

Colts losers, Chargers winners in NFL draft

By Pat Clark

The greatest thing about the NFL Draft is that it rewards failure. We are constantly reminded that the world is chock-full of success stories; people who overcame great odds to become winners with that hearty American blend of determination and hard work. But for every success story there is also a colossal failure, and for us in the failure category the NFL draft represents our day in the sun, our ticker-tape parade, the time when The Worst Become the First.

This year no team failed as magnificently or as frequently as the Baltimore Colts, which puts them at the front of John Elway Sweepstakes. Elway, the clear-cut first choice has stated that he will not play for the Colts. With that in mind, the Colts will probably not draft Elway, because they would be drafting to strength. They've already got 43 guys who won't play for them, and don't need another. The going rumor is that San Diego has the best chance at making a trade for the Colts' draft pick, and that it will take both of their first-round selections (picks 5 and 20 in the draft order) to get it. For the purpose of predicting the first round of this year's draft, we're going to count the rumor as a fact.

1. San Diego Chargers — John Elway, quarterback, Stanford. The Chargers covet Elway because their present quarterback, Dan Fouts, is now a free agent and is asking for something close to a million dollars. So, at the expense of two first-round selections, the Chargers will draft Elway, trade Fouts to somebody, then pay Elway about a million dollars to sign. We should all be such keen businessmen.

2. Houston Oilers — Eric Dickerson, tailback, SMU. You don't get to draft this early every year without making some sacrifices to avoid improvement. The Oilers have Earl Campbell and not much else, so they need another all-purpose running back like the ocean needs water. Bet the rent money that that's who they'll take then.

3. Los Angeles Rams — Tony Hunter, tight end, Notre Dame. Common draft wisdom tells teams to draft "the best player available; regardless of position." New Rams Coach John Robinson isn't well versed in draft lore, however, and will take the bold approach of drafting players who can help his team in spots where it is weak. He can't draft an owner to replace Georgia Frontiere, so he will settle for Hunter.

4. Denver Broncos — Curt Warner, halfback, Penn State. The Broncos really

don't need Warner, because they drafted a running back in the first round last year (Gerald Wilhite). The Broncos management believes in the aforementioned "best player available" theory, however, and that's Warner. This strategy should allow the Broncos to draft fourth again next year.

5. Baltimore Colts — Billy Ray Smith, linebacker, Arkansas. The Colts use a version of the "best player available" theory because they need help in every position. This could be a great team, with 21 other first-round picks.

6. Chicago Bears — Dave Rimington, center, Nebraska. This is Walter Payton's idea. The current Bears center is the world-renowned Dan Neal, and he's good enough to allow Rimington to break in slowly. Don't look for Rimington to play much until the second quarter of the first exhibition game.

7. Kansas City Chiefs — Chris Hinton, guard, Northwestern. All the talk is that Hinton is a great lineman, and may be the first lineman to go in the draft, ahead of Rimington. If he was that good, what was he doing at Northwestern?

8. Philadelphia Eagles — James Jones, fullback, Florida. Fullback suddenly became a pressing need for the Eagles when Leroy Harris, their fullback last year, whispered something about his drug addiction that was subsequently whispered into national headlines. There are better fullbacks than Jones, but none that the Eagles will be able to get their hands on.

9. Seattle Seahawks — Bruce Matthews, guard, USC. The Seahawks' famed "Five Blocks of Play-Doh" offensive line has needed help for years, but in the grand tradition of the NFL Draft they have managed to avoid selecting a quality lineman. They'll select Matthews by mistake, believing he's a back because he's faster than any of the Seattle backs.

10. New York Giants — Jimbo Covert, offensive tackle, Pittsburgh. Jimbo is about as Covert as a nuclear warhead, and just what the Giants need to preserve the who-are-they-quarterback tandem of Scott Bruner and Phil Simms.

11. Green Bay Packers — Terry Kinard, defensive back, Clemson. The 1982 edition of the Pack could really put the points on the board — for both teams. Kinard was the last line of defense at Clemson, and becomes the only line of defense at Green Bay.

12. Buffalo Bills — Todd Blackledge, quarterback, Penn State. Blackledge is a bargain if he's available this late, and "bargain" is the magic word with Bills owner Ralph Wilson.

