

The Case for Rolando McClain

Written by {ga=davekolonich}

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I've already broken my own rules and made [the case for Dez Bryant](#) as the Browns' top draft choice come April. Of course, my Bryant fancy comes on the heels of [a much more rational pick](#) in Florida's Joe Haden. Naturally, all of this indecision reveals three very important truths regarding the multiple directions the Browns could go in April's draft.

1. Whoever the Browns draft first will more than likely be justified considering the staggering number of overall team needs.
2. I can't make up mind regarding who I want to see drafted first.
3. Keep reading.

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For some five seasons, the Browns have desperately tried to sell themselves on the idea that a 3-4 defensive alignment was the best fit for the team. Ushered in by the hiring of Romeo Crennel, the fatal flaw in establishing such a system has been a complete front office personnel meltdown - as it turns out, specific players are needed to staff such a system.

Witness the Browns' evolution at linebacker over the past half decade. Andra Davis manned the middle of the team's linebacking corps for years, despite serving as a strange type of "tweener" player. Davis brought some great size to the position, but was not the most physical of players, nor even remotely athletic.

Enter D'Qwell Jackson, who in some respects was a smaller version of Davis. Jackson certainly upgraded the position in terms of tackling, but tended to get swallowed up by advancing blockers. And in a Davis-ian cruel irony, Jackson - while mobile - is not the elite athletic, "roamer" type of inside linebacker required of the unit.

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Or, in other words - the truly effective 3-4 units feature one inside linebacker who can bang away, while his partner can run horizontally and make plays.

And over the past five years, the Browns have not really featured either one of these types.

Enter Rolando McClain.



In an ideal setting, McClain could finally serve as the "banger" type who frees up D'Qwell Jackson to make plays across the field. Or, in a more dreamlike setting, could you imagine the inside blitz options coming from a near 250 lb. pass rushing force such as McClain?

Simply put, McClain is to inside linebackers what Joe Haden is to this April's draft's cornerbacks - simply the best option at his position. And while of course, nothing is a given concerning the draft, McClain could be considered one of the safer picks given the Browns' draft spot.

Physically, McClain would offer the Browns an inside linebacker who possesses the type of physicality and leadership not seen in decades. McClain's mix of ferocity and fearlessness is the type of identity-creating, "spiritual" type force that the Browns defense has lacked for far too long.

Back to more practical manners - and Jim Brown, I curse your Yoda-like hyperbole - McClain's experience combined with Eric Mangini and Rob Ryan's defensive system could produce some immediate results for a scrappy, yet underwhelming base of defenders.

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Consider this - if the Browns run defense finally improved down the stretch last season with the likes of two bigger bodies in Jason Trusnik and David Bowens manning the middle of the field, could you only imagine the added athletic thump of McClain?

But, much like the Haden and Bryant picks before him, a McClain selection comes down to an evaluation of just which team need is most critical.

The argument for Haden is simply that his presence could stabilize the coverage units, elevate Eric Wright and ultimately improve the team's pass rush. In the case of Bryant, the Browns could add a much-needed offensive threat, which could allow Mohammed Massaquoi to flourish, as well as give the team a much needed diversion, which could allow the resurgent running game to continue to progress.



A McClain pick could do similar wonders for both the team's run defense, as well as generate some pressure on opposing passers. In a most ideal sense, McClain's versatility could add a much-needed layer to the necessity meets creativity schemes shown by Rob Ryan in December.

In the end, a McClain pick has to reflect identity and attitude. Currently, on defense, the Browns lack such a player, one whose intensity and pure nastiness is the hallmark of an entire unit. Physically, a McClain pick is a no-brainer. In terms of experience and leadership, there is also little debate regarding his selection.

However, the question is this...much like a Bryant selection, is McClain worthy of the seventh overall pick? Or, how about this - would he be available some spots lower?

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Perhaps my uneasy feeling about the Browns taking virtually anyone at number seven, considering the still huge amount of money slotted to a top 10 draft pick, along with the variety of needs still present on the team - assuming that the Browns can swing a trade that lands them additional selections - makes me a little hesitant to give a full endorsement.

At least at the moment.

But then again, this could be the type of special player, one in which forges the team's defensive identity for years to come.

At least until later in the week - when I envision trading down to land Michigan's Brandon Graham...which is a story for the ages when it comes to the Browns and 3-4 personnel.