

{ “To be the best, you have to
believe you’re the best.” }

-Kevin Mcleod-

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Preface

After not receiving a phone call from any NFL teams prior to the 2005 season, I made one of the toughest decisions of my life. I concluded that it was time to walk away from the sport I had given my heart and soul to for so many years. My goal, for as long as I could remember, was to play for fifteen years. Obviously, it was not to be. Like so many other football players, I never thought that my career would end prematurely due to circumstances that occur every day in the NFL. My career started with so much potential and promise, but somehow ended in a way I never expected.

Upon retiring, several thoughts resonated through my mind. I was thrust into a new era of my life. It was an era that I was not quite prepared for. For so many years I was catered to, and now I was faced with an unfamiliar challenge. It was the challenge of Independence. I was like a fish out of water. As embarrassing as it may seem, I truly felt helpless.

A very special woman who I became very close with, understood my situation. No judgment or recrimination about my manhood, she took me by the hand and helped me become familiar with the normal world. For so many years, my entire world had been devoted to football. I had no idea how to do a good portion of the things that people do every day.

For example, I did not have a résumé and did not know how to put one together. With the help of this special heaven-sent angel, we put together my first résumé and she helped me find my first job.

From that point on, I made my mind up to learn as much as I could about everything; I would make myself a better man. My mind became a vacuum cleaner, sucking up all types of information; I read different books on forming corporations, real- estate and everything that could make money. I became a student ready to learn.

Ultimately, this new outlook on life made me realize that if I was going to excel in this world, a college degree would be the springboard that I needed.

That's when I made the decision to go back to school to complete my bachelor's degree. Upon going back to school in 2007, I told this special woman that, one day, I would write a book about my incredible journey through football. The vast amount of information I've acquired while playing the sport of football is priceless.

While at work, a co-worker asked me a question. The question was about some of the events that happens in football, mainly the NFL. It was at that moment I had a revelation. That's when I realized that it was time to write my book. When I first made the decision to write the book, I wasn't quite sure how I was going to write it. As time went on the vision of how I should write the book became evident. With so many young players continuously making the same mistakes I made as a player, I knew exactly how I was going to go about the project. I devoted an entire year of my life to completing this unique manual. I decided to write my book from a 360-degree angle. So many players write autobiographies about their personal stories. Most of the time, these players are very successful. There's more to the story the public doesn't know about.

So many people are curious about what it takes to make it in professional football. The truth of the matter is it's very hard. Also, it's not as lavish and full of excitement as people might think. If a player has made a team, he will experience the time of his life. The reality is that most players are not as successful as people think. Even if you make the team, having a job is not promised to you. It's a very cutthroat business with more lows than highs. This book is truly for football fans of all ages. Young aspiring ball players who have dreams and aspirations of playing college and pro can learn from this book. Not only young players, but present players who have just entered the League can benefit from this valuable, real information as well. Even if you are not a football player and you just have a curiosity about the Culture of the NFL, you must read this book.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank the Most High (God), for sending his son Yahshewa (Jesus Christ) for bearing the burden of our sins on his shoulders. I thank the Most High (God) for every gift and blessing he has bestowed upon me. For a long time, I didn't understand why Yah (God) had blessed with me the ability to play this sport of football only to take me through such an unpredictable career. It all makes sense now. Had I not been through such a roller coaster ride of a career, how could I have gained the knowledge and insight to write this unique book? I thank Yah (God) for taking me on this voyage. Ultimately, this journey has made me a wiser and stronger person. Yah (God) is great!

I would like to thank my parents for their love and support over the years.

I would like to thank my late father, Egbert Mcleod, for always believing that one day I would overcome adversity to become a better man. Even though his time on Earth was short-lived, I know he is smiling from above. Love you Dad.

I would like to send special thanks to one of my mentors, my high school coach Roy Sparks. I never understood why you took me under your wing and helped guide me through that period in which I could have easily went in the wrong direction. Without your guidance while at school and on the football field, I don't think I would have made it this far. Thanks Coach, for everything.

To my beautiful daughters, Briana and Hailey, thank you for your words of encouragement through those turbulent days. Thank you for being the most joyful and loving kids a father could ever have.

To Sharon, the mother of my eldest daughter, thank you for your patience. It's been a long hard fight, but victory is around the corner.

To Wendy Parker, thank you for everything you have done for me.

To all my family and friends, thank you for your support over the years; I will keep every one of you in my prayers. Thank you all and God Bless!

Chapter 1: The Amateur Stage

1.1 The Psychological Development of Football Players

Pop Warner, known as the little league of football, is often the first structured sports competition many NFL players participate in as they begin their journey through the school of hard knocks. It's during this time that players learn the fierce competitiveness of America's beloved sport. Most NFL players spent their childhood playing in Pop Warner leagues, gaining valuable experience and skills. Most players advance from this league to junior high school competition.

Pop Warner is a series of little leagues that are divided into nine different age/weight divisions:

- First division, Tiny-Mite--- 5- 7, 35- 75 lbs.
- Second division, Mighty-Mite--ages 7-9, 45-95 lbs.
- Third division, Junior Peewee- ages 8-10, 60-105 lbs.
- Fourth division, Peewee--ages 9-11, 75 to 120 lbs.
- Fifth division, Junior Midget--ages 10-12, 85-145 lbs.
- Sixth division, the Midget--ages 11-14, 105-170 lbs.
- Seventh division, Unlimited--ages 12-15, 170 lb. or more
- Eighth division, Junior Bantam--is age's 12-14, 120-170 lbs.
- Ninth division, Bantam--ages 13-15, 135-185 lbs.

Each Pop Warner division has strict age and weight requirements. It is from these leagues that future NFL Hall of Fame players are born.

1.2 The Psychological Development Begins

During these young and impressionable ages, the attitudes and lives of apprentice football players are formed. According to psychologists, a child's early childhood experiences are critical to the emotional and intellectual development of the child. The years from birth to age six are when 75 percent of a child's brain development is completed. It is at this time in a young child's life that information is learned and stored at a phenomenal rate, including the cultivation of athletic skills necessary to become a superior athlete or professional football player later in life. Football players learn, from an early age, the definition of teamwork, discipline, and dedication.

Their psychological development in football begins almost as soon as they hit the field. At this early stage, principles and foundations are formed which help direct young boys as they grow into young men. These essential years are the building blocks that shape a young football player's attitude and self-esteem. During this pivotal period, football players start to recognize they're part of an elite group.

Many will take the unique lessons learned and use them throughout their life. Coaches work with young players teaching them to be the best, because to be the best, you must believe you are the best. The young players learn that greatness only comes through hard work. Many of these young players will take the fundamental teachings and lessons learned and implement this knowledge, subconsciously, as part of their own personalities. This transformation may turn some young players into a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde type personality, while other players will take this transformation to motivate themselves to become great players. Welcome to football!

1.3 Vygotsky Theory on Psychological Development that Correlates with Football Players

As discussed, personalities of ball players oftentimes change when they start to play the sport we all have grown to love. Unfortunately, this transformation is not always positive. These same teachings can, at times, cause a lot of emotional or mental issues when the football

player grows to adulthood. Many people, from all lifestyles, have their own opinions on this subject. Some think players are born this way; some think ball players are taught these behaviors, (Nature versus Nurture). Let's see what some of the world's experts have to say on this matter.

One of the most influential psychologists of our time, Lev Vygotsky, had a very interesting theory. He had a theory known as the "Sociocultural" theory. The Sociocultural theory focuses on how adults and peers influence individual learning. It also focuses on how cultural beliefs and attitudes affect how instruction and learning take place. It is a theory that looks at the important contributions that society makes to an individual's development. This theory stresses the interaction between developing people and the culture in which they live.

According to Vygotsky, "Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first between people (inter-psychological) and then inside the child (intra-psychological)." This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory and to the formation of concepts. Higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals. Another world-renowned psychologist, B.F. Skinner, had a theory on behavior and the environment. B.F. Skinner believed one's environment played an important part in human behavior.

According to a statement from an article by Carole Ann Somerville of the Yahoo network, "Skinner's theory highlights differences in behavior that are largely the result of various learning experiences." Therefore, whereas some psychologists might look at genetics and the subconscious in the forming personality, others like Skinner would recommend the psychologist focus on "observables," such as the environment and people's behavior within that environment.

The translation of this belief means the people around us such as coaches, teammates, fans, mothers, fathers and the people in the neighborhoods in which we live help shape and form the person we grow to be. Throughout the years, the topic of ball players' attitudes,

egos, and lifestyles have resulted in heated discussions on many forums. The curiosity the public has about NFL players has grown into a national obsession. The issues of egos, violence, and entitlement are learned behaviors. In other words, the NFL players who develop these undesirable traits are taught to behave this way.

Chapter 2: The Athlete Becomes Royalty

How can one not argue that the attitudes, often displayed by football players, are a learned behavior? From an early age of development, this arrogant behavior is taught. Society plays a major role in why football players exhibit such behavior. Oftentimes, ball players receive special treatment. They are introduced to luxurious lifestyles at a young age. In American society, athletes are glorified. Football, being America's favorite sport, puts players on a pedestal at a very young age. It begins in the Pop Warner league and continues all the way through college. Coaches, family, friends, and complete strangers attend the games and scream their names. Cheerleaders cheer them on. The entire stadium is filled with fans on game day. Anyone who is continuously exposed to this much admiration and attention would naturally begin developing feelings of superiority.

Many skilled players have evolved into a hometown celebrities before they reach junior high school. As most venture into high school, the attention grows. Being catered to reaches the next level of popularity. I've experienced, firsthand, this notion that football players are treated as royalty. When I played, my teammates and I received the royal treatment throughout high school. We could attend school functions free of charge. Teachers also showed us plenty of attention.

Many teachers were more lenient towards athletes. We were not held to the same level of expectation as the other students in school. If there was a subject we did not understand, the teachers would spend more time with us to make sure we understood the subject. Plenty of days I would walk into my high school late. I was never reprimanded for my chronic tardiness.

During my senior year, one of my teachers took turns with my coach picking me up in the morning. They made sure I was in school, on time and present, every day. Just think how great it would be if your teachers sacrificed their time just for you! You would feel special. The lunchroom supervisor would give me more food than the other students. Sometimes she would give me free lunches if no one was watching. I received the royal treatment of a prince; it was great! The idea of people catering to your every need becomes a reality, and only increases as players are on top of their game.

2.1 The Expectations Get Worse

As a football player reaches the next level in his career, the expectations of special treatment continue to increase. While attending high school, scouts begin attending the games. The top colleges throughout the country contacts him, offering full athletic scholarships to this rising star.

Everyone in his small town or city knows his name. Now all the local kids want his autograph. He has not stepped foot on a college campus yet, but all attention is on him. All the top college football magazines have his name plastered in their pages. Somewhere along the line, the young player realizes he is not an everyday, ordinary person anymore. He is one of the few in the entire world that is getting this opportunity. He is a rising star! This sudden stardom can launch some into a fantasy-type state of mind. The normal world once known is a thing of the past.

2.2 We Lose a Sense of Reality

As humans, we sometimes lose a sense of reality when certain events in our lives occur that cause us to change. These events could be tragic, or they could be events of great achievement. Whatever the situation, we become different people. An abundance of outside attention from everyone can begin to affect one's inner self. He may be weak and channel this attention into negative actions or, with the right guidance from the adults in his life, he could redirect the attention into something positive, like participating in charity events.

Even when a person is well-grounded, such attention is difficult to handle. It is easy to see why many football players change and become arrogant. Unfortunately, this is often the case.

Lots of times, when people are in the limelight, they can easily become arrogant. I suspect it is because some may already had low self-esteem and confidence issues to begin with. Now that they're on the grand stage of their life, they can become that person they've always fantasized of being. The fact that money is involved will play its role in this transformation. There is a strong correlation between a person's arrogance and a person's income.

As the player starts to mature, a certain confidence begins to develop. Often this confidence can be perceived as arrogance or cockiness by others. If you ask a football player if there is anyone on the field that can stop him, he will most likely respond, "Hell, no!

There's no one on earth that can stop me!" As a ball player, you must believe there is no one on earth who can outrun, out-tackle or outplay you! This confidence helps ball players dominate on the field. Everything starts in the mind. "What the mind conceives, you can achieve!" It is that belief in one's self that allows football players to dominate.

2.3 Thin Line between Confidence and Arrogance

Oftentimes, players have that same confidence off the field. Everything they do and say has confidence behind it. In some cases, that confidence converts to arrogance! There is a very thin line between confidence and arrogance. As I mentioned, a player is not the same person after he has attained a certain amount of success in life. When you develop notoriety, and stay in the spotlight throughout high school, college, and then the pros, you change.

The fact that a stranger recognizes you and knows everything about you, can be intoxicating. Even if you have the best intentions and try to be your old self, you will not be the same person. Subconsciously, you become someone other than yourself. Mr. Hyde can be the life of the party, or he can be the biggest jerk in the city.

Whether good or bad, you're not the same person. With this much attention, a player will start to believe people are supposed to admire and praise him. It is like a king making an appearance to his subjects. Everybody Hail the King!

2.4 The King Syndrome Develops

I see this behavior in a lot of football players. I created a name for this behavior; I call it the "King Syndrome!" The King Syndrome happens to most football players when they have reached the pinnacle of their career; everything is very different. Everyone wants autographs, pictures; major companies want them to endorse their products.

The normal life, as they knew it, is over. Being admired and having everyone at your command can become very overwhelming and seductive. If you're treated like royalty most of your life, you're going to feel like a king. Does a king think of himself as equal to his subjects?

If you put me on a pedestal my whole life, I am going to walk through life as if I am royalty. Who is truly to blame for this? We live a society where athletes make astronomical amounts of money, much more than doctors and teachers combined! Ball players not only have the best of everything, but they are adored by their fans. How can you blame the football player for believing he is grand? It is taught at an early age, and most will take this frame of thinking and at times violent behaviors throughout life. Some habits are just hard to break.

Chapter 3: The Violence Begins...

Training camp in college was the hardest physical and psychological experience I have gone through in my entire life. It was during this time that the aggression transformation began. I went from being a nice, passive, young boy to a fierce competitor who did not take crap from anyone. Some football players experience this evolution early in their football years; my evolution began my first year in college. It was physically as well as psychologically grueling.

Once you were the star player on your high school team; now, everyone is just as good as you are. The practices were more competitive and the coaches were more verbal.

My college running back coach was an incredible motivator. If he sensed you were an underachiever, he would jump in your face yelling, screaming, and pushing until he felt he was getting the best out of you. This training made you, literally, turn into a psycho on the field. My coach would have you so fired-up that the only thing you would think of was destruction. If you did not dominate your opponent, he was not satisfied. In some cases, this fierce style of motivation would lead to aggression which I, personally, unleashed on my teammates. Imagine this behavior repeatedly reoccurring for four years. At the time, it was a great motivational tactic because it brought the best out in me. It also brought out the worst in me.

3.1 The Possible Link between Violent Behavior and Football

Is it possible that the violent behavior player's exhibit off the field is related to football? In my opinion, yes. It is easy to see the correlation. From an impressionable age, football players are trained to block, hit, and dominate their opponents. Coaches constantly shout and scream in a player's face, pushing them to the brink of madness.

Most coaches, like my college coach, want to see the opponent's spirit broken. Their way to accomplish this is to get you to become a heat-seeking missile, with your opponent's head as the target. If the mission fails, the coach takes his frustration out on you by launching a verbal assault of yelling and derogatory comments...all directed towards you. You are barraged by screaming and yelling, and demoralizing insults, while saliva and chewing tobacco get spit in your face. This is acceptable behavior on the football field.

However, after years of experiencing this type of psychological abuse, you develop an attitude about yourself. It is an attitude of, “no defeat, and no surrender.” Some players can turn this attitude off at will, and some cannot. Thus, you see a lot of off-the-field incidents involving football players and violence.

3.2 Environment Plays its Role

One can theorize that a possible reason why some football players are violent is because they were subjected to violence in their personal environment. A decent portion of football players grew up in neighborhoods reminiscent of a Hollywood gangster movie. Exposure to this lifestyle adversely affects people’s behavior. This lifestyle relates to Lev Vygotsky’s “Sociocultural” theory, discussed earlier. Millions of children are physically as well as psychologically abused every day.

In some cases, these children grow into adults displaying these same abusive behaviors to their loved ones. It is a good possibility that many of the players you see playing the game were subjected to some form of abuse as a child. This goes for some coaches as well. People are products of their environment.

Abuse knows no color or economic status. Being exposed to a life of abuse can also be the reason why some players fail to learn their lesson. It is puzzling to see some players continue to repeat the same mistakes that got them into trouble in the first place. I realize deep-rooted, traumatic issues some young men have faced in their lives result in destructive behaviors. This is the case when you see these same individuals being charged with repeat violations.

When you look deep into their past, you will find these men were often neglected and traumatized; physically, psychologically and sexually, as kids. These same individuals, now grown up, are taught more violence through the sport of football. It only serves to pour fuel on the fire! Never seeking help for their problems, they continue living their lives with open wounds that never heal.

3.3 Harboring the Pain

Is it possible some ball players have subconsciously harbored the pain for years and not realized it? Could this be the reason some ball players parade through life so recklessly? Some young men who constantly commit fouls against themselves sometimes will get labeled as troublemakers. Coaches and general managers often deem these men to be a detriment to their team and, in some cases, to themselves.

As a coach and general manager, you need to be able to recognize that some of your players might have some issues that needs attention. Rather than labeling this player as a problem, try to understand that he may be dealing with something he does not realize. Help him! It is because of this possible unseen by the human eye problems, that I'm a big advocate for psychiatrists to be hired by NFL organizations. All NFL teams need to have a psychologist or psychiatrist on staff. Psychological therapy is an amazing tool that most football teams do not take advantage of. Many would think therapy is a sign of weakness.

As football players, we're taught to play with pain and never show signs of weakness. These same lessons transfer into a player's life. If a player is hurt, he is programmed to play with an injury. If he is dealing with an emotional problem, a player will do what he has been taught to do all their life, ignore the pain. The brain is a very powerful, but fragile, organ. When emotional pain is held inside and not released, it damages a person internally. This damage can be physical as well as psychological.

The emotional pain that some may harbor may well be the reason that you see destructive behavior in some ball players today. Beyond the bright lights and glamour, you never know what internal struggle someone may be battling.

One shocking example of the reality some football players face happened to one of my top five favorite NFL players of all time, Junior Seau. The news of Junior Seau's suicide left me distraught for days. Millions of fans were bewildered by the shocking act of one of the NFL's finest players. The unanswered question lingered for months throughout the country; why would a man who had it all would take his own life? Obviously, Junior was dealing with a problem that was more powerful than any opponent he ever faced.

The heartbreaking event that occurred to one of the NFL's great ambassadors leads me back to the fact that players are trained not to give in to pain. Is it possible Junior lived his life feeling that if he talks to family or friends about his problems, they would perceive him as being weak? I can only speculate. His issue could very well be the same that's faced by hundreds of football players today. His death should be a lesson to all who have battled in the trenches on Sundays. Re-program your minds; if there is something wrong--seek help. Let his passing not be in vain.

3.4 Shrinks on Staff

I often wonder why NFL teams do not have a psychologist or psychiatrist on staff. With all the issues football players face daily, it only makes sense. Players deal with multiple problems like injuries, money, and spousal matters throughout their careers. It would be logical to have a psychologist or psychiatrist on call 24-hours a day; you never know when crisis may occur in the lives of these young men. This lack of attention shows the tremendous ignorance the League has when it comes to the mental health of their players. Teams spend tremendous amounts of money making sure their sources of income are producing on the football field.

Why neglect the area that is just as important as the physical...the mental? Everything happens in the mind. If ball players' minds are not stable, regardless of the coaches who are telling them to "suck it up," it will affect their performance on the field. The psychological health is just as important as the physical; I cannot stress this enough.

I pray teams will start to pay closer attention to this issue. I hope in the future; all teams will have at least one psychologist or psychiatrist on staff. All teams have trainers or a physical therapist onboard. That same attention needs to be paid to the mental health of their players; a psychologist or psychiatrist makes sense!

3.5 Warrior Mindset is embedded

At this stage of players' lives, the idea of giving in does not exist; we take this same approach in our personal lives. Most people can walk away from confrontation; it is that much harder for ball players. We have been conditioned for years to never back down, to fight; we are trained to dominate our opponents physically.

If that is embedded in a person's mind for years, it is very easy for someone to develop a warrior-like mindset. When confrontations arise, players greet it with open arms. A possible scenario could go like this: A jealous man is sitting in a bar drinking. He begins to bad mouth the Auburn Tigers. He says to everyone around him, "The Auburn Tigers are the worst team I have ever seen!"

He then turns in my direction and says, "You're the worst football player Auburn University has ever had!" After that comment, it is a strong possibility that this drunk, belligerent person is going to receive a knuckle sandwich for dinner. Most people would ignore this person, and walk away and avoid trouble. It is easier for an average person in the normal world. It is not that easy for football players, especially when you have been trained not to back down most of your life. Players are trained to meet these physical challenges head on. The public should understand that football is a very violent game. No matter how you look at the situation, we are taught violence. How can it not be expected for football players to develop a mean streak? It is that psychological transformation we have been subjected to for years.

3.6 The Brawl

During the spring of my junior year in college, my Greek fraternity organized the biggest party on campus. I invited four of my cousins to attend this huge gala. They drove from Atlanta to Auburn University in Alabama to join me for a weekend full of fun and festivity. Upon their arrival, my girlfriend and I had a disagreement. We proceeded to settle our differences in my car, and while we were in a heated discussion, a stranger walked up to my car and began to laugh. I asked my girlfriend, "Do you know this guy?" She replied, "No I don't." I got out of my car and asked the man, "What do you want?" The stranger, who was obviously drunk or high, replied by saying "F you!"

By this time my temper was boiling over. I told the stranger, "You need to back up!" The stranger started moving closer to me, but before he took another step, he was lying on the ground. I gave him a right hook straight across the jaw. My sudden reaction was not a wise one and, as it turned out, this stranger had a few companions that accompanied him. Ready for a fight, his companions started jumping out of their cars ready to beat me to a pulp there in the parking lot.

Although it was dark, I estimate approximately ten guys surrounded me. By this time, my training kicked in, and I was at the point of no return. Everything happened so fast. Suddenly I was in the parking lot getting ready for the fight of my life.

