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Blalock coaching himself, others to success

By [Dave Gladow](#)
NFL.com

(April 26, 2007) -- The typical image of a football player doesn't often paint a picture of intelligence. The tendency is to look at the brutality and violence of the game and reduce it to that level. Indeed, football players are usually thought of as the stereotypical thoughtless jocks, with little chance at redeeming themselves.

Of course reality can be quite different. Many football players around the NFL are actually very intelligent. Fortunately, they could soon see their numbers increase, thanks to the 2007 NFL Draft.

That's because former Texas offensive lineman [Justin Blalock](#) figures to be picked early. Blalock is one of those players who break the mold, excelling on the football field as well as off it.

"I think being smart helps you in just about anything you want to do in life, not only in football," Blalock says, "Specifically, it helps with things like learning the playbook, picking up on all the nuances of the position quickly and just understanding what the coaches are asking of you at all times."

He has received high marks in all of those areas and for his general field awareness. Meanwhile, his off-field honors continue to pile up.

Those honors started in high school, as Blalock was an Honor Roll student and was listed in Who's Who among American High School Students. His accomplishments at the high school level naturally landed him several honors for athletic prowess, but being named one of five finalists for the 2002 Watkins Award (presented to the nation's top African-American high school scholar-athlete) may have been his greatest accomplishment of all.



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Playing football for a major Division I football program didn't seem to hurt his academics either, as Blalock was a member of Texas' Athletics Director's Honor Roll. He graduated last fall with a major in Youth and Community Studies and a minor in Business. But what exactly does he envision for himself after his playing days are over? What does he plan to do with his academic successes? The answer, once again, isn't exactly what one would expect.

"I want to be a coach one day. Everyone always asks me, 'Are you sure you're so smart, wanting to get into coaching?,'" Blalock says with a laugh. "But I still want to be a coach."

"Hopefully I'll be in a position where I can have a job I want to do and feel passionate about, and that's coaching."

That passion is genuine, as the topic of coaching is one that gets Blalock excited. But what, specifically, is the major appeal for him?

"I've seen the effect that a good coach can have on a young person's life. I'd like the opportunity to change people's lives for the better, especially younger kids."

"I've been really fortunate over the years to have coaches that cared about not only what goes on on the field, but off the field too. And I think in youth sports, it's important to care about that sort of stuff (the off-field stuff). My coaches have cared about my home life and my grades, and so I really feel I've been blessed. I'd like to pass that leadership on."

If anyone is in a position to do that, it's Blalock. As a four-year starter with the Longhorns, Blalock naturally took on a leadership role as he got older and more experienced. But Blalock took it more seriously than most, excelling and leading by example in practice, in the weight room and in the classroom.

In short, Blalock is getting a jump on his potential coaching career by helping younger players now -- and it's no accident.



Texas guard/tackle Justin Blalock is smart, strong and versatile.

it needs some work.

"I feel very fortunate to have had some of the best coaches in all of college football, but even they can't be with the players all the time," he says. "So I try to be a resource to the younger guys as much as possible. I'll give them some pointers, help with technique or go over the playbook with them. It's something I can do to help my team get better."

"And if I can teach some of these guys, I think coaching entire offenses shouldn't be too bad."

Of course right now, his focus is on his own game, and Blalock is realistic enough to know

That's a funny thing to say about a first-team All-American, but he knows he'll be starting from scratch as a rookie in the NFL. And toward that end, he's willing to do anything asked of him at the next level --

even if it means switching positions.

"I'm open to all suggestions. I think I project more as a guard because of my body type, but if a team needs a tackle, I will not be opposed to playing that at all. I played it the majority of my career in college, and it treated me well. So I would have no problem playing any position along the line.

"I do like to watch a bunch of other players, but I wouldn't go so far to say that I try to emulate anybody. I'm my own person and I have a different style, and I like to think that most people are the same way. There are certainly a lot of people I like to watch play, but it doesn't necessarily mean I can do all the things they can do or that they can do the things I can do. Still, with some of the top tier guys -- it's easy to watch the guys who are successful and try to pick up on what they do that might translate to my game as well. I'm always looking for any kind of advantage I can get."

And what advantage does Blalock possess in trying to make an NFL roster?

"I think my attitude. I'm very open, coachable and pick up on things very quickly. And I know as a rookie, especially on the offensive line, there's going to be a lot to learn. Probably the biggest hurdle to getting on the field will be learning the plays, more so than other positions where maybe natural skills can take over. But I think in that aspect, probably the greatest thing going for me at the moment is being able to process things and understand them. My philosophy, no matter what offense I'm in, should help."

Many scouts project the cerebral Blalock to succeed at the next level thanks in part to his intelligence as well as his humility and drive. Of course the physical skills don't hurt either. But how can a prospect develop one's intelligence or determination?

Putting on his teaching cap again, Blalock has a few ideas for younger players out there looking to improve their grey matter.

"Well, always be a good listener. You never know when or where some type of knowledge is going to come from. It's important that you learn something new every day. And even though I'm not in school any more, I keep trying to improve my knowledge base every day."

Blalock takes that seriously. His determination to prepare for the draft has been relentless, with the big guy working on all his skills to gain notice from potential employers. That includes working on the interview process, which interestingly enough, went smoothly. Prospects typically have horror stories to tell, but not Blalock.

His most bizarre experience over the past few months has come courtesy of the post carrier, as Blalock received an application for Mensa, the prestigious high-IQ society, in the mail recently. Blalock looked at the initial interest as an honor and may pursue it, but for right now, he's focused on football.

Gil Brandt on Blalock

"Blalock has been well-coached and is an outstanding person and worker, serving as the team captain at Texas ... He worked out well at the Combine and will play a long time at a high level. The team that drafts him will love him as a player and a person."

[Read Brandt's linemen evaluations](#)

"I haven't submitted anything yet as far as an official admissions test. It's a practice test, a take-it-at-home, see-how-you-might-do kind of deal. When I get some real free time, it'll be something that I seriously look into."

So with Mensa off the table for now, what are Blalock's short term goals?

"First off, make the team. That's first and foremost. I'd like to be able to go in and compete for a position on the field. I don't want to ride the bench all the time. I want to go in and give it my best shot and hopefully come out with a job in the fall."

With his academic and athletic background working in his favor, this likely future coaching candidate should be able to do much more than simply make a roster -- much to the benefit of whatever team decides to select him.

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