

# Agassi expected to give up spot on Olympic team

by Rick Freeman  
The Washington Post  
September 5, 2000

Andre Agassi is expected to relinquish his position on the United States Olympic tennis team for this month's Sydney Games because of concern over health problems suffered by his mother and sister. Also, two-time Tour de France winner Lance Armstrong is considering withdrawing from the cycling competition following an Aug. 29 accident in France.

Agassi, who was ousted last week as the top seed in the U.S. Open, apparently wants to spend as much time as possible with his mother, Betty, and sister, Tami, both of whom have breast cancer.

Armstrong fractured a vertebra in his neck in a head-on collision with a car outside of Nice, France. Armstrong's official Website said he will make a final decision on the Olympics after competing in the Grand Prix des Nations on Sept. 16. The site also said he will withdraw from two races this weekend.

United States Tennis Association President Judy Levering said Agassi's withdrawal from the Olympic team looks "probable."

"He called me today, and I got the impression that he was very seriously considering not coming," Levering

said Tuesday.

Levering did not offer a reason for Agassi's decision.

"Tennis players play a very difficult sport," she said, "so anytime one does pull out, they usually have a reason."

Agassi had been expected to join Michael Chang, Todd Martin and Jeff Tarango in representing the U.S. in singles. Alex O'Brien and Jared Palmer will play doubles. Levering refused to speculate on who might replace Agassi on the team.

"We'd have to talk to the IOC and be sure to comply exactly with whatever their procedures are," she said.

In an Aug. 28 interview with CBS, during which he revealed the conditions of his mother and sister, Agassi said he doubted whether he should be playing tennis at all, telling reporter and former player Mary Carillo that "it has been a difficult year."

Agassi was eliminated in the second round last Thursday by Arnaud Clement of France. In the past seven months, Agassi's most impressive result has been a semifinal appearance at Wimbledon; in the seven months before that, he won three of the four Grand Slams.

Agassi was involved in a car accident soon after his return from Wimbledon this summer. His car was struck from behind by another car, and

Agassi took some time to return to form, reaching the final of the Legg Mason Tennis Classic last month in Washington, where he lost in straight sets to Spain's Alex Corretja.

Armstrong's situation appears less resolved. X-rays taken of Armstrong after the collision did not reveal any damage, but an MRI exam taken at a clinic in Monaco on Monday revealed a fracture in his seventh cervical vertebra, according to his official Website [www.lancearmstrong.com](http://www.lancearmstrong.com).

Nerves that go through the seventh cervical vertebra control hand and wrist muscles.

The site says that Armstrong still intends to compete in the Olympics, though it also quotes the two-time Tour de France champion saying he is able to train only "on a limited basis, but that it is very painful."

"It also makes me nervous when you are out on the open road and it is difficult to turn my neck either way to look for traffic and be aware of what's around," the Website quoted Armstrong as saying.

Armstrong is currently scheduled to compete in Sydney in the Olympic road race Sept. 27 and the individual time trial Sept. 30. His bicycle and helmet were destroyed in the collision.

# Giants look for improvement by special teams

by Neil Best  
Newsday  
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EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. - On the first play of the Philadelphia Eagles' season, they tried an onside kick. It was a shocking gamble, but it worked. They recovered the ball, drove for a touchdown and went on to humiliate the Dallas Cowboys, 41-14.

On the first play of the Giants' season, Brad Daluiso kicked off 2 yards deep into the end zone, a milestone in a comeback from knee surgery. But wait: Brandon Short was offside. Do-over. The Arizona Cardinals returned the ball 12 yards farther upfield after Daluiso's second kick.

Short's goof did not cost the Giants. But it was a reminder that against a better opponent, such as the Eagles, whom they visit Sunday, poor special-teams play easily could decide the game.

The first play against Arizona was only the beginning. Five of the Giants' nine penalties were on special teams. (Two holding calls against Craig Walendy cost 48 yards of field position.) They mishandled a punt, allowed a kickoff return of 51 yards on a reverse and failed to recover an onside kick.

