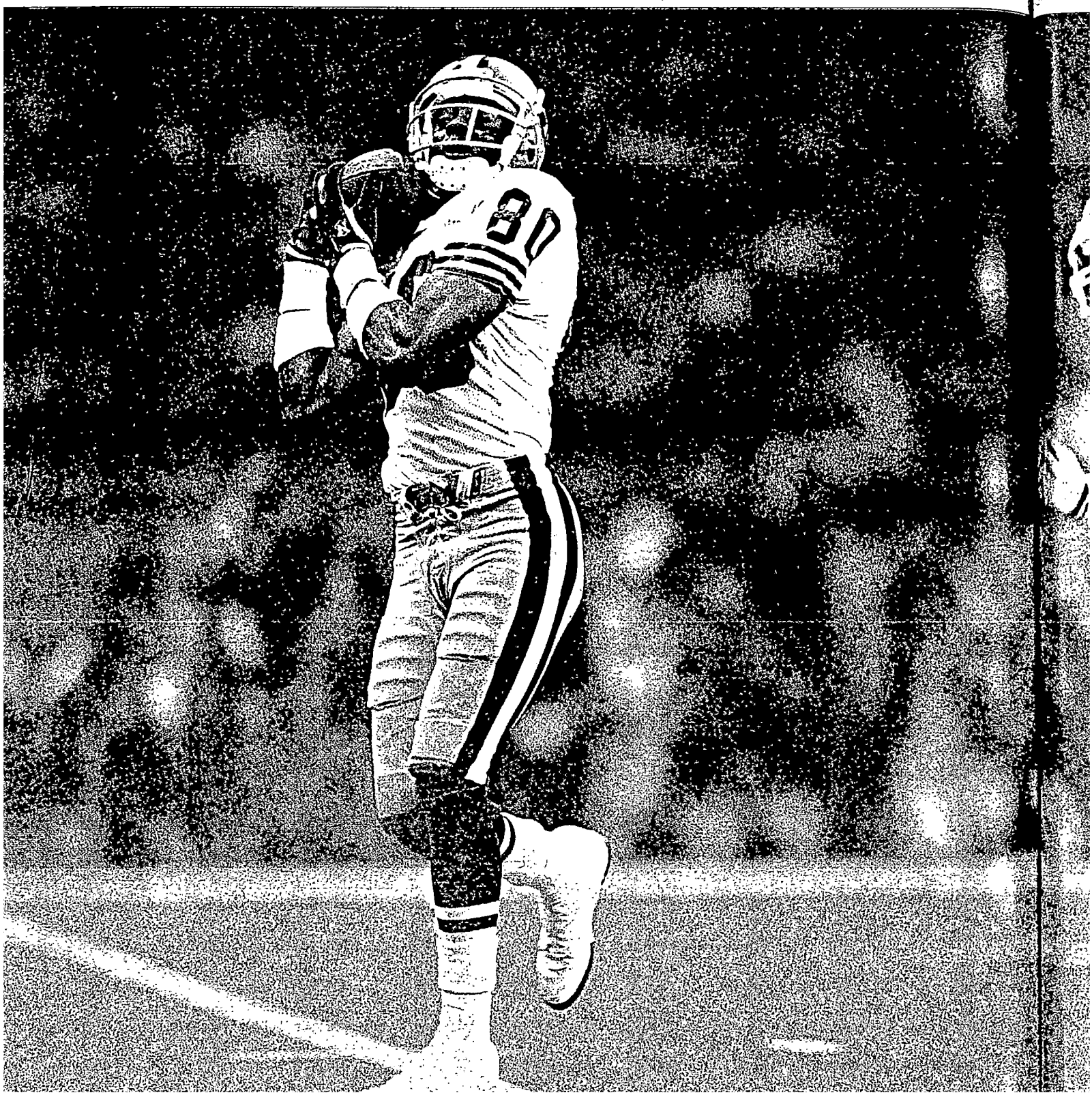
Montana is getting ready for his own people—his uncle and aunt from Monongahela, Pa., friends of relatives—maybe 40, all told. He has put on a white shirt and a tie. On a couch his dad, Joe Sr., is changing his grandson Nathaniel's diaper. Next to him Joe's wife, Jennifer, is pouring '82 Dom Perignon into a water glass and apologizing because room service hasn't brought up champagne glasses yet. Montana finally gets through to room service: eight pizzas, four orders of Cajun wings—wait, better make it six—champagne glasses, like 30 of them.

The TV in the corner is playing a tape of the game. Montana watches his 38-yard touchdown pass to wideout Jerry Rice with 40 seconds left in the first half, the play that made the score 27–3 and essentially put the game away. As running back Roger Craig goes in motion, left to right, Bronco nickelback Mark Haynes switches off Rice and

picks up Craig. Rice then bends inside on a post pattern and loses strong safety Dennis Smith, who gets no inside help. Rice is all alone as he crosses the goal line. It's like stealing.

"Haynes was supposed to bump Rice before he switched coverage," says Montana. "He didn't. He gave him a clean release. I faked a slant pattern to John Taylor on the other side, and that froze the free safety, Steve Atwater. That's the thing about them. They kept following my eyes. Every time I looked somewhere, they overplayed. They showed that on film, and they never changed. Actually, they never changed anything they showed on film."

Smith is one of the Broncos' big hitters. So is Atwater, the 217-pound rookie. But they were whiffing as much as they were hitting, and on some of the hits the Niner receivers simply refused to go down. For example, on the first of Rice's three touchdown catches—a 20-yarder that capped San Francisco's first series—he bounced off Atwater at the Denver eight-yard line. "Rice was



made to be a receiver, and Taylor's not far behind," said Craig in the locker room after the game. "They're not intimidated by the big safeties in this league. They're as good as running backs."

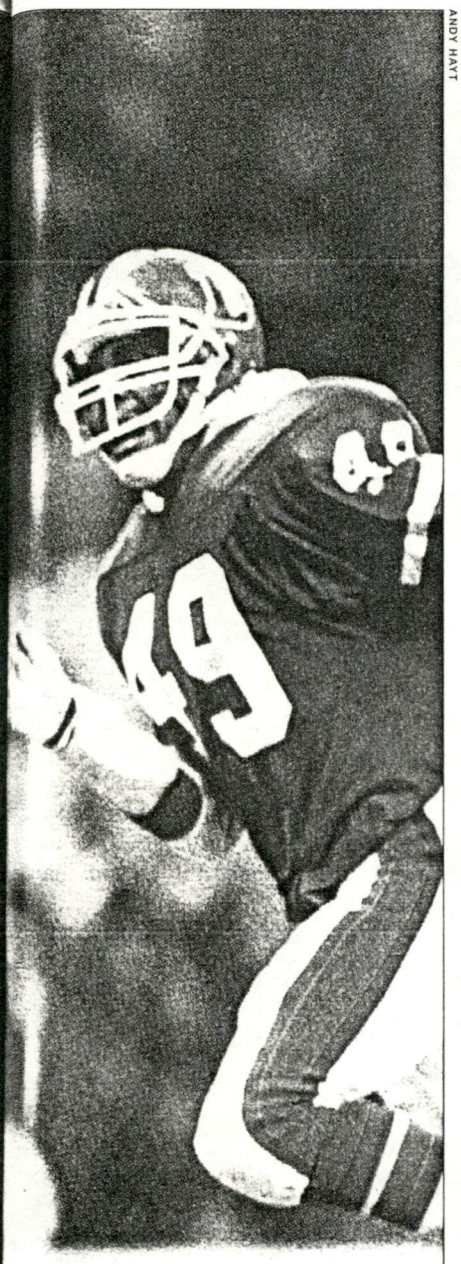
"Hey, Joe, you didn't even get wounded today," says Jim Bell, a friend of Montana's father.

"If I didn't get so tired, I could have played three games," says Montana. "I only got touched twice—once when I scrambled out of bounds—and I didn't get sacked at all."

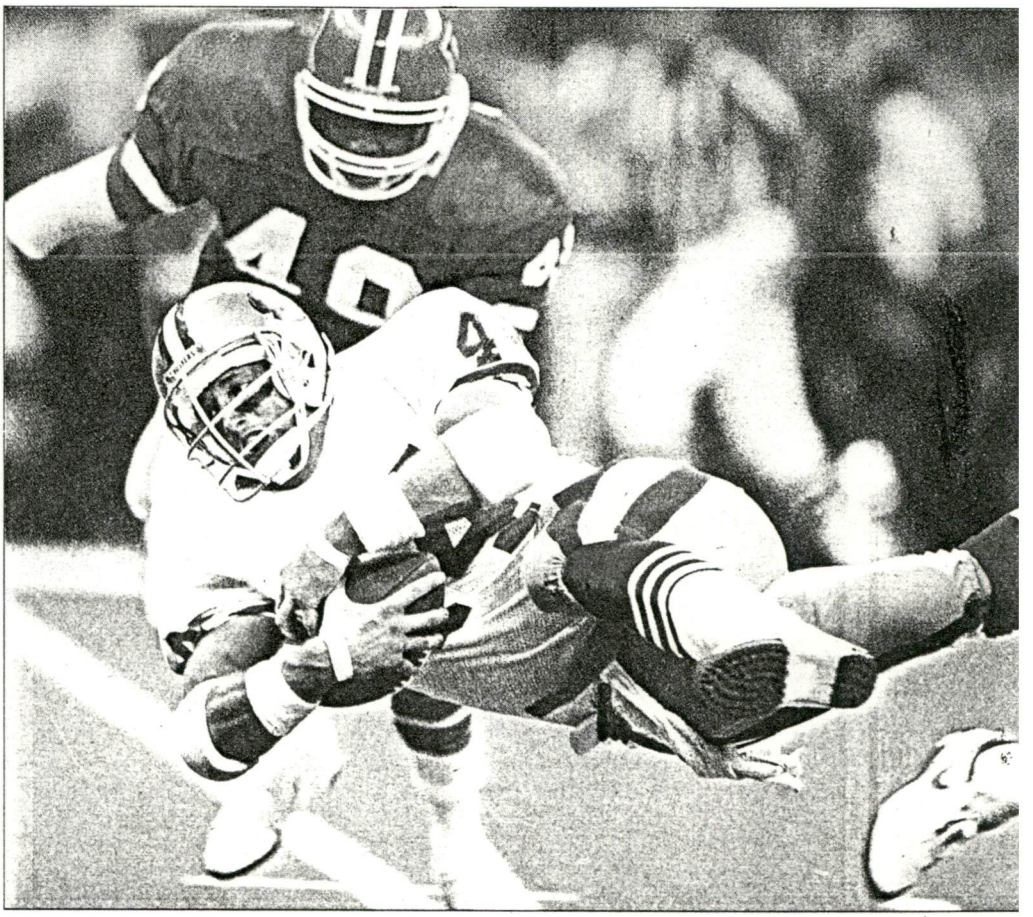
Uh, make that one sack. The scramble was for no yards, technically a sack. "Is that right?" says Montana. "I should have dove for the yard. Those guys on the offensive line are going to kill me."

Let's hear it for the offensive line, left to right: tackle Bubba Paris, splitting time with Steve Wallace; guard Guy McIntyre; center Jesse Sapolu; guard

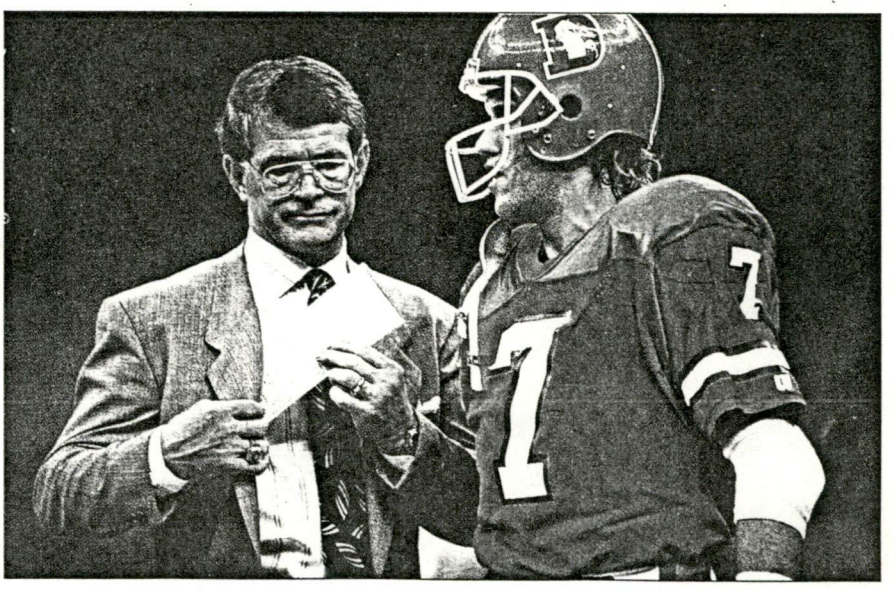
As Smith chased Rice (scoring at left) and Rathman in period No. 2, Reeves and Elway seemed ready to put away their game plan.



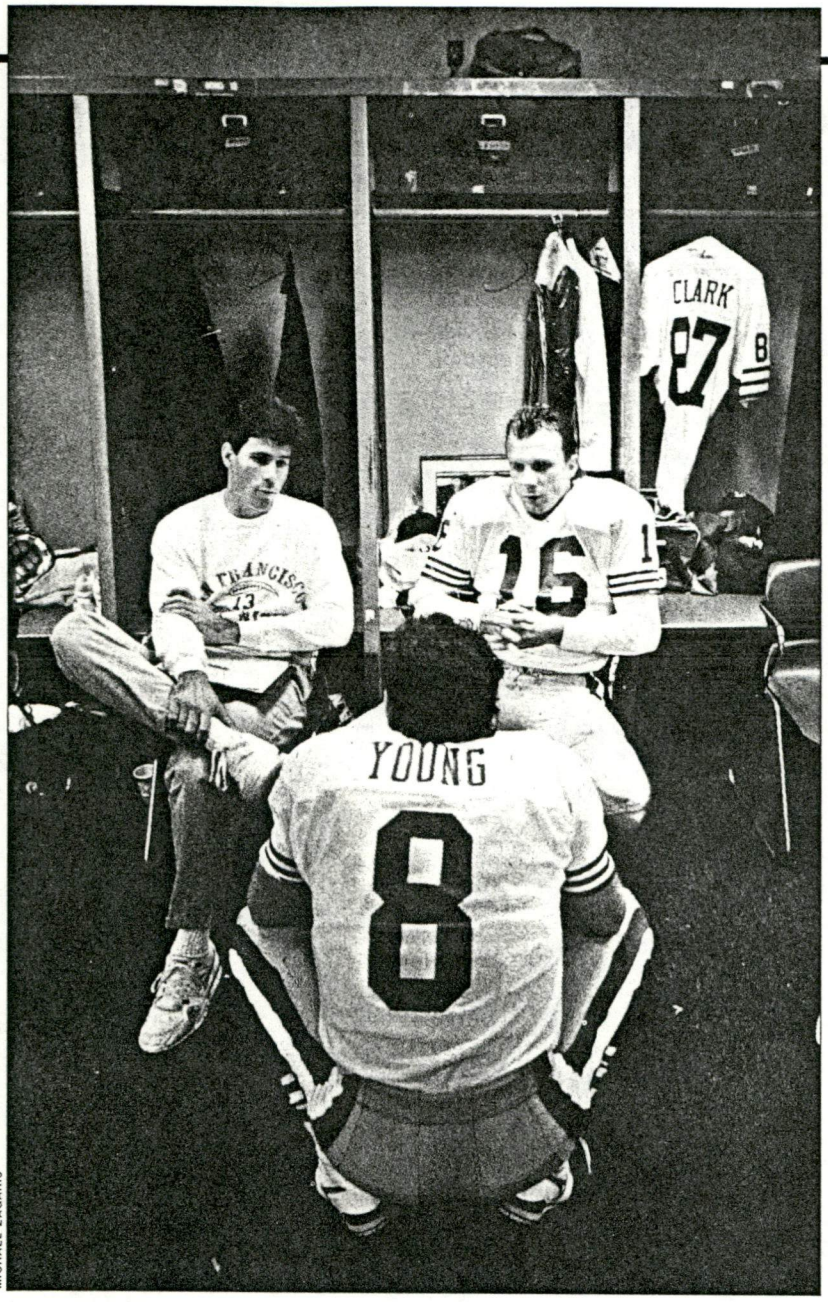
ANDY HAYT



RICHARD MACKSON

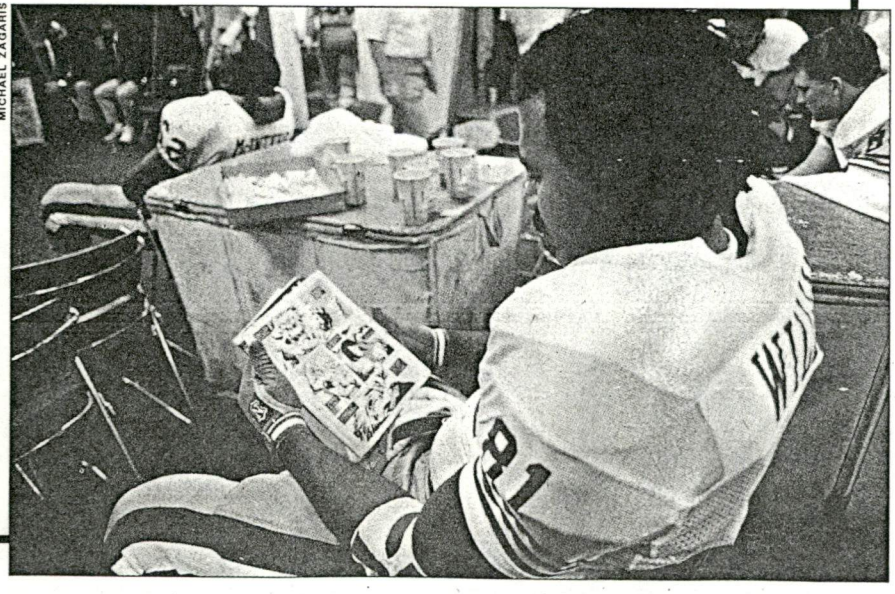


JOHN BIEVER



MICHAEL ZAGARIS

Halftime: Montana and his backups confer, while Jamie Williams studies other superheros.



MICHAEL ZAGARIS

Bruce Collie, splitting time with Terry Tausch; and Harris Barton, the mobile tackle who pulled and led the counter plays. At times Montana got as many as three looks to spot his receivers. On one of the rare occasions when Denver came with an all-out blitz, the Niners' front wall cut the rushers down like a firing squad. After that the Broncos stopped blitzing and played their same old lay-back zone.

With things neatly in place up front, the rest of the offense was merrily efficient, as it had been in the 49ers' first two playoff games. Rice, who finished with seven receptions for 148 yards, and Taylor, who had three catches for 49 yards, including a 35-yard score, flitted through the Denver zone like hummingbirds. Craig bounced off tackles for 103 yards running and receiving. Fullback Tom Rathman, who banged the left side for three short-yardage first downs, pulled off the most remarkable play of the day, corkscrewing his 232-pound body to make a one-handed reach-back catch at the Bronco 10 to set up the 49ers' third touchdown—a one-yard Rathman plunge three plays later. And of course, Montana was the master architect, completing 22 of 29 passes for 297 yards.

"People talk about our great offensive scheme," said inside linebacker Matt Millen. "Yeah, it's brilliant in its conception, but with lesser talent, it's nowhere. I mean how many teams have a Montana and Taylor and Rice and Craig and Rathman? I'll tell you, man, it's talent."

"I think this is the best offensive team I've ever seen," someone says as Montana watches himself being interviewed on TV.

"A lot of weapons," says Montana. "An awful lot of weapons."

Last Friday former 49er coach Bill Walsh, who created the monster that devoured the Broncos on Sunday, wrote a guest column for the *San Francisco Chronicle* in which he predicted a 35–17 Niner victory. Walsh went so far as to predict some final stats, including 460 total yards for the 49ers (they gained 461) and 24 completions in 32 attempts for 320 yards for Montana. Montana's numbers might have been right on target if he hadn't given way to sub Steve Young with 11 minutes to go.

After Friday's practice Mike Holmgren, new coach George Seifert's offensive coordinator, read Walsh's story and smiled. "I hope what I've been watching on film is what we'll see Sunday," said Holmgren. "What scares me is that it looks too easy."

On Jan. 17, the Wednesday after the NFC Championship game against the Los Angeles Rams, Holmgren studied the Bronco films with Montana for the first time. "How many of their games have you looked at?" Montana asked him.

"Ten," Holmgren said.

"And they've run this defense every time?"

Holmgren nodded. Montana's eyes lit up. "I can't wait," he said.

"Overconfidence, that's what scares me," Holmgren said last Friday. "Our guys have all looked at films. They're dying to get out there. Denver plays that old-style 3–4, Cover Three, which is a three-deep zone, or the Cover Two, which is two-deep, and they don't change.

"That's the defense that Bill Walsh designed his whole offensive scheme for when he first came to San Francisco, the static base 3–4. Then along came Buddy Ryan [as defensive coordinator of the Chicago Bears in the mid-1980s] and the 46 defense, and then people started copying our own guy, George Seifert, and the way he gave so many defensive looks before the snap. I remember Bill saying one day, 'Doesn't anybody play the old-style 3–4 anymore?' Well, these guys do.

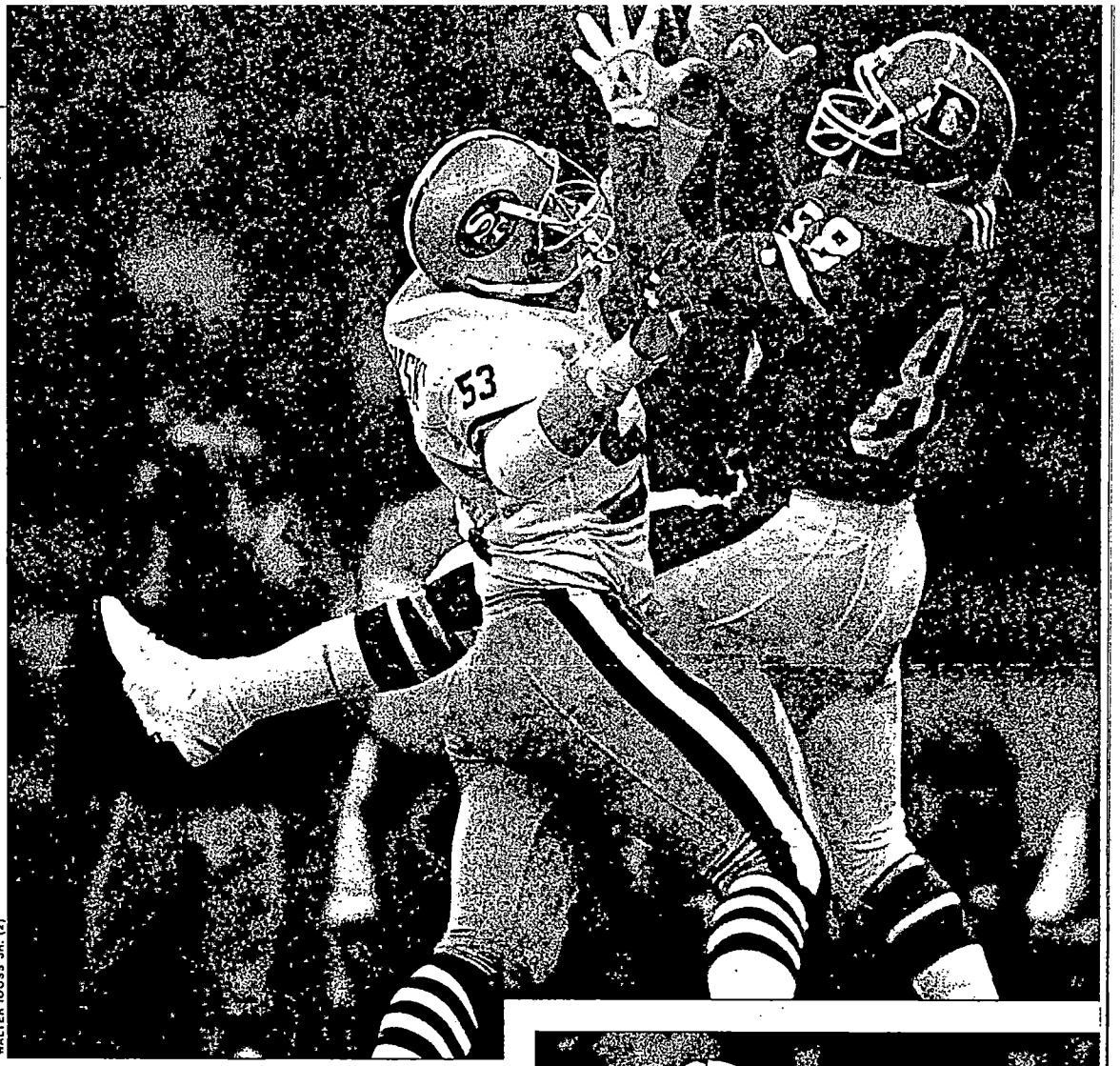
"I kept thinking, No, they'll change for us. They'll blitz more. They'll do weird things. I was very concerned about Montana getting hit. He hadn't been hit at all in the playoffs. I was nervous about all those drug stories that broke on Wednesday. They upset him more than he let on."

O.K., assuming the Broncos stay with their 3–4 defense, what will you do? Holmgren got out a pencil and lined paper. "First of all, you read Smith, the strong safety," he said. "Ninety-eight percent of the time his alignment will dictate their coverage. Then there's Atwater. Very aggressive. The more you go for the hit, the more you miss.

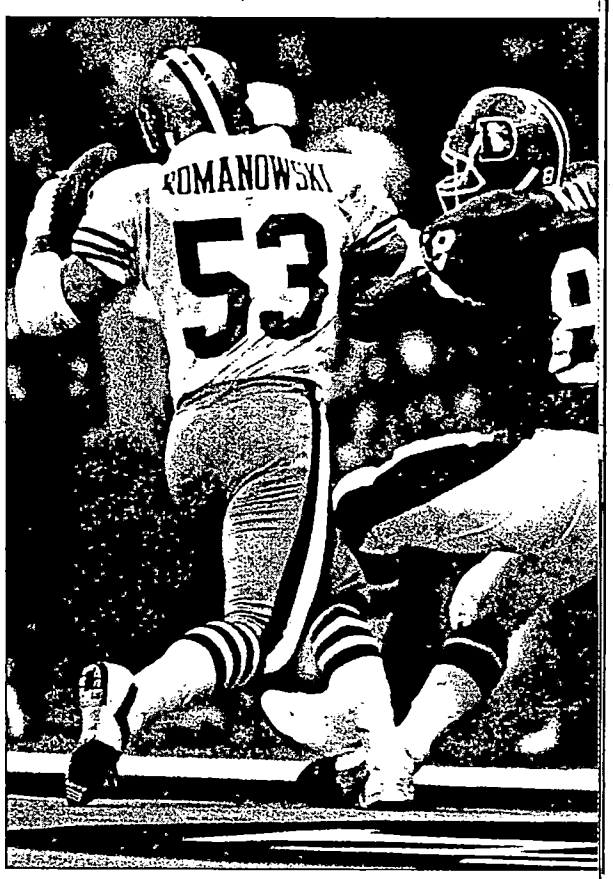
"I think we can get a touchdown out of our tight end, Brent Jones. Pittsburgh should have had one [in the AFC Championship game], but Bubby Brister threw the ball late. We line up Rice and Taylor on the left side, and motion Craig right, toward Jones's side. If Atwater doesn't go with Craig [and the cornerback picks him up], we can get Brent down the seam. If Atwater does take Craig, we can get something up on top to Rice or Taylor."

In the first quarter, as diagrammed, Atwater stayed put, Jones beat the jam of linebacker Michael Brooks and split the zone for a seven-yard TD. "Just what they'd shown on film," Jones said later.

In the third quarter the Niners did the same thing, only this time Atwater went with the motion man. Rice broke



WALTER IOOSS JR. (2)



Denver got its only TD after Bill Romanowski's apparent interception in the end zone was ruled pass interference.

over the middle for a 28-yard touchdown. "Give us two weeks to prepare for someone, and they're in trouble," said Rice.

"Here's another one," Holmgren had said on Friday. "We motion Craig left to right and hope the cornerback goes with him. If he does, we've got Rice on the post. It's a college coverage, figuring wider hash marks and a narrower side of the field to work with—in the pros the hash marks are in tighter and you've got a bigger area on the short side—but Denver plays it."

That was the play that produced Rice's 38-yarder right before halftime. Holmgren draws it up, the line blocks, Montana throws, Rice spikes. Textbook football. "They were rushing only three guys a lot of the time," said Collie. "Yeah, good luck. We realized at halftime that the only way they could get to Joe was to come in off the corners, to blitz more. They tried it once, and we blocked it and got a big gain, so they went back to the old stuff. But they seemed unsure, like they'd had too much to drink or were hung over."

While Montana and the textbook were dismantling Denver's defense, John Elway and the Broncos' offense were unraveling. Denver got a field goal on its second possession, but even that drive was weird. Elway tossed a shovel pass to running back Bobby Humphrey, who picked up 27 yards. On the next play Elway tried another shovel pass, but the ball hit Humphrey in the back. When Elway tried a third shovel pass, outside linebacker Charles Haley tipped the ball and the 49ers almost intercepted. "We expected them to go deep early," said Millen, "but this was strange, like they were setting us up for something that never came."

Elway was subjected to constant pressure, especially by right end Kevin Fagan, who was charging in like a maniac. Fagan played himself into exhaustion and spent half an hour in the trainer's room after the game. A couple of Elway's passes were batted away by nickelback Tim McKyer, who made the kind of plays Denver's defense didn't. Another Elway pass was deflected by free safety Ronnie Lott. Then Elway started pressing and misfiring, and the interceptions came—two of them, both in the second half.

Elway completed only 10 passes in all, for 108 yards. The Bronco running game picked up 64 yards. Put it together and you've got the worst Super Bowl blowout ever. A couple of hours after the game, Elway walked hand in hand with his wife, Janet, across the Superdome field, surrounded by photographers and autograph hounds. Finally, he said wearily, "Can't you let a guy sulk in peace?" They couldn't.

Before he stepped on the team bus, he answered a last question. "This is going to live with me," he said. "I know that."

