

49ers Clips – May 14, 2017

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Why the 49ers zeroed in on surprise draft pick QB C.J. Beathard

By Matt Barrows, Sacramento Bee

<http://www.sacbee.com/sports/nfl/san-francisco-49ers/article150386827.html>

National Media

Versatile Ethan Pocic will get more scrutiny than most Seahawk rookies

By Larry Stone, The Seattle Times

<http://www.seattletimes.com/sports/seahawks/versatile-ethan-pocic-will-get-more-scrutiny-than-most-seahawk-rookies/>

Pitt pass rusher sees himself as perfect fit for Rams defense

By Gary Klein, Los Angeles Times

<http://www.latimes.com/sports/rams/la-sp-rams-rookie-minicamp-20170513-story.html>

Confidence not a problem for Arizona Cardinals rookie WR Chad Williams

By Kent Somers, The Arizona Republic

<http://www.azcentral.com/story/sports/nfl/cardinals/2017/05/13/confidence-not-problem-arizona-cardinals-rookie-wr-chad-williams/321313001/>

Doug Marrone: Jags to run more but Leonard Fournette must earn role

By Michael DiRocco, ESPN.com

http://www.espn.com/nfl/story/_/id/19375732/jacksonville-jaguars-coach-doug-marrone-says-leonard-fournette-earn-starting-job

Saints anticipate Max Unger will be back by Week 3 of the preseason, Sean Payton says

By Herbie Teope, New Orleans Times-Picayune

http://www.nola.com/saints/index.ssf/2017/05/saints_anticipate_max_unger_wi.html#incart_river_index

Local Clips – Full Version

Why the 49ers zeroed in on surprise draft pick QB C.J. Beathard

By Matt Barrows, Sacramento Bee

Greg Davis, Iowa's offensive coordinator, was stationed high in the coach's booth when quarterback C.J. Beathard crashed into the end zone from nine yards out against Pitt early in the 2015 season.

Beathard sprang up immediately after the second-quarter score, received the customary back thwacks and helmet whaps from teammates, and then started making his way back to the Iowa sideline.

Slowly.

"When he came off the field he was kind of limping a little bit," Davis, now retired, recalled. "So when he got on the phone I said, 'Hey, you OK?' He said, 'Yeah, I got hit on the hip. I'm not sure, but I may have a little hip pointer.'"

Beathard was wrong. He later learned the blow he received just before scoring tore an adductor muscle, one of the bands that go from the hip to the upper thigh. The adductors help control side-to-side locomotion, and when one of them is compromised it makes shuffling in the pocket, rolling out, accelerating and stopping – movements critical to quarterbacking – painful and more difficult.

Looking back, the injury is notable for three reasons:

- Beathard never left the Sept. 19 game against Pitt. Instead he led the team on a two-minute drive that set up a game-winning field goal. He started every contest that year despite being unable to go through a full week of practice. "On Friday he would get a shot, feel pretty good for the ball game, and then on Sunday it would start back," Davis said.
- The Hawkeyes went undefeated in the 2015 regular season for the first time since 1922. Iowa went 12-0 in the regular season despite the fact Davis had to remove rollouts, bootlegs and similar calls from the playbook.
- After the season, when doctors finally addressed Beathard's torn adductor, they realized he also had been dealing with a sports hernia for most of the season. Both had to be surgically repaired.

All of which goes a long way toward explaining why 49ers coach Kyle Shanahan was so drawn to the Iowa quarterback

The 49ers traded up so they could take Beathard in the third round of the draft. The move was a surprise – Beathard hadn't been considered one of the draft's Top 10 passers, much less a Day 2 pick – and it was immediately criticized as a reach. But perhaps the draft watchers should have seen it coming.

Two months earlier at the scouting combine, Shanahan was asked what he looked for in a quarterback. His answer: moxie.

"Do they watch the rush? Are they fearless?" Shanahan said. "If they're watching the rush at all, it's very hard to make the reactions you need to make in this league with how quick these windows close. So you want to see how quick their decision making is. Not on the board, but in the pocket when they're under duress."

Family legacy

Beathard comes from a family steeped in football and music.

His grandfather is Bobby Beathard, the former Redskins and Chargers general manager. The elder Beathard lives in Tennessee now but grew up in Southern California and returns each August to compete in bodysurfing competitions.

