

= Ryan Leaf =

Ryan David Leaf (born May 15 , 1976) is a former American football player who was a quarterback in the National Football League (NFL) for four seasons . He played for the San Diego Chargers and the Dallas Cowboys between 1998 and 2001 , and also spent time with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and the Seattle Seahawks .

Leaf had a successful college career for the Washington State Cougars of Washington State University , where he was a finalist for the Heisman Trophy after his junior year . He was selected as the second overall pick in the 1998 NFL Draft , but his career was short and interrupted by poor play , bad behavior , and injuries . He struggled to stay focused . An episode of NFL Top 10 ranked him as the No. 1 " draft bust " in NFL history .

After his NFL career ended , Leaf completed his degree at Washington State . He would later have legal troubles involving drugs beginning in 2010 , after a Texas judge sentenced him to 10 years ' probation . Two years later , Leaf pleaded guilty to felony burglary and drug possession in Montana . After a suspended sentence with a stint in drug rehabilitation , Leaf began serving a seven @-@ year sentence in state prison in December 2012 . In 2014 , Leaf was sentenced to five years in prison for breaking into a home in Montana to steal prescription drugs , which violated his Texas probation . He was released from prison on December 3 , 2014 .

= = College career = =

After leading Charles M. Russell High School in Great Falls , Montana to the 1992 Montana state title , he considered playing college football as a linebacker at the University of Miami . He chose to be a quarterback for the Washington State Cougars instead after head coach Mike Price , who had coached longtime New England Patriots starting quarterback Drew Bledsoe , called him on the phone while Leaf was watching the Rose Bowl , and told him " If you come here , we 're going there " even though Washington State had not reached the Rose Bowl since 1931 . Leaf told Sports Illustrated that he immediately knew he wanted to accept a scholarship and play for Price .

He played in 32 games for Washington State , starting 24 of them . In his junior year , he averaged 330 @.@ 6 yards passing per game and threw for a then Pacific @-@ 10 Conference (Pac @-@ 10) record 33 touchdowns . He also led the Cougars to their first Pac @-@ 10 championship in school history . Despite his strong early showing in the 1998 Rose Bowl , Washington State was defeated 21 ? 16 by the eventual Associated Press national champion Michigan Wolverines .

Leaf was a finalist in balloting for the Heisman Trophy that year , which is given annually to the " most outstanding " player in American college football voted in by media figures and former players . He finished third behind the winner , defensive back Charles Woodson of Michigan , and fellow quarterback Peyton Manning of Tennessee . He was named Pac @-@ 10 Offensive Player of the Year , was named first @-@ team All @-@ American by The Sporting News , and finished second in the nation in passer rating . The Rose Bowl helped make him a possible first overall selection in the NFL Draft , and Leaf decided to forgo his senior year at Washington State and enter the 1998 draft .

= = NFL career = =

= = = 1998 Draft = = =

Peyton Manning and Leaf were widely considered the two best players available in the 1998 draft , and scouts and analysts debated who should be selected first . Many favored Leaf 's stronger arm and greater potential , while others deemed Manning the more mature player and the safer pick . Most observers , however , believed that it would not greatly matter whether Manning or Leaf was drafted first because either would greatly benefit his team .

The Indianapolis Colts owned the first draft pick that year . Team scouts favored Leaf , but Colts

president Bill Polian and coaching staff preferred Manning , especially after discovering during individual workouts that he could throw harder than Leaf . Manning also impressed the team during his interview , while Leaf missed his . Leaf 's draft prospect profile described the player as " self @-@ confident to the point where some people view him as being arrogant and almost obnoxious " . Leaf gained about 20 pounds between the end of his junior season and the NFL Combine in February , which Jerry Angelo , one of six experts Sports Illustrated consulted on the choice , described as " a [negative] signal " about his self @-@ discipline . All six believed that Manning was the better choice , but the magazine concluded " What does seem reasonably certain is that ... both Manning and Leaf should develop into at least good NFL starters " .