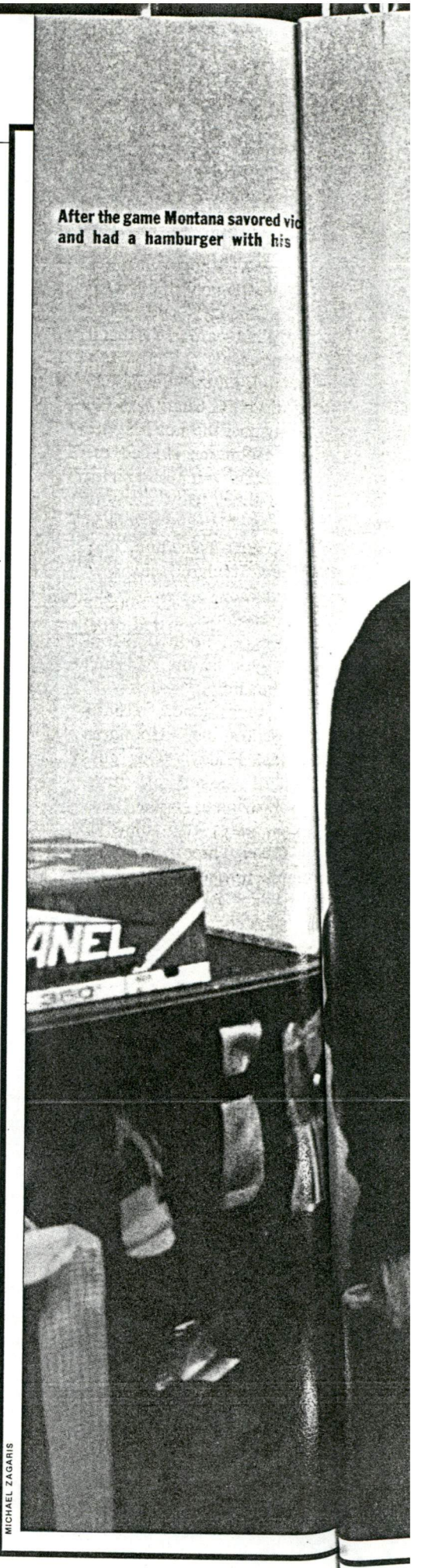
For the Niners the victory completed an unparalleled run of postseason excellence. The historians will be spending the off-season trying to assign them a place in history. Greatest team ever? Well, offensively, yes. San Francisco has the perfect scheme and the perfect cast to execute it. Defensively? Sorry, we still like the Steel Curtain bunch in Pittsburgh, even though the Steelers played in the era of the head slap and the extended downfield bump. Greatest overall team? Let's put it this way. No other team has been as hot over three games—against top-caliber competition—as these Niners.

How about Montana, who answered each query regarding his stature among the game's alltime best quarterbacks in the same manner: "I don't want to be judged that way until I retire." Maybe the greatest quarterback ever is not one guy but a composite. On crossing patterns and quick slants—Montana. No one has delivered these babies with such sustained accuracy. Short squareouts—Joe Namath. Intermediate-range outs—Terry Bradshaw. Timed patterns to one receiver—John Unitas to Ray Berry. Seam patterns on rhythm—Dan Fouts, or maybe Montana. Fade patterns—Dan Marino. Deep posts—Otto Graham. Deep fly patterns—Norm Van Brocklin.

"I guess that's as good a way to rate 'em as any," says Montana. "Yeah, I kinda like that."

And into the off-season he goes—not to Honolulu and the Pro Bowl ("Elbow's too sore," he says) but to some other sunny isle with Jennifer and the three kids—the Caribbean, maybe. "I hear that in Aruba there's a beach where you can go out 80 yards and the water's only up to your waist," he says. "Perfect for the kids, plus I won't be known there."

Don't be too sure. ■



After the game Montana savored vic and had a hamburger with his

MICHAEL ZAGARIS

DECEMBER 25, 1989 PICTURES JANUARY 1, 1990 / $2.95

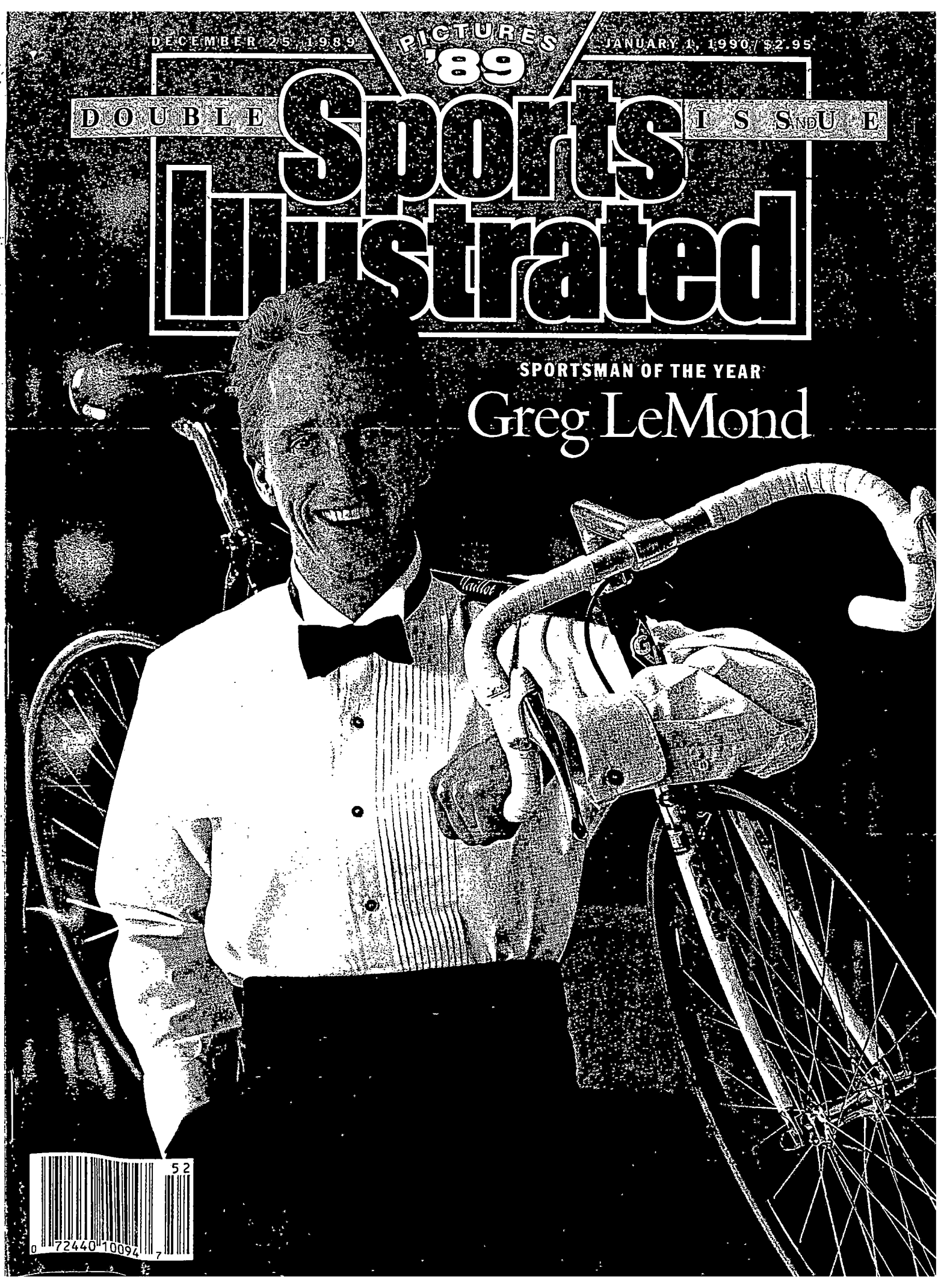
'89

DOUBLE ISSUE

Sports Illustrated

SPORTSMAN OF THE YEAR

Greg LeMond



52

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BY PETER KING

IN THE NORTHEAST CORNER OF OHIO on Sunday night, a man with a new life was sipping wine in his living room and watching football on TV. "We're alive," said Cleveland executive vice-president Ernie Accorsi in the wake of the Browns' 23–17 overtime win against the Minnesota Vikings at Cleveland Stadium. "It's incredible, but we're alive. With all the things that have gone wrong this season, we're alive and playing for the division championship in the 16th week."

At the same time, 260 miles to the southwest, Cincinnati quarterback Boomer Esiason was watching Sunday night football, too, without the wine. The Bengals had beaten Houston at Riverfront Stadium, shamelessly running up a 61–7 score because Bengal coach Sam Wyche hates his Oiler counterpart, Jerry Glanville. But unlike Cleveland, Cincinnati has only an outside chance to play in the postseason.

"You figure it out," said Esiason. "We go 5–1 in our division, maybe the toughest one in football. If you had told me we would do that before the season, I'd have said we'd be 13–2 going into the last game. But we're 8–7. It's just weird."

As is the NFL's 70th season. Here's how weird. Eleven AFC teams entered last weekend's games with a chance to make the playoffs, and 11 teams exited them with a chance to make the playoffs. Going into the final weekend of the regular season, 17 of 28 NFL teams are still alive. That's a record.

The NFC East title will be decided 95 miles apart just off I-95, when the New York Giants and Philadelphia Eagles each play at home, against the L.A. Raiders and Phoenix Cardinals, respectively. The Vikings, winners of 12 games in a row under their Teflon dome, can take the NFC Central with a home victory over the Bengals or a Green Bay Packer loss to the 1–14 Cowboys in Dallas. As for the NFC West, the only question remaining for the champion 49ers is how ouchy Joe Montana's ribs will be for San Francisco's first playoff game.

The AFC East has a three-way 8–7 tie among the Buffalo Bills, Miami Dolphins and Indianapolis Colts. Buffalo quarterback Jim Kelly and his team are in trouble. Kelly has sniped at some teammates and his quarterback rating has dropped from 96.9 in Week 12 to 85.0 after Sunday's 21–10 loss in San Francisco, where he threw three interceptions. Buffalo has lost three straight games down the stretch. Coach Marv Levy has but one explanation: "I think



JOHN W. MCDONOUGH

STATS OF THE YEAR

• The most renowned defensive lines in recent times—the Rams' Fearsome Foursome, Minnesota's Purple People Eaters, Pittsburgh's Steel Curtain—never had as many sacks in a season as the Viking line of Chris Doleman, Henry Thomas, Al Noga and Keith Millard *(left)* got this year. No asterisk here, either. Until 1978 the NFL played 14-game seasons, and through 14 games this year, Minnesota's front four had beaten them all, with 51½ sacks.

• The Cardinals paid a total of $4.19 million in salary and bonuses this year to their four quarterbacks—the most money paid to any quarterback unit in the league—yet through the last 10 weeks of the season the Cards never ranked higher than 24th in quarterback rating.

• The 49ers are 8–0 at Anaheim Stadium when Joe Montana has started.

• Giants tight end Mark Bavaro hurt his knee early in the third quarter against San Diego in Week 7 and was lost for the season. Here's how New York's offense fared before and after that injury:

	Avg. Rushing Yards/Game	Avg. Total Yards/Game	Avg. TE Catches/Game
6½ games with Bavaro	133.1	348.8	4.8
8½ games without Bavaro	107.7	284.2	2.2

• The NFC has won five straight Super Bowls by an average of 23 points. The Broncos, the top AFC candidate to go to New Orleans and the best home team of the decade, lost to the two probable NFC playoff teams on its schedule, the Giants and Eagles, and both games were in Denver.

• By midseason Bengal running back James Brooks had gone 38 straight games without losing a fumble. He fumbled seven times in his next seven games.

• Minnesota kicker Rich Karlis, who was let go by Denver before the season and took a $75,000 pay cut to sign with the Vikings, became the first kicker in history to have a 7-for-7 field goal day. He accounted for all the Vikes' offensive points in their 23–21 overtime victory over the Rams in Week 9.

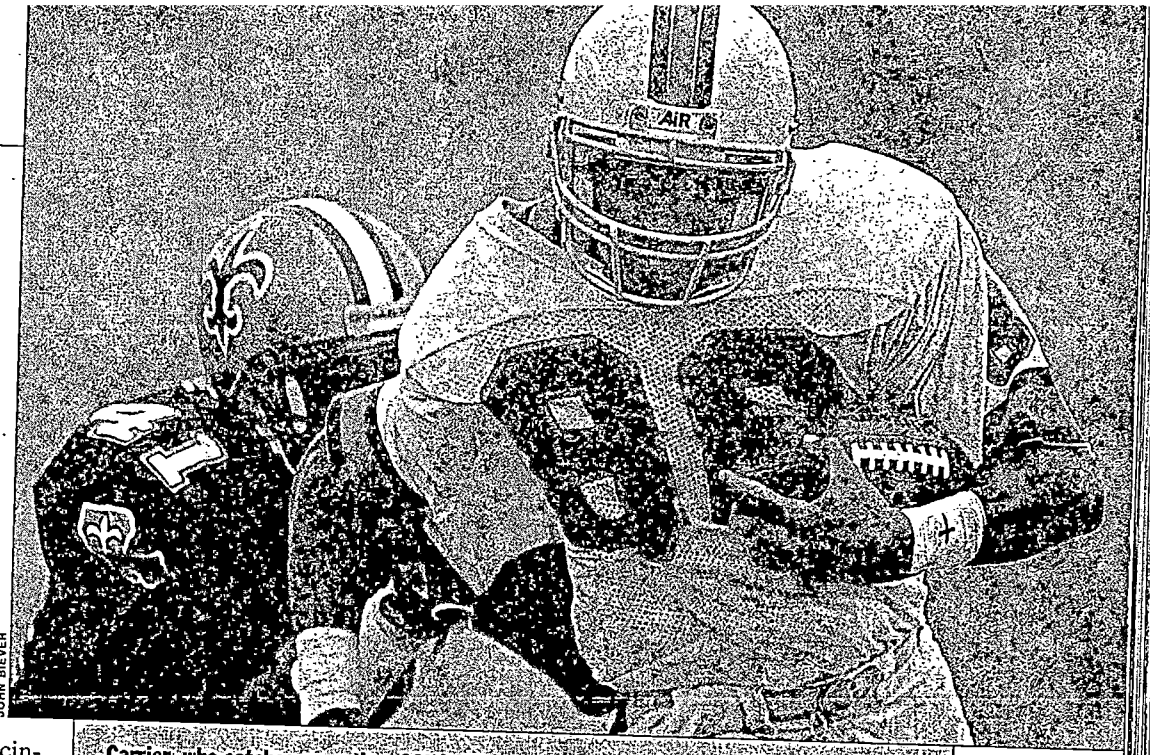
this team is drowning in analysis."

The four AFC Central teams are separated by one game, from the 9–6 Oilers to the 8–7 Pittsburgh Steelers. Houston can win the division by defeating Cleveland in the Astrodome. The Denver Broncos clinched the AFC West title a month ago, but three other teams in the division—the Raiders, Kansas City Chiefs and Seattle Seahawks—still have wild-card hopes. "This is what the league wants, right?" said Esiason. "Full stadiums, everybody in it to the end. Well, the league has got it now."

On Sunday the fighting was fiercest in Ohio. Great drama in Cleveland and great hatred in Cincinnati. Last Thursday, with the Cleveland area in a panic over the uncertain condition of quarterback Bernie Kosar's right elbow, and with the Browns in serious danger of falling out of the playoffs, TV station WEWS asked the question: "Who should start for the Browns at quarterback Sunday—Bernie Kosar or Mike Pagel?" Over the next 11 hours, viewers phoned in 29,850 toll-free votes, a record for a WEWS poll. Kosar rallied from an afternoon deficit to edge Pagel 51% to 49%. But the message was clear. "It showed the Superman aura surrounding Kosar is a thing of the past," said Nev Chandler, the Browns' radio voice.

Kosar hadn't thrown a touchdown pass in 4½ games, the Browns were 0-3-1 since mid-November, and he would be facing the sack-happy Vikes on a windy 10° day. But Kosar kept Cleveland in the game. Minnesota led 3–0 at the half, and Kosar threw to tight end Ron Middleton for a 7–3 lead early in the third quarter. Twenty-five seconds after the Vikings pulled ahead 10–7 late in the quarter, Kosar found Reggie Langhorne for 62 yards to put Cleveland on top 14–10. Minnesota went back ahead, 17–14, in the fourth, before Matt Bahr forced overtime with a last-minute field goal.

Kosar needed to do something, because the Browns' ground game (29 carries, 64 yards) was doing nothing. Nine minutes into OT, he had positioned Cleveland for a 31-yard Bahr field goal on third down. When Pagel, the holder, saw 11 Vikings preparing to rush the



JOHN BIEVER

Carrier, who catches more than 90% of the passes he touches, could be the next Largent.

GOOD PARTS, BAD TEAMS

The best teams always get the most attention. Here are four units that quietly excelled on teams that didn't.

1) *San Diego's pass rush.* Quick, tell us one thing—anything—about Leslie O'Neal or Lee Williams. O.K., they're linebackers. You may have heard that O'Neal missed the '87 season and part of '88 recovering from knee surgery. But did you know that Williams and O'Neal are ranked first and fourth, respectively, in the AFC in sacks this year? And that O'Neal is playing outside linebacker for the first time after a career inside? Don't worry, you're not alone. "Nobody knows who I am," says Williams.

2) *Tampa Bay's wideouts.* Bruce Hill and Mark Carrier are the genuine article, and when quarterback Vinny Testaverde learns to make fewer mistakes, Carrier could become the next Steve Largent. He has great hands and has been among the receiving leaders all season. Bucs coaches have calculated that, through 15 games, Carrier caught 80 of the 87 passes he touched this year. Hill hauled in 50. Give the personnel staff a hand: Carrier was picked in the third round of the '87 draft, Hill in the fourth.

3) *Detroit's special teams.* Frank Gansz may not have the touch as a head coach—he led the Chiefs to an 8-22-1 record in 1987 and '88—but he sure has it as a special-teams boss. The Lions ranked 17th in kickoff-return average and 15th in punt-return average last season. This year, with Gansz in charge, they have the league leaders, Mel Gray (kickoffs) and Walter Stanley (punts), in both categories. Further, Detroit has improved from ninth in kickoff-return defense and 15th in punt-return defense to join the league leaders in each.

4) *New Orleans's run defense.* The Saints had been respectable against the run for a couple of years, allowing 4.0 yards per carry in 1987 and '88. But they became downright stingy this season, leading the league for much of the way with an average of around 3.5. Inside linebackers Sam Mills and Vaughan Johnson have solidified their roles as the league's premier run-stuffing tandem. But the difference this season has been nosetackle Jim Wilks. A 12th-round pick in 1981 and a defensive end until this season, Wilks won the nosetackle job in camp by default and greatly exceeded the coaches' expectations. He's durable too. Wilks has dressed for 131 of New Orleans's 132 nonstrike games in his career.

TOP 10 PERFORMANCES

1) *Joe Montana, 49er quarterback, Week 3.* Playing its third straight game in the eastern time zone, San Francisco trailed Philadelphia 21–10 with 13:40 to play. Montana had been sacked seven times, he had bruised ribs, and he stood 70 yards from the end zone. In the next 12 minutes, he threw scoring passes of 70, eight, 24 and 33 yards to four different receivers. The Niners won by 10.

2) *Flipper Anderson, Ram wide receiver, Week 12.* As a rookie in 1988, Anderson caught 11 passes. On this Sunday night in New Orleans, he hauled in 15 for a record 336 yards in a 20–17 overtime win. Nine of the catches, for 195 yards, came after the start of the fourth quarter.

3a) *Randall Cunningham, Eagle quarterback, Week 2.* Hours after signing the richest contract in NFL history, Cunningham threw for five touchdowns and 447 yards in Washington to lead Philly to a 42–37 victory.

3b) *Randall Cunningham, Eagle punter, Week 13.* With his team pinned on its own two-yard line and the score tied in a crucial game against the Giants, Cunningham waved punter Max Runager off the field, took the snap near the back of the end zone and put up a 91-yard punt—third-longest in NFL history—to bury New York.

4) *Keith Millard, Viking defensive tackle, Weeks 5 and 6.* A week after a three-sack, one-interception performance against the Lions, Millard had four sacks against Green Bay. Eight days, seven sacks.

5) *John Taylor, 49er wide receiver, Week 14.* Never before in 70 years of NFL play had any *team* scored two touchdowns of 90 yards or more in a game. The Niners did it against the Rams, and Taylor scored both of them, on short slant-in routes that he turned into personal 92- and 95-yard track meets.

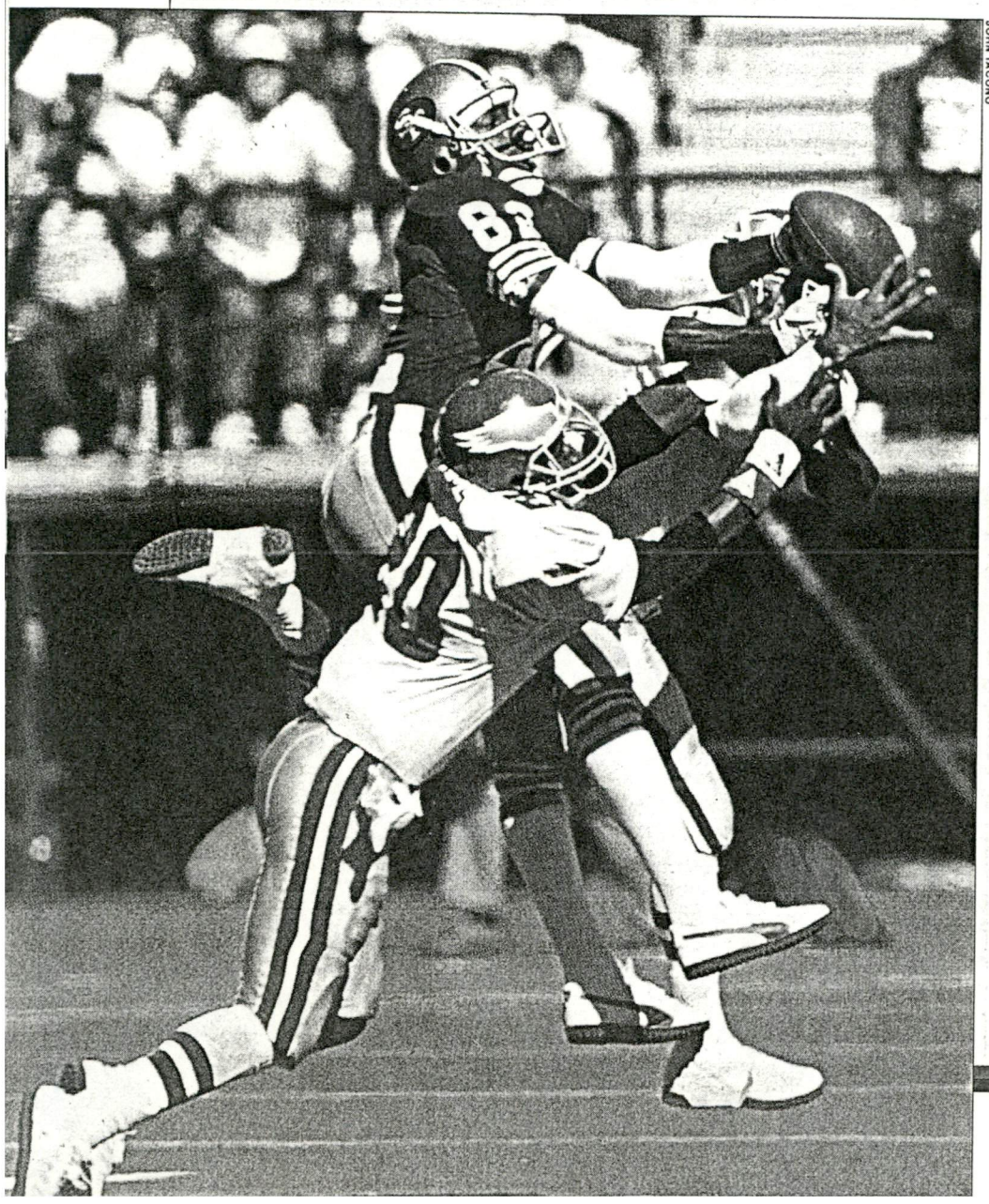
6) *Jim Lachey, Redskin offensive tackle, Week 12.* In '88 Lachey was manhandled by Bears defensive end Richard Dent, who had two sacks and put constant pressure on Washington quarterback Mark Rypien in a 34–14 Chicago victory. A year later Lachey shut out Dent—zero sacks, zero tackles—and Rypien passed for 401 yards in a 38–14 Redskin win.

7) *Dave Brown, Packer cornerback, Weeks 12 and 13.* Just two months shy of turning 37, Brown had back-to-back two-interception games, against Minnesota and Tampa Bay.

8) *Herschel Walker, Viking running back, Week 6.* Seventy-five hours after being traded from Dallas to Minnesota, Walker, who had learned 12 Viking plays, saw action on 33 of 68 offensive downs against Green Bay. His day: 18 carries, 148 yards.

9) *Mike Merriweather, Viking linebacker, Week 7.* At Detroit, Merriweather may have had the best individual game of any defensive player this season: six tackles, two sacks, two forced fumbles, one interception, one fumble recovery.

10) *Paul McFadden, Falcon kicker, Week 9.* Fourteen kickers in NFL history have made two field goals of 50 yards or more in one game. Against Buffalo, McFadden became only the third player to accomplish it twice in a career, booting 54- and 50-yarders in a 30–28 Atlanta win.



JOHN IACONO

Taylor (82) performed superbly in Philly, but his best was yet to come, against the Rams.

kicker, he called for a fake field goal. Van Waiters, a linebacker lined up at end, broke free and caught a wobbly 14-yard touchdown pass for the winning score.

It was just as cold and far more bitter in Cincinnati, where Wyche had been in bad temper all week over what he considered insults from Glanville and a history of dirty play by the Oilers. So it wasn't a total surprise when the Bengals successfully executed an onside kick after they had built a 45-point lead, or when they trotted out Jim Breech to try a field goal with 21 seconds left. It was a textbook case of running up the score.

Glanville said he couldn't figure out what Wyche's game was, but Esiason said, "I've never been around a team that could bring out the hatred in you like Houston. On the second series, [defensive end] William Fuller absolutely cheap-shotted me. He took three steps after I released the ball and earholed me, waxed me to the ground. Then, bang—[Bengal tackle] Anthony Munoz smacks Fuller and yells, 'You ain't gonna hit our quarterback like that!' After that, we just wanted 'em."

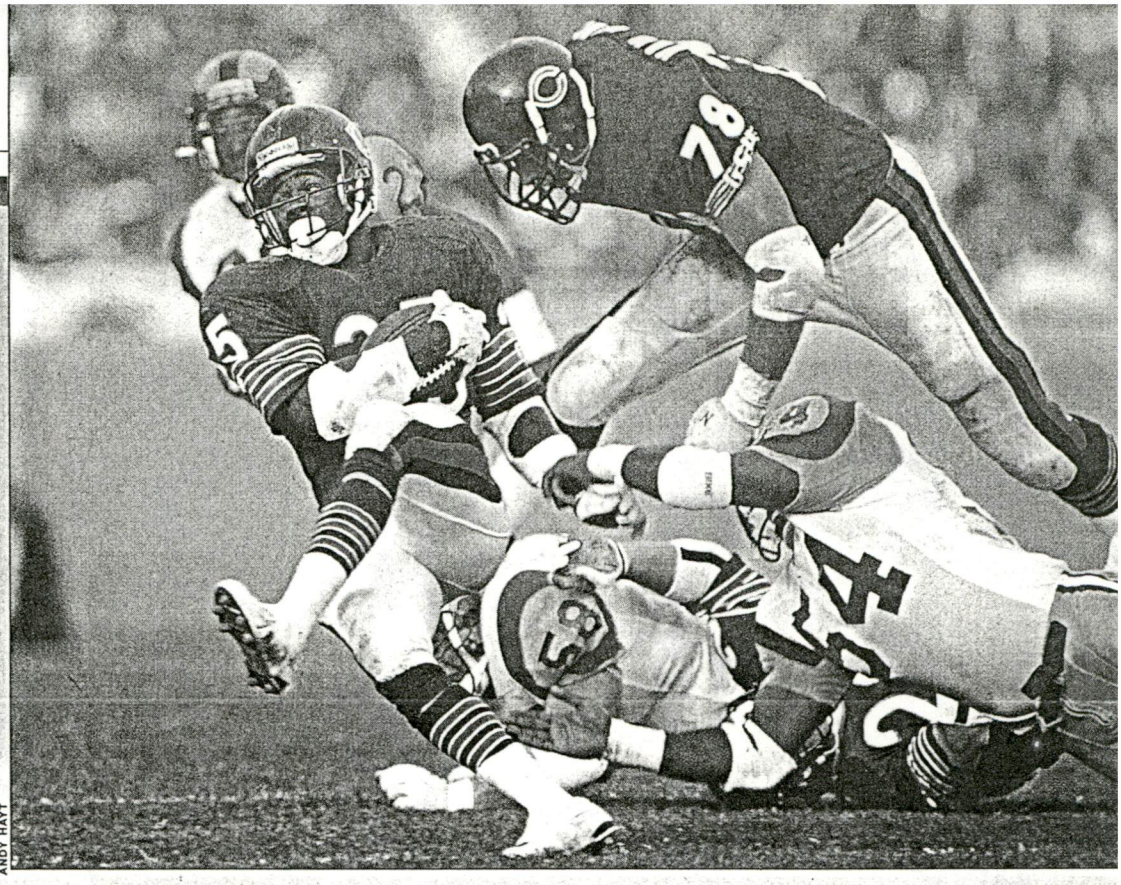
Esiason later picked on Oiler cornerback Cris Dishman, a Bengal archenemy because of his belligerence. "Hey Dishman!" Esiason yelled after one completion. "If you were a bedspread, you couldn't cover a bed!"

Wyche gloated about "humiliating" the "sorry" Oilers and called Glanville "probably the biggest phony" in football. "It's the dumbest, most undisciplined, stupid football team I think we've ever played," said Wyche afterward. "You can only be so stupid, but the Oilers have exceeded the limits. They're a team with no discipline, and when you have no discipline you have no chance of winning."

Wow. When was the last time an NFL coach spilled his guts in public like that? The runaway will haunt them in future games against the Oilers, but it sure made great theater.

