

**ARIZONA CARDINALS DRAFT PREVIEW PRESS CONFERENCE (4/21/09)  
GENERAL MANAGER ROD GRAVES (RG) AND HEAD COACH KEN WHISENHUNT  
(KW)**

**On having the 31<sup>st</sup> pick and what problems that presents in figuring out who will still be on the board:**

**(RG):** "Actually, that point has been kind of driven home here in the last couple of days. We have been setting out the 120 board and realizing that we are in a much different position that we have been in past years but we welcome that challenge and we are still confident that we are going to be facing a good football player at that point."

**(KW):** "I think a lot of it goes down to the preparation work that you do in the months leading up to it. (Director of Player Personnel) Steve Keim and the scouts have done a great job of getting all the information on players. We have spent a lot of time with the coaches up there in the room going through them. I think the best thing, or what the most important thing is about this process, is being prepared. Obviously, it is hard to speculate on who is going to be there at 31, which is a good problem to have. Like Rod (Graves) said, we are in a good position because we have worked hard to be prepared."

**On if there is less deception in drafting lower, rather than in the top of the round where no one wants to tip their hand:**

**(KW):** "I don't think there is as much deception because it is really hard to speculate on who is going to be there. It seems like in every draft, there is a run on a certain position, which kind of changes the depth of what is going to be there when you pick. I think, and this is just a hunch, that at 31, there is going to be a couple of players that we like and that we have highly rated on our board that we are going to be able to select from. That is a good thing, just because some of the areas where I think there may be any early run, like offensive tackle, that is not something that we are really looking at early. So I don't think the deception really falls into it, as far trying to give one scenario and try to do another to try to get a pick. It is really come down to, hopefully, having a selection of having a good football player there."

**On whether the need for running back is so great that they might pass up other highly rated players to choose a player at that position:**

**(RG):** "We have normally approached the draft as the best player available and we are still going to approach it that way. But even as we set our top players, the order of that list takes into consideration our needs. We are going to look at those positions where we feel like we could possibly gain the greatest margin of improvement and if those players are there and they merit consideration, that is the direction we will go in."

**On whether additional teams have called since announcing they would listen to trade offers for Anquan Boldin:**

**(RG):** "We have had quite a few teams call but we have no offers from those teams. Anything can evolve from this point through draft day, so that is where that is right now."

**(KW):** "I think we are just evaluating our options. Like we said, this was about knowing that there was going to be a lot of talk about that specifically. Like we said last week, Anquan is an important part of our team and ultimately our goal is to make sure he is with us. As part of this process, evaluating what other people think or what other people want to say about him, that is something we are listening to. So as the week progresses and we get closer to the draft, that seems to be where a lot of things may pick up."

**On whether no offers have been made for Anquan Boldin that are acceptable or no offers at all have been made:**

**(RG):** "No offers have been made up to this point. I don't know that that is any indication of the way the rest of the league sees Anquan, I just think that there is time between now and draft day."

Many teams have been finishing up their draft boards and that sort of thing and the only thing that we indicated was that we'll listen. We haven't specified what we are looking for or anything along those lines. Teams have called to inquire, we say that we are willing to listen, but to this point we have had no real, hard offers. As Ken (Whisenhunt) indicated, our objective all along was to weigh the interest out there in Anquan as we do with all of our players from time-to-time if there is interest to be stated, and weigh that against the option of extending him. The ultimate goal is to do what is in the best interest of our team. It is just something that we decided we would take a look at but we feel very highly about him as a player and what he means to our football team. I think that if there were to be any consideration for doing anything, it would certainly have to be for commensurate value."

**On whether it is possible these days to get a package that would be equal to what he is as a player:**

**(RG):** "That remains to be seen. We will see. If not, he is an outstanding player that is a member of our football team and we are happy to continue with him."

**On whether they worry about Boldin's mental state and how much that factors into the process:**

**(KW):** "I really don't have a concern about that. We have gone through a year, been through a successful season with Anquan. He went to the Pro Bowl and played well for us and I have no expectations of not having the same thing."

**On whether Boldin not being traded by the end of the draft indicates that he will be coming back to the Cardinals for the 2009 season:**

**(RG):** "He is under contract."

**(KW):** "We never said we were trying to trade Anquan. That has been a perception out there. All we said was that we were willing to listen to offers. We knew that coming into this draft, there was going to be talk about that. So, rather than try to face those questions, we just said we were going to take a pro active stance on this and listen to what people say. But, we are going to evaluate that against what we know—and that is that Anquan is a very good football player."

