

Orr Draft Diary: McFarland offers assistance

Landon Watnick - InsidetheGators.com

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As he arrived at the NFL Scouting Combine in Indianapolis last Thursday, former Gators defensive tackle Leon Orr knew interviews would be an integral part of his four-day process. The elephant in the room - Orr's midseason departure from UF in 2014 and his reasoning behind it - didn't go unaddressed by teams and the media for very long.

But Orr wanted to let teams know he was regretful for how his career at Florida ended - and that he's working to grow both on and off the field after what had transpired late last year.

"A lot of the things were pretty straightforward, like, 'What happened? What happened with you and Florida? What's the relationship between you and the university?' Just basically wanting to know how I put myself in that situation and what was my thought process," Orr said. "So it was a lot of thoughts about my mind frame and what was going on both on and off the field, just to get an analytical presence of what was going on when the whole situation happened.

"As a man, you have to own up to your mistakes but at the same time you can't let your mistakes break you. You've got to progress. So I just wanted to get the point across that I felt like I made a mistake, but at the same time that's not going to stop me to try to progress as a man and a player."

After hearing an array of similar questions from scouts and other NFL types at the NFLPA Collegiate Bowl last month in Carson, Calif., Orr echoed similar sentiments - but this time got the opportunity to address them to a wider scope of people. Ultimately, that experience from late January helped prepare Orr for what to expect at the combine.

"I feel like me coming from the NFLPA Bowl in California, it kind of gave me a taste of the professionalism and the organization that I was going to be walking into," explained Orr. "When I got there, I was not really nervous more or less because I feel like I kind of got walked through a mini course of what was to be expected. When I got there, it was really organized. You had a lot of teams with their own suites, their own little sections, so when you're talking to them you really get isolated and have one-on-one conversations."

Orr talked to an array of teams during his four days at the combine from last Thursday to Sunday, but the five he feels he had the best interviews with are the Atlanta Falcons, Cleveland Browns, Jacksonville Jaguars, New York Jets and Oakland Raiders.

During his time speaking with the Falcons, Orr met with his former defensive coordinator/defensive line coach at UF from 2011-12 in new Atlanta head coach Dan Quinn as well as Falcons defensive line coach Bryan Cox, the father of Orr's teammate at Florida, Bryan Cox Jr.

"We had a really good conversation," Orr said. "Me and his son had a really good relationship at Florida, so that really helped smooth things over during the interview."

When Orr spoke with Browns defensive line coach Anthony Weaver, he was already familiar with the former UF defensive graduate assistant from the 2010 season. Before coaching at the next level Weaver served as the linebackers coach at North Texas in 2011 under head coach Dan McCarney, who was the Gators' defensive line coach in 2008-10.

On the second day of his combine process Orr measured at 6-foot-5, 323 pounds with 9 3/8-inch hands and 34 1/8-inch arms. Over the next few months, Orr hopes to get his weight down to 310-315 to improve his body control.

"I didn't feel like I was going to weigh less," Orr said. "When I was training, my weight wasn't a major emphasis.

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I was really lifting and really trying to rehab my wrist. Make sure that I had put on a lot of muscle. Even though my weight was higher than I expected, I still felt like I had held a good posture and I was holding the weight really well.”

Due to his wrist, which Orr had surgery on in January 2014, he could not start benching until this off-season. Because of this, Orr opted out of the 225-pound bench press just so he could improve his strength and put up impressive numbers when he plans on performing drills at UF’s Pro Day on April 7.

It took Orr a few minutes to begin his first 40-yard dash, which clocked in at an unofficial 5.19 with a 1.85 split, as he said he had a misunderstanding with Pittsburgh Steelers scout Mark Gorscak about how he should set up his stance for the 40.

