

PRO FOOTBALL

Morris promoted after eye-opening debut

By Mike Kiley
Chicago Tribune

PLATTEVILLE, Wis.—Ron Morris was looking for some shut-eye after the red-eye flight from Miami. But an hour after the Bears rookie fell into bed at 6 a.m. Monday, he got a series of wake-up calls that kept him reliving his dreamy Sunday night.

That's what happens when you come from a Texas-sized family that watched on their televisions as Morris scored the game's only touchdown on a 65-yard pass from Jim Harbaugh in the Bears' 10-3 preseason victory over the Dolphins.

"Everybody in my family wanted to talk about it," he said. "I must have talked from 7 to 10 o'clock."

Hold the phone, Ron. Now there's more news to discuss.

Tuesday, coach Mike Ditka named Morris as one of his starting wide receivers for Saturday night's preseason game against Pittsburgh at Soldier Field. Ditka added that Morris might team with Willie Gault as the starting wide-receiver tandem when the regular season opens Sept. 14 against the New York Giants.

"We'll start Morris at wing this week," Ditka said.

In place of Dennis McKinnon?

"In place of anybody. We don't have a starting wing now," Ditka replied. "We alternated two people [Keith Ortego and Dennis Gentry] last year when McKinnon wasn't here. From what I've seen so far, the position is up for grabs. Morris could well be the starter when we open the season. It wouldn't hurt our team a bit."

McKinnon sat out last season after knee surgery. He started against Miami but will be in a tough fight with Morris to regain that job.

"When I decided to start Morris at wing McKinnon never entered my mind," Ditka said. "It has nothing to do with him."

"Dennis did well Sunday, except for the dropped ball. He ran well and blocked well. I thought he should have caught the ball. But it's all new to him. He's been away a year."

"That's the first contact he's had since the Super Bowl in game conditions, and that's tough. You can understand [the drop] when the first pass thrown to him is in traffic, slanting in and he doesn't hold on to it. But that's no excuse, either."

Morris will also receive a chance to return kickoffs against the Steelers. Just as No. 1 draft pick Neal Anderson improved the special teams



Ron Morris is catching on fast with Bears.

last year with his coverage ability, Morris will be asked to put his speed to work on returns.

You couldn't call Morris, a Texas native, the Lone Star in Sunday's game, though pundits would be tempted to. But Bear fans are very excited about Gault no longer being the Lone Ranger as a deep threat.

The TD pass wasn't the first time Harbaugh and Morris have been a 1-2 punch. That was also the case draft day, when Harbaugh was chosen No. 1 and Morris No. 2 by the Bears.

"Jim was ready to go deep as soon as he got in the game," Morris said. "I saw the gleam in his eye."

And the scoring play succeeded because both of them saw a way to beat the Miami defense. They were on the same wavelength.

"The entire night their cornerbacks were playing our outside receivers bump," said Morris. "Our receivers were getting shut off because our release was to the outside. So when Jim came into the game in the fourth quarter, he had no one open to throw to."

"So Jim came to me and said 'Ron, you can go right by him, huh?' And I said 'Yeah, on an adjustment to the inside.' So I gave him a move outside, he took it, and I went right around him inside and got back outside. Jim laid the ball there perfectly, and I got under it. I felt we could have done the same play all night."

Once isn't enough for this pair of go-getters.

But Morris is playing it intelligently off the field, too, and not proclaiming himself as the new savior on offense.

"Right now things are looking real good for me," Morris said. "The coaches like what they see in me. Coach Ditka and Coach [Greg] Landry tell me good things all the time."

"It really doesn't stick in my mind what they say, though, because I don't want to get too big-headed. I feel good about what I'm doing, but I try and let a great play die in my mind and not get too high about it."

"I have a lot of friends come up and tell me 'This guy said this about you, this other guy said this.' I know he said that, I tell them, but don't go pumping me up any more than I am."

"Just like everybody is asking me now if I want to be starting right away. In time, by doing my very best every day, I'll start. That's the best way I can answer it."

One of the odd things about Morris is that he wears gloves to catch the ball. They are actually cement-mixer gloves.

And before you start with the jokes about having stone hands, Morris admits he had to work on softening his hands early in his career to catch the ball.

But the gloves came much later. He began wearing them in his last season at Southern Methodist.

"A buddy of the SMU equipment manager brought them up to spring practice and I tried them," Morris explained. "A lot of people think it's psychological, but I think they help me catch better."

"My third day wearing them I caught everything they threw at me. So I stayed with them. They're rubber outside and cloth inside. The water comes through, so I can squeeze any sweat out of them."

"When I first started wearing them, they were 50 cents a pair. But when the Bears called down to Paris, Tex., to order me some, the price had gone up to \$2 a pair. That's the difference, I guess, between college and the pros."

Talking about SMU, and the scandal that rocked the university's football program, Morris says he's done talking about it. Just as he has filed away in his no-comment drawer his opinions on a brief run-in with agent Norby Walters.

