

NFL Draft relevant for trio of locals

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When the NFL Draft concludes Saturday, the last pick of the seventh round will be dubbed "Mr. Irrelevant" -- a title first handed out in 1976 to the final player selected.

It may not sound like a coveted distinction, but it still puts that college football player a step closer to making an NFL roster. It's an opportunity coveted by a trio of long shots in Matt "Teddy" Silano, Poppy Livers and Matt Vinal.

"You only get to play football for so long, and then after that your body will not allow you to play any longer," said Vinal, a 23-year-old strong safety out of UNLV who hails from Tom Brady's alma mater Serra High and made his way through College of San Mateo, same as Julian Edelman. "So I'm just trying to keep playing as long as I can before I have to face the real world."

Two weeks ago, Vinal participated in the 49ers' local pro day.

Silano and Livers, former teammates at St. Francis High in Mountain View, were also invited to the practice facility in Santa Clara.

"If you had asked me freshman year if I would have gotten into any NFL football camp, I probably would have told you no," said Livers, 23, a 5-foot-7, 168-pound wide receiver who led Villanova in catches (67), receiving yards (987) and scored 10 touchdowns, including one on a punt return. "Not that I don't believe in myself, just because a lot of people don't believe in me. But it was truly a blessing. Growing up in Mountain View and going to St. Francis, the 49ers were my favorite team and it was amazing when they called me and invited me to their pro day. I honestly was almost at a loss for words. They asked me if I could make it down, and I was like, 'Man, I'll make it down even if I have to take a bus. No matter what, I'm going to get down there.' Because it was an opportunity I couldn't pass up and not a lot of people are fortunate to get."

Silano -- a 6-8, 317-pound left tackle out of Colorado Mesa University, a Division II program -- was invited to the local pro days for both the 49ers and Raiders.

"I'm from a small school, so I kind of approached as really nothing to lose and don't hold back," said Silano, who turns 23 on Sunday. "It was an honor to just be out there and just live in the moment. I was kind of blown away a little bit at where I was. Growing up watching those teams and now I have a shot to be on the field with the coaches, it was nice."

The 49ers' pro day lasted roughly 2½ hours. The players were measured in height, weight, hand size, arm length. Other tests included the 40-yard dash, the 3-cone shuttle drill and broad jumps.

"It's basically almost about half the stuff that we did at the school pro day," said Vinal, who measured at 6-0½ and 205 pounds, and felt he performed to his ability in the position drills.

"It just showed so much about how the NFL is so precise to detail," Vinal added. "How you have to learn from the one time they tell you and make sure you know what you're doing. They don't want to slow down anything."

The night before the 49ers' pro day, Livers spent 45 minutes on the phone with his uncle Chad Morton, an assistant special teams coach with the Seattle Seahawks who played 12 seasons in the NFL as a wide receiver after being drafted out of USC.

"It was kind of different going with quarterbacks that you don't have timing with," Livers said. "But it was a great experience and it was fun, though. It was great seeing that there's so many guys there still trying to pursue their dreams."

Livers was back in Pennsylvania last week, where he attended a Canadian Football League tryout to showcase his elusive skills as a slot receiver and natural ability as a punt returner, which earned him a scholarship at Villanova after joining as a walk-on.

He promises to watch the draft, holding out hope that at least one NFL team deems him relevant to their needs.

"I'd probably break down because not many people get their names called in the draft, but you never know at this point," Livers said. "That's what I was telling my agent, I went down there (to the 49ers' pro day), I did my best and you never know what these guys are looking for, but hopefully you are what they're looking for. ..."

"I want to give myself the best opportunity to keep playing this game that I love," Livers added.

Meanwhile, Silano will do his best to catch the draft whenever he's not studying.

"I'm really just expecting anything," he said. "I'm just kind of letting God pick the path. I've put in all the work and I can't really control anything else."

After the pro days, Silano returned to Grand Junction, Colo., where he will graduate in May with a degree in criminal justice. His father was a police officer in Miami and then a DEA agent, while his mother was a federal prosecutor for the U.S. Department of Justice in San Francisco. Both are retired and live in Menlo Park.

Either way, he plans to protect and serve. Just like Silano did at Colorado Mesa, where he allowed one sack as a senior, earning an invitation to the USA College Football Bowl held in January at Jackson, Miss.

"If this doesn't work out, hopefully I can become a Mountain View police officer," said Silano, who spent the past couple of summers as an intern with the police department.

The only player still in the Bay Area as of last week was Vinal, who over the weekend attended a CFL tryout at San Jose State for the Montreal Alouettes.

If his name isn't called before Mr. Irrelevant is revealed Saturday afternoon, Vinal will continue to find a way into an NFL training camp.

"I don't expect to get drafted, but I do watch the draft every year because it's cool seeing guys you know getting drafted," he said. "But the fact is there is so many way to join an NFL team. I'm hoping someone just gives me a chance, an opportunity, maybe even a camp roster spot so I can prove that I can play special teams or practice squad for them. And I would give so much to that program because they believe in who I am."

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