

NFL

With draft over, Niners now turn to preparing rookie quarterback Trey Lance for the pros

BY JOSH DUBOW
AP Pro Football Writer

From the moment the San Francisco 49ers made the decision to trade two future first-round picks to move up from No. 12 to 3 in the NFL draft, the pressure on the organization was immense.

General manager John Lynch and coach Kyle Shanahan spent the next month debating one of the most consequential decisions in franchise history before settling on taking North Dakota State's Trey Lance as the quarterback of the future.

After spending the final two days of the draft adding players to help Lance on offense and address their defensive depth, the Niners can finally catch their breath.

"I think I'm ready to go on vacation and leave Kyle here to run the team," Lynch said Saturday. "That's how I feel."

The next big job will be getting Lance prepared for the NFL after he threw only 318 passes in college at the FCS level, the fewest college passes for any first-round quarterback in the last 40 years, according to ESPN.

Lance will report to rookie minicamp in less than two weeks and then take part in the full offseason program.

There isn't an immediate rush for Lance to play. The Niners are planning to keep Jimmy Garoppolo and follow the Kansas City model from 2017 when Patrick Mahomes spent his rookie season backing up Alex Smith.

Garoppolo appears to be on board with the plan and reached out immediately to welcome Lance to the team.

"Jimmy has taken a business approach, but I think he's excited for right now just talking to him and he's ready to come here and get back to being healthy and playing with our team," Shanahan said. "If we have them compete, I know he's ready to compete."

Day 3 picks

The Niners spent the final day of the draft adding more depth on the offensive line, help in the secondary and a running back.

San Francisco took Western Michigan



North Dakota State quarterback Trey Lance, right, holds a jersey with NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell after being chosen by the San Francisco 49ers with the third pick in the first round of the draft Thursday night in Cleveland.

Tony Dejak/AP

guard Jaylon Moore with its first of three fifth-round picks, adding a player with experience blocking in a zone running scheme.

The 49ers followed that up by taking Oregon cornerback Deommodore Lenoir and Southern California safety Talanoa Hufanga.

Lenoir projects as a slot cornerback who can also play outside if necessary, while Hufanga is a box safety or linebacker. Both will be counted on to contribute on special teams.

Louisiana running back Elijah Mitchell was taken in the sixth round.

Health report

After a 2020 season that was derailed by injuries and a draft process with limited medical information, the Niners prioritized players with clean bills of health.

Lynch said they focused more on injury history and the only player they picked with an extensive one was Hufanga, who missed time in college with a broken collarbone, concussion and shoulder sprain.

"You learn over time. We make adjustments each and every year," Lynch said. "But after you go through what we went through last year, you take a harder look. We didn't overreact to it, but I think we responded accordingly."

Happy coach

Niners running backs coach Bobby Turner spent the lead-up to the draft feeling a bit ignored as Shanahan was focused on the quarterback pick. But Turner got a nice gift on the final two days of the draft with the selections of Ohio State running back Trey Sermon in the third round and Mitchell in the sixth.

"Bobby's been sensitive lately because I haven't talked to him as much he claims in the last month," Shanahan said. "Today he forgave me for it. I told him I've been working on some stuff and he didn't believe that. We got him two running backs. He was very happy."

San Francisco also added two potential strong run blockers with guard Aaron Banks in the second round and Moore in the fifth.

Sewell

Continued from B1

Q: How did you learn the game of football?

A: My dad, he was head coach on the island ever since I was young. He was always a head coach. The moment I remembered anything I was always out there with him whether it was helping take out football bags for his practice or set up the cones for conditioning for his team there. My dad ultimately helped me learn the basic knowledge of the game and fundamentals.

Q: Why do people say you're a generational talent, what is it about your skills?

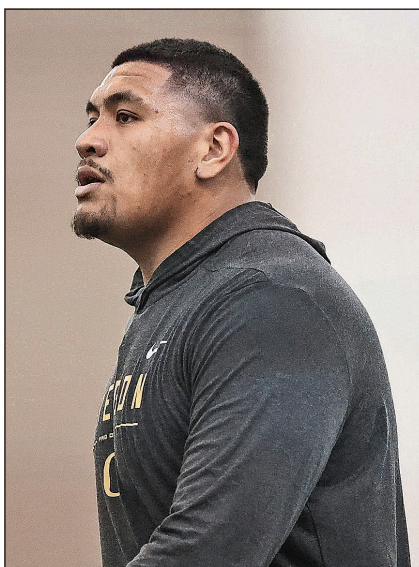
A: It's my mindset. If I had to pick one thing, my mindset. I'm coming each and every day ready to run through the wall, ready to do whatever it takes to accomplish my goals and the team goals. I'm willing to do whatever it takes. I'm putting everything on the line, my body and everything else. I'm ready to sacrifice everything for my goals and my dreams.