No one was surprised, given the Giants' spotty special-teams work under assistant coach Larry MacDuff in recent years and poor preseason performance. But Coach Jim Fassel put a surprisingly positive spin on the effort. Although he made it clear the penalties were unacceptable, he said the units have been improving and are close to becoming "solid, if not threatening."

The reason for his relative optimism? Youth. The Giants believed their problem in the past was lack of talent, especially speed. The problem now is inexperience, which time and coaching could heal. Four of the five penalties were committed by players in their NFL debuts - Walendy, Short and Ron Dixon.

"We're dealing with a lot of young guys," Fassel said. "I'm basing a lot of my projections on that, and that they have a chance to get better."

Fassel is excited about the potential of Dixon on kickoff returns and Tiki Barber on punts.

"It's the only game in the world of the NCAA it's the NFL," said Dixon, who spent 1999 not in the NCAA but

at NAIA Lambuth in Jackson, Tenn. "People make mistakes; they'll be corrected. We have a good group now, an imposing group, but we'll get much better."

Michael Strahan did not have a sack Sunday, leaving him with one in his past 10 games over two seasons. But Strahan had an active game, and showed Arizona a new look that was a throwback to his early days in the NFL.

*"People make mistakes; they'll be corrected. We have a good group now, an imposing group, but we'll get much better."*

-Ron Dixon  
NFL Rookie

At times, the Giants had rookie Cornelius Griffin replace Strahan at left end and moved Strahan to the right side in place of Cedric Jones. Strahan was the right end for two seasons before switching against his will in 1996.

Strahan said the strategy makes more work for opponents. "It's very easy to prepare for one guy; now you have to prepare for two," he said. "It gives me more opportunities. Cedric's style and my style are very different, and I think it's very hard to prepare for two different styles."

Strahan expects more action on the right side this week. When he is on the left, he will face Jon Runyan, arguably the best right tackle in the NFL.

Running back Joe Montgomery admitted not dressing for the opener was "very hard," but said, "I just plan to go out there and play my game when I get the chance."

Fassel said he was benched because as a third-stringer, he will play only if he contributes on special teams.

"There's not a person in this organization who'd love to have him active more than me," Fassel said. "The bottom line is who gets that last jersey is a guy who is going to help us."

Fassel tried Montgomery as a fullback in preseason, but his blocking was not up to par. He also frustrated coaches with some of his decision-making as a halfback.

Montgomery's path is beginning to

resemble the one that eventually led 1995 first-round draft pick Tyrone Wheatley out of town. In 1998, Fassel often benched Wheatley, giving his lack of help on special teams as the primary reason.

Wheatley led the team with 152 rushes in 1997, and was released after the following season. Montgomery led the team with 115 rushes in 1999.

Pete Mitchell went home Aug. 5

thinking "See you next year." The Giants tight end spent the night "trying to figure out what the hell I was going to do with my year." Like most in the organization, he assumed he had suffered a season-ending knee injury against the Chicago Bears.

Instead, Mitchell was diagnosed two days later with a sprained left knee, not a ligament tear, and underwent arthroscopic surgery. He hopes to practice today and play Sunday.

"It's new to me how it's supposed to feel coming back from surgery," said Mitchell, whose only previous surgery was for the removal of wisdom teeth. The final game of last season and this year's opener were the first games he has missed in six pro seasons. He ran without complications last week.

Mitchell, who had a career-high 58 receptions in 1999, is a focal point of the offense, but he presumably will be worked into the rotation gradually.

As expected, the return of Mitchell allowed the Giants to waive tight end Brody Hefner-Liddiard and re-sign cornerback Ramos McDonald.

McDonald signed Aug. 25, then was waived last week when the Giants signed safety Omar Stoutmire. The team told McDonald then that it wanted to re-sign him after the opener.

Hefner-Liddiard went to the practice squad, replacing fullback Michael Jones.

## Sports Commentary

# Cowboys are already on the ropes

by Steve Springer  
Los Angeles Times  
September 4, 2000

How 'bout them Cowboys!

