

Fred Mitchell  
ODDS & INS



## Angry Reinsdorf denies interest in buying Bears

**J**erry Reinsdorf is livid. Not because of the ongoing **Scottie Pippen** travails, or the Bulls' recent troubles on the road. The Bulls and White Sox chairman is angry about an article in the current edition of **Crajin's Chicago Business** that asserts he and Blackhawks owner **William Wirtz** head a group that has approached the McCaskey family about buying the Bears, "looking for a ready-made product for a privately financed football stadium."

The article further speculated the two sports moguls would explore having other NFL teams to come to Chicago.

"That's the most irresponsible thing I have seen in ages," Reinsdorf said Thursday from his winter home in Arizona. "This is absolutely untrue. I haven't even thought about making an offer."

**Keeping track:** The 45th Ted Haydon Holiday Classic indoor track and field meet is Saturday at the University of Chicago's Henry Crown Field House.

The late coach originated the meet as a way to give area athletes an opportunity to compete when they came home from college for the winter holiday break.

More than 500 athletes ranging from youth, high school, college/open and masters competitors are expected. Heats will be arranged according to times. The meet is the only indoor meet this year put on by the University of Chicago Track Club.

The meet directors are astronomy professor **Patrick Palmer** and new coach and three-time Olympian **Jim Spivey**.

One area masters runner, **Vic Heckler**, will be going after a national age-group record in the mile. Heckler competes in the 55-59 division.

Entry fees were \$6 per event but the late fee is \$10 up until 10 a.m. Saturday. Relay entry fee is \$24, team entry fee is \$150.

**Cubs Caravan:** The Cubs' annual promotional caravan will take place Jan. 14-15. The caravan will consist of two tours, visiting five cities, seven schools and two Chicago-area hospitals. Cubs General Manager **Ed Lynch** will be on the tour, along with manager **Jim Riggleman**, coach **Billy Williams** and players **Kevin Foster**, **Kevin Orle**, **Mark Clark**, **Bob Patterson**, **Terry Adams**, **Call** **773-404-4191** for more info.

**Picks to click:** New York Giants over Washington; Pittsburgh over New England; Cincinnati over Dallas; Minnesota over Detroit; Tennessee over Baltimore; Miami over Indianapolis; Jacksonville over Buffalo; Atlanta over Philadelphia; New York Jets over Tampa Bay; Arizona over New Orleans; Green Bay over Carolina; Kansas City over San Diego; Oakland over Seattle; St. Louis over the Bears; and San Francisco over Denver. Last week: 6-9; year-to-date straight up: 130-78-2 (619).

**The fine print:** Salute to **Lloyd Walton**, director of the James Jordan Boys & Girls Club and Family Life Center, for sharing 300 Chicago Wolves tickets with 10 other Chicago Boys & Girls Clubs. The tickets were a holiday gift from **James Vitiello**, president of Northbrook's U.S. Office Equipment. . . . **Frank Thomas'** annual "Big Hurt Toy & Book Drive" is noon to 1:30 p.m. Friday, on the lower level of the John Hancock Center. The toys and books collected will be donated to Rainbow House, a non-profit Chicago shelter for abused women and children, and Hope Children's Hospital, the only pediatric hospital on the South Side. Send e-mail to **Fred Mitchell** at **Kick3485@aol.com**

## OTHER VOICES

Bill Lyon, Philadelphia Inquirer

### It all comes down to respect

"For a coach to talk down to a player like that," John Starks said of the **Latrell Sprewell**-**P.J. Carlesimo** matter, "players are too sensitive to that. If you want respect, you have to give respect." That last part is exactly right. But it cuts both ways. The problem is, there are players who believe the coach should respect the player but never mention that the player should respect the coach. . . . Sometimes what today's player interprets as savage criticism may be no more than a suggestion of how to make a certain pass. There are players who claim free throws at an embarrassing 60 percent rate and yet when a coach suggests they might want to shoot a few after practice they puff up in rage and claim they are being disrespected. This attitude, as with all things in life, starts at an early age. Those who show promise young are frequently coddled. They are rarely answerable. They are never criticized. Hardly ever disciplined. So what comes out shouldn't be surprising. But it should be disturbing. To all of us.

