The Mink is off to another trip to New York to attend the NFL draft with cousin Obey.  We annually match wits with the best NFL draft experts including Mel Kiper, Mike Mayock and Todd McShay.  Unfortunately, we do not get paid for it, but we have a pretty good track record of picking the results.

This year’s draft will be the second draft after the new collective bargaining agreement. This draft is one of the deepest drafts in recent memory due to the record number of Juniors declaring for the draft – 73 in total. This draft does not offer as many “blue chip” prospects but it is extremely deep. As a result, teams will receive just as much value for picks 15-25 as those drafting in the top ten of the first round. In addition, teams will be able to draft some starters in rounds 2-4 due to the depth of this draft.

We expect movement in the bottom half of the first round with teams looking to trade up for the top quarterbacks or playmakers that drop out of the top 15 picks. As a result, it will be very difficult to pick the bottom half of the first round as many teams may be trying to move into the bottom half of the first round. The strengths of the 2012 draft include:

1. Offensive Tackle – This is the deepest offensive tackle draft in years with several blue chip prospects that will go in the top 15. There could be as many as 4-5 Offensive Tackles taken in the first round with three legitimate “blue chip” prospects. This year’s class is led by tackles Luke Joeckel of Texas AM, Eric Fisher of Central Michigan, Lane Johnson of Oklahoma and DJ Fluker of Alabama. We believe Joeckel is the best left tackle in the draft due to his intelligence, athleticism and tenacity. He is very athletic, possesses long arms which helps in pass protection and he is also effective in run blocking. He will be a Pro Bowl left tackle for the next decade. Fisher comes from a small school but comes with a big upside. He is 6’7” inches tall but possesses great feet for a big man and provides the physical tools and athleticism required to play left tackle in the NFL. Johnson is a former quarterback and tight end that now plays left tackle. He has not been a left tackle long and his technique needs work but he may have the largest upside of any left tackle in the draft. Fluker continues the tradition of outstanding offensive line prospects from Alabama – we project him as a right tackle in the NFL. This draft also has a strong class of guards with 2-3 that could go in the first round including Chance Warmack of Alabama and Jonathan Cooper of North Carolina. Other offensive linemen that could go in the first two rounds include: Menelik Watson, Florida State, Terron Armstead, Arkansas Pine-Bluff and Kyle Long Oregon. Warmack is one of the best guard prospects since Steve Hutchison and he will be a Pro Bowl guard for the next decade. You can also get good value in rounds 2, 3 and 4 if you are looking for a guard or tackle.
2. Defensive Tackle – This is a deep draft for defensive tackles. There are several blue chip prospects in this year’s draft class, but the draft is deep with talent that will allow teams to bolster their defensive lines. We project that 4-5 defensive tackles may go in the first round including: Star Lotulelei, Utah, Sharrif Floyd, Sheldon Richardson, Missouri, Sylvester Williams North Carolina and John Jenkins, Georgia. All five of these players will immediately upgrade your defensive line. Sharrif Floyd is moving up draft boards due to his combine performance. Star Lotulelei is one of the most athletic defensive tackles in the draft. He is big, strong, quick and extremely agile and mobile. These traits translate into position flexibility in the NFL. Sheldon Richardson flashed dominant ability as a junior and is a big, strong and athletic tackle. Sylvester Williams has prototypical size and was dominant at the Senior Bowl. He is a very disruptive player that creates havoc and offers some interior pass rush capabilities. The Vikings may draft Williams to replace Kevin Williams long-term. We could see as many as 4-5 defensive tackles taken in the first round. You will still be able to get significant value in rounds 2 and 3 due to the depth in this draft. Other defensive tackles projected to go in the first three rounds include: Jonathan Hankins, Ohio State, Kawann Short, Purdue, Jessee Williams, Alabama, Brandon Williams, Missouri Southern and Montori Hughes, Tennessee-Martin.
3. Wide Receiver - In terms of wide receiver, this is an extremely deep draft with very few blue chip prospects. You will be able to get great value in rounds 2-4 in this draft. There are two top 20 talents in Tavon Austin of West Virginia and Cordarelle Patterson of Tennessee. Austin is the next version of Percy Harvin and makes plays all over the field with his quickness and 4.3 speed. He would look great in purple but is probably gone by pick 15. Patterson brings more size but just as much playmaking ability. He needs to work on his route running but provides the playmaking ability NFL General Managers dream of. Other potential first round picks include: Kennan Allen, California and Justin Hunter, Tennessee. Allen was hurt by his 4.71 40 time and may fall out of the first round. Teams will find WR talent in rounds 2 – 4 due to the depth of this draft including prospects such as Robert Woods, USC, Terrence Williams, Baylor, DeAndre Hopkins, Clemson, Stedman Bailey, West Virginia, Quinton Patten, Louisiana Tech, Markus Wheaton, Oregon State, Aaron Dobson, Marshall and Ryan Swope, Texas A&M. Robert Woods may end up going in the first round – Woods is a player the Vikings covet and they need to understand where he is projected.
4. Cornerback – The cornerback class has excellent top end talent (Blue Chip) and is a deep draft. Teams looking to improve their secondary will be able to find quality secondary talent in rounds 2 – 4. We believe the best cornerback in this draft is Dee Milliner of Alabama. He has excellent size coupled with outstanding ball skills. He could be the next Darelle Revis. He will be a Pro Bowl cornerback in the NFL for many years. We also expect Xavier Rhodes, CB, Florida State, Desmond Trufant, C, Washington and DJ Hayden, C, Houston to go in the first round. All of these prospects will provide immediate value at the cornerback position for the team drafting them. Rhodes is a big, physical corner that can run. Trufant has great bloodlines as his brother Marcus was drafted 11th overall and played in 10 NFL seasons. Hayden is moving up draft boards after his Pro Day and demonstrating to scouts that he is fully recovered from the tragic injury he suffered last year. Outside of the first round, teams will find outstanding talent on Jonathan Banks, CB, Mississippi State, Jamar Taylor, CB, Boise State, Blidi Wreh-Wilson, CB, Conneticut and Robert Alford, CB, Southeastern Louisiana. Tyrann Mathieu “Honey Badger” is an interesting prospect in that he may have the best talent of any corner in the draft but some teams will be deterred by his off-field challenges – He may go as high as the second or as low as the fourth.