We can't leave the AFC Central without mentioning Pittsburgh and its 28–10 victory over the New England Patriots. Chuck Noll's Steelers are 8–5 since getting outscored 92–10 in their first two games. "Noll loses his first two games 300 to nothing, and he keeps an even keel, acts like nothing's wrong," says Accorsi. "He's got to be coach of the decade for that job."

Yes, even the Steelers are still alive. But amid all the confusion, Seattle's situation is the weirdest. A Seahawk win over the Washington Redskins, coupled with losses by the Bengals, Steelers, Raiders, Chiefs, Colts and Bills, would put Seattle in the playoffs. Got that? You're good at the Parity Game. ■



ANDY HAYT

Anderson, who's among the leaders in rushing and touchdowns, can look forward to a promising free-agent market.

1990 ALL-FREE-AGENT TEAM

With top rookies often holding out in pursuit of high salaries, many NFL executives may be willing to give up two No. 1 draft picks—the compensation for signing a premier free agent—to land a topflight veteran. Here is an all-star team of likely free agents as of Feb. 1.

OFFENSE

Wide Receivers: Anthony Carter, *Vikings;* Tim McGee, *Bengals;* John Taylor, *49ers*

Tight End: Rob Awalt, *Cardinals*

Tackles: Anthony Munoz, *Bengals;* Jim Lachey, *Redskins*

Guards: Steve Trapilo, *Saints;* Ron Hallstrom, *Packers*

Center: Jim Sweeney, *Jets*

Quarterback: Jim Everett, *Rams*

Running Backs: Christian Okoye, *Chiefs;* Neal Anderson, *Bears*

DEFENSE

Ends: Chris Doleman, *Vikings;* Eric Williams, *Lions*

Tackles: Tony Casillas, *Falcons;* Erick Howard, *Giants;* Al Noga, *Vikings*

Linebackers: Charles Haley, *49ers;* Leslie O'Neal, *Chargers;* Kevin Greene, *Rams;* John Offerdahl, *Dolphins;* Pat Swilling, *Saints;* Mike Johnson, *Browns*

Cornerbacks: Frank Minnifield, *Browns;* Eric Thomas, *Bengals*

Safeties: Joey Browner, *Vikings;* David Fulcher, *Bengals*

SPECIALISTS

Kicker: Mike Cofer, *49ers*

Punter: Sean Landeta, *Giants*

Return Man: Vai Sikahema, *Cardinals*

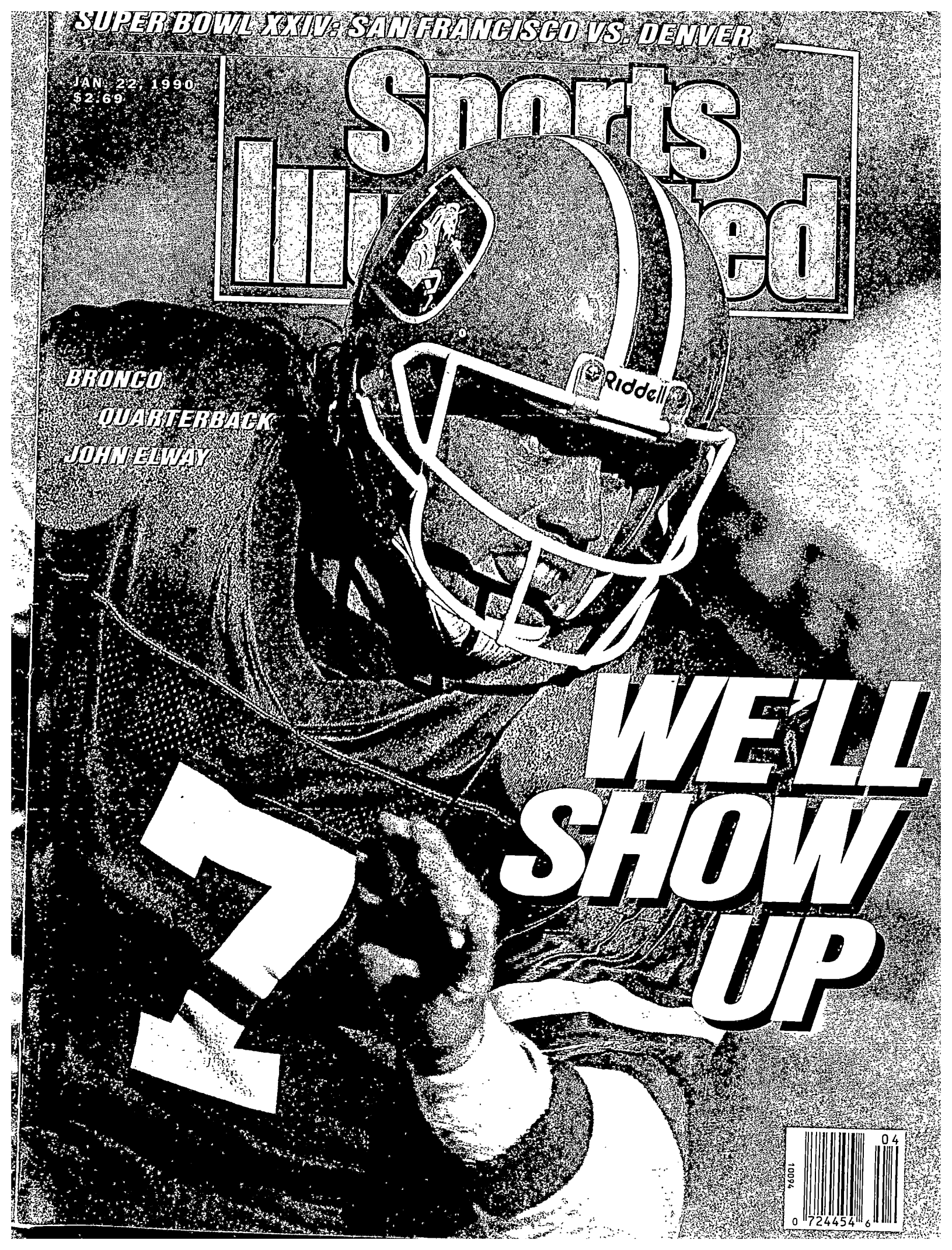
Designated Pass Rusher: Rufus Porter, *Seahawks*

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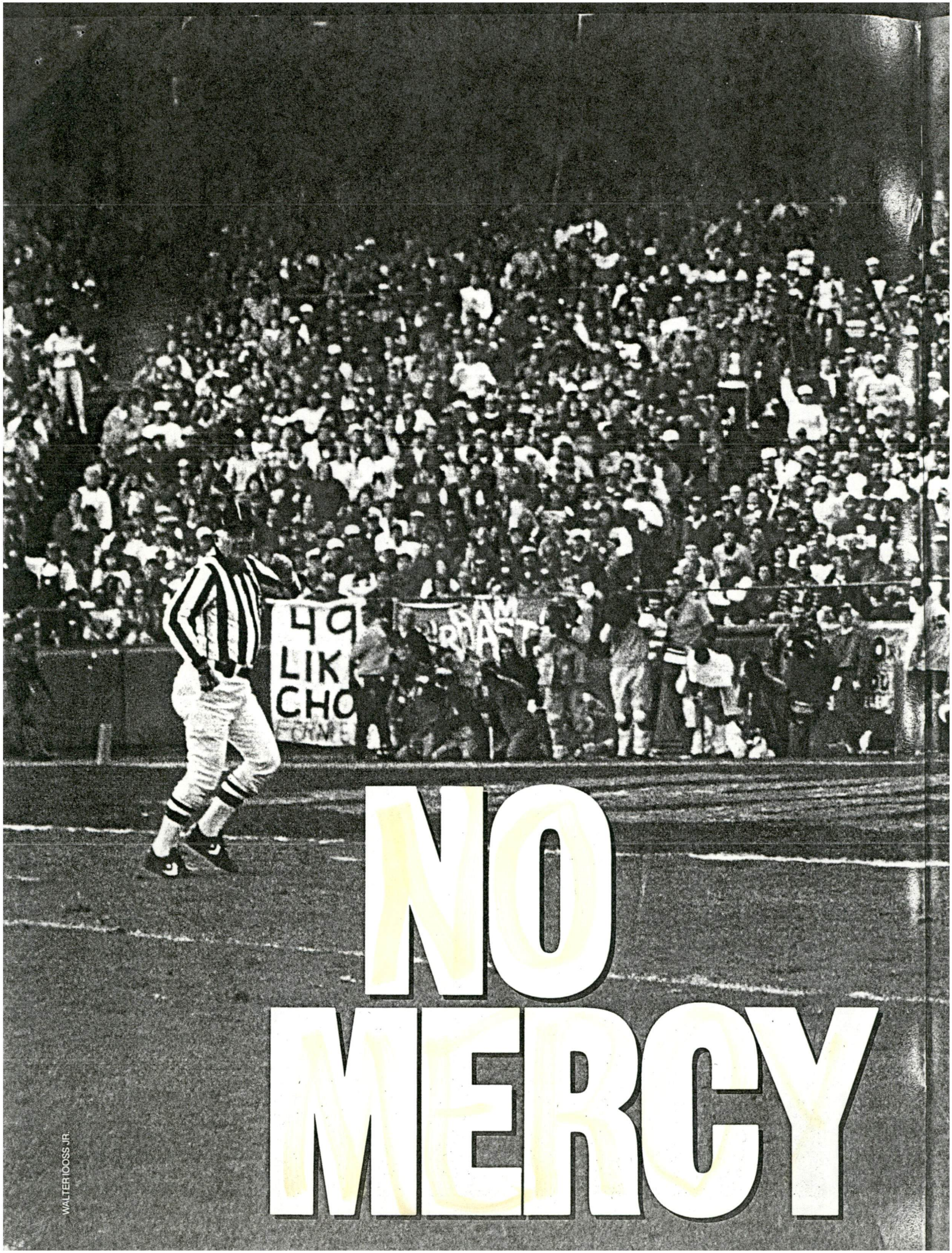
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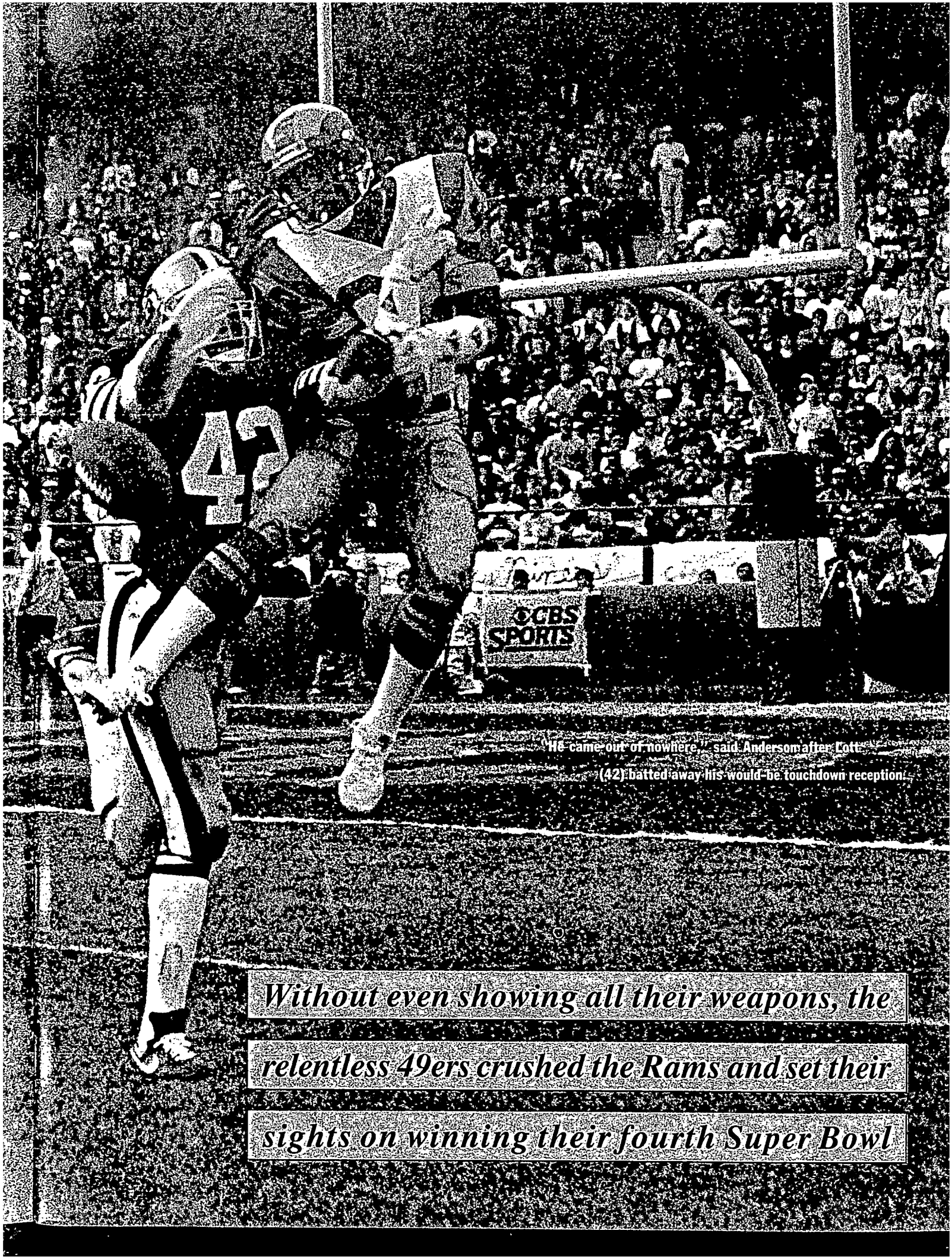
WE'LL SHOW UP

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NO MERCY

WALTER IOOSS JR.



"He came out of nowhere," said Anderson after Lott (42) batted away his would-be touchdown reception.

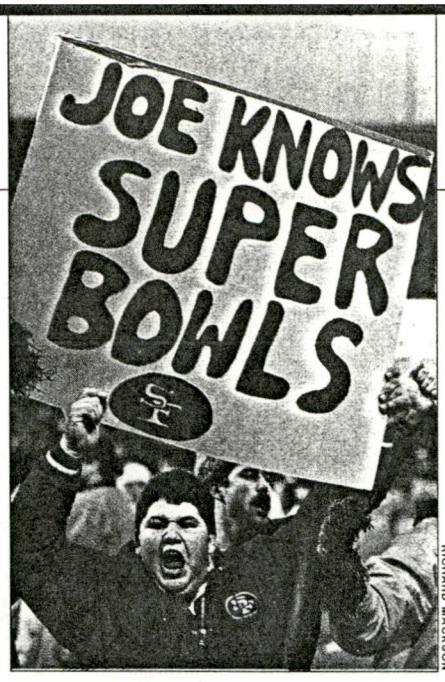
Without even showing all their weapons, the relentless 49ers crushed the Rams and set their sights on winning their fourth Super Bowl

BY PAUL ZIMMERMAN

WE ARE SAILING IN UNCHARTED waters with these San Francisco 49ers. We are seeing them put up numbers that we've rarely seen. We are seeing power football, defensive brilliance, and execution so precise it's scary. That's what the Los Angeles Rams got a taste of in the Niners' 30–3 victory in the NFC title game at Candlestick Park on Sunday, and now it's the Denver Broncos' turn in Super Bowl XXIV on Jan. 28. The question we must ask is: Have we seen it all? Is this the complete 49er package?

The frightening answer is: not really. Waiting in the shadows, like an assassin behind the door, is the long passing game. The Niners have yet to show it in these playoffs. In their crushing wins over the Minnesota Vikings (41–13) and now the Rams, they didn't need it. Everything else worked too well.

Especially on Sunday. Here are some numbers: Joe Montana completed 26 of 30 passes for 262 yards. The San Francisco offense rolled up 442 yards, while the defense allowed 156—and only 26 on the ground. The 49ers ran 76 plays to L.A.'s 47, and their time of possession (39:48) was almost double that of the Rams.



RICHARD MACKSON

Fans know what Seifert knows: Montana's . . .

But things didn't start out that way. The Niners were stopped on their first series. They fumbled in Los Angeles territory on their second. Then came the deluge. Their next three possessions in the first half produced three touchdowns. Their first four possessions in the second half: three field goals and one that missed. While all this was going on, the Rams failed to crack the San Francisco 40. In fact, only once all day did they get inside the 40, and that was on their first possession.

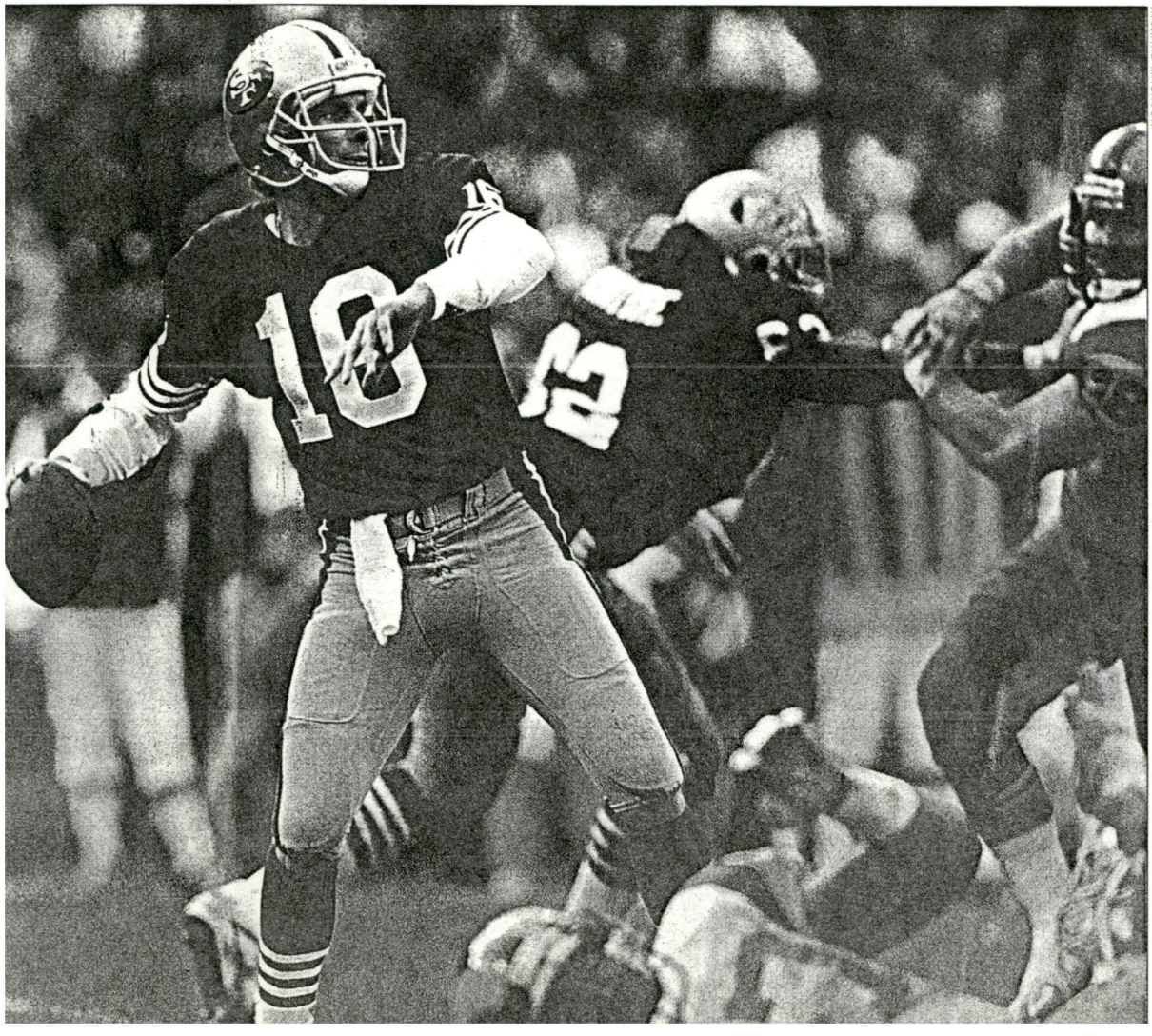
The game, for all practical purposes, ended with the 49ers' last drive of the first half, an 87-yard, 13-play touchdown march that made the score 21–3. At the two-minute warning the Niners were on their own 18. With nine seconds left they had the touchdown—an 18-yard bullet from Montana to wideout John Taylor. Eleven plays in 111 seconds, an average of 10 seconds per play. San Francisco ran crosses and picks and hooks and quick cuts, and on the TD pass, the line gave Montana so much time that he could wait for Taylor to put three moves—fake in, fake out, break inside—on poor LeRoy Irvin, the Rams' right cornerback.

"That drive sent us reeling," said Irvin afterward. "It turned the tide. We were on our heels the rest of the game. They dropped an overhand right on us."

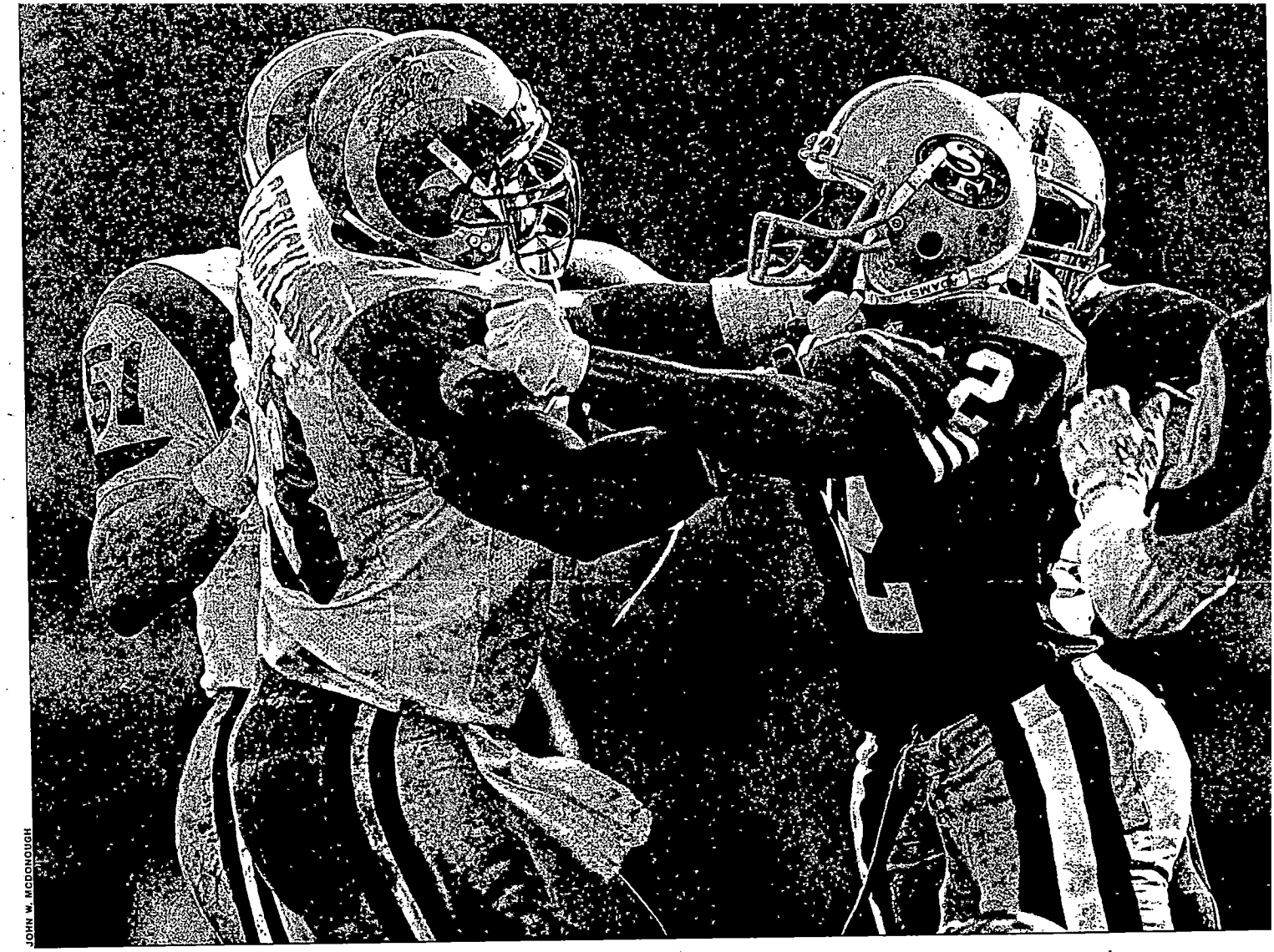
"The last drive of the first half? I can't even remember it, there were so many drives," said Los Angeles linebacker Mel Owens. "It was about as devastating as the first one."

"We were overwhelmed," said John Robinson, the Rams' coach. "Clearly dominated." And on and on—one depressing, slightly stunned quote after another from a team that had been thoroughly whipped.

The second half brought out the bully in the 49ers. They turned their attack to the


RICHARD MACKSON

. . . "concentration, his 'into-it-ness' is mind-boggling."



JOHN W. MCDONOUGH

Taylor squared off with 250-pound Fred Strickland as the 49ers turned physical.

ground against a tired and injured L.A. defense. The Rams were against the ropes, getting hammered, with no referee to stop the fight. They had come into the game short-handed in the secondary—free safety Vince Newsome was sidelined with a sprained ankle—but their troubles up front were even worse. When the Rams lost linebacker-lineman Mark Messner because of a sprained knee in the first quarter and starting end Mike Piel with a dislocated elbow in the second, they were down to three linemen, total.

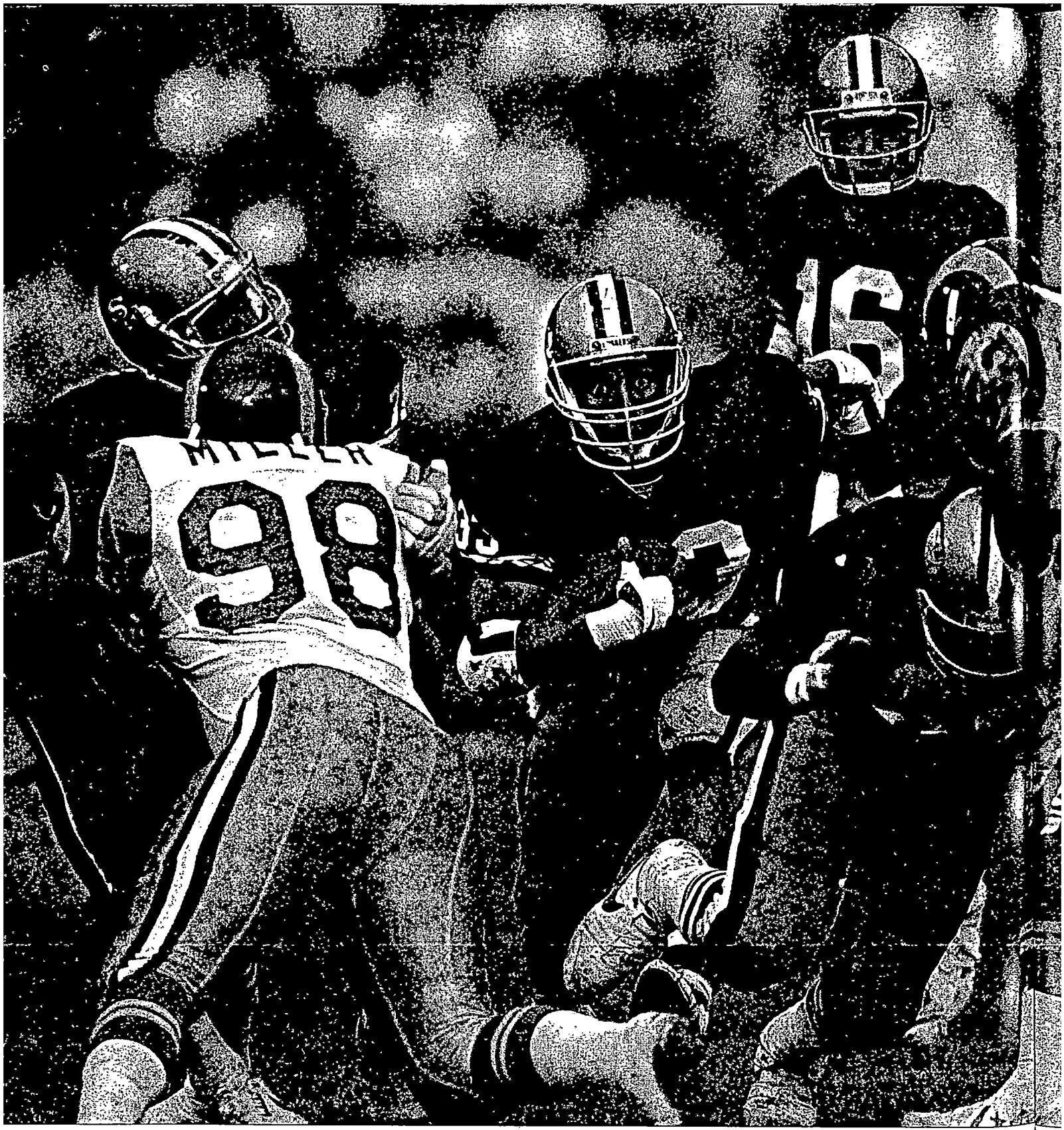
By the third quarter the Rams were fighting for air, their jerseys black with mud and sweat. The 49ers kept pounding them with running backs Roger Craig and Tom Rathman—between the tackles, especially with the Washington Redskins' old counter-gap play in which the offside guard and tackle pull, and outside on sweeps, with wide receiver Jerry Rice doing some heavy-duty blocking. On one 12-yard counter-gap run by Craig in the third quarter, 280-pound right tackle Harris Barton pulled and found a corner so soft that he had no one to block. "A finesse team?" said Irvin. "Oh no, not today they weren't. Today they were a physical team."

"We lobbied for a running game all week," said 49er right guard Bruce Collie. "We'd seen what the Giants did to the Rams [the previous week]. We felt that the Giants might have won that game if they hadn't thrown a single pass. At the meetings we'd drop hints—'How about running the ball?' 'Don't forget the running game'—stuff like that."

Montana had different ideas. The 49ers and the Rams had met twice in the regular season. San Francisco lost the game it should have won (a 13–12 defeat in Week 4 on a last-second field goal) and won the one it should have lost (thanks to two long touchdowns by Taylor off short completions in Week 14). "The cornerbacks like to sit on the receivers," Montana said last week. "They'll be conscious of clamping down on the short stuff. I think our receivers can double-clutch 'em, give them a short move and break deep. I really think I can get something going up top."