I had to make a quick decision: Was I going to take on ten guys, or was I going to hightail it out of the parking lot? The amazing thing is that, not that long before this situation, I learned about the "fight or flight" syndrome in one of my psychology courses. **According to the website, www.science.howstuffworks.com, the article "How Fear Works," written by Julia Layton states,** "The Fight or Flight response happens when the hypothalamus activates two systems: the sympathetic nervous system and the adrenal-cortical system. The sympathetic nervous system uses nerve pathways to initiate reactions in the body, and the adrenal-cortical system uses the bloodstream.

The combined effects of these two systems are the fight-or-flight response. When the hypothalamus tells the sympathetic nervous system to kick into gear, the overall effect is that the body speeds up, tenses up, and becomes generally very alert. If there is a burglar at the door, you are going to have to take action-- and fast.

The sympathetic nervous system sends out impulses to glands and smooth muscles and tells the adrenal medulla to release epinephrine (adrenaline) and norepinephrine (noradrenaline) into the bloodstream. These "stress hormones" make several changes in the body, including an increase in heart rate and blood pressure at the same time, the hypothalamus releases corticotrophins-releasing factor (CRF) into the pituitary gland, activating the adrenal-cortical system. The pituitary gland (a major endocrine gland) secretes the hormone ACTH (adrenocorticotrophic hormone).

ACTH moves through the bloodstream and ultimately arrives at the adrenal cortex, where it activates the release of approximately 30 different hormones that get the body prepared to deal with a threat. **These physical responses are intended to help you survive a dangerous situation by preparing you to either run for your life or fight for your life (thus the term "fight or flight").**

The fight-or-flight response in particular, is an instinct that every animal possesses.” How coincidental that a few weeks prior to this incident, my psychology professor was lecturing about this unique syndrome and here I was, living out the discussion in the parking lot. People learn a lot about themselves when situations such as this occur. Most individuals with logical sense would have run and sought cover, but not the big, bad football player.

Like a scene out of an action-packed adventure, there I was in the parking lot surrounded, and ready to fight ten other guys by myself. Fortunately, about that time, my cousins realized what was taking place and came to my aid at the right moment. Then it happened; the brawl began. It was a free-for-all with four of us against ten of them. Even though we were outnumbered, we fought the fight of our lives. The fight was so intense, I did not realize someone had pulled a blade and cut me. Unfortunately, I was left with a six-inch gash across the left side of my face.

The fight ended with the stranger and his companions walking away battered and bruised. I ended up in the emergency room, received thirty-two stitches, and partied the next day. As suicidal as it seems, I was ready to take on all ten guys by myself. I refused to run or back down! I became this aggressive person that football trained me to be. I refused to be dominated or intimidated. That night, a hundred thugs could’ve tried to make mincemeat of me; I was going to stand my ground and fight.

The point of the story is to explain how the human mind can be motivated and transformed into a fighting machine. I theorize this is the same kind of psychological transformation experienced by soldiers. One can argue that certain individuals may already have an aggressive nature before playing football. Could it be that the individual’s genetics made him predisposed to violent tendencies? Some may say the psychological transformation players experience during their evolution as football players has nothing to do with violent behavior. I can say this...as a boy I was never a confrontational type of person. By the time I was ready to move on to the pros, I felt I could fight a bear and win.

Chapter 4: The next stage of Royalty, College...

Growing up in a middle-class home in Decatur Georgia, I was always a very respectable kid. Receiving a full athletic scholarship to Auburn University was the highlight of my life. I was the first in my family to go to college. My parents were so proud. I arrived on Auburn University campus and, within minutes, a feeling came over me that I had never felt before. I achieved what no one in my family could accomplish...I made it to college! I realized, at that moment, I could not disappoint my parents.

I understood I was now a part of a small fraternity of men on earth. I felt there was nothing I couldn't achieve if I put my mind to it. College was the best time of my life. It took a little time to adjust but, as the days went by, I started to feel at home. I lived college life to the fullest. There were so many memorable moments, that if I wrote about them all, it would take a few eons. The one lasting impression that has remained with me throughout the years was the treatment the football players received on campus.

When we hit the field, it was all business--prepare for battle. When we were not in the trenches, it was all love. We were treated like first-class citizens. The royal treatment on this level was the stuff of dreams. What dreams were made of. We had the best of everything. We received the best foods, the best tutors, brand new books; we got the opportunity to choose our classes in advance of the other students. The athletes had their own separate academic department. Our weight room was state of the art. The locker room and training room were on the same level as pro teams. We received all the apparel we needed.

We had the top two orthopedic physicians in the country on call. Dr. Lemax and Dr. Andrews who, in my opinion, are living legends in their field. They would fly to Auburn every Tuesday to do routine check-ups.

Players who were injured during the game were examined thoroughly. They make sure the players bodies were in tip-top shape and free of check-ups were performed to injuries. Any issues concerning our physical health were well taken care of. We traveled like the president of the United States. When our team played in away games, the athletic department would charter an entire 750 Boeing airplane. It did not matter what state we were playing in; that weekend we were flying in style.

First class, chartered buses would transport us from the athletic department to the airport. We had at least four police escorts that led the way. We received the same presidential-like escort on a regular basis when we played away games. This was a normal routine for us. Division 1A college football players travel in style and class.

If you are a professional, you should travel in this manner. The hotels we slept in were five star hotels, nothing but the best. The athletic department had multiple floors rented for the players and staff. We had security for each floor we occupied. We were catered to like professionals, that's what it's like when you play at a major university.

4.1 The State of Alabama is Football Country

We played in front of thousands of people. To be honest, I played in front of more people in college than I did in the NFL. When I played at Auburn University in the mid-90s, the stadium capacity was 85,214. Today the capacity is 87,451. Auburn University's Jordan-Hare Stadium at Pat Dye Field has a stadium capacity larger than most teams in the NFL. The football games at Auburn are something truly special. The years I played are memories I will cherish for a lifetime. The state of Alabama is a very special place to play college football. In my opinion, the state of Alabama is football country. The competition between Auburn University and the University of Alabama is the greatest rivalry in college football, hands down. When the two teams meet in the "Iron Bowl," it's a dogfight!

The Iron Bowl is the last game of the regular season; when Auburn and Alabama play for bragging rights in the state for that year. The game can also have National Championship implications based on the records of the teams and who wins the game. Either team can prevent the other from playing in the Southeastern Conference Championship or National Championship game. The reason being, both teams are in the same conference and division.

The winner of this game has a great chance of playing in the National Championship game, if they have an undefeated record as well as winning the SEC Championship. The entire state shuts down for the "Iron Bowl". All eyes in the state, and possibly the country, are on these two teams when they meet. The people of the state are very passionate about their football teams. All their focus is on their beloved Auburn or Alabama.

I have often wondered why an NFL team is not based in this state. With so many passionate people who sincerely love football, why would there not be an NFL team there? I guess an NFL team would probably take away from the rivalry between the two teams. Maybe one day we will see a franchise make its mark on the state. As for now, we will just focus on Auburn and Alabama.

4.2 Tiger Walk--an Auburn Tradition

Auburn football is rich in history and tradition. Auburn has a unique pre-game ritual. This custom has been around for years. This ceremonious act is called the "Tiger Walk." The Tiger Walk was something that I and all the other players looked forward to each week. The Tiger Walk, was exhilarating. The fans would meet around the former football dorm (Sewell Hall) ready to cheer on their adored Auburn Tigers. There would be a long line of people gathered from Sewell Hall all the way to the stadium. There would be an orange and blue trail, as far as the eye could see. The dorm was approximately a quarter of a mile away from the stadium. On game day, the players would meet at Sewell Hall before departing to the stadium.

We would walk in single file from the dorm to the stadium. While walking, the fans would cheer us on, giving us pats on the shoulders as we marched to the stadium. Some admirers would give us hugs and words of inspiration. Just imagine, thousands of fans screaming and encouraging you as you prepare for a game. If that doesn't get you excited, nothing can.

Once the season started and the games began, the entire town was a huge party. The population of the town tripled overnight. The football games were something to remember. In high school, the most people I ever played in front of was approximately 150. Now at Auburn I was playing in front of more than 85,000 screaming, passionate fans who loved Auburn football. The Auburn fans are the greatest fans alive. The state of Alabama is truly football country. Even in less important games, the seats are full. That is true, die-hard love.

4.3 College Football is the Pros

As far as I'm concerned, the luxuries I received in college were no different than what I received in the League. In my opinion, college football is the pros. The only difference between the two is when I moved up to the pro level, I started receiving paychecks.

At the college level, we had specific days when the media would do interviews. We had those same days on the pro level. The facilities were state-of-the-art, same as the pro level. Our practices were scheduled like pro teams. Everything we did had "professional" written all over it. My college experience ultimately prepared me for the NFL. Once I reached the pro level, I did not miss a beat. I was already accustomed to the luxuries that pro football players received. This is why I advocate for college players to be paid; it only makes sense.

4.4 College players should be paid

If the college football player is treated like a pro, he should receive some form of payment. Football is the highest grossing sport in college athletics; colleges and universities make millions off their players each year. Why shouldn't the players get a cut? That is a valid reason why the players should receive a piece of the pie.

Let's talk about the economics of it all. I will use an imaginary team for this example. We will call this team, Big Money University. Let us say Big Money University's stadium holds approximately 95,000 people. Each ticket can cost anywhere from 60-\$250, depending on the game. Some of the most popular game tickets can run extremely high. For some games, the ticket prices may peak at \$300. Let's multiply an average of \$100 a seat. At \$100 a seat, 95,000 seats would bring \$9,500,000 to the university. This staggering amount is what Big Money University collects in ticket sales. This is just for one home game.

At least five games are going to be played at home. The team can very well bring in approximately \$47,500,000 for all home games combined in one season. Big Money University still gets a percentage of the profits for the away games. Then there's the merchandise! Big Money University owns the rights for any apparel sold with the Big Money University logo on it. The University gets a major payday from any products sold with Big Money University's name or symbol on it. Lets' not forget the TV contracts.

The money that is generated from TV contracts is astounding. These numbers can range well into the hundreds of millions if not billions of dollars. These are more than enough reasons why college football players should collect a check every week or bi-weekly. If players were paid, this would solve the problems that most young men will face during their tenure.

If paid, I believe this would alleviate the issues of college players accepting money from boosters or any other entity that's offering to give these young men money or gifts. If paid, most will not risk the chance of losing their eligibility just for money.

4.5 Boosters role in college sports

The boosters, also known as donors or alumni, are the wealthy men and women who donate millions of dollars to their respected college or universities. Some donate because they want to give back to their college or university.

Others contribute for tax breaks. Over the years, the boosters have gained a notorious reputation for using money, in the form of bribes, to influence top-rated athletes to come play at their respected university or college. These bribes come in the form of cars, clothes, jewelry, and homes. Whatever it takes to get that athlete to sign, the boosters will provide it.

I, myself, never received any gifts from any boosters during my tenure at Auburn. However, I have heard stories from players who attended different colleges saying they had received thousands of dollars placed in their gym bags. I have also heard stories of players' parents' homes being paid off. Stories were told of players receiving \$100 handshakes after football games.

From what I have heard, these handshakes can sometimes add up in the thousands. I believe this distribution of cash will never stop. If you have young athletes coming from impoverished homes, it will continue for generations to come. Therefore, the NCAA needs to change their policy and allow athletes to receive some form of payment from the universities.

4.6 The NCAA role in college sports

These same boosters have gotten many colleges in trouble for violating NCAA rules pertaining to gifts... The NCAA has passed heavy sanctions on college teams, over the years, for these violations. The NCAA has been the bearer of bad news for many major programs. They have gained the title of being the police of college football. The role they play is that of an overseer who rules with an iron fist. The NCAA is college football's governing entity. "The NCAA was founded in 1906 with noble intentions." According to its website, NCAA.org, "its core purpose is to govern competition in a fair, safe, equitable, and sportsmanlike manner, to integrate intercollegiate athletics into higher education so that the educational experience of the student athlete is paramount." The NCAA is also responsible for the disbursement of TV revenues to all NCAA division schools.

The NCAA imposes sanctions on teams who are non-compliant, (not following the rules) with the NCAA guidelines and regulations. Punishment for breaking these rules can range from fines, probation, banishment from TV, loss of scholarships, or in rare cases the death penalty." No football team wants this sanction imposed on them. The death penalty is when a school's football program is dissolved forever. Only one team has ever received this stiff penalty. Hopefully, it will be the last.

4.7 The NCAA-Deceptive

In my opinion, the NCAA pays more attention to college football than any other sport. For one thing, college football generates the most money; for another, they have more student athletes than any other sport. It is the NCAA's job to make sure the student-athlete have the best possible college experience. It is also the NCAA's job to keep the playing field in college sports on an equal level. In addition, it punishes those who decide to make it unequal. It is their job to serve as a protector for all student athletes against physical, mental, and financial danger.

The NCAA states that they want to protect the amateurism of college sports--mainly football. The biggest question I have for the NCAA is this: what is so amateur about young men between the ages of 18-21 being able to generate billions in revenue annually? Nothing about that is amateur; this sounds very professional to me! If the NCAA cares so much about the well-being of student athletes, why not provide resources for these young men and women to have a great college experience? Offer funds for some student athletes to be able to fly home if they live across the country. Provide means for the student-athlete to be able to buy some decent clothing.

It sounds like high tech pimping, with college sports and its athletes as the whores! People need to realize that some of these young men and women are coming from impoverished situations. Yet, the NCAA says it cares! The reason these athletes end up falling victim to bad situations is because of a lack of funds.

Most will be dismissed from the program for their unwise decisions. If it walk's like a duck and quacks like a duck, then nine times out of ten it is a duck! These young men are professional athletes and they should be compensated! I hope one day the light will come on and the NCAA will realize the struggle of student athletes.

4.8 The Economics of the NCAA

Major sports apparel companies like Under Armour, Nike, Reebok etc. pay millions of dollars to university athletic programs. The teams endorse the brand of their sponsors on a weekly basis for the world to see. This is the reason college football is such big business; the more a team wins, the more money they receive in endorsements. Money is coming in from all directions. It is only fair that if the college athlete is helping the university make millions of dollars, they should be entitled to some of the profits.

I have heard some arguments where people have stated, "A college scholarship should be enough to fulfill the needs of college football players." Let's use my alma mater, Auburn University, as an example. According to Forbes magazine's ranking of the 2011 season, Auburn was ranked 23rd in the country. The cost of an in-state football scholarship to Auburn University is worth about \$21,140 annually. The cost of a football scholarship for an out-of-state student is worth approximately \$35,156.

The NCAA allows universities to add 25 new scholarship players annually to the team each season. This number is based on the older players that graduate, drop out, or decide to go pro. Their place will be taken by 25 new high school players or junior college transfers each season. This is done so the numbers can stay balanced; approximately 25 players leave and 25 new players are added on. Let's do the math; Auburn has 25 scholarships to award every year. Each scholarship is worth about \$84,560 for four years for in-state students.

Roughly, it cost \$140,625 for four years for out-of-state students. Let us calculate the average between the two. An average between in-state and out-of-state students would be approximately \$11,000. There can only be 85 total scholarship players on a Division I-A football team a year. That would be a breakdown of \$9,350,000 that would be spent for all 85 scholarship players on the team per year. The comparison of how much the athletic department spends on its scholarship football players is peanuts compared to the profits they make annually.

Once they have received a scholarship, their room and board are paid. These young men do not have the money for leisure expenses. Most will want to experience college life. Most of the athletes will want go the movies, date, and go out to eat with their friends or girlfriend. To do so, you need money to experience the normal outings that college students participate in. The scholarships do not provide these men with income needed to be able to experience these things. Some can call home and have Mom and Dad send money but, the reality is, many of these young men come from poor homes. Their parents can barely afford to pay the bills, no less send money to their child while they're at school.

Think about the player who signs a scholarship with a team that is based across the country. Some may argue these young men and women can get a job, like thousands of college students do today. During my tenure at Auburn, the NCAA forbids student athletes from working during the school year. It was the biggest Catch-22 ever! You cannot receive gifts from boosters, nor can you work, because it is a NCAA violation.

What is a person supposed to do? Even if these student athletes could work, when would they have the time to work? Student athletes have some of the most grueling schedules imaginable. If they're not in class, they're in team meetings, practices, traveling or rehabilitating their injury. How can student athletes work nine-to-five with such a hectic schedule? It is impossible. How will these young men get home to visit the family during the holidays?

The government provides a Pell Grant, but that amount is not nearly enough. During the mid- to late 90s, when I played football at Auburn, I received \$700 quarterly in Pell Grants. Quarter systems in the 90s were three months. Receiving \$700 for three months was not nearly enough money. Within a month, I was broke!

Another matter of contention in college football is the issue of what happens when a player's eligibility has expired and he has not graduated. These players helped their institutions make millions during their tenure; now what happens? When a football player has used all his eligibility, time is up. There is something very wrong with that! Some players have taken a stand against being left out in the cold. A few players have started a movement to continue their education once their eligibility is up.

4.9 The Compensation Movement has Begun

According to ESPN.com news services and the Associated Press, "more than 300 major college football and men's basketball players are telling the NCAA and college presidents they want a cut of ever-increasing TV sports revenue to fatten scholarships and cover all the costs of getting a degree, with athletes picking up still more grant money when they graduate." According to AP, "Players from Arizona, Georgia Tech, Kentucky, Purdue, and UCLA have signed a petition asking the NCAA to realize its mission to educate and protect us with integrity.

The document urges the NCAA and college presidents to set aside an unspecific amount of money from what it estimates are \$775 million in recently acquired TV revenues in an "educational lock box" for football and men's basketball players. Players could tap into those funds to help cover educational costs if they exhaust their athletic eligibility before they graduate. They could receive what is left of the money allocated to them with no strings attached upon graduating.

This step would undoubtedly be seen by some as professionalizing college sports. It seems to me the movement has begun! It is good to hear that these young men are finally realizing their worth. I believe

these are the beginning steps for these young athletes to be compensated for their efforts. All parties involved that oppose this idea must realize that, without these young men, there would be no college sports. Do you realize what this economy would be like without college sports, mainly football? It would be a grim and miserable country to live in. Athletic directors would not receive their larger than life salaries. Coaches would not receive their even more, larger than life wages and benefits. Most importantly, there would be no football. How sad would that be? Think of what kind of world this would be without college football. It only makes sense to pay the athletes!

Chapter 5: The Economics of College Football...

Many people play important roles in college football. All parties involved work together to make college football the biggest and most adored sport in college athletics. There are different positions that play an intricate part in the success of a college football team. One position that plays a vital role in college sports is the role of the athletic director. The athletic director, also known as the "AD," is the person behind the scenes making important decisions as they pertain to the overall business of college athletics. If I could compare the role of the athletic director to anyone, it would be to a CEO in a company.

Division I-A athletic directors' annual salaries range somewhere between \$350,00-\$650,000 per year except for a handful of AD's whose earning fall into the seven figure brackets. Division I-A athletic directors usually make the most money of all the different divisions. In certain cases, some athletic directors, depending on the school, make more money than the head coach. An athletic director's job is preparing budgets and allocating funds for budget costs such as coaches' salaries, team travel, equipment purchases, and facility upkeep.

The athletic director works with coaches to determine the scheduling of games and practices. Athletic directors also work with conferences on league scheduling and other issues, like post-season playoffs. The athletic director provides guidance for coaches as well. At the major college level, the hiring of coaches is a key responsibility for athletic directors, which can be subject to public scrutiny. Athletic directors work with coaches as well as travel coordinators to plan trips.

They coordinate the schedules of officials and umpires at games, and budget their incomes. Typically, athletic directors file reports on the status of each team to include its successes and shortcomings. They may mediate disputes between athletes and coaches. The athletic director works with a compliance officer to make sure a program is acting within the rules of the conference, NCAA, and any other participating associations. Long story short, the athletic director's job is to make sure the everyday business of his team operates smoothly.

He does the hiring of the head coach, as well as the firing if the season doesn't go as planned. He handles different issues within the business aspect of the football team. This task may include fundraising, sales of club seats, etc. The athletic director has incredible influence in college sports, especially football. I believe if athletic directors pushed the issues of college athletes getting paid, we would see change. I do believe there are some AD's that understand that college football is like a job and that these young men should be and need to be compensated.

5.1 Pay Like it's a Job

College football is just like any major corporation; in fact, college football is a major corporation. Football season is the time of year America looks forward to. It is the season when the grills are fired up and the tailgaters are ready to enjoy the fall season. The business of college football is like the NFL, most the money earned is through media. The revenue generated annually is estimated at around \$775 million. That is a staggering amount of money! The amount is based only on what is generated through media. Other sources, such as concessions and merchandise, are not included in this picture.

As I discussed earlier, this is a major reason why I am an advocate for college players receiving payment for their services. Just to be clear, I am not saying universities need to sign players to huge multi-million dollar contracts; no! That would be the wrong message to send. What I am saying is college players need to be compensated as if they worked a forty-hour work week. By doing this, college athletes can prepare themselves for life after football. Unfortunately, not all are going to make it to the NFL; some will never play another down of football after their college career is over. Rather than simply sending them to college to play sports and earn a degree, let's help them through the whole process. Many will experience difficult financial times post-graduation. While compensating them with a scheduled paycheck, college athletes can save their money. They can graduate with a financial safety net.

It may take a while to find employment; having money in the bank will keep some afloat until they find a job. The athletic department can set up programs to teach these athletes how to manage their money, how to invest, save, and budget. Hopefully, most would have learned how to manage their money upon graduation. This would be the beginning steps in teaching athletes how to earn a living. Have them fill out W-2 forms just like people in the real world. Guide them through the process of filing their taxes at the end of the year. Equip our beloved college athletes with the skills they will need to succeed in the work place. This process will make the transition into the workforce much easier. They will be prepared for the financial challenges that life sometimes brings.

5.2 The Payment Model for the College Player

A unique idea came to mind as it pertains to compensating college athletes. Create a system that's fair and makes sense. This system of payment will have incentives for performance in the classroom and the field. You can even give it a catchy name like the Pay to Perform model (P2P model). The model should be created as a payment system that is based on the production of the student athlete on and off the field.