The strengths of this year’s draft align well with the Vikings needs. The Vikings needs going into the 2012 draft include in priority order:

1. Wide Receiver
2. Middle Linebacker
3. Defensive Tackle
4. Cornerback

The areas highlighted above will provide great value in the first day of the draft including rounds, two, three and four because of the depth of these positions.  Several teams have needs at Offensive Line (Guard/Tackle), Defensive Backs (cornerback/safety), Wide Receiver and Defensive Tackle and we see these positions dominating the first 50 picks.  We see the first 10 picks like this (assuming no trades):

1. **Kansas City –** [**Luke Joeckel**](http://min.scout.com/a.z?s=63&p=8&c=1&nid=6542635)**, OT,** [**Texas A&M**](http://tamu.scout.com/)**.** The best idea for the Chiefs may be to trade down a handful of spots and let someone else take the safest pick in the draft. Some might think putting the franchise tag on [Branden Albert](http://min.scout.com/a.z?s=63&p=8&c=1&nid=6824903) eliminates need, but with all the spending the Chiefs have done in free agency to add talent, Albert is only a one-year solution and there may not be enough money to sign him to a long-term deal at this point. Joeckel is the best left tackle in the draft and fills a need for the Chiefs.
2. **Jacksonville –** [**Eric Fisher**](http://min.scout.com/a.z?s=63&p=8&c=1&nid=6759235)**, OT,** [**Central Michigan**](http://centralmichigan.scout.com/)**.** Jacksonville needs help everywhere so they need to take the best player available at number two. Fisher is the next best player available after Joeckel. Fisher will provide the Jaguars with a Pro Bowl caliber left tackle for the next decade.
3. **Oakland –** [**Sharrif Floyd**](http://min.scout.com/a.z?s=63&p=8&c=1&nid=6063922)**, DT.** [**Florida**](http://florida.scout.com/)**.** He was the No. 2 defensive tackle on the board prior to the Combine, when [Utah](http://utah.scout.com/)’s Star Lotulelei drew concerns over the flow of blood out of a ventricle in his heart. Floyd fills a need for the Raiders after they purged the majority of their defensive line this offseason.
4. **Philadelphia –** [**Dee Milliner**](http://min.scout.com/a.z?s=63&p=8&c=1&nid=6503538)**, CB,** [**Alabama**](http://alabama.scout.com/)**.** The Eagles spent a ton on [Nnamdi Asomugha](http://min.scout.com/a.z?s=63&p=8&c=1&nid=6863670) and [Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie](http://min.scout.com/a.z?s=63&p=8&c=1&nid=6847669) and all they got was tired cutting big checks. Neither ever seemed to be an ideal fit in Philly. The Eagles got rid of both of them and now have a huge need here. Milliner is head and shoulders the best corner in this year’s draft. If Chip Kelly loves his former protégé Dion Jordan, he could endorse that pick if he is still on the board, but after letting the Dream Team cornerbacks go away, they need help and Milliner fills a need.
5. **Detroit –** [**Dion Jordan**](http://min.scout.com/a.z?s=63&p=8&c=1&nid=6116506)**, DE/OLB,** [**Oregon**](http://oregon.scout.com/)**.** Detroit lost a lot of pass rushing capabilities losing their two starting defensive ends from last year – they need to go defense with this pick. Jordan is the most impactful pass rusher in the draft. A few years ago, he would have been branded a positional ’tweener, but in the new-look NFL anyone who can harass a quarterback has a ton of value. His value in a 3-4 defense is such that a team like Cleveland, Arizona or the Jets might move up to grab him as a quick-fix option – an expensive quick fix, but one that may well be worth the risk.
6. **Cleveland –** [**Star Lotulelei**](http://min.scout.com/a.z?s=63&p=8&c=1&nid=6799820)**, DT, Utah.** Trust us on this one. Whether Lotulelei ends up in Cleveland, his stock is going to be on the rise despite concerns long-term about investing in a player with heart questions – not his willingness to play through pain, but literally his heart. While he didn’t play SEC-style competition, Lotulelei was dominant at his position and with the proper coaching could become a dominant NFL Defensive Tackle. The Cleveland defense isn’t that far away from being very good and Lotulelei could be the biggest piece of that puzzle. If the run on offensive tackles hits like we think it will, teams that need a left tackle may have to trade into this spot – or if they want to land Geno Smith. The Browns may get an offer they can’t refuse.
7. **Arizona –** [**Lane Johnson**](http://min.scout.com/a.z?s=63&p=8&c=1&nid=6101985)**, OT,** [**Oklahoma**](http://oklahoma.scout.com/)**.** The Cardinals still haven’t been able to get a good young QB to replace Kurt Warner after he retired and they’ve opted to go the old-school route by bringing in Carson Palmer and Drew Stanton and delaying the inevitable for another season. As far as the Class of 2013 goes, there are three blue-chip left tackles and the Cardinals do their part by locking down the last of the three. They might consider trading out, but they have needed a left tackle for quite some time and Johnson could help make OLT a non-issue until 2020 or so.
8. **Buffalo –** [**Geno Smith**](http://min.scout.com/a.z?s=63&p=8&c=1&nid=6157759)**, QB, West Virginia.** [Ryan Fitzpatrick](http://min.scout.com/a.z?s=63&p=8&c=1&nid=6875703) was an expensive mistake and was cut in early March. With Tarvaris Jackson as the incumbent and rental QB Kevin Kolb in the mix, Smith will still get every chance to win the job this year and, if he doesn't, will still likely have the job handed to him next year. Smith is the best QB in this year’s draft and provides the athleticism and strong arm that is required in today’s NFL. He needs to work on his pockets presence and ability to read defenses to succeed at the NFL level.
9. **New York Jets –** [**Barkevious Mingo, DE**](http://min.scout.com/2/%5bPlayerNode:)**, LSU.** The Jets have so many needs on both sides of the ball that they could just as likely trade down from this spot to acquire more picks or, if they stay here, could go in multiple directions on either side of the ball. However, one of the biggest weaknesses that hurt the Jets last year was an inconsistent and ineffective pass rush. They have not had a pass rusher get more that 6 sacks in the last several years. Mingo can provide an upgrade to the front end of the defense and provide the pass rush ability required of a 3-4 scheme.
10. **Tennessee –** [**Jonathan Cooper**](http://min.scout.com/a.z?s=63&p=8&c=1&nid=6261526)**, G, North Carolina.** The Titans are an offense that runs through Chris Johnson and that’s not going to change, especially with the signing of Shonn Greene to give the backfield a 1-2 punch. This is historically a bit too high to take a guard, but many scouts envision Cooper as the type that of player that would be an ideal replacement for retired Steve Hutchinson and, with the Titans gearing up to be a ground and pound offense, Cooper is an ideal addition.   
      
