



## HIGH STAKES POKER WEEKEND: THE NFL DRAFT

By Kerry Schmidt 04-30-2006

Just quick note before I get into the column. In the news this past week was a prominent story and photo shoot of the unveiling of the official painting of Bill Clinton. His wife's painting was next to it. Well, some pesky individuals discovered that Bill's wedding ring was not on his left hand.

Artist Mr. Chang said, "It was just the angle."

Well, I'm P.O.ed. I'll protest as an unfair act to women.

Where was Monica's picture!!

Ok, on to business.

In the last 3-4 years, high stakes and world championship poker have become the new "in" sport.

Friday's USA/TODAY had a full page story on the question of whether poker is a sport. Bottom line. Well, chess is officially a sport, so poker sure as heck is! Plus, poker's ratings are higher than many other sports. They are way higher than the NHL playoffs. Of course, commercials rate higher than the NHL

In the poker games, players can win or lose a million bucks or more. And many of them play several times a week.

The NFL draft is only once a year, but it is the ultimate high stakes poker game.

Hundreds of millions of dollars are at stake, in just one weekend.

And like poker, it is a gamble. You bet 20-50\$ million on 1 or 2 players, and you may get a stud or a stinker.

Combined, each team will also spend millions of hours pouring over stats and playing "Heinz 57" – prospects are put through at least that many tests.

Every fan knows test # 1, the 40-yard dash time as well as a few others.

But until a couple of weeks ago when rumors abounded that Texas QB Vince Young had scored a 6 on the Wonderlic test, I bet that far less than 50% of even hard core fans knew Wonderlic was an integral part of the total assessment.

Thus, let's spend a minute or three checking out this ever so important part.

The Wonderlic (means "I WONDER if he can play a LIC) test is a 12 minute, 50 question test to "assess aptitude for learning a job and adapting to solve problems." (It is given to many fields of employment).

The questions range from idiot to very smart.

Sample idiot question: The 9<sup>th</sup> month of the year is? And they give you multiple choices! October, January, June, September or May.

One of the more difficult ones: In printing an article of 48,000 words, a printer decides to use two sizes of type. Using the larger type, a page contains 1,800 words. In the smaller type, a page has 2,400 words. The article is allotted 21 pages. The Q is, how many pages must be in smaller type?

Now the scores are supposed to be kept secret, but some leak out, although not many have done so this year.

The report on Young's six was mistaken. He allegedly took it again and got a 16.



# OFF THE WALL SPORTS

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I took the sample test of 15 questions and give myself the proportioned 3.6 minutes to finish. I got 13 of 15 correct. Extrapolated, that means I would have scored 42.4 out of a possible perfect 50.

Thus, the test is worthless. If a stupid sports writer like me could do that, then forget it. Let's look at some of the past scores of players.

Pat McNally, a punter for Cincinnati from Harvard, is the only player to score a 50, a perfect score.

One (thankfully) unidentified player scored a 1. He must have played for the Saints.

By position, offensive tackles average 26, the highest. Half backs, 16, the lowest. A newswriter's average is 26. Whoa, weze idiots is smarts. Gollllleeee.

Since QB's are arguably the most important player on the team, a brief look at a few of the better known ones

Eli Manning, 39. Ben Roethlisberger, 25. Carson Palmer, 26. Bryon Leftwich, 25.

Joey Harrington, who Detroit is reportedly ready to give up on, scored a 32.

One of the lowest scores ever reported for a QB was 14. Yea, he was bad. Name was Dan Marino.

The Saints' Aaron Brooks got a 17 – on the third try. He rolled a 7 the first time. As a former beat writer for the Saints, I had often said he was just a finger print smarter than a doorknob.

Duante Culpepper scored 18, 21, and 15, so take your pick.

Steve McNair was brilliant with a 15. Drew Brees, a Purdue Ivy Leager, got 28 and Michael Vick scored 20.

Last 3 samples. Brett Favre scored a 22, Troy Aikman a 29 and Steve Young, ESQ, a 33. So, a 14 is the all-time passing yardage and TD leader. Alex Smith got a 40.

Who is Alex Smith?

So, this test is hardly conclusive.

Since a million is a common number here, it just seems like there are a million so-called experts who have their own mock draft guesses. I looked at some 45 of them, and it virtually looked like a Xerox, so...?

It is somewhat ironic that the Saints, the team with the worst overall draft record over the years (see below) could just be the flash point in this draft.

And that became much more so when a huge bomb exploded in Houston Friday evening. Ever since Reggie Bush declared for the draft, it was, according to the "experts," a lock that they would take him. All other teams were planning on what to do "post Bush."

Well, the Texans shocked everyone by agreeing to a six-year, \$54 million deal (\$24 million guaranteed) with N.C. State DE Mario Williams with the # 1 pick.

As Tennessee Titans' coach Jeff Fisher said, "This absolutely changes everything."

So, all the suspense was in New Orleans. They were the hidden factor, and could cause all sorts of complications.

It did not happen.

The Saints took Reggie Bush with the #2 overall pick., thus negating trades and moves up/down. Three teams tried to make a deal with the Saints to get Bush, but the big surprise is Tom Benson, who usually talks like a chicken – cheap, cheap, cheap, was willing to open up his wallet.



Since Bush, the player several teams wanted was gone, it made it rather straight forward after that, with a couple of surprise, including a big one.

Tennessee, which is in big need of a QB, took Vince Young over Matt Lienhart. It was reported that Coach Jeff Fisher and the GM wanted Lienhart, but the team's owner is from Texas, and he wanted Young.

The big shock is that Matt Lienhart lasted to the 10<sup>th</sup> pick, to Arizona.

