NFL Draft Preview 2014

Do as the Champions Do

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Something for Everyone in 2014

The theme of last year's Draft IQ's magazine was "championship builder" due to the deep draft class. This year isn't quite as deep overall but it is deep as far as late round gems that have the chance to develop into difference makers at the next level. There is also a logjam at the quarterback position that includes the enigmatic Johnny Manziel, a sliding Teddy Bridgewater, small-school stud Jimmy Garoppolo, prototype Blake Bortles, and the brother of former number one overall pick David Carr in Derek Carr. The third unique thing in the 2014 draft is the diversity in types of players in the position groups. Nearly every group has some standout players with very different skillsets and a similar but lesser version of those players in later rounds (see "Double Vision" on pg. 5).

It's all shaping up to be what we think will be a wild first day with quite a bit of trade talk among the teams with many of those potential deals coming to fruition. Some teams will stay true to their draft boards and philosophies but if there was ever a year to pick based on need, this is the versatile draft to do it. Outside of WR, DE, OLB there isn't a position that draft pundits agree on a consensus top player (or top 10 for that matter). Some of those positions include:

Fales: Part of Second Tier

QB: What a long strange trip it's been in evaluating the top quarterbacks in this year's class. Texas A&M's Johnny Manziel is as polarizing a prospect as you're going to find playing the most important position in the game. Louisville QB Teddy Bridgewater's poor pro day kicked off a slide that started at number one overall to potentially falling out of the first round. Pitt's Tom Savage and LSU's Zach Mettenberger are late risers. Savage flashes great arm strength but hasn't strung together success at any of the schools he played at and Mettenberger is coming back from a torn ACL. There's also a cluster of next tier players that includes Georgia's Aaron Murray, Alabama's A.J. McCarron and San Jose State's David Fales.

RB: This year's draft class has two wrinkles. There is no shortage of backs in this year's group but due to the devaluing of the running back position in the NFL we're seeing less all-purpose backs coming out of college. Instead they're clustered into three main types: Big backs like Boston College 2,000 yard rusher Andre Williams and Ohio State's Carlos Hyde; all-purpose backs like Washington's Bishop Sankey and West Virginia's Charles Sims, and speed backs like Baylor's Lache Seastrunk and Oregon's De'Anthony Thomas. Throw in a slew of small school standouts like Towson's Terrance West and Toledo's David Fluellen and you have a very unique class.

Hyde: Big Bruiser

WR: There is a lot to like in this year's receiver class. Clemson's Sammy Watkins is going to be a special player that is likely mentioned with the best wideouts in the league in coming years. It doesn't stop there, however. There are some explosive playmakers like Oregon State's Brandin Cooks and Kent State's Dri Archer, big targets like Texas A&M's Mike Evans, Vanderbilt's Jordan Matthews and Florida State's Kelvin Benjamin,

and some high-upside guys like Indiana's Cody Latimer and Mississippi's Donte Moncrief. With more emphasis on the passing game than ever before, the league has a host of new talented players on the verge of stardom.

CB: Just as the receiver class is deep, the group of players covering them is equally as deep. There is a very talented top level tier but the middle rounds are also ripe with opportunity. Small school studs like Lindenwood's Pierre Desir and Liberty's Walt Aikens seem to have the chops to play in the NFL and Purdue's Ricardo Allen and Auburn's Chris Davis are a couple guys from major programs that have some intriguing skills that will be around in the later rounds.

Desir: Top Small School Defender

S: There is a lot to like in this group as well. Some of the top prospects include both in-the-box style run defenders like Louisville's Calvin Pryor and Washington State's Deone Bucannon and centerfield style pass defenders like Alabama's Ha Ha Clinton-Dix and Northern Illinois' Jimmie Ward. There are some interesting players of note that will be available in later rounds. Wyoming's Marqueston Huff is known for his athleticism and has played both safety and corner, Vanderbilt's Kenny Ladler is a rangy four-year starter that averaged 90 tackles his final two years, and Arizona State's Alden Darby is a scrappy player that plays bigger than his size, the type of guy coaches and teammates love.

Huff: Versatile Athlete

As our cover story details, the latter rounds of the draft have never been more important. Though teams may have to look a bit harder than in year's past, the talent in rounds 3-7 certainly exist. The key is matching the player with the right scheme, coaches and situation to make the fit a successful one. Does Purdue's Ricardo Allen move to safety? Can a team be patient enough to put Oklahoma CB Aaron Colvin on the Physically Unable to Perform list at the beginning of the season if he needs more time to recover from a torn ACL? Will the team that drafts troubled South Florida DE Aaron Lynch have the support system in place to help in the transition to the pros? These are all delicate situations that need to be examined before turning in the selection for what may seem like trivial picks to many. As the Seahawks proved last season, no pick is trivial and every selection has an opportunity to lead a team to a Super Bowl victory. Those 4th and 5th rounders may very well make up the majority of your roster.

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Cover Story: Super Bowl Champions Doing the Draft Right

We called last year's draft "The Championship Builder" for a reason as the Seahawks just proved. Those middle rounds are where you build the foundation of your championship franchise. For the Seahawks – the NFL's 2nd youngest team – the process has created a championship roster that has the potential to stay together for years to come.

Sherman: 5th Round Find

The Seahawks squeeze every ounce out of every selection, whether it's the first overall or the final pick, a.k.a. "Mr. Irrelevant." Two-thirds of their defensive secondary that shut down Denver, the NFL's highest scoring offense of all time, came in rounds 5 and 6. The right side of their run-heavy offensive line consisted of a 7th rounder and a player poached from another team's practice squad.

Head Coach Pete Carroll does not hesitate to play the best player on his roster, regardless of draft or contract status. After signing free agent QB Matt Flynn to a three year, $20.5 million deal in 2012 he turned around and handed the starting QB job to an upstart 3rd round rookie named Russell Wilson. Wilson, of course, is now a Super Bowl champion. Flynn is on his fourth team in three years.

