For today's 'Feeling a Draft' installment I want to swap sides of the ball and talk about defense and, more specifically, cornerbacks. Everyone in the city of Cleveland already knows the Browns have the super talented Joe Haden manning one CB spot and if you read some of my articles over the last year, especially the 'No Average Joe' article, you know I respect him both on and off the field.

On the field he is without a doubt a star in Cleveland and if you ask most GMs I am sure they would consider him a budding star in the NFL as a whole. With all that being said, the other CB spot presents a lot of questions and the long term future of the position is up for debate.

The first question we need to figure out an answer to is what the organization thinks of 2011 starter Sheldon Brown. He clearly has lost a few steps and he really struggled last year compared to his performance in 2010. He is going into his 11th season and at 33 years old I don't expect him to rebound, I actually think he will continue to decline. If the grumblings are true and he moves to safety it could extend his career, but Brown is only under contract for this season anyway, so regardless he would need an extension to stay in Cleveland past 2012.

Cutting Brown would only save about $2million after his signing bonus acceleration, so he could

stay on the roster as a mentor to the young group and not cost too much money against the salary cap. Regardless if he stays or goes, his contract expiring after this year means this is the year he is targeted to be replaced, which brings us to the resigning of Dimitri Patterson.

Patterson signed a 3 year 16 million dollar deal with 6 million guaranteed. Some may think that is a bunch of money for a CB who may start or may end up being the nickel CB who covers the slot WRs, but the money is in line with the type of money second tier starters or really good nickel CBs get. That is about what Sheldon Brown got from Cleveland after they traded for him and it isn't close to the 5 year 50 million dollar contract that top free agent CBs received this offseason.

To take the money conversation a step further, when you consider the rookie wage scale that now exists, even if the Browns do take a CB high in the draft he would be making about the same as the Patterson contract, and combining the two contracts still put the Browns in a better cap situation than if they would have gone out and signed one of the top free agents on the market.

Enough about the money, since most people are saying the league is passing league you need CBs and pass rushers to stop it. When I look at Cleveland's roster, the most intriguing guy in the defensive backfield is James Dockery. If the rumors are true and the guy has added the muscle mass that I hear he has, Dockery can be on his way to fulfilling his potential,which has a really high ceiling.

He has great length and the ball skills to be a difference maker in the NFL. There still is some question whether he will play CB or safety but either way he is a natural born playmaker that I think will be a Brown for a long time.

As long as we are hitting on the roster, I don't want to leave 2011 5th round draft choice Buster Skrine out of the conversation. Skrine has all the physical tools to at least be a good slot CB in the league. He needs to continue to adjust to the jump in competition because he played at a smaller school and he also needs to become more consistent with his technique. Now that he is in the NFL he isn't the best athlete on the field anymore and it is critical he stays disciplined if he wants to perform well.

Now that we have checked out the roster you probably understand Cleveland is looking for a different kind of player at the CB position than they were last year. Going into the 2011 draft the Browns needed a good nickel CB but this year they should be looking for a CB who can play on the outside because they need a long term answer to replace Sheldon Brown.

The good thing about the players on the roster is that Patterson really excels against slot WRs so even if he starts, the nickel CB can be an outside player and they could just bump Patterson to cover the slot WR.

Last year the Browns played a lot more man coverage than in years past, so the CBs I put on the list need to be able to hold up on an island. They also will need to be physical and solid in run support and, as usual with the position, the bigger and faster the better. Since the CBs on my list need to play decent man coverage, having smooth hips is also a high priority trait and CBs that have the balls skills to create turnovers are always at the top of the wish list.

In my opinion there is only one CB Cleveland would consider taking with the 4th pick so I am going to start with him and work my way down the list.

Early Rounds (1-2)

Morris Claiborne LSU **(5-11, 188lbs)**

The first point I want to make about Claiborne is simple and clear….. forget the damn wonderlic score. I could care less that a CB got one of the worst scores in history. The NFL uses the test to check for players who may have a learning disorder and Claiborne has had one his whole life and it isn't a secret. The only thing that tells a team is he has to learn information in a slightly different way than some other players would.

The second thing is just like Joe Haden at the combine, I am not worried about his speed. Find me some game tape that says the guy is slow and I will start worrying if he is fast enough, because I haven't seen any indications from anything I have seen that speed will be an issue.

