

RUNNING BACKS

Intro by Jason Wood

The running back position is unforgiving and fantasy owners have to accept the inevitable changing of the guard. The owner of the first pick this year can't simply call out LaDainian Tomlinson's name and sit back waiting patiently for his next pick. Tomlinson, while finishing as a Top 10 RB again, suffered through injuries and had to redo his contract to stay in San Diego. The new top dog is Minnesota's Adrian Peterson who led the league with 1,760 yards rushing and has a shot at 2,000 yards this season.

There's been a lot of discussion that the league is moving toward a running back-by-committee approach, but the numbers don't really bear that out. Last season 16 RBs had at least 1,000 yards rushing - in line with the league average over the last decade. Also, 12 RBs rushed for 10 or more TDs, slightly higher than average. **The Bottom Line** is that stud, workhorse

RBs are still en vogue, and as a fantasy owner you need to roster as many as possible.

Maurice Jones-Drew is the consensus #2 fantasy RB this year, as he will no longer have to share touches with Fred Taylor. Michael Turner, last year's breakout star, joins veterans Tomlinson and Steven Jackson in the Top 5. A trio of second-year stars, Matt Forte, Steve Slaton and Chris Johnson, are expected to deliver RB1 returns again. Curiously, DeAngelo Williams is being drafted more on the threat Jon Stewart poses to his carries than for his unbelievable productivity last season (20 TDs).

This year's rookie class is sure to have a number of impact players. Knowshon Moreno (DEN), Beanie Wells (ARI) and Donald Brown (IND) should all have important roles right from the start. Free agency doesn't seem to have another Michael Turner for us this year, as Derrick Ward is the highest rated RB to change teams and he slots right outside the Top 30.

The thing to remember this year is that RB depth gives you flexibility on draft day. You need not overweight RB at the expense of other positions. Realistically full-time NFL starters are going to fall into the sixth, seventh and eighth rounds. Do your homework, and consider handcuffing your projected starters to insulate yourself from inevitable injury. Visit our website: Footballguys.com where you can view customized rankings that are tailor-made for your league's scoring system.



Maurice Jones-Drew

ICON SM

1. Adrian Peterson - MIN

6-0, 220, age: 24

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	325	1528	13		25	165	1	253	1
2008	MIN	363	1760	10	39	21	125	0	248	3
2007	MIN	238	1341	12	28	19	268	1	239	3

The Good - Now in his third season, Adrian Peterson is ready to erupt into fantasy stardom. In 2009, the offensive line returns to dominance after an average performance in 2008, new starting QB Sage Rosenfels plays well, forcing defenses to honor the pass and Peterson find huge holes to exploit. He stays healthy throughout the season, once again carrying the ball 350+ times but averages more than 5.5 yards per carry and doubles his touchdown output. He finishes with close to 2000 rushing yards and 20 touchdowns and is the fantasy MVP of 2009.

The Bad - Barring injuries, the worst-case scenario for Peterson is a similar performance to the 2008 season with perhaps 30 fewer carries that go to rookie Percy Harvin and veteran Chester Taylor.

The Bottom Line - Entering into his third season, Peterson is poised to become the elite running back that fantasy owners have been waiting for over the past two seasons. He has been on the verge over his first two seasons, finishing as the third-best fantasy back in each of those two seasons. However, with improved offensive line and quarterback play this season,

Peterson has a real opportunity for a magical season.

2. Maurice Jones-Drew - JAX

5-8, 205, age: 24

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	240	1104	12		55	462	2	241	2
2008	JAX	197	824	12	75	62	565	2	223	9
2007	JAX	167	768	9	55	40	407	0	172	13
2006	JAX	166	941	13	61	46	436	2	228	8

The Good - Maurice Jones-Drew has always made the most of his touches. His career 4.8 yards per carry is fifth best among active RBs. His career 34 rushing touchdowns already put him on the Top 20 list among active players - in just three years in the league. Jones-Drew has been a solid fantasy starter each of his three NFL seasons while having to share the backfield with Fred Taylor so far - until now. Taylor is in New England, so Jones-Drew could be in line for 250+ carries for the first time in his career, which could easily vault him into the top three among fantasy RBs.

The Bad - Jones-Drew's lowest fantasy finish was at #13 among RBs two years ago. He's been a Top 10 RB in each of his other two years while sharing the backfield with Taylor. Just because Taylor is gone, however, does not mean that Jones-Drew will have the backfield to himself. Rookie Rashad Jennings has the talent to help the Jaguars immediately, and fullback Greg Jones could get additional carries as well.

The Bottom Line - The Jaguars' running game hit a road bump last season with all the injuries they suffered along the offensive line. While Jones-Drew still averaged a respectable 4.2 yards per carry that was nearly a full yard below his previous pace. With a rejuvenated offensive line, expect the Jaguars' running game to bounce back; and with Taylor gone, expect Jones-Drew to play a bigger role and projects for a top 5 finish.

