

Cowher happy with the progress of Stewart

By ALAN ROBINSON
AP Sports Writer

LATROBE, Pa. — Kordell Stewart has kept coach Bill Cowher's promise: There is no Pittsburgh Steelers quarterback controversy.

Unlike last year's three-ring circus among Stewart, Mike Tomczak and Jim Miller that divided players' loyalties and disrupted the camp's continuity from start to finish, Stewart arrived as the set-in-stone starter.

Three weeks later, he has the look of a star.

To paraphrase the line popularized in Pittsburgh by former starting QB Bubby Brister: Kordell Stewart is the man. Write it down.

"I think every day you kind of see him maturing into the role of a leader," Cowher said. "To this point, he's put everything into perspective. He hasn't changed his personality. He's been genuine and he's handled everything that's been thrown at him."

His receivers handled virtually everything he threw at them in exhibition victories over the Bears and Chiefs. While quarterbacks' numbers can be misleading in the preseason, as receivers and defenders rotate with frequency and defenses aren't as complex, there is no masquerading Stewart's stats: 15-of-21, 239 yards, two touchdowns passing, one running and four scores in as many drives.

"We're just trying to get Kordell relaxed and ready for the season," receiver Yancey Thigpen said. "We've told him, 'You throw it up there and we'll catch it.'"

Sure, it's only the preseason, and sure, Stewart has played only played 2½ quarters, hardly long enough for protracted analysis or comparisons to Tomczak, his predecessor and, now, his backup. But



AP Photo

Steelers quarterback Kordell Stewart has been the first-string quarterback all through preseason and Pittsburgh coach Bill Cowher has been impressed with Stewart's performance early in training camp.

they can't teach coolheadedness or confidence even in three-a-day practices, and Stewart has exuded plenty of both.

"Yes, I'm playing with confidence," said Stewart, who has added an element of improvisational surprise missing from the Steelers' offense since Terry Bradshaw retired 15 seasons ago. "The key is not to have too much of it."

His confidence reflected that shown in him by Cowher and offensive coordinator Chan Gailey, who took a major gamble in the offseason by turning over their offense to a third-year player who never has started an NFL regular-season game at quarterback — and one who was 0-for-10 in a playoff loss to New England in January.

Gamble? So far they look like geniuses.

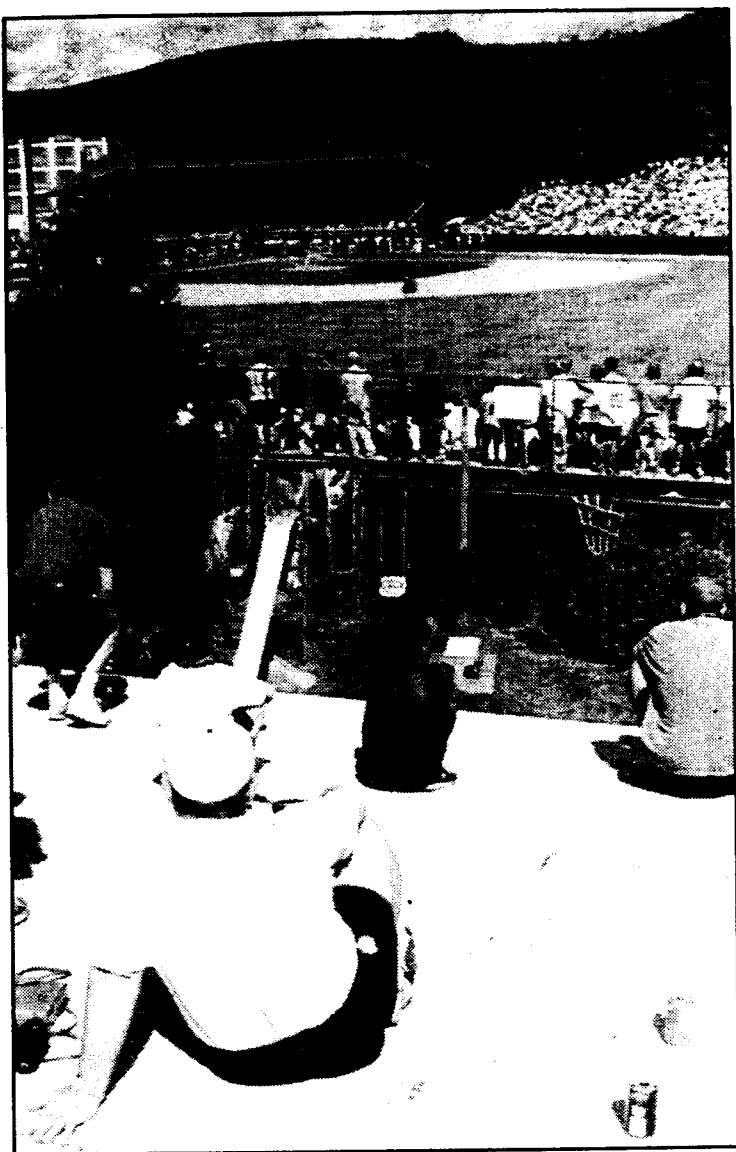
They've taken the dash out of Slash — so far, he's been strictly a passer, with no ad-libbed sprints to the goal line or forays as a wide receiver. He's had only one carry, on a quarterback sneak. But there's plenty of time during the season to show off the speed he flashed on an 80-yard TD against Carolina last season, the longest in NFL history by a quarterback.

