

Cowboys took safe route in draft

Quality RB not available, so team will go with Hambrick

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By JEAN-JACQUES TAYLOR / The Dallas Morning News

IRVING – Owner Jerry Jones and coach Bill Parcells took a conservative approach to the 2003 draft.

Each wanted safe picks that will upgrade the roster on a team that has finished 5-11 each of the last two seasons.

Now that the draft is over, here's the answer to a few questions about the Cowboys' draft:

Question: Emmitt Smith is gone to Arizona. Why didn't Dallas draft a running back?

Answer: It's really quite simple. The Cowboys didn't see a running back on the draft board that they thought was significantly better than Troy Hambrick and would be able to carry the ball 20-25 times a game for the next five years.

Hambrick comes cheap this season and next when he's a restricted free agent. If he can do the job, he'll be a salary cap friendly player at a key position.

Question: Is there some good reason Dallas passed on Marshall quarterback Byron Leftwich and California quarterback Kyle Boller?

Answer: The Cowboys have enough young quarterbacks on their roster. Drafting another would have only set up Chad Hutchinson to fail because of the internal pressure to play a quarterback taken in the first round.

Clearly, Jones learned from the Hutchinson-Quincy Carter fiasco of last season. Dallas wants a veteran, but he'll only start if Hutchinson is horrible.

Question: With pressing needs at defensive tackle and defensive end, how could Dallas come out of the draft with neither?

Answer: The Cowboys wanted a defensive tackle in the worst way, but Terence Newman was the best player on the board when it was their time to draft in the first round. There was a big drop off after Al Johnson at center, so they had to take him. By the third round, most of the best defensive linemen were gone. The Cowboys had a choice: take a lesser player to fill a need or take the best player.

Question: Bradie James is a physical specimen at weak side linebacker. Does that mean Dexter Coakley will be traded?

Answer: It means the Cowboys had no depth behind their starters and they decided to add some. James looks like the prototypical Parcells linebacker, but Coakley has been to a pair of Pro Bowls and is a team leader. Let's not get rid of him just yet. Trading Coakley, who's only two years into a six-year deal, would also cost Dallas about \$3.6 million against the cap.

Question: Terence Newman is fine, but Dallas has a lot of holes. How come the Cowboys didn't trade down?

Answer: Dallas wanted to trade down, but couldn't find any partners. Take away the quarterbacks and the receivers and there were only 8-10 elite players in this draft. The Cowboys wanted an elite player not two pretty good players, so they kept the fifth pick.

Briefly...

Vice president **Stephen Jones** spent much of the day negotiating a one-year deal that will keep free agent **Michael Myers** with the Cowboys. ... Miami released quarterback **Ray Lucas**, a Parcells favorite, on Monday. It's unlikely Dallas will pursue him until the end of May, when Parcells has had his first look at Quincy Carter and Chad Hutchinson in a mini-camp. ... Dallas is expected to sign a dozen free agents on Thursday. The Cowboys have already agreed to terms with several: Eastern Illinois quarterback **Tony Romo**, Kentucky receiver **Aaron Boone**, UNT cornerback **Don McGee** and Middle Tennessee running back **Reshard Lee**.

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