

## Hmmm: Haden...Berry...McClain?

Written by {ga=jerryroche}

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Handicapping the NFL college draft every year has become a cottage industry. Mel “Wethead” Kiper, for one, has pocketed millions selling his dubious expertise to Website visitors, magazines and ESPN -- and he’s wrong more often than he’s right!

So although these guys like to think of themselves as astute, their records are far from infallible. Most of them hover around the 20 to 25 percent accuracy mark. Why? Because there are just too many variables.

Take the case of the Cleveland Browns, for instance, drafting seventh next month. Like most of the teams drafting above them, the Browns have multiple holes in their roster, giving them a variety of options, depending on who is left on the draft board in each round. In the first round, if Mike Holmgren and company feel that their most pressing need is a safety, Eric Berry of Tennessee may or may not be an option. If they feel that their most pressing need is a cornerback, Joe Haden of Florida may or may not be an option. Wide receiver: Dez Bryant; running back: Rolando McClain. And on and on.

Don’t forget to factor in the Browns’ conundrum of having six teams pick before them, most of which didn’t get an exalted position in the draft because of their scintillating -- or predictable --past choices.

According to an unscientific survey of 25 top NFL Draft Websites, 15 prognosticators predict the

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St. Louis Rams to choose defensive tackle N. (no, I'm not going to spell it out; you know who I mean) Suh of Nebraska. That means 40 percent of the most astute NFL draft followers don't even agree on the No. 1 overall pick, which theoretically should be the easiest fortune to tell.

Then there's the prospect of draft-day trade or trades. Just last year, for instance, the Browns themselves made three trades the first day, including one involving the No. 5 pick. So they ended up with a big o-fer in the first round -- and who woulda thunk it?

Speaking of trades, there's also the prospect of pre-draft-day trades. If, for instance, the Browns dealt for an up-and-coming quarterback in the next few weeks, Matt McEniry of [fantasyfootballjungle.com](http://fantasyfootballjungle.com) might be compelled to change his current prediction that the team will pick Notre Dame quarterback Jimmy Clausen.

Finally, there's money -- the most blatantly overlooked factor among professional prognosticators. Wethead and his kin tend to look at the talent available at a certain position and compare it to the drafting team's needs. They seldom factor in the financial "weight" of the choice itself. Money, not always talent, is the main reason why "skill" positions -- including and especially quarterback -- are often among the top five choices every year.

For instance, offensive tackle Russell Okung of Oklahoma State is generally regarded as one of the top two physical specimens/talents in the entire draft. But as a first or second overall pick, he would command a salary perhaps not commensurate to the value he would give the team (as opposed to, say, a quarterback or running back). The contract of quarterback Matthew Stafford, selected No. 1 overall by Detroit last year, was reported at six years and \$72 million with \$41.7 million guaranteed and an additional \$6 million in incentives that could push the total value to \$78 million. If Okung is drafted No. 1, the \$72 million might just be a starting point in the negotiations. Even at No. 3 overall two years ago, the Browns' Joe Thomas agreed to a five-year deal that could max out at \$42.5 million, including guarantees of about \$22 million. Thankfully, Thomas has been worth every penny so far -- but do you really want to make a habit of paying an offensive lineman that kind of money in these trying economic times?

On the other hand, there is no can't-miss quarterback eligible for this year's draft. The top two prospects -- Clausen and Oklahoma's Sam Bradford -- both have well-publicized flaws. But both are showing up quite frequently in mock drafts. (It wasn't much different last year, either. Consider the case of USC's Mark Sanchez -- chosen No. 5 by the Jets -- whose 2009 season was hardly stellar. As popular as Sanchez is with the fans and media, Jets owner Woody

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Johnson has to be thinking that he could've signed a career back-up to muster a 63.0 quarterback rating, thus saving him the better part of \$50 million.)

