

Traumatic moment: Steve Young lies unconscious on the turf at Sun Devil Stadium in the first half Monday night after suffering the latest in a series of concussions.

# 'I am very concerned about myself'

## Latest hit intensifies discussion of football future for 49ers quarterback

By Richard Weiner  
USA TODAY

TEMPE, Ariz. — The next time Steve Young has said ever since contemplating retirement because of repeated concussions two years ago, things would be different. He was no longer in denial regarding the long-term effects on his brain. Nor would he again so handily reject the advice of family and friends.

In other words, Young, who turns 38 on Oct. 11, would seriously consider ending his Hall of Fame career.

Well, "the next time" happened before a gasping national television audience Monday night: Young, the top-rated passer in NFL history, was briefly knocked unconscious after being sandwiched by two blitzing Arizona Cardinals.

And, though Young tried to convince San Francisco 49ers coach Steve Mariucci to put him back in the game, he did sound different regarding his future following the 24-10 win.

"I am much more sober about it than ever before," Young said. "So, I will deal with it as realistically as possible. In the past, I was not as conscious of my future. And now I'm very, very conscious of my future."

Asked about his future, Young said, "I feel like ... I don't know. You know what I mean?"

### Rest recommended

Young spent Tuesday having tests and visiting with medical experts at Stanford University. The magnetic resonance imaging exam showed none of the "white spots" indicative of brain trauma, but neurosurgeon Gary Steinberg (no relation to the agent) is recommending that Young miss Sunday's game against Tennessee and possibly the next game, at St. Louis.

Because Young felt good enough to return, he did not believe this concussion was as serious as the time he was knocked out of the game by Tampa Bay's Warren Sapp during the 1997 season opener. That marked the third time in 12 games Young had suffered a concussion.

Young was cleared to resume playing, he was held from action in games following each of the three concussions. But his parents went on record as saying they urged him to retire, as did his agent, Leigh Steinberg.

"He doesn't have anything more to prove," former 49ers tight end-turned-broadcaster Brent Jones said Tuesday. "He's going to the Hall of Fame. He's won a Super Bowl. He's been at it for so long. The same thing that concerned me when I retired (last year) was that no-



Getting it from both sides: The Cardinals' J.J. McClleskey (44) and Aeneas Williams sandwich Steve Young. His head subsequently hit an offensive lineman's knee. "It was a flash ... it just went. 'Boom.'"

body knows the real lasting effects of concussions. And he's got too much going for him."

Young, in his 15th NFL season, has been sacked 10 times in 2½ games and been repeatedly hit while throwing.

"I am very concerned about myself," Young said.

### Rough season

The Cardinals sacked Young once and hit him four times Monday night. The devastating blow came at the end of the first half, when a tackle was beaten on one side and a back missed protection on the other. A jarring tackle by Arizona cornerback Aeneas Williams slammed Young's head backward and into the knee of 49ers tackle Dave Fiore.

"I got twisted around, and I got a shot to the back of the head," Young said. "For a second, that shocked me. As soon as I got my wits about me, I felt fine. I felt much better ..."

### Should Young retire?

In a USA TODAY on-line survey of 3,802 people, 37.2% said Steve Young should announce his immediate retirement from football and 42.7% said no, he should not retire.

"It was a flash, like a boxer, it just went. Boom."

Young lay motionless until regaining consciousness and refusing assistance to the sideline Young stayed in the locker room at the start of the third quarter for observation.

This followed a game against the New Orleans Saints during which Young was knocked down 21 times.

"That was the hardest I've ever seen him hit, even when he was with Tampa Bay and the USFL's L.A. Express," Leigh Steinberg said.

"He has played about as

gutsy and as tough as I've ever seen him." 49ers offensive coordinator Marty Mornhinweg said. "But he's grinding it out, holding on until we start clicking. We're getting closer. That's why he's been so positive."

### Holes to fill

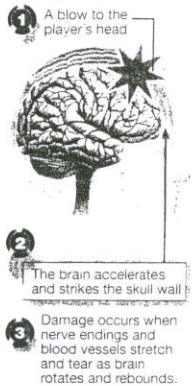
The possible career-threatening injury to Pro Bowl tailback Garrison Hearst has been the biggest reason for the 49ers' lack of protection. While Hearst's replacements, Charlie Garner and Lawrence Phillips, have improved each game, Young has had no pure running threat behind him to remove pressure. Furthermore, the new backs consistently have missed protection assignments.

The 49ers' offensive line also has struggled after Pro Bowl guard Kevin Gogan was traded to Miami and tackle Kirk Scraftford retired. Left tackle Fiore and center Chris Dalmann started the season within days of

### Blow to brain

San Francisco 49ers quarterback Steve Young suffered a concussion in Monday night's victory against Arizona. It was at least the fourth concussion he has suffered since 1996.

#### How a concussion occurs:



Source: USA TODAY Health  
By Susan Parker, USA TODAY

having arthroscopic knee surgeries. Against the Cardinals, the 49ers flip-flopped Derrick Deese and Jeremy Newberry, moving the veteran Deese from right guard to right tackle in order to protect the left-handed Young's blind side.

The 49ers will be bolstered this week by the return from injury of tough-blocking tight end Greg Clark. However, the Titans are coached by Buddy Ryan disciple Jeff Fisher, who likes to stack the line on virtually every play.

### New approach

The changes in the 49ers' attack have been especially glaring since the team led the NFL last season in total offense and rushing. Much has been made of Young's age as well.

The most noticeable change, however, is that Young has been in love for about a year now; there has been talk of him finally being removed from the most-eligible-bachelor list. Young also says he is less cavalier about his future.

"Football is a great game for a lot of fun," he says. "It's a tremendous challenge. It takes all your wits. Especially this year, you can tell, nothing is real smooth. You can tell there's a real challenge. Plus, like I said last week, I started preparing for my retirement my rookie year. So, when I retire, it's going to be wonderful. So, I know, I don't want any ill effects. So I'm going to the 10th degree. I hope, to make sure I'm on top of that."