



We're ten days to all the speculation finally ending. All of the 'experts' and bloggers and talking heads will be removed from our collective conscience until next year starting a week from Thursday. And the draft still starts at pick #3 given Andrew Luck and Robert Griffin III are going one and two.

So let's reset and see what we're looking at.

The Browns still hold the 4<sup>th</sup> pick in the draft and will have their choice of any number of top-rated players at any of numerous positions of need. You want a RT? Well Matt Kalil may be there at #4 but he's a LT. Do you take him, solidify your line and pay LT money for a RT?

What about Trent Richardson? Is he clearly the best talent available at #4? Is he enough of a difference maker where he can help Colt McCoy AND help a solid defense by keeping them off the field by sustaining drives?

Do you reach for Ryan Tannehill, a guy who was just a guy in December and has suddenly shot up the rankings because of ridiculous media hype and teams in dire need of a QB hope? Or do you take the best WR available at #4 despite there being so many receivers who can help you later?

What about that defense? Morris Claiborne is going to be an impact CB for 8-10 years in the NFL and if you have Claiborne and Joe Haden as bookend CBs which outside receivers are going to beat them? Or do you trade down in what's got to be one of the deepest drafts in a long time if you need potential explosive play-makers at the RB and WR positions?

That's where the Browns are today. They're balancing all of those questions and weighing all of their options. They've got their draft board set other than a few guys who may move up or down depending on how stupid those kids may get between now and the time their names are called (like with crimes, injuries, etc) but there is likely calm and eagerness in Berea.

It's just crazy for us due to the ESPN-ization of sports and the inability to watch any programming without being inundated by idiocy and hype.

What you need to do is step back and remove yourself from the media blitz if you really want to narrow down what the Browns will do. Analyze their most urgent needs, the players who are available to fill them, the difference between the first layer of those players and the next and look at what the guys pulling the trigger have done in the past.

If you do this you can eliminate a couple possibilities. Justin Blackmon is not going to be the selection. Tom Heckert is smart enough to realize that Blackmon is not even in the same class as AJ Green or Julio Jones and isn't worthy of that #4 pick. Making this even more clear is the fact that there are scores of other quality receivers who are a better value than Blackmon at #4 because they're nearly as talented and will be available at 22, 37 and beyond. [Jason Askew and I have spent the better part of the last month profiling many of these guys.](#)

Similarly, you need to ask yourself if Trent Richardson at #4 is logical. Yes, he's clearly the best back in the draft. And the gap between him and the rest of the pack is bigger than the gap between Blackmon and the next level of receivers.

But this is the regime that drafted Montario Hardesty and brought in the forgotten Brandon Jackson. And not only did they take Hardesty in round two a couple years back but they traded up to get him. And Jackson was brought in to be that 3<sup>rd</sup> down back that can run, catch the ball and pick up blitzes before he was hurt in training camp last year.

Richardson is a very, very good back. But he's not as gifted a runner as Adrian Peterson and you don't take a back at the #4 spot because he can pick up blitzes and occasionally catch the ball. Not to mention this arrogant and egotistical front office would often times appear to be more comfortable cutting off their nose to spite their face and they're probably not ready to admit trading up for Hardesty was a mistake.

I don't see Richardson at #4. If the Browns are unhappy with their 'every down' RB situation then they can address it later in round one or after with guys like David Wilson and Lamar Miller, etc. If they think Jackson isn't going to be back then they can get their change of pace back like LaMichael James or Isaiah Pead in round 3 or 4 as well.

As for Tannehill, if the Browns are that dumb to take that guy at #4 then I will lead the torch and pitch fork parade to the building. Understand this: you don't take guys like Blackmon or Tannehill at #4 simply because they're the best guys at the position available.

Example- due to an outbreak of Ebola that killed every other NCAA wide receiver I am granted eligibility and I am the best WR coming out of school next season. Do you take me at #4 because you have a need and I'm the best guy available? Do you take me because I'm the top receiver on the board?

No. Stop listening to the idiots and the talking heads and use your own. Ryan Tannehill was a project when the real games ended. He's still a project today. Nothing he's done in shorts and workouts changes any of that. And you don't take that guy at that spot unless you're a complete and total fool.

So what then?

So it appears to me the Browns will do one of two things; they will trade down or they will select LSU CB Morris Claiborne at #4. They could trade back a few spots and still have a couple of the guys we discussed available to them. If that happens the thinking changes because those guys being available later give you far better value than if you took them at #4.

Example (skewed again for effect): Justin Blackmon at #4 is bad. Justin Blackmon at 14 is much better.

Why Claiborne if they don't move back? Because of what was discussed earlier in terms of having two shut down CBs to match up with and because Tom Heckert comes from an organization where they're not afraid to draft quality even at positions where they already have it.

