

Arbitrage All-Stars, Volume I

In perusing the completely unhealthy glut of fake football articles I read, I've come to understand the concept of arbitrage (credit to rotoviz.com for first planting the seed in my brain). In financing (read: the real world), arbitrage basically entails making a profit off of market inaccuracies. To us, though, arbitrage points out incongruence in player ADP (average draft position) and offers potential to capitalize on it. Since fantasy players are essentially volatile stocks, with their values rising and falling through the offseason, the concept translates well to draft strategies. In this series, I'll be taking a look at player stock I believe may be inflated, and offer some possible arbitrage plays at their positions; in other words, players who can offer the same or similar production for cheaper, thus allowing a drafter to make a profit. Most likely, these will follow standard scoring, but I'll be sure to include some fodder for other formats like PPR if this series goes on. Now, with all the boring introductory fluff out of the way, let's get to our first study.

Offender: Cordarrelle Patterson, ADP 4.12/WR 19

Arbitrage All-Stars: Torrey Smith 6.4, Eric Decker 8.10, Rueben Randle 9.4

Deep Cut: Kenny Stills 11.4

Sometimes, one game is all it takes. When one thinks of Cordarrelle "Flash" Patterson, one recalls his absolutely monstrous dismantling of the Ravens' special teams in week 14 last season, where he posted 252 all-purpose yards and a score. That game could have been a bit of NFL clairvoyance, showing us his potential future dominance. Flash Patterson has all the makings of a potential breakout when you look strictly at his metrics: a forty time in the 4.4's, 37-inch vert, and 128-inch broad jump, all to go with a 6-2/216 frame. Drafted as the next Percy Harvin, he's the prototypical "take-it-to-the-house-anytime" guy scouts rave about and fantasy GMs drool at. Despite my adoration of Mister Migraines himself and belief in the new coaching staff, I have low expectations for Flash this year, due to both his game and the environment around him. Camp reports and beat writers have seen much of the same from Patterson this year as the last: long on talent, but rawer than sushi. His route tree is still tiny, requiring more designed plays to get him in space (which, granted, will certainly happen more this year, but still). He also seems to still have some problems with the catch, breaking out the old alligator arms occasionally. Meshing with his potential shortfalls is the team itself. The entirety of the Vikings' offense is an unknown outside of Adrian Peterson and Jerick McKinnon (who will slide into Toby Gerhart's old role). We don't even know who will be under center week one; neither Cassel or Bridgewater bode well for Flash, though. Bridgewater's arm lacks the strength to push the ball downfield the way Norv Turner's scheme usually requires. With his propensity for short and intermediate throws, I can see Bridgewater developing a much better rapport with Greg Jennings and Kyle Rudolph, using them as his security blanket and playmaker respectively. Cassel's skills fit the scheme better and make better use of Patterson's speed, but their history together curbs optimism. With Cassel under center last year, ignoring the Baltimore game as an outlier, Flash averaged just under 2 catches a game on 4 targets, for under 20 yards. The new coaching hires, Norval in particular, offer a huge opportunity for Flash to be used as true weapon all over the field, just as Harvin was years ago. However, I have little faith in him

blowing away his last year so bombastically, as the possible third target in a run-first offense featuring an actual cyborg beside the quarterback. His subpar hands, continued dearth of a route tree, and preexisting identity as a gadget player limits his upside more than his athleticism and opportunity present. I'm not willing to pay a fourth-round price for one of the bigger dice rolls at the position.

At the other end of the spectrum, we have four receivers whom I see as just as good as, if not better than Flash, for a comparative pittance. The major value I see with all four players is their better consistency, greater touchdown potential, and broader skill-sets (save for maybe Randle). Torrey Smith was already on the breakout radar last year as he's become a more complete receiver every year, but the death of Baltimore's run game and Mr. 120-Million-Dollars' struggles chained him to earth. Now he's in a position to be the new Andre Johnson in Kubiak's offense; with a new zone scheme to open lanes for the backs and a healthy Pitta commanding attention in the middle, I can see Smith easily outperforming his current seventh-round ADP. Plus, his floor is higher than Patterson's as an already-established part of the offense and has a proven rapport with Flacco. As a safer pick with similar upside and a lower price tag, Smith is arguably Patterson's best arbitrage play for those non-risk-takers out there.

