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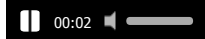
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FOOTBALL EXTRA POINTS -
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TUESDAY, MARCH 12, 2013

ARE WE THERE YET? DA BEARS AND DA DRAFT POST FREE AGENCY

The Bears win the Super Bowl!!

No, you haven't stepped out of a time machine where the Super Bowl Shuffle is still number 41 on the US Billboard Hot 100 and is up for a Grammy Award for best rhythm and blues performance by a duo or group (look it up, that actually happened). William "The Fridge" Perry isn't back running in goal line touchdowns (and by the way, I grew up near The Fridge when I was a kid and can attest to the fact that he was a great guy. I base that almost entirely on the fact that he gave out full size candy bars for Halloween. I mean seriously, whoever thought it was a good idea to call mini candy bars "Fun Size" never talk to any kids before. But I digress...).

No, the Bears haven't really won the Super Bowl. Except for on my Playstation Vita. And that's only because I can't play Madden on my Playstation 3 because "someone" in my household needs to watch "Project Runway" reruns for several hours in a row.

But I certainly hope the Bears will win a Super Bowl in the near future. They were a 10 win team in 2012, which isn't bad, unless you're Lovie Smith and wanted to keep your job. Unfortunately, due to a particularly strong division and some tough injuries, it just wasn't good enough to get a shot at the playoffs. But only slight modification is necessary -- the core team (assuming everyone stays healthy) is actually quite good. With the addition of quarterback and West Coast offense guru, Marc Trestman, there may be a change in offensive approach, but the same old issues exist now as did in 2012.

Now that we've seen what the Bears have done in free agency, it's time

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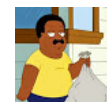
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to re-evaluate what the Bears need to do in the draft to get that playoff spot in 2013. They've got a new tight end in Martellus Bennett. They're continuing to look for offensive line help after signing Jermon Bushrod. But not everything needs to be replaced in free agency and the draft; there are certainly elements that only need reinforcing.

Things That Need to Be Replaced

It's no surprise that the Bears offensive line is sometimes just downright "offensive". In 2012, the offensive line allowed for the 5th worst offensive yards per game (310.6 yards) and allowed the 8th most sacks in the NFL (44). ESPN Stats & Information even supplied this neat stat – the Bears allowed a sack once every 11.9 dropbacks since the start of 2011. We all came to appreciate Jay Cutler more after we got a chance to watch Jason Campbell spend 80% of his spot start on the ground against the 49ers, managing to get sacked 5 times and throw 2 interceptions during the short time he was able to stay upright. And being tied for 24th in the NFL for total first downs (292) is also an issue. If you're not moving the ball, you're just not going to have scoring opportunities. Now that's not entirely on the offensive line, but it sure is a clear indicator that improvement is needed.

According to Scouts Inc., this year's first round draft class is light on skill positions. There's only one quarterback, one running back, two tight ends and four wide receivers. Although it's always more exciting for fans when skill position players are taken in the first round, what better way for the Bears to make an impact in the draft than to start adding new parts to the offensive line.

The first priority would be to draft an offensive tackle, and more particularly, a left tackle. J'Marcus Webb has been no great shakes (he allowed 9 sacks in 16 games played in 2012, which, surprisingly, is down from 14 sacks allowed in 16 games played in 2011) and with his recent off field problems, who knows how long he'll last. And no, I don't think that the recent signing of left tackle Jermon Bushrod from the Saints is the answer. Frankly, it seems more like a sideways move to build depth than an improvement. Unfortunately, the top offensive tackles in the draft (four in total) are all scheduled to be off the board by the time the Bears have their first pick at number 20. Although it's certain that Luke Joeckel and Eric Fisher will be gone well before the 20th pick, it's not even clear that if the two other tackles were available, that they would be a good fit in Chicago. For instance, D.J. Fluker, whom I saw play in person this year as the Tide unfortunately rolled the Irish (I'm still suffering from post-traumatic stress...), is an amazing tackle as far as run blocking is concerned (Lacy and Yeldon not only ran all over the Irish vaunted defense in the BCS Championship game, but also destroyed other impressive teams, like Georgia in the SEC Championship game), but lacks consistency in pass protection. Also, many project Fluker as a right tackle, and not a left tackle, which is not as much a concern for the Bears (Gabe Carimi was a first round pick in 2011 and it's probably too early to give up on him). Clearly, Trestman needs someone to help keep Cutler upright throughout the season and can ill afford another concussion, which is becoming an annual issue with Cutler. And although Lane Johnson is probably a better fit with excellent pass protection skills, he's not an elite run blocker (and just like Cutler, the Bears can't afford another Matt Forte injury) and he's only played two seasons at tackle, with only 11 games at left tackle. If Johnson is available at 20, he'd be a strong selection, but I might pass on Fluker if he was the only tackle available.

If this is the case, then perhaps adding help to the interior of the offensive line with a guard would make sense. However, only three guards are in Scouts Inc.'s top 32 (Chance Warmack, Jonathan Cooper and Justin Pugh), two of which are supposed to be gone in the top 10. Justin Pugh, listed at 32, does have excellent pass protection skills (and may be able to play left tackle since he played three seasons at left tackle in college), which is something the Bears will need with a wide open offense, but his durability concerns can be a problem. He had a shoulder injury early in the 2012 season and had to miss four games at Syracuse. The Bears

an Elite 2013 Fantasy Quarterback?

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are no strangers to injury, but drafting a potential injury risk might be tough. And reaching for an injury risk in the draft might be even less palatable.

Even with the recent Martellus Bennett signing, I still might consider a tight end at 20. The Kellen Davis experiment is clearly over. Davis struggled mightily in 2012 catching only 19 of 44 targets while plagued with the "dropsies". Who knows where he'll be next year, but that's simply not going to cut it in a Trestman offense. And with only two viable pass catching options, Marshall and Jeffery, there's just not enough for opposing defenses to worry about (and how exactly do you run a "trips" play with only two viable receivers?). Maybe Bennett opens it up, but other teams have been successful with two tight end sets (New England Patriots anyone?). The West Coast offense relies on quick timing routes with multiple receiving options. Two tight ends might be just what the doctor ordered. I know that you're probably thinking "why not draft a wide receiver?" But having the flexibility to keep a tight end in to block and use him as a downfield offensive weapon may be more important, addressing offensive line and pass catching issues for the Bears. And if that's the case, why not draft a great pass catching tight end like Zach Ertz or Tyler Eifert?

Both Ertz and Eifert have the good hands and off the line speed to get separation for the quick timing routes necessary to have a successful West Coast offense. They're big and are a complete mismatch for any opposing defense, making them excellent candidates for significant yards after the catch. It's probably less likely with the Bennett signing, but a first round tight end might pay off in Trestman's aggressive offensive schemes. And besides, as I mentioned previously, isn't it more exciting for fans when a skill player is picked in the first round?

Either way, building the offensive line should be the Bears' priority in the first round, with a tight end being a nice consolation prize.

Things that Need to be Reinforced

Assuming the offensive line issues have been addressed, these other pieces can probably be added later in the draft.

Clearly, Brian Urlacher is not getting any younger. Over the years, as a middle linebacker, Urlacher wasn't only one of the best at getting to the ball and containing offenses, but he also was one of the smartest in organizing and calling defensive plays. I'll never forget watching Urlacher call defensive plays to neutralize Peyton Manning's audibles during Super Bowl XLI. Picking up a middle linebacker in the draft will not be a viable way of immediately replacing Urlacher, as no rookie has Urlacher's football acumen. But if Urlacher is resigned, it's a great opportunity for a rookie to play with and learn from one of the best. Unfortunately, there's not much at middle linebacker in the draft past the first round. I'll admit to being a Manti Te'o fan (please, no more invisible girlfriend jokes), but taking him in the first round probably doesn't make sense if there's offensive line or tight end option, particularly since he sometimes has trouble in high traffic situations (which a middle linebacker will be in a lot). However, if Te'o falls to the second round, maybe he's worth considering. Also, Kevin Minter or Nico Johnson could be a good pick up outside the first round.

But if not reinforcing the middle linebacker position, what better way to give Trestman's offense an instant boost than drafting a wide receiver? With Johnny Knox retiring in February after recovering from the horrific injury he sustained in late 2011 and Devin Hester likely to go back to just playing special teams, there's not much help coming for the air attack outside of adding it from the outside. Since the Bears haven't picked up any significant receivers in free agency, taking a shot in the draft might be their best bet. There's plenty to go around, but some later round picks might include Aaron Dobson or DeAndre Hopkins in the second round or Conner Vernon or Chris Harper in the fourth round. Another intriguing later round flyer might be quarterback turn wide receiver, Denard "Shoelace" Robinson. I'm not fan of Michigan (Muck Fichigan I always

say!), but if Shoelace can learn to catch a ball, he could be a real threat in an aggressive West Coast offense.

“They are who we thought they were!”

Who could forget Denny Green and his media outburst when he and the Cardinals lost a 20 point lead over the Bears in under 20 minutes? But that's why they play the game. The Bears were a 10-win team last year. Slight modifications to the team through free agency and the draft should help the Bears get to 11 wins and have a shot at the Lombardi Trophy. Heck, a 10-win team won the Super Bowl just over a month ago. Will the Bears be who they thought they were last year – a Super Bowl contender? Only time will tell. Anyone can be a winner. And that's why we love the NFL.

By
Ha Kung Wong

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28 comments:



Anonymous March 13, 2013 at 3:38 AM

tevon austin hed blow the roof off defenses that should be the bears first round pick nfls about puttin up points and thats wat hes about get him

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Hakung Wong March 13, 2013 at 4:56 PM

I like Tevon Austin A LOT. But in the first round, it's tough to not look to o-line help. Trestman is a west coast offense guy that depends on timing. A rookie WR would have a difficult time with that (although I suppose the same can be said for a rookie TE, but I feel a rookie TE could adapt better with a smaller offensive play book). If we get Autin, though, I won't have any problem with that. As a side note, Kellen Davis (and his 8 out of 44 drops last season) has be released by the Bears, so now it's even more important grab a TE). GO BEARS! Feel free to follow me on @Rhihan on Twitter.



Dwight Schrute March 13, 2013 at 5:31 PM

Bears, Beets, Battlestar Galactica!



Hakung Wong March 13, 2013 at 6:05 PM

Nice Office reference! ;-)

[Reply](#)



Anonymous March 13, 2013 at 5:07 PM

The bears will not get to the SB regardless of who they draft! NFC far too deep this year!

[Reply](#)



Hakung Wong March 13, 2013 at 6:08 PM

Well, the NFC is definitely deep, but there's reason to see the Bears making a a wild card spot behind the Packers. This is assuming S-Jax goes to the Packers. And of course, the NFC is WAY better than the AFC this year. ;-)

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Anonymous March 13, 2013 at 6:19 PM

Will the Vikes losing Harvin, the division at least looks a whole lot easier.

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Hakung Wong March 13, 2013 at 6:21 PM

Agreed! Although I never thought the Vikings were much of a contender (until they ruined the Bears season by not only winning against the Packers in week 17, but then losing to them in the first round of the playoffs!), it's always nice to see others in the division get weaker.

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Anonymous March 13, 2013 at 6:29 PM

We're not here to start not trouble.
We're just here to do the Super Bowl Shuffle.

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Hakung Wong March 13, 2013 at 6:31 PM

I could sing that every day of the year, all day long... ;-)

[Reply](#)



Erik Gold March 13, 2013 at 9:10 PM

The Fridge has always been about full size candy bars.

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Hakung Wong March 13, 2013 at 9:56 PM

Other than scoring touchdowns with style, that's one of his best characteristics. ;-)

[Reply](#)



Seal March 13, 2013 at 9:42 PM

Yay, Project Runway!

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Hakung Wong March 13, 2013 at 9:54 PM

Nice, I knew there had to be at least one of you out there! ;-)

[Reply](#)



Anonymous March 13, 2013 at 10:11 PM

Love the Denny Green reference!! Great article, looking forward to the Project Runway follow up.

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Hakung Wong March 13, 2013 at 11:19 PM

Thanks very much! Now that Hell's Kitchen is on TV

again, I'm sure I'll find another opportunity to write...and to bring the Bears to another Super Bowl of course. ;-)

[Reply](#)



Hakung Wong March 13, 2013 at 11:55 PM

BTW, J.Marcus Webb moved to Right Tackle and Bushrod to Left Tackle. I suppose that means Carimi goes to the inside o-line. I sure hope the Bears do more than that! Otherwise we're going to see whole lot more of Jason Campbell (assuming he re-signs...)

[Reply](#)



Hakung Wong March 14, 2013 at 12:55 AM

Kellen Davis and Matt Spaeth both jettisoned. So really, another TE like Eifert or Ertz could really help in my opinion. If for nothing else, some good depth and a potential future offensive threat.

[Reply](#)



Hakung Wong March 14, 2013 at 8:11 AM

Another possible scenario since they now are using Bushrod at LT and Webb at RT is that the Bears trade back in the draft to get more picks. This might give them a chance to reinforce some other positions like come back, or allow them to take more shots at potential wide receivers. But if they do that, I sure hope they take a couple added shots at improving the line too.

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Jason Johnson March 14, 2013 at 11:15 AM

Matt Forte is a hack. Bears should have went after Reggie Bush.

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Hakung Wong March 14, 2013 at 11:48 AM

Although Reggie Bush has upside, I don't think another dance-happy RB is what we need. Matt Forte may be brittle at times, but he's solid. Much more durable than Hakeem Nicks...

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Blazer Vest March 15, 2013 at 7:37 AM

Nice article. What about a back that can pass protect and possibly serve as a pass threat? (e.g., Stepan Taylor) Or maybe, as a 3-4th round pick, a fullback that has tight-end experience and is wicked smaaat? (i.e., Kyle Juszczyk)

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Hakung Wong March 15, 2013 at 9:18 AM

Thanks! Taylor is a great back that does have good hands, but after watching him in a number of games (including against my Irish), I feel he doesn't have great open field speed, and that most of his ability to find open lanes was due to Hogan's ability to run the option. Not that I would be upset to get him, but he's basically the same as Forte with less speed. As for Juszczyk, I have to admit, I haven't been paying much attention to him. But he does have great versatility for a 4th or 5th round pick. I don't think we need a FB or RB much though (unless Michael Bush has problems), so his only real use would be at TE. But for a late pick, if we don't go for Eifert or Ertz early, I'd say that's a good suggestion.

[Reply](#)



Hakung Wong March 15, 2013 at 9:23 AM

BTW, I've been looking at Aaron Mellette as a possible late round grab at WR. I'm starting to think his size and speed might make him a sneaky pick late. We could definitely use a big body out there to take hits on short timing routes.

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Anonymous March 19, 2013 at 4:14 PM

For all the free agent moves, draft, etc., it really comes down to one question in my mind, can Cutler get it done? As a non-Bears fan (go Skins!), Cutler has yet to prove to me that he can lead a team both on and off the field. From a leadership standpoint, I am not sure he comes close to guys like Eli, Rodgers or even someone like Flacco.

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Hakung Wong March 19, 2013 at 4:19 PM

Well, I do agree with that. Jay Cutler is not one would call a "natural born leader". He outwardly appears disinterested and uninspiring, and can apparently only have a personality during 30 second stretches, and only during NFL Shop commercials. But he's a good quarterback, and he has some passion. Maybe getting married will help. ;-)

[Reply](#)



Hakung Wong March 21, 2013 at 12:15 AM

With Urlacher now gone it's even more important that the Bears go out and get a Linebacker!

[Reply](#)



Hakung Wong March 22, 2013 at 5:42 PM

As per the NFL Network, Ertz had his pro day and it looks like Ertz and Eifert will be pretty similar. Grabbing either one is bound to pay off!

Ertz was 6-foot-5 1/8, 244 - down 5 pounds from his Combine weigh-in - and improved on his 4.76 forty time at the Combine to 4.62 and 4.68 at the Stanford Pro Day. Ertz also posted a 35 1/2-inch vertical leap and 9-foot-6 broad jump at the Stanford Pro Day. Eifert's Combine results were 4.68, 35 1/2 inches, and 9-foot-2 at 6'6 / 250.

<http://blogs.nfl.com/2013/03/21/zach-ertz-is-intriguing-prospect-at-watch-atop-draft/>

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