

Editorial:

# Best and Worst of the 2007 NFL Draft

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With thirty-two teams choosing 255 players over a span of two days—not to mention the signings of an indeterminate number of undrafted free agents, player trades for extra picks, etc.—it is difficult to sum up the whole of the 2007 NFL draft in anything less than a multivolume work. However, I have waded through this muck and mire, searched through expert opinions, and done general overviews of all thirty-two franchises and their needs in order to make some sense of the madness that is NFL draft weekend. So, it is with great pleasure—and pain—that I bring you the three best and the three worst teams of this year's NFL draft. Enjoy.

## The Best

1. Let's start out optimistically, shall we? I believe the team that helped itself most in this year's draft is the New England Patriots. I know, as if this team needs another pat on the back. To be honest, after hating the Patriots for such a long time and wondering how one team could be so damn good, I was no longer scratching my head after draft weekend. This team had an outstanding off-season before the draft, acquiring the likes of wide receiver Donte Stallworth, tight end Kyle Brady, and all-star linebacker Adalius Thomas, thus addressing many of their most pressing needs in free agency. Fantastic, I thought, the rich get richer. However, it was during the draft that the Patriots truly impressed me. Having filled their needs and possessing two first round picks, the Patriots were sitting pretty. With their first pick, number 24 overall, the Patriots nabbed up cornerback Brandon Meriweather, a talented young safety from the University of Miami (Florida). Though he has some character issues, the Patriots have always been good with addressing this and it should become a non-factor. At number 28 overall, the Patriots decided to give up the pick to San Francisco

in return for the 49ers' 2008 first round pick. Brilliance. And it didn't stop there. The Patriots kept wheelin' and dealin', ending up with even more sweet deals, perhaps the most notable being the acquisition of the prolific Randy Moss from the Raiders for a fourth round pick, adding another hot target for Tom Brady. On top of this, the Pats ended up loading up on late round picks and addressed their most pressing need at inside linebacker...*twice*. I was astounded, but, hey, that's why they're the best team of the decade.

2. The Cleveland Browns get my vote for the second best draft. Coming into the draft, the Browns had holes to fill at offensive tackle, defensive end, cornerback, and quarterback, in that order. They did the unexpected and addressed their most pressing need of tackle by drafting Joe Thomas from Wisconsin—easily the best offensive tackle of the draft. This deviated from the popular assumption that the Browns would scoop up Notre Dame Quarterback Brady Quinn with the third overall pick. However, the Browns showed that they were in fact very interested in Quinn and after watching him fall unexpectedly through the first round they finally worked out a deal with the Dallas Cowboys for the 22 overall pick to nab him. So the Browns came out of the first round sitting pretty with arguably the best two talents of the draft at their positions and—more importantly—they both fulfilled needs. I liked the way the Browns operate. The Browns rounded out the weekend by drafting two cornerbacks and two defensive ends, plugging their other two holes and adding depth to boot. In my opinion, it was impressive weekend for the Cleveland Browns.

3. At third best, with some reservations, I have the San Francisco 49ers. The Niners waited until the sixth round to address one of their more pressing needs at cornerback but I believe picking Patrick Willis, the tenacious inside linebacker from Mississippi, was a wise move at eleventh overall. He can

immediately step in and contribute to the new 3-4 defense the Niners are going to use in 2007 with his speed, athleticism, and outstanding tackling skills. Their second pick was also a bit questionable, but, again, the skill provided by an athletic tackle like Joe Staley is hard to pass up. The Niners added three defensive ends, which will bode well for that questionable front seven, and were even able to pick up a decent wide receiver in the third round. Had I gone based on draft alone, I might not have picked the Niners for third best, but if you combine a pretty solid draft with a fantastic free agency period, it's hard not to.

## The Worst

1. The Washington Redskins made a fantastic choice with the sixth overall pick, taking Laron Landry, safety out of LSU and arguably the best defensive player of the draft. Lined up next to Sean Taylor, the Redskins will have quite possibly the best safety tandem in the league and a formidable secondary. I would like to say the 'Skins continued in this manner, but that would just be untrue. The 'Skins, unable to pick again until the fifth round, did address their linebacker corps with one inside and one outside linebacker, but did not address a pressing need at defensive end—really, the entire defensive line—and made unnecessary picks with their last two choices, taking a quarterback and a tight end, both positions that were already well-covered. These oversights combined with scanty numbers (only five picks total) easily make the Redskins' draft the worst this year.

2. If the Washington Redskins were bad, their NFC East rival Philadelphia Eagles were not too far behind. The Eagles traded their first round pick to the Dallas Cowboys. This was not such a horrible decision, as the Eagles ended up the 36 overall pick in the second round. However, that 36 pick was quite possibly *the* wasted pick of the draft, as the Eagles chose Kevin Kolb, quarterback out of Houston, a position already



Coming as no surprise, with the first pick of the 2007 NFL Draft, the Oakland Raiders selected JaMarcus Russell, Quarterback, from LSU

## Drafted Penn State Players

Jay Alford - DT  
N.Y. Giants

Levi Brown - OT  
Arizona Cardinals

Tony Hunt - RB  
Philadelphia Eagles

Paul Posluszny - OLB  
Buffalo Bills

Tim Shaw - ILB  
Carolina Panthers

occupied by a trio headed by all-star Donovan McNabb. The Eagles also picked *two* running backs (another position filled three-deep), addressed the defensive line with only one pick, and picked no wide receivers, a position requiring desperate attention. Perhaps what makes this draft so dismal is that one would expect more from a team whose front office consistently produces quality drafts.

3. The New Orleans Saints got outstanding value at 27 overall, likely getting a steal on wide receiver Robert Meachem of Tennessee at that point in the first round. However, with a very deep wide receiver class, the Saints could have waited to address that need and looked to add more bulk at the cornerback position or in the defensive front seven. The Saints ended up getting to that cornerback position (with two picks) but seemed to forget about that front seven, possibly the biggest chink in their defensive armor, making only one pick the whole draft. To add insult to injury, it was their last pick of the draft. The Saints made two picks on the offensive line—always good for depth but less important when your defense is in disarray—and chose *another* running back. I'm sorry, but I thought seven running

backs were enough, especially when two of them are Deuce McAllister and Reggie Bush. To be concise, I believe that the Saints *needed* to address the defense more in this draft, especially that front seven. Sure, they addressed that secondary but the secondary was not the problem (it was third in the league last year). For a very good team that could be great with a better defense, this year's draft for the Saints was disappointing to say the least.

## The Skinny

This year's draft had its share of surprises. It was largely predictable in the first round, with the exception of Brady Quinn at 22 overall, but became a little more mixed up in the later rounds. The best action though, came from the series of trades and swaps that ensued as teams moved to maximize their draft value without sacrificing too much. However, that's always a fine line, and many teams will be criticized for choices made. Overall, I feel that most teams came out better than before, with a few notable exceptions, and it looks as if the 2007 season will be one of the best we've seen in many years. Here's to next year. We'll see how it goes.