

SEND OFF STORY?

NFL ANALYSTS AGREE: CUTLERS SHOULD BE OUT AS BEARS QUARTERBACK

By Brad Biggs | CHICAGO TRIBUNE

HOUSTON—

Troy Aikman's reaction Tuesday was nearly identical to the one he had 12 years ago when he was asked a related question on the topic of the Bears' quarterback situation—or quandary, if you will.

It was before Super Bowl XXXIX in Jacksonville, Fla., that I asked him why Sid Luckman still held the majority of significant career-passing records for the franchise. Aikman slowly pushed back from the table, turned toward me laughing and said he wanted an answer to the same question.

On Tuesday, Aikman and the Fox Sports talent preparing for Super Bowl LI had a free-for-all media availability. When I asked the Hall of Fame quarterback about the Bears' current QB predicament, he chuckled again—although it's hardly a laughing matter for fans.

"What do the Bears need to do? Man, I don't know," Aikman said. "I know they had something good going with Adam Gase when he was there and [Jay Cutler] has been

through a number of coordinators and that certainly hasn't helped."

Aikman's remarks were as kind as they come for Cutler. While there was no clear-cut solution to the franchise's quarterback situation, the consensus from Super Bowl LI is it's time for a change.

Cutler is under contract through 2020, but no guaranteed money remains in the deal and the team could trade or release him and incur only a \$2 million salary-cap hit. The waiver system opens Monday, but the Bears cannot trade Cutler until March 9—the start of the new league year. His contract does not give the Bears more financial freedom by removing him from the roster early.

Former Bears cornerback Charles Tillman, who launched a career with Fox this season, believes Cutler's time at Halas Hall has run its course.

"I think they will probably find a new [quarterback]," Tillman said. "The writing is on the wall. They might have to part ways. Eight years is a long time. ... He probably knows that. They probably know that." Hall of Fame quarterback Jerry Bradshaw

had just finished criticizing Texans quarterback Brock Osweiler when the subject turned to Cutler.

"I don't like Cutler either. ... It's time for him to go," Bradshaw said. "... I said on the air one day watching him, 'You know what, Jay? You've got a gorgeous wife. Beautiful kids. You're making \$20 million a year. How about a smile?'"

"That's a damn good job playing quarterback in the NFL, huh? How about a little excitement? How about something from you?"

"He's just not an upper-echelon quarterback. He just isn't. He hasn't proven it. He can't carry a team. He never has. End of story." Former Bears quarterback Kordell Stewart also laughed at the question of what the Bears should do at quarterback.

"Get another one," Stewart said. "You may have Tony Romo out there. He went to Eastern Illinois."

But despite having the same alma mater as Bears general manager Ryan Pace, Romo turns 37 in April and has appeared in only five games in the past two seasons.

"Hey, Romo is better than what they've got," Stewart said. "But they have Brian Hoyer. He had, in all seriousness, a lot of success in the short time he was in. Much more productive than Jay Cutler. He took care of the football, which Jay wasn't doing. ..."

"[Despite the injuries], Tony Romo ... that's a great get. He can stretch the field, has a gunniger's mentality and still has some football left, at least a good three years."

"Cutler is probably the first quarterback that showed a glimpse of something good as far as the coaching staff is concerned, believing in him. I mean, I was a part of the 50 quarterbacks they had over the last 15 or 20 years."

Former Dallas and Miami head coach Jimmy Johnson also advocated for a change.

"Woo," Johnson said when the topic was broached. "The Bears? Cutler has had a lot of opportunities with a lot of coaches. And there is a reason why he's had a lot of different opportunities with a lot of different coaches. He hasn't been successful with any of them. He is a very talented individual but for some reason they haven't been able to get over the hump."

"I would say time for a new guy?"