



## TRAINING CAMP, A VETERANS NIGHTMARE

By Kerry Schmidt      July 25, 2010

Of the 48 players who will end up on the opening day roster of all NFL teams, the majority of them are veterans.

Some of those veterans are long timers, while others may be only 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> year starters.

And then, you have the rookies, even that occasional one who is penciled in as a starter.

But for the rest – a team may open camp with 75-80- players or more, training camp is their chance to have their name engraved on opening day programs.

Some who may get cut by one team, could be a good fit with another.

Today, you have seven draft picks (224 players), then after the draft is over, teams will often “sign” a number of undrafted players, giving them a chance to go to a training camp and just maybe catch on.

But for the established vets, training camp is “a one month pile of s..t, wherein you have to live like you were in college or back in your rookie season,” said Ed Kennison, who in 2007 was with the KC Chiefs.

Now Kennison, and the other established starters, they show up with their large screen TV’s and stereos with their “fave tunes’ and other aspects of luxury and home.

Kennison also brings his favorite quilt, and between morning and afternoon practices, he – and a number of other vets, will curl up under same in a queen size bed that he “arranged” for himself, turn on his TV or tunes and doze off in air conditioned comfort.

While he and the other vets are partaking in the good times, the rookies take every second they have to spare and study the 200 page play book. They usually will not have even a minute to lie



down or relax. You see, this month, is their career. They have around 30 days to prove to an angry and nasty bunch of coaches that they can contribute enough to the game to help his new employers.

And other than the top draft choices, there is rarely any large amount of kindness from these coaches.

They are there to produce a winning team, and they, like the players, must report to someone. In the coach's path, are the GM and management, and then the owner.

Thus, in just 30 days, careers are made and/or lost. Players who dreamed of being in the NFL, well, most of them have their hopes dashed, and not in a nice or polite manner.

But for the vets, most know their position is secure, for now, but they must bust their butts also, to beat out any "new kid" who has his eyes on their spot(s). And, even they are but one torn tendon away from retirement.

But the biggest thing, by far, that a vet hates about training camp, is that chance he any suffer a major injury – a torn knee, broken foot, torn bicep, et al.

It's not uncommon for a star to be out a year due to injury, and when he comes back next year, well, he finds someone else has taken his place. It happens.

Pro football is a game of violence and mayhem, where your ability to stay in one piece is as important as your ability to stay "better than the guy behind you."

Yes, team camaraderie is formed during training camp, and, hopefully, enough that you enter the season with a cohesive unit that can take you well past 16 games.

Kennison and many other vets like him, besides their own rugs, favorite slippers, et al, when asked what they really like about training camp, the answer is a resounding, "the last day."



As Chiefs president and GM Carl Peterson says, “It’s the same routine in the same dormitories that the president and everybody else is in. Does it make us a better football team” I sure hope so.” Then, looking back at Kennison..... He is a millionaire with a tired and sore 34-year old body, a father who misses his kids but has the means to videoconference them. Just close the door on the first floor – the rookies must walk up 30-40 steps to the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> floors, and while 4 flights of stairs may not seem that much, by day 2 or three, it’s like climbing a mountain - so he can catch a nap in between practices, under the above mentioned comforter.

The rooks? They often do not even have time to shower before the afternoon practices begin.

It is the players drafted in rounds 3-7 that are really on the bubble. They have a scant 30 days out of a lifetime of some 80 years, to earn a roster spot so they can say, “I’m an NFL football player!” Different worlds for different players. While one is famous and established, another is simply trying to hang on and be one of the 48 names on that opening day roster.

Thus, you have 30 days to prove you belong. Period.

Enough of the cut and dry, hard core stuff.

Training camps can, and often do, produce some hilarious moments.

Not so many crazy things happen today, but go back 15-20, even 30 years ago, and wow, it was a 3-ring circus.

Long time readers may remember my accounts of the Oakland Raiders, but they are worth mentioning again.

The Raiders, under John Madden, were a group of whackos.

Kenny Stabler was the QB, and one of his most famous moments was during a Super Bowl in New Orleans. Some media types found him at 3:30 in the morning in a bar. Big surprise, huh?

When asked about that, he simple said, “Ain’t nothing wrong with studying your playbook by the light of a juke box.”

During training camp.....



## OFF THE WALL SPORTS

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One of the all time wild ones was LB Ted Hendricks, AKA, the “Mad Stork.” (He was about 6’5” and only about 220 pounds). During an exhibition game against the 49’ers – exhibition games back then were not TV’d, few fans, more like a scrimmage, Stork got tired, so he just went over and sat in the 49’er huddle.

When the refs tried to stop his antics, Madden pulled him out and said, and now remember these words, “Ted, get your expletives uniform off and cuss, cuss out of here and quit horsing around.

Just as the second half was starting, here comes the Stork. Seems he had gone down to a farm not far away and stolen a horse. He then comes riding onto the field. No uniform on – buck naked. Both teams and the refs were doubled over with laughter, and Ted rode over to Madden and said, “Coach, you told me to get my uniform off and quit horsing around....”

