

# Pats' delay of game bewilders Bledsoe

The kids gasp when one of his 60-yards-on-the-fly passes finds a receiver in full stride. When he pulls up to the Pine Bowl in a Porsche, there's an echo.

Still, Drew Bledsoe's impact on a teenager can never be greater than when he imparts a good word.

A brief visit to watch Bledsoe work the student body at this week's All-Northwest Football Camp at Whitworth College drives home the point. For a junior-high quarterback, it's worth the price of tuition when the National Football League's most recent No. 1 draft pick says, "Great ball."

So he says it often. Or he tells a high school thrower, "You could play for the Cougars." Even the odd overthrow merits a compliment.

"If you're going to miss," he counsels, "that's the place to put it."

Then — this being his last football camp for fun this summer — he'll jump into a drill as a defensive back and dare the next kid from Woodinville or Walla Walla to lob it over him.

"If Torey Hunter ever saw me try to play defense,"

Bledsoe mused later, "he'd never stop talking smack."

Of course, Washington State's lip-smacking cornerback never stops anyway. But Bledsoe learned in their time together as Cougars that there's no sense giving him any new ammunition.

Same goes in the pros, he's discovering.

Training camp for the New England Patriots doesn't start until July 15 — and, indeed, it may start without their new quarterback, who is still without a contract or a clue as to what's holding things up. But he got a taste of the pro perks last week, when he and eight NFL veterans took a resort-sponsored junket to the Cayman Islands for a fishing derby.

Bledsoe wound up in the same boat with Seattle Seahawks defensive tackle Cortez Kennedy, which is decidedly preferable to winding up in the same backfield with him.

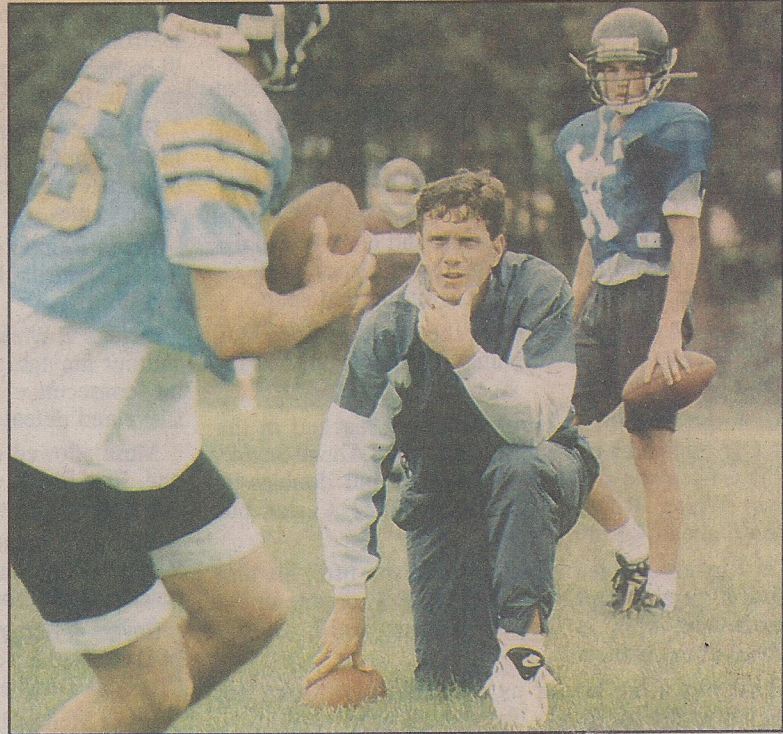
"He was telling me last year when they played the Patriots he had three sacks in the first half and five tackles for loss," Bledsoe reported. "He said he was looking forward to playing us again."

That would be in Week 3 of the NFL season, at Foxboro. Remember



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Staff photo by Shawn Jacobson

## Drew Bledsoe puts All-Northwest camp QBs through the paces.

that Patriots coach Bill Parcells pledged not to "throw him to the wolves" by rushing Bledsoe into the starting lineup, but by then the wolves may have eaten anyone else Parcells might throw in there.

Providing Bledsoe has been assigned a locker by then.

Bledsoe has been nothing but gracious and upbeat about becoming a Patriot, but he's already experiencing the downside of being top dog in the draft. Parcells may have the Rx for what ails New England on the field, but the problems there run deeper than lack of talent.

The franchise's very terms of existence seem to change daily. The NFL has declared Foxboro Stadium unfit for habitation. Owner James Orthwein is toying with moving the club to St. Louis, or committing it to a long lease if a proposed new stadium is approved — or with selling it so he can get in line for an expansion franchise.

Apparently, there hasn't been much time to negotiate with Bledsoe's agent, Leigh Steinberg, who has balked at the idea of locking his client into

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