

Cards open to choosing QB first

Young, Cutler could be available when 10th pick arrives

BY DARREN URBAN
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Kurt Warner is biased, which is understandable.

When the Cardinals quarterback looks at the upcoming draft, he isn't pondering what the franchise might do at his position when he is done. Warner wants to play at least three more seasons. He wants to return to the Super Bowl.

"What's the best way to do that?" Warner said with a chuckle. "Not to take a guy who's going to take over my job. Go get somebody who can help us next year."

But Warner acknowledges it isn't his place to think about the future. And for those who are planning long term for the Cards, this might be a good year to spend a first-round pick on a quarterback.

Given Arizona's 10th spot in the first round, the choices are limited. USC's Matt Leinart will almost certainly be taken in the first five picks. Texas' Vince Young has a slight chance of dropping, but most speculation has someone snapping up Young before the Cards pick. Vanderbilt's Jay Cutler could be off the board, too.

But if Young or Cutler were there, Cardinals vice president of football operations Rod Graves said the team is "open" to taking a quarterback.

While a rookie quarterback won't have the immediate impact of other position players — for example, someone such as Florida State linebacker Ernie Sims — Graves acknowledged, "You have to think about your quarterbacks in a little different light."

Graves also noted there is a significant drop-off from the Leinart-Young-Cutler trio to

Quarterbacks				
Name	Ht	Wt	School	Comment
Matt Leinart	6-5	223	USC	Most polished prospect and good leader; arm strength a question
Vince Young	6-5	229	Texas	Awesome potential as runner and thrower but not a prototype QB
Jay Cutler	6-3	226	Vanderbilt	Big arm but raw; questions remain about how good he can really be
Charlie Whitehurst	6-5	223	Clemson	Up-and-down results give pause but has quality physical tools
Brodie Croyle	6-3	205	Alabama	Bad injury history, but if healthy, could become solid NFL starter
Kellen Clemens	6-2	225	Oregon	Good leader; better suited for the short passing game

Cardinals' need: The Cardinals need to think long term at the position, and in the short term, there remain huge question marks about John Navarre's ability to be Kurt Warner's backup.

Running backs				
Name	Ht	Wt	School	Comment
Reggie Bush	5-11	201	USC	Dynamic playmaker should be the top pick overall
DeAngelo Williams	5-9	214	Memphis	Versatile, quick and productive; injury history and size hurts his stock
Laurence Maroney	6-0	217	Minnesota	Should develop into a workhorse-type back
LenDale White	6-1	240	USC	Big college production tempered by attitude concerns
Joseph Addai	5-11	214	LSU	Good tools although has never been a full-time starter

Cardinals' need: With the signing of Edgerrin James and J.J. Arrington in his second year, it is unlikely the Cards would burn a draft pick on a back unless it was later on.

the rest of the quarterback draft class.

Coach Dennis Green insisted he would have no problem drafting a quarterback first, if the quarterback was the top-rated player left on the draft board.

Historically, the Cardinals do not take a quarterback in the first round. Since 1960, the franchise has four times spent its first-round pick on quarterbacks, all of whom proved to be wasted choices.

In 1960, they took George Izo, and he lasted one season. In 1977, Steve Pisarkiewicz was the pick, but he was a Card for only three seasons. The other two picks — Kelly Stouffer in 1987 and Joe Namath in 1965 — never put on a Cardinals uniform.

(The Cardinals burned a first-round pick in 1990 when they selected quarterback Timm Rosenbach in the 1989 supplemental draft. Rosenbach started one season before a knee injury derailed his career.)

The idea of drafting a quarterback in the first round clearly frustrates Warner, who

just signed a three-year contract and who dealt with the specter of rookie Eli Manning in his one season as a New York Giant in 2004.

The problem with a young first-rounder, Warner said, is that if the team suffers a couple of losses in a row, it's both easy and natural to think about putting in the new guy. That's what happened with Manning and the Giants.

That, Warner said, makes it a "difficult dynamic."

"Some teams say, 'Hey, we're happy to let a guy sit on the bench for two or three years,'" Warner said. "But I think there is that pressure when you take a guy in the high first round for him to play as quickly as possible and validate that pick."

Since 2001, 15 quarterbacks have been taken in the first round. For every Ben Roethlisberger and Carson Palmer, there has been a Patrick Ramsey and Joey Harrington. It's too early to tell on last year's choices of Alex Smith in San Francisco, Aaron Rodgers in Green Bay and Jason Campbell in Washington.

"Every quarterback," ESPN draft analyst Mel Kiper said, "is a project."

The risk inherent in selecting for that position is underscored by opinions on this year's players. Cutler — the most likely to be around when the Cards pick — produces different opinions. Kiper thinks Cutler has been overhyped, a player who will be selected sooner than his late first-round grade and a quarterback nowhere near the level of a Leinart or Young.

NFL Network analyst Mike Mayoock, however, was so impressed with Cutler's play at Vanderbilt he believes Cutler will become the best of the three prospects.

"There's no fail-safe at the position," Warner said. "If you get a tremendous athlete at another position, odds are they can contribute in some shape or form and not be a complete bust."

"With a quarterback, it's all or nothing."

CONTACT WRITER:
(480) 898-6495
or durban@aztrib.com