### **The Picks**

**It's no secret that the Browns covet defensive backs. And for good reason.**

**"In today's NFL, what applies to cornerbacks also applies to safeties," NFL.com senior writer Steve Wyche has noted. "While safeties tend to be more physical tacklers, they have to be precise as well, like Indianapolis' Antoine Bethea. Safeties are now being singled out with more frequency as the guy offenses try to pick on in open space with 'flex' tight ends or with one of a multitude of receivers.**

**"They get picked on because they're typically not as good in coverage as corners. So if they can't consistently make plays on the ball, they better make a tackle. With that in mind, teams are putting more emphasis on safeties who can cover instead of the traditional tack of having a free safety monitor things in the deep passing game and using a strong safety as a fourth linebacker."**

**According to 13 of the 25 Wetheads, the Browns will choose cornerback Joe Haden of Florida. He's the best cornerback in the draft, they contend, plus the Browns are in dire need of a shut-down corner. (And yes, a few of those mock drafts were posted before Haden took a whole 4.57 seconds to run 40 yards in the combine last week).**

**Four Wetheads think safety Eric Berry of Tennessee will be the Browns' first-round choice. The rationale posited by Tony Grossi of the *Plain Dealer* and others is that Berry and Haden will both be available when the Browns' turn comes, and that Berry is the better bet to make it big in the NFL.**

**Three Wetheads think wide receiver Dez Bryant of Oklahoma State will be the Browns' first-round choice. RB Rolando McClain of Alabama received two votes, while Clausen, DE Jason Pierre-Paul of South Florida and DE Derrick Morgan of Georgia Tech each**

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received one vote.

Here, then, to save you three or four hours of surfing the Internet, are the first seven first-round picks as predicted by the 25 mock drafts that are included in this article.

"WETHEADS"	St. Louis	Detroit	Tampa Bay	Washington	Kansas City	Seattle	Cleveland
<b>myfldraft</b>	Suh	McCoy	Berry	Clausen	Okung	A. Davis	Haden
<b>nfldraftdog</b>	Suh	McCoy	Okung	Clausen	Berry	Bradford	Haden
<b>newfldraft</b>	Clausen	McCoy	Suh	Okung	T. Williams	Berry	Pierre
<b>draftcountdown</b>	Suh	McCoy	Berry	Clausen	Okung	Bradford	Haden
<b>walterfootball</b>	Bradford	Suh	McCoy	Clausen	Okung	Berry	Bryan
<b>nbcsports</b>	Suh	Okung	Berry	Bradford	Bryant	McCoy	Haden
<b>football.about</b>	Suh	T. Williams	McCoy	Okung	Berry	Spiller	Haden
<b>draftsite</b>	Suh	McCoy	Berry	Bradford	Okung	Clausen	Haden
<b>nfldraftgeek</b>	Suh	McCoy	D. Morgan	Okung	Berry	A. Davis	McClain
<b>Banks-SI/CNN</b>	McCoy	Suh	Pierre-Paul	Bradford	Okung	Bulaga	Haden
<b>rookiedraft</b>	Suh	Okung	McCoy	Clausen	Bradford	Campbell	Berry
<b>thefootballexpert</b>	Clausen	Suh	McCoy	Bradford	Berry	Okung	McClain
<b>draftzoo</b>	Clausen	Suh	McCoy	Bradford	Okung	Berry	Haden
<b>ourlads</b>	Suh	McCoy	Berry	Okung	McClain	Clausen	Haden
<b>squidoo</b>	Clausen	Suh	McCoy	Bradford	A. Davis	Okung	Bryan
<b>bestpropicks</b>	Suh	McCoy	Berry	Bradford	Haden	Clausen	D. Morgan
<b>Bryan Pinkston*</b>	Bradford	Suh	McCoy	Okung	McClain	Spiller	Berry
<b>Tyler Ogden*</b>	Clausen	Suh	McCoy	Okung	Haden	Campbell	Berry
<b>Matt Chase*</b>	Suh	McCoy	Morgan	Bradford	Okung	Clausen	Berry
<b>Matt McEniry*</b>	Okung	Suh	McClain	Bradford	McCoy	Haden	Clausen
<b>drafhuddle</b>	Bradford	Suh	McCoy	Okung	Berry	Clausen	Haden
<b>fanhouse</b>	Suh	McCoy	Berry	Okung	A. Davis	Bradford	Haden
<b>docsports</b>	Suh	McCoy	Berry	Okung	A. Davis	Bulaga	Bryan
<b>draftking</b>	Suh	McCoy	Berry	Bradford	Okung	Clausen	Haden
<b>nfldrafttoday</b>	Suh	McCoy	Berry	Bradford	A. Davis	Clausen	Haden

\*fantasyfootballjungle staffers