

SIGNET-451-E7724-\$2.25



1977

FIRST EDITION

**THE COMPLETE HANDBOOK OF
COLLEGE
FOOTBALL.**



INSIDE 300 COLLEGE TEAMS
JOE ROTH'S PROFILE IN COURAGE
WILL MICHIGAN'S LEACH WIN THE HEISMAN?
ARA PARSEGHIAN: FROM BENCH TO BOOTH
STRANGEST COLLEGE FOOTBALL STORY OF ALL

College, Schoolboy All-Americans—TV Games
Top 20 Picks—NCAA Schedules, Stats

BONUS: 100 BEST HIGH SCHOOL BACKS

EDITED BY ZANDER HOLLANDER

Joe Roth's Profile in Courage

By MERV HARRIS
San Francisco Examiner



It happened at 3:55 p.m. on February 19 this year in a college kid's modest apartment in Berkeley, not far from the gray old stadium where the University of California plays its football games. A young man . . . a boy, really, named Joe Roth lay on plumped-up pillows in

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his bed. With him were members of his family, friends, former coaches and teammates. The boy, wasted to just 100 pounds from what had been a prime athlete's physique, looked up with the best smile he could muster and asked Bonnie Miller, the Cal football secretary, if she wanted to dance. "Then," she recalled later, "he coughed up some of the stuff in his lungs, took one more breath and that was it. We laid him down. And somehow he looked so peaceful."

At 21, Joe Roth had reached the threshold of a storybook career. He left Granite Hills High School in El Cajun, Cal., in 1973 as an honor student, president of the student body and three-year letterman in football, basketball and baseball. But the major colleges considered him too frail and only the University of California at Riverside offered him a scholarship to play football.

He declined and instead enrolled at Grossmont Junior College in his home town. After two record-smashing seasons as Grossmont's quarterback, he chose the University of California (Berkeley) over all the schools vigorously seeking his talents. And there he became a bonafide All-American candidate and prime pro prospect.

It is such a hellishly cliché story, so too nicely a symmetrical tale with beginning, middle and ending that in the retelling one screams out for some meaning or lesson and finds no solace except the simplicity of this one boy's life.

Joe Roth never considered himself an outstanding athlete. He stood at 6-1, 130 pounds after high school and was surprised Grossmont was willing to take him on as its quarterback. But he loved football. It was his way of expressing himself. He listened to his coaches' suggestions to put on more weight and was given command of Grossmont's pass-oriented offense. His responsiveness paid off. In 1973, he led the Griffins to a 7-2 record and in 1974 carried them to the California Community College championship with a 10-0-2 record.

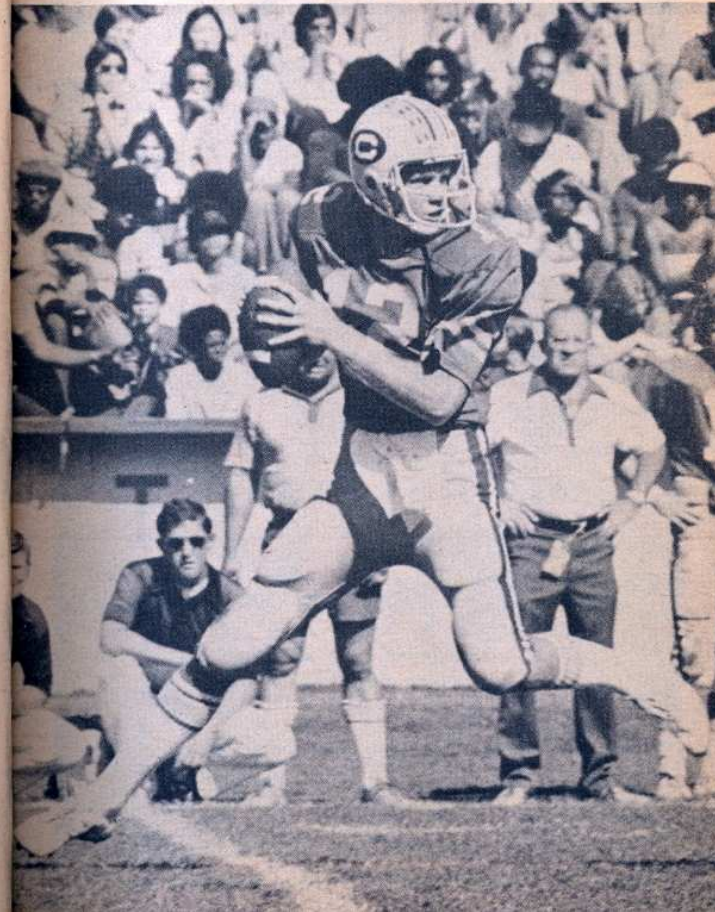
The colleges that had ignored Roth two years earlier watched his every move during his last year at Grossmont. What they saw was a 6-3, 180-pounder setting season marks of 184 completions and 2,129 yards passing. His 13 completions of 23 attempts for 288 yards and three touchdowns against Orange Coast in the championship game were just a hint of his emerging potential as a quarterback.

