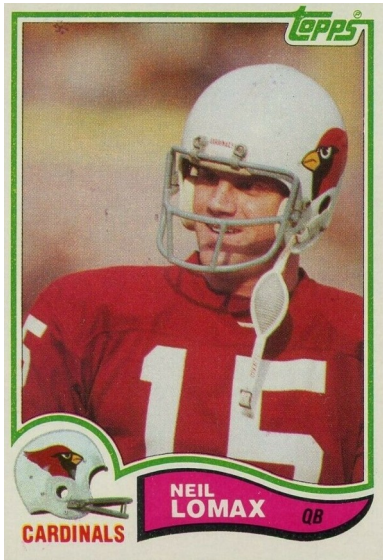


## Neil Lomax

This article was written by Matt Keddie.

Neil Vincent Lomax (b. February 17, 1959) took nothing for granted during his football playing days. He was very opportunistic and shone in the spotlight of adversity. For instance, Lomax was regarded to be a high first-round draft pick coming out of college at Portland State. It turned out that he was not selected until the second round. “He could have been angry, vitriolic, but he exhibited the most maturity, patience and understanding. He handled it beautifully. There were probably 20 stories I read why Lomax didn’t go in the first round, yet he handled the scrutiny with grace and dignity,” said his attorney, Leigh Steinberg.<sup>1</sup> Lomax was the second quarterback chosen in the 1981 NFL draft, but had a more successful career than any of the other signal callers.<sup>2</sup>



He transcended the ranks from Lake Oswego High School, to a record-setting four years at Portland State, to a prolific talent in the NFL with the St. Louis Cardinals. “I was very fortunate. No one goes there [to Portland State] saying they’re going to be an NFL player. It was, ‘Let’s have some fun, get an education, get on the bus to Missoula or Cheney and play some football.’ And from that, I went on to have a solid career while making a great living.”<sup>3</sup>

- 
- 1 Amdur, Neil. “LOMAX PASSES CARDINALS’ TEST,” *The New York Times*, December 13, 1981, 1.
  - 2 “1981 NFL Draft,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed April 2, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/years/1981/draft.htm>.
  - 3 Eggers, Kerry. “Neil Lomax (1959-),” OregonEncyclopedia.com, accessed April 2, 2022, [https://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/lomax\\_neil\\_1959/#.YIIoU8jMK3C](https://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/lomax_neil_1959/#.YIIoU8jMK3C).



## Professional Football Researchers Association

www.profootballresearchers.com

---

At the time, St. Louis was mired in a rut of losing, had not posted a winning record since 1976. St. Louis ranked in the bottom half of the league in points scored.<sup>4</sup> The poor performances were largely attributed to terrible draft decisions, and coaching failures that did not improve the team. The offense was in dire need of a revamp. Enter Neil Lomax. The rookie quarterback, who wore #15, teamed with wide receiver Roy Green and running back Ottis Anderson to revitalize the Cardinals' attack.<sup>5</sup> Lomax made seven starts as a rookie, earning the starting role midway through the season. St. Louis finished 7-9, their highest win total since 1977.<sup>6</sup> His numbers weren't gaudy, throwing just four touchdown passes and 1,575 passing yards, but Lomax had belief from the coaching staff that he was the future.<sup>7</sup> Head coach Jim Hanifan recalled a difficult decision, that he called the right one, "When I made the decision (to start Neil)... It was extremely difficult in one respect and easy in another. I slept on it Sunday night, thought about it on Monday and Monday night. Then I came in on Tuesday and said to the offensive staff, 'We're going with Neil this week.' ... I didn't feel I was hurting the team with this move. I felt just the opposite – that I was helping the team because basically this is a young team."<sup>8</sup>

In 1982, Lomax led the NFL in interception rate, throwing an interception on just 2.9 % of his passes, leading the team to a 5-4 mark, and a playoff appearance against the Green Bay Packers.<sup>9</sup> The Cardinals were overmatched and lost, 41-16, despite Lomax tossing two touchdowns and throwing for 385 yards.<sup>10</sup> The results weren't quite there yet, but Lomax's confidence was growing not only in his ability, but in support by his peers. His belief the team was coming together spread rampant in the locker room. Hanifan praised Lomax, "What Neil Lomax has, is a lot of confidence in his ability. His confidence radiates to everybody else – to his teammates, to anybody else who comes in contact with him. It isn't an arrogance either. It's a feeling you get that this guy is a confident young man. He demonstrates that on and off the field."<sup>11</sup>

St. Louis started 0-3 in 1983, but Lomax led them to a 7-2-1 finish, losing only twice in the season's final two months. His production was on the rise, throwing 24 touchdowns against 11 interceptions, and over 2,600 passing yards. The Cardinals, 8-7-1, narrowly missed the playoffs by a half game.<sup>12</sup> 1984 was again a season of heartbreak for the

---

4 "Chicago/St. Louis/Phoenix/Arizona Cardinals Franchise Encyclopedia," ProFootballReference.com, accessed April 2, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/crd/>.

