



by Joe Bryant

A Twisted Look at the Offseason...

I wrote the first Random Shots column some 10 years ago with no greater purpose than to relieve the pressure inside my head. There were simply too many (mostly useless) thoughts banging into each other. Most were generated from watching 16 hours of football every Sunday. It was blogging back before blogging was a word. (It is a word, right?)

The interesting thing to me was that as I published the column each week, I started receiving lots of replies back along the lines of “I can’t believe you saw that?” I thought I was the only one that thought that was weird, funny, stupid or just generally “out there.” Pretty soon, it sort of took on a life of its own and I had people tell me they were watching games looking for “Random Shots moments.” Even with the stalker factor bumping the redline, it was kind of nice knowing I wasn’t the only guy thinking these things.

From there, we went to an every-week feature during the season and never looked back. This year, I wanted to do some of the same sort of thing taking a look at some of the goofy things we’ve seen since the regular season ended. So here goes.

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■ The Cowboys have finally decided on a name for their new stadium: “Cowboys Stadium”. I wonder how long it took them to come up with that gem. I guess it sounds better than the more accurate “let’s just use a generic name to serve as a placeholder until Jerry can land the overpaying ego crazed corporate whale”.

■ Matt Millen: Further proof that no matter how miserably one fails, there’s always TV to fall back on. If Millen can land a job with NBC, Ryan Leaf should be a Sports Center anchor.

■ **Lawrence Taylor on Dancing with the Stars. That was pretty**

uncomfortable on multiple levels.

■ Every NFL player has a ridiculously short window of time to produce. But wide receivers seem to fall especially fast. Terry Glenn was a solid player in 2006 with six TDs and 1,058 yards. Three years later he’s reportedly naked wandering the hotel halls before being busted on marijuana possession. No confirmation on the rumor Jimmy Smith and Matt Jones were following him to Jamal Anderson’s room. Things move fast.

■ **The Lions have a logo that is more fierce. I’m sure that’ll solve all**



their problems.

■ 49ers coach Mike Singletary is a dream for a guy like me that writes goofy things about football. With Jon Gruden off the field and into the booth, we need a guy like Singletary. This off-season, he was asked by a group of fans about his commitment to smash mouth football. Singletary summed up his philosophy saying that he wanted his team to be “Physical with an F.” You gotta like that.

■ I like Brian Allee-Walsh of The New Orleans Times-Picayune paper. But typing all that for a source seems like a lot of letters and too many hyphens. Sorry, this is the kind of thing I worry about.

■ Dallas Owner Jerry Jones put a gag order on all Cowboy officials and coaches at the NFL Combine in Indianapolis this spring. He was extremely clear that no one would be allowed to speak to reporters on any subject. Jones said, “The way to clear that (problem) up, because I’m the one who knows, is we get together and we all say it, so everybody hears it, at the same time. So we can find a way to cut back on some of this misinformation.”

Translation: Nobody gets to talk but me.

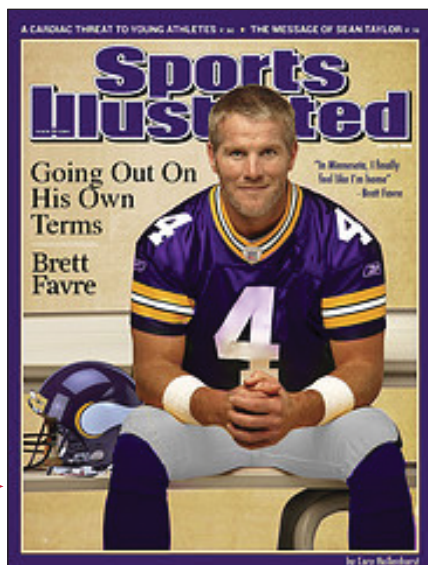
■ Daniel Kaplan of the Sports Business Journal reported in February that the NFL paid former commissioner Paul Tagliabue \$3.6 million in the 12-month period ending last March 31, even though Tagliabue had resigned in August of 2006. It’s assumed it was for a consulting role. Nice work if you can get it.

■ I’m not a guy that spends a lot of time worrying about the feelings of NFL athletes. But I seriously feel sort of bad for Sage Rosenfels and Tarvaris Jackson. Have two quarterbacks ever been forgotten more quickly? Granted,



they haven't done a whole lot to make us remember them but c'mon people.

■ On that subject, as I type this on May 18, Brett Favre is still very much retired. His agent Bus Cook said yesterday there was "no substance" to the speculation that Favre would play again. The word just came out today that Favre is scheduled for surgery with Dr. Andrews in Birmingham.



■ With that scant bit of information, my prediction for Favre in 2009 is simple: He returns as the Minnesota Vikings starting QB, breaks Jim Marshall's consecutive starts record in a Vikings uniform (which will be enough to melt every power line in Bristol, CT) and finishes the year as the 14th-best fantasy QB in the league leading the Vikings to a 10-6 record again. For a bonus prediction, he wins the Nov. 1 game in Lambeau with a last-second game-winning TD pass and does a Randy Moss-style moon shot by the goal post while Ted Thompson's head explodes.

