

Make-A-Wish Colorado's Sporting Affair

By Joanne Davidson

Denver Post

April 1, 2017

Schwachman-Diamond syndrome is a rare genetic disorder affecting bone marrow, the pancreas and skeletal system, believed to occur in only one of every 75,000 people.

Olympic figure skater Scott Hamilton, who has also survived brain and testicular cancer, was diagnosed with it as a child.

Three Colorado siblings who also have Schwachman-syndrome — 16-year-old Ethan, 13-year-old Adrianna and 8-year-old Sadie — were the special guests when Make-A-Wish Colorado hosted its 11th annual Sporting Affair.

Mistress of ceremonies Amelia Earhart of 9News introduced the youngsters to guests attending this dinner and auction held at Wings Over the Rockies Air & Space Museum.

She also shared the happy news that each of them will soon experience a dream come true, thanks to Make-A-Wish Colorado.

Ethan will travel to New York, where he will see the award-winning musical "Hamilton." Sadie will get a behind-the-scenes experience at a kids' baking championship, and Arianna will get to snorkel and swim with dolphins when her family visits Hawaii.

Sporting Affair 2017 raised \$260,000, money that will be used to grant wishes to other Colorado children experiencing life-threatening medical conditions.

Sports figures serving as table hosts for the fundraiser included figure skater Max Aaron; former Denver Broncos Mark Schlereth, Billy Thompson, Mark Jackson and Larry Brunson; Colorado Mammoth defenseman Josh Sullivan and goalie Dillon Ward; Team USA swimmer Roderick Sewell; Kara Cannizzaro, head coach of the Valor Christian High School girls lacrosse team; Bandimere Speedway's Beth Bandimere; and drag racer Tommy Johnson Jr.

Abandoned NFL cities have old stadium debt, new outlooks

By Brent Schrotenboer

USA Today

April 1, 2017

Oakland, St. Louis and San Diego all share a heavy burden these days -- and it's not just the grief of recently losing their NFL teams to other cities.

They also have about \$220 million in combined public debt stemming from stadium and facilities construction for those same cut-and-run Raiders, Rams and Chargers. Governments for each market effectively decided to throw public money at them in the 1990s, hoping to lure or keep those teams in town with new or upgraded buildings that cost around \$570 million combined.

All three teams are now gone or leaving soon. But that debt load will haunt taxpayers into the next decade. Those old stadiums also will have to be redefined -- or possibly torn down -- along with a sudden change of identity for each sports town. A breakdown:

In Oakland

The 51-year-old Oakland Coliseum is the last stadium still housing both an NFL and Major League Baseball team, the Raiders and A's. That will soon change.

The Raiders will play at Coliseum for at least one or two more seasons before moving to a new \$1.9 billion domed NFL home in Las Vegas in 2020 -- a move that was approved by the NFL on Monday.

In 2019, the NBA's Golden State Warriors also are scheduled to move across the Bay to a new arena in San Francisco.

That will leave leaves the A's as the last big-league team in Oakland.

"We'd like to see the Raiders to stay, but it's not really our choice," A's President Dave Kaval told USA TODAY Sports. "We're just a member of the community like everyone else. We're going to build our own ballpark in Oakland and open it to great fanfare."

The team previously had looked at leaving Oakland but committed to stay and is expected to pick a location for a ballpark there later this year. Its lease at the Coliseum runs through 2024.

Kaval calls it a 100-year decision and says the East Bay, which includes Oakland, has the "best fan base in all of professional sports."

As taxpayers, many of those fans are helping pay about \$90 million in debt left on the Coliseum stemming from a \$200 million renovation that helped lure the Raiders to move back to Oakland from Los Angeles in 1995. When the Raiders leave, possibly by 2019, the Coliseum's fall schedule will be opened up for other events such as concerts, said Scott McKibben, executive director of the Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum Authority.

In St. Louis

The city still has its beloved baseball Cardinals and hockey Blues. But taxpayers also still have the former home of the Rams: the old Edward Jones Dome, which has about \$85 million left in debt for the city, county and state, according to St. Louis officials.

The dome opened in 1995 at a cost of about \$300 million. Twenty-one years later, the Rams left last year for Los Angeles, where they are building a privately financed \$2.6 billion stadium to be shared with the relocated San Diego Chargers.

