As our draft journey continues on, the position next on our list to review is linebacker. This year the LBs will be looked at much differently than years past because the Browns are switching to a 4-3 alignment preferred by Pat Shurmur as opposed to the 3-4 defense that was preferred by the Romeo Crennel and Eric Mangini. Shurmur and Tom Heckert are more comfortable with the 4-3 because they have experience with that defense from their past jobs.

The new defensive scheme won't really change the type of middle LB the Browns are looking for because Dick Jauron is a coach who seems to prefer bigger MLBs anyway. The physical traits involved in evaluating a MLB will be virtually the same for the new scheme as it was for the old one other than maybe wanting a little more range from a MLB playing in the 4-3.

The real difference in evaluating talent for the LB position in a 4-3 versus the 3-4 is at the outside LB spot. In the 3-4 the defense relies on the outside LBs to get pressure on the QB which places different expectations on the position. It often causes teams to try and convert college defensive ends into professional LBs for the NFL. This means GMs try and project how a guy in college will transition from having his hand in the dirt to standing upright and playing in space in the pro game. Having to project how a guy will play a position he has never played before can lead to a lot of draft picks not panning out.

When looking for LBs to play in the 4-3 you don't have to play as much of a guessing game because the vast majority of the time you are looking at guys who actually played LB in. Really, the biggest projections will involve trying to forecast if a player can play in the middle, on the weak side, or on the strong side. Sure there are some traits specific to playing each of those positions but the forecast is much easier than trying to predict a drastic position change. Usually at some point over a LB's college career you will get the opportunity to see him respond to various situations in a game setting that will tell you if he is best suited for one specific LB spot or if you think he can play in more than one spot for your defense.

When you take a look at the Browns roster and evaluate the LB position you see that they would be in decent shape if they had to play a game today but adding depth is something they surely need.

When the Browns resigned D'Qwell Jackson they turned the position from a must-have/must-draft into one in which they can address later in the draft because the player will have a little time to develop. I know some people are not blown away with the potential starting group of Jackson, Scott Fujita and Chris Gocong but Gocong and Fujita already have experience in the 4-3 as starters and Jackson has averaged well over 100 tackles a year when healthy. Jackson being injured the last two years does raise a small red flag and makes the position one the Browns will address, but it isn't going to cause them to pick a LB high strictly out of need. That's good because the crop of LBs this year is not the best for early round picks.

The list of LBs I like and think can help the Browns will include both inside and outside candidates because the traits needed to play any of the 3 spots tend to be very close when evaluating players for the 4-3. That being said, most of the players I will list could potentially play multiple spots within the 3 LB positions.

Early Rounds (1-2)

Von Miller (6-2 5/8 246lbs) Texas A&M Von Miller is a do it all LB. He is big, strong, and fast (4.49). He can play in space which he showed senior bowl week and he is a very aggressive and physical when he arrives at the action. He most surely will be your best pass rusher and can pile up sacks in bunches, racking up 27.5 sacks in the last two years alone. He is a great leader and is a fun loving guy in the mold of Joe Haden. He more than likely will be picked

before the Browns are on the clock because he can play in any scheme but he really has the 3-4 teams drooling with his explosive ability to get to the QB. For those who say 4-3 teams will not get full value out of him I think they are wrong. This is a player who can run and be a dominant performer chasing down plays while playing weak side LB on 1st and 2nd down and then line up as a stand up DE on third down and wreak havoc in the backfield. If he is available this is a homerun pick.

Middle Rounds (3-5)

Mason Foster (6-1¼ 245lbs) Washington Foster is the type of LB who can play multiple positions in the 4-3 because he has great instincts. He is big enough to play inside and fast enough to play outside. His production is incredible when you consider he had 163 tackles this year and he can also get to the QB if you send him on a blitz which is evident by his 6.5. His 14 tackles for loss shows the ability to make plays on the opponent's side of the field. He also shows a good understanding of the passing game when asked to drop into coverage and can also cover TEs in man coverage. The longer the draft goes on it increases his value greatly. If you can get him after the third round it would be a steal and he would still be a good value pick in the 3rd.

Kelvin Sheppard (6-1 7/8 250lbs) LSU Sheppard is a player who has experience playing multiple LB spots in the 4-3 defense. He has good size and enough speed to play inside or outside. He has produced with over 311 career tackles in the SEC and excels in the mental aspect of the game. You can see him communicating and lining up his players throughout every game. Sheppard understands the passing game but he struggles to play man coverage, so if you are a team who runs man coverage on third down he will only be a two down player. I also would like to see him play a bit more physical utilizing his great read and diagnose skills to create more tackles for loss plays.

