



## SCOUTING THE DRAFT

BY DAN POMPEI

**Local angles, the insider advantage, Tennessee's power line and South Carolina's talent explosion are among the influences that will shape the 2002 draft**

**J**ulius Peppers offers the NFL rare athleticism, a first step quick as a finger snap, speed off the edge, explosive power and the predatory instincts of a shark. Beyond that, the defensive end offers something unique to the Panthers—box office appeal.

As a player who grew up in Bailey, N.C., and attended the University of North Carolina, Peppers would help the Panthers sell tickets and market their team. That in itself is not the reason for the Panthers to draft Peppers, but it is an extra incentive. Just ask the Cardinals, who experienced a local surge in popularity after drafting Jake Plummer out of Arizona State in 1997.

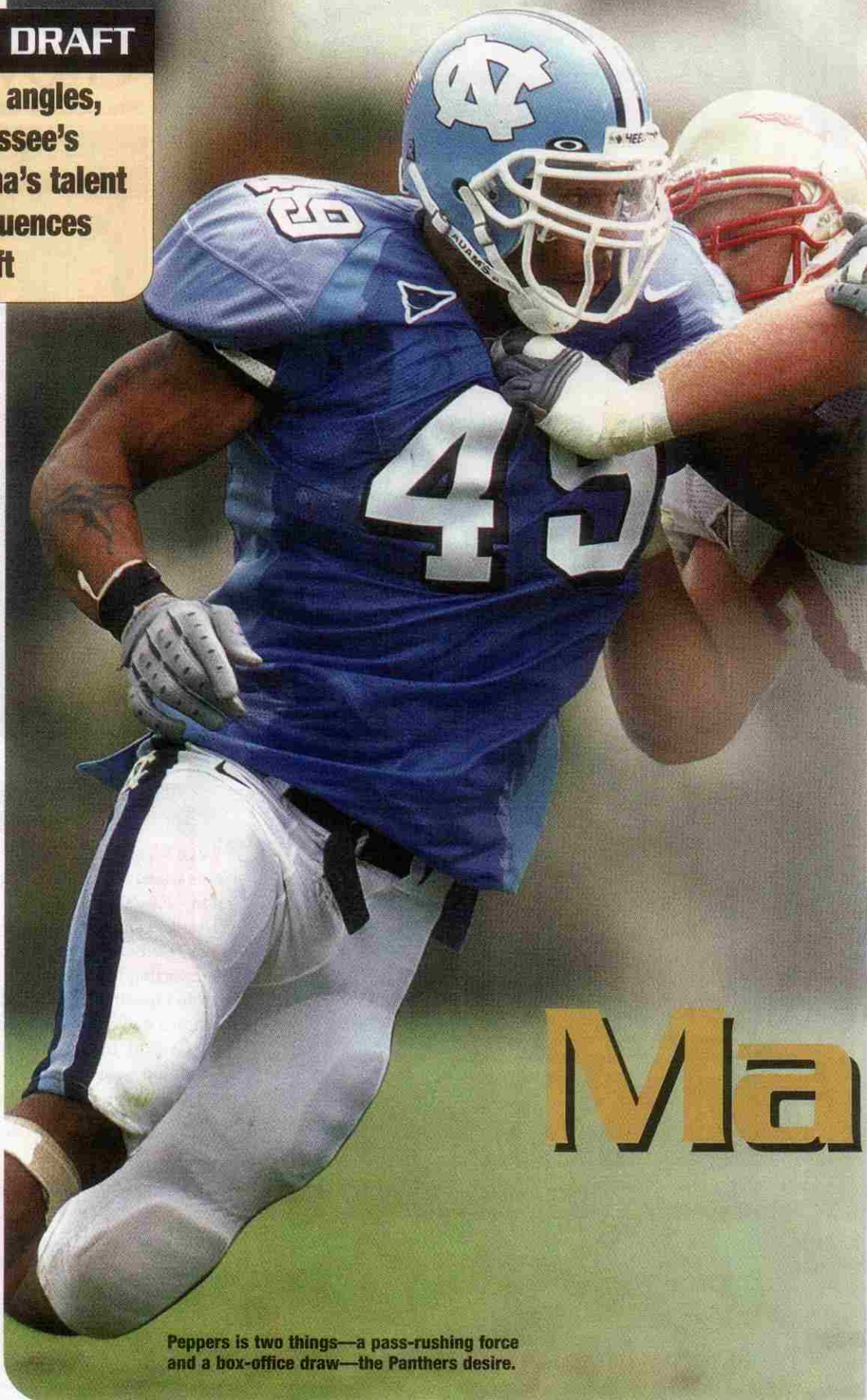
"You have to draft right no matter where the player is from," Panthers general manager Marty Hurney says. "If he's from a local school, it's an added bonus from a business perspective. You would love for the best player to be from a local school."

