

Special agent -- Jimmy Sexton is in his 22nd 'season,' and the NFL guys have his number

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It is NFL Draft Saturday, and one of the most powerful agents in the NFL sits behind his desk in a posh East Memphis office suite, a flat-screen monitor providing up-to-date info and a massive LCD-screen TV feeding the ESPN broadcast.

Jimmy Sexton's most valuable tool, his chrome Blackberry cell phone, shimmies with urgency.

Who could it be?

The Houston Texans, updating Sexton on their efforts to trade up for Memphis running back DeAngelo Williams?

Or perhaps it's Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones, triple-checking on another client of Sexton's Athletic Resource Management agency, Ohio State linebacker Bobby Carpenter.

"Parker, he's going to go 10th," Sexton says into the phone. "Sit tight."

It's Sexton's middle son, 8-year-old Parker, fretting over USC quarterback Matt Leinart's freefall down the draft board. He's the family draft fanatic. James, 11, doesn't pay much attention and 4-year-old Blake is too young, yet.

For Sexton, 42, this is the 22nd NFL Draft in which he's had a vested interest. The first, in 1985, came before he had even graduated from the University of Tennessee, but after a conversation at the 1983 Citrus Bowl that changed the course of his life.

That's when coach Pepper Rodgers and agent Robert Fraley, representing the interests of the Memphis Showboats and the old USFL, approached Sexton about his good friend defensive end Reggie White. A manager for the UT football team, Sexton listened as they explained they could offer White, college football's best defender, \$1.5 million a year.

The best defensive player in the NFL was making \$400,000 at the time.

"I might have been a junior in college," Sexton says, "but I knew that math worked."

That's how it all started for Sexton, who grew up in Whitehaven the son of a dentist and graduated from Evangelical Christian School in 1981. He was considering law schools before

that first draft. Not long after, to the great consternation of his mother, he stopped considering.

"She thought I had lost my mind," Sexton says.

Some days, Sexton does, too. In his two busiest months, December and January, Sexton might be home 10 days and average four hours of sleep. Sexton says his two brothers, one an oral surgeon and the other an investment adviser, "think I'm nuts, that I have no life."

Yeah, Sexton will tell them. But you have a job.

He's never felt like he had one. He's definitely never bored.

"The best thing," Sexton says, "is it's different every day. You absolutely don't know what to expect when you go into the office every day."

Certainly not on this, the biggest weekend of the year for an NFL agent.

"Amy," Sexton yells outside to Amy Milam, the office's air traffic controller, "get John Croyle back on the phone."

Croyle, father of Alabama quarterback Brodie Croyle, is famous in Alabama for having played under Paul 'Bear' Bryant and starting a ranch for wayward youths. Sexton reassures him it looks good for Brodie to go in the second round, to Baltimore.

Ravens General Manager Ozzie Newsom and an Alabama alum told Sexton he wanted Brodie.

"Yeah, John," Sexton says. "I told him, 'If you are lying, you are not lying to me, you are lying to another Alabama football player.' "

When the Ravens pass on Croyle in the second round, Sexton will regret that conversation.

"I made a cardinal mistake in the agent business," Sexton will say. "I believed what somebody told me."

That's why Sexton waits to tell Williams, the Memphis running back, about Houston's desire to trade up for him.

It's why he's worried Carpenter will slip past the Cowboys, at No. 19, despite what another client, Cowboys coach Bill Parcells, told him at dinner earlier in the week.

As the commissioner walks across the stage to announce the pick, Sexton says, "I hope this is Carpenter."

It is, and clapping and yelling erupt throughout the office suite.

"One down," says Milam, his assistant, "and nine to go."

That jolts Sexton back into insecurity: "Don't even say that, Amy, please."

Two picks later, when the New England Patriots take another running back instead of Williams, the disappointment is palpable.

"That," Sexton says, "hurts."

But the move triggers a flurry of activity. Indianapolis and Carolina join the Texans in a bidding war for the Chicago Bears' No. 26 pick, trying to move up for Williams.

By now, Sexton's sons have arrived and are sitting below him, on the floor. Sexton is also consumed with whether the boys' baseball games are canceled by the day's intermittent rain.

Corrie Stauffer, the young woman who works as Sexton's nanny, keeps checking. Sexton divorced last year, and as the kids grow older, he's had to learn to adjust his schedule more to fit theirs.

"I may be able to make the 9 o'clock," he tells the boys.

When the chrome cell phone shimmies again, it's Carolina.

"What?" Sexton says. "A second-round pick, for one spot? They'll come down."

He calls Williams.

"The GM from Chicago called me and said they have six teams going after the pick and he knows for sure three of them want you," Sexton says. "Yes, DeAngelo, Indianapolis is one of them."

At one point, Sexton hears Indianapolis has secured the pick, but Buffalo, who is not interested in Williams, makes the deal with Chicago.

Carolina, at No. 27, will take Williams, and Sexton calls to tell him. Turns out Williams was on the phone with them and clicked over.

"DeAngelo," Sexton says, almost shrieking, "don't answer my call if you are on the phone with them."

When Williams' name is called, the office is once again jubilant, and Sexton closes his eyes and holds his fist in the air.

Corrie's cell phone buzzes with more good news. The early ball games, at least, are canceled. Meaning the boys can go to the Grizzlies playoff game.

Without Daddy, though.

He may not be pulling teeth, but he's working, just the same.

"I've had long talks with them over the years," Sexton says. "They are able to go to Super Bowls and NBA all-star games and . live a little bit different lifestyle than other kids their age."

And their father gets to work a dream job.

"I think you are very lucky," Sexton says, "if you get to do something you love."

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Caption: Photo

Mark Weber/The Commercial Appeal Agent Jimmy Sexton (left) and Memphis head football coach Tommy West work behind the scenes during last month's NFL Draft. Sexton doesn't consider his work a job, but sleep can't be a big requirement, either.

Memo: This Memphis Life

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