"From now on, I'm just going to say that's dead and gone if I'm asked about them," he said. "I don't like to sit back and get stuck in the past. I'm shooting for the future."

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of a maze for Harbaugh, but when the maze clears up, he'll be very capable of putting points on the board and running the offense."

Ditka said it isn't out of the question that Harbaugh might progress fast enough to start against the Giants, "but you're asking a little bit much."

Ditka said it would take a combination of two things to convince him that McMahon is ready.

"It's got to be him letting me know it doesn't hurt and me being able to see with my eyes he can throw with velocity," Ditka said. "It's not a matter of me saying, 'Jim, I want you to play' and him not being ready, like happened last year, or him saying he's ready and me not thinking he's ready. It has to be clear-cut both ways."

While trying to remove the questions on McMahon's shoulder, Ditka said he wants to replace the chips on everybody else's shoulders.

"I refuse to take the shortcuts they want to take," Ditka said. "We have guys who don't even want to practice in the rain. They're mad at me and I like it. We're going to work hard and gripe and get mad at the coach and call him bad names and then we're going to play better."

As usual, Perry provides Ditka's widest target.

"It's just silly," Ditka said. "I don't want to go through all the fines, but if that's the only thing he understands, that's what I have to do. He told me by the end of camp he would be down to—cough,

cough—about 315.

"He got lazy on his diet. He's working hard on the field. He's got to discipline himself."

■ Sunday's Bears-Dolphins telecast helped ESPN set a record. The cable network had an 8.9 rating, which means 3.8 million sets were tuned into ESPN's first pro football telecast. It was the highest rated sports telecast on basic cable. Counting WLS-TV in Chicago and WPLG in Miami, which picked up the ESPN feed, 5 million sets watched the game.

The previous viewing record for basic cable was 3.17 million homes for WTBS' May 26 telecast of the Boston Celtics-Detroit Pistons National Basketball Association playoff game.

■ The Chicago Park District told the Bears that parking for games in Soldier Field will no longer be permitted in the lots designated as the Arvey Lot and the Burnham Lot. The Arvey Lot is north of the Field Museum and accessible from southbound Lake Shore Drive. The Burnham Lot is located east of northbound Lake Shore Drive, across from Soldier Field.

■ Safety Shaun Gayle, slated to start at cornerback Saturday night, is hampered by a strained ankle. As announced last week, Todd Bell will start at strong safety with Dave Duerson moving to free safety in place of Gary Fencik. "Nothing to do with Gary at all. He played well. Just an experiment in flexibility," coach Mike Ditka said.

Injured offensive linemen Keith Van Horne, Kurt Becker and Jay Hilgenberg are expected to be ready for the Steelers, Ditka said, although Hilgenberg's shoulder sprain is a concern.

Jaworski makes his deal: 2 years with the Dolphins

From Chicago Tribune wires

Ron Jaworski, 36, the former Philadelphia Eagle quarterback who has been shopping for a team during the off-season, finally found one when he agreed to terms with the Miami Dolphins. Jaworski said he will sign a two-year contract.

■ Kicker Tony Franklin walked out of the New England Patriots training camp, just three days after agreeing to terms of a four-year deal that would make him the highest-paid kicker. Franklin was asked—and refused—to sign a waiver that would absolve the Pats of any financial responsibility should he suffer an injury to either of his legs prior to the start of the regular season.

■ A dispute between the California Angels and Los Angeles Rams over Anaheim Stadium may force the Rams to move their regular-season home opener up a day. The Angels, noting that a recent Ram game left the field nearly unplayable, may invoke a clause in the baseball team's lease that gives it exclusive rights to the facility 36 hours prior to the start of a home game. Under terms of that lease, the Rams can't play their Sept. 20 game against the Minnesota Vikings without the permission of the Angels, who open a homestand against the White Sox the next night.

■ Left tackle Chris Hinton has returned to practice for the Indianapolis Colts, but probably won't play in Saturday's game at Minnesota. He underwent off-season

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knee surgery for an injury suffered while working in his yard.

■ Denver Broncos defensive end Tony Colorito will be out for the season after undergoing knee surgery to repair a torn ligament.

■ The Seattle Seahawks have cut former Illinois defensive end Ron Bohm. . . . The Buffalo Bills have cut ex-Illini guard Rick Schulte.

■ New Orleans Saints quarterback Dave Wilson was held out of passing drills after suffering what was described as a back twinge.

■ San Francisco 49ers have waived wide receiver Johnny "Lam" Jones.

■ The eight linebackers who played for the Kansas City Chiefs last year earned \$1.24 million total, or \$140,000 more than Brian Bosworth's average salary with the Seahawks. . . . Bosworth already is at odds with the league. The former All-America at Oklahoma wants to wear his college number—44. That's against the rules. NFL rules require linebackers to wear a number in the 50s or, if those are all taken, one in the 90s. The 40s are reserved for running backs and defensive backs.

Seahawks President Mike McCormack said the team will list Bosworth as a defensive back if it has to and then have him play linebacker.

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