

SPORTS BUSINESS

Kelli Masters overcomes critics, among few female NFL agents

BY ROB MAADDI

Associated Press

Kelli Masters remembers the feeling of going to her first NFL scouting combine in 2006, seeing no other female agents in the room and wondering if the people who told her she didn't belong were right.

Masters had studied law at the University of Oklahoma and began her professional career as a business litigation attorney.

The former national and world champion baton twirler and Miss Oklahoma 1997 became an agent because her passion for helping people with their nonprofits led her to work with athletes who wanted to start charitable foundations.

Masters had only one client and little experience when she went to Indianapolis, but she was eager to attend the annual agents' meeting and break into the business.

Then, she got a rude reality check.

"I was approached by one of the biggest agents at the time who's still a big agent, and he basically gave me a lecture on why I didn't belong there and really spoke to a lot of the insecurities that I walked in with," Masters said on the AP Pro Football Podcast. "I was thinking: 'Gosh, I feel like I'm prepared, but am I prepared? Can I really hang with this crowd? Can I really compete and be respected and develop relationships in this very male-dominated industry?' And he basically told me that I couldn't. He told me that I was a laughing-stock and that I would never be respected and that players wouldn't want to sign with me strictly because of my gender."

Masters faced difficult obstacles often early in her career. She'd meet potential clients only to be asked if she was the assistant or secretary. She was told by parents of college athletes that women couldn't handle the job.

But Masters didn't walk away. Instead, she put this agent in his place.

"I said: 'You know what? I don't see a lot of other women around here, but that's OK. You don't know me as a person. You don't know what I'm capable of. You don't know what I'm wanting to accomplish here. And sorry, I'm not going anywhere. And there are going to be other women coming behind me that are



AP photo

Kelli Masters in her office in Oklahoma City in October. In 2010, Masters became the first female agent to represent a top-5 pick in the NFL draft. Masters has now represented more than 40 NFL players on active rosters. Her clients also include MLB players, Olympians and professional golfers.

also going to be doing great work in this industry, and you're just going to have to accept that fact," Masters recalled.

"Being told to my face by someone that I actually looked up to that I didn't belong and I was a joke was pretty harsh. And then being specifically told in the recruiting process that we just don't want to sign with a woman because we don't think women can do this, those were tough in the beginning. But I think we've definitely blown right past that."

'The impossible dream'

Masters has more female colleagues now, including Kim Miale, Caitlin Aoki, Nicole Lynne, Molly McManimie and Christina Phillips. Of the 910 NFLPA-certified agents, 67 are women. Still, that's only 7.3%.

"I love the fact that now, 18 years later, gender is no longer a barrier, and I'm thankful for that," Masters said. "I always kind of hoped that we would get to a point where it was no longer making headlines when a woman did something big in football."

It took Masters four years before she represented a player who earned a spot on a team's regular-season roster, meaning she didn't get paid until that happened. Agents don't get compensation if a player only makes the prac-

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tice squad. Some agents need a secondary job because they spend their own money to prepare players for the draft. They provide them with everything from nutritionists and trainers to travel, lodging and meal money.

Masters invested plenty of time, money and energy building relationships, establishing herself in the business and recruiting players before she finally saw a return.

In 2010, she got her big break when Oklahoma defensive tackle Gerald McCoy and his family chose her to be his agent. McCoy was selected No. 3 overall by the Tampa

Bay Buccaneers, making Masters the first female agent to represent a top-5 pick in the NFL draft. McCoy went on make six Pro Bowls in an 11-year career, and earned more than \$100 million.

"It's still hard to sign first-rounders," said Masters, who started her own agency, Kelli Masters Management. "It's the impossible dream for most agents."

Masters has now represented more than 40 NFL players who've been on active rosters. Her clients also include players in Major League Baseball, Olympians and professional golfers. She detailed her career as a sports agent in her book called "High-Impact Life," released in 2021.

Her Christian faith is a theme throughout the book and has been a foundation during her career.

