



THE NFL DRAFT: THE BIGGEST CRAP GAME OF ALL

By Kerry Schmidt April 26, 2009

This weekend, the NFL will hold their annual crap shoot.

Thousands of fans, wearing their team's jerseys, filled to the gills with alcohol, will stuff themselves into Radio City Music Hall – it used to be in Madison Square Garden, but when a couple thousand more drunks “absolutely had to attend this mega event,” it was moved.

For some, once their team announces their draft choice(s), they will make music, either wild cheers, or horrendous jeers, and spill a few beers.

These people obviously have absolutely NO life, if they can spend 12 hours on Saturday and Sunday absorbing this “crap game.”

But speaking of all the time.

Both the NFL Network and ESPN will cover both days. The coverage will begin at 10 AM EDT. Now since the first draft choice is not named until just after 4 PM, EDT, well, a hell of a lot of BS will be broadcast

Just shows how HUGE the NFL has become. I mean, you sure don't see much for the MLB or NBA drafts.

Poker exploded onto the TV screens a few years back. One World Series of Poker champ picked up \$10.4 million.

Pocket change. In the first 2 rounds (Saturday), each team will shell out between 50-75 million bucks for just 2 players! The guaranteed sign on bonus' alone will be at least 45 million. Now multiply that by 32 teams.

But factor in the ‘intangibles.’

Many of the drafted players have been scouted, filmed, interviewed, background checked and a zillion other things.

Then you lead up to the combine and the many top players who have their own “look at me” days, usually on their own campus. Each team sends between 15-30 individuals to cover all these players.

Point here is that the best guess that the NFL came up with is that for the top 3 rounds, at least, some 8-10 million have been spent just checking them out.

And believe me, they research every possible aspect, right down to their jock size and favored color of same.

Now a few teams share joint grunt work, yet the combined outlay of the 32 teams is over 100 mil just “to evaluate” the prospects.

Again, these figures are “best guesstimates,” but it is big bucks.

Thus, 2-3 years of scouting players (from freshman year to when they declare), and all else up to draft day, they've spent enough to fund 1 or 2 of politicians pig projects.

Add in the above contract dollars, and whew!, you have spent a bunch of money before he even plays a down. Up to over a half BILLION just to guess who the good guys are!

Now, many of these top choices turn out to be great players. But also a goodly number totally “bomb out.” See Ryan Leaf, Brian Bosworth, Tony Mandrich, Pacman Jones, et al.

Yes, many also became stars, but the point is you just can't be sure. And you must “lay your money down” before you can find out.

Many a scout and whomever may also have their employment future on the line.

So, lets examine some of this year's pounds of flesh.

QB's are the most coveted picks. Look what a Joe Montana, John Elway, Dan Marino can do for you.



But they also are the most risky.

Last year, Atlanta with Matt Flynn and Baltimore with Joe Flacco lucked out, as both lead their teams to big turn-around season.

But how about 2004 through 2007?

2004 was great for Pittsburgh with Ben Rothlisberger. He has won 2 SB's.

2005, Alex Smith, 49'ers. Mostly injured, and ineffective, battling for a starting spot.

Add in Vince Young and JaMarcus Russell, and you have some bad investments, to date.

Yes, while a franchise QB is THE most coveted draftee, it is also the biggest gamble.

But certainly, at least 2 QB's are projected to go in the top 10, Georgia's Matthew Stafford and USC's Mark Sanchez. Kansas State's Josh Freeman, will likely be first rounder. All were juniors this past season. Some "experts" have Stafford as the No. 1 overall pick. You'll have all the answers by the time you read this.

So, what position is the "safest" choice?

By far, offensive tackles are the best! Of the 80 OT's drafted since 2000, only 7 are not playing! Since 1990, of the 23 OT's taken in the top 10, only 4 were considered flops.

Last year, 8 OT's were taken in the first round. Seven became starters by week 4 and Miami's Jake Long went to the Pro Bowl.

In 2007, 9 of the first OT's drafted were starters before the season was half over, and 2 were stars. Thus, look for a goodly number of OT's to be drafted highly, again.

NOTE: Guess what group of position players have the highest IQ's? Again, offensive linemen.

The intricate amount of details they must deal with require brains as well as brawn.

Jim Dombrowski, who played on the O line for New Orleans for 13 seasons, graduated in 3 years from Virginia with a 3.9 GPA in bio-chemistry. He was accepted to 6 medical schools, including Harvard.

And, a "new" trend is taking hold in the NFL.

Like Bill Walsh's "west coast offense," copied by the majority of teams, the newest set up is called the "Wildcat."

It has been sweeping the top college teams for several years, and the NFL has taken notice. The college teams first called it the "Spread" offense, or "wide out." As of last season, 31 of the 65 BCS teams were running it.

And, since there is no longer an NFL Europe or Arena League, colleges are "the training grounds."

Basically, it spreads players out nearly from sideline to sideline, forcing defenses to adjust. But, the biggest aspect of this is due to a "new" type of player. They call him a "Hybrid."

A hybrid is a player who is talented enough to play 2 or more positions.

Teams line up and will have a direct snap to a RB or WR who is in the back field. They may run the ball or pass it, sometimes backward to the QB who will either run or pass.

QB Tim Tebow of Florida is a Hybrid. He has over 60 TD, over a third running.

The Gators also had Percy Harvin, a WR who scored 17 TD's rushing and 40 receiving. He also threw for 4 TD's.

West Virginia's QB, Pat White, scouts say, is a QB, but can, and has, played at RB, WR and kick returner.