5 "Chicago/St. Louis/Phoenix/Arizona Cardinals Franchise Encyclopedia," ProFootballReference.com, accessed April 2, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/crd/>.

6 "Neil Lomax," ProFootballReference.com, accessed April 2, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/L/LomaNe00.htm>.

7 "Neil Lomax," ProFootballReference.com, accessed April 2, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/L/LomaNe00.htm>.

8 Amdur, Neil. "LOMAX PASSES CARDINALS' TEST," *The New York Times*, December 13, 1981, 1.



## Professional Football Researchers Association

www.profootballresearchers.com

Cardinals, but it was the year Lomax fans waited for. It was his statistically greatest season yet: completion percentage over 61%, 28 touchdown passes, and 4,614 passing yards.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, the Cardinals lost their regular season finale on a missed field goal, albeit losing the tiebreak to the New York Giants, that effectively cost them the playoffs. Lomax's outstanding production caused a lot of buzz. He was selected to the Pro Bowl, and named among the NFL's best passers.<sup>14</sup>

Lomax continued his strong performance in 1985 and 1986, even though the Cardinals struggled. In 1985, Lomax threw for 3,214 yards and 18 touchdowns, that led to a 3-1 start, but St. Louis went on a pair of four-game losing streaks that led to a 5-11 mark. His 2.5 % interception rate was second lowest in the league. The Cardinals further slumped to a 4-11-1 record in 1986, however, Lomax still threw for over 2,500 yards and 13 touchdowns, despite the Cardinals' offense being ranked last in points scored and 26 out of 28 in total yards. Lomax had a very special year in 1987. It marked his second Pro Bowl appearance in what was the Cardinals' final season in St. Louis. He was the NFL's leading passer in completions (275), attempts (463), passing yards (3,387), and passing yards per game (282.3).<sup>15</sup>

The numbers speak for themselves, Neil Lomax was on his game. It was unfortunate he suffered from playing on mediocre Cardinals teams. Especially, with lackluster protection from the offensive line. Lomax was sacked 362 times in his career.<sup>16</sup> Not to mention the football Cardinals also played in the shadow of the baseball Cardinals throughout their tenure in St. Louis. The baseball club made three World Series appearances in the 1980s, winning the 1982 championship.<sup>17</sup> Lomax was in favor of Bill Bidwell's relocation of the franchise to Phoenix, "I'm excited about making the change. ... There's no question this

9 "Neil Lomax," ProFootballReference.com, accessed April 2, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/L/LomaNe00.htm>.

10 "Wild Card – St. Louis Cardinals at Green Bay Packers – January 8<sup>th</sup>, 1983," ProFootballReference.com, accessed April 2, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/boxscores/198301080gnb.htm>.

11 Amdur, Neil. "LOMAX PASSES CARDINALS' TEST," *The New York Times*, December 13, 1981, 1.

12 "Neil Lomax," ProFootballReference.com, accessed April 2, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/L/LomaNe00.htm>.

13 "Neil Lomax," ProFootballReference.com, accessed April 2, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/L/LomaNe00.htm>.

14 "Neil Lomax," ProFootballReference.com, accessed April 2, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/L/LomaNe00.htm>.

15 "Neil Lomax," ProFootballReference.com, accessed April 2, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/L/LomaNe00.htm>.

16 "Neil Lomax," ProFootballReference.com, accessed April 2, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/L/LomaNe00.htm>.

17 "St. Louis Cardinals Team History & Encyclopedia," BaseballReference.com, accessed April 2, 2022, <https://www.baseball-reference.com/teams/STL/>.



## Professional Football Researchers Association

www.profootballresearchers.com

will make us a better football team. We'll have better facilities out there, better support, ... There were times in St. Louis when we've felt like second-class citizens. We won't have to apologize anymore because we don't play baseball.”<sup>18</sup> Lomax's final NFL season was the 1988 campaign, the franchise's first in Phoenix. He missed the 1989 season due to arthritis in his hip, and elected to have hip replacement surgery in 1990, that effectively ended his career. In 1990, Lomax elected to retire.