The San Diego Chargers needed a new quarterback after having scored the fewest touchdowns in the league in the previous season . To obtain the second draft pick , the team traded its third overall pick , a future first round pick , a second round pick , and three @-@ time Pro Bowler Eric Metcalf to the Arizona Cardinals , guaranteeing the Chargers the right to draft whichever of the two quarterbacks Indianapolis did not take first . Manning was drafted first by the Colts and Leaf second by the Chargers , who signed him to a four @-@ year contract worth \$ 31 @. @ 25 million , including a guaranteed \$ 11 @. @ 25 million signing bonus , the largest ever paid to a rookie at the time . Leaf said , " I 'm looking forward to a 15 @-@ year career , a couple of trips to the Super Bowl , and a parade through downtown San Diego . " The night after the draft , Leaf flew to Las Vegas , Nevada on the jet of Chargers owner Alex Spanos and partied all night ; the following day Leaf yawned during his first news conference .

= = = San Diego Chargers (1998 ? 2000) = = =

= = = = 1998 season = = = =

San Diego 's high hopes for Leaf were soon dashed , as his rookie season was marred by poor behavior . Before the season started , he skipped the final day of a symposium mandatory for all NFL draftees and was fined \$ 10 @, @ 000 .

Leaf did well in the preseason and led the Chargers to victory in the first two regular @-@ season games . The Chargers won the season opener on September 6 , 1998 , 16 ? 14 over the Buffalo Bills despite mistakes from Leaf such as fumbling his first snap and throwing two interceptions ; Buffalo penalties voided two would @-@ be interceptions from Leaf . In the game , Leaf 's 6 @-@ yard touchdown pass to Bryan Still that followed a 67 @-@ yard pass to Still gave San Diego a 10 ? 0 lead . However , late in the game , San Diego fell behind 14 ? 13 after a Leaf interception . Leaf completed 16 of 31 passes for 192 yards in the opener and 13 of 24 passes for 179 yards (with 31 rushing yards in 7 carries) in the second game , a 13 ? 7 win over the Tennessee Oilers . In the third game of the season on September 20 , Leaf completed only one of 15 passes for four yards , threw two interceptions and fumbled four times (losing three) in a loss to the Kansas City Chiefs . The Thursday before that game , Leaf was hospitalized for a viral infection . Leaf later said that infected turf fibers entered his skin and lymph glands .

After Leaf threw four interceptions in the first half against the New York Giants in the Week 4 game (September 28) , coach Kevin Gilbride benched Leaf in favor of Craig Whelihan . The following game on October 4 against the Indianapolis Colts matched Leaf against the number one 1998 draft pick Peyton Manning . Indianapolis won 17 ? 12 , as both quarterbacks completed 12 of 23 passes with an interception each , but Leaf threw for 160 yards (23 more than Manning) , and only Manning threw a touchdown . Manning was never sacked ; Leaf was sacked four times . Inside the final two minutes and San Diego down 14 ? 6 , Leaf 's 56 @-@ yard pass to Charlie Jones set up a one @-@ yard Natrone Means touchdown run , but Leaf 's potential tying two @-@ point conversion pass to Webster Slaughter was incomplete .

Whelihan replaced Leaf on November 8 after Leaf completed only 4 of 15 passes and became starter on a permanent basis afterwards . Leaf finished the season having played 10 games with 1 @, @ 289 passing yards , 45 @. @ 3 % completed passes , 2 touchdowns , and 15 interceptions ,

with an abysmally poor quarterback rating of 39 @.@ 0 .

Leaf related poorly to both the media and his teammates , whom he tended to blame for his poor play . In a locker @-@ room incident during Leaf 's rookie year , he was caught on camera screaming at San Diego Union Tribune reporter Jay Posner , and was physically restrained by Junior Seau . He soon developed a reputation for a poor work ethic to the point of occasionally being found on the golf course while the other quarterbacks were studying film . After Leaf 's rookie season ended , Charger safety Rodney Harrison described it as " a nightmare you can 't even imagine , " adding : " If I had to go through another year like that , I 'd probably quit playing . "

= = = = 1999 season = = = =

Leaf missed his second season due to a shoulder injury suffered 20 minutes into the Chargers ' first training camp workout on July 23 , 1999 . Leaf had surgery to fix a labral tear in his throwing shoulder . During an August training camp , a fan heckled Leaf : " Hey , Ryan , you 're the worst draft choice in NFL history . You make Heath Shuler look like an All @-@ Star . " Leaf , accompanied by a coach and security guards , walked towards the fan and asked a question . The fan began walking closer to Leaf , and two coaches restrained Leaf , with another Chargers employee saying " No , don 't do it , Ryan . Don 't do it . " Leaf later explained the incident : " ... what I wanted to do was say , ' Hey , look , I 've grown up , I 'm calm about it , I would like to understand why you would say that about me . ' "

He was placed on injured reserve but made headlines in early November when he got into a shouting match with GM Bobby Beathard and one of the coaches , resulting in a fine , a suspension without pay and an apology by Leaf (four weeks later) . During his suspension , he was caught on video playing flag football at a San Diego park , a violation of his contract according to Charger management .