Baldwin: Undrafted

McDonald: Trade Acquisition

In addition to an emphasis on later rounds and playing his best players, the Seahawks judiciously seek out players that best fill the holes on their roster. Of the Seahawks 22 players starting in Super Bowl XLVIII, 15 were drafted or signed out of college, 3 were acquired via trade and 4 were free agent signings.

The Seahawks front office carefully utilizes the draft for all its worth. The average draft position of their Super Bowl starters is the middle of the third round. Not surprising when you think about it…that is where current Seahawks poster child Russell Wilson was taken. Beyond the draft they use carefully orchestrated free agent signings and trades to fill out their roster. It adds up to a championship roster wrought with youth and talent and perhaps poised for another Super Bowl run.

Kam: 6th Round Steal

How the Seahawks Were Built

Offense	Defense
QB Russell Wilson – 3rd round 2012	LE Cliff Avril – Free agent
RB Marshawn Lynch – Trade w/Buffalo	DT Michael Bennett – Free agent
WR Doug Baldwin – Undrafted FA	DT Clinton McDonald – Trade w/Cincinnati
WR Golden Tate – 2nd round 2010	RE Chris Clemons – Trade w/Philadelphia
TE Zach Miller – Free agent	OLB K.J. Wright – 4th round 2011
LT Russell Okung – 1st round 2010	MLB Bobby Wagner – 2nd round 2012
LG James Carpenter – 1st round 2011	OLB – Malcolm Smith – 7th round 2011
C Max Unger – 2nd round 2009	CB Richard Sherman – 5th round 2011
RG J.R. Sweezy – 7th round 2012	CB Byron Maxwell – 6th round 2011
RT Breno Giacomini – Free agent	FS Earl Thomas – 1st round 2010
T Alvin Bailey – Undrafted FA	SS Kam Chancellor - 5th round 2010

Reps, Lies and Videotape
Who Should You Trust During the Evaluation Process?

2014 will be remembered for the curious case of Teddy Bridgewater. Once considered a potential first overall pick, Bridgewater's stock has dropped sharply since the end of the Louisville season. It begs the question, what is the right way to evaluate prospects?

It starts with the tape. Game film is the best way to see a player in pads playing full speed against various levels of pressure and competition. From there, the NFL Combine and individual pro days give you a chance to see players up close and personal as they run through position drills. These pro days are usually scripted and simply confirm what scouts and coaches already saw on tape. In Bridgewater's case, a downright horrible pro day gave everyone a reason to go back to the tape and look for flaws. Frame is too slight. Hands are too small. Competition wasn't good enough. These were all identified after Bridgewater's disastrous pro day.

Then the smokescreens begin. Why in the world would a team ever come out and give away their scouting reports? That's essentially what the media expects teams to do when asking about specific prospects, which leads to some gamesmanship on the part of general managers and coaches. Tell the world we're not crazy about a player so no one will try to jump a spot ahead of us and grab him, when we loved him all along. Lies, lies and more lies is par for the course in March and April.

Even when your evaluation process is done right, it's still not perfect. For example a recent report notes that the San Francisco 49ers had a high character grade on OLB Aldon Smith coming out of Missouri. Head Coach Jim Harbaugh went as far as to call Smith an "all-American young man" after picking him in the 1st round. Meanwhile, the 49ers had character concerns about Penn State LB NaVorro Bowman, who they selected in the 3rd round. Fast-forward to today when Bowman is a high character guy and team leader and Smith has been arrested multiple times, had a stint in rehab and most recently was detained at LAX airport where he claimed he had a bomb. It's clearly not an exact science and all you can do is your due diligence to feel comfortable about the player you are about to select. It's all about the reps, lies and videotape.

Remember those great knockoff commercials? "If you like product X, you'll LOVE our product!" There is a bit of that happening in the 2014 draft, so if you miss out on your favorite player fear not, you may be able to pick up a cheap knockoff in later rounds.

- **QB:** **Blake Bortles = Tom Savage** - Prototype size and arm strength
- **RB:** **Charles Sims = David Fluellen**: Great combo of size & speed
- **CB:** **Jason Verrett = Ricardo Allen** – Small stature, great in coverage
- **CB:** **Darquez Dennard = Nevin Lawson** - Physical man corners
- **S:** **Ha Ha Clinton-Dix = Tre Boston** - True centerfielder safeties
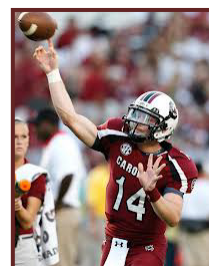
Lights Out!

Dark Horses Looking to Make an Impact

The story of 6th round draft pick Tom Brady is the most well-known cinderella story but certainly not the only one. Each year players in late rounds go on to make an impact in the NFL, sometimes all the way to Canton. Hall of Fame TE Shannon Sharpe was a 6th round pick and Hall of Famers Warren Moon and John Randle weren't even drafted. Here's a few of our favorite late-round sleepers in the 2014 draft.

Quarterback

Connor Shaw, South Carolina: Gritty winner with intangibles that are off the charts. Accurate passer with great mobility and leadership skills. Shaw actually had better numbers in the combine mobility drills than Johnny Manziel.

Jeff Mathews, Cornell: Stoic pocket passer from the Ivy League QB factory Cornell ("maybe you've heard of it") that produced Texans QB Ryan Fitzpatrick. Mathews isn't the athlete Fitzpatrick is but might be a better overall QB.
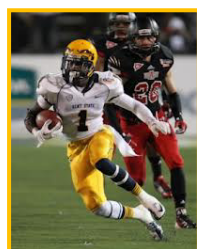

Shaw

Running Back

Lorenzo Taliaferro, Coastal Carolina: Big back (230 lbs.) with some wiggle and soft hands, Taliaferro is a throwback to the big every-down backs absent from today's NFL.

