Today the 'Feeling a Draft' series is on the lookout for some TD makers as I preview the RB position. The Browns didn't address the position last year in the draft because of three reasons: first and probably foremost was they had Peyton Hillis coming back after a monster season, the second reason was they were getting Montario Hardesty back after he missed his entire rookie year because he blew out his ACL. Remember, they traded back up into the 2nd round during the 2010 draft to get Montario Hardesty so they had already invested a high pick at the position. The 3rd reason may be a guess or they could have decided it after the draft but they ended up signing ex-Packer RB Brandon Jackson, so they may have already had him in their crosshairs.

After not using a pick at all during the last draft, losing Hillis to free agency, and watching Hardesty battle multiple injuries in his first full season in the NFL, many including myself feel Cleveland will use a pick on RB in the early rounds of the draft.

If you look at the roster right now it contains Hardesty, who actually did make it through his first season without the need to go on the IR list but showed he still has some durability concerns after missing several games throughout the season. They also have Jackson who has experience in this west coast system, but who missed the entire year in 2011 due to injury. As far as Jackson is concerned he isn't a player who should be counted on to carry the load at the position regardless of him missing the season or not, because he has not been a carry the load guy yet in his NFL career.

The other two players at the position are really nothing more than camp bodies and practice squad candidates in my book so it is clear that Cleveland can use a difference maker or at least a point scorer at the position. The Browns only scored 4 rushing TDs on the season and Hillis had 3 of them so a player who can put the ball in the end zone is paramount.

One thing I wanted to talk about before I get into my fits for Cleveland on draft day is what I took away from watching the blocking scheme the Browns used in 2011. After watching the way Cleveland blocked I have put a much bigger emphasis on patience and burst when it comes to characteristics I am looking for in a RB for this offense.

In re-watching the 2011 season, it was really frustrating to see so many creases in the defense that our RBs never saw because they were impatient or simply couldn't get to the hole because they had no burst. The timing of the running game may get better in general this year because the offseason will allow the lineman and RB to get a better feel for each other, but timing and vision is only half the battle. If a RB doesn't combine that timing with a quality burst that is good enough to get through the first level of defenders the running game will never be more than a few yards at a time outfit.

The promising thing I saw on film as I watched the season was the ability of our offensive lineman to create an initial crease. Other than the departed Tony Pashos they were all athletic enough to get into the way of LBs. There were more than a few plays that would have gone for big yards if there was a RB in the backfield who could capitalize on the space that was created by solid (not great) blocking. Even if the Browns don't find a back with multiple gears they definitely need one that can get from zero to 60 really quick.

Now that I have talked a little about what I saw on film from the 2011 running game let's get into some of the players I think can help the 2012 team.

Early Rounds (1-2)

Trent Richardson Alabama **(5-9, 228lbs)**

Most people are probably in overload when it comes to Richardson so I won't get long winded. Richardson would fit from just about every standpoint in this Browns offense. I say 'almost' because Richardson isn't a player who is going to be able to take advantage of many DBs while running patterns in the pass game but he will get open against LBs and he will catch the ball. From a pure running perspective he is probably the perfect blend of patience and burst you look for in a RB using our blocking scheme, and if you watched Alabama play you probably have seen that they use a similar blocking scheme as Cleveland does, which is also a plus.

Richardson is a player with a plus rating in just about every category except height, pure speed, and route running and he is the best overall RB available in the draft. I think he is a great RB prospect and he will excel in the NFL, but I don't put him in the same category prospect-wise as I did Adrian Peterson because Peterson was much taller and he had blazing speed coming out of college. I agree with most who say Richardson is the best RB prospect, and a better one than we have seen in many years, but he doesn't rate as high as Peterson did in my book.

I will give Richardson his credit when it comes to pass protection. If you watch the way he easily handles his responsibilities you can clearly give him the edge in that category and, like Peterson, he runs with a certain nastiness that Cleveland would fall in love with. If Cleveland picks Richardson there is no doubt that fans around here will fall in love with him.

Doug Martin Boise St. **(5-9, 223)**

Doug Martin doesn't have dynamic speed, clocking a 4.55 at the combine, but he is a player many say isn't a huge drop off from Trent Richardson when it comes to getting a total package as a RB. I think the talent level is a drop without a doubt because Martin doesn't show some of the quick twitch or explosiveness that Richardson does, but he is on par in many other categories.

