

Dolphins Draft: On The Offensive

Written by Alessandro Miglio
Tuesday, 01 March 2011 17:25

DOLPHINS DRAFT: ON THE OFFENSIVE



The NFL Combine has come and gone and team draft boards have been ravaged accordingly. I am a believer that a prospect's Combine results should always be taken with a grain of salt – game film is much more important. Since I do not have access to much game film, though, the Combine is a nice way to get more information about each player. The Dolphins have several

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needs they could fill in the draft – mostly on offense – and the Combine shook things up for them as much as any other team.

First, here are some prominent names being discussed for the Dolphins with the 15th pick in the first round:

QB Ryan Mallett, Arkansas

The mercurial quarterback has been compared to Ryan Leaf for his “edge”, to put it nicely. True, Mallett’s off-field concerns and poor interviewing skills are red flags, but all this does is sink his draft stock enough for the Dolphins to grab him when he was a top-10 pick candidate two months ago. If there is any truth to these disturbing allegations, though, then I would not touch him with a goalpost.

Before his alleged off-the-field troubles began, Mallett was touted as a top QB prospect alongside Cam Newton and Jake Locker. At 6’7”, Mallett is bigger than the likes of Cam Newton and Ben Roethlisberger, and he has the tools to be a good quarterback at the next level. He was arguably the class of the Combine at the position, but despite that he might fall into the second round. The Arkansas quarterback steadily improved each year he played in college, posting some great numbers in 2010 including 65% accuracy playing in the SEC, one of the more important statistics for a QB prospect. He is also a former Michigan man, which could help him get over the hump in the eyes of Dolphins ownership.

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RB Mark Ingram, Alabama

The trendy prediction is that the Dolphins will go with Mark Ingram in the 15th draft slot. With Ronnie Brown and/or Ricky Williams departing, it makes sense for the Dolphins to go after a running back whether via draft or free agency.

Ingram had a great college career and was the consensus #1 RB coming into the draft before last weekend. There are a lot of folks who think of him as a surefire prospect, and I think he could do well in the NFL. Could he be the next Emmitt Smith? Possibly. He could also be the next Cadillac Williams, or worse. His official 40 time was a lackluster 4.62, though his splits were pretty good and I have to remind myself not to get bogged down in Combine results. There is also a fellow by the name of Mikel Leshoure who some now think should be the first back taken in the draft.

The trouble with picking a running back here is the Dolphins will have plenty of options in free agency. DeAngelo Williams will be a coveted back, but Miami could certainly sign him. Ronnie Brown could be back as well, and Jeff Ireland is reportedly high on Lex Hilliard getting a shot. I think there are too many current NFL players available for the Dolphins to use this draft slot for a running back.

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QB Cam Newton, Auburn

When the Dolphins met with Cam Newton I viewed it as little more than a formality or wishful thinking. Newton has long been viewed as a top-10 pick, and I could not see the Dolphins trading up to grab him. His draft stock, however, has become volatile as of late, with some experts saying he could well fall to the Dolphins at the 15th pick.

For a long time I have said Newton is like a cross between Ben Roethlisberger and Michael Vick. The problem is, that could just as easily be the case for him off the field as on. I personally believe Newton will have a successful NFL career, but the risk might be too high for a team that has been burned by one too many quarterback prospects in the last decade. If he happens to fall to the Dolphins at 15, though, I think he may be worth that risk.

Other Notable Options

RB Mikel Leshoure, Illinois – Here is one name climbing the draft boards. Leshoure is being compared to Steven Jackson, but he is a reach with the 15th

pick. The Dolphins would likely try to trade down in the first round to get him.

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QB Jake Locker, Washington – Tumbling down the draft board for entirely different reasons than Ryan Mallett - accuracy is the biggest concern for the embattled quarterback, though some experts believe those issues can be corrected. Locker could be a third-round target for the Dolphins. Or a first round target. One really can never tell with a potential franchise quarterback/bust.

WR Julio Jones, Alabama – He is a stud, but this is not happening unless the Dolphins trade up, which is a bad idea for a receiver. I will be surprised if he makes it out of the top 10.

Mock Draft

If the NFL Draft were tomorrow, here is what I would love to see the Dolphins do. Of course, this is wildly wishful thinking, but that is what we do in the offseason. Please bear in mind that, while I have watched some of these players in action, I am largely relying on other scouts' and columnists' information, statistics, and Combine results. And, of course, trades are complete conjecture.

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Round 2, Pick 4 (from Denver): **QB Ryan Mallett, Arkansas**

Trading all the way out of the first round, the Dolphins gain a second rounder they did not have. The Dolphins have had little luck drafting a quarterback in the second round (Pat White, Chad Henne) or trading a second-rounder to get one (A.J. Feeley) over the years. The draft is a craps shoot, especially at the QB position, though, so you have to think they would eventually get lucky, right? If – and that is a big “if” – Mallett does fall out of the first round a la Jimmy Clausen, I think this would be a steal for the Dolphins. Of course, the Dolphins might have to trade back up a little to get him because two of the first three teams in the second round could use a franchise QB as well. Mallett is a big prospect with a lot of the tools it takes to succeed at the next level despite some character questions, and the Dolphins need a franchise quarterback. Plus he would be playing with an Aaron Rodgers-sized chip on his shoulder.

Alternative Pick: **OL Orlando Franklin, Miami**

If Mallett is gone or the Dolphins do not want to take the risk, the interior offensive line is a major area of need. Franklin has said he is ready to be a “beast” at guard, and could be a great pick for the Dolphins in the second round. He performed well at the Combine despite still recovering from surgery 6 months ago, and he was part of the woefully underachieving Miami Hurricanes squad. Translation: he will be better in the pros than he was under Randy Shannon. This might be a reach, but it seems Franklin would not fall too much further.