"As a player here he was a quiet leader who came through with some clutch plays that helped make us a championship team," said Grossmont coach Dave Jordan. "He was unbelievable under fire and pressure. He kept his cool and helped me keep mine, too. He was an unbelievable person."

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Few of the scouts who marveled at Roth's passing knew that he had undergone major surgery in May of his freshman year to remove a malignant growth near his left ear. The black mole cancer, or melanoma, a rare form of cancer, required that five ounces of tissue be cut out. There had been concern that the surgery might have left him with his head crooked to one side. But he came out

The scouts rated Roth as a top pro prospect.





In practice, or in a game, Joe was a dedicated athlete.

of it without any such impairment. And he graduated from Grossmont with academic honors, a place on the Junior College All-American team and designation as the school's best athlete.

Roth would later tell the San Francisco Examiner's Wells Twombly how upset he had been when the cancer was detected. "You can imagine," he said. "Being an athlete was what I wanted to be. When that was over I wanted to be a coach."

"I feel the scar," Roth said in the same interview. "I never would have known it was there if it hadn't been a problem shaving. It would bleed and not stop when I nicked it. My helmet at Grossmont rubbed against it and bothered it."

The blond-haired, blue-eyed Roth had grown to 6-4, 205 pounds by the time he reached Berkeley. Under coach Mike White's tutelage, he quarterbacked the most potent offense in college football in 1975. With All-American halfback Chuck Muncie operating in his backfield, Roth led Cal to its first share of the Pac-8 title since 1959 with a 6-1 record, with only a loss to UCLA preventing it from going to the Rose Bowl.

The big quarterback seemed the ideal future pro, and he displayed the full range of passing talents—long, short, soft, hard, primary receiver deep or safety valve broken play improvisation short. His 126 completions of 236 attempts for 1,880 yards and 14 touchdowns made Cal fans forget the great Steve Bartowski, whom he succeeded. Pro scouting reports called him the "most advanced signal-caller of the decade . . . there is not a pass he cannot throw, he is accurate, has a quick release, great touch and the ability to find secondary receivers."

A flawless Roth performance in which he completed 24 of 37 passes for 380 yards, an all-time Cal record, and four touchdowns in a 27-24 victory against the fifth-ranked defensive team, the University of Washington, gave support to the pros' observations.

The future couldn't have looked brighter for Roth before the start of the 1976 season. He was a consensus All-American, a likely No. 1 pick in the pro draft, the cover-boy on the NCAA's Official Collegiate Football Guide, and a candidate for the Heisman Trophy. Relaxed and optimistic, he cheerfully celebrated his 21st birthday by downing shots of tequila with his friends at the Tar and Feathers Saloon in Walnut Creek.

"I'm just happy to be alive and happy to be here," he said before the start of his last season. "Pressure doesn't bother me as much as you might think. It's nice that they're talking about the Heisman Trophy. I like that. But I know we can only do so much. I'm the quarterback and I can do only as well as the team does and the team can only do as well as I do."

With Roth expected to lead the way, Cal was rated as one of the

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favorites for the 1976 Pac-8 crown and a trip to the Rose Bowl. As it turned out, the Golden Bears did not have a glorious season. Roth opened well against host Georgia, throwing touchdown passes of 69 and 88 yards for a 21-12 lead. Then Cal's flaws began to manifest themselves and Georgia wound up a 36-24 victor. Roth managed 21 completions in 36 attempts for 379 yards, but Cal could mount little on the ground and Georgia defended accordingly. This set the pattern for the season.