"There are faster pathways to the top of the industry by kind of cheating or skirting the rules and it's just not even on my radar," Masters said. "Even if it means losing clients, I want to do things the right way. It's not about who am I impressing, who am I pleasing, do I look successful. It's have I served, have I fulfilled what I was assigned to do, am I loving people well, am I advocating and fighting for and protecting the people that have trusted me to do that. I cannot imagine doing that without faith."

La Pine ousted after quarterfinals loss

In the 3A quarterfinals, the No. 7 **La Pine** football team saw its eight-game winning streak and season come to an end after falling 49-6 to No. 2 Cascade Christian in Medford Friday night.

The Challengers racked up more than 450 yards of offense, while holding the Hawks, the Champions of the Mountain Valley Conference, to fewer than 100 yards of offense.

The Hawks fell behind 42-0 before senior quarterback Colton Campbell connected with senior running back Dawson Cook for La Pine's only touchdown.

— Bulletin staff report

Summit

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Senior quarterback Hogan Carmichael then connected with Ozolin to give Summit a lead it would not surrender. In the final minutes of the first half, Carmichael scored on a QB sneak to put the Storm up 21-7 at half.

"Our kids took on the challenge, and they didn't buckle," said Summit coach Corben Hyatt. "That was good to see."

It was not always the prettiest of football on a snowy night on the west side of Bend, but the Storm overcame an early deficit to win its 10th game in a row and is now a win away from playing for the program's first state title since 2015.

"Let's be super honest," Hyatt said. "We uncharacteristically turned the ball over, we weren't in the right formations, it wasn't our best football by any means. But to win a quarterfinal game 35-7, I'll take that. We get to move on, and we get another week of practice to get better."

It wasn't picturesque football. At the start of the second half, there were six turnovers, three by each team.

The Storm's first drive after halftime ended in a fumble that Central recovered. But on the next snap, Ozolin plucked the ball out of the air for his first interception. However, the Storm could not take advantage of the short field and turned the ball over on downs inside the Panthers' 10-yard line. Central again tried throwing the ball in Ozolin's direction — and again, Ozolin picked off Nelson.

"I'm not getting those picks if the defensive line is not doing their job or the linebackers aren't doing their job," Ozolin said. "It is a bunch of moving parts. And when all of those parts are working, that is when the benefits happen."

But the turnovers would not stop. Just as it looked like Summit would score a touchdown to end the string of offensive miscues, Stephens had the ball stripped near the goal line and Central recovered the fumble in the end zone.

Summit got its third interception of the half when junior defensive lineman Braden Bailey intercepted an attempted screen pass.

Already with two intercep-



Brian Rathbone/The Bulletin

Summit's Charlie Ozolin (30) tries to break the tackle of a Central defender Friday night in Bend.

tions and a touchdown, Ozolin caught his second touchdown pass from Carmichael to put an end to the third-quarter turnover party.

Carmichael then threw for his third touchdown pass to senior wideout Matthew Guthrie to put the game on ice.

After giving up a touchdown on the first series of the game, the Summit defense pitched a shutout the rest of the game, holding the Panthers squad that had scored more than 35 points in seven of its previous nine games, well below its season average.

"It was just a unification of the team," Ozolin said. "To have that as a team with no weak links, it makes us all so confident"

Summit is one of four remaining teams — along with Bend High, Wilsonville and Thurston — in the 5A playoffs. Summit defeated the three other playoff teams during the regular season.

Friday, Summit will face Thurston, a team it beat 48-10 back in Week 2. To reach the state title game, the Storm will have to beat a team a second time, which is not an easy feat.

Thurston has not lost any of its nine games since that Sept. 9 matchup in Bend. This time, Summit will not have a home-field advantage.

"Since early in the season every team has gotten better," Hyatt said. "Thurston has rolled off a lot of wins. It's going to be a challenge. Now going to a neutral site, they have seen us play and will be prepared. It's going to be a challenge for everybody."

