

49ers Clips – May 3, 2017

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The next Patrick Willis? Reuben Foster might be next Derrick Brooks

By Daniel Mano, San Jose Mercury News

<http://www.mercurynews.com/2017/05/02/the-next-patrick-willis-reuben-foster-might-be-next-derrick-brooks/>

Jed York: 49ers will keep “taking shots” at finding next great quarterback

By Matt Barrows, Sacramento Bee

<http://www.sacbee.com/sports/nfl/san-francisco-49ers/article148242659.html>

49ers eager to let Arik Armstead 'cut loose' as pass-rusher

By Nick Wagoner, ESPN.com

http://www.espn.com/blog/san-francisco-49ers/post/_/id/24884/49ers-eager-to-let-arik-armstead-cut-loose-as-pass-rusher

The 49ers, Lynch are winning the Perception War

By Brian Murphy, KNBR.com

<http://www.knbr.com/2017/05/02/656884/>

The Post-Draft Mailbag

By Peter King, MMQB.com

<http://mmqb.si.com/mmqb/2017/05/03/san-francisco-49ers-nfl-draft-room-mailbag#>

Jed York: Draft was perfect example of how Lynch/Shanahan work together

By Josh Alper, ProFootballTalk.com

<http://profootballtalk.nbcsports.com/2017/05/03/jed-york-draft-was-perfect-example-of-how-lynchshanahan-work-together/>

York: 49ers regime wants to win more than anyone

By Conor Orr, NFL.com

<http://www.nfl.com/news/story/0ap3000000806108/article/york-49ers-regime-wants-to-win-more-than-anyone>

2017 NFL Draft: Fourteen instant-impact rookies

By Gil Brandt, NFL.com

<http://www.nfl.com/photoessays/0ap3000000805592/2017-nfl-draft-fourteen-instantimpact-rookies>

National Media

Five takeaways from John Schneider's radio appearance: A Kam Chancellor extension? Draft day regrets?

By Bob Condotta, The Seattle Times

<http://www.seattletimes.com/sports/seahawks/five-takeaways-from-john-schneiders-kjr-am-appearance-a-kam-chancellor-extension-draft-day-regrets/>

Rams decline to exercise fifth-year option on offensive lineman Greg Robinson

By Gary Klein, Los Angeles Times

<http://www.latimes.com/sports/rams/la-sp-rams-greg-robinson-fifth-year-option-20170502-story.html>

Arizona Cardinals 'in talks' with QB Blaine Gabbert

By Kent Somers, The Arizona Republic

<http://www.azcentral.com/story/sports/nfl/cardinals/2017/05/03/arizona-cardinals-in-talks-qb-blaine-gabbert/309438001/>

Report: Lions showing interest in RB LeGarrette Blount

By Justin Rogers, Detroit News

<http://www.detroitnews.com/story/sports/nfl/lions/2017/05/02/report-lions-showing-interest-rb-legarrette-blount/101194084/>

Report: Veteran TE Barnidge visiting Bills

By Vic Carucci, Buffalo News

<http://buffalonews.com/2017/05/03/report-veteran-te-barnidge-visiting-bills/>

Local Clips – Full Version

The next Patrick Willis? Reuben Foster might be next Derrick Brooks

By Daniel Mano, San Jose Mercury News

Reuben Foster's next goal may well come to fruition and-some, if you asked NFL Network analyst Charles Davis.

"This guy could be the Patrick Willis, and I'm not shy about saying that," Davis said Tuesday on KNBR 1050 before also comparing Foster with Hall of Fame linebacker Derrick Brooks.

A Willis-type player is who Foster is aiming to be in his NFL career after the 49ers took him 31st overall in the 2017 NFL Draft.

"Who wouldn't want to be like Patrick Willis?" the linebacker said at his introductory press conference. "He played nasty. He played like a savage. He played the game like I want to play it."

Seeing as that Willis was a seven-time Pro Bowler with the 49ers, that's a lofty standard. Davis doesn't think it's high enough, though, judging by who else he compared Foster with Tuesday.

"Derrick Brooks was phenomenal, able to play the outside 'backer and make plays there, run down plays — he was a run, chase and hit linebacker," Davis said. "Well if you watch Reuben Foster, he's a three-down linebacker who can cover, run, chase and hit. There's Derrick Brooks."