The Panthers have much to gain by drafting Peppers, who many consider the most talented player in the draft. Passing on him with the second overall pick would not be a popular move. They had a similar opportunity in 1998 when North Carolina's Vonnie Holliday was available and they were in need of a defensive lineman. Instead, the Panthers chose Nebraska's Jason Peter and lived to regret the decision.

The Bucs, on the other hand, have benefited from a long history of drafting local players. With Miami, Florida and Florida State to choose from, they have selected a player from a Florida-based college in 14 of the last 15 years, including six first-round picks. "When you are trying to build fan loyalty, drafting local players is an effective tool," Bucs general manager Rich McKay says. "You can't go outside your grading scale, but the tie goes to the local guy."

The other advantage to drafting talent out of local colleges is the team down the road should know the player better than the team 3,000 miles away. NFL teams typically have cozy relationships with the colleges in their area. Representatives from the pro team are around local college campuses more and observe the players for their entire careers. Therefore, the information NFL teams receive on local prospects often is more reliable and/or complete than the information they get on prospects from other schools.

"If the guy fits, you can get a lot of information on him," says Cowboys director of player personnel



**Ma**

Peppers is two things—a pass-rushing force and a box-office draw—the Panthers desire.

BOB LEVERONE / TSN

Stephen Jones. "You have more resources to get information on him. You really get to evaluate local guys."

The Cowboys have the sixth overall pick and among the players they are considering are cornerback Quentin Jammer and offensive tackle Mike Williams, both from the University of Texas. Some teams rate Miami cornerback Phillip Buchanon ahead of Jammer while others prefer Jammer. There is a similar split of opinion on Williams and Miami offensive tackle Bryant McKinnie. Having local ties could make the difference for the Cowboys.

"Very rarely is it just a flip of the coin, but if it comes to that, you would lean toward the local person because you're more comfortable with him," Jones says.

Whether the Panthers draft Peppers, they, like many teams, will try to sign undrafted local products to flush out their roster. "When you're trying to convince (undrafted) free agents to sign with you, having a local connection helps," Hurney says.

There is a potential downside to locally grown players. If the player goes to a team within driving distance of his hometown or former college campus, it's easy to visit instead of hanging around the team headquarters. So, if the player is looking for trouble, he already knows where to find it. This is a particular concern for the Panthers, given the conservative mindset of their community and the team's history of high-profile players with off-field issues.

But given how clean and gifted Peppers appears to be, it doesn't make sense for the Panthers to look beyond their backyard.

## Insider information

If the draft were the stock market, the Redskins and Browns could be charged with insider trading.

Nobody knows more about prospects coming out of the University of Florida than Redskins coach Steve Spurrier and the six assistants he brought with him from Gainesville. And nobody knows more about University of Miami prospects than Browns coach Butch Davis, who arrived in Cleveland before last season along with four assistants from his Hurricanes staff.

