

Taking Advantage Of Combine Fallacies

Written by {ga=ryanlewis}

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This is when NFL General Managers—some, anyway—must be licking their chops.

These are the guys in the war room who value “football speed” over “track speed,” who put more weight into decisions made on the field than cone drills and what a stopwatch says.

This is the week when players who didn’t perform well at the combine are bludgeoned to death by scouts and begin to fall further and further down draft boards.

Player X’s name looks a little rusty, a little less polished, and he falls right into the waiting arms of someone who saw a great “football player” over a great “athlete.”

It’s the old debate of what’s more reliable—what you see with your own eyes, or what you see in numbers? Trust your eyes and gut feeling or your stopwatch?

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Without beating around the bush, those “tainted” players are whom the Browns should at least take a longer look at later in the draft.

Like Pittsburgh’s Jon Baldwin.

Baldwin’s had a first-round label for most of the season but teetered off towards the end and after showing bad technique at some of the drills at the combine, his stock continues to fall even though he did, for his position, shine at the bench press and vertical jump.

It means very little if he wasn’t “efficient” in a cone drill here or there—he plays tough, has great hands, can out jump anyone guarding him and works best in shorter routes. He’d be a great fit in Cleveland, and as an early second round pick could end up being one of the best values as well.

It’s drafting for the system you’re running, which is almost always a good line of thinking.

The thought of drafting another wide receiver in the second round should bring some queasy feelings, but Baldwin’s ceiling is much higher than anyone on the Browns roster. Just for consideration.

And, as it is every year, signal callers garnered the most attention all week.

I’ll never, ever understand why any QB throws at the combine. It doesn’t test your decision making, there’s no way you can be comfortable, there’s no “game” feel and you’re usually throwing to someone you haven’t worked out with beforehand so there’s no timing.

Playing quarterback is about controlling the game, making snap decisions and throwing through windows with impeccable timing—throwing in a gym cannot recreate that atmosphere.

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Which is why the quarterback who didn't throw at the combine, won the combine.

Blaine Gabbert, who only ran in Indy, continues to sit back, relax, and watch Cam Newton raise more and more questions about his validity as the top QB to be taken off the board.

Newton looked like he was trying to set the world on fire and overshot several routine routes. Gabbert also ran his 40-yard dash pretty close to Newton and Washington's Jake Locker, which was where the latter two were supposed to gain ground on the field. Gabbert didn't really boost his own stock, rather he let Newton come to him.

The hype around Gabbert certainly resembles that of Jay Cutler just a few years ago—wasn't thought of too highly during the season but put with solid numbers, is a bit of a surprise when talked about as a possible high first-rounder and then continues to gain steam right into the top-10 (Buffalo, Arizona, Washington and San Francisco are certainly options).

Christian Ponder is the lone quarterback who threw and drastically improved the perceptions about him. He showed much better accuracy than what's on film and on film, he's the best suited for the West Coast Offense, which helps draft stock every single year. Ponder was mostly thought of as a nice mid-draft pick after Ricky Stanzi and Andy Dalton. After those two showed accuracy issues in Indy, maybe Ponder threw himself into or ahead of that group. He is the exception to the rule.

Quickly some notes—

Julio Jones still won't jump A.J. Green as the first WR to be taken off the board despite running a 4.34 according to handheld stopwatches with a broken bone in his foot. It is, however, downright impressive.

Marcell Dareus—aided by Nick Fairley's maturity concerns—may have just put himself in the top-3 overall with his performance. Dareus's first split in his 40-yard dash—1.66—is what's

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fueling the questions about who the top defensive tackle prospect is in this class. There shouldn't be any stock put into how fast he runs 10 yards, but that's why some of these people get out of bed in the morning. More power to them.

Robert Quinn looked as smooth as ever and ran a 4.6, which is exactly what he needed. Still, he has to be the biggest question mark with only 2009 tape and a couple combine workouts to his name. He just didn't hurt his name, either.

Sometimes shooting par for the course is a better score than it appears.