    We see the rest of the first round shaping up like this:
11. **San Diego –** [**Chance Warmack**](http://min.scout.com/a.z?s=63&p=8&c=1&nid=6503562)**, G, Alabama.** If Lane Johnson is still on the board, he will be the picked here, but that seems unlikely. The Chargers have terrible offensive line and it wouldn’t be surprising if they use their first two picks to shore up this weakness. San Diego needs help across the entire offensive line and landing a guard with Pro Bowl potential is a decent consolation prize for not getting in on the offensive tackle run.
12. **Miami –** [**Ezekiel Ansah**](http://min.scout.com/a.z?s=63&p=8&c=1&nid=6189713)**, DE,** [**BYU**](http://byu.scout.com/)**.** Miami did a great job of addressing needs at linebacker, wide receiver and tight end in free agency, so the Dolphins are now in a position to draft the best player available. Considering that defensive end is a pretty big need, Ansah is a perfect choice to address that need. He has a motor that runs hot and doesn’t stop until he drops a shoulder into the back of a quarterback.
13. **New York Jets –** [**Tavon Austin**](http://min.scout.com/a.z?s=63&p=8&c=1&nid=6157684)**, WR, West Virginia.** Few players have their stock on the rise more than Austin. While [Cordarrelle Patterson](http://min.scout.com/a.z?s=63&p=8&c=1&nid=6471885) has the most upside of any wide receiver in the draft, Austin has a chance to catch 80-100 passes right out of the gate and become Percy Harvin version 2.0. This pick would seem to come down to two players – Austin and cornerback Xavier Rhodes. Rhodes would make up for the loss of Revis but the fast-rising Austin will provide the jets with a weapon their offense has been solely missing. The Vikings covet Austin and may move ahead of the Jets to obtain a replacement for Harvin.
14. **Carolina –** [**Sheldon Richardson**](http://min.scout.com/a.z?s=63&p=8&c=1&nid=6796937)**, DT,** [**Missouri**](http://missouri.scout.com/)**.** The Panthers used to be defined by their defensive line play. In recent years, they’ve stunk, especially up the middle. This is a need pick that matches up nicely with the “best player on the board” philosophy. We think Richardson is the best Defensive Tackle in the draft and if he is still on the board this is a “no brainer”.
15. **New Orleans –** [**Jarvis Jones**](http://min.scout.com/a.z?s=63&p=8&c=1&nid=6474082)**, OLB, Georgia.** The loss of Jermon Bushrod took a big toll on the offensive line, but the Saints are down too far in the pecking order to land one of the top offensive tackles. Without a second round pick due to the Bountygate scandal, the Saints will have only one pick in the first 74 selections. As much as any team, they need to hit a home run with that pick, and given the sorry state of the Saints defense they need to go defense. Jones led the nation in sacks last year and can give the woeful New Orleans defense a much-needed talent infusion. He is an active linebacker capable of handling himself in coverage and blitzing the QB.
16. **St. Louis – Cordarrelle Patterson, WR, Tennessee.** The pick here is either Patterson or safety Kenny Vaccaro. Vaccaro makes sense for the Rams but they are in need of a big play receiver to complement Bradford. Patterson has the biggest upside of any receiver in the draft. He needs coaching and his technique needs work but he can become the star many scouts believe he can become if put in the right situation.
17. **Pittsburgh -** [**Tyler Eifert**](http://min.scout.com/a.z?s=63&p=8&c=1&nid=6439629)**, TE,** [**Notre Dame**](http://notredame.scout.com/)**.** Heath Miller was hurt last year and is a question mark going into the season. Eifert’s strong combine performance pushed him past [Stanford](http://stanford.scout.com/)’s [Zach Ertz](http://min.scout.com/a.z?s=63&p=8&c=1&nid=6107464) as the top TE in the draft. Eifert gives Pittsburgh insurance if Miller does not return to form.
18. **Dallas –** [**Kenny Vaccaro**](http://min.scout.com/a.z?s=63&p=8&c=1&nid=6138181)**, S, Texas.** The Cowboys have struggled defensively the last couple of seasons and one of the reasons has been inconsistent play in the secondary. Vaccaro makes sense for a couple of reasons. First, he is the clear-cut top safety in this year’s draft class. Second, as a member of the Longhorns, Cowboys fans are comfortable with him and he will help sell jerseys to the fan base. Nothing is guaranteed when Jerry Jones is on the clock, but this seems like an ideal marriage of talent, value and hometown considerations.