# As Cordero's troubles mount, Cubs back off

By Paul Sullivan  
TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

Instead of the usual hot stove talk, most discussions about **Wil Cordero** last week focused on his recent arrest for spousal abuse.

What kind of statement were the Cubs making when they showed interest in a player who pleaded guilty to beating and threatening his wife? Or was Cordero a rehabilitated man and deserving of a second chance?

The Cubs decided they didn't need a Cordero controversy after their 94-loss season, announcing Thursday morning they no longer were interested in signing Cordero. A few hours later, news arrived from Puerto Rico that a restraining order had been issued against him Wednesday for allegedly threatening his wife, Ana. Cordero denied the charge.

"Obviously we made our decision to get out of the Wil Cordero derby before the latest information came out," Cubs General Manager **Ed Lynch** said.

Earlier in the day, Lynch said the Cubs' decision had as much to do with his ability as his notoriety.

"We had been weighing the entire package, off the field and on the field, and one of the hurdles we had to get over right away was the baseball side," Lynch said. "For him to help us, he had to be a second baseman. Our people were telling me they didn't feel that was something

he should do. Baseball-wise, he was best served playing the outfield."

Translated, Cordero can't play second and doesn't have enough home-run power to be the left-fielder the Cubs are seeking, even with a reduced, post-arrest price tag. But the spousal abuse incident that got Cordero released was a factor because bad publicity is the last thing the Cubs want after a year in which everything that could go wrong did.

Cordero received a 90-day suspended sentence in October after pleading guilty to assault and battery against Ana and he was ordered to attend regular counseling sessions. The Red Sox opted not to pick up Cordero's \$3.5 million option after

the season. Cordero's wife said after his arrest that she forgave him and asked fans to forgive him too. She attended almost every Red Sox game the rest of the season, home and away, supporting her husband. The couple currently are separated, although Ana is expecting their second child in April.

The Cubs sent manager **Jim Riggleman** to Puerto Rico this week to evaluate whether he could help the Cubs at second or in left, but Riggleman's report persuaded Lynch to go in a different direction. With Cordero out of the picture, the Cubs will go back to seeking a power-hitting left-fielder via a trade.

The Cubs have made inquiries into the availability of Califor-

nia outfielder **Jim Edmonds**, but so have several other teams. Cincinnati recently was rebuffed in efforts to acquire Edmonds, who is coming off of surgery on both knees but is relatively cheap (around \$3 million) and has a contract that runs through '99.

The Angels aren't shopping Edmonds, but would consider moving him if a top pitcher was available. **Steve Trachsel** is the best the Cubs likely would offer the Angels and Trachsel is coming off of a sub-par season (8-12, 4.51 earned-run average, league-leading 32 homers allowed).

California was said to be interested in **Mark Grace**, but **Riggleman** said Thursday Grace would not be traded.