In the NFL's absence, the dome has done better financially, said Kitty Ratcliffe, the president of the St. Louis Convention & Visitors Commission, which operates the dome. She said the dome lost around \$400,000 in a year of Rams games but generally can gain about that much with a single big concert.

Last September, for example, the dome hosted a Beyonce concert that would not have been possible if the Rams were still there. The dome is part of a convention center complex that can host a wide array of events year-round. She said there are no plans to tear it down.

"It's better for the community overall to be able to use the facility for other events that generate a lot more economic activity," Ratcliffe told USA TODAY Sports.

A new stadium – for soccer – might help them get over their loss. On April 4, St. Louis voters will decide whether to provide \$60 million in public funding to help build a Major League Soccer stadium. If it's approved, the city might gain an expansion team in the MLS.

"St. Louis never really has been defined by a football team," Ratcliffe said. "It's not who we are. It's one of the many things that citizens in our community enjoyed, but that's all."

In San Diego

It is the eighth-largest city in the U.S. but the only city to have lost an NFL team and two NBA teams — the Rockets and Clippers. The departure of the Chargers after 56 years means San Diego also currently is the only metro area to have a Major League Baseball team (the Padres) but no NFL, NBA or NHL counterpart.

And that's just fine for many residents here, where the beaches, mountains and desert outshine spectator sports. In November, about 56% of San Diego voters rejected a Chargers stadium plan that would have raised taxes on hotel rooms to help pay for a \$1.8 billion Chargers' stadium and convention center downtown.

After the Chargers then decided to leave for Los Angeles, the city of San Diego has been considering the fate of the Chargers' old home: 50-year-old Qualcomm Stadium, which is owned by the city and has cost around \$12 million per year for the city to maintain. San Diego State's football team and the college football Holiday Bowl have leases to use the stadium through 2018.

“Given the high cost to the city’s operating budget, the city is undergoing review of the financial feasibility of continuing stadium operations beyond that point,” said Craig Gustafson, spokesman for San Diego Mayor Kevin Faulconer.

Those costs are in addition to about \$47 million owed on Chargers-related debt that the city is scheduled to pay through 2027, including about \$10 million in interest, Gustafson said. In the 1990s, the city had borrowed around \$68 million for stadium renovations and Chargers practice facility construction to help keep the team from leaving.

The good news for taxpayers is that the Chargers had to pay the city \$12.6 million to break their lease this year in San Diego – money that can be put toward the city’s \$4.7 million annual payments on that Chargers-related debt. “That will free up \$4.7 million in the budget for other purposes,” Gustafson said.

Meanwhile, given the uncertainty of the old stadium’s future, the Holiday Bowl has explored moving across town to Petco Park, home of the Padres – a facility not designed for football. The Poinsettia Bowl, a lower-tier postseason game, was canceled this year after 12 years.

San Diego State's football team also is seeking a new permanent home, which might be in a new soccer stadium at the old Qualcomm Stadium site – or not. An investment group has proposed redeveloping that site with a privately funded 30,000-seat soccer stadium, with hopes of landing an expansion team in Major League Soccer. The soccer stadium decision might be decided by city council, or voters, later this year.

Philip Rivers explains why Von Miller will be one of the best defenders in NFL history

By Cameron DaSilva

FoxSports.com

April 1, 2017

Denver Broncos pass rusher Von Miller has been one of the best defensive players in the league since he was drafted second overall in 2011. He has 73.5 sacks, 19 forced fumbles and a Super Bowl MVP to his name already, and he's just six seasons into his career.

If he continues on this path, he could easily be one of the best pass rushers the game has ever seen. Philip Rivers, however, took that idea a step further. The Los Angeles Chargers quarterback believes Miller will be one of the best defensive players to ever step foot on an NFL field.

"I think what makes him unique, too, is he's not just a speed guy. Against us over the years, I've grown to respect his every-down ability. He's not a pass-rusher. He is a football player. He stops the run, he plays hard every snap. He can wreck the game with his pass rush. And he'll go down one day as one of the best defensive players to play," Rivers said

Rivers is familiar with Miller's game, having played against him in the AFC West all these years. Miller has gotten to Rivers off the edge 13 times – more than any other quarterback, actually – so he knows how difficult it is to avoid No. 58.

