

Feeling a Draft: It's Combine Time

Written by {ga=jta1975}

Wednesday, February 22 2012 9:39 PM - Last Updated Wednesday, February 22 2012 9:40 PM



Alright Browns fans and draftniks, the Senior Bowl has come and gone so this week NFL teams are in Indianapolis, Indiana for the NFL Scouting Combine. The combine has grown in popularity with fans over the years and now is a spectacle that can be witnessed live both on NFL Network and NFL.com.

You will get a variety of opinions from experts and fans about the combine's worth but most NFL organizations consider it a valuable tool. No, not to worship every display of awesome athleticism or scrutinize every misstep....NFL teams are using the NFL combine as a giant job convention.

I think sometimes people forget that playing in the NFL is a job and therefore some of the hiring principles are going to be similar to the way we get any job. For most of the bigger school athletes and household names the testing won't even matter a whole lot. For the organizations with a great scouting department the on-field testing is just a confirmation of the skills that they saw on tape or in person at practices and during games, so the greatest value to organizations isn't always using a measuring stick or stop watch.

Many organizations will tell you the biggest value to them is from the medical evaluations that are performed during combine week. Teams wouldn't have the resources to put 327 invitees through the battery of medical testing that takes place including all of the imagery testing. That not only costs a ton of money in equipment and personnel, but also a boat load of time. Sure, teams would isolate their targets, but it is a great tool to have the testing done on players that may have slipped through the cracks of your initial research.

The medical reports are always an extremely useful resource that teams take full advantage of. Another great feature of the combine is it's much like what a normal job conference would offer

Feeling a Draft: It's Combine Time

Written by {ga=jta1975}

Wednesday, February 22 2012 9:39 PM - Last Updated Wednesday, February 22 2012 9:40 PM

and a critical component to that is the interview process.

Many scouts have met the players in their region before but for other members of the front office and especially coaches, they are meeting players they have watched on film in person for the first time. Getting to see how a player interacts with people is an extremely underrated but important aspect of the NFL combine.

You can begin to see how well they handle group settings, how they interact with people they have never met including people who are working for the league and those coordinating and running the event.

Some players will be extremely standoffish and operate with a high maintenance mentality and others will be totally comfortable and respectful. We all know that certain personalities just don't mesh well and even though these players have all been on a team throughout their football career, that doesn't mean some of them aren't individual minded.

From a football perspective, getting a few minutes to work with a player and ask him some questions about his own scheme can also help you evaluate their film better. Getting the chance to ask them football questions will also allow you to see if they already understand some the things you value in your scheme or if they will be learning them from scratch, which will allow coaches to begin making a determination on how a player would operate in their scheme.

Coaches also use the opportunity to see how a player reacts to uncomfortable situations as well as getting some insight on how they take criticism. You have heard many stories of coaches like Bill Belichick showing players cut ups of them playing badly and making mistakes while asking them why they were doing what they were doing. Getting inside the minds of players and trying to figure out how they are wired is a common occurrence during combine week. Some teams and coaches will get a player in an interview and won't even ask any football questions or talk scheme. Some will ask probing questions trying to learn more about the man than the football player.

There are a lot of reasons why the combine is an important tool in the evaluation process and the value of specific parts of the combine will have a varying degree of worth to different organizations. Some will value the time with the players more than anything else...some will

Feeling a Draft: It's Combine Time

Written by {ga=jta1975}

Wednesday, February 22 2012 9:39 PM - Last Updated Wednesday, February 22 2012 9:40 PM

value the medical information more and some will value the ability to see how certain players stack up to others physically.

The NFL combine is a valuable event to organizations for the reasons I mentioned above but the fans and draft "experts" won't be privileged with the majority of that information so they talk about the things they hear about and see, which usually is the numbers players put on paper during testing.

First off, let's put two extremes to bed before we even get into the testing; the first is the notion that a player's draft position is going to be based strictly on what the measuring stick or stop watch says. The second is the notion that the results of the testing doesn't matter at all.

These two stances are the polar opposites and even though most understand that neither is true, it doesn't stop people from saying it and I am most certainly sure it doesn't stop some from believing it.