The Rams thought so too. "They'll want to go deep on us early," said their defensive coordinator, Fritz Shurmur, last Thursday. "They'll be in for a surprise." So Los Angeles worked on the deep stuff and effectively took it away, and Montana shrugged and smiled and cut the Rams to pieces underneath. The offensive line gave him plenty of time to wield that surgeon's knife of his. "You know, when we were preparing for Minnesota and looking at the films of their front four, we were horror-struck," said Barton on Friday. "It was like getting ready for Charles Manson, Freddy Krueger and Norman Bates. But this time it's like getting ready to face an entire scheme. I hope we don't get lulled into being complacent."

The only time San Francisco seemed complacent was during the Rams' first possession, on which they marched 44 yards and kicked a field goal. "It's hap-



Craig pounded out 93 yards on 23 carries against the Rams' tired and injured defense.

pened to us all year," said 49er outside linebacker Keena Turner. "It happened against the Vikings on their first possession. It's like we're saying, 'O.K., let's get that first drive out of the way, then we can play football.' "

The Niners' biggest and most spectacular play of the game came on the Rams' second drive. Los Angeles was leading 3–0, with a second and three on the San Francisco 40. Flipper Anderson, the Rams' best deep receiver, fed cornerback Darryl Pollard a hitch-and-go and raced free down the right sideline. Inside help from strong safety Chet Brooks failed to materialize. Jim Everett's pass hung in the air forever, a banana, and free safety Ronnie Lott sprinted over from centerfield and knocked the ball away at the last moment. "I didn't know if I could get there in time," said Lott, "but the ball hung so long."

"He came out of nowhere," Anderson said.

"An unbelievable play," said the Rams' offensive coordinator, Ernie



PETER READ MILLER

Zampese. "The way he sat back there, the break to the ball—he might be the greatest weak safety ever to play the game." Without Lott's play, the score would have been 10–0. Would the Rams, spurred on by this gift, have gone on to victory? Or would the final count merely have read 30–10—or worse? San Francisco certainly didn't have any defensive lapses thereafter.

The 49ers had put in a new wrinkle called the Lark Special, which was designed to neutralize the most dangerous part of the L.A. attack—the deep routes to Anderson and split end Henry Ellard. Turner would jam one wideout, usually Ellard, and cornerback Don Griffin would pick him up deep. On the other side, Pollard would play the wideout short, and Brooks would get him downfield. The result was double-coverage on both wide receivers. The strength of the scheme was Turner's speed and agility, which enabled him to cut off a wideout in the short zones. The weakness was in the intermediate and underneath coverage—weak inside linebacker Mike Walter running across the field with Ram tight end Damone Johnson or the second tight end, Pete Holohan, and strong inside linebacker Matt Millen covering a running back.

"The deep game is Everett's strength," said 49er defensive coordinator Bill McPherson. "Our idea was nothing deep, nothing cheap. He's not the type of quarterback who picks you apart underneath. So we said, 'Let's go with our scheme until they get us out of it.' The key was the push of our defensive line. Everett didn't have time to wait."

In the second quarter Everett looked for Ellard down the right side and threw into double coverage. Griffin deflected the pass, and nickelback Tim McKyer intercepted it. The turnover set up a 27-yard TD drive that made the score 14–3. Turner got a second-quarter interception of his own off a short pass intended for Ellard, and when Everett tried to go to Holohan on a post pattern in the third period, noseguard Jim Burt broke in and forced Everett's hand, and Lott intercepted.

"I kept noticing Holohan when he'd go to the huddle," said Lott. "He'd keep motioning to Everett, 'Hey, I'm open over the middle.' I knew eventually he'd go to him."

Everett had a long day, completing 16 of 36 passes for 141 yards. The Ram running attack was history after the half, gaining only six yards in the final 30 minutes.

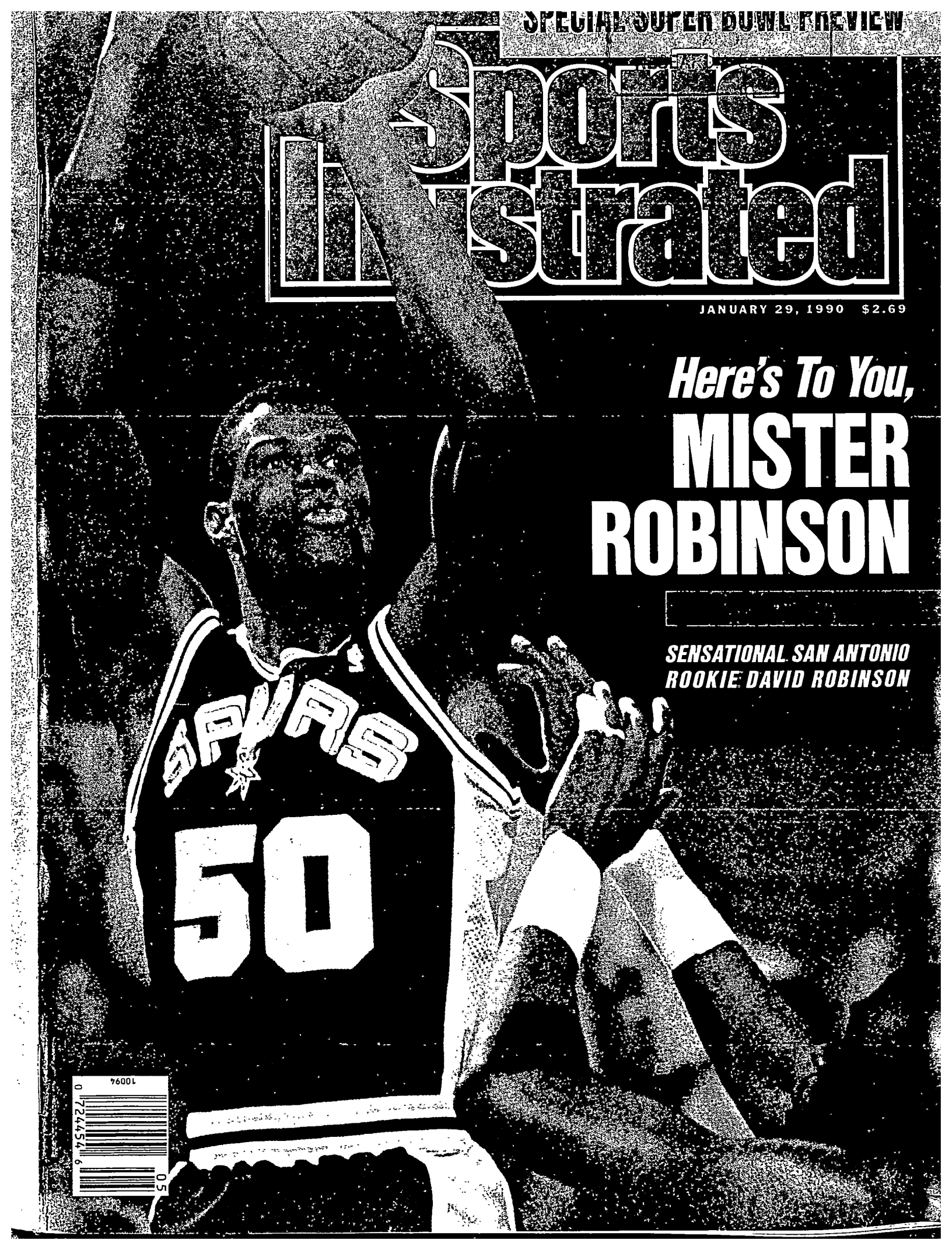
So what must coach George Seifert fear as his Niners head to New Orleans for their date with Denver? Complacency? A false sense of invincibility? Arrogance? Greed? All the evils the rich and powerful are heir to? He'll take them, as long as he can keep Montana on his side. "Joe's been phenomenal all year," said Seifert on Sunday, "but it seems that he's elevated his performance for the playoffs. His concentration, his 'into-it-ness'—it's mind-boggling. He hasn't had a flat spot.

"You look at him from the sidelines, and you're almost in awe. You find yourself watching like a fan would. You fight to get out of a mode like that. In this game if you let your guard down, pretty soon you're fighting for your life. But today, in the heat of battle, I couldn't help saying, 'Damn, we're pretty good.'" ■

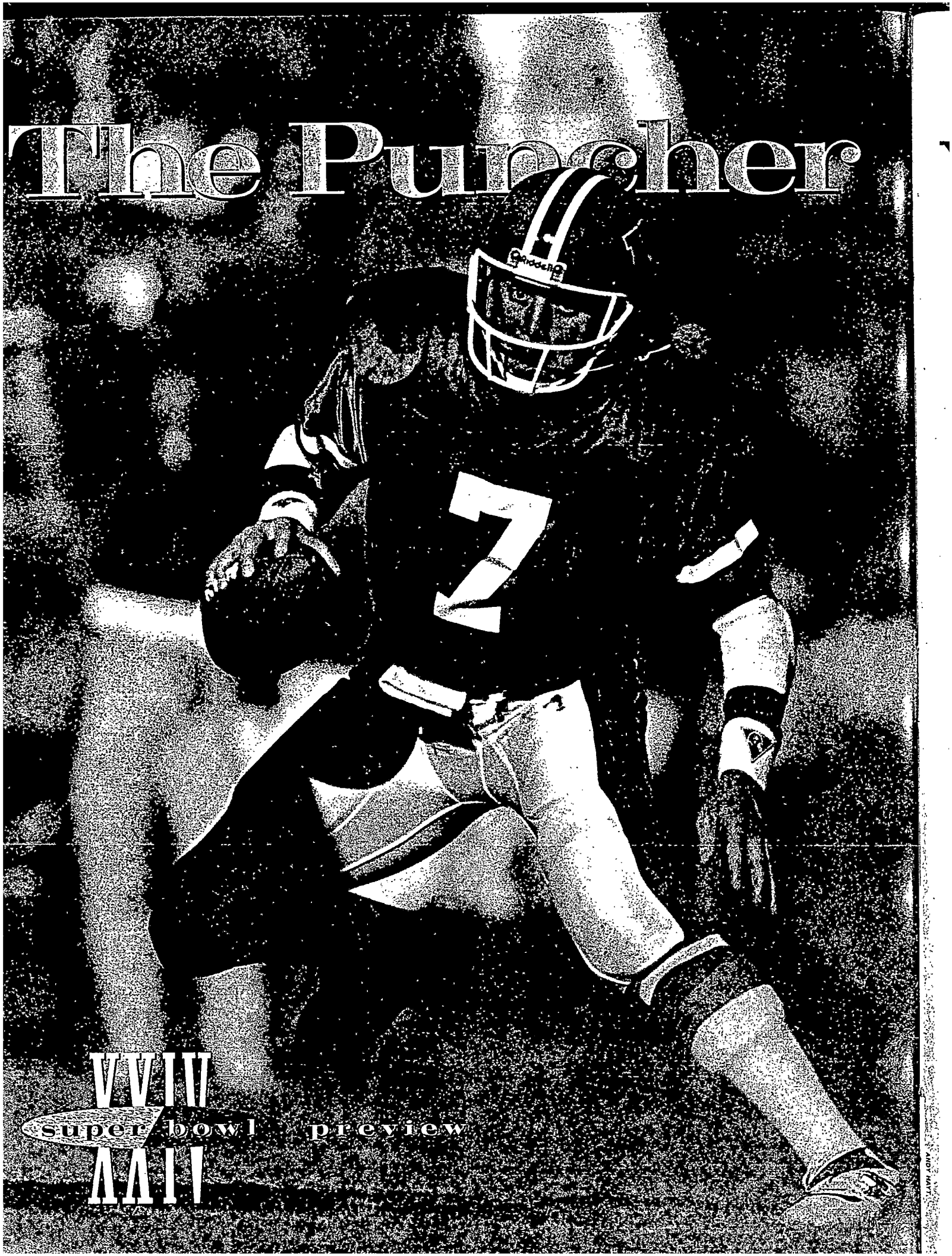


PETER READ MILLER

Offensive tackle Steve Wallace celebrated after hammering L.A. into the ropes.


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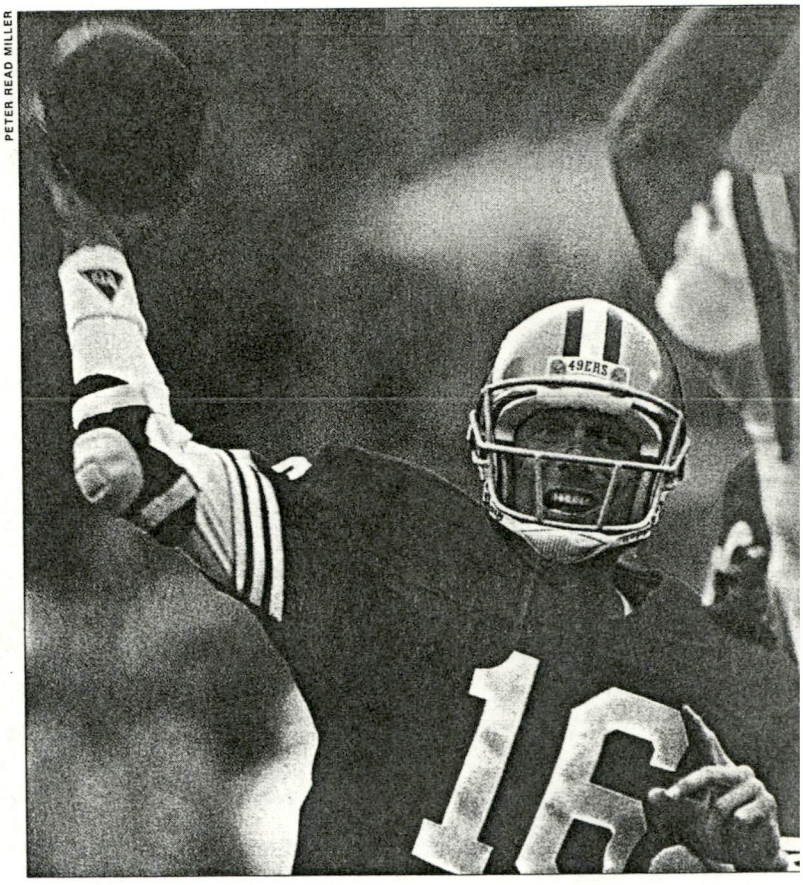
XVIII
super bowl preview
XXII

ANDY HAYT

vs. The Boxer

THE SUPER BOWL WILL PIT FREE-SWINGING JOHN ELWAY OF DENVER AGAINST TECHNICALLY PRECISE JOE MONTANA OF SAN FRANCISCO

BY PAUL ZIMMERMAN



PETER READ MILLER

UNLIKE MONTANA, ELWAY (LEFT) IS AT HIS BEST ON THE RUN

SOMEDAY, WHEN FOOTBALL HISTORIANS sit down and analyze the great NFL quarterbacks, they will stop at Super Bowl XXIV and say, "Here was a fascinating matchup." John Elway versus Joe Montana. Denver Broncos versus San Francisco 49ers. The individual versus the system.

Montana and the system are heavy favorites going into Sunday's game in New Orleans. Why shouldn't they be? The Niners' offensive system, put in 10 years ago by then coach Bill Walsh and refined by his successor, George Seifert, and offensive coordinator Mike Holmgren, has reached a frightening level of proficiency. The 49ers' two playoff victories approached perfection offensively, and Montana was close to flawless in both. Technically precise, gifted with an uncanny touch on short passes, he has been the ideal operator of the system.

"Watching him in the playoffs was like watching him in a skeleton drill in practice," says Mike Giddings, who runs a scouting service for 12 NFL clubs. "It was like a professional quarterback coming back to his high school and running a drill. I've never seen a quarterback make it look as easy as Joe does."

He completed nothing deep in the 49ers' 41–13 victory over the Minnesota Vikings in the divisional playoffs or in their 30–3 win over the Los Angeles Rams in the NFC title game. He didn't have to. Protected by his offensive line of tackles Bubba Paris and Harris Barton, guards Guy McIntyre and Bruce Collie and center Jesse Sapolu, Montana carved up both teams with crosses and slants and quick outs. He gave them the slow death.

Elway has been wild and unpredictable in the playoffs, a mirror of his season—of his whole career, actu-

ANDY HAYT



JOHN MCDONOUGH

BARTON (79) AND COLLIE HELP MONTANA APPLY SLOW DEATH

ally. When the Broncos' system breaks down, he puts in his own system—scrambling out of the pocket, peering downfield, buying time, dodging a rusher, looking, always looking. Then comes a flick of the arm, and from nowhere one of Denver's fleet wide receivers—Vance Johnson, Mark Jackson or the new one, Michael Young—materializes 40 yards downfield with the ball in his hands.

"Elway's greatest strength is reading on the run," says San Francisco linebacker Matt Millen, a former Raider who has seen more than his share of Elway from the other side of the ball. "Always was, always will be."

"The Cleveland Browns said to Elway, 'We're going to blitz the hell out of you,' " says 49er defensive coordinator Bill McPherson of Denver's opponent in the AFC Championship Game. "They chased him plenty, and what does he give 'em? The Singapore Sling."

That's the fascination of this matchup. It's the machine versus the free-spinning wheel, Broadway against improvisational theater. Elway's postseason statistics, in beating the Pittsburgh Steelers 24–23 and Cleveland 37–21, don't match Montana's except in one category: the long one. Elway is at the top of his game, with four touchdown passes and one interception in the playoffs, but here's the exciting stat: 19.5 yards per completion (versus Montana's 11.7). The NFL's quarterback rating system doesn't award points for a number like that; all that number does is give cornerbacks gray hair.

Denver versus Cleveland, Jan. 14: Elway scrambles right and finds Young for a 70-yard touchdown. Elway scrambles left, buys time and finds Young for 53 down the left side. Elway scrambles left on third-and-10, stops and throws across his body to Johnson, who's crossing left to right, away from him, for a 20-yard gain.

Montana can throw with touch on the go too, but his big numbers have been built with timed patterns off short drops. And no quarterback has ever put together the playoff numbers that Montana has. In three playoff games last season and two this year, he has thrown 14 touchdown passes and one interception, and it came 112 passes ago. His quarterback rating for those five games is an unheard-of 127.2. Then consider his final-minute drive to beat the Cincinnati Bengals in last year's Super Bowl and his selection as MVP in the other two Super Bowls the Niners have won, in 1982 and '85. He has the skins on the wall.

Under Elway the Broncos have been blown out in two Super Bowls. In both games he found himself in the shadow of the opposing quarterback. Elway lifted Denver to a 10–9 first-half lead over the New York Giants in Super Bowl XXI, and his numbers at intermission read 13 completions in 20 attempts for 187 yards. But that was the day Giants quarterback Phil Simms chose to have a career game, completing 22 of 25 passes, and by the second half the undersized Broncos had been worn down. Final score: New York 39, Denver 20. A year later Elway's long passes got the Broncos off to a 10–0 lead over the Washington Redskins—he completed three of his first four throws for 96 yards—but that accomplishment was buried under the Redskins' 35-point avalanche in the second quarter and under the record 340 yards passing that won

quarterback Doug Williams the MVP and Washington a 42–10 victory.

Both Montana and Elway have had poor stretches. At midseason the Broncos had a 6–2 record, but they were coming off a 28–24 loss to the Philadelphia Eagles, and Elway had turned in a miserable performance. Scouts were saying that his fundamentals were screwed up. He was feuding with the local media. Maybe it was his reunion with quarterback coach Mike Shanahan, who returned to Denver in Week 7 after an unhappy 1½-year stint as head coach of the Raiders, but by the start of the postseason, Elway had pulled his game together.

Montana's walk through the shadows was longer, and it cut deeper. In the mid-1980s he was recovering from the breakup of his second marriage, a costly business venture of his had failed, and he was the target of unsubstantiated drug rumors. "I remember watching the six o'clock news with Joe one night," says his present wife, Jennifer. "They flashed his face on the screen, and underneath was the word *drugs*. Then they went to a commercial. I can remember Joe's eyes welling up. It was just so untrue, but what could we do about it?"

"The absolute low point came in 1985," says Montana. We'd lost to Detroit on the road, we were 3–4, and I came back with the flu. Our baby, Alexandra, had caught it, and I was getting in the car to take her to the hospital, holding her in my arms, and I couldn't get out of the driveway. A bus was blocking it, and the driver, a woman, was sitting there making faces at me and turning thumbs down, and all the people on the bus were staring. I just sat there thinking, Just go away. Please go away. That was the worst."

In 1986 he needed surgery to widen his spinal canal. He was 30. Doctors told him it would be risky to play again. He was back in eight weeks. He was named All-Pro the next season, when he threw a league-high 31 touchdown passes and led the Niners to a 13–2 record. But then came a first-round playoff loss to Minnesota, in which Montana was benched for his 26-year-old backup, Steve Young. For a while in '88 he and Young shared the position, and the word was that Montana was trade bait.

"I didn't want to go anywhere else, but Jen and I sat down and started looking at teams," says Montana. "Two that jumped out were San Diego and the Raiders. We started planning how we'd do it—would she move out with me right away or stay in the house? I knew I wasn't through, but I thought maybe I'd have to prove it somewhere else."

Leading the Niners to their third Super Bowl victory, last January, put an end to that. But the bitterness remains. "He could have one bad week," says Jennifer, "and it would all start again."

"His confidence is so high that it will be a problem slowing him down," says Bronco defensive coordinator Wade Phillips *(page 62)*. "At one time Ken Stabler was considered the NFL's most accurate passer. He was hitting 60 percent of his throws when most of the league was in the 50's. Now the league is approaching 60 percent, and Montana's at 70 percent. He's got a lot more weapons to work with now. They're throwing to their fullback, Tom Rathman, more, and they've got a real threat at split end—John Taylor—who can burn you short or long."

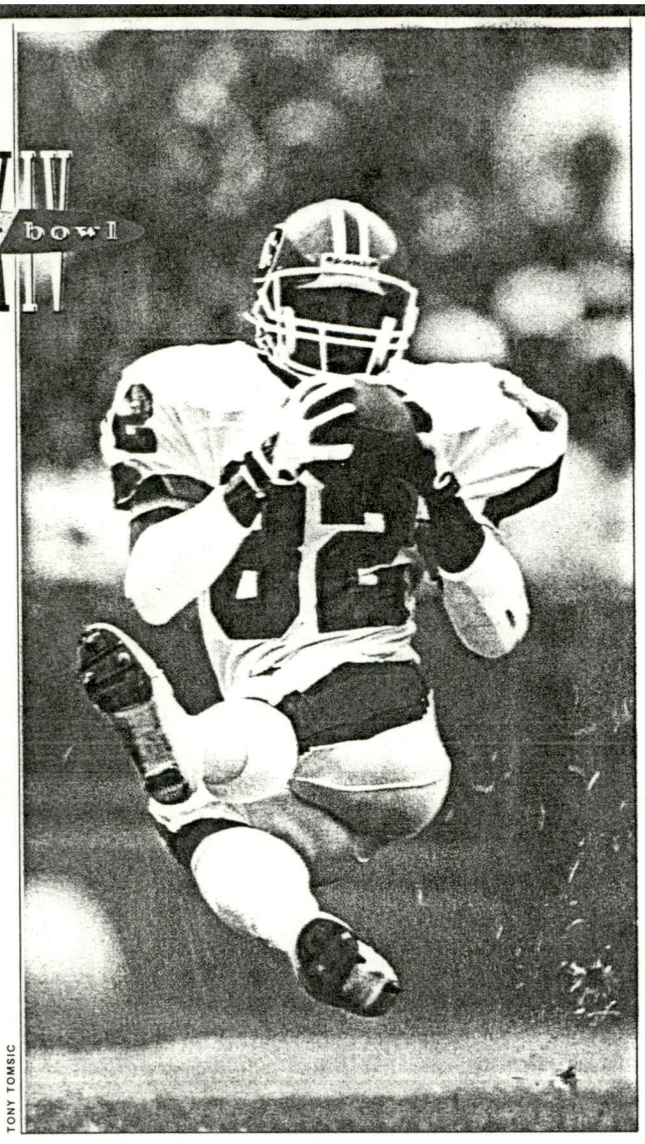
Taylor broke two short catches for 90-plus yards against the Rams in Week 14, and San Francisco's other wideout, Jerry Rice, turned a five-yard pattern into a 72-yard TD in the playoff game against the Vikings. There's a reason these plays turned into long gainers. Montana's timing is so sharp on short passes that his receivers are almost always in full stride when they catch the ball. They run their routes with confidence, knowing the ball will be where they want it. They're in perfect balance. Hence, the short becomes long.

"One strength of their offense is that they don't make

THE 272-POUND CARREKER HAS ADDED MUSCLE TO DENVER'S D

JOHN BIEVER





TONY TOMSIC

JOHNSON AND THE BALL OFTEN MATERIALIZE DOWNFIELD ...

their players do what they can't do," says Phillips. "They have everyone in the right slot. Our defense is the same way. For instance, our left linebacker, Michael Brooks, is real strong against the tight end, so he plays the tight end, and he is expected to be stiff against the run. Our right linebacker, Simon Fletcher, can rush the passer, so that's what we let him do. We free up our strong inside backer, Karl Mecklenburg, so people can't get to him, and we protect our corners by not putting them in too much man-to-man. You know, the 49ers have scored 30 or more points in 10 games this season, counting the playoffs, but we have yet to give up 30 points in a game."

The Denver defense has some new players, including left end Alphonso Carreker and right corner Wymon Henderson, both of whom are Plan B pickups. It's also got a new coaching staff under Phillips and a new philosophy—all in an effort to prevent what happened to the Broncos in their last two Super Bowls. The Giants wore them down physically. The Redskins destroyed them with their favorite running play, the counter gap, in which the offside guard and tackle pull and lead the back through the hole. Now Denver has bigger, bulkier defensive players, although the Steelers hit them hard with the same counter gap play in the divisional playoff. And the 49ers got good mileage out of the play in both their postseason victories. One key to Sunday's game will be how well Denver copes with the counter gap.

The Broncos can rush the ball better now too, but the effectiveness of their ground attack will depend largely on the condition of rookie halfback Bobby Humphrey, who cracked two ribs against the Browns.

If the Niners have shown one weakness in the playoffs, it has been a tendency to play soft on defense in the early going. The Vikings and Rams both got long drives, capped by field goals, the first time they had the ball. For Elway, a long drive could be two plays—for a touchdown.

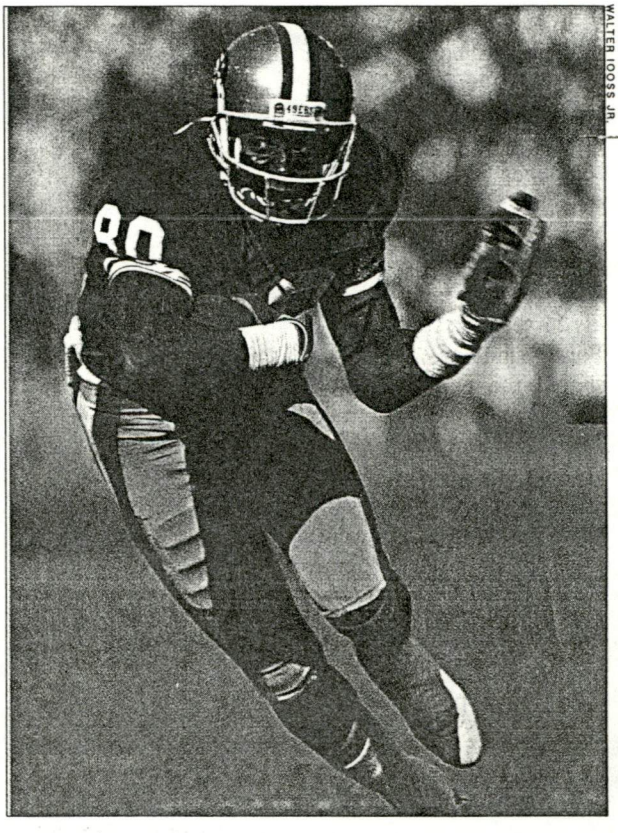
But just as Montana has lifted the San Francisco offense in the postseason, 30-year-old free safety Ronnie Lott has elevated the defense. He has been the steadying influence, the guy who keeps everything under control. "A guy like Elway can make things happen so quickly that he can induce a state of panic in a defense," says Lott. "That's when you have to step in."

The smart money says the 49ers will blow out the Broncos. The line opened at 10 points after San Francisco routed the Rams. A week later it jumped to 12. People with long memories recall the biggest Super Bowl spread of all, in 1969, when the Baltimore Colts opened as 17-point favorites over the New York Jets. After the bettors took a good look at the Jets, the number rose to 19½.