Martin is short like Richardson and he is also muscular and stocky like him. He is actually even a little bit stronger than Richardson if you compare their repetitions of 225lbs. Martin was tied with Robert Turbin for being the strongest RB at the combine (28reps) and Richardson pumped out 25 reps at his pro day.

In the passing game, Martin can catch the ball effortlessly and he also blocks well. As a runner Doug Martin shows great patience to the hole and enough burst needed to regularly get into the second level of the defense. He isn't going to be a consistent big play player but he may just end up being the most productive back in this draft over the course of his career because he is consistent and reliable in all phases of the game.

Lamar Miller Miami **(5-11, 212lbs)**

Although Richardson and Martin are the best all around backs coming out in the draft, you can mark down Miller as the one with the skill set that is best suited for consistent big plays in the NFL. Miller was tied for the best 40 time at the combine for the RBs and as a runner he shows uncanny vision and a burst that is second to none. Miller also shows the ability to make tough catches as a pass receiver as well as a high level of toughness.

Miller showed great toughness this year because he had a shoulder injury the bulk of this year and played through the injury. He also endured the pain to participate in the combine then had surgery when it was over. Miller needs to get his body stronger and work on pass protection because right now he relies on cut blocks too much, but that also could have been due to his shoulder injury.

David Wilson Virginia Tech **(5-10, 206lbs)**

David Wilson is a RB who I am going to call a cross between Lamar Miller and Trent Richardson because he is really fast, explosive, and has really good acceleration like Miller but he runs really strong like Richardson does. As a matter of fact, I saw a stat that said he broke the most tackles of any of the RBs coming out in the draft. Wilson catches the ball fairly easily but he looks a bit stiff in routes because his body seems so tightly wound. Wilson is also a cut block artist so he needs to work on pass protection. He also needs to work on staying patient…. he has gotten a lot better than in years past but he still needs to improve. He also has special teams value with over 60 kickoff returns in the books.

Mid Rounds (3-5)

LaMichael James Oregon **(5-8, 195lbs)**

James may be a 2nd round player on NFL team's draft board but I will put him here because I think going in the 3rd round would make him a steal. James's value is only suffering from his size because he has more production than any of these RBs by a wide margin. In 3 years playing in the PAC-12 James has piled up over 770 carries, over 5800 yards, and 53 rushing TDs. Throw in his special teams and receiving TDs and he is almost averaging

20 TDs a year, which is incredible for a back any size in a solid conference, let alone for a "small" RB.

James boast great hands, outstanding speed and the thing I like most about him is his ability to run between the tackles. He has natural ability to find holes and creases while running between the tackles and he is more than willing to work the middle of the field. You don't see him trying to use his speed and bounce every run outside. He runs better inside than a lot of RBs who are much bigger than he is. Durability in the NFL will be question but he was a workhorse in college so the red flag shouldn't be raised too high. James will never be a stout pass protector but he will do his share trying.

Isaiah Pead Cincinnati **(5-10, 197lbs)**

Isaiah Pead is an extremely explosive RB who can get points from anywhere on the field. He is a player that can be a weapon in the running game or the passing game. He gets really good separation when running routes and can make tough catches. He has really good acceleration and is difficult to bring down once he gets up to speed. He is a willing inside runner but he isn't that effective because he doesn't run behind his pads all that well, and he's a narrowly built in his lower half. I don't know how good of an every down runner Pead would be with the way Cleveland currently blocks but he could be an excellent zone runner because he runs the stretch play better than I have seen in a while. Pead would immediately be a good change of pace runner and an explosive weapon in the passing game if he is drafted by the Browns.

Chris Polk Washington **(5-11, 215lbs)**

Chris Polk is one of those RBs that you know is going to be a solid pro because, although there is not an elite portion of his game, there are also no glaring holes. He is a player that will produce at solid pace if given the opportunity and occasional catch the defense slipping and create some long gains. He is good in the passing game both as a blocker and a receiver. He is the type of RB that can come in and contribute immediately on third downs because he has great hands, runs good routes, and he won't get your QB killed when he needs to block. Polk will be a good RB in the NFL through his prime years and Browns fans can appreciate it when I say his game reminds me of ex-Brown Earnest Byner.

