



NFL DRAFT: THE ULTIMATE MULTI-MILLION DOLLAR POKER GAME

By Kerry Schmidt 04-24-2005

This weekend, the NFL holds its annual high stakes poker game/meat market. The teams combined will spend huge bucks on players who will either end up as stars or stinkers.

In the beginning, the draft was over 17 rounds and was simply having a few scouts look at players or have their college coaches send in some film with comments.

But today, millions of dollars are spent by the teams just checking out which players they want to spend millions of dollars on.

For every Jerry Rice or John Elway, there is a Ryan Leaf or Brian Bosworth.

Plus, there will always be players that slip through the cracks, and are either drafted in the late rounds or are free agents. Tom Brady, Super Bowl MVP was a sixth round pick, and going way back, Johnny Unitas was not even drafted.

Bill Walsh, the former coach/GM of the 49'ers, was, in my opinion, the best judge of talent in the last 40 years. He would pick up players in the 3rd through 8th rounds that became integral starters in their five Super Bowl wins. Example: Four QB's were drafted before Walsh threatened to resign if they would not let him draft the "skinny, too small, weak armed" QB out of Notre Dame, but Joe Montana worked out OK.

All week, ESPN and other print/TV media have speculated on all possibilities. Rather than rehash this, let's take an off-the-wall look at this weekend's gamble, a draft of which Buffalo's GM Tom Donahue says, "All drafts are crapshoots, but this one may be more so than a lot of others." Sic "... there is no real consensus on who are the better players." Having said that, they agree there is a decent amount of talent, just no clear No. 1 or 2 picks, like last year.

San Francisco has the first pick, and will likely take either QB Aaron Rodgers of nearby California, Utah's Alex Smith, or trade down.

Now, the off-the-wall stuff.

ESPN will show their huge draft studio – I think it's in Madison Square Garden again, but wherever, you will see several thousand drunken fans in their team's jerseys wildly making asses out of themselves over their team's choices. I can sort of understand the fanatics during the season, to a point, but in the spring, at the draft? Certainly these guys can't be married, or if so, not for long.

Now if you are one of those who has no life and will stay glued to the tube for this cattle auction, Rob Rang, senior analyst for NFLdraftscout.com, says "...coaches aren't exactly linguists, so we develop vernacular. Heavy speak.

Thus, I will give a brief menu of must-know slang.

Starting simple, if you hear someone say "breaking down in the open field," you don't call the medics. Au contraire, the player is supposed to "break down," i.e. get himself in good position to make the tackle in the open field.

"Stiff hips:" White guy trying to dance. No, means a safety lacks flexibility in turning and running, and also refers to a DT as someone with a high motor, which itself means intensity.



OFF THE WALL SPORTS

Here's my favorite. "Big Bubble." AKA, bubble butt. Means an offensive lineman can quickly turn both his large cheeks for better blocking power and push.

And a favorite story from way back. When now famous announcer John Madden was coach of the Raiders (he won a SB), he used to own one of those 60's VW busses, with the sliding side door. He would say, "if an offensive lineman's butt is too big to get through that door, I'm gonna draft him."

"Waist-bender." Opposite of above, an offensive lineman who bends at the waist, not the knees, thus bad leverage.

"Coke machine." Not a substance abuser, just a big guy who is hard to move.

"Low pad level." Not a street level crib for the athletes. Means players who can get lower than their opponent for better leverage.

"Vertical threat" Not a pole vaulting midget, but a WR with speed to go deep.

"Burst." Or, the politically correct verbiage, "short-area quickness." Describes a defensive player's speed for the first 2-3 yards.

Here's one any self respecting fan should know. "Happy feet." See Aaron Brooks. Means a QB who is always moving his feet, usually in fear, thus cannot set and throw properly.

"Mirror and slide." Joe Thiesman primping himself before airtime. No, means when an offensive lineman can anticipate his opponent's moves and stay balanced in front of him.

"Hand punch." Remember disco? "Hand Jive." Not. It's where the offensive lineman fires his arm into the opponent's chest to knock him off balance.

"Anchor and read" No, seaman drop anchor then head to the nearest bar. In football, it means when a defensive lineman can hold off blockers and stay in position to make the tackle.

"Trash." Not as in Southern White. Means the bodies lying on the field during a play. A good tackler can pick his way through the "trash" to make the tackle.

Tarzan/Jane. Means, looks like Tarzan, plays like Jane. See Jonathan Sullivan of the Saints.

"Tweener." No transvestites in the NFL, but a player that is in between two positions, like he could be either a strong safety or linebacker, large receiver or tight end. Tight end tweener. I like that.

There are numerous other football faux pas, so I'll stop my grid iron Webster's, since I hope, that you, like myself, will be outdoors in a wonderful, rare, non-humid southern Saturday. At least I'll resemble a fan, since I'll likely have a cold beer nearby.

And one future thing you can count on. Most of the No.1 and 2 picks will wait until after training camp starts to sign.

For you glassy-eyed draftnicks, here's my pop quiz

Which school has sent more first round draftees to the NFL?

Answer, spelled backwards. IMAIM., with 42. Ohio State, Southern Cal and Florida are tied for 2nd at 26. Note: Of the 42 Miami players, 16 could actually speak a full sentence.