And it's not just against the pass where Miller excels. He can wreck the run game, too.

"Each week when you play a team, you circle a guy that you say, 'This guy can ruin the football game.' And he's a guy that gets circled twice a year every time we play him," Rivers said. "He really can ruin a game because of his ability to sack-fumble. He plays the run very well. We've had some words in the past, and he's gotten some good shots on me in the past, but he's one of those guys you respect and a guy you'd love if he's on your side. You love going against the best and he definitely is that."

Rivers will probably be facing Miller twice a year for the remainder of his career because it doesn't seem like either player is in danger of leaving his team any time soon.

2017 NFL Mock Draft: Jaguars, Eagles and Colts all snag new backfield weapons

By Jared Dubin
CBSSports.com
April 1, 2017

We're another week deep into free agency and the shape of each NFL team's roster is becoming more clear. Needs are coming into focus, not only for 2017 but for the years to come.

Changes throughout the league always affect the draft board, and this week is no different.

Scroll on down for Mock Draft 7.0.

1. Cleveland Browns

Myles Garrett, DE/OLB, Texas A&M: Myles Garrett, wildly productive athletic monster, is the slam-dunk No. 1 pick.

2. San Francisco 49ers

Solomon Thomas, DE, Stanford: There is too much noise around Thomas-to-San Francisco right now for this not to be the selection. Throw him on the same defensive line as Arik Armstead and DeForest Buckner and watch them all make plays.

3. Chicago Bears

Marshon Lattimore, CB, Ohio State: Signing Prince Amukamara was a nice start, but the Bears still need more in the secondary, especially as they attempt to build their defense beyond the 2017 season.

4. Jacksonville Jaguars

Leonard Fournette, RB, LSU: The Jags went out and spent a ton of money on their defense (again). Here, they give the offense some balance by dropping Fournette into the backfield beside Blake Bortles, who already has talented receivers on the outside.

5. Tennessee Titans (from L.A. Rams)

Jamal Adams, SS, LSU: The Titans need help in the defensive backfield more than anywhere else. Adams is maybe the best back-end playmaker in this draft, and well worth a top-five selection.

6. New York Jets

Deshaun Watson, QB, Clemson: Todd Bowles might not want to publicly acknowledge that his team is rebuilding, but it is. You can't move forward in the NFL without an answer at quarterback, and it should be eminently clear that none of Josh McCown, Christian Hackenberg or Bryce Petty is that answer. Take Watson and mold your offense around his strengths.

7. Los Angeles Chargers

Malik Hooker, FS, Ohio State: The bones of a really good defense are already in place in L.A. Adding Hooker to the back of the secondary would be the finishing touch.

8. Carolina Panthers

Jonathan Allen, DL, Alabama: If there's one thing Dave Gettleman has shown during his time as Carolina's GM, it's that he subscribes to the maxim that you can never have too many defensive linemen. Allen has the flexibility to move along the line of scrimmage, making him a good fit with any of the Panthers' fellow front four rushers.

9. Cincinnati Bengals

Reuben Foster, LB, Alabama: The Bengals signed Kevin Minter to play some middle linebacker, but it was only a one-year deal. Second-level defensive help is still a long-term need, and the Bengals have not been afraid to draft a big talent at a position that already looks filled. (See: tackle.)

10. Buffalo Bills

Corey Davis, WR, Western Michigan: Davis has prototypical size at 6-feet-3 and 209 pounds, and he blazed to a 4.48 40-yard dash last summer. (He hasn't run during draft evaluations due to injury.) Combine that with his monster numbers at Western Michigan and you have a top-10 pick at receiver.

11. New Orleans Saints

Derek Barnett, DE, Tennessee: For the millionth year in a row, the Saints need to invest heavily in defense. Barnett is Step 1.

12. Cleveland Browns (from Philadelphia)

Mitch Trubisky, QB, North Carolina: With Trubisky still on the board, the Browns get foundational players on both offense and defense.

13. Arizona Cardinals

Patrick Mahomes, QB, Texas Tech: We've had DeShone Kizer here for the past couple weeks, but after further consideration, Mahomes seems like a better fit for Bruce Arians. His arm strength and velocity make him a good candidate to run Arians' vertical-heavy offense.

