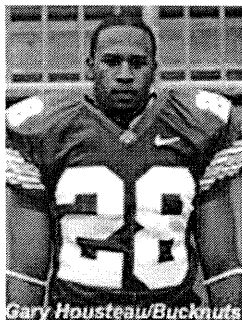


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Gary Housteaw/Bucknuts  
Maurice Hall

**Special Report: Selecting An Agent**

By *Dan Steinberg* Special to *Bucknuts.com*  
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**In the first of a series, contributor Dan Steinberg goes inside the process football players face in preparing for the NFL draft. Today, he follows Maurice Hall as he and his family choose an agent.**

**EDITOR'S NOTE -- This is the first of a series of articles planned on how various outgoing Ohio State football players are preparing for the upcoming NFL draft. In today's edition, contributor Dan Steinberg examines Maurice Hall's search for an agent.**

Anyone who's ever been to Nancy's Home Cooking diner on High Street in Columbus knows it serves a full breakfast plate of waffles, eggs, sausage, bacon, toast and potatoes. Each order comes with enough food to feed half of Arkansas. When you take time to loosen your belt, on Nancy's walls you'll notice an array of autographed sports photos and memorabilia.

If you look to the left of Michael Jordan and a bit farther down from Joe Namath you can catch Ohio State tailback Maurice Hall on the Wall of Fame. You'll also find Hall in person at Nancy's, chowing down a full breakfast plate "with a couple of extra sides of bacon."

Hall loves the food and also seems to naturally enjoy the attention he gets from other diners. Within a short time of his first bite, he puts down his fork to sign an autograph for a 14-year-old admirer, shake hands with a Buckeye well-wisher and talk Brookhaven High School football—Hall's alma mater—with another fan.

"Maurice is the man in Columbus," says OSU teammate Roshawn Parker, Hall's breakfast companion that morning.

Others also see Hall's "glass-is-half-full" outlook and personable nature.

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"He could be mayor of this town after he's through playing football," adds Hall's brother, Eric Gray, a successful landscape business owner in Memphis, Tenn.

But for all his popularity and success on the field, only common sense and natural-born smarts have prepared Hall and his family for his next step in football: selecting an agent, financial adviser and training facility to help him acquire enough strength, speed and exposure to be drafted by an NFL team.

Hall's father, Reuben, knows this is a critical step in securing his son's future.

"I want to know how an agent sees Maurice," he says. "My expectations are going to be very high. It's important an agent does the best he can do so Maurice can attain the best. Anything short of that I really don't want to hear about.

"I don't want anything sugar-coated either—I want to know exactly what the scouts are saying. I want a straight shooter and I want someone to sell Maurice—we need a seller."

In 115 years of Ohio State football no player has more kick-return yardage than Hall. The list he stands atop reads like a Who's Who of football players: Heisman Trophy winner Howard Cassady, NFL Hall of Famer Paul Warfield, and Heisman runner-up Keith Byars, to name a few. The Columbus Dispatch said of Hall and Ohio State's special teams that they are, "Without a doubt the most effective special teams unit in the country. OSU's success began and ended with this bunch."

But despite a three-game stretch this season where Hall carried the ball 30-plus times and averaged more than 6 yards per carry in victories over Indiana, Penn State and Michigan State, he still needs selling. Although Hall played in the Gridiron Classic college all-star game in Orlando, Fla., pro scouts will want to know why he didn't get more "touches" at tailback and if his knees are holding up.

That's where a good agent fits in. Not only will an agent sell Hall to NFL scouts but he'll advise him on how he can prepare for life after football. With so much at stake—67 percent of current NFL players are millionaires—the right agent is critical.

"I'm in a position where I have to do well and catch the eye of scouts anyway I can," Hall says.

There's no formula involved in meeting with agents and deciding on representation. Agents can meet with players throughout the year as long as there are no benefits—payments, meals, merchandise—to student-athletes before their eligibility expires. Ohio State helps by hosting an Agent Day each spring for players and agents to make acquaintances. Agents contact the university's Athletic Compliance Office and schedule interviews with the players they wish to meet. Hall attended the event this year along with his father.

"A handful of agents contacted the family one way or another so we decided to meet with them," said Hall's mother, Gloria. "We narrowed it down to four and then set appointments with each one."

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As Hall steps off the elevator with his mother, father and brother on the 14th floor at Hahn Loeser and Parks LLP Attorneys at Law in downtown Columbus, attorney/agent Marc Kessler is waiting. The law firm, Ohio's 11th largest, has been representing clients for 85 years.

Kessler tosses Hall an NFL football and urges him to get used to the feel. The family is escorted into the conference room where a large flat-panel display reads "Hahn Loeser and Parks LLP Welcomes Maurice Hall." For the next two hours, Hall naturally cradles the football while listening to Kessler's presentation.

"My job is not only to get you to the NFL but to get you prepared to have a life after sports," Kessler says. "The NFL stands for 'Not For Long'. The average running back lasts 2.57 years in the NFL. Accordingly, football is just a stepping stone to get you where you want to be."

