Rich Campbell

This article was written by Matt Keddie.

Rich Campbell was a multifaceted professional. He was a star quarterback at the University of California, Berkeley, and was among the nation's most prolific passers in 1979 and 1980. His success and stout stature at 6' 4" and 224 pounds led him to the NFL, where he was selected with the sixth overall pick in the 1981 NFL Draft by the Green Bay Packers.[i]

Campbell played just five seasons (1981-85) in the league before deciding to use his religious studies degree and work in ministry for most of seven years. Following stints in Oregon, Mississippi, and Arkansas, Campbell continued to demonstrate versatility.[ii] He forayed into journalism, saying, "I really enjoyed sitting at a computer."[iii] One of his ministry connections offered him a position as an editor with the *Hattiesburg American*. Campbell recalled that as a player he, "... tended to see journalists as intrusive ..." and it was ironic he was on the other side, saying, "... not necessarily disabused of that notion being on the other side of that issue."[iv]

Despite never earning a starting role as a pro, Campbell never considered his football career a failure. He said, "To be honest, it's nice to hear people – since it's been 25 years – still think enough of me to remember what I did."[v] His fondest memories were in college, when he beat the rival Stanford Cardinal, 21-14, on the road in 1979 and won the Joe Roth Award in 1978. Roth recruited Campbell to Cal, but lost a bout with cancer in 1977.[vi] Campbell was honored to be the recipient who "best exemplifies Roth's courage, sportsmanship and attitude."[vii]

Only one quarterback in Packers history has been drafted in the first round since Campbell: Aaron Rodgers. Coincidentally, Rodgers also played at the University of California, Berkley. When Rodgers was drafted, Campbell received much attention because of this connection. He recalled that the two were very close, with Campbell serving as a mentor to him.[viii] Sports Illustrated's Michael Rosenberg wrote, "Campbell spent a week with Rodgers in Green Bay after he was drafted. He stayed at Rodgers' house. They played bocce and got to know each other."[ix]

As of 2026, Rodgers' NFL career has included a Super Bowl XLV championship and Super Bowl MVP award, as well as four NFL MVP awards (2011, 2014, 2020, 2021).[x] Campbell did not experience the same degree of success, appearing in just seven games.

By 1984, Campbell wondered whether he would see the field consistently, shattering his confidence in himself and the Packers. Campbell recalled, "Personality-wise, I'm the kind

of person that … I need a coach that believes in me. I had that in college, and I flourished. I didn't have that with the Packers, and I struggled. Emotionally, I needed the Packers to say publicly, 'This is our guy.' When that didn't come, it kind of chipped away at my confidence. By the end of my four years there, I was not nearly as good as when I got there."[xi]

As a rookie in 1981, Campbell saw action in two contests, completing 15 of 30 passes for 168 yards while throwing four interceptions. Green Bay finished with an 8-8 record and missed the playoffs.[xii] He appeared in only two games over the 1982 and 1983 seasons combined, but never attempted a pass. The Packers went 5-3-1 in the strike-shortened 1982 season, earning a postseason berth for the first time since 1972.[xiii] (*Although Green*

i "Rich Campbell," ProFootballReference.com, accessed October 1, 2026, Rich Campbell Stats, Height, Weight, Position, Draft, College | Pro-Football-Reference.com.

ii Rosenberg, Michael. "Why Rich Campbell, the Packers' 1981 First-Round Pick, Is Glad He's a Draft Bust," SI.com, April 24, 2019, Why Rich Campbell, the Packers' 1981 First-Round Pick, Is Glad He's a Draft Bust.

iii Kroner, Steve. "WHERE ARE THEY NOW/ Rich Campbell / Late-'70s Bears QB is in the news again / Campbell's records are the ones Rodgers is beating," SFGate.com, November 30, 2004, WHERE ARE THEY NOW / Rich Campbell / Late-'70s Bears QB is in the news again / Campbell's records are the ones Rodgers is beating.

iv Kroner, Steve. "WHERE ARE THEY NOW/ Rich Campbell / Late-'70s Bears QB is in the news again / Campbell's records are the ones Rodgers is beating," SFGate.com, November 30, 2004, WHERE ARE THEY NOW / Rich Campbell / Late-'70s Bears QB is in the news again / Campbell's records are the ones Rodgers is beating.

v Kroner, Steve. "WHERE ARE THEY NOW/ Rich Campbell / Late-'70s Bears QB is in the news again / Campbell's records are the ones Rodgers is beating," SFGate.com, November 30, 2004, WHERE ARE THEY NOW / Rich Campbell / Late-'70s Bears QB is in the news again / Campbell's records are the ones Rodgers is beating.

