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Nolan nawrocki draft guide

Full Description UnavailableShow Lake ... next question... Kent Horner/Getty ImagesAs you might have heard, Pro Football Weekly's Nolan Nawrocki recently became the next character assassination of Auburn standout, Cam Newton, in his draft guide: Plenty of dissent - had a false smile, coming off as very scripted and had a selfish, me-first makeup. Always know where the cameras are and play for them. Has an enormous ego with a sense of entitlement that constantly invites trouble and makes him believe he's above the law — doesn't command respect from teammates and will always struggle to win a locker room . . . Lacks accountability, focus and reliability – is not punctual, seeks shortcuts and sets a bad example. Immature and had problems with authority. Not reliable. I mean, ouch. Very ouch, baby. I'll go out on a limb and say Nawrocki won't draft Newton if he was a GM. (I'll also go out quietly on another limb and wonder if Nawrocki didn't go the extra vitriolic mile with the nation's favorite prospect of pulling a little extra PR around his draft guide. Just say: no such thing as bad PR.) Doug Farrar of Yahoo's Shutdown Corner wrote a column in response. His counterpoint was more or less: Nawrocki is a great talent evaluator, but where is the line of decency? Sure, we need to take apart a guy's footwork, football IQ and field vision, but have a fake smile and me-first makeup? It cuts close to large veins. Why go there? Take it easy. The child has not yet turned 22. On some level, Farrar is right. It's a brutal evaluation. That cuts straight to the core: Newton's character. And it's hard not to experience a certain breathtaking redundancy in Nawrocki's language that makes you increase the halting, slow down, cowboy hand, no matter how much you don't like Newton. But no one really knows. That's why I love calling this coming month aspiric; everyone is an expert to see the future suddenly. (Please, manage my share portfolio too) So let's step back instead. Here are headlines on the same blog published around when Farrar has sued his response to Nawrocki:Report: Dez Bryant after not paying for his jewelryPolicy report accusing Aqib Talib of pistol-whipping, shooting at a guyNow the NFL wants HGH blood testing? Uh-ohMind you, these stories aren't from the previous weeks or months; we speak within 24 hours. Another fun fact: Bryant and Talib were both first-round draft picks. Nawrocki hopefully implies that Newton will be a dive, assassin or substance abuse; but although the exercise may have painful conclusions, character evaluations are needed in today's

NFL. (I'm still flabbergoured that Marvin Harrison was a stone cold thug.) No one is investing millions of dollars hiring either of us, such as the NFL for prospects but personality confirmation is not a practice either. Any security clearance in the military requires a personal report far thicker and more complex than anything NFL scouts can produce. Hiring managers usually try to project whether you're me-first or team-first based on conversations with former co-workers and ask tough questions. Google and most tech companies test your intelligence and logic during interviews; not hired usually means, honestly, you're not smart enough. And lastly, I can't even imagine the humiliating exams needed for a job in professional pornography. The difference is that Newton's evaluations are public — a fair point. But what's not public in the NFL? You're about to work in front of millions of people every Sunday. Get used to it. You chose this job and people's opinions today are playful danger to what's to come tomorrow. Pretend and fast forward: Buffalo picks Newton and now the Bills have just suffered a brutal shell to drop to 1-7 midway through the 2011 season. Newton steps up to take the podium questions after the game... In the quote-fetished echo chambers of today's media, we know there are exactly two possible outcomes: 1) Newton, with that million dollar smiles, feeds the Purple Machine a series of benign, non-committal sound bites and his words appear in the fourth paragraph of everyone's write-up or 2) he generates a head. Even if he suggested the running game wasn't quite there today—even if it really wasn't—we know that writers will imply that he takes a shot at the backfield, the O-line, the coaching and cruciling the old Take Responsibility, Son! Column. And then you'll have a media storm. And the locker room will be polluted. And players and coaches will react and be angry and annoying. And TV ratings will tumble because no one wants to watch an apathetic football team. And the drama will be amplified by camera shots of empty stands. And people will start talking about which quarterbacks are available in the 2012 draft. And it's involved without the police — just with a sloppy