For now, Cowher is keeping Slash and his multitude of talents mostly under wraps, but he hasn't tried to harness the athlete who already has injected considerable excitement into what once was expected to be a downsized, give-the-ball to Jerome Bettis offense.

So much for the theory of easing the Steelers' third starting quarterback in as many seasons into one of the most demanding jobs in the NFL, as the leader of a team that has made five consecutive postseason appearances.

Last season, as Stewart often rotated between two positions, he sometimes required his role in a certain play to be defined in the huddle. Now, he runs the huddle with a veteran's touch, never hesitating to alert a receiver when a pass route has been improperly run.

"He's getting to the point where he knows what people should be doing," Cowher said. "I like the way the kid has handled everything."



AP Photo

From the cheap seats

Baseball fans sit back and enjoy the Hall of Fame home run derby during this past weekend's induction ceremonies. These fans sit on a rooftop behind the right field fence at Cooperstown's Doubleday Field.

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Today's HOROSCOPES

By Jacqueline Bigar ©1997 by King Features Syndicate, Inc.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY for Tuesday, Aug. 5, 1997: The nuances of life grab your attention in this complex but interesting year. Much of what you hear is only half of the story; dig deeper, and question everything. This is especially true when it comes to a romantic interest. If you feel you are having trouble communicating, then listen. A little mystery works! If you are single, you are apt to encounter someone with whom you will be associated for some time to come. This might not be all good, but it will be memorable. If attached, work together to handle finances and a potential major investment. VIRGO is attracted to you.

The Stars Show the Kind of Day You'll Have: 5-Dynamic; 4-Positive 3-Average; 2-So-so; 1-Difficult.

ARIES (March 21-April 19) ★★★★★ Work consumes you, and you couldn't be happier! The competitive spirit inspires you to be the best you can be. Others are cooperative, but make sure to discuss some facts Someone doesn't know as much as he thinks. Tonight: Brainstorm with a co-worker. **TAURUS** (April 20-May 20) ★★★★★ Stick to the program, and you will be pleasantly surprised. Accord is easy. You handle situations with finesse. An impromptu get-together with neighbors suits you. Bring home flowers or a knickknack. Tonight: You are the life of the party! **GEMINI** (May 21-June 20) ★★★★★ Behind the scenes is the place for you. You are mentally active, but the time is not right for singing your ideas to the world. Home projects are satisfying; you hum into the night. Tonight: Put on a pot of coffee! **CANCER** (June 21-July 22) ★★★★★ Ideas mean money, and you are full of them. Double-check facts, to anchor your presentation. There's no need to be nervous. Your humorous take on events wins the day. Tonight: Celebration is in order. **LEO** (July 23-Aug. 22) ★★★★★ Usually the social butterfly, you find your thoughts turned inward. This gives you a chance to review details necessary to progress in a financial matter. You are closer to the truth than you think. You can be satisfied with what you've accomplished. Tonight: Hip hip hooray! **VIRGO** (Aug. 23-Sept. 22) ★★★★★ Work is under control, giving you time to shift into a more romantic mode. A

admirer might make a move; you are hard to resist. A relationship could blossom. Single or attached, this is a golden time for all personal connections. Tonight: Your wish is another's command.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22) ★★★★★ A secret affair or crush could get interesting; it's up to you. Discretion is still the better part of valor, so be conscious of what you say, as well as how you take what you hear. You can certainly cuddle up to a paramour, if you choose. Tonight: Love reigns supreme. **SCORPIO** (Oct. 23-Nov. 21) ★★★★★ A friend could become more, if you want to move to the next level. The words might be elusive, however. A gesture of affection—a card or small gift—is in order. Be yourself, and know that what you wish is within reach. Tonight: Be a pioneer.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21) ★★★★★ An office romance could become high profile, but you don't have to worry. If you work together well, keep your eye on the goal. You could both end up with a promotion! A friend might disapprove and give you an earful. Follow your instincts. Tonight: Disappear. **CAPRICORN** (Dec. 22-Jan. 19) ★★★★★ A vacation is overdue; now is the perfect time to begin planning. Give yourself the pampering you deserve, and seldom get, for your hard work. A partner is a step ahead; allow him to nudge you in the right direction. Tonight: Shop for clothes.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18) ★★★★★ You become thoroughly absorbed in financial literature or travel brochures. When you are interested in something, you learn as much as you can about it. This education pays off, both financially and for the sheer enjoyment of new knowledge. Tonight: Chat with a friend. **PISCES** (Feb. 19-March 20) ★★★★★ A loved one practically shouts for attention; give him an extra helping. He deserves it! Take him for a late lunch or early dinner. One thing is likely to lead to another, to your great delight! Tonight: You will be pleased as punch.

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