vi Kroner, Steve. "WHERE ARE THEY NOW/ Rich Campbell / Late-'70s Bears QB is in the news again / Campbell's records are the ones Rodgers is beating," SFGate.com, November 30, 2004, WHERE ARE THEY NOW / Rich Campbell / Late-'70s Bears QB is in the news again / Campbell's records are the ones Rodgers is beating.

vii Kroner, Steve. "WHERE ARE THEY NOW/ Rich Campbell / Late-'70s Bears QB is in the news again / Campbell's records are the ones Rodgers is beating," SFGate.com, November 30, 2004, WHERE ARE THEY NOW / Rich Campbell / Late-'70s Bears QB is in the news again / Campbell's records are the ones Rodgers is beating.

viii Kroner, Steve. "WHERE ARE THEY NOW/ Rich Campbell / Late-'70s Bears QB is in the news again / Campbell's records are the ones Rodgers is beating," SFGate.com, November 30, 2004, WHERE ARE THEY NOW / Rich Campbell / Late-'70s Bears QB is in the news again / Campbell's records are the ones Rodgers is beating.

ix Rosenberg, Michael. "Why Rich Campbell, the Packers' 1981 First-Round Pick, Is Glad He's a Draft Bust," SI.com, April 24, 2019, Why Rich Campbell, the Packers' 1981 First-Round Pick, Is Glad He's a Draft Bust.

x "Aaron Rodgers," ProFootballReference.com, accessed October 1, 2026, Aaron Rodgers Stats, Height, Weight, Position, Draft, College | Pro-Football-Reference.com.

Bay was first in the NFC Central Standings, the league did not award division championships that year. Instead, eight teams from each conference qualified based on their records.)

After a dominant, 41-16 win over the St. Louis Cardinals in the Wild Card Game, they fell to the Dallas Cowboys in the Divisional Round, 37-26.[xiv]

Campbell's signature moment came in 1984, when he relieved quarterback Randy Wright in a Week 15 contest against the Chicago Bears. Campbell completed 9 of 19 passes, including two touchdowns and two interceptions.[xv] He opened the scoring with a 3-yard pass to tight end Ed West in the first quarter, giving Green Bay a 7-0 lead. Then, trailing in the fourth quarter, 14-13, after Walter Payton scored a rushing touchdown to put Chicago back ahead, he found receiver Phil Epps on a 43-yard strike with less than one minute to play.[xvi] The score held up as the winning play for Green Bay, 20-14. Chicago went on to win the NFC Central Division and advanced to the NFC Championship Game against the San Francisco 49ers.[xvii] The following season, the Bears went on to field one of the greatest defenses in NFL history that included a Super Bowl XX win. The victory was sweet for Green Bay as they avenged an earlier-season loss to the Bears.[xviii]

After the season, the Packers waived Campbell. He signed with the Los Angeles Raiders for the 1985 season, but he never appeared in a game, bringing his professional football career to an end.[xix] Although Campbell initially expressed deep frustration with the

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xi Rosenberg, Michael. "Why Rich Campbell, the Packers' 1981 First-Round Pick, Is Glad He's a Draft Bust," SI.com, April 24, 2019, Why Rich Campbell, the Packers' 1981 First-Round Pick, Is Glad He's a Draft Bust.

xii "Rich Campbell," ProFootballReference.com, accessed October 1, 2026, Rich Campbell Stats, Height, Weight, Position, Draft, College | Pro-Football-Reference.com.

xiii "Rich Campbell," ProFootballReference.com, accessed October 1, 2026, Rich Campbell Stats, Height, Weight, Position, Draft, College | Pro-Football-Reference.com.

xiv "1982 Green Bay Packers Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees," ProFootballReference.com, accessed October 1, 2026, 1982 Green Bay Packers Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees | Pro-Football-Reference.com.

xv "Rich Campbell," ProFootballReference.com, accessed October 1, 2026, Rich Campbell Career Game Log | Pro-Football-Reference.com.

xvi "Green Bay Packers at Chicago Bears – December 9th, 1984," ProFootballReference.com, accessed October 1, 2026, Green Bay Packers at Chicago Bears - December 9th, 1984 | Pro-Football-Reference.com.

xvii "1984 Green Bay Packers Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees," ProFootballReference.com, accessed October 1, 2026, 1984 Green Bay Packers Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees | Pro-Football-Reference.com.

xviii "1984 Green Bay Packers Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees," ProFootballReference.com, accessed October 1, 2026, 1984 Green Bay Packers Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees | Pro-Football-Reference.com.