“What I was trying to do was set my feet and what I was doing was catching my balance because I wanted to set my balance on the second line because that’s where my feet were lined up and then I was going to set my feet again and move forward,” Orr said. “I wouldn’t say that it was an unorthodox method of setting up the stance, but it may have been slightly different from what he was seeing. Before the run if you see anything with my 40 time, he was going to stop me and I just had to make it aware that was what I’m doing and after that I kind of reminded that I was doing this on purpose. I’m going to put my hand on the front line. I just want to set my feet first just so that I have the proper balance because me being the big guy I like to get my hips set up so when I come out I use that explosion.”

Despite the commercial break and a few technical difficulties on his second try, Orr still recorded an unofficial 40 of 5.23 with a 1.87 split.

“When I lined up for my second time he was like, ‘Hold up, we’re having technical difficulties,’ so I had to get up and reset,” Orr said. “It was like little small things. Like you know when you’re set your personal best times, you really want to lock in and the littlest things can really throw you off track.”

Orr’s official 40-yard dash time came in at 5.16, a decent number for a defensive tackle his weight. His goal is to get his 40 down to the low 4.9s, perhaps at about 4.95, by April.

“Not disappointed, but it wasn’t what I wanted to run personally,” Orr said of his 40-yard dash from Sunday. “Me, I’m the type of person that’s never satisfied. I’m very critical of my performance. But for me, being 325 and being able to run that 5.1, it kind of built a platform to jump from and to improve from so it was good. It was just a big blessing, just to get to be able to run on that stage and let those scouts see my quickness and display some athleticism.”

In his other drills Orr logged a 28-inch vertical jump, a broad jump of 8 feet, 4 inches, a time of 8.26 in the three-cone drill and a 4.90 in the 20-yard shuttle. As for the defensive line-specific drills, the former Gator was really pleased with how he performed.

“We hit the pads and did some pass rush moves, just feel our quickness and our ability to react,” Orr said. “I felt like I got a lot of positive feedback during the drills, some from players and some from coaches. It was one of those surreal moments to get recognized by some of the top defensive linemen in the country.”

During their drills, Orr and his former teammate Dante Fowler Jr. wore Adidas cheetah-print cleats from the Uncaged Collection. Fowler made headlines Sunday for wearing the cleats and a gold watch, which was actually just a G-Shock athletic performance watch, during his 40-yard dash attempts.

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Even in the frigid weather in Indianapolis, when he wasn't interviewing with teams or performing drills Orr enjoyed his stay at the Omni Hotel, which was right across the street from all the action.

"The Omni hotel was a very beautiful hotel," Orr said. "We were right next to Lucas Oil Stadium, so that was crazy. It was all connected together so we were able to keep ourselves warm going underground, just transporting directly from the hotel to the stadium to do our drills. They made sure they took care of us. I had a little problem during the end. Some of my jewelry went missing, but they're in the process of helping me recover that right now.

"I had my masseuse there on set," Orr added. "My training staff came up from the Performance Compound and they made sure I was loose and limber. I was doing some 80 warm-ups before the runs and before the drills just to get my nervous system fired up. Overall, I think I handled it pretty well."

Orr will continue to work at the Performance Compound in Tampa, Fla., with coaches Jason Riley and Yo Murphy over the next few months. He said he spoke with a few teams last weekend about setting up some private workouts leading up to the draft.

Former Bucs defensive tackle and current SEC Network analyst Anthony "Booger" McFarland has also offered his assistance to Orr as he prepares for the next stage in his career.

"He texted me right after the combine and he was like, 'You've got your whole life to be average. Just give me 40 days of greatness and I'm going to train you into something special,'" Orr said of McFarland. "That was something that gets sent out to the heart and it motivates me. Not that I wasn't already motivated, but it took my level of motivation to a deep that I don't think it had ever been. When somebody with that type of recognition, with that type of credibility to sit down and tell you you're going to be a great player. That it was time to handle the little things so that you could take it to the next level, just with the conditioning and the things like that.

"It just really shows you that the NFL and the people who are in the NFL really care about those guys who are coming out of college and trying to make it to the next level."