

# High school combines range in price, legitimacy making it vital to choose right one

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A college football recruiter will find out everything possible about a prospect, researching every avenue until he feels comfortable about taking a chance on a particular athlete.

It is the same type of cautious approach that the athlete and his family should take when trying to get noticed; especially when it comes to using certain recruiting tools to do so.

Take for example, the explosion of the NFL-style combines. There seems to be one every weekend (Ahwatukee Foothills, Scottsdale, Apache Junction) this time of the year, ranging in price, exposure and sponsorship.

"There are ones out there that set up, take your money, time the kids and get out as fast as they can," Mountain Pointe coach Norris Vaughan said. "Thirty-percent of (the participants) have no business being out there anyway. You have to be careful."

To be fair, Vaughan said this from Karl Kiefer Stadium, the home of the Pride, while the Future Pro Five Star Combine and Youth Clinic was taking place last weekend.

But Vaughan, whose players received a 50 percent discount, said he agreed to have the Future Pro combine at Mountain Pointe because of a few factors that all potential prospects should consider.

The company is run by former NFL players, including Ahwatukee Foothills resident AC Caswell, they are associated with Sullivan Proformance, a well-respected training center used by NFL players, as they did all of the testing, and there was an Ahwatukee-based sports medicine team on hand.

"I wouldn't have them here if I didn't think they were legit," Vaughan said. "There are only a few I'd ever tell my players to ever go to like Nike, Under Armour, this one and the free one by the (Arizona) Coaches Association."

The turnout at the two-day event - about 200 high school and 100 youth - made it clear that the event was a success for Future Pro, but what exactly did the athlete get out of it.

The first day was about individual testing - bench press, 40-yard dash, vertical jump, long jump, three-cone drill - and the second day was about breaking down into position groups and 7-on-7 drills.

"This is an opportunity for them to get a baseline (for the first time attendees) and give them an idea where they need to improve," Caswell said. "It's a chance to get your picture, your information and your numbers out there and get noticed by recruiters."

As with everything there are pros and cons as to whether or not attending these types of events is a good idea.

It's a good way to keep the competitive juices going, show the player what aspect of their athleticism needs attention, give the lesser known recruits a chance to catch a recruiter's eye and give them experience of competing in a combine-type environment.

The cons are the cost (Future Pro was \$80), recruiters rely more on game tape than measurables, there is a meat market feel to them and a bad performance could damage a player's confidence.

Phoenix Greenway junior Alfredo Moreno is one of the attendees who had to come away thinking it was the right decision to attend.

The 6-foot-1, 275-pound junior defensive lineman stood out in the bench press, pushing out 25 reps with 185 pounds on the bar.

"I was always told you have to do something to stand out in these things," he said. "I wanted to get 30 but I'll take it."

Mountain Pointe's Raynon Blackshire is a 5-10, 300-pound lineman whose demeanor changed depending on the test he took. He was upset at himself after running a 5.40 40-yard dash but was proud that someone with his body type could get a vertical leap of 26 1/2 inches.

"That's what I am talking about; it shows the coaches my athletic ability," said Blackshire, who was a first-team All-East Valley Region offensive lineman. "But it also showed me that I probably need to lose weight so I can get faster and take more advantage of my athletic ability."

Combines bring a wide variety of participants from those just realizing what the recruiting process is about, to the veterans making their second or third appearance since the season ended to those there to set a foundation for the future.

Junior Chris Lee of Highland took his run through the gauntlet of the weekend after getting his first taste of varsity action.

"We are just getting into this recruiting thing," said his father, Jason White. "I had no idea how intense it could be and how much it entails. I can imagine making the right decision is important because there are so many options out there."

Elbert Hereford of Mesa played at Phoenix North in his day and felt he could have benefited from a combine like the one Future Pro offered. That's why he brought his eighth-grade son, Je'Maya, to the Mountain Pointe event.

"It's about getting him experience so he is used to it when it becomes his time," Elbert said about his son who will attend Desert Ridge in the fall. "If he wants to play at the next level it is something he has to do."

Hereford said he could see how the pressure of such of an event could be too much if the parent's reason for being there is wrong.

"The negative comes from the parent, those who are pushing their kids to something they don't want to," he said. "If he wants to do it then I am with it."

Saguaro head coach John Sanders is one of the coaches who never steers his kids to a combine of any kind. It doesn't mean they don't go, but he doesn't put an emphasis on it.

"I am not a fan and I want to throw up at the money some people are making off these things," he said. "Every coach is different. I think getting these kids to college is my job. Not everyone has that same belief. I can help my players get to all levels of college from D-I to NAIA.

"You can have a combine hero, but the coach is still going to want to see the game tape. Put up all the numbers you want, but if you can't stand out on the tape they are going to pass."

Caswell, of course, is on the other side. He himself was a combine kid. The California native excelled in track as a sprinter and went to the Olympic Trials as a junior college track athlete. He turned pro and couldn't play football at a four-year college so when he returned to football his only option was to go the combine and tryout route.

"I'm a testimony to the combine," said Caswell, who played in the Canadian Football League before joining the Oakland Raiders (1995-2000). "I am a believer if it is done the right way and that is what we are doing. There are those out there that post a hand time of 4.2 in the 40 and the scout sees that so they want to test them and it is not even close. It's about the integrity.

"These days it is about going through the marketing. They come away with an idea of what they need to do and realize I have to train better and I have to get better. We show them the way to get where they want to go."

**Source:**

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