Brooks was a Super Bowl winner, the 2002 NFL defensive player of the year and an 11-time Pro Bowler. The former Buccaneers linebacker, who played with 49ers general manager John Lynch, might be a more comparable case than Willis since he was also drafted late in the first round (28th to Tampa Bay in 1995).

Foster going 31st surprised many, including Davis — who saw the Alabama product as a Top 5 talent.

"For him to fall as far as he did and the 49ers to be able to manipulate the board, come back and get him at that number... " Davis said. "Imagine him now, looking at this and thinking, 'I'm a top 5 player and I'm going down here?' ... It's gonna be something when he unleashes all that."

Jed York: 49ers will keep "taking shots" at finding next great quarterback

By Matt Barrows, Sacramento Bee

Jed York on Wednesday said the 49ers won't "stop taking shots" at quarterback until they find the player capable of taking them to another Super Bowl.

Appearing on Good Morning Football on Wednesday, the team's CEO noted that even though the Seahawks signed quarterback Matt Flynn to a big free-agent deal in 2012, it didn't stop them from drafting Russell Wilson in the third round later that year. Wilson quickly took over as starter and in 2013 helped Seattle win the Super Bowl.

"That's a position that, until you get your guy, you have to keep taking shots," York said. "As much as we compete with the guys up north, they did that very well. They signed Flynn to a big contract, but then they still draft one that they like who happens to be Russell Wilson. Until you're set, you can never stop taking shots to get your guy at quarterback, because that's ultimately what drives this league."

Earlier this year, the 49ers signed Brian Hoyer and Matt Barkley to be the starter and backup this season. Last week, they used a late third-round pick on Iowa quarterback C.J. Beathard.

York said he trusted head coach Kyle Shanahan to find the right passer and referred to Hoyer as a "good" quarterback.

"He's done a great job with Brian Hoyer in the past," York noted. "And he's going to continue to do a great job with Brian. Brian has grown in his career, and I think he's ready to be a good quarterback for us."

The 49ers are expected to make a strong push for Kirk Cousins in March if the Washington quarterback becomes an unrestricted free agent.

In his question to York, host Peter Schrager noted that the 49ers have been synonymous with quarterbacks and listed Joe Montana, Steve Young, Colin Kaepernick and Alex Smith as examples.

One of those players, Kaepernick, led the 49ers to the Super Bowl the year before Wilson and the Seahawks won it. He remains unsigned while Blaine Gabbert, who took over the starting role from Kaepernick in 2015 only to lose it to him a year later, will get a tryout with the Arizona Cardinals, according to several reports this week.

Hikutini coveted -- It turns out that Reuben Foster isn't the only player the 49ers snatched from the Saints.

In a follow up to his draft story about the 49ers, MMQB's Peter King wrote Wednesday about the team's pursuit of tight end Cole Hikutini after the draft, someone the 49ers thought could be a good "move" tight end in Shanahan's system.

Hikutini, a Sacramento native who spent the last two years at Louisville, received five calls from tight ends coach Jon Embree, two from Shanahan and another from general manager John Lynch. At the same time, he was getting calls from Saints coach Sean Payton.

Hikutini last year led Louisville with 50 catches, eight touchdown receptions and finished second in receiving yards with 668. He went undrafted, in part, because he ran a slow, 4.85-second 40-yard dash, something the 49ers attributed to a knee injury suffered in Louisville's bowl game.

In the end, the 49ers landed Hikutini with a strong contract offer, including a \$10,000 signing bonus, as well as the opportunity for a roster spot. The 49ers acknowledged trying to trade their starting "move" tight end, Vance McDonald, during the draft.

Earlier in the draft, the Saints, who had the No. 32 pick in the first round, were on the phone with Foster when the 49ers clicked in to notify the Alabama linebacker they were about to take him at pick No. 31.

49ers eager to let Arik Armstead 'cut loose' as pass-rusher

By Nick Wagoner, ESPN.com

For the third consecutive year, the San Francisco 49ers used their first pick in the NFL draft on a defensive lineman.

Under a new regime led by general manager John Lynch and coach Kyle Shanahan, the Niners vowed not to be beholden to the choices of previous leadership and then followed through on that promise by using the No. 3 overall pick on Stanford defensive lineman Solomon Thomas.

