

Rookies prepare for life in NFL

By Tom Shanahan
Courtesy of Chargers.com

(June 25, 2004) -- When Jim Harbaugh entered the NFL in 1987 as a first-round draft pick, the league had yet to launch its annual Rookie Symposium, a program now in its eighth year as the Class of 2004 assembles for meetings Sunday through Wednesday in La Costa, Calif.

Harbaugh, one of the Symposium panelists, was well prepared for life after football largely because he is the son of a coach and always had a plan to follow in his father's footsteps. But in the quarterback's 15-year NFL playing career, including two with the Chargers (1999-2000), he saw plenty of examples of players who could have benefited from lessons now available to young players at the Rookie Symposium.

"There is some difficulty with adjusting to life in the NFL, and then there is some pain that comes with leaving the league," Harbaugh said. "It's a tremendous thing in life to be able to play a sport and get paid for it. It's important to realize how good you have it and to give it everything you have. It's also important to be conscious that you must prepare for it to end."

Harbaugh, drafted by the Chicago Bears, played his last season in 2001 and spent his first two years away from the playing field as an Oakland Raiders assistant, coaching quarterbacks. This fall he makes his debut as the head coach at the University of San Diego, a Division I-AA school.

He is one of several retired and active NFL players who will serve on panels at the Rookie Symposium. Harbaugh's panel, which includes Kansas City Chiefs running back [Priest Holmes](#), covers "Life In and After Football." ESPN commentator Paul Maguire, who also played for the Chargers (1960-63), serves as the moderator.

The four-day symposium includes presentations, videos and workshops on subjects such as personal finance, life skills, personal conduct, life as a rookie, media policy, substances of abuse, personal experiences, family issues, player development and handling success in the NFL as well as life after the NFL.

The NFL's 255 drafted rookies are required to attend. In 1998, when the Chargers drafted Washington State quarterback Ryan Leaf with the second pick of the draft, he skipped the Symposium and was fined by the NFL. It was the first of many problems Leaf encountered in his brief NFL career.

But the Chargers don't have to worry about that problem this year with [Philip Rivers](#). The Chargers acquired Rivers when they swapped first-round quarterbacks with the New York Giants. The Chargers took Mississippi's [Eli Manning](#) with the first pick, but after the Giants selected North Carolina State's Rivers with the fourth choice, the Chargers acquired Rivers and three draft picks, including the Giants' 2005 first-round choice.

"I'll be there," Rivers said with a grin after he finished working out on his own at Chargers Park, one that included weight lifting, conditioning and drop-back footwork drills.

"I'm looking forward to it for a couple of reasons," said Rivers, who is married with a young daughter. "One is there is a lot of information to learn. Some of it may not seem to involve you, but it's still good to learn. You can help yourself and you can learn things that it might be good to know to help your teammates.

"The second reason is I'm looking forward to meeting a lot of the guys around the league who were drafted. Two of my (North Carolina State) teammates were drafted, and I'm looking forward to seeing them."

N.C. State offensive guard [Sean Locklear](#) was taken in the third round by the Seattle Seahawks and wide receiver [Jerricho Cotchery](#) in the fourth by the New York Jets.

Another draft pick among the Chargers working out on his own was kicker [Nate Kaeding](#), a third-round pick from Iowa.

"The (Chargers) administration has stressed there is a lot to learn that will help you simplify your life and simplifying your life will allow you to concentrate on football," Kaeding said. "There are guys like me who went to college near where I grew up, so making the move to San Diego is a big adjustment for me. This is a new challenge for me. I want to eliminate as many distractions as possible."

In addition to Rivers and Kaeding, the Chargers drafted nine other rookies who are attending the symposium. The others are Oregon defensive end [Igor Olshansky](#), a second-round pick; Purdue center/guard [Nick Hardwick](#), third; Purdue outside linebacker [Shaun Phillips](#), fourth; UCLA defensive end [David Ball](#), fifth; Northern Illinois running back [Michael Turner](#), fifth; Nebraska-Omaha tight end [Ryan Krause](#), sixth; Nebraska defensive tackle [Ryon Bingham](#), seventh; Ohio State offensive guard/tackle [Shane Olivea](#), seventh; and Miami offensive tackle [Carlos Joseph](#), seventh.

Draft picks in attendance who played high school football in the San Diego area are Cleveland Browns tight end [Kellen Winslow](#), first round, from Scripps Ranch High and Miami (Fla.); St. Louis Rams linebacker [Brandon Chillar](#), fourth round, from Carlsbad High and UCLA; Denver Broncos cornerback [Jeff Shoate](#), fifth round, from Serra High and San Diego State; and Cleveland defensive lineman [Amon Gordon](#), fifth round, from Mira Mesa High and Stanford.

"There is a lot of knowledge to be gained, and I want to soak up as much as I can," said Chillar. "The more education we can learn about life as a pro football player the better it is for us. This is a new step for all of us."

The four-day symposium also includes time for a youth clinic for 250 kids ages eight to 15. The kids are brought in to receive instruction on fundamentals and football drills from the NFL players