Receivers! On the line!!

As we look at the NFL draft as it relates to the Browns, Cleveland obviously needs a WR. But not just any WR will do because they need a point producer. We talked about getting a homerun threat when we looked at RBs and the same rule applies when discussing the WRs. The Browns have two young WRs in Brian Robiske and Mohamed Massaquoi that basically have the same game. They run well but not great, they are big but not really physical, and they have good hands. This current roster is begging for a playmaker in the worst way.

I do think Carlton Mitchell has really good potential now that he'll likely get a real shot but you can't put all your eggs in one basket. We will look into some players at the WR position that can add some sizzle to the currently boring group. The focus will be on guys who can give the West Coast Offense of Coach Pat Shurmur some much needed pop.

Before we get into the players I feel can give the offense some big play potential I want to dispel the notion that the WCO functions best with "little WRs". I am not sure why people think the 5-10 170lb DeSean Jackson is the model for a west coast WR because he clearly is not the

dominant body type for that offense.

Keyshawn Johnson (6-4 212lbs) had over 70 catches and 1,000 yards for Jon Gruden in that offense, Terrrelle Owens (6-3 220lbs) killed on two different teams in the offense, Jerry Rice was 6-2, John Taylor was 6-1, Antonio Freeman and Robert Brooks are over 6-0, Joe Jurevicius is 6-5 and played for Gruden and I can go on and on naming players who are not “small and lightning fast” that played and performed well in the WCO. The offense is about timing, precise routes, running after the catch, and stretching the defense which means there is a place in the WCO for big and small WRs.

There are many WRs that could improve the WR core of the Browns but the biggest need is one who can get yards in chunks so we will talk about some players in various rounds who can do just that.

Early Rounds (1-2)

A.J. Green (6-3 5/8 211lbs) Georgia A.J. Green is a name everyone knows by now because he is the number one rated WR by most accounts. When you talk about NFL-ready WRs this guy is the real deal. Green has it all when it comes to a WR: size, speed, balance, coordination, and his route running is great because he utilizes his understanding of leverage to set up his routes. I could write a whole page on the great ability he shows but I will end this by talking about what could be his biggest asset which is his ‘catching radius’. Green has a 34 3/8 arm length which gives him the ability to make catches way outside the frame of his body. *He often gets his hands on balls that other WRs simply can’t get to*. When you watch him on film you see him catching balls that most people can’t and this will score TDs, keep drives alive, and make QBs stats look better than they should. This guy is a pure stud.

Randall Cobb (5-10 ¼ 191lbs) Kentucky Cobb is a perfect blend of speed, power, and determination when the ball is in his hands. He is an ex-QB with really good ball skills and runs with a toughness not usually seen in someone of his size. He needs to get better at route running to excel in the WCO but he would be a dynamic run after the catch guy in the Gregg Jennings mold. He has the toughness to play in the slot right away.

Titus Young (5-11 3/8 174) Boise St. People compare him to DeSean Jackson because of his thin body and big play potential, which is fair, but he is not as fast and doesn't have the start and stop that Jackson has got. He has great but not elite speed (4.37) but I actually do think he runs routes better than Jackson. He is a WR who eats CBs up because he has the ability to make cuts and change direction without losing very much speed at all. His hands are good but needs to work on maintaining his focus all the times. He would excel in the WCO because of his ability to get in and out of breaks combined with the speed to get deep. After the catch he is a threat to make big plays because he has the ability to make the first defender miss and he gets up to top speed quickly. He can handle the slot because he doesn't fear going across the middle, although with his size I would worry about him lasting if he was asked to do it all the time. He is best on the edges.

Gregg Little (6-2 ½ 231lbs) UNC Gregg Little is a nightmare for CBs because of his size and rough style. He is a converted RB and runs like it when he gets the ball in his hands. His size, strength (27 bench press reps), and aggressive running style make him really difficult to tackle. He plays the game like an Anquan Boldin or Brandon Marshall. Because he is a converted RB his route running still needs improvement but that should get better with reps. If you are looking for a WR that will help the running game, this guy mashes DBs. He will have to answer the questions about the reasons he was suspended and the character issues that come with it. He missed the entire season for receiving gifts from an agent so he hasn't played football in a year and may drop because of it.

Also, I know you don't see Julio Jones on here and it's not because I don't think he's a really good football player. But I'm convinced the Browns need that home run guy and even though Jones's measurable are more on the athletic side than Green's you'd think just the opposite from watching them. I don't see the Browns taking Jones because he's a better blocker. I don't see the Browns taking him at all.

Mid Rounds (3-5)

Jerrel Jernigan (5-8 7/8 185lbs) Troy Jernigan is a player gaining steam on many boards as the draft draws closer because of his big play potential. He is a player that will return kicks and play in the slot. I think he is too small to be an every down WR but he will give defenses fits in the slot and wreak havoc on special teams. He can run by most DBs but the majority of his big plays will come via his ability to run after the catch. He will also help a team's reverse and screen game. His negatives are his size and I also question his numbers. I think he should have put the ball in the end zone more than 6 times in the 84 receptions that he had and his 6 TDs last year are the most he has caught in his 4 year career.

Edmund Gates (5-11 ¾ 192lbs) Abilene Christian Gates is a raw WR. He grew up playing basketball and has only been playing football for a couple of years. He desperately needs NFL coaching. He shows good hands, he is blazing fast (4.3), and has very good lateral movement. He shows no fear of coming across the middle and has strong hands to make catches in traffic. He will have to answer questions about handling the increased competition and NFL teams will need to determine whether he can get it done against the great athletes in the league.