**On whether it is possible to extend him this year, under the salary cap:**

**(RG):** "Well, we have two other priorities as I see them right now, and that is to address (LB) Karlos Dansby and (SS) Adrian Wilson and we are currently engaged in talks with their representatives right now. I think those contracts will dictate, basically, whether or not we can address (Boldin's contract) and win. And so we will just have to see how things fall at that point."

**On whether they have a philosophy about tying up so much money in one position:**

**(RG):** "All I know for a fact is that (Anquan) is an outstanding football player and a core member of our team. We are going to take a hard look at what it takes to extend him when we are in a position to do that, and that has been our position all along."

**On whether, if he is not traded by the draft, he is a definite member of the Cardinals team for 2009:**

**(KW):** "Last time I checked he is a member of the team right now."

**On whether they will stop listening to offers after the draft:**

**(KW):** "We are not proactively trying to trade Anquan. Like Rod (Graves) said and I said. Nothing has changed about that. All we said was that, as part of this process and knowing there were going to be questions, we were just going to do what was best for our organization and that was listen to what people had to say. I don't anticipate that is something that will change. We didn't necessarily put a deadline (on it). We just knew that was part of the process that we were going to be faced with going into this draft. Once again, let's be clear about this, Anquan is a good football player. We are not trying to trade Anquan. We were just stating that, at this point, we were listening to offers because we knew that was going to be a topic of discussion."

**(RG):** “The more definitive answer is, yes, he will be a member of our football team but at some point in time, up until the trade deadline, we certainly may be in a position of listening. That is the position we are going to take with all of our players.”

**On draft picks being so valuable and whether that is why it would be important for a trade to happen before the draft:**

**(KW):** “A year ago this time, a week before the draft, there was a lot of talk about that so that kind of guided our reasoning for saying we would listen.”

**On whether they anticipate on staying at the 31<sup>st</sup> position in the draft rather than trading up:**

**(KW):** “If we trade up, we will move up in the draft. If we trade out, then we will not move up in the draft. Who knows? A lot can go on during draft day.”

**(RG):** “We have always been prepared to stay where we are but we will look at the options. There is considerable time that will lapse between the start of the draft and where we are, and a lot of things can happen. We will just see how it evolves but we are certainly open and not focused or fixated on staying right there at 31. But we will just see how things go on draft day.”

**On whether it has been harder to predict the way the first 10 picks are going to go this year:**

**(RG):** “I think generally, we will have the top players rated, in terms of the top 10, but exactly where those top 10 go in the order has always been somewhat of a challenge. I don’t know, I think the top 10 or 15 players are the top 10 or 15 players, that part of it I don’t think is any more difficult this year to speculate who those guys are compared to past seasons.”

**(KW):** “It seems like there is a lot of information out there this year. There are more and more mock drafts, people speculating about where players are going to go. I think we are obviously, like Rod (Graves) was saying, we are ranking our players on where we think they fit. I am sure there is going to be some differences on how we see players and how (other teams) see them. There are some good football players this year, at the top of the draft. I am sure that some things, there is always going to be a surprise or two, but our surprise may not be somebody else’s. It all goes back to how you look at players and how you evaluate them.”

**On who he sees going at 31:**

**(KW):** “At 31? We haven’t gotten there yet. Our mock draft is Friday. We are still trying to get our board straightened out.”

**On what abilities they look for in a running back:**

**(KW):** “It depends on what we are trying to get done offensively. I think it has to be a back that can protect, especially when we go to some of our spread formations, and still do some things out of the backfield—as well as a back that can run between the tackles on first and second down. I think that the best thing we did, especially in the playoffs last year, was having a good mix of doing that. A lot of people classify a back as a big bruiser and inside runner or a scat back, as you have heard people say, one that is a speed outside guy. I guess what we are looking for is a guy that is a combination of that or one that can do some different things. But one of the things that is most important to us—because right now we have a very good quarterback and some outstanding receivers—we simply do have to have a back that has some versatility and that is something that is important.”

