Ohio State Buckeye correspondent Mike Furlan is back, this time to detail the Buckeye Invasion of the NFL this past weekend. Five Buckeyes went in the 1st round, seven went on the first day, and nine got drafted in total. Another five were signed as undrafted free agents.

New Class Sends Seven to the NFL on the First Day of the Draft

Had the talking heads at ESPN been forced to sing the words to the Buckeye Battle Cry each time a Buckeye was drafted in the first round, Mark May might have learned upwards of 25% of the words and hell, Trev Alberts may have even been able to hum along (from his couch at home). Ohio State put on a show Saturday at the NFL draft that was every bit as impressive as the Fiesta Bowl. The Buckeyes put five players into the NFL during the first round of the draft surpassing the old team record of four, set in 1971 by the class of the “Super Sophomores,” and they were also responsible for one of the early surprises of the draft.

A. J. Hawk: Frequently regarded as the “safest pick in the draft” teams fell in love with his work ethic and instincts. There are plenty of players

in the draft who are better at certain aspects of the linebacker position than A.J. Some are better pass rushers, some are faster, some are better at plugging the line against the run, but none have his fluidity and natural ability to find the play. Although Hawk runs a 4.4 forty, his instincts make him much faster than that. He seems to have a head start on the ball and the play all the time.

Donte Whitner: The second biggest surprise in the draft to all the talking heads was Donte Whitner going to the Bills with eighth selection in the draft. I love watching those guys choke on their words and expectations. Frankly, the Bills chose the best player in the secondary available at their selection instead of a defensive lineman. Most of the “experts” seemed to think that selection was too early, but ultimately the Bills must (and probably do) know something that the “experts” don’t. I suspect that hidden in all the duplicity and misinformation in the NFL draft press leaks was secret demand for Whitner. A large portion of somethings worth is its availability, and frankly, there were not too many real NFL safeties available in this year’s draft. I suspect that many teams had him much higher than the “experts” simply because of the relative shortage at the position, otherwise the Bills would have done the obvious thing and trade down to 18 or so and drafted him there. Basically they must have been pretty confident that he was not going to be around much longer.

What did the Bills get at number 8? Well, going into the draft most of the talking heads agreed that Whitner was the only true safety in the draft. There were a lot of guys who could play the position, but most were “tweeners” (1/2 safety, ½ cornerback) or were missing some fundamental aspect of the position, whether it was coverage skills or run stopping ability. In my opinion the Bills identified that this was a pretty weak draft for safeties, so they drafted the best available safety and did not take any chances.

Bobby Carpenter: Often overshadowed by his teammate, A.J. Hawk, Bobby Carpenter would have probably moved up even higher on most draft boards had he been the best linebacker on his own team. Carpenter will bring the Cowboys an exceptionally versatile player that probably fits into a 3-4 defense even better than Hawk. Carpenter’s size and strength allow him to drop a hand and rush the passer from the edge, yet he still possesses the ability to drop into coverage with tight ends. In the worst case scenario, Bobby Carpenter will be a solid pro in the league for a long time, but I personally think that Carpenter with a career very similar to another Buckeye with similar skills (but less speed), Mike Vrabel.

Santonio Holmes: Holmes is the perfect wide receiver for the Pittsburgh Steelers. The Steelers front office must have been

doing back flips in the street when they saw him available at 25. Holmes is the most complete receiver to leave Ohio State since Terry Glenn. His routes are crisp, his speed is exceptional, and his hands are tremendous. He is a fearless receiver and will catch balls in front of safeties in the middle of the field, yet he still possesses the speed to burn cornerbacks on the outside. But what makes him a perfect fit for the Steelers? The most underpublicized aspect of Holmes game is his ability and sincere unselfish desire to block down the field in support of the running game. I saw several plays last year in which Holmes blocked two separate DB's on the same play in order to spring Pittman for big gains. Willie Parker will grow to love this guy, ten yards down the field.

Nick Mangold: What can you say about this guy? He is everything you want an NFL center to be. He is a vocal leader of the offensive line and quite frankly he is probably one of the meanest offensive linemen that I have seen in college football. This guy brings a linebacker hitting mentality to the offensive line, possibly a by-product of sharing a house with A.J. Hawk for the last couple of years. He is a solid in pass blocker and uses his hands exceptionally well. He is quick to get to the next level of the defense when required and he will surprise a lot of middle and inside linebackers in the NFL three to four yards ahead of the line of scrimmage. The addition of Ferguson and Mangold to the Jets offensive line now elevates Chad Pennington's chances of surviving this season all the way up to 25%.

Anthony Schlegel: I was very surprised to see Schlegel go this high. His time in the forty was painfully slow and frankly he does not move very well. He is exceptionally strong and will be an effective run stopper up the middle, but his lack of speed makes him a liability in pass coverage. I was expecting to see him go around the fifth round, like everyone else, but apparently Eric Mangini either thought that there is something to having him as a run stopper or that having a former teammate on the Jets might help ease Mangold's transition into the NFL. He must've forgot that he has Mike Nugent.

Ashton Youboty: I was every bit as surprised to see Youboty to fall into the third round as I was to see Schlegel move up to the third. Anyone who thinks that Marv Levy made a bad pick with Whitner at eighth should consider Youboty a bargain at 70. Youboty will bring the Bills not only a solid cover corner but also a guy who is not afraid to step up and support the run on the outside. My memory is chocked full of solo tackles made by Youboty on the outside, after shedding a wide receiver's block, in support of the run defense. You don't see a lot of that in the NFL. Youboty approaches the cornerback position with the physical play expected of a safety. Even if he does not pan out in the NFL as a corner, he will easily make the transition to free safety and may even be more natural at that position.

All in all it was an amazing first day for the scarlet and gray, and I think the Buckeyes that were drafted yesterday have all landed in systems that will accentuate their strengths. Yesterday was an important day for the future of the Ohio State program, for as much as we would all like to think that recruits are drawn to a program by its history, facilities, and tradition, what really draws them is the ability of the program to help elevate them to the next level. Something that Ohio State demonstrated clearly to a nation full of watching recruits yesterday. As for today? There are still a few Buckeye bargains out there, Mike Kudla and Josh Huston to name two. In their honor….

In old Ohio there's a team that's known throughout the land

Eleven warriors brave and bold who's fame will ever stand

And when the ball goes over, our cheers will reach the sky

Ohio Field will hear again the Buckeye Battle Cry!