Ronnie Hillman San Diego St. **(5-9, 200lbs)**

Hillman is another early entry candidate. He is only a redshirt sophomore so his body has a chance to get much stronger after gets into the NFL. Hillman is a very quick and explosive RB who has really nice agility. He is another narrowly built player who doesn't generate a lot of power but in two years as a starter he racked up almost 600 carries and over 3200 yards, so he proved to be both durable and productive. He also scored more than 35 rushing TDs so he knows how to find the end zone. Hillman needs to get stronger and work on his routes and hands, because for a RB his size he should be better in the passing game than he is. One of the knocks on him is too many dropped passes…..that needs to be improved. He is on the list for potential more than anything.

Cyrus Gray Texas A&M **(5-10, 206lbs)**

Cyrus Gray is a RB who presents tremendous value for a player projected to be picked on the final day of the draft, especially to a team running the west coast offense. He is a back that has two consecutive seasons of rushing for over a 1000 yards and he carried the team in 2010 when A&M decided to start Ryan Tannehill at QB. He finished that season with seven consecutive 100 yard games and dropped 223 yards rushing on Texas.

The most intriguing aspect about Gray in my book is the fact he played under Mike Sherman in a west coast system, and he can be seen on film running routes from the backfield in addition to running them lined up outside as a WR. Gray has over 100 catches in his career and would be an immediate contributor on third downs for this offense. The later Gray lasts in this draft the more value he will gain but somehow I think he will end up in Miami with his ex-college coach. If the Browns add him during the draft it will be a nice depth move and an immediate help moving the chains.

Late Rounds (6-7)

Terrance Ganaway Baylor **(5-11, 240lbs)**

If the Browns want a bigger back to add to a smaller back, Ganaway may be a guy they consider. He has the knack for scoring TDs piling up 21 this year. Ganaway is a player with potential because he has good size combined with fast feet. He doesn't always run like a big back and he can get greedy sometimes but he has all the skills to be a good short yardage runner in the NFL if he puts his mind to it. He was not much of a factor in the passing game as a WR but he is physical enough to hold up in pass protection if he cleans up some technical issues. Ganaway could be a good back to add to a group that is smaller in size.

Boom Herron Ohio State **(5-10, 213lbs)**

Herron is a player we have watched at Ohio State for a few years and the reason I think he will survive in the NFL is his quickness and attitude. Herron runs like he is as a big as Eddie George and he plays the game with a high level of intensity that will be respected in the NFL. Boom is combining a never give up attitude with decent speed (about 4.5) and quickness that had him in the top 6 times at the combine in the 3-cone and 2nd for RBs in the short shuttle. Herron also proved to teams he could catch the ball during his workouts and we all know he won't shy away from blocking in the passing game, so I think he will be a solid roster guy in the NFL who will do just fine when he gets called on.

Sleeper

Michael Smith Utah St. **(5-8, 206lbs)**

Smith is a lighting fast player who played behind a RB in Robert Turbin and a guy who will be picked at some point in this draft. Smith had 870 yards and 9 TDs as a backup and averaged almost 8 yards a pop, so he can get chunks of yards in a hurry. He also is a player familiar with running routes and he has good hands. He isn't a big guy so blitz pickups will be a bit suspect, but if you want a proven change of pace RB with big play potential, Smith might be your guy.

Projected Pick

I know the easy pick for me to make would be taking Richardson and move on to the next group

of players that need profiled, but I am not going the easy route with my pick. I am going for the most explosive player with the highest upside in my book.

Lamar Miller is a player I have been salivating over since October when it was rumored he would come out if he had a good year. Miller is a redshirt sophomore who turns 21 in a couple of days so I think his ceiling is off the charts. He will grow and get even bigger than his 5-11 212lb body is right now and he has a gift when it comes to seeing holes and exploding through them that I haven't seen since LaDainian Tomlinson. Personally I think Miller is the perfect RB to grow and mature with this offense and every time he gets the ball he would make the opposing teams' heart rate increase, which is something this team has lacked for a long time.

Miller is also a RB who has the natural ability to keep his feet moving on contact, which you can see him use time and time again to break tackles of LBs and Safeties who try to knock him down instead of wrapping him up. He doesn't have great power yet, but we were also watching him play with a bum shoulder that needed surgery, so I expect him to be more physical once he heels. Plus, in my opinion, if the Browns need a short yardage RB they can develop Hardesty and his 225lb body into that role. Miller is the lighting in a bottle Cleveland has been looking for and I hope he is a target for them on draft day.

Browns fans, if you want to get some more details and watch some game film of some of the players I profiled you can click on this link to the website Brian McPeek and I started for more information. Look on the right hand side at the archives and you will find links to profiles of many of the players I previewed. Until next time…….Go Browns!

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