Davis says he has known some of the players at Miami since they were 15. He watched them in high



BRIAN WAGNER FOR TSN

**The Vols' defensive line, featuring Haynesworth inside, is one of the highest rated in draft history.**

school and has been in their homes. "You get an opportunity that's a little unique," Davis says. "Not only from a playing standpoint, but you get insight into who they are, what they are all about, their character, their work ethic, their practice habits, their background, what other sports they were involved in. The more things you know about them, the more comfortable you feel about selecting somebody."

All of which explains Davis' interest in trading up

for Miami left tackle Bryant McKinnie.

Former college coaches such as Davis and Spurrier also know other draftable players whom they recruited but chose another school. "It's clearly a huge advantage because a high percentage of the players over five years—last year and the next four—are guys we've tracked," Davis says.

## Palmetto power

Everybody knows Florida is a hotbed of football talent and that Texas produces more players than tumbleweeds. But here's a little-known fact: the unheralded state of South Carolina is becoming a NFL factory.

It starts at the grassroots level. "The high school ball in South Carolina is at a pretty good level," says Falcons vice president of football operations Ron Hill. "They probably have 15 or more blue-chip kids every year."

In recent years, the state has produced first-round picks defensive tackle Richard Seymour of the Patriots, defensive end Courtney Brown of the Browns, defensive ends John Abraham and Shaun Ellis of the Jets, offensive tackle Victor Riley of the Chiefs, linebacker Anthony Simmons of the Seahawks and linebacker Peter Boulware of the Ravens. In addition, South Carolina was the original home to receivers Troy Brown and David Patten of the Patriots, safety Lee Flowers of the Steelers, cornerback Jeff Burris of the Bengals, running back Mike Anderson of the Broncos, receiver Oronde Gadsden of the Dolphins and many, many others.

The state's specialty is defensive linemen, and this year, the trend will continue with projected first-round picks Ryan Sims of North Carolina and Albert Haynesworth of Tennessee, who could be the first two defensive tackles chosen. All told, about 15 players with South Carolina roots figure to be drafted.

Other South Carolina products expected to be drafted include Ohio State cornerback Derek Ross, Florida State safety Chris Hope, Michigan guard Jonathan Goodwin, Clemson quarterback Woodrow Dantzler, Tennessee linebacker Dominique Stevenson, Arkansas linebacker Jermaine Petty, Winston-Salem State safety Stephon Kelly and five University of South Carolina players: cornerbacks Sheldon Brown and Andre Goodman, offensive tackle Melvin Paige; defensive end John Stamper and linebacker Kenny Harney.

Also figuring prominently in the draft are a handful of players who grew up elsewhere but played for a college in the state—South Carolina defensive end Kalimba Edwards and South Carolina safety Willie Offord.

## Rocky tops

It isn't often that an entire college unit is drafted, but it could happen this year with the Tennessee defensive line.

The only question is if defensive end Bernard Jackson will be selected. If so, he is expected to be a late pick. There is no question that defensive tackles John Henderson and Albert Haynesworth will be high picks in the first round.

# King THE rounds

Titans general manager Floyd Reese talked with Vols coach Phillip Fulmer at the Tennessee workout. "I told him not only did he have the best defensive tackle duo in college, but he also had the best defensive tackle duo in the pros," Reese says. "I don't know of an NFL team that has two defensive tackles with that size, that athleticism and can run like those guys."

Hustling defensive end Will Overstreet is expected to be gone by the end of Round 2, making the Tennessee defensive line one of the most highly rated by NFL scouts in draft history.

"It's really an impressive group," Reese says. "You'd have to think long and hard to find a better group of defensive linemen."

## See you later, Gators receivers

Jabar Gaffney and Reche Caldwell could be victims of discrimination—based upon the program they played for in college.

Just because Gaffney and Caldwell happened to attend the same university and play the same position

as Travis Taylor, Reidel Anthony, Jacquez Green, Ike Hilliard, Jack Jackson, Chris Doering, John Capel, Travis McGriff, Willie Jackson and Darrell Jackson, NFL teams are wondering if they can expect the same kind of disappointment from these two as they faced with many of their recent Gators predecessors. Both well-regarded players could drop in the draft as a result.

