

Former MLB player puts down his bat and glove, and picks up football helmet

Monte Harrison, who will turn 29 in August, is giving football another shot as a walk-on receiver at Arkansas.

By MITCH SHERMAN | The Athletic

When Royce Boehm, Monte Harrison's high school football coach at Lee's Summit (Mo.) West, heard that his ex-star wide receiver wanted to give it a go again on the gridiron, Boehm had a wild thought.

Why not call the hometown Kansas City Chiefs and inquire about an opportunity?

A former two-sport signer at Nebraska, Harrison spent the past decade in professional baseball.

His career fizzled after a season in Triple-A Nashville last year following his 76 plate appearances in the big leagues from 2020 to '22. Harrison recently called Boehm, now coaching freshman football at Rockhurst High School in K.C., and told him, "I want to go back."

News broke on Tuesday that Harrison would walk on at Arkansas this fall to play football.

He'll be 29 in August when the Razorbacks open. Boehm and his former defensive line coach, Limbo Parks — who played for the Hogs in 1985 and '86 — helped forge a connection with the SEC program.

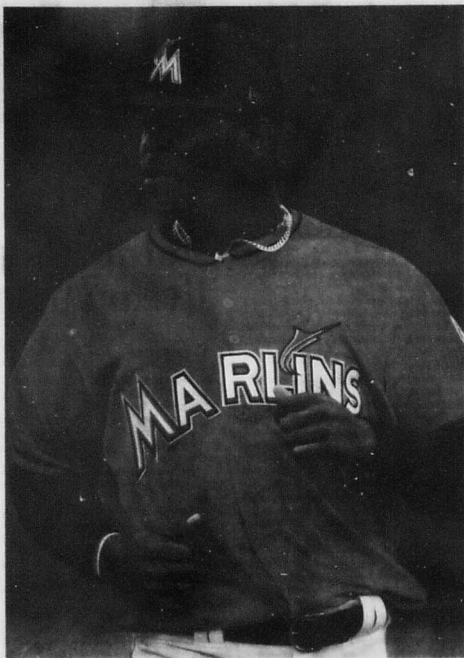
"He's a Bo, a Bo Jackson," Boehm said. "He's athletic. He's a stud."

Ultimately, the Chiefs were not an option, considering Harrison's lack of experience beyond high school and 10-year break from the sport. Harrison is older than every wide receiver on the Chiefs roster and three weeks older than Patrick Mahomes.

But if Harrison proves himself in one season as a pass catcher at Arkansas, perhaps his football dream could stay alive, said Boehm, whose son, Evan Boehm, spent six years in the NFL after starting for four seasons as an offensive lineman at Missouri. Harrison was his high school teammate.

Back in 2013, during Harrison's last fall at Lee's Summit West, Royce Boehm pushed him toward football. As a senior, Harrison earned first-team All-Metro recognition by the Kansas City Star in football, basketball and baseball.

"He was a specimen," said Nebraska baseball coach Will Bolt, the Huskers' top assistant from 2012 to 14 who helped



JEFF ROBERSON | Associated Press. The photo

Miami Marlins outfielder Monte Harrison runs sprints during spring training practice on Feb. 19, 2018, in Jupiter, Fla. After hitting .240 and stealing 210 bases in nine minor-league seasons, Harrison is giving football another try as a walk-on receiver at Arkansas.

recruit Harrison out of high school. "I still remember watching his high school basketball highlights. It was pretty freaky. His athleticism stood out. And his physicality."

A four-star prospect in football in the Class of 2014, Harrison picked Nebraska over offers from Missouri, Kansas, Iowa and others. He was excited to play for Bo Pelini in Lincoln, Boehm said.

"We were excited when he committed," Bolt said, "but we knew that Monte was go-

ing to be a high draft pick (in baseball). We just hoped that football would get him to college."

The Brewers selected Harrison, an outfielder, in the second round in June 2014 and paid him a reported \$1.8 million to sign. He had been set to enroll at Nebraska in August of that year, but his eligibility clock never began because he did not begin coursework in Lincoln.

Harrison was part of a trade in 2018 that sent all-star Christian Yelich from Miami to Milwaukee. Harrison hit .240 and stole 210 bases in nine minor-league seasons. He made his MLB debut with the Miami Marlins in 2020 and last played at the Major League level with the Los Angeles Angels.

"He was a 6.5-(second) runner (over 60 yards) and he could hit for power," Bolt said. "There was a ton of untapped potential that he never really had the chance to realize in high school."

Harrison remains a physical specimen, Boehm said. The Nashville roster last year listed Harrison at 6-foot-3 and 220 pounds.

He's spent his time in Kansas City this year, Boehm said, and plans to head to Fayetteville at the end of this month.

"My whole thought back then was that he was an NFL player," Boehm said. "But he was stuck on baseball. I'm just so glad that Arkansas is taking a shot on him."

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WILL BOLT
Nebraska baseball coach, on Monte Harrison

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