

QUOTE: 'WE DEFINITELY HAD AN ARGUMENT.'

— Georgia kicker Brandon Coutu, on whether his school deserved a shot at the BCS title

Jets seeking Giant draft leap

Gholston looks to be worthy pick

By Kyle Stack
Special to amNewYork

The Giants reached Super Bowl XLII after an 8-8 season in 2006 that left observers expecting perhaps less from them than the Jets, who finished 10-6 last year.

While Giants (13-6) improved dramatically, the Jets stumbled to a 4-12 finish.

And yet, the sixth-place draft pick the Jets' disappointing season earned them could help turn their fortunes around. (The Giants have the No. 31 pick in the first round on April 26.)

Here are the Jets' most likely targets on draft day:

Chris Long, DE, Virginia, 6-3, 266 lbs.



Chris Long

Pros: If the defensive end plays anywhere near the level of his father, Howie, he will have a great career. His strength, energy, fundamental understanding of his position and maturity level all signal that Long



As a sixth pick, Vernon Gholston (50) could shore up the Jets' 3-4 defense. (Getty Images)



will be a sure-fire productive NFL player. He would be a perfect defensive end in the Jets' 3-4 defensive scheme.

Cons: The five teams picking ahead of the Jets might find it impossible to pass up a productive defensive end. Bill Parcells' new team, the Miami Dolphins, may even grab him with the top pick.

Jake Long, OT, Michigan, 6-7, 309 lbs.

Pros: If the Jets want to

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find out what kind of quarterback Kellen Clemens is, they need to construct an offensive line that properly protects him. Long would improve the most important position on the line: left tackle.

Cons: The Jets have the underachieving D'Brickashaw Ferguson at left tackle. Some say the No. 4 overall pick of two years ago —

still owed about \$19 million over four years — is a lost cause. Others say Ferguson can still develop into a player worthy of his contract. But Jake Long at No. 6 could be too much to pass up.

Darren McFadden, RB, Arkansas, 6-2, 212 lbs.



McFadden

Pros: Think LaDarian Tomlinson's versatility combined with Adrian Peterson's big-play potential. Jets incumbent Thomas Jones averaged a mere 3.6 yards per carry in 2007, so the top-rated

player will likely be a Jet if he is still available five picks into the draft. He just may be: Three of the five teams picking before the Jets (Miami, St. Louis, Kansas City) have needs at positions other than running back.

Cons: Oakland's Justin Fargas is an unrestricted free agent and Atlanta's Jerious Norwood looks like more of a change-up back than a starter, so the Raiders and Falcons, picking fourth and fifth, could target McFadden.

Vernon Gholston, DE, Ohio State, 6-3, 255 lbs.

Pros: Six NFL Draft Web sites project Gholston as the man for the Jets. Their 3-4 requires upgrades at the ends and at outside linebacker. With Chris Long likely a top-three pick, Gholston is the most realistic option for the Jets. His speed and versatility off the edge is a defensive coordinator's dream.

Cons: Gholston is undersized for an NFL defensive end, so he could be switched to outside linebacker and force the Jets to continue their search for a standout defensive end in the 3-4. Scott Wright of NFL-DraftCountdown.com has another take. "He [Gholston] might be their best option [after Jake and Chris Long and McFadden], although

NFL Draft Order

1. Miami	1-15
2. St. Louis	3-13
3. Atlanta-x	4-12
4. Oakland-x	4-12
5. Kansas City-x	4-12
6. Jets	4-12
7. New England (from S.F.)	5-11
8. Baltimore	5-11
9. Cincinnati	7-9
10. New Orleans	7-9
11. Buffalo	7-9
12. Denver	7-9
13. Carolina	7-9
14. Chicago	7-9
15. Detroit	7-9
16. Arizona	8-8
17. Minnesota	8-8
18. Houston	8-8
19. Philadelphia	8-8
20. Tampa Bay	9-7
21. Washington	9-7
22. Dallas (from Cleveland)	10-6
23. Pittsburgh	10-6
24. Tennessee	10-6
25. Seattle	10-6
26. Jacksonville	11-5
27. San Diego	11-5
28. Dallas	13-3
29. S. F. (from Ind.)	13-3
30. Green Bay	13-3
31. Giants	10-6

x=subject to coin flip
Note: New England's own selection was taken away by Commissioner Roger Goodell for spying against the Jets.

he may be a reach at six" — meaning the Jets' needs may mean Gholston, not likely a top-10 choice according to his talent, is the No. 6 pick.

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Senior Bowlers ask 'what if?'

By John Zenor
The Associated Press

Southern California's John David Booty and Georgia's Brandon Coutu are too busy preparing for the Senior Bowl and NFL careers to bemoan national championship games that never happened.

When asked, though, they'll gladly state cases for their teams. They can cite impressive finishes capped by dominant bowl wins and even the fact that another two-loss team, LSU, wound up winning the Bowl Championship Series title after beating Ohio State.

"After the Rose Bowl we knew, and I think a lot of people around the country knew, that we should have



Delaware QB Joe Flacco, right, practices with USC's John David Booty, left, and Michigan's Chad Henne. (AP)

been in that game," said Booty, the Trojans' quarterback. "And we would have been if we hadn't hit a little rough patch there during the middle of the season."

That rough patch included a loss to 41-point underdog Stanford in October,

when Booty broke the middle finger on his throwing hand. He and Coutu are among a group of players from teams that were nursing title hopes until the very end who are preparing for Saturday's Senior Bowl.

Booty and Coutu wish

college football had a play-off system after finishing their college careers having to perpetually wonder "what if."

Then, they would be rewarded for peaking at the right time like, say, the Super Bowl-bound Giants.

Like USC, Georgia had two losses and a too-little-too-late surge that ended with a 41-10 win over Hawaii in the Sugar Bowl.

Coutu, a kicker, doesn't claim the Bulldogs were more deserving of a title shot than LSU or Ohio State.

"We definitely had an argument for being the two-loss team that should have had the opportunity to move forward and play for the national championship," Coutu said.