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Alternative Pick #2: WR Leonard Hankerson, Miami

Call it the Sam Shields Effect, but I find this class of Hurricanes to be underrated. Hankerson, to me, is a cross between Andre Johnson and Reggie Wayne. Although not as big as Andre, he has worked hard to become a great receiver. Like Wayne, Hankerson is quietly hanging around the end of the first round. If he falls to this slot, this would give the Dolphins a great 1-2 punch at wide receiver to go along with Bess in the slot and (hopefully) an upgrade at tight end. The problem is that Miami's need at other positions is greater, so drafting Hankerson could be a bit indulgent.

Round 2, Pick 14 (from Denver): TE Luke Stocker, Tennessee

As part of the deal for the Dolphins' first round pick, Denver gives back the second round pick they took for Brandon Marshall. Even if the Dolphins end up with Jeremy Shockey, they need their tight end for the future. It is doubtful Notre Dame's Kyle Rudolph will fall to this far, but Stocker is widely considered to be the second best TE in the draft. The problem with Stocker is that, while he is big, he is not the fastest prospect, something Miami would be looking for at the position. A tight end in the middle of the second round feels odd too; the studs go in the first round, so there would have to be some real potential here for it to be worthwhile.

Alternative Pick: QB Colin Kaepernick, Nevada

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If the Mallett pick falls through, I have heard rumblings that Kaepernick will not make it out of the second round. He was already high on the Dolphins list, and a good Combine – purportedly second only to Mallett – pushed him up draft boards. The Nevada product is a dynamic quarterback with great raw skills that could turn him into the next Steve Young. He is more of a project than some of the other QBs, though, and there will be pressure for him to become the starter before he is ready. If the Dolphins are going to address the quarterback position through the draft, Kaepernick is the last best option for them at this juncture.

Round 3, Pick 3 (from Denver): **RB Bilal Powell, Louisville**

The final trade piece of the draft-day trade sees the Dolphins and Broncos swap third-rounders. They say that 6 yards-per-carry is the benchmark for a running back coming out of college to be successful in the pros. Powell averaged 6.1 YPC in 2010, and he is flying a bit under the radar right now. He could be a great downhill runner in the NFL.

Alternative Pick: **TE Virgil Green, Nevada**

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Green had a great Combine and is moving up draft boards by all accounts. If Miami loses out on Stocker or take a different route, Green could fill in the tight end position nicely. Even if they do not trade down, he could still be there at pick #15 in the third round. At the very least, he is fast.

Round 4, Pick 14: C Tim Barnes, Missouri

As part of addressing their need at interior offensive line, the Dolphins draft the best available center here. Drafting offensive linemen out of need can be boring, I suppose.

Alternative Pick: QB Christian Ponder, Florida State

If the Dolphins lose out on all the previous quarterbacks, Ponder is a dark horse for best NFL QB coming out of the 2011 class. He does not have the measurables that the higher-rated quarterbacks do, and he has a history of injuries, but he is a smart guy and there would be less pressure for him to start immediately. He may not fall this far, but there are only so many teams in need of a quarterback and he is the odd man out.

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Alternative Pick #2: RB Taiwan Jones, Eastern Washington

I do not want to bog this article down with too many alternative picks, but another player the Fins could look at in this round is Jones, who had a fantastic year with Eastern Washington, averaging an eye-popping 7.8 YPC while racking up 1700+ rushing yards, albeit in FCS competition. Coming off an injury, he could be a mid-round steal.

Round 5, Pick 15: CB Cortez Allen, Citadel

The word is that the Dolphins are high on Allen, and this would be the spot to draft him if he is still on the board. He is 6'1" and runs a 4.47 dash, both great measurables for the position. Coming from the Citadel, I expect him to be smart as well. In the NFL, a team can almost never have too many good cornerbacks.

Alternative Pick: OG Keith Williams, Nebraska

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Williams should be the best available guard in the draft at this point, and again fills a position of need for Miami. The boring pick strikes again!

Round 6, Pick 14: RB Dion Lewis, Pittsburgh

He is small at 5'7", but Lewis would be the lightning to Powell's thunder. The Dolphins would need a speedy pass-catching threat to complement a lot of their off-season running back possibilities, and Lewis fits the bill. At the very least, he could be a special teams player and make his way up the depth chart. Miami might have to move up in the round to get him, though.

Alternative Pick: S Eugene Clifford, Tennessee State

Yeremiah Bell is turning 33, and the Dolphins could use this draft pick to start trying to groom his eventual replacement. This would be a project pick, but Clifford is on the bigger side at 6'1" and I am a fan of picking small-school players.

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*Round 7, Pick 15: **TE Julius Thomas, Portland State or Jordan Cameron, USC***

How many basketball-players-turned-tight-ends do we have to see succeed before the Dolphins grab one? Jimmy Graham was the latest, making waves with the Saints coming out of Miami as a former basketball player with just one year of experience at tight end. Both of these guys are fast and athletic; even if the Dolphins have already drafted a TE, one of them is worth a flier.

*Alternative Pick: **RB Alex Green, Hawaii***

A big back with good speed, Green is flying almost completely under the radar despite having a great Combine. Averaging 7.8 YPC for a pass-heavy Hawaii team is huge, but also could be misleading – after all, he did average just under 12 carries per game. He could be one of those late-round gems, though. If the Dolphins pass on the other running backs in the draft, Green is a flier worth taking.

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