



ARE YOU READY FOR SOME FOOTBALL?!

By Kerry Schmidt August 2, 2009

So, are you ready for some football? So am I. The Godly time of year is nearly upon us. But, not yet. So, you won't read much about football in this column! I just like the Headline! All NFL teams have opened their training camps. Thus, optimism abounds. Last year is history. Every team has a hope for the golden ring. And, all but one will fail, some miserably! There is, however, one trend at the start of training camps every year. It is a tradition. All players having been drafted back in mid April, they and their agents have had over 3 months to agree on a contract. RIGHT!

Of the 32 first round picks, a grand total of 9 have signed, as of this writing! What in the F is it that makes both sides act like tackling dummies? Every frickin year, the majority of 1st rounders hold out well into training camp, thus they are way behind the curve when it starts to count.

Yea, I know the agents want to get the most money that can for ---- themselves, screw the player, so they play hard ball. And, the owners' people are just as screwed up. They all say, "wait until a few have signed, then we have a measuring stick as to where to slot (my) guy."

Well, the top two have signed, along with no's 5, 7, 13 17, 22, 24 and 32. Therefore, they have the ranges from top to 32nd, or last, in first round. It's akin to a baby holding on to their piece of candy and wanting a bigger one. I have seen many a player miss so much of that ever important first camp that they, for most of them, are virtually worthless in their first year.

But, this idiocy of mistakes has been happening for over 20 years. One other thing I have mentioned before, one that the veterans and owners are together on. Matthew Stafford, QB out of Georgia was the No. 1 pick. He signed for 6 years, 72 million, with 41.7 mil guaranteed!! And, he has yet to play a single frickin down!

Thus, you have numerous All-Pro veterans making far less than that with no guarantee. Nowhere can you find such a screwed up process in a "Corporation" – if the NFL, all facets combined, were one corporation, they would be the 52nd largest in the world! And how they screw this up so badly is beyond stupid.

Many people have office pools picking which 1st rounder will be the last one to sign. There will be no salary cap in 2010, then in 2011, all hell could break loose. I'm, to a point, totally on the player's side, but I would love to see a clause in the rookie contracts that set a quick deadline, and if no agreement is met, the team can give said player the league minimum for the first year, AND, he is still the property of said team next season. Damn sure would solve this idiotic mess.

Lastly, from experiencing this up close, I can assure you that the many of the grizzled vets, well, when the rooks do show up, they get treated like one of Michael Vick's dogs. No such thing as "non-contact" practices, except for a golden boy QB, who may be great or may be a total piece of doggies ...

Enough.

In a later column, I will give my predictions and reasons for same. But for now, since I live in the greater New Orleans area, and was a beat writer for them for 8 years, I'll give you a quick insider's picture of them.

Bottom line: This IS a make or break year for the Saints. And Reggie Bush.



OFF THE WALL SPORTS

They have been the No. 1 offensive team for 3 of the last 4 years. Also in that time span, they have been ranked in the bottom quarter in defense. They especially have sucked in pass defense, giving up more big plays than Nancy Pelosi's lies.

Tom Brady and Peyton Manning are the yardsticks all press folks point to. But Drew Brees has passed for more yards, more points and higher completion percentage than the top 10 QB's. Thus, N.O. brought in Greg Williams, a defensive guru, with a "full attack" mode on D. And, there are 7 potential new starters, especially in the CB/Safety's arena.

In 11 games last season, the Saints led with less than 3 minutes left in the game. They lost 7 of those, 6 by allowing pass completions of 30 yards or more!

They are in a very tough division, the NFC south, where every team except the Saints had winning records, 12-4, 11-5 and 9-7.

Sean Peyton, the head coach, is beloved here, but if they repeat their gross defensive deficiencies this season, there could be trouble in booze town.

The famous banners may reappear. Best was: "New Orleans. A drinking town with a football problem."

Again, however, I believe the Saints fans are the most loyal, by far, in the NFL. Here is a team that has won 2 playoff games in 42 years, yet they have sold out season tickets for the 3rd straight year and have a 50,000 waiting list! Drinking heavily is important here.

There are a record 9 new head coaches this year, nearly 30%, so it is wide open. As many as 18-20 teams have honest chances to get to the promise land.

The early odds-on choice is for Pittsburgh to repeat. Injuries and luck are major factors towards the holy grail. We will see.

Further Vick input from Mr. Upright himself.

Terrell Owens, having been ejected by most big name teams is now a big fish in a small town, Buffalo.

"Buffalo is the right town for TO," said one beat writer. "In the bigger towns, he had to share the spotlight, something he does not like to do. Here, he is the spotlight."

But he has not stopped spouting off. He said that Commissioner Roger Goodell should immediately reinstate Vick, not waiting, no conditions.

He even said, "Goodell thinks Vick has not been punished enough. He (Goodell) should spend 23 (18, actually, but facts aren't important to TO) months behind bars and see how it feels.

He "tweeted," or whatever the hell you call that stuff, that "there should be no gray area here. I'm not satisfied. My problem is with the 4-game suspension!"