All players should have a base pay of \$700 every two weeks. The cost of living in some states may be higher. Adjust the salaries according to the cost of living in the state in which the player's college or university is located. The player whose jersey is selling like hot cakes should receive a little more money. The payment should be due to the players on a bi-weekly basis. This payment should be contingent on the players completing the necessary things that are required of them as student athletes.

The requirements are making sure he goes to class as scheduled. He should be on time for every scheduled meeting. The player must stay out of trouble during and after the season. To make the agreements a little more enticing, add some incentives to the model. Give bonuses to the athletes that maintain a certain grade point average each semester. Give bonuses to the players who have the most tackles and touchdowns. There so many creative incentives you can come up with to motivate the athlete to be the best he can be.

Requirements would include:

- attending scheduled classes
- arriving on time to scheduled classes
- staying out of trouble during and post-season
- Additional incentives might include bonuses for:
 - maintaining a pre-determined GPA
 - most touchdowns/most tackles
 - community service

There are so many creative incentives you can come up with to motivate the athlete to be the best he can be.

Design the model to include consequences. If a player is late to meetings or missing classes, you deduct their pay. If a player is suspended for the upcoming game, he does not receive a paycheck for that week. This would be an incentive for the player not only to stay out of trouble, but to be responsible. This would be a great model for universities to adopt.

It would prepare these young men for the real world post-college. There will be better football games if you give these athletes something like money to work for, it is going to bring out the best in them. This would be a great motivational tactic; you would see more football players graduating from college. Give them that incentive for making it to bowl games, and the playoffs. If the schools gave bonuses to the players for making it to post-season play, guaranteed you would see more players competing to the best of their abilities on a consistent basis. A playoff bonus would be a great motivational factor, leading me to the next discussion about the playoffs.

5.3 Finally, a Playoff System

Finally, we now have a playoff system in Division I-A football! It is amazing to me that here we are in the year 2016, and we have yet to have a real playoff system. I must admit this past season was ridiculous! I have never seen so many bowl games in my life. It got to a point where I was tired of bowl games before the good ones were played on January 1st. America has become completely bowl crazy. Whatever happened to the concept of teams that are the best in the country play in the bowl games? It seems to me that teams are being rewarded for playing horribly throughout the year. A bowl game should not be reward to a team that has a mediocre record.

Another disturbing flaw that has been aggravating football enthusiasts for a few years is the Bowl Championship Series (BCS). The BCS is not an accurate system of determining a true national champion. Let me explain in detail what the BCS system is and how it works. According to College Football Poll.com, the BCS is a “statistical rating system used to determine the teams that will participate in the championship game of the Bowl Championship Series. This statistical rating system consists of three components and each count as one-third of the final BCS formula-subjective polls of Harris Interactive (replaces AP), and coaches (USA Today), and six computer rankings. To put it in simpler terms, it is a computer-generated system that gives Division I-A teams their national ranking.

The system bases its ranks of teams on the wins of the team, the difficulty of their schedule and the difficulty of their conference. Ultimately, the system determines who plays who for the national championship at the end of the season. Usually, the top two teams with the best ranking and record will play for the national championship. Sadly, the best teams don't always play for the championship. I have seen this predicament happen repeatedly over the years.

The better teams are being left out of the championship hunt because of the degree of their schedule and other factors. The playoff system should have been implemented years ago. Having a playoff is the only way you are going to be able to determine the true national champions. I think the playoffs are a good business for college football. It is estimated the new playoff system has the potential to generate over a billion dollars in revenue. That is a staggering amount of money. My understanding is that a good portion of those funds would go to the university that plays in the game. Wow! We have come a long way.

5.4 The College Playoff Model

Even though we have something of a playoff system intact, it is still a long way from being the true playoff system that it needs to be. Remember, the top four ranked teams are the ones that will have the opportunity to play in the playoffs; the powers that be will still rank those teams. The new playoff system is better than using the old BCS system to determine who plays in the championship game.

I am still not sold totally on the idea of only using four teams to participate in the playoffs. There have been cases in which teams play terribly early in the season. After about the third or fourth game, the team starts to turn around and plays great football. Should a team who started playing poorly, then improved as the season went along, miss an opportunity to play for the national championship? If they're using the systematical system of the BCS, the opportunity will be missed. The team might have a talented group of players but, for whatever

reason, started slowly. I have seen situations where teams lost their first three games and came back to win a conference title. Therefore, a playoff system is imperative. If a full playoff system cannot be implemented, at least have an eight-team playoff that is based on the teams who are the champions of their conference. The top eight ranked teams in the country should play for the lead title of college football.

As I understand it, there is a lot involved when introducing a full-fledged college playoff system to Division I-A; ultimately this is the one true way to determine who the legitimate champion will be. That would be nice to see, a complete playoff that includes the winner of all 1 college conferences. Rather than basing everything on rank, base the system on who wins the conference. Implement a system like the NFL, since there are 11 conferences in Division I-A football, the team who has the best record in all 11 conferences should be awarded with a first-round bye. If there needs to be a tiebreaker, the team with the best overall statistics gets the bye. The model would go as follows:

There are 11 conferences in Division I-A football. Assign each conference a division. Separate the division by demographics, east and west. The champions of the five conferences in the east would have a loser-eliminated tournament. The exact system is repeated for the west. The winner of east would play the winner of the western division for the national championship. Give each game a title. For example, the team that plays in the first round would have a name like the College Football First Round Mud Bowl.

Each game would have a different company sponsoring the game, just like a bowl game. This way you would still leave the bowl sponsors involved, in some capacity. This is just one example. Do the same the following week in the second round. This would continue until the top two teams played in the championship. This would add a little excitement to it all. I hope in the future we can see a full-fledged college playoff in Division I-A; until then, we will just have to accept things for what they are.

Chapter 6: The Opportunity Almost Missed...

Receiving a full scholarship to attend a major university was the greatest achievement of my life. I realized I was part of a small percentage of people in the world that could go to school free of charge. One of the major adjustments I faced when I entered the college ranks was the schoolwork. To be quite honest, high school was something of a breeze. I did not put forth the effort I should have in high school. To me, the only thing good about high school was football. I hated studying for tests; I hated doing homework.

School was not one of my focal points. When I graduated from high school and went to college, I was in for a very big surprise. I was not prepared for the college workload. I screwed around so much in high school, that when it came time for college work I found myself feeling a little lost. Everything was different. In high school, there would probably be no more than thirty-five people, at the most, in class. In college, there are about one hundred and fifty students in one class. The classes are held in auditoriums.

All the students do is take notes, all day long. This was a major adjustment after being in a class where there were so many students. In high school, everyone in class knew one another. In college, I might go an entire quarter without meeting any of my classmates. The work was a little bit more complicated. I wrote so many essays it was ridiculous. In high school, I could make decent test grades if I did not study for my exams. In college, that was not the case. If I did not study for my tests, I failed. It was so bad that by the end of my first quarter at Auburn, my coach called me to his office. He told me, "If you don't get your grades up, you are going to lose your scholarship."

6.1 Time to Buckle Down

The thought of losing my scholarship and going back home was very horrific. Receiving a scholarship was the highlight of my parent's life. It would absolutely break their hearts to know their son had flunked out of college. The idea of not having the opportunity to make it to the League terrified me. I had a reality check while my coach was speaking to me. I made my mind up... I was not going to be another statistic.

After the meeting with my coach, I went back to my dorm and started studying. It was as if someone turned the lights on. I became more focused than ever. I started taking better notes in class. I started studying very hard. I truly became a student athlete. Whenever there were study sessions, I was there. On weekends when my teammates went out partying, I was in my dorm, studying. One of the great things about playing Division I-A football is that you have the best tutors at your disposal.

I had a tutor for every one of my subjects. The thought of going home was enough to wake me up. My outlook on college changed during this surreal experience. I realized that this was not high school; I could not coast through school; not on this level. If I had any chance of making it to the NFL, I had to stay eligible and pass all my classes. Even through this experience, my mind was focused on the League. Truth be told, an education was the last thing on my mind. The only thing I thought about while at Auburn was being drafted. I went to school and did the work just so I could stay eligible. Being ineligible means you cannot play; not being able to play means no NFL. The whole reason I was in college to play football; a degree was the last thing on my mind.

6.2 Why most College Football Players Don't Graduate

The question of why some college football players are graduating at a very low rate is still a very curious topic. My answer to this longstanding question is very simple: they do not graduate because getting a degree is the last thing on their minds. Every young aspiring football player's dream is to play in the NFL one day. Let the truth be known: major universities don't give these men scholarships to receive a degree. They give them a free ride to school to play football. The decision is totally up to the ball player if he desires to obtain a degree. The school will provide the necessary resources for this young man to earn a degree. Ultimately the choice is his if he is going to seize the opportunity. Unfortunately, some don't.

Thoughts of playing in the League drive these young men for years. That is the ultimate accomplishment...to play at the highest level of football. Playing in the NFL would help some of these young men out of an impoverished situation. Playing on a professional level would set some of these men free, financially. Most of the time the desire to play at the next level can supersede their perception of what is important. Believe it or not, some football players have no desire to get an education and probably will not. Their main objective is to use college as a springboard to get them to the NFL. The only thing they are concerned about is making sure they get enough receptions or carries so their stats look impressive to the scouts.

Then there are some players who just cannot do the work. No matter how many tutors this person gets, he still does not get it. The college courses are just too complicated for certain players. The likelihood of these players graduating is slim to none. As farfetched as this may sound, it's true. Academic advisors will give players just enough elective classes to keep them eligible. The reality is coaches know these kids can't do college course work.

They also know a good amount of the young men they sign probably will not graduate. Most coaches are only concerned about the young men's ability to play football. Their grades are horrible, but they can

play some football! They are going to do whatever they must do to keep the player eligible. Packing a schedule with elective courses can only work for so long. What happens when all the elective courses run out? The player gets to pack all his belonging and head home. The party is over! This is the reality of college football. If you cannot do the work, you will not stay eligible and will not graduate. It is not like the old days where you heard about players who couldn't read, or an entire football team getting copies of exams before their test day. Those days are long over. In today's world, young men have to earn their degree, if they so choose.

6.3 If you are a Top-rated Prospect as an Underclassman Go Pro

Another reason why some of these young men do not graduate is that some decide to leave school early to pursue a pro career.

I am starting to see more college football players go this route.

I think it is a wise decision if you are projected to be in the top two rounds. I never understood why some underclassmen who are projected first or second round picks decide to come back for their senior season. I think that is insane! Let me be frank! If you have an opportunity in life to put yourself in a better place financially, seize the moment.

Think of the following scenario and decide if it makes any sense.

If you went to the local gas station and purchased a winning lottery ticket, would you wait until next year to cash it in? Think about it.

Would you take a chance of possibly losing that lottery ticket because you felt you were not ready to handle all that money and fame?

What would you do if you lost that winning ticket? You would probably shoot yourself! That is pretty much what top rated football players do when they decide to come back for their senior season.

If you decide to come back for your senior season and end up breaking a leg or tearing a ligament in your knee, then what? I am not saying you are not going to get picked up by a team, nor am I saying you cannot have a great career. What I am saying is the chances are a whole lot smaller. You might miss the possibility of receiving millions

if you are drafted high. Teams are not going to invest loads on a player who is hurt. This is how the League works. It is business and you are the investment. If you were an investor, would you purchase millions of dollars' worth of stocks in a company that was not doing well? You more than likely would not. That is how the teams would look at you if you were injured. These are the questions you must ask yourself. Why take that chance? That is a little too risky. If the opportunity is given, take it. Tomorrow is not promised to anybody, live for today. You may not get the same opportunity next year. Seize the moment.

Let me be clear! I do not want anyone to misunderstand what I am saying. If you were not projected in the top two rounds, it would behoove you to stay in school. However, if scouts have you rated high, and project you being drafted in the first or second round, cash in. Do not be a fool! College is not going anywhere, but your youth is. Once you're playing days are over, you can always go back to school and pay your tuition with your millions if you so choose.

6.4 Auburn University's Operation Follow Through, a noble gesture

I can truly say Auburn University is a blessed school. The University truly wants to see the best for its athletes. Auburn has a unique program. I am not sure if there is any other college in the country that is doing this. Auburn has a program called Operation Follow Through. It is a unique program that gives its former student athletes an opportunity to complete their education once their professional careers in sports are over.

I went through the program, and I know many other former Auburn University athletes who completed the program as well. The program is truly a noble gesture. Some former Auburn athletes did not have an opportunity to graduate. Some left early to pursue a pro career. If you decide you would like to go back to college and get your degree, the school will put you back on scholarship until you have graduated. This scholarship would be a full scholarship. It would be like you are playing football or whatever sport you were involved in during your

tenure at Auburn. The good thing about this go-around is that you do not have to go to practice. You will be a fulltime student without the distraction of football. How wonderful is that?

This noble gesture shows the world the sincere love Auburn University has for its athletes. This is a message to all top prospects in high school football. When you are considering your college choices, make sure you choose a school that truly cares about you once you're playing days are over. If I were a top-rated prospect coming out of high school, Auburn would be at the top of my list. Universities like Auburn are hard to come by. God bless Auburn University and its athletic department.

Chapter 7: The Sports Agent...

A sports agent's role is very interesting. The sports agent may act in multiple roles. The primary role of the sports agent is to negotiate a player's contract with their respective team. In some cases, sports agents, may negotiate endorsement deals for their players as well as their specific team contract. Most sports agent fees are anywhere between 3-4% of the player's contract. This includes the players signing bonus or, in some cases, his endorsement deals if the agent has negotiated it. The percentage the agent will require for negotiating the endorsement deal is probably going to be higher than 3 or 4 percent. It's based on what the agreement between the player and the agent is finalized to be. Depending on the outcome of the endorsements deal, both parties can walk away with lots of money.

Most college athletes acquire sports agents after their college eligibility is over. It's an NCAA violation for athletes to have any association or dealing with sports agents while still eligible for college sports. Once athletes have declared that they are going pro, they can do business with whichever agent they choose. Sports agents have gotten college athletes in major trouble throughout the years for violating NCAA rules. Sport agents have been known to give athletes various gifts while they are still eligible to play college

sports. Some of these rules violated can range from giving player's money to buying them suits, cars and houses, etc. There have been times when sports agents have defrauded their clients through various fraudulent deals, schemes, and false investments opportunities.

I found the biggest mistakes a lot of pro athletes make is that they allow their agents to act in multiple roles. In some cases, you will find an agent acting as: financial advisor, accountant, publicist, attorney, mother and father--the list goes on and on. I have always felt an agent should be just that, an agent. I think you should never put all your eggs in one basket. Young athletes must realize that, more than likely, they are not the only client. The agent has other clients who are trying to make it in the League. How can your agent handle all your financial affairs plus the financial affairs of his/her other clients? It's unrealistic! Better to choose an agent with specialized staff that can provide guidance in several fields. If your agent handles all the financial affairs of all his or her clients by themselves, this could become an issue.

It's wise to hire people separately who are experts in their specific field. Remember this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity; you want to make sure you maximize your opportunity to make and save money. Having one person handling all those responsibilities along with their other client's affairs will hinder you more than help you. Having individual people to handle individual responsibilities makes very good business sense.

Some sports agents are attorneys that still practice law. In cases, such as these, your agent can be very valuable. Some advice to athletes coming out in the draft, it is wise for your agent to have a background in law. Pro athletes are major targets for criminals of all classes. You never know when you are going to be in a situation where you're going to need legal advice. You may just have questions about business. You might want to open a franchise one day. It's good to know you have someone on your side, who knows the law and who can respond to a client's legal issues, quickly.

Sports agents can sometimes develop close relationships with their clients. It's not an unusual thing for athletes to develop close bonds with their agents. After all, this is going to be the most important person, other than your parents, at this stressful period of your life. Some agents are not quite as personable; some agents are strictly about business. My agent, when I was in the League, was strictly about business. We would talk a little bit about the game or what's going on in the sports world. But for the most part, it was about business. To be quite honest I preferred it that way. I know, at the end of the day when football is over, the agent will have no more use for you, than you have for them. Therefore, why fake like it's a lifelong friendship? In rare cases, your agent can be a good friend, but for the most part once the game is over it's on to the next client.

7.1 Is an Agent a Necessity?

The business of being a sports agent has become a very lucrative one. Sports agents are seeing more money than ever before in the history of sports. As the contracts of players continue to reach staggering numbers, sports agent salaries will continue to rise as well. Nowadays, you might hear more about the agent than the athlete. In the past, you never heard anything about what the agent was doing or what kind of deal he was working for his clients. These days, agents are just as much celebrities as the athletes they represent.

The truth of the matter is that, technically, athletes don't need sports agent to negotiate their deals. It's the biggest misconception in all sports. There have been situations where a few NFL players have negotiated their own contracts. If you have a great understanding on how the business of the Leagues work as it pertains to value and worth of players, you might want to self-manage. Would teams look at you as if you were crazy? They probably would! Would I advise you to try to negotiate your own contract? Absolutely not! If you do not have experience in negotiating these deals, it would probably be the biggest mistake of your life. You can lose tons of money because of ignorance; I would not advise it if you do not have the background.

There have been cases where players have hired attorneys to negotiate their deals. Some attorneys are knowledgeable about negotiating NFL contracts. Most attorneys who negotiate NFL contracts would likely charge an hourly rate. The rate may vary; it all depends on the attorney. Personally, I would prefer to pay an attorney a flat fee for a few hours, rather than have him or her receive three to four percent of my salary. The three to four percent counts throughout the length of my contract, as well. Let's be honest, does an agent deserve 3 or 4% of a player's salary just for being on the phone for a few hours? Most contracts, especially if the player is a late round draft choice or rookie free agent, are basic.

Late round draft picks are players who will make significantly less money than the players who were drafted in the first, second and third, rounds. Late round draft picks were drafted from the fourth to the seventh round. Rookie free agents are the crop of first year players coming out of college who were not drafted. If the rookie free agent signs a contract with an NFL team, he will be invited to training camp. At this point, the free agent can make the team if he plays well.

The truth of the matter is that agents have the knowledge and expertise in negotiating NFL contracts. As well as a vast knowledge of the business of football, they are a necessity during the times when a player is unemployed. These are the people who are going to make the phone calls on a player's behalf when he is without a team. Do your research; make sure the agent you decide to sign with has your best interest at heart.

7.2 Football Players Holding Out for More Money

Football players holding out for money has been a major issue for NFL organization. When a player holds out for more money it's usually based on the advice of his agent. Holding out means the player did not report to offseason workouts, training camp or any organized or unorganized team function or event. These hold outs can last for days or months, depending how fast the team and player can come to an agreement about the player's contract. A player holding out can be due to any number of reasons: the agent could be dissatisfied with the

terms the team is offering the player or the player may feel his current value is higher than the original terms of the agreement. The bottom line--it's all based on more money! Holdouts can be a headache for all parties involved: head coaches, general manager, team owners, players and agents.

Everyone involved can become frustrated. If you are the star player and you're holding out, this can cause major changes in offensive or defensive game plans. Coaches trust certain players to run specific plays; if their star player is holding out that can alter the offense or defensive schemes. Coaches can sometimes use backups, but he would feel more comfortable with his starter in the lineup.

More than likely if a player is holding out it's probably for a very good reason. In the past holding out was the normal thing to do. If a player has out played his contract, it was certain he was going to hold out. When a player has out played his contract, it means exactly what the term says. He is more than likely producing top numbers on the field whether that's by scoring touchdowns, receptions, rushing yards and tackles, etc. Usually the amount of money the player is receiving as a salary is grossly under his value when compared to his productivity on the playing field.

For example, the player might have led the NFL in rushing two years straight but he is getting a league minimum salary. At this point, the agent realizes the value of his player has soared through the roof. Now the player and agent can go to the bargaining table and request a bigger contract from his team. Usually the agent will request a long-term multiyear deal. This deal may end up being anywhere from 4-10 years with the numbers ranging from \$40-120 million depending on the player's position, productivity, value and what the agent and team negotiates.

In these days and times, holding out for more money can be extremely costly for the player. With the new NFL Collective Bargaining Agreement, players are fined up to thirty thousand dollars a day for holding out. The definition of the agreement is as follows:

NFL Collective Bargaining Agreement: The player's guidelines as it pertain to wages and rights. The player's union which is called the NFL players association (NFLPA) for short, negotiates the terms of the agreement with the NFL team owners.

According to lawbrain.com, the collective bargaining agreement is "the process through which a labor union and an employer negotiate the scope of the employment relationship. A collective bargaining agreement is the goal of the collective bargaining process. Typically, the agreement establishes wages, hours, promotions, benefits, and other employment terms as well as procedures for handling disputes arising under it. The collective bargaining agreement cannot address every workplace issue that might arise in the future, unwritten customs and past practices, external law, and informal agreements are as important to the collective bargaining agreement as the written instrument itself.

Collective bargaining allows workers and employers to reach voluntary agreement on a wide range of topics. Even so, it is limited to some extent by federal and state laws. A collective bargaining agreement cannot accomplish by contract what the law prohibits. For example, a union and an employer cannot use collective bargaining to deprive employees of rights they would otherwise enjoy under laws such as the civil rights statutes (Alexander v. Gardner-Denver Co., 415 U.S. 36, 94 S. Ct. 1011, 39 L. Ed. 2d 147 [1974]). Collective bargaining also cannot be used to waive rights or obligations that laws impose on either party. For example, an employer may not use collective bargaining to reduce the level of safety standards it must follow under the occupational safety and health act (29 U.S.C.A. §§ 651 et seq.). Furthermore, the collective bargaining agreement is not purely voluntary. One party's failure to reach agreement entitles the other to resort to certain legal tactics, such as strikes and lockouts, to apply economic pressure and force agreement.

Moreover, unlike commercial contracts governed by state law, the collective bargaining agreement is governed almost exclusively by federal labor law, which determines the issues that require collective bargaining, the timing, and method of bargaining, and the consequences of a failure to bargain properly or to adhere to a collective bargaining agreement.”

It puzzles me that the NFL Players Association would agree to such a rule fining players thirty thousand dollars a day for holding out! This takes all the advantage away from the players receiving new contracts. If I am holding out for a new deal, I'm thinking, what if the team does not give me a new deal? What if I have wasted all this time holding out? What if I must report to the team without a new deal? I potentially may have to use my entire season's salary to pay these fines for holding out! Remember players are fined thirty thousand dollars a day for holding out! Some of these players may just be earning the League minimum. The possibility of using all the money I have earned during the season to pay back fines is tragic! That would drive me to drink alcohol! I don't think I would chance it.