That doesn't mean Lynch and Shanahan are ready to discard the previous two defensive linemen the Niners brought in. Quite the opposite, in fact. With Thomas joining Arik Armstead and DeForest Buckner in San Francisco, the onus now falls on Shanahan, defensive coordinator Robert Saleh and the rest of the defensive staff to figure the best way to deploy them.

In the case of Thomas and Buckner, that task doesn't appear too difficult. Thomas is likely to step in as a defensive end on running downs while moving inside in passing situations. Inside, Thomas would join Buckner, who is slated to become the team's three-technique defensive tackle. So, where does that leave Armstead?

Surprisingly enough, the Niners actually view Armstead as a potential solution for their Leo pass-rusher position. In basic terms, that's the end opposite Thomas, but it's actually one of the most important positions in the defense. In Saleh's scheme, it's the spot reserved for the best pass-rusher on the team.

"We're just looking for our best pass-rusher, and that's what we'd like to put at the Leo spot," Shanahan said. "So, I think Armstead has a chance to be one of those. I think he also can play inside too. So I think we have a few guys like that who are capable of playing a number of spots. So it's tough to figure that out until we get out there on the field. And he didn't get to go in minicamp, but that's something we'll be looking at throughout OTAs and training camp. Usually the best pass-rusher, when it's all said and done, we'll most likely put him at Leo."

Although he's entering his third NFL season, it would be a stretch to say Armstead has proven himself as the team's best pass-rusher, or in any capacity, quite frankly. He didn't play starter's snaps until the final weeks of his rookie season in 2015, and a shoulder injury suffered in training camp limited him to just eight games last season.

In 24 career games, Armstead has 34 tackles, 4.5 sacks and a forced fumble. Those numbers don't necessarily cry out "elite pass-rusher." Dig a little deeper, though, and you can see why Shanahan and Lynch are optimistic.

According to Pro Football Focus, Armstead had the highest pass-rush productivity rate of all 3-4 defensive ends in 2016. While his sample size was cut in half because of the injury, Armstead had 21 hurries and three sacks on 168 pass-rush snaps for a pressure rate of 11.2, by PFF's metrics. Armstead showed a similar penchant for getting after the quarterback as a rookie with a 12.3 pass-rush productivity score on 236 pass-rushing snaps.

Of course, switching to the Leo will require an adjustment for Armstead, who has been playing in a 3-4 defense for most of his career. But the Niners see the traits -- such as quick feet and ability to transition speed to power -- that could allow him to have success in his new role. The 49ers haven't seen Armstead work at the Leo spot yet because he's still recovering from the shoulder injury and didn't participate in the first minicamp.

Lynch even goes so far as to offer the possibility that Armstead could be even better in the new scheme if he's able to stay healthy because it allows him to be more aggressive.

"One of the things that we're really excited to see once he gets healthy, and this is not to disparage the system that they were playing, and systems are different, we're going to let him cut loose," Lynch said. "We think when this guy starts going that way (up the field), that it can be pretty special."

"Now, it's up to him to go do it. But we believe that he has that versatility Kyle talks about about being inside in pass-rush situations, outside. You can move all over, and I'm excited to see the product, particularly with all the different combinations we can put out there now."

The 49ers, Lynch are winning the Perception War
By Brian Murphy, KNBR.com

It's been three months since the 49ers hired general manager John Lynch, a hire so random that longtime NFL columnist Sam Farmer of the L.A. Times said he woke up to the news during Super Bowl week and

thought to himself: "Huh. There must be another dude named John Lynch, because the former player and current FOX analyst surely can't be the guy."

He wasn't alone. An NFL general manager revealed to Bleacher Report's Mike Freeman: "I thought he'd suck."

And even here, on this very slice of cyberspace, a Jock Blogger furrowed his brow, writing on Jan. 31 that there was "a certain randomness to the Lynch hire that allows room for a healthy skepticism", and noted that the hire contained "plenty of risks", even asking, "Most important: How will you get along with Paraag?"

Yes, my home slices, that Jock Blogger was yours truly.

Now? Three months later? After the swindling of the Bears for draft picks to move back only one spot? After landing two of the top 10 players in the draft in Alabama LB Reuben Foster and Stanford DL Solomon Thomas? After daring to identify a quarterback in Iowa's pro-style C.J. Beathard and making a move for him? After taking a cornerback in Ahkello Witherspoon that Greg Cosell thinks is one of the best in the draft? After collaborating and conferring with Kyle Shanahan and ultimately showing his flexibility and drafting Shanahan's favorite, explosive Utah running back Joe Williams?