Zach Bauman, Northern Arizona: Small school back compiled 5,132 rushing yards, 1,181 receiving yards and 51 total TD's in four-year career. Resembles current Rams RB Zac Stacy.

Archer

Wide Receiver
Shaq Evans, UCLA: Solid receiver that reminds us of Cowboy's 2013 3rd round selection Terrence Williams. Good size and decent hands, could end up a reliable #2 WR.

Dri Archer, Kent State: Multi-purpose threat stands only 5'8" but can run and catch. Some creative offensive coordinator will find a place and purpose for Archer.

Sleepers Cont.

Defensive End

Ethan Westbrooks, West Texas A&M: Dominant pass rusher at the Division II level, racked up 23 sacks, 39 tackles for loss and more than 100 total tackles in two seasons.

Larry Webster, Bloomsburg: Pass rush specialist tallied 26 total sacks in two seasons and has NFL bloodlines, his father Larry Sr. played for seven years in the league.

Westbrooks

Ethan Hemer, Wisconsin: Solid four-year starter in the big ten should be a solid run-stuffer as a 3-4 DE at 6'6" 285 lbs.

Defensive Tackle

Bruce Gaston, Purdue: Stout athlete maintained decent numbers despite losing inside mate Kawaan Short to the NFL last season. Gaston should begin his career as a rotational pass rusher.

Chris Davenport, Tulane: Interesting project, former offensive lineman transferred from LSU and eventually switched positions to defensive tackle his senior season. Strong lane clogger at 6'3" 330 lbs.

Linebacker

Uani Unga, BYU: Tackling machine (143 as a senior) has the instincts to play in the NFL but the question remains if he has the athleticism. Will get a shot as a special teamer and look to prove his worth at every opportunity.

Cornerback

Phillip Gaines, Rice: Not the best athlete but makes up for it as a technician. Could fit nicely in a press scheme.

Ross Cockrell, Duke: Cagy veteran as a four year starter in the ACC, Cockrell had 25 pass deflections in the past two seasons. Has the "it" factor you need to succeed at CB in the NFL, just not all the physical tools.

Cockrell

Safety
Marqueston Huff, Wyoming: Tremendous athlete converted from corner to free safety as a senior and averaged more than 10 tackles a game. Could play both in the pros, and defensive coordinators love that versatility.

2014 Mock Draft!

Guaranteed to be Right Every Time, 60% of the Time...

1. Houston Texans
Jadeveon Clowney, DE, South Carolina: Though he doesn't fit their scheme, Clowney is the consensus top player in the draft and gives Houston a formidable pass rush with J.J. Watt on the other side.

2. St. Louis Rams
Greg Robinson, OT, Auburn: The Rams get an Orlando Pace-style of player to put at RT opposite Jake Long, solidifying the line for years to come.

3. Jacksonville Jaguars
Khalil Mack, LB, Buffalo: Defensive-minded head coach Gus Bradley continues to rebuild in north Florida with the top LB in the draft.

4. Cleveland Browns
Sammy Watkins, WR, Clemson: Watkins paired with Pro Bowl WR Josh Gordon will be a terror and they can address the QB situation later in the draft.

5. Oakland Raiders
Mike Evans, WR, Texas A&M: The first big surprise of the draft comes as the win-now Raiders take a big, pro-ready wideout for new QB Matt Schaub.

6. Atlanta Falcons
Jake Matthews, OT, Texas A&M: The Falcons must improve on both sides of the line and Matthews is a plug-and-play starter to protect Matt Ryan.

7. Tampa Bay Buccaneers
Taylor Lewan, OT, Michigan: Lovie Smith won't make the same O-line mistakes he made in Chicago and starts rebuilding the Bucs with a nasty tackle.

8. Minnesota Vikings
Aaron Donald, DT, Pittsburgh: Head Coach Mike Zimmer had Geno Atkins anchoring his great lines in Cincinnati and has a chance to get a similar player.

9. Buffalo Bills
Eric Ebron, TE, North Carolina: New head coach Doug Marrone is already reshaping the offense with a trade for WR Mike Williams. Ebron gives young QB E.J. Manuel a dangerous target in the middle of the field.

10. Detroit Lions
Justin Gilbert, CB, Oklahoma State: The Lions are in desperate need of an upgrade at corner, and they get a dual threat in Gilbert.

11. Tennessee Titans
Anthony Barr, LB, UCLA: New Defensive Coordinator Ray Horton is bringing the 3-4 to Tennessee which means he'll need pass rushers and Barr fits the bill.

12. New York Giants
Zack Martin, OT, Notre Dame: In order to fix Eli Manning the Giants need to keep him upright. Martin's versatility is his best asset as New York retools their line.

13. St. Louis Rams
Darqueze Dennard, CB, Michigan State: The Rams get the type of player they hoped Cortland Finnegan would have been before releasing him in the offseason.

14. Chicago Bears
Calvin Pryor, S, Louisville: Chicago has a glaring hole at safety and if they choose to draft for need they can fill it with a pretty solid player. They have a need at DT as well but Timmy Jernigan's failed drug test from the combine probably takes him out of the running at 14.

15. Pittsburgh Steelers
Kyle Fuller, CB, Virginia Tech: The Steelers have a lot of needs but CB is the most pressing. Fuller should excel in Defensive Coordinator Dick LeBeau's scheme.

16. Dallas Cowboys
Johnny Manziel, QB, Texas A&M: The reality is Jerry Jones probably won't even stay put at 16, but if he does he can't resist "Johnny Football." And why not? It makes sense with Tony Romo 34 and coming off back surgery.