Cecil Shorts (5-11 ¾ 205lbs) Mount Union Shorts is a local kid that many of you may know about. He was a QB at Mount Union his first two years before switching to WR. He has nice size to go along with his really good strength (21reps). He already is a really good route runner and can run the entire route tree very smoothly. He shows great acceleration out of breaks and can change direction really well which was reflected in his 3 cone drill at the combine (6.5sec).Shorts is not the kind of WR who will blow past DBs in the NFL with blazing speed but he will be a guy who gets a lot of yards after the catch because he shows great vision and elusiveness. He needs to work on tracking the deep ball because he can get lost sometimes.

Later Rounds (6-7)

Denarius Moore (5-11 7/8 194lbs) Tennessee Moore is really good vertical threat WR. He averaged 21 yards per catch his senior year along with 9 TDs and over 900 yards. He shows all the things you want to see in a vertical WR such as decent size, speed (4.37 pro day), strong hands, leaping ability (37inch vertical), good ball tracking, and he fights for jump balls. His route running is good but not great and he needs to work on his hand play/release because he tends to get held at up at the line by the better CBs. He has the potential to be a really good compliment to a more physical WR and could develop into a solid number 2 WR with big play potential.

Ronald Johnson(5-11 ¼ 199) USC Johnson's development has been slowed by injuries over the years which is really noticeable when you watch him run routes. He is not crisp yet. He tends to slow down and chop his feet when making cuts. He has, however, shown the ability to be explosive which is why he is on this list. He has scored 20 TDs in only 138 catches which is a really good ratio and he did clock a 4.46 at the combine. His explosiveness can best be seen as he starts. He really accelerates quickly creating initial separation that can be hard for a DB to close down if the DB doesn't have elite speed. He needs to continue polishing his routes and work on not allowing the ball to get into his body because he traps the ball against his pads a little too much.

Aldrick Robinson (5-9 1/8 184lbs) SMU Robinson is a player who can score in a blink which is evident by him having more than 30 TDs. He runs great routes and consistently creates separation. His size will probably limit him to being a slot WR and he plays tough, showing no fear going across the middle, so he should excel in this role. He is also an explosive athlete who was able to shine at the combine where he measured an impressive 40in vertical and pushed out 17 reps on the bench. His great speed (he was clocked at 4.35) combined with his route running gives him the potential to be an excellent slot WR. His size will always be an issue but he is less than an inch shorter and 6lbs heavier than DeSean Jackson so keep that in mind if you think he is too small.

Biggest Upside

Edmund Gates has the most upside of any of the prospects except for Green. Gates is so raw and explosive and I see him becoming a Mike Wallace type of player. He's the kind of WR you have to keep an eye on all over the field because he can run by everyone in your secondary. The guy has only been playing football for (basically) four years and he just gets better every time he steps on the field. His legs have so much juice in them it reminds me of watching a horse's muscles twitch and spasm while they wait in the gates before release.

He can be special in this league because he can run by you when tracking deep balls and can also use his superior quickness and agility to take a short ball to the house on any play. Once he adjusts to the level of competition he has the potential to be a star.

Note I am not going to put Green here in the 'Upside' category because it is simply not fair in my mind. Green could be the answer to all of these categories except sleeper so I will not go with the low hanging fruit. We will talk about some of the other players because in my opinion Green will be in the elite category when it comes to NFL WRs within the next two years.

Projected Pick

Gregg Little is a guy who would be the physical 'run-after-catch' type of WR that the Browns need. I will take the stance that Carlton Mitchell, who was supposed to be a senior in college

this past season, will develop into the downfield threat we need and Little will be the physical guy with incredible hands that does the dirty work over the middle. He will bring the size and physicality of a TE and the run after catch ability that a RB brings. I think he could have the exact same effect that Boldin had in his early years with the Cardinals and dominate between the hashes and underneath the safeties. He would be a steal in the 3rd or 4th round.

One more note on why I think Carlton Mitchell will get a shot to contribute this year has to do with the young WRs that the Rams played last year. I understand some of them playing had to do with more with injuries but Brandon Gibson and Danario Alexander were given a shot by Shurmur. I really think now that Mangini and his “Special teams or bust” rookie mentality is gone we will see some of Mitchell’s 4.40 speed shine through….that is of course contingent on him catching the ball consistently which has been an issue with the young WR.

Disclaimer I am not going to put A.J. Green as the pick only because it is what everyone is already talking about. I am a huge Green fan and would not be upset at all by the pick!

Sleeper

Ricardo Lockette is a player some of you have heard about since the combine when he put up a time of 4.34 in his first 40 yard dash. He is big at 6-2 1/8 211lbs. Combined with the speed he is a late round prospect that could develop into a downfield threat. He has red flags all over the place (multiple transfers, poor production, inconsistent hands) so I don’t see the Browns picking him before their 7th round compensatory pick, but a guy with the size-to-speed ratio will get either a late round selection or preferred undrafted free agent shot with somebody.

Stay Away

Jerrel Jernigan is a prospect that some are very high on but he is a guy that doesn’t really excite me. I really think if he was as good as people are saying he would have had better production while playing in a very weak conference. The Browns need players to put points on the board, not to just get open. I think he will be a very good return guy but I am not sold on him being a very good WR threat….Buyer Beware.