

Cowboys pass on Manziel, take OL from Notre Dame

Written by Administrator
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IRVING, Texas (AP) — If Zack Martin is forever known as the player the Dallas Cowboys drafted instead of Johnny Manziel, the Notre Dame offensive tackle is fine with it.

"I can live up to that," Martin said Thursday night a few minutes after the Cowboys took him with the 16th pick in the first round of the NFL draft.

With anticipation growing that Cowboys owner and general manager Jerry Jones wouldn't be able to pass on the flashy former Heisman Trophy winner from Texas A&M, Dallas instead went with an offensive lineman in the first round for the second straight year — and third time in the past four drafts.

Jones said college football's most exciting player was never really a consideration. The Cowboys used most of their 10 minutes considering offers to trade down.

"There's no way any quarterback comes in here and beats out Tony Romo," Jones said. "As you well know in here, Romo is by contract as well as by commitment is going to be the quarterback for the Cowboys for several years to come. There's no moving around it. I don't care who you draft."

Instead of his potential replacement joining the roster, the 34-year-old Romo gets another piece to protect a back that underwent two surgeries last season. The latter was for a herniated disk sustained against Washington that knocked Romo out of the playoff-or-bust loss to Philadelphia in the season finale.

Jones took Martin a year after trading down 13 spots to No. 31 and getting center Travis Frederick, later explaining the strategy as wanting to get an "extra half-second" for Romo to throw. Frederick started all 16 games as a rookie.

The Cowboys stayed put this time, just as they did in 2011 when they drafted ninth and took left tackle Tyron Smith, who has played 47 of 48 games in his career — all as a starter.

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"Can't wait to learn under those veterans and learn how to be a pro and go into battle with them each week," said Martin, who holds a Notre Dame record with 52 consecutive starts.

Jones said he was surprised Manziel was still around — he eventually went at No. 22 to Cleveland. And the Cowboys owner was equally surprised that the prospect of getting Manziel didn't lead to a "bonanza" of trade offers.

The marketing-savvy Jones turned down a chance to get Manziel under one of the biggest brands in sports — in his home state, no less — without so much as a second glance. Or so he said.

"The idea of flair, flash, show business, all that kind of thing was never a consideration and we never discussed that type of thing," Jones said.

The Cowboys figure to start 2014 with three first-round picks in their starting offensive line, which has been a rebuilding project throughout Jason Garrett's four drafts as coach.

"You look at the best teams in the league now and for a lot of years, they're able to control the line of scrimmage on the offensive side of the ball," Garrett said. "We did that for years here when we won championships in the '90s. You need to build the infrastructure of your team. We feel like we've got a great start with that."

Martin was a tackle with the Irish but could see time at guard with the Cowboys. Doug Free is the starter at right tackle and was better in 2013 after having a rough season a year earlier. Ron Leary and Mackenzy Bernadeau were the starting guards, but neither has a stranglehold on the job.

Martin was the fourth player on the Cowboys' primary list of targets behind three defensive players — Pittsburgh defensive tackle Aaron Donald and linebackers Anthony Barr of UCLA and Ryan Shazier of Ohio State. All three were gone by the time Dallas picked.

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The Cowboys figure to turn their attention to the defensive line at some point in the draft. They are revamping their front four after releasing franchise sacks leader DeMarcus Ware in a salary-cap move following the worst season of his nine-year career.

Dallas re-signed defensive end Anthony Spencer, but he missed 15 games last season with a left knee injury. The Cowboys added three other defensive linemen in free agents Henry Melton, Jeremy Mincey and Terrell McClain.

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