**On a lot of running backs just out of college not having been asked to block very much:**

**(KW):** “No they haven’t, but I have seen backs like (Pittsburgh’s) Willie Parker and even Tim Hightower, who didn’t do a lot of blocking in college but adapted to that role and do well. I think a lot of that has to do with what you are doing schematically offensively. Plus, it goes with having a (offensive) line like we do that makes those backs protect because they do such a good job up front.

**On what it means to be welcoming the draft picks to the defending NFC Champions:**

**(KW):** “It is exciting. It is exciting for our organization and I know it is exciting for our players and how they’ve been working in our offseason program. I don’t think any of us are happy where we finished last year. Our goal, obviously, after having tasted a little success, is to try to get back and win it. It does feel good to know that we are the NFC Champions, and we are excited about the draft and getting back out on the field to practice.”

**On what the chances are that Edgerrin James will be at mini-camp:**

**(RG):** “I think we will have to go through the draft and see if we are in a position to make a decision after that point. But at this point he is a member of our football team, under contract through next season. I still believe Edge is a productive running back and was a big part of our success last year. We would certainly want to feel like we are in a position where we’ve improved enough to move forward before making any decision. That doesn’t necessarily mean that we would have to take a running back high in order to do that. I just think we will evaluate our draft and where we are as a team and make some decisions about that next week sometime.”

**On what the odds are that a mutual decision can be reached between Edgerrin James and the team regarding him staying away from minicamp since an injury could result in a five million dollar payout:**

**(RG):** “We haven’t crossed that bridge as of yet but right now we will consider all of those things immediately after the draft and prior to minicamp and see where we are. But those considerations will be given.”

**On if the possible departure of Anquan Boldin would make the Cardinals look at drafting a wide receiver or if they are happy with the current group:**

**(KW):** “Well if there is an outstanding receiver that we really have graded highly, much like Early Doucet last year, I don’t feel like that is going to keep us from drafting one. With that being said, we do feel very good about our receivers, even our young ones and the progress they made last year.”

**On the difficulty in evaluating defensive linemen, especially defensive tackles and whether you get them can they be put on the field right away:**

**(KW):** “Well I think that those positions—there are a couple of positions it seems like, in the draft, are hard to find. That is one of the positions that historically has been difficult to find, a good defensive tackle or defensive lineman. I don’t think the evaluation process is that difficult. I think what is difficult is the depth at those positions at times. As we saw last year, Calais (Campbell) and Kenny (Iwebema) both came in and were productive for us. So I think that those guys can play that position. I think the important thing when you are talking about defensive linemen, it is a little bit like running back from the standpoint of you have to have a rotation with those guys because they just can’t take 60 snaps a game and still be able to perform the way you need them to. So I think anytime that you have a good defensive lineman available and you have a chance to draft him you obviously want to give that strong consideration. But as far as expecting him to play, I think that is a position that those young men can perform early in their career and perform well.”

**On how difficult it is for a college defensive end to be an NFL outside linebacker:**

**(KW):** “That is difficult. That is something that the 3-4 teams have been looking for, for years and years. I have had many conversations with (Pittsburgh Defensive Coordinator) Dick LeBeau about that exact thing—about trying to find the defensive end and make him an outside linebacker. It is not so much the play in the physical part of the position (like) stopping the run or the pass rush concept because those guys generally are pretty good at that. Where you get into problems is the drops, making sure you drop into the right zone and making sure you drop off the number two vertical or you are going to the curled hook or you are going to the flat. All those things that these guys have never had experience for are difficult for them to learn. When you are expecting to come in and be involved in a zone blitz scheme, which has become so prevalent in the NFL, that is tough because you’re trying to teach these guys who have never gone

backwards, a term we use a lot, to do that and that is tough. In this draft there are a number of those guys that people are projecting as possible outside linebackers in the 3-4 type scheme. I think personally it is good that you have those type of athletes because look at a LaMarr Woodley and what he did for Pittsburgh coming out of Michigan. That has always been a challenge and I think it always will continue to be because in college football those guys are putting their hand in the dirt and rushing the passer. That is what they are doing; they are not worried as much about the zone drops and because of the roster sizes in the NFL and because of having a limited number of those guys, you've got to be able to use them in different spots."