At the end of the day, the player is going to lose this battle. Some advice to players holding out for more money...do your research. How many players holding out in this day and time with this new CBA in effect gets the team to see things their way? Teams are not budging now-a-days! It would be wise to go to off season training as well as training camp. Business is business; your leverage has been taken away. With fines at \$30,000 a day...if you are a great player...your big payday will come soon. Just be patient. It's not worth the headache, especially if you're making the League minimum. The team owners got the upper hand on this one.

7.3 Pay Your Agent Installments if you're on the Bubble

This situation happens all too often with players on the bubble. When a player is on the bubble, it usually means his chances of making the team are slim to none. In many cases, bubble players get released from teams because of circumstance. Usually it's because there's just not enough space on the team. They could have had a great training camp, but because of the dynamics of how the NFL works, he still may lose his job.

Typically, teams use this term during training camp when players are being evaluated by the coaches. A bubble player usually must do something spectacular to make the team. Sometimes a player that is on the bubble can make the team due to certain circumstances. These circumstances may arise because of another player being injured. At times, teams will bring in a new player to fill the spot of the injured player. Rather than bringing in a new player, coaches will use the player that's on the bubble. It makes all the sense in the world to use the bubble player.

He knows the plays; he knows all the coaches and he has developed a bond with his teammates. At times, these bubble players can get a raw deal. Often these bubble players will be used as temporary fill-ins, until the team's normal player is healthy and ready to get back on the field. Once the team's normal player is healthy, the bubble player may be released. Here is where things can get somewhat tricky with the agents and their fees.

Normally agents will request their fee up front. If I'm a player that has just made the team due to some unfortunate event. This event may stem from another player being injured. I would have to realize I might not be on this team when that injured player gets well. If it's a season ending injury the player received, I stand a better chance of remaining on the team the entire season. If not, I can be released once the hurt player is healthy.

You must be business smart in situations such as these! If you know there is a possibility you may not be on the team the entire season, why would you pay your agent his total fee? Most agents will request a payment based on the entire season. If you are released from the team a month after the season starts and you've paid your agent his percentage, you've basically given away free money. Being released a month in is not playing the entire season, yet you've paid the agent his full-season fee. Money paid...services not rendered!

It's wise to pay your agent in installments in the event the team releases you. Players on the bubble need to realize that the agent knows your team standing. If your agent is fair, he will agree to the installment method. Break those payments up depending on when you are paid. Each team is different--some teams pay their players weekly, others bi-weekly. Prorate those payments to last through the duration of your tenure with the team. You will appreciate that decision in the end.

Chapter 8: The Dream Achieved...

All peewee, junior high, high school, and college football players dream about this day. This is the day all football players realize their days as amateurs are over. This is the rite of passage for all young ball players coming into their own. The NFL draft is such a special day for young college football players across the country. Moms and dads, the players themselves shed tears of joy on this glorious day. However, this day can also turn out to be one of the most disappointing days of some of these young men's lives.

The draft can be unpredictable at times. Players who were projected to be early first round picks can slip into the second or third rounds, unexpectedly. When this happens, it can mean trouble. The player may have had a bad showing at the NFL combine, failed a drug test or simply had issues that caused the coaches or general managers to re-evaluate the player's worth. Players who slip into later rounds could lose millions.

The same can happen to players who are projected to be second or third round picks. In the blink of an eye, their value can rise and they can go from second or third to be first round picks. If they manage to dazzle the scouts at the combine or individual workouts for an NFL team. This can also happen if a scout sees something that no other coach or scout sees in that player. That's the exciting thing about the NFL draft; anything can happen at any given time. The players get an early introduction to the cutthroat business of the League.

The NFL draft has seen its difficulties over the years. New rules have been added. We have seen new faces come and go. The one thing that never changes is the gleam in players' eyes, anticipating that they might become millionaires overnight. The draft sets the tone for what could be a Hall of Fame career or a complete bust.

It's amazing to see how the draft has evolved over the years. Now, the draft is like a circus. Football fanatics take days off from work to see the stars of tomorrow. Up and coming players who are picked have draft parties. It's a media spectacle for a couple of days. Everyone loses sleep: coaches, players and parents.

When I was drafted in 1998, it was the biggest highlight of my life. I sat at home with my parents and brothers, waiting for my name to be flashed on the television screen. I was a nervous wreck, as was my family. Eventually I was drafted on the second day in the sixth round. I was praying to go earlier than that, but the sixth round is better than not being drafted at all. I still think about that day and how exciting it was. It is a moment like this that young football players will forever have embedded in the neurological vault called a memory. If you are fortunate enough to get drafted, enjoy it. You've joined an elite club. Congratulations!

8.1 A Head Start on Life

Those long days of training and hard work have finally paid off. God has answered your prayers. You have made it to the big show. Now you can afford to buy all the things you have always wanted. The NFL is a wonderful blessing to those who have made it thus far. The amount of money a player makes in one season is more than most

people will make in a lifetime. The gift of playing in the NFL enables the players to purchase homes, cars, and other needs for their families with no financial stress or worry. The opportunity of being able to make a lot of money at a young age can set some of these young men up for life.

Not all players will make millions of dollars. The reality is most the players in the NFL only make six figures! I will discuss this misconception later in the chapter. Think about this scenario! What if you only play three years in the NFL? If you are making the League minimum the first three years in the NFL, in three years' time you will have made over a million dollars.

The League minimum is three hundred and seventy-nine thousand dollars with a jump of fifteen thousand every year for the next two years. If you are smart with your money, you can put yourself in a good position early in life. If you pay cash for a house, car, pay off debts, and so on, three years in the NFL could set you up for an easier future.

Think of how great life would be if you didn't have to pay a mortgage or car note? Eventually you are going to have to go into the work force when football is over. How lovely life would be if some of the things that most Americans struggle with were already taken care of. It's all about being smart with your money!

8.2 Not all NFL Players are Millionaires

As I discussed earlier, not all NFL players are millionaires. Most these players make six figures. Some players make high six figures and some make middle six figures. Nevertheless, it's a lot of money. It's more money than normal people will see in a lifetime. Only a handful of players make the millions. That is a common misconception of pro football. Indeed, six figures is a lot of money, but it's nothing close to what some players on the team earn. I have always felt it was unfair to the other players on the team. Most of the other players that make six figures contribute to the team just as much, or in some cases more, than the players who are receiving all the millions. A good portion of the time, the players who are making the six figures are the ones who

have to do the extra things at practice. They run the scout teams, special teams and are the backups for the full-time starters.

8.3 Scout Teams Practice Squad and Special Teams

Every day, before the players hit the field to practice, the coaches will have a script they follow throughout practice. This script consists of possibly thirty or more offense and defensive plays. Usually these offense and defensive plays will be the plays that will be used in the upcoming game. The practice squad is responsible for running these scripted plays so the offense or defense can get an accurate look of how opposing offense and defenses will look during the game. The scout team is just as important to football as any other facet of the game.

Another vital part of the game is the special teams. They set the tone of the football games. The special teams are one part of football that gets very little media attention they consist of a kickoff team, kickoff return, punt team, punt return, and field goal. These special teams are critical when it comes to field positions for offense and defense. In some cases, special teams can win or lose a game. Some NFL players have made a career out of being special teams players, playing up to 10 years or more just on special teams.

Now, the question I pose is this: Why is there such a huge gap in the salaries of the special team players and full-time starters? Obviously, starters on offense and defense are the stars of the team. The people pay to see them play. I am not saying starters should not be paid more money than the special team players, but there should not be such an enormous difference between the salaries on the team. After all, football is a team sport. Without the efforts of special teams and practice squad players, the starting team would not be as well prepped or successful.

In my opinion, there is not one player on a team that's worth eight million dollars. If you have a player making eight million dollars, he should be able to play at least four positions at the same time. We all know that is impossible. A player making eight million dollars a year is taking money away from other players that play equally important roles. Whatever happened to the concept of team? This is something I feel the NFL should examine closely. Every one of those guys bust their butts in offseason training, training camp, practice and the games. Everyone should be compensated fairly. I hope that one day the NFL will adjust the salaries of players. Hopefully, one day every player will be on a similar financial playing field.

8.4 The Pressure of Winning in Professional Football

Being a pro football player is the greatest accomplishment a young athlete can achieve. There is no other feeling like reaching that level of celebrity status. All athletes should feel a great level of achievement if they have reached the status of pro. However, along

with the accolades and fame comes a lot of responsibility and pressure. The amount of pressure football players and coaches go through is unbelievable! The public must understand it's not all glimmer and gold in the League. On the outside, it looks glamorous; behind the scenes, it can be Heartbreaking.

Being a pro football player is a very demanding job. Just like most major corporations, if your production falls you become valueless to the company. Production is the name of the game when it comes to the NFL! There is a saying in the League that both coaches and players mention from time to time: The NFL stands for Not for Long"! If you are not winning football games, whether you are a player or coach, you will not be around for long! That's the name of the game: Winning! If you are not winning as a player or coach, the owner will not keep you around. It's unprofitable. That's the cutthroat part of the business.

Coaches are under constant scrutiny from the press. If a team is not playing well, the media will have a field day. Most of the time, the coach will be blamed for everything that goes wrong. I've always been a firm believer that coaches should be the last to blame. The players are the ones who play the game. If the players are not playing on the level they should be, I don't care how great the coach is, they are not going to win ball games. It's ultimately up to the players to go out there and perform. There have been instances where coaches will call horrible plays and cost the team the game. In circumstance like these, the coach is to blame. However; that's something you don't hear about often in the League; most of the time coaches have a solid game plan.

If teams are not winning football games, fans will not attend the games. When fans aren't attending the games, tickets are not being sold. When tickets aren't being sold, money isn't being made. The pressure to win the game reigns supreme in the NFL. That's what it's all about! When teams are not winning, that means the owners aren't making money. When that happens, people start losing jobs. Coaches, general managers, players, you name it! No one is immune to losing their job in the NFL; unless they are the owners.

The pressure to win games can be overwhelming; it can cause players to find alternative methods of dealing with the stress. Sometimes drugs and alcohol can be the solution. Sometimes players will cross the line of no return and use performance enhancing drugs. You are probably asking yourself, "What do performance enhancing drugs have to do with relieving the pressure that football players go through on a day-to-day basis?" I will explain!

Though a banned substance in the League, some players will take the chance of using steroids or performance enhancing drug to gain an advantage. These drugs are taken to improve their level of play on the field. Throughout the year the League does random PED testing on the players. The pressure of winning will drive some of these players to do it anyway and risk the possibility of being caught. If they are a dominant player on the field, that means they're productive. This could mean the possibility of signing a big contract. That also means they will have a job for a while. Having that feeling of a little job security will make some players take the big risk.

8.5 Football Players Should Not Be Able to Go Pro Out of High School

From time to time someone will ask me the question, "Should high school football players be able to go pro right out of high school?" I would give them the straightforward answer, "No!" The amount of pressure an adult football player faces while on the pro level is overwhelming. I can't imagine putting an eighteen-year-old kid through this roller coaster ride. Reflecting back to when I was a high school senior, there was no way I was ready for a professional career. I was not mature enough mentally or physically to handle the drama that comes with the NFL. To be honest, I don't think I was mentally ready for the NFL when I left college. At least when I was ready to leave college, I was developed physically. My body was ready for the blows and impact I had to endure in the League. Putting a high school player in the NFL would be like putting a kid in the ring with a heavyweight champion. Their bodies are just not ready. They can

literally be killed on the field. That is why I am strongly against high school kids going pro in any sport. Everything on the pro level is much more complicated. The speed of the game is such a huge difference from college to pro, high school to pro more so. The NFL playbook has no comparison to the "x and o" of high school plays. High school plays, compared to NFL plays, are like seventh grade geometry compared to post-graduate physics. I believe that high school kids need to go through the process like most young athletes. They need to go through the college ranks and get used to a faster paced game.

I remember in the early 2000s, there was a big issue of college freshman being able to enter the NFL draft after their first year in the college ranks. The incident was brought before the Supreme Court. The ruling was a very wise decision. Young men who go pro out of high school or their first year in college face too many challenges. The major challenge is being able to decipher who holds their best interests. They can be easily taken advantage of if they do not have the right people in their corner. Simply put, going from high school straight to the pro ranks is not a wise decision for young men to make.

The Supreme Court made an excellent decision of shutting down the notion. They have saved the lives of America's future stars. I feel all sports should require their athletes to complete at least three years of college before they become eligible for the pro ranks. In addition, it is not fair to the young men who are currently in college and are going through the process. I've seen college basketball players get passed over because of some young phenomenon. Where is the justice? This "Phenom" has not spent one day in the college ranks paying his dues, but has signed a multimillion-dollar contract. Something about that just isn't fair.

Basketball players can no longer go from high school to pro. They must complete at least one year of college before they can enter the pro ranks. It's still not good enough! They should complete at least three years, period. Give the college player who developed the skills and paid their dues that opportunity. If these young Phenom's are

truly talented players, let them go through the college ranks and prove it.

Chapter 9: The Economics of the NFL...

Throughout the years I have had friends, family members, and perfect strangers ask me, "How does the process of the NFL draft work?" These same people are curious about how the League distributes payment to the players based on the draft rounds. I will try to answer these questions as clearly and precisely as possible. The entire draft process can be complicated. A few factors can determine how much a player receives.

It all depends on the round he is drafted in. The NFL draft is somewhat like the stock market. The players are the companies and the NFL teams are the investors. Players can lose stock value in various ways. Some players can lose stock value by performing poorly at the NFL combines or their personal workouts at their college. Players can lose stock value by having a poor season in college or if their statistics were not as good as the season before. They can also lose stock value by having off the field issues like a DUI, failed drug tests, or criminal offenses. Due to the drastic change in the player's value, some of these young men end up going from early first round projections to late second round picks.

A person falling from early first round pick to late second round pick has a major impact. The amount of money that is paid to a player is based on the round in which he is picked. The first rounders are the major moneymakers. They are the millionaires of the draft. The earlier the players are picked, the more money they are going to receive. Conversely, the amount of money a player receives declines as he goes further in the rounds. That is how the dynamics of the draft is set up.

First round picks, prior to the new Collective Bargaining Agreement a couple of years ago, were receiving some major money. The amount of money rookies received was staggering. Many of the veteran

players throughout the League had major issues with this. Those rookies were getting outlandish contracts prior to stepping foot on an NFL field. The veterans' argument was that the rookies needed to prove themselves worthy and play a few years before they received that amount of money. The money the team was giving to these unproven rookies should be going to the veterans who had already paid their dues. The veterans had a valid point! The new CBA changed it all. First rounders in this day and time still make a lot of money, but nothing close to what they used to make.

The top ten players are usually supposed to be the top ten best players of that draft class. We know sometimes that may not be the case. Some of the best players may have slipped to lower rounds because of what I discussed earlier; off the field problems. The rounds are set up in this manner. There are seven rounds in the NFL draft. There are thirty-two picks in each round. There are thirty-two teams in the NFL and each team has one pick in each of the seven rounds.

Some teams may have two or more picks in a round, based on certain variables. A team having extra picks in a round may be the result of another team giving up their pick in a trade. Teams may want a player that is on another team. They can use their draft pick during the draft to get the player that they want. They can give their draft pick to another team to receive the specific player that they want.

Different scenarios may play themselves out during draft day. Teams will give up draft picks to be able to move up a few spots in the round to choose the player they need. This would depend on what spot the team has to pick in the draft. The player they would like to pick probably would fit perfectly in their offense or defensive system. For example; if Team A has the tenth pick in the first round, the player they need is probably going to be chosen by another team by the third pick. Team A may call the team that sits at the third spot and ask them if they would like to negotiate a trade.

This trade will be negotiated so Team A can move up a few slots and replace Team B at the third spot so they can choose the specific player they had in mind. This deal may require Team A to give up draft picks for the other rounds to come. The deal may also include draft picks for the future drafts. Many scenarios can come out of the negotiation. If Team B agrees to the deal, then Team A will move up some spots and take Team B's position on the draft board. Now Team A can pick the player they need for their system.

Teams negotiate trades during the draft all the time. These trades can happen in each round. Sometimes teams may give up their draft picks in certain rounds for drafts picks in years to come. Teams may give up their first-round picks in this year draft for two first-round picks and a third-round pick for the following years draft. There are many ways these trades can be structured. That's briefly how it all works. It can be very complicated.

9.1 How NFL Players Gets Paid During the Season

Every player enjoys this part of the season. This time of the year all the players in the NFL celebrate. I call this time of the season Christmas in September. Once the season starts and after the final cuts, every player starts to receive their season salaries. Some people are under the assumption that football players get paid throughout the twelve-month period. They do not.

Sometimes you will hear sports commentators or agents use the word 'annually' when they are discussing players' salaries. Technically, players do receive that money during that specific year, but it's not throughout the entire year. Football players receive their annual salaries during the actual playing season. It's all compressed within a six-month time frame. For example; if a player receives a salary of six million dollars a year, that six million dollars would be broken up in a weekly or bi-weekly paycheck based on your team's payment system. The six million earned in a salary would be prorated for the period the player played football during the season. The period in which football is played is called "regular season." The regular

season is a sixteen-game schedule that usually lasts about four months. Each game is played once a week. If a player earned a salary of six million dollars, and was paid bi-weekly (once every two weeks), the paycheck would be seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars every two weeks for four months.

When I was with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, we were paid on a bi-weekly schedule. When I was with the Cleveland Browns, we were paid on a weekly schedule. It is all based on the team. Some of my teammate's paychecks were three hundred thousand dollars every two weeks. Can you imagine being paid over three hundred thousand dollars every two weeks after taxes? I remember seeing a teammates' paycheck one day. (You would think this person would have direct deposit.) The amount of money this person was walking around with was ridiculous. All I saw was enough zeros to enable him to buy a three hundred-thousand-dollar home, in cash, and still have plenty left over. I remember thinking to myself, "He must have a screw loose. I hope he's going straight to the bank to deposit that." Walking around with that much money would make me nervous.

It is pretty much the same formula for all NFL teams. This is the time of the season when everyone is happy. I remember the day I received my first paycheck: I've never seen so many zeroes in my life. I did what most rookies who have never seen that much money does...I went shopping. The feeling of being able to buy anything you wanted was such an unbelievable high. I spent about eight thousand dollars on jewelry and clothes. I spent close to ten thousand on my sport utility stereo system.

I bought furniture for my condo. I sent money home to my parents. I spent almost half the season just buying things that I've always wanted. It was such a wonderful period of my life. I gave money to friends and I gave money to my relatives. However, buying what you want can become addictive, which is why many players go broke. More on that later.

9.2 The NFL salary cap

Most, if not all, major corporations will have budgets or certain limitations on how and what they can spend. The NFL system of checks and balances is set up, in what the League refers to, as a salary cap. As the season transpires, you will hear commentators and football gurus mention issues with the salary cap. According to howitworks.com, “in 1994, the owners' and players' associations of the National Football League approved a new collective-bargaining agreement. This agreement included a salary cap designed to keep players salaries from increasing at the rate they were at the time.”

The salary cap is essentially a set amount of money that each of the NFL's thirty-two teams can spend on player salaries for any given year.” The salary cap is based on the income a team earns throughout the year. The income the team bases the salary cap on is called the Define Gross Revenue. The Define Gross Revenue (DGR) is profits earned from ticket sales, TV, and merchandise, just to name a few. Any lucrative stream the team uses to make money is the Define Gross Revenue. Let's say the salary cap for this year's up-coming season is season is set around \$120.6 million. This means each team has \$120.6 million to spend on all the players on the team for the year.

For example, if a team has a cap of \$120 million, that \$120 million is spent on the salary of all fifty-three players on the team. A good portion of that money goes to the star players. The star players usually make the most money on the team. The League monitors the limit on the teams so they will not go over the cap. All contracts that are negotiated go through the League office. It's done this way so no team can go over the cap. If the contracts are over the cap, the League will reject it. Once the team rejects the contract, the team must restructure the money that's being paid to the player. The team does this so they can fit beneath the cap.

There have been situations in the past where teams have somehow gotten contracts past the League office. If the League finds that this is the case, the team is penalized. The team would lose draft picks for the upcoming draft or fines would be issued. This is how all NFL teams conduct business in the League.

9.3 NFL Contracts are not Guaranteed

There are so many misconceptions about NFL ball players and the business of football itself. One major misconception concerns the contracts of the NFL players. Many people are under the assumption that the contracts NFL ball player's sign are guaranteed. The truth about the matter is these contracts are not guaranteed at all. The only thing that's guaranteed is the signing bonus of the players. That is why agents negotiate to get a good portion of their player's money in the form of a signing bonus. Before I go any further, let me explain what the signing bonus is and the significance it plays when negotiating contracts.

The signing bonus of an NFL contract is exactly what the name says. The NFL team cuts a check and gives it to the player upon completion of the negotiations; the player will then sign the contract with his specific team. That team will then write a check to that player for signing the contract. The amount of money the player receives in his overall contract will at times dictate the amount of money he receives as a signing bonus. The money the player receives as a signing bonus will be taken out of the overall amount of his contract the team agent agree to.

For instance, a player signs a six year, sixty-million-dollar contract with a signing bonus of twenty million. The twenty million dollars the player receives as a signing bonus will come out of the sixty million dollars of his overall contract. This will leave him with forty million dollars he will earn for the next six years. The forty million will then be broken down in annual payments to the player for the next six years. The problem with these contracts is that none of them are guaranteed! The player may not see the rest of the 40 million because the team can release him any time through the period of the contract.

This is the reason agents will negotiate a huge signing bonus. The agent knows his player may not play out the life of his contract. The team may decide to go another direction, which may not include that player. The player can be put out on the street at any given time. For financial security, it makes sense for agents to conduct business this way. I think players would appreciate contracts being guaranteed. Unfortunately, they will never be.

