

Giants GM getting the last laugh

by Jerry Magee

Ernie Accorsi had been had. In the 2004 draft, the New York Giants general manager had been playing what came down to a game of high-stakes poker with A.J. Smith, and Smith played his hand as cleverly as any Las Vegas sharpie could have.

Perhaps you remember. The Chargers held the ranking choice in those selections and the hot guy coming out was Eli Manning, only the Manning family had been announcing that Eli had no intentions of pursuing a professional future in San Diego, thank you very much. Smith took him anyway. He had read Accorsi perfectly. He sensed that Accorsi wanted to enlist the junior of the quarterbacking Mannings so desperately that he would take almost any action to obtain him.

It worked out as Smith had to have believed it would. With choice No. 4, Accorsi named Philip Rivers, whom Smith valued more than Manning, and assigned negotiation title to Rivers to the Chargers for negotiation rights to Manning. This, though, was not a one-for-one matter. For agreeing to it, Smith won a third-round choice in 2004 and the Giants' first- and fifth-round selections in 2005.

The Chargers would translate the third-rounder into kicker Nate Kaeding. The 2005 selections would be invested in linebacker Shawne Merriman and offensive tackle Roman Oben (obtained in a trade with Tampa Bay).

Accorsi had been hornswoggled. I wrote it. I once had an amicable association with Accorsi. Why, he once was one of us. He had been a sports writer before he lost his way and became involved in NFL administration. Accorsi now is retired, but the last time I was in his company, he extended to me the coldest of shoulders.

Ernie, I wronged you. I say this because when the Manning/Rivers thing was being hammered out, there was a Giants defender whose name Smith kept repeating, according to reports. About him, Accorsi was adamant. He would not give him up, although the guy had played only one season, starting just once and recording only one sack.

The reference is to defensive end Osi Umenyiora, who had six of the Giants' 12 sacks of Donovan McNabb while the New Yorkers were throttling the Philadelphia Eagles 16-3. The 12 sacks tied a league record.

The NFL, one can decide, is going to see a good deal more of Umenyiora, who attended Troy State. He won't be 26 until Nov. 16. He is a 6-foot-3, 261-pounder who spent the first seven years of his life in London, where he was born. From the ages 7-14, Umenyiora lived with his family in Nigeria. On one of his visits to Nigeria, he was made a chief in the village of Okbunike.

He also rates pretty highly in New York. And with Accorsi, one can think. Meantime, the Giants aren't doing badly with Manning, and Rivers' recent efforts have not been admirable. Not in the least.

EVOLUTION OF THE PASS

Al Davis did not invent the forward pass, although he has had something to do with its development. He was the first NFL coach of my knowledge to send all his receivers and all his running backs into pass patterns, then a novel scheme. In particular, Al liked to go deep. The vertical passing game. Al adored it.

The Oakland Raiders' history being what it is in this area, one can only view with amazement what the Raiders are doing with the pass under 31-year-old coach Lane Kiffin. They aren't doing much. When the Raiders outscored the Dolphins in Miami 35-17, Kiffin had Daunte Culpepper throw only 12 passes.

The previous week, between them, Culpepper and Josh McCown had attempted just 26 passes in a 26-24 escape against the Cleveland Browns. The week before that, McCown had put the football up only 16 times while the Denver Broncos were winning in overtime 23-20. In Week 1, McCown had gone pass mad, throwing 40 times, and the Detroit Lions had won 36-21, which might explain the team's recent reluctance to throw.

Had a 52-yard Sebastian Janikowski field goal in the closing moments of regulation not been negated by a belated Mike Shanahan timeout in their loss to the Broncos, the Raiders would be 3-1 and alone in first in the AFC West.

The East Bay team, 2-14 a year ago, has made a stunning turnaround, and it is positioned to expand on it. It has a bye this week while it awaits going to Qualcomm Stadium to engage the Chargers. After that, it has games against Kansas City, Tennessee, Houston, Chicago, Minnesota and Kansas City again.

Get used to having the Raiders around.

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