## INSIDE BASEBALL

### Drabek signs with the Orioles Martinez heading for his big payday

FROM TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICES

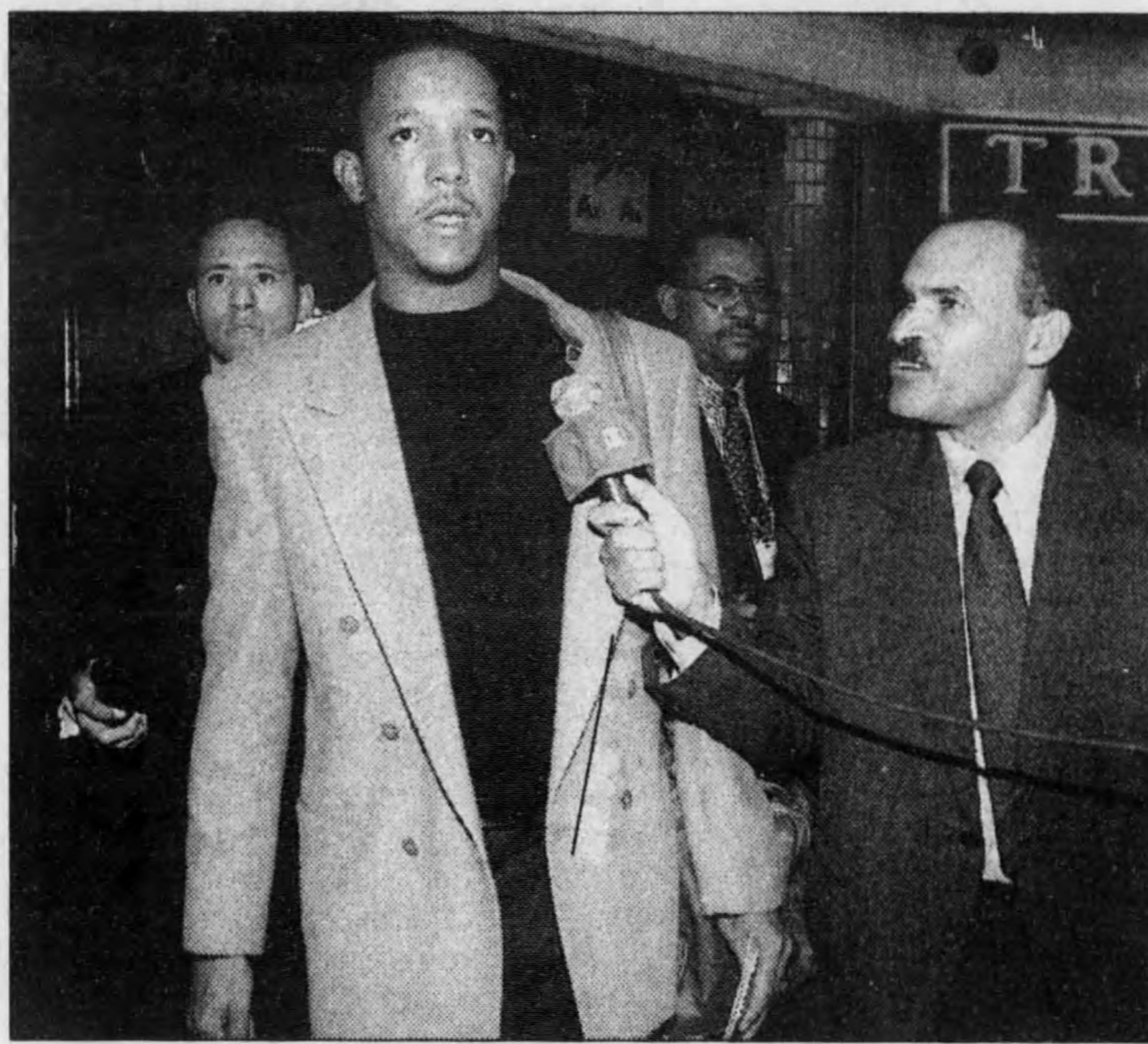
One day after **Pedro Martinez** shook up baseball by saying he had agreed to a record \$75 million, six-year contract, **Anaheim**, **Baltimore** and **Detroit** signed free-agent pitchers for a fraction of the cost.

**Doug Drabek** agreed to a \$1.8 million, one-year deal with the Orioles; **Frank Castillo** agreed to a \$1.75 million, one-year contract with the Tigers; and **Omar Olivares** agreed to a \$1.35 million, one-year contract with the Angels.

But most of the talk in baseball centered around **Martinez**. He traveled from the Dominican Republic to Boston Thursday night, and the Red Sox were expected to announce the contract Friday.

"I always work with a lot of dedication and focus," **Martinez** said. "Now what I want is to reach the World Series with the Boston Red Sox."

