

Lomax returns to 'normal life'

Cards QB walks away while he still can walk

By Scott Bordow
Tribune writer

Neil Lomax tried to put a positive spin on the press conference.

"I've got two beautiful children, a third on its way, a beautiful wife," he said. "What else can I ask for?"

He answered his own question.
"Health, I guess."

Lomax, the Phoenix Cardinals' two-time Pro Bowl quarterback, ended a season-long personal struggle Tuesday by announcing his retirement because of degenerative arthritis in his left hip.

"I needed to make a decision with my life," said Lomax, 30. "I wanted a chance to step away from the game and not just try to hang on."

"I can go ahead and retire and get on with my life, and the Cardinals can get on with the quarterbacks they have now and not worry about the Neil Lomax situation. I didn't want to be a burden."

Leigh Steinberg, Lomax's agent, said the Cardinals gave the nine-year veteran \$2.65 million to settle the final two years of his guaranteed contract, which called for Lomax to earn \$1.4 million this year and \$1.5 million in 1990. The club also is obligated to pay for Lomax's hip replacement surgery and any future care costs, Steinberg added.

But the money, Lomax insisted, didn't matter.
"Money can't buy health," he said.

Lomax said his immediate plans are to travel across the country and find an orthopedic specialist

Lomax Log

Year-by-year stats for Cards quarterback Neil Lomax, who announced his retirement Tuesday:

Year	Att.	Com.	Pct.	Yds.	TD	Int.	Rtg.
1981	236	119	50.4	1575	4	10	60.1
1982	205	109	53.2	1367	5	6	70.3
1983	354	209	59.0	2636	24	11	92.0
1984	560	345	61.6	4614	28	16	92.5
1985	471	286	56.5	3214	18	12	79.9
1986	421	240	57.0	2583	13	12	73.4
1987	463	275	59.4	3387	24	12	88.5
1988	443	255	57.6	3395	20	11	86.7

Total 3153 1818 57.7 22,771 136 90 82.7

Cardinals records held by Lomax:

Season Passing Yards: 4,614 (1984)
Single-Game Passing Yards: 468, vs. Washington (Dec. 16, 1984)
Season Pass Attempts: 560 (1984)
Single-Game Pass Attempts: 61, vs. San Diego (Sept. 20, 1987)
Season Pass Completions: 345 (1984)
Single-Game Pass Completions: 37, vs. Washington (Dec. 16, 1984)
Season Touchdown Passes: 28 (1984)

to perform a hip replacement, possibly within a month.

"He's been in incredible pain," Steinberg said.
"They say the pain goes away" with the surgery, "and you can lead a normal life," Lomax said. "I hope so. Maybe I can beat Nicholas (his 3-year-old son) in the 40-yard dash finally."

Cardinals general manager Larry Wilson said he would like Lomax to remain with the organization in some form, possibly as an assistant coach or public relations spokesman.

"I don't know what I want to do yet," Lomax said. "I'm entertaining the thought of staying with the team. I know I want to stay involved in the

community affairs of the organization. We'll see what happens."

Steinberg said Lomax already has been approached by one network — presumably CBS — and a local station about possible broadcasting jobs.

Lomax's loss was lamented by Cardinals owner Bill Bidwill and Wilson, both of whom attended the press conference along with several players.

"Neil is one of the great players in the history of this franchise," Bidwill said. "It's regrettable his career has been cut short by his hip condition."

Lomax's announcement did not surprise his teammates or coaches, who had been expecting the news since last July.

"I pretty much figured it was going to happen," said offensive coordinator Jim Shofner, who's in Mobile, Ala., for the Senior Bowl. "It (the hip) never got any better. I was pretty much resigned to it."

"I think everybody anticipated Neil was going to call it quits," added linebacker Garth Jax.

Lomax was on injured reserve all last season but held out hope for, as he called it, a miracle. He worked out every day with physical therapist Mack Newton, attended virtually all the team's meetings and workouts and joined the club on the road, helping tutor young quarterbacks Timm Rosenbach and Tom Tupa from his pressbox perch.

A conversation with Wilson prior to the Cardinals' season finale against the Philadelphia Eagles helped convince Lomax it was time to quit. Also, Newton warned him that another shot to the hip could ruin his chance for a successful hip implant.

"Neil desperately wanted to continue his football career," Wilson said. "He was very, very committed to being a Phoenix Cardinal. But it became

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clear over the course of the summer and then over the course of the regular season that could not happen."

Lomax said he had trouble accepting the realization his career was over.

"I really did want to play," he said. "I wanted to earn my keep, so to speak. But I just can't play anymore. I thought a miracle would happen. It didn't."

"The condition has gotten worse over the years. It's like cancer eating away at you."

"I think when Larry and I talked about it before the end of the season, I knew something had to be done. I feel a lot better letting people know I'm not going to play."

Lomax leaves the Cardinals as the franchise's second all-time leading passer, with 22,771 yards. A second-round pick in 1981 out of Portland State, he completed 1,818 of 3,153 passes for 136 touchdowns, with 90 interceptions. He holds four of the club's top five single-game passing totals, and his 4,614 passing yards in 1984 rank fifth in NFL history.

He passed for more than 300 yards 17 times and twice eclipsed the 400-yard barrier. Lomax earned Pro Bowl honors in 1984 and 1987, and his 82.7 career passing efficiency rating ranks seventh in league history.

"I don't think anybody quite knew how good Neil was," Shofner said. "He was an exceptional quarterback. You put him on (Joe) Montana's team (the San Francisco 49ers), and they're the same. Neil is in the top echelon of quarterbacks."

Lomax said, "I felt last year I was at the peak of my game."

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