Football is such a violent sport. The chances of these players' careers being over are at a higher risk than other pro sports. Owners would be stuck paying players who cannot perform due to injury. It's something all payers and agents have accepted. It's the business of pro football; you accept it or find another sport to play. I remember when I received my signing bonus, I was so relieved. It came at a time when I needed it the most. Signing bonuses can range from in the thousands to millions of dollars. The amount of money a player receives in a signing bonus is based on a few factors. If he's a rookie coming out of the draft, it's based on the round he was drafted. If a veteran is signing a new deal, it's based on his productivity, age, and negotiations with the team.

This is another reason the agents will plead their case for more money up front. At times, teams will back load the player's contracts. Back loading contracts is when a player will earn most of his money during the end of his deal. A good portion of his salary is structured to be paid in the later years of his contract. For example, a player may sign a six year, \$80 million contract. He may receive a signing bonus of twenty million dollars. When the signing bonus is subtracted from the amount of his entire deal he is left with sixty million. The sixty million will be prorated and paid in the form of a salary for the next six years. The prorated amount of sixty million for six years equals ten million a year. The team will then try to negotiate a contract that will pay the player five million dollars a year for the first four years. The remaining two years of his contract the team will pay the player \$20 million a year, which equals to \$40 million for the last two years of his deal.

Let's do a quick review! From the first to the fourth year, the player will receive \$5 million annually for the next four years. That equals \$20 million in four years. The remaining two years on his deal the player is scheduled to make another \$40 million. In a six-year span, the player is scheduled to make \$80 million when you include the signing bonus. Do the math. Teams will want to negotiate this type of deal for insurance purposes.

Here is the major problem with a contract such as this. The team may decide to release the player before the fifth and sixth year. Remember the player is scheduled to \$40 million in the remaining two years of his deal. His departure could be for various reasons. The player's production level may have declined tremendously in the later part of his deal. If the player is not playing up to the standards the team expects of him, it's a good possibility the team will release him. Another reason the team may decide to release the player is to free up some money to pay another up-and-coming star.

By the team releasing this player, who they sign to the eighty-million-dollar contract, they can free up some dollars and stay under the salary cap. This can happen any time during the length of a deal. Remember, contracts are not guaranteed. It's rare to see players play out the life of their contract. Most will never make all the money they sign for. The reason is that most of the money is back loaded to the end of the contract. Once again, this is an insurance policy for the teams. They cut all ties with the player without having to pay him \$20 million for his fifth and sixth year.

I have seen this happen so many times. Players would get that big payday, and disappear from the football field. I guess receiving those huge paychecks makes some players lazy. On the flip side, if a player is doing what he's supposed to do, which is put up big numbers and feed the hype, he can very well play through the life of his contract. It depends on how the team feels about the player as an investment.

9.4 Image is everything in the NFL

Up and coming future draft picks take notes. America is the biggest image-driven society in the world. Major corporations, such as the

NFL, take major steps in protecting the “NFL Shield”. The NFL wants players to be role models on and off the field. They want ambassadors of the game. The League admires men who can perform at the highest level of football while being able to represent themselves in a professional manner off the field. Representing themselves in a positive manner includes participating in charitable events within the community and the world. This is the reason why so many football players create foundations geared towards the community. It's all about giving back.

The fans are the reason players make the money they do. Giving back only makes sense. Think about this. What if I'm a possible first round draft pick according to the projection of the experts? I've outplayed any other player in my position or in the country, statistically. Easily I'm the most talented player in this year's crop of football players entering the draft this season. All the football experts, all radio talk shows and everybody in the country is talking about me. However, I've been arrested a couple of times for beating up my girlfriend. I've failed a couple of drug tests and I have a bad attitude. Do you think a team is going to draft me high? Who knows, they may, but the reality is they probably won't!

Players can lose millions of dollars because of off-the-field issues. Unfortunately, some players are magnets for trouble. Missed opportunities will haunt them for the rest of their lives. I've seen this happen to some of the most talented players you'll ever see step foot on a football field. Players must remember that they are an investment. Teams are investing in them to be an ambassador on and off the field. It's all about business. They can't afford to have their cash cows getting arrested and being charged with domestic violence or DUIs. If teams are selling jerseys with a player's last name and number on the back, they must be mindful. If they are being charged with misdemeanors, they're sending a negative message to children and the world. If a player has been charged with domestic violence or DUI, mothers probably won't buy a jersey with the player's name on it! It's bad business for the team. Teams cannot associate themselves with players who become a detriment. Remember, it's the mothers

and fathers who are buying the tickets for the family to come and watch them play. Be smart about lifestyle decisions.

9.5 Major Endorsement Deals are Part of the Business

Professional sports and endorsement deals are like marriages. They work hand in hand. Currently, image is the key to an athlete maximizing their earning potential. Athletes are making phenomenal amounts of money because of endorsement deals. Some athletes are making 3X as much from their endorsement deals than from the actual sport they play.

Major corporations are realizing sports figures are the ones they want to promote their products. In the American society, sports figures are glorified more than doctors or teachers. Americans have such passion about sports, and companies know it. It makes sense to use athletes to promote their products. With football being America's favorite sport, young men have a great opportunity to make a lot of money outside of football. Young ball players should take these opportunities seriously. They must protect their image at all costs.

If your image is tainted, it could mean millions lost. If players are smart with their money, they will not have to work for the rest of their life. Football players should understand the moment will not last. During the period they are in the NFL, they should use this grand stage to their advantage. They must make sure they have people in their corner that are resourceful and help them make millions while they are on top. Those precious days will go by fast. Seize the opportunity and keep on the straight and narrow. By doing so, it will open the doors to more money and opportunities. That's the name of the game. Take advantage of all the benefits while you're in the League. By doing this you can set yourself up for life.

9.6 Maximize your Earning Potential and Stay Out of Trouble

The biggest issue I've witnessed as both a player and a spectator are players and their off-the-field conduct. I tend to see this issue more in pro football players than in any other sport. Football players take a big chance of losing major endorsement deals and possible employment with other teams by doing stupid things off the field. Sometimes performance enhancement drugs can be an issue, but most of the time it's a player's conduct off the field that lands him in serious trouble.

The reality is that sometimes the temptation can be too strong for the players to resist. A lot of times, issues of improper conduct may come from spousal issues or arrests. Present and future players must realize that once they have become a professional in any sport, they are no longer a regular person. Once these young men have reached the ranks of pro, they become a "Brand". That brand is the key to financial freedom, possibly for the rest of their lives. All athletes, especially professional football players, must protect their brand.

Do not take this matter lightly. Having a strong brand in the NFL gives a lot of young men the opportunity to maximize their earning potential. If you were the CEO of a major company, would you want a thug who has been charged with domestic violence or marijuana possession to be the poster boy for your product? Wouldn't you want the spokesperson for your merchandise to be someone who has never been in trouble, who has a squeaky-clean image, and is a delight to be around? Of course, it makes sense to choose the latter. Teams are not only investing in the ability of these young men to play the game, they are investing in their ability to become a brand.

The protection of a player's brand should start in the early years of football. Do not wait until you have reached college or the NFL. Players should start as early as little league. The earlier a player understands that someday his name could be worth millions, the more he will be conscious of his actions.

This idea of protecting your brand could be important for life after football. Some players might have careers in sports commentating. Some players might land a job with a major corporation. Your brand is still just as important when your football days are over. If you were a hell-raiser in the NFL, it can hinder whether you are employed after the NFL. If I was the CEO of a company and I knew you had a checkered past, I probably would not hire you. The image of you being a problem would linger in my mind. First impressions and reputations are the things that last.

Chapter 10: The Two-Headed Monster Training Camp...

Training camp is the absolute worst time of the season. Most football players do not look forward to it. If there were words to describe NFL training camps, it would be Hell on Earth. Sometimes you will hear players refer to two-a-day practices as training camp or vice versa. The two terms mean the same thing. Two-a-day practices or training camp means the season is around the corner. Training camp is the period in which the NFL gets prepared for the upcoming season.

Training camp usually begins about a month before the season starts. Some teams' training camp will last approximately six weeks. This is the period when players will temporarily leave their families and report to a designated site. The designated site may be a university or a hotel. The team rents it out for the month of August and it is always away from the player's natural surroundings; in a nearby state or major city. This is so their players can stay focused on nothing but football for a month. Some teams feel that relocating for training camp is unnecessary and will remain at their home facility, and training camp will be held at the team's headquarters.

As a player, I was against the idea of teams going out of town for training camp. It was a hassle to pack a month's supply of clothes. The beds at these sites were very uncomfortable. Players are away from their wives and kids for a few weeks. Let's not forget two-a-day practices. No player in the NFL looks forward to this. I never understood why teams pay all that money just to go out of town to practice. I understand the concept of getting away to be focused, but why in a different city or state? I guess, in the coach's minds, it makes a lot of sense.

Economically it makes sense to have camp locally. Also, the player's morale would be higher. At least if camp is in a nearby town, the players' wives and kids can visit during practice and cheer them on. Two-a-day's or training camp is the most grueling and physically challenging thing a football player will go through on any level. Training camp in the NFL puts a player's mind and body to the test.

The schedule of two-a-day's goes as follows: Players wake up at the crack of dawn. The team is dressed and ready to practice by eight o'clock. The term 'dressed' simply refers to full uniform. This uniform includes shoulder pads, helmet, pants, thigh, knee, and hip pads. When coaches request players to dress in full pads, it usually means practice is more likely going to be live hitting. It will not be game tempo (speed), but it will be close enough. Prior to the 2012 season, there were no limits to the amount of full pad practices during training camp. After the Collective Bargaining Agreement was passed, teams were limited to one full pad practice a day.

At times, teams will opt to practice in less attire during some of the practices. It's called practicing in shells. The term shells could mean several different things, depending on the team you are with. During the period in which I played college football, the term shells referred to practicing in shoulder pads and helmets. We did not wear thigh or knee pads. Usually, when teams practice in shells, it's not as physical as full pads but can still get very intense. Different teams will have different definitions for the term shells. As I mentioned earlier, the schedule during training camp is grueling. The schedules for morning practices are pretty much the same throughout training

camp except for the days leading up to the games. The first practice is from 8:00am to 10:00am; after the first practice, all players must report to the weight room to get their weight training. The strength training program lasts about forty-five minutes to an hour. After strength training, lunch is prepared. The team usually has their own chef and cafeteria at the home facility. If the team has camp out of town, all three meals are catered. Lunch usually runs around 11:30am-1:00pm. After lunch, the players have about two hours to rest before team meetings. Team meetings begin around 2:00pm. Players have to be dressed and taped prior to reporting to the meetings. Players would attend their meetings dressed and fully taped so they would have enough time upon completion of their meetings to get to the field without being late.

The term taped refers to wrapping any part of the body a player needs to support and protect from injury while at practice. Body parts like ankles and wrists are wrapped in athletic tape for better support and to help prevent sprained joints. Some players may wear elbow or knee braces for preventative measures as well. After the athletic trainers tape the players properly, the entire team and coaches will come together and have a team meeting. The topic of discussion may be whether the team displayed an overall good effort at practice earlier that morning. Once the team meetings are over, the Special Teams coach might have a meeting with the Special Teams players.

Special Teams may meet before or after the team meeting, depending on the coach. The Special Teams consist of a kick-off, punt return, kick-off return, and punt return team. The Special Teams are a vital part of football. I will explain later in the chapters the importance of players being able to play Special Teams. Players and coaches will go to their individual position meetings. These individual meetings cover things like new plays for the upcoming practices, or changes in coaching. Each position has an individual meeting room. Each position will watch a film of the practice from earlier that morning. Coaches will analyze the players' performances of the earlier practice.

If a player is using incorrect steps on a play for example, coaches will try to teach the correct steps. This is the whole idea of having meetings; coaches want the players to perform to the very best of their ability. The corrections coaches make help players improve their game tremendously. The second practice of the day starts around 3:30pm. The second practice will last about one hour and forty-five minutes to two hours. Practice usually ends around 5:00pm.

The players will take a shower and eat dinner around 6:00pm. The players will have about an hour to eat dinner, then team meetings begin around 7:00pm. The evening team meetings will last 30-60 minutes. After team meetings, you have Special Teams meetings. Special Teams meetings will last about 30-45 minutes. In the Special Teams meetings, you watch films of the Special Teams practice for that afternoon. After Special Teams meetings, players attend position meetings from about 8:00-9:30pm. During position meetings, everyone watches a film of the practice that was held earlier that afternoon. Coaches will again, critique the performance of the players and correct their errors.

It's not the same repetitive conversation every day. Sometimes during the meetings, coaches will talk about topics unrelated to football. Sometimes they discuss matters concerning politics, kids, wives, girlfriends, family or world issues. The position meetings are usually over around 9:30pm but can go as late as 11:00pm. This is based on whether the team had a productive practice. Once players return to their dorms or hotels from late night meetings, snacks (sandwiches, fruit, cake, cereal, etc.) are provided to ensure weight and energy levels for the next day's practice. 11pm is the universal curfew hour.

This process would continue six days a week for the entire month of training camp. Sundays are free days; players can relax or catch up on some well-needed rest. Later that evening, the teams will have team meetings and position meetings to go over practice for the upcoming week. Here is the interesting twist to all of this. As grueling as the schedule may be, teams still must play four preseason games during this period. The schedule changes a little once the preseason games begin. Near to the start of the season, coaches give the players

a break and lighten up on the practices. Training camp usually ends two weeks before the first game. At this point, the players go back to their regular home life. They reunite with their wives, kids, and dog. This is pretty much the formula for the NFL. All teams follow just about the same time schedule.

10.1 The NFL Playbook

As an amateur, before I reached the ranks of pro, I heard stories of how big and confusing NFL playbooks are. If I could find a word to describe this subject, it would be brainy. The NFL playbooks are truly a bundle of confusion. The NFL playbooks are a half-inch thicker than the yellow pages. Inside the infamous playbooks are hundreds of plays and formations.

The offense and defense have their own version of the playbook. Usually the offensive and defensive coordinators will have their philosophy and style of offense and defense in the pages of the book. All the firepower that coaches need to make their offense and defense work is contained in the pages of the playbook. Every player that comes into camp will get a copy.

It's a misconception that the players have to learn all the plays during training camp. You have to learn a lot of plays but not the entire playbook. It's impossible to learn all the plays in one training camp. You would have to study every day for a couple of years to learn all the plays.

Coaches will pick anywhere between thirty or forty plays for the team to master. As the season progresses, they implement new plays, as needed. Most the plays that are taught during training camp will be used for the season. To be honest, I don't understand the need to have a playbook so big. Most of the time, teams won't run half the plays that are in the book. I think NFL playbooks were designed to terrorize rookies. Once the young guys get settled in and learn the system, the playbook isn't that confusing anymore.

Although I must say the plays can be challenging when you have to run them live in practice or the games. The plays look very easy when you're reading them in the book. When the bullets start flying, it's a different story.

Chapter 11: Competition for Jobs...

On this level of football, competition is at an all-time high. When a player has come into his own, he realizes the days of partying are not as important as providing a solid foundation for his family. As well as being a great provider, a player should consider the maintenance of the luxury items that football has enabled him to purchase. Players will come to the harsh realization that, if they want to sustain this luxurious lifestyle, they must compete for and win a job every single year. This thought should resonate through the players' minds throughout the course of the off season. The driving force that keeps these players motivated is the knowledge that, without a job, the bills will not be paid.

When training camp begins, it's time to buckle down and get serious. During this period, players are on the edge. A majority will not know whether they are going to make the team. Most will give their all trying to secure a roster spot and still come up short. These are the times that a lot of fights break out among players.

These young men are playing with passion and a sense of urgency, so sometimes fighting comes with the territory. I remember when I was an up-and-coming player, I was ready to fight anyone who stood in the way of my making the team roster. Players must get into a mindset. They are going into battle and taking no prisoners.

If they want to earn a position, they are going to have to fight for it. Once they step on the field of battle, they have no friends. They must transform their minds and become a warrior that takes no prisoners. Football players are today's gladiators.

Young players should realize that this is a job interview. Every play must count. Full speed and domination is the key to success. The name of the game is effort. Keep playing until the whistle blows. Sprint to the football whether you are on offense or defense. This will let the coaches know you play--hard. This is vital during the coach's evaluation process when it's time for the final cuts.

The final cuts are the period when a player's heart can be broken into a million pieces. This is the period when players will learn the fate of their future. Coaches and general managers will make their final decision on who will make the team for that season. This phase is an indication that the season is right around the corner.

The first wave of cuts usually starts after the third preseason game. The last and final wave of cuts begins the fourth and final week for some players. The team reduces its overall number of players from ninety to fifty-three on the team's roster. The fifty-three players that remain will be the official team for the upcoming season.

I will provide more details about final cuts in the upcoming chapters. During this period of heated competition, some players, mainly veterans, advise the younger players to take it easy or slow it down. My advice to the younger players is to not fall for that old veteran trick!

The veterans have proven themselves already; you have not. Keep playing hard, no matter what tricks they pull. There are going to be players who try to befriend you. Make friends after you've made the team. Remember that you are competing for a job; you might have to beat out your new buddy for a position. You don't want that added worry on your mind. I would like to give some important advice to the League newcomers reading this book. Stay away from alcohol and clubs during training camp. When I say clubs, I mean clubs of all sorts. Stay out of strip clubs, nightclubs, and anything that has club on the end of it.

Remember, camp is a month or so long. Your body is going to be put to the test. You need your rest. Going clubbing is not going to help your ability to play the game. A fatigued body cannot perform at a high level. If you are going to a club to party, more than likely you are going to have a drink or two, maybe more. Drinking dehydrates the body! A dehydrated and fatigued body puts your ability to play football at a disadvantage. You are going to be practicing in very hot and humid weather. Drinking alcohol will make your body more dehydrated than is healthy. Remember, the summers are hot, especially when you have equipment on.

I can't stress this enough. Your body cannot perform at the level it needs to be if you are not taking care of yourself during camp. You have plenty of time to party during the offseason. Make the team first. Before camp begins, prepare yourself mentally. The NFL is not all glamour like most people think it is. Players literally have to fight for their jobs because there are a limited number of positions available. When they are filled, that's it. This goes for coaches as well. Every day, players have to be ready to work and be productive on the field. If not, there are plenty of ball players on the street who are ready to take your place. Take it seriously and play hard.

11.1 Not Enough Teams in the NFL

Arguably, football is America's favorite sport. Americans can't seem to get enough football. I have always wondered why there aren't teams in all 50 states. You would think, with all the football players coming out of college each year, there would be more teams in the League. The cycle of football players continues year after year. The young men leave college, sign with a team, get released, and then you might not hear from them again. There are so many talented young men whose careers prematurely end because of a lack of teams. Think of how many colleges there are throughout the country. Almost all of them have football teams. There are 625 four-year colleges in the country with football teams. Multiply the number of football players in each college. The numbers add up. Being a former player that was released from a team a few times, I know the disappointment football brings. It is heart-wrenching not being able

to further a career you have so much passion for. It's a heartbreaking thing for those who are the "odd men out." Wealthy businessmen and various entrepreneurs have made efforts to try to start independent leagues outside the NFL. Unfortunately, they have failed. The arena league had a strong push for a few years before it collapsed. Like most businesses during the time of the recession, the arena fell victim to a lack of funds. The economy got the best of them. The League just did not have the strong financial foundation of the NFL. It was bound to fail when the economy went down. The players in that league were making decent money. I had a short run with the Orlando Predators during my last year of professional sports. The money wasn't anything close to what I had received in the NFL, but it was a decent living for a person who needed a job. Some players in the arena league were making six figures.

Of course, those players were the stars. From what I remember, I was paid \$12,00 a week, after taxes, in the arena league. That's a big drop from making \$20,000 a pay period in the NFL, but it still wasn't bad for a temporary fix. Just playing in the NFL is the dream of most football players. The ratio of college players in the country vs. NFL teams is completely off balance. I think the league needs to address this situation. The public would have no issues with more teams. Having more teams would be beneficial for some states, economically. An NFL franchise would give these states more entertainment. In the past, other independent leagues have been formed. One example is the United Football League. Like most independent leagues, it started with the good intention to expand football. It gave more opportunities to young men to further their careers in football. The League had some recognizable NFL players and coaches behind it.

My opinion, there is nothing like the NFL! People do not want to see players on unknown teams. Rather than trying to start these new leagues and waste millions of dollars, why not petition to start new expansion teams? Become part of the NFL. There's no other league in the universe that can compete with the NFL. If you can't beat them, why not join them? The efforts of these rich tycoons have all been in vain. Millions of dollars have been wasted on trying to start a

completely new league. If these big spenders can come together and work with the NFL to expand, rather than trying to reinvent the wheel, it can work. It's just a thought. The bottom line is that the NFL reigns supreme and we need more teams. Make it work!

11.2 The Practice Squad

During a football player's early career, he may get released several times before he makes a team. Usually you will see this with the late round draft picks and free agents. The late round draft picks are the ball players drafted from the 5-7 rounds. The free agents I refer to are the rookies that were not drafted coming out of college. Often, these late round players and free agents will go on a roller coaster ride before they make a team. Unfortunately, some of these young men might never play another down of football once they have been released from a team. If they are lucky, another team might think they have some potential.

If a rookie played well during the preseason and didn't make the team, another coach may take notice. The coach may feel that the player has the potential to be great one day. The teams will fly that player in for a tryout after they have been released from their original team. The team may sign him to the practice squad or they might just work him out for future purposes. Teams may add the player to the fifty-three-man roster if another player gets hurt in the future. If this player has tremendous ability but is not quite ready to play, the team will probably reassign him to the practice squad.

The practice squad is basically what the term says. It consists of eight players who were released from their present team. Rather than sending them home, the team may decide to sign them to the practice squad. They will practice with the team during the week but not travel or play in the games. Practice squad players salaries are significantly less than the players who are on the 53-man roster. The coaches will work with these players to develop their skills for the next season. If a player isn't ready for the pace of the NFL, the practice squad is a great

place to learn. While on the practice squad, a player can get bumped up to the active roster at any point in time during the season.

If a player on the active roster is injured, the coaches may pull one of the same position players from the practice to replace the injured player. If the practice squad player has been practicing well with the vets, and has shown he can compete on a pro level, he could get his big break. If the coaches feel the practice squad player is not up for the challenge, he may look to bring in a veteran from off the streets. If a practice squad player isn't bumped up to the active roster during the season, he may get an opportunity to make the team again in the upcoming season.

