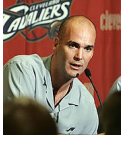


Papa Cass takes a look at Danny Ferry's first draft of any significance here in C-Town, and likes what he saw. Cassano endorses the selection of Shannon Brown, and like me, feels he may turn out to be an absolute steal at #25. He makes the case that Brown gives this Cavs team alot of what they lack, and his athleticism is welcomed after years of picks like Langdon, Diop, and Mihm.



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Heading into his first night of draft picks as an NBA general manager, Danny Ferry knew he had at least one shield in place that predecessor Jim Paxson never did: he was drafting late.

If the Cavs weren't able to cash in with the 25th pick and two second-rounders, at least it wouldn't be because Ferry whiffed on a top 10 pick the way Paxson so often did. There's a limit to what you can do with the fifth-to-last pick in the first round.

Picking 25th lowered expectations from the fans enough that Ferry knew he wouldn't be facing a lynch mob if he didn't find an all-star. He wouldn't be branded an incompetent drafter as Paxson was. It's one of many pieces of Teflon armor provided the general managers of good teams.

But that doesn't mean the 25th pick didn't carry some significant weight for Ferry's team.

The pick was potentially the only first-rounder the Cavs could have in the span of three years. Failing to come through with something good could have ramifications far worse than angry callers to radio shows.

Every move Ferry makes is an opportunity to reinforce the good feelings LeBron James has about the Cavaliers, or to begin eroding them.

Ferry cut his executive teeth in a Spurs organization that prides itself on finding gems in the back end of the draft. It's how the Spurs ensure that they keep drafting there. After winning a pair of championships in San Antonio, it can reasonably be expected that Ferry would know a thing or two about how late draft picks can turn a good team into a great team.

So given his credentials and the fact that he is charged with keeping LeBron in a

Cavs uniform, maybe Ferry had more heat on him than we give credit. The fact that the ESPN-induced adrenaline rush of the first couple pick had long since worn off by the time the Cavs held the clock doesn't mean the 25th pick held no suspense.

As we now know, Ferry used that pick on Michigan State's Shannon Brown.

ESPN's Jay Bilas called Brown potentially "the steal of the draft." Other adjectives attached by pundits included "interesting" and "solid." Ferry's own adjectives included "lucky." As in, lucky Brown slipped far enough for the Cavs to draft him.

My adjective is "logical." Brown was probably the best player on the board at 25. He's a 6'-3" combo guard who has height working against him at the off-guard spot, and a lack of skill working against him at the point guard spot.

What he has is athleticism to spare, which will allow him to hold his own at the next level. After watching athletically-lacking first rounders like Trajan Langdon, DeSagana Diop and Chris Mihm come through here, Brown's athletic pedigree can't be undervalued.

He's wide for his frame, which should help him on defense. He has a respectable outside shot, something else that can't be undervalued if you've watched the Cavs for most of this decade.

Brown should help bolster a Cavs backcourt that was among the lowest-scoring in the league last year. His pick might also spell the end for the similarly-skilled Flip Murray in Cleveland, unless the unsettling Larry Hughes trade rumor becomes fact.

Once Ferry selected Brown, the pieces began to fall into place. The Cavs were rumored to be eyeing Texas' Daniel Gibson at 25, but were inclined to pass when Brown fell to them.

No worries. Gibson was still there at No. 42 in the second round, and the Cavs got another both-ends-of-the-floor guard who could help them in the coming years.

The pick at 55 yielded Nigerian project player Ejike Ugboaja, a 6'-9" power forward who is raw, but has played in international competition. Time will tell if this was the hit Ferry needed to get in his first NBA draft. If Shannon Brown is playing big minutes and contributing this winter, if Gibson starts to find a niche and Ugboaja begins developing properly, Ferry can't expect anything more from what he did Wednesday night. If all that happens, given where we've been, Ferry will be considered a draft-night guru around these parts.