

The Quinn Effect

Written by {ga=davekolonich}
Tuesday, December 01 2009 7:00 PM -

For the past two decades or so, Notre Dame has been reduced to an afterthought in the ever-changing college ranks. In recent years, the one-time dynasty has essentially become a mid-tier Big East team, at least when you take a look at the team's ridiculously easy schedule. In this sense, Notre Dame barely registers on anyone's football radar. And with the exception of current Brown Brady Quinn, any Cleveland connection to the Irish has long since been extinguished. Or, so you thought. By now, I'm sure most of you have read or heard about the dismissal of Charlie Weis from Notre Dame. And unless Weis' name pops up as a potential coaching candidate in Berea - which no doubt it will, considering Randy Lerner's fascination with anyone claiming a prior connection to the Patriots - the news coming out of South Bend could be considered irrelevant to a Browns fan. After all, we have enough problems to worry about here.

Also, for the past two decades or so, Notre Dame has been reduced to an afterthought in the ever-changing college ranks. In recent years, the one-time dynasty has essentially become a mid-tier Big East team, at least when you take a look at the team's ridiculously easy schedule. In this sense, Notre Dame barely registers on anyone's football radar.

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Another interesting development coming on the heels of Weis' firing is the speculation that Irish quarterback Jimmy Clausen will enter the 2010 draft, largely because of the tenuous coaching situation at Notre Dame. Although, I would wager that Clausen - like any other potential high draft pick - is also considering the benefits of becoming an instant millionaire. And rightfully so.

Consider that Clausen's draft stock will never be higher than it is right now - or at least based on the next several months' worth of analysis and meaningless mock drafts. Speaking of which, several mock drafts currently project Clausen going in the top 10 of next April's draft.

And here's where the first of many Browns connections begin.

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The Body Double

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Watching Clausen over the past couple years at Notre Dame is like entering a time machine programmed for some three years ago. The similarities between Clausen and Quinn are remarkable. In terms of size, they stand the same height. Body-wise, the only real difference between the two is about 15 pounds of muscle - albeit unnecessary - found on Quinn.

Stat-wise, the two are pretty much the same quarterback. While Quinn played in more games than Clausen, their numbers are strikingly similar.

QUINN

2004: 191 of 353, 2586 yds. 17 td 10 int

2005: 292 of 450, 3919 yds. 32 td 7 int

2006: 289 of 467, 3426 yds. 37 td 7 int

CLAUSEN

2007: 138 of 245, 1254 yds. 4 td 7 int

2008: 268 of 440, 3172 yds. 25 td 17 int

2009: 289 of 425, 3722 yds. 28 td 4 int

And of course, both quarterbacks served as the face of the Notre Dame "franchise" and displayed remarkable leadership, poise and intensity throughout their careers. In some respects, it's like these two are brothers - both have even shown a tendency to get assaulted - Clausen waltzed around campus with a black eye last week, while Quinn was the infamous victim of a Shaun Smith weight room mugging late last year.

And in terms of the coming draft, if Clausen truly is being considered as a first round pick, he would follow in the footsteps of none other than Quinn.

Here's where it gets interesting.

Since these two quarterbacks are so closely linked by recent history, who benefits and who is hurt by such an affiliation?

On one hand, Quinn's shaky NFL career could affect Clausen's overall draft status. Although Quinn has not been dealt the best of NFL hands during his short career, his recent inaccuracy and inexplicably poor play at the beginning of the

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season could reflect on Clausen. Perhaps teams in need of a quarterback come next April will be scared off by such comparisons.

If this theory holds any weight, then Clausen better hope that Quinn's career game against the Lions was not just that.

However, considering that most NFL decision makers and draft experts have the attention span of a precocious fantasy football player, Quinn's shortcomings will likely be forgotten. If this is the case, then look for Clausen to be selected within the first ten picks of the next draft.

Based on several teams' quarterback needs, Clausen could emerge as the top candidate at his position, based simply on his skills and recent production. After all, Clausen can "make all the throws" and is viewed as a solid team leader. Sound familiar?

And if this idea comes to fruition, then perhaps Quinn is somehow validated by the entire draft process. Consider that if Clausen goes early - and a needy team that is not drafting high misses out - then the still untapped potential of Quinn begins to look a little brighter.

Regardless of your opinions of Clausen - or Quinn, for that matter - the upcoming draft does not feature one standout quarterback. Basically all of the big names coming out each have some serious flaws. In the case of Sam Bradford, his injury history is alarming, while Tim Tebow is probably destined for another NFL position. Finally, Colt McCoy is from Texas - which is a big deal, considering the recent NFL fortunes of several ex-Longhorns.

