

## 2005 NFL Scouting Combine Review: Part II

### BY MATTHEW HATFIELD

#### Defensive Linemen:

This year's defensive linemen class is about the same as last year, whereas there are more quality linebackers and maybe even corners. The DL crop this year includes such names as DeMarcus Ware, a Troy State guy that could be a DE/OLB tweener, Trent Cole of Cincinnati, Georgia's David Pollack, Travis Johnson of Florida State, Marcus Spears (LSU) and Erasmus James. Wisconsin's James might be the most highly thought of prospect. At 6-4 266 pounds he has an explosive quality about him that reminds me of Philadelphia Eagles end Jevon Kearse. One knock on James is that he was not productive every year and missed all of 2003. But if he is able to overcome injuries like Kenechi Udezue he can be a can't miss player.

James ran between 4.85 and 4.89 unofficially. It's not the greatest time in the world, though it is pretty decent for a guy that had a hip injury. Ware was apart of a Troy defense that made its first ever bowl appearance and held Marshall to 177 total yards of offense in their season opening upset. They followed it up the next week by forcing three Missouri turnovers, keeping Brad Smith to 31 scrambling yards and winning again, 24-14. Ware is likely to be an OLB at the next level, but another player I like that can be an effective end is Marshall's Jonathan Goodard. He's one of the elite sackers out there and did not disappoint at the combine.

Johnson chose not to run at the combine (own choice) and will be the first DT off the board. Someone that also did not run the 40-yard dash at the combine was USC's interior penetrator Mike Patterson, who had a left hip flexor. Teammate Shaun Cody could be someone that rises up on the board if teams do not like the fact that Pollack has very short arms and Spears is not as fast as some DE's. **My Top Rated D-lineman entering the draft: Georgia DE David Pollack - Many like Dan Cody of Oklahoma, James and I won't put up much of an argument against Travis Johnson as the best DT. Pollack, 6-2 265, ran between a 4.78-4.85 and has a motor more than anything. He's one of those relentless type DE's that will get by a lot of guys and is just a great football player more than anything. Not the athlete say Spears is, who is another player I think highly of as a 3-4 DE, but he will get the job done on Sundays. And did I mention he was the SEC Defensive Player of the Year as a sophomore? Having all that said, one second round DT that comes to play with a nasty mentality that should be successful is Wisconsin's Antaaj Hawthorne. Don't be surprised to see him rise in the weeks before the draft due to the intimidation quality he brings.**

#### Linebackers:

There's an unusual number of players that fit the mold of a DE/OLB tweener or even a DT/OLB. When evaluating players that play the defensive line and linebacker positions the first thing to figure out is what spot do they fit in a particular system. For instance - Shawne Merriman of Maryland is one of those guys that probably could play either. His work ethic is better than good, it's great. If the Dallas Cowboys are able to

get him it would be a good fit for him under Bill Parcells. Florida State's Eric Moore measures in at 6-4 268 and looks more like a 3-4 outside linebacker. Moore is projected to go somewhere early in the third round as of now, but can he or teammate Chauncey Davis be persistent enough in an aggressive defense?

Clemson's Leroy Hill (6-1 229) played inside linebacker in college and because of his stature is destined to play weakside linebacker. Also, he does not bend, otherwise he has the raw football abilities to start real soon somewhere. A few intriguing prospect to me were Barrett Rudd (Nebraska), Marques Harris (So. Utah) and Michael Boley (So. Miss). Rudd can cover, is smart and is compared by some as a mini Brian Urlacher. Don't know about that, but he, Odell Thurman (Georgia) and Virginia's Darryl Blackstock, who's used to the 3-4 defense playing for Al Groh, can be impact players in the early-mid part of the second round. Harris is a Colorado transfer that will go somewhere in the middle part of the draft, while Boley was the star of the New Orleans Bowl.

Want to know which linebacker is the most ripped? Hands down Robert McCune of Louisville, who ran in the 4.51 neighborhood. McCune's displayed strength and how well Derek Wake (Penn State) and John Beck did in the vertical jump (Wake at 45 ½ inches and Beck right at 41) improved their stock. Only difference is McCune was not a low-mid round guy to begin with like Beck and Wake.