17. Baltimore Ravens
Ha Ha Clinton-Dix, S, Alabama: The Ravens take a chance in drafting first round safeties in back-to-back seasons. This allows them to move Matt Elam to SS and use Clinton-Dix in the FS centerfield role once occupied by Ed Reed.

18. New York Jets
Odell Beckham Jr., WR, LSU: The Jets signed Eric Decker in the offseason but still need a playmaker on the opposite side. They get him in Beckham.

19. Miami Dolphins
Morgan Moses, OT, Virginia: Miami does a good job solidifying a major weakness by signing LT Branden Albert in the offseason and adds Moses to lock down the right side.

20. Arizona Cardinals
Blake Bortles, QB, Central Florida: Bortles is not quite pro-ready and the Cardinals have the luxury of sitting him behind the similar style QB in Carson Palmer.

21. Green Bay Packers
C.J. Mosley, LB, Alabama: Mosley would be a great addition to an already talented LB group that includes A.J. Hawk and Clay Matthews.

22. Philadelphia Eagles
Jason Verrett, CB, TCU: If Head Coach Chip Kelly wanted a player similar to DeSean Jackson in Brandin Cooks he likely wouldn't have cut Jackson in the first place. Instead he upgrades the secondary with a tremendous CB.

23. Kansas City Chiefs
Brandin Cooks, WR, Oregon State: Andy Reid on the other hand would probably love to have a player like Cooks to play in a similar role to Jackson's in K.C.

24. Cincinnati Bengals
Ryan Shazier, OLB, Ohio State: With the top CB's gone the Bengals go best player available despite LB not being a pressing need. Roby might have been the pick a month ago but the Bengals tend to shy away from those players now.

25. San Diego Chargers
Bradley Roby, CB, Ohio State: The Chargers are thankful that one of the top 5 corners is still available at 25. That shows just how deep the position is this year. Some big red flags in the past month with a potential DUI situation.

26. Cleveland Browns
Derek Carr, QB, Fresno State: The Browns seemingly worked out every single QB prospect this year. We think Carr was their guy all along.

27. New Orleans Saints
Dee Ford, DE/OLB, Auburn: The Saints need a big time pass rusher and Ford would be a good fit in Defensive Coordinator Rob Ryan's defense.

28. Carolina Panthers
Cyrus Kouandjio, OT, Alabama: Jordan Gross is retired and that leaves a huge hole at tackle. WR is a need as well but that is a deeper group this year.

29. New England Patriots
Louis Nix, DT, Notre Dame: Though Vince Wilfork returns he's not getting any younger. Pats find his eventual replacement in the big Notre Dame DT.

30. San Francisco 49ers
Marqise Lee, WR, USC: The 49ers get a dangerous slot receiver to join wideouts Crabtree and Boldin and TE Vernon Davis. Kaepernick is drooling.

31. Denver Broncos
Xavier Su'a-Filo, G, UCLA: The Broncos lost both guards this offseason and begin to rebuild with a nasty player in Su'a-Filo.

32. Seattle Seahawks
Ra'Shede Hageman, DT, Minnesota: Seahawks have a need in the middle and get a huge value in Hageman, who has the highest upside of all DT prospects.

THE RATINGS

Quarterback: This year's class has quality into the middle rounds with some late round gems available.

Who We Love: Connor Shaw

Mobile, accurate and a gritty team leader and winner.

1. **Blake Bortles, Central Florida**: Prototype quarterback will need a year to develop but has the most upside as any QB in this year's draft. Looks the part of a franchise QB.
NFL Equal: Matt Ryan, Atlanta

2. **Johnny Manziel, Texas A&M:** The question remains…is he Brett Favre or Ryan Leaf? The most enigmatic and polarizing figure to enter the NFL in quite some time. He'll need to learn discipline as his reckless style will lead to injuries and interceptions at the NFL level.
NFL Equal: Tony Romo, Dallas

3. **Zach Mettenberger, LSU:** We like Mettenberger's size, arm strength and leadership skills. Tore his ACL in November and was able to go through a full workout at LSU's pro day just 13 weeks later. He has all the tools.

4. **Derek Carr, Fresno State:** Great bloodline as brother David was former #1 overall pick. Carr put up great numbers at Fresno State but in a spread offense that featured a short passing game. He'll face a bit of an adjustment in the pros. Hopefully the team that drafts Derek signs his brother as well and it leads to a Carr & Carr 80's style buddy sitcom. I'm pitching it as we speak to TV execs for next fall.

5. **Teddy Bridgewater, Louisville:** We typically don't put a lot of stock into pro days but Bridgewater's was so bad it warranted greater inspection. Small frame and hands and a weak strength of schedule at Louisville leaves a little to be desired here.

6. **Jimmy Garoppolo, Eastern Illinois:** Small School stud was the FCS player of the year. Proved he belongs with the big boys at the Senior Bowl and as the East-West Shrine Game offensive MVP. Garoppolo threw for 5,050 yards and 53 TD's in 2013 while breaking school records held by Tony Romo and Sean Payton. We're admitted Garoppolo-holics.

7. **Aaron Murray, Georgia:** Four-year starter in the SEC, Murray threw for at least 24 TD's and more than 3,000 yards in each season. Doesn't have prototypical size or arm strength but his production in college football's toughest conference speaks for itself. Like Mettenberger, recovered quickly from a late-season ACL tear.

8**. Tom Savage, Pittsburgh:** Savage is an interesting case as a journeyman college QB. Began at Rutgers, transferred to Arizona and finished at Pittsburgh. Not a great body of work but a good pocket passer who played well behind a porous Panthers offensive line.

9. **Connor Shaw, South Carolina:** Shaw is Phillip Rivers-lite. Mobile QB with good accuracy and strong intangibles. Winningest QB in Gamecock history with a 26-5 record.

