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Montana has surgery, is out for season

■ 49ers quarterback decides on operation for injured elbow.

By Nancy Gay

Knight-Ridder Newspapers

SAN JOSE — The final resort for Joe Montana finally came to be: After weeks of speculation and concerted efforts to avoid the knife, the San Francisco 49ers quarterback underwent elbow surgery Wednesday night.

A three-man surgical team — led by 49ers team physician Michael Dillingham and associates Dr. Gary Fanton and Dr. Warren King — performed the operation to repair his injured right elbow, which took place at 5:30 p.m. at Stanford Medical Center. Montana, 35, is expected to be released sometime this afternoon.

49ers President Carmen Policy said the surgery, the nature of which he wouldn't detail, and subsequent rehabilitation means Montana won't return this season. But Policy added the team fully expects Montana back in 1992.

"The prognosis at this point ... is that Joe should be able to be back in full stride, maybe even stronger, next season than he was when he reported to training camp this season," Policy said of Montana. "And we're praying that is the case."

Montana has been on injured reserve since Aug. 27 with what has been described as torn pronator teres tendon.

A similar injury and surgery performed on former Pittsburgh Steelers quarterback Terry Bradshaw ended his career at age 35. 49ers Coach George Seifert said Wednesday there's a possibility

Montana won't be able to return next season.

"From what I understand, there certainly is always that chance," he said. "I'm going to think optimistic, as I've thought optimistically through this entire process."

Seifert — who initially spoke glowingly of Montana's return, then became more guarded in recent weeks — said surgery was something he never really expected.

"We were wrong. It turned out to be more serious than previously thought," Seifert said. "It's come to this point. I think it was handled very, very well with regard to our medical staff and Joe himself."

The decision to proceed with surgery came after Montana, the 49ers and Dillingham reviewed the second and third opinions they obtained the past

two days. Policy acknowledged that Montana "personally visited at least two other physicians."

The decision to proceed with surgery ultimately rested with Montana, Policy said.

Montana, who has a long history of problems with his right elbow, injured the joint again throwing a 40-yard post pattern in practice Aug. 13. The irritation was first believed to be tendinitis, which has flared up in his right elbow throughout his career. At that time, rest and anti-inflammatory shots were prescribed as treatment.

On Aug. 19, during warmups for the San Diego Chargers exhibition game, Montana again experienced pain. He didn't throw again until last week, when he participated in four sessions of catch with the 49ers conditioning coach.