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AGENT: CONLAN TO DECIDE HIS NFL FUTURE AFTER DRAFT

Unrestricted Free Agent Has Drawn Interest From Six Teams, But Is Also Considering Retirement

To play or not to play.

That is the question Shane Conlan is contemplating these days, but it's unlikely the three-time Pro Bowl linebacker will have an answer until sometime after the NFL draft later this month, his agent said.

Bret Senior told *The Post Journal* by telephone Monday that six NFL teams have expressed "sincere interest" in Conlan, whose contract with the St. Louis Rams expired after last season. As an unrestricted free agent, Conlan, 32, can negotiate with any team.

"That's probably on hold until after the draft," Senior said. "At that point, teams will make a determination about the veteran players like Shane and what their needs are going to be."

Conlan must also decide whether, after nine years, he wants to continue playing a physically demanding position.

"I think in terms of what you have to put your body through, if there's not a certain dollar amount out there then I think he would consider retirement," Senior said.,

"Financially he doesn't have to play. He's been the best player I've had with saving money and being conservative with his money. That speaks a lot for him and his family. He can walk away under his own terms."

"Still," Senior said, "if it was the right team and coaching staff, and the money was fairly reasonable, he'd consider playing another year."

Conlan is coming off a season where he started 11 games for the Rams at middle linebacker, compiling 63 tackles, sixth best on the team. He was also the only defensive player on the Rams to record an interception, pass defense, forced fumble and fumble recovery.

Conlan was placed on injured reserve Dec. 20 after suffering a season ending knee injury and eventually underwent surgery to remove some loose cartilage.

"It locked up on him a little bit," Senior said. "I think if the team was making a run, he probably could have played and finished the season out"

As it turned out, Conlan's final game of the 1995 season was a 35-23 loss to Washington on Dec. 17.

Will it turn out to be the final game of his career?

Senior said that won't be known until after the draft, which will be held April 20-21. But whatever he decides, Conlan will have left a mark on the NFL, his agent said.

"I think he's had a tremendous career," Senior said. "I don't think he got the recognition he deserved to get. Playing the position he plays and the type of personality he has, he never promotes himself. But if you talk to football people, they know what kind of player he was and is.

"If he'd been with the Chicago Bears or the New York Giants, he would have been a Hall-of-Fame caliber player....He's not going to get sacks. He's not asked to do that. He's a run-stopping linebacker."

Conlan, an All-American at Penn State, was Buffalo's first pick, and eighth overall, in the 1987 draft. In six seasons with the Bills, the Frewsburg native played in 12 playoff games, including three Super Bowls, was selected to three Pro Bowls and was twice named All-Pro.

He signed with the Rams on April 12, 1993. After the 1994 season, Conlan received the Daniel F. Reeves Memorial Award as the team's Most Valuable Player.

For his career, Conlan has 789 tackles, five fumble recoveries, 13 forced fumbles, seven sacks and 21 passes defended.