Now I'm sure Goodell gave a crap what TO said.

Same ole TO. Two days in another camp with another team, this time with a virtual unknown team in a town where there are only two seasons, 4th of July and winter, and he's already stirring up some poop. Mr. Attention Man. "Look at me."

The sporting News put together a panel of 118 "very distinguished" coaches from all sports.

Their goal was to pick THE BEST coach ever. Not one for each sport, but just THE ONE coach to anoint as the best ever!

This was the 4th time various panels of coaches have done this. And for the 4th time, by a huge margin, John Wooden, the "Wizard of Westwood," was the winner.

Note: Vince Lombardi was a distant 2nd, Bear Bryant 3rd, Phil Jackson, 4th and Don Shula, 5th.

Speaking of college basketball coaches, Kentucky's Mr. Racist himself, Adolph Rupp was.....21st.

The statistics for this "Great One," are staggering. For his entire career, he was 885-203, a winning percentage of 81.3%.



In his 27 years at UCLA, he was “better,” as he went 620-147, or 82.2%.

People will say that he had such great players at UCLA, which was true, but his overall percentage, including his tenure at Indiana State, spoke for itself.

In his favorite restaurant, not far from UCLA, Wooden was met by a number of his former players, including Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Marques Johnson, Jamaal Wilkes and many others, along with coaches, press and friends.

At UCLA, Wooden won 10 NCAA basketball titles in a 12-year span, including an unbelievable 7 consecutive championships and four 30-0 undefeated seasons.

It is fitting then, that the recognition of each year’s best collegiate basketball player receives the John Wooden Award.

But as great a coach as he was, it was perhaps his character and integrity that almost dwarfs his wins.

He had 3 simple rules: Be on time, never use profanity and never criticize a teammate.

He had his famous “pyramid of success,” and perhaps his most well remembered saying was on a placard that always sat on his desk. “Failing to prepare is preparing to fail,” it read.

Many of his former players still keep in constant touch with him.

Pointing out his former “young men” at the diner who played for him, he said, “No one is deserving of being called the best. No one. They’re (his players) the ones who make coaches.

Coaches help, but if you don’t have the youngsters, you’re not going to do the job.”

There are so many traits that dignify this great man. Two stories stand out.

He married his high school sweet heart, Nellie and they were married 53 years, before she died, on the 21st of a month. Thus, on the 21st of every month, he visits her grave site, then writes her a letter, each ending with telling her how much he misses her and looks forward to the time he can be with her again.

He then takes that letter and places it on her pillow on their bed, along with a single rose. The letter and rose stay there until the 21st of the next month. It is then put into the box with the others, and a new one takes its place.

He only sleeps on his side of the bed. “It’s out of respect,” he says.

Nothing has changed in the house they shared together since she’s been gone. “Every picture on the walls are the ones Nellie chose, the ones she wanted up,” said John. “I’ve changed nothing, except to add pictures of the great-grandchildren she never got to see.”

At 98 years young, he uses a wheel chair much of the time, but his mind is still “as sharp as ever,” said a close friend.

And, his code of conduct included no beards, cut hair and, on road trips, coats and ties.

Which lead to one of the greatest stories.

His All-American center, Bill Walton, was really into the 60’s-early 70’s anti-war, hippie life style.

It was Walton’s senior year and he was the most dominant player (center) in the country.

He showed up at the first practice with a scraggly beard, long, unkempt hair, torn jeans and the obligatory “peace” T-shirt.

“It’s my right,” Bill insisted. Wooden asked him if he believed that strongly, and Walton said he did. “That’s good, Bill,” said Wooden. “I admire people who have strong beliefs and stick by them, I really do.” After a pause, Wooden turned to walk away but said, “We’re going to miss you.”

Walton shaved and got a haircut almost immediately, and led UCLA to another 30-0 season and NCAA Championship.

Now Walton still calls once a week to tell Coach he loves him.



OFF THE WALL SPORTS

The latest “roid rubbish.” Seems Manny Ramirez and David Ortiz tested positive for steroids in 2003. The Red Sox won their first WS in over 80 years in 2004.

Both the Red Sox management and the Red Sox nation po pa the drug test, saying it had nothing to do with their WS win. Again, OK for everyone except Barry Bonds.

Hank Aaron, Bud Selig’s love child, came out and said that Pete Rose deserves to be in the Hall of Fame. I definitely agree! And, he added that the steroid users also be inducted, but with an asterisk on their plaque.

Most costly pitcher in MLB? Jason Schmidt of the Dodgers. He signed a 3-year, \$47 million contract in 2007. Since then, he has won a whopping 2 games for them. Thus, each Schmidt win has cost the Dodgers \$23.5 million. Not a bad gig if you can get it! Unfortunately, I’m no relation to him.

In the never ending hunt to squeeze more revenue out of their games, the NBA and NHL (what’s that) are entertaining the idea of putting corporate sponsor’s logos on the uniforms.

Geeze, they may end up looking like NASCAR drivers. Maybe the players could get corporate tattoos and make a bunch of money for themselves.

Well, time to stock up on single malts. Football starts in about a month!