

## Excerpt from Chapter Thirteen: *On to Indy*

Coaches, executives and scouts from every NFL team poured into the city of Indianapolis for the six-day extravaganza that has come to be known as the NFL Scouting Combine. Media outlets from all across the country also flooded the city along with hoards of renowned agents, up and coming agents and slick talkers who desperately wanted to be agents. Fans even gathered outside of Lucas Oil Stadium and the nearby Crown Hotel, anticipating the arrival of the top college prospects in the land. Their whitening knuckles were wrapped tightly around pens as they hoped to get a simple signature from a future NFL star. But the inclement February winds did not make anyone's time outdoors a very pleasant one. Arctic blasts seemed to rip right through the body and induce a chill that dug deep into the bone.

Many souls braved the conditions and turned Indianapolis into a budding metropolis. Some of the locals had dubbed the city 'nap town', but the city was far from sleepwalking through that week. Planes continued to touch down without an empty seat to spare. 'No Vacancy' was a common phrase uttered by many hotel receptionists throughout the city and taxicabs couldn't seem to kick people out fast enough. As soon as one passenger would set foot on the curb, there was another waiting to escape the icy backdrop that was Indianapolis.

On one of the 747's that was taxiing down a jetway at Indianapolis International Airport, there sat a man who had just endured a very uncomfortable flight. That was mainly due to the little room he had, thanks in part to the 6-foot-7, 310 pound Lydon Murtha who sat next to him. Coach seats were not built for someone of Lydon's size. Since Lydon had not yet signed a NFL contract, the extra space that comes with a first class seat was way out of his reach. The NFL did not feel the need to ante up and purchase a first class ticket for its Combine invitees. However, it wasn't the last time during that week when the NFL would impose quite a bit of discomfort on the players.

Having the luxury of more leg room was the furthest thing from Lydon's mind. Less than a month ago, Lydon could only hope for an invitation to the Combine. By some stroke of luck, that hope had turned into a reality. And now, Lydon finally had the opportunity to make his dream come true.

As Lydon collected his luggage and found the car that would take him directly to the players' hotel, he didn't entertain thoughts of playing in the NFL. All he could think about was doing well at the Combine. The more those thoughts raced through his head, the more nervous he grew. Inside the massive individual who exuded such mammoth strength was just a scared and nervous kid.

Shortly after Lydon checked into his room, the militant routine of

the NFL Combine began. He immediately reported to orientation with the rest of the offensive linemen. Once that orientation was over, the players were shuttled to a variety of nearby hospitals. There, x-rays were administered to knees, shoulders, backs and feet. CAT Scans and MRI's served as sort of a welcome mat for these wide-eyed young men. That process took quite a while as players were forced to spend a good portion of the day in a place they so desperately tried to avoid.

It wasn't long after Lydon left the hospital that the interview process began. Teams were allowed to interview players for a fifteen-minute period and, in some cases, they would return for a follow-up interview the next day. But the interviews differed a bit from the ones at the all-star games. Now, it wasn't just scouts interviewing the players. Head coaches and GM's often sat in on many of the interview sessions.

"The interviews are always one of the most interesting parts of the Combine," said New England Patriots head coach Bill Belichick. "I never thought and I don't think you can analyze a player in a ten-minute interview. That's stretching it. But I find it interesting to see where some of these kids come from, what their background is, who's important to them in their life, what situations they've been through that kind of shape the way that they are; the way they approach the game and things like that. I find that very interesting."

Lydon had been through his share of interviews during the week he spent at the Texas vs. The Nation game, so he thought he knew what to expect. Knowing full well that the players would be adequately prepared, coaches purposely switched up some of the questioning.

New York Giants head coach Tom Coughlin noted, "Part of the challenge for us is we try not to ask the right down the middle questions. There aren't as many fastballs now as there are curves."