And, when training camp was just about over, Hendricks would have their annual “pizza party.”

This was held at a pizza place where they went every training camp, up in Santa Rosa, CA.

Remember those little “bowling games,” the kind where you would slide a silver puck down the alley and it would trip the pins to flip up?

Well, somehow, things changed. Lyle Alzado began turning the pizza tables over, and collecting the silver pucks – they were made out of metal and weighed around 12-16 ounces.

Now Stork’s bowling team, they did not need the pucks, since they would just dive onto the “alley” and slide into the pins.

Thus, Alzado began throwing these metal slugs at Storks’ team!

To say the least, nearly every window and piece glass were broken and a number of stitches were needed to fix everyone up.

But, over 2,000 bucks worth of beer were served, and, well, an additional \$25,000 was needed to “fix the pizza place.”

But, good times were had by all, and only 4 players had to miss the next exhibition game.



And this stuff went way back.

The Green Bay Packers, under the legendary Vince Lombardi, well, they ruled the NFL back then.

Thus, the first “Super Bowl” was born, though it was not called that yet.

Anyway, Max Magee was the tight end on the Packers, and he was an early day Stork.

As the Pack was preparing to play Kansas City in the first “SB”, Lombardi would grab Magee and yell at him to not miss 10PM curfew. Lombardi yelled that the first time he was caught, it would cost him \$100. (That was a good bit of money back then). He went on upping the amounts, until he got to the 5<sup>th</sup> “late night” call, and he yelled up the stairs to Magee, “...this one will cost you \$2,000. Lombardi bellowed.

As Magee began to slink away, Lombardi yelled up to Magee, “...hey Max, if you ever find a girl worth \$2,000 let me know, ‘cause I’ll damn sure go with you!”

Yea, training camps were totally different than they are today. I cannot really remember when the first pre-season game was televised, but it was several years into pre-seasons before the first game was aired, probably not until the mid-70’s or so.

You have to admit, the players back then, they certainly livened things up.

A big salary back in the 60’s was \$50,000 a year. That was the most QB John Brodie made when he was the MVP of the league in 1969.

Today, pre season is huge. The league charges the fans the same amount of money as the regular season games, - it is a part of your season package, and all games are televised.

Thus, with salaries in the many millions of dollars, pre-season has a completely different meaning than it did way back then.

Kids signed multi-million dollar contracts before they even play a single down! No wonder the established vets tend to be a bit upset



with this standard. I mean, you get a first round QB who gets \$25 million guaranteed BEFORE he even takes a snap, while the established vets make far less than that and nothing is guaranteed. However, this season will be VERY different, and it leads up to the 2011 season, IF THERE IS ONE.

And speaking of all that money to the new players.

A goodly number of the new “kids” who sign million dollar contracts, well, they can tend to buy 3-4 flashy cars, a couple of houses, the obligatory 10 carat diamond earrings, et al.

Team management has been telling these new kids to hang on to most of their money, since it is quite possible that there will be no contracts in 2011.

However, according to league sources, a “significant number” of players are not listening, and are spending like there is no tomorrow – which, ironically, there may not be.

Owners are expecting a lockout of about 6 games, league sources say. The players are expecting slightly fewer games but (some) are preparing for a worst-case scenario of half the season.

League sources say that owners can deal with 8 games, as Forbes estimates that each NFL owner makes an average profit of \$31 million a year.

Some younger players, especially, may have difficulty handling the loss of a single game, paycheck, let alone 6 or 8.

The owners know this, and are secretly relying on some players’ inability to cut back on spending as a sort of ultimate, unspoken leverage.

However, some of the owners have large stadium payments, thus, there are tough arguments over next years TV revenues, which is the one major arena that could hurt some owners.

The current TV deal allows owners to receive monies even if there is a lockout. The players, on the other hand, will not get a dime of that money, so therein lies a huge advantage for the owners.



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Also, over and above the actual monetary amounts, you have the potential adversity that will develop between the owners and players over this “we get ours anyway and you don’t” aspect. So, as we began with pre-season, we end up with, perhaps, not only no pre-season next year, but also no real season.

Remember way back in, I believe it was '94, when MLB went on strike and resulted in no WS that year. It took MLB nearly 10 years to get revenue and interest back to where it was prior to the strike. Not good. You would think that both sides would realize the potential damage to both parties and the game itself, but, well, stupidity seems to devour common sense herein, so who knows. Waking up September, 2011 with no football on your TV screens does not sound pretty.

Beginning from opening day, I am glued to the tube, and I subscribe to the NFL package, wherein I can watch every game. Not watching pre-season is bad, but having no regular season to watch, well, that is catastrophic.

Let’s hope common sense arrives in time to abort such a disaster. No TV on Sunday?! God help us!

I’ll have to double up on my single malt! Which is a good thing! Another too long one here. Sorry. I promise I will be much shorter next week.