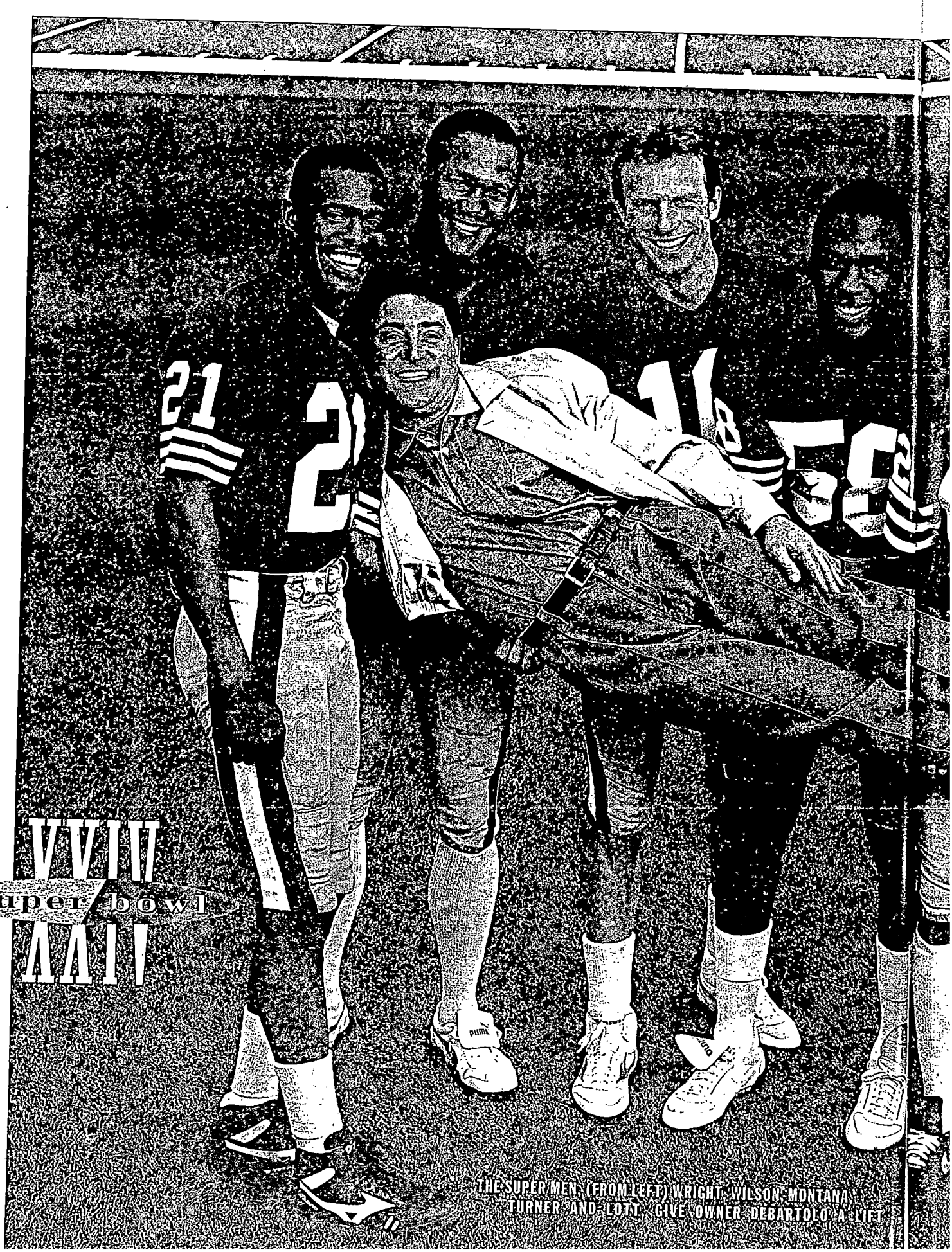
"Big numbers scare me," says Millen. "I remember how the Jets beat the Colts and how Kansas City beat Minnesota [in Super Bowl IV] when the Chiefs were heavy underdogs."

Perhaps the truest Super Bowl formula of all is this: Go with the hot team. No one has ever been as hot as the Niners. The call here is San Francisco 31, Denver 21. ■

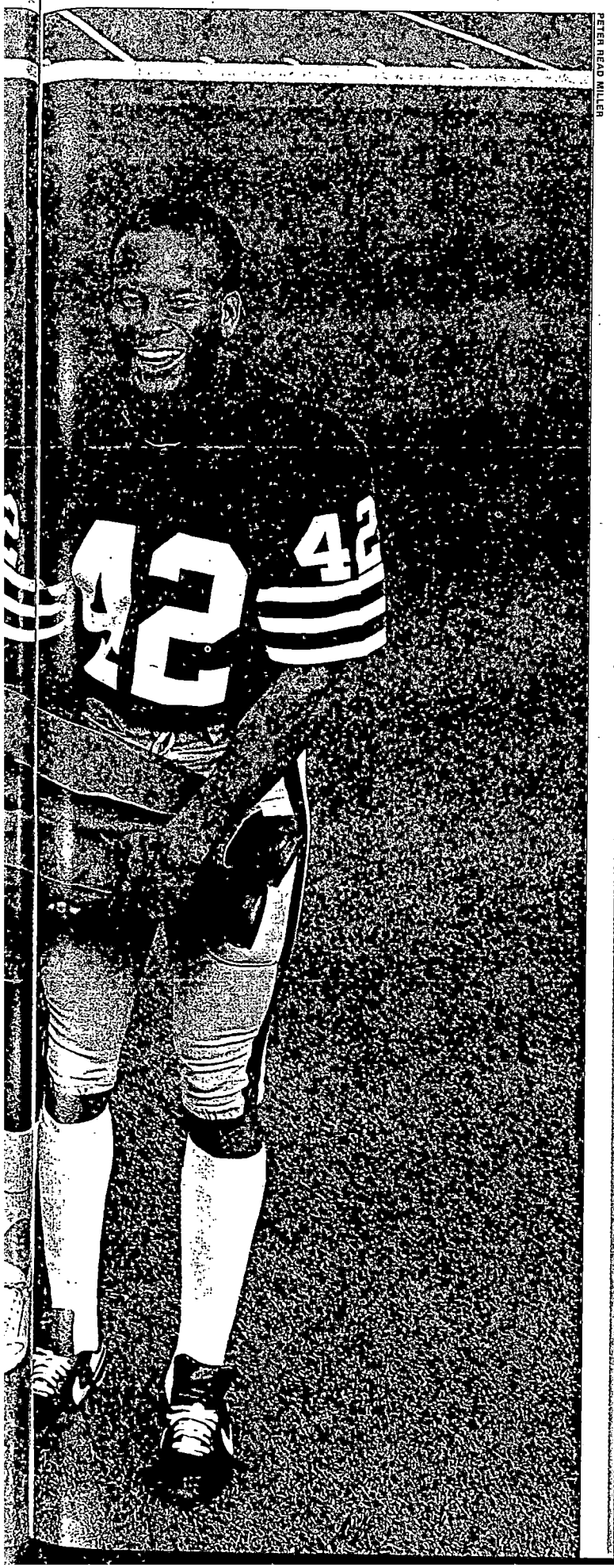
... WHILE RICE TURNS SHORT PASSES INTO LONG GAINS



WALTER IOOSS JR.



THE SUPER MEN (FROM LEFT) WRIGHT, WILSON, MONTANA, TURNER AND LOTT GIVE OWNER DEBARTOLO A LIFT



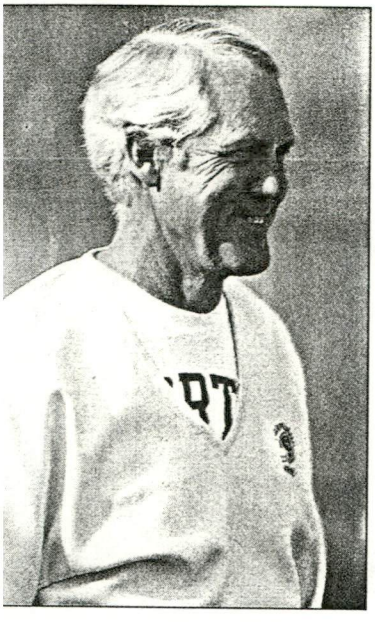
PETER READ MILLER

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SAN FRANCISCO'S FOUR SUPER BOWL TEAMS HAVE HAD FEW CONSTANTS. FIVE OF THEM WILL BE ON THE FIELD SUNDAY

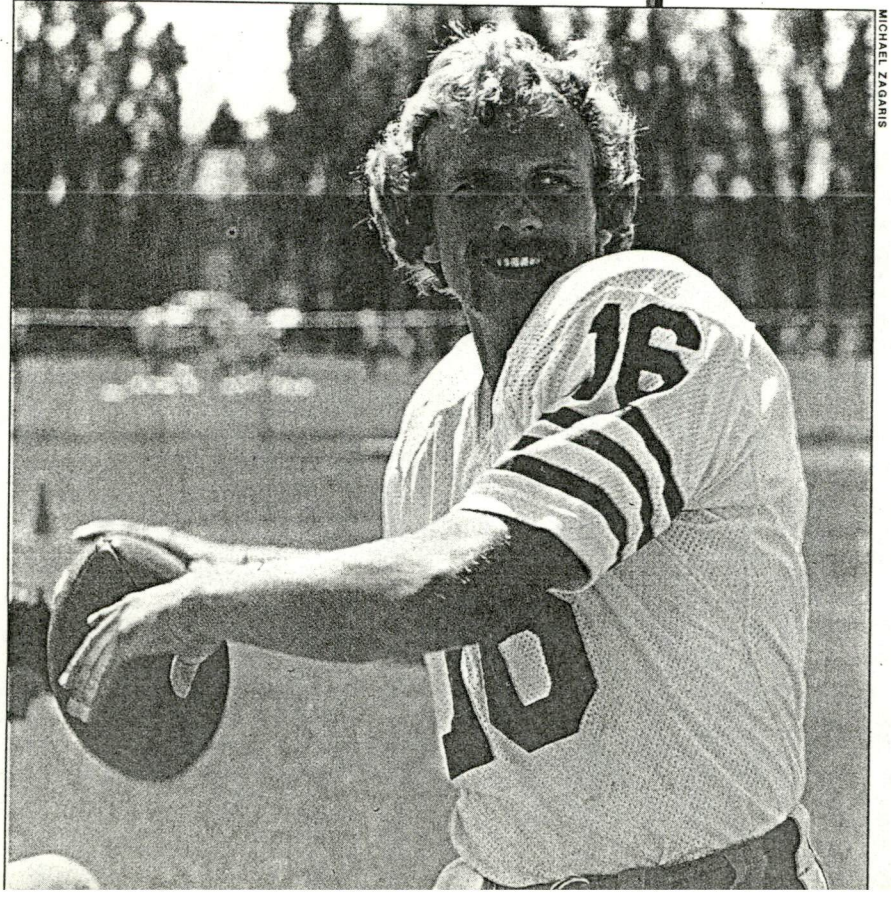
BY JILL LIEBER

THE 49ER FIVE LOOK EXTREMELY UNcomfortable. The only players to have been on all four of San Francisco's Super Bowl teams have gathered for a group photograph at a practice field in Santa Clara, Calif., but they aren't very happy about it. Quarterback Joe Montana and linebacker Keena Turner squirm. Cornerback Eric Wright won't smile. Free safety Ronnie Lott and wide receiver Mike Wilson move slowly and self-consciously when the group is asked to squeeze closer together. Eddie DeBartolo, the 43-year-old owner of the 49ers, offers some banter to ease the tension. But when he takes his place in front of the camera, he too stiffens. These players know each other as well as any group of teammates in the NFL. They have played through an extraordinary decade together, and now they are on the verge of a historic fourth Super Bowl appearance. Why the pained faces?


ANDY HAYT

"That picture represented an era," DeBartolo said later. "These guys have been together nine years. Nine years! That's a little more than two careers for the average football player. They've outlived the norm. They've all gone through difficult times. Their bodies and their psyches have been banged up. They had to be asking themselves, 'How much longer will we be together? Is this going to be it?' "

IN WALSH'S FIRST YEAR AS COACH, THE 49ERS DRAFTED MONTANA. IN MONTANA'S FIRST YEAR AS THE STARTING QUARTERBACK . . .


MICHAEL ZAGARIS

Before embarking on their very own Victory Tour nine years ago, the 49ers were a laughingstock, the doormat of the NFL, having just had 2–14, 2–14 and 6–10 seasons. In those days, none of the players who would perform for the Niners throughout their remarkable dominance seemed a likely hero.

Montana, who had been picked in the third round of the 1979 draft, from Notre Dame, had been made the starting quarterback after Steve DeBerg was traded to the Denver Broncos before the start of the season. "[Coach] Bill Walsh felt Joe was the quarterback of the future," recalls Chuck Studley, the 49ers' defensive coordinator at the time. "The staff vociferously argued against the trade. DeBerg was an experienced veteran. But Bill felt if DeBerg was there, Joe would never take control. Frankly, we were quite upset and very definitely divided."

Turner, a second-round choice in 1980, from Purdue, had just become a starting outside linebacker despite being—at 219 pounds— a bit undersized for the position.

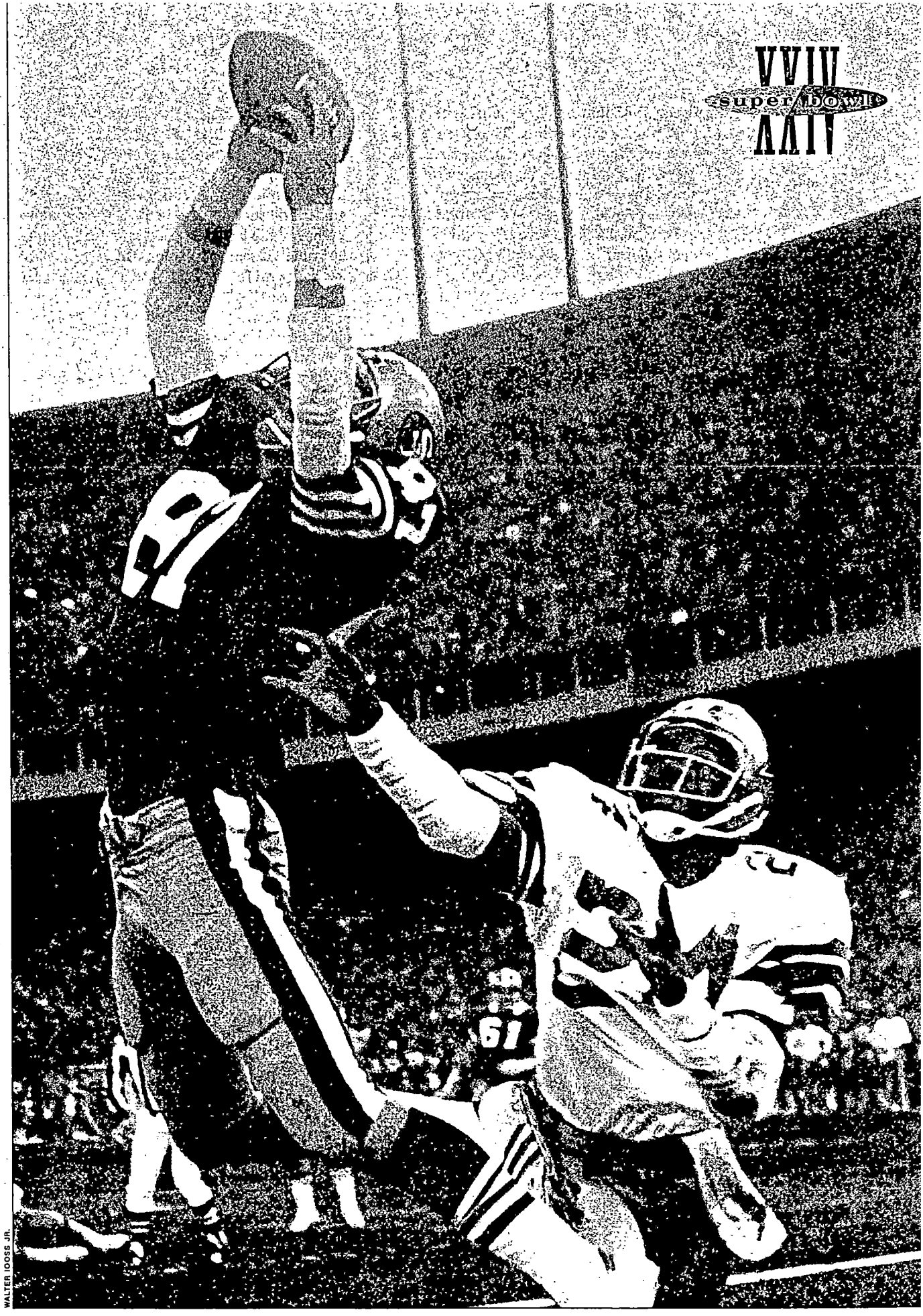
The other three players were rookies. The Niners selected Lott, from Southern Cal, with the eighth pick in the first round of the 1981 draft, even though some of the front-office folks doubted that he was a blue-chip prospect. "We really didn't want Lott," Studley says. "I remember Walsh turning to [then defensive backs coach] George Seifert in the draft room and saying, 'Is Ronnie Lott truly worthy of the eighth pick in the draft?' It was a rather pointed question. But George didn't hesitate. He said, 'There's no question in my mind.' "

San Francisco then picked Wright, from Missouri, in the second round and threw him and Lott together as rookie starters at the corners.

Wilson, from Washington State, had been a ninth-round draft choice of the Dallas Cowboys that year, but he was released before the last exhibition game and was signed by the 49ers three days later. "I went from America's Team to the bottom of the heap," Wilson says. "I'd never even seen the 49ers play on TV. My friends said, 'A terrible team picked you up,' but I was just happy to be in the NFL."

Together, the 49er Five have traveled hundreds of thousands of miles, from London and Tokyo for preseason games to the White House as Super Bowl champions. Among them, they have earned 17 Pro Bowl selections and have helped carry the 49ers to seven division titles, four conference championships and three Super Bowl victories. They've swapped chiropractors and masseurs, and they've sprung for dozens of beers.

Each has achieved remarkable longevity despite suffering a career-threatening injury. Lott fractured and lacerated the small finger on his



WALTER IOOSS JR.

. . . HE LED THE NINERS TO THEIR FIRST NFC TITLE, VIA "THE PASS" TO CLARK, AND BECAME MVP OF THEIR FIRST SUPER BOWL WIN

left hand so badly in 1985 that he chose to have the tip amputated when it didn't heal properly. That same season, Wright broke a bone in his pelvis and has been hampered by painful chronic groin pulls ever since. In 1986, Montana underwent surgery to remove a ruptured disk in his lower back, and Wilson severely sprained his neck. A year later, Turner tore ligaments in his right knee. "We all could have quit so long ago," Montana says. "We have a real love for football and for each other. That's what keeps us coming back for more."

"In the heat of battle, these guys are my everything," Turner says. "We've shared experiences and emotions that most men seldom have in relationships with other men. We've developed a closeness that is unique."

And all of them agree that this year's Super Bowl is their most meaningful. At the opening of training camp, seven defensive starters from last season's Super Bowl-winning team were holding out; six of the first eight games of the season were on the road; and looming large over all of that, Bill Walsh had resigned after 10 years as the Niner coach, and Seifert, who had worked his way up to defensive coordinator, had replaced him.

Still, when they take the field against the Denver Broncos on Sunday, the 49er Five will have mixed emotions. This could be the end of the road for three of them. Wilson was left unprotected as a Plan B free agent last spring. Wright has been used only in nickel situations because of his groin injury. Frustrated by his inconsistency since knee surgery two years ago, Turner may retire. Montana, the most valuable player in the NFL this season, and Lott, who has been voted to the Pro Bowl for the eighth time . . . well, they'll have to be carried out feetfirst.

These five players will always be linked by their unique position in Super Bowl history. It has already provided them a lifetime of memories.

RONNIE LOTT

Lott couldn't believe his eyes at the team breakfast before the NFC Championship Game against the Dallas Cowboys in January 1982. There, sipping a cup of coffee and poring over the game plan, sat crusty, 34-year-old linebacker Jack (Hacksaw) Reynolds. He was dressed in his complete uniform, from eye black to cleats. Even his ankles and shoes were taped. "Hacksaw could have tackled one of the busboys," Lott says. "It blew me away. The last time I'd seen something like that was in Pop Warner football. I said to myself, 'This guy means business. This is a *big* game.' "

Later, Reynolds put on his helmet and drove to Candlestick Park in his gold 1970 Lincoln Continental with its rattling engine and smoke coming out the tail pipe. "What a crazy old turkey I was," Reynolds says.

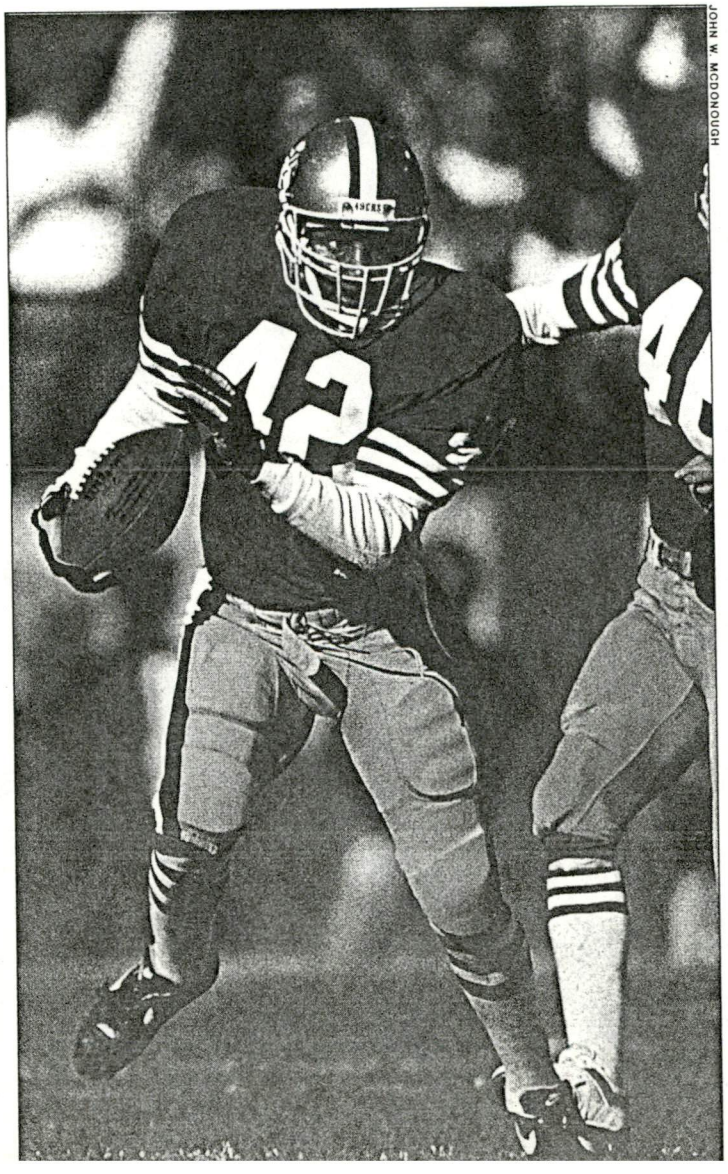
The old turkey made a lasting impression on Lott, who went on to become the hard-nosed leader of the San Francisco defense. He also became the 49ers' most stirring pregame speaker. "Bill Walsh was not great at motivational speeches," Lott says. "John Robinson, my college coach, could turn an ice cube into hot water. But Bill, well, I'd laugh at him sometimes."

A couple of days before Super Bowl XVI, at the Pontiac Silverdome on Jan. 24, 1982, Lott delivered one of his shortest and most unusual speeches. Huddled in a hotel ballroom, the Niners were hardly getting fired up as Walsh and his coaches debated the merits of letting the players sleep with their wives or girlfriends the nights preceding the game. Lott jumped to his feet. "Do whatever it takes to win," he bellowed. "If you've slept with them before every other game, don't stop now. You've got to be able to do your job well."

Lott laughs at how naive the 49ers were then. Because everything was new, including winning, nothing seemed to bother them. "I remember telling myself before the game," says Lott, " 'This is no big deal. I've played in front of 100,000 in the Rose Bowl. The Silverdome only holds 80,000 people. So what?' "

Although half of the team hadn't arrived at the Silverdome 20 minutes before warmups—the Niners second bus

LOTT BECAME THE CLUB'S TOP INTERCEPTOR AND MOTIVATOR



JOHN W. MCDONOUGH



ANDY HAYT



ANDY HAYT

THOUGH "SICKER THAN A DOG," TURNER EXULTED AT SUPE XVI

was trapped in traffic—nobody in the locker room panicked. "I had taken a limo over early," Lott says. "There were only 10 or 15 guys in the locker room. [Tackle] Keith Fahnhorst and [guard] Randy Cross volunteered to play both ways. [Equipment man] Chico Norton said he'd play running back. [Trainer] Lindsy McLean offered to try quarterback. Here was a chance for everybody to panic, and we were in there laughing. It was one of the keys to winning that Super Bowl. It got us loose."

San Francisco beat the Cincinnati Bengals 26–21 that day, but Lott says he didn't fully comprehend what the 49ers had accomplished until a week later. He and wide receiver Dwight Clark were lounging in a Honolulu bar after a Pro Bowl practice, when Steeler greats Mel Blount and Jack Lambert began sending drinks to their table. An endless stream of Tropical Itches.

"They were tipping their hats to us," Lott says. "They had won four Super Bowls and could have said, 'Hey, one is no big deal.' That moment taught me how to act. That's a true champion."

When the Niners made their third Super Bowl appearance, a year ago in Miami against the Bengals, Lott had no trouble grasping what being a world champion meant. "I told myself to enjoy every moment, to savor everything that happens on the field," Lott says. "I hadn't done that at the other two. So this time I noticed [Los Angeles Dodger manager] Tommy Lasorda in the tunnel. I heard Billy Joel sing the national anthem. I checked out Christie Brinkley during warmups. Before, I had looked at the Super Bowl as a game and never as the event it is."

One of the moments Lott savored came early in the game. Bengal fullback Ickey Woods gained 27 yards on his first four carries. Then near the end of the first quarter, Lott walloped him with a bone-jarring tackle. Woods rushed for only 10 yards the rest of the half. The Niners went on to win the game, 20–16.

"Ickey Woods was playing at a different tempo than the rest of us," says Seifert, "Ronnie Lott had a direct impact on us winning that ball game."

Says Lott, "I had studied him on film, and I hadn't seen any free safeties all year get a good, straight-on hit on him. When he got into the secondary, guys were just bringing him down from the side. I was determined to get Ickey full speed. Make him remember me. After that, when he ran with the ball, he stopped his feet and hesitated a bit."

KEENA TURNER

Three days before the NFC Championship Game in January 1982, Turner was soaping up in the shower when his fingers ran across a tiny bump in the middle of his chest. A scratch, he reckoned. Then he felt several bumps on his shoulders and arms. And a couple more on his thighs. "They were popping out on me right there," Turner says. "I panicked. I ran out of the shower and grabbed Hal Wyatt, one of the trainers, and said, 'What do I have?' I thought I was going to die on the spot. Hal looked, then he quickly backed away from me. I was sure I was a goner."

It was only chicken pox. "A kid's disease, at age 23," Turner says now, shaking his head. "By the next day, I had them in my mouth, on my head, all over my butt. Everywhere. I couldn't eat, and I was so tired I couldn't move."

The 49ers practically carried Turner onto the field for the championship game. "We woke him up and told him it was time to put on his uniform," recalls McLean. "Then

we pushed Keena out the locker room door like a zombie."

At Super Bowl XVI two weeks later, Turner still felt the effects of the chicken pox. He had lost 10 pounds, shriveling down to 207. With so little stamina, he had difficulty breathing. "It was not an enjoyable Super Bowl," he says. "I was sicker than a dog."

Feeling so lousy made Turner concentrate harder on his assignments in the 49ers' two new blitzing defenses—Cobra and the Nickel Blizzard—which Studley had devised especially for the game. Late in the first quarter, with the 49ers leading 7–0 and the Bengals facing third-and-10 on their own 41, Studley called for Cobra—a blitz by Fred Dean, who was the middle linebacker in this formation. Turner, who was lined up in a down position on the outside shoulder of Cincinnati left tackle Anthony Munoz, found himself smothering quarterback Kenny Anderson to end the series. "I wasn't even the rusher," Turner says. "Kenny ran right into my arms."

Turner wasn't quite so well positioned late in the third quarter. The Niners were ahead 20–7, and the Bengals had a third-and-one on the San Francisco five. On the sideline, Turner suddenly realized—too late—that there were only 10 49ers on the field, and he was the missing man. Bengal fullback Pete Johnson lumbered two yards for a first down. After that, in one of the most exciting defensive series in Super Bowl history, San Francisco—with Turner now on the field—stopped the Bengals on four consecutive plays.

"I'll tell you a secret," Turner says. "I also missed a play in the NFC Championship Game, and that time [Dallas running back] Tony Dorsett scored. In those days, I wasn't playing every down. If we were in short-yardage, I wasn't in; but in goal-line, I was. In some spots of the field, it was hard to distinguish between the two."

His Super Bowl blunder could have etched Turner's name and number in the mind of every Niner fan. But he was lucky. When the 49ers returned for a gigantic victory parade through the streets of San Francisco, Turner was hardly recognized. "I got out of a trolley car at City Hall, and most of the players turned one way, but I went around the other side," Turner says. "A cop said, 'Where are you going?' He shoved his club into my chest. I said, 'I'm one of the players.' And he said, 'Get back!'

"Even today, people yell, 'Hey, Tina!' when they see me. They think I'm Tina Turner. The 49ers have always had few recognizable faces. With all our Super Bowl successes, only Joe Montana has gotten big endorsements. None of us has a TV show. We've been lucky, because all that can destroy a team."

No season has been more difficult for Turner than the present one. He fears the end is near. His damaged right knee kept him from practicing on most days. "He's withdrawn," Fahnhorst says. "He seldom talks. He has had a rough time." Turner worried about the strained relationship between some of his teammates and Walsh, who resigned three days after last year's Super Bowl.

WILSON, SAYS MONTANA, IS UNCANNY AT FINDING HOLES IN THE D



MICHAEL ZAGARIS



PETER READ MILLER

WRIGHT'S 21 INTERCEPTIONS INCLUDE TWO IN SUPER BOWLS

"I was extremely hurt that Bill didn't ever tell us as a team that he was retiring," Lott says. "He never said goodbye. It was unusual that Bill wasn't closer to us at the end. When I first got here, he was open, a player's coach. He'd crack jokes, be sarcastic. But he started to change after the '82 strike season, then a lot more after the second Super Bowl. To me, that was the last season Bill had fun and enjoyed football. The media started calling him a genius and prying into his personal life. He was really distant after that."

Says Wright, "When we lost to the Minnesota Vikings in the '87 playoffs, Walsh couldn't talk to us the day after. He lost a lot of respect with the players. When it was going well, he was there. When the ship was shaky, he couldn't face us."

Adds Fahnhorst, "Bill made so many enemies. He was the type who had everything, but he could never enjoy it. He was a miserable human being."

Turner spoke with Walsh on the phone a few times this season, and he has pleaded with past and present 49ers to phone or write Walsh because he knows Walsh won't make the first move. "Bill and I both said and thought things along the way that might not have been right," Turner says. "We fought. We argued. We disagreed. But we've also done some pretty good things. I've tried to stay away from judging him. He misses football terribly. He is uncomfortable with the way he left things, and he doesn't know what to do. Too much has happened for us not to be able to talk."

MIKE WILSON

Ask someone to name the five players who have been on the four 49er Super Bowl teams, and Wilson is the one that usually stumps them. That's understandable; in nine years with the team, Wilson has started only 27 games, most of them in the 1987 and '88 seasons. "I'm a good trivia question," Wilson says. "Unless you really know the NFL, you'd have no idea who I am. Ten years from now, nobody will remember me."

