

## Plan B

Written by {ga=mrburns}

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Draft day is finally upon us (!), and there are two things on which everyone seems to agree: 1) Just about everyone would be pleased if the Browns were able to snag Eric Berry with the seventh pick, and 2) If Berry is off the board when the Browns go on the clock, nobody has a clue what Holmgren, Heckert, and company will do.

Obviously trading down becomes very attractive if Berry is gone, but it takes two to tango, and it's probably too presumptuous to say with certainty that the Browns could pull off such a move. For our sake, let's assume that they can't. So the clock is ticking, and with Berry likely destined for either Kansas City or Seattle, the Browns have to go to Plan B.

Who would be the pick? The Browns have been attached to no shortage of names, with Berry the consensus pick if he's available. But the other girls the Browns are thinking of asking to the prom include DBs Joe Haden and Earl Thomas, pass rushers Derrick Morgan and Jason Pierre-Paul, defensive linemen Jared Odrick and Dan Williams, tackles Bryan Bulaga and Trent Williams, linebacker Rolando McClain, and even running back C.J. Spiller and receiver Dez Bryant. The only thing to expect out of the Browns' contingency plan is the unexpected.

Who would the Browns choose? If I had to lay down some greenbacks in Vegas, I'd flip a coin between Earl Thomas and Jared Odrick, and 10 minutes later I'd probably be grumbling about throwing that money away. The front office has effectively left us with little or no clue of what they have in store for us tonight, and that means that they've done their job.

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But who *should* they pick, you ask? Notre Dame signal caller Jimmy Clausen. If you just spat coffee all over your keyboard, I apologize. Grab some napkins and give me a few minutes to explain.

We haven't heard much about the Browns being interested in Clausen. Mike Holmgren commented earlier this winter that he "wished he liked him more." Although Holmgren has been a real straight shooter with the media throughout his career, that statement seems like a colossal misstep, as it could compromise potential trade leverage.

Basically, we can take Holmgren at his word and accept this as ill-advised honesty, or read it as a ploy to make teams like the Raiders and Bills more comfortable that Clausen won't be heading to Cleveland with the seventh pick. It is impossible to know Holmgren's intentions, but this isn't his first rodeo, and like he mentioned recently, everything he's said prior to the draft has been said for a reason.

Holmgren recently stated that he does in fact like Jimmy Clausen, and that his interview with Clausen went well. Depending on where you stand, you can read that as damage control for his previous comments, an attempt to make a team that wants Clausen trade with Cleveland or trade ahead of Cleveland, or Holmgren trying to soften the fan base for potentially drafting Clausen. It may also be a code for the Canadians to start their invasion of the United States. Again, we just won't know until tonight.

Here is why Clausen is a smart pick at number seven, and why we fans probably haven't given him a fair shake.

Jimmy Clausen went to Notre Dame, and let's face it: it's really fun to hate Notre Dame. He was coached by Charlie Weis, who came across as pompous and arrogant during his time at South Bend, and looks a lot like a clean-shaven version of South Park's Rob Reiner. It doesn't help that Brady Quinn, who just washed out in Cleveland, was coached by the same Charlie Weis at the same polarizing university.

Jimmy Clausen's teams simply weren't very good, especially the abhorrent 2007 Irish. There

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have been rumblings about the 22-year old having leadership issues, and he's viewed by many as selfish.

Plus, there's just something about him, isn't there? You can't quite put your finger on it, but Clausen comes off as well, kind of a jerk. It doesn't help that he has had a professional coach since his youth, and announced his intention to play for Notre Dame at the College Football Hall of Fame, where he arrived in a stretch limousine. The perception definitely exists that Clausen has been handed everything, and it's going to be tough for him to shake.

But here's the thing: that's all largely perception, not necessarily reality. None of that stuff has much to do with what kind of a football player he is. Jimmy Clausen may very well be an arrogant fellow who was handed a silver spoon, but he's also not the devil (as far as we know, he doesn't frequent any watering holes in Milledgeville, Georgia), and he's a pretty damn good quarterback.

If Jimmy Clausen hadn't been on the national radar as a top recruit, and hadn't announced his commitment to Notre Dame (a school which once again, people love to hate) in such a pompous fashion, we'd look at him in a very different light.

For example, say that Clausen attended Purdue. What if this kid from Purdue threw for 3,172 yards, 25 touchdowns vs. 17 interceptions, and completed 61% of his passes as a true sophomore? Okay, I'm listening... What if that same guy followed up that sophomore season by throwing for 3,722 yards, 28 touchdowns and just 4 picks, and a 68% completion rate? I'd be pretty sold.

Consider that Clausen did put those numbers up on a lousy team that didn't give him much support. Unlike other top prospects like Bradford, McCoy, and Tebow, Clausen played in a pro style offense, he has good size at 6-2 ½, and even if he doesn't have a Jeff George cannon, he can still make all the throws. He was extremely accurate in college and made great strides each of his three seasons.

Clausen has almost three full years of starting experience, which has been one of the better indicators of whether top college prospects can succeed in the pros. He is fairly mobile, has had success playing for a cold weather team, and showed true grit by playing most of the 2009

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season with two torn tendons in his right foot. He was unanimously voted the team captain last season, and earned a reputation for clutch play during crunch time.

Clausen definitely comes off as a little cocky, but I don't want Mother Theresa under center; give me the guy with confidence and a little swagger. Like Tom Skerritt's "Viper" in *Top Gun*, I like [arrogance] in a pilot. Besides, Clausen doesn't strike me as all that cocky in his media appearances like this

[interview](#)

with Jim Rome, so I have to wonder how much of his image has been fabricated by the media following his status as the nation's top prospect in high school.

But most importantly, the guy can simply throw the football. What I remember most about Clausen last season was seeing him effectively throw the ball to space and hit receivers while they were moving, which is no small task for college quarterbacks. He looked like the best quarterback in the country last fall, although we didn't see much of Sam Bradford.

Chris Hutchinson and I talked with Scott Wright of [Draftcountdown.com](#) during a podcast last week, and Scott actually rated Clausen as a better prospect than Sam Bradford, the likely number one pick. To be perfectly honest, I've flip-flopped on Clausen during the last six months enough times to make the senior Senator from Massachusetts proud, but with draft day upon us, I'm back on the bandwagon. Scott's one of my favorite draft analysts, and for him to be that sold on Clausen bumps Jimmy up a few notches in my book. Wright isn't alone, as Mel Kiper Jr.'s *hair* also rates Clausen just ahead of Sam Bradford.

Clausen might still be a little rough around the edges, but Jake Delhomme is here to be a mentor and teach by example (to teach study habits, work ethic, and leadership, not necessarily play on the field). I would much rather spend the seventh pick on Clausen, a guy with the upside to be an above-average NFL starter, than use a second round choice on a project like Tim Tebow or a vertically challenged system quarterback who can't throw downfield like Colt McCoy.

Hopefully Eric Berry is on the board at number seven and this whole argument is rendered moot, but if he isn't and the Browns have to use the pick, Clausen should be the guy. The league is more quarterback-driven now than ever, and you have to take a shot at getting a franchise quarterback when you have the opportunity, especially when one of Clausen's pedigree is sitting there. It would be "swing for the fences" type of move, but if it pays off, the

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Browns would be set at quarterback for the first time since they chose a quarterback from Miami with the top pick in the 1985 supplemental draft.

What will Team Walrus ultimately decide? We'll have our answer in a few long, long hours.