NFL Draft Preview

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faster than his time of 4.9. But, Buchsbaum added, "he is sloppy with the ball" -- in other words, he has a propensity for fumbling.

Said Razzano: "He blocks real well for a guy his size, he catches the ball real well. He might go higher than you think. He could go in the fourth, fifth or sixth round. He's rated pretty well."

After gaining only 4 yards as a freshman, Baxter rushed for 1,705 yards in 1986, but dipped to 1,206 in '87, when his team switched to the wishbone offense. Baxter gained 817 yards as a senior.

In the case of Dubose, Buchsbaum said he "can catch the ball, a late-round guy. He might catch on as a fifth back. He runs about 4.65 in the 40."

But Buchsbaum added: "He is not instinctive or elusive. Rarely breaks tackles with his legs. Needs work on running pass routes."

Razzano predicted that Dubose would be a late pick "like 10th or later."

Barnes gained 594 yards as a freshman, 734 in '86, 619 in '87 and 1,336 yards as a senior, when he was named to the All-MEAC team.

One negative thing for Barnes is his speed: 4.7 in the 40. Says Buchsbaum: "He could make it if he continues to improve."

Collins, according to draft analyst Mel Kiper Jr., author of "Draft Report 1989," lacks ideal size for a linebacker. But he runs a consistent 4.75 40-yard dash and "delivers a blow equal to that of a 245-pounder, and has terrific football instincts." Collins, who had 20 sacks his last two seasons, rates as a special-teams player at best, Buchsbaum says.

Fair has size (6-1 1/2, 200) and runs a 4.65 in the 40-yard dash. Hall, a 6-1 1/2, 228-pound linebacker who runs a 4.7 40-yard dash, made a career-high 68 tackles last season.

Hall's positives, according to Buchsbaum: "Good athlete. Above-average size. Excellent speed."

Negatives: "Does not make that many plays. Lacks great instincts and awareness. Is not as tough and competitive as you'd like."

According to Razzano, Fair ranks above several other defensive backs -- but below Massey. Fair may have a chance to be drafted in the later rounds or sign as a free agent.

The other defensive backs include Kevin Dent, 6-2 1/4, 200, of Jackson State. Dent, who runs a 4.7 time in the 40, has great size and played well in the SWAC. But his speed deficiency will hurt him in the NFL. Furthermore, according to Buchsbaum: "He has yet to show that he can cover man-on-man."

Other defensive backs are Steve Hill, 6-0 1/2, 190, of Langston; Jack Phillips, 6-0, 202, of Alcorn State; Jeffrey March, 6-1 1/2, 188, of Tuskegee; Kenneth Johnson, 6-2 1/4, 196, of Florida A&M; Greg Fitzpatrick, 6-2, 205, of Central State (Ohio); Marvin Bright, 6-1 1/2, 195, of Delaware State; Darrell Hall, 6-0 1/2, 195, of Winston-Salem, and Willie Thomas, 5-11 1/2, 189, of Alcorn State.

Another lingering question: What about Earl Harvey, the 6-1, 192-pound quarterback from North Carolina Central who passed for 10,621 yards and 86 touchdowns in his career. "He's raw, needs refining," Buchsbaum said.

Said Razzano: "I saw him play against Sacramento State (in a playoff game). He threw a tight spiral. He has a good arm. He threw for about 10,000 yards (in his career). With work, he could be a decent backup. He just needs to go to a team with the patience to work with him."

Other players who may have a chance to be drafted or sign as free agents are: Ricky Warren, 6-4 1/2, 295, tackle, Grambling State; Jeff Hunter, defensive end, 6-4, 265, Grambling; Greg Ross, 6-1 1/2, 215, fullback, of Langston; Bryan Tobey, 6-0 1/2, 240, fullback, of Grambling (he gained 769 yards as a senior); Richie Crosby, 6-1 1/4, 202, wide receiver, of Grambling (he caught 26 passes for 577 yards and nine TDs in '88); Lybrant Robinson, 6-4, 228, defensive end, of Delaware State; Charles Jackson, 6-4 1/4, 291, defensive tackle, Jackson State; David Ammons, 6-1 1/2, 279, defensive tackle, South Carolina State; Robert Presbury, 6-2, 265, defensive tackle, Delaware State; Greg Harris, 6-4 1/2, 229, linebacker, Hampton; Donny Williams, 6-1, 222, linebacker, Clark, and Vaughn Wilson, 6-3, 202, punter, Florida A&M.

-- G.D. Clay

Tillman could be the 'steal' of the '89 NFL draft

Is Lewis Tillman on the draft bubble?