There are a lot of players available who can and will make the Browns more explosive and give them more weapons on the offensive side of the ball. And they're available outside of the top ten. The Browns will get a couple of those guys. They can significantly improve the defense with Claiborne and still get those explosive offensive players and that's what they'll do.

If they're smart.

### **What's the Fuss?**

You folks out there complaining about the Indians signing Johnny Damon can keep on screaming and keep on objecting. The noise doesn't bother me in the least. That's mostly because I'm too focused on wondering why Michael Brantley gets a pass from so many Tribe fans.

Not only has Brantley gotten off to a slow start offensively (even by his anemic standards) but I sat there on Opening Day and watched him ease up instead of lay out for a ball in the right center field gap and I watch him all too casually approach each and every game.

Maybe Brantley is just a super-cool cat with talent to burn who's just about to erupt on the Major League level and take his place amongst the game's best centerfielders. Or maybe he's a somewhat aloof, somewhat spoiled son of a former Major League ball player who's had things easy for 25 years and who won't ever amount to much more than the fourth or fifth outfielder

that I take him to be.

I understand Johnny Damon throws like a girl. I understand he's 116 years old. I understand all of that and I'd almost still rather see Damon play CF in place of Brantley than in left field.

Why? Well, as old as he is Damon has always and still plays the game hard. He's a dirt bag and I've watched him throw his body around the field for nearly 20 years. I've never questioned Damon's intensity and passion and I've always admired the production he's given whichever team he's played for. Contrast that to Brantley who looks walks around as though he's disinterested and aloof and who doesn't always look like he's putting forth an abundance of effort and I'd rather have the guy busting his ass, even if he can't throw a ball from one end of the dugout to the other.

I know...I know....how about something other than personal opinion and speculation. Well let's just look at Damon v. Brantley from 2011, when Damon was 37 years old and Brantley was 24:

Player

PA

AB

HR

RBI

SB

BA

OPS

OPS+

Brantley

496

451

7

46

13

.266

.702

97

Damon

647

582

16

73

19

.261

.743

110

So personal preferences and potential biases aside, which of those guys is the better, more productive hitter?

It's really not even close. Damon stayed healthier, was a more powerful, impactful run producer and (and this one is indicative of the hustle and effort issue) stole nearly 50% more bases at age 37 than Brantley did at 24.

No one is more appreciative and respectful of defense than I am. When I played ball it was pretty much all that kept me in a lineup. I hoped to hit enough to justify playing defense. But this isn't that era. This isn't the dead-ball days when you could put plus defenders at every position and pray they executed enough to score you a run. The Indians already used up those moves when they plugged Jack Hannahan and Casey Kotchman into their corner infield positions and demoted Lonnie Chisenhall.

In this day and age you have to mash or have some guys at least capable of mashing. That's not Michael Brantley. And he's not exactly Jacoby Ellsbury or Alex Gordon in CF or LF or wherever you put him. He's basically about average defensively and he's actually marginally better in CF than in LF.

When you consider Brantley's shortcomings, combine it with his lack of fire and consider you can find guys like Michael Brantley pretty much anywhere at any time you can begin to understand why signing Johnny Damon makes sense to me. You may be asking why I'm comparing Damon to Brantley as opposed to Shelley Duncan. It's simply because if and when Grady Sizemore comes back then Brantley would conceivably move back to LF and render Damon as an accessory and part time guy. I don't necessarily see it going down that way if plate appearances are earned. Damon is a better player than Brantley and he's a far better player than Duncan. I'm fine with Duncan getting his swings against some left-handers and some hard throwers but Shelley Duncan is nearly 33 years old and has less than 50 more career plate appearances *than Damon had last season* at age 37.

Damon vs. Duncan is a mismatch even with defense considered. One guy can't catch a ball and one can't throw it.

At the end of the day I just don't have an issue with this move. Sure, I wish the Indians would

have addressed this glaring need with a younger, more productive bat in the offseason. The Indians foolishly thought maybe Grady was that guy and they ignored the obvious deterioration of Sizemore's physical skills and ability to stay healthy. That's on them. That was \$5million that could have gone to someone more productive than Sizemore.

But you can't judge the Damon signing on those past mistakes. The Indians are addressing an area of need and concern and they're doing it with only money and not a great deal of it. What do we care about the cash? Not signing Damon isn't going to reduce ticket prices and it's not going to lower the cost of a beer and a hot dog. What it does do is put a guy in the lineup that is capable of putting together a major league-quality at bat and gives the Indians a better chance to compete every single night.

I'm all for it. And if Michael Brantley broods down the road when he's the one losing playing time, how will anyone know the difference?

### **Ahhh Yes... The Cavs**

I completely put it out of my mind that the Cavs were still playing until I read that Luke Harangody led them to a *huge* win over the Washington Wizards.

A night after being called up from the D-League.

Thanks for that, Luke. If there's anything we need it's a big night from the 12<sup>th</sup> (or 13<sup>th</sup>??) man on the team to mess up potential draft position.