Boston also hopes to sign **Mo Vaughn** and **John Valentin** to



Pedro Martinez, who will sign a huge contract in Boston Friday, talks to Dominican reporters in the Santo Domingo airport Thursday.

long-term deals. **Martinez's** contract probably will cause **Vaughn** and **Valentin** to raise their demands.

"**Pedro Martinez** is a superb pitcher and they're lucky to have him," **Vaughn's** agent, **Tom Reich**, said. "It would be disingenuous to say that it won't affect the **Mo Vaughn** negotiation because it will."

**Drabek**, 35, was 12-11 with a 5.74 ERA in 31 starts for the White Sox last season. The right-hander is expected to vie for the fifth spot in the rotation.

**Castillo**, 28, gets a \$10,000 raise. He went 12-12 last season

with a 5.42 ERA, starting the season with the Cubs and finishing with the Colorado Rockies. He was 10-5 in his final 20 starts. **Olivares**, who pitched for Detroit and Seattle last season, has a 43-49 career record in the major leagues.

**Nixon signs:** The Minnesota Twins signed veteran outfielder **Otis Nixon** to a one-year contract. **Nixon**, 38, hit .266 with two home runs, 44 runs batted in and 59 stolen bases in 145 games with the Toronto Blue Jays and Los Angeles Dodgers last season. The Twins will be **Nixon's** sixth team.

## INSIDE THE CUBS

### Believe it or not: Blausler posed deal

By Paul Sullivan  
TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

**Jeff Blausler** was talking with some teams late last week when he casually called up his agent and asked a simple question: "What about the Cubs?"

A call was made, a deal soon was struck and out of the blue **Blausler** became a Cub. Instead of recruiting the free agent, the free agent recruited the team.

"Once we went to them, they became more interested," **Blausler** said.

**Blausler** played for a perennial loser in Atlanta before the '91 team went from last place to the World Series. No one is predicting the same scenario will happen with the '98 Cubs.

"It may not turn around when I'm there, but I believe I can help," **Blausler** said. "When [the Braves] won in '91, no one had any idea we could do it. I didn't think so myself. It all boils down to a mentality. I know some of the players on the Cubs and I know they have the mentality that they're better than this year's team."

**Blausler** said playing day games in Wrigley Field was a big part of why he wanted to play here.

"It's Americana," he said.

**Attitude adjustment:** On the last day of the '97 season, manager **Jim Riggleman** went off about selfish play by some Cubs. One day earlier, he chastised **Sammy Sosa** for ignoring a sign.

"It's done," **Riggleman** said. "The message to the players has been received. It had been something building and I felt I'd say it. I didn't want to pinpoint any one player. It infiltrates players when you're losing. . . . There were certain instances of selfish baseball and it was brought out to the players. You play for the name on the front of the uniform, not the name on the back."

**Sosa** said he doesn't believe the final weekend's incident will hurt his relationship with **Riggleman**. "I never had a problem with anyone," **Sosa** said. "I'm willing to change."

**New blood:** The Cubs acquired catcher **Sandy Martinez** from Toronto for a player to be named. **Martinez**, 25, has a .232 career average and 43 runs batted in in 141 games with the Blue Jays over the last three years. **Martinez** is considered above average defensively and could replace **Tyler Houston** as backup to **Scott Servais**.

## Harmon hangs on to career Newest Bears back keeps his balance despite rough spots

By Melissa Isaacson  
TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

He's a New York kid with a lot of years and a lot of mileage between the last time he found himself in the Midwest and now. And yet **Ronnie Harmon** still can't seem to escape it.

"It's unbelievable," the newest Bears running back acquisition said Thursday. "I go on vacation and there will always be someone saying, 'Hey, you're from Iowa, so are we.' I never believed it, but [**Hawkeyes** coach] **Hayden Fry** told us that a long time ago. He always said, 'Everywhere you go, there will always be Iowans.'"

And everywhere **Harmon** goes, there always seems to be the long shadow of the 1986 Rose Bowl.

Until Thursday, in the quiet of the Bears' dressing room, the 33-year-old **Harmon** had not spoken to the media in eight years, even as he distinguished himself as one of the best third-down backs in NFL history.

