

Inside The NFL

by Peter King



On the Upbeat

The Vikings are feeling good about themselves again after unloading a headache and revamping the defense

SOME WOULD say the Vikings have had the worst off-season of any NFL team. Coach Mike Tice admitted that he scalped Super Bowl tickets. Arizona businessman Reggie Fowler's bid to become principal owner of the team fell apart after he failed to come up with the necessary capital. The franchise came out on the short end when it traded star wideout Randy Moss to the Raiders. Running back Onterio Smith was stopped by airport security and found to be carrying vials of dried urine and a prosthetic penis used

to beat drug tests; last week reports circulated that Smith faced a one-year suspension for violating the NFL's substance-abuse policy for a third time.

Some would say the Vikings have had the best off-season of any NFL team. For about what it would have cost to pay Moss over the next three years, they signed three leader-type free agents—nose tackle Pat Williams, cocky corner Fred Smoot and Pro Bowl safety Darren Sharper—to substantially upgrade a defense that ranked 28th in the league last year. In the first round of the

FRESH FACES Smoot (27) and Williamson are two reasons Tice (inset) is so excited about '05.

draft Minnesota got the speed receiver (Troy Williamson of South Carolina) and the edge-rushing defensive end (Erasmus James of Wisconsin) it needed.

"Oh, and we're a few days from having a new owner," general manager Rob Brzezinski said last Thursday, referring to Zygmunt Wilf, a New Jersey developer. (Fowler will be a minority owner.) "We've had a little action, haven't we?"

The Vikings *had* to do something. Tired of Moss's immaturity and selfishness, Minnesota went into the off-season with a two-pronged plan: get as much



take that pressure off him."

As the players split town after a minicamp last Thursday, some would say the Vikings are coming out of the off-season as the most

optimistic NFL team. Says Birk, who is entering his eighth season, "I was just saying to Daunte [Culpepper, the Vikings' quarterback] the other day, 'This is the most excited about a season I've been since coming to Minnesota.'" □

Dispatches

Browns tight end **Kellen Winslow** could miss the 2005 season after tearing his right ACL in a motorcycle accident on May 1 and, as a result, could lose a sizable chunk of income from the six-year, \$40 million contract he signed in 2004. Cleveland will try to withhold significantly more than the \$4.4 million bonus that Winslow is due this year. . . . Retired running back **Ricky Williams** made headlines in South Florida last week when he discussed a comeback with new Miami coach **Nick Saban**, but Dolphins fans should be more excited about the return of wideout **David Boston**. The eighth pick in the 1999 draft (by the

Cardinals), Boston played at 248 pounds for San Diego in 2003—12 more than the previous season—then was traded to Miami. Having recovered from patella-tendon surgery on his left knee which sidelined him in '04, he's down to 233 pounds and looks fit and fast again. . . . Here's why disgruntled wideout **Terrell Owens** will report to the Eagles before the season starts: TO loves the spotlight, and Philadelphia's first three games are the *Monday Night Football* kickoff, in Atlanta, his adopted hometown; a home game against his former team, the 49ers; and a home date against the Raiders and **Randy Moss**, whom Owens fancies himself better than.

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1. What team was Randy Moss traded to?
A.) Lions B.) Raiders C.) Cowboy D.) Bills
2. Who is the coach of the Vikings?
A.) Smith B.) Moss C.) Tice D.) Williams
3. How was Kellen Winslow injured?
A.) In a car B.) on a motorcycle C.) on a Train D.) on an airplane
4. Who is the Quarterback of the Vikings
A.) David Boston B.) Randy Moss C.) Dante Culpepper D.) Terrell Owen
5. What team does Terrell Owens play for?
A.) Eagles B.) Titans C.) Steelers D.) Jets
6. Who is the Miami coach?
A.) David Boston B.) Reggie Fowler C.) Mike Tice D.) Nick Saban
7. Fred Smoot signed with the Vikings in the off season?
A.) True B.) False
8. Who will be the new owner of the Vikings?
A.) Zygmunt Wilf B.) Ricky Williams C.) Pat Williams D.) David Boston
9. What place was the Vikings defense ranked last year?
A.) 23 B.) 15 C.) 28 D.) 30
10. Troy Williamson was a 1st round pick for the Vikings?
A.) True B.) False