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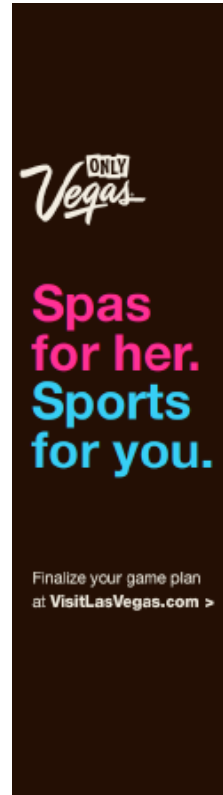
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Oakland Tribune, The (CA)

NFL rookies from Cal fit in

October 25, 2002
Section: More Sports News...
Jerry McDonald
STAFF WRITER

Langston Walker and **Scott Fujita** are proof that when it comes to projecting an NFL career, winning in college isn't everything, the only thing or even a particularly important thing.



As painful as the persistent losses were at the University of California, both men have used the hard times as a springboard to promising NFL careers.

After learning about patience, persistence and maintaining their composure through difficult times, Walker and **Fujita** find themselves on opposite sides of an AFC West rivalry Sunday as the Oakland Raiders visit the Kansas City Chiefs at Arrowhead Stadium (Channel 5, 10 a.m.).

Walker, taken in the second round and 53rd overall, has more than justified the lavish praise from Raiders coach Bill Callahan since draft day.

He started at right tackle for Lincoln Kennedy (concussion) in a Week 4 win over Buffalo, and at left tackle for Barry Sims (turf toe) in Week 7, acquitting himself well on both sides.

If Sims, listed as questionable, can't play against Kansas City, Walker will start again.

Fujita, a fifth-round selection and No.143 overall, starts his third game at left outside linebacker for the Chiefs after replacing veteran Lew Bush.

After a 1-10 senior year and a 13-31 record in four seasons at Cal, Walker and **Fujita** show no bitterness or regret about their time in Berkeley.

They've moved on and carry themselves as serious professionals but can't help wondering what they could have done to help Cal, currently 5-3, enjoy its success so far in 2002.

"You sort of feel like, 'What did I do wrong? Why were we losing?'" Walker said. "At the same time, you feel real good for the guys who are rectifying it."

Fujita, having watched Cal tapes and talked to his former teammates, said, "There's a resurgence in attitude there, something I can see watching game films, and now I'm convinced more than ever that attitude is everything."

Both arrived in the NFL humble and ready to learn. Although draft reports generally labeled Walker as an underachiever who could last into the second day of the draft, Callahan was sold on his potential after one workout.

At 6-foot-8, 345 pounds, Walker has the size to engulf pass rushers and surprising footwork and agility. His versatility has been a bonus.

"I haven't had a guy like that since I've been here, who could go right to left, week-to-week, changing positions, changing footwork, changing his stance, changing the matchup," Callahan said. "His future and potential in this league is going to be awesome."

Walker speaks softly and moves about the locker room nearly invisible for someone his size. Yet he does have a sense of humor, expressing surprise at playing so much and noting wryly of his offensive linemates, "These guys are old."

Entering Cal, Walker was billed as the next Tarik Glenn. Like Glenn, Walker went to Bishop O'Dowd High in Oakland and was a skilled tackle. Unlike Glenn, Walker did not ascend to All-America or even All-Pac 10. However, he was unfazed by the selection-day bashings of draft guru Mel Kiper Jr.

Coming in as a fifth-round choice on a team with veteran linebackers Marcus Patton, Glenn Cadrez, Bush and Mike Maslowski, **Fujita** watched closely and learned quickly.

A safety when he entered Cal, **Fujita**, 6-5, 248, retains good speed and the athletic ability that once enabled him to win a high-school slam-dunk contest.

"He's very bright, with a tremendous work ethic, makes plays within the discipline of the defense and then goes beyond that," Chiefs coach Dick Vermeil said. "That's all you can ask of a young player."

The adopted son of a father of Japanese-American descent, **Fujita**, 23, was an Ivy League recruit out of high school and has been married since his junior year at Cal.

Walker remembers indulging in first-year foolishness at Cal and then seeing **Fujita** watching with a bemused smile.

"Even when we were freshmen, he was the adult of the group," Walker said. "We were typical college kids, screwing around, and **Scott** would sit back and look at us."

Fujita acknowledges he has to remind himself to enjoy the ride. "I don't want to grow up too fast," **Fujita** said. "I'm enjoying my rookie experience, but at the same time I want to take a mature approach."

As disappointing as the losses were at Cal, **Fujita** believes he and his teammates may have been even closer because of the struggle.

"A lot of guys get out of college and get to look back at all the bowl games and big wins," **Fujita** said. "For us it'll be different. We'll look back on how, despite all the stuff we went through, we stuck together. I would have loved to have won more games, but I wouldn't trade my Cal experience for anything."

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