



# Shonkas stay busy with draft prep



Peggy and Dan Shonka run Ourlads, an NFL scouting service, out of their home in Cedar Rapids. The couple, who have been married for 41 years, keep very busy this time of year. (Family photo)

C.R. couple runs Ourlads, an NFL scouting service

There's an old saying about never working a day in your life if you love what you do.

Dan Shonka of Cedar Rapids works many, many long days, especially this time of year.

But that "is the quote I live by," he wrote in an email shortly after our telephone conversation Sunday.

The 67-year-old Shonka loves football. That's not unique. But unlike many of us, he and his wife, Peggy, make a living from

their passion.

The two run Ourlads, which calls itself the "longest independent NFL scouting service" in a vast world of scouting services. They do daily NFL reports on their website, updating depth charts and team news daily.

This time of year, though, it's all about the NFL draft, which begins Thursday. The two put out a comprehensive 110-page guide to the draft with detailed information on hundreds of prospects, as well as team needs and other draft information.

And, of course, a mock draft.

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## Ogden/Shonka high on Princeton QB

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"Without her, there wouldn't be an Ourlads," Shonka said of his wife of 41 years. "I do the scouting ... she types up all the reports."

That, in a nutshell, is what Dan loves.

"I've always loved to evaluate talent," he said.

He fell in love with the game during his playing days at Cedar Rapids Jefferson High School — and one year in college — and later got into coaching. He eventually moved into the scouting business, working for several NFL teams and other services, before taking over Ourlads from founder Thomas E. Hepler in 2004. He also works as player personnel director for the East-West Shrine Bowl.

There's tons of film study, starting each June, and this time of year he's working 18-hour days putting together information for the draft with the help of six scouts who all have their own "segment" of expertise.

"I look at everybody," he said. "I kind of tie it all together."

Working long hours sequestered from home — like many of us these days thanks to the coronavirus pandemic — is nothing new for the Shonkas.

"We're always in quarantine anyway," he said about the six or seven weeks leading up to the draft. "We're in a submarine. We'll put the periscope up every once in a while. ... It's pretty intense in January and going forward."

One of the best parts of the job is finding that player nobody else is looking at — and, of course, being right.

"You always remember the ones you really like that others didn't," he said.

He was one of the few scouts who liked Kurt Warner when the Pro Football Hall of Famer came out of Northern Iowa.

"I tried to get him in the combine ... nobody had Kurt as a prospect," Shonka said.

It works the other way, too. Shonka really liked former Oregon quarterback Joey Harrington.

"He checked all the boxes," Shonka said. Harrington lasted just six sea-

sons in the NFL.

"I'm really proud ... of the guys who end up making a roster or drawing a paycheck ... that didn't even go to the combine," Shonka said.

He has several in that category every year. This year's "sleepers" — Shonka doesn't like that word, by the way — include Princeton quarterback Kevin Davidson and Barry College wide receiver Mason Kinsey.

Shonka thinks the 6-foot-4, 225-pound Davidson is "a really good football player" and Kinsey is a "a guy, I think, whose got a chance if he gets into a camp."

Shonka will be hunkered down at home watching the draft unfold this weekend, hoping the information he has provided will help teams pick the right players, get the right fit and maybe find an unexpected gem. He'll get a couple of calls from NFL teams and do radio interviews.

Then, he'll relax a bit before starting the process all over again.

And never work a day in his life.

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