

A Tale Of Two Draft Picks

Written by {ga=furls}

Monday, April 16 2007 7:00 PM -

In Furls' latest, he has a little literary fun with the NFL Draft. More specifically, with the skyrocketing draft status of JaMarcus Russell ... and the plummeting status of Troy Smith. How could one bowl game from each change so much? And who will really end up being the better quarterback? ***"It was the best of times, it was worst of times,***

The 2007 NCAA football season ended in a dramatic flourish of contradiction and paradox. In a moment, the lives of two young men, barely of legal drinking age, collided from across the country.

Going into the bowl season, it was common wisdom that Brady Quinn was the premier signal caller entering the 2007 NFL Draft, the only remaining question was who would emerge as the second. Most draft pundits were shying away from Smith in spite of his big game prowess because of his height, at the same time these same experts were shying a way from Russell in spite of his obvious physical stature because of his perceived lack of big game prowess. This was indeed a world of irony and contradiction befitting Dickens.

***it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness,□
it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch incredulity,***

Ohio State and Troy Smith were destined to be champions. Smith had experienced nothing but success in college football's largest stages. He was the Michigan slayer and he was just one year removed from an exceptional performance against Notre Dame in the Fiesta Bowl. It was the common belief, not only in Columbus that Smith and the Buckeyes would win the championship, and with that win Smith would cement himself a slot in the first round of the 2007 NFL Draft.

Ahhh, how foolish we were.

***it was the season of Light, it was season of Darkness,□
it was the spirit of hope, it was the winter of despair,***

For Smith and the Buckeye faithful the long winter of despair began on January 9th and this Spring, and redemption, will not arrive until August. Smith's success in the past, present, and

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future was tied to the success of his Buckeyes. He was a winner, this, above all things, was his defining trait, except for one night in Glendale. This trait enabled Smith overcome all other attributes and slights, even his height.

About 750 miles to the south, in Baton Rouge, the sun was rising on JaMarcus Russell. It was his time to shine. Fresh off a thorough thrashing of an overmatched, overrated Notre Dame team, Russell emerged as the new darling of the 2007 Draft. Russell's Herculean feats were documented and promulgated at every opportunity and the hype machine began to run into overdrive. Russell had always been an efficient, high quality quarterback with obvious physical skills, but he lacked the definitive victories, the same victories that had seemed to come so consistently to Smith.

***we had everything before us, we had nothing before us,□
we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way –***

What happened next was not unexpected. Smith's stock plummeted. Now, he no longer appeared to be able to overcome his meager 6'0" stature; gone were the comparisons to Drew Brees and now came the predictable comparisons to Gino Torretta and Charlie Ward.

At the same time, JaMarca-mania was just beginning. Soon the scouts could not get enough of him. Suddenly no one could even remember how many interceptions he threw against Tennessee or how he had performed in big games against superior competition. All that mattered was that he had thoroughly thrashed America's favorite whipping boys in Golden Domes.

in short. the period was so far like the present period. . . "

The Ohio State loss to Florida was not anymore Troy Smith's fault than LSU's victory at Notre Dame was Russell's. Smith never had a chance in the pocket, I hesitate to even call it a pocket. To Russell, playing against Notre Dame's secondary must have felt an awful lot like shooting fish in a barrel.

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The point of this piece is not to say that Smith should be a first rounder or that Russell should not be, it is just interesting to see how much one week in time could have had this impact on these two young men.

Which camp were you in immediately preceding these games, three months ago? Were you hoping to see Troy Smith calling plays for his home team? Did you think he could get the job done here? Did you think he was a winner?

Did you really think that JaMarcus Russell was the premier passer in the draft? What did his win against Notre Dame prove to you? Did you really think or hope to see him in Cleveland Browns uniform?

These are all rhetorical questions. I do not expect you to actually answer them, at least not out-loud where someone could hear you. If you did, then you might have to admit that you have been letting other people think for you. As for me, I stand exactly where I did four months ago. The Browns could (and currently are) do a lot worse at QB than Troy Smith, and part of me is still hoping that one of our native son's can restore our team to its rightful place, but at the same time I know it is not as easy as all that.