Packers, he eventually resolved the grudge.

One of his greatest NFL moments was when head coach and Hall of Fame quarterback Bart Starr contacted him, stating the team was drafting him sixth overall.[xx] Campbell signed a four-year, $1 million contract, which was monumental at the time. Michael Rosenberg wrote on Campbell being drafted, “He made a lot of money and appreciated it. He did not have a huge ego. He did not think it was his God-intended plan to conquer the world. When people questioned his ability, he did not arrogantly dismiss them; he figured maybe they had a point. These are all qualities we tend to admire in people and seek in friends. They are not what makes a franchise quarterback.”[xxi] On his contract Campbell said, “There is something from going from having no money to having money, it changes your focus. I kind of had the sense I had already arrived when I got my contract. I didn't realize this was just the start, the rest of it had to be earned. I wasn't as single-[minded] as I needed to be. I worked a lot harder in college than I did in the NFL. I just felt like when I made the transition, I lost my edge.”[xxii]

Richard Delano Campbell was born on December 21, 1958, in Miami, Florida. He attended Santa Teresa High School in the Bay Area, where he was a standout football player. Campbell stayed local, attending the University of California, Berkeley.[xxiii] His athleticism earned him the starting quarterback role from his sophomore through senior seasons, 1978-80.

Following the 1977 season, the school fired head coach Mike White amid speculation of recruiting violations, replacing him with assistant coach Roger Theder.[xxiv] Under Theder, the Golden Bears regressed somewhat from White's leadership, which included a Pacific-

xix“Rich Campbell,” ProSportsTransactions.com, accessed October 1, 2026, Football Transactions Search Results.

xx Kroner, Steve. “WHERE ARE THEY NOW/ Rich Campbell / Late-'70s Bears QB is in the news again / Campbell's records are the ones Rodgers is beating,” SFGate.com, November 30, 2004, WHERE ARE THEY NOW / Rich Campbell / Late-'70s Bears QB is in the news again / Campbell's records are the ones Rodgers is beating.

xxiRosenberg, Michael. “Why Rich Campbell, the Packers' 1981 First-Round Pick, Is Glad He's a Draft Bust,” SI.com, April 24, 2019, Why Rich Campbell, the Packers’ 1981 First-Round Pick, Is Glad He’s a Draft Bust.

xxiiRosenberg, Michael. “Why Rich Campbell, the Packers' 1981 First-Round Pick, Is Glad He's a Draft Bust,” SI.com, April 24, 2019, Why Rich Campbell, the Packers’ 1981 First-Round Pick, Is Glad He’s a Draft Bust.

xxiiiKroner, Steve. “WHERE ARE THEY NOW/ Rich Campbell / Late-'70s Bears QB is in the news again / Campbell's records are the ones Rodgers is beating,” SFGate.com, November 30, 2004, WHERE ARE THEY NOW / Rich Campbell / Late-'70s Bears QB is in the news again / Campbell's records are the ones Rodgers is beating.

xxivCurtis, Jake. “Mike White, Head Coach of Cal's Powerful 1975 Squad, Dies,” SI.com, December 15, 2025, Mike White, Head Coach of Cal's Powerful 1975 Squad, Dies.

8 Conference co-championship in 1975. During his first season as the starter in 1978, Campbell led California to a memorable road victory over the West Virginia Mountaineers.[xxv] The Golden Bears trailed, 13-7, then scored a quick touchdown on a blocked punt to take a 14-13 lead at halftime. Campbell took over, passing for 226 yards that keyed the 28-21 win.[xxvi] Mountaineers head coach Frank Cignetti commented on Campbell, stating, "I was really impressed with Campbell. He plays with poise and maturity. We lost our poise early in the third quarter and their quarterback (Rich Campbell) took them to a couple of touchdowns. That and a breakdown in our kicking game were what killed us."[xxvii]

The next week, California welcomed the University of Oregon Ducks to California Memorial Stadium. The Golden Bears may have felt the hangover effects from the previous week's thrilling win, as they trailed 11-0, then 18-14 with less than four minutes to play.[xxviii] Earlier in the game, Campbell was replaced by Gary Graumann after completing just 10 of 23 passes and throwing three interceptions.[xxix] With roughly 1 minute and 25 seconds remaining, Graumann found receiver Holden Smith over the middle. Smith scampered untouched into the end zone to give California the lead and a 21-18 win.[xxx] After a win over the University of Arizona Wildcats the following week, the Golden Bears lost four of their final five games with Campbell at the helm to finish the season with a 6-5 record.[xxxi]

