# [***MULTIFACETED;***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:47KN-5GN0-0094-52Y2-00000-00&context=1516831) [***USC'S PALMER READY FOR NFL … AND ANYTHING ELSE***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:47KN-5GN0-0094-52Y2-00000-00&context=1516831)

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (Pennsylvania)

January 2, 2003 Thursday

SOONER EDITION

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**Section:** SPORTS,

**Length:** 1105 words

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**Dateline:** DAVIE, Fla.

**Body**

Carson Palmer, University of Southern California quarterback, 23-year-old Heisman Trophy winner, is a romantic.

He surprised Shaelyn Fernandes with dinner at an outdoor table at a cliff-top restaurant overlooking Dana Point in California. This on a day he had football practice, on a day NFL scouts had come by to poke, prod, time and weigh him.

He was frazzled and running late, and it was in the middle of his most fabulous season, but Palmer, from Laguna Niguel, Calif., never lost his poise, never varied from his plan. That is the Palmer method. Never panic, never complain.

"I couldn't figure it out," Fernandes, a former USC soccer goalie, said. "We were running late, and I told Carson, 'Just call the restaurant and say we'll be late.' But Carson wouldn't do it.

"When we got to the restaurant, I understood. We were taken outside to this single table overlooking the ocean. We had our own waiter and violin player. Everything was ready. When dessert came, it was under a cover, and the waiter took the cover off and there was the ring.

"It's a perfect ring, just what I would want. Carson picked it out himself, and it showed how well he knew me. And then I was trying to call my parents. I was calling their ***cell phones*** and home phone and no one was answering. It turns out Carson and his family had arranged for my parents to fly [from Northern California] to Carson's parents' house. When we went after dinner, everybody was there."

Carson Palmer is a goof.

His younger brother, Jordan, 18, a freshman quarterback at Texas-El Paso, remembers the time Carson cut the tips off golf tees, put them into a BB gun and shot Jordan in the back. Jordan called their mother, Danna at work and yelled, "Carson shot me in the back." Jordan didn't mention the golf tips or the BB gun. Danna rushed home, imagining the horror. She found two boys fighting.

"That was pretty much the end of my working outside the home," she said.

Carson Palmer is a planner.

His older sister, Jennifer, 31, remembers how Carson would always send Jordan out to try new, scary things first.

"Water skiing, fishing, skiing, snowboarding, Carson would send Jordan down first, just to see how it went," she said.

"Yeah, I was kind of like the food tester," Jordan said.

Carson Palmer is a throwback.

USC Athletic Director Mike Garrett, a man who appreciates action instead of speaking and admires old-fashioned values, said Palmer "could have played on our teams."

Garrett played at USC in the 1960s, when athletes didn't dance after touchdowns or parade around after every big play. When Garrett played football, men accepted responsibility for mistakes, took the blame, shared the praise.

"Carson Palmer," Garrett said, "has never wanted to distinguish himself from others, has never shied away from responsibility, always took blame when he played badly, always deflected praise when he had earned it. He handles winning the same as defeat. He could have played with us. He would have fit in nicely."

Carson Palmer is a prankster.

USC wide receiver Keary Colbert, who lives with Palmer and six other players in a house near campus, said Palmer loves practical jokes, that Palmer knows where to shop for joke props -- "I didn't even know they had stores like that," Colbert said -- and was a victim when Palmer bought fake dog poop and put it in the living room so that when housemates came through the door, Palmer could sit and watch.

Colbert was a victim.

"I walked in and said, 'Whose dog did that?' " Colbert said. Then Colbert saw Palmer laughing.

Carson Palmer can't play soccer.

"He toe-kicks the ball straight ahead every time," Fernandes said. "He tries to score on me, and he can't even get the ball near the goal. It's pretty funny."

Carson Palmer is an athlete, a great athlete.

When he was 3 1/2, his mother took Carson along to a golf tournament Jennifer had entered. Though he had never played, he pestered his mother until she entered him in the 5-and-under division.

"And Carson won," Danna said.

Until fifth grade, Bill Palmer, Carson's dad, hoped Carson would play basketball, like his oldest son, Robert, who is 37 and a financial planner in Baltimore.

"I had resisted Carson playing football," Bill said. "I just saw too many kids getting hurt, and the coaching wasn't very good. But I finally gave in. He wanted it too much."

By seventh grade, Carson Palmer was being introduced to Bob Johnson, the Mission Viejo quarterback guru whose son Rob, played at USC and is in the NFL.

"What I saw," Johnson said, "was a tall seventh grader who came from a great family, who wanted to work hard, who wanted to learn, who kept a good head about him. Early on, I told his dad, 'You've got something here. There's potential that's pretty nice.' I didn't go overboard -- he was still just a seventh grader -- and I didn't ever get into saying this guy's going to be this or that. I was not going to say he was going to USC, or going to win the Heisman, or go on to pro ball, even though I heard a lot of people talk that way."

Carson Palmer will lead USC against Iowa tonight in the Orange Bowl.

Palmer completed 288 of 458 passes for 3,639 yards, with 32 touchdowns and 10 interceptions. Besides the Heisman, Palmer won the Johnny Unitas Golden Arm Award, given to the nation's top senior quarterback, and the Pop Warner Award as the top senior on the West Coast.

He is 6 feet 6, 230 pounds and is considered a strong possibility to be the first player drafted in April.

He will praise himself only a little, give himself credit only in a backhanded way.

"I think I've become a better player mentally," Palmer said. "I learned a lot from all the mistakes I've made. I've learned simply from playing so many games."

Palmer will brush aside the injuries -- a broken collarbone ended his sophomore season early -- the coaching changes, the offensive changes, the criticism he heard.

"I know some of it hurt him," Fernandes said, "but he never let anybody know that."

All of this has made Palmer more ready than most college players for the pros.

"I think Carson has matured in a very special way," USC Coach Pete Carroll said. "He had been a golden boy since high school. He never got to realize the fun. He didn't meet expectations until this year. Then he exceeded them.

"It's very difficult to be an NFL quarterback and it's very difficult to be a high draft pick with all the expectations that go along with that. Almost all rookie quarterbacks get pounded and look like they'll never find their stride. But Carson, he's been through all that at USC. You can't find a guy more prepared for the rigors of the NFL."

Or just about anything else.

**Graphic**

PHOTO: Gary I. Rothstein/Associated Press: Heisman Trophy winner Carson Palmer is so much more than just a quarterback.

**Load-Date:** January 3, 2003

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