

Pro player says to be best off field

By Matt Bender
Emerald Contributor

All-pro cornerback Gill Byrd told the Oregon football team Wednesday night that the most important key to life is for the players to dedicate themselves off the field as much as on.

Byrd, who plays for the San Diego Chargers, appeared courtesy of the University Athletes in Action.

Byrd is the NFL's interception leader over the last four years with 27 thefts, despite his lack of size and speed. He is 5-foot-10 and weighs about 190 pounds and runs the 40-yard dash in 4.7 seconds, slow by NFL cornerback standards.

"Every week I am on the corner and every week the other guy is faster than me," he said. "But football is a game of angles, and if I study the other guy and I know where he is going, I can be waiting there after he gets done with all his cuts and fakes."

But football was not always easy for Byrd. He received no scholarship offers coming out of high school and had to talk his way into a tryout at San Jose State. He made the team but played sparingly as a freshman.

"The only reason that I



Gill Byrd

played was to hopefully get a scholarship so my parents didn't have to pay for school," Byrd said. "I wasn't looking to play pro ball."

In his sophomore season, Byrd became one of the top defensive backs in the nation with seven interceptions. After that season Byrd said he decided he would go pro after his junior year.

During his junior season Byrd's plans were changed by a career-threatening knee injury.

"I went from prospect to suspect just like that," he said.

Byrd battled back from that injury and another — a broken wrist — to salvage his senior year and become the 22nd player taken in the 1983 draft by San Diego.

At the time Byrd was drafted, he said he had a "\$50 hairdo and a 5-cent head," he started to believe that he was as good as his press clippings made him sound, and he became a hard person to be around.

Midway through his rookie season all that changed for Byrd.

"I allowed Jesus to come into my life and things have never been the same," he said.

Byrd impressed upon the players that student-athletes should be more concerned with their lives off the field.

"There are tremendous odds against you making it in the NFL," he told the players, "but we put so much emphasis on it. Too much emphasis on it."

Byrd said it is more important for the players to get their personal lives straightened out than it is to be good in football. He said the only way to do that is to "look to Jesus to help you be your best."

Tracksters go east for Penn Relays

Three Oregon women's track and field athletes and five athletes from the men's team will compete at the prestigious Penn Relays in Philadelphia beginning today.

Distance runners Nicole Woodward and Lucy Nusrala and javelin star Kim Hyatt left with Duck head coach Tom Heinonen Wednesday for the event. Woodward will compete in the 5,000-meter run, and Nusrala will run in the 3,000.

Heinonen said it was the group's goal to see some of the best athletes the college ranks have to offer.

"The whole goal for Lucy and Nicole is to see top-flight competition and to run after having traveled," Heinonen said. "They need an NCAA (Championships) prep."

For javelin throwers like

Hyatt, Heinonen said it is simply a matter of time before they throw their best.

"In the javelin, it happens when it happens," Heinonen said.

Heinonen also said Hyatt may compete in Saturday's Oregon Invitational at Hayward Field.

The Oregon men's track team also sent its share of athletes to the relays.

In a distance medley relay that consists of legs of 400, 800, 1,200 and 1,600 meters, Bob Gray will lead off, handing off to Coley Candaele, to Alan Foster and finally to Shannon Lemora for the final laps.

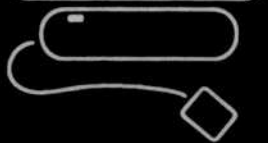
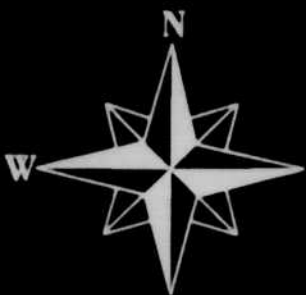
Those four athletes, excluding Gray, are expected to participate in a 4x1,600-meter relay, along with freshman Tracy Hollister.

Gray is slated to compete in an invitational running of the 400 hurdles Saturday.

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"There were a lot of good things about him."

Thomason and Woods were the only Ducks invited to the prestigious NFL combine this year. The combine brings in the top collegiate athletes to show off their talent in front of NFL scouts.

Kretz said the one thing favoring his team on draft Sunday will be that the Seahawks are looking for new people at all positions this season.

The 49ers, though, are looking at filling some major holes on defense, including defensive linemen, linebackers and defensive backs, Wilson said.

San Francisco signed former Duck quarterback Bill Musgrave as a free agent last year and has been known for having other Oregon alumni on its roster, including Tony Cherry, Rollin Putzier and Mike Walter. 49ers head coach George Seifert was an assistant coach at Oregon from 1967-71.

Wilson, who scouted Musgrave for the 49ers while the quarterback was at Oregon, has shown some interest in defensive end Matt LaBounty, Schaffeld said. The Duck coach, who has produced more professionals than any other Oregon assistant, said he was recently contacted by Wilson, who wanted to know LaBounty's home phone number.

"When they do that," Schaffeld said, "they seem to at least have some interest."

Wilson agreed with Schaffeld's assessment.

"Matt is another guy that we kind of like," Wilson said. "He's a tough, hard-nosed kid.

He was a long snapper, and those are hard to find."

However, Wilson said LaBounty's size — 6-foot-4, 260 pounds — is not "quite as heavy as you'd like," but he said he thought that size would not be as much of a consideration as talent.

Other Duck players that Wilson said he looked at while at Oregon were linebacker Andy Conner, defensive backs Muhammad Oliver and Daryle Smith, and offensive linemen Todd Gydesen and Joe Baguio. Of those players, Wilson liked what he saw in Conner the most.

"Conner ... he's big enough (to play in the NFL)," Wilson said. "He's a pretty good athlete — a very intelligent kid."

Kretz said he also looked at a number of players while he was in Eugene last year. The Seattle scout said Conner, Oliver and Smith have potential, and he also mentioned Oregon kicker Gregg McCallum as an NFL candidate.

Kretz said all of the Oregon players on his list may get drafted on Sunday.

"These guys have all got draftable talent," Kretz said. "I would think they all have a good chance of getting drafted."

The next logical question would be: When will the Oregon players get drafted? But as Schaffeld said before, there is little rhyme or reason as to predictions of which round players will be drafted.

"They can tell you, but if someone takes a guy out of form, then it juggles the lineup," Schaffeld said. "Some guys they say will go in the sixth (round) go in the third."

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sider trying out with a team the same way former Duck stars Derrick Loville and Terry Obee did with the Seahawks two years ago. Both were signed as free agents and are still playing

in the NFL, and Loville recently signed a two-year deal with the Rams.

Brooks said he just wants to see his players get credit where credit is due.

"I just hope the players who have played so well for us have a chance to show their talents in the NFL," he said.