In 1979, Campbell elevated his game. He was among the nation's superior passers, finishing inside the top 10 in several major statistical categories. For instance, Campbell ranked fourth in pass completions (216), seventh in pass attempts (322), fourth in passing yards (2,618), and was the nation's most accurate passer with a 67.1 completion percentage.[xxxii]

The Golden Bears played the 19th most difficult schedule in the nation, featuring four ranked opponents. Despite Campbell's elevated play, California finished with a 6-6 record. As a senior in 1980, Campbell remained among the nation's best quarterbacks. He ranked seventh nationally with 193 completions and was the nation's most accurate

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xxv "Campbell keys Cal past W. Va.," *The Modesto Bee*, October 1, 1978, 47.

xxvi "Campbell keys Cal past W. Va.," *The Modesto Bee*, October 1, 1978, 47.

xxvii "Campbell keys Cal past W. Va.," *The Modesto Bee*, October 1, 1978, 47.

xxviii "Smith's catch beats Oregon at the end again," *Statesman Journal*, October 8, 1978, 8.

xxix "Smith's catch beats Oregon at the end again," *Statesman Journal*, October 8, 1978, 8.

xxx "Smith's catch beats Oregon at the end again," *Statesman Journal*, October 8, 1978, 8.

xxxi "1978 California Golden Bears Schedule and Results," sports-reference.com, accessed October 1, 2026, 1978 California Golden Bears Schedule and Results | College Football at Sports-Reference.com.

xxxii "1979 College Football Year Summary," sports-reference.com, accessed October 1, 2026, 1979 College Football Summary | College Football at Sports-Reference.com

passer, posting a 70.7 completion percentage.[xxxiii] This was 5.3 points higher than the next most accurate, John Elway (65.4 %), a future first overall draft pick and future college and pro football Hall of Famer.

Despite Campbell's impressive performance, the Golden Bears regressed to a 3-8 season.[xxxiv] Their schedule remained difficult, squaring off against the University of Florida Gators and the University of Michigan Wolverines in non-conference play, as well as the Top 10-ranked USC Trojans and UCLA Bruins in conference play.[xxxv] Florida finished the season ranked nationally, and Michigan won the Big Ten Conference.

In the contest against the Gators, Campbell completed a then-NCAA record 43 passes.[xxxvi] His 19 completions in the second quarter also tied an NCAA record for passes completed in a single quarter, yet California lost 41-13.[xxxvii]

There is a saying in life that everything happens for a reason. For Campbell, this is akin to why the NFL did not work out for him as a long-term career. He said, “I have actually come to the place now where I am literally grateful I didn't have a 10-12 year NFL career.”[xxxviii] Campbell felt content working as a journalist for *Treasure Coast Newspapers* in his most recent position. Michael Rosenberg elaborated on Campbell's short NFL career writing, “If he had played a lot of pro football, it could have wrecked him in later life. That would not have been worth it to him. He is glad he never became great. And that may explain why he never did.”[xxxix]

End Notes:

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xxxiii“1980 College Football Year Summary,” sports-reference.com, accessed October 1, 2026, 1980 College Football Summary | College Football at Sports-Reference.com

xxxiv“1980 California Golden Bears Schedule and Results,” sports-reference.com, accessed October 1, 2026, 1980 California Golden Bears Schedule and Results | College Football at Sports-Reference.com.

xxxv“1980 California Golden Bears Schedule and Results,” sports-reference.com, accessed October 1, 2026, 1980 California Golden Bears Schedule and Results | College Football at Sports-Reference.com.

xxxvi“Florida thrashes Bears in second half,” *San Francisco Examiner*, September 14, 1980, 45.

xxxvii“Florida thrashes Bears in second half,” *San Francisco Examiner*, September 14, 1980, 45.

x xxviii Rosenberg, Michael. “Why Rich Campbell, the Packers' 1981 First-Round Pick, Is Glad He's a Draft Bust,” SI.com, April 24, 2019, Why Rich Campbell, the Packers’ 1981 First-Round Pick, Is Glad He’s a Draft Bust.

x xxix Rosenberg, Michael. “Why Rich Campbell, the Packers' 1981 First-Round Pick, Is Glad He's a Draft Bust,” SI.com, April 24, 2019, Why Rich Campbell, the Packers’ 1981 First-Round Pick, Is Glad He’s a Draft Bust.