

Lomax vows to return for '90

By Scott Bordow
Tribune writer

PHOENIX — Neil Lomax's football career is over — for now and possibly forever.

The Phoenix Cardinals ended a month's worth of speculation Tuesday by placing Lomax, who has degenerative arthritis in his left hip, on the injured reserve list, making him ineligible to play or practice this season.

"In some point in time, we knew there would be a bridge to cross," Lomax said in an afternoon press conference. "I guess this is the bridge I have to cross. I can't perform to the abilities I'm used to performing at. That saddens me."

The decision came after a Tuesday morning meeting between Lomax, Cardinals general manager Larry Wilson and team physician Dr. Russell Chick.

"I said he couldn't play," Chick recalled, explaining that Lomax's lack of mobility made it impossible for him to function on a football field.

That left Lomax with two options: retire

or be put on IR. When Wilson gave him the opportunity to stay with the club and then try again next season, Lomax jumped at it.

"I do not want to leave the Phoenix Cardinals right now," Lomax said. "It's the hope. I would never quench the hope I have to play football again."

That hope, however, may be a dim one. Chick said there's less than a 50-50 chance Lomax will ever play again. Lomax, a Pro Bowl quarterback in 1984 and 1987, has no cartilage left in his hip. When asked if he knew of anybody who regained their full range of motion after losing their cartilage, Chick said, "Not that I'm aware of."

"I'm not quite optimistic purely from a physician's standpoint," Chick added. "Neil has a severely arthritic hip. It's a progressive situation that's not going to reverse itself."

Chick said that if Lomax ever plays again, he's risking the quality of a hip replacement, which Chick says he eventually must have, or a normal life.

"If he sustains a blow to the hip, it could cause a fracture around the joint," Chick

said. "That could damage his ability to walk on a normal basis."

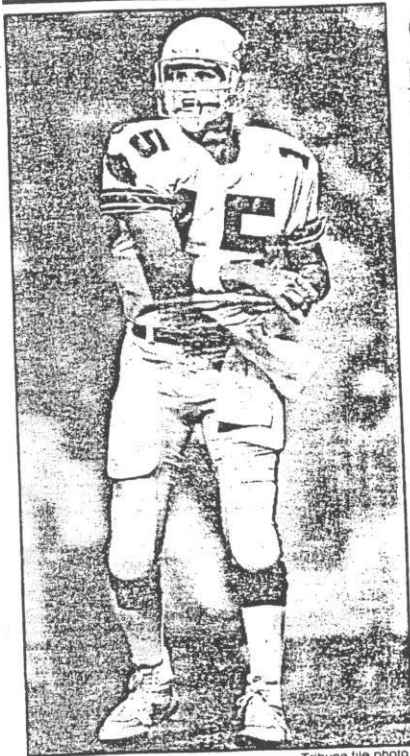
Chick said he would not clear Lomax to play football again unless "I could see that Neil's mobility and movement have improved. Whether he can regain that mobility, I don't know. I don't have a crystal ball."

Chick's pessimistic outlook failed to bother Lomax, who believes the year off will give him enough time to rehabilitate the hip, possibly to the point of being able to play in 1990. He said he will work out every day with Mack Newton, the taekwondo expert he began training with early this summer.

"That's what I'm excited about," Lomax said. "I have more time to work on my rehabilitation and get the hip stronger. The last two weeks I've felt better than I have ever felt before."

"It's not just a gut feeling. It's in my heart. I want to play. The game is still fun for me. That's why I go rehabilitate this

Please see **Cards / C3**



Tribune file photo

There's less than a 50-50 chance Neil Lomax will ever play again.

Cards

From page C1

thing.

"It would be easy for somebody in my position to say, 'Hey, my career is done.' Everybody says I can't play anymore. But I usually do what my heart tells me."

Although Lomax has long figured this day would come, he knows this season will be difficult emotionally.

"It's going to be hard for me to swallow for a long time," he said. "Right now I have a challenge in front of me, to see how I handle this."

Head coach Gene Stallings said Lomax, who will receive his \$1.3 million salary this year, will stay with the team to help tutor second-year quarterback Tom Tupa and rookie Timm Rosenbach.

"Maybe this is the opportunity to pass along something I've learned," Lomax said.

Stallings said that on Sundays, Lomax will either be on the sidelines or in the pressbox helping offensive coordinator Jim Shofner.

Lomax missed two games last season because of the arthritis. He was on anti-inflammatory medicine the entire year and received a cortisone shot at one point to speed the healing process.

"I know the guy performed in great pain," Shofner said. "You have to admire him for what he's tried to do."

If Lomax, 30, is forced to retire, he'll do it as the NFL's eighth all-time leader in passing efficiency with a 82.7 rating. He ranks second to Jim Hart in Cardinals career passing yardage (22,771), attempts (3,153) and completions (1,818). He's thrown for 136 touchdowns, with 90 interceptions. Nineteen times he's thrown for more than 300 yards, and his 4,614 passing yards in 1984 were fifth-highest in league history.

"We're losing a Pro Bowl quarterback," said fullback Ron Wolfley. "It's not easy."