10. **A.J. McCarron, Alabama:** McCarron does a lot of things good and none of them great. The bigger question is how important is football to him? He'll star with his wife in a reality TV show. And just for fun, google "A.J. McCarron weeping Jesus" and see what comes up.

Late Round Gems Worth a Closer Look

The Pocket Passers

Keith Wenning, Ball State

David Fales, San Jose State

Bryn Renner, North Carolina

The Dual Threats

Stephen Morris, Miami

Logan Thomas, Va. Tech

Keith Price, Washington

Running Back: Intriguing class full of big backs, all-purpose prospects and speedy scat backs.

Who We Love: Terrance West, Towson

High character player absolutely dominated at the FCS level.

1. **Lache Seastrunk, Baylor**: Seastrunk gets our nod as the top back as the best pure runner in the draft and tremendous upside. Played in a spread offense at Baylor so he'll have to adjust to a pro offense, but his combination of speed and power is prototype.
NFL Equal: Ray Rice, Baltimore

2. **Jeremy Hill, LSU**: Like Seastrunk, Hill gets rated high based on potential. Powerful runner with surprising speed, Hill has some red flags but seems to have matured while at LSU.
NFL Equal: Arian Foster, Houston

3. **Carlos Hyde, Ohio State**: Punishing runner cranked out 1,521 and a 7.3 yards per carry as a senior at Ohio State. Surprisingly nimble for a big back, compares to current Green Bay Packer Eddie Lacy.

4. **Charles Sims, West Virginia**: Sims is a jack-of-all-trades back that offers added value as a return man. Rushed for 1,095 yards and caught 45 balls as a senior. Sims reminds us of Chicago Bears RB Matt Forte.

5. **Bishop Sankey, Washington**: Sankey is right up there with Sims as the top all-purpose back in this draft class. Broke Corey Dillon's single-season rushing record with 1,870 yards in 2013.

6. **Tre Mason, Auburn**: Dynamic back but a bit on the small side and doesn't offer much in the way of pass blocking or receiving. Likely a productive member of a team's running back committee.

7. **Ka'Deem Carey, Arizona**: Tough, instinctive runner has everything but top end speed necessary in the NFL. Could benefit from a zone blocking scheme.

8. **Terrance West, Towson**: Ran for a ridiculous 2,519 yards in 2013 vs. FCS opponents. As a shifty back with good size (220 lbs.), West is a poor-man's Marshawn Lynch.

9. **Andre Williams, Boston College**: Williams is an absolute beast to bring down. He would just as soon run over you as he would around you. Led Division I football with 167.5 yards per game. It does take him a while to get to top speed.

10. **Devonta Freeman, Florida State**: Isn't super flashy but gets the job done with the ball in his hands. Freeman joins Sims and Sankey as the top all-purpose prospects.

Wide Receiver: With an emphasis on the passing game in both college and the pros this group is one of the deepest of all positions.

Who We Love: Brandin Cooks

Playmakers like this don't come along very often.

1. **Sammy Watkins, Clemson**: Best combination of size and speed in this receiving class. Has the speed to beat you over the top and the moves to turn a short pass into a long gain.
NFL Equal: Roddy White, Atlanta

2. **Brandin Cooks, Oregon State**: Perhaps the biggest playmaker in this year's draft class, Cooks caught 128 balls for 1,730 yards and 16 TD's in 2013. Amazing athlete in space and looks custom-made for today's NFL passing game.
NFL Equal: DeSean Jackson, Washington

3. **Mike Evans, Texas A&M**: Big-bodied wide receiver with soft hands, Evans looks like more of a possession receiver than true number one but should put up big numbers with someone opposite him to stretch the field.

4. **Odell Beckham Jr., LSU**: Beckham is a playmaker with a thick body and good speed. Averaged 19.5 yards per catch while racking up 1,152 yards and 8 TD's in 2013. Doubles as an explosive return man.

5. **Marqise Lee, USC**: Tremendous speed and agility despite 6'1" frame. Caught 118 balls for 1,721 yards in 2012 before injuries derailed his 2013 season. If he stays healthy Lee will be one of the best pros from this class.

6. **Jordan Matthews, Vanderbilt**: Savvy receiver totaled 2,800 yards and 15 TD's in last two seasons at Vanderbilt despite inconsistent play from his quarterbacks. Comes from good stock as the cousin of Jerry Rice.

7. **Kelvin Benjamin, Florida State**: Raw but physical specimen at 6'5" 235 and can run after the catch. With some seasoning Benjamin could become a serious mismatch for opposing corners. Has a feel for the redzone with 15 TD's in 2013. Must keep weight down.

8. **Paul Richardson, Colorado**: Tall, lanky receiver will be an immediate deep threat as one of the fastest receivers in the draft. A knee injury wiped out all of 2012 but he bounced back with 83 receptions for 1,343 yards as a senior. NFL bloodlines as his father Paul played for several teams in the NFL.

9. **Cody Latimer, Indiana**: Tough receiver battled through a foot injury through most of the season on his way to a 1,000 yard season. After offseason surgery, ran a 4.44 40 time to show he has the speed to be more than a possession receiver.

10. **Donte Moncrief, Mississippi**: Skillset may be better than his numbers show. Though he never put up a thousand yard season at Ole Miss Moncrief is a big, fast, concise route runner. A QB's best friend.

Tight End: Weak class with few prospects that translate to the new passing-oriented NFL.

Who We Love: Joe Don Duncan

Longshot from Dixie State with good measurable and impressive athleticism.