"I still win my age group," the 80-year-old great-grandfather said.

Bobby's younger brother, Pete, played quarterback for the Kansas City Chiefs and Houston Oilers. One son, Kurt, is the former offensive coordinator at Illinois State. Another, Casey, who is C.J.'s father, is an accomplished song writer who has crafted tunes for Kenny Chesney, Billy Ray Cyrus, Darius Rucker and others.

C.J.'s younger brother, Tucker, is a rising star in country music who last year opened for Blake Shelton. There's a chance that Tucker Beathard takes the stage at Levi's Stadium before his big brother has a chance to start there. (The Beathard boys, including youngest brother, Clay, once formed a band called – appropriately, it turns out – Fayd 49.)

Bobby Beathard prefaces everything he says about C.J. with, "I know he's my grandkid, but ..."

He, too, touts C.J.'s toughness and resilience. And he insists there always was something special about the boy.

C.J. Beathard became his high school's starting quarterback when he was a skinny sophomore and then led the state of Tennessee in passing yards and touchdowns his last two years there.

"His high school had never had successful teams," Bobby said. "And when C.J. got there they went to state championships. He's a natural leader. You don't become a leader by saying, 'Hey, I'm your leader.' People kind of gravitate toward him."

Beathard initially committed to Mississippi because it ran a pro-style offense. But when head coach Houston Nutt was fired after a two-win season in 2011, Beathard started looking for other options.

Bobby Beathard had once tried to hire Iowa coach Kirk Ferentz as his offensive line coach with the Chargers. So Bobby made a phone call to Ferentz, which led to C.J. taking a trip to Iowa City before signing day.

"I was really hoping he'd go to where coach Ferentz was," Bobby said. "When he got back he said, 'Hey, Grampa?' I said, 'What?' He said, 'Oh man, the hottest girl escorted me, took me around campus. If I commit, I think I have a date. So I called coach Ferentz and said, 'That's illegal recruiting!' "

'He wants to win'

When C.J. arrived at Iowa, Ferentz found a quarterback with a strong arm and ironclad determination, but one who weighed only 170 pounds. Beathard redshirted the 2012 season and then lost a quarterback competition to Jake Rudock in 2013.

Beathard was behind Rudock when the 2014 season began, but not when it ended.

"We didn't play quite as well down the stretch as we had hoped," Ferentz said. "So what we decided to do in the bowl game that year is let both guys play. No knock on Jake, but C.J. – you could just see C.J. gaining ground almost every week."

Shortly after the bowl game, Ferentz and his coaches decided Beathard, not Rudock, would start in 2015.

Rudock transferred to Michigan where he would play for Jim Harbaugh; Beathard was voted an Iowa team captain before the season.

That seemed premature considering Beathard never had spent any meaningful time as starter. But the honor fit perfectly when he led Iowa – despite his injuries – to its best regular season in 93 years.

“He’s a guy who wouldn’t come off the field unless they dragged him off the field,” said tight end George Kittle, whom the 49ers drafted in the fifth round and who was Beathard’s house mate at Iowa.

“If you saw the highlight against Indiana – he jumped over, like, six guys and I’m pretty sure he had a sports hernia at the time,” Kittle said. “He doesn’t care about his body. He wants to win and do well for his team. He’ll do anything.”

Said Ferentz: “He made history. We’ve had two (teams) go undefeated at Iowa, two undefeated teams in the history of the program, and one was 1922 and then again in 2015. So that tells you a lot.”

Under the radar

When Beathard’s statistics drooped in 2016, his draft hype did, too. Asked about those middling numbers – including a 58.6 completion percentage and minus-24 rushing yards – Ferentz said that Shanahan “nailed it” when the 49ers coach noted on draft day that Iowa simply wasn’t as talented in 2016 as it had been the year before.

Two of Beathard’s top targets from 2015 moved on to the NFL last season. Another, receiver Matt VandeBerg, broke his foot in September and was lost for the year. Even Kittle was slowed by his own foot injury in the second half of the season.

“I thought the experts missed it totally,” Ferentz said. “... My sense was that by the time of the draft there were a handful of teams that had figured it out. And San Fran was in that group.”