

A LINE ON SPORTS

By ELBURT MILLER



If John Walton is on the Ram's active roster when the league season begins, he'll be a minority within a minority. Walton is a black quarterback and although member of the black race have excelled in Pro football and almost any other major sport you can name, few have distinguished themselves at quarterback. There are many theories as to why. It's been said black quarterbacks have been restricted by inexperienced coaches and mediocre opposition while playing for predominantly black colleges.

One black quarterback, Joe Gilliam of Tennessee State and now a rookie with the Pittsburgh Steelers, doesn't believe this premise is valid today. He says coaching and defensive alignments at black colleges have the same sophistication as at larger schools.

It's also been suggested that blacks are so gifted as runners, receivers and rushers that there hasn't been any reason for the white coaches to teach them the time-demanding job of quarterback.

NFL coaches and executives insist that the black pro quarterback hasn't been a victim of discrimination. What do you think? "When a team has a black quarterback who can do the best job there's question in my mind he'll be playing quarterback," says Pete Rozelle, the NFL Commissioner.

"Today, it comes down to the best man gets the job - which is the way it should be - what the club and coach care about is winning and they are going to get and use the best people they can find to achieve that end."

However, the emergency of the black Pro-quarterback has been slow. Twenty five years after Jackie Robinson broke the baseball color line in the Majors, there is only one NFL black quarterback, James Harris of Buffalo, who has veteran status. And Harris, a former Starter, is now a reserve. Aspiring to regular jobs in 1972 are Walton, Gilliam and Karl Douglass (Baltimore), who apprenticed on the Taxi Squad last year.

I don't know why there haven't been more black quarterbacks in Pro ball," says Walton, a quiet young man who teaches geography in Junior High School in the off season. "You'd have to get together with the coaches. They know more about it." It's easy to recall the blacks who have played quarterback in Pro-football because there have been so few.

Marlin Brisco a wide receiver with Buffalo, started five games as quarterback for Denver in 1968. Eldridge Dickey was drafted out of Tennessee State as a quarterback by Oakland. But he was converted to wide receiver and now plays for Kansas City. In the 50's a quarterback with the apt name of Willie Thrower played one game for the Chicago Bears. And Charlie Bracking briefly filled in for Green Bay's Tobis Rote against Cleveland in 1955. The same era produced talented George Taliaferro, who was considered more single wing tailback-type although he quarterbacked the old New York Yankee and Colts from the Wing-T and Straight-T formations. It's an exclusive club and John Walton wants in. If persistence counts, the hard-throwing quarterback from Little Elizabeth City State in North Carolina will make it.

This is his fourth year in the Ram Training Camp since he was signed a greet agent 1969, a season in which he was farmed out to Indianapolis of the Continental League. He was the Most Valuable Player in the Minor Circuit but Walton remembers "It's a long way from Continental to the NFL."

Walton has spent the last two seasons on the taxi squad, forfeiting his chance to be No. 2 quarterback behind Roman Gabriel. In 1971, when he separated his shoulder in a summer game against Oakland. "I'll always wonder what would have happened last year, if I hadn't got hurt," said John, who has an imposing build from the waist up - a smooth, 6-foot-2, 200-pound frame. Walton forte is distance. His elastic arm can sling football for "55 to 60 or maybe 70 yards." But does he have the necessary leadership qualities essential for a quarterback? And, is he hampered because, few black athletes have ever directed an NFL Team? Without doubt, Walton has the leadership ability or

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else he wouldn't have been around this long. Whether being black will continue to hamper a black athlete's chance at quarterback in the NFL still remains to be seen.

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Other prevalent infractions recorded during the month included 15 citations issued for over-limits of fish and 10 for fishing prohibited methods.

Of the total 194 citations, 64 were issued for violations of Nevada State Board Act. Failure to carry life-saving devices on board a boat amounted to 32 citations.

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