1. **Eric Ebron, North Carolina**: Top all-around TE in this year's draft is extremely versatile, able to line up wide or on the line. Great hands, good release, and while not the best blocker he can hold his own.
NFL Equal: Vernon Davis, San Francisco

2. **Austin Seferian-Jenkins, Washington**: Best combination of size, speed and hands of all the TE's but hot and cold play coupled with injuries his senior season leave some question marks.
NFL Equal: Jordan Cameron, Cleveland

3. **Jace Amaro, Texas Tech**: Put up ridiculous numbers in 2013 with 106 receptions and 1,352 yards. Amaro will be utilized similarly to Saints TE Jimmy Graham but lacks the speed and athleticism that Graham possesses.

4. **Troy Niklas, Notre Dame**: One year starter has tremendous size at 6'6" 270 lbs. but will need time learn the nuances of the position. With his size Niklas should become a great safety outlet for his QB.

5. **Crockett Gilmore, Colorado State**: Probably the third best all-around TE after Ebron and Seferian-Jenkins, Gilmore impressed at the Senior Bowl all week during practice and had a TD and nice deep reception during the game. Could be a steal in later rounds.

6. **C.J. Fiedorowicz, Iowa**: Bulldozing blocker doesn't offer much in athleticism, though he did catch 45 balls as a junior.

7. **Arthur Lynch, Georgia**: Built in the mold of Fiedorowicz as an old-school blocking tight end who will catch 30-40 balls a season.

8. **Marcel Jensen, Fresno State**: Traditional TE looked out of place in the Bulldogs' spread offense. Will likely serve as a solid #2 TE in the pros.

9. **Joe Don Duncan, Dixie State**: Announcers should have fun shouting "Joe Don Duncan from Dixie State!" on Sundays. All kidding aside, JDD made serious waves in Division II, catching 71 balls for 1,045 yards and 13 TD's as a senior playing in a spread offense. Dixie State, for those wondering, is in Utah and named after an area in Southern Utah nicknamed "Utah's Dixie." Who knew? Now you do!

10. **Colt Lyerla, Oregon**: A first-round talent who missed most of 2013 after leaving the team in October and later pleading guilty to cocaine possession. Lyerla is plastered with red flags but some team will take a chance on him in the late rounds.

Offensive Tackle

Moses

1. Greg Robinson, Auburn
2. Taylor Lewan, Michigan
3. Jake Matthews, Texas A&M
4. Morgan Moses, Virginia
5. Zack Martin, Notre Dame
6. Cyrus Kouandjio, Alabama
7. Joel Bitonio, Nevada
8. Antonio Richardson, Tennessee
9. Jack Mewhort, Ohio State
10. Cameron Fleming, Stanford

Offensive Guard

Jackson

1. Xavier Su'a-Filo, UCLA
2. David Yankey, Stanford
3. Gabe Jackson, Mississippi State
4. Dakota Dozier, Furman
5. Trai Turner, LSU
6. Chris Watt, Notre Dame
7. John Urschel, Penn State
8. Cyril Richardson, Baylor
9. Anthony Steen, Alabama
10. John Halapio, Florida

Center

1. Marcus Martin, USC
2. Travis Swanson, Arkansas
3. Weston Richburg, Colorado St.
4. Russell Bodine, North Carolina St.
5. Bryan Stork, Florida State

Defensive End: Another good year for pass-rushing specialists in this class.

Who We Love: Scott Crichton

Plays with a passion and fire that trickles down to his teammates.

1. **Jadeveon Clowney, South Carolina**: Let's be honest, Clowney wasn't all that interested in playing college ball last season but the NFL rules state a player must be three years removed from high school. Freakish athlete should dominate at the next level as a pass rusher and all around DE. Not really suited as a 3-4 OLB, which the Texans might have to use him as if they select him number one overall.
NFL Equal: Julius Peppers

2. **Stephon Tuitt, Notre Dame**: Mountain of a man at 6'6" 310 lbs, perfectly suited to stuff the run and disrupt passing lanes as a 3-4 DE.
NFL Equal: Calais Campbell, Arizona

3. **Kony Ealy, Missouri**: Versatile athlete can play in either scheme. Tallied 9.5 sacks and 13 tackles for loss in 2013 despite being constantly double-teamed.

4. **Dee Ford, Auburn**: Undersized at 6'2" 243 lbs, may be moved to OLB. Excellent pass rush specialist with great snap anticipation. Senior Bowl MVP may have played his way into the first round with an exceptional week of practice.

5. **Scott Crichton, Oregon State**: Crichton could be a nice 2nd round steal. Technician with a great motor and good size and finds a way to overcome a lack of elite athleticism to make an impact. 18 tackles for loss and 7.5 sacks in 2013.

6. **Trent Murphy, Stanford**: Self-made two-time All-American (enough hyphens for you?) can play DE or LB. Success may depend on how the team that drafts him ultimately uses him.

7. **Kareem Martin, North Carolina**: Martin has the size but not the consistency of former first round Tar Heels Quinton Coples and Robert Quinn. Put it all together his senior season with 10 sacks. Stout run defender who could be dangerous if he develops pass rushing moves in the pros.

8. **Marcus Smith, Louisville**: Hybrid DE/OLB moved around a lot and had great college production but what do you do with him in the pros?

9. **Jackson Jeffcoat, Texas**: Injuries piled up during his time at Austin but he had a promising senior campaign, leading the team in sacks with 13. Son of longtime Cowboy Jim Jeffcoat.

10. **Will Clarke, West Virginia**: Scheme-diverse player given his size and strength, the three-year starter is still developing. Gave potential top-15 pick Zack Martin fits at the Senior Bowl.

Defensive Tackle: Some intriguing prospects this year that could become difference makers in the NFL.

Who We Love: Will Sutton

Went "Beast Mode" in 2012 and we expect him to return to form.