Wilson's one shining moment came in the 1982 Super Bowl. He caught the most significant pass of the game. On second-and-15 from the San Francisco 22 early in the fourth quarter, with the Niners leading by six points, Wilson burned Bengal cornerback Louis Breeden and snared a 22-yard pass from Montana. The play set up a field goal by Ray Wersching that gave the 49ers a 23–14 lead.

"At the start of the game I thought, If only I could make a good play," Wilson says. "We jumped to a big lead; then for the next three series, it was three-plays-and-out. The offense came to a screeching halt. Finally, Bill called Sweep Pass Right, Z-Comeback. Joe sprints right, and I ran past the 20. Breeden kept going, figuring it was a bomb. I stopped and came back for the ball.

"Thinking back, I'm sure glad there wasn't instant replay. I caught the ball on the Cincinnati sideline, and their guys were screaming, 'You're out of bounds!' I barely got my tiptoes in."

Montana says he can depend on Wilson: "Wills is a survivor. He does something no other receiver does: He finds the holes inside. He reads the coverages well. He knows this system inside out."

And he has always understood his role. Wilson has played second fiddle and never complained. Perhaps better than any other 49er, he knows the importance of plan-

ning for life after football. He has worked with team adviser Dr. Harry Edwards to establish programs at three Bay Area universities for teammates who want to finish their college degrees. Wilson received his diploma in business administration from San Jose State last year, and Wright and Turner are on schedule to graduate in 1991.



"There is no rookie hazing here, and nobody has to sing his school song in training camp," Wilson says. "From day one, you're a 49er. It's more important to learn and help the team as soon as you can.

"You learn right off the bat that there are only a few key players here. On paper, a lot of teams should be better than we are. What it comes down to is knowing your role and responsibility. And taking pride in that. That kind of character makes us successful."

ERIC WRIGHT

Before the pregame introductions of Super Bowl XVI, Wright, who was the starting right cornerback as a rookie, stood alone on the Pontiac Silverdome sideline. Tears streamed down his face.

"I was so keyed up, so juiced, that I lost it," he says. "My body chemistry totally changed. I had no appetite that day. I was sharp, on edge. Any little thing somebody said, I fired back, 'Leave me alone!' All my emotions were on the surface."

Wright tries to calm himself before every game by kneeling in the end zone and saying a prayer. But that never seems to work in Super Bowls. Before the kickoff for Super Bowl XIX against the Miami Dolphins at Stanford Stadium in 1985, Wright turned himself into a bundle of nerves. Although he had been beaten for only one touchdown all season, Wright went bananas thinking about Miami quarterback Dan Marino and his wide receivers, Mark Duper and Mark Clayton. "I couldn't remember precisely what I had to do," Wright says. "I was out of control."

The Dolphins jumped to a 10–7 lead, scoring on their first two possessions of the game. On the first, Wright missed a tackle on running back Tony Nathan after a simple swing pass. A five-yard gain turned into a 25-yarder. Marino stung Wright in the next series on successive passes, an 18-yarder to Clayton and an 11-yarder to Duper. "After that, I told Eric to challenge them," Lott says. "I reminded him that he was the best cover guy we had. I told him to relax."

The 49er defense toughened after that. Lott stopped a second-quarter drive in the end zone, soaring with Clayton and poking the ball out of the way with his helmet. Wright knocked down three passes, including a third-down throw to Duper that killed a series. Late in the third quarter, Wright made a leaping interception at the Niner one-yard line, halting Miami's last chance at getting back in the game. The 49ers went on win, 38–16.

"That was the most athletic play I ever made and probably the best of my career," Wright says. "It was a shake post pattern. I got an unbelievable reaction on the ball.

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Great break. Clayton would have beaten anybody else."

Wright is already jazzed for this Sunday's game. "We want to show we can do it without Bill Walsh," he says. "A lot of guys are driven to show that Bill wasn't the only genius around here. He had a good supporting cast of athletes." Wright pauses, feeling the anxiety rise. "I have to admit that one thing bothers me. People expect us to win. What if the Broncos have our number? It would be our most devastating loss ever."

JOE MONTANA

Montana loves to watch replays of The Drive, that 92-yard march in Miami's Joe Robbie Stadium that beat the Bengals, 20–16, in the final 3:10 of Super Bowl XXIII last year. He can't remember it any other way. "It's a blur," Montana says. "I hyperventilated to the point of almost blacking out. You know how a TV screen gets fuzzy? Well, that's what my vision was like. I was yelling so loudly in the huddle that I couldn't breathe. Things got blurrier and blurrier.

"One time, I put my hands under center and I felt like it was taking days to call the play. Everything was in slow motion. When I took my first step back, the fuzz appeared again. By the fifth step, things got so fuzzy I had to throw the ball over Jerry Rice, out of bounds, to clear my head."

When Montana came back to earth after the game, he suffered an emotional letdown. Waiting to take his place behind a podium for the postgame interview, he was approached by an NFL official. "He said he'd been assigned to stay near me and escort me to the MVP press conference," Montana says. "He said it was practically certain—99 percent sure—that I'd be named MVP."

But when Montana stepped away from the podium after answering questions, the NFL official was nowhere in sight. Montana learned that Rice had been selected MVP. "Jerry had a great game," Montana says. "But I was, you know, kind of hoping."

Montana and his wife, Jennifer, took a limo to the 49ers' hotel and snuck in through a service entrance. He was exhausted and cramping in the stomach. They tried to order a room-service dinner, but the kitchen was so backed up that Jennifer had to go downstairs to DeBartolo's victory party and load up a plate of food for Joe. Then the Montanas phoned for several bottles of California champagne, popped corks and opened their door.

"Our room was right by the elevator, so most of the players and their families stopped in," Montana says. "I don't know how many bottles we went through. We just kept pouring."

Jennifer had played an important part in the victory. She had saved the red jersey Joe had worn in the 1985 Super Bowl, and she packed it in Joe's bag the night before last year's game. He found it the next morning.

"My jersey last year was a little different from everybody else's," Joe says. "The sleeves were longer and the stripes on the arms were wider. It was just a little something to take my mind off the game. It was a great idea."

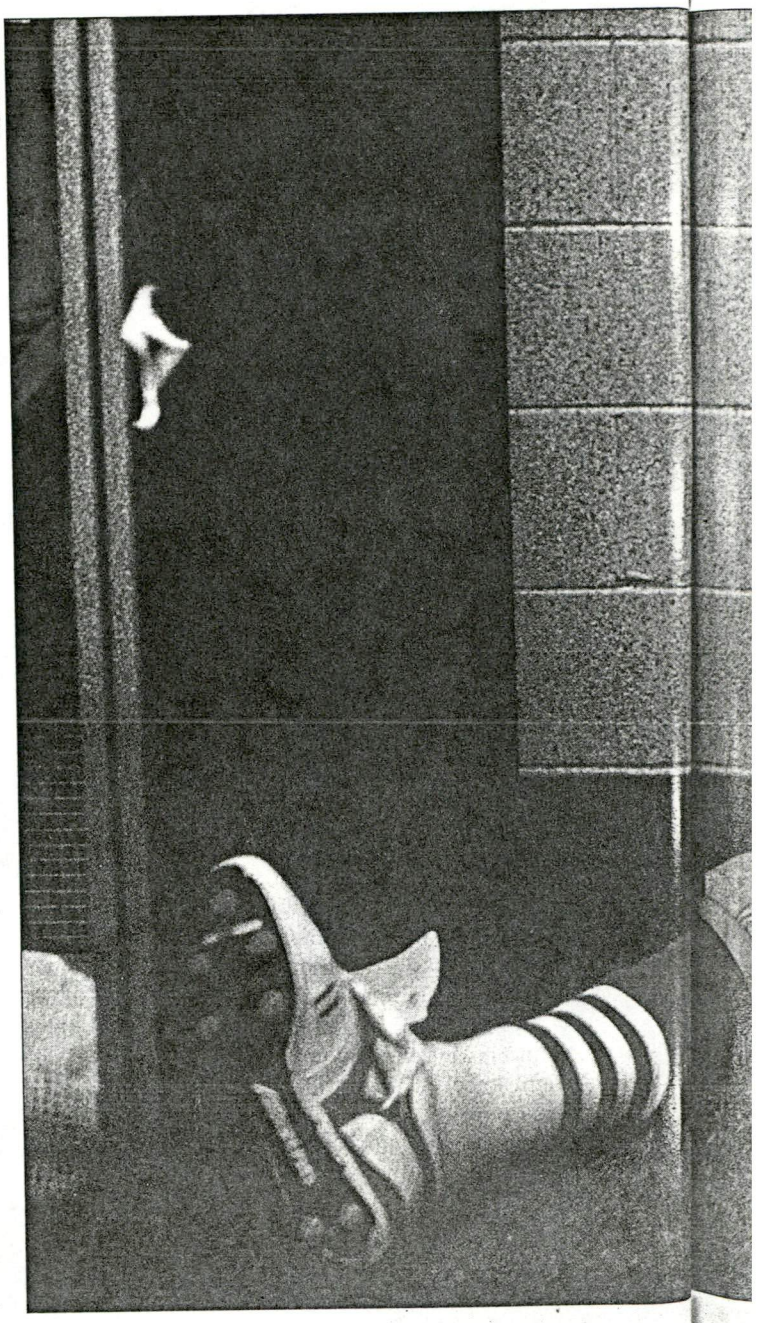
Jennifer keeps Joe loose for big games by taping snapshots of their three children to strategic places in his playbook. Underneath, she writes captions. Several hours before the NFC Championship Game against the Los Angeles Rams two weeks ago, Joe discovered photos of Alexandra, 4, and Elizabeth, 3, decked out in extra-large T-shirts emblazoned with the words BEAT L.A. On the following page, he saw himself being tackled on the living room floor by the two girls. "Don't let them tackle you, Daddy," the caption read.

Montana is not so soft-hearted on the field. Listen to what he says in the heat of battle:

- Before the NFC Championship Game in '82, Cowboy defensive end Ed (Too Tall) Jones was quoted as saying

MONTANA, SAYS LOTT, IS BOTH EXTRAORDINARY AND ORDINARY

MICHAEL ZAGARIS



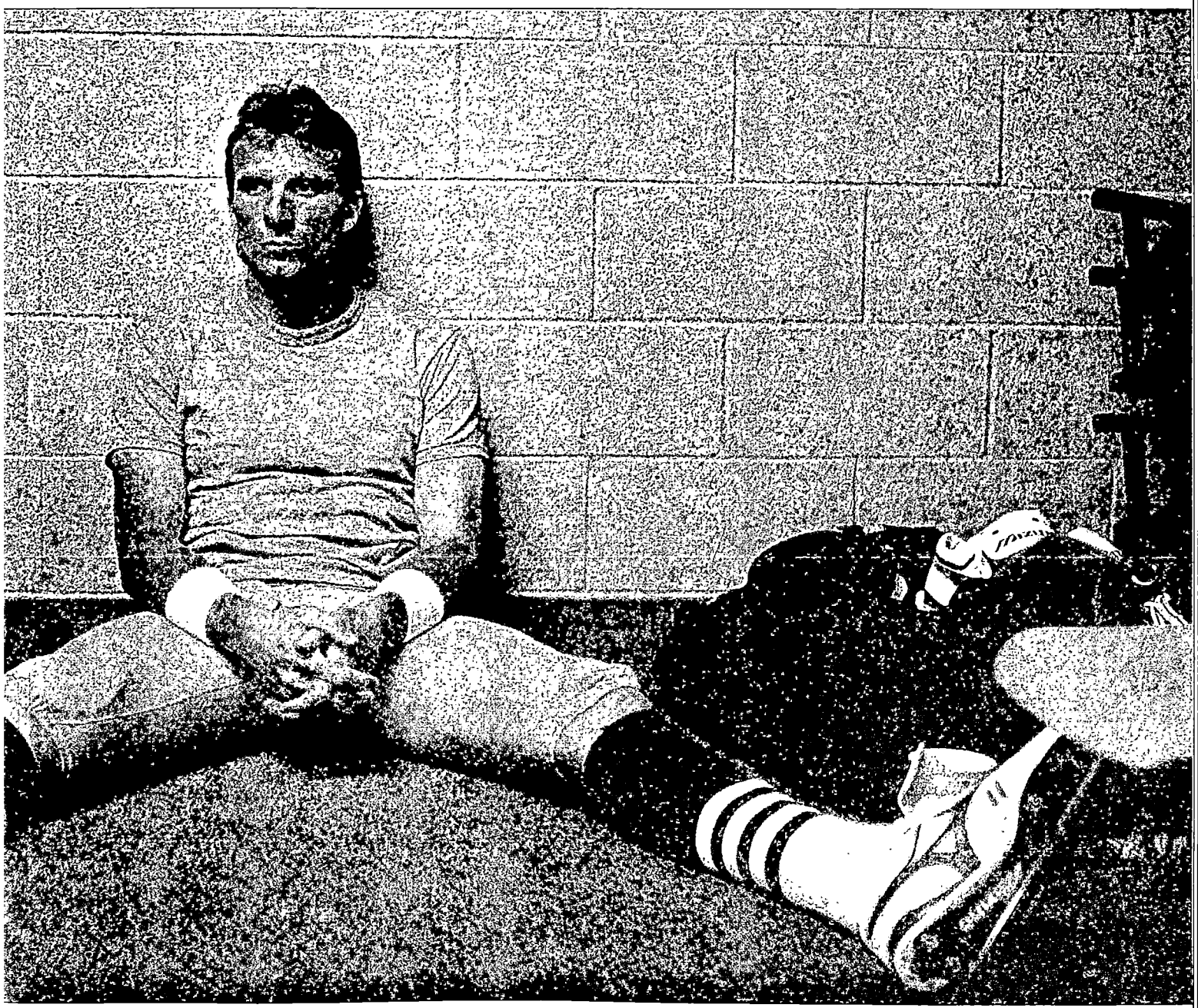
he had no respect for the 49ers, that he didn't even know most of their names. "At one point, Joe ran a naked bootleg to the left, and Too Tall was the only one out there," Fahnhorst says. "Joe faked him and went for 30 yards. Then he shouted, 'Respect that, ——.' "

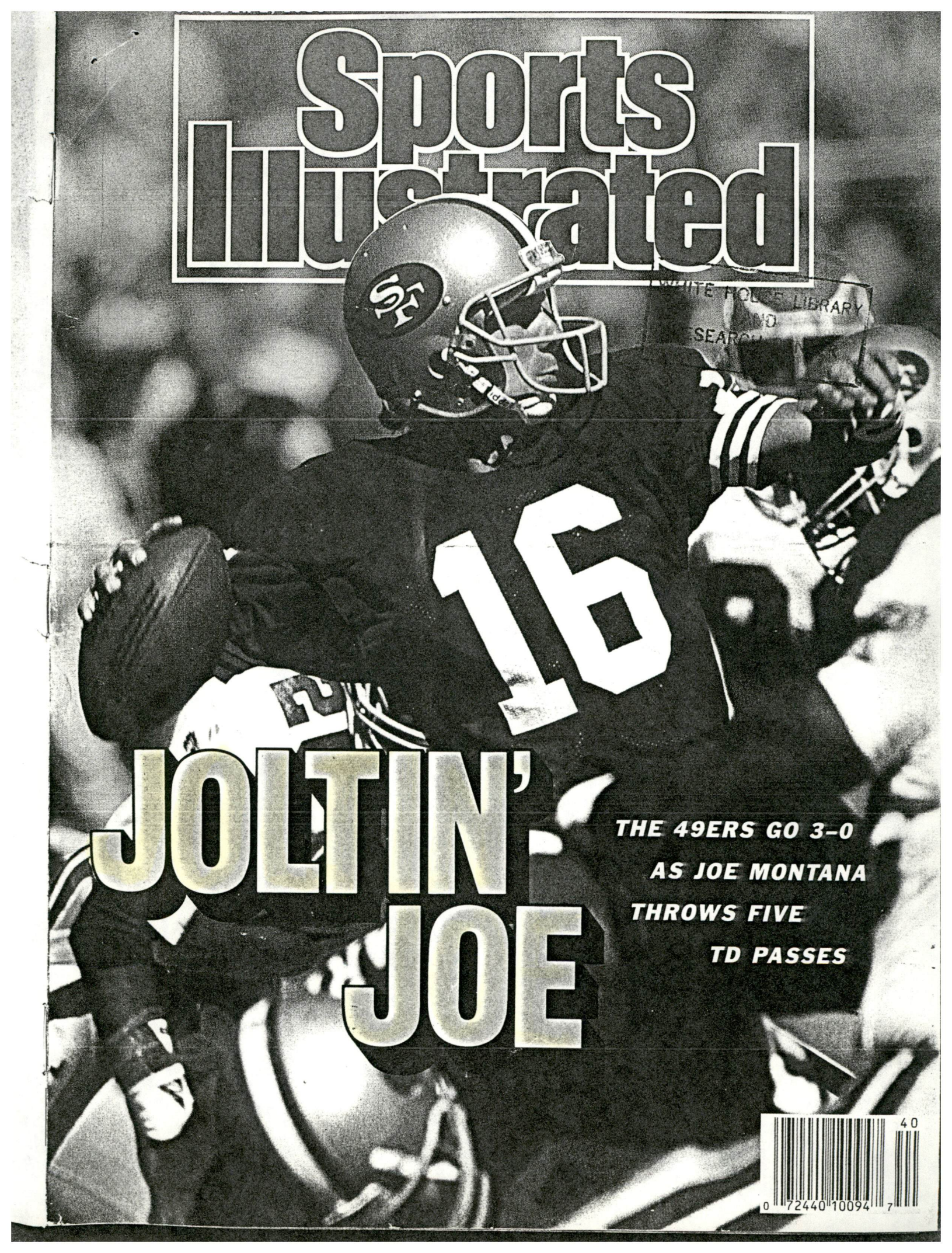
• After Montana released the winning touchdown pass to Dwight Clark, Jones and Harvey Martin knocked Montana to the turf. "Harvey said, 'You've just beaten America's Team,' " Clark recalls. "And Joe said, 'Well, you can just sit home with the rest of America and watch the Super Bowl.' "

• Montana vaulted into the air after John Taylor caught the winning touchdown pass in the 1989 Super Bowl. Then he confronted Bengal linebacker Reggie Williams. "That guy tried to hurt me earlier in the game," Montana says. "He buried me into the ground as hard as he could. He's their hit man. Every time we scored, I was looking for him to let him know we were there."

"Joe always has an opinion," says Fahnhorst. "Joe used to get plays from Walsh on the sidelines, and then he'd start to bitch. He'd say, 'This is a great play, let's get to work.' Or, 'The old man is panicking.' Or, 'The old man is crazed.' "

But don't get the idea that Montana is arrogant; he just has absolute confidence on the field. "The kingpin is the reason we've been able to maintain this," Lott says. "Joe is one guy who could have broken this up many moons ago. He could have spun away from us, gone on to be rich and famous, more important. He hasn't changed a bit since 1981. He's extraordinary, but ordinary. A normal guy. He's got to be the most unselfish player in the history of the game." ■




Sports Illustrated
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JOLTIN' JOE
THE 49ERS GO 3–0
AS JOE MONTANA
THROWS FIVE
TD PASSES
40
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THAT MAN AGAIN

Joe Montana rallied the 49ers for 21 points in eight minutes to shock the Eagles

BY PETER KING

IN THE VISITING OWNERS' BOX HIGH above Veterans Stadium, the San Francisco 49ers' Eddie DeBartolo was watching a game that couldn't be won. Slightly more than eight minutes remained, and the Philadelphia Eagles were leading by 11 points. DeBartolo's quarterback, Joe Montana, had been sacked seven times. The Niners' running game had been held to eight yards. Their special teams had turned the ball over twice, leading to 14 Eagle points.

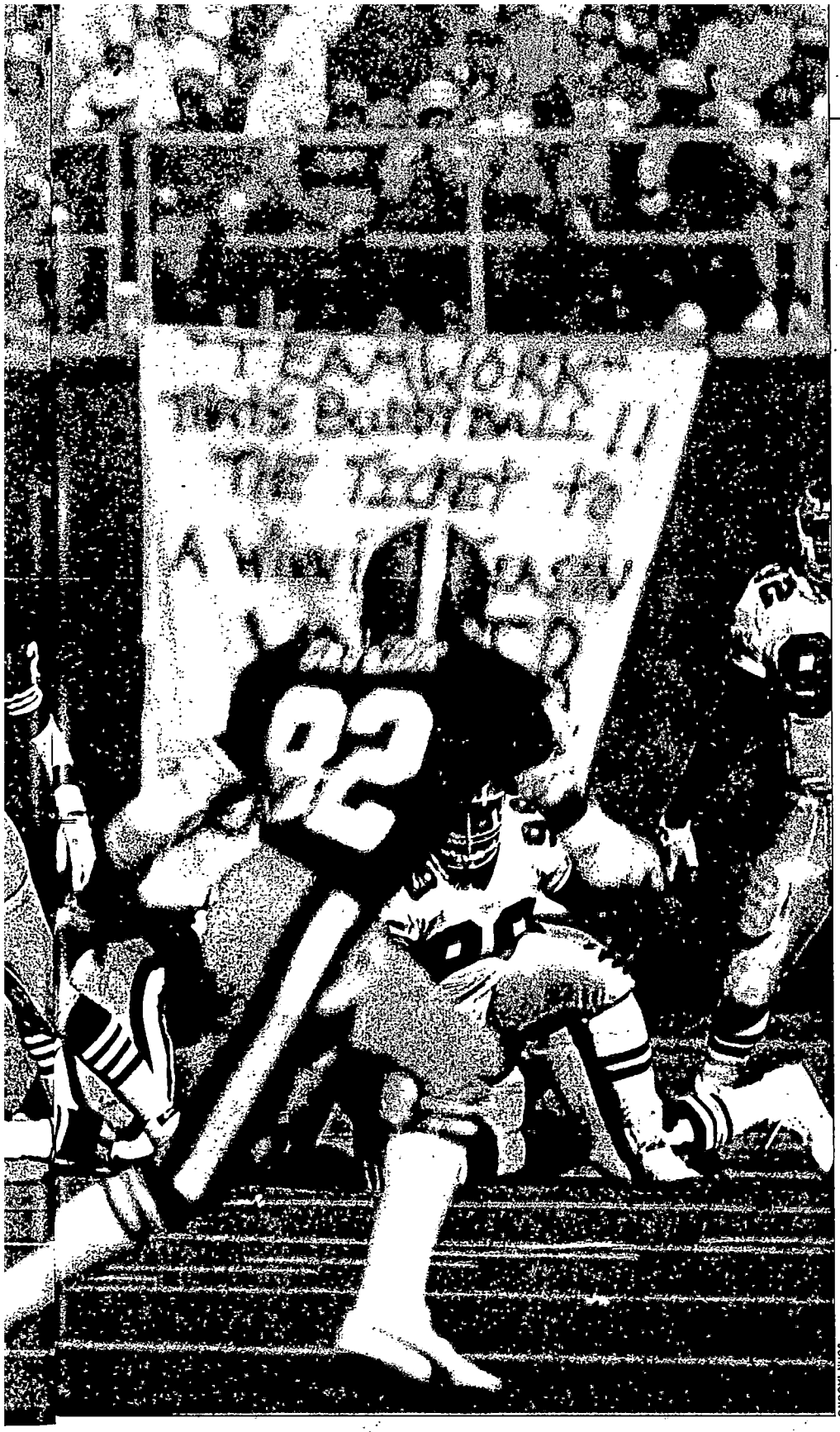
San Francisco could have been even further behind, and DeBartolo admired the way his guys, who were playing their third straight game in the eastern time zone, had hung in against such a strong, young team. DeBartolo turned to 49er executive vice-president Carmen Policy and said, "We'll lose, but our guys have so much character. I'm going to be proud to talk to them after the game."

A few minutes later, while standing in the north end zone, DeBartolo's eyes were misting as he watched another Montana Miracle unfold. "God, they're spunky. I love this team," said DeBartolo, his voice breaking, as the seconds ticked away on a 38–28 San Francisco win. Montana had thrown his fifth touchdown pass of the game to rally the Niners to their third consecutive victory away from home—and under a new coach, George Seifert, no less. "I'm prouder of them right now than I was at the Super Bowl," said DeBartolo.

Gush, Eddie, gush. Your guys deserve it. In a sport where long-term greatness is all but obsolete, the Niners are still going strong near the end of their decade of dominance. As for Montana, no one since George Blanda has played so well in so many fourth quarters.

In three of their last four wins, the 49ers have come from behind in the final four minutes. First came the 11-play, 92-yard drive that gave them a 20–16 victory over the Cincinnati Bengals in last January's Super Bowl. Then, against the Tampa Bay Buccaneers in the second game of this season, San Francisco went 70 yards in 10 plays, scoring with 40 seconds left to win 20–16. On Sunday,





JOHN IACONO

after twice trailing by 11 points in the fourth quarter, Montana might have—let's emphasize "might have" to avoid sounding blasphemous—played the best quarter of his 11-year career.

Not counting the two plays in which he fell on the ball to run out the clock, the 49ers had the ball four times for a total of less than six minutes in the fourth quarter. In that time Montana completed 11 of 12 throws for 227 yards, including touchdown passes of 70, eight, 24 and 33 yards to wide receiver John Taylor, fullback Tom Rathman, tight end Brent Jones and wide receiver Jerry Rice, respectively. "You relish being in those situations," the happy but typically blasé Montana said afterward.

Philadelphia had thought it was pretty good at winning this kind of game until it met the experts. The week before, the Eagles had scored 21 fourth-quarter points to beat the Washington Redskins 42–37. Now the same thing had happened to them. "The difference between our fourth quarter last week and this one?" said Eagle quarterback Randall Cunningham. "Joe Montana."

For the game, Montana completed 25 of 34 passes for 428 yards. Cunningham had a good day too, throwing for 192 yards and eluding everyone in red. But it wasn't his best day. When San Francisco took a 31–28 lead with 3:17 remaining, Cunningham got a chance for another fabulous Philly finish. He threw to fullback Heath Sherman for 17 yards and ran for three more himself. Next, he tried a seven-yard flare-out to running back Keith Byars, but the ball bounced off Byars's hands and into the arms of Niner safety Ronnie Lott. Ball game.

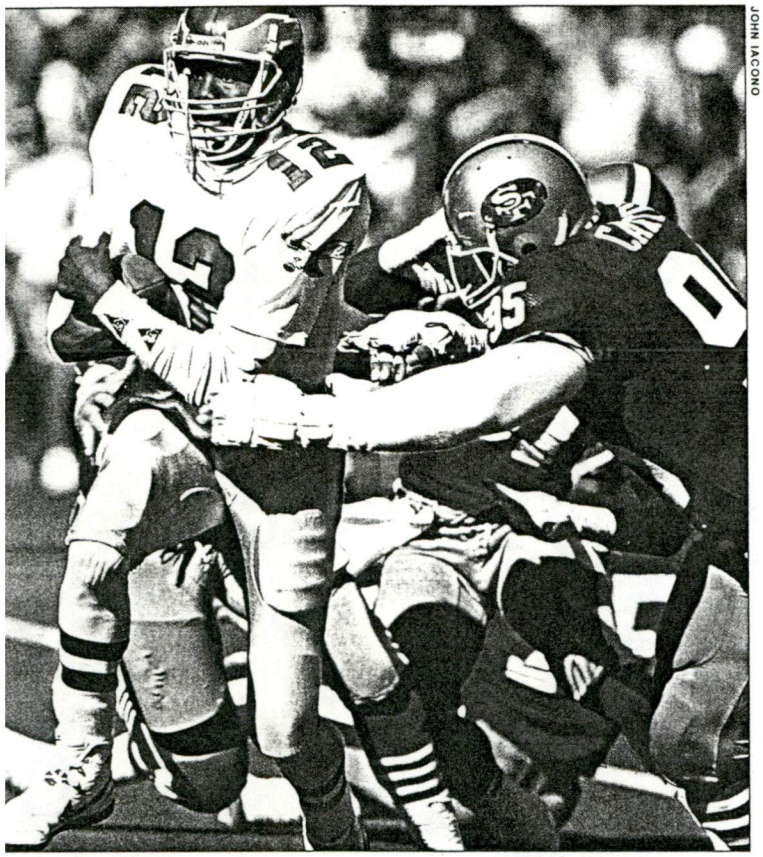
Montana (16) hooked up with Taylor (82) for a 36-yard gain on the go-ahead drive.



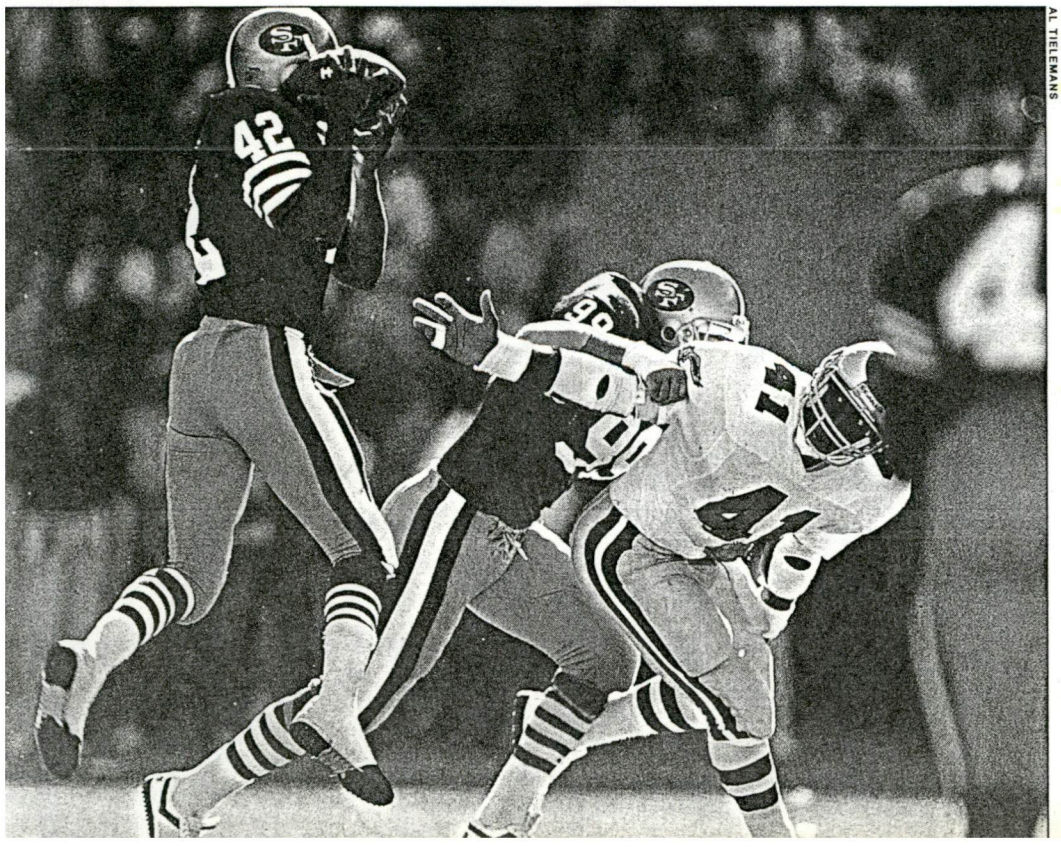
JOHN IACONO

"Damn it!" Cunningham said, his face twisted in frustration as he walked to the sideline. He threw his helmet. *"Damn it!"*

San Francisco's opponents often end up cursing themselves. The 49ers seem to be finishing the decade as strongly as they started it—they won their first of three Super Bowls after the '81 season—largely because they've turned over their roster well, despite drafting late through most of the '80s.