"There is a stigma with some positions with some schools," says Ravens vice president Ozzie Newsome, who chose Taylor with the 10th overall pick in 2000 and believes Taylor is about to break out. "But you have to evaluate the individual. It's tough to say a player can't play a position just because he's from a certain school."

The issue is this—Steve Spurrier's offense might have made the receivers appear better than they are. "A lot of them haven't been as talented as some other receivers, and it's a tremendous tribute to Spurrier," says Giants general manager Ernie Accorsi, who drafted Hilliard with the seventh overall pick in 1997. "That system would make anybody look good."

NFL talent evaluators agree that Florida receivers come to the pros as well prepared as any. "When you get them, they are polished and playing at a certain level," Newsome says. "The key is do they get any better?"

## Misfits on a mission

NFL teams don't know what to do with five college quarterbacks who don't fit the mold, so how about putting them all together in one offense? Think you could run a few trick plays with this lineup?

**QB—Antwaan Randle El, Indiana.** OK, so he's 5-9. He is the only Division I-A player to produce 40 touchdown passes and rush for 40 more touchdowns.

**RB—Eric Crouch, Nebraska.** He has innate running skills that were evident in the option, and he ran a 4.46 40-yard dash at the combine. If Crouch's shoulders were sturdier, he definitely would have a future at running back.

**RB—Woodrow Dantzler, Clemson.** His mind is set on playing quarterback, but he rushed for more than 1,000 yards last season and played running back at the Senior Bowl.

**WR—Ronald Curry, North Carolina.** This high school safety and former basketball player has elite athletic ability, and he ran a 4.6 in the 40 while weighing 220 pounds.

**WR—Steve Bellisari, Ohio State.** He has been timed at 4.59 in the 40 and has shown agility in defensive back drills. Safety might be his best position.

## The 'Cane collection

Last year, the University of Miami produced four first-round picks and seven picks overall. This year, Miami could have five first-round picks and 11 players drafted overall.

That might be the most impressive two-year output from any school ever. "Five or six years from now, we'll look back at last year's Miami team and say that was an NFL-caliber team," says Phil Savage, the Ravens director of college scouting.

In the backfield of the NFL Hurricanes would be Clinton Portis, a projected first-round pick this year, at tailback, and Najeh Davenport, who could go as high as the second this year, at fullback. James Jackson, a third-round pick in 2001, would provide depth. At receiver are 2001 first-round picks Santana Moss and Reggie Wayne. At tight end is 2002 projected first-rounder Jeremy Shockey.

The offensive line would feature left tackle Bryant McKinnie, expected to be a high first-round pick, and two others who should be drafted—guard Martin Bibla and tackle Joaquin Gonzalez.

The defensive front is the leanest area, with the only NFL representatives being tackle Damione Lewis and linebacker Dan Morgan, both first-round picks a year ago.

The secondary is loaded. At corner would be Phillip Buchanon, who should be a high first-rounder this year, and Mike Rumph, who should be a second-rounder. Leonard Myers, a sixth-round pick last year, and last season's nickel corner Markese Fitzgerald, a late-round prospect in this draft, provide depth. At safety would be Ed Reed, who is on the borderline between the first and second round this year.

It's not like the talent well runs dry after this draft. Former Hurricanes coach Butch Davis, now coaching the Browns, estimates that at least 40 players from the 2001 Miami roster will be in a pro camp, and that Miami should produce between nine and 13 draftees every year for the next four years.

## Wire story

After he signs his first NFL contract, Stanford's Coy Wire should turn over a percentage of it to Rams safety Adam Archuleta.