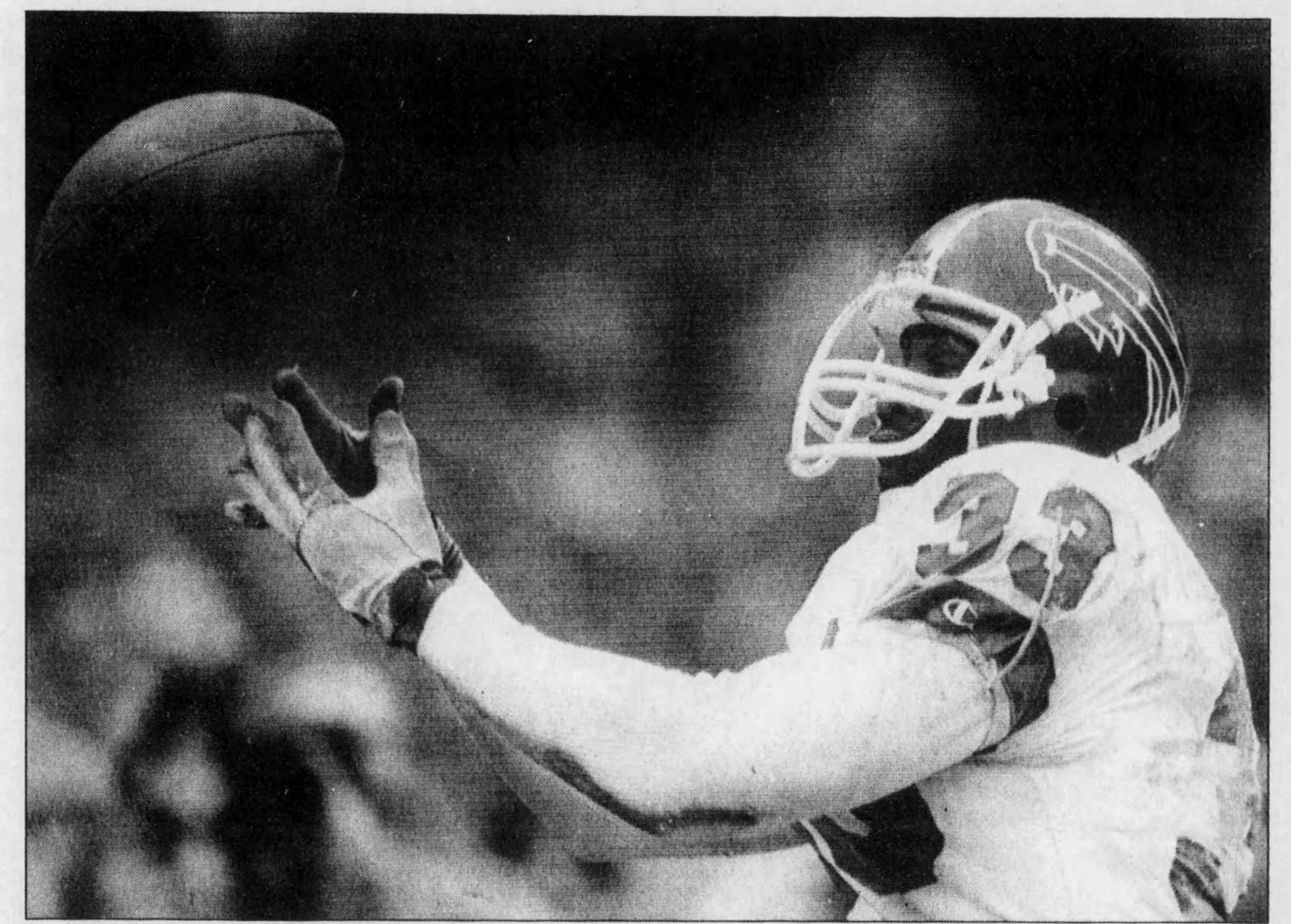
"If people want to know what type of person I am, I'll sit down and talk as long as they don't personally attack me," he said.

