

Vikes' QB Is No Kid

By Vito Stellino

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Ashburn, Va. — Don't tell Richie Petitbon that Sean Salisbury is a "young" quarterback.

Petitbon, the assistant coach who runs the Redskins' defense and has a reputation for confusing young quarterbacks with his complicated schemes, refuses to consider Salisbury a young quarterback. "This guy's 29 years old. He's been around. I don't think he can be put in the same category as a young quarterback," he said.

Whatever category he's in, Salisbury had thrown only 12 National Football League passes coming into this season, even though he spent four seasons with three different teams since signing as a free agent out of Southern California in 1986.

He spent the 1988-89 season with the Winnipeg Blue Bombers in Canada, passing for 5,615 yards and 37 touchdowns while winning a Grey Cup. All that did

was earn him a spot on the bench when he returned to the NFL in 1990 and signed with the Vikings after previous stints with the Seahawks and Colts. He didn't take a snap the last two years.

When Rich Gannon faltered this year, he finally got his chance. He re-

lieved Gannon at halftime of the Cleveland game on Nov. 22, started two games, but was benched again after losing the second one, a 28-17 verdict to the Eagles when he passed for only 122 yards.

Gannon threw for only 102 yards in a 20-17 loss to the 49ers and was given a seat back on the bench. Salisbury came on and passed for only 131 yards, but escaped with a 6-3 victory over the Steelers that won the division title for the Vikings.

That got Salisbury the start against the Packers in the season finale, and he exploded for 292 yards and two touchdowns in a 27-7 victory. The solid performance earned Salisbury the starting nod for the playoff game against the Redskins today.

It'll be only the fifth start of his NFL career and he savors the opportunity. After all, he was bypassed in the draft even though he thought he performed well as the scouting combine, where he roomed with Redskins quarterback Mark Rypien.

"I expected to be drafted fairly high and it was one of the more frustrating days of my football career," he said. "That's all behind me now. That's why I don't take anything for granted. I enjoy the journey. I didn't used to, but I do now every time I get to go out and play."

He knows it won't be easy to take snaps against Petitbon's defense. It doesn't help that his wide receiving corps is ailing (Cris Carter was just activated from the injured reserve list this week).

The Vikings are favored at home and the Redskins lost their last two regular-season games, but the one Redskin edge could be the chess match pitting Petitbon's defensive schemes against Salisbury.

"He's amazing at what he does," Salisbury said. "He has his people well-prepared and well-schemed up. I have a lot of respect for him and their defense. We still have to show up and I'll prepare myself very hard and have myself ready to go."