This all depends if the team re-signs him after the season. The practice squad players are every bit apart of the team as any of the other players. Just like the players on the active roster, practice squad players play a vital role in the success of a team. The practice squad players do not play in the games on Sundays. They do not travel with team for away games and their salaries aren't anywhere close to what the players on the active roster make. However, compared to what most Americans earn, it's not bad. The salary for a practice squad player in 2012 was around \$5,700 a week. Not bad for a player who is not an official member of the fifty-three-man roster. The life and journey of practice squad players can be very tiresome and frustrating at times. Teams will fly players in throughout the year and work them out. If a team flies a player in for a workout, that doesn't mean the player is going to be signed.

As I discussed earlier in the chapter, sometimes teams like to get an up-close, personal look at a player for possible future playing purposes. A player may not get signed that day, but may possibly get signed for the next season. A player can get released and signed as many as three to thirteen times with different teams during a season. One day, he could be a member of the Atlanta Falcons. Two days later, situations may occur in which the team has to release him. During that period of his unemployment, another team may want to sign him, depending on their team issues and needs. One of the

team's top players may have gotten hurt and they now need a replacement.

That phone call can come anytime throughout the day. You never know. In the NFL, changes are fast and furious. During my first year in the NFL, I was on the practice squad of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. Even though I did not get to travel with the team or play in any of the games, I had a blast. I would practice with the team during the week and have the free time to do what-ever I want do on the weekends while everyone traveled. During the home games, the active roster players would have to report to the hotel in downtown Tampa the night before the games.

I, along with some of my other practice squad teammates, would take full advantage of the free time it was a great period of my life. I made decent money. The salary for practice squad players in 1998 \$4,700 every two weeks. Though it wasn't anything close to what the active roster players were making, it was still more money than I ever made on any job growing up. When the team was out of the area, I hit the town! When I look back at the old days, I realize that I probably had too much free time. Nevertheless, it was a great period of my life.

11.3 The Key to Earning a Roster Spot

Competing on the pro level for jobs is very serious. Young and upcoming ball players, take note. Once you have reached this level of competition, it's a matter of survival! The name of the game is survival. The best man may not always win. Players should do the necessary things to put themselves in a great situation to succeed.

You put yourself in a good situation by lifting weights to build your strength, studying the playbook, and playing great on special teams. As a rookie, I didn't realize the importance of playing on special teams. Here's some advice to all up-and-coming rookies. The key to making it in the NFL is to learn how to play special teams. This is the funny thing about the League. You can be a horrible player at your position and be a very good special teams player, and make the

team. Your ability to be a very good special teams player may secure you a spot on the fifty-three-man roster. Young players must know how the dynamics work. You have 11 men on defense and 11 men on offense. Each one of those positions requires backups. Coaches are going to choose the backups that can play special teams well. Special teams are a vital part of football throughout the game; the special team players who will mostly be the backups on offense or defense will not contribute to the offense or defense that much, if at all, once the season starts.

Once the season begins, the starters will play most of the downs (plays). The backups will mostly be used on special teams. The backups may get the opportunity to play if a starter gets injured, but his main role is special teams. This is where late round picks, undrafted rookies or a free agent veteran can make the squad. If you are a backup, there's no way around it. You must play special teams. I can't stress this enough. This is the area coaches will critique the most. Where a backup player truly must shine is special teams. Those are the positions that are up for grabs. The starters are pretty much secure in their starting positions unless injury occurs or if the team releases them.

Special teams are where young guys have an opportunity to claim a spot on the team roster. The biggest problem is that most guys wait until they have reached the NFL to try and play special teams. Start learning how to be a great special teams player the day you decide to play football. Being an all-around football player will give you an excellent chance of making an NFL team one day. Every player needs to have an edge to secure a spot. That edge is being an outstanding special teams player. I've known some men who have played ten years or more on special teams.

Playing ten years on special teams can give you an excellent head start in life. The key is to be great on special teams now. Don't wait until you've arrived in the NFL. Be great at it before you reach the big show.

11.4 Possibly Competing with a Close Teammate for a Job

As you know, professional football is a very competitive sport. Players are always competing for jobs. When it comes to job security, the NFL is sorely lacking. Sometimes players may be competing with a close teammate or close friend they might have known since college or high school. That is the nature of the business; no one is your friend at this stage of the game. Indeed, football is a team sport, but when it comes to taking care of your family and making sure the bills are paid, that friend stuff is irrelevant. When players get to training camp, they need to focus on making the team, not friends.

You have the entire year to make friends if you make the squad. This is the time to compete and get a job. Imagine this scenario! What if you get super close to one of your teammates? He plays outside linebacker and you play middle. One day the coach decides to switch his position to middle, which is your position. The coach tells both of you that there is only one roster spot left. He says that both of you are going to have to compete for the position. Whoever plays the best will earn a spot on the fifty-three-man roster. The player that loses the competition goes home. What are you going to do at that point?

Are you going to compete for this job knowing it could cause you to lose your friendship? Of course you are! That is why you are in training camp, to earn a roster spot. There's no loyalty when it comes to getting a job. That's what a lot of young players should realize once they've enter the League. It's a cutthroat business and you must think about yourself until the season starts. This story may sound a little far-fetched or selfish, but anything can happen at any time in the League. You have to be prepared for any and all adjustments.

11.5 Animosity Among Players

As I mentioned earlier in the chapter, the League is a very competitive arena. It is this same competitive nature that can cause teammates to have animosity toward one another. Some players are

going to dislike each other because they may feel another player is threatening their job or position on the team. In most cases, that's exactly what's going on. That's the whole point of competition. If you know someone is trying to steal your job, are you going to be able to call him a friend, or be a friend to him?

Now let's talk about women. As elementary as this may seem, some players have animosity towards each other because of the one thing that causes men to do some of the most idiotic things you've ever seen. Women! Since the dawn, of time men have been competing, fighting and even killing over women.

Men in the NFL are no different than any other man out there in the world. The only difference is that NFL ball players have more money. I'll give you a quick example of what I am talking about. Player Z might have a fondness with a beautiful woman by the name of Sunshine. What Player Z doesn't realize is that Sunshine is secretly seeing Player X. Player Z tries everything in the world to win Sunshine's heart but it doesn't work. One day, a teammate overhears Player Z talking about how much he adores this woman by the name of Sunshine. His teammate tells Player Z that she is seeing Player X. Player Z is crushed; now jealousy starts to arise.

Do you see where I'm going with this? Once Player Z finds out Player X is seeing the woman of his dreams, the bad blood begins. As crazy as this sounds, it happens. I've witnessed this occurrence on two different teams that I have played for. The worst thing about the situation is this feud may go on for their entire career.

Another reason animosity may develop between players is that one player is getting more playing time than the other. Pro football is just like any other job in corporate America. You are going to have people who you like and there are going to be those you dislike. Other players might feel the same towards you. You are going to have some players like you and there's going to be some that can't stand the ground you walk on. Again, it's all part of being a pro ball player.

It's the same thing in all the locker rooms of the NFL. You're going to have people from all walks of life. Each person has his own personality. Some people you will like and develop friendships with; some you absolutely can't stand to be around. That's all part of the business.

Chapter 12: The Last Week of Training Camp...

The final week of training camp is the time when some players will rejoice and some will go through a depression. The final cut is a time where anxiety is at its all-time high. The last week of training camp is the period when the teams will cut down to the final fifty-three players that will officially be on the team for the season. This is the week where coaches will make their final assessment of who are the best fifty-three players that will be able to help the team win for that specific year. This is the time where the future of the young players and veterans "on the bubble" will be revealed. This is a week of sleepless nights. I remember when I was a player. I couldn't wait for this week to be over. I did not get much sleep the last week of cuts. One tries to think positive thoughts and say to oneself, "It's been a good camp, I should make the team." In the back of the mind, those negative thoughts creep in.

Some veterans say good things to help keep spirits up. The reality is that the only thing that's going to make you feel better is seeing your name on the fifty-three-man roster at the end of training camp. Sometimes players who are waiting to hear if they made it through the final cuts will attempt to do an assessment of who they think will make the team. They try to determine where each individual player stands as far as meeting the needs on the team. By doing this, players will try to get an idea of where they might fit into the scheme of things. The truth of the matter is that you just never know until the final decisions are made at the end of camp. Many times, a player who you think is going to be released makes the team, and vice-versa.

Having too much anxiety is a normal thing to feel during this period. This enormous amount of pressure during the final cut week can make your ability to play the game become better or worse. During the last week of camp, I always played tremendously well. I realized I had a unique ability to rise to the occasion; I played my best games when the pressure was on. Many people do not possess this ability. If there's any period during the preseason a player needs to play exceptionally well, it's the last game.

I had the opportunity to experience this quite a few times throughout my career. You would think by going through this situation a few times, you would get used to it. The reality is that you never get used to it. The anxiety is always at a high level. The way a player can assess whether he's the odd man out relates to the playing time he receives in the final preseason game. Usually, the starters will not pay much in the last preseason... Coaches will sideline the starters to keep them fresh for the season opener. The starters will be dressed in full pads but not play any downs. Some teams will have their starters play one or two quarters in the final preseason game. It all depends on whether the coaches feel the starters need some fine-tuning before the season opener. In addition, coaches will be mindful of the possibility that one of their starters may be injured before the first game of the season. By this stage, the coaches will have a good idea of who is going to make the team. The back-ups who are going to make the team will usually play most of the game.

Sometimes a player can start the last preseason game and still receive his walking papers. It may be based on circumstances that occur with injuries at different positions. For the most part, if a player has made it to the final cut and is not receiving any playing time during the last game, it is a good indication he is not going to make it. Coaches are not going to take the chance of a player that's going to make the final cut getting hurt. If the player receives an injury, the team must put the player on injured reserve and pay him for the remainder of the season.

I've witnessed this scenario countless times. On the other hand, things happen so fast in the NFL, you can be the odd man out and, in the blink of an eye, someone gets hurt. You win a roster spot because the person that was injured plays your position. Now, coaches are relying on you to step up and fill that spot. Just another day in the life of the NFL.

12.1 Waiting for that Phone Call

Life is full of so many uncertainties. The thought of not being able to achieve your lifelong dream is the worst thing that can happen to a football player. The thought of someone calling to tell you that your services are no longer needed is heartbreaking. Football is all most of these young men have known since they were children. This is what hundreds of football players go through annually after training camp. A lot of dreams are shattered within seconds...by one phone call.

The NFL has a unique way of relaying the message to a player that has just lost his job. This dreaded phone call is usually received at the players resting domain; either his home or the hotel he is staying at during training camp. During training camp and offseason training, most of the young players and some veterans who are trying to make the squad will live in a hotel. The team usually pays for the living expenses of the players they sign during the offseason. Whether a team has training in-town or out-of-town, the outcome will be the same. At the end of training camp, the coaches will make their final decision about who stays and who goes. If a player did not make the final cut, he will receive the phone call.

The dreaded phone call usually takes place the day after the last preseason game. The phone call may come in the morning or the early afternoon, at the hotel or to a personal cell phone. Someone from the organization, like the scout or a representative of the team, will give you a call. If they get you on the phone, they say these horrible words: "Hey, how you doing? Coach would like to see you in his office!" Once a player hears those heartbreaking words, the end has come.

This predicament is the worst imaginable. It feels like someone has sentenced you to death. Immediately, you stop what you are doing and head to the coach's office. On the way, you start to think, "Maybe he has some good news for me. Maybe he's going to tell me I made the team personally". You don't want to think the worst, so you try to stay positive.

The closer you get to the coach's office, the faster your heart beats. When you finally get there, he tells you to come in and have a seat. Some coaches will be direct and honest and tell you why you are being cut. If you played horribly during training camp, they will tell you that your performance during training camp was subpar. Some coaches will not be totally honest, they will tell a player he a good camp, but unfortunately became victim to the numbers game.

Some players do fall victim to the numbers game. The coaches will use it as an easy excuse to let the player go. The numbers game is when the team decides to keep more players at one or more positions. If a team decides to keep more than the usual number of players at a position, this means the team may have to release one or two players from other positions, to compensate. If this takes place, certain positions will have less than their usual number of players. For example, the team might decide to keep one extra receiver on the fifty-three-man roster. By keeping one extra receiver, the team must cut a player from another position. That position will have one less player than normal. Remember the team must have fifty-three players on the active roster by the beginning of the season. Those numbers must stay at fifty-three...no more, no less. Even if a team decides to keep an extra player at one position, a player from another position will be released so the team can stay at fifty-three players. This happens often in the NFL. That's just one quick example of falling victim to the numbers game.

Being released from an NFL team is the worst feeling ever. Sometimes players start to question themselves and their ability to play the game. Players will start to ask themselves what they could have done to put themselves in a better position to make the team. After a while, they start to feel like a failure. Next, the tears and depression set in.

I've seen the toughest of men, including myself, break down like babies. I have seen this with every team I have had the opportunity to play for. The strongest of men will have their moments during this period of heartache. The feeling of rejection on this level is so real. After the heart-wrenching news, a player will start his journey back to his hotel room, and reality will sink in. If he has driven or caught the shuttle bus to the facility, the ride back to the hotel is the worst. The thought of his next move is all he can think about. Where does he go from here? The player is going to have to call his mother, father, girlfriend, and high school coaches to break the bad news. There will be other players at the hotel with the same feeling of failure. They are all thinking the same thing, "What do I do now?"

Now it's time for the player to pack his belongings and head home. Some players will drive home and some players will fly. The team will give the player an opportunity to fly home, if he chooses. The organization will pay the bill for the flight. They will book a plane ticket for whatever time the player chooses to leave. If he decides to go back home the next day, the team no longer pays the expenses of the room. Once the player is released from the team, all expenses, apart from a plane ticket home, are on him. If the player decides to leave town that night after being released, it will be the longest ride he has ever taken in his life. No matter how many teams you have played with, the feeling will always be the same. It's something players will never get used to.

12.2 The Grim Reaper Pays a Visit

Most corporations have someone in place to carry out orders or enforce rules. The CEO of the company may have this person do multiple things or just one thing specifically. The NFL has its own version of the "Enforcer". To be quite honest, I do not know the full capacity of his role on a team. All I know is they have brought tremendous sorrow to young football players and veterans, alike. These people are like something out of a horror movie. These mysterious figures are the unique few who have earned the title of The Grim Reaper. You will see them around the organization from time to time. Sometimes you will see them in the cafeteria, at practice,

in the weight room, or in the training room. If you have never heard of these demonic creatures, I will explain. The Grim Reaper is a mythical being whose sole purpose on Earth is to bring death to a person. That's exactly what these men do to aspiring pro football players' careers. Sometimes these men will get the message to a player via a phone call. Sometimes they will find you if you are still at the facility. The manner in which they deliver the horrific news is something out of a movie. A player can be standing in front of his locker, and suddenly the Reaper appears right behind them. Some will have that look of sadness, and then some will have an evil grin on their face. They will pause, and then look the player right in their eyes. They will say those words no player wants to hear: "Coach would like to see you in his office." Once those words are mentioned, he will then ask the player for his playbook. Once he has the playbook, he slowly walks away; never to be seen again.

Sometimes the Grim Reaper will come in the middle of some player's position meetings to snatch players out. I've seen this happen on a couple of occasions! The position coach would be at the front of the room discussing something that has to do with football, and suddenly the Grim Reaper comes into the room and slowly walks over to the player and whispers in his ear. The next thing you know the player stands up, looks at everyone with a look of terror in his eyes, grabs his playbook, and walks out the room. No good bye, no see ya later. The Grim Reaper waits by the door to receive the playbook. The player hands the playbook to the Grim Reaper on his way out the door, and you never see the player again. You don't see him at practice; you don't see him at the hotel. The player is gone for good. He has been officially released. I know this sounds like some horror movie. As fictional as it may sound, it happens this way, and it will continue to happen for years to come.

When I first witnessed this event, during my rookie year, I knew something was not right. I saw this person walk into our position meeting, unannounced, with a serious look in his eyes. I knew, whatever it was, somebody was not going to like it. He walked over to one of the rookies and whispered in his ear. The rookie stood up,

looked at us, picked up his playbook, handed it to the Grim Reaper, and then both walked out of the room. Just like that, he was gone and never seen again. I could tell by the look on the veterans' faces that this person probably was not coming back. The vets looked at each other and shook their heads.

The one thing that bewildered me was the reaction of the coach. He just continued to discuss what he was talking about before the Grim Reaper entered the room. It was as if nothing had happened. He continued to talk as if no one entered the room. After the player and the Grim Reaper walked out of the room, the coach finally said something. He said, "Pay attention and stay focused!" He was referring to staying focused on what he was discussing at the time. Wow! Really? A man's dream has just been crushed and all this man had to say was stay focused and pay attention!

Seeing an event, such as this, traumatized me. At that moment, I realized how serious the NFL was. It was at that moment I realized that the League was all business. I remember not being able to stay focused during the entire practice. Everything the coach discussed during the meetings I forgot.

I remember thinking, "I hope that doesn't happen to me." I've seen this same scenario on different teams. You get used to players disappearing during training camp. The one thing you never get used to is the fear that you could be next.

12.3 The Big Tease

The thought of not being able to play football again when you are young is horrifying. A lot of young football players leave college without a concrete plan. Some will not have a degree by the time their college eligibility is over. Most football players leave college and embark on a pro career hoping everything works out. When tragedy strikes, some of these young men are like lost sheep. Some players, who in my opinion are the smart ones, will have backup plan for what they are going to do in the event football doesn't work out. For the most part, a majority do not have a clue.

As I discussed earlier, all will go into a depression for a while. Some will snap out of it immediately; others may need weeks or months. Some players will have the opportunity to sign with other team's active roster or practice squad. One team's junk is another team's treasure. The ones who are not as lucky have to spend a few months, if not the entire season, out of football.

This period of being out of football is frustrating. This time in a ball player's life, as I can best describe it, is like a huge tease. During this period, the player's agents are going to tell their clients to stay positive and have faith. The agents are going to tell their clients, don't give up yet, some teams have been inquiring. The agents are going to stress to their players, "stay in shape, you can get signed at any time". Some players will have teams inquiring about their status. If a player is cut from one team, that doesn't mean other teams will not be interested. There might be a team who still sees tremendous value in players who have been released from other teams.

Other NFL teams know how the system of the League works. NFL teams realize certain players may have fallen victim to the numbers game. Teams will scout and watch the preseason game film of players who may show sparks of greatness. They will also speak to scouts from the team the player was on before he was released. This will be how the team will determine if this player still has value.

As I wrote earlier, some players may interview for thirteen different teams during the season. He may get signed or he may not. The term "interviewed" is not your regular Corporate America job interview. The NFL version of a job interview is tiresome.

As I said earlier, if teams are interested in certain players, they will fly the player in for an interview/work-out. It's sort of like a preliminary to the possibility of being signed. Teams will call the player's agent and let him know that they would like to fly the player in for a work-out/interview. The agent will agree and then call his client with the news. A representative or a scout will contact the player with his flight arrangements and itinerary. The player may fly out that evening or the next morning. Things happen fast in the League. The player will

fly to the state in which the team is located. The team might have someone from the organization pick the player up from the airport, or they may have a shuttle bus or cab waiting for the player. The player will then go to the hotel. He may get a phone call from someone in the organization just to make sure the player has made it safely.

A representative from the ball club will pick the player up in the morning and take him to the team's facility. He will be escorted to the team's locker room where he will be given his workout clothes and cleats. Once the player is dressed, he will be escorted to the field.

When a player arrives at the workout field, the coaches and scouts will be waiting. The player will be introduced to the coaches. The player will be given a few minutes to warm up and stretch. Once the player is ready to proceed, the workout will begin. There will be different position coaches performing the workouts. You can have multiple players working out at the same time. You may have players at different positions working out. If there are different players who play a different position, other coaches at that specific position will be there to perform the drills for that specific position. You may not be the only player the team has its eye on.

The players will have a series of drills to perform. The scouts may want the player to run a forty-yard dash to test their speed. After the forty-yard dash, they will proceed to do a series of drills related to their specific position. For example, if the player is a running back, he may perform some agility drills. He may run and cut through a series of cones. If he is an offensive lineman, he might perform certain drills that test his ability to drive his opponent off the football. There can be an array of different drills depending on the position. These drills can range anywhere from thirty to forty minutes.

It is always an advantage when you have multiple players working out with you. If you are interviewing for the team by yourself, it can be a tiresome day. You will be the only one doing drills for 30 minutes or more. These drills are very fast paced. In the League, we use a term called rapid-fire. Rapid-fire is defined as the ability to fire shots in quick succession. The speed of the drills will be rapid-fire pace. This

is the reason players must remain in shape during the time they are unemployed. If a player receives a call for a workout, it will be rapid-fire. If coaches see the player is not in shape, it can hinder him from being signed. A player may be interviewed for the upcoming season. Once the workout is over, the coaches will let the player know if he is going to be signed or not. If the team decides to sign the player...Hip, Hip Hooray! He now has a job!

It is wise for players to make preparations with family, spouse, or friends before going on these workouts. In the event the team decides to sign him, he will not be able to return home to get his belongings. Whatever clothing the player came with is what he will have until he has the time to retrieve his belongings from his home. Hopefully a family member, friend, or girlfriend will be able to ship his belongings to him. If not, he will probably have to buy some new clothes and rent some furniture until the team has a bye week or after the season.

The bye week is the week the team does not have a game to play. The team will practice for a few days then the coach will give the players a few days off. Each team in the NFL has one bye week. After the workout, if the team decides not to sign the player, the coaches will thank him for participating in the workout. The team will express to the player that they will not require his services. The player will then go back to the locker room and shower up. His plane ticket will be waiting. A representative from the team will take the player back to the airport.

Upon arrival at the airport, the player will receive his ticket, say goodbye, board the plane, and then fly back home. This process can happen numerous times throughout the course of the season. This is the reason I say being out of football during this period can be a tease. You try to think positive thoughts when you go on these workouts. Some teams will have the decency to let your agent know beforehand that they will not be signing you. I always appreciated those teams. Spare me the suspense and let me know before I leave my home what your intentions are.

You have some teams who will keep you in suspense for the entire workout. They will keep a player in suspense all day just to say "great workout, have a nice life". You can't help but get your hopes up, then it all comes crashing down many players are sent home with a wounded heart. Some teams will give you a false impression that you may be signed. You work out with the enthusiasm that you are going to be signed, and then it doesn't happen. It's the biggest tease ever!