■ Hats off to the folks at Deadspin for pulling this one up from the archives: New ESPN employee Jon Gruden had some not too flattering words for ESPN back in 2007 when an ESPN report suggested Tampa QB Bruce Gradkowski might be involved with a point shaving situation at the University of Toledo. (Gradkowski was never accused of any wrongdoing). Gruden said this at the time, "I don't watch ESPN. I don't believe half the f***** people on the channel, personally – no disrespect. But if Bruce Gradkowski is throwing games in Toledo, how in the hell does he lead the NCAA in passing percentages? That

is a crock. You know, these reports make me sick – really. I don't believe [there is] any truth to it, and I'll go to my grave believing that. I hope ESPN 3 or 4 has real sources behind this story, because it has nothing to do with the kid. He's a great kid. He wants to be great. This is very uncharacteristic, in my opinion, of 'professional' journalism."

I'm sure they've worked through all that now though. They wanted a guy that speaks directly. I think they've found one in Gruden. Very interested to see how this plays out.

■ You people talking about having the Super Bowl in London, just stop it. Right now.

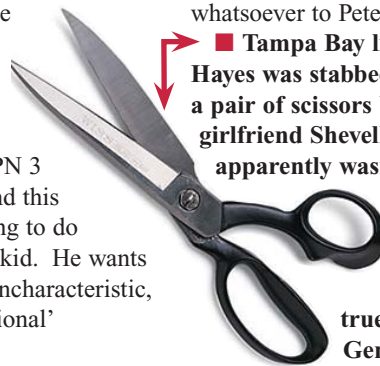
49ers linebacker Jeff Ulbrich is doing what he has to do in order to earn a roster spot on the team. The ten-year veteran recently accepted a pay cut from \$2.23 million to \$950,000 for this season. "I was getting paid too much for what I'd be contributing," he said. You don't see a lot of that.

■ New Cleveland coach Eric Mangini got off to a rough start with defensive tackle Shaun Rogers. According to Adam Schefter writing for NFL.com, Rogers was so upset, he asked the Browns not to pick up the \$6 million option-bonus payment due to him. Schefter wrote that Rogers would rather be released after one season with the Browns, despite still being owed another \$15 million in guaranteed money.

■ The heinous offense committed by Mangini that would make Rogers feel like this? Mangini walked into the Browns training room and failed to say hello to Rogers. AND, they later were at a charity function where both men were in the green room and neither said hello to each other. I don't make these up.

■ Note to Seattle DB Jordan Babineaux: Move over. Your reign as longest name on the team is officially over now that Mr. Houshmandzadeh is in town.

■ There was a heartwarming story in the Globe Gazette about how Minnesota RB Adrian Peterson was donating close to \$150,000 to keep the Northern Iowa Area Community College football program alive. Smiles all around. Except for the fact that Peterson had never said anything like that and the story was a case of misunderstanding with no fault



whatsoever to Peterson. Ouch.

■ Tampa Bay linebacker Geno Hayes was stabbed in the head with a pair of scissors by his 19-year old girlfriend Shevelle Bagley. That apparently wasn't enough, and Bagley went back and stabbed Hayes in the neck with a knife. I understand true love and all, but Geno, you're an NFL player. You've got a

pretty large pool to fish in when it comes to finding a girlfriend. I've got to believe you can find one that won't stab you in the head with scissors.

■ Terrell Owens in Buffalo is going to be fun. He showed up for voluntary workouts today. And they gave him the key to the city. Sweet. Owens had this gem at the press conference when he signed, "I beat to my own beat." I love me some T.O.

■ Rapper Eminem says that Tony Romo is one of his favorite quarterbacks. So at least Romo has that going for him.

■ Everyone pretty much agrees that the rookie pay scale is out whack. But in a system where Kellen Winslow is the highest-paid TE in the history of the game, I'm not sure it's working any better for the veterans.

■ The Dolphins are looking to rename their stadium Land Shark Stadium. I wish I were joking.

■ President Barack Obama invited the Super Bowl Champion Pittsburgh Steelers to the White House. NFL Defensive MVP James Harrison declined. Harrison had this nugget on why he didn't want to go: "This is how I feel. If you want to see the Pittsburgh Steelers, invite us when we don't win the Super Bowl. As far as I'm concerned, he (Obama) would've invited Arizona if they had won," said Harrison. Yes, I think that's pretty much how it works, James.

And on that note, we'll head towards Week 1 of another season of which I've no doubt will be chock full of enough Random Shots to keep me busy all year. If you see one during the game, shoot it to me at Bryant@Footballguys.com. Thanks for reading and I hope you have a gas with whatever you're doing in life. Here's to Football.

J