Not talking, however, has only seemed to magnify events of that New Year's Day 12 years ago when **Harmon**, a senior All-Big Ten selection playing in the biggest game of his career, had probably the worst game in his life.

"I had a dropped pass in the end zone and (four first-half) fumbles," he recalled, though a recap is hardly necessary for any **Hawkeyes** fan or Big Ten fan who remembers **Iowa's** 45-28 loss to UCLA. "And I guess no one ever saw me do that before."

Despite the fact that he also caught a career-high 11 passes for 102 yards in that game, the flubs were enough to start one of the bigger unfounded rumors in sports—that **Harmon** had thrown the Rose Bowl.

He already had investigators looking into charges that he had taken money from would-be agents while at **Iowa**, which he later acknowledged doing. They looked at the Rose Bowl as well and found no evidence to indicate any



This dropped pass by **Ronnie Harmon** during a Buffalo playoff game in 1990, along with several muffed plays in the 1986 Rose Bowl, harmed the newest Bear's reputation, but **Harmon** says his friends would never throw a game.

wrongdoing by **Harmon**. But years later, when he dropped a pass in the end zone while playing for Buffalo in a 1990 playoff game at Cleveland, his reputation was further sullied.

"I guess I should have defended myself," **Harmon** said. "Maybe by not talking for so long, that made it worse. I just honestly didn't think it was that big of a deal. People who knew me at **Iowa**, my teammates . . . [they] knew that wasn't me and that was isn't."

Twelve years later, he isn't bitter. "If you do that, it destroys you," **Harmon** said. "I just love to play football and that's the essential part. I never believed I was going to play this many years."

It has not been exactly the way he envisioned. Though his career took off while he was in San Diego from 1990-95, **Harmon** never achieved the status he enjoyed in college. He was the second-leading rusher in the Big Ten to Michigan State's **Lorenzo White** his senior year, set an **Iowa** career record with 146 receptions for 2,045 yards and was the Bills' first-round draft choice (16th overall) in 1986.

As a third-down back, he has started only 27 games in 12 years and never has

had more than 89 rushes from scrimmage in any one season. Still, he has carved out a career as a dependable pass catcher and began the season tied with **Keith Byars** for third place in career receptions by a running back with 564. Since 1992 he has caught 315 passes, more than any other NFL back.

Signed by the Bears this week after **Raymond Harris'** season-ending injury Sunday, **Harmon** will not play Sunday night in St. Louis.

"We had some hopes we might be able to put in a couple plays for him, but it's just going to be too much," coach **Dave Wannstedt** said. "So we're looking at maybe a little bit next week against Tampa, or next year."

Bears personnel chief **Mark Hatley** is fond of giving veteran players' careers a jump-start—the Chiefs did it with **Marcus Allen** when **Hatley** was there—and the Bears are in the market for a third-down back after this season's use of **Tyron Hughes** was largely unsuccessful.

**Harmon** "has good quickness and can catch the ball," **Wannstedt** said. "He still has a lot of good football left in him."

How much is unclear, even to **Harmon**. "That's like asking a reporter how

many more questions they've got," he said with a smile. "I can play until I feel I don't have the speed or quickness to do the job."

Grudgingly, he acknowledges that being a third-down back has probably prolonged his career.

"I've just tried to make the best of a situation I thought was bad when I first started doing it," he said. "But maybe it has."

Before being cut by Tennessee two weeks ago, **Harmon** caught 16 passes for 189 yards and ran the ball eight times for 30 yards. Waived largely because of a numbers crunch with **Rod Thomas** and **Eddie George** in the backfield, **Harmon** said it never occurred to him that his career might be over, mostly because the idea is unthinkable to him.

"It would be like working for the Ford corporation for 25 years of your life and then being told to go do something else," he said. "People don't understand why athletes come back from retirement, but it's what we do. I don't even think about [life after football] because there is nothing else that could give me the same satisfaction football gives me. There's nothing else I love like this."