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NFL Draft Preview: Johnson consensus No.1, McElroy, Brown top Aggie prospects

NEW YORK (AP) — Things rarely come easy for the New York Jets. Here they are holding the No. 1 pick in Saturday's NFL draft, and the player they're likely to take is a wide receiver, Keyshawn Johnson of Southern California.

Nothing against Johnson, who is compared to Jerry Rice and Michael Irvin, but NFL conventional wisdom holds that the No. 1 pick is supposed to be spent on a quarterback, an impact defensive player, or a running back who can carry a team.

The Jets' problem is that there are no strong quarterbacks in this draft; the top running back, Nebraska's Lawrence Phillips, carries

personal baggage; and none of the top defensive players is a sure thing.

So when commissioner Paul Tagliabue calls the draft to order at noon EDT, the Jets are almost sure to claim Johnson, the 6-foot-3, 220-pound all-American who had 12 receptions for 216 yards in the Rose Bowl and the outgoing personality to fit in New York.

"I'd love to play here," says Johnson. "I'm born for New York."

"He talks too much, but if that's his only flaw, we can live with it," Dick Haley, the Jets' personnel director, says of Johnson.

Rice was the 16th overall pick in 1985; Irvin went 11th overall in

1988 and the last wide receiver to go No. 1, Irving Fryar in 1984, has had a successful career.

There is Phillips, whose talent is undeniable but who pleaded no contest to misdemeanor assault and trespassing charges after assaulting a former girlfriend. That has turned off some teams, but not all — notably the Baltimore Ravens, who might be willing to trade up from fourth to get Phillips.

Phillips and Johnson reflect this draft, considered one of the better crops of the '90s.

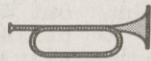
It's rich in wide receivers, running backs and a usually rare commodity — tight ends. As

many as a half-dozen receivers could go in the first round, three running backs could be sent in the top eight — Pittsburgh's Tim Biakabutuka, Eddie George, the Heisman Trophy winner from Ohio State.

It's also almost sure to be the first draft since 1988 in which a quarterback is chosen in the first round. That year, Chris Chelmsford remains in the NFL, was in the third with the 76th pick overall. This year's top prospect is probably Ohio State's Bobby Hoyt, who could last as long as Chris

How many prime prospects are there?

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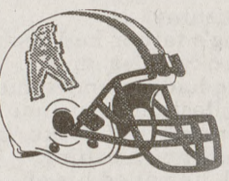
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1996 Houston Oilers Draft Needs

QUARTERBACK: The emergence of Steve McNair at the end of last season makes the point moot on using a high pick on a quarterback. However, Houston does need a third quarterback.
RUNNING BACK: If Eddie George drops to ninth, Houston has said they will pick the 238-pound Heisman Trophy winner and make him their featured back. Critics Rodney Thomas was too fumble-prone last season.
OFFENSIVE LINE: Almost every year, the Oilers seem to be on their last leg on the offensive line. Bruce Matthews is still an All-Pro, but is on one of his last legs.
WIDE RECEIVERS: If George is taken early, Houston might go after Terry Glenn, the Buckeyes' premiere wide receiver.
DEFENSIVE LINE: Early in the year, Texas' Tony Brackens seemed to be a lock as the Oilers' No. 1 pick, but scouts say he is too small.
LINEBACKERS: Injuries decimated the Oilers' linebacking corps last season, and Eddie Robinson left the team via free agency this year.
SECONDARY: The Oilers' greatest strength, if everyone can stay healthy. With starters Cris Dishman, Marcus Robertson, Darryl Lewis and Steve Jackson, Houston doesn't need any help here.
LIKELY FIRST-ROUND SELECTION: Eddie George, RB, Ohio State

1996 Dallas Cowboys Draft Needs

QUARTERBACK: Troy Aikman is an all-pro and Wade Wilson is a competent backup. No need to waste a pick here.
RUNNING BACK: Plug in Emmitt Smith's name and see above.
OFFENSIVE LINE: Strong front five and a magnificent tight end in Jay Novacek. May be time to add a young stud to take over in the future.
WIDE RECEIVERS: A very intriguing situation with Michael Irvin facing a possible suspension and perhaps even imprisonment. Deion Sanders could see vastly expanded playing time, but the Cowboys may use a draft pick.
DEFENSIVE LINE: Leon Lett and the rest are continuing to punish opposing quarterbacks and running backs, but like the offensive line, a young trainee is hurt.
LINEBACKERS: The big question mark finally rears its ugly head. Free agency greatly depleted the Cowboys' linebacking corps, and they could use a bumper to keep the rush on. Read: Reggie Brown.
SECONDARY: If Kevin Smith is completely recovered, passing will go out of style in the NFC. With Smith and Deion Sanders, the field will be a no-man's land.
LIKELY FIRST-ROUND SELECTION: Reggie Brown, LB, Texas A&M

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