

Draft Recap: Consensus Building Edition

Written by {ga=davekolonich}

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Much like a mock draft projection, speculating on the success of a team's draft is a most useless exercise. Obviously, it will take some 2-4 years to figure out the effects of what just happened. By that time, this site will exclusively devoted to pictures of kittens playing and babies saying the cutest things, Mike Holmgren could be entering year two as head coach and the entire city will yet again be held hostage by LeBron's free agent indecision.

However, in the meantime, all we can do is guess, or grade or even gnash our teeth knowing that a future All-Pro or two slipped away. But, unlike years past – something quite remarkable occurred in the Browns war room.

No, Randy Lerner didn't actually say something.

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Instead, the idea of true consensus was finally delivered among the Browns' decision makers, including Holmgren, Tom Heckert and Eric Mangini. This entire draft seemed to reflect the desires of all three of the Browns' principles. Unlike in years past, where Butch Davis or Mangini dominated the entire process – or the times when Phil Savage traded away the team's future multiple times – and whatever it was Dwight Clark was doing a decade ago – the team's draft picks seemed to reflect a general idea of consensus, built upon the specific needs of the overall roster.

Entering the draft, it was obvious that the secondary was the team's biggest weakness in 2009. Considering that at times last year, Mike Adams was the team's most effective corner, and a converted wide receiver proved to be the best nickel cover man – it was clear that help was needed.

The Joe Haden, T.J. Ward and Larry Asante picks seemed to reflect this huge need. With an eye towards the team's recent draft history, it's quite remarkable that the Browns spent three picks to address one area of need. In fact, looking back on the past decade of drafts, the only time that such an occurrence has happened in Berea would be during Butch Davis' linebacker draft of 2002.

As for who these players are, it's worth noting that each has a specific "sponsor" within the Browns' trimuvirate of decision makers.

Certainly, Haden was Heckert's pick. Coming from the Philadelphia school, which emphasizes building secondary depth through the draft, Haden seems to fit the old Sheldon Brown and Lito Sheppard type of corner model. In a move completely unique to the Browns' drafting at the position, Haden could prove to be the mythical "shutdown" corner the team has lacked for over two decades.

At the least, Haden should relieve some of the pressure that Eric Wright has faced in his first few years in the league. While Wright is a solid player, it's become obvious that he is nothing more than a complimentary corner. However, if Haden proves to be as good as his hype, watch for Wright to become a serious playmaker down the road.

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The Ward and Asante picks scream of Mangini's influence on the process. After having to plug in Adams and Furrey in 2009, it was clear that the team needed something more than a couple of veteran stopgaps at the position. In both Ward and Asante, Mangini may have found the deep relief he was seeking.

In addition to shoring up the overall depth at the position – clearly, the weakest area on the team in 2009 – Mangini may have found some physical game-changers to do exactly that. Without question, both draft picks bring a physical style of play not seen at any time during the expansion era. And after watching countless teams destroy the Browns across the middle of field and over the top in 2009, whatever influence Mangini still has in Cleveland become significant over the past few days.

As for the “marquee” pick in Colt McCoy, let's just take it for what it is. In McCoy, Holmgren has his QB project. Already, two stories have surfaced regarding the McCoy pick. The first states that McCoy will not see the field in 2010. The second is that since no one could present a better option with the team's late third-round pick, Holmgren got his man.

In this sense, the idea of consensus building continues to prove viable. Consider that with Holmgren's assumed position of power, he could have easily overruled both Heckert and Mangini and made this pick some 60 spots earlier. Or, in Savage's case, traded away four first-round picks to move up three spots. However, staying true to his original words – Holmgren stayed patient and waited for his hand-picked QB to fall to him.

And before I offer another 1,000 words on the follies of such a move, let me just say this:

1. The team's larger needs were addressed well before the McCoy pick.
2. Assuming Jake Delhomme recovers even slightly from his two-year slump, there is absolutely no need for McCoy to do anything more than wear a headset in 2010.
3. My interpretation of draft value is somewhat skewed. While I'm relieved that McCoy was taken late in the 3rd round, as opposed to somewhere much higher – I'm still leery of what he

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can actually bring to an NFL franchise.

4. Character and college success can only take a player so far in the NFL. In the Browns' case, we've already seen this with Brady Quinn. Or, in Denver's case, they'll realize the same thing in 2-3 years...with Tim Tebow.