post-match tongue. (Of course, who's not razor-carved in front of a pack of reporters after taking a beating for three hours on national television?) NFL players can't own loose strands of narcissism because the Press Machine's cat clowns will-always-catch and tear them to shreds. Nawrocki may have asked the harsh judgment exactly to sell a few more copies of the draft guide, but more importantly, you know what it's picking up? The I told you so column. Every writer's favorite. So what can Newton do to defend himself? What should he do when Nawrocki's take comes back to him? Suck it up and make every team that's going to pay on him. Knock the lights off the scoreboard because revenge is the only tool that players really have. Then the Press Machine will slobber over the disrespected if they weren't responsible for promoting it — and we'll forget about the laptops he stole when he was a teenager or his canned speech during the NFL combine. If he plays like he's supposed to and keeps a good head on his shoulders, none of Nawrocki's words will mean more than the hot air they created in the first place. Maybe that's why they play the game ... [Follow Caleb at Nolan Nawrocki lives in the most beautiful house in a neat neighborhood in Elmhurst, Ill., a western suburb of Chicago. When I visit him a few weeks before Easter, the windows are already in signage. He does a lot of his work in his basement. Next to his desk, a full weight room is set up with a punching bag. Five large flat screen televisions are mounted on the nearest wall. The lights are diluted when we meet, and Nawrocki uses one of the UFC's, which is addicted to his laptop, to show me footage of Nick Foles' interview at the 2012 NFL draft combine. It's insider stuff, not available to the general public. Nick, what comes to mind when you think about family, friends and the experiences you had? ask some off-camera NFL official for Foles. I think the big thing I have is a very close family, said Foles, with steady eye contact and an involuntary smile. I was raised in a Christian household. My parents are my heroes. They didn't have a great childhood. They provided me and my two younger sisters. What they've done for us is outstanding, so every time I step on the field they're on my mind. What are the key messages from home about what it takes to succeed? My parents taught me to be the hardest worker, but to always be humiliated. My mom always sends me Bible verses to this day before matches, just randomly. There are 10 minutes of this shit, but you get the drift. The point Nawrocki makes has nothing to do with Foles anyway; he randomly chose this interview to show me the kind of eyes-only information he's privy to as an independent draft analyst. He's trying to illustrate to me the depth of the process, as he puts it, as part of a grander effort to prove he's not what the internet is increasingly saying he is: a troll, a prig, a management porch, or maybe something much more unsealing. However, he doesn't do his point very well by offering a canned harrowing interview as evidence of his depth. Furthermore, Foles is an odd choice, as Nawrocki wasn't terribly high on him when he was a prospect two years ago. (Can function behind a strong offensive line, but will require an adjustment period to the pro game and can always be satisfied with a backup role, he wrote of the 2013 Pro Bowler for Pro Weekly.) When I ask how much he thinks can be extracted from this type of exchange, he remembers the 2005 combine, when Darryl Blackstock, the linebacker of the of Virginia, which was submitted to the interrogation process. He came into the room, said Nawrocki, with his hat tilted sideways, and the body language, the answers he gave at the table, the demonstration way he presented and carried himself, didn't sit well with me. Blackstock, drafted in the third round, didn't do much over the course of five NFL seasons with Arizona, Cincinnati and Oakland. You could see the NFL flotsam he would become in that pre-draft interview, Nawrocki seems to be telling me. The clues were all there. You just couldn't look too nicely at the player himself, so you don't lose sight of how he wears his hat. I first reached out to Nawrocki last April. He was with Pro Football Weekly at the time, and he was in the midst of a storm over his assessment of quarterback Geno Smith, which he described as essentially unreachable and not a student of the game. He was very notorious at the time, having famously blasted another high-profile black quarterback, Cam Newton, in 2011. It was hard not to read his Geno Smith onslaught as a kind of sequel to the Newton evaluation. Written in his usual sharp-elbow and telegraphic style, Nawrocki's scouting report on Newton was comfortable about confusing the person with his performance: Don't spin a tight spiral. A lot of dissent — have a false smile, come off