Thus, with these multi-talented players, the defenses have to make major adjustments also. For example, an OLB now needs to be able to rush the passer, cover both tight ends and WR's, and actually play safety at times.

While most fans have yet to see these major changes, they soon will.

Perhaps one of the potential "ultimate" of hybrids is Rice's TE, James Casey.

At 6-3, 246 pounds, he shocked scouts and coaches of pro day.



Yes, he ran routes and caught passes. But then he just picked up a ball and began zinging multiple passes all over the field, with precision placement.

Some say scouts just gazed in amazement.

At Rice, as a freshman, he once played 7 different positions in a single game. He passed for a TD, ran for one, and had two sacks. He often took direct snaps, throwing for 2 TD's and rushing for 6.

But he also played LB and safety, covering 7 passes, intercepting one and made 4 unassisted tackles.

Versatility, certainly, but the aspect that most excites coaches is his arm strength. "He can pass better than many starting QB's in the league now, claimed draft expert Mike Mycock (Damn, why did he not change his name?! I can only hope announcers have to quote him many times). He added, "Most NFL defenses have figured out what the wildcat is, so you better get someone who can pass the ball as well as run it.

"With some of these guys (like Casey), your getting a 2-3 position offensive player and yet he can play 3 defensive positions."

To use a dumb, but appropriate cliché, "It's a whole new ball game."

Over the past several years, USC has been a very dominant team.

They have sent more players to the NFL, by far, than any other college.

And they are about to do a "first."

Only once in past drafts have 3 LB's been drafted in the top10, and never from the same team.

As a tough Indianapolis coach, John Becker, told USC coach Pete Carroll, "I've never seen such talent at one position on the same team." All three are All-Americans.

While they are a "very tight knit group," their backgrounds could not be more different.

The three are Rey Mauluga, Brian Cushing and Clay Matthews III.

Mauluga won the '08 Bednarik Award, bestowed on college football's top defender. He also is "By far the most devastating hitter I've coached," said Ken Norton Jr., LB coach.

At 6'2", 249 pounds "Mal," as his teammates call him, is an explosive, prototype MLB, whose tackles Baltimore Ravens director of player personnel Eric DeCosta likens to "train wrecks."

Cushing was elected defensive captains by his teammates. He can play a variety of LB positions in the 4-3 and 3-4.

The only question on Cushing is does he have the "shock" – brute strength to stalemate guards in the 3-4. (Hey, I know I'm getting pretty technical here, but I'm a football guy and this is a column about football, so screw you who can't keep up.)

Some also wonder if Mal and Cushing are nimble enough to cover receivers.

But there is no doubt about the "odd ball" in the bunch, Matthews.

At 6'3", 240 pounds, he is the fastest and most athletic of the 3, and the best pass rusher. He is also the best special team's player.

While he certainly does not have the background of the other two, he has become what many say may be the first one of them to be drafted.

Mal and Cushing came to USC as highly touted picks, and both became starters in their freshman year.

Mathews was the total opposite.

While he has the best pedigree of them all – his grandfather, Clay Matthews played with the 49'ers for 5 years; his dad, Clay Jr. played LB for 19 seasons with the Falcons, and his uncle, Bruce Matthews played for 20 seasons with Houston Texans/Tennessee Titans. He is in the Hall-of-Fame.

All three of them played at USC.



OFF THE WALL SPORTS

Matthews III, went to Agoura High School near L.A. He rarely played his junior season, as a scrawny 166 pound LB.

He bulked up a bit for his senior year and played well, but his coach, his dad, told him he would not make it a any big college.

But he turned down offers from a couple of tiny schools and was a “walk-on” at USC.

Coach Carroll admitted that he never thought he could play at this level, but let him in due to his family’s background.

To make it short, he red-shirted his first year – his own decision, not the coaches, never started in his sophomore year, but played on special teams.

In his junior year, he was named captain of special teams, but only player a small bit at LB.

But by his senior year, he had bulked up and greatly increased his speed. Yet he was only a backup LB at first, but by game 3 he started, and, as some say, he was the best of the 3.

And, he just may be the first of the 3 taken.

The other part of this year’s draft is the buzz that there could be “an unprecedented” number of trades.

The Lions have the first choice, as well as the 20th in round one and two in the third round via previous trades. Thus, they will pick 5 of the first 82.

When you were 0-16, you only have one way to go – up.

Yes, they need a QB, but many say taking one of the great OT’s first would be smart. “Having a good QB won’t help you if he spends his time on his backside,” said one scout.

There have already been four trades, the biggest being TE Tony Gonzalez, a 10-time Pro Bowler, who was sent to Atlanta.

“Expect more, especially at the last minute” (during the draft) said one GM.

Thus, yesterday and today was/will be a day where millions of dollars are spent on flesh and body parts – sounds like a morgue.

Careers of future NFL players will start, and perhaps careers of some scouts/managers, whatever, will come to an abrupt end.

And a goodly number of agents will begin drooling all over their \$3,000 suits, seeing large amounts of green.

The same agents that for some unknown reason, ALWAYS have clients hold out until training camp is nearly over, then sign for what they could have at the beginning. Stupid as hell, but every year, same ole, same ole.

Success or failure, I can assure you that both will take place. We just won’t know which/how much for some time.

I can also assure you that I will NOT sit in front of by big plasma flat screen watching the drunken bimbos act like the importance of the free world is at stake.

I may walk by the TV occasionally and watch that “scroll bar” at the bottom of the screen that tells you who/what has happened, but that’s it.

Me and my single male have many better things to do. Like drink some of the SM.