19. **New York Giants –** [**Alec Ogletree**](http://min.scout.com/2/%5bPlayerNode:)**, LB, Georgia.** Ogletree is a big question mark in terms of off-field baggage. However, his talent far outweighs his off field issues. Ogletree is a former safety that can be a three down linebacker in the NFL. The Giants have had a need for many years for a middle linebacker and Ogletree fills this need. If they can keep him focused on football, he will be a star.
20. **Chicago –** [**D.J. Fluker**](http://min.scout.com/a.z?s=63&p=8&c=1&nid=6503513)**, OT, Alabama.** The Chicago offensive line has been a mess for the last couple of years and remains a work in progress. The Bears would love to see one of the top left tackles drop to this spot, but they got scooped up quickly in the first half of the first round. Instead, Chicago opts to take the best run-blocking right tackle in the draft in hopes of solidifying that side of the line. Fluker will team with Jermon Bushrod to give the Bears the best pair of offensive tackles they have had in a decade.
21. **Cincinnati –** [**Xavier Rhodes**](http://min.scout.com/a.z?s=63&p=8&c=1&nid=6133050)**, CB,** [**Florida State**](http://floridastate.scout.com/)**.** This might seem a bit like overkill given that the Bengals already have Leon Hall and used one of their two first-round picks last year on Dre Kirkpatrick. However, the Bengals are in a position to take over the AFC North. With the Ravens losing a handful of starters following their Super Bowl win and the Steelers aging at key positions, the Bengals have quietly made the playoffs the last two seasons. Rhodes is a big, athletic playmaker who can play immediately and compete for a starting job sooner than later, giving the Bengals the potential to have the best secondary in the AFC if they’re willing to take the chance.
22. **St. Louis (from Washington) –** [**Matt Elam**](http://min.scout.com/2/%5bPlayerNode:)**, S, Florida.** After releasing one starter (Quintin Mikell) and losing the other (Craig Dahl) to free agency, the need exceeds the desire to stick to their own rankings. A glaring need can force players up the draft board and this is an example of need trumping “best player available.” After landing a playmaking wide receiver with their first pick, the Rams draft for need here. Elam is a great playmaker that will solidify the rams secondary.
23. **Minnesota –** [**Manti Te'o**](http://min.scout.com/a.z?s=63&p=8&c=1&nid=6439654)**, ILB, Notre Dame.** Te’o will captain the defense and provide instinctive playmaking ability that the Vikings defense has been missing since a healthy EJ Henderson. Teo’s “dead girlfriend episode leads many to question his judgment but the tape does not lie – he is a very instinctive player who makes plays. Those around him vouch for his character and Spielman is building the “Notre Dame” Vikings. As soon as he gets on the field and makes plays, the “dead girlfriend” questions will wane.
24. **Indianapolis –** [**Menelik Watson**](http://min.scout.com/a.z?s=63&p=8&c=1&nid=6438653)**, OT, Florida State.** This is a risky pick because Watson played only one full season of D-1 football but he may have the best upside of anyone in the draft. There is no questioning his measurables, which are off the charts, but playing offensive tackle in the NFL is no picnic. Watson may not be a Day 1 starter, but could end up on the right side of the line at tackle or guard early on with the plan being to make him Andrew Luck’s blindside protector for the rest of the decade.
25. **Minnesota (from Seattle) –** [**Sylvester Williams**](http://min.scout.com/a.z?s=63&p=8&c=1&nid=6261565)**, DT, North Carolina.** This is a pick that took on a new sense of urgency when it was discovered that Kevin Williams had restructured his contract to make 2013 his last season under his current deal. Defensive tackle was a need already – even if there was the belief that “Ticket” would be around for two more years. With his blue-collar work ethic, versatility and strong showing at the Senior Bowl, he would seem to be a natural selection here. The only potential fly in the ointment is Rick Spielman’s tendency to “get cute” with draft picks. If a team like Miami is willing to give up their two second-round picks for this pick and a late-round throw-in, it wouldn’t surprise anyone who knows how Spielman operates to see the Vikings swing a trade to add more high-round talent to fill more gaps and needs.