Seems like the entire NFL community is standing back, nodding their heads in approval, and cueing up Paulie Mac's soundboard from Ali G, the one that says: "Yo(snap fingers)... respect."

Appropriate that the first prominent ex-49ers Hall of Famer to visit the Lynch/Shanahan regime in Santa Clara recently was Steve Young, since Young often says that in the NFL, "perception is reality."

And since the day they fired Jim Harbaugh with no real plan to succeed him, the Jed York/Trent Baalke/Paraag Marathe regime had the perception of incompetence. Losses piled up. Draft picks whiffed. Coaches floundered. Let's face it. It was more than perception. It was reality.

Jed York's best move since hiring Harbaugh was the firing of Trent Baalke, an at-last admittance that the personnel moves were abysmal and team desperately needed an infusion of talent and scheme. But who would replace Baalke? The list of respected NFL personnel men interviewed was somewhat reassuring, and then came the bolt from the blue: John Lynch, GM.

Three months later, the perception is now that the 49ers nailed it.

Three months later, the perception is now that the 49ers have a plan.

Three months later, the perception is now that Lynch can handle an NFL Draft, that Lynch can work with Kyle Shanahan, and after the details were revealed that he and Marathe worked to pull off the Bears trade, the perception is that can even get along with the oft-mysterious figure that is Paraag.

The 49ers were even smart enough to let Peter King embed during the NFL Draft, letting King's favorable pen write an essay describing what appeared to be a Draft Room in control.

The 49ers may not win six games this year. They don't have their franchise quarterback, they still don't have a game-breaking wideout, Solomon Thomas hasn't proved he can dominate an NFL line of scrimmage, and Reuben Foster has yet to prove his shoulder injury isn't too serious to be an NFL force for years.

But for now, 49ers fans are happy to accept the alternative: They are happy to perceive that the 49ers look to have a competent regime in place.

The Post-Draft Mailbag

By Peter King, MMQB.com

When I wrote about the 49ers' draft this week after being embedded with the team in the draft room, I wrote a lot about the rookies atop the San Francisco organizational structure—GM John Lynch and coach Kyle Shanahan. And rightfully so. They're the ones, collectively, pulling the trigger on the picks and the formation of this roster. But when you spend significant time with people making crucial decisions for a franchise's long-term future, you see how important others in the organization are.

Martin Mayhew, senior personnel executive, was one of those with a role you won't hear much about. He's sort of a shadow GM, after having the experience with Detroit, and Lynch sought his counsel quietly during the draft eight or 10 times that I saw. He was one of the four front-office guys who called other teams to inquire about trades, and who put trade possibilities out on the floor for the group to consider. Since the Niners made six trades, this quartet of people was important. Mayhew is important, too, because he's the only guy in the room who's been a GM, and he can tell Lynch where the trapdoors are—with no ego.

The other two I wanted to mention were vice president of player personnel Adam Peters, imported from Denver by Lynch to run the personnel side of the building, and Paraag Marathe, a 17-year veteran of the organization. Marathe does the cap, and he's chief strategy officer and executive vice president of football operations. Peters and Marathe were highly impressive, and, like Mayhew, operated in ego-less and subservient roles fitting in well with Lynch and Shanahan.

I wanted to follow up on the Niners story with a couple of things that I originally was going to include in the piece but didn't. With a 5,100-word story on the 49ers and another 5,000 words covering the rest of the draft, I thought asking people to read a novella was one thing, but a novella plus 1,500 more words ... well, I figured, let's save a bit for Wednesday.

I've done this job for 33 years, and I've seen collaborations in quite a few front offices. In this case, I was really interested to see how Marathe (pronounced "mur-RAH-tay") fit. In San Francisco and elsewhere around the league, the word on the street was that Marathe's power had been neutered late in the Jim Harbaugh Era and in 2016, during the failed Chip Kelly season. Marathe lost any power that he once had, the word was, and had simply become a cap guy, without much contribution to the football product other than contract negotiating.