Q: How much growth do you feel there is in your game and in what areas?

A: To be honest, I haven't even started yet. That's how I feel. I feel like there's a lot to grow, there's a lot to be done and the sky's the limit and I'm ready to tap into that potential and I'm ready to go to work to fulfill that dream.

Q: Did the Lions give any indication where you'll play?

A: Wherever they put me I'm going to play and I'm going to give it all 100%, it don't matter to me. To join a room like this, this is a blessing. To be a young dude and come into such a veteran group with so many years it's easier for me to approach the game because I can go to them and ask them for advice and soak



Former Oregon left tackle Penei Sewell works out for NFL personnel in Eugene in early April.

Eric Evans/Oregon Athletics, file

up as much knowledge as possible. Being a sponge around those guys will help me out tremendously.

Q: What is it about your game that's going to fit the toughness and culture Detroit is looking for?

A: It goes back to my mindset, ultimately it's a mindset. I'm bringing that mindset, I'm joining that culture and I'm joining the team with that same mindset. They're ready to run through anybody. Come in each and every day putting on the pads and ready to get under somebody's chin and make them feel uncomfortable. Coming in and joining him on that, it's cool.

Q: What will you do first when you get to Detroit?

A: I don't even know. I don't know much about Detroit but once I get out there I'll probably hit up Tyrell some be-

cause that's big bro to me, to see what's out there to see. Really I don't know yet.

Q: Did you see Brad Holmes' reaction to having you on the board?

A: A little bit. I was kind of tearing up too and I looked down but I did see the room kind of turned.

Q: Did you see or hear the quotes from Dan Campbell about biting kneecaps and being tough?

A: No I didn't.

Q: What about playing for a head coach that has that kind of fire makes you excited about playing?

A: That's the coach I love playing for and it's the kind of culture I kind of came from that is at Oregon. I'm used to that and I'm ready to put that again and be a part of another team that preaches that and implants that type of mindset into the culture of everyday practices and games and so on and so forth.

Q: How much do you love football?

A: It's a way of life. It's not just a game. It's something that I've always remembered and if I told you if I have the first memory of anything it's the game of football. I fell in love with it the moment that happened. I'm willing to do whatever it takes to keep playing this game of football.

Q: What does it mean to you?

A: It's the world. Every time I think about this moment I go back to the kid that was on the island in that shack with all my family. I have that same (memory) when we were all in the living room sleeping on the floor in that shack and now look at us, I'm in a position to really change my family dynamic and also play the level I wanted to play my whole life, the NFL. To be a part of the NFL and Detroit Lions organization, it's nothing but a dream come true.



Sean Meagher/The Oregonian

Portland Timbers fans at Providence Park in Portland for a match against Club América on Wednesday, the first of two meetings between the teams in the CONCACAF Champions League tournament. Oregon pro sports franchises are struggling to understand the governor's harsh attendance restrictions compared to those of other states.

Commentary

Continued from B1

The franchise presented a detailed safety protocol that was originally approved by Gov. Brown and the Oregon Health Authority. It allowed for 10% attendance — 1,933 fans — in the nearly 20,000-seat arena.

That exemption was rescinded last week amid a series of county shutdowns that also affected smaller businesses such as restaurants and retail stores.

That's not leadership. It's not even common sense.

Team president Chris McGowan said in a statement provided to The Oregonian/OregonLive:

"In consultation with infectious disease experts and the NBA, our team worked incredibly hard to develop a meticulously detailed plan that maintains the safety of our players, staff and fans and meets or exceeds guidance from the state and CDC. After months of diligent work with the state and OHA, we still don't know more now about our return to fans than we did at the beginning of the season. With our regular season ending on May 16, we are the last team across all U.S. professional sports leagues without a clear path of return."

Welcome to Oregon, folks. Dead last in America.

Meanwhile, the Timbers and Thorns professional soccer franchises are bracing for a rough week spent dealing with our state officials. The franchises offered a "no comment" on the issue. They are currently cleared to have 15% capacity at the downtown outdoor Providence Park venue but the whisper is that approved exemption is now in jeopardy as well.

The Timbers and Thorns have played five combined games this season with fans in attendance. The events were viewed as successful and safe. The franchises were originally approved for 25% capacity and sold tickets accordingly. Then, the maximum capacity was rolled back to only 15% and the teams had to scramble figure out how to make that work with customers who had already purchased tickets.

They figured it out.

The soccer franchises are now bracing for more drama and planning a series of pre-emptive contingency plans. One includes dropping to 10% capacity and closing down food and beverage. Another includes requiring fans to present proof of vaccination before they're admitted to the outdoor stadium. But our state's two wildly successful professional soccer franchises are in a scramble to avoid a nationally televised embarrassment.

