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Jaguars make huge reach

RENTON, Wash. -- Still shocked at two things this morning: Jimmy Clausen out of the first round (despite the media storm clouds that said he wouldn't go 'til late in the round), and Cal defensive tackle **Tyson Alualu** with the 10th pick of the draft, to Jacksonville, when most NFL people had him with second-round value. "Stunning," one club official told me overnight about the Jags reaching for Alualu. "Almost fell out of my chair."

Now for the Jags' pick. It's an interesting story. Jacksonville GM **Gene Smith** told me late last night that the club hid its interest in Alualu, a Samoan kid raised in Hawaii who played at Cal. When front-office people around the league would trade pre-draft information on what they were hearing, Alualu's name never leaked out of Jacksonville. I know because two scout types I talk to who know Jacksonville people well were bowled over by the pick when we spoke overnight. Alualu played every position on the defensive line at Cal; with the Jags, he'll be tried as a 3-technique disruptive presence, the same spot Detroit drafted **Ndamukong Suh** to fill. The draftniks on the edge of the game -- **Mike Mayock, Mel Kiper, Todd McShay** -- didn't have Alualu anywhere near the middle of the first round, though Mayock did have him as his 30th-rated player, even though he did not include Alualu in his first-round mock draft. Respected analyst **Gil Brandt** had Alualu rated in the fifties.

I don't mind a team having a strong belief in a player. But the team has to know value. The 10th pick overall was right around the spot where the trade-downs were percolating. Smith told me last night the reason he didn't trade the pick is that there was nothing that came to him remotely approximating value for the pick. "There wasn't a lot of ability to trade down," Smith said from Jacksonville. Understood. But I still think at that point you take anything you can get and bail out -- unless you have a legitimate fear that Alualu was going in the next few picks.

"You can call this a reach," Smith said, "but the more work we did on him, the more we saw an excellent player with high character and excellent competitiveness who'd played every spot on the defensive line. I watched every game he played the last two years. The more I watched, the more I became convinced this was an excellent player for what we



The Jaguars shocked everyone when they took Cal's Tyson Alualu with the No. 10 pick.

do. He had 17 sacks, playing inside a lot, and another one in the Senior Bowl. He's a very disruptive player."

This pick's going to be fascinating to watch. When a player doesn't show up in the mock drafts of respective analysts like Mayock, or as a first-round-graded pick by Gil Brandt, and he goes 10th overall, the cries of "reach" are going to go up. "This is not a popularity contest," Smith said. "I don't give a damn about perception. I care about picking the right player for our team. My attitude is, 'You can outsmart people some of the time, but you can outwork them all of the time.' If you can't trust your ability to judge players after all the work you put in on them, you shouldn't be in this business."

All eyes will be on Alualu, early, in Jacksonville. He's going to have to be the knifing pocket-disrupter Smith saw on film to take the heat off this pick.

"There might have been jaws dropping in your business," Smith said, "but I don't think there were in draft rooms."

I beg to differ. I talked to some of those jaw-holders, and this was the surprise pick of the night, by far.

This morning, I asked Brandt about the pick. He said two things in defense of Smith, who is a well-admired scouting veteran in the league. He said he thought Alualu would have been picked low in the first round, regardless of the personal grade he had on him. He also said he knows Jacksonville was trying to trade down.

"But I'll tell you a story about trading down," Brandt said. "When we picked **Thomas Henderson** from tiny Langston in the first round, we got criticized for not trading down. But when you want a guy really bad with your pick, you think, 'If I lose him, I'm really going to kick myself in the fanny.' " So that, I'm sure, factored into Smith's thinking -- even though a couple of scouting types told me last night you've got to know the value of the player better than Smith did. And so it goes.