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FOOTBALL EXTRA POINTS - MONDAYS @ 9:00PM EASTERN

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2014

## PRINCESS LEIA HATES YOUR BARISTA: 2014 QB DRAFT CLASS PREVIEW - JOHNNY MANZIEL

Johnny Manziel is a nerf herding scoundrel.



Keeping with the Star Wars theme I always use to breakdown quarterbacks in the NFL draft, and because I think Star Wars is the greatest trilogy ever made (note that I say "trilogy", as in the singular, not "trilogies" in the plural...and yes, that was intentional), I really do think the player known as Johnny Football is most like that scoundrel from Bespin that we love to hate, then love, then hate, then love again, Lando Calrissian. And while we're at it, isn't scoundrel a great word? Just say it again aloud. We should all be using scoundrel more in our everyday vernacular. As well as using laserbrain as an insult. Like Princess Leia did in Empire Strikes Back. For instance:

**Person 1:** *Wow, that barista at Starbucks is such a laserbrain! I asked for triple skim cap mochachino valencia and he only made it a double!*

**Person 2:** *He's such a scoundrel!*

**Barista:** *Laugh it up fuzzball.*

Oh wait, sorry, I'm getting my scenes mixed up. That last one was actually Han Solo, not the barista at Starbucks. But I digress.



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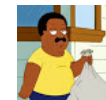
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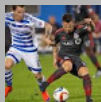
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**Johnny Manziel – QB - Texas A&M Aggies**



The point is, just like Lando Calrissian, everyone either loves or loves to hate Johnny Football. Like it or not, his frenetic play on the field and confident (some might say over-confident) personality off the field has made him a lightning rod for praise and criticism alike.

First, he breaks on to the scene and has a fantastic game beating Alabama in 2012. Suddenly, Johnny Football is everyone's idol. Then he wins the Heisman Trophy (off a season with a 68.0% completion percentage with 3,706 yards and 26 TDs to 9 INTs) and everyone thinks he's the best thing since sliced bread. Then we have the off the field autograph scandal and all the random parties he's pictured at acting like a...well...like a college kid. And suddenly everyone thinks he's irresponsible, has poor judgment and is immature. Then the 2013 season starts, and although Manziel does well (69.9% completion percentage with 4,114 yards and 37 TDs to 13 INTs), the Aggies fail to live up to expectations with a lowly 9-4 record, with loses to every ranked team they played except for #24 Duke in the Chick-fil-a Bowl, and that by only 4 points. And now the NFL Combine. Manziel checks in at 5-foot-11 and ¾ inches, 207 pounds with 9 ¾ inch hands and everyone starts whispering that he's too small, he's too volatile and he's too immature. Is there any truth to this?



Frankly, Russell Wilson kicked the door down on the "he's too small" argument. Wilson is only 5 foot 10 and 5/8 inches and 206 pounds with 10 ¼ inch hands. And all Wilson did was win a Super Bowl. Russell Wilson didn't light the world on fire with his play, but he was one of the smartest QBs in the NFL with a 101.2 Passer QB Rating, extending many plays with his legs while not making too many mistakes. The difference between Wilson and Manziel might end up being patience.

There's no doubt that Manziel has top end speed for a QB, but his height combined with his inability to quickly pick up blitzes will be magnified in the NFL. When in college he could make up with this by escaping with his legs, everyone knows that defenses in the NFL are bigger, faster and smarter. Manziel will need to learn to trust his offensive line (which means of course that he'll need an offensive line he can trust) and resist scrambling out of the pocket at the slightest sign of danger. And Manziel's lack of deep pass accuracy will hurt him as well, since he'll be less able to take advantage of any plays that develop downfield with the time he buys while scrambling. Which means Manziel will have to be extra patient with the ball and try to take advantage of openings in the short and intermediate routes where he excels.

an Elite 2013 Fantasy Quarterback?

