

Browns Roster Primer

Written by {ga=jta1975}

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I originally planned on putting out a review of the notes I acquired while watching the 2010 Browns season again but with news of the lockout ending I instead decided to focus my energy on doing a roster review.

I will incorporate some of my notes from the Browns season-in- review and will pass on some of my thoughts on the 2010 season but with football back and the Browns changing their schemes, I really think people want to move forward and don't want to focus on the past as much.

When talking about the roster and potential player acquisitions we must factor in a few variables:

- Both the offensive and defensive schemes will change dramatically in the 2011 season and therefore personnel will have to change accordingly.

- The roster requirements (along with the skill sets) needed by teams running a 4-3 are much different than that of a team running a 3-4. One example is the number of LBs versus the number of D-Lineman a team will carry. The 3-4 team will have more LBs and the 4-3 will have more guys for the DL.

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- Another consideration is cap room. The Browns have put themselves in a very favorable position when it comes to the 2011 off-season and acquiring free agents because they are well under the projected cap by ~ \$30million dollars.

Also, with the cash spending minimum being raised, it means the Browns will be obligated by rule to spend most of that \$30million on players so expect quite a few signings including the re-signing of some of the Browns' own free agents.

- Another factor will be the resigning and extending players currently already under contract. You better believe players who think they are underpaid will be forming a line.

Just like Josh Cribbs last year, there will be some players who really are underpaid and some other players who will be free agents soon that the team won't want to risk ever even getting to free agency (Joe Thomas).

I expect some guys like Peyton Hillis and Ahtyba Rubin to begin conversations involving raises and extensions as soon as some of the free agent buzz starts to die down and I imagine some of those conversations began before the lockout even started.

A player like Joe Thomas who has a voidable year in his original 6 year contract could also possibly get extended. Even though he won't be a free agent until after the 2012 season it would allow them to spread the bonus money over a longer period of time and ensure his services for years to come.

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- I also expect the team to make a few roster purges that will also increase the amount of money available to spend in 2011 with the most obvious candidate being Jake Delhomme.

- The last theme you will see in players acquired...especially with a new coaching staff ,is relationships.

Coaches want players that they think can help them implement their schemes. Knowing a player already understands what you want and can also teach other players is an important aspect of transition from one coaching staff to another.

From a GM perspective, if a player comes available that you're familiar with, studied, drafted, or played against it increases the player's value to you because you feel like you already know what kind of football player he is.

Having a good idea of what a player is and will be for you can be the difference in team's willingness to pay big money to acquire that player.

Also, relationships with other executives and coaches in the league come into play when you need a trusted source to give you an honest and accurate opinion on a player. This can ease a GM's mind when dealing with a player that the GM has no direct or prior relationship with.

Yes, film on current players in the league will give you an impression of the football player, but getting a feel for the man is something that needs to come from research and talks with trusted sources who know him. And part of that research is getting opinions from people you trust.

When it comes to the talent level of the team.... 2011 should be a year you see the Browns overall level of talent jump by leaps and bounds.

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The amount of money available automatically increases the opportunity to bring in players but I think the factor that will really allow Tom Heckert to increase the talent of the roster is the comfort level he has with both the existing players on the roster and his high comfort level with the schemes the team he will deploy under Pat Shurmur.

Offensively Tom Heckert knows exactly what Pat Shurmur is looking for in a player. Their days of working with each other in Philadelphia will be a huge factor understanding what type of offensive players need to be acquired.

Defensively the team is going to run a 4-3 much in the same manner that the Eagles did during the time they both were in the same organization.

The high level of familiarity with the expectations that the coaches have for a given position will allow him to evaluate and forecast how a player will work in the schemes of the 2011 Browns.

For the first year of Heckert's reign as Cleveland GM he was not only trying to evaluate what a player was all about, but he was also trying to gain the knowledge from the coaches on what exactly that player was going to be asked to do.

He was also trying to learn what the players on the roster that he inherited brought to the table.

You can really start to understand why some positions didn't get addressed in the off-season leading up to last season if you understand that Heckert really was trying to figure out what Daboll was going to ask a WR to do and how exactly a 3-4 two gap DL should look and play.

I really think you will see the Browns use this cap money very aggressively because the front office will be more confident in what they are looking for. There is no projections needed on how a DE will do standing up and playing OLB, they know exactly the type of skills needed to play DE in a 4-3 defense.

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Heckert will not have to guess on the types of routes a WR is going to be asked to run. He already has familiarity with that part of the offense Shurmur will use.

All of these factors will make it easier to not only determine what players they want but it will allow him to prioritize what players are most important to sign. You can clearly see the comfort level that the GM has in the schemes that Shurmur will be running if you look at the players drafted in the early rounds of this year's draft.

This year in the draft when the Browns traded the 6th pick and moved down to 27.... they already had Phil Taylor targeted and eventually traded back up a couple spots to ensure they got him. This shows me the comfort level Heckert felt with exactly what he was looking for in a DT and he knew Taylor had it.

In the 2nd round they drafted a DE and then took a WR with their second choice in that round. All three of those positions were needs last year (OLB,DE,WR) but the Browns drafted what I call 'scheme indifferent' type of players.

Positions like CB, S, and RB are really positions that are not dependant on the scheme or philosophy a team runs. Good players at these positions can play in any scheme.

I am not trying to go all JFK conspiracy theory on you guys and I understand that those players were all positions of need last year (what wasn't really?)... I am simply stating we clearly knew that age on our DL was an issue...we had little to no pass rush and we traded Cam Wimbley so the draft really could have looked a whole lot different had management come from the same system as the coaching staff.

Players like Rolando McClain, Tyson Alualu, Jason Pierre-Paul could have been the pick in the first....Koa Misi, Torrell Troupe and Sergio Kindle could have been the picks in the second round, and so on.

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I really think Heckert did the smart thing not drafting players high in the 2010 draft who were 'scheme dependent' due to the fact that both he and Holmgren came from a different system than because the front office just didn't know if Mangini was the answer at coach....and yes, I do think that was in the back (or maybe the forefront) of his mind.

Since the players he chose ended up being good players it makes him look even better, I just don't think it was an accident that no OLBs were taken at all and they waited until their last pick in the draft to get a 3-4 DE....I am not saying it was any evil plan to sink Mangini, I am saying it was more about Heckert's comfort level with the schemes (3-4 defense for sure) he ran.

I really think Heckert and the Browns did a great thing by not over-spending in the uncapped year. They anticipated the cap coming back and planned to be way under it in order to take advantage of the anticipated HUGE free agent class this year.

This is the year the Browns will really start adding talent and creating competition within the roster and free agency will be a huge part of that.

They will re-sign some of their own players and add solid mid-year veterans to go along with a super 2010 draft and what looks to be a solid 2011 draft.....All of these things will create a roster that will be as deep in talent as we have had since returning to the league.

In the next article I will break down the roster and give my opinion where the holes are. I will also give the names of my favorite players available to help our team transition to the new schemes that Shurmur will bring.

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