The Timbers vs. Sounders rivalry game on May 9 is scheduled for a national broadcast on ABC. One day before,

the Thorns could be playing in the Challenge Cup championship game on CBS. Two wonderful opportunities to showcase the state of Oregon.

What will the national narrative be?

I asked a sports executive who has worked in professional sports for three-plus decades what the optics on empty stadiums would be. Keep in mind, the rest of the country is already following protocols and safely allowing fans into venues. The College Football Playoff featured fans in the stadiums. The NCAA basketball tournament in Indianapolis had a limited number of fans. Also, the entire country watched the NFL draft the last three days with fans allowed inside a number of venues across the country.

It's uplifting stuff. At one point of the first-round draft broadcast on Thursday night, the studio commentators even broke from talking about the draft prospects and teams to say how inspiring it was to see a limited number of fans safely back inside the venues. So what's the story for Oregon if those two games aren't attended? And what's the narrative when the NBA playoffs start and Portland is the only participant that doesn't have fans present at home games?

Said the longtime executive: "The narrative nationally will be that Oregon doesn't have its (expletive) together."

What is it about our state that consistently leaves it behind the rest of the country?

I asked Gov. Brown's spokesperson, Charles Boyle, for a comment on Friday morning.

"The capacity issue the governor is focused on is making sure Portland-area hospitals and ICUs are not overwhelmed so we can save lives," Boyle said. "I hope you will encourage your readers and listeners to go and get vaccinated as soon as possible, so we can put the pandemic behind us."

Boyle also said the governor is getting her guidance from the Oregon Health Authority.

At least the governor's office finally is allowing high school runners to remove masks when competing at six feet of distance or more after Summit High runner Maggie Williams had a health scare during a race on April 21.

But now I'm left with the same question that our state's pro sports franchises are asking.

Who is in Gov. Brown's ear?

That's become the question to ask. Because she's no longer following Washington and California. Both of those states allow fans inside venues, no problem. They also allow all outdoor competition for kids, maskless. She's not following any other state in our country. She's out there, alone now. And it's left our state dead last when it comes to sports.

Derby

Continued from B1

Baffert punched his right arm in the air after watching the finish on the video board in the paddock. He was swarmed by his wife, Jill, and youngest son, Bode, with celebratory hugs.

"I'm really, really surprised," the 68-year-old Hall of Fame trainer said.

It wasn't false modesty. Baffert had been low-key about his chances after two of his best horses — Life Is Good and Concert Tour — were derailed along the Derby trail.

Medina Spirit isn't the typical high-priced talent with a fancy pedigree in Baffert's California barn.

"I cannot believe he won this race," the trainer said. "That little horse, that was him, all guts. He's always shown that he's been an overachiever. His heart is bigger than his body."

Medina Spirit has never finished worse than second in six career starts and two of his three losses came to Life Is Good, who likely would have been the Derby favorite had he not been injured.

"He doesn't know how much he cost," Baffert said, "but what

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— Trainer Bob Baffert

a little racehorse."

Medina Spirit led all the way and ran 1 1/4 miles in 2:01.02. Sent off at 12-1 odds, he paid \$26.20, \$12 and \$7.60.

Thundering down the stretch, Medina Spirit was pressed by Mandaloun on his outside. Hot Rod Charlie was coming fast outside of Mandaloun, with Essential Quality giving chase on the far outside.

"I kept waiting for all those horses to pass him," Baffert said. "When he got to the eighth pole, we said, 'This guy has got a shot.'"

Mandaloun — one of Louisville trainer Brad Cox's two entries — finished second and returned \$23.00 and 13.40. Hot Rod Charlie, partly owned by five former Brown University football players, was another

half-length back in third and paid \$5.20 to show.

Essential Quality, the 5-2 favorite trained by Cox, finished fourth.

Baffert won back-to-back, having tied Ben Jones with his sixth victory last year when the race was run in September without spectators because of the coronavirus pandemic. Velazquez became the first jockey to win consecutive Derbies since Victor Espinoza in 2014-15. The 49-year-old rider also completed the Kentucky Oaks-Derby double for the first time since Calvin Borel in 2009, having won the race for

fillies on Friday.

The Derby went off on a sun-splashed day with attendance of 51,838 — about 100,000 fewer than usual. Fans were told to wear masks inside the track, but plenty of them did not.

O Besos was fifth, followed by Midnight Bourbon, Keepmeinmind, Helium and Known Agenda. Highly Motivated finished 10th, ahead of Sainthood, Like The King, Bourbonic, Hidden Stash, Brooklyn Strong, Super Stock, Rock Your World (the 9-2 second choice), Dynamic One and Soup and Sandwich.