

Feeling a Draft: The Defensive Line

Written by {ga=jta1975}

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As the days until the draft on Thursday wind down we turn our positional breakdown series to the defensive line. This year, with the switching of the defensive philosophy, the Browns will be starting 4 big guys with their hand in the dirt instead of the 3 that we have been used to under the previous 2 head coaches. This will bring a need for more depth at DT as well as some DEs whose skill set better suit a 4-man front. The difference between the two types of defense will be easily seen when examining the DE position.

In the 3-4 two-gap system that Crennel and Mangini ran the DEs were expected to be big and stout against the run and for the most part rely on the OLBs to get pass rush. In the 4-3 the DEs will be the ones primarily relied on to generate the pass rush so the type of player and body type will change accordingly.

As far as the DTs needed to run a Dick Jauron 4-3, the positional needs will be similar to what the NT and the DE positions required in a 3-4. He likes bigger, stout tackles that will be used as anchors in the middle of the defense in order to free up the LBs to make most of the tackles. He has not run a gap-penetrating system in the past so I will assume he will continue with this type of scheme for the current Browns defense. This actually helps the Browns a little when it comes to acquiring personnel needed to run the new defense because some of the bigger bodies that the Browns had on the roster playing DE in the 3-4 actually were DTs in college and can slide back inside and have some familiarity and history with the position.

When evaluating the current Browns roster it is clear we will need to focus some draft picks on the DE position in the 2011 draft. I do think the Browns will have interest and try and resign Jayme Mitchell (DE the Browns traded for during the 2010 season) because at 6-6 and 285lbs he has the prototype body type for a power (LDE) end in the 4-3 alignment. Tom Heckert has

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mentioned him by name in his last 2 press conferences as our best pass rusher on the defensive line and as someone the Browns will "wait to see what happens with in free agency". I think Heckert will resign him to a reasonable deal to provide some depth and potentially start at the position.

Marcus Benard is a player who could also be in the mix for a role as a pass rushing DE because he was a 270lb DE in college who was a rush specialist in the 3-4 as an OLB and a guy who actually rushed sometimes from a three point stance this past season. Regardless whether Benard is good enough in run support to start for the Browns I expect him to have a place in the sub package defense rushing the passer and that shouldn't be taken lightly because in today's NFL teams spend 60% of the time in their nickel packages. Even with these two potentially playing on the outside the Browns will add players to the mix and more than likely take some DL players in the draft.

The Browns lucked out, in my opinion, when it comes to the players available in this year's draft playing on the defensive line. This year's crop of defensive lineman is as deep and talented as any group that comes to mind in recent years. With the need the Browns have I think it is fair to say that they will get a good player or two for the defensive front. My list is compiled of DEs and DTs.

Remember that the list of players is put together using a two-fold philosophy with the first thought being players I like and the second being a prediction of who will be available to pick from when the Browns are on the clock in the various rounds of the draft. With the depth in this year's draft we will talk about players believed to be available within the first five rounds of the draft.

6th pick Candidates

Robert Quinn (6-4 265lbs) DE **UNC** Quinn is a guy that has shown great natural ability to rush the passer. He has great speed and strength off of the edge and is a classic natural knee and ankle bender. He had 11.5 sacks his sophomore then missed his junior year due to a suspension from violation with agent gifts. He is an elite talent but hasn't played football in over a year.

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Marcel Dareus (6-3 1/8 319lbs) DE/DT Alabama Marcell Dareus is the top rated DT on most boards because of his versatility to play DE in the 3-4 which is what he played in college. He is also what they call a "clean" player meaning he has no character issues and no one questions regarding his work ethic. He will be stout against the run and will be a good power player but he is not an elite athlete so I am interested to see if he can get to the QB on a regular basis.

Nick Fairley (6-3 7/8 291lbs) DT Auburn Fairley is a player that has off of the chart ability but comes with higher risk than the others because of some attitude and motivation concerns. This guy is an elite athlete with tremendous feet but needs to get better with his hands. He will eat up guards in the NFL with his athleticism but will need to improve his anchor against the run.

DaQuan Bowers (6-3 3/8 280lbs) DE Clemson Bowers is a player whose stock has dropped since the season has ended due to medical concerns. He was a player that had weight issues his first two seasons before losing 25lbs prior to his junior season and leading the nation in sacks with 15.5. He injured his knee during the season but played through the pain having surgery after the season was done. He worked out in a pro day looking stiff and less than 100% which only fueled the fire of doubt about him being an elite player in the NFL level.

2ND-3RD Round

Brooks Reed (6-2½ 263lbs) DE Arizona Reed is a player that has been on the rise since the end of the season. He was slowed this past season due to injury so his junior tape is better than his senior tape. He has a skill set and motor that has gotten many comparing him to Clay Mathews Jr. He is best against the pass when he can use his speed, quickness and motor to his advantage. He is okay versus the run but tends to get overwhelmed by bigger lineman too often.

Terrell Mclain (6-1 5/8 297lbs) DT South Florida Mclain is a player that fits the power defensive scheme that Jauron has run in the past. He is not great at any one aspect but he is solid in all areas and gives the type of effort that is needed for DTs to have long careers.

Jabaal Sheard(6-2 7/8 264lbs) DE Pitt Sheard is a DE who can fit the mold of a RDE in the 4-3. He is a player who will be a solid DE and who will bring a nice variety of moves in the pass rush game and really understands leverage in the run game. He has good speed (4.69) but

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needs to work on his burst and getting off the line.