Let's see a ninth career concussion for Troy Aikman, a season-ending knee injury for Joey Galloway, a thumb injury for backup quarterback Randall Cunningham, the possibility of having to start rookie quarterback Clint Stoerner in Week 2.

It doesn't look as if we'll see much of Jerry Jones on the Cowboy sideline this season.

### THE GOOD DOCTOR

Of course, Jones won't be kept from his appointed rounds as team doctor.

Monday, Dr. Jones made these observations:

On Galloway: "The good news is he's repaired and rehabbed an ACL before."

Yep Jerry, that's what you want on your \$42 million investment - a receiver who leads the league in ACL rehab.

On Aikman: "His test at the hospital would allow him to be considered day-by-day. He'll be monitored closely."

Hopefully by someone other than Jones. Remember, he's not a real doctor, he just plays one at press conferences.

### SNOOZE CONTROL

The only team that seems to be in more of a mess than the Cowboys are the Cardinals. No Simeon Rice or Andre Wadsworth to detour opponents on their expressway to the Cardinal end zone. No Rob Moore to flag down those high and outside floaters delivered by Jake Plummer.

The possibility of L.J. Sheldon not being around to keep defenders off Plummer before he delivers those floaters.

It's fitting that the Cowboys and Cardinals should meet in Week 2, a Sunday night extravaganza in which the musical theme from "Saint Elsewhere" should be played instead of the National Anthem.

I can hear the ESPN promo now: "This week on Sunday Night Football, it's... 'The Replacements.'"

Don't stay tuned.

### MONEY TO BURN

Jerry Jones must be green with envy, his team going down the tubes while Daniel Snyder gets all the media attention with his RedSkin\$.

This past weekend's signing of Stephen Davis brought the Redskin payroll close to the national debt. Maybe Snyder can spare Jones a nickel back.

### JUST PLAY UGLY, BABY

Attention Vince McMahon. Please do not script your NFL games like the Chargers and Raiders did for their 9-6 debacle.

Hey, those old Battle of the Network Stars tug-o-wars were more exciting than watching those teams smash-mouthing it off at midfield.

Also Vince, you can have dibs on Ryan Leaf.

### QUICK HITS

- Three Rivers Stadium is scheduled to be demolished after the season, but errant passes by Kent Graham and Kordell Stewart may finish at the job early.

- It was painful to watch Brett Favre trying to rally the Packers at Lambeau

Field, but as Mike Holmgren can tell you, having Favre with about half his usual arm strength is better than having Jon Kitna with full arm strength.

- The air has already been let out Steve McNair.

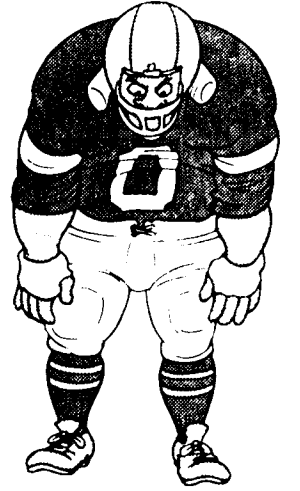
- Jamal Anderson may have lost his "Dirty Bird" step, but he took a licking and kept on ticking in his first extensive duty since tearing up a knee in Week 2 of last season.

- Vinny Testaverde had just as much success converting third downs with his Smurfs II receiving corps than he did with gangly "Just Give Me the Damn Ball" fellow.

- How long to you think it will be before Cris Carter and Randy Moss tell Touchdown Daunte Culpepper to give them the damn ball?

### LAST THOUGHT

If Chris Chandler can lead a team to the Super Bowl, then why can't Donovan McNabb do the same for the Eagles?



# Final month is crucial to Belcher's baseball future

by Mike DiGiovanna  
Los Angeles Times  
September 6, 2000

DETROIT - Tim Belcher admits he has been a little cranky this summer, the frustration of his elbow injury and the constant questions about it causing him to snap occasionally at reporters.

