

FOOTBALL

FOOTBALL; Harmon Likes Seeing New York And Loves Playing in San Diego

By Al Harvin
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Even though he'll be wearing the navy blue and gold of San Diego on Sunday in the Meadowlands, Chargers running back **Ronnie Harmon** is a born and bred New Yorker who will be glad to be back home.

"I have to stay with my teammates out in New Jersey, but the first thing I'm going to do when I arrive is to head for Manhattan," said **Harmon**, a consensus all-city football player at Bayside High School in Queens when the Commodores were a powerhouse in the late 1970's and early 1980's. "I still live at home with my parents in Laurelton in the off season."

Harmon is one of five sons Jesse and Jackie **Harmon** sent to Bayside and one of three who went on to the National Football League. Derrick, **Ronnie's** older brother, went to Cornell and was drafted ninth by San Francisco in 1984. Younger brother Kevin followed **Ronnie** to **Iowa** and was a fourth-round pick by Seattle in 1988.

But **Ronnie**, a first-round Buffalo pick in 1986, is the only one still in the league.

"Derrick is going back to school and wants to go into engineering," said **Ronnie**, who was a communications major at **Iowa**. "Kevin is in marketing, and he is living in Seattle. Bad Times in Buffalo

For all of his love of New York, **Harmon** does remember a time when he wanted to leave the state, and it wasn't that long ago. But it wasn't New York City he wanted to leave; it was Buffalo.

Harmon's football career was doing all right in Buffalo until Jan. 6, 1990, the date of the Bills' 34-30 playoff loss to the Browns in Cleveland. **Harmon** came out of that game wearing goat horns for dropping a Jim Kelly pass in the end zone that would have won the game.

"They blamed me for losing them their championship," **Harmon** said by telephone from San Diego. He didn't thrive in the atmosphere that led the team to be known as the "Bickering Bills," with Kelly in the middle of all the finger-pointing family feuds. "If you look at the play-by-play, you'll see that the pass to me was not the last play of the game," he said. "The last play was an interception thrown by Kelly.

"I didn't say hardly anything to Kelly all the time I was in Buffalo. He apologized for some of the things he said, but it's hard to get the same feeling back after some of the things that were said.

"I got labeled as a troublemaker. I don't know why because I hardly ever talked to anybody. I didn't talk to the press up there, either. I guess maybe it was because I went to the coach, Marv Levy, and asked to be traded." Useful in San Diego

The Bills didn't accommodate him, but they did leave him on their unprotected list. He was signed as a Plan B free agent by San Diego on April Fool's Day of 1990, and has since then proven himself to be no joke in the Chargers' offensive arsenal.

After being used as a receiver more than a runner, **Harmon** was returned to the backfield last year and gained 363 yards rushing on 66 carries, a 5.5 average that was third best on the team. He was also San Diego's second-leading receiver with 46 catches for 511 yards, an 11.1 average; 26 of his catches picked up first downs.

This year, he is again the Chargers' third-leading rusher (322 yards on 56 carries, a 5.8 average) and is again second in receiving with 38 catches for 394 yards, a 10.4 average.

"I'm happy that I am where I am," **Harmon** said. "I just go out and do my job."

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