

HIT PARADE FINALLY ENDS FOR 49ERS' STEVE YOUNG;
VICIOUS SACKS, CONCUSSIONS MADE QB'S CHOICE AN EASY ONE

June 18, 2000

BYLINE: Brian Allee-Walsh Staff writer

BODY:

New Orleanian Aeneas Williams does not need to apologize for doing his job.

The blow he delivered to San Francisco 49ers quarterback Steve Young the night of Sept. 27, 1999, at Sun Devil Stadium in Tempe, Ariz., was clean in every sense of the word. Fact is, Young never saw Williams coming.

Unfortunately for Young, the 49ers and NFL fans everywhere, that blow ultimately ended the quarterback's brilliant 15-year career.

Young, 38, announced his retirement Monday during an emotional 90-minute farewell inside the 49ers' locker room before an overflow crowd of family, friends, teammates, coaches and media.

Young's last NFL snap came with 30 seconds remaining in the first half of their game against the Arizona Cardinals on Monday Night Football. The 49ers led 17-0 and were driving for more points when Williams buried Young on a blitz.

Young was hit simultaneously from the other direction by Cardinals cornerback J.J. McCleskey, a former Saint who resides in New Orleans. As Young fell to the ground, his head hit 49ers tackle Dave Fiore's knee, and the quarterback collapsed face down on the grass.

Replays showed 49ers running back Lawrence Phillips had missed a block, allowing Williams a clear path at Young. The force of Williams' hit caused Young's head to snap backward in a whiplash-like motion. It was Young's fourth concussion in three years, his second in as many weeks.

Afterward, Young did not display the symptoms of his previous concussions. No dizziness, no nausea, no blackouts. He was, however, loopy and woozy and more conscious of his vulnerability than ever before.

"I didn't know how hard I had hit him," said Williams, a perennial Pro Bowl cornerback for the Cardinals, who starred at Fortier High School and later at Southern University. "The ironic thing is I was miked for NFL Films, and they caught everything, the point of impact, everything."

"It was really weird. I remember it being really quiet and seeing him laid out on the field. Then, I remember seeing (49ers backup Jeff) Garcia warming up on the sideline."

Williams has not spoken with Young since that fateful night, although Young has been in Williams' prayers. Williams did speak with Young's wife, Barbara, several months ago at a wedding in Phoenix. She

assured Williams that her husband is "perfectly fine."

The Youngs are expecting their first child in mid-December.

"The most important thing is Steve is leaving the game after having an excellent career and is able to move on to another challenging chapter of his life," said Williams, a licensed minister who spoke to a men's conference Friday night in New Orleans.

"I understand that when you play the game within the rules, there are a number of things that can happen out on the field. I am very concerned whenever a player gets injured. But the play that happened with me was the culmination of a series of events."

Forty-Niners' officials actually believe Young had absorbed more punishment a week earlier against the Saints at 3Com Park. During the waning minutes of that game, Saints safety Chris Hewitt was called for roughing the passer after leveling Young on a blitz. The NFL fined Hewitt \$7,500 a few days later.