Belcher seems in better spirits this week, though, in part because he finally has something different to talk about. After a two-month absence, the 38-year-old right-hander will start Thursday for an Anaheim Angel team that needs a strong pitching performance the way Montana needed rain this summer.

"Yeah, I'd like to help us get to the playoffs, but by the same token, the addition or subtraction of one player rarely makes a difference," Belcher said. "With the youth in the rotation, I can be a nice addition if I pitch well. If I don't, it won't matter."

Belcher, limited to four starts this season, knows what he does in a few starts this month could determine whether he returns in 2001 or retires. The Angels have a \$5.1 million option on Belcher for next season, which they will almost certainly buy out for \$1 million.

"I can't lie and say I'm not thinking about how this will affect next year," Belcher said. "But I'm not going to make it an issue right now."

The Angels, Tuesday, signed Johan Quezada Santana, a highly touted 16-year-old pitcher from the Dominican Republic whose fastball has already been clocked at 93 mph and whose changeup, according to Angel scouting director Donny Rowland, "is surprisingly advanced for his age."

Santana, a 6-foot-2, 155-pound right-hander who turns 17 in November, received a considerable signing bonus, though a baseball source said it was not as high as the \$900,000 the Angels gave to Francisco Rodriguez in 1998.

"He's very athletic, he has a clean arm action and a good feel for pitching," Rowland said. "He's an exciting kid."

# Culpepper doesn't fit the mold

by Bill Williamson  
September 05, 2000  
Knight-Ridder Tribune

ST. PAUL -- Locally, Daunte Culpepper will be compared to Fran Tarkenton. After all, Culpepper is the Vikings' first true running quarterback since the days Tarkenton scrambled for his life, looking for an open receiver.

Nationally, Culpepper is going to draw comparisons to John Elway. At 6 feet 4, 255 pounds, Culpepper may be the most dangerous running quarterback since a young Elway in the mid-1980s.

Yet, coaches familiar with both Tarkenton and Elway say there's no comparison.

"Culpepper is much faster than Tarkenton ever was," said former Vikings' coach Jerry Burns, who was the offensive coordinator when Tarkenton was the Vikings' quarterback.

"Really, Culpepper is the fastest quarterback I've seen. There's been no one with that much speed. At his

size, he can really take off and hurt people. Tarkenton ran for a different reason. He ran back and forth to find time for his receivers to get open. ... Culpepper is much more dangerous."

While Burns sees Culpepper as a better runner than the king of all Vikings' running quarterbacks, Paul Wiggin, the Vikings' director of pro personnel, believes Culpepper is a better runner than Elway was. Wiggin, of course, was Stanford's head coach while Elway ran the Cardinal's offense.

"They're both instinctive runners and both are effective," Wiggin said, "but Culpepper is more dangerous because of the speed. Elway wasn't that fast. He was powerful but he wasn't as fast. Also, Elway didn't like to get hit. I don't think Culpepper cares about getting hit."

Of Course, Both Burns And Wiggin Believe Culpepper Will Be One Of The Most effective running quarterbacks in NFL history. Thus, they don't believe his first-game ground success was a fluke.

Culpepper had 73 rushing yards on 13 carries in the Vikings' 30-27 victory over Chicago on Sunday. He scored three touchdowns in the second half, on runs of 1, 7 and 4 yards, as the Vikings erased a 20-9 third-quarter deficit. It was the first time a Vikings' quarterback ran for three touchdowns in a game.

"He'll always be a running threat," Burns said. "He'll come right at you. ... He could be the best running quarterback ever because of his size and speed."

Burns points out that in addition to Tarkenton, Joe Kapp and Rich Gannon also had some success running the ball as Vikings' quarterbacks. Kapp, who led the Vikings to Super Bowl III, was more comparable to Culpepper than Tarkenton and Gannon because he was a bigger quarterback, weighing around 220 pounds. However, he was nowhere near as big or fast as Culpepper.

"Culpepper is definitely different," Burns said. "The Vikings have never seen anything like it before."