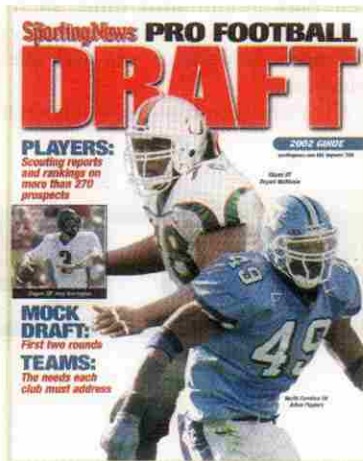
Archuleta, a first-round pick last year, did more to enhance Wire's stock than anyone by seamlessly

**You're on the clock** Time is running out for you to get the Pro Football Draft Guide with its analysis of more than 270 prospects, plus an inside look at the needs of every NFL team. It's available on newsstands and at [www.sportingnews.com/books](http://www.sportingnews.com/books) or by calling 1-800-825-8508, Dept. TSN.



Caldwell

BOB LEVERONE / TSN



	Archuleta	Wire
40 time	4.40	4.63
Vertical jump	39	38½
Bench press reps	31	28
*Tackles	127	92
*Sacks	4	3
*Interceptions	1	0

\*Statistics are from both players' senior seasons, when Archuleta played 12 games and Wire played 11.

making the switch from college linebacker to NFL safety. The fresh memory of Archuleta's success is promoting the belief that Wire can make the same switch.

Wire, however, is a different type of player than Archuleta. He doesn't have Archuleta's speed, athleticism and fluid coverage skills. Wire is more similar to Pat Tillman, who preceded Archuleta at linebacker at Arizona State and has gone on to play safety in the NFL.

That isn't to say Wire lacks athleticism. Among safeties at the scouting combine, he had the best three-cone time, the best 60-yard shuttle time, the second-best 20-yard shuttle time and the most bench press repetitions of 225 pounds. When he took off his shirt at the combine, scouts say Wire looked more like he belonged on Venice Beach than in Palo Alto.

But it's how Wire is wired that makes him special. He led Stanford in rushing yards as a sophomore running back. After switching to linebacker as a junior, he was voted MVP of the defense. Learning yet another new position shouldn't intimidate him.

Wire makes plays because he's instinctive and tough. "I know he didn't run as well as Archuleta, but he plays as fast as any guy I've ever had," says Kent Baer, Wire's defensive coordinator at Stanford who now is at Notre Dame. "He takes good angles, he has quickness and instincts. He has a low center of gravity and understands leverage."

Some teams expect Wire to be an undrafted free agent. Other teams think enough of Wire to consider drafting him on the first day. Wire would fit perfectly in a scheme like the Titans', in which the strong safety is basically a linebacker wearing a lower number. But a team that asks both safeties to run with receivers probably won't have much interest in Wire.

Baer, however, contends Wire has the ability to cover receivers. In fact, he says Wire's versatility allowed Stanford to stay in man defense instead of checking to zone when opposing offenses came out with four and five wideouts. Every day in practice, Wire was allowed to get in a half dozen or so one-on-one reps against wideouts. Linebackers normally have no need to do that, but the Stanford coaches wanted Wire to show NFL scouts what he could do.

He can do quite a bit—even if he's not Archuleta.

TSN

 For more in-depth analysis from Dan Pompei and the scouting experts at The War Room, subscribe to TSN's Draft Central at [www.sportingnews.com/nfl/draft](http://www.sportingnews.com/nfl/draft).

