

For Cowboys, draft all about numbers on defense

Written by Administrator
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IRVING, Texas (AP) — For all the talk about no Johnny Manziel and yet another offensive lineman taken in the first round, the draft for the Dallas Cowboys ultimately came down to defense.

Or more specifically, a defensive line that owner and general manager Jerry Jones thought was in serious trouble at the end of a fourth straight year without a trip to the playoffs in 2013.

"This time last year, we didn't expect to have happen what we had happen with attrition and injury and one or two other things in our defensive line," Jones said Saturday after the Cowboys finished the draft with seven of nine players on defense. "You all were a party to and witnessed a team that just flat was bankrupt in the defensive line last year."

While Jones passed on Manziel to take Notre Dame offensive tackle Zack Martin at No. 16 in the first round, the most expensive selection was Boise State defensive end Demarcus Lawrence. The Cowboys vacated the third round to move up 13 spots in the second, grabbing Lawrence near the top of that round at No. 34 overall.

Jones acknowledged that the Cowboys overpaid NFC East rival Washington in the trade. But after releasing franchise sacks leader DeMarcus Ware and believing Lawrence was the last player on their board capable of anything resembling the seven-time Pro Bowler, Dallas felt the need for a bold move.

The Cowboys ended up taking two more defensive linemen in Stanford's Ben Gardner and Ken Bishop of Northern Illinois. Both were among five defensive players taken in the seventh round.

Along with free agents Henry Melton, Terrell McClain and Jeremy Mincey, the Cowboys are flooding the front four with plenty of options after finishing last in the league in total defense last year. There are now 16 defensive linemen on the roster.

"I thought our team did a really good job dealing with the different injuries, bringing guys in,"

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coach Jason Garrett said of the 2013 season. "But that's not the way you want to operate. You don't want to bring guys in on Wednesday and they play 30 snaps on Sunday. And we did that over and over and over again."

The Cowboys started the final day by taking Iowa linebacker Anthony Hitchens with the 119th overall pick in the fourth round, looking for depth behind Sean Lee after the defensive leader missed nearly half the games over the past two seasons.

Dallas moved up again in the fifth round in a trade with Detroit and took its other offensive player in this draft, Pittsburgh wide receiver Devin Street, at No. 146.

The other defensive players taken in the seventh round were Texas Tech linebacker Will Smith (No. 238), Baylor safety Ahmad Dixon (248) and Oregon cornerback Terrance Mitchell (254).

"We weren't opposed to helping the offense," said executive vice president Stephen Jones, noting that the Cowboys had a third-round grade on Street with the Cowboys trying to replace Miles Austin after his release. "Obviously our bend when we came into the draft was to help the defense and obviously we took a lot of picks and did well there."

By getting Martin, the Cowboys took an offensive lineman in the first round for the third time in four years. And Stephen Jones said they almost had a deal that would have given them the third-round pick they surrendered in the deal for Lawrence and another blocker with 34-year-old Tony Romo coming off two back surgeries.

Ultimately, the seventh round said it all — five picks, five defenders.

"The obvious is the obvious," Jerry Jones said. "We were trying to emphasize defense in terms of numbers."