

Young receives break

49ers conservative, rest injured QB

By Kent Somers
The Arizona Republic

As Steve Young lay motionless on the grass at Sun Devil Stadium, one thought came to San Francisco 49ers Coach Steve Mariucci.

"I was just saying, 'Get up, get up, get up,'" Mariucci said.

Minutes later, in the locker room at halftime, Mariucci was trying to convince his 37-year-old quarterback that taking the rest of the night off was a good idea. And Young was pleading his case to play the second half.

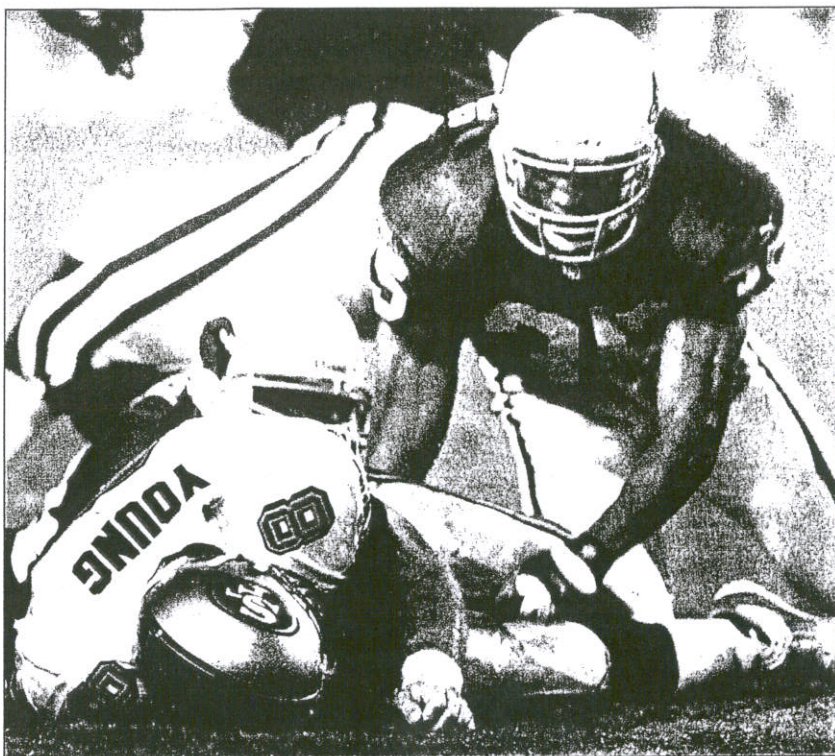
"I didn't swing," Young said when asked how hard he argued, "but I about swung. We were playing well. We weren't playing perfect, but we were playing well."

Backup Jeff Garcia, signed in the off-season after spending five years in the Canadian Football League, relieved Young and played the rest of the game. He wasn't spectacular but did complete 5 of 6 passes for 30 yards and helped the 49ers (2-1) to a 24-10 victory over the Cardinals on Monday night.

The 49ers were trying to add to a 17-0 lead late in the first half when Young dropped back to pass. The Cardinals blitzed their cornerbacks, and Aeneas Williams drilled Young in the chest as he threw an incomplete pass. Young fell backwards and while going down, he hit his head on a teammate's leg.

"I got a flash, a shot to the back of my head," he said. "It was like a shock. Probably for a second, I wasn't sure what happened."

He didn't move for several seconds, and his teammates took one look at him and frantically yelled for the 49ers medical team. Young left the field upright and



Dave Cruz/The Arizona Republic

Steve Young (8) lies on the field after taking a hit from Cardinals cornerback Aeneas Williams (35). Young had to leave because of a slight concussion.

was diagnosed with a concussion.

After recovering from the initial shock, Young's head cleared and he asked Mariucci to re-enter the game. But Mariucci said he learned from a similar incident two years ago, when Young suffered a concussion in the season opener against Tampa Bay and returned to play in that game.

Young missed the following week's game but hasn't had problems since.

"I know it's not as severe as it was against Tampa," Mariucci said. "I was on the conservative side (Monday night) and made the decision to take him out."

Mariucci said Young's long-term future flashed before his eyes. "Of course, the same with your eyes and everybody else's," he said.

Young's condition will be evaluated today, and he hopes to play next week against Tennessee.

Young's eyes and mind seemed clear when he talked to reporters after the game. But after suffering several concussions in his career, he no longer jokes about the injuries because he knows the possible consequences are serious.

"I am much more sober about it than ever before," he said. "and I'll deal with it as realistically as I possibly can. In the past, I was not as conscious of my future. And now I'm very, very conscious about my future."

But given all that, Young still would have played in the second half had Mariucci approved. Young didn't want to leave because the 49ers offense was playing the best it has this season. Young completed 13 of 23 passes for 92 yards and a touchdown, and the 49ers rushed for 101 yards on 19 carries in the first half.

The 49ers aren't exactly stocked

with proven quarterbacks. They traded Ty Detmer to Cleveland in the off-season and sent Jim Druckenmiller to Miami during training camp. That left Garcia and Steve Stenstrom, hardly an ideal situation.

"We took a step tonight because we beat a playoff team on the road," Mariucci said. "We haven't been as good on the road as we have been at home. You know how hard it is to win with a backup quarterback who hasn't practiced much, I like the way Jeff handled the situation. He didn't make any mistakes, and he was very cool under pressure."

Tackle Derrick Deese said Garcia proved what the 49ers have known all along.

"Now, he's gone out on national television and showed everyone that if something happens to Steve, we're still coming," Deese said.