He's been the SWAC Offensive Player of the Year two consecutive seasons. He played well in the Blue-Gray and East-West Shrine all-star games.

But then those qualifying phrases pop up. Such as -- he's tough, but he doesn't have stopwatch speed. He will average 7 yards a carry, but he won't break one for 60. He has running ability, but he caught only nine passes his last three seasons.

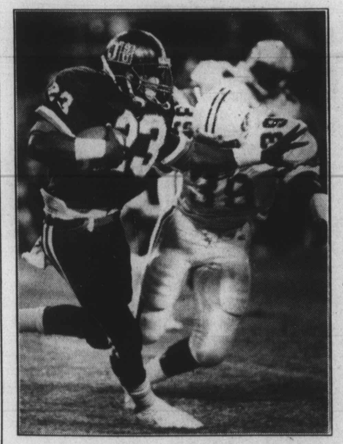

Photo by J.D. Schwalm

Lewis Tillman

Most fans of the SWAC, as well as those of predominantly black college football programs in general, probably expect him to be a first-round draft pick. Or, at least, the first player taken from a predominantly black school.

But chances are, it won't happen. It should be noted that few critics are saying Tillman's chances of making the NFL are slim, but the key questions are, where will he be drafted, can he start, and, just how good is he?

Said Brooklyn, N.Y.-based draft analyst Joel Buchsbaum, "He's 50-50 to make it in the NFL. He'll probably make a team as a backup. I don't see him starting and making an impact.

"The difference between him and Robert Massey (of N.C. Central) is that Massey hasn't reached his full potential. He's still developing. But Tillman has already gotten the max out of his ability."

According to NFL scouts and draft analysts, Tillman is 5-11, 195, runs a 4.65 to 4.7 time in the 40-yard dash. And, says Buchsbaum, "he doesn't have acceleration."

Tillman broke the Jackson State career and season rushing records previously held by Walter Payton, former Chicago Bear and future Hall of Famer. Tillman averaged 4.8 yards per carry, gained 3,989 yards and scored 33 touchdowns in his career -- including 1,388 yards and 13 touchdowns in 1988. He also was the most valuable player in the Blue-Gray All-Star Classic.

Said Green Bay Packers running backs coach Willie Peete, "One of the things I look at in running backs is when contact is made, will he make extra yardage? He did that."

Tillman also proved to be durable. Against Northwestern State, he rushed 41 times for 172 yards. Furthermore, Mel Kiper Jr., a Baltimore-based draft analyst, wrote in his "1989 Draft Report": "One area of his game that no one could ever question is his ability as a blocker. This kid really gets after people, showing an aggressive quality that has to make scouts around the NFL stand up and take notice."

But why not a first-round draft pick? Wrote Kiper: "Some may downgrade him due to the lack of stopwatch speed, making him a possible steal in rounds two to four."

A possible steal?

Said Tony Razzano, San Francisco 49ers director of college scouting: "We have him as a pretty productive guy. His 40-yard-dash time is a little deceptive. He has great hands coming out of the backfield. He's a guy who will probably go in the third round, maybe late in the second. We think he could be a solid NFL player."

The Packers' Peete asked Tillman to undergo some drills during a workout. And he came away impressed.

"Once I visited Lewis and talked to him, I had a completely different feeling about him," Peete said. "I had a good feeling about him -- the things he told me about himself. The thing that impressed me is that he already has graduated from school, and yet he was there, still working out.

"His attitude was whatever you want me to do, I'm willing to do. It wasn't one of 'Hey, let's hurry up and get this over with so I can join my friends.' "

Now, the question is, in what round will he join his friends -- as well as his rivals -- in the April draft?

-- G.D. Clay

CONTROVERSY

Prairie View gridsters are at odds with coach

Storm clouds continue to swirl over the Prairie View football program.

The Panthers finished 5-5 last season -- their best since '76 when they recorded a 6-5 record.

But in recent months, the program has been besieged with internal problems. The team went on strike for three weeks, demanding that coach Haney Catchings be replaced.

PVU players complained that Catchings isn't concerned about their education and that he conducted overly long practice sessions which included having the players participate in dangerous drills. They also charged that the coach knowingly played an ineligible athlete.

The strike was called off after an internal investigation cleared Catchings of any wrongdoing. But when spring practice started in late March, only 30 players showed up. Catchings said he had expected at least 50 for spring drills.

"I don't know if they're striking or just not going to play," said Catchings. "This makes it difficult."

Even though the Panthers lost 13 starters from last year's team -- eight on defense and five on offense -- he was anticipating improvement in the upcoming season. He says the latest developments won't alter his expectations.

