

ITL 2004: The draft-day blog

By **NEIL STRATTON**

Inside the League

Like you, Inside the League's Neil Stratton is glued to the NFL Draft broadcast. Check in throughout the day as Stratton's blog is updated.

An Inside the League salute goes out to Rick Smith, Mike McCartney, Kenny Zuckerman and all the members of the Chicago-based Priority Sports team, which represents Iowa OT **Robert Gallery**, the No. 2 pick in the draft. In a business where some of the biggest players operate in and out of the shadows, Priority Sports is a first-class operation with a record as clean as that of **Gallery**.

As a guy who grew up in New Orleans idolizing Archie Manning (even today you can go into my closet and find an XL Adult-sized No. 8 jersey in black and gold), it's hard to quantify the amount of disappointment I feel in the way the elder Manning has decided to handle the Chargers situation this year. Everyone at ESPN and all around the media have gone out of their way to avoid criticizing the Mannings because they all have strong relationships with him, but let's cut the BS – this was a dishonorable thing to do. And don't compare Eli's situation to Archie's; the situation for players today is far from the indentured servitude of the 70s and 80s, the salaries have taken a quantum leap, and no player selected this weekend is more than four years away from freedom.

Given the circumstances, you have to give Chargers GM A.J. Smith, who has somehow gotten criticism for the situation that has been thrust on him, a lot of credit. He hit a home run with the draft package he received (keep in mind that his predecessor, John Butler, got a comparable pittance for the Michael Vick pick three years ago) in exchange for getting a player he was happy with – and who isn't the prima donna Eli has turned out to be. The Giants won't do much this year because new head coach/GM Tom Coughlin won't take any shortcuts to the top. Therefore, the Chargers may have gotten another top-five in addition to the third-rounder (the 65th pick in the draft – practically a late second-rounder) and fifth-rounder they received in this year's draft.

Speaking of Kellen Winslow Jr., who was just selected by the Browns, no one has to be happier with the Manning farce than Kellen Sr., who is now just the second-most obtrusive father in this year's draft.