Marvin Austin (6-1 5/8 309lbs) DT UNC Marvin Austin is a player who would be rated much higher in my opinion if he had the benefit of playing in 2010. He has all the physical abilities to be a dominate DT but he has character issues on and off the field. Off of the field he was one of the players suspended at UNC for illegal gifts received from an agent. The word on the street is that he has a lot of the young Gerard Warren in him which is not a compliment. On the field he tends to disappear too often causing people to question the effort he will give after getting paid. I like that he is stout and plays with the strength he showed at the combine putting up an eye popping 38 reps of 225.

Stephen Paea (6-1¼ 303lbs) DT Oregon St. Paea is a DT who plays the run just the way a coach asks. He is really strong at the point of attack and has a really violent hand shiver due to his superior strength, which he displayed at the combine breaking the bench press record while putting up 49 reps. He isn't going to be a penetrating DT because his pass rush is a work in progress but you can't move him in the run game making him elite in that aspect. He is coming off of a Senior Bowl injury so he will need cleared medically.

Jurrell Casey(6-0 5/8 300lbs) DT USC Casey is a player whose assets would be perfect for a Dick Jauron defense. He is great at controlling gaps and rarely gets pushed off the point when defending the run. He had 67 tackles this past season which is great production for a DT and shows his value against the run. He has adequate pass rush skills and can develop into a solid starting DT in the league for many years with his abilities to find the football.

4th-5th Rounds

Greg Romeus (6-5 264lbs) DE Pitt Romeus is a player who would be rated higher but he blew out his ACL early in the season and missed most of the year because of it. He projects as more of a LDE because he is more of a power leverage player than a speed player. He has good production with 7.5 and 8 sacks in each of the last two years. You could only have expected him to reach or exceed these numbers if he had not been injured in the first game of the season this year. The injury will allow him to be picked later in the draft increasing his value.

Sam Acho (6-1 5/8 262lbs) DE Texas Sam Acho doesn't have elite skills in any area but has

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put up 10 and 9 sacks over the last two seasons and tested well at the combine. He is the classic player that doesn't flash greatness but seems to get the job done. He should be available in the fourth or fifth round and could provide depth and value down the line.

Kenrick Ellis (6-4 7/8 346lbs) DT Hampton Ellis was originally enrolled at South Carolina and transferred to the smaller Hampton after being dismissed for disciplinary reasons. He is a super athlete for someone his size and had 94 tackles this year which is tremendous for any DL no matter what level of competition. If he has matured properly and isn't a character risk he will be a steal if available in the 4th round. He has all the skills to be a Shaun Rogers type of player.

Ian Williams (6-1³/₄ 319lbs) DT Notre Dame Williams is another stout DT who is more of a one dimensional player with elite run stuffing ability and average to below average pass rush. His bull mentality against the run is enough to make him a good two down player and worthy of a later round pick.

Christian Ballard (6-3³/₄ 283lbs) DT/DE Iowa Ballard is a player who I think translates to a classic LDE in the 4-3. On the surface you look at his stats and see his biggest sack season is a 5.5 sack performance but they played a 3-4 scheme in Iowa. In that system he wasn't asked to rush the passer every down so his sack numbers are not what you like but he has all the tools in his tool bag and can excel in the NFL given the right situation. There are rumors that he popped positive at the combine for wacky tobacco and if that is the case he could also be had on the cheap.

Cliff Mathews (6-3¹/₂ 257lbs) DE South Carolina Mathews is a solid football player and a good defensive end in all categories. He will not jump off of the stat sheet but can be a solid rotation player early in his career and develop into more with some more work. He needs to improve his anchor against the run and improve his counter move in the pass rush. He is a solid developmental player.

Bruce Miller(6-1 3/8 254lbs) DE UCF Miller fits the type of player Heckert is used to drafting as a developmental DE who can be used in the sub-package right away. His 7.05 3-cone and 35 reps on the bench show his potential with both foot speed and power.

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Biggest Upside

Robert Quinn by far has the biggest upside of all the DEs. He is a natural pass rusher with a top notch motor and was just scratching his surface before his suspension. His 405 power-clean shows his natural strength and his ability to turn the corner is as natural as they get. Some of his technique is still raw but he shows tremendous potential.

Sleeper

Martin Parker (6-2 1/8 303lbs) DT Richmond Parker is a small school DT with plenty of potential. He had 94 tackles this past year and has had 12 sacks over the last two years. He excels in most aspects on a lower level but his measurables say he can compete with the big boys. If he shows the ability to adjust his game to the NFL level of competition then he should be a solid player in the league.

Projected Pick

Nick Fairley is a player I want to put here because he is the most talented in my opinion. I think he can actually play LDE in the 4-3 and move inside on pass rushing situations but without knowing if the issues with his character are true or not I will instead pick **Robert Quinn**.

Quinn has Demarcus Ware-type of potential that will be hard for any GM looking for pass rush to turn down. I think he can be a terror on the QB and he has the strength to be a solid run player. Out of all the guys from UNC that got caught up in the agent issue he has the most genuine story and when looking into his character. In fact, before the issue occurred, you would have found him to have a very high character rating.

Stay Away

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DaQuan Bowers is a player I really like on the field but not having confidence in his medical report turns me off to him as a draft pick. If I knew for a fact his knee was O.K. long term I would not hesitate to pick him at 6. He is the best DE against the run, shows an array of pass rush moves and can bend the corner with ease for a big man when coming from the left side. He has an off the charts character rating but if I can't ensure him to be on the field I can't afford to pull the trigger on him as my pick.