

Not the typical NFL predictions

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So you've seen the graphics below and you're thinking, "Oh, no! Not another NFL preview. I've got numbers coming out of my ears!" Don't worry, this one promises to be a little bit different.

First, a little NFL history. 1981 was the NFL's glory year. There were more good teams than ever. Division races were tight. Two teams that had taken their share of the hard knocks over the years finally emerged from the rest: San Francisco and Cincinnati.

There was talent in 1981. There were several good organizations. There was tons of television money. Things were good.

Too good. There was the strike of 1982 and that ridiculous season,

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saying will be a more pass-oriented set-up. Many observers will believe that when they see it.

All-America candidate Kevin Brooks (6-6, 245) heads up a strong defense that only needs to patch up some holes at linebacker.

Schembechler, more passing or less passing, should field one of his better Wolverine teams this fall. A Big Ten title seems likely.

Miami, Fla.

After losing seven starters on defense and coach Howard Schnellenberger to the USFL, you would think the defending national champion Hurricanes would slow down. Those who saw Miami's upset win over Auburn and their come-from-behind victory over Florida know that is not the case. The Hurricanes seem to be carrying the momentum from last year's Orange Bowl victory over Nebraska into this season.

The major reason the Hurricanes are still rolling is the return of QB Bernie Kosar, last year's freshman phenom. Kosar, who has the poise of an NFL veteran, probably has the most dangerous passing arm in the NCAA. He still

and then there was the USFL. And suddenly no one knew what was going on. The USFL took away a few top players, but more importantly, a bunch of decent second-stringers.

In 1983 the league was mediocre. Previously solid franchises lacked depth. Teams would go from fantastic to horrible in one week because of injuries and individual mismatches. Al Davis and the Raiders won it all with their philosophy of "I don't care where he's from or what he did to that little boy, he can play."

This season is going to tell where the league is going. The smart organizations, the truly good teams, the good coaches, the outstanding players, the USFL's true impact, all of these things will become clear during these 16

weeks. Below are the predictions of one person who has spent a lot of time thinking about and studying the NFL, trying to answer some of those questions.

AFC EAST

MIAMI (11-5) — Even if former defensive coach Bill Arnsparger is the secret behind Don Shula, his absence shouldn't be felt this year.

NEW YORK (10-6) — The Jets always seem to do the exact opposite of what the consensus of the media say they will.

NEW ENGLAND (8-8) — Coach Ron Meyer's ultra-conservative style is a good idea; unfortunately his quarterback, Steve Grogan, and his defense aren't up to it.

INDIANAPOLIS (6-10) — With all the yelling and screaming about the move from Baltimore, no one has noticed that coach Frank Kush is putting together a respectable football team. Indianapolis might have a winner in 1985.

BUFFALO (4-12) — This is what you get when you fire a head coach who's a proven winner like Chuck Knox and hire a guy named Kay Stephenson. Think about it, would you want a football coach named Chuck, or one named Kay?

AFC CENTRAL

CINCINNATI (10-6) — Winner of this weak division by default because, like the Jets, they're a talented team that fell on hard times last year and are due for some breaks. They also happen to have the only proven quarterback in the division.

CLEVELAND (9-7) — Browns' QB Paul McDonald, who is not blessed with a rifle arm, has to be an improvement over Brian (Knucksie) Sipe.

PITTSBURGH (8-8) — It's hard to imagine squeaky-clean country club David Woodley in a mean, old, black and gold Steeler uniform. In fact Woodley might just turn out to be a softer version of exiled QB Cliff Stoudt.

HOUSTON (2-14) — Warren Moon has taken a lot of pressure off John Elway by usurping him as the NFL's most overpaid attempted franchise remedy. The Oilers would have been better off

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Moon

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to be in the same class with Lawrence Taylor and Mike Wilcher (former UNC players who were dominant at the position)."

In the spring, when Crum first sat him down and discussed the possibility of switching positions, Moon was, to say the least, hesitant. He gave Crum a firm "Maybe."

"I wasn't real, real happy about it at first, because that's (inside linebacker) where I had most of my fun, and where I thought a lot of the action was," he says. "When he told me about what he wanted to do, I just said I couldn't give him an answer right now, that it was something I'd have to sit down and think about."