as many scripted and have a selfish, me-first makeup. Many detected in this comment the whiff of a troll, if not the sound of a dog whistle. His denunciations were too neatly aligned with longstanding biases about black players — and about black quarterbacks in particular. They were the shadowy versions of the compliments so often handed out to white quarterbacks (enormous ego instead of confident; selfish, me-first makeup instead of star quality; problems with authority instead of gunshot wound). Nawrocki, who at the time vigorously defended his views of Newton, went so far as to call him a fraud and an artist in interviews, remained silent about Smith.Last spring, Pro Football Weekly announced that it was closed, and for a moment it looked like Nawrocki would be excited from the comments as well. But then, this February, he relied from behind the NFL shield with a piece on the league's website—where his former PFW boss, Keith Schleiden, serves as an editor-delving into the character of this draft's most controversial prospects. Among other things, he called out quarterback Johnny Manziel for a sense of entitlement and prima-donna arrogance. He also wrote a book that surely has something to do with how I was wounded in the basement part of the so-called troll scout. We're sitting on an avid couch, the kind with cup holders built into the arm leanings. Nawrocki, what a under six feet and has a shaved head, wearing Under Armour shorts and a shirt and ankle socks. His wife wife three children are out of the house, but there is evidence of a family man around the basement: the balance beam on the floor, a pop-a-shot on the wall. He offers me a bottle of water. It would be a meaningless detail if I spoke to anyone else, but because it's Nawrocki, even insignificant gestures begin to vibrate with meaningfulness. I see him staring at the wall a lot. What would Nolan Nawrocki make of this if he explores Nolan Nawrocki, I wonder. Bad eye contact. Shift. Get off so uncomfortable in the spotlight. If there's one thing people say about Chicago, he tells me about his hometown, it's that there's a general instinct a feeling for people you get in this region of the country — more than others. It's just innate, in terms of the size of a person's character right away and a gut response. He invokes Malcolm Gladwell's book Blink and talks about how, when Blackstock was swated from the league, a number of chief executives called him up to tell him he was right. I ask if he ever analyzed how the players he thought had questionable character ended up faring in the league. As one general manager says: 'You need some fuss in the locker room, to keep people in check,' he says. It's a good thing to have personality. It's a violent game. You have to have a chip on your shoulder, some kind of grit in your soul, so you can look at guys who have had a hard life, and I'm a believer that people are maturing. I believe about 80 percent of these kids, they come in, they have some sort of alcohol load, they have some sort of indiscretion early in their career, whatever that may be, and I'm trying to document as much as it's been documented. Nawrocki, it might not surprise you, comes from a different background. His father worked in logistics for a food manufacturing company, and his mother was a teacher's aide. His older brother and younger sister were both high school valedictorians who went to Northwestern University and became industrial engineers. Nawrocki was also strong in maths — he scored 36 on his ACT, he tells me a few times — but less so in reading and writing. He attended St. Rita's, an all-boy's Catholic high school, where he wrote in football. I don't know how it's perceived, he says, without prompting, of his single-sex education. People who don't go through who think it's such a terrible thing, but as a community, bringing a group of kids together, it was unique. It was a great experience. He wrote for his high school newspaper, which under the supervision of an English teacher Nawrocki became very fond, someone who would take his glasses off and start confessing more about ethics, theses, right and wrong. On the football field, he started playing safety but became a little too big and physical, and was moved to linebacker. His dad would have all his games and Nawrocki would look compulsively at the is the perfectionist in me, he says. I can't tell if it was right or wrong - I just felt a need to see what happened. Born into a family of military men, Nawrocki thought about trying to become a Navy SEAL after high school. Instead, he walked on the football team at the University of Illinois, eventually earning playing time on special teams. Years later, he would write about his underdog football career and his failed attempt to crack the XFL in a 6,700-word piece for Pro Football Weekly, his first for the publication. The spirit