Nate Irving (6-1 240lbs) NC St. Irving is a guy that could be ranked higher and should be considered a steal from the 4th round or beyond. I think he would have been rated higher by draft experts had he not been in a horrific car accident and missed the entire 2009 season. He was a highly rated sophomore and started while making 80 tackles even though he missed 3 full games due to an ankle injury. This year he was a monster in the opponent's backfield making 21.5 tackles for loss and getting 7 sacks. His knack for being around the football and his ability to get the QB on blitzes give him a good chance to be a 3

down LB in the NFL.

K.J. Wright (6-3 3/8 246lbs) Mississippi St. Wright's size and physical play, along with his tremendously long arms, make him an ideal candidate to play strong side OLB in the NFL. I think his athleticism and reach would make him a perfect fit over the TE in the 4-3 defense. He plays strong and has a good motor in the run game even while his reactions tend to be a little slower than you would like. I think he would be able to stick with most TEs in man coverage and would excel in zone coverage because he jars many balls loose with his physical play. With his average instincts he will have to put in plenty of time in the film room studying opponent's tendencies.

Late Rounds (6-7)

Mike Mohamed (6-3 239lbs) Cal Mike Mohamed is the type of LB every team needs because he is as smart as they come and has enough all around skill to play in any scheme. He has tremendous quickness for a player who runs a 4.7 40 yard dash and he showed that at the combine while running a 6.7sec 3-cone drill which put him in a tie with Von Miller for the best time. He is not great at any one aspect of the game but would be an ideal backup and developmental candidate. He needs gain lower body strength because he is on a thin frame but with some bulk and coaching could develop into a player who challenges for a starting spot and he will immediately pay dividends on special teams.

Scott Lutrus (6-2 3/8 241lbs) UConn Lutrus is a player that has some durability concerns after missing games the last two seasons for stingers and an upper arm injury. He has all the skills to be a starting LB in the NFL and if he had been at a bigger program would be rated a little higher. I actually think he could play any of the LB spots but his speed (4.68) and quickness (6.8 3cone drill) would probably be best utilized on the weak side. If he can stay healthy and adjust to the level of competition he can be a solid NFL LB.

Mark Herzlich (6-4 244lbs) Boston College Mark Herzlich is a player whose career was derailed when he was diagnosed with cancer in 2009 causing him to miss that season. He was a top tier prospect at the OLB position prior to getting sick and has been working hard every since trying to reclaim his strength. He was cleared in spring of 2010 to start football activities again but suffered a broken bone in his hand and played the majority of the season with a cast on it. He has not regained the explosiveness and strength that he once had but if he does get anything close to what he had, and teams can get the O.K. from their doctors to draft him, they

will be drafting a football player with tremendous instincts and a never-give-up mentality. In the two years prior to getting sick he combined for 249 tackles and 8ints. I think he would be the perfect understudy at strong side OLB behind Fujita.

Sleeper

Greg Lloyd (6-1 1/8 246lbs) UConn Yes, he is the son of the Greg Lloyd that is embedded in most Browns fans heads wearing the pee and black jerseys from Stooler land. The junior Greg started at LB in 2009 and blew out his ACL and MCL. Everyone thought he was going to redshirt this year but his coach shocked everyone by naming him as the starting MLB only to bench him for the remainder of year after the 3rd game because he wasn't properly healed from the injury and he was not playing well (talk about getting worked over by your own coach).

Lloyd was more of a two down player before his injury and will play MLB at the NFL level. I love his aggressive physical style and he will be a solid developmental MLB once he is fully healed from the injury.

Keith Darbut (6-4 229lbs) Baldwin Wallace I could not leave this local player out of the sleeper category. After running a 4.38 40 and 1.42 10yard split at the Akron pro day this kid has been all the buzz while earning himself a trip to the Browns facility on an official visit and workout. He was rumored to run a 4.32 the other day for the Colts in a private workout and his legend is growing by the day. He was the OAC defensive lineman of the year and had 10.5 sacks and 15 tackles for loss last year. I am not sure if he can play LB in the 4-3 but he is a killer athlete and some team will give him a chance to prove he can play with the big boys. It could be the Browns knowing that he is on their radar.

Projected Pick

K.J. Wright is a player I think the Browns can get late in the draft who has the potential to be a starting LB in a Dick Jauron defense. He would be provided great leadership in the LB room and would not be thrust into many pressure situations early because of the veterans in front of him. He was a leader on his college team as well as an active volunteer in the community and would fit right in with what the Browns are trying to build here on the lakefront.

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