5. I just realized I've done the exact thing that most of Browns Nation and anyone with access to a message board will do in 2010 – that is, endlessly debate the merits of a player who will likely not play for 1-2 years. In some ways, it's like the draft never even happened.

Anyway, getting back to the players who could actually contribute in 2010 -

There is little doubt that the influence of Mangini was felt with the pick of Monterio Hardesty. Despite having some college injury issues, Hardesty could prove to be one of the steals of the 2010 draft. Although I despise the term, Hardesty is nothing but a “throwback” type of runner – one who has great RB size, blazing speed and some toughness. In many ways, Hardesty could prove to be the perfect complimentary back to Jerome Harrison – and at the least, will offer a different dynamic at the position.

In terms of consensus, clearly this pick signals the continued emphasis on improving the team's running attack. After all, what else is this offense going to do? However, in a nod to functional management, Holmgren and Heckert foresaw a mid-round run on RB's and made a deal to get a player that they wanted.

The Shaun Lauvao pick furthers this idea. Although not a highly publicized pick, Lauvao could help to bolster the depth along the right side of the line – or even push potential 2010 starters Floyd Womack and Tony Pashos. Lauvao appears to be an athletic blocker with some solid college experience – traits that are currently not found everywhere among the front line. In a nod to both Mangini and Heckert, this pick seems to signal the future of the team's draft plans, as there is a great chance that the Browns will have to replace three 2010 starters a year from now.

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As for the rest of the draft, perhaps the Saturday highlight for me was the selection of South Florida's Carlton Mitchell. Although I'm no draft expert – which means I'm almost as qualified as Todd McShay – I've had my eye on Mitchell for the past year or so. He is simply a big, fast, physical target – albeit one who was injured a lot and lacking the “polish” of say a Brian Robiskie. Of course, this means that he should instantly compete for a starting job. Right?

Of course, we've been down this path with late-round receivers before. It was only a few years ago that Savage traded up to grab Paul Hubbard – a player who possessed similar speed and size. And like Mitchell, my excitement overruled my sense of logic. The book on Mitchell is that he's ill-equipped to play an NFL style of offense, considering South Florida's run heavy attack. Also, he's not exactly sure-handed. However, considering the team's complete lack of playmakers at the position, it's possible that Mitchell can become a contributor - if only as a player who can stretch the defense deep.

Also, if we're viewing the McCoy pick as a developmental one – why not do the same with Mitchell?

Speaking of more projects, how about Clifton Geathers in the late 6th round?

If anything, the Browns win the award for drafting the player with the longest arms in recorded history. While trying to gather video evidence of Geathers actually playing college football is nothing short of an impossible task, it's worth noting that he comes from a great lineage of NFL players. Perhaps the combination of bloodlines and a lack of young depth along the current defensive line can give us something.

The Pick

It's hard to be disappointed with this group of players. Again – who knows? However, in a most comforting realization, the Browns targeted four critical roster needs at corner, safety, offensive line and running back, and added some projects at quarterback, wide receiver and defensive end.

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However, in the most positive of drafting news, it finally appears that the franchise has implemented a functional system of management. At least in 2010, gone are the days of one pseudo-GM dominating the process by chasing one player across the draft board and mortgaging the team's future in the process. Finally, it appears that common sense and that elusive idea of consensus has come to Cleveland.

The Pick – Part Two

So now, the more important question is this: What next?

Assuming that 3-4 of these 2010 picks can actually contribute in 2010, we're still staring at some critical needs. The Browns still need a veteran wide receiver and some help along the right side of the offensive line. The defensive line is rapidly aging and the situation at linebacker is still muddled.

But then again, it's doubtful that Holmgren is finished.

In fact, the most pressing need now becomes settling the restricted contract situations of Jerome Harrison, Lawrence Vickers and D'Qwell Jackson. After all, Harrison and Vickers proved to be the core of the team's late-season offensive surge, while a pre-injury Jackson was the roster's best tackler.

And of course – to go back in time a month or so – no one outside of a prosecutor's office knows the fate of Shaun Rogers. In perhaps the quietest potential criminal case in league history – thanks to Ben Roethlisberger – there is no guarantee that Rogers suits up for the Browns – or another team – in 2010.

In the end, we know that this is just the beginning. And while we know nothing right now, at least it appears that the Browns as a functional franchise have finally found some footing.

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Let's just leave it at that.