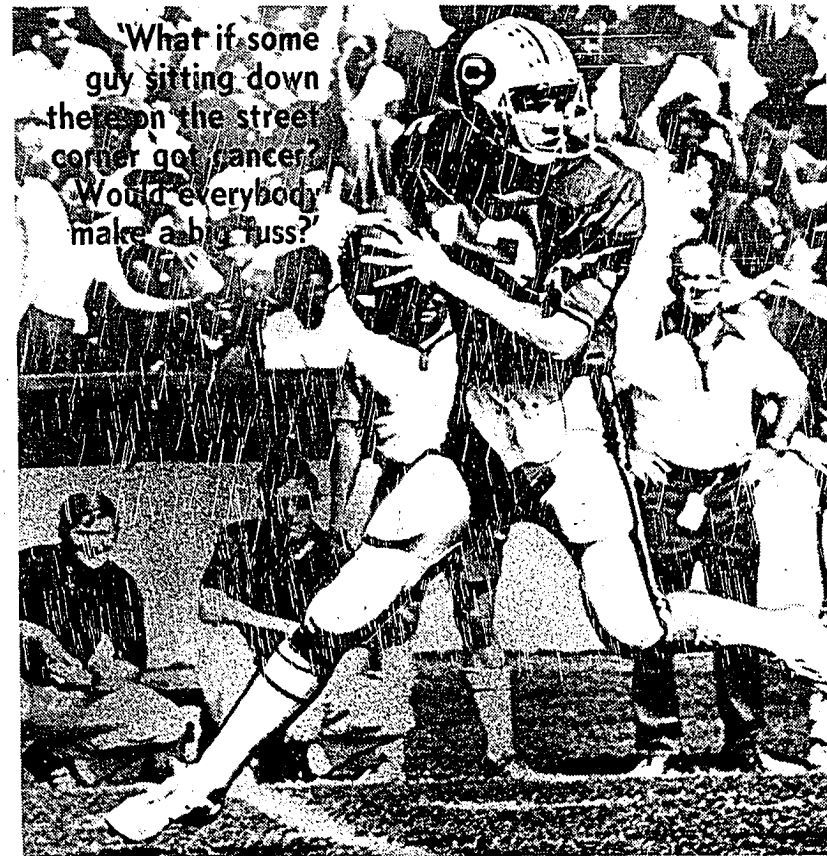


## Joe Roth Accepts the Penalty

SKIP BAYLESS

Los Angeles Times (1886-Current File); Jan 6, 1977; ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Times (1881 - 1985)

pg. D1



# Joe Roth Accepts the Penalty

Cal quarterback sees his new flareup of black mole cancer as a mere disability he plans to play with as a professional

BY SKIP BAYLESS  
Times Staff Writer

HONOLULU—Below the 17th-floor hotel balcony, the Waikiki surf rushed soothingly onto the beach. Through the peaceful Hawaiian night could be heard sounds of merrymaking: the throb of drums, drifting guitar chords, an occasional ecstatic laugh.

In the lobby, members of the East and West Hula Bowl all-star football squads—Ricky Bell, Tony Dorsett, Rob Lytle, to name a few—were fending off potential agents, signing autographs, sipping fruit drinks and attracting the stares of star-struck Hawaiian girls.

For most of these college seniors, at the height of their prestige and promise, this was paradise. Only blond-haired, blue-eyed Joe Roth, rated by many pro scouts as the best college passer in America, was having a tough time enjoying himself.

The cancer which forced him to have an operation in May, 1974, has flared again. While other college stars have been enjoying the Christmas holiday bowl hoopla, the Cal quarterback has been undergoing chemotherapy treatment that has created nausea. He vomited nearly every five minutes over one 10-day span.

Such a poorly timed turn of events would turn many human beings bitter, cynical, forcing them perhaps to throw up their hands and ask, "Why me?" Not Gentleman Joe Roth, 21, whose choirboy smile belies an extraordinary amount of courage, character, heart and hope.

"I really have a positive outlook about the whole thing," he said Tuesday night, smiling. "I like the cliché about looking at the glass as either half full or half empty. I see it as half full. I figure I can walk across the street tomorrow and get run over by a car. At least I know what my problem is and how to cope with it."

Roth's problem is melanoma, or "black mole" cancer. It first affected a mole on the left side of his face. Even after being burned away, it persisted.

Surgeons then cut away five ounces of lymph nodes and salivary glands from his neck, leaving one side of his face with a rubbery texture. A thin, deep scar hooks around his ear and down toward his shoulder.

Over the Thanksgiving holidays, while in a shower, Roth noticed tiny lumps in his chest. Examination disclosed a recurrence of the disease.

Research breakthroughs have allowed some melanoma victims to lead normal lives, Roth said he has been told. That's his game plan.

His family has requested his doctor (Michael Friedman of the UC Medical Center in San Francisco) not to disclose the exact degree of the spread. (In Berkeley Dr. Friedman said only that he has given Roth the OK to play in post-season games.) Another doctor close to Roth said:

"It's impossible to know exactly how the disease will affect different people. Some don't last too long, and some live a normal life. It's not nearly as terminal as bone cancer. I have one doctor friend who retired from his practice with melanoma and he's still going strong 15 years later. Ducky Drake, the UCLA trainer, had it and feels no effects."

Drake, asked to comment, said: "I took treatments every three months for two years. Last October the doctor said I looked OK and didn't need to have another check for six months."

Joe Roth believes his glass is half full. And he hopes National Football League scouts, coaches and general managers do, too.