JOHN IACONO

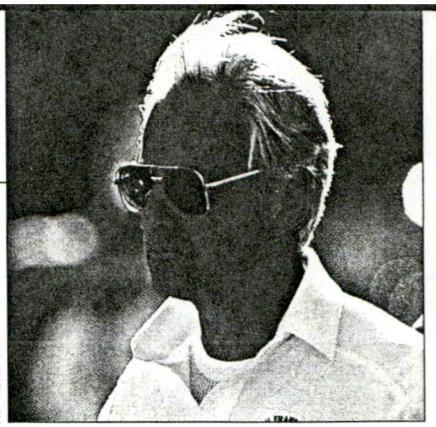


AL TIELEMANS

Cunningham eluded red jerseys all day, but Lott (below) intercepted him at the end.

"It's a terrible thing to do, and I'd hate to have been [former coach] Bill Walsh or to be [general manager] John McVay," says DeBartolo. "But you've got to turn your team over. You've got to stay young. And we haven't let this team grow old."

The Niners are only the 19th-youngest team in the NFL—their 47 players average 27.02 years—but their 22 starters are younger than those of the Cleveland Browns, Buffalo Bills, New Orleans Saints, Redskins and Los Angeles Rams. With the exception of Montana, the first-team offense has no one left from the '81 championship team. Yet the 49ers still have one of the most dangerous attacks in the game.



AL TIELEMANS

Seifert says, "There's a specialness to how we travel that's conducive to winning."

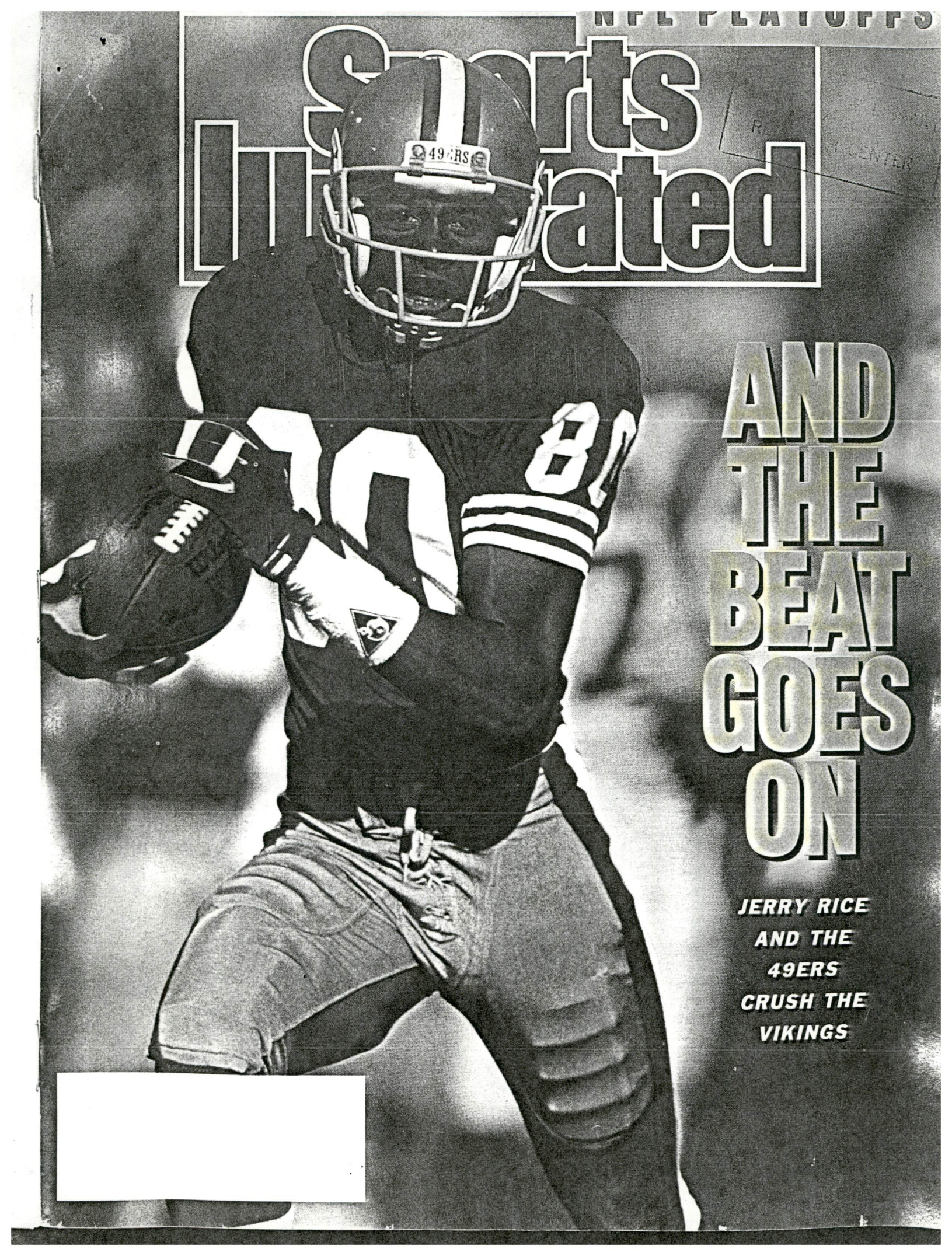
Among the starters on defense, only Lott remains from the '81 team; still, San Francisco has the league's fourth-rated defense. "Youth has always had its place here," says Keena Turner, a 10-year vet who now splits time at outside linebacker with Bill Romanowski. "It's not like a Pittsburgh Steeler team that was the same for eight or 10 years."

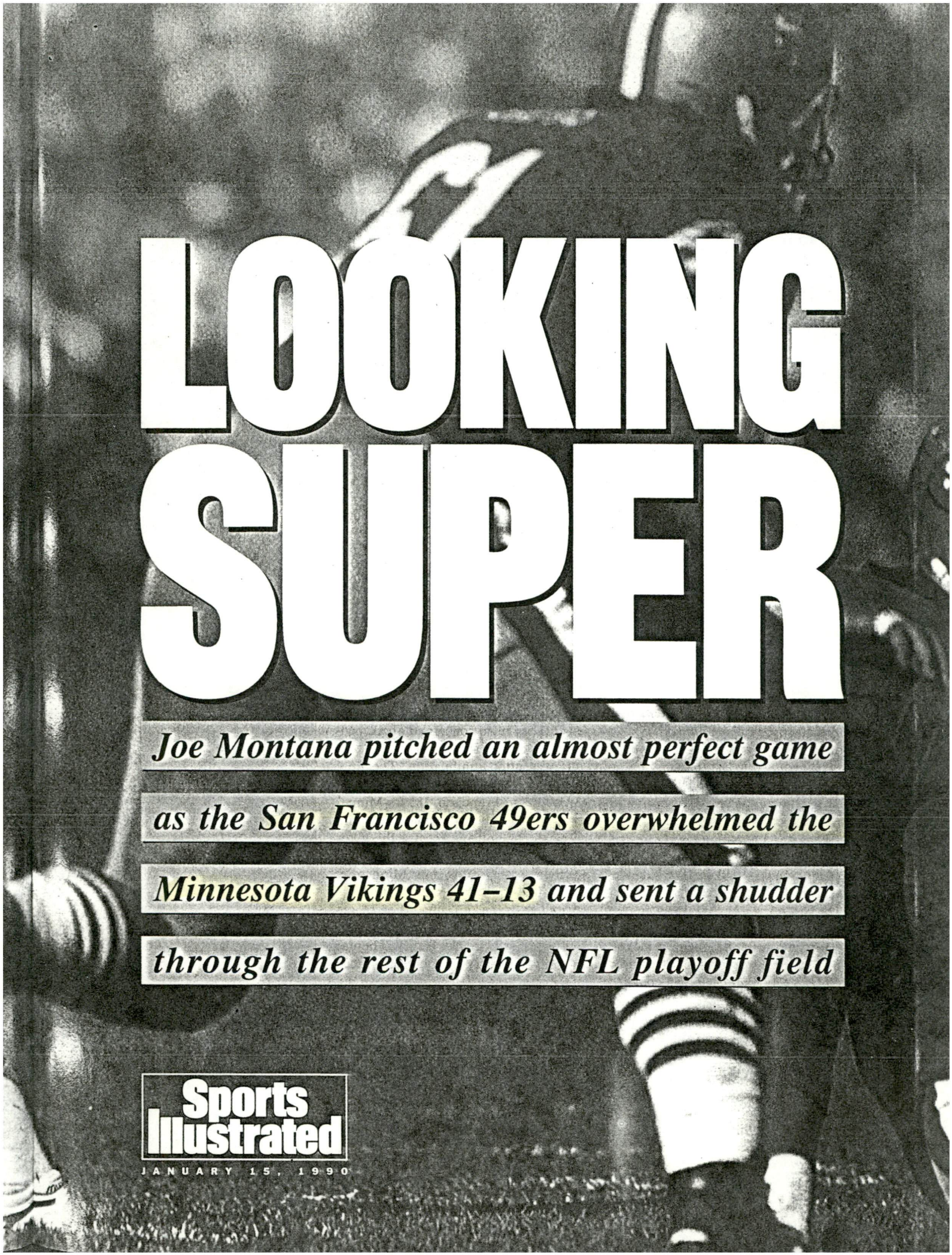
Now the 49ers are 3–0 with only five away games left. One of Walsh's enduring lessons was how to win on the road, and the Niners haven't forgotten it: They are 17–2 for their last 19 road games, with the two losses coming by a point each. Since '81, they have been a .650 home team and a .770 road team *(page 82)*.

Talent, conditioning and attitude have obviously contributed to San Francisco's prowess on the road, but so has the way they travel, which is absolutely luxurious. The team usually flies on widebody jets; most players have two or three seats to themselves to stretch out. Each player receives the equivalent of three first-class meals on cross-country flights. Once on the ground, about 30 of the 45 active players get single rooms; some other NFL teams double up every player. "There is a certain specialness to how we travel," says Seifert, who was the Niners' defensive coordinator before he took over for Walsh. "It's conducive to winning."

Can San Francisco continue playing like this all year? "A minitradition has been established," said Seifert on Saturday. "We have to follow. It's what's expected of us."

"We're starting to remind me of 1984," said safety Jeff Fuller after Sunday's game, recalling the championship season in which the 49ers finished 18–1. "Every game we go into, I can't imagine us losing." ■


NFL PLAYOFFS
Sports Illustrated
49ERS
AND THE BEAT GOES ON
JERRY RICE AND THE 49ERS CRUSH THE VIKINGS


LOOKING SUPER
Joe Montana pitched an almost perfect game as the San Francisco 49ers overwhelmed the Minnesota Vikings 41–13 and sent a shudder through the rest of the NFL playoff field
Sports Illustrated
JANUARY 15, 1990

BY PAUL ZIMMERMAN

THE SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS HAVE served notice to any unbelievers who might conceivably remain. Give Joe Montana time to throw, and his performance will approach perfection.

One half was all the Niners needed to dispose of the Minnesota Vikings last Saturday and qualify for the NFC championship. The final score read 41–13, but the game was over by halftime. At that point, San Francisco led 27–3 and had treated the 64,585 fans at sold-out Candlestick Park to a remarkable show of offensive football.

There had never been anything like it at this level of competition and against this caliber of opponent—the No. 1–rated defensive team in football. The 49ers had six possessions in the first half, not counting a one-play kneel by Montana at the end, and they scored four touchdowns. The other two times, they drove to the nine and fumbled, and to the 14 and missed a field goal.

The halftime statistics looked like final stats. Montana completed 13 of 16 passes for 210 yards and four touchdowns, and the three incompletes came on two drops and a throwaway. Roger Craig rushed 95 yards on 11 carries. Jerry Rice made five catches for 112 yards and two touchdowns. The offense gained 10 yards a play and piled up 320 yards. The Vikings had held 13 regular-season opponents to less than that for an entire game. "Awesome, just awesome," said Minnesota defensive coordinator Floyd Peters. "We were in shock."

"What was your game plan?" he was asked.

"Sure didn't look like there was one, did it?" he said.

The odd thing was that, early on, the game had the look of an upset. After a 58-yard return on the opening kickoff from Terrence Flagler, San Francisco ran a four-play minidrive then coughed up that fumble on the nine. The Vikes responded by launching a seven-minute, painstaking field goal drive to go ahead 3–0. Then the fun started.

Second series: Montana to Rice, 72 yards for a score on a play that started as a five-yard hook pass. "The defense went into shock after that," said Peters. "Nobody stepped forward to make a big play. It was a total collapse."

Third series: 29-yard run by Craig down to the Minnesota 33, after Montana had connected with Rice on a 12-yard slant-in that was so perfectly timed, so quick and decisive, that the pass looked like a telephone wire stretched between quarterback and receiver. "One second, one and a half at most," Terry Bradshaw, who was doing the game for CBS-TV, said later. "No way in the world you can stop that pass when the timing is so perfect."

San Francisco's second scoring series ended with a touchdown pass to tight end Brent Jones in the same corner of the end zone where Dwight Clark had made his famous catch against the Dallas Cowboys in the '82 NFC Championship Game. The play was a near replica of Clark's game-winner: cut left, break right, Montana delivering the ball just as the receiver is being chased out of the end zone.

The Niners used everybody in that first half, from tight end Jamie Williams, a little-used Plan B free agent picked up from the Houston Oilers, to wide receiver Mike Sherrard, the former Dallas wideout who was activated just last week after having missed all of the 1987, '88 and '89 seasons recovering from a broken leg. "They're running so many people in and out," Giants director of pro personnel Tim Rooney said at halftime, "that Peters can't run his defense. They're so concerned about people they've never seen."

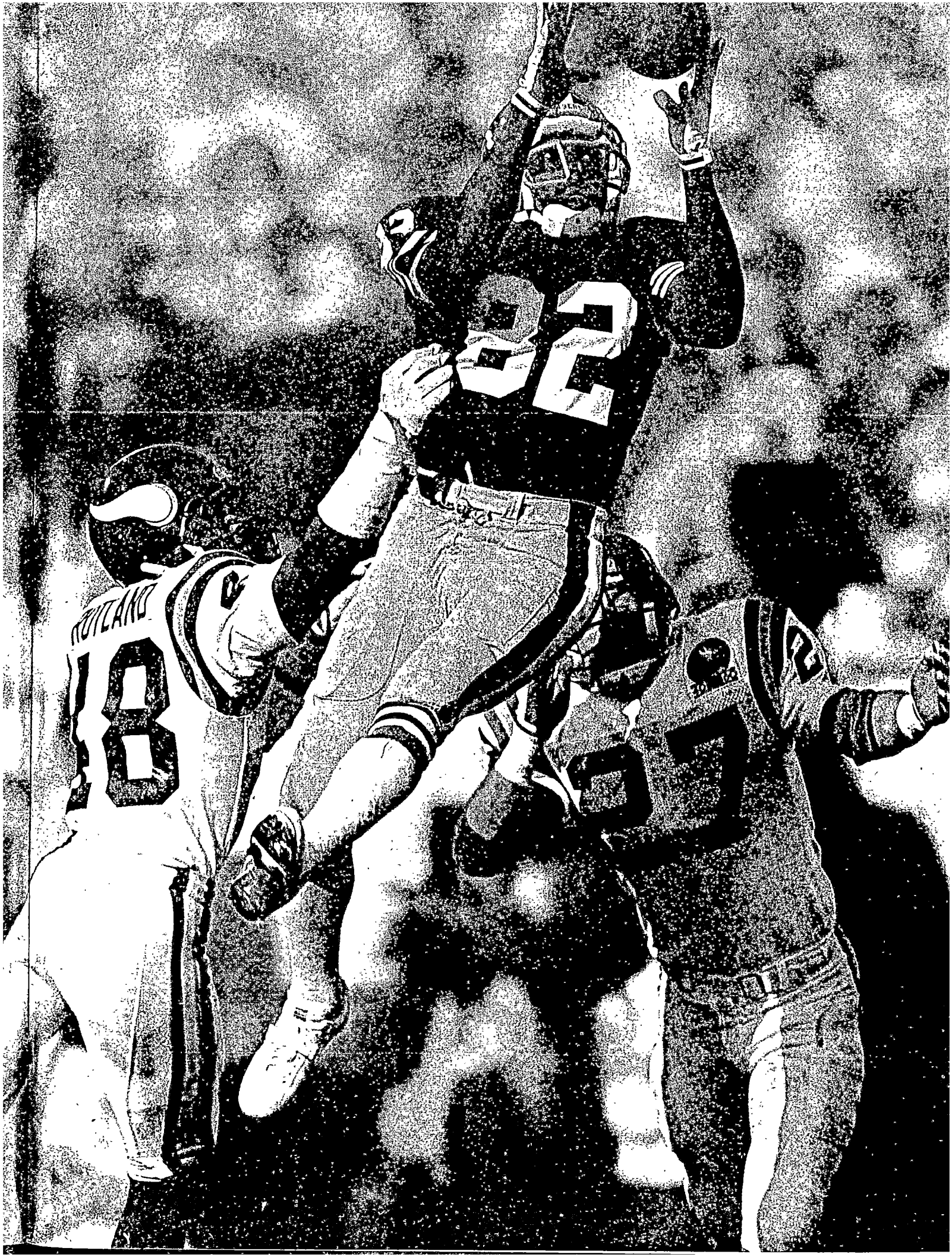
It was utter annihilation. The final stats made the game look close—403 yards for San Francisco, 385 for Minnesota—because the 49ers diddled around in the second half and because the Vikes piled up a lot of gimme yards. But here are the most revealing stats: Minnesota, which finished the regular season one sack short of the NFL record of 72, got no sacks; end Chris Doleman, tackle Keith Millard, tackle Henry Thomas and end Al Noga—the finest front four in the business—had a cumulative six tackles and three assists.

San Francisco's offensive line was the platform from which Montana launched all those pretty, well-timed passes. It was magnificent. "We blocked them the way a field goal team would block," said center Jesse Sapolu. "We blocked gaps



PETER READ MILLER

Taylor outleapt two Vikings for this 30-yarder from a hurried (for once) Montana.


RUTLAND
18

instead of individual men. Each man was responsible for a gap, and we had to read the scheme together. We all had to be on the same page. If one guy broke down, the scheme wouldn't work.

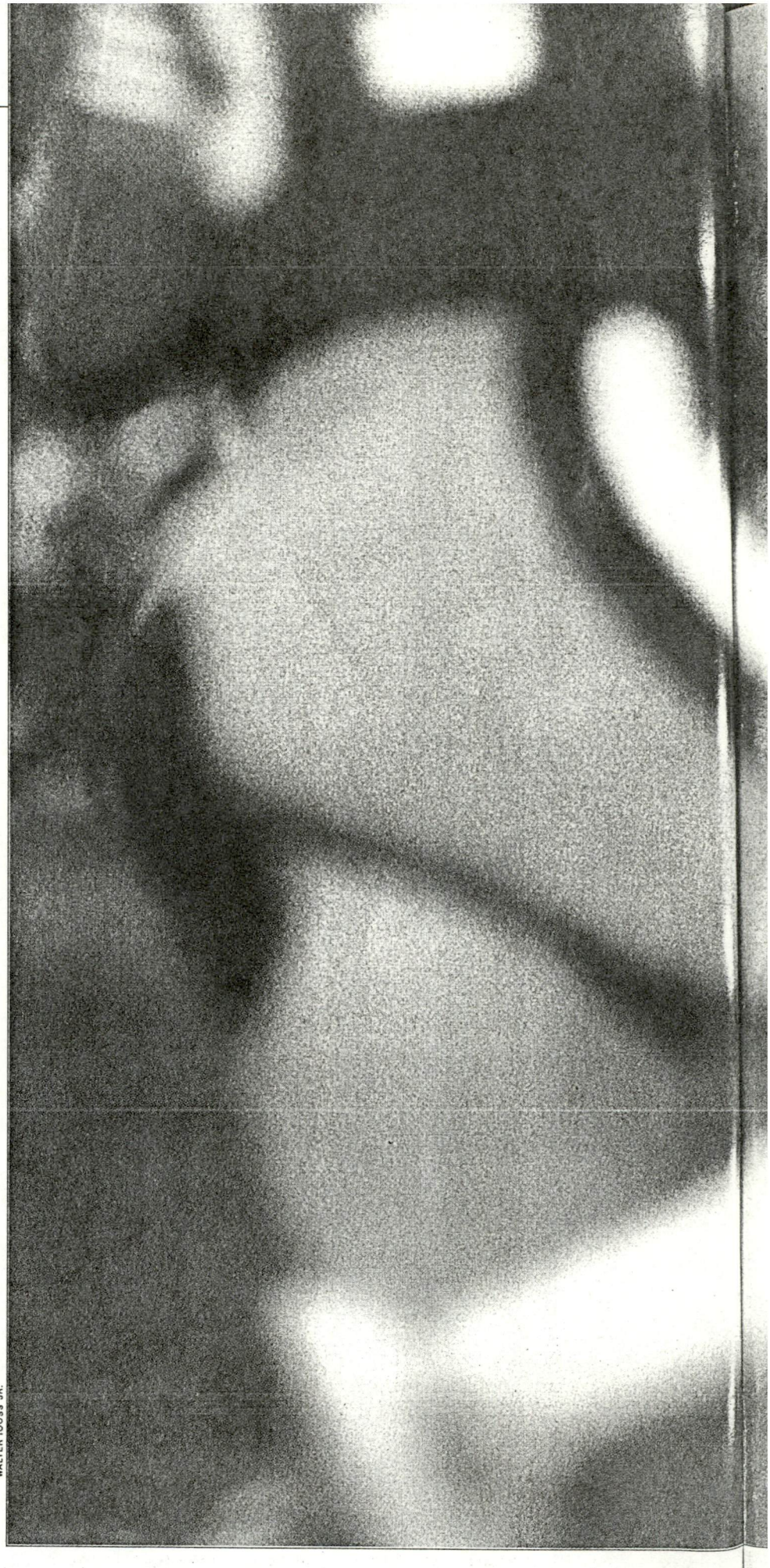
"They're always stunting and looping. They stunt themselves into big plays. They're so quick, they get into those gaps and get their sacks and big losses on running plays. So we had to beat them to the gap."

Millard, Minnesota's quickest inside rusher, got most of the double-team treatment, though not all of it. Sapolu was responsible for making the line calls, such as which way the double-teams would shift—the first man fills the gap, the second zeros in on the defender. On pass plays, a call of "Minnesota" meant the line double-teamed left; "Viking" meant it double-teamed right. Then there were the run calls, and dummy calls to keep the Viking defenders guessing. Everything worked. The offensive line performed like a precision drill team.

The Niners got terrific performances from their tackles—Harris Barton, who handled Noga much of the day, and Bubba Paris, who, with relief help from Steve Wallace, contained Doleman, the league's sack leader. Going into the game, the Paris-Doleman matchup looked scary for San Francisco. Doleman is a speed rusher. Paris, shorn of the weight restriction former coach Bill Walsh had imposed on him, is high in the kilos department. One Niner who eavesdropped on a weigh-in swears that the needle stopped at 348 when Paris stepped on the scale early in the week.

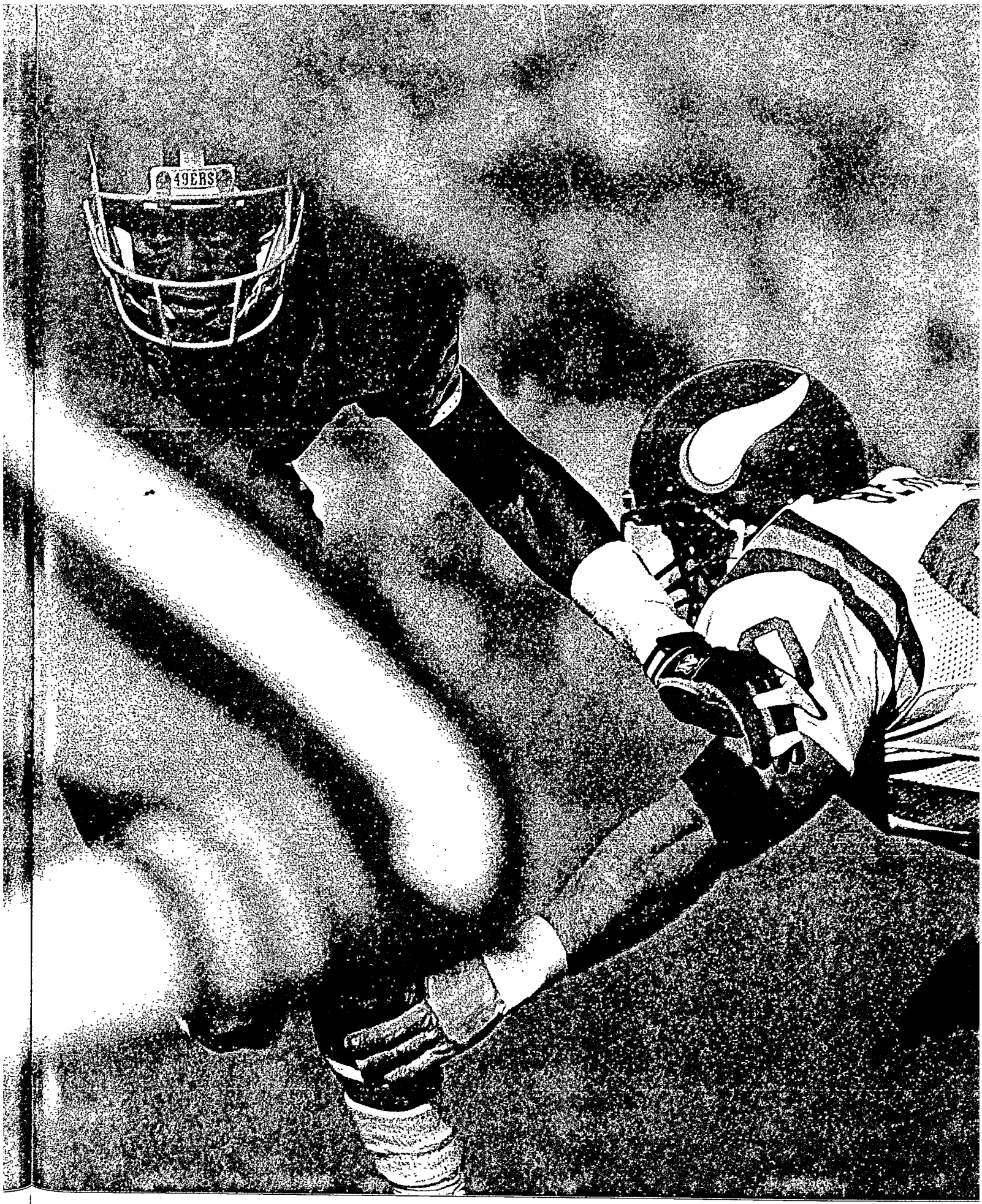
"It's a personal challenge," said Paris last Thursday. "My job is to go out there and beat [Doleman] up, put a lot of weight on him, tire him out. Then Steve gets him and finishes him off."

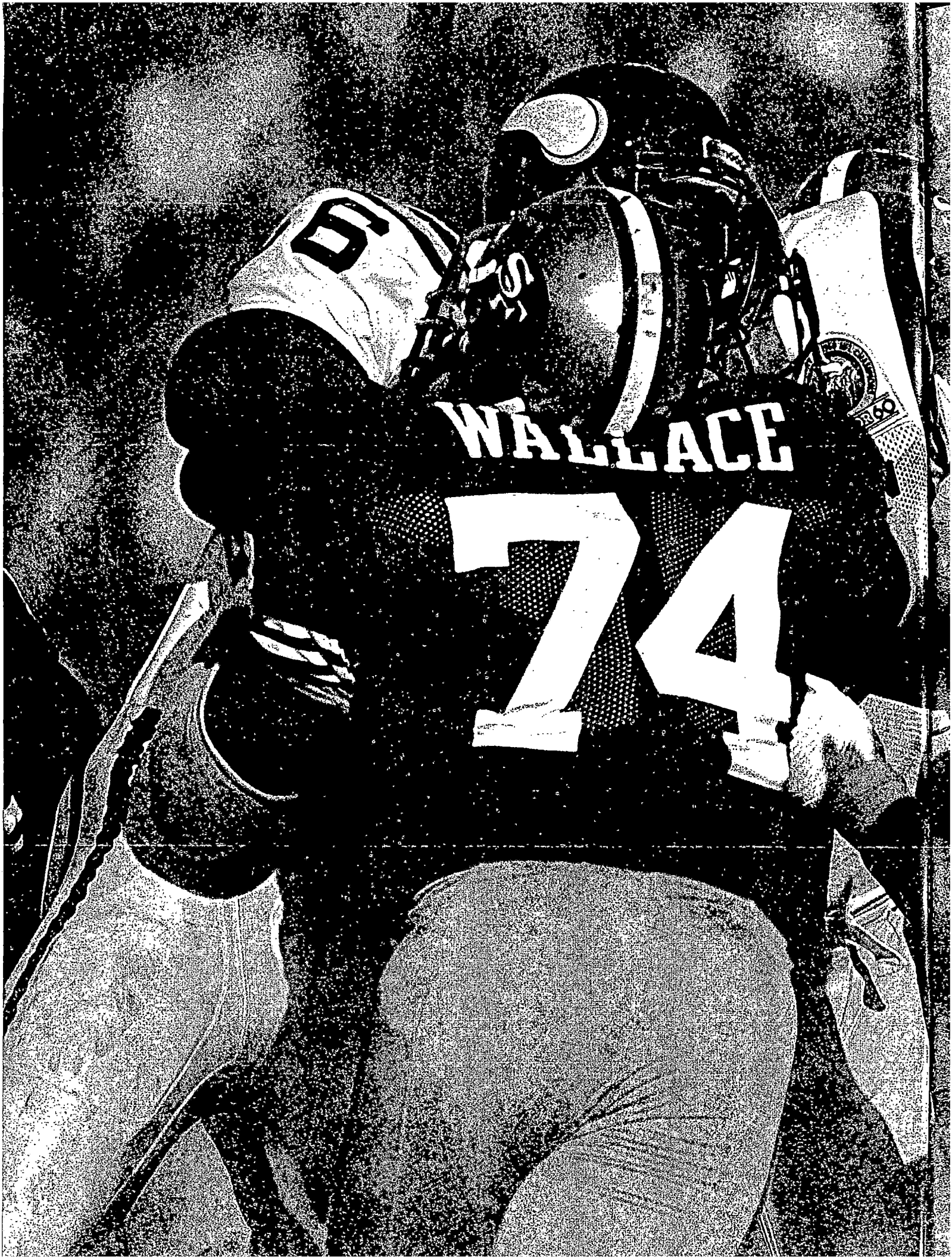
When the Viking pass rushers crowded in with the Chicago Bears' old 46 alignment, Barton and Paris were supposed to collapse Doleman and Noga inside, to get them knocking into their teammates. And that's what happened. "One time Noga and Millard bumped into each other and bounced off," said Niner right guard Bruce Collie. "Harris and I were laughing in the huddle. He said, 'Look, it's Ping-Pong ball.' "



WALTER IOOSS JR.