1. **Aaron Donald, Pittsburgh**: Disruptive force in the backfield despite smallish size at 6'0" 285 lbs. 29.5 sacks and 66 tackles for loss in four years at Pitt.
NFL Equal: Geno Atkins, Cincinnati

2. **Timmy Jernigan, Florida State**: Stout run defender with 54 tackles, 10.5 for loss in 2013. Doesn't offer much in the way of pass rush (only 8.5 in three seasons) but can break down running lanes.
NFL Equal: Randy Starks, Miami

3**. Louis Nix, Notre Dame**: Big man custom built to be a 3-4 nose tackle at 6'2" 331 lbs. Coming off a torn meniscus in 2013 after solid campaigns the prior two seasons.

4. **Ra'Shede Hageman, Minnesota**: Steadily improved in four years at Minnesota but production never matched his huge size at 6'6" 320 lbs which leads to questions about his motivation.

5. **Dominique Easley, Florida**: Explosive player coming off a torn ACL in his right knee. That injury comes after a torn ACL in his left knee in 2011. If he fully recovers from the injury he could be a steal.

6. **Will Sutton, Arizona State**: It was a tale of two seasons for Sutton at Arizona. He looked like a surefire first rounder after 2012 with 22 tackles for loss and 13.5 sacks. After adding weight for 2013 those numbers dropped significantly to 11 tackles for loss and 4 sacks. If he keeps the weight off Sutton could return to the monster he was in 2012.

7. **Kelcy Quarles, South Carolina**: Took advantage of having Jadeveon Clowney getting attention on the outside and racked up 9.5 sacks and 13.5 tackles for loss in 2013.

8. **Jay Bromley, Syracuse**: Versatile tackle exploded his senior season at Syracuse with 14 tackles for loss and 10 sacks.

9. **Caraun Reid, Princeton**: Small school stud has all the tools to be a starter in the league but will need a season to adjust to the level of play. Showed he belonged with the big boys with a good week at the Senior Bowl.

10. **Daniel McCullers, Tennessee**: Mountain of a man at 6'6", 350 lbs. but he should be much more productive given his size advantage. Tallied only 10 tackles for loss and 1.5 sacks in two years.

Linebacker: Very weak class with just a few solid prospects at the top.

Who We Love: Ryan Shazier

Size and speed reminiscent of the late Thomas Howard.

1. **Khalil Mack, Buffalo (OLB)**: Best all-around LB prospect is a pass rush specialist (28.5 in four seasons) and versatile enough to play in either a 4-3 or 3-4 scheme.
NFL Equal: Lavonte David, Tampa Bay

2. **C.J. Mosley, Alabama (ILB)**: On the small side for an inside linebacker but held up in the SEC during back-to-back 100+ tackle seasons. Quick, instinctive and able to shed tackles and get to the ball carrier.
NFL Equal: Luke Kuechly

3. **Anthony Barr, UCLA (OLB)**: Converted RB who is still developing at the position, so his upside is tremendous. 23.5 sacks in just two seasons on defense at UCLA.

4. **Ryan Shazier, Ohio State (OLB)**: Freakish athlete who produces despite light frame (6'2" 225 lbs), tallied 143 total tackles in 2013. Has the speed to go sideline to sideline. Shazier is a leader on and off the field and overcame adversity in his youth dealing with an autoimmune disorder that causes hair loss (including his eyebrows).

5. **Kyle Van Noy, BYU (OLB)**: The talent begins to drop off at this point, but Van Noy will be a nice addition to a team as a solid yet not spectacular defender. Can get to the QB and is not a total liability in pass coverage.

6. **Jeremiah Attaochu, Georgia Tech (OLB)**: 22.5 sacks over the last two years, Attaochu is suited for a team with a 3-4 scheme.

7. **Trent Murphy, Stanford (OLB)**: Not the greatest athlete but an instinctual player with a great motor. Sack artist for the Cardinal with 25 sacks since 2012, Murphy can also play DE on passing downs. If a 4-3 team drafts him that position may be his permanent home.

8. **Chris Borland, Wisconsin (ILB)**: Tackling machine with 359 tackles since 2011, Borland doesn't offer much in the way of pass coverage so he'll have to come off the field on passing downs, but is a solid run-stuffer on first and second down.

9. **Shayne Skov, Stanford (ILB)**: Very similar player to Borland, Skov is a downhill thumper with one mission – find the ball carrier and take him down.

10. **Christian Jones, Florida State (ILB)**: This slot could easily have gone to Jones' counterpart Telvin Smith, but he gets the nod because of his size at 240 lbs. Smith is a paltry 218 lbs. and may need to make a move to safety. Jones is scheme versatile and decent in pass coverage.

Cornerback: Good mix of schemes and styles with quality deep into the middle rounds.

Who We Love: Jason Verrett

Physical corner plays well above his small stature.

1. **Jason Verrett, TCU**: The best cover corner in the draft has everything but size at just 5'9" but he plays bigger than his height. Had the highest vertical jump of all CB's at the combine. He'll be a solid starter with the potential to turn into a shut-down corner despite the height disadvantage
NFL Equal: Alterraun Verner, Tampa Bay

2. **Justin Gilbert, Oklahoma State**: Has everything you want physically in a corner at 6'0" 200 lbs. and great speed. His mechanics are sloppy and he lacks the instincts of a shut-down corner but should match up well against the league's top receivers given his size. Good ball skills with 12 INT's in four years, including 7 in 2013. Added value as a dynamic return man.
NFL Equal: *Sam Shields, Green Bay Packers*

3. **Kyle Fuller, Virginia Tech**: Comparable in size to Gilbert but lacks the elite athleticism. Makes up for it with better instincts. Extremely versatile, able to play press, man, off and zone coverage.

4. **Darqueze Dennard, Michigan State**: Dennard showed traits of a shut-down corner in the Big Ten but there are concerns. Dennard's physical style is likely to draw a lot of pass interference calls in the NFL so he'll need to adjust his game. He also lacks top end speed though he makes up for it with fluid hips to turn and run with receivers. If he adjusts to the hands-off nature of the NFL passing rules he compares to Cincinnati Bengals CB Leon Hall.

