

'Show time' signals Lomax's return

Cards' QB throws in practice, says knee 'feels OK, I feel optimistic'

By Scott Bordow
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PHOENIX — It's unofficial, but it appears Phoenix Cardinals quarterback Neil Lomax will start Sunday against the New York Giants.

Lomax, who has missed the past two games with a torn ligament in his left knee, participated in drills Wednesday for the first time since his injury and took most of the snaps with the first-team offense. Lomax threw the ball well and his knee did not buckle.

"It feels OK," Lomax said afterward. "I feel optimistic."

Coach Gene Stallings said there's a "50-50 chance" Lomax will play Sunday.

"It's a question of whether he can take a hit and move around," said Stallings, who said he wouldn't comment further until Sunday.

"No one's hitting it yet," agreed Lomax. "It hasn't really been tested in game conditions."

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Lomax said Stallings told him a final decision will be made on Saturday. He said team doctor Russell Chick will examine him after Friday morning's practice.

Backup quarterback Cliff Stoudt thinks he'll return to his customary spot on the bench Sunday.

"I got my job back," said Stoudt, who was 43 of 72 for 477 yards and four touchdowns plus six interceptions in Lomax's absence. "I knew it was going to happen. I'm not going to go home and tear my house up or anything."

The Giants (8-5) also expect Lomax to be behind center for a game that could mathematically eliminate Phoenix (7-6)

from the NFC East title.

"It's show time," said Giants coach Bill Parcells. "We'll see Lomax."

Lomax bristled when told of Parcells' comment.

"I don't care what he says," snapped Lomax.

Lomax was wearing a new fiberglass brace Wednesday that was fitted for him last week. He said the heavy brace made him feel conscious of the injury during practice.

"It was just awkward to take a few drops," he said. "I knew it was there. I'll go a couple of days and it'll feel better and I won't think about it as much."

Lomax said the new brace helps his mobility, but "I was never one to move around a lot anyway."

If Lomax does start, the Cardinals will make some adjustments to further protect the knee, said Stallings, who declined to be more specific. One possibility is limiting

the number of slow-developing pass patterns.

Lomax, who appears to be headed to his second straight Pro Bowl, suffered the injury when Giants linebacker Carl Banks rolled onto his knee during the fourth quarter of Phoenix's 24-17 victory on Nov. 13.

The Giants are having their own quarterback mystery. Starter Phil Simms missed last Sunday's game against New Orleans with a deep shoulder bruise — he was hurt the week before against Philadelphia — and did not practice Wednesday. He spent the afternoon on the sideline lobbing balls to teammates.

Parcells said Simms cannot throw with much velocity, but that "he's a lot better than he was a week ago. If it's at all possible, he'll play." If Simms can't start, fifth-year pro Jeff Hostetler will get the call.

Stallings doesn't believe for a second that Simms will miss the game.

"It's show time, isn't it?" he said, smiling.



MICHAEL SCULLY/Tribune

Neil Lomax most likely will start at quarterback when the Cardinals play the Giants on Sunday.

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