

Roth's Reputation on Line With Cal's Tough Schedule

BERKELEY (AP)—Quarterback Joe Roth has collected more preseason publicity than any University of California athlete since Craig Morton. The next few weeks may determine if he's worthy of his growing reputation.

The Bears, aided by Roth's 1,880 yards passing, led the nation in offense last year and were ranked No. 15 in this year's Associated Press preseason poll.

They also have one of the toughest early schedules of any major college team, opening with road games against No. 16 Georgia, No. 5 Oklahoma and No. 3 Arizona State.

"If you're a good athlete, you look forward to playing the best," Roth said before Cal left for Saturday's opener with Georgia. The soft-spoken senior, who had a cancerous growth cut out of his neck three years ago, knows his All-American and Heisman Trophy chances could hinge on those first three games.

"But I'm really not concerned about all the All-American and Heisman Trophy talk. If we do well, everything will fall into place. I'm looking forward to playing Georgia, Oklahoma and ASU and I'm sure we'll be ready."

Roth became Cal's starting quarterback in the third game of 1975 and his 46-yard bomb to wide receiver Wesley Walker with just over

a minute remaining gave the Bears their first victory, 27-24, over San Jose State. The team won eight of nine games and tied UCLA for the Pacific 8 title, with Roth.

He passed for 244 yards as Cal broke USC's 18-game unbeaten streak, and against Washington he broke a school record with 375 yards total offense.

Now the 21-year-old quarterback from San Diego has acquired the nickname "Telegraph Avenue Joe," a takeoff on "Broadway Joe" Namath, with Telegraph to Berkeley what Broadway is to New York.

"It all happened so fast, I'm actually awed by all the attention," said Roth, who follows in the footsteps of such former Cal passing stars as Morton, an All-American in the early 1960s and now the starter for the New York Giants; Joe Kapp, onetime Minnesota Vikings star, and All-American Steve Bartkowski, now with the Atlanta Falcons.

Although All-American running back Chuck Muncie and last year's Pac-8 reception leader Steve Rivera are now playing professionally, Roth has confidence in their offense.

"I think I'm a much better quarterback," he said. "I feel I'm involved in one of the greatest offenses in the country and I feel more confident running it now. It's just amazing what we're able to do."