Kessler explains that Hall needs an active agent. "Scouts are asking, 'Why didn't Mo Hall have more play time?' You're a question mark in scouts' and teams' minds."

Kessler has spoken with NFL scouts in several cities and has asked each one to assess Hall's abilities. "Excellent athleticism. Good vision, burst, hips, explosion," Kessler relates from one scout. "A diamond in the rough. Needs an opportunity to play," from another.

Most student-athletes are unfamiliar with the business side of professional sports. Kessler addresses those issues in the meeting. He reviews salary structures, tendencies and bonuses of each NFL team. With \$27 billion in revenue from TV contracts, NFL players earn a nice piece of the pie. But while tens of thousands dream and hundreds try out, only a relative handful get their slice.

"I pledge that you will be the only running back I will represent," says Kessler. "There's never going to be a time where I make a decision for you. But the only person who can get you drafted is you. I'm your advocate but you will have to sell yourself. There are no free gifts, no offerings. You'll have to work hard to make it on and off the field."

Each agent is familiar with training facilities across the country. Between now and the NFL Scouting Combine in Indianapolis, where each team sends its scouts to observe player workouts and test players' strength, speed, endurance, intelligence and medical and physical condition, Hall will be expected to devote himself to training. The better he performs at the Combine in front of all 32 NFL teams' representatives, the better his chance of being drafted. Most Division I and II universities also have a second opportunity for students to show their skills, called "pro day," and Ohio State is no exception. Last year,

NFL teams spent \$160 million on signing bonuses alone so the teams want to make sure the money is well earned.

Agents often pay the up-front costs for players to attend a premier training facility, which can easily run \$10,000 for two months. Hall will work on cardiovascular and neuromuscular conditioning, coordination, flexibility, quickness, agility and nutrition, all with the aim to make him an explosive, integrated, dynamic athlete while correcting deficiencies in his technique. Kessler touts a particular facility in Florida, far from all the distractions of home.

"Maurice is going to be ready for the combines," says Hall's brother, Gray. "He'll be ready to run 4.35 (seconds in the 40) and (bench) press 225 pounds more than 20 times."

Both of these marks would be extraordinary and Kessler says that Hall needs that training dedication to reach these levels.

"I expect you to run at the combine," says Kessler. "I want to be in a position to talk to every team and get the word out about you. I also want to get you personal workouts with the teams that need a running back."

The family leaves satisfied that Kessler can do a good job for Hall. "He seemed to know Maurice and did his homework," said father, Reuben.

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A conference call is set up with attorney/agent Max Pastor, a 2000 graduate of Ohio State and vice president of ETL Associates, Sports Management and Representation, on Park Avenue in New York.

Pastor is attending his brother's wedding but squeezes in a call to Hall. He had contacted Hall by e-mail months earlier and had spoken to him over the phone. Hall had asked him to talk to NFL scouts so he could get a feel for how scouts were seeing Hall in the draft.

Hall's first question was what the scouts were saying but Pastor hadn't spoken to any. After 15 minutes, Hall knew this wasn't the agent for him. The conversation ended.

"He didn't know anything about me except that I went to Ohio State," Hall said. "He hadn't done any of the research I asked. It left a bad taste in my mouth."

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The walls of the conference room at Buckingham, Doolittle and Burroughs Attorneys and Counselors at Law are adorned by framed pro football jerseys. The Arena District law firm, in existence since 1913, still has relationships with Chris Spielman and Cliff Stoudt, two former NFL players from Ohio. Meeting the Hall family on a Sunday afternoon are attorney/agent Adam Heller and partner Bret Adams.

Buckingham, Doolittle and Burroughs has its own BDB sports and entertainment division and maintains offices for its 161 attorneys in Akron, Canton, Cleveland and Boca Raton, Fla. Heller has worked with 18 NFL draft picks and just as many free agents, the term used for those players who are not drafted.

Heller gets down to business quickly, telling how BDB's experience trumps any other local firms and how it can help Hall with any business deals, legal advice and tax and estate planning. The firm would charge 3 percent of Hall's first contract and foot the bills up-front for Hall's training.

Adams talks of Heller's experience in working inside the NFL Player's Association and how Heller has personal relationships with every team in the league. He tells of the association with a premier Columbus training facility, Max Sports Center and its performance institute, and how they would like to see Hall train there.

Hall is set on training in Arizona, however, because he heard how former teammate Will Allen trained and improved his speed tremendously there. Allen was an early fourth-round pick in last year's draft. The talk goes back and forth on providing a tour for the family of Max Sports. The tour would come two days later.

Heller explains that they need to create a story for Hall. The meeting begins to focus on overcoming Hall's minuses rather than his attributes.

"Your major weakness is that scouts wish they had seen you more," says Heller. "There's a bit of an unknown with you. You're versatile in that you return kicks and run the ball. But we have to overcome the negative.

"Getting drafted is the goal. The difference between the fourth and seventh round is not as big as not sticking. You must know how to make a team and stay. A career is more important than exactly where you are drafted."

Hall's mother asks how Heller can provide him with maximum exposure and overcome these weaknesses.

