

PLAYERS

PLAYERS; FROM BAYSIDE HIGH TO 49ERS



By Malcolm Moran
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The education of Derrick Harmon

took a different turn last winter, a

direction that has little to do with achieving a degree in engineering physics at Cornell. Last winter Harmon attended two seminars to learn about a business that has often, to his disappointment, interfered with the business of getting an education.

He went to seminars on professional football, invitation-only affairs in Seattle and New Orleans. These were much more than tryout camps. These were places where dozens of players were examined, drilled, challenged, filmed, studied, compared and evaluated. In those antiseptic settings, far from the bands and the emotion of lining up for the big game, all those athletes discovered how much marketability they possessed, or how little.

And what Derrick Harmon learned was that he belonged.

"It opened my eyes," he said. "All I really wanted was an opportunity, and after the camps, I was convinced that was all I needed."

He has since convinced others. Harmon, a ninth-round choice of the San Francisco 49ers, the 248th player selected in the draft, will play against the Giants on Saturday in his first playoff game. He rushed 39 times for 192 yards in the regular season, and returned 13 kickoffs for an average of 27.5 yards.

In his progression from Bayside High School in Queens to Cornell to a Super Bowl contender, Harmon has helped reverse the feeling that football teams should not look to New York City high schools

or Ivy League colleges for their talent.

When Harmon was at Cornell and Bayside, he felt strongly that the football business was not yet supposed to be a business, and he went through an uneasy acceptance. "Football doesn't rate that high on my priority chart," he said two years ago.

He resented a recruiting process that forced him to miss class time and spend hours at night talking to persistent strangers. He wanted to play running back at Cornell after a high school career as a quarterback of the Commodores, because of the fewer demands on a running back's time.

Late in the summer before his sophomore year at Cornell, Harmon decided he had had enough. He told his brothers, Ronnie and Kevin, who were then at Bayside, that he had decided not to play football. After missing seven days of camp, Derrick returned, he said, partly to demonstrate to his brothers that it was possible to succeed on a field each Saturday and in a classroom from Monday through Friday.

His career total of 3,004 yards at Cornell is second only to that of Ed Marinaro. He was graduated with a 3.5 grade-point average (out of 4.0). Kevin Harmon, a reserve quarterback and tailback at Iowa this year, gained an average of 6.8 yards in 10 carries and threw for one touchdown. Ronnie Harmon gained 907 yards and scored 11 touchdowns in his junior season despite being limited to nine games by a broken leg. He was named second-team All-American by The Sporting News and earned honorable mention from The Associated Press.

Once, Ronnie Harmon heard advice from his older brother. But as Derrick's professional opportunity drew near, he was able to hear from Ronnie that the big-time is not necessarily that much bigger. "Every time we spoke," Derrick said, "he always said the level of Big Ten players was not something extraordinary. He said, 'Hey, you could do it.' He's always been supportive."

Now football is a job, not an intrusion. "Whereas the college life is understood to be an amateur activity," Harmon said, "that in theory is supposed to be fun for all who participate, and beneficial for all who participate. Those are the things I began to question when I went to college. When I came out of high school I had the illusion of how football is supposed to be on the college level. I understood pro football to be what it is."

Even before he arrived, he understood the professional game to be a business in which management must exert pressure on its employees to produce. What Harmon did not understand early in his career at Cornell was how similar the pressures of the college game could be. "It's so close," he said, "there's not a great deal of difference there. The pressures a college player and a pro football player face are pretty much the same. Pro football is pretty much the way I imagined it to be. I'm comparing what is, and what I thought it would be, right now. It's one of the things I'm going through."

Though the odds of making the United States Football League might have seemed more in his favor last winter, Harmon chose the N.F.L. for the rarest of reasons - because a spring season would have delayed the completion of his degree requirements. Sometime soon, after the season is over, he plans to consider what will be done with that degree. For now, his plans extend little further than a kickoff Saturday. Soon the range will reach a little longer, beyond his pro career.

"I'm getting a little older now," said Derrick Harmon, age 21.

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