

Too many quarterbacks? Not really

Robert Markus

Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file); May 5, 1977;

ProQuest Historical Newspapers Chicago Tribune (1849 - 1987)

pg. C3



Tribune Photo by Ernie Cox Jr.

Ted Albrecht, the Bears' first choice in the National Football League draft, meets the team's new song-and-dance group at a press conference Wednesday. The girls, 28 in all, will perform at the Bears' home games this season. Albrecht is an offensive tackle from California.

Too many quarterbacks? Not really

HAVING TOO MANY quarterbacks is like drinking too many martinis. It can make you feel good, but it also can give you a headache.

It's a problem that Bear coaches haven't had to wrestle with seriously lately. Finding one quarterback has proved the major headache.

Now they have five. Obviously, that's too many. So the question is: Can too many quarterbacks spoil the Bears?

Not really.

Sure, you've read plenty of horror stories about how teams have been torn apart with bickering over who should start at quarterback.

BUT IT doesn't happen with good teams. Case in point: the Los Angeles Rams. By the time last season ended at least two of their three quarterbacks were unhappy about not starting. Presumably, each had the support of several teammates.

Yet, were it not for a coaching error — when Chuck Knox elected to go for a field goal early in the NFC championship game instead of a touchdown — the Rams could have been in the Super Bowl.

Tom Landry of Dallas once had so much trouble deciding whether to start Craig Morton or Roger Staubach that he used both on alternating plays in a game against the Bears.



Robert Markus

Dallas lost that game, but won the Super Bowl that year. So, if a team has everything else, it doesn't hurt to have more than one good quarterback.

Some people even think it helps. The late Joe Stydahar used to believe in the "hot hand" theory. When he coached the Los Angeles Rams he used the quarterback who was performing best. The quarterbacks hated it, but the Rams were winners.

JIM FINKS and Jack Pardee prefer one strong leader, a la Bart Starr with the Packers and Johnny Unitas with the Colts.

So Pardee will be faced with two decisions when the Bears go to training camp in July. First, who will be the starting quarterback — Bob Avellini or Mike Phipps? Second, which one of the remaining three — Virg Carter, Pat Sul-

place on the roster?

Pardee appears to be committed to giving Avellini first shot at the job, and I think that's wise. Avellini had a disappointing season but — and this is important — he did not lose the confidence of his teammates.

He is going to be a good quarterback someday, but he no longer has the luxury of maturing slowly. The Bears, by acquiring Phipps, have dedicated themselves to winning this year. They are not going to wait for their quarterback to grow up.

AVELLINI WILL have to produce in a hurry, and there's nothing unfair about that. If he doesn't do it, Phipps is ready to take over. Phipps had some good years and some bad years at Cleveland, but has proved he can win with a good team.

It's likely that Avellini and Phipps will have their backers among the fans and press — if not among their own teammates. But the Bears have to be better for having acquired the former Brown.

Drafting Evans, who led Southern Cal to its Rose Bowl victory over Michigan, was a bit surprising. Even more surprising is the fact that Pardee indicates Evans will be considered only as a quarterback.

That means Sullivan might as well pack his bags, and that Carter, an experienced backup, could be out of a job, too. Evans is a fine all-round athlete, who could play several positions. But like most who have experienced the glamor at quarterback, he wants to remain there.

I THINK THAT, like Avellini, Evans eventually will make a good pro. He has a great arm and is a competitor. But he's inexperienced, and I seriously question whether, should Avellini and Phipps both get hurt or fail to perform, the Bears would entrust the quarterback job to Evans this year.

Evans sat on the Southern Cal bench behind Pat Haden his sophomore year and was woeful as a junior. Then USC brought Paul Hackett down from California to install a passing offense, and Vince grew up in a hurry. He was MVP in the Rose Bowl.

If I were the Bears, I'd keep Avellini, Phipps, and Carter as my quarterbacks and try to convince Evans to play another position. If I were Evans, I wouldn't listen.

No matter how Pardee resolves his problems, I'm glad he has them. After all, any serious martini drinker knows he's going to wake up with a headache. He just has to figure it's worth it.