= = = = 2000 season = = = =

In the final game of the 2000 preseason , Leaf completed a pass to Trevor Gaylor to seal a 24 ? 20 win over the Arizona Cardinals . After the game , he appeared on the cover of the September 4 , 2000 issue of Sports Illustrated along with headline " Back from the Brink " . The cover story characterized his comeback as " an ascent from pariah to possible standout pro passer " . He started the first two games of the 2000 season but completed less than half of his pass attempts and threw five interceptions but only one touchdown . In the season opener on September 4 , a 9 ? 6 loss to the Oakland Raiders , Leaf completed 17 of 39 passes for 180 yards and threw three interceptions , including one on a 4th @-@ and @-@ inches play with 1 : 37 left and sealing the Raiders victory . After the game , Leaf 's left hand was swollen , and a late hit from Regan Upshaw gave Leaf a chin gash that required seven or eight stitches . The following game , a 28 ? 27 loss to the New Orleans Saints , Leaf completed 12 of 24 passes for 134 yards and threw his first touchdown pass since his rookie season , a 20 @-@ yard pass to Curtis Conway ; however , Leaf threw two interceptions , including one that ended the Chargers ' final drive .

Coach Mike Riley started Moses Moreno for the Week 3 game , but Leaf took over after Moreno went down with a shoulder injury . Leaf injured his wrist when he threw an interception in the Week 4 game and next played in Week 11 . By October , Leaf speculated that the Chargers would release him after the season . Late that month , reports suggested that Leaf lied about a hand injury to get out of practice and play golf instead .

In the Week 11 game on November 12 against the Miami Dolphins , Leaf replaced Moreno mid @-@ game . Leaf threw an interception on his fourth snap , led a touchdown drive in the Chargers ' next series , and left the game with nearly a minute to go after straining a hamstring on a scramble . This game was the first since 1993 where three quarterbacks for a team - in this case Leaf , Moreno , and Jim Harbaugh - threw interceptions in one game . On November 19 against the Denver Broncos , Leaf completed 13 of 27 passes and reached career single @-@ game highs in quarterback rating (111 @.@ 8) , passing yards (311) , and passing touchdowns (3) , but the

Chargers lost the game 38 ? 37 . After a 0 ? 11 start , the Chargers got their first win on November 26 , 17 ? 16 over the Kansas City Chiefs . San Diego took a 14 ? 3 lead early in the second quarter after Leaf made two touchdown passes to Freddie Jones , but the offense struggled later in the game , and Leaf threw two interceptions , one of which was returned for a touchdown .

Leaf would again play poorly , as he threw four interceptions on December 3 against the San Francisco 49ers and completed only 9 of 23 passes on December 10 against the eventual Super Bowl champion Baltimore Ravens . He improved on December 17 , completing 23 of 43 passes for 259 yards , 2 touchdowns , and 1 interception , but San Diego lost to the Carolina Panthers 30 ? 22 . In the Chargers ' final drive , with nearly two minutes remaining in the game , Leaf completed a 10 @-@ yard pass to Curtis Conway that referees ruled was six inches short of the end zone . On first down , however , miscommunication between Leaf and running back Jermaine Fzande resulted in a fumble and 8 @-@ yard loss , and the next two plays followed by a penalty forced a fourth down and goal 10 yards from the end zone , and Leaf 's fourth down pass was incomplete . On the final game of the season on December 24 , Leaf made a 71 @-@ yard touchdown pass to Jeff Graham on the first play from scrimmage , but San Diego lost to the Pittsburgh Steelers 34 ? 21 . In the game , Leaf completed 15 of 29 passes for 171 yards , 1 touchdown , and 1 interception and fumbled his final snap . After finishing the season 1 ? 15 , the Chargers released Leaf on February 28 , 2001 . In three years with San Diego , Leaf had only four wins as a starter . For the 2000 season , Leaf completed 50 % (161 of 322) of his passes for 1 @,@ 883 yards , 11 touchdowns , and 18 interceptions .