26. **Green Bay - Datone Jones, DE, UCLA.** We all know that the Packers need to improve their defense after the embarrassing performance in the playoffs in the loss to the 49ers. Jones fits perfectly in the Packers defensive scheme. He is an ideal 3-4, 5-technique defensive end. Jones is athletically gifted and brings some scheme versatility to the table. He had a great week in mobile at the Senior Bowl practices looking like one of the best defensive lineman on the field. He will not solve all the Packers problems on defense but it is a start.
27. **Houston –** [**Keenan Allen**](http://min.scout.com/a.z?s=63&p=8&c=1&nid=6162817)**, WR, California.** The Texans would be ecstatic if Allen is still on the board at this point. Viewed by some as the best pure NFL-ready receiver in the draft, the Texans are desperately looking for someone to line up opposite Andre Johnson, with the intent of eventually replacing Johnson as the go-to receiver in the offense. Allen wouldn’t have a big learning curve, and with a team many believe is poised to make a Super Bowl run in 2013 Allen won’t be pushed into being the go-to guy and can develop naturally – which could end up making him the best value at WR in this year’s draft class two or three years down the line.
28. **Denver –** [**Bjoern Werner**](http://min.scout.com/a.z?s=63&p=8&c=1&nid=6133064)**, DE, Florida State.** Denver now has a need due to the botched contract with Elvis Dumerville.Werner would be an ideal addition because he was one of the most productive players in college football last year, but after having a sub-par Combine performance has been in free-fall. In February, he was a lottery pick in the top 10. He is a great talent with a high motor and would fill a need in the mile high city.
29. **New England –** [**D.J. Hayden**](http://min.scout.com/a.z?s=63&p=8&c=1&nid=6390317)**, CB,** [**Houston**](http://houston.scout.com/)**.** Few prospects are making a late run in the world of positive buzz as much as Hayden. He is an intelligent player, which is a must when playing for New England. Bill Belichick will change things up completely from one week to the next, depending on opponent, and it requires athletic players able to adjust on the fly. Hayden is extremely athletic and agile and could make an immediate impact – making this a perfect landing spot for him, even if some of us believe he could be available early on Day 2. Given Belichick’s penchant for trading, nothing should be seen as surprising here.
30. **Atlanta –** [**Desmond Trufant**](http://min.scout.com/a.z?s=63&p=8&c=1&nid=6102456)**, CB, Washington.** Atlanta needs secondary help after losing several of their top corners from last year’s team. Trufant gives the Falcons a playmaker that can play in the slot immediately and compete for a starting job sooner than later. Trufant has excellent bloodlines as his brother Marcus was drafted 11th overall and played 10 seasons in the NFL. Trufant will allow the Falcons to match up better with the more prolific passing offenses in the league (i.e. Packers).
31. **San Francisco –** [**Zach Ertz**](http://min.scout.com/2/%5bPlayerNode:)**, TE, Stanford.** The 49ers need to add weapons to their offense to complement their great defense. Ertz is viewed by some as the best tight end in this year’s draft class and will help the 49ers improve their overall passing attack. Ertz will team with Vernon Davis to give Kapernick one of the best tight end tandems in the league making the 49ers a matchup nightmare for defenses.
32. **Baltimore –** [**Kevin Minter**](http://min.scout.com/2/%5bPlayerNode:)**, MLB,** [**LSU**](http://lsu.scout.com/)**.** Perhaps no defending champion has been raided as hard as the Ravens. They have made some signings to offset some of the damage, but losing Ray Lewis, Paul Kruger and Danell Ellerbe in the span of a month is a lot to recover from. If Te’o is still on the board, we are convinced he would be the pick here and would be an ideal replacement for the lost talent in the middle of the Ravens defense that has been a staple of the team for so long. Ozzie Newsome rarely hiccups on draft picks, so you can bet the player he takes here will be worthy of selection. As the last pick of the round, if anyone