14. Philadelphia Eagles (from Minnesota)

Christian McCaffrey, RB, Stanford: The Eagles spent a bunch of their free-agent money making their offense more Carson Wentz friendly. Adding a versatile weapon like McCaffrey in the draft amounts to doubling down on that effort. There are few things more important than putting your franchise quarterback in position to succeed.

15. Indianapolis Colts

Dalvin Cook, RB, Florida State: Speaking of putting your quarterback in position to succeed, it's about time the Colts gave Andrew Luck a dynamic runner in the backfield to relieve some of the pressure of carrying the entire offense.

16. Baltimore Ravens

Mike Williams, WR, Clemson: The Ravens have Mike Wallace to replace the departed Steve Smith, but the wide receiver corps is thin beyond that. Enter Williams, with his elite size, stickum hands and otherworldly body control.

17. Washington Redskins

Zach Cunningham, OLB, Vanderbilt: Washington needs to figure out its run defense, badly. Cunningham might help more than almost any player in the draft. He can fly around and make plays anywhere from the second level to the backfield.

18. Tennessee Titans

John Ross, WR, Washington: Ross would provide an excellent complement to Tennessee's exotic smashmouth run game, and give Marcus Mariota the field-stretching weapon he needs alongside his No. 1 target, tight end Delanie Walker, who mostly works the middle of the field.

19. Tampa Bay Buccaneers

O.J. Howard, TE, Alabama: The Bucs added DeSean Jackson to give them a deep speed complement to Mike Evans' size-and-power game. Adding Howard to the mix would make their passing attack even more dangerous.

20. Denver Broncos

David Njoku, TE, Miami (Fla.): Whoever winds up taking snaps for the Broncos next season already had a good group of wideouts to throw to, led by Demaryius Thomas and Emmanuel Sanders. Adding Njoku, who has the flexibility to line up all over and the power-speed combination to score from anywhere, would almost be unfair.

21. Detroit Lions

Taco Charlton, DE, Michigan: The Lions badly need someone that can get to the quarterback. Charlton showed during his time at Michigan that making plays in the backfield is his specialty. He increased his sack total (and tackle for loss total) with each successive season.

22. Miami Dolphins

Forrest Lamp, G, Western Kentucky: Slotting Lamp into the middle of a Miami offensive line that improved last season would go a long way toward clearing lanes for Jay Ajayi, who should continue to be the foundation of the Dolphins' offense.

23. New York Giants

Ryan Ramczyk, OT, Wisconsin: Ramczyk could slide right in at left tackle for the Giants, who need to move 2015 first-rounder Ereck Flowers back over to the right side, where they originally planned on using him before Will Beatty got hurt.

24. Oakland Raiders

Marlon Humphrey, CB, Alabama: Oakland is low on high-level cornerback talent, even though it has two solid starters. Humphrey can be a sub-package player early before eventually taking over for Sean Smith.

25. Houston Texans

DeShone Kizer, QB, Notre Dame: With the Tony Romo saga still dragging itself out, you almost have to figure the Texans look into a quarterback early. A real playoff contender, Houston can't rightly go into the season with Tom Savage atop the depth chart.

26. Seattle Seahawks

Garett Bolles, OT, Utah: Bolles lands in Seattle and kicks the recently signed Luke Joeckel inside to guard, helping Seattle fill two openings with one pick.

27. Kansas City Chiefs

Haason Reddick, LB, Temple: Reddick would be a picture-perfect fit in Kansas City, given his flexibility to play the run and the pass from all over the defensive formation. The Chiefs could use help both inside and outside at the linebacker spot, with some of their top options getting up there in age.

28. Dallas Cowboys

Obi Melifonwu, S, Connecticut: Two years ago, the Cowboys took a wildly athletic UConn defensive back (Byron Jones) late in the first round. Here, they do it again, teaming Jones and Melifonwu to form one of the most athletic safety tandems in football.

29. Green Bay Packers

T.J. Watt, OLB, Wisconsin: Watt doesn't have to move too far to find his first professional home, as the Packers add an athletic pass-rusher to a defense that started last season hot before slowing down the stretch due to injuries.

30. Pittsburgh Steelers

Jabrill Peppers, S, Michigan: Peppers is still more athlete than football player at this point, but the bet here is that the Steelers can mold the former into the latter. They've done it before.

