

It's definitely a different culture in the NFL

By Larry Pritchett

Past PCHS activities director

Former Nebraska football player Richie Incognito made headlines across the nation's sports pages this week and the news about him was again negative. Incognito was accused of "bullying" one of his teammates, Jonathan Martin, to the point that Martin quit the team.

I don't know if anyone knows yet what was going on, but I am sure that there is much more to the situation.

On the surface, I find it hard to visualize an NFL offensive linemen being bullied by a teammate. Guys who play in the NFL and are 6-4 and up, or however tall these two are, and weigh 300 pounds-plus just don't seem to fit into that category.

Incognito, we do know comes to any team with baggage. His history is going to probably tilt the opinions of most people to think that he is in the wrong.

Incognito was dismissed from the Nebraska team two times. Frank Solich dismissed him and then Bill Callahan who had been an NFL coach for the Raiders couldn't take him and also dismissed him. Incognito transferred to Oregon where he was booted before he even practiced. Still he was drafted into the NFL and has been an all-pro offensive lineman.

There were teams who would not take a chance on him and a few of those teams announced publicly since this incident that during the draft Incognito had the (DNDC) behind his name. Do Not Draft-Character. But if you have talent someone will take you and they will put up with less than perfect character if the player controls it somewhat and especially if you are of all-pro caliber.

Mike Martz, former coach of the Rams, stated that "The Rams drafted Richie Incognito because he's nasty."

The NFL is a business, I am pretty sure that building character is not always high on the team's priority list. Profit and loss is very high. Incognito isn't the only person in the NFL now or in the past that has been "nasty."

There was also a number of teammates, current and former, who have stood up and commented that Incognito is not a racist or a bully.

Mike Pouncey, who is the center on Miami's offensive line, stated that he didn't think Incognito bullied Martin.

He did say if they could do it all over again they might change some things, but even at that, the locker room is very, very comfortable with Incognito.

One unnamed player told a reporter, "I don't expect you to understand because you're not black. But being a black guy, being a brother is more than just about skin color." The player had told the reporter that Incognito was considered "an honorary black guy."

Lydon Murtha, who played with Incognito at Nebraska and at Miami, also came to his defense. Murtha said, "Martin was expected to play left tackle beside Incognito at guard, so Incognito

took him under his wing. Martin had a tendency to tank when things would get difficult in practice, and Incognito would lift him up. He would tell him there is always tomorrow. Richie has been more kind to Martin than any other player.”

It has been suggested that the coaches knew that Incognito at times would get on Martin to try to get him to play harder and that they encouraged that kind of action. I would bet that goes on in every locker room in the NFL. Have you ever watched Peyton Manning yell at some of his receivers or linemen?

Tom Brady will do the same thing and that is during a game. I know this dates me but I can remember watching Dick Butkus on TV and thinking that his teammates are more afraid of him than the opposing team.

Incognito has been suspended by the Dolphins but it was rumored that he had already been to LA. Now maybe he was going to Disneyland I don't know, but I would bet if Miami cuts him loose it won't take him long to find another team that will take him and his baggage for the rest of the season.

The locker room culture is different. I remember what it was like in college and comparing that with my high school experience was an eye opener.

I can only imagine what it is like at a professional level. Doesn't make it politically correct but it would be very difficult to change.