

# Iupati goes to Niners: Former Vandal picked 17th in first round of NFL draft

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Staff report

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Former Idaho guard Mike Iupati will be trading in one gold helmet for another this coming season after being drafted by the San Francisco 49ers with the 17th pick in the NFL draft Thursday.

Iupati, who was at home in California with his family, said he knew moments before the nationally televised announcement that his name would be next.

"Right when I got the call, I was so excited," said Iupati, who looked the part during ESPN coverage of the draft that showed him awaiting the announcement then hugging his parents and other family members. "It was very emotional."

It marked the end of a long day for Iupati, who said his Mom woke him at 6:30 a.m. to make sure everything was in order for the arrival of the television crews and a house full of company.

"I waited and waited and waited," he said. "I wasn't really nervous."

The 6-foot-5, 331-pound Iupati paved the way for the Vandals turnaround season in 2009, when Idaho went 9-5 and won the Humanitarian Bowl. Iupati capped his senior season by not allowing a quarterback sack in 807 snaps, and he only allowed five QB hurries. He had 49 knockdowns and 21 pancakes and was part of an offensive team that is ranked 10th in the nation in total offense and was the 11th-best passing attack.

The 49ers' pick gives them a prospect widely considered the top offensive guard, who is pegged as one of the most physically dominant guards coming out of college.

Iupati will be expected to challenge for a starting spot as a rookie and should have an excellent shot, considering the fact that the Niners' inconsistent offensive line has allowed an NFL-worst 150 sacks over the past three seasons.

Idaho coach Robb Akey has no doubts that the guard will be a force in the NFL.

"I'm very excited for Mike," coach Robb Akey said. "I'm excited for his family. I know he has a great future."

Iupati, who didn't play football until he was 14, became Idaho's highest draft choice since Ray McDonald was the 13th selection in the 1967 draft.

He leaves Idaho as the most decorated player in school history. Following his senior year, Iupati earned first-team All-American honors from the Associated Press, Sports Illustrated and CBS teams. He also was a consensus All-American as a member of the Walter Camp, Football Writers Association of America and American Football Coaches Association teams, and he was one team shy of being honored as a unanimous consensus All-American when he was listed on The Sporting News second team.

Iupati was the second lineman chosen by the 49ers in the draft. San Francisco traded up to the 11th pick to take Rutgers tackle Anthony Davis.