

The Miami Herald

May 1, 2015

10A | FRIDAY, MAY 1, 2015

H-I

MiamiHerald.com | MIAMI HERALD

OPINION

JOHN S. KNIGHT (894-1518)

ALEXANDRA VILLOCH, PUBLISHER | AMINDA MARQUES GONZALEZ, EXECUTIVE EDITOR | NANCY ANGRIM, EDITORIAL PAGE EDITOR

JAMES L. KNIGHT (809-891)

THE READERS' FORUM

Does character matter in the NFL?

This will be an important year for the NFL. Escaping the shadows of the last NFL season will be difficult, but the question remains: What will be the direction and future of the once-almighty NFL?

The 2015 NFL draft could be a key indicator of just what the NFL wants to portray to the public in the years to come. What is the brand? And how tarnished is the NFL shield, a once pristine, untarnished and seemingly invincible mark? The NFL is at a crossroads, and player conduct is at the forefront.

This year, the No. 1 question in the NFL draft for the teams and its owners is whether Jameis

Winston, a young man who has been accused of rape; stolen crab legs and stood up on a table in the student union and uttered vulgarities about a part of the female anatomy (most of this conduct occurring after having won the Heisman Trophy and the national championship) will be drafted with the first pick if he is available.

But there are more issues than just Jameis Winston that the NFL is facing for the upcoming season.

What will the perception be of other recent offenders?

Does the former Miami Dolphin, Richie Incognito, take advantage of the second chance

that Rex Ryan and the Buffalo Bills have given him?

What about Adrian Peterson? Will the Vikings keep him or will other teams get in the mix? How will the dark cloud of child-abuse allegations affect his impact on the team chemistry and the game? Surely any team that signs him will have to answer many questions.

Finally, Ray Rice maybe the biggest black eye for the NFL last year. While other players are getting second chances, will a team see fit to give a once-talented running back a second chance? Does the perception then become that the team is condoning domestic abuse?

What is more important — winning or public perception?

In drafting, Winston, still a young man, what message does it send to the players, the fans, the sponsors and more important, the youth? Does character really matter? Does player conduct really matter? Or is it, as we all suspected, only about wins and losses and attendance and profit?

The NFL is at a crossroads and by owners' conduct in selecting Jameis Winston, they will let us know the answers to these questions.

— Alan K. Fertel, acting chair,
Miami-Dade Sports Commission,
Miami