Opinion Column: The 49ers’ franchise mistake

In 2012 the San Francisco 49ers made their biggest mistake in franchise history. They declared Colin Kaepernick the starting quarterback, over Alex Smith.

After beginning the 2012 season with a 6-2-1 record, Smith suffered a blow to the head in week 10 that required him to sit out for two weeks under concussion protocol.

But when doctors cleared him to play, coach Jim Harbaugh kept him on the bench to serve as Kaepernick’s backup for the remainder of the season.

A week before his injury, Alex Smith had been named NFC Offensive Player of the Week and set an NFL record by completing 94.7 percent of his passes, with a minimum of 15 attempts. And how does Harbaugh reward that? By keeping him as a bench warmer!

Harbaugh claimed that Smith was too conservative and didn’t have the potential to make big plays, while Kaepernick had the arm strength to take a shot downfield. But having the ability to throw the deep ball doesn’t matter if your quarterback throws the ball into the hands of the opposing player!

Since gaining his position as the starting quarterback for the 49ers, Kaepernick has thrown 28 interceptions and committed 32 fumbles – losing 14 of them.

Instead of utilizing Smith as a conservative, pocket quarterback who protects the football and wins games, Harbaugh choose to put his faith in a pompous, egotistical player that runs recklessly into trouble. If he wanted a quarterback who could run the ball, he should’ve just given the job to Frank Gore.

After two full seasons as the starting quarterback, Kaepernick only played nine games in 2015 before being placed on injured reserve with a torn labrum in his left shoulder. Now the hot-headed, so-called future of the 49ers is destined to follow in the footsteps of Robert Griffin III.

San Francisco has started this season with a 1-7 record and three of those losses are with Kaepernick under center, after he was reinstated as the starter.

Alex Smith, on the other hand, has won five games this year as a starter for the 6-2 Kansas City Chiefs. After missing last week with a concussion, Kansas City isn’t likely to make the same mistake as the 49ers did in 2012.

The Chiefs will start him because they know he is a quarterback who can win games.

In high school Smith led the Helix Highlanders to a 25-1 record. With the Utah Utes he boasted a 21-1 record as the starter in 2003 and 2004 and was the first Ute to become a candidate for the Heisman Trophy.

Immediately after being traded to the Chiefs in 2013, he led them to the playoffs by opening the season with 9 straight wins and finishing with a record of 11-5. It was a huge upgrade for the Chiefs, who only managed to win 2 games without Smith in 2012.

In 2014 and 2015, Smith continued to demonstrate that the 49ers made a mistake by trading him away, as he led the Chiefs to records of 9-7 and 11-5, respectively, along with a playoff berth last season.

As Alex Smith continues to win games and Colin Kaepernick fades into irrelevance like Tim Tebow, it is increasingly clear that the San Francisco 49ers made a gigantic error by benching their 2005 first round draft pick and future franchise quarterback.

Maybe Colin Kaepernick should consider playing a new sport.

Perhaps baseball would suit him well.