

PRO FOOTBALL

AFC East Coaches say there is indeed room for expansion in the NFL

By STEVEN WINE
AP Sports Writer

The five head coaches in the AFC East agree that NFL expansion is inevitable, and they say it won't dilute the quality of play.

"The colleges are doing such a great job that there are lots of prospects coming out," Miami Coach Don Shula said. "The expansion teams will become competitive in a hurry."

Shula and Indianapolis Coach Ron Meyer said players who could help expansion teams surfaced during last year's strike.

"The replacement squads pointed that direction -- that there is some untapped talent out there," Meyer said.

New England Coach Raymond Berry said discussion of expansion shows the league is healthy.

"It's a good sign for the National Football League that there are four, five or six cities out there that are making a case for a franchise," Berry said. "The National Football League is in demand."

The AFC East coaches gathered Thursday for their third annual media day. Four of the five said their division is too even to predict this year's winner, and Berry said the entire NFL has the most balance he's seen. Only Shula was willing to pick a division champion. Shula favored emerging Buffalo because of the Bills' pass rush, secondary and quarterback Jim Kelly, but he agreed the division is balanced.

"People tend to relate it to mediocrity or subpar teams," Shula said. "But I consider New England to

have a heck of a football team. They were in the Super Bowl two years ago. And you have to applaud the job Buffalo and Indianapolis did to improve. ... "We used to dominate the AFC East. Last year we won two games and lost six against the AFC East teams."

Indianapolis won the division last year with a 9-7 record. The New York Jets were last at 6-7. Twice during the season, all five teams had the same record.

"When we were all 6-6, that was a pretty good indication of the division," Buffalo's Marv Levy said. "We were probably even a little more even than the standings indicated, to tell you the truth."

Meyer said this fall's race will be a repeat.

"It appears to me very similar to the Masters teeing off today, in that anyone is capable of winning it, especially when you look at the quarterback talent in the division. And that's where we have to solidify," Meyer said.

Berry said the division's balance is a reflection of the rest of the league.

"It is as even as I have ever seen it," said Berry, who has been associated with the league for 27 seasons. "Most any team with a little momentum and a few breaks can contend for the NFL title this year."

The Jets, who made the playoffs in 1986, showed last season how quickly a team's fortunes can change amid the tight competition. "We felt in 1986 that we had a pretty damned good football team," Coach Joe Walton said.

"But we had a tremendous amount of injuries the last couple of years that have decimated (us)."

"The college coaches are doing such a great job that the expansion teams will become competitive in a hurry."

-- Don Shula
Miami Dolphins

'Sweetness' has hung up the spikes and gotten a lead foot in Toyota Grand Prix

By the Associated Press

ROSAMOND, Calif. -- Walter Payton has traded in his helmet and pads for a set of white walls and racing gloves. Just three months after retiring as the leading rusher in NFL history, Payton has a new hobby, auto racing.

Payton, 33, says in the short time he's been pursuing the sport, automobile racing has turned him into a more serious driver on public roads.

"I'll tell you what, it (racing) makes you a better driver on the street," he said. "It's not even fun any more to speed out there."

Last year, Payton was pulled over by police for driving 90 mph on a 35 mph stretch near the Bears' camp in Lake Forest.

"It was 125 actually. I slowed down before he clocked me," Payton said.

Payton already is applying his winning philosophy to his newly adopted hobby.

"You don't worry about people

who are ahead of you or behind you," Payton said. "Your concentration has to be on what you're doing."

"Once you lose that concentration, that's when things go awry," he said.

After playing 13 seasons for the Chicago Bears, Payton plans to make his debut in auto racing Saturday in a pro-celebrity race at the Toyota Grand Prix of Long Beach.

"The problem with these celebrity races is that it's embarrassing when you get lapped by someone like Helen Hayes," said comedian Jay Leno who also has signed up for the race.

To train for the race, Payton has been getting instruction and practice time at a track north of Los Angeles.

"Right now, Walter has very good car control," said Danny McKeever, Payton's instructor.

"He's a little rough around the edges, but we're working on that and I have no doubt that he'll be a

very smooth driver."

But Payton says he won't let auto racing distract him from his real goal, buying an NFL franchise.

"My desire is to own an NFL team, and once that happens, then my goal is to take that team from No. 30, or whatever it will be, to No. 1," he said.

"Racing is something I can do three or four times a year. All my attention and energy has to be dedicated to my team."

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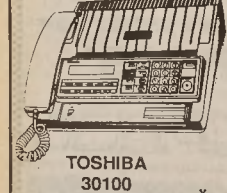


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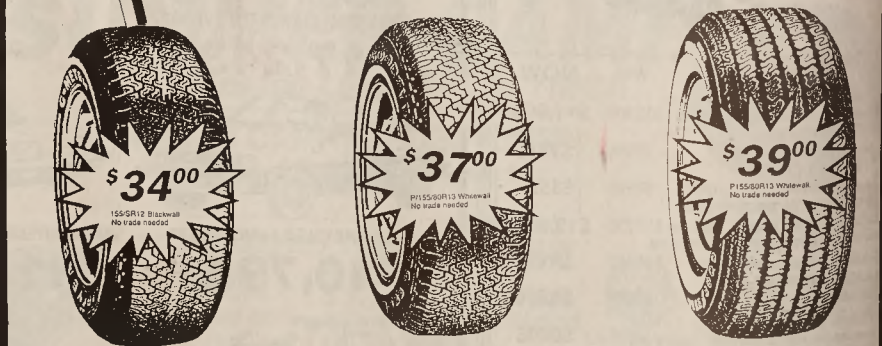
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185SR14	\$47.00	P205/75R14	\$51.00	P195/75R14	\$54.00
185SR15	\$44.00	P205/75R15	\$53.00	P205/75R14	\$56.00
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