So witnessing his role in this draft was a surprise. Marathe was every bit a peer of Shanahan and Lynch all weekend. He sat next to CEO Jed York (who was next to Shanahan and Lynch, in that order, in the front of the draft room) and ran the trade possibilities. Which, for a team that traded six times in a seven-round draft, were plentiful. Lynch and Shanahan were dial-up on the league-wide draft-trade value chart, which is to be expected for rookies. Marathe was Google. At one point late Friday, in round three, Shanahan said to him: "I want another pick in the top 10 of the fourth round." Right away, Marathe said, "For the sixth pick to 10th pick [in the fourth], we can do it for our 143 and 146. Earlier in the round, it's close." The Niners held pick 143 (late in the fourth) and 146 (atop the fifth). But Marathe didn't even have to look at the draft-trade value chart. He just blurted it out. He just knew.

When I wrote about the mayhem in the last 80 seconds of the 31st draft slot, from the time Marathe and Seattle GM John Schneider agreed on the deal that saw the Niners acquire the pick to the time the Niners picked Reuben Foster, it was hectic on the phone (notifying the league of the trade) and then getting in the pick during the allotted time. Not saying the deal wouldn't have gotten done with another negotiator, but I can tell you Marathe moved fast and tamped down the enthusiasm in the room so business could be done till it was official, with 19 seconds on the clock.

The Marathe I saw was not a marginal player. He was a peer. Not in terms of telling Lynch or Shanahan what to do about anything football, but in advising and quickly formulating plans in a changing draft environment pick-by-pick. I was really impressed with him.

Peters had the staff of scouts organized for the undrafted free-agent portion of the weekend. Immediately after the Niners' last pick of the draft, the 229th overall, Peters had the regional scouts calling players they hoped would go undrafted. There was one player midway through the last round who was top on their list: tight end Cole Hikutini from Louisville, a player who made sense for the 49ers because Shanahan wanted a "move" tight end, a player with enough speed to separate from linebackers in coverage. The 49ers drafted more of a blocking tight end, George Kittle, earlier, and now they want to pursue Hikutini if he didn't get picked. Peters felt he was the best candidate to fill that role—as did Shanahan. What was keeping him down was a 4.8-second 40-yard-dash time, but Peters told the coaches that happened because he was hurt. When healthy, Peters said, Hikutini would be a separator. That's what the head coach demanded.

As the round went on and Hikutini remained undrafted, the plan was solidified: tight end coach Jon Embree would pitch Hikutini on the merits of signing with the 49ers. Peters would debrief agent Camron Hahn and pitch Hahn on the Niners. As the draft ended and Hikutini was still free, the recruitment began seriously.

Over two hours, Peters estimated, Embree called Hikutini five times. Shanahan—competing with Sean Payton of the Saints at the end—called him twice. Lynch called him once. Peters sent several texts, and more to Hahn as the derby went on. Something else helped quite a bit: the money. Each NFL team has \$98,000 to spend on undrafted college free agents. That's not much, so the 49ers (through Marathe and director of football administration and analytics Brian Hampton) use an approach that several teams use too: They guarantee some money from a player's prospective salary in his rookie year (either on the practice squad or 53-man roster), figuring that it's likely that such a highly regarded player as the top undrafted free agent on the board would at least make the team's practice squad.

And so the final offer to Hikutini netted him: \$10,000 signing bonus, plus \$100,000 guaranteed from his Paragraph 5 (his regular-season salary) "Paraag and Brian Hampton put together a model which I think gives us an advantage, in using part of Paragraph 5 to add to the guarantee," Peters said. "Opportunity to make a roster is crucial. But ultimately the money is going to sway a lot of guys. It gives us a chance to be competitive with a lot of players. I think with Cole, we won him over with our situation and our control."

It was a good draft weekend for the 49ers. And one of the key things they found out is they've got a group of front-office players who work well together. Around the 49ers, it hasn't always been that way.

ON JOE WILLIAMS

Does it not seem deficient by the 49ers scouting staff that it was left to the GM on the third day of the draft to talk to Williams and find out the back story about his past? The kid has almost indisputable talent, and teams take character risks year after year after year. How could the scouting staff not have asked about it?

—Greg, Calgary, Alberta

The scouting staff knew all about him, and running backs coach Bobby Turner shared video of him with Shanahan and they watched a lot of it together. It's just that the majority decision was made by the scouts that Williams was too pockmarked to take. And then Shanahan brought it up with Lynch, and in order for Lynch to get comfortable with the Williams, he felt he had to have a personal conversation with Williams. Which he did. Would Lynch have preferred to let Williams go? I think he would have. But he knew how passionate his head coach and running backs coach were about Williams, and so he changed his mind.