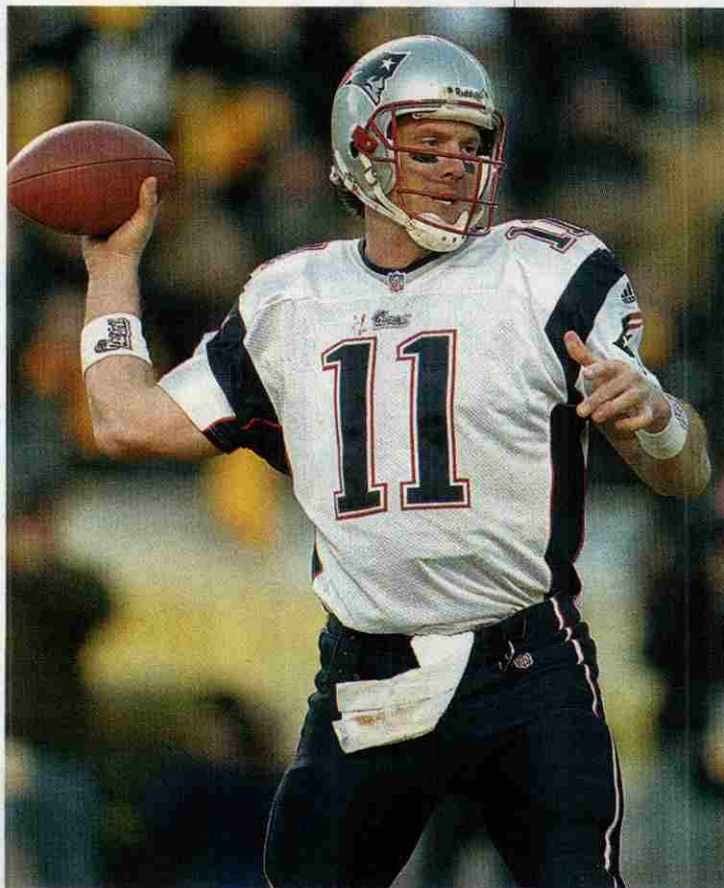
# INSIDE DISH

By DAN POMPEI

Despite their proclamations that the window to acquire **Drew Bledsoe** had closed and despite Bledsoe's wish not to be traded to Cincinnati, the Bengals are back in the bidding for the Patriots' former No. 1 quarterback. The most recent trade bait the Bengals offered was not LB **Takeo Spikes** or LB **Brian Simmons**, however. Nor was it their first-round pick in the draft. It was an offensive player who could spice up the Patriots' attack. ... The Giants won't attempt to extend DE **Michael Strahan**'s contract this year, but it has more to do with timing than with contentious negotiations. The Giants had hoped to create some cap space for 2002 by extending the contract of the NFL's single-season sack leader before the opening of the free-agent market. When it became obvious the Giants weren't getting anywhere with Strahan, they reworked the contracts of six other veterans. If the Giants were to extend Strahan after redoing the

other contracts, the team would put itself in a salary-cap bind for 2003. The Giants are expected to try to re-sign Strahan after next season. ... If FB **Mike Alstott** has his mind set on being a feature back, then he better plan on playing for a different team in 2002. Alstott might be able to live with the reduced salary the Bucs are proposing, but it might be harder for him to live with a reduced role. Now that the Bucs have signed RB **Michael Pittman** to carry the ball 15-20 times a game, Alstott can expect 10 carries a game at the max. Then again, it's unlikely he would get any more carries with another team. ... Not everyone was surprised by **Elvis Grbac**'s decision to retire after getting cut by the Ravens. In fact, there was a rumor circulating through the Ravens' complex last fall that Grbac was considering retirement. Of course, Grbac might not have retired if the Ravens had decided to pay the \$6 million roster bonus that his contract called for in March. But paying Grbac that kind of money made little sense if the Ravens suspected Grbac wasn't long for the league. ... The idea of a flexible schedule in which the NFL

could choose one of several games for its showcase on *Monday Night Football* late in the year is not dead. In fact, it is almost certain to happen at some point in the future. The most likely scenario is that the flex schedule will be included in the new television contract in 2006. In the meantime, the league will continue to try to sell Fox and CBS on the idea. The NFL has the option of reopening the TV contract after the coming season, but it's not going to play around with a \$17 billion contract over a relatively minor issue like the flex schedule.



BOB LEVERONE / TSN

**The Bengals are making another run at acquiring Bledsoe without giving up their first-round draft choice.**