In terms of the Vikings, they will be able to take the best player in the draft not playing quarterback. We see four alternatives that could unfold in the first round:

1. Take the best Defensive Tackle – Drafting Sylvester Williams will provide the Vikings a long-term replacement for Kevin Williams who will be a free agent next year after re-negotiating his deal. He will be available with pick 23 or 25.
2. Take the Best Middle Linebacker – There may be three options at middle linebacker for the Vikings. They are Alec Ogletree, Georgia, Manti Te’o, Notre Dame and Kevin Minter, LSU. Ogletree’s off field concerns will give the Vikings second thoughts but he has the best upside. Teo’s “dead girlfriend episode leads many to question his judgment but the tape does not lie – he is a very instinctive player who makes plays. Those around him vouch for his character and Spielman is building the “Notre Dame” Vikings. Minter is the best against the run and Obey and I really like him. The Bears, Giants and Ravens are also looking for a starting caliber middle linebacker in the draft.
3. Take the best wide receiver – drafting Tavon Austin will replace the playmaking ability of Percy Harvin but they will have to move up to get him. Cordarrelle Patterson also offers size and big play ability but he may not be there at pick 23 or 25 either. They may take Keenan Allen with pick 23 or 25 but it is more likely they wait until the second round to draft Robert Woods, USC, DeAndre Hopkins, Clemson or Terrence Williams of Baylor, unless Austin or Patterson falls to them for some reason.
4. Take the best cornerback – the top two corners Dee Milliner of Alabama and Xavier Rhodes of Florida State will be gone by pick 23 or 25. However, drafting Desmond Trufant, Washington, Jamar Taylor, Boise State or DJ Hayden, Houston will solidify the secondary and compensate for the loss of Antoine Winfield. All three are very athletic corners that will play well in a cover 2 scheme. We think the more likely scenario is that the Vikings draft a cornerback in rounds 2-4, possibly drafting the honey badger in round 3. This will add depth to a young secondary that needs to match up with the great receivers in the NFC North.