**On what you see in a defensive end that would make him a possible outside linebacker:**

**(KW):** "Size is one of the things you have to look for. If the guy is a tall, angular 300-plus pound defensive end then the chances of him playing that position are hard. But there seems to be more and more college defensive ends that are in the 6-5, 260 pound range, that are very good rushers and that is the pool you are looking at to see if they can drop. A lot of what we do in the spring is working those guys out on the field to see what they look like when they drop. Then putting them on the board and seeing mentally if they understand the concepts of a zone drop or when they have the flat and those types of things. There is a lot that goes into it and it is not an easy process."

**On the possibility of drafting a defensive end with Antonio Smith leaving:**

**(KW):** "We feel good about Calais (Campbell) and Kenny (Iwebema) both stepping into the spot in the rotation to help those guys and we've got some good young defensive ends. So it is not as much of a concern for us. While I think that, obviously, we have kind of a hybrid system where we are using a little bit of both of those things and we have Chike (Okeafor) and we have Bertrand Berry and we have Travis LaBoy and we have Clark Haggans. So we feel good about our positions but we are always looking as with every position, not just the outside backers or defensive ends, for young talent."

**On what breaking a person into the outside linebacker position in a 3-4 is like:**

**(KW):** "A lot like quarterback. It's similar that if you have a chance for those guys to learn, if you don't have to play right away it helps. That they can actually go through a minicamp, go through the OTAs, even a training camp where they are getting those reps and it is not costing you a ballgame. That is something that is good. I think that we made great progress with Chike (Okeafor). Look at Chike in the two years that we've had him. He's become a good dropper and it's become an important part of our defense. I think it always helps when you've had a chance to bring these guys along. Another good example is Dominique (Rodgers-Cromartie). Last year we were able to bring him along slowly, then when he got in and actually started, he played very well for us."

**On how much stock they put into the 'beauty contest' (the combine) compared to film:**

**(RG):** "I think most of us are really old school and we rely a great deal on the time we spend in the fall going to the schools and evaluating the players, watching the video, practices and games and that sort of thing. There is great value in the combine for a lot of reasons. Great information comes out of that environment, but for the most part we still stick very closely to the production that the player has exhibited, not only within the past year but over his career. There is the football character that we talk a lot about—the player's character, how much does he love the game, his attitude and that sort of thing, in addition to the physical and athletic tools that he has. The 'beauty contest' as you call it, I think we love the opportunity to sit down and take a close look at these players. To have a chance to talk with them one on one, to see them in the same environment and using the same testing environment that all other players there use. We are sort of measuring all those guys in the same environment. So it is a plus but I think that is only one tool that we take a look at and most important is the evaluation that takes place in the fall on the players."

**On the difference today, compared to five to 10 years ago, of evaluating off the field character:**

**(KW):** "I think it really starts with the commissioner. He made a statement a few years ago when he instituted the personal conduct policy and that has had ramifications with these young men, which I think has been very good. In the last five years in the interviews that we do at the combine talking with these guys, you can see where that has become more important to them. In general—and I don't have stats to back it up—but (there) seems to be a lot less situations in college that are coming up, problems that they have had. You don't hear about near as many of those because I think they are very aware that football character is important to a lot of teams and it is going to affect their draft status and ultimately that means money to them. I really applaud the commissioner and his foresight in doing that because it has made us all more accountable. Even our players in the league now to the role models that our players are and the character we have to have. To me that was one of the big reasons that we had success as a football team last year because we had a lot of strong character guys that were able to count on each other and we didn't have issues. Even when things didn't go so well at the end of the season we didn't have finger pointing. We didn't have dissension with our team because I thought that our guys had strong character. That further reinforced the position to me about how important that is in the evaluation process."

**On if they would take a guy off the board because of character issues:**

**(RG):** "We have. Obviously that is very important for us. We want to give ourselves a chance. We don't want players who will work against our system and be a challenge for Ken and his staff to work with and create headaches for us. We're about risk management as much as we are about building a strong football team so those considerations have to be given and, unfortunately, we have to make decisions to take certain players out of consideration."

**On if character issues were as important seven or eight years ago:**

**(RG):** "It certainly is more important now than it was seven or eight years ago, I believe. I think for a number of reasons; those which Ken mentioned, but I think the amount of money that you are spending on players now is so great that you just have to be very careful about the money that you put into certain players. Again, you just want to take less of a chance on guys that have proven to be problems."