Against mighty Oklahoma the following Saturday, Roth put the ball in the air 46 times, completing 27 for 284 yards and a touchdown. But the Sooners won easily, 28-17.

"Roth set a Cal record for completions in a game," the Examiner's Frank Cooney wrote later, "but didn't see most of them because he was on his back after every play. Cal lost the game, but Oklahoma's defensive backs praised Roth as the best quarterback they had ever faced."

On the way home from Oklahoma, Roth was told by Dr. Jerome Patmont, the team physician, that new X-rays had showed a spot on his lung and that further tests would be necessary. Near the end of November, Roth discovered three small lumps on his chest while showering and went immediately to the University of California hospital. Joe could not be treated with further surgery. All that could be prescribed was chemical treatment and he was told there was no real chance therapy would succeed.

Still, he completed the season. Pummeling by defensive linemen, scornful of Cal's inadequate running game and charging furiously against the pass, had cost Roth a twisted knee and a slow-healing ankle. Yet, he managed to pass for 1,789 yards and seven touchdowns. And he did it with the suspicion that cancer was eating him away and would let him live only a few months more.

Those close to Roth knew since early December that he had little time to live. He had dated several girls from the El Cajun area even while he was at Berkeley, but midway through the football season he suddenly broke off all his relationships.

Roth's parents telephoned Dave Jordan, his junior college coach, to tell him of Joe's worsening condition. "Joe was upset because his parents had phoned me," Jordan said. "He didn't want anybody to know. I spent a day with him and he was in such excruciating pain I had to fight back tears."

Ravaged by the disease and with his weight down to 170 pounds, Roth nonetheless accepted an invitation to play in the East-West Shrine game in Stanford Stadium January 2. He was to have started for the West, but a pulled muscle in his back sustained in practice kept on the sidelines.

"I guess you know I've been back in the hospital undergoing

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tests," he said to reporters after the game. "You wonder whether it will pop up again. You wonder what there was in your system that made it pop up in the first place. I'd appreciate it if you wouldn't print any of that."

During the weekend of the game he made a visit to crippled children in Shrine Hospital. "I feel so fortunate," he said. "Football players are lucky, they are favored by good health. These children didn't have a chance."

Early in January, it was revealed publicly for the first time that cancer had recurred. From Honolulu, where he was preparing for the Hula Bowl all-star game, he would only say, "I don't want to talk too much about it. But I'll say that I've been having treatments for a few weeks and things are looking real good."

With his weight dropping and his body getting weaker, Roth played briefly in the Hula Bowl. He completed a few short passes, and was dropped a couple times by a big defensive rush. A week later he played in the Japan Bowl. He completed five of six passes for more than 100 yards. That was his last football game.

After the Japan Bowl, Joe came home to Berkeley with Mike White, his Cal coach. In mid-February, Roth entered the University of California Medical Center for "daily tests and treatments." Three days later, on February 18, it was announced he had been permitted to go home, although "his condition remains serious and he is still under care of physicians."

Only Roth's family and closest friends knew the truth, that he had been granted his wish to die at home. At his apartment, a 24-hour vigil was kept by his family, friends and teammates. Kim Roth, the wife of older brother Tom, and Bonnie Miller took turns administering morphine injections. Less than 50 hours after leaving the hospital, he died.

"He had three goals," said Tom Roth. "He wanted to do well in his classes, and he did that. He wanted to play in the post-season games; he did that. He wanted to be drafted and play pro football. He would have done that, but he ran out of time."

Joe Roth lived the last year of his life with simple dignity. He asked for no favors and he received no favors. "It didn't come as any great shock," he had said of the recurrence of his illness. "You always know once you have it that there's a chance it may crop up again. If everyone starts coming up and feeling sorry for me, I'm afraid it will start making me feel the same way. I mean, I fear I won't be the same Joe Roth anymore. Instead, I'll be Joe Roth Underdog, the guy everybody feels sorry for. I don't want that."

"Really, just figure I'm a normal guy. What if some guy sitting down there on the street got cancer? Would everybody make a big fuss?"