We do not think the Vikings will trade up and they will keep picks 23 and 25. We think Tavon Austin, WR, West Virginia, Xavier Rhodes, C, Florida State and Cordarrelle Patterson, WR, Tennessee will be off the board by pick 23. We think the choices will come down to Manti Te’o, Kevin Minter, Sylvester Williams, Keenan Allen and Desmond Trufant. We believe the Vikings will select Manti Te’o, LB, Notre Dame and Sylvester Williams, DT, North Carolina in order to make the middle of the defense stronger which is something they have been missing for the last few years. You win games in the middle of both the defense and offense – this would accomplish that objective. They will then target wide receiver and cornerback in rounds 2 and 3. Te’o will captain the defense and provide instinctive playmaking ability that the Vikings defense has been missing since a healthy EJ Henderson. As soon as he gets on the field and makes plays, the “dead girlfriend” questions will wane. Sylvester Williams will provide a long-term replacement for Kevin Williams and he will create havoc and an inside pass rush in his first year.

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In terms of the Vikings, we see three alternatives that could unfold in the second round:

1. Take the best wide receiver available. This could include: Robert Woods, USC, Terrence Williams, Baylor, DeAndre Hopkins, Clemson, Quentin Patton, Louisiana Tech.
2. Take the best Cornerback available. This could include: Jonathan Banks, Mississippi State, Jamar Taylor, Boise State, Blidi Wreh-Wilson, Connecticut and Robert Alford, Southeastern Louisiana, Jordon Poyer, Oregon State.
3. Take the Best Guard available – Justin Pugh, Syracuse and Larry Warford, Kentucky

We think scenario it will come down to a choice between (depending on their first round choice): Robert Woods, WR, USC, Terence Williams, WR, Baylor and Jonathan Banks, C, Mississippi State or Jordon Poyer, C, Oregon State.

Based on our projected first round picks of Te’o and Williams, our pick is Robert Woods, WR, USC. The Vikings will use this draft to find playmakers on both offense and defense. Woods provides the Vikings with an intelligent wide receiver that is probably the most ‘pro ready” wide receiver in the draft. He was extremely productive at USC, particularly in his Junior year. He was overshadowed by Marquis Lee last year but a lack of opportunities in his Senior year does not diminish the talent and production he could provide the Vikings. This draft will infuse young talent on both sides of the ball for the Vikings. This is a pick that fills a need while at the same time fits into the best-athlete-available mantra the Vikings have maintained. If they choose Allen and/or Trufant in the first round, the Vikings will then look to draft Kawaan Short, DT, Purdue, Kevin Reddick, LB, North Carolina or Aaron Brown, LB, Kansas State, Jonathan Bostic, LB, Florida State, could also be an option in round 2 if the Vikings do not select Te’o in the first round.

Options in round 3 that the Vikings could draft:

1. **Tyrann Mathieu “Honey Badger”:** Mathieu is an interesting prospect in that he may have the best talent of any corner in the draft but some teams will be deterred by his off-field challenges – He may go as high as the second or as low as the fourth. He offers big play ability and will play the slot and return kicks at the NFL level.
2. **Stedman Bailey, WR, West Virginia:** Bailey was more productive than his more highly coveted teammate - Tavon Austin. He provides big play ability and possesses outstanding hands. Bailey would be a great pick for the Vikings in the third round.
3. **Dwayne Gratz, CB, Connecticut:** This draft is full of talented corners. Gratz may not go as high as his counterpart Breh-Wilson but he is just as talented. He is more of a press coverage guy.
4. **Hugh Thorton, G, Illinois:** Thorton is a very good athlete who offers position flexibility which is key in the NFL. He played three positions in college and offers good athleticism. He can get to the second level. Needs to improve consistency.
5. **Kiko Alonso, LB, Oregon:**  Alonso is a very athletic linebacker with excellent size/speed combination. He could be a starting middle linebacker in the NFL.
6. **Brandon Williams, DT, Missouri Southern:**  Williams is a large, athletic defensive tackle in the mold of Pat Williams. He would form the second coming of the Williams wall with Kevin Williams.
7. **David Amerson, CB, North Carolina State:** Amerson has excellent size for a corner and ran a 4.4 at the combine. He is extremely talented with excellent ball skills. He offers position flexibility as either a corner or safety.
8. **Aaron Dobson, WR, Marshall:** Dobson is an underrated Division 1-A standout. He is a big wide receiver that has the athleticism and speed to get downfield and get yards after the catch. He had a great Senior Bowl and raised some eyebrows.
9. **Darius Slay, CB, Mississippi State:** Slay formed one of the best cornerback tandems in college football last year alongside teammate Jonathan Banks. You could make an argument which corner is better. We think Slay translates better to the NFL Slay has ideal size, a strong upper body and great recovery speed.
10. **Ryan Swope, WR, Texas A&M:**  Swope was a tough matchup for defenses in college. He has outstanding hands, speed and makes a lot of plays after the catch. He helped Johnny football win the Heisman. Would be great value in the third round.
11. **Travis Frederick, Center/Guard, Wisconsin:** Frederick is the number one rated center that can also play guard. Continues the tradition of great offensive lineman from Wisconsin.
12. **Sam Montgomery, DE, LSU:** Montgomery was one of the best defensive ends in college football last year. He plays both the run and pass well. He offers great value in round three.

