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NBA Draft Insight From Ryan Blake

The NBA's co-director of scouting dishes on the Draft's biggest names.

by Kyle Stack / @KyleStack

The determination of where to go for the most in-depth knowledge of NBA Draft prospects is quite simple. Think 'Blake'. Marty Blake has been a scouting director for the NBA for several decades and his son, Ryan, brings 28 years of experience to his role as the co-director of NBA Scouting.

Ryan, a former player on professional tennis' ATP Tour in the early '90s, appears as a guest regularly on NBA TV and will be in New York June 21-24, including at the Draft in New Jersey June 23. I had about 35 minutes on the phone with Blake this week; much as I wanted to get to every draft prospect, only a certain amount of players could be discussed in the timeframe. That's why most of the interview centered around the notable players expected to be taken at the top of the draft as well as under-the-radar players to keep an eye on throughout the first and second rounds.

SLAM: Do you think this draft could really not produce any All-Star players? What would keep the best guys in this draft from becoming All-Stars?

Ryan Blake: If we look at the draft right now, we don't have a lot of guys with huge upside, with this tremendous amount of athleticism that just jumps out with that high ceiling. I think that's kind of pulling the covers over your head a little bit because we got Kyrie Irving and Derrick Williams who are really our top two guys who don't have a lot of risk factor, who have a high ceiling. Those guys can potentially be your franchise players or go-to guys or All-Star players, however you want to put it.



It is a deep draft in that there are so many good players that it's so difficult to decipher on why one player is better than the other. A lot of players can run into that [Shane Battier-Tyler Hansbrough](#) type of player. You may have a guy who produces 10 [points] and 10 [rebounds] for 10 years, and that is a great pick. And you get it inexpensively. You get a guy like [Enes] Kanter who has a huge upside, but he's lost a year of experience. You also have guys like Jimmy Butler and Jon Leuer and Andrew Goudelock who are really under-the-radar who can come up and be that [Landry Fields](#) or [Wes Matthews](#) type. Any of these guys, including Brandon Knight or Kemba Walker can turn into those guys who might develop into one of those top starting point guards. It's just so hard to develop right now what's going to happen. You can only hope to develop players and hope that they will put in the work and continue with their educational process and development on their own.

That's the thing: we tend to forget that the game is played below the rim. Regardless of athleticism, we've had guys who have played in the League well into their 30s who are not the greatest athletes in the world. We take up a guy Kenneth Faried, who even though he is undersized at 6'6, 6'7, he's got great hair. And that's 6'9. He is the most competitive person in this draft. I say that because he has a NBA skill set. And we look at that. This guy has a skill set of a guy who can play a role. When you develop a team...when [Boston](#) took those guys and made the trades with [Ray Allen](#) and [KG](#) and then they got [\[Raion\] Rondo](#), you didn't know how they were going to distribute the ball and the same with [\[Chris\] Bosh](#) and [\[Dwyane\] Wade](#) [in Miami]. From a GM and a coach's standpoint, you wonder how that is going to mesh. And it has. It took [Miami](#) a long time. But when you throw

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Landry Fields in there and he knows how to play a role, or a Faried, he's going to rebound, he's going to set those screens, he's going to space well, he knows where to be and he gives the ball up. His teammates will want that.

When we look at guys in any first round, they're not going to be anything but the fifth option. They have to earn their minutes from playing defense and to develop to make that impact defensively, without the ball, first and then add whatever versatility they have, whatever role they have that can translate more offensively. And sometimes with that pick, like Faried, he won't be that offensive guy. But if he can be that [Ben Wallace](#), can be a Dennis Rodman, he can make an impact that can help elevate a team.

SLAM: With Kyrie, is there any reason for teams to have concern about the lack of experience he has from missing so much of his freshman season in college?

RB: It definitely is. It's the same you look at with [Brandon Jennings](#), who went overseas, didn't get to play a lot, the development isn't there. Both guys totally talented, but when you have a point guard who has to learn a NBA system, tell veterans where to go, it's going to take time. Brandon Jennings...[Milwaukee](#) did a great job and took a big risk to pick him. They did a good job. But it is a risk. There's a risk factor with anybody. NBA teams and evaluators and scouts are not allowed to scout in high school. They're allowed to scout the summer and the All-Star games. They've done as much with Irving, with the talent he has, the maturity, the ability to be a complete point guard.

But, along with Kanter, you lose that experience, that game experience, which is valuable and can't be brought back. That learning curve is how quickly a person is going to adapt. We have this percentage, we call it guessability, this ratio on how we predict guys will become successful in the NBA using a percentage, and we had [LeBron \[James\]](#) at a high percentage. And this is not hindsight but with LeBron there was that risk factor because he was going from high school to the pros. But we knew how versatile he was and how good he was. We had a high percentage with [Yao Ming](#), which surprised a lot of people but, although he's 7'5, Yao played a lot of international ball against a lot of guys at a higher level. But we still had that risk factor of him coming over – new language barrier, America, all that stuff. So, when you look at the percentages here, you have more of a lower percentage with an Irving or a Kanter because of the fact they don't have that experience. Some of the stuff that makes up for it are some of the things they've done on the court previously, their maturity, their professionalism and their heart and desire. Which you can't look into but which you have to gauge.

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