Redskins vs. Vikings

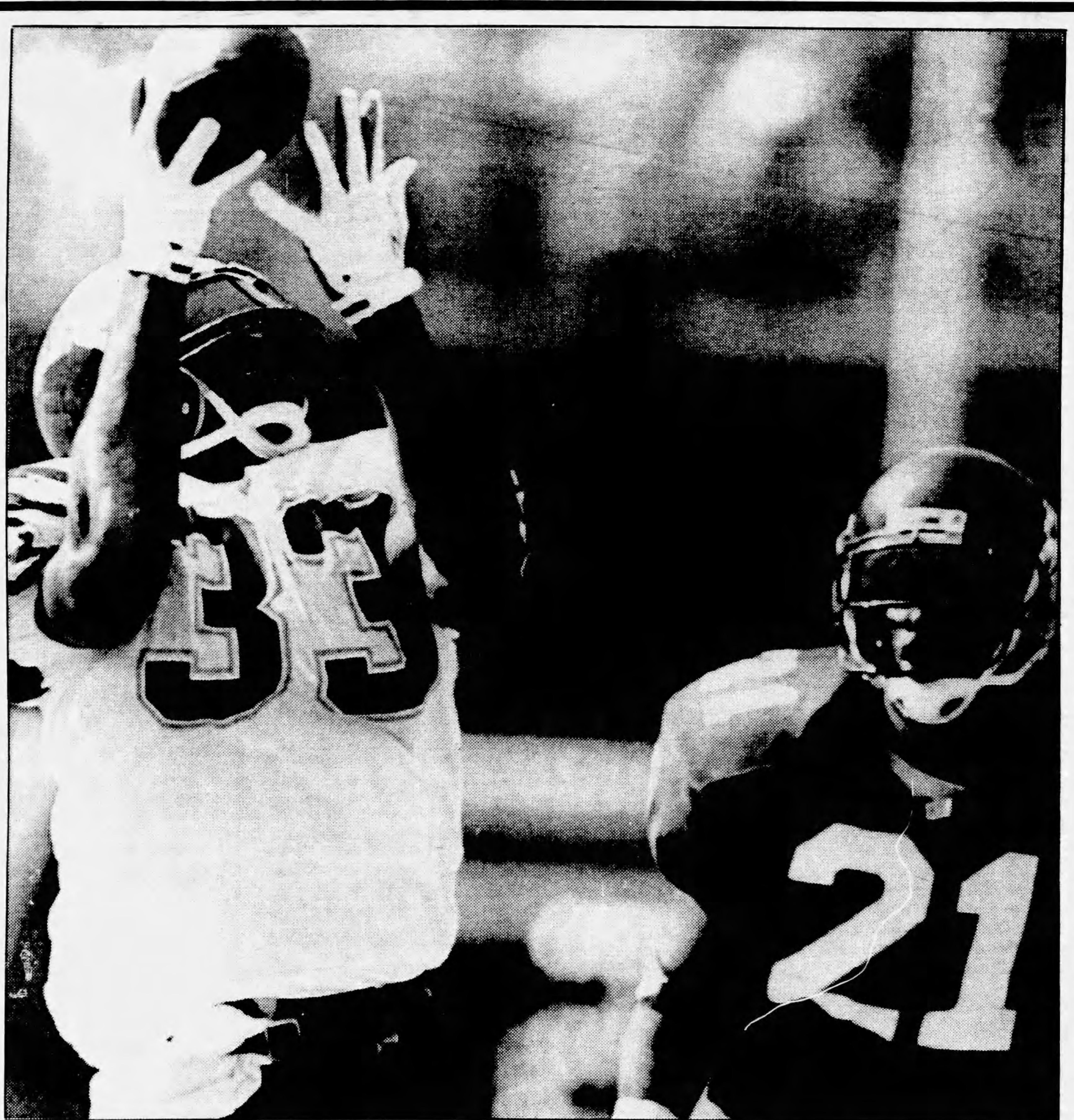
Time: 12:30 p.m. today TV: Ch. 7

Line: Vikings by 3½

Records: Redskins 9-7, Vikings 11-5

Last Meeting: In Week 8 at Minnesota, Chip Lohmiller accounted for all of Washington's scoring with five FGs, including 49-yarder with 69 seconds remaining, in the Redskins' 15-13 victory.

Last Game: Redskins backed into playoff berth despite 21-20 loss at home to Raiders; Vikings had 447 yards of offense in 27-7 win at home over Packers.



AP Photo

The way the Chargers' Ronnie Harmon catches the ball, you could forget he's a running back

Running in Harmony

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

San Diego — The Chargers' backfield is a crowded place, so Ronnie Harmon does most of his work elsewhere. Think Pro Bowl wide receiver Anthony Miller has the most catches here? Guess again.

Harmon led the Chargers with 79 catches this year, more than any other back in the NFL and seven more than Miller. Harmon used to be considered a third-down back, but he's kept many drives going on first and second down, as well.

Harmon has been one of the stars of San Diego's surprise season. The AFC West champions (11-5) will be host today to Kansas City (10-6) in their first playoff game since 1982.

Despite his team-high 1,149 yards from scrimmage, including 914 receiving, Harmon considers himself in no-man's land.

"I'm not a receiver. That's just part of my job," Harmon said. "I'm a running back. I'm just trying to use the time that you get out there, because you're not going to get a lot of time. You just got to do whatever it takes."

Harmon ran the ball only 55 times for 235 yards. When the Chargers need a power run, they use power runners Marion Butts and Rod Bernstine. Eric Bieniemy provides a compact changeup.

"It just so happens that we've got three other very good backs and the thing we like to do is to get the ball to Ronnie in space," running back Sylves-

ter Croom said. "The easiest way to get him the ball in space is to throw it to him, and then we feel like we've got the advantage, even with two people on him."

Harmon could fill a highlight film by himself. Harmon's teammates credit his work habits for his success. He's at the stadium early to lift weights, he takes karate lessons and works out with San Diego State's track team.

On the field, he changes direction, makes one-handed catches and hurdles defenders. Said back Derrick Walker: "When he gets the ball, sometimes you may find yourself looking instead of doing your own responsibility because he's just that good."

Harmon was the No. 1 draft pick of the Bills in 1986, but never excelled. After dropping a potential touchdown pass in a 1989 playoff loss to the Browns, he was left unprotected.

"He kind of had a reputation as maybe having a bad attitude, and that was the farthest thing from the case,"

said Chargers punter John Kidd, who also played at Buffalo. "You just can't ask for any more of the guy than what he gives."

Humphries Should Play. Coach Bobby Ross said yesterday that there was no additional swelling in quarterback Stan Humphries' dislocated left shoulder and that he'd start if his condition is unchanged today.

Chiefs vs. Chargers

Time: 4 p.m. today TV: Ch. 7

Line: Chargers by 3

Records: Chiefs 10-6, Chargers 11-6

Last Meeting: In Week 10 at Kansas City, Chiefs were held to 11 first downs but came away with 16-14 victory on Nick Lowery's 56-yard FG in final minute.

Last Game: Chiefs avoided elimination from playoffs with 42-20 home victory over Denver as defense scored three TDs; Chargers won seventh in a row and 11th in last 12 with 31-14 win at Seattle.