Claiborne's best attributes are his zero resistant hips. He transitions effortlessly when he turns to run with a WR. One of his best physical features, like Haden, is his long arms, which is a huge asset for a CB to have. His arms are actually even longer than Haden's at 33 ¼ inches. A CB can stay engaged longer and get more deflections with those longer arms which can be critical in man coverage.

Claiborne is a tremendous talent and ready to contribute day one. He's had wrist surgery but that shouldn't affect where he is drafted. He will rehab during the offseason and although he won't get a chance to gain much strength until next offseason, his talents make him a player I wouldn't hesitate drafting because of the surgery.

Stephon Gilmore South Carolina **(6-1, 190lbs)**

People who know me will tell you I have been a Gilmore fan for a while. I like the attitude with which he plays the game, I like his height, and I like his nose for the football. Gilmore isn't afraid to challenge WRs and in fact he actually plays better closer to the line of scrimmage than he does off the line. He is really quick and for a taller CB he has good start and stop ability. He can also provide some value in the return game and he should be a great gunner on coverage teams until he earns a starting job.

Gilmore will get beat in man coverage from time to time because he needs to be more disciplined with his footwork, and although he is a more than a willing tackler in the run game he can fail to wrap up at times and attempts too many shoulder tackles. His lighter weight won't allow that technique to be effective in the NFL so he needs to start wrapping up.

Jamell Fleming Oklahoma **(5-11, 206lbs)**

Fleming is on my list because he is natural cover corner with good size and great strength (23 reps at 225lbs on the bench) for the position. He shows solid ball skills and he also closes extremely well on the ball. Although as a CB it is a needed skill, I don't like amount of time he spends using the trail technique, but that can be fixed. He is a sound tackler who wraps runners up and doesn't rely solely on his size or strength when supporting the run. I also like the way I

see him read routes. He has great recognition skills and is quick to get to the ball if his man doesn't get it.

Fleming does have some bad habits like his free lance tendencies which may keep him on the sidelines early in his career, but he has the size, strength, and natural instincts to be a starting CB in the NFL.

Mid Rounds (3-5)

Alfonzo Denard Nebraska **(5-10, 204lbs)**

Denard is a player I may have rated too low, but don't get me wrong, I love the way he plays the game. He is one of the most competitive CBs in the draft and fills fast and physical against the run. He had a better season last year than he did this year and I was a bit disappointed when I saw him compete at the Senior Bowl, so that is why I have him rated here.

My main concern when I saw him in the senior bowl was the fact he was losing a lot of battles in the one on one drills. He didn't have the same success as Fleming did so I rated Fleming higher. Their draft positions may be reversed but I put a lot of stock in watching them play side by side.

Trumaine Johnson Montana **(6-2, 205)**

I love Johnson as a DB but I am not sure what position fits him best in the NFL, so he is a player you will actually see on both my safety and cornerback list. He plays at Montana which isn't the best competition out there, so he really dominated with his instincts and size in college. At the combine he put down a time of 4.61 in the forty and he moved much more like a safety in the position drills. Some believe he can play CB in the NFL if he refines his technique. I am not convinced just yet because sometimes I see him and he looks fluid enough and sometimes he doesn't. If the Browns played more zone than man it wouldn't matter as much, but last year they didn't.

Regardless if he can play CB or not he is still worth a selection at this point in the draft because if he fails at CB, I think he can be a really good free safety.

Chase Minnifield Virginia **(5-10, 183lbs)**

Yes this is the son of Dawg Pound founding member Frank Minnifield and no he isn't on the list out of respect for his dad. Minnifield's stock is low right now because he had a senior year that was considered a disappointment when compared to his junior year and he also had some poor pre draft testing. We also found out after the regular season was over that he was playing with floating cartilage in his knee so he had surgery and missed his bowl game. His pre-draft testing really showed he hasn't healed yet.

As far as film traits you can see two things for sure when you watch the tape, especially if you go back and look at his junior year; he has great technique, which you would expect from the son of a Pro Bowl CB, and he also has really good ball skills.

I think more than anything Minnifield needs to decide if football is important to him and I say that because he was only able to put up 225lbs a measly 7 times at the combine. Even if he couldn't lift for a while after surgery, those numbers make you ask yourself what has he been doing in a college weight room for the last 4 years. In my mind that goes back to desire and he will get eaten alive in the league if he doesn't play with the same type of fight and grit his father played with. I will say from what I saw on film, even if he is never dedicated enough to put in the work necessary to become a starter, his quickness and technique will allow him to contribute in sub defenses in the NFL, but as someone who watched and idolized his dad….I sure hope he achieves what he is capable of.