of the underdog thrives on hunger, determination and an eagerness to prove critics wrong, he wrote. I think of how my children, when pregnant, will heed my past actions as much as my words and hope they will never give up on themselves either. I may have made my last tackle, but I'll take everything I've learned and continue to tackle obstacles, continue to fight adversity and continue to prove critics wrong. Nawrocki, who obtained a graduate degree in journalism and whose Illini media guide bio said in 1995 he dreamed of winning the Pulitzer, landed at PFW because of a connection then-Illinois coach Ron Turner's wife had with his editor, Ron Pollack. When he started out as an unpaid intern working out of a storeroom, he quickly came under the tutelage of PFW's legendary player evaluator Joel Buchsbaum, who would often find Nawrocki on the other side of the line when he called the office to ask for the modem to be turned on so he could send his dispatches. Buchsbaum was the original draft nod, and today he is widely regarded as the grandfather of modern independent football scouts, who along with Mel Kiper, his more telegenic counterpart, made the esoterica of the NFL a mainstream concern. While Kiper the polished face on ESPN, Buchsbaum, a nebbishy stick figure of a man who spoke in a loud Brooklynese, carved his niche into print and radio, where he attracted a cult following. He rarely left the sty of his New York apartment, spending most of his waking hours on the phones with NFL chief executives and area scouts. He became a kind of keeper for the privileged chattering and conventional wisdom of the league, and people within the NFL came to name him as much as he called them. Two days before Christmas 2002, Buchsbaum dropped dead from an apparent heart attack on his desk; Nawrocki was at office when the news broke. He was only at work two years at the time, but the publisher, Hub Arkush, assigned him and a few others to go through a stack of Buchsbaum's handwritten notes found at his apartment, to complete that year's pre-concept textbook. Soon enough, Nawrocki was tapped to the role fill. At the time, I was the only guy at PFW playing the game, and at a high level, said Nawrocki, adding that he received the support of Al Davis, did, Oakland Raiders owner, who at one time was a part-owner of the magazine. At the ensuing NFL combine, a memorial service was held for Buchsbaum. After that, said Nawrocki, Davis heard him around. He specifically recalled half an hour spent schmoozing with Mike Lombardi, a Davis lieutenant who went on to be an analyst for the NFL Network and now works for the New England Patriots. A lot of the people who helped Joel were willing to help me, teach me, shape me, he says. Nawrocki was a perfectionist in the Buchsbaum vein, Schleiden told me, and he worked his sources as tirelessly as his predecessor had. But he left in one notable way from the Buchsbaum model. Joel did not reject his opinions of league players. He was a consensus of league-thinking, said Pollack, the former PFW editor-in-chief, who hired Nawrocki. Nolan also talks to all the people, but he's a bit of a scout in addition to an information collector. He's willing to put his opinion on top of everything people tell him. Pollack, who left the magazine in 2002, says he subsequently warned Nawrocki that his approach could make him a target, but Nawrocki didn't care. And Schleiden says he had no problem with the direction his young writer took the beat. Did we sometimes have to edit some of his stuff? Sure, that's what an editing staff does, Schleiden says. And there are limits and I believe he's holding things back that are too sensational because it can create too much controversy. Nawrocki recalled to make his first real wave in 2007 when he threw JaMarcus Russell, the star LSU quarterback who would become the top pick in that year's draft. He wrote that Russell showed a defiant approach to the game and predicted he would require very difficult coaching from a strong authoritative figure. Though it plowed in comparison to his later criticism of Newton and Smith, its harshness has created a tiny bit of controversy within NFL circles. Behind the scenes, Nawrocki says, he went even further and openly campaigned against Russell. I thought he was going to be a complete bust, he says. He went bust all over him. He had a lot of talent, but [it was] based on the work ethic, the character, the football character, the overall character. I had three conversations with Al Davis that year, and it might not be good to get into any of those things, but I told him that he should take Calvin Johnson or Adrian Peterson. That was the guy I was trying to help out. I know where Al was at that point in his career: He lost some of the ears on the ground he might have had when he was a little sharper. But Al would do what Al is going to