



ALLEN

THE COWBOY RIDES AWAY

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BY BJ PICKARD

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If the National Football League were a game of Texas Hold’Em, the hand dealt to Jared Allen would have been a 7-2 offsuit.

In other words, his odds were not good... at least in the minds of NFL scouts.

The 126th overall selection in the 2004 NFL Draft was passed on - multiple times - by all 32 NFL teams before the Kansas City Chiefs finally picked him up in the fourth round. Despite a decorated college career at Idaho State where he finished as a Division I-AA All-American, Defensive Player of the Year, and three-time All-Conference honoree, scouts didn’t see his potential at the next level. In fact, many didn’t even view him as a defensive prospect at all - the Chiefs actually drafted Allen to line up at long snapper.

Still, there was something about the 6-foot-6, 270-pound native of Los Gatos, California that intrigued Chiefs head coach Dick Vermeil.

“Sometimes you just can’t coach those intangible things like toughness and passion to play,” Vermeil said upon drafting Allen. “Kid’s going to be a hell of a football player.”

Turns out, he was right.

Fast-forward 12 years and the man holding that 7-2 offsuit has turned it into a 7-7-2 on the flop. Allen, who announced his retirement from the game on February 18, not only worked his way into becoming a veritable field-tilter during his time with the Chiefs, Minnesota Vikings, Chicago Bears, and Carolina Panthers; he’s solidified his legacy as one of the greatest pass rushers the game has ever seen. During his time in the League, Allen garnered four All-Pro selections and earned five trips to the Pro Bowl while accumulating 136 career sacks along the way - the ninth-highest sack total in NFL history.

“It’s been a great ride for me, and I couldn’t be more grateful for the memories,” Allen wrote in his official retirement statement.





Even with a list of accolades and achievements that will certainly warrant Pro Football Hall of Fame consideration down the road, Allen's career arguably reached its pinnacle just a few weeks ago when he finally got the opportunity to contend for a championship at Super Bowl 50. Though the Panthers ultimately came up short in the game, the experience was one that Allen will never forget - taking the field at Levi's® Stadium in Santa Clara, California, a mere 12 miles from where he grew up, and squaring off with Peyton Manning, the future Hall of Fame quarterback against whom he made his first NFL start in 2004. Talk about coming full circle.

In many ways, Allen's final season was a microcosm of his entire professional career. He began the year playing out of position at linebacker for the winless Chicago Bears before being traded to Carolina three weeks into the season. His insertion into the Panthers' lineup helped Carolina achieve a franchise-best 15-1 record in the regular season. Allen also battled back from a broken foot that held him out of the NFC Championship Game. Suffice it to say, there was nothing that was going to keep him from lining up against the Denver Broncos on Super Bowl Sunday. It just wasn't going to happen. Credit for that goes back to those intangible qualities that enamored Dick Vermeil in 2004, a series of personality traits that Allen himself attributes a great deal to his family's military background.

"My grandfather served 23 years in the U.S. Marine Corps and he made sure that we all understood what it took to have the privileges that we have in this country," Allen said. "If it weren't for football, I would probably be in the military myself."

Allen's respect and admiration for America's men and women in uniform has been well documented over the years. His grandfather was a Marine. His uncles served in Vietnam. His younger brother is now a Marine and his older brother was in the Air Guard. But his appreciation for military personnel rose to another level in 2009 when he visited U.S. troops in the Persian Gulf as part of a USO/NFL Tour in what Allen described as "the most humbling experience" of his life.

"There are thousands of brave men and women who have risked everything to defend our freedoms and they've made this commitment larger than anything I have ever done in my life," Allen said. "Since I'm not standing beside them over there, it's my duty to stand behind them over here."

Moved by the commitment, dedication, and sacrifices made by American soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan, Allen created his own charity, Jared Allen's Homes for Wounded Warriors, with the mission to provide financial assistance and support to injured veterans by building and remodeling handicap-accessible homes to suit each of their individual needs.

"I wanted to give them what I believe is my slice of the American Dream - a functional home for them and their families," Allen said. "It's a real honor to be able to serve those who serve us."

Since launching JAH4WW in 2009, Allen and the Foundation have completed home builds for seven severely injured veterans and are currently working on three more in 2016 with the ultimate goal of raising upwards of 10 handicap-accessible homes a year.

"The best parts for me are the day I get to call somebody to let them know that our Board has approved them for a new home and then the day I get to hand the keys over to them," Allen said. "There's just no better feeling."

Allen, who was honored with the NFL's "Salute to Service" Award for his military outreach efforts last year, stays in contact with each of the wounded warriors JAH4WW has built homes for and looks forward to seeing their lives progress long after the "Welcome Home" ribbon is cut.

"They really become a part of our family," Allen said. "It's a blessing to see them aspiring to do more, to achieve their dreams, and become part of their communities."



Allen has become a huge part of those communities as well. He still maintains strong roots in Minnesota, where he spent six of his 12 years in the NFL, as well as in Arizona, his offseason home. Allen and the Foundation have combined for seven home builds in those two states alone, and in 2016, JAH4WW's reach will expand to Illinois, Oregon, and Texas. Despite enjoying only a quick stay professionally in the Carolinas, Allen says he can't wait to begin working with veterans in Panthers' territory as well.

"Everyone has been so good to me here," Allen said. "It's been a lot of fun and I hope I can continue to be a part of this community for a long, long time."

As he rides off into the sunset (minus the sunset), football's favorite cowboy can take pride in an incredible, improbable journey. His on-field credentials will no doubt put him in the conversation for Canton; off the field, he's easily a first-ballot Hall of Famer.

Against all odds, Jared Allen has gone from unknown to unwanted to simply untouchable.

It looks like that 7-2 offsuit wasn't such a bad hand after all.



CANTON QUALIFICATIONS

Jerseys

- Kansas City Chiefs (2004–2007)
- Minnesota Vikings (2008–2013)
- Chicago Bears (2014–2015)
- Carolina Panthers (2015)

Highlights

- 4× First-team All-Pro (2007–2009, 2011)
- 5× Pro Bowl (2007–2009, 2011, 2012)
- 2× NFL sacks leader (2007, 2011)
- PFWA All-Rookie Team (2004)
- Minnesota Vikings Ring of Honor
- Buck Buchanan Award (2003)
- Idaho State Bengals No. 41 retired

Records

- Most career safeties: 4
- Most safeties in a season: 2
- Most seasons leading league in sacks: 2

Statistics

- Sacks: 136.0
- Total tackles: 648
- Safeties: 4
- Interceptions: 6
- Pass deflections: 57
- Forced fumbles: 32
- Fumble recoveries: 19
- Total touchdowns: 4