31. Atlanta Falcons

Charles Harris, DE, Missouri: Harris would prove an excellent complement to NFL sack leader Vic Beasley.

32. New Orleans Saints (from New England)

Fabian Moreau, CB, UCLA: The Saints snagged Derek Barnett early, and now add an incredible athlete at corner to continue the makeover of their defense.

Perfect Pairs: Ideal top two draft picks for Denver Broncos

By Daniel Jeremiah and Bucky Brooks

NFL.com

April 1, 2017

Denver Broncos

Perfect draft pair: Utah OT Garrett Bolles (Round 1, pick 20); Youngstown State DE Derek Rivers (Round 2, pick 51)

Jeremiah on Bolles: Denver has to continue to address its need on the offensive line. Bolles is athletic and has a nasty, physical demeanor. They want to run the football in Denver, and Bolles can help the Broncos get it done.

Brooks on Rivers: The Broncos are looking to replace DeMarcus Ware, and Rivers can help in that effort. I'm impressed with his first-step quickness, motor and burst. He can be a terrific player off the edge.

On the Move the Sticks podcast, former NFL scouts Daniel Jeremiah and Bucky Brooks break down the latest news and action around the league from a scout's perspective, alongside NFL player personnel executives.

Holgorsen explains challenges of developing college quarterbacks

By Mike Florio
Pro Football Talk
April 1, 2017

The most important position in the NFL also has become the toughest to properly evaluate. Friday's PFT Live included a visit with one of the men who develop quarterbacks at the college level for consideration and employment by pro football teams.

West Virginia coach Dana Holgorsen explained the challenges of developing quarterbacks, given the time limitations that apply to student-athletes.

"It's tough," Holgorsen said. "I've had that question a lot from a lot of the NFL guys. 'Why do keep things this simple? Why is the spread offense so simple? Why don't you go under center? Why don't you use more tight ends? Why don't you use more fullbacks?'

"You've only got 20 hours a week with these guys, plus you're limited with your scholarship numbers too. So we choose just to try to get good at something. You don't have very much time where you can work with these guys. They've got to go to class, they've got to have a social life. We're limited with the amount of hours that we have with them so you've just got to be careful on how much you put on them."

That's why, as Bruce Arians told PFT Live in Phoenix, college coaches look for quarterbacks who can "out-athlete" defenses. At the next level — as players like Robert Griffin III have discovered — that simply doesn't work.

Which makes it only more difficult to figure out which of the college quarterbacks can and will become good (and hopefully great) NFL quarterbacks.

What was said about Dion Jordan in 2013, and the lesson from it

By Michael Gehlken
Pro Football Talk
April 1, 2017

Woooooah! Woooooah!

Woooah-woooah-woooah!

And so it began in 2013, the NFL Network booth reacting to Commissioner Roger Goodell's podium announcement of Dion Jordan as the Dolphins' selection at No. 3 overall following a trade with the Raiders. The analysts expected tackle Lane Johnson, hence their surprise. That reaction is not to be faulted.

What was said afterward, and in the weeks before, is where the lesson comes.

When projecting draft prospects, no one knows for certain.

The Dolphins finally released Jordan on Friday, ending months of expectation. The ex-Oregon defensive end totaled the same number of suspensions for violating the league's substance-abuse policy, three, as he did sacks in Miami. His regard in 2013 speaks equally to Jordan's talent level as to there being few guarantees in scouting.

Here is what was said after Jordan was selected.

Mike Mayock: "This young man, I think he's got the potential to be the player that I compare him to, which is Jason Taylor, who ironically played for the Miami Dolphins. I also think he looks a little bit like an Aldon Smith, and if he puts on 20 pounds on that 6-foot-7 frame, some day he might be as good as a DeMarcus Ware. He's got that kind of edge speed."

Steve Mariucci: "You know, I talked to his coach Nick Aliotti the other day, his defensive coordinator at Oregon. And he said this kid loves football. He loves to play. He loves to practice. He's fully committed right now to football. This guy has got everything that it takes not only to rush the passer but to drop into coverage at over 6-6. This guy, when he puts on a little muscle, he's going to be dynamite."