Most all mock drafts and experts said he would be in the top three and the first QB, so, see next paragraph.

To paraphrase Forrest Gump, (the draft) is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're gonna get."

A brief look back at some of the all-time top rated busts.

Ryan Leaf. Remember in 1998, the raging debate over who was best, Leaf or Peyton Manning. San Diego went with Leaf. Two years, 2 million tantrums and an "I got my \$10 million bonus" later, he was history.

Lawrence Phillips. Mucho talento, mas mucho problemas (doing Spanish in honor of the great Mexican protest tomorrow.

Then you had Chuck Muncie, the Ricky Williams of yesteryear. He put more coke up his nose than a real Coca Cola bottling company could produce.

And my favorite, Oklahoma "All-World" (his own words) LB, Brian Bosworth.

In his second and last memorable year, he is most famous for his Monday night appearance in which Bo Jackson absolutely flattened him, actually stepping on his face as he bowled Boz over on his way to the end zone for a TD. Great moment.

Anyone remember Art Schleister? The QB from Ohio State? Anyone remember Kenny Rodgers' hit song, "The Gambler?" Well, Arty baby gambled away his career and nearly his life. Is he out of prison yet?

Then last but not least, loveable Ricky Williams.

He, basically, took his Heisman and just went to pot.

Then you have the many players who were unheralded but became stars.

Tom Brady was the 199<sup>th</sup> player taken in the 2000 draft.

Bill Walsh, who I consider the greatest judge of talent ever, forced the Niners to let him draft a small, weak-armed QB out of Notre Dame – the 5<sup>th</sup> QB in the draft, Joe Montana.

Like wise he pushed for and got the "too slow WR from a 1AA school, Jerry Rice.

The great Pittsburgh coach Chuck Knoll said, "Bill is without a doubt the best ever of going into the bramble bushes and coming out with 2 or 3 great baskets of fruit."

Now overall, which team has the best and the worst draft record over the last 30-40 years.

The best is Pittsburgh. They have always relied on the draft, never being big in free agency.

Early on, they missed. In 1938 their round first pick from Colorado led the team in rushing but then left the league to pursue other endeavors. That was Byron "Whizzer" White, the late US Supreme Court Justice.

Then in 1955, they cut their 9<sup>th</sup> round QB, as he "failed to impress." This loser ended up in Baltimore. Name was Johnny Unitas.

But beginning in the late 60's and into the 70's, the Steelers, without a GM,



## OFF THE WALL SPORTS

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started with “Mean” Joe Green, and in future drafts they got Terry Bradshaw, Franco Harris, Jack Ham Lynn Swann, Jack Lambert, John Stallworth and center Mike Webster. Every one of them is in the Hall of Fame.

And it continues today. Of the 22 starters in their Super Bowl win last year, 19 were drafted by the Steelers.

In the last few years, they have snagged Ben Roethlisberger and Troy Polamalu in the first rounds and gathered up players like Hines Ward, Joey Porter, Casey Hampton and Kendall Simmons, just to name a few.

And though they will have the 32<sup>nd</sup> and last pick in each round, I bet they score in the upper half of the draft.

On the other side, you have the loveable losers, the New Orleans Saints.

Their drafts have been about as useful as ¼ of a roll of toilet paper just before you take your colonoscopy medicine.

There are really only three #1 picks who were great. Archie Manning, Willie Roaf and (so far) Deuce McAllister. I was out of deadline time to research it, but I do not think a single member of the Saints (other than the late GM, Jim Finks) is in the Hall of Fame. And of those, poor Manning played on some of the worst teams in NFL history, Roaf has played his best since leaving the Saints, and McAllister’s knee will tell how he will do. On the other side. Some more wonderful top draft picks.

Ole Poker Face himself, Mike Ditka, traded away their entire 1999 draft choices plus a 1 and a 3 in 2000 for Pothead Ricky Williams.

And ’99 was the end of four awful years.

In ’98, they took Kyle Turley. He had the talent, but he definitely had a few screws loose. I nicknamed him “Surley Turley,” and after he found out I was the namer, when I went to interview him in the locker room after a game, he cussed my out and physically was about to turn me into a pretzel before other intervened. He might have thrown my helmet with my head in it.

’97 saw Chris Naeole, a guard, who could not guard anyone and had more false starts than a politician’s speech.

Backward to ’96. the Saints passed on two excellent players to draft DB Alex Molden, who could not cover an old sportswriter like me.

RB Vaughn Dunbar in ’92 was a snail, ’91 gave us WR Wesley Carroll. You likely could count his catches on two hands.

My favorite., 1988 Craig “Ironhead” Heyword. Ran hard, but dumber than a post and was virtually worthless.

In 2003, they got the “next great defensive tackle, a real run stuffer” in Johnathan Sullivan. All he has stuffed is food into his mouth and has hardly played.

And last but not least, let us not forget 1979, when the Saints spent their first choice on Russell Erxleben, a KICKER. He never place kicked for the Saints, but he did some punting. He was a very smooth talker and a great crook. Spent some eight years in prison for fraud.

Futility at its finest, the Aints.



# OFF THE WALL SPORTS

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Well, Radio City Music Hall will be filled to the rafters again this weekend as a few thousand 300-pound beer gutters with their team's hats and jerseys on will be drunk and make fools of themselves.

Three things you can count on. Whoever the Jets draft, their fans will boo, Joe Thiesman will have spent all this week in front of the mirror getting himself dandied up, and teams will give millions of dollars to, hopefully, good football players.

I can just see the Escalade and Navigator dealerships drooling, not to mention the jewelry shops.

I'll watch about 10 minutes, then read about how each team said how great they did.

Single Malt time.