12.4 The NFL Waiver Wire

At some point in their careers, most players will be put on waiver wire. Only a handful of players make it through their entire career without being put on the NFL waiver wire. The NFL waiver wire, also known as waivers, is the NFL's list of unemployed players. Players who were released from NFL teams throughout the course of the season are put on this list. The waiver wire is a virtual list of players who are currently seeking employment from NFL teams.

Players on the waiver wire are legitimate NFL players who have NFL experience whether they are a seasoned veteran or a rookie who was signed to a ball club at one point. These players were released from other NFL teams and are placed on this wire to show their availability. This is the list you try to avoid as a player. The NFL waiver wire comes in handy because injuries strike at any given time in the League. In the event a player gets hurt, teams need to know who is available so they can make replacements fast. The waiver list is design to be fast and efficient.

When a player goes down, the team goes to the waiver wire to see a familiar name they know. They call the player's agent and the next thing you know; he is on the first plane out to become a new member of the team. It happens that fast. The way the wavier works is very simple. If a team decides to part ways with a player his name automatically goes on the waiver list when the team has released him. A player will have a 24-hour window in which another team can pick him up and sign him. The order in which a team can pick a player up and sign him is based on that specific team's record. The team with

the worst record has the pick of the crop of players on the waiver wire. If a team decides they would like this player to become a new member of their ball club, they would have to honor the player's contract with the previous team that released him. The player will have the very same contract he had with the team who released him. If the player is not picked up and signed to a ball club after the 24-hour window, that player becomes an unrestricted free agent. This process is known as clearing waivers.

An unrestricted free agent is when a player has no contractual agreement with any team in the League. The player is free to sign with any team he so chooses. If a player has cleared waivers without being signed it's not the end of the world. All it means is no teams are interested in that player at that moment. That does not mean your life is over! I've had the experience of being on both sides of the waiver. When I was with this particular team, I received an injury. Someone was called to replace me right before I went on injured reserve. In the same breath, I was on the other end of the spectrum when I received a phone call to replace someone who had just gotten hurt. It's all a matter of being patient and being ready when your number is called.

There are instances when players will not get picked up and remain unemployed all year. They may not have participated in any workouts throughout the season. After the season is over, a player may get an opportunity to sign with a team. He can have an excellent training camp, and make the squad. It can happen. Don't get discouraged. The business of professional football is very complex. Keep training and stay very close to your agent.

Here is some advice to all players who have been out of football for a while and have not yet signed to a team. Do not leave it all in the hands of your agent. Teams are going to want to see if you are still in shape and doing the things you need to do to make yourself a better football player. It would not hurt to make a highlight video of your workouts. Get the e-mail addresses of all the teams in the League. Upload your workouts to YouTube, and send all the teams your workout video.

You have nothing to lose and everything to gain. The worst thing that could happen is that the teams may not reply, but at least you let them know you are still in good shape. That video could be the thing that sparks the attention of a team. You never know! There are thirty-two teams in the League; all you need is one to sign you.

Chapter 13: The Politics of the NFL...

The harsh reality of the League is that sometimes, good players get a raw deal. The best player does not always win a spot on the fifty-three-man roster. The dynamics of the League are unique because of the interesting way the NFL operates. Lots of good players do not make the final cut. As I stated earlier, some great players fall short, due to the numbers game. There are just not enough teams in the League. Throughout my playing years, I've seen great players with Hall of Fame potential receive their walking papers. Most of the time the players had excellent training camps but fell victim to the numbers game. This is the nature of pro football. Many times, it's all about timing when it comes to making an NFL team.

I've seen situations where players have been released numerous times, sign with a different franchise, and become the starter for years. Some players fall into a situation where their abilities and skills fit perfectly with the offensive or defensive coaches' philosophy. Once again, it's all about timing. If a player can find the right team that fits his abilities and skills, he may become the starter for a long time. Sometimes a player may fall into a perfect situation where injuries to another player plunged him into the starting lineup. Even though he is the starter now, he may still receive the short end of the stick once those players have recovered from their injuries. For example, let's say a player signs with a team during training camp. Let's say this player has been invited to several training camps throughout his career. The player has developed a name for himself as being a camp guy.

Camp guy is a player the team signs to participate in training camp. This player has been labeled as being a camp guy because he has signed with various teams, and has participated in various amounts of training camp throughout his career. He is a decent player but always seem to come up short making a fifty-three-man roster.

Let's say he signs as a middle linebacker. He is the third middle linebacker on the depth chart. The third middle linebacker on the depth chart means he is the third string linebacker, with two other linebackers in front of him. The coaches don't know much about this new player's ability. The two linebackers in front of him, the first and second string, receive an injury. Now this unknown linebacker moves up two spots on the depth chart. He goes from third string linebacker to starter. This is what a journeyman dreams about.

There are two types of journeymen. The first type of journeyman is a player who has played for several teams throughout his career. This type of journeyman has had success in the sport of football, but for whatever reason has not remained part of a team for a lengthy amount of time. Even though, each team he has played for he has made the fifty-three man roster, he has yet played with a one team for a substantial amount of years. The other type of journeyman is the kind who has bounced from team to team trying to make a ball clubs fifty-three-man roster. This diligent journeyman has yet to make a team, but has signed with a various amount of ball clubs throughout his career.

The unknown player who has been cut from several different teams now has an opportunity to display his skills. He starts to take snaps with the first string. He gets to play in his first game as a starter. He does well; he plays better than the two linebackers that were in front of him. The coaches realize that they have found a "diamond in the rough." The third string linebacker has a tremendous preseason. Now, here comes the final cut date when decisions must be made. There is the unknown player who comes in and does an excellent job for the team. He bewilders all the coaches with some amazing big plays. He plays better than the team's full-time starter and the backup linebacker. Here is the interesting twist!

The team has invested over \$30 million dollars between the first and second string linebackers he replaced because of injury. What do you think is going to happen? Two things may happen! The team can conclude, because they have invested so much money in the two linebackers, they will have to release the third string diamond in the rough. This will depend on whether the team only keeps two linebackers at that position. The odd man out is the linebacker who went from third string to first. Despite playing well, he still receives his walking papers.

When a team invests millions of dollars in a player, it is likely that player is going to be there. The flip side to this scenario is if one of the first or second string players have not lived up to their expectations and this diamond in the rough steps up and plays well. The coaches may feel that they are letting a star player go. The team may decide to release one of the two linebackers to free up some money under the salary cap. The team may decide to not waste any more money on the regular full-time starter or backup player. They will just label the player as a bust.

A bust is a player who has signed a lucrative football contract with an NFL franchise; this player has not lived up to the expectations of the coaches. He is a huge disappointment in the eyes of the organization and fans. He has under achieved tremendously, for that reason he has obtained the label as being a bust. They will cut ties with the player and move on. Now the third string diamond in the rough has secured a spot as the backup or possibly the full-time starter, depending on the decision of the organization. The diamond in the rough may continue to be the starter until the full-time starter is healthy enough to play.

The team may decide to keep the diamond in the rough as the full-time starter even if the regular full-time starter is healthy enough. The team may keep the original full-time starter and have him play behind the diamond in the rough. The coaches may do this as a safety precaution just in case the diamond in the rough is injured at some point throughout the season. This scenario may sound a little kooky, but it happens in the NFL. Players lose their positions to injury all too often. A young unknown diamond in the rough is waiting to get his

opportunity to shine. This can happen with different positions and it can happen with different scenarios like this.

13.1 The Coach's Favorite

Some players may face this conflict at some point in their career. Hopefully, if you are a player in a situation such as this you are on the good side of this unfair kind of place. At times, coaches will play the favoritism game. Some coaches will have that one player that holds a special place in their heart. This favoritism is not just on a pro level, it can be displayed on all levels of football: little league, high school, college, and pro. We all are human beings; sometimes we come across someone who, for whatever reason, we have a connection to. This connection can happen on a level of teammate to teammate, player to pro personal director, or someone in the head office.

At times, some coaches will develop a close bond with certain players, or one player. Some of these bonds may last for a season or they may last a lifetime. I witnessed this occurrence on every team I played for. I guess it's just a natural thing for some coaches to take this special liking to certain players. The conclusion that I came to is that, maybe, these individual players remind some of these coaches of themselves in their early years of their career. Perhaps these individual players remind the coaches of family members or friends that are no longer living. Maybe coaches just empathize with some of these players' situations in life.

Not all NFL players have lived a silver spoon life. Maybe some coaches appreciate some of these young men's ability to persevere through all the curve balls life has brought to their doorsteps. Despite some of the adversities some players face early in life, they are still able to fight and achieve their dreams. That dream is to play in the National Football League. Who knows what the exact reasons are? The fact remains that coaches will always have that favorite player. Being the coaches' favorite is not a bad position to be in. Being the coach's favorite has its benefits. Having favor with a coach can be the difference in a player having a three-year career or a ten-year career. Yes, it's that serious!

If you are a player who has fallen into the good graces of having the title of the coach's favorite, enjoy and take full advantage of it. In that same breath, being the coach's favorite can cause animosity with some teammates. Some players might feel that they are being treated unfairly. If this is the case, get used to it. Being in this position, animosity comes along with the territory. When you think about it...it's very unfair. There are times the coach's favorite can be the worst player on the team. This player make the fifty-three-man roster just because the coach likes him.

Yes, it's true, this happens in the League as well. I've been on a pro team where the head coach was hired from the college ranks. A small portion of his former college players just happened to be members of the team. That's when having a coach in your corner works in your favor. Sometimes talent will take a back seat to the coaches who favor certain players. My talents took the backseat because of favoritism with a team I had a brief stint with. I knew I was the better player. Not to take anything away from this certain player who I was competing with for a position; he was an exceptional human being and a great all-around person. The truth is I was the better player. It became obvious, as the days of training camp went along, that this player was the coach's favorite. During meetings when we watched the films of practice, all you could hear the coach saying was, "Great block!" It was so annoying! Most the time the blocks were not anything spectacular. I would make some of the most unbelievable blocks and I received no praise for them. It was so obvious that the coach was showing this player favoritism.

A teammate of mine realized what was happening and started giving me my well-deserved props! At the end of training camp, I received the phone call that no player wants to get during the last day of final cuts. I got the call to come and see coach in his office. This coach who showed me no love during training camp looked me in the eye and said, "Son, you're the best blocking fullback I've ever seen in my life, but I have to do what I have to do!" He then gave me my walking papers. Go figure; he just told me I was the best blocking fullback he'd ever seen, and then released me. His favorite player remained

intact and on the team. Those experiences opened my eyes to the politics of the League. It was then that I understood how serious it was. Politics come with the territory. You can't change it; you just have to ignore it and keep playing.

13.2 The Fraternal Order of the NFL

During my tenure at Auburn University, I had the opportunity to pledge a Greek Fraternity by the name of Phi Beta Sigma. A Greek Fraternity is a very interesting organization to be a part of. When a person pledges a fraternity, they instantly become part of a huge family with thousands of brothers overnight. A person who becomes an official member of a fraternity is a member for life. When a young man gets the opportunity to play football in the NFL, he becomes a member of a special fraternity. Whether you are a retired or a current player, you're connected for life. The NFL truly is the fraternity of all fraternities.

The fraternal order of the League is deeper and more connected than most people realize. The men who have had the opportunity to play in this wonderful game have one thing in common. A good portion of these men started playing football in the little leagues. Some started playing football in high school. What makes this fraternity a truly special fraternity is that we are connected in the sense that at some point, we played against or with each other. At some point in time, some men have played football together from the little leagues all the way up to high school. Some are fortunate enough to have played football together all the way up to college and the pros. Some players end up marrying other player's siblings. That's how deep the fraternal bond the League is.

These brotherhoods stand the test of time. Playing on a team isn't just a sport that the average person thinks it is. These men have lifelong friendships until the day they pass away. The League has thirty-two teams. Some of these players are journeymen who have played with several teams. These players have developed friendships with players on every team. They will more than likely become close with many other players that they played with throughout the years.

For example: I sign with a team. At some point, a few of my teammates become free agents. Those players as well as I will sign with other teams. We will all play each other at some point in our career. After the season, I will hang out with my old teammate in his new city. I will possibly get the opportunity to meet some of his new teammates. Vice versa, my old teammate will get the chance to hang out with me in my new city and meet some of my new teammates. If I was close with a few players on my old team and they moved to play for different teams, I would probably be doing a lot of traveling during the offseason.

The same goes for college teammates who have made it to the pro ranks. College teammates may still stay in touch with each other once they have reached the pro level. You might recognize some players you played against in high school and college that have made it pro. Most the time, old and new teammates will have the opportunity to see each other during major events like the Super Bowl. Even though I never had the opportunity to play in the Super Bowl, I enjoyed going to the Super Bowl and participating in the events. This was the opportunity I had to meet some of the people I played against on Sundays. Game day: it's all about business. When the season is over, these same guys I played against are some of the nicest people you'll ever know. You get the opportunity to bond with some of your adversaries you battled against during the season. That's when you realize the League is truly a brotherhood of men who all have the same dreams and goals in common.

Every player in the League is trying to be the best ball player he can be. Everyone is trying to sign that major deal. Everyone has nice cars; the list goes on. The same notion of brotherhood applies to the coaches, general managers, and owners. As we all know, the League's idea of job security is winning on Sundays. We all know it's impossible for a team to rule for years. As I spoke of in the early chapters, when teams start to lose, coaches get fired! Coaching jobs in the League are like a revolving door. Some coaches get recycled throughout the League because of the bonds they have with each other. Some of these coaches may have played high school, college,

and pro with the head coach of the team this coach is interviewing for. Now he has a job because he is in the fraternity. Being in this universal fraternity can also be beneficial if a player is looking for employment. For example, I'm a superstar of a team and I have some influence in the front office. Say an old teammate of mine is currently not signed with a ball club. If I have enough influence, I can talk to the general manager and plead my case for my friend who is unemployed. The next thing you know...your buddy has a job because he's in the fraternity. Another example: some players' agents could possibly be old teammates and close friends of a few general managers of different ball clubs throughout the League.

Your agent may call in a favor to his good friend, the general manager, of the team you would like to sign with. The next thing you know, you are an official member of the fifty-three-man roster because you and your agent are in the fraternity. You'll be surprised how things happen in the League; sometimes it's all about who you know.

13.3 Blackballed in the NFL

This topic is probably one the most sensitive issues that a player may face in his career. It's a topic you will not hear coaches discuss. It's a very unusual topic because players sometimes may not know this is taking place. There's not a special list that informs you this event is happening to you. It's an invisible occurrence you should sense after a while. It's an issue some players will not realize has happened to them until years after their career are over. If there were words to describe this dark cloud of a verb, it would be phantom thief in the night. The word I'm referring to is blackballed.

According to freedictionary.com, the definition of blackball is a negative vote, especially one that blocks the emission of an applicant to an organization. To shut out from social or commercial participation; ostracize or boycott.

Being blackballed in the League is as real as rain falling while the sun is shining. It happens from time to time! Owners, general managers, and coaches will probably never admit that it happens, but it does. We live in a society where the media reigns supreme. Players are constantly in front of cameras and microphones being interviewed about several topics that have to do with football. We live in a society where once a player is in front of millions of viewers, he is expected to be politically correct. At times, players will forget the definition of politically correct. Football can be such an emotional game at times. Men are on the field playing their hearts out. Sometimes, when things do not go their way, they become filled with anger and pain. This is what happens when you are passionate about what you do.

In some cases, off-the-field issues can bring on this anger. There can be life-changing events, contract disputes, family, and medical issues taking place in a player's lives. Negative things may be said about coaches, owners and the organization. Sometimes players forget and do not realize that once they are in front of a camera, the entire city and, at times, the nation is watching. Reporters have a distinct talent for catching players in these moments of despair. At times, personal issues are revealed in front of news cameras that can be detrimental to the team. Sometimes players will say things that may be taken out of context. There may be comments made about an organization and its internal problems. Nevertheless, the naughty words are said on the grand stage of media, which is television.

As players, we tend to forget we are employed by an organization that has invested millions of dollars in us. At times, we forget we are employed by men who are multi-millionaires and, in some cases, billionaires. Some of these rich tycoons have egos as big as their bank accounts. When certain negative words are said about something that is sensitive and dear to their hearts, they tend to make it personal. This is the case when players may say negative things about an owner's team. When a person is employed by men who have influence, money and power, things can be done to them that can change the entire course of their career, and in some cases, their life.

As I discussed earlier, the League is a fraternity. Although teams play each other, it has no significance on some of the relationships some of these general managers, owners and coaches have together. As I discussed, the NFL is a major corporation. It's just like any Corporate America job; before a team signs a player they do background checks. They talk to the former administration of the player. Coaches, general managers, and owners speak with each other. They find out about a player's lifestyle, work ethic, and attitudes. If there were negative events that took place while a player was with his previous team, it will be exposed. The team the player is trying to sign with will find out about it.

This event can negatively affect whether a player is signed to a team. Once the word has gotten out about a player's character and lifestyle, it spreads like wildfire. No team wants a player with negative baggage. This can result in some players being blackballed. In rare cases, some player's talent may be too enticing for teams to put the blackball label on. For most players, once that label is attached, it's the beginning of the end.

I truly believe that was the case with my career. I wish I had taken my football career more seriously. I wish I had not allowed my appetite for partying to interfere with the business at hand. There were negative comments I said to the press, at certain points, that may have negatively affected the outcome my career. There were things I did off the field that may have caused my career to go in the direction it did. It's all speculation. No coach or general manager is going to come out and admit it. After a while, I started to sense I was being blackballed. I've had training camps where I was a moving force when I stepped on the field. No matter how great I played, I still received my walking papers. It was at that point, towards the end of my career, I realized what was happening to me. If a player plans to have a great and lasting career, this is the label you must avoid at all costs. Take the game seriously.

13.4 The Company Guy

Despite the numbers game, players being released for their off-the-field antics, and all the possible crazy things that can happen to a player throughout the season, there always seems to be that one unique player who will make it through the cuts every year. I call this favored person that always seems to beat the odds the "company guy." Not all teams have this lucky guy on board. I've played for a couple of teams in which this person was every bit as real as the politics of the League.

The company guy is a player who always seems to make the team every year. This player is sometimes the worst player on the team but, for whatever reason, is still a part of the team. As I spoke about earlier in the chapter, the League is a huge fraternity. One can speculate that the company guy is usually a friend of someone in the front office. The company guy could be the nephew of the general manager's best friend. The company guy may be the godson of the owner of the team. He may be the son-in-law of the head coach. There are so many ways this scenario can play out. The company guy can be any person at any position on the team. Sometimes, this friend to the organization is the eyes and ears of all the coaches.

He will act as if he is your friend. As soon as you make a mistake and say something negative about the organization, you can bet that the coaches, general managers and all the authorities will hear about it. The company guy can also be someone who has no personal affiliation with any of the owners, general managers, or coaches' family. This particular kind of company guy has earned the title by simply being a snake. There are some people in the world that feel reporting to supervisors about what their co-workers are doing will give them favor in the eyes of their employers. Sometimes it will. They feel that carrying information, or what I like to call it in the real world, brown-nosing, to coaches or general managers might gain them a little favor when they need it.

The time of need may come around the final week of training camp. They might need that favor if any kind of unusual event takes place: a DUI, a domestic issue, etc. I've came across a couple of guys on teams who led this double agent type of lifestyle. While all the players in the locker room are around, they will laugh and carry on conversations as if they were the greatest teammates on Earth. As soon as everyone's backs are turned, they plunge the dagger. The company guy comes in all shapes and forms. He can be the team's equipment man. He can be the team's head trainer or he can be the team's strength coach.

There was one team I played for in which I knew the strength coach was the company guy. This guy hated every bone in my body and he did not try to hide the fact. To be honest, the feeling was mutual. I think he was going through some midlife crisis at the time I played for this team. He rode a motorcycle. I guess he bought it to make himself feel like he was young and cool again. Sometimes players may be an adversary to the company guy. That's not a good place to be, especially if the company guy is in a position of influence or is close to someone in the organization that's important. If the company guy has it in for you, he can pretty much say what he wants to about you and the powers that be will believe it. I guess all corporations will have their own version of the company guy. Young players be aware!

Chapter 14: The Injury Report...

Injuries are the most annoying set of events that can take place in a football player's life. Injuries are the number one reason a player will miss their entire season and, in some cases, will lead to the end of his career. Some players are fortunate enough to play their entire career without any injuries. These are the rare cases. Most football players, at some point in their career, have been regulars in the training room. The training room is the team's recovery room. The training room is where all the injured players receive their treatment or rehabilitation from injuries. In NFL training rooms, teams have state-of-the-art rehabilitation equipment. There will be a wide array of technological devices that I do not have a name for. The team doctor, as well as the

team's head trainer's office, is usually located in the training room. The training room is the place where the doctors and trainers will make their assessments and treatment plans for a player's injuries. This is also the place doctors will give their prediction about the length of rehabilitation required.

Some injuries can last the entire season and some injuries can last a couple of weeks. It depends on the severity of the injury, the rehabilitation, and the player's natural ability to heal. Sometimes players will have injuries serious enough to require immediate surgery. Football is a sport that, even though glamorous, can be very dangerous.

Most injuries that occur in pro football are torn Anterior Cruciate Ligaments, also known as ACLs. This is the most common injury that happens to football players on all levels. Occasionally you will have a few broken bones, but the torn ACL reigns supreme. According to Medicine.net, "We Bring Doctor's Knowledge to You," torn ACL article.

Anterior Cruciate Ligament is a ligament in the knee that crosses from the underside of the femur (the thighbone) to the top of the tibia (the bigger bone in the lower leg). Abbreviated ACL. Injuries to the ACL can occur in a number of situations, including sports, and can be quite serious requiring surgery.

Sometimes players will have injuries that last the entire season. Some of these nagging injuries: sprained ankles, turf toes, pulled hamstrings, just to name a few. These injuries may not be serious enough for a player to miss any games. The player might not be able to perform to the best of his ability, but he can still make a difference in a ball game. Some players are so talented that even if they were playing hurt, they could still outplay a good amount of the other players in the League. It's frustrating because these injuries can drag on throughout the course of the season. The injuries can become re-aggravated from practicing or playing before the injury has a chance to heal. The only time these injuries get an opportunity to completely heal is when the season is over. Even though a player is still able to

play through some of these injuries, it can be very painful. During these painful episodes, a player's mental toughness comes into play. These are the times a player's ability to play with pain will be tested.

