

The start of what could be a career

By Pat Johnson

Freelance Sports Reporter

Feb. 6, 4:40 a.m.

On any other Friday morning, I would still be in bed at this time.

But at the request of National Football League commissioner Paul Tagliabue, as well as those from representatives from all 30 teams, I have been beckoned to see if I am really the kind of player in person as they see on television. I leave for the airport — the NFL combine awaits.

This is, without a doubt, one of the biggest accomplishments of my life. I have earned the opportunity to be on a level playing surface with all of the other so-called All-Americans that play the same position as me. I thought that this day would take so long to get here, but it has finally arrived. I have been waiting, and I have been ready.

The day started with a long flight from Eugene to Denver, Colo., and from Denver into freezing Indianapolis, Ind. On the flight were a few other top players that I met and played against during my career. People such as Stanford's Damon Dunn, Washington State's Chris Jackson and Colorado's Phil Savoy and Chris Anderson. We all met each other on the plane and, surprisingly, ended up being in the same group at the combine.

Upon our arrival, we were met by a scout from the Denver Broncos and were given beanies with the Broncos' media guide in them. We were then escorted to a shuttle to be taken to the Indianapolis Expo Center to check in.

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When we arrived at the hotel, a security guard opened the door and let us in. Then he relayed to another source that group No. 7 had arrived. I couldn't believe how tight the security was.

FOOTBALL



NFL Draft Combine Report

by Pat Johnson

Security didn't let anyone enter the building who wasn't a representative of an NFL team, a guest or a prospect. There were no agents in the hotel, but they were everywhere around the premises trying to gain an edge on their competition.

After the check-in, our group was corralled downstairs in an empty meeting room filled with large machines attached to computers. These were called Cybex machines and were used to test the strength ratio of each player's hamstrings to quadriceps.

A series of tests was done and a graph printout was made and attached to our physical records. When everyone from our group was finished with the test, we were driven to a nearby Indianapolis hospital for more tests.

The hospital had a very orga-

nized plan for getting as many players done as possible. They had four stations: one for urine, one for blood, one for monitoring the heart and one for X-rays. The hospital staff took four small vials of blood from us. Then they collected urine samples and took numerous X-rays. If your urine sample was too diluted, you had to sit around the waiting area and drink juices until you could produce a good sample.

The series of tests was tiring and took nearly five hours to complete. After the tests, we were allowed to return to the hotel for some rest, but it never happened.

The hotel was crawling with NFL personnel, from assistants to head coaches. I tried to mask my tiredness by remaining alert and talking with people. The first night I had the pleasure of being interviewed by Tampa Bay head coach Tony Dungie and his staff; Mike Shanahan of the Broncos; and Marty Shotteneimer of the Chiefs among others.

It felt good to know that out of so many players that played the wide receiver position in football this season, these coaches were more interested in my talents than nearly any other player at my position. After awhile, I began to like what this weekend was shaping up to be — a hopeful start to a fun career in the NFL.

Pat Johnson is a former Oregon wide receiver. This is the first of two stories by Johnson about his experience at the NFL combine.

Recruit: March is deadline for his decision

Continued from Page 7

academically. If he is able to do it, this will be a great reward for him. If he is not able to do it, we are still going to stay with him and help him to be successful in terms of his academic life and putting him in the right junior college environment as well too."

Nathan's story has become famous in the Portland area, where he grew up in the inner city with four younger sisters, no father and a mother addicted to drugs.

According to the Times' story, by age 11 Nathan had to steal food to feed his sisters and by age 15 had already been arrested for selling drugs. Nathan was able to get out of that environment years ago, but he has continued to struggle in school.

"He is a victim of his circumstances and you can't blame him for that," Kent said. "He had to become a man at a very young age, and he was robbed of some things in his childhood that have robbed him of some things in his adulthood. He is trying to get that back — that is the focus, the structure, the discipline to be successful."

Kent believes he can provide that for Nathan at Oregon. But until then, Kent has set the deadline for March so he can find another player to fill the open scholarship that right now is set aside for Nathan.

"We have a plan in place if he does not make it [into Oregon]," Kent said. "We are going to place him in a community college and then go another direction. We are in the process of recruiting some other point guards just in case he does not make it. Either way, that scholarship will be filled."

Of course, Kent's first choice would be to have Nathan in a Duck uniform come October 1998. Or even October 2000.

"If it means getting him back two years down the road from now, we're going to do that," he said. "If he can do what he needs to do to get into the University of Oregon, we're going to welcome him with open arms."

Chris Hansen is the assistant sports editor for the Emerald. His Oregon men's basketball notes appear every Wednesday.

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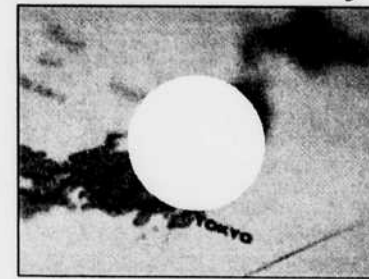
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