do. Nawrocki says he never tried to be a lightning rod; He was simply planning an honest version of his research at the transfer. The information I have on this Nawrocki says, I probably like it 60 percent. As much as it's perceived in recent years that I'm looking for the shock value, if it understood how much information I really had on all these players, I think the perception people did a little bit would change. Because that's the tip of the iceberg. There's a ton of research behind the scenes that's not spoken collectively, maybe [it's shared] with certain people in the NFL you trust, but it won't see the light of day. But even today, I don't feel comfortable getting in more of the details. It's not just about protecting his bonds, he insists. I feel I'm constantly protecting players (through) not sharing too much information, he says, and if people knew this kind of stuff — that's one piece of it and I don't think regular people realize. If only you knew. If only you knew what he knew about JaMarcus Russell or Cam Newton or Geno Smith or Johnny Manziel. The problem, of course, is that Nawrocki doesn't let us know. He hands over a harsh verdict and keeps the charter of insents sealed. He's a FISA court judge — and a tending one at that. His efforts to answer his critics in the wake of the Newton put-down did little to allay their concerns. During a conference call hosted by PFW, he stood by his assessment, arguing that the language he used to describe Newton was precisely the language a number of NFL scouts used to describe Newton to him. After throwing Smith, he didn't even try to defend himself, even if some called him racist. [I got] 120-some interviews, and then I stopped counting, he says. It's been a ridiculous number of requests coming in and it's going to be the same storyline. Does it serve well to go down this road again and keep answering the same questions? I tried to make it as much of a non-story as I could. When I asked him about the charges of racism, he says, See that was the piece of it I was nervous about. He pauses for a moment. My statement would be: I always thought the best evaluators in the league were colorblind in their assessments, he says. You have to look at these things so much deeper than the surface level. It was ludicrous for those accusations that needed to be made against me. If you want to watch the reports have been produced throughout the years—Johnny Manziel is far from a fever boy and has tons of issues. Jimmy Clausen, Rex Grossman, the TCU quarterback Casey Pachall — he didn't even invite to the combine with all his issues. These players tell us who they are. We just analyze it and tell people. If people didn't put as much time into understanding it, so be it. He pauses again and adds, I had more information than anyone on Cam Newton. Whatever information is, and just how it reconciles with Newton's a tremendous professional quarterback, he won't share it with I just get what the reader gets: the putative tip of the iceberg. Nawrocki is in a tough spot as an independent scout who serves as both a Buchsbaumish channel for gossip around the league and as a conveyor belt of his and his sources' opinions to the fans. Theoretically, his job, as begured by his predecessor, is to reflect the conventional wisdom back at the NFL; in practice, however, he was far more effective at strengthening the small low-mindedness of the league and its talent evaluators for the general public. I ask if the internet backlash has made him change his approach smoothly, especially when it comes to evaluating black players. He answers the question by not really answering the question. You look at the makeup of the league, he says. I don't know if there's a better kid in the NFL than C.J. Mosley. I think it says more about the media's concentration and the way stories are sensationalized. Why aren't they talking about Mosley anymore? Why isn't it about his coverage? They could pick out whatever they wanted to pick out. But yes, said Nawrocki, he softened. He never intended to become what he became, and he doesn't care about it at all. Before joining NFL.com, Nawrocki says, he was in discussions with joining a team as a scout. It could still be in the future. For now, he's left to weather the scorn that comes from the people who will never have a chance to size him up at a glance and form a vague idea of who he may be, all the stark words thrown by people evaluating him based on what he actually does and says and writes. If they want to say I'm a hack, he says, his eyes stuck to the wall of empty TVs, I think I should be prepared and have thick enough skin. I try to ignore the noise. Maybe it should bother me more than it does. Daniel Libit is a writer in Chicago. He can be reached djlibit@gmail.com.Image by Jim Cooke. Source photo via AP. AP.

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