



FMIA: A Peek Inside The Journal Of Aidan Hutchinson, And What We Learned At NFL Scouting Combine

10 Things I Think I Think

1. I think I wanted to give you flavor of what it's like to be at the combine, and I thought the well-plugged-in [Peter Schrage](#) of NFL Network and Fox Sports would be a good guide. In Schrage's words...

Working on the NFL Network's morning show 'Good Morning Football,' I maximized my time in Indy and had time with 15 or so general managers, execs and coaches. Three nuggets from my week:

- Rams COO Kevin Demoff was in Indianapolis for less than 24 hours. We had the bold thought of meeting for lunch outside the convenient Combine bubble. We walked twenty minutes away and hit BRU BURGER, and we didn't run into one assistant coach, didn't see one NFL logo, and had salads and shared a plate of nachos. The one thing I took out of it was how excited the entire organization is over the hiring of Liam Coen as the new offensive coordinator. Coen was with the Rams from 2018 to 2020, left for a year to call plays at Kentucky, and is now returning to L.A. Wondering if the Rams are wallowing after losing eight coaches? Don't be fooled. They're happy for the guys moving on, energized by the new crop coming in.

- It's always amazing to me when folks who've been in the league for a long time don't necessarily know each other well. When I met Broncos coach Nathaniel Hackett for a coffee, Bills GM Brandon Beane walked in with his Aunt Patti, a native of Carmel. Within seconds of handshakes and hugs, I realize Hackett and Beane were strangers. I introduced them, they hit it off, and within minutes, Aunt Patti's daughter and son in law were posing for a photo with Brandon. Hackett was the photographer. Awesome.

- Coaches and GMs have agents too. Bob Lamonte has been one of the best for decades. Every year, he has a setup in the back corner of the steakhouse Prime 47, with an open tab, for all his clients to come pop in for a hello. It ends up being a giant melting pot of coaches, GMs, media folks, and everything in between. I popped over one early afternoon and was pleased to meet Colts special teams coordinator Bubba Ventrone for the first time. Ventrone was the star of the in-season version of "Hard Knocks," leading meetings and getting me ready to run through a wall every Tuesday night. A former player, he was great to hang with and has countless stories. As I was BS'ing with him at "Lamontapalooza," Chiefs GM Brett Veach swung by, noting he and Andy Reid were going to the Butler-Villanova game in a few days, and asked if we wanted to join. Ventrone, a Villanova alum, chimed in to say the 'Cats would be winning that game. We did not attend. The Wildcats did win.

2. I think, at 64, I'll recover from the Combine experience by Friday. Yikes. That is some sleep-deprivation period there.

3. I think this was my Thursday, to illustrate what a day in the life of the Combine is for reporter types:

7:15 a.m.: Chargers coach Brandon Staley in his hotel lobby

8:05 a.m.: Bears GM Ryan Poles at his hotel

8:45 a.m.: PFF founder Neil Hornsby, breakfast, Café Patachou

10 a.m.: Rams COO Kevin Demoff, Kaffeine Coffee Co., coffee

11:35 a.m. Panthers coach Matt Rhule/ESPN college football reporter Pete Thamel, lunch, Café Patachou

1 p.m.: Bears coach Matt Eberflus at his hotel

2 p.m.: Vikings coach Kevin O'Connell at his hotel

2:45 p.m.: Raiders coach Josh McDaniels at his hotel

4:15 p.m.: Meeting with AFC team PR person to discuss future plan

5 p.m. Leave hotel for fundraiser with other NFL media

5:30-7 p.m. Fundraiser for Teachers' Treasures at Sun King Brewing, downtown Indianapolis

10:25 p.m.: Meeting with NFL GM in his room after evening workouts/meetings

11:55 p.m.: Back in room at JW Marriott. Sleep

4. I think that is a crazy time, obviously, but it's the combine. I've grown to love it. Time stops, and you just dive into the job.

5. I think the player that seems most interesting to me high in the draft is Cincinnati cornerback Sauce Gardner. He's a 6-3 corner who never allowed a touchdown in his last three years of coverage, in 1,100 snaps. He'll need to bulk up a little, but a 4.4.1-in-the-40 corner that size is special, and he'll certainly go in the top eight or 10. Deservedly.

6. I think the best line I heard at the combine was this from Chargers coach Brandon Staley. When he got home from the heartbreaking Week 18 loss to the Raiders, he and his wife both got Covid. His three children had to stay home from school while the Covid dissipated, and that meant 10 days at home with three fired-up boys. The loss, and the Covid, and the packed house ... "Talk about adding insult to injury," Staley said. "Lot of friction in the Staley household then."

7. I think Brian Griese-to-San Francisco-as-QB-coach looks stunning, unless you consider three things: The writing was on the wall for Griese regarding the "Monday Night Football" gig after the hiring of Troy Aikman to do color. He was not going to be back in 2022 ... Griese, a Michigan quarterback, was drafted 91st overall by Denver coach Mike Shanahan in 1998 ... Griese played quarterback for Tampa in 2004 and 2005, and one of his coaches was a quality-control guy on offense, Kyle Shanahan. So, as the Niners try to move past losing QB coach Rich Scangarello to Kentucky as offensive coordinator, Griese takes his first job in coaching with a very familiar head man.

8. I think the best thing that has happened to the Buffalo Bills this year, at least off the field, was the ascension of Kathy Hochul to governor in the wake of the resignation of Gov. Andrew Cuomo. She's a western New Yorker, and she wants to assure a long-term home for the Bills. That's a big reason why the Bills should have a new stadium in Buffalo, and soon.

9. I think one of the things I love about the combine is talking to so many young writers, so many media folk hungry to be good. People like Tom Pelissero, Jeff Darlington, Stephen Holder, Tashan Reed, Kaelen Jones, Josh Tolentino, Jori Epstein, Safid Deen, Kalyn Kahler, Chad Reuter. This business is in great shape.

10. I think these are my other thoughts of the week: