

THE EAGLES' TOP PICK: WHAT'S THE METER SAY?

Daily News sports writers Les Bowen and Paul Domowitch have targeted seven players the Eagles could draft Saturday with their first pick, 21st overall. Here is what they have to say about each player and a rating from 1 to 10 on the chance that he will be selected by the Eagles (1 is least likely; 10 is most likely).



KNOWSHON MORENO
RB, Georgia



DONALD BROWN
RB, UConn



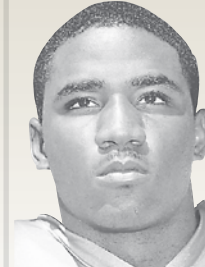
HAKEEM NICKS
WR, North Carolina



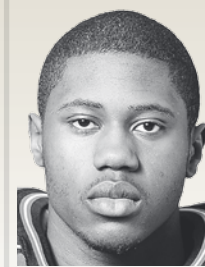
DARIUS BUTLER
CB, UConn



BRANDON PETTIGREW
TE, Okla. St.



ROBERT AYERS
DE, Tennessee



DARRIUS HEYWARD-BEY
WR, Maryland

Paul Domowitch



Domowitch's meter reading:

The Eagles need somebody to share the ball-carrying load with Brian Westbrook, and this guy fits their offense better than a \$4,000 suit. They like him a lot, and if he's there at No. 21, it would be a no-brainer. But getting him probably is going to require a tradeup to 15.



Getting Brown wouldn't require a tradeup. In fact, the Eagles might even be able to slide down later in the round and grab him. While he can catch the ball and is a willing blocker, he's not quite as physical a runner as Moreno.



I know, I know. The Eagles taking a wideout in the first round seems as likely as June snow. But if they're not going to make a play for the Cardinals' Anquan Boldin, why not grab the guy in this draft who is the closest thing to Boldin?



Who knows where the Sheldon Brown saga is headed, but you never can have too many good corners. Another plus: He's a return guy, who could help lighten DeSean Jackson's load. Like Moreno, they'd probably have to trade up a few spots to get him, though.



The Eagles like Brent Celek's upside and really aren't in the market for a No. 1 tight end. But this guy is the complete catch-and-block package, and if he's there at 21, he'd be tough to take a pass on.



The Eagles seem happy with their defensive line, but the 6-3, 272-pound Ayers would be a fun toy for Jim Johnson. He's out of the Justin Tuck mold and you could move him all over the place. He and Victor Abiamiri make a formidable pair of nickel defensive tackles.



Heyward-Bey is the fastest guy in the draft and would give the Eagles another receiver who would have opposing safeties backpedaling as soon as the ball is snapped. My gut tells me, though, that the Ravens will be trading up to get him.



Les Bowen



Bowen's meter reading:

This is the guy most experts think the Eagles want and should draft, even if they have to trade up into the teens. That probably means they have no intention of drafting him. Birds haven't gone for a first-round RB since Keith Byars in 1986. But Brian Westbrook turns 30 this year, and Correll Buckhalter is in Denver. It's time for a serious move at this position, not a cross-your-fingers-and-hope project. If Moreno isn't an excellent pro, just about every draft analyst in the world is horribly wrong.



I don't think the Birds will take this well-rounded UConn running back at 21, but they might very well trade down a bit and draft him. He's rated a notch below Moreno, but is said to be very good at the things the Eagles want a back to do, and he's a high-character guy. Could they just draft him in the second round? Not with the 53rd overall pick — I think he'll go considerably earlier than that.



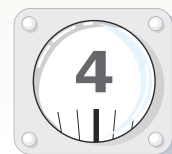
If you can't trade for Anquan Boldin — and the Eagles still could, which would make all this who-are-they-going-to-take-in-the-first-round stuff as moot as it has been the past 2 years — why not draft the guy who is often compared to him? Nicks, from North Carolina, is a 6-1, 212-pound wideout with excellent hands and strength. He lacks Darrius Heyward-Bey's speed. This is another guy you might be able to trade down a half-dozen slots or so and still get.



I can't believe our draft meter has two UConn players in it, but here we are. This cornerback can also play wideout and run back kicks. The Eagles are always going to be intrigued by athletic corners, and with Sheldon Brown unhappy, you can't discount the possibility of a first-round CB.



I believe the Eagles when they say they like Brent Celek as their starting tight end. Several mock drafts have them taking Pettigrew, the draft's top TE, out of need, but I think the running back need is bigger and the wideout need might be more pressing, as well. The Eagles will draft a tight end, but I'd be a little surprised if it was in the first round, at 21.



This big defensive end was a bit of a disappointment until his senior season, but he made himself into a first-round pick with an excellent year. The Eagles have drafted a lot of defensive lineman high during the Andy Reid era; that's partly because the defense had to be rebuilt as guys like Hugh Douglas and Hollis Thomas cycled out. Do they have a pressing need now? No, but a difference-maker at DE is something that always catches the Birds' interest. He might not last to 21.



A wide receiver? The Eagles? We will now pause for a collective snort of derision. OK, now we're back. Fact is, the Birds have shown pretty strong interest. I would say they need a running back more, but they might feel they can get what they need there in the second or third round. I think, deep down, they know they'd be better with a legit No. 1 wideout, a big, fast, skilled, receiver. This guy from Maryland could be it.