Rice made six receptions but gained most of his 114 yards on runs after the catches.


49ERS


WALLACE
74



JOHN W. McDONOUGH

Wallace and Sapolu did a number on Doleman (56) and Millard as the 49ers allowed Minnesota no sacks and shocked Peters (below).

San Francisco added new wrinkles to its running game as well. For instance, Sapolu, a former guard and one of the team's fastest linemen, pulled to lead the sweeps. That was a switch. The 49ers had the right side of their line, Barton and Collie, pull left in front of a back on the old Washington Redskins countergap, a play the Niners hadn't shown much. Then, in the second quarter, they pulled left, but fullback Tom Rathman ran the other way, behind Craig. They picked up 10 yards. "A key-breaker," said Barton. "We hadn't shown that."

Offensive line coach Bobb McKittrick, who designed most of these schemes, rubbed his eyes in disbelief as he watched the carnage. "I mean, you expect some things to work," he said, "but never in my wildest dreams did I expect anything like this. During the week I'd be sitting in the hot tub and I'd be thinking, What if they line up this way, can my guys make an adjustment? And I'd jot something down. Then it would work."



JOHN W. McDONOUGH

"In all the years I've been here," said cornerback Eric Wright, who has played in all three of San Francisco's Super Bowls, "I've never seen a better half of football. I mean play selection, execution, everything."

Even the Niners' few potential disasters came up roses. On one play early in the second quarter, backup Viking defensive tackle Ken Clarke took a wide loop and came in clean on Montana. Throwing off his back foot, Montana flipped a perfect fade pass to split end John Taylor, who outleapt two defenders for a 30-yard gain. Score that one for individual talent.

"The way they played today," said Minnesota center Kirk Lowdermilk, "no one can touch them. They'll walk into the Super Bowl. I'll tell you what the real difference was between the two teams. We thought we could win. They knew they were going to win. That was the story." ■

DECEMBER 18, 1989 • $2.50

Sports Illustrated

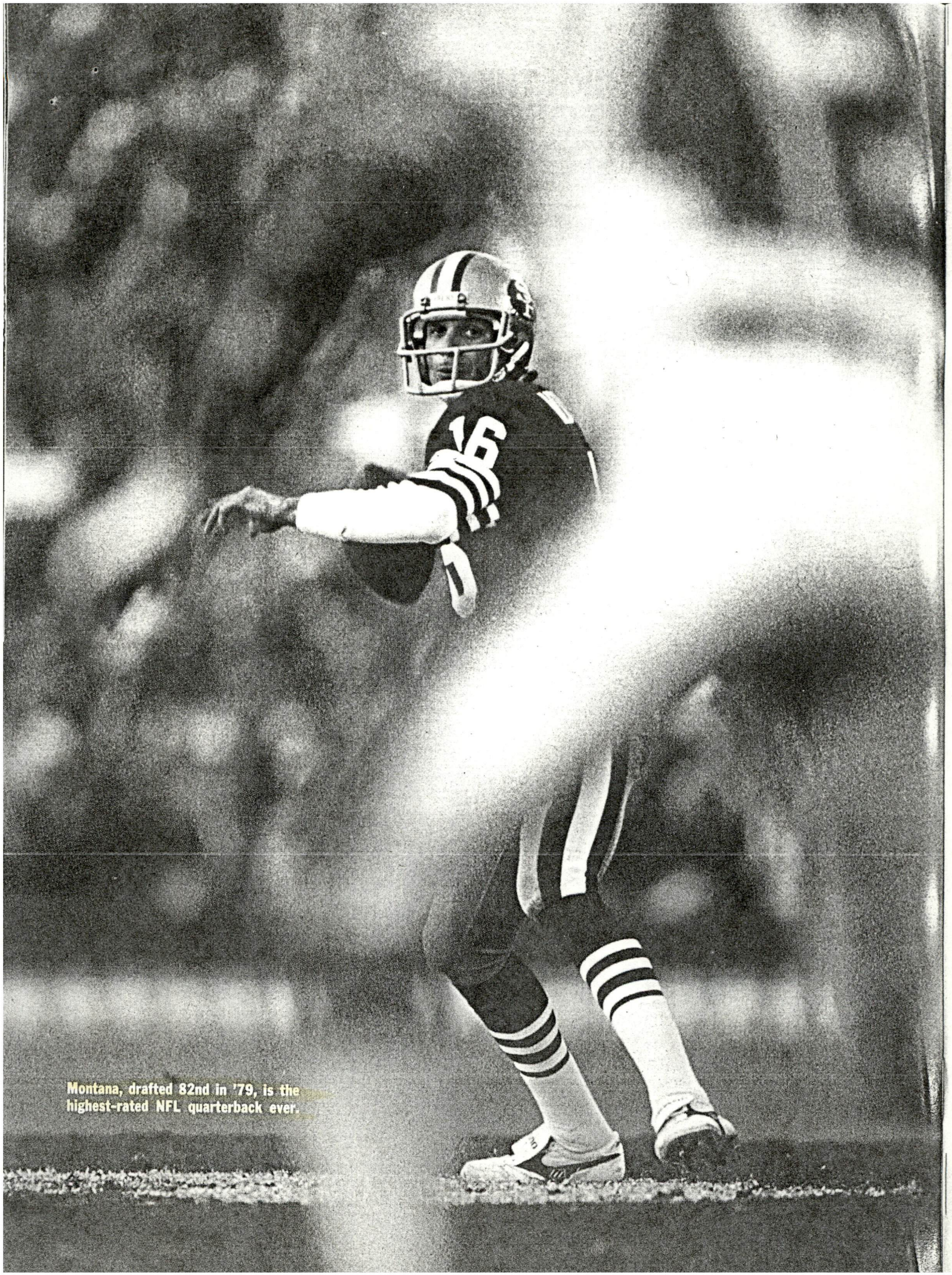
THEY DOMINATED THE '80S



MONTANA
MAGIC
GRETZKY

A TRIBUTE TO THREE CHAMPIONS

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Montana, drafted 82nd in '79, is the highest-rated NFL quarterback ever.

ANDY HAYT

MASTERS OF THE '80S

THE THREE MOST ACCOMPLISHED ATHLETES OF THE DECADE HAVE MUCH IN COMMON, ESPECIALLY A WILL TO WIN

WHAT THE THREE GREATEST ATHLETES OF THE 1980S NEEDED MORE OF WAS NOT MONEY OR SOFT-DRINK ADS OR WALLPAPER IN THEIR IMAGE OR SONGS IN THEIR HONOR. THEY had all that. What they *really* needed was more garages.

What with their various playoff MVP and All-Star MVP and Player of the Year awards this decade, Magic Johnson, Wayne Gretzky and Joe Montana won 17 cars, Jeeps, trucks and other fuel-injected mementos, almost none of which they kept. Yugo should *sell* that many cars.

They also won five NBA titles, four Stanley Cups, three Super Bowls, 11 MVP awards, two unfairly beautiful wives, countless free sweat suits, enough rings to start a jewelry store and most of the hearts of North America.

They made VCR ownership a law. Play back the rookie Magic performing at center in Game 6 to beat Philadelphia. Rewind to Montana's fingernail-biting spiral to fingernail-catching Dwight Clark to beat Dallas in the NFC Championship Game. Fast-forward to Gretzky's game-tying goal against his former teammates in Edmonton to break Gordie Howe's alltime point record—26 years of work undone in 10.

But what they did the best was the simplest. They won. Isn't that what the Reagan '80s were about, the bottom line? The number of presidential naps didn't bother us; the number on our bank statements did.

Y.A. Tittle once said, "They love you in the beginning, hate you in the middle and love you at the end." But Y.A. was way off here. These fellows won in the beginning (Montana and Magic won titles in their first years as starters), in the middle (only a puck kicked in by one of his own men stopped Gretzky's Edmonton Oilers from winning five straight Stanley Cups in the mid-'80s) and at the end (Montana splintered Super Bowl passing records in Supe XXIII as his San Francisco 49ers beat the Cincinnati Bengals).

Could they dance, or what? Montana, with his Gene Kelly feet tap-tap-tapping until the last possible moment, watching more touchdowns from the seat of his pants than Pat Summerall. Gretzky, jitterbugging in tiny arcs around and between giant unflossable defensemen, emerging somehow with the puck and depositing it on the stick of some innocent bystander wearing the right color jersey. "Passes from god," one teammate called them. Magic, with his sweaty slam dance, busting straight forward, then suddenly wheeling into a 360-degree pirouette off the dribble, and at about 320 degrees, ejecting the ball into the good hands of James Worthy.

In these 10 years, Gretzky and Magic never missed the playoffs and Montana missed them only once as a starter. In seven of those years, at least one of them won a championship. These guys saw more of Brent than Mrs. Musburger. Magic has had his team in the finals eight times, and in one of the seasons that the Lakers failed to get that far (1980–81), he sat

BY RICK REILLY

ANDY HAYT

out 45 games with a bum knee. Montana has yet to throw a Super Bowl interception. Before Gretzky, the record for assists in one season was Bobby Orr's 102. Gretzky made it 163. Mathematically, if he had been hitting home runs, Gretzky would have thumped number 97.

Even if the world suddenly got mass amnesia and these three were forgotten, what they willed us would still be around. Magic, for instance, brought into fashion the full-court bounce pass—"It was the only way I could *get* the thing there"—and the no-look pass. While he may not hold the patent on such things—Mr. Cousy of Massachusetts was something of an inventor himself—Magic gave them new cachet. Magic made the pass cool again. In the '70s basketball was a game of gluttonous hoop pigs like Bob McAdoo and George McGinnis, men who thought "assist" was strictly for Boy Scouts. Magic and Larry Bird made the pass a thing of honor. "Now kids on the playground all want to make the beautiful pass," says Magic. It also helped bring America back to the arena. Basketball, struggling for recognition at the outset of the '80s, has enjoyed a huge surge in popularity.

Along the way, Magic made the point guard a position of equal-opportunity employment, open even to men standing 6′ 9″. As Peter Vecsey of the *New York Post* once wrote, Magic was "a human Scrabble blank," usable at any position anytime. Magic knows how he has changed the game. "In the '90s, there won't be any more low-post players," Magic says. "And I think you'll have point guards who are better than me." We should all live that long.

Gretzky created with a stick and puck artworks of preposterous cleverness. He is the master of the pass that *bounces* off the side of the net to grateful teammates. True, he was not the first to set up *behind* the net; Bobby Clarke, for one, has done that. Of course, people had hips before Elvis, too. Watching Gretzky behind the net, with two defensemen afraid to come get him and one goalie trying desperately to see out the back of his vertebrae was one of the sports ticklers of this decade.

There were times when Gretzky seemed like a stowaway aboard Mork's ship. In one impossible evening against St. Louis goaltender Mike Liut, Gretzky started by scoring off a face-off, a rare feat in its own right. Then he scored again by flipping a puck from behind the net, over the goal, off Liut's innocent back and into the net. And then he scored *again* from the face-off. If Liut had been found hanging the next morning from some duct pipe, Gretzky would have faced murder one.

Gretzky changed hockey so much that fighting may someday be a relic, like helmetless players and the Atlanta Flames. What 10-year-old on blades doesn't know that stickhandling, not stick mangling, will get you nine MVP awards and the Flamingo Kid's girlfriend? Gretzky's incomparable slipperiness changed the NHL from smash-face to speed and grace. "People say players in the NHL won't hit me,"says Gretzky. "They all want to hit me. But they have to catch me first."

Montana may not have invented anything in the '80s, but he did make the 49ers' attack the model of the "in" offense of the decade: the control passing game, in which receivers are kept on a leash until some cornerback starts getting smart and suddenly finds himself chasing the business end of a 75-yard bomb. And what Montana reinvented was the impossible, get-serious, did-you-hear-what-happened-after-we-left comeback. Down by 22 in the fourth quarter and sick with the flu, he brought Notre Dame back for a win over Houston in the 1979 Cotton Bowl. Down 35–7 at halftime to New Orleans in 1980, Montana brought the Niners back to win. Down 21–10 in the fourth quarter against Philadelphia this year, Montana threw four touchdowns to win. And there are only a couple of dozen others.

What Unitas was to the '60s and Staubach to the '70s, Montana is to the '80s. All this from a third-round draft choice, 82nd overall, who wasn't even sure if he would make the team. "I remember that Dwight Clark and I would avoid making plans for the future because we weren't sure we'd still be around," he says.

MAYBE THIS IS WHAT MADE THEM GOOD AND MAYBE IT ISN'T, BUT THESE ARE THREE OF THE WORST LOSERS YOU'LL EVER MEET. ON ROAD TRIPS, MAGIC AND COACH PAT RILEY HAVE been known to bet a dollar on whose piece of luggage will come down the chute first. "If he loses," Riley has said, "he actually gets teed off." In summer pickup games, Magic is known to call ticky-tacky fouls, so much so that some people dread playing with him.

When Gretzky's L.A. Kings lost to the Edmonton Oilers the other night at the Forum, Gretzky dressed quickly and left without greeting the locker room guests. One was Bruce Springsteen. "I just didn't feel much like chatting after we'd lost." And Gretzky is a Springsteen *fan*.

Or maybe this is it: All three come from similar money, which is to say, not much. They were reared in working-class neighborhoods, all in the Great Lakes region: Gretzky from Brantford, Ont., an hour from Toronto, Johnson from Lansing, Mich., less than two hours from Detroit, and Montana from Monongahela, Pa., half an hour from Pittsburgh. A very big net in 1969 might have hauled in all three.

Gretzky's father is a teletype repairman, Montana's was a telephone equipment installer and Magic's was a line worker at an Oldsmobile plant. Though there was plenty to eat, there wasn't plenty of else. Magic, because his father couldn't afford to buy him a bike, had to walk. So wherever he went—"to the grocery store, to the movies"—he dribbled. Montana learned what winning meant in his steel-toed town. "Back there," he once said, "people competed for *everything*." Gretzky's parents spent their fortune on skates, tournament entry fees and gas. "My dad would buy me two sticks for $1.99 down at Avery's, and they'd last me three months," he says.

Is it more than merely a coincidence? "Maybe we just didn't have any distractions," Magic says. "No beach. Not a lot of expensive stuff around—toys. Just our sports."

All three bring a certain optical-illusion quality to their athleticism. In person, Magic may have a YMCA shot, herky-jerky and one-handed, but it still has gone in 53% of the time in his career. He has always taken those mincing steps, as though his legs were not quite hinged in the middle, yet he can outjuke a wolf to a sirloin. He seems to dribble with the flat of his hand, as though holding a two-by-four, but if you were told you had to cross a minefield behind a dribbling NBA player, whom else would you choose?

Montana stands only 6′ 2″, and when Clark met him for the first time, he said, "Who is this, the punter?" O.K., so he

RICHARD MACKSON

Magic's most notable achievement has been to make the pass cool again.

doesn't have the wrist of Marino, the arm of Elway, the feet of Cunningham. But he has the accuracy of Price Waterhouse, and as 49er broadcaster Wayne Walker once said, he's "cooler than the other side of the pillow."

Gretzky has the look of a bag boy at the local A&P or perhaps the guy working socks and underwear at J.C. Penney. He is a shade over 5′ 11″ and 170 pounds—he entered the league at 161—and yet this is a player who once could have won the scoring race with his assists alone.

Of the three, Magic is probably the least natural athlete. Gretzky was terrific at lacrosse and was so good at baseball that the Toronto Blue Jays offered him a tryout. At age nine, he was nationally known as a hockey prodigy. At 10, he was the subject of a 30-minute national TV special. Once, he won a peewee game by scoring three goals in the last 45 seconds. "No wonder some parents didn't like me," he says.

Montana probably could have been a professional at any sport. (He was offered a basketball scholarship to North Carolina State.) As a child he pitched three perfect Little League games. Montana can dunk two-hands backward. In high school, he high-jumped 6′ 9″.

Earvin Johnson, however, was not very good at anything but basketball. He was a tight end in football but gave up that pursuit without reservation—or any argument from the coach. He knows he's no Michael Jordan. "I don't jump very high, but I jump high enough," says Magic. "I don't shoot very well, but I shoot well enough. I just like to win."

Of all his thrills, he rates Game 6 of his first title over Philadelphia the thrilliest. With Kareem on his couch in Bel Air icing an ankle, the rookie got 42 points, 15 rebounds and seven assists—all duly recorded on a tape he keeps near his VCR. "I'm almost wearing it out," he says.

For Gretzky, the finest moment was ending the New York Islanders' bid for their fifth consecutive Stanley Cup in '84 and winning his first. That's a tough choice, though, because Gretzky has a semi full of good stuff to sift through. How about beating the Soviets in the Greatest Hockey Game Ever Played, 6–5 in Game 3 of the Canada Cup in '87? Or how about splattering Phil Esposito's alltime one-season goal record by 16? What about turning the lowly Kings team into a sellout machine inside of nine months?

For Montana, it is not the first title he most cherishes ("We were just a bunch of kids") but the last. He had his back operated on in 1986 and had been given the vaudeville hook in favor of supple-backed Steve Young in '87, then won his job back. Yet he felt as if he were sitting at his own retirement roast. And it wasn't funny. "They kept saying I'm too old, I'm over the hill and all that," he remembers. "But other quarterbacks that came out the same years as I did, they weren't saying a thing about. It made you angry."

With the 92-yard drive in the closing minutes to beat the Bengals, Montana worked out a lot of anger. At the same time, he seemed to move up a floor in the department store of history, past Unforgettables and on to Unsurpassables. Dan Fouts has said, "Montana redefined greatness at the quarterback position." Ram coach John Robinson says Montana is "unparalleled in my experience in this game."

Perhaps the only parallels these men had in the '80s were each other. None has ever been accused of spending too much time in the weight room. All three live in California. None is in the honored guests club at the Hazelden drug clinic. None has been suspended.

All three are decent guys. Magic works all summer on a benefit game to raise money—nearly $3 million to date—for the United Negro College Fund. Gretzky refused to do any promotional gigs in conjunction with his alltime point record unless it included a profit split with Gordie Howe; his share was then handed over to charity. In 1987 and 1988, every touchdown pass Montana threw meant a donation to the Crippled Childrens Society of Santa Clara County. The society came out well—Montana threw 49 TDs in those two seasons.

STILL, THERE ARE BASIC DIFFERENCES. MAGIC AND GRETZKY ARE PERENNIALLY ALL-INTERVIEW, WHEREAS MONTANA GETS THE HIVES BEFORE THE MICROPHONE. MAYBE IT'S BEcause Montana has been divorced twice and remarried twice and cares not to entertain discussions on same. Montana and Gretzky did the thing living sports legends are supposed to do—marry sex symbols. Montana married the Schick Sheriff from his commercial, Jennifer Wallace, which seemed to be a pretty good match. After all, who had more close shaves in the '80s than Joe Miracle? Together they have two girls and a boy. Gretzky married Janet Jones, the movie star with the body, in a cozy little wedding attended by 2,000 of their closest friends, press, live newscasters and fire departments. They have a girl, Paulina. Magic is the father of one, but he has vowed to stay single until his career is over "and then have lots of kids, maybe six or eight," he says. "Maybe even adopt a few." (Sorry, you must be a kid to enter.)

All three seem to just get better with age. Magic at 30 is as good as Magic at 20. Against Denver in November, he had 24 assists, his NBA best. He even looks younger. He shaved off his trademark goatee—the one that bordered that 64-tooth smile—and now looks 25. Gretzky, a mere 28, is—yawn—leading the league in points. Montana, 33, has reached a proficiency even he didn't know he had. This year his passing rating is far and away the league's best and his career best (he's first in NFL history in the category). If he keeps orbiting along at this level he will set an NFL record for a one-season rating.

Who knows what keeps them going? Somehow they keep convincing themselves, year after year, that there is something left to prove. These days, maybe Magic figures he must show he can win without Kareem, Gretzky without the Oilers, Montana without Walsh.

It could be we might meet them here again in 1999. Gretzky says he will play at least six more years. Montana says he's good for at least three. Magic says he wants to finish the four years he's got left on his contract and then *really* get to work. He is getting to be a freak about business, sitting in with his agent now on all business deals. He has his own T-shirt company, his own Nintendo game and his own line of clothes, plus a hefty deal with Converse shoes. He's leaving his 8,000-square-foot house for a 13,000-square-foot house. "The old one wasn't big enough," he says with a straight face.

But what he *really* wants is his own NBA franchise. "I don't want to be a businessman," Magic says. "I want to be the *best* businessman."

Boy, some people never change. ■

JERRY WACHTER

The artful Gretzky has changed the name of the game to speed and grace.

deaf father or the other way around?" (asked of the Raiders' Jim Plunkett at Super Bowl XV).

Humphrey carefully explained to his inquisitor that he went earringless into competition because he didn't want his diamond "to be pushed through my ear to the middle of my brain." It was a reply, at least, of some length—unlike those of the Cowboys' Duane Thomas in Super Bowls V and VI. One day on a Miami beach, Thomas was asked what he was thinking about as he peered across the water. "New Zealand," he replied. A year later, postgame in New Orleans, a TV interviewer babbled on about how great Thomas had played. "Evidently," said Thomas, ending the interview.

It was the same Duane Thomas who once inquired as to how the Super Bowl could be the "ultimate" game if they were playing it again next year. And yet, somehow, the event annually reaffirms itself. In 1980, several days before the Rams played the Steelers in Super Bowl XIV, a man's closest friend died and the burial was scheduled for Super Sunday. "We had planned to attend the game together," the man recalled last week in *The Times-Picayune* of New Orleans. "But now I would be a pallbearer and would have to tape the game. Instead, my friend's son insisted his dad would want me at the game. He reminded me how sacred Super Sunday was. He said: 'You go on to the game. I'll stay home and tape the funeral.' "

No tickee, no perspective.

In the early going this year in New Orleans, there was little for the fourth estate to rally round, other than the spectacle of the 49ers' 300-pound Bubba ("We will not rest on our morals") Paris making fun of the media with his video camera while they made fun of his avoirdupois. If you were CBS's Terry Bradshaw, you could always trash Elway during a press conference set up to promote animated-cartoon beer bottles. Or if you were NBC's Bill Walsh, you could always cover yourself. "It's real exciting here . . . I guess," Walsh reported from the insanely raucous French Quarter. "A lot of people seem to be wearing orange shirts and green."

Green?

So it was that the midweek Three-White-Quarterbacks-On-Drugs "scoop" by television station WJLA in Washington, D.C., came as such a godsend to a media starving for work. Each time the word "cocaine" was mentioned, a press conference broke out. Everybody but Paul Prudhomme was cooking up a prepared statement, including WJLA-TV sports director Frank Herzog, who said the Super Bowl timing of his station's report was "85 percent coincidental." It was the grandest phony controversy since Supe IV, when Len Dawson was accused of associating with a gambler and held three press conferences in one day. "A record that will live forever," said a man from the *Washington Post*, "except I've forgotten it already."

By sundown Sunday the only statistic that really mattered to the media was that Joe Montana had just combined with Kenny Stabler and Bradshaw for a historically terrific double-nine: nine Super Bowl rings/nine wives.

"Twenty-two bad Bowls, one good Bowl and now you're on another bad roll," said a man from the New York *Daily News* to NFL communications director Joe Browne. "At this rate the next good one will be Supe XLVI—in Caracas."

"And on pay-per-view," said Browne.

In the postgame locker rooms the interrogatory clichés were dripping as thick as filé gumbo.

Q.: What can you do to improve?

Bronco owner Pat Bowlen: "Send an assassin after Montana."

Q.: When did you know you had 'em?

The 49ers' Paris: "When they lined up for the extra point."

Q.: Feelings?

The 49ers' Matt Millen: "Feelings?"

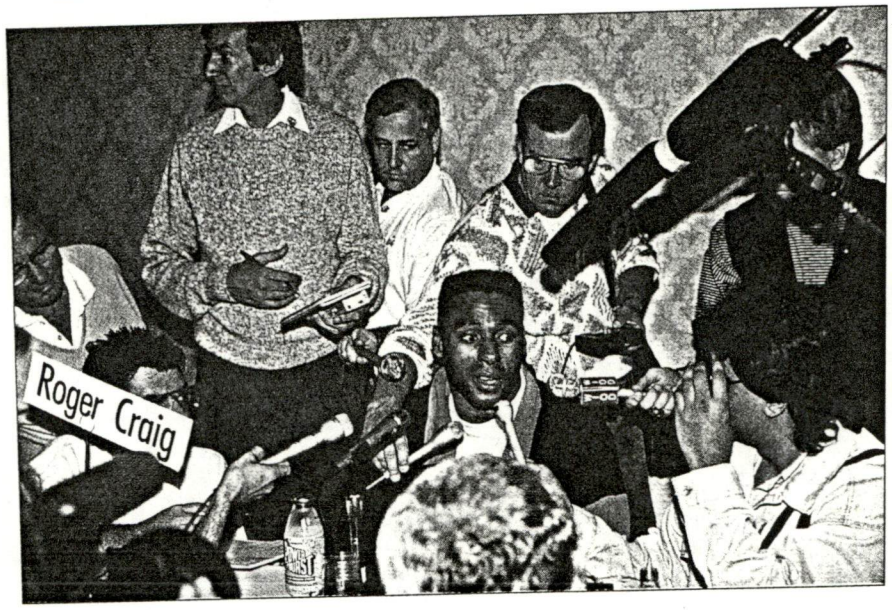
Q.: Joe . . . Joe . . . did this game seem ridiculous after a while? Were you guys laughing about it? Did you want to close your eyes and throw some passes behind your back?

Joe just smiled.

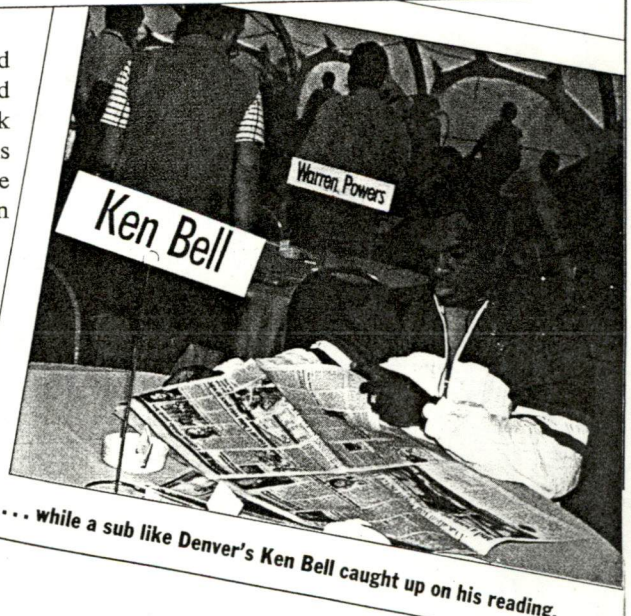
"Hey, did you hear this wild stuff about Montana? Says he'll keep playing, try to win three Supes in a row. But right now wants to take Jennifer and the kids, hop in the van and get away from it all."

"Hold on. You crazy? We'll need another source to confirm."

—CURRY KIRKPATRICK



At the press gatherings, a star like running back Roger Craig became a magnet for microphones . . .



. . . while a sub like Denver's Ken Bell caught up on his reading.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOHN IACONO

DOUG GAMBLE

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Feb. 14/90

TO: KRISTEN GEAR

S.F. 49'S AT WHITE HOUSE (Mark Davis)

WHEN I FIRST HEARD THIS OCCASION WAS IN HONOR OF ONE OF THE MOST ONE-SIDED VICTORIES IN AMERICAN CHAMPIONSHIP HISTORY, I THOUGHT I WAS GOING TO MEET NEW HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMP BUSTER DOUGLAS.

SOME PEOPLE SAY THE SAN FRANCISCO 49'S ARE A DYNASTY. I KNOW A LITTLE ABOUT DYNASTIES MYSELF -- I HAVE TO DEAL WITH THE DEMOCRATS IN CONGRESS.

A BRONCO FAN HERE IN WASHINGTON SAID THE GRAMM, RUDMAN, HOLLINGS LAW SHOULD HAVE GONE INTO EFFECT AT THE SUPER BOWL TO CUT BACK ON THE SCORE.

IF THE SUPER BOWL SCORE HAD GONE ANY HIGHER, I THINK THE SCOREBOARD WOULD HAVE FLASHED "TILT."

I HAD TO SYMPATHIZE WITH THE BRONCOS. ~~[illegible]~~ THEY HAD THE SAME KIND OF LUCK SCORING TOUCHDOWNS AS I DO CATCHING A FISH.

I'VE TOLD MR. GORBACHEV THAT ANY TREATY TO ELIMINATE AMERICA'S MOST POTENT WEAPONS WILL NOT INCLUDE JOE MONTANA'S ARM.