Options in round 4 that the Vikings could draft (the Vikings have two picks in the 4th round) – this is where you start to build your team:

1. **Will Davis, CB, Utah State.:** In his final season at Utah State, Davis had five interceptions – one each in the final five regular season games there. He also had 17 passes defensed and 64 tackles. In 2011, he suffered an elbow injury but still played in all 13 games.
2. **Brad Wing, Punter, LSU:** Wing is one of best College Punters in recent years with booming left leg. He could become a long-term answer for the Vikings and replace Kluwe.
3. **William Gholston, DE, Michigan State:** Gholston plays like beast sometimes but disappears on occasion. He would be a similar pick to Ray Edwards a former Viking. Gholston would be a steal in the fourth round.
4. [**Ryan Jensen**](http://min.scout.com/a.z?s=63&p=8&c=1&nid=6926494)**, Guard, Colorado State-Peblo:** Jenson is one of the top sleepers in this draft. This kid is one of the tougher offensive lineman in this draft. He dominated in 2012 – he showed great movement, got to the second level and was a beast in pass protection. Great pick in the fourth round.
5. [**Jeff Baca**](http://min.scout.com/a.z?s=63&p=8&c=1&nid=6208853)**, Guard, UCLA:** Baca offers position flexibility having played both guard and tackle. He has good feet, arm length and is excellent in the run game. He would be a solid pick but offers little upside.
6. **AJ Klein, LB, Iowa State:** Klein is a tenacious, productive player who has the versatility to play inside or outside at the linebacker position. He had a ton of tackles in his college career and was very productive in both 2011 and 2012. He is athletic, fast and knows how to tackle.
7. **Da’Rick Rogers, WR, Tennessee Tech:** Rogers has the physical talent and athleticism to be a first round pick. Off field issues have caused him to drop. If he focuses on football, he offers great value in round 4.
8. **Chris Harper, WR, Kansas State:**  Harper is a big, physical receiver that can stretch the field. He has great hands and really had an outstanding year. He had a great Senior Bowl and made GMs take notice.
9. **Leon McFadden, CB, San Diego State:** McFadden is a quality cover man and teams stayed away from him in college. He is not real big but he is a good one on one cover guy due to his instincts and awareness.

Options in the Second Day (Rounds 5-7):

1. Ace Sanders, WR, South Carolina
2. [Alvin Bailey](http://min.scout.com/a.z?s=63&p=8&c=1&nid=6454405), Guard,
3. [Travis Bond](http://min.scout.com/a.z?s=63&p=8&c=1&nid=6261557), Guard,
4. Tavarres King, WR, Georgia
5. Mike Edwards, WR, Hawaii
6. Dennis Johnson, WR/KR, Arkansas
7. Vince Williams, LB, Florida State
8. Terry Hawthorne, CB, Illinois
9. Marcus Sales, WR, Syracuse
10. BW Webb, CB, William & Mary

We really like Tavarres King the wide receiver from Georgia.

Sleepers:

1. Nick Williams, DT, Samford
2. Cooper Taylor, S, Richmond
3. JJ Wilcox, S, Georgia Southern
4. Charles Johnson, WR, Grand Valley
5. Rodney Smith, WR, Florida State
6. Michael Hill, RB, Missouri Western

We really like Williams and Johnson as sleepers. Both are great talents from small schools.

The Vikings have picks in every round this year including two picks in the fourth round and three picks in the seventh. They can fill find depth needs in several areas in this draft. Most notably, the Vikings needs are: Middle Linebacker, Cornerback, Defensive Tackle and Wide receiver.

We will update our readers with a post-draft report after the draft.

Mink and Obey from Radio City, NYC!