

Rookie life

by Cris Carter, Yahoo! Sports

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I was pleased to be a speaker at the eighth annual **Rookie Symposium** in San Diego. The symposium is a **four-day seminar designed to help introduce the 2004 NFL draft class to life in the pros.**

This was the fifth time I have spoken at the seminar, and I've seen it develop over the years into an efficient teaching source. The NFL's program is now the best in all of sports and a **great orientation tool for incoming players.**

The NFL educates rookies on topics ranging from **steroids and drug testing to personal finance and security to conduct on and off the field.** The league gives these rookies information on every aspect of their lives so that they leave with a good understanding of what lies ahead.

I remember coming into the NFL in 1987 and immediately seeing how fast-paced my life became. The league didn't have this type of seminar in my day – simply assuming we knew things that we didn't.

Much of the stuff is common sense, but the NFL now is acting like everything must be taught. That is what is great about the symposium. There are no dumb questions, and the teachers take nothing for granted. This is the way it should be – all the upcoming challenges are on the table.

For the most part this year, guys were looking to me for tips on how to get better and what to watch out for this upcoming season. They all are interested in playing well and want to know how to improve themselves from an athletic standpoint.

From there, it is easy to get their attention and transition the talk to their new life as an NFL athlete. They aren't in high school or college now, and they must work out and act like professionals.

They also were interested in how to balance family life and free time. All those things are very important for a rookie to understand, and we spent a lot of time discussing this crucial adjustment period.

Many people talk about **rookies hitting the wall in their first year.** I didn't spend much time discussing this with them because it is up to the veterans on their individual teams to help them. Instead I told them to get in the best shape possible so they can maintain a certain level of conditioning throughout the season.

In addition to all the education, the rookies had some fun in San Diego. The seminar often broke into small, intimate groups in which the guys could catch up with former teammates and meet their new peers. Many of these guys had only heard of each other or seen each other play on TV.

All in all, the week was a good first step in forming new relationships.