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49ers

Continued from B1

Limited air service

With receivers Keenan Allen playing in only two games and Mike Williams about to miss his second one, offensive coordinator Joe Lombardi and quarterback Justin Herbert have seen their downfield options nearly disappear.

Herbert has gone four straight games without going over 300 yards and hasn't completed a pass longer than 20 yards in the air in the past three.

Joshua Palmer is the only intermediate to deep threat, and he might start seeing more double coverage after having eight receptions for 106 yards last week.

The Chargers are likely to go with another grind-it-out passing game, where Herbert makes a lot of underneath passes and hopes that his receivers or running back Austin Ekeler can generate yards after the catch.

Bosa brothers

The first NFL meeting between the Bosa brothers will have to wait, with LA's Joey on injured reserve after undergoing core muscle surgery similar to the one that sidelined San Francisco's Nick in college.

Nick Bosa said their mother, Cheryl, still plans to attend the game in a split Chargers-49ers jersey, but he's



Butch DiPill/AP

Los Angeles Chargers quarterback Justin Herbert warms up before a game against the Atlanta Falcons last Sunday in Atlanta.

sad his brother won't be able to play.

"I've watched them for seven to eight years now and I definitely have cheered for them for a long time, for Joey," Nick Bosa said. "It's going to fun to play them. I wish he was out there. But I think I have a good idea of their offense."

If Nick Bosa gets at least a half-sack, the family will reach the 100 mark, with Joey coming into the game

with 59½ in his career, Nick with 33 and father John with seven.

Second choice

Right tackle Mike McGlinchey knows many 49ers fans would have rather gotten a different player in the 2018 draft.

San Francisco picked McGlinchey ninth overall in that draft and he has been a capable starter for most of his five years.

Niners fans will get the chance to see the player many of them wanted when safety Derwin James visits with the Chargers.

James was picked 17th overall and has developed into one of the top safeties in the league.

"Most people wanted him here and not me, if I remember correctly," McGlinchey said. "So sorry for the socks and underwear that they got for Christmas in 2018."

Bend

Continued from B1

The Bend High defense held a team scoreless for the seventh time this season and forced three turnovers on a cold night with intermittent snowfall.

"We knew that their offensive line would try to mug up our defensive line," Craven said. "So it was super important that we played very physical on the defensive line and that we take away their fullback and their quarterback with their triple-option game. Our defensive linemen and linebackers just did a masterful job of that."

Bend senior running back Malakai Nutter rushed 24 times for 115 yards and one touchdown and caught another TD. He got the scoring started with a 4-yard touchdown run early in the first quarter for a 6-0 lead.

The score remained 6-0 by the end of the first quarter, but the Bend barrage let loose in the second quarter with 21 points. Nutter scored again on a 7-yard reception midway through the second quarter for a 13-0 lead. Then Bend defensive back Sam Armstrong intercepted a pass by South Albany quarterback Kaden Younger.

Two plays later, Malinowski threw the ball over the top and down the middle. The 6-foot-4, 205-pound Groshong went up and grabbed it. When he came down, there was nothing but frozen green grass in front

of him on the 97-yard play.

"It was the best feeling of my life," Groshong said. "I dreamed about this my whole life. I loved it."

Craven said the South Albany defense was stacking the box "with as many people as humanly possible" to try to stop the Lava Bears' vaunted Wing-T rushing attack. Their man-to-man coverage on the outside appeared helpless in stopping Groshong, who caught a 6-yard touchdown pass late in the second quarter to give Bend an insurmountable 27-0 lead.

"We were able to pass protect long enough to run some double moves out there and he did a great job of going up and getting the ball each time," Craven said.

Jack Sorenson added a touchdown run on a reverse in the third quarter for Bend, and defensive back Sean Craven returned an interception for a touchdown in the fourth quarter.

Bend has reached the state semifinals for the first time since 2007, and the second time since 1966. The Lava Bears last claimed a state title in 1940. Bend has 33 seniors, most of whom have played together since middle school.

"Just the energy and the teamwork that we have together, not many teams have it," Groshong said. "We've been together forever. We just love each other and we'll fight for each other"

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