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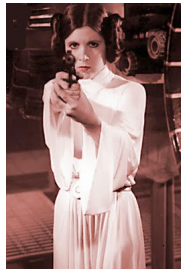
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The other concern will be injury. We all saw what happened to RGIII in the NFL when he didn't learn to consistently slide. You just can't go all out and consistently put yourself in harm's way when you're an NFL franchise QB. You have to be smarter than that. Comparatively speaking, Manziel does not have a big frame, and consistently taking hits in the NFL similar to what he took in college will insure that Manziel spends more time on the sidelines sitting on the bench than on the field.



So what does this all mean? Well, two things seem clear to me. One, Johnny Manziel needs to go to a team that has a system that will fit his skillset. He needs a solid offensive line, a significant ground threat so he can use play action and keep pressure off from excessive pass rushers and an offense built primarily around movement out of the pocket coupled with short and intermediate routes. Two, Johnny Manziel needs a team that can give him some time to learn. A year under veteran tutelage will greatly improve Manziel's ability to adapt his skillset to the NFL while learning to play at NFL speed with NFL defenses. Giving him that time may be the difference between a fiery leader / franchise QB versus a dissonant (potentially injured) malcontent unable to deal with excessive criticism and pressure.

With that said, I think two potential fits are the Cleveland Browns and the Oakland Raiders. Both the Browns and Raiders have potential starters at QB, so there would be no pressure for Manziel to take the field immediately. The problem with the Raiders is their horrible offensive line in the bottom 5 of the NFL in 2013. The Browns on the other hand had a top 5 offensive line, not to mention an elite receiving option in Josh Gordon, making it a much better location for Manziel to end up. The Houston Texans aren't a bad spot either, having a serviceable offensive line, but I fear that throwing Manziel into the starter gig right away will be doing him a disservice, and Houston really needs a QB to play right away. And the last thing you want is for fans to nickname your new franchise QB "laserbrain". Trust me, no one wants that.



By *Ha Kung Wong* (Twitter: [@Rhihan](#))

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4 comments:



**Hakung Wong**  February 22, 2014 at 11:05 AM

UPDATE -

Turns out Johnny Manziel will NOT be throwing at the NFL Combine. Looks like scouts will have to wait for his pro day or rely on college tape. Interesting choice.

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**Hakung Wong** February 25, 2014 at 12:41 PM

UPDATE 2 -

According to SI, Jaguars GM Dave Caldwell interviewed Manziel and stated "[h]e did a really nice job in there. He was prepared for the interview, very prepared...We've found nothing that's come across as a fatal flaw to us." Raiders owner Mark Davis was said to be "very impressed" after Oakland's 15-minute discussion with Manziel. The Jaguars and Raiders hold the 3rd and 5th picks, respectively, in May's draft.

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**Hakung Wong** February 27, 2014 at 10:21 AM

UPDATE 3 -

ESPN's QB guru, Ron Jaworski, stated that he wouldn't take Manziel in the first three rounds, since he thinks that it would be difficult to coach Manziel out of leaving the pocket so much, and as a consequence, if Manziel plays like he did in college, he wouldn't last 3 games in the NFL. I don't disagree, but I think the biggest issue will be whether Manziel will have time to be coached into being more like Wilson, a smart game manager that keeps his eyes downfield and only extends plays with his legs when he has to, or if he'll end up being thrown into the fire and be another Tebow.

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**Hakung Wong** March 27, 2014 at 3:45 PM

And apparently, Johnny Manziel has managed to impress all 75 officials from 30 different teams at his pro day today at Texas A&M, including some special guests, in former President George H.W. Bush, and current stars Michael Vick and LaBron James, both who tweeted out about him ([http://espn.go.com/nfl/draft2014/story/\\_id/10683601/johnny-manziel-texas-aggies-dazzles-pro-day](http://espn.go.com/nfl/draft2014/story/_id/10683601/johnny-manziel-texas-aggies-dazzles-pro-day)). It's going to be an interesting draft...

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