

 **ESPN.com: Dollars - ESPN**
Playbook

[Print without
ESPN
images]

Thursday, April 26, 2012

In this year's draft, it will pay to be No. 2

By Kristi Dosh

Andrew Luck might be the top pick in the NFL draft, but Madison Avenue has its sights on the likely second pick, Robert Griffin III.

“When it comes down to marketability, it’s no contest,” said John Stone, director of business development at New England Consulting Group. “Luck is awkward in the way he speaks. RGIII is a rock star.

“[Griffin] is someone who we haven’t seen in a couple of decades. If you look at some of the most iconic marketing stars in the last decade -- [Derek] Jeter, [Peyton] Manning, [Michael] Jordan -- RGIII is ahead of them at the same age as far as charisma, overall dynamic personality, his ability to communicate, his authenticity and just being a refreshing personality. He has the potential to be as big a superstar as those athletes were in their sports.”

Luck has already signed deals with Panini America and Nike, while Griffin has racked up deals with Subway, Castrol Oil and adidas and is on the cover of EA Sports "NCAA Football 13."

Henry Schafer’s firm, The Q Score Company, polls sports fans to determine which athletes fans are most aware of and how they feel about those athletes. Griffin came out on top in the most recent survey, with an overall Q Score of 20, five points above the average for all NFL players. Half of all sports fans are at least familiar with him.

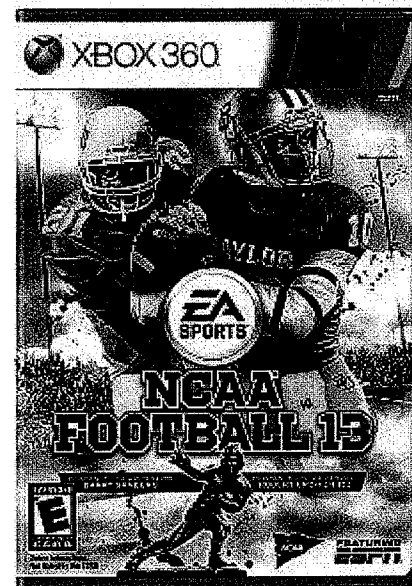
Luck is slightly more well-known, with 54 percent of fans saying they’re familiar with the former Stanford quarterback, but his Q Score comes in below Griffin’s at the NFL average of 15, meaning more sports fans identified Griffin as one of their favorites rather than Luck.

Both outscored last year’s top pick, Cam Newton. Prior to the draft his Q Score was well below the league average at 11, with 42 percent of people who were aware of him holding a negative opinion. The No. 1 pick in 2010, Tim Tebow, had a Q Score just one point above Griffin’s going into the 2010 draft, in part because 28 percent of sports fans had a negative opinion of him.

No matter their familiarity or likeability, companies generally are willing to take a risk on the top one or two quarterbacks in the draft.

Bob Dorfman, executive vice president and creative director of Baker Street Advertising, said, “It’s always a risk for marketers to spend big on these guys, but if they don’t someone else will grab them. You can’t take that chance.”

Dorfman said the endorsement game for rookies is a little different in football than in basketball.



Robert Griffin III on the EA Sports "NCAA 13" cover.

“You’re pretty sure the first few guys are going to make a difference, but with football there’s a learning curve, and quarterbacks don’t always shine right off the bat,” he said.

Russell Wilson, who was a runner-up, along with Luck, for the Heisman Trophy Griffin won last year, isn’t getting the same attention as Luck and Griffin. Marketers say he’s still too big a risk for companies.

“Russell Wilson is a very interesting guy,” Stone said of the possible third-round pick. “He’s a little bit of an underdog because he’s short.”

However, Stone said Wilson, 5-foot-11, could see plenty of opportunities if he can become a starter. “He has leadership capabilities and is so charismatic. He also has a strong face.”

Gary Stibel, founder and chief executive officer of New England Consulting Group, said marketers often overlook players such as Wilson because they’re too caught up in the hype surrounding the top picks.

“Sponsors tend to dramatically overpay for the top dog and underpay and miss out on value among other players. What sponsors tend to do incorrectly is get in bidding contests because they fall in love with the top dog,” said Stibel.

As an example, Stibel said, “Look at [Mark] Sanchez -- often times the top dog doesn’t make it.”

If marketers want a quarterback who creates excitement while he’s playing, Wilson is their guy, according to the Thuuz, a mobile app that among other features assigns each player an “Excitement Quotient” based on play on the field. The app uses an algorithm that measures factors such as the impact the player has on overall game excitement and the novelty of the plays in which the player is involved.

Wilson tops the list of NCAA quarterbacks for the 2011 season, followed by Case Keenum, Griffin, Kellen Moore and Luck.

“If he can become a starter and have success in a starter’s role then the sky’s the limit for him,” Stone said of Wilson.