Decker's appearance on the list probably has a handful of you readers snickering at my complete incompetence. Hell, even some Jets fans I know aren't too excited to have a *gasp* white number-one wide receiver. However, for our purposes, Decker was put into a solid situation, and carries with him a pedigree of performing well in the face of QB adversity. In 2011, lost in the midst of the Tebow/Orton shuffle and Matt Prater making some ridiculous game-saving field goals, Decker made it to the end zone eight times. He scored on 18% of his catches (1) that year, and his career mark currently sits around 15%. Adjusting for a regression, his TD ceiling on 120 targets is 15. FIFTEEN SCORES. Add in his average of 1,000 yards per season, and Decker's 120-target ceiling becomes 190 points. Sexy Rexy has said Decker will undoubtedly be their go-to guy, making him an easy candidate to outpace that target projection. All this from a dude you can snag in the eighth round. My eye just twitched a bit. Of course, people cry out about who's throwing him the ball, but Geno did much better than people realize last year. Rotoviz.com's game splits app shows that in Geno was a top-12 QB both when the Jets won (duh), and more importantly, when his only competent receiver Jeremy Kerley played. hilariously, writer Justin Winn points out that one of the bigger bearings on his success was his receiving corps: Kerley boosted him up, while games where bust Stephen Hill played knocked him down to the lows we would come to know as Bad Geno. Adding pieces on his side of the ball, considering his strong finish last year, should help stabilize Smith, in turn bolstering Decker's production. I honestly only see problems for Decker coming from being shadowed by a few elite cornerbacks now (coughReviscough); otherwise, he should provide a great return on investment while possibly outpacing Patterson.

Call me crazy, but my ticket on the Rueben Randle Hypemobile has finally been punched. Randle has never been short on talent, but last year showed he lacked a connection with Eli Manning. Jesse put it best, in one of our many football pow-wows: "Eli would look down field and see a bump-and-run that his receiver can beat, meanwhile Randle runs the hitch route on the play... it ends up with Eli heaving it downfield for a pick while Randle's standing in the middle of the field a mile away." Granted, this kind of situation came during the quarterback's most woeful season. With Ben McAdoo installing a new quick-shot offense, plus another offseason together (this time without Hakeem Nicks between them), the duo's connection should strengthen. Plus, the system plays into one of Randle's biggest strengths, his yards-after-catch ability. Making sure the ball gets in his hands quickly will be a top priority, allowing plays to unfold at his pace. Some have expressed doubt for Randle due to both the Giants' dire tight end corps and Odell Beckham coming in. However, the lack of a true every-down tight end only makes Randle an even more appealing red-zone option, and if camp reports are true, Beckham will spend his rookie year strictly as a Ted Ginn-style clearout runner. I expect both of New York's receivers to prosper from a return to form by the crayon-eating QB, but Randle holds some major value in the later rounds, and is a more worthy gamble than Flash is a handful of rounds earlier.

Every receiver in New Orleans comes as a package deal with Drew Brees and Sean Payton peripherally attached; if the Saints' receiver corps is a Corvette, they're like the turbo option with the heated seats. Kenny Stills, to stretch this metaphor even further, will inevitably be one of the pistons that powers the air game. As a rookie last year, Stills flashed fantastic ball skills and respectable field-stretching speed. More importantly, he was Brees' most efficient receiver, with the highest yards-per-attempt and catch rate of any other pass catcher (even Jimmy Graham). Only an aging Marques Colston grips a spot in front of him on the totem pole, and that grip is tenuous. Stills' fantasy value isn't all sunshine, though, as there are a handful of factors to give drafters pause. First of all, the Saints run a spread-the-wealth offense; as any former Lance Moore owner knows, production from any receiver not named Jimmy or Marques can be streaky. There's also the addition of Brandin Cooks, whose skills have wowed every member of the team and staff during camp. Despite my belief that Stills will run better routes and generally knows the offense more, Cooks' talent may force a timeshare. Finally, Payton has perennially claimed a return to the ground game for the Saints, which may be hot air no longer; last year saw the Saints' three-headed backfield log the most touches of any under Payton's tenure. However, with his price scraping the kicker and defense rounds, Stills is worth a shot for his potential in arguably the most prolific offense in the league. And if he blows it, whatever, you paid pennies for him. Conversely, if Flash busts, you're out a high mid-round pick and most likely picked him in lieu of a scarce running back, making you thin at two positions instead of just one.

Don't take this article or any like them as concrete proof that I hate the offending players in question and expect them to sling poo all over the field each week. I would be extremely pleased to see Patterson do well, as his talent makes him a potential star and fun to watch. Greg Jennings even told reporters he plans on telling his kids someday that "I played with Cordarrelle Patterson" (2). However, I don't seek to

question a player in real-life, but how they can affect me as a buyer in fantasy. Do I pay five bucks for a box of Lucky Charms, or half that for the off-brand "Marshmallow Mateys?"

If you couldn't tell from the rest of this article, I haven't had a name-brand cereal in years. Viva la value.