= = = Tampa Bay Buccaneers (2001) = = =

On March 2 , 2001 , two days after the Chargers released him , Leaf was claimed by the Tampa Bay Buccaneers , who were intrigued by his physical talent and planned to develop him more slowly , giving him time to watch and learn . Leaf 's wrist had still not healed , and doctors recommended surgery . After mediocre preseason performances , he was asked to accept demotion to fourth quarterback status on the team and accept a lower salary . He refused , and was released on September 3 , five days before the start of the 2001 season .

= = = Dallas Cowboys (2001) = = =

His next attempt at a comeback was with the Dallas Cowboys , who signed him after the Buccaneers released him , but he failed his first physical and was let go on September 5 . After regular starter Quincy Carter suffered an injury , the Cowboys signed Leaf again on October 12 . The Cowboys released him in May 2002 after he had appeared in only four games ? all losses ? throwing for a four @-@ game total of 494 yards with only one touchdown and three interceptions .

= = = Retirement and legacy = = =

Days later , he got still another chance when the Seattle Seahawks signed him to a one @-@ year contract , planning to let him develop slowly (as the Buccaneers had done) to allow his still @-@ injured wrist time to heal . He attended the team 's spring minicamps and seemed upbeat about his new team , but then abruptly retired at the age of 26 just before the start of the Seahawks ' 2002 training camp , offering no explanation at first . Seahawk coach and general manager Mike Holmgren told the media Leaf 's wrist didn 't bother him with either the Cowboys or the Seahawks .

During his brief career in the NFL , Leaf appeared in 25 games and made 21 starts . He completed 317 of 655 (48 @.@ 4 %) passes for 3 @,@ 666 yards , with 14 touchdowns and 36 interceptions and a career quarterback rating of only 50 @.@ 0 . After hearing of Leaf 's retirement , Rodney Harrison , one of his most outspoken critics on the Chargers , said , " He took the money and ran . Personally , I could never rest good at night knowing my career ended like that . Normally in this game , you get back what you put into it , and he pretty much got back what he put into it . "

The ESPN sports network put Leaf first on its list of 25 biggest sports flops between 1979 and 2004

. NBC Sports commentator Michael Ventre called him " the biggest bust in the history of professional sports " . Since Leaf 's retirement , sportswriters and commentators have characterized subsequent drafted potential NFL quarterback flops as " the next Ryan Leaf " . In 2010 , the NFL Network listed Leaf as the number one NFL quarterback bust of all time , adding that the only good that came out of drafting Leaf for the Chargers is that it put the team in position to draft LaDainian Tomlinson , Drew Brees , and eventually (after it initially appeared Brees himself would be a draft bust) Philip Rivers . In lists of " Worst NFL Draft Picks Ever " compiled since 2010 , Leaf is always listed in either 1st or 2nd place , directly ahead of or only trailing JaMarcus Russell as the worst NFL draft pick of all time .

Deadspin ranked Leaf as the 6th worst NFL player of all time in 2011 , opining " To call Leaf a bust is unfair to the Blair Thomases and David Carrs of the world . "

More recently , Dish Network included Leaf in their " Biggest NFL Bust Bracket " where he was a " 1 Seed " along with fellow busts Jamarus Russell , Tony Mandarich , and David Carr .

On February 4 , 2016 in an interview with Yahoo ! Sports , Leaf himself compared the problems of Cleveland Browns quarterback Johnny Manziel to his own , saying it was like " looking in the mirror " and that the only difference was that Leaf 's substance abuse problems happened after he retired . Leaf went on to state that Manziel is able to get the help he needs .

= = Life after football = =

After retiring from professional football , Leaf returned to San Diego and became a financial consultant . In 2004 , Leaf resumed his education at Washington State University and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in humanities in May 2005 . The San Diego Union @-@ Tribune reported that among his classes in the spring 2005 was a sports management course titled Media Relations .