13. Detroit Lions — Tony Eason, quarterback, Illinois. At one time, Detroit was interested in trading with Baltimore to get into the Elway Sweepstakes, but nothing materialized. Another few years of Gary Danielson at quarterback, however, and the Lions would have earned that top draft pick on merit.

14. Buffalo Bills — Gary Anderson, wide receiver, Arkansas. The Bills want Anderson so that they aren't dead in the water if they lose Joe Cribbs as a free agent next year. There's a good chance of that, too, because the only thing true about a free agent is the name.

15. New England Patriots — Jim Kelly, quarterback, Miami. The quarterback with the nice Irish name goes to play in the nice Irish town with the nice American show. Kelly probably wishes he has a nice, California-sounding name.

16. Atlanta Falcons — Joey Browner, safety, USC. The last couple of years, Falcon fans have come to believe that the purpose of the pass rush was to make the opposing quarterback hurry up and throw the touchdown pass, as the Atlanta secondary found new ways to avoid contact with intended receivers. They wanted a cornerback last year and didn't get one, but won't make the mistake twice in a row.

17. St. Louis Cardinals — Tim Lewis, defensive back, Pittsburgh. The retirement of Roger Wehrli gives the Cards one of the league's true Matador Secondaries. Lewis is a good cornerback whose greatest claim to fame was blaming his teammates when Pitt lost last year. He will get plenty of opportunities to do the same this year.

18. Chicago Bears — Willie Gault, wide receiver, Tennessee. Giddy with their success in drafting Rimington, the Bears opt for another Bears first: a fast wide receiver. The only people in Chicago who run faster than Gault are Bernard Epton and Harold Washington.

19. Minnesota Vikings — Glen Young, wide receiver, Mississippi State. The Vikings need to replace Ahmad Rashad, and all Young lacks to do the job is a catcher name. The reason you've never heard about Young is that Mississippi State threw the ball about once a month, whether they needed to or not.

20. Baltimore Colts — Don Mosebar, offensive tackle, USC. The Colts use their second pick from the Chargers to get the most desperate need on their large shopping list, a quality lineman. Mosebar has to love the thought of going from the second best (some scouts say third or even fourth best) lineman on his college team to being the best on his professional team. Of course, the Colts don't have the payroll

USC does, either.

21. Pittsburgh Steelers — Daryl Talley, linebacker, West Virginia. Talley almost beat Pitt (college version) single-handedly last year. The Steelers will teach him how to use both hands.

22. San Francisco 49ers — Michael Pitts, defensive tackle, Alabama. The 49ers vaunted rush turned into a vaunted blush last year, and Michael "La Brea Tar" Pitts is just the guy to help.

23. Dallas Cowboys — Vernon Maxwell, linebacker, Arizona State. The Cowboys have been looking for a Hollywood Henderson without the Hollywood, and Maxwell might be their man. More likely, however, Maxwell will develop slowly, and some bus driver will walk into the Cowboy's fall camp, earn a starting spot and be all-Pro for the next decade.

24. New York Jets — Dan Marino, quarterback, Pittsburgh. Marino is the kind of quarterback who gets labelled as a "project." He's got as much ability as anybody, but doesn't know what to do with it yet. The Jets need a backup quarterback, because the only thing behind Richard Todd right now is a paid-up insurance policy.

25. Cincinnati Bengals — Leonard Smith, defensive back, McNeese State. Somebody from a school like McNeese State gets drafted in the first round every year, and Smith is this year's candidate. Smith is a great combination of size, speed, smarts and bargain price the pro teams love.

26. Los Angeles Raiders — Gabriel Rivera, nose tackle, Texas Tech. Rivera is the Tasmanian Devil in cleats; point him at the right players and he's unstoppable. At 6-2, 295 pounds minimum, he's Al Davis' kind of player; he looks lousy until the game starts.

27. Miami Dolphins — Mike Charles, defensive tackle, Syracuse. The Dolphins will go with the "best payer available" option because there isn't much they need.

28. Washington Redskins — Michael Haddix, fullback, Mississippi State. The last time Washington had a draft was to send kids to Vietnam. After years of trading away top picks, the Redskins have had to explain to their fans the NFL Draft is their way of finding brave young men who will leave their homes to fight in distant lands like Dallas and Los Angeles, in return for large sums of money. Haddix, a big back who can open holes for John Riggins and give him an occasional rest, will learn to understand the "Large sums of money" part quickly.

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