Marshall Faulk: "Dion Jordan is the guy that you don't have to scheme to get a sack. He gets you a sack. And if you're going to to compete against the New England Patriots two times a year, you have to be able to just beat a guy 1-on-1 and get a sack and not blitz Tom Brady. You need this guy."

That was the immediate reaction to Jordan's selection.

Mayock stood out in a key area, doing well to say what Jordan could be as opposed to will be.

Pre-draft chatter included this from Bleacher Report: "If a player is going to be considered a 'can't-miss' prospect, he needs to have a combination of elite physical traits, sound technical football skills and be

free of character flaws. Oregon linebacker Dion Jordan may not be the first player selected on Thursday night, but when you consider the combination of athleticism and versatility he brings to the table, there is no way Jordan will fail to produce in the NFL.”

Jon Gruden anchored the ESPN broadcast’s reaction to Jordan’s selection.

He had his doubts.

“I really like Dion Jordan’s athleticism, but I’m shocked about this pick,” Gruden said. “When I watch Dion Jordan play, Mel (Kiper), I just don’t see him play. And this isn’t any false information. When you watch Oregon play, he doesn’t play against Cal because he’s hurt. But they play almost like hockey. He plays six plays; he’s out six plays. When you watch Dion Jordan play seven snaps in an NFL game, that’ll be the first time you’ve ever seen him do it. ... He’s a great athlete, but there’s a lot of unknown right now at third overall.”

Plenty of love will be shown toward prospects during and after the April 27 to 29 draft.

It’s best digested with a grain of salt.

Diehard Broncos fan Eric LeGrand named WWE's 2017 recipient of Warrior Award

By Caroline Deisley
DenverBroncos.com
April 1, 2017

Eric LeGrand figured he must have done something wrong.

Paul “Triple H” Levesque, a 14-time WWE champion and World Wrestling Entertainment’s executive vice president of talent, live events and creative, was trying to get in touch with LeGrand, who had hosted Levesque on “Mission Possible,” LeGrand's Fox Sports digital series.

“Uh oh, what did I do wrong? What could he want from me?” LeGrand recalls thinking.

Levesque’s assistant told him that he would be in touch in two days — time LeGrand spent fearing he had angered the wrestling legend. But LeGrand had nothing to fear, as he would soon find out from the wrestler he grew up watching.

The phone call was a joyous one, and it left LeGrand in complete shock. Levesque told him that he would be the recipient of the Warrior Award at the 2017 WWE Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony in Orlando, Florida.

The award, named posthumously for Warrior (also known as The Ultimate Warrior), is presented to “an individual who has exhibited unwavering strength and perseverance and who lives life with the courage and compassion that embodies the indomitable spirit of The Ultimate Warrior.”

LeGrand embodies those characteristics, and he demonstrates them in his travels around the world to share his story of overcoming adversity. When LeGrand was a defensive tackle at Rutgers University, he sustained a devastating spinal-cord injury while making a tackle on a kickoff return in October 2010. It left him paralyzed from the neck down, but in spite of the injury, LeGrand found a silver lining in sharing his story of positivity and serving as an inspiration to all.

“When you talk to Eric and when you're around him, it's really hard not to be blown away by his positivity and his demeanor as a human being; it's just inspiring," Levesque told ESPN.com. "Here's a guy who has every reason in the world to be bitter and angry and yet he's the most positive dude you've ever met.”

LeGrand’s positivity clearly leaves an impact on anyone he meets, but it’s also his authenticity that disarms and earns him accolades.

“I do really enjoy getting awards like this. It really does mean a lot to me that people recognize me being the person that I am and doing what I’m doing,” LeGrand says. “I always try to tell people that the best part about it is it’s who I am. I don’t have to put on a character. To be recognized for being the person that’s you, it’s pretty awesome.”

Accepting the award will evoke a similar reaction to how LeGrand felt when he watched the Broncos hoist the Lombardi Trophy after Super Bowl 50. Prior to his years at Rutgers, LeGrand wore No. 30 to pay homage to legendary Broncos running back and two-time Super Bowl champion Terrell Davis, his football idol. In 2011, Davis hosted LeGrand at a Broncos home game against the Kansas City Chiefs.

“My Broncos, that Super Bowl run, was absolutely amazing. That’s everything I needed,” LeGrand says. “Football is my life, and the Denver Broncos, they are my life.”