Josh Norman Coastal Carolina **(6-0, 197lbs)**

Josh Norman is a small school player that created a ton of buzz in the early offseason with his dominant play in the Shrine Game. He is another guy from a smaller school who doesn't possess blazing speed but is blessed with great cover skills. Norman is very fluid in his change of direction and he also benefits from having long arms. The length he has allows him to cover

more ground than his speed would lead you to believe he can. His size and fluid nature give him a really big upside when it comes to playing in the NFL and with some work I think he could become a starter in the league.

Late Rounds (6-7)

Cliff Harris Oregon **(5-11, 175lbs)**

Harris is a poster child for players with early round talent that make undrafted free agent decisions. He is a really talented cover corner with superb ball skills. He is also a really good return guy on special teams. He excels in playing off man coverage and even though he is a lighter player he is both willing and effective in run support.

Harris had an All-American type of year in 2010 which included 6 interceptions and 4 punt return TDs as he averaged 18.8 yards per return but as good as he was on the field in 2010 he was as bad off the field once the season ended. Harris got in trouble multiple times and ended up getting kicked off the team in December after only playing 6 games in 2011. He is ultra talented so I think a team will take a 7th round flier on him. If he can get his mind right he will be a great addition to a team and, if not, he will be another sad story.

Donnie Fletcher Boston College **(6-1, 190lbs)**

Fletcher is a big framed CB that may be a bit stiff but has experience playing man coverage. He isn't the most fluid mover but he has really good top end speed and that speed combined with length allow him to make up for some of his stiffness. Watching his games you will see that BC played a lot of off man coverage and because of that he may have a habit of giving WRs too much initial space, so he will probably have to get more comfortable being closer to WRs before he is an effective cover man in the NFL. He is really good in run support and doesn't shy away from contact. Fletcher is an ideal developmental pick.

Desmond Marrow Toledo **(6-3, 208lbs)**

Marrow is local player with a great size speed combination. He shows plus movement for a player his size and has good ball skills. He may not be rated as a draftable player by some, but the later rounds are when you see players like Marrow who have talent, good size, and solid speed (4.5) taken in NFL drafts. Plus he is a local player so I thought I would give him some ink since I am going with someone else as my sleeper pick.

Sleeper

Janoris Jenkins North Alabama **(5-10, 193lbs)**

I know people are scratching their heads because I picked a player as a sleeper who some consider the best pure cover CB in the draft but with his character concerns it is a mystery where Jenkins will be picked. Some teams will take him off their boards completely and others will dismiss the issues that got him kicked out off of the University of Florida football team.

Last year I think Jimmy Smith was a better prospect than Jenkins is this year, and Smith lasted until the 27th pick in the 2011 draft because of similar character concerns. If Cleveland is sitting there at some point thinking they can't pass on him, I wouldn't be shocked if Jenkins becomes a Brown.

The Browns scouts, including the GM Tom Heckert, spent plenty of time on Florida's defensive backfield when they were investigating Joe Haden so they probably have a solid grasp on Jenkins as a player before they even get the results of the background checks. If Cleveland trades back from 22 or is sitting there at 37 and Jenkins is on the board they will probably think long and hard about taking him. He is a talented man-cover CB who also brings the added edge of being an explosive return man on special teams, so he will be an great asset to a team if they can keep him focused on making good life decisions.

Projected Pick

I am not going to beat around the bush on this pick. I think Morris Claiborne is a better football player than any offensive player who will be on the board for Cleveland when they pick 4th so I am taking him without hesitation. I understand all the fans who are clamoring for offense and I agree 100% about the Browns needing weapons, but because the Browns have two first round picks and also pick so high in the 2nd round, I believe there will be plenty of time to upgrade the offense so I am taking the best player. I also get excited about the pick because it makes a part of the team elite which is something Cleveland hasn't been able to say for many years.

The value of two stud CBs goes all the way back to the original days of the Dawg Pound and nobody who was actually around watching the team during those days could argue against the fact that the secondary put that team in a position of power. Having two playmaking, young stud CBs to go along with a talented front 4 would allow Cleveland to be a defensive force for years to come and put us back on the trail leading up instead of being stuck on the bottom.

All right Browns fans I am staying in the defensive secondary for the next installment so be on the lookout. You can also take a look at a ton of players Brian McPeek and I have previewed over on a blog we set up for that very purpose. Take a look here and, as always, …….Go Browns!

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