

# 49er great Roger Craig still on the run: Rock 'n' Roll Half Marathon up next

By Mark Emmons

Mercury News

Posted: 10/03/2008 06:03:22 PM PDT

Former 49ers running back Roger Craig won't even try to guess how many times he was hit during his 11-year NFL career. But he will settle for this vague, non-statistical estimate: a lot.

"I got hit even when I didn't have the ball," Craig said. "I was a marked man out there. But I always kept on running."

He's still running.

Craig, 48, looks like he could spell current 49ers standout Frank Gore on a few carries Sunday afternoon at Candlestick Park against the New England Patriots. Instead, he will run in the Rock 'n' Roll Half Marathon through San Jose's streets earlier that morning.

At an age when many of his NFL peers are more likely to be thinking about knee and hip replacement surgeries, Craig somehow hasn't slowed down despite all the punishment he absorbed. He's an avid distance runner with six marathons on his resume.

"I know that I'm fortunate to be able to do these things now because I took a pounding," Craig said. "But I also took care of my body for that pounding. I've never stopped working out."

And, yes, as he approaches the finish line at Plaza de Cesar Chavez, he will begin his trademark, high-knee running style.

"Just like I'm hitting the end zone," he added. "That's my signature finish."

Craig ran for 8,189 yards, caught 566 passes for 4,911 yards, was a four-time Pro Bowl player and a member of three 49ers Super Bowl teams. But perhaps even more remarkable, he only missed two games because of injury.

That durability didn't happen by accident. Craig's off-season training regimen included a hilly, 4 1/2-mile trail run in San Carlos. He even introduced it to a young Jerry Rice, who would make "The Hill" famous.

"That originally was my hill," Craig said. "The first time Jerry did it with me, he didn't quite finish and I didn't see him for three weeks. But I understood because the first time I did it, I had to stop and throw up a couple of times."

When Craig retired, he was determined to maintain his fitness. He had watched many ex-NFL players slide into obesity and battle conditions such as diabetes and heart disease.

"Your body is like a fish bowl," said Craig, a director of business development for Palo Alto software company Tibco. "If you don't filter it, you know what happens to the fish. They float to the top as the water gets murky. Athletes spend years toning our bodies. It's all we know. So your body goes through a shock if you stop doing those things."

He began looking for a new competitive challenge and settled on running a marathon. He entered the 2004 San Diego Rock 'n' Roll Marathon to honor his late sister, Brenda Martinez, who had been a runner.

"That 26.2 miles is no joke," said Craig, whose time was 4 hours, 9 minutes. "I was kind of heavy and I hit the wall at about mile 18. And that wall is tougher than any linebacker."

Reaching the finish line, Craig said, made him feel like he had won another Super Bowl. So he went looking for more marathons and has since lowered his personal best time to 3:48. After completing a Rock 'n' Roll race in Phoenix, he got the idea of bringing the innovative series — bands are stationed at every mile — to the Bay Area.

While others would hammer out the details, it was Craig who took the first step by pitching the idea to San Jose officials. Sunday, more than 12,000 runners and walkers will take part in the third annual event.

Craig, married with five children, will be among them. He now weighs 205 pounds, which is about 15 less than his playing weight. He averages between 35 and 40 miles a week. Craig, who has regular visits with a chiropractor and massage therapist, also pays close attention to his diet because "if you don't eat right, you won't run right."

Some former teammates don't know what to make of Craig's running obsession.

"They think I was hit on the head too many times," he said. "Joe (Montana) and Ronnie (Lott) think I'm crazy. Even Jerry thinks so because he doesn't like long-distance running."

Craig often gets recognized during races. It can be a mixed blessing. Sometimes, when runners are passing him, he can see it in their eyes that they're thinking: I'm going to beat Roger Craig.

"And it really can be humbling when you see a little old guy blow past you," Craig added. "But we all do the best we can with what we have."

Contact Mark Emmons at [memmons@mercurynews.com](mailto:memmons@mercurynews.com) or (408) 920-5745.

[http://www.mercurynews.com/peninsula/ci\\_10632575](http://www.mercurynews.com/peninsula/ci_10632575)