True, by now most good organizations have formulated their boards based on their scouting departments' research but that doesn't mean testing doesn't move some players around on that board and there is usually some level of movement all the way until the draft actually happens.

For most teams, testing results really come into play for players who have comparable film evaluations. In those scenarios, testing, interviews, and medical will be factors in ranking similar players. The testing isn't in a vacuum so the numbers by themselves aren't the tell-all, but without a doubt it is a piece of the puzzle called a draft profile.

The testing is really valuable to the smaller school players who play against inferior and therefore look extremely dominant on film. These players get an opportunity to test their athleticism against the best players the draft has to offer and see how they stack up. The testing and position drills also gives the opportunity for players who played in certain schemes a chance to show they can do other things than just what their teams asked them to do and that is why the film isn't the only measuring stick a player is evaluated with.

Feeling a Draft: It's Combine Time

Written by {ga=jta1975}

Wednesday, February 22 2012 9:39 PM - Last Updated Wednesday, February 22 2012 9:40 PM

When you watch any particular game and try to evaluate players it is important to also understand what they were expected to do so you can understand if they accomplished that and if they did.... how well did they do it? There are certain positions that aren't measured by stats so if you think a player is capable of doing something (or not) sometimes a drill allows you to better understand if a player can athletically handle what you might ask them to do. Just because you don't see them do it on film may not mean they can't...it could also mean they simply weren't asked to.

I am not going to continue with a rant about why all the drills are meaningful. I just want people to understand that although a bad showing at the combine isn't going to kill the stock of a player a team has rated highly on their board, the testing isn't just for show or to gather useless information.

If you are younger and just learning or older and just getting into the scouting combine ins and outs for the first time, the players will report, go through medical screening, get height weight measurements, then perform position drills and also perform some athletic testing.

The athletic testing will be a series of events that they use to gauge how fast, explosive, and quick you are. The drills will be the bench press, vertical jump, broad jump, 3 cone drill, shuttle run, and everyone's favorite, the 40 yard dash.

Now if you hear people talking about and giving numbers for something called a 10 yard or 20 yard split, they are referring to different timed points during the 40 yard test and not a separate test.

Now that I have talked a bit about what happens at the combine, I want to get into some of the things that I will have my eye on when I tune into the coverage February 22-28th on the NFL Network.

Quarterbacks

The top QBs usually don't throw at the combine as they typically have a management team that

Feeling a Draft: It's Combine Time

Written by {ga=jta1975}

Wednesday, February 22 2012 9:39 PM - Last Updated Wednesday, February 22 2012 9:40 PM

wants to put them in a controlled environment to throw so they can perform well. The one's at the top of the draft don't want to throw to receivers they don't know and ones they don't trust to catch their balls. The combine is usually for the second tier QBs to try and climb the rankings a bit by separating themselves from the other candidates with either arm strength or accuracy.

I will be watching to see what type of numbers athletically Baylor QB Robert Griffith III puts up and in particular what he runs his 40 yard dash in. He won a big 12 championship in track well before he ever took one meaningful snap at Baylor and he also trained with the Olympic team for the hurdles and I want to see how fast he really is.

Throwing wise, I want to see Arizona St. QB Brock Osweiler (a giant of a man) throw side by side against Oklahoma St. QB Brandon Weedon who I have always been impressed with and who threw the ball extremely well during Senior Bowl practice. I was interested to see Texas A&M QB Ryan Tannehill but he is recovering from an injury and won't work out.

RBs

I have a few interest RB wise. I want to see how Oregon RB Lamichael James and Cincinnati RB Isaiah Pead stack up to speedsters Lamar Miller and David Wilson in the 40. I also want to see how strong Florida speedster Chris Rainey is. I want to see how well San Diego St. RB Ronnie Hillman catches the ball....I will also have my eye on Buckeye Boom Herron to see how he stacks up to some of the other later round RBs.

As far as general drills and other times to pay attention to for the position, I would look at the 10 yard split to judge how quickly they get up to speed, and the 3 cone drills looking for their agility levels.

WRs

Speed is the name of the game for the WRs...Cleveland needs some explosive players in the passing game so I will have my eyes peeled to this group and the stop watch. It will be very interesting to see what the timed speed of Oklahoma St. WR Justin Blackmon is because he

Feeling a Draft: It's Combine Time

Written by {ga=jta1975}

Wednesday, February 22 2012 9:39 PM - Last Updated Wednesday, February 22 2012 9:40 PM

makes a ton of big plays on the field but people still question his speed.