To all young players, if you want to make it on the college or pro level, you must develop a certain amount of mental toughness. Coaches want to see this in the players they recruit. If you are going to play through some of these injuries, you are going should have a good amount of mental toughness. By the same token, be smart; if you have an injury that's severe, do not play no matter what anyone tells you. Sometimes coaches will influence some players to try and play hurt.

Coaches on the college and pro level have a unique saying if a player gets banged-up. The definition of banged up is when a player receives a minor injury during practice or a game. The injury is not severe enough for the player to miss practice or a game. The player may have to sit out of the game or practice for a few minutes. He will eventually return to the game or practice once he has recuperated.

Coaches will ask that player if they are hurt or if they are injured. I think at some point in every player's career, the player is asked this question...at least once. If a player gets nicked a little bit, coaches will ask that question to see if the player can continue to play. Coaches will also ask this question to see if the injury is so severe that the player can't play another down. Usually if it's something minor, the player will shake it off and get back into the ball game.

This mental toughness is what coaches want to see in their players. They want to see players fight through some of the bumps and bruises that may occur during a ball game. A player is no good to a team when he is always in the training room. He can become labeled as being injury prone. Injury prone is a player that becomes hurt easily and often. This kind of player is considered fragile because of his inability to stay healthy.

This kind of player usually doesn't last that long in the NFL. Think about it; if you were an owner of an NFL team, would you invest millions of dollars in a player who is always missing games?

Remember, football players are investments. Team owners invest in ball players who can be very productive on the field. Owners invest in the fact that a player's talents can help his team win. If you are not doing that, you're a useless stock. If a player spends more days in the training room than the meeting room, it's not good. Once a player gets a label of being injury prone, it can influence his value when negotiating a new deal. It can also affect his value in the NFL draft when he is coming out of college.

I've played with a few players that carried this label. I'm not quite sure why there are some players who get hurt more than others. I can only theorize:

1) Often, people get injured because of a lack of flexibility. When playing a sport such as football, being flexible can prevent many injuries.

Players are constantly making quick movements and at times may have certain body parts twist and turn in different directions. Having flexibility will certainly prevent muscles from straining or tearing in the event a player's body is turned in an awkward position.

2) Vitamin and mineral deficiencies in the body. Sometimes, when muscles do not receive the proper nutrients, they can become very fragile. Football is not the sport for those with fragile muscle fibers.

At times, I've seen players get hurt because they are not playing at full speed. When a player is not giving 100% effort at practices or games, their chances of getting hurt increase tremendously. It makes sense; it's all about physics. If you are playing or practicing at half speed and your opponent is playing or practicing at full speed, logically, he is going to overpower you. This unbalanced amount of strength can cause a player's body to be turned in an awkward position, resulting in muscle and ligament tears. Some advice to young players: make sure you stretch often, eat right, take your vitamins and make sure you play and practice at full speed.

14.1 Does a Player Receive Payment when Injured?

This topic has certainly been asked on numerous occasions from curious minds that have an interest about the welfare of players. The question of players being paid when injured is a subject that I think the public lacks knowledge of. Thank goodness we have an organization like the NFL Players Association that has fought valiantly in the early years of football for player's rights. The truth of the matter is that players are compensated once they have received an injury while playing. The amount the player receives is a different story.

A few factors are involved when it comes to compensating players who are injured. If a player receives an injury during the regular season and it's not a season-ending injury, he will rehab until he becomes healthy enough to play again. He will not receive any settlement because he is still receiving his salary payment, so the need to compensate him is unnecessary. I will discuss in more detail player's compensation later in the book, when the topic of injury reserve compensation approaches.

Surprisingly enough, at one point in the NFL, if a player received an injury, he would receive no compensation. The League has come a long way with the process of handling the health and welfare of players. There are guidelines teams must follow pertaining to players receiving compensation for their injuries. This is where all players must be mindful of what they are entitled to and the place the injury occurs. Usually a player's agent will have full knowledge of what his client is entitled to if injury strikes. Even though the agent will handle the situation if it presents itself, it is good for a player to understand the process of being compensated on the job.

If an injury has occurred while a player is involved in any scheduled team event, he will be compensated. This event includes practice, games, or strength training and conditioning. For example, let's say I was a player who had a scheduled strength training session with the team's strength coach at 8am at the team's facility. This is my assigned strength-training schedule 3 days a week. One of the exercises I was performing during my session was the bench press. Once I started

performing the exercise, I tore a pectoral muscle. After I was injured, I went to the hospital and had an MRI. The doctor explained that my injury was going to require surgery immediately. The team is required to pay for the surgery per the NFL Collective Bargaining Agreement. The NFL Collective Bargaining Agreement is the rules and guidelines negotiation between the NFL and the NFL player's union to determine wages, hours, and working conditions for NFL players.

Depending on the injury, which in this case is very severe, it's a good possibility I will miss the entire season. Now the big question: Will I receive compensation? The answer is yes! I was performing a scheduled workout at the team facility. By performing a scheduled workout at the team's facility, it entitles me to receive compensation for my injury. The same thing goes if I am injured during practice or in a game. Remember that it is a scheduled team event. According to the Collective Bargaining Agreement, also known as the CBA, all players, including practice squad players, are to be compensated if injured at a team event.

This event also includes training camp. I've seen players, who had no chance of making the team, receive a huge paycheck because they were injured. Depending on how severe the damage is, he may get a full season's pay. If a player receives his entire salary for the season because of his injury, more than likely the injury required surgery. The flip side to it all is that some players are not as lucky when it comes to being compensated for certain injuries.

There have been instances where players have gotten injured performing events that were not scheduled by the team. These events may include playing a pick-up game of basketball at the neighborhood recreation center. Other events may include riding motorcycles or rock diving. Some players have been seriously injured performing these unscheduled recreational events.

These injuries range from torn ACLs broken ribs/legs/arms and numerous possible career-ending injuries. Now, the question is: Does a player receive compensation if he gets injured riding a motorcycle, playing basketball, or rock diving? The answer is no! Those events are not scheduled team events; therefore, players will not receive compensation if they get any injury participating in these events. I've seen this occurrence happen one too many times. I've seen football players play a pick-up game of basketball and tear their Achilles tendon. I've also seen players decide that they are going to go to the local gym to get a quick workout and tear their pectoral muscles. It happens more often than people think.

Players must be very mindful of the things they do in the offseason and during the season. Injuries such as these can happen in the blink of an eye. Countless players have lost thousands, and in some cases, millions of dollars not being smart. If you are going to be involved in extracurricular activities, realize that your body is the reason you are receiving a paycheck. Players must make sure they are not putting themselves in a situation that may cost them an entire season's pay. Take care of your body!

14.2 Injured Reserve and Non-Football Related Injured Reserve

The topic of injured reserved and non-football related injured reserve has been one of the most confusing issues football players will possibly encounter in their careers. Injured reserve is defined as a list a player is placed on if he becomes physically unable to perform due to a severe injury from a scheduled event in football once the player is placed on the injured reserve list, he will miss the remainder of the season.

As discussed previously, football is a high-risk sport. The chances of players being injured are very high. These injuries can happen at any given time or place in a football player's life. If a player receives a season-ending injury during a scheduled football event, more than likely he will be placed on the injured reserve list.

The injured reserve list is a place no football player wants to be, unless you are a player who has no chance of making a football team. At that moment, being on the injured reserve list has its advantage. For the most part, players hate getting hurt, especially during the season. Once a player is placed on the injured reserve list, he will miss the remainder of the season. If the injury occurs before the season and he is placed on this list, he will miss the entire season. More than likely if he is placed on the injured reserve list, this means his injury is severe enough that he will probably require surgery. Surgery is a word no player wants to hear.

As I discussed in earlier chapters, there are guidelines and rules set in place in the event a player receives a serious injury. A player will still receive his salary if he misses the entire season due to an injury. This injury must occur while performing in a scheduled team event. His salary will still count against the team's salary cap. This rule applies at any point in time during the start of off-season training, preseason, or during the regular season.

If a player is placed on the injured reserve list, he cannot play at any time during the season. If his injury has healed ahead of schedule, he still cannot play that season. He must wait until the next upcoming season to play again. As stated earlier, sometimes players receive injuries performing non-scheduled football events such as pick-up games of basketball and riding motorcycles. If his injury is severe enough that he should miss the entire season, then more than likely he will require surgery. If this event occurs, the player will be placed on the non-football related injury reserve. The non-football related injury reserve list is a player's worst nightmare.

This list is for an injury that was the result of nothing that had to do with football. The most horrific thing about this injury list is that teams are not required to compensate the player. Non-Football Related Injury Reserve is a list a player is put on if he receives an injury due to an unscheduled football event. Due to the injury occurring in a nonscheduled football event, the player will not receive his salary from the team for the season. He will miss the entire season with that team without being paid.

That's the nightmare of it! Imagine that you are a full-time starter in the League and you are scheduled to receive a \$4 million salary for the upcoming season. Along with the four million, you have a lot of bonuses attached to your contract for that year. While relaxing in your multi-million-dollar mansion, you decide to go and play a pick-up game of basketball at the nearest recreation center. While playing basketball, you go up for a rebound, and when you land, something pops in the back of your foot.

Immediately you realize that something is not right. You are in pain and you can't walk on the foot that popped. The ambulance is called, you are taken to the hospital, and an MRI is performed. The doctor comes back to tell you the worst news possible. The doctor tells you the injury you suffered is a torn Achilles tendon. He tells you the injury is going to require surgery and you are going to miss the entire season. Here comes the part that's bad.

You call your agent to break the news. Your agent calls the team and tells them what just occurred. Here is when things get somewhat tricky. The first question the team is going to ask is how and where this injury occurred. Once the agent tells the team this injury happened while playing a pick-up game of basketball, his client's entire season salary and bonus is flushed down the toilet. This is a no bargain/no deal situation. It doesn't matter if the agent files a complaint through the NFL players union. It does not matter if the agent puts a dream team of attorneys together to try to fight this case.

The outcome will be the same! He will not receive his salary or bonuses for that year. The team is not liable for the player's salary if the player was injured during a non-football related activity period! Those are the rules! Some teams are gracious enough to give players a game check or two; those are rare cases that you do not hear about often. It's a no-win situation. I've seen this event happen on a few occasions. Sometimes players will obtain an injury at one place, and then try to convince the trainers and doctors it happened while they were performing a scheduled workout. Doctors and trainers are constantly watching players as they perform their team activities.

Doctors and trainers have been doing this type of work for years. They have trained eyes. They can spot when a player gets hurt at any given time on the field. They can tell if a player is faking an injury. They can spot when a player is already hurt, especially with a serious injury like a torn Achilles. It's going to be extremely hard for a player to hide that kind of injury, especially from a team doctor or trainer. Players have tried and failed. Can you blame them for trying? There is a lot of money on the line! I think the rules of non-football related injury reserve are fair. Business is business. If a player gets hurts while doing something that has nothing to do with football, why should the team pay him for it?

You would think most players would have a little bit more sense about this situation. You hear cases of players getting hurt doing some of the most foolish things. Why risk playing a pick- up game of basketball and chance losing millions of dollars? NFL players must realize that they are football players, not basketball players. If they want to be a basketball player, they should try out for the NBA. Football players must be very mindful while performing certain activities, especially when it may jeopardize their livelihood. Some advice to young and old players: your body is your moneymaker; take very good care of it.

14.3 Can a Team Release a Player if He is injured?

Many people have speculated on whether teams can release players if they are injured. The reality is that teams can release players whenever they choose. The only thing they cannot do is release players once they have received an injury. For a team to release a player while he is injured, the player and team would have to agree to a settlement. I will explain in depth what the injury settlement is and how it works later in this chapter. The League has certainly changed a lot of its policy as it pertains to players being injured. One monumental achievement the League has made is teams not being able to release players when they are injured.

For many years, NFL players got a raw deal when it came to matters such as this. In the early days of football, once a player received an injury, that was it. Teams could release them at any time. In present-day football, the thought of a player being released with an injury without being compensated is unheard. Today, if a player received a season-ending injury, he would remain on the team and he would receive his season pay. He may also receive an injury settlement, which can change things.

It is an official rule per the NFL Collective Bargaining Agreement. All teams honor this rule. It is a very fair rule, in my opinion. Things happen fast in the League. Injuries happen at the drop of a dime. With football being such a high-risk sport, players have a safety net if an injury occurs. It makes a lot of players sleep better at night. A rule like this allows players to play their hardest. It allows them to be more aggressive when on the field. They can play the game of football without any fear of getting hurt. In my opinion, players are much more productive with rules such as this set-in place.

Ball players sacrifice their bodies on a regular basis to get that extra yard to score a touchdown. It can be the difference between the end of a season and a trip to the Super Bowl. Some of those amazing highlights football fans see on Sundays would not happen if there were not rules set in place like this. Players would think twice before throwing their bodies around if they knew they would not receive payment if they were injured. It would be a tremendous drop in the excitement of the game. I cannot count the number of amazing highlights I've witnessed of players performing some of the most acrobatic feats in football.

I have seen players rush to score touchdowns. I have seen them leap in the air, and while in the air, the defender hits them, and the force causes the offensive player to do a somersault. Simply amazing! I've witnessed a player leap from the ten-yard line and while in mid-air, the defender hit him and propelled his body into a swirling missile. He was able to cross the pile line and score. How amazing is it that a player can leap from the ten-yard line and, literally, have his body turned into a human missile? Only in the NFL! Guaranteed, if there

were injury rules such as these, you would not see some of those amazing plays. It is plays such as those that make the NFL so exciting to watch. This is where the teams step up to the plate and compensate players in the form of injury settlements for those amazing plays.

14.4 Injury Settlements

An injury settlement is a safety net for all players who are trying to make a team. It's a safety net in the sense that it has its benefits, just as a player who is put on injury reserve. The dynamics of how the injury settlement works is a little different from when a player is put on I.R. (injury reserve). The outcome is still the same--the player receives compensation, but how he receives it is very different.

Players who receive an injury settlement from a team are those who, at some point during training camp or the season, obtain an injury. This injury may be multiple injuries or may be just one. Injuries can range from pulled hamstrings, sprained ankles, pulled groins or any type of strains/sprains to the more serious injuries--broken hands, ankles, or muscle tears. Players will receive compensation for their injuries whether it is very serious or not. If a player receives an injury, the team doctors will give the team an approximate time for recovery.

Usually the player's agent will have his client get a second opinion to make sure the team doctor is accurate. Once the player receives a second opinion, the player's agent will inform the team. The player's agent will give the team the second doctor's opinion about recovery time. The agent and team will then negotiate the time limit it will take for that player to recover. Recovery time is based on the team doctor's estimated time limit and the other doctor's second opinion time limit. For example, the team doctor suggests the player will require 3 weeks to recover. The second opinion suggests 6 weeks. The agent and team will agree upon a time between 3-6 weeks that are reasonable for both parties. The amount the player receives is based on the prorated amount of the player's salary for the estimated week the player has to recover.

Back to our example: The team and agent agreed on five weeks as the time of recovery. The amount the player would receive as a settlement is five weeks of his salary for that season. If the player receives \$20,000 a week as a salary for the season, he would receive one hundred thousand dollars in a settlement. You multiply \$20,000 X 5 weeks, which equals \$100,000.

There are specific times when a player can get an injury settlement. Here is where things get a little tricky. A player may be entitled to an injury settlement if, at some point during training camp, he gets hurt. Usually if a player gets hurt during training camp, he is going to rehabilitate his injury. Depending on how fast a player can recover from his injury will determine if he receives compensation. When a player gets hurt during training camp, he will start to rehabilitate his injury immediately. He will continue to receive his weekly or bi-weekly pay for training camp. The payment players receive during training camp is nothing close to their salary pay.

Remember, players do not start receiving their salary pay until the season starts. Players can get \$600-\$800 weekly during training camp. By the end of training camp and the last cuts, if he is one hundred percent healthy, he will not receive any compensation in the form of a settlement. The process of the player receiving compensation is all based on whether the player still suffers from an injury before the final cuts. If he gets hurt during training camp, he is entitled to receive medical attention from the team. The medical attention may be rehabilitation or surgery, depending on the severity of his injury. Usually if a player must receive minor surgery, the injury probably is not that severe. In the event this situation occurs; the team is probably going to negotiate a short-term injury settlement with the player's agent.

Short-term Injury settlement is a monetary settlement a player receives from a team in-which the player's injury will take approximately four to six weeks to heal. Once the player is healed from his injury, he is free to resign from the team that he settled with. The player may have other teams interested and opt to sign with another squad. If the injury was severe enough for the player to

undergo major surgery and rehabilitation for months, the player would be placed on the injury reserve list. The amount of money a player receives as a settlement is based on the time the player takes to recover from the injury. If it's a serious injury like a torn Achilles heel or torn ACL, it's going to be months before that player fully recovers. For injuries such as these, the player will more than likely be placed on the team's injured reserve list. The player may receive his full salary for the year if placed on this list. It all depends on the conditions and terms in his contract. A player may receive a split salary if that was negotiated in his contract.

A Split Salary is an agreement negotiated with the team and player, that in the event a player is put on injured reserve list he will receive a reduced amount of his normal salary. Teams will request this agreement for certain players. The team and agent negotiate the amount. These types of agreements are usually in the contracts of young players, rookie free agents and rookie late round draft picks. Teams will negotiate some of these injury settlements so they can relieve themselves from the liability of that player. Teams will also agree to injury settlements so that an injured player cannot receive a spot on the fifty-three-man roster by default.

Remember that teams cannot release a player if he is injured. If the player is not 100% healthy by the final cuts and the team has not settled with him, he must take a spot on the fifty-three-man roster. He obtains a roster spot by default. If a seasoned veteran who plays a major role on the team receives a short-term injury, the team will, more than likely, save a spot on the fifty-three-man roster rather than give him an injury settlement. The team will put him on the physically unable to perform reserve list.

When a player is put on this list, the team thinks he can contribute to the success of the team at some point during the season. The team also feels that this player will have a chance to recover from his injuries and make it back in time to help his team win. He will be able to return to the team by Week Seven of the season. The team will hold a roster spot for him. The team will allow the veteran the time to recover from his injuries. Once the veteran has fully recovered, he

will fall back into the lineup to play his role. Teams will not use a roster spot for a player who plays no significant part on the team for that season.

A good portion of the players that receive these injury settlements are the camp guys. Teams do not expect camp guys to make the final cuts. These players, if they remained healthy during pre-season would, more than likely, have been cut at some point during training camp. Rather than giving up a spot on the fifty-three-man roster by default, the team will cut a check and send the player on his way. By doing this, it secures an open spot on the roster that can be utilized by a player who can contribute to the team in a significant way. The team would be free and clear of having to give a roster spot by default.

The player will have an opportunity to continue to rehabilitate his injury until he is healthy. He will be able to rehabilitate without being a member of that team. Once he is healthy, he will be sent home with a check. With all that being said—once he receives his injury settlement check, he can sign with a team at some point during the season, and play. Unlike injured reserve status, if a player has signed an injury settlement, he can return to play football once his injury has healed. Remember, if a player is put on injured reserve, he cannot play for the rest of the season. That's not the case with a player who receives an injury settlement. Once a player is healthy, he re-signs to the same team or to another team. He has to be completely healthy before he signs with another team. If another team signs him, more than likely they will perform a physical to make sure the injury is healed. The same process applies if he resigns with the team that he settled with.

14.5 The Exit Physicals

All thirty-two teams will have their players to go through this process at some point. When teams give players their exit physical, it can mean two things. It can mean the season is over, or someone has just received his walking papers. Teams will conduct an exit physical at the end of the season to make sure the players on the fifty-three-man

roster have no injuries. It can also mean a player is being released. After a team releases a player, he usually undergoes an exit physical. The team's head trainer and doctor will usually administer this process. They will ask the player if he is hurt. They will also ask the player if he has any physical issues that the team needs to know about.

If a player was suffering from any kind of injury, this would be the time to let the trainer or doctor know what's going on. Football players have been programmed to play hurt. They have a high tolerance for pain. Sometimes some players will go the entire season with serious injuries and not realize it. These players will think the injury is something minor and will continue with their daily routine. These minor injuries can turn out to be very serious and may require surgery.

I've seen cases where players have played the entire season with torn ligaments. A player will think it's a minor bump or bruise. During the exit physical, he mentions the minor discomfort he is having. At this point, if he tells the doctor or trainer that there is a minor problem somewhere in his body, they will probably require him to get an X-ray or MRI. The results come in and he gets a big surprise. The injury he thought was nothing is something. The injury he thought was nothing turns out to be severe enough to require surgery after the season. Trust me, this happens!

The quicker a player finds out what's wrong with his body, the quicker the injury can be repaired. If you find out what the problem is later than sooner, you stand a chance of missing a few games or possibly the entire season. Some advice to all players, both young and old: if you have any kind of injury, please tell your team trainer or doctor. It doesn't matter how simple and small you think the injury may be. Unless you have X-ray vision and can see inside your body, you will not know what is going on. You could have an injury that needs medical attention. In addition, you may miss an opportunity to be compensated. If it's a minor injury, you stand a chance of receiving an injury settlement. If it's a serious injury that will require surgery, you may be missing out on a lot of money. Remember that teams

cannot throw you to the wolves if you are hurt. They must either settle with you or place you on injured reserve list. If you receive either one, you are in a good position. Informing trainers and doctors of any minor bumps or bruises may be beneficial down the road. At some point, all ball players will become old men. Sometimes the minor injuries athletes obtain while playing football will not affect them until later in life. If you have documentation that these injuries occurred while you were with a team, you may receive compensation later in life. Older players are now suing their former teams for injuries they obtained while playing. Some of these men have not played football in two or more decades. If there is proof in the medical records, you can backtrack all the injuries you had over the course of your career. You can have a solid case if these injuries reoccur later in life.

Conclusion

I hope the information that I've written in this book has given the readers some insight into the beginning stages of the voyage to the NFL. There is a lot more to be told about this incredible journey. Log onto the website for future times and dates of the book launch and signing.

www.lessonsofthegamefootball.com

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