Please Turn to Page 7, Col. 1

# Roth Goal: Coping With Cancer

Continued from First Page

Many believe he's the hottest pure passing talent to come along since Joe Namath—a cinch first-round draft choice. Though he knows the scouts have heard about his turn for the worse, he plans to sit down with the team which drafts him and detail his medical history—and future.

"This may hurt my bargaining power some," Roth said with a wry grin. This football star, though, has never been too interested in money for money's sake. A six-figure contract would be important only as a symbol of merit.

"I could play tomorrow," Roth said. "It's just that I'm a little weak."

The draining chemotherapy process, coupled with a pulled back muscle and a bout with the flu, forced Roth to miss last Sunday's East-West Shrine game at Stanford. He is 6-3 and his weight has fallen from a preseason 205 pounds to 179. USC quarterback Vince Evans has been added to the West Hula squad in case Roth isn't ready. Roth said he feels no pain now and won't take further treatment until he returns from his current trip, which takes him to Japan.



Joe Roth

"Really, I feel as strong as ever," said Roth, whose pink glow and slim stature don't appear much different from midseason. "It's just been a hectic few weeks for me. The first thing I wanted to know from my doctor was whether I could play pro football. A lot of people go through life with a disability. It's like I have two fingers missing. The doctor said there's no reason I can't play. All I want is a chance."

Joe Roth is a classic example of fate making no exceptions. He looks like an ideal All-American—billows of curly blond hair and billboard good looks. He faithfully attends mass Sunday mornings. You won't see him smoke. You won't hear him curse. You won't find him in a bar. He speaks softly and politely, saying, "Maam," "Thank you," and "Excuse me."

Roth spends week nights with nose in text or playbooks. When he dates, he travels in a beige Volkswagen.

Anyone who's around Roth gets the feeling he knows exactly where he's going and what he's doing. But unlike many of the Hula All-Stars, he seems genuinely to believe his Cal teammates were 90% responsible for his success.

"If a receiver is open," he has said in emotionless nasal monotone, "it's really not that difficult to hit him. Ours are open 50 to 75 per cent of the time. All this publicity has

---

*'I just want to get away and relax  
... all I can do is hope and pray'*

---

surprised me . . . because I still view myself as just another Joe Blow walking down the street."

But, like it or not, Roth's character and ability have made him something of a folk hero. And to him an even more perplexing dilemma than how he'll cope with his malady himself is how friends, fans the media will handle it.

Sketchy reports have appeared in several Northern California newspapers, and Wednesday the San Francisco Chronicle printed a story on his illness. Roth, who until now has done a poor job of lying about his condition, realizes that from now on he'll be in the spotlight.

"Right now I'm thinking positively," he said, staring at the floor. "But 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 corner got cancer? Would everybody make a big fuss? Even now, some of my teammates here from Cal have heard the reports, and it's funny how they look at me. Some have heard that I only have three months to live, and they wonder what they should say, how they should act. It has a lot to do with the disease. People are scared. It's on top of the disease totem pole."

"But sometimes I feel that all the attention will be like a flood straining against a dam. The water builds and builds until finally the dam breaks . . ."

But on the other hand Roth wonders whether God left him with uncommon courage and is making him an example for weaker humans similarly afflicted. Even after he thought he had licked the disease, Roth wrote letters of encouragement to a cancer victim in Georgia and to his high school basketball coach's doctor, whose cancerous leg had to be amputated.

"I know how much I can do for a lot of people, how much it will mean if I keep a positive attitude about the whole thing," Roth said. "I know how much I have to be thankful for, how many right turns at the fork in the road I've been fortunate enough to make. I appreciate how much people care. I guess, in a way, it's a good problem to have. You know, one out of four people have cancer . . ."

He forced a chuckle. "Like I've been telling myself, I'm just keeping up with the statistics."

Certainly Roth's first bout with cancer strengthened him emotionally, allowing him now to smile instead of sulk.

"My whole athletic career flashed before me those three days," he said last October of the operation 2½ years ago. "It made me realize just how important it is to be alive. After you beat something as terrible as cancer, the pressures of football are meaningless."

But even a human being with Joe Roth's backbone would have had trouble shouldering his burden.

As a high school senior, the scouts thought the 165-pounder too frail for major college football. He went to Grossmont, a junior college near his San Diego home, and proved them wrong.

A junior college All-American, he went to Cal, won the starting job in the fourth game a year ago, and led the Pac-8 in passing and total offense. With his name on the Heisman Trophy ballot, he began the year by throwing for 379 yards at Georgia and 284 at Oklahoma. His classic drop-back style, textbook motion, poise, touch, range and vision had pro scouts counting the days.

But a strained knee suffered against Oregon kept him out of the UCLA game and shackled him against USC. Cal finished a disappointing 5-6. No one suffered more than Roth the perfectionist.

"It hurt because I wanted to make more of a contribution," he said. "But, like I've learned, there's more to life than football."

Roth sighed. The flurry and worry of the past 10 weeks have sapped some of his strength. A day of practice, Hula Bowl festivities, sun and surf had drained some more. Friends were out roaming the Waikiki strip but Roth figured he'd turn in early.

The prospect of more tests, more chemotherapy, more nausea are the only things which seem to depress him. Never a big eater, Roth now has to force himself to down the finest of Hawaiian fare.

"After the Japan Bowl (a week from Saturday)," he said, rising, "I just want to get away for a while and relax and think."

He smiled. "But for now, all I can do is hope and pray."