Jed York: Draft was perfect example of how Lynch/Shanahan work together

By Josh Alper, ProFootballTalk.com

Over the course of their first draft since hiring General Manager John Lynch and coach Kyle Shanahan, the 49ers traded down, traded up and stood pat on their way to constructing a 10-player class that they hope will help set the foundation for better records in the future.

A great look at the machinations that went on behind those moves was provided by Peter King of TheMMQB.com. King was in the 49ers' draft room and reported on how the two men worked with the rest of the personnel staff to identify the players they wanted and do what was necessary to bring them to the roster.

It all came off very symbiotic, which hasn't always been the case around the 49ers in recent years. During an appearance on NFL Network Wednesday, 49ers CEO Jed York said that the three days of the draft illustrated the way things have gone since the two men joined the organization.

"I don't know that there's enough data to assess where are they and where do they stack against everybody else," York said, via NBC Sports Bay Area. "What I'll say is, I think the draft was a perfect example of how they work together. And watching John and Kyle work together, and watching how the scouts and the coaches work together. I have no idea whether it was a good draft or not — we'll find out three years from now — but it certainly worked out the way we wanted it to because we planned for it. We were ready. And we executed because we were all on the same page."

It's tough to win when there's dysfunction among the people charged with building a winning team, so it seems the 49ers have taken a step in the right direction on that front. It's also tough to win without talented players playing at a high level, but, as York said, the jury will remain out a little longer as far as that's concerned.

York: 49ers regime wants to win more than anyone

By Conor Orr, NFL.com

Still riding a post-draft high from this past weekend, San Francisco 49ers CEO Jed York appeared on Good Morning Football on Wednesday and lauded the working relationship of his new power structure atop football operations.

The embattled executive, who fired Jim Harbaugh, Jim Tomsula and Chip Kelly in consecutive seasons, needed a win. After the 49ers traded back, allowing the Chicago Bears to select quarterback Mitch Trubisky while netting themselves two of their top players on the board in the first round, the narrative around the team -- and the suspicion that general manager John Lynch would be greatly overmatched in his first high-pressure situation -- slowly started to change.

No longer on his heels, York sounded different as well and openly took the blame for the team's recent bout with dysfunction.

"I mean that's who you should question," York said, talking about himself. "This isn't where we want to be. We don't want to be a 2-14 team, we don't want to be a team that has your fourth head coach in four years. But you also have to be willing to change paths if you've made a mistake and know we're not going to settle for being a 9-7 team. That's not who we want to be. If you want to make your team great, you have to do everything you can to get back up to that level."

"We will get there. We had three NFC championship games in a row sandwiched between a Super Bowl loss. It's close, right? That's not where we want to be. We want to be a team that consistently competes for it and when it's all said and done, when John, Kyle (Shanahan) and I look backwards, we want to know that we've won more together than anyone else."

Being a 49ers fan right now requires both selective memory and strong faith. Selective memory because, of course, the Harbaugh era didn't need to end. Faith because York is following the draft weekend buzz with an encouraging assessment of journeyman quarterback Brian Hoyer.

"He's done a great job with Brian Hoyer in the past and I think he's going to continue to do a great job with Brian Hoyer," York said of Shanahan. "Brian has grown in his career and I think he's ready to be a good quarterback for us. That's a position where, until you get your guy, you have to keep taking shots. As much as we compete with the guys up north, they did that well. They signed (Matt) Flynn to a big contract, but they still drafted one they liked who happened to be Russell Wilson. Until you're set, you can never stop taking shots to get your quarterback. That's ultimately what drives this league."

To York's credit, there is now at least a reason to look forward. Should most of their defensive investments grow together, the unit could become one of the more formidable pass rushing fronts in the league. It was far more than anyone could say about the 49ers a year ago.

2017 NFL Draft: Fourteen instant-impact rookies

By Gil Brandt, NFL.com

Reuben Foster, linebacker, San Francisco 49ers

Drafted: Round 1, No. 31 overall.

This guy is an unbelievable football player -- he can really bring it. In fact, one team had Foster rated as the best player in the draft. He's very physical and plays with great passion. Foster excels in pursuit; he's very strong and the most competitive linebacker I've seen since Jack Lambert. Foster can cover tight ends and running backs and plays with reckless abandon.