5. **Bradly Roby, Ohio State**: Roby has the athleticism of Gilbert but lacks the instincts of a top corner. Huge red flags with a suspension due to a bar fight at the beginning of 2013 and an arrest for suspicion of DUI leading up to the draft. If he matures off the field hand gets coached up on it he should make a solid starter for years in the NFL.

6. **Phillip Gaines, Rice**: Underrated corner had 27 passes defended in last two seasons. Ran a surprising 4.38 40 yard dash at the combine and has good football instincts to go with that speed. Despite the speed, may be best suited for zone coverage as he has struggled in man coverage in the past.

7. **E.J. Gaines, Missouri**: Gaines is a good athlete with great speed, but is a bit of a liability against the run and lacks the instincts of the top corners in the draft. With a little seasoning Gaines could develop into a solid starter.

8. **Stanley Jean-Baptiste, Nebraska**: Big corner at 6'2" 215 lbs. in the mold of Seattle Seahawks CB Richard Sherman, which is very chic right now in the NFL. Jean-Baptiste put it all together in 2013 with 12 passes defended and 4 INT's.

9. **Aaron Colvin, Oklahoma**: Colvin looked like the top CB at the Senior Bowl when he tore his ACL during practice. His rehab has gone well and he may be ready to go by the start of the season. Plays physical in coverage and solid against the run. The injury might scare some teams off, making Colvin the potential steal of the draft depending on when he finally comes off the board.

10. **Keith McGill, Utah**: A bit of an enigma as McGill looks like a safety at 6'3" 215 lbs. but plays like a corner. Injury history is a concern as he only played one full season at Utah due to a shoulder injury. He'll start as a solid special teamer until he settles in at either corner or safety in the NFL.

Best of the Rest: A deep class with potential starters more than 10 deep this year.

Terrance Mitchell, Oregon: 5 INT's in 2013

Marcus Roberson, Florida: Hasn't put it all together yet.

Pierre Desir, Lindenwood: 25 INT's in career at small school

Ross Cockrell, Duke: Four-year starter, 12 INT's in that time

Mitchell: Athletic Playmaker

Bashaud Breeland, Clemson: Bigger press corner and willing tackler

Safety: Mostly special teamers and role players but a few developmental prospects that could develop into something special.

Who We Love: Craig Loston

Has all the physical tools, with the right coaching Loston could be great.

1. **Calvin Pryor, Louisville**: Rangy prospect can also lay the hammer as an in-the-box safety. Pryor is a sure tackler with 175 tackles last two seasons along with 5 INT's.
NFL Equal: Kam Chancellor, Seattle

2. **Ha Ha Clinton-Dix, Alabama**: One of the best cover safeties as a true centerfielder but not a solid tackler when it comes to run defense.
NFL Equal: Reggie Nelson, Cincinnati

3. **Deone Bucannon, Washington State**: In-the-box stud racked up 220 tackles since 2012. Has the athleticism to cover some but not all TE's and WR's in the NFL.

4. **Jimmie Ward, Northern Illinois**: Averaged nearly 100 tackles since 2011, Ward is actually a better cover safety than run stopper. Not the biggest at 5'10" 190 lbs. but versatile enough to play both safety and corner.

5. **Lamarcus Joyner, Florida State**: Played both safety and corner at FSU but at 5'8" he projects as a either full-time safety or slot corner. Aggressive and a good athlete, size is his biggest liability.

6. **Ed Reynolds, Stanford**: Good but not great athlete has good instincts for the game – father Ed played ten years in the NFL.

7. **Terrence Brooks, Florida State**: Former corner is a bit raw but has tremendous upside as a physical and athletic safety. Needs to clean up his tackling and his ball skills are nothing to write home about.

8. **Dion Bailey, USC**: Only one-year of playing safety after converting from linebacker but seemed to take to the position. Led Trojan defenders with 5 INT's in 2013.

9. **Craig Loston, LSU**: Prototype size/speed for the safety position, but seems to lack a high football IQ. Aggressive style leads to missed tackles. Turned 24 in December.

10. **Ahmad Dixon, Baylor**: Big hitter had 272 tackles last three seasons. There are some red flags both on-field (ejected for targeting) and off (misdemeanor assault charges in 2013).

FINAL THOUGHTS

This year's NFL Draft was especially fun to prepare for because it's so unpredictable. You get the feeling that scouts and general managers are split on their player rankings. As of print we're less than 48 hours from the first overall pick and I'm not convinced that the Texans, nor many of the other teams for that matter, know who they're completely sold on yet. Throw in the extra few weeks of overanalyzing and smokescreens with the draft pushed back to May and you get a very wacky draft season. As always we hope this year's Draft IQ guide helps you prepare for Christmas in April (May)!

Report Card

How we fared last year

Eddie Lacy, RB (Drafted by Green Bay): Lacy was our number one running back despite speed and injury concerns. He went on to win Rookie of the Year with 1,178 yards rushing and 11 TD's. Verdict: HIT!

Keith Pough, LB (Undrafted, signed by Buffalo): We called Pough a mid-round gem. He went undrafted and was eventually cut by Buffalo. Verdict: MISS!

Da'Rick Rogers (Undrafted, signed by Buffalo): This undrafted wideout was actually our 7th ranked WR. Cut by Buffalo in the pre-season, picked up by Indianapolis and went on to start 3 games. Verdict: Hit!

Khaseem Green, LB (Drafted by Chicago): Our 4th ranked LB didn't start until injuries forced him into the lineup in week 9, but finished on a strong note. Has a ways to go to develop into the "tackling machine" we touted him as. Verdict: Undecided

Overall: Another solid year for Draft IQ. No Cam Newton-level misses and our player rankings were spot on as rookies performed as we expected them to in the NFL.