



## New Orleans Saints long snapper Jason Kyle was in Cleveland Browns' 1999 expansion draft

By Tony Grossi

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Jason Kyle, in training camp with the 2000 Browns. He was cut before the season began.

FORT LAUDERALE, FLA. - Mamas, let your babies grow up to be long snappers.

That has got to be the moral of the **Jason Kyle** story.

Kyle, long snapper for the New Orleans Saints, now has made it to his second Super Bowl since passing through Cleveland.

Don't recall the name, Browns fans? Kyle was one of the 38 players selected by the Browns in the 1999 expansion draft. But he never played a down, never delivered a long snap, because he tore a knee ligament on the first day of the team's first minicamp.

Like many players who wind up on a Browns roster, Kyle went on to, well, better fortune if not fame. He was released by the Browns the following summer, signed with Carolina a year later and carved out a career as a long snapper. He played in a 32-29 loss to the New England Patriots in Super Bowl XXXVIII on Feb. 1, 2004, while with the Panthers.

Kyle actually has outlasted every player made available to the Browns by the NFL in the 1999 expansion draft. Arizona quarterback Kurt Warner was the only other player on that original list of 150 still active in 2009, and he retired last week.

"Is that right? Wow," Kyle, 37, said Thursday, sitting at a table in a ballroom of the Saints headquarters hotel. "Kurt Warner was on that list?"

Strange but true. That hodgepodge list of high-priced or broken down veterans and unproven nobodies included future Hall of Famers (Reggie White and, probably, Warner), future broadcasters (ESPN's Desmond Howard and Fox's Darryl Johnston), future assistant coaches (Alex Van Pelt of Buffalo and Scott Milanovich of the Montreal Alouettes) and a future U.S. congressman (Heath Shuler, a North Carolina Democrat).

And then there's Kyle, still delivering the ball on New Orleans place-kicks and punts while viewing his target from an upside-down position.

"I'd have been released a long time ago, if not for long snapping," Kyle said.

Kyle was a two-year starter at linebacker and was his team's leading tackler at Arizona State, decent enough

to be drafted in the fourth round by Seattle in 1995. He took over long snapping chores in his second season and then was put on the Seahawks' expansion draft list (five per club). The 11th anniversary of that draft is Feb. 9.

"I was actually visiting my mom in China at the time," Kyle said. "My mom grew up in Lakewood and my dad grew up in Rocky River. So my dad was excited and he e-mailed me. That's how I found out."

Kyle's injury prevented him from traveling with the Browns that season, so he missed the team's inaugural victory on the famed Tim Couch "Hail Mary" pass, which happened to be against Kyle's current team at the Superdome. The Saints have progressed on a steeper level than the Browns, you may have noticed.

"[That first season] was rough," Kyle said. "There were a lot of good guys on that team, but I just think everyone coming from different programs like that, it was tough to get on the same page."

Kyle's special teams coach in that 1999 season was Ken Whisenhunt, who had his Super Bowl moment last season as coach of the Arizona Cardinals.

Kyle said he gave up all hopes of playing linebacker in the NFL in his second season with Carolina in 2002.

"We had a couple of linebackers get hurt in a game and [coach] John Fox grabbed one of our defensive linemen and started teaching him cover-2 and I realized they didn't plan on me playing any linebacker," Kyle said. "After that I went on and said, 'I'm fine with not playing linebacker but I'd rather not go to meetings if I'm not going to play.' He said, 'No problem.'"

Kyle's been a full-time specialist ever since. He's completing his 15th NFL season. His contract is up after Sunday's Super Bowl. He hopes to keep playing "until all 32 teams say I can't . . . I've already been on six."

As for life after football, Kyle already has plunged into the social media universe with an enterprise called **Pro Player Connect**. He describes it as "a **Facebook** network," which enables businesses to bypass agents to contact athletes for speaking engagements or other business endeavors.

More than 1,000 athletes are registered on Kyle's Web site, including former Browns Couch and Kelly Holcomb and several active players.

Kyle is registered on the site, naturally. So any team looking for a long snapper in 2010 can find him there. It's not quarterbacking, but the job security is fairly good.

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