I will also be on the lookout for South Carolina WR Alshon Jeffery's 40 time. He reminds me of Sydney Rice the way he makes acrobatic catches downfield so I am interested to see if he shows the type of numbers that can help him be a downfield threat in the NFL. I am also interested to see if he gets any type of separation when he runs routes against the DBs.

Another interesting drill to pay attention to for the WR position is the vertical leap, it is always a plus when a player can use explosive leaping ability to go up and catch the football.

OL

The Browns need a RT of the future so I will be looking at the drills for offensive lineman where they shadow a rushing player. The best RT candidates will have great feet and balance in this drill and should also have a plus rating on the bench press. You will also be able to tell how stiff a player is when they do the pulling drills.

Another measurement to pay attention to with offensive lineman will be hand size and arm length. You want big hands to take up more surface area and long arms to keep rushing player away from the QB.

DB

The Browns have a GM that really puts a high value on the secondary so I will keep my eye on the hips of the CBs in the DB drills. The Browns played a lot of man coverage last year and Joe Haden needs a solid young CB to pair with him for the future.

South Carolina CB Stephon Gilmore is a player I have really liked over the years so I want to see how he turns and runs. One of the knocks on him is that he is a bit stiff. You will be able to see how well he can flip his hips when he needs to turn and go. Trumaine Johnson from

Feeling a Draft: It's Combine Time

Written by {ga=jta1975}

Wednesday, February 22 2012 9:39 PM - Last Updated Wednesday, February 22 2012 9:40 PM

Montana is also a player I will have my eye on. He plays man coverage very well but the level of competition wasn't that high in his conference so I want to give him the visual comparison against some of the top CBs.

Alabama S Mark Barron and Notre Dame S Harrison Smith are two safeties I will have my eyes on. Some say they are both in the box players but I think they both have the athleticism to play well in space so I want to see if they look the part during drills.

LB

The LB group is one that is about instincts and physicality so it is hard to get anything earth shattering from this group and more than anything I will be looking for the bad numbers. Who is Brandon Spikes slow or who needs to add weight or strength? You can also see who has loose hips in coverage so you can possibly look for 3rd down players. The 3-4 teams will be looking for the smaller more athletic DEs to perform OLB drills to see if they can play in space so you can expect to see DEs perform the OLB drills.

Two of the lighter LBs I will have my eye on are Nebraska product Lovante David and Miami LB Sean Spence. These players live in the 220s and they need to be a bit heavier so I will be watching where they weigh in.

DL

From this group I will be looking for the explosion and strength numbers. The bench press, broad jump, vertical jump, and 3 cone. The best DL are the strongest most athletic players so these numbers can either confirm what you saw on film or expose the underachievers.

I want to see the change of direction(3 cone) numbers for North Carolina DE Quinton Coples as well as the 10 yard split from his 40 yard dash. I am interested if he can beat LTs in the NFL or is he a player that needs to attack the right tackle. Two more DEs I will have my eye on are Virginia DE Cam Johnson and Marshal DE Vinny Curry. Curry plays with an incredible motor I want to see how athletic his numbers say he is. Cam Johnson is a player I think can play RDE

Feeling a Draft: It's Combine Time

Written by {ga=jta1975}

Wednesday, February 22 2012 9:39 PM - Last Updated Wednesday, February 22 2012 9:40 PM

in the NFL and I want to see how explosive he is.

The DT group is one I will be watching the agility drills on specifically the bag drills where they shuffle down a line over the top and in between bags. I want to see which big men are the most agile because I think the Browns could use a good pressure DT to go with the two stout players they have now.

These are just a few things I will be watching for during the giant job fair they call the NFL Combine so if you choose to turn in, then enjoy...Just remember no matter how silly you think the combine is or whatever value you think it provides, the NFL will always be about the biggest, strongest, fastest, smartest players that can condition themselves to last the longest and the Combine is an awesome place to see some of that ridiculous ability on display.

[Follow @JasonA_TCF](#)