**My Top Rated Linebacker entering the draft: Derrick Johnson of Texas - 6-3 242 pound linebacker chose to participate in all drills and that's a plus in itself. In a 3-4 he looks like an inside linebacker, though can be used on the outside in a 4-3 scheme. Nobody in college football at LB did a better job the last few years of making tackles, interceptions, sacks and racking up forced fumbles than him. He's good enough to develop into a Ray Lewis or Derrick Brooks like playmaker on the defensive side of the ball.**

### **Cornerbacks:**

If you recall last season, Dunta Robinson of South Carolina (now with the Houston Texans) and DeAngelo Hall (from Va. Tech to the Atlanta Falcons) helped themselves considerably at last year's combine. Their super speed put them over the top, while Chris Gamble slipped to the bottom of the first round when initially penned as a top 15 selection. Not sure if anyone really helped themselves so much or damaged their stock for 2005.

Still, Antrel Rolle could have some teams questioning his top end speed. Rolle, in my opinion, can come right in and be close to a shut down corner. Let's face it, in today's NFL there virtually are no more shut down corners. Deion Sanders was one and Darrell Green as well. Rod Woodson, a Purdue product, was fast as lightning, yet converted to safety when he joined the Baltimore Ravens in pursuit of winning a title, which he did. Rolle, West Virginia's Adam 'Pac-Man' Jones and Carlos Rogers (Auburn) appear to be ahead of the class with Justin Miller of Clemson not far behind at all. Miller is the wild card of the group since he was clearly one of the three best return

men in college football last season along with Ted Ginn and Devin Hester. Rogers' ability to be tough as nails in press coverage and make receivers work to get open makes him a physical presence on any team. Jones might have hurt himself by not showing up and participating in the drills at the combine.

Marlin Jackson, a Michigan Wolverine, is right on that late first/early second line. Despite what many scouts say, if you ask me this young man can play corner just as well as safety if he is able to backpedal effectively and crisply. Speaking of crisp, Eric Green of Virginia Tech was not happy with his time, which was not crisp. Live with the attempted seg-way, okay? Green got better as the season went along, but will not tolerate the 4.59-4.62 time he clocked in at the combine when he was in the low 4.4's at Tech. Travis Daniels of LSU did prove to be as smooth as teammate Corey Webster, a first round possibility. Another Nebraska player improved original stock in corner Fabian Washington, now looking more like a third round pick.

**My Top Rated Cornerback entering the draft: Miami of Florida's Antrel Rolle - He gets the nod over Carlos Rogers and Pac man Jones. Why? In my mind he meant more to that injury riddle Hurricanes defense than any other corner did to their respective defense. In spite of lacking world class speed, he can accelerate if he gets that ball on an interception. In addition, Rolle will cover someone like white on rice and be a driving ingredient with any type of coverage.**



**Stanford corner Stanley Wilson (AP - pictured), Ellis Hobbs of Iowa State and Oregon State DB Brandon Browner are three intriguing defensive backs that could go anywhere in the draft at this point.**

### **Safeties:**

One of the safeties in this draft that reminds me of Sean Taylor from last year is Georgia's Thomas Davis. He was a real force all year long on the Bulldogs defense, came to play vs. Wisconsin in the bowl game and is a linebacker playing safety. Which leads me to believe he will be converted to linebacker at some point. Hits a little bit like a Steve Atwater and is a top 10-20 caliber player in a draft short of outstanding safeties. Brodney Pool of Oklahoma can help a team weak in the secondary and Michigan's Ernest Shazor has a knack for the ball. But very much like last year, after the first few safeties teams are going to have to search for hidden gems.

Hidden gem no more is Nebraska's Josh Bullocks, who had one of the finest showings at the combine of any player at any position. Bullocks is a player I absolutely love and desperately want to put at the top of my board as far as safeties are concerned. A three-year starter and walk-on at Iowa, Sean Considine worked very hard to get where he is or may be going. Reminds me a little bit of Stu Schweigert from last year.

Looking for a couple hidden gems in the 3<sup>rd</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> round areas? Look no further than Jim Leonhard (Wisconsin) and Jamaal Brimmer (UNLV). They're a little different from one another, though have some similarities. Brimmer was a flat out outstanding tackler in college and can be a nice pickup in the 5<sup>th</sup> round or later. Special teams may be where he initially starts out and I would not put it past him finding a way in the lineup. All Leonhard did at Wisconsin was make interception after interception and contribute towards the end of his career even more on special teams. Believe it or not, the 5-8 183 free safety can return kicks/punts if someone goes down to an injury.

**My top rated Safety entering the draft: If you want to call him one - Thomas Davis of Georgia - Davis is a sure-fire first round pick heading into April and why not? All he did was make a bunch of tackles, play like the captain of the Georgia defense and take away much of the attention David Pollack and Odell Thurman, two very solid players, were getting. Not quite the commodity Sean Taylor was, but can bring a certain toughness to a defense lacking it on Sundays. Bullocks improved his stock dramatically at the combine and he is right behind Davis here.**