His career record stood at 47-52-2, starting in 101 of 108 games in which he played.<sup>19</sup> Lomax threw 136 touchdowns, 90 interceptions, and amassed over 22,000 passing yards. In addition to his two Pro Bowl selections, he was named second-team All-NFC by the UPI in both 1984 and 1987.<sup>20</sup> He is often regarded as one of the greatest quarterbacks in franchise history, having played all eight of his NFL seasons with the team. At the time of his retirement, he ranked second in Cardinals' history in passing behind Jim Hart. Lomax was also named to the Pro Football Writer's Association's All-Rookie Team in 1981.<sup>21</sup>

Lomax grew up in Lake Oswego, Oregon, a suburb in Portland. He played quarterback on the football team. Lomax was a raw player who had ideal size, a powerful arm, and talent to play exceptional ball. During his senior year in 1976, Lomax was not being heavily recruited, however, Mouse Davis, the head coach at Portland State decided to take a chance on him.<sup>22</sup>

Davis ran the run-and-shoot offense, a system he believed played to Lomax and his abilities. His offensive philosophy was a microcosm of his genius at Portland State, where his success transformed the school's football program.<sup>23</sup> Davis won 42 of his 66 career games at the university, producing five Division 1-AA All-American players. In 2007, he returned to the team as the offensive coordinator, and the Vikings led the nation in total offense that year and again in 2008.<sup>24</sup> Davis' offer turned Lomax into one of the most legendary college football careers in history.

- 
- 1 8 “Some were saddened, but Neil Lomax was thrilled when the Big Red announced they were leaving town,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, January 15, 2022, [https://www.stltoday.com/sports/football/professional/some-were-saddened-but-neil-lomax-was-thrilled-when-the-big-red-announced-they-were/article\\_f97b7c2a-18c7-11e9-8cf0-bf46c3e16602.html](https://www.stltoday.com/sports/football/professional/some-were-saddened-but-neil-lomax-was-thrilled-when-the-big-red-announced-they-were/article_f97b7c2a-18c7-11e9-8cf0-bf46c3e16602.html).
- 1 9 “Neil Lomax,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed April 2, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/L/LomaNe00.htm>.
- 2 0 “Neil Lomax,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed April 2, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/L/LomaNe00.htm>.
- 2 1 “Neil Lomax,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed April 2, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/L/LomaNe00.htm>.
- 2 2 Eggers, Kerry. “Neil Lomax (1959-),” OregonEncyclopedia.com, accessed April 2, 2022, [https://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/lomax\\_neil\\_1959/#.YIIoU8jMK3C](https://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/lomax_neil_1959/#.YIIoU8jMK3C).



Lomax ran Davis' offense to perfection, when the team compiled video game-type numbers, by rolling up the score on the opposition. In his senior year, the Vikings scored 75 points or more in a game, three times.<sup>25</sup> They defeated Cal Poly Pomona 93-0, beat Delaware State 105-0, and rolled over Weber State 75-0 to end the season. Lomax was in the national spotlight as one of the top players, throwing for 4,094 yards in 1980, then a single-season record.<sup>26</sup> He was also a first team All-American and finished seventh in the Heisman trophy voting. Lomax accounted for 13,200 career passing yards, 13,345 total yards of offense, and 106 passing touchdowns. He accumulated 28 games of more than 300 passing yards and 10 games of more than 400 passing yards.<sup>27</sup> These two marks were just a few of the 90 NCAA records he held at the time of his graduation in 1981. Lomax graduated in 1981 with a bachelor's degree in communications. He was also a two-time state of Oregon Athlete of the Year in 1979 and 1980. In 1993, he was inducted to the Oregon Sports Hall of Fame, then to the College Football Hall of Fame in 1996.<sup>28</sup>

End Notes:

- 
- 2 3 Eggers, Kerry. "Neil Lomax (1959-)," OregonEncyclopedia.com, accessed April 2, 2022, [https://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/lomax\\_neil\\_1959/#.YIIoU8jMK3C](https://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/lomax_neil_1959/#.YIIoU8jMK3C).
  - 2 4 "Darrell 'Mouse' Davis," GoVikes.com, accessed April 8, 2022, <https://goviks.com/honors/portland-state-athletics-hall-of-fame/darrel-mouse-davis/15>.
  - 2 5 "Neil Lomax," GoVikes.com, accessed April 2, 2022, <https://goviks.com/honors/portland-state-athletics-hall-of-fame/neil-lomax/34#:~:text=Lomax%20finished%20his%20career%20with,Year%20in%201979%20and%201980>.
  - 2 6 "Neil Lomax," GoVikes.com, accessed April 2, 2022, <https://goviks.com/honors/portland-state-athletics-hall-of-fame/neil-lomax/34#:~:text=Lomax%20finished%20his%20career%20with,Year%20in%201979%20and%201980>.
  - 2 7 "Neil Lomax," GoVikes.com, accessed April 2, 2022, <https://goviks.com/honors/portland-state-athletics-hall-of-fame/neil-lomax/34#:~:text=Lomax%20finished%20his%20career%20with,Year%20in%201979%20and%201980>.
  - 2 8 "Neil Lomax," GoVikes.com, accessed April 2, 2022, <https://goviks.com/honors/portland-state-athletics-hall-of-fame/neil-lomax/34#:~:text=Lomax%20finished%20his%20career%20with,Year%20in%201979%20and%201980>.