Moon thought about it a lot, but he thought very little of Crum's idea. Simmons says Moon was not in the best frame of mind during that period.

"He took it too personal," Simmons remembers. "He didn't see it from the coaches' standpoint. He felt it was threatening to move from a position he played for a while, and he just felt he could contribute more on the inside than the outside."

Eventually, he overcame his reluctance and made the move. The difference between the positions is that on the outside, Moon must line up over an offensive lineman, while in the past, he was free to focus his attention on the ball. He also must use his hands more than he did when he played inside linebacker.

The adjustment may not have been perfectly smooth, and it is still in progress. But Moon seems to be growing more comfortable with his new role.

"I've gotten used to it a little bit now," he says. "It's coming OK. Basically, I've got to use a lot different technique now. The thing that's getting me is that I'm not really concentrating when I have to line up over a tight end sometimes. I find myself looking to the backfield, trying to figure out where the ball is going, instead of concentrating on getting the blocker off me first. I've got to take it one step at a time: first I've got to get this guy off me, and then I've got to go to the ball."

Missing all of spring practice didn't make the adjustment any easier. In fact, standing and watching his teammates participate in off-season drills became an adjustment in itself.

In 10th grade, Moon broke his left wrist. It never healed properly, but until last year, when he began to get a significant amount of playing time, the pain was relatively easy to tolerate. Toward the end of last season, it became more intense, though his play was hardly an indication. Moon underwent surgery after the season. Bone chips were removed and screws inserted to reconstruct the wrist.

And while the rest of the team practiced, he observed. Or tried to.

"I paid attention and I didn't pay attention, you know what I mean?" he says. "It was a very enthusiastic practice and I was sitting over there on the sideline with a cast on my arm. I couldn't get a lot out of it, 'cause I really wasn't into it."

Now he wears a "gauntlet," a leather glove with a piece of steel inside, to prevent him from reinjuring the wrist. Thanks to modern technology, the injury should not present a problem for Moon this

season.

"It (the gauntlet) helps out a whole lot," he says. "But it'll never be back to normal. Not the way it was, the way God made it."

Moon came to UNC for a couple of reasons, not the least of which was football. When he decided to leave for Chapel Hill from Altavista, Va., he seemed to have several other things in mind.

"The schools in Virginia that recruited me were nice schools, like Tech and UVa, but I didn't consider UVa an ACC school," he says in total seriousness. "I wanted to go ACC, and I wanted to be the first from my area to go."

Then there was the idea of North Carolina basketball. It seems Moon couldn't get enough of it.

"I wanted to play basketball here," he says. "But I realized that my opportunity to play football was a whole lot better (though he won four letters in high school for basketball). So one out of two ain't bad."

For the majority of his freshman season, Moon was a reserve fullback, getting most of his playing time in junior varsity games. The j.v. team was short of linebackers in one game, so he was asked to help out. He did. And the next day, Crum made him a linebacker, where he has stayed.

Last year was Moon's first as a starter. He led the team in solo tackles with 73 and had 27 assists and three sacks. In UNC's loss to Florida State in the Peach Bowl, he had 21 tackles and was named the CBS defensive player of the game. He was the only ACC player to be a *Playboy* preseason All-American.

"Micah Moon is one of the most intense players I've ever seen play a football game," Clemson coach Danny Ford says.

Mike Eppley, who serves as Ford's quarterback:

"He has as good a nose for the football as anyone I've ever played against. He's got a lot of ways up his sleeve to beat you. Most of the time, it takes more than one player to stop him once he makes up his mind he's going to do something."

Sound familiar? The same things were and still are said about Taylor, who now makes his living dismantling NFL offenses for the New York Giants. The comparisons are inevitable, but Moon prefers not to discuss them.

Nor does he like to contemplate his future in the sport, and whether or not it will parallel Taylor's career. Occasionally, he admits, it is difficult to put such things in the far reaches of his mind.

"It is when you see a BMW," he says, smiling. "Sometimes I think about it, but then I realize that this is my last year, and the present is the most important thing right now. I'll worry about what's goin' on down the road later on."

Most likely, it will be a BMW goin' on down the road later on. With Moon behind the wheel.

It doesn't take a prophet — no matter what his name may be — to figure that out.

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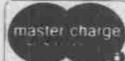
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