"We'll make a dossier on Maurice and compare him next to guys he's competing with," says Heller. "We'll make your stats look good—we can work with the stats—and talk about your versatility in returning kicks and catching the ball.

"As to why you didn't get more plays at tailback we'll provide you with a true answer: 'I can do the best I can do and work as hard as I can but it's not my decision to play or not, it's the coach's decision.'"

"We'll also have to overcome the injury talk—scouts know about your knees. There will be good opportunities for you but right now," Heller says, "you're looking at late round to free agent pick."

Hall's brother points out that Hall is a hard worker and repeats what he

said to Kessler, that Gray will make sure that Hall will be ready at the Combines to run a 4.35 and press 225 pounds more than 20 times.

"He's not going to run that fast," says Adams. "If you can make him do that I'll hire you."

Gray replies, "We know the road goes up and we'll have to climb, but Maurice can do it."

"We don't want to give you a false impression," says Adams.

Hall seemed stung by the overall negative assessment. The meeting ended and the opinions flew quickly.

"They didn't seem hungry enough," said Hall's father.

"They seemed to want you to go to Max Sports and that was the only option," said Hall's mother.

"I didn't get a good feeling at all that they would work hard for me," said Hall. "I want to get drafted as high as possible and they didn't seem they had that belief in me."

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The Hall family kitchen in central Columbus serves as the conference room for Hall's final lawyer/agent appointment, with 12-year Pittsburgh Steeler defensive back Dwayne Woodruff and his law partner, Eddie Edwards Jr. The pair drove from Pittsburgh to meet with the Halls and will drive right back in a rainstorm after the 90-minute meeting.

Woodruff's Super Bowl ring adds a nice touch as he emphasizes that he can relate as an agent and a player to the pressures of the NFL. Both he and Edwards are impressive: professional, articulate, experienced and approachable. Woodruff earned his law degree while playing in the NFL and negotiated his own player contracts most of his NFL career.

Edwards served for six years as the vice president for a company that managed eight television stations. They teamed in 2003 to form Sports Entertainment Management Group in Pittsburgh and last year signed their first player, San Francisco 49er punter Andy Lee.

Woodruff speaks of the trials and tribulations of being a sports agent. "You have to love it to do it," he says. "We run this company like my family and we want our guys to be here for the long haul. While you're playing football it should be your number one concern. Football is just a small part of your life. You do your part and we'll do ours."

Edwards agrees, and explains how he has a passion for representing players. "Not everyone can be a professional athlete. In representing athletes it's my way of being one. When you have ups, I have ups and when you have downs I do too. Overall I love going through every step of the process with players. I even helped Andy (Lee) pick out his

engagement ring.”

Woodruff then tells his opinion of where Hall will be in the draft. “You’re a projected late round/free agent pick. You’ve had a limited number of carries, knee surgery and you’re not the number one back in the offense.

“How do we move you up? We’ll get good information to every NFL team about you. You’ll have to be prepared for the combine with your measureables—we’ll show your times and strength and how tough and durable you are.”

Woodruff and Edwards favor a training facility in Pittsburgh—Velocity Sports Performance. Later they mention there’s another Velocity in Memphis, something that appeals to the family since that’s where Gray lives.

“They’ll show you tricks at Velocity to help with the measureables,” Woodruff says. “The \$2,000-3,000 cost will come out of our pockets but we’ll have to recoup the costs later.”

The meeting concludes on a high note. “I wouldn’t be here if I didn’t think Maurice could have success in the NFL,” says Woodruff. “You need to be more punishing as a running back and run over people. You’re a good strong kid but you seem to always be running in (kickoff) return mode rather than a low, punishing, aggressive north-to-south running back mode. You have the potential to have an impact in the NFL and we hope to help you find it.”

Edwards gave Hall punter Lee’s phone number and said to call him for a reference.

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The family deliberated as to which agent should represent Hall. No signing could take place until two weeks later, after Ohio State finished its season in the Alamo Bowl.

“It was hard to decide because I really liked Woodruff and Edwards,” said Hall, “but I think I can be higher than a seventh-round pick. I called their punter and he never called me back. I want to get drafted as high as possible and Edwards didn’t seem to think I would go that high. But they also had strengths—they had more contacts since Woodruff played in the NFL.

“I believed that Kessler wasn’t going to settle for anything lower than he could get and would go the extra mile for me.”

Hall said if it was up to his mom and brother they might have gone with Woodruff and Edwards. His dad liked Kessler.

One week after Ohio State defeated Oklahoma State in the Alamo Bowl, a game in which he had one return for 26 yards and four carries for 9 yards, Maurice Hall signed to be represented by attorney/agent Marc

Kessler. He will train at Velocity Sports Performance in Memphis, 10 minutes from his brother's house.

**Dan Steinberg has been an instructor and communications director for Ohio State's School of Journalism and Communication for the past five years. In addition to teaching strategic communication courses full-time, he works with students, including student-athletes, to prepare them to meet the media and create strategic plans. He admits to being a Cal Bear and baseball fan at heart.**

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