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Doesn't that title just scream of some Twilight-esque drivel aimed at lovestruck pre-teen girls?

After all, this is Brady Quinn we're talking about.

Anyway, everything in this equation comes back to Quinn.

First, the Browns are anything but settled at the QB position heading into 2010. Regardless of the franchise's overall direction or Eric Mangini's future with the team, no one really knows whether Quinn is the guy for years to come. Granted, Quinn has not exactly been given a full assortment of weapons to work with in 2009 and obviously, the virgin play-calling of Brian Daboll has left something to be desired.

In this case, Quinn's potential can easily be compared to Clausen's. Do we really know anything about either QB?

Yet another facet of this discussion has to deal with Quinn's almost brilliant college career and how it ultimately affected Clausen. Perhaps some future backlash against Clausen will arrive via the opinion that Notre Dame has not really played anybody of significance - or at least won - over the past two years.

Perhaps Quinn is to blame here - indirectly.

Consider that Quinn's emergence at Notre Dame helped to elevate expectations for the Irish and Charlie Weis. After his first year in South Bend, Notre Dame was ready to deify Weis. However, the high expectations set by Notre Dame fans ultimately crushed Weis, and in some respects, Clausen.

Evidence can be found in Notre Dame's softball scheduling over the past two years. With the exception of USC, Notre Dame rarely played any ranked teams and lost several games to the likes of middling Pac-10 and Big East teams, along with dropping two straight to the Naval Academy.

Perhaps Clausen's career, which took part in the midst of this weak "strength of schedule" portion of Notre Dame history could affect his draft status. It's very possible that Clausen could be considered as yet another prospect, solely because of the demise of Notre Dame.

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And to complete this holy trinity of mediocrity is none other than the dearly departed Weis.



The Weis Continuum

If you're still with me here, let's go ahead and assume that there would not be a Brady Quinn without Charlie Weis. And in most respects, there would not be a Charlie Weis without Brady Quinn - at least when it comes to college football.

Although Quinn certainly had some great talent entering Notre Dame, a coach with the NFL pedigree and expertise of Weis helped to mold our current QB into first a college star and then into a first-round draft pick. The NFL offense that Weis installed and ran at Notre Dame gave both Quinn and the Irish offense a considerable advantage against mostly inferior opponents.

This progress shown under Weis eventually led Quinn to Cleveland, in the form of an expensive draft day trade. In fact, Weis' involvement with Quinn likely sold the Browns on the move. Reports have suggested that Weis sold the virtues of Quinn to Phil Savage and Romeo Crennel, which essentially sealed the deal.

And it's not beyond probable that Weis will do the same with Clausen.

In fact, Weis' NFL channels may be opening up in the not too distant future. Already, speculation has Weis assuming a coaching job - either in the next couple weeks or at the latest, next season. Considering that Weis advocated for Quinn from the confines of South Bend, his return to the NFL could have similar results for Clausen.

A Vicious Circle

So, here's the money question - actually, this is more like the 80 million dollar question: how does any of this affect our Browns?

Certainly, the Browns can't be considering taking Clausen with a pick that is destined to be at least in the top three of the draft. Although this team has some serious needs at quarterback, the prospects of adding yet another untested Notre Dame alum is downright insane - not to mention, incredibly frightening.

However, it's possible that this scenario could unfold, assuming that a few developments take place before next April.

First, there is no telling who will be in charge of this franchise come 2010. Initial

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reports suggested that Randy Lerner was hot on the trail of a football czar, but so far we have only heard scattered rumors regarding any real action. In fact, no one outside of Lerner is even convinced that someone will actually be brought in to take on the monumental challenge of organizing this mess of a franchise.

For all we know, Eric Mangini will retain defacto control of the Browns for another season. And if that's indeed the case, then get ready for the Kellen Clemons era in Cleveland.

However, if someone else is brought in, the prospects of yet another major personnel shift will soon come to reality. And considering the recent success of the Falcons, Ravens and marginal gains made by the Lions and Jets, it's more than possible that the Browns highlight their 2010 draft by selecting yet another franchise quarterback.

And to further cloud the future, the potential arrival of Weis in Cleveland - which may sound remote, but is possible - could also accelerate this development. However, in this scenario, the more logical assumption would be that Weis tries to jump start Quinn's NFL career.

And since we're dealing in hypotheticals, how about this: is it possible that in the mind of some copycat NFL executive, trading for Quinn would equate to drafting Clausen? After all, we're pretty much dealing with the same player.

And if this happens, then all of the above will have been deemed irrelevant. Which may end up being the best thing that has happened to Cleveland football in some time.