

Baltimore Ravens

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Trading for Anquan Boldin the Best Move for the Baltimore Ravens Right Now

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By
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There are few Ravens observers who would disagree with the notion that Baltimore's top offseason need is a legitimate No. 1 receiver, whether that comes from the draft, trade, or free agency.

Who and how the team should acquire to fill that need...that's where folks seem to differ.

Let's get the unrestricted free agents out of the way: there aren't any. Well, no legitimate No. 1's anyway.

The list is headed by 36-year-old Terrell Owens, who was briefly a Raven years ago and loved the idea so

much he filed a grievance and fired his agent, forcing a trade to the Eagles. Owens is still a productive receiver, but he's a locker-room headache and probably a No. 2 at this point. Not what Joe Flacco or the Ravens need right now.

Unless by some miracle the NFL signs a new labor deal, the remaining legitimate No. 1's will be restricted: Miles Austin (Dallas) and Brandon Marshall (Denver). Both players come with significant question marks. Is Austin a one-year wonder? Can Marshall be controlled?

Given such concerns, they would not be worth the No. 1 and No. 3 picks the team would have to give up to get them through the restricted market.

Barring a dramatic change in the landscape, that leaves just two players for the Ravens to consider for the hole: Dez Bryant from Oklahoma State via the NFL Draft and Anquan Boldin from the Arizona Cardinals.

Baltimore's strength and preference has always come through its drafting. Indeed, the Ravens record with its first-round picks is stellar, and if GM Ozzie Newsome sets his sights on a player there, he can generally be counted on to produce.

While there are good receivers in the draft this year, Bryant is the consensus top pick at the position, and the only receiver with the size, speed, and intangibles to have a chance to become Joe Flacco's best friend in his first season.

But bringing in Bryant won't be easy. The Ravens are currently sitting at No. 25 in the first round, and Bryant is slated to come off the board somewhere between No. 9 and No. 12 right now.

Using the NFL Draft's trade value chart to guide us, the No. 12 pick is worth 1,200 points. The Ravens would need to trade their No. 1 (720), No. 2 (330), and No. 3 (145) picks to come close, with 1,195 points.

No matter how you cut it, that's a lot of picks for one player, especially at a position as streaky as wide receiver.

The team could also mortgage its future and swap some 2011 picks; but it would likely require their No. 1's in 2010 and 2011, or a 2010 No. 1 with their No. 2's in 2010 and 2011. That's still a steep, steep price for someone who has never played an NFL down.

However, Boldin likely wouldn't require such a price. The team might be able to trade a single first-round choice in 2010, or a second rounder in 2010 with a future 2011 pick to boot.

Despite his recent role as a malcontent, Boldin is a smart, tough receiver who had proven himself as a top wideout long before the team got to be any good. He has the size, speed, and track record to be an immediate impact for the team in 2010, and should still have four or five good years left as a top NFL player.

Acquiring Boldin would allow Mason to slip into the No. 2 receiver role, a position he is better suited for now. The team could also allow former first-round choice Mark Clayton, a rare Newsome miss, to walk and recoup some draft choices, leaving the team free to bring in a new slot receiver via free agency.

Baltimore could then focus its top choices on the defensive side of the ball, where they have a nucleus of aging stars, and grab a developmental receiver to perhaps replace Mason in a year or two with no early pressure.

In short, trading for Boldin is the safe bet, and it allows everything else to simply fall in place right away.

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