

NFL Draft Telecast

A Neat Experiment

The live telecast of the National Football League draft began on ESPN in New York, N.Y., and Bristol, Conn., at exactly 10 a.m., Peter Rozelle, presiding.

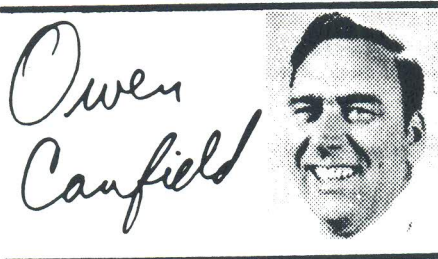
BRISTOL — Bill Rasmussen, who not very long ago did one job and another for the Hartford Whalers, came around from behind a dark polished desk as big as a freight car and sat down with a visitor to watch the show. He swivelled the television so both could see.

NEW YORK — Kelly Murdock, a taxi driver, was presented live and in color. "Well," the cabbie said, "they need defensive backs." Kelly Murdock was not unhappy that his New York Giants had drafted Mark Haynes of Colorado. Murdock got his blond image, voice and opinion transported live via RCA's Satcom 1 satellite into some four million homes around the country from the Sheraton ballroom. He was obviously not unhappy about that, either.

Dave Jennings, Giants punter, spoke on camera with Bob Halloran. "I was leaning toward picking Roland James of Tennessee," he said. "because we haven't had good punt returners and I know about him." But he was satisfied with Haynes and so were Giants fans in the live audience. It wasn't like last year when they booed the selection of quarterback Phil Simms.

BRISTOL — The Entertainment and Sports Programming Network would broadcast the whole schmiel, start to finish, for the information and enlightenment of professional football nuts, of which there are many. Chairman of the Board Bill Rasmussen, ESPN President Chet Simmons and the Getty Oil Co. all agreed that to do so would be good business. It had never been done before, for one thing, and what the heck, ESPN is exclusively devoted to sports, more sports and strictly sports.

The Detroit Lions hesitated, for show, before drafting Billy Sims, and then grabbed him. In a room not far down the hall from Rasmussen's dark-paneled office, men were busy with



scary-looking computer consoles that blinked and whirred, and with hundreds of tape cassettes, arranged alphabetically on racks.

An action tape of Billy Sims, doing his wonderful running-with-the-football thing, appeared on TV monitors. "We put 135 of those together preparing for this broadcast," Rasmussen said. "And we built 195 still graphics." The last referred to a man at a keyboard tapping out the draftee's name and vital statistics, which come up on a screen and are then paired with a mug shot and filed in a computer, the push of a button away from instant retrieval.

NEW YORK — In the Sheraton ballroom, there were 10 cameras and another at Rusty Staub's restaurant nearby. Announcers were all over the place. The doors didn't open to the public until a few minutes before the draft began. A crowd had waited patiently outside the hotel.

BRISTOL — "The NFL did a smart thing," Rasmussen said. "They passed out ballots to everybody waiting. People filled them out and the one that comes closest to picking the first 28 draftees wins two tickets and an all-expenses-paid trip to the Super Bowl next year. Talk about good public relations."

In another small room, five young men sat at a table with a bank of TV monitors in front of them. The producer was loudly producing, the director directing, etc. The expensive soundproof studio could be seen through a window. A young woman was busy on the telephone, contacting drafted football players around the country for in-

terviews. In the studio, ESPN's Bob Ley pumped comments from ex-Philadelphia Eagle Vince Papale, and Upton Bell and Howard Balzer of the Sporting News.

NEW YORK — George Grande anchored the Sheraton broadcast, Joe Thomas commenting. The Jets picked Johnny "Lam" Jones of Texas and Frankie Ramos of the Jets' front office, wearing a big cowboy hat, was immediately interviewed. So was Dave Thomas, a Jets fan who drove to New York from Wilmington, Vt., to watch and kibitz. He used his minute on the camera to say, "I predict Marc Wilson will go to Pittsburgh." Shortly thereafter, Oakland drafted the BYU passer and his action cassette was called and seen.

BRISTOL — Rasmussen took his guest on a tour of the two-story ESPN building that is packed with space-age computer machinery. It isn't large enough. Another building will soon go up.

When Rasmussen brought to light his wierd idea about filtering University of Connecticut sports events through a satellite and sprinkling them around the country, less imaginative people snickered. When Getty Oil bought him out, the sneering stopped because it was obvious Bill Rasmussen had stuck his sabre in the sand and poked around until he struck something solid — gold.