He then joined Don Carthel 's West Texas A & M University staff as a volunteer quarterbacks coach in 2006 , commenting , " About a year after I retired from playing , I decided that I wanted to get back to college , where I had the greatest time of my life , and to get involved with college football . " He also admitted that he was unprepared for the NFL when he was drafted back in 1998 . In April 2008 , ESPN described Leaf as having come to terms with his past . He said at the time , " When playing football became a job , it lost its luster for me . I kind of got out of the spotlight , and life 's never been this good . "

But in November 2008 he was put on indefinite leave , and resigned the next day , from his coaching position at West Texas A & M for allegedly asking one of his players for a pill to help him deal with pain in his wrist from past injuries .

In October 2009 , he went to work in Vancouver , British Columbia as business @-@ development manager for a travel company .

In September 2010 , he began writing a regular column about Washington State University football for the website Cougfan.com. He wrote nine columns that football season and his work attracted a strong following among Washington State fans . In December 2010 , he signed a contract with Pullman , Washington @-@ based Crimson Oak Publishing to write no fewer than three memoirs . Crimson Oak describes its mission as publishing books with themes of " hope , possibility , and determination . " Crimson Oak released Leaf 's first book 596 Switch : The Improbable Journey from The Palouse to Pasadena in October 2011 . The book focuses on the 1997 Washington State football team that made the 1998 Rose Bowl .

= = Personal life = =

In 2001 , Leaf married Nicole Lucia , a Charger cheerleader and daughter of financial radio host Ray Lucia . They separated in November 2003 and eventually divorced .

His younger brother Brady was a backup quarterback and cornerback for the Oregon Ducks football team from 2003 to 2006 .

In September 2010 , the Associated Press reported that Leaf was spending time with his family in

Montana .

In June 2011 , he had a benign tumor from his brainstem surgically removed .

= = = Legal troubles = = =

In May 2009 , Leaf was indicted on burglary and controlled @-@ substance charges in Texas . He was in a drug @-@ rehabilitation program in British Columbia at the time of the indictment , and was arrested by customs agents at the border on his return to the U.S as he was intending to fly to Texas to surrender on the indictment . However , his attorney Jeffrey A. Lustick successfully blocked the fugitive warrant extradition process , therefore legally allowing Leaf to go to Texas on his own . Lustick later successfully got the Washington fugitive action against Leaf dismissed with prejudice . On June 17 , he posted a \$ 45 @,@ 000 bond in Washington state for the criminal charges in Texas . In April 2010 , he pleaded guilty in Amarillo , Texas to seven counts of obtaining a controlled substance by fraud and one count of delivery of a simulated controlled substance , all felonies . State District Judge John B. Board sentenced him to ten years of probation and fined him \$ 20 @,@ 000 .

On March 30 , 2012 , he was arrested on burglary , theft and drug charges in his home town of Great Falls , Montana . Four days later he was arrested again on burglary , theft , and two counts of criminal possession of dangerous drugs . As part of a plea bargain on May 8 , 2012 , he pleaded guilty to one count of felony burglary and one count of criminal possession of a dangerous drug .

In late April 2012 , Texas authorities issued two arrest warrants for him and set his bond at \$ 126 @,@ 000 .

On June 19 , 2012 , Leaf was sentenced to seven years in custody of the Montana Department of Corrections , with two years suspended if he abided by the conditions imposed by District Judge Kenneth Neil in Montana . He was to spend the first nine months of his sentence in a lockdown addiction treatment facility , Nexus Treatment Center in Lewistown , Montana . But on January 17 , 2013 , Leaf was remanded to Montana State Prison in Deer Lodge after being found guilty of " behavior that violated conditions of his drug treatment placement . " He was also accused of threatening a program staff member .

In May 2014 , Leaf was incarcerated at Crossroads Correctional Facility in Shelby , Montana .

On September 9 , 2014 , a Texas judge sentenced Leaf to five years ' imprisonment , giving credit for time spent in prison in Montana . According to ESPN , Leaf would not see further time in jail , but would also not be released from Montana prison . On December 3 , 2014 , Leaf was released from prison and placed under the supervision of Great Falls Probation and Parole .

= = Writing = =

Leaf , Ryan D. (2011) . 596 Switch : The Improbable Journey from The Palouse to Pasadena . Pullman , Washington : Crimson Oak Publishing . ISBN 0982950535 .