"I'm going with the people we have," he said. "Football is football, blocking and tackling and catching the ball. I'm still anticipating a better season. The guys out there want to be there."

Catchings says he still doesn't know why the team initiated the strike.

"The things (they complained about), I had no control over," he said. "I haven't figured out what caused the strike and I haven't tried."

The players said Catchings withheld their books and threatened to suspend their scholarships. Catchings responded that he doesn't handle books and fees and denies conducting excessive practices, some of which, players claimed lasted for as long as six hours.

"We have one-hour film sessions and two-hour practices like all major colleges," said Catchings. "We did very few things different (from predecessor Conway Hayman). We worked a little harder, but not longer."

Catchings' future as the Panthers' coach is very iffy. Prairie View president Dr. Percy Pierre will retire on May 31. His successor might choose to replace Catchings, whose teaching contract expires Aug. 31.

However, Catchings doesn't think that there's any pressure on him.

"Pressure comes from within," he said. "People don't expect us to win, but I always expect to win."

Meanwhile, athletic director Brutus Jackson asked for and received a temporary reassignment in the wake of the investigation. Jackson's reassignment came a day after the *Houston Chronicle* reported that Jackson's daughter and son received athletic scholarships even though the daughter never played for the school and his son was sidelined for at least a year.

The *Chronicle* obtained records that showed Brutus Nolan Jackson Jr. received $5,562 and Madelyn Jackson received $1,807 in athletic scholarships over the last two years even though never played during that period.

The elder Jackson said his son received a scholarship for four years and that it was last renewed in 1987. He acknowledged that his son probably did not play after 1986.

Madelyn Jackson performed clerical work for the women's basketball team.

-- Roscoe Nance

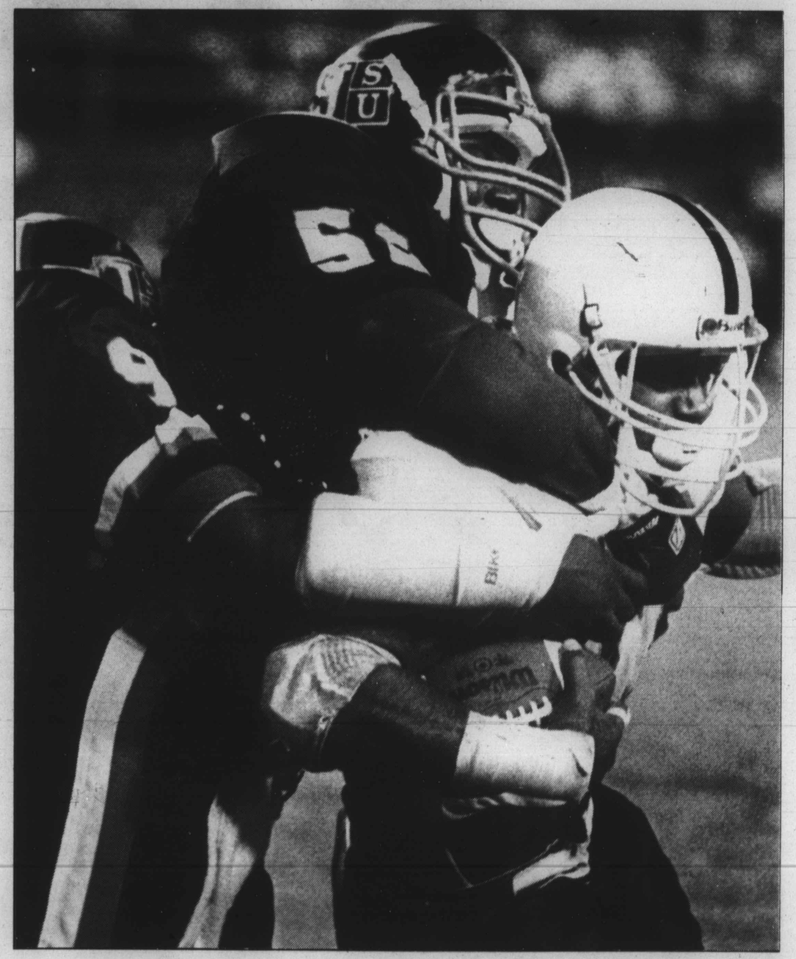

Photo by J.D. Schwalm

In '88, Prairie View turned out to be a much tougher opponent than expected, breaking even at 5-5. Lynn Bradford (with ball) was a key to the season as running back. But since spring drills started last month, only half the team showed up because there are still bad feelings between the players and coach Catchings.