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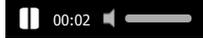
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FRIDAY, MARCH 29, 2013

VEGAS BABY, VEGAS! — BEARS COMPENSATING FOR URLACHER IN FREE AGENCY

Ah, Las Vegas. Is there any place more cliché for a group of guys to go to for a bachelor party?



Probably not. And, why do guys like to go to Las Vegas for bachelor parties? In truth, it's because, as a whole, we're a relatively lazy bunch. Yeah, one might point to the dizzying array of gambling opportunities, adult entertainment options, and sheer over the top opulence in general, but when it comes right down to it, it's because when you put a bunch of guys together, they don't want to plan anything, so Vegas is always the path of least resistance. I don't know why that happens. You can be the most organized man on the planet when it comes to work, life and family, but you get together with a bunch of your old buddies in Vegas and you're suddenly lucky if you remember basic information, like where you live, your kid's names, not yelling at crying babies and asking them how they like it (thank you, Brian from Family Guy), not challenging the family sitting next to you at the buffet to shots...well, you get the picture.

A bunch of years ago, I was heading out to Las Vegas for a bachelor party for one of my friends, Erik, and ended up having to pull a "planes, trains and automobiles" to get there (and if you didn't get that reference, please put this article away and go watch the movie right now). My flight out of New York spent 4 hours on the tarmac before taking off and

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RTP Richard Thigpen Photography



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circling Indiana for 3 hours due to inclement weather until we ran out of gas and had to land in Fort Wayne, Indiana. There was only one place to get food at the airport -- a sandwich shop with about 8 old ham sandwiches, which might as well have been rib eye steaks as far as the 200 hungry, tired passengers were concerned. So after the "Walking Dead" incident (i.e. where everyone rushed the sandwich stop at 3 AM as if we were all zombies checking out Kevin James from "King of Queens" fame -- seriously, I'm pretty sure one of the passengers bit my hand as I was trying to dive out of the way...or wait, maybe that was me...), the airline finally decided to bus us to Chicago to catch a connection. Four hours later (and one misaligned back later, as I was trying to sleep in a coach bus in between two seats) I was in Chicago waiting to catch the Southwest Airlines airplane equivalent of a bus to Las Vegas. All in all, it was about 16 hours door to door.

So again, why did I just waste the last 5 minutes of your life with that story? Well, the one thing I realized about that entire experience is that everything seems better after having to suffer through a traumatic event to get there. I really had to earn that trip to Las Vegas via this traumatic cross country trip, and boy did I enjoy it when I got there. Not that I wouldn't have enjoyed it anyway. I mean, have you seen the size of... wait, I almost forgot. What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas. But I digress...

As you all know, the Bears let Brian Urlacher go this off season. It's been written about many times as well as on this very site. Urlacher is a legend in Chicago, playing 13 years for the Bears. In a time when there's very little loyalty between players and teams, Urlacher was the exception to the rule. He's a punishing tackler, terrific run defender and a solid pass defender able to pick up on receiver routes as they unfold. Unfortunately, Urlacher was slowing down and was getting injured. He missed all of 2009 with a wrist injury and then missed the last four games of the 2012 season with a hamstring injury. His time had come to an end, and we're all sad to see him go. So that's the traumatic part.

And what is it we're supposed to enjoy after that? Hopefully a good draft. But for the meantime, here are the most significant additions to the Bears defense during free agency:

D.J. Williams – Linebacker



The Bears added D.J. Williams, an outside/middle linebacker from the Broncos, to a one year contract. At 30 and soon to be 31 in the summer, he's about 4 years younger than Urlacher, and he led the Broncos in tackles five out of his nine years. Williams is an athletic linebacker with strength and quickness to fill running lanes as well as drop into coverage, but he's clearly not much of a ball hawk (only 2 INTs in his nine year career compared to Urlacher's 22 in his 13 year career). The more alarming issue is his off the field problems. Last year, Williams was suspended six games for violating the league's policy on performance-enhancing drugs and three more games for an alcohol-related arrest in 2010 that led to a conviction last August. Hopefully a change of scenery (and being reunited with both Jay Cutler and Brandon Marshall) will improve his discipline and focus. If he gets close to his 2009 and 2010 years, he'll be a fine plug in, but still may not be a long term solution to pair with Lance Briggs.

James Anderson – Linebacker

an Elite 2013 Fantasy Quarterback?

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The Bears also added James Anderson, an outside linebacker from the Panthers, to a one year deal. At 29, he's about the same age as Williams and, although he's not as celebrated as Williams, still has potential to be productive for more than his one year contract. Although Anderson shows consistent effort on the field, he can be limited in his ability to take on blockers and meet backs in the hole. He is quick and able to get back into coverage when necessary, but is not as good at identifying receiver routes and doesn't get his hands on the ball in pass coverage often (only 3 interceptions throughout his career). He set the Panther's single-game tackles record with 20 in week 3 of the 2012 season and finished with 84 total tackles, third-most on the team. Clearly, he has ability to get to the ball carrier and can help fill the gap left with the absence of Urlacher's run stopping ability. Anderson missed four games in 2012 with lower back issues and although those are the only four games he's ever missed, his long-term durability could still be an issue.

Tom Zbikowski – Safety



I know he isn't a linebacker, but the Bears also added Tom Zbikowski, a safety and special teamer from the Colts, to a one year deal. More importantly, Zbikowski used to play at Notre Dame, where he was almost legendary in stature. Heck, he even had his first professional boxing match when he was still at Notre Dame! What could be cooler than that? I've watched quite a few games of Zbikowski at Notre Dame. At the time, he was tough playing safety that was always quick to the ball. He had good route recognition and had a knack for stepping in the way of passes. In the pros, he hasn't been quite as much of an impact player as he was in college and has failed to accumulate many defensive stats. Much of that is due to playing time, but one has to think that play time should have increased if the coaches saw increased potential. But, generally speaking, when he's on the field, he's been solid in filling the alley in run support and has had good power on contact. He doesn't get beat often and knows how to stay in front of the run and pass. He also contributed a little as a kick and punt returner on his previous teams, but with Eric Weems and Devin Hester, the Bears don't really need this. But he can certainly help on special teams throughout the season in addition to pushing for a starting spot on the defense.

Clearly, Williams, Anderson and Zbikowski aren't, at least for the time being, in the Bears' long term plans, as they all only have 1 year contracts, so the Bears will still need to find defensive help in the draft. And I've already covered what I think they should do in the draft in two of my previous articles. But with these additions, the Bears certainly have a lot more flexibility. Hopefully the off season trauma of losing an icon like

Urlacher will result in something good. But if not, how about we all get together for a quick trip? Maybe Vegas? I've heard they've got great clubs with incredibly...oops, there I go again. Let's just meet in Vegas and I'll fill you in.



By Ha Kung Wong
(Twitter: @Rhihan)



4 comments:



Anonymous March 29, 2013 at 1:20 PM

Wolf pack, baby. Nifty article, sir.

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Hakung Wong March 29, 2013 at 2:25 PM

I believe the full cite is: "4 of us wolves running around the desert together, in Las Vegas looking for strippers and cocaine. So tonight, we make a toast!" ;-)

Thanks for reading!

[Reply](#)



Erik Gold March 30, 2013 at 10:58 AM

Didn't that bus break down on the way to Chicago too? You certainly took the scenic route. ;)

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Hakung Wong March 30, 2013 at 12:23 PM

Oh that's right, I think the post traumatic stress is effecting my memory. I definitely remember from Vegas forward though...oh wait, I mean, I don't remember anything. :-)

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