

Gary Zauner On Tyler Schmitt And The Value Of Long Snappers

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"They didn't know what they were talking about." --Coach Gary Zauner on the NFL Network's mocking response to Seattle drafting Tyler Schmitt in the 6th round.

Gary Zauner knows special teams. For 13 years, he worked in the NFL as a special teams coordinator. Today, he works as a consultant for talented special teams players looking to improve. As noted below, Zauner worked with recent Seahawks draftee Tyler Schmitt. I called Coach Zauner to ask his opinion of Schmitt's abilities and the importance of long snapping.

The first thing Zauner noted was how annoyed he was with the response from the NFL Network's draft team following Seattle selecting Tyler Schmitt in the 6th round. He referred me to a post on his blog where he effectively argues that teams with a definite need often draft long snappers and that those long snappers typically have long and productive careers. If Seattle enjoys the stability and longevity of a Jason Kyle or Brad Saint Louis, it will be hard to argue that they wasted their 6th round selection.

Good snapping is hard to notice, but bad snapping isn't. When Boone Stutz heaved the ball into Seattle's end zone in week 6, he gifted the New Orleans Saints 7 points. "Snapping should be automatic," states Zauner. Bad snapping affects the timing and confidence of punters and kickers. In 1993, Zauner worked with the Seahawks' Jon Kasay. Kasay kicked a 63.6% field goal percentage in 1992, but improved to 82.1% in 1993. Zauner argues the problem wasn't just with Kasay, but with the holder and long snapper. "It's all about timing, rhythm; perfect snap every time, laces down." A good long snapper gives not only his kicker and punter confidence but also his coach. "[Schmitt] will get Holmgren's hair back to its normal color."

Zauner was especially complimentary of his ability to cover after the kick. Schmitt practiced at linebacker for San Diego State and was an all-state defensive end in college. "He's a heck of a cover guy." That's an extra able body on punt returns.

If the most Seattle did was replace the worst long snapper in the league with the best long snapper in this draft class, that's still worth a 6th round pick. If my eyes and the words of Coach Gary Zauner are any indication, they may have quietly done much more.