3. Michael Turner - ATL

5-10, 237, age: 27

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	335	1508	13		8	51	0	234	3
2008	ATL	377	1699	17	9	6	41	0	276	2
2007	SD	71	316	1	7	4	16	0	39	73
2006	SD	80	502	2	3	3	47	0	67	51

The Good - Michael Turner could repeat his stellar 2008 campaign this year and be among the most valuable pure runners in the league. He's 27 but has relatively low mileage. With the arrival of Tony Gonzalez and Matt Ryan's continuing maturation as a passer, teams won't be able to concentrate 7-8 men in the box very often. Turner should have a lot of seams to work with during 2009.

The Bad - Those 377 carries were a lot of work, folks. If Turner hasn't been able to rest and recuperate sufficiently during the offseason, he could turn in a less-than-magnificent season. One has to regard last year's stellar performance as a ceiling - it's hard to see him doing much more than he did during 2008.

The Bottom Line - Michael Turner tore up the NFC in his first season as a starter, finishing #2 among all fantasy RBs last year. He posted an outstanding 4.5 yards per carry, rushed for over 200 yards twice and went over 100 yards rushing in eight out of 17 games. Turner is the type of fantasy back who can carry a team to victory on any given week. The Atlanta

offense has improved during the offseason with the addition of Tony Gonzalez, which will help Turner find more room to roam during 2009.

4. LaDainian Tomlinson - SD

5-10, 220, age: 30

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	275	1155	12		42	315	2	232	4
2008	SD	292	1110	11	77	52	426	1	226	7
2007	SD	315	1474	15	86	60	475	3	308	1
2006	SD	348	1815	28	80	56	508	3	427	1

The Good - LaDainian Tomlinson is no stranger to the top of the fantasy RB standings. In his eight years in the league, he has scored double-digit rushing touchdowns in every single season. While Tomlinson has a lot of mileage on him, he has generally avoided taking big hits throughout his career, and has maintained rigorous offseason and in-season conditioning programs with an eye toward increasing his longevity. If Tomlinson plays the 2009 season in full health, he has a chance to return to the top of his game.

The Bad - The trend-line describing Tomlinson's recent drop in fantasy points isn't pretty. Tomlinson has struggled through nagging injuries over the past couple of years. He's also seen his yards per carry drop steadily over the past two seasons and now has Darren Sproles waiting behind him for work. Tomlinson will turn 30 before the season starts, an age at which few running backs have bounced back to reverse previous declines in their production.

The Bottom Line - Norv Turner said during the offseason that he intends to get Tomlinson more touches than he had last season. If that comes to fruition, another #7 finish is about the worst one can reasonably expect out of Tomlinson, which makes him a solid pick in the first half of round one - that is, if you don't have concerns about his ability to stay healthy, in which case you may want to pass on him in the first round entirely.

5. Steven Jackson - STL

6-2, 233, age: 26

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	280	1162	9		48	413	3	230	5
2008	STL	254	1043	7	62	40	379	1	190	13
2007	STL	237	1002	5	52	38	271	1	167	14
2006	STL	346	1528	13	111	90	806	3	329	3

The Good - Steven Jackson is the focal point of the Rams' offense. They will get him the ball often, both as a runner and as a receiver out of the backfield, and he has the individual talent to put up big numbers. For the Rams to be successful, they will have to rely heavily on their running game, and they play in a conference with a number of weak defenses. If the young talent around him develops some cohesion, Jackson has the potential to finish atop the fantasy RB standings.

The Bad - Jackson has been a Top 10 fantasy RB only once in his five-year career. When he is healthy, he gets a huge workload - but that has limited his ability to stay healthy. The Rams' offense is in a state of transition, and while the running game should be the strongest part of that offense, the Rams may find themselves behind early in games which may limit their ability to feed Jackson the ball on the ground and also limit his scoring chances. Jackson is still practically a lock to finish in the Top 20 at his position unless he suffers a major

injury that causes him to miss a substantial number of games.

The Bottom Line - Jackson carries a lot of uncertainty for a first round fantasy pick. If the Rams' offense jells quickly, Jackson could be the best fantasy RB in the league. If the passing game and offensive line struggle, Jackson will be unable to propel himself into the Top 10 all by himself. Jackson needs help from his teammates to enjoy fantasy success, so your view of his fantasy prospects will depend somewhat on your view of how the Rams' offense will fare as a unit.

6. Matt Forte - CHI

6-1, 217, age: 24

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	280	1106	9		60	432	3	226	6
2008	CHI	316	1238	8	77	63	477	4	244	4

See Forte's full-page face-off on Page 111.

7. Brian Westbrook - PHI

5-8, 200, age: 30

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	215	935	7		57	450	4	204	11
2008	PHI	233	936	9	73	54	402	5	218	10
2007	PHI	278	1333	7	120	90	771	5	282	2
2006	PHI	240	1217	7	109	77	699	4	258	6

The Good - Brian Westbrook has the ability be a 1,000-yard rusher and 1,000-yard receiver and certainly any discussion of his upside would start there. But at 29 years old, coming off a season that fell a bit short of expectations, a more realistic upside would be a return to Top 5 fantasy status. For that to happen, Westbrook must stay on the field for at least 14 games, the Eagles rebuilt offensive line must be effective from the start, and Westbrook has to recapture some of the explosiveness his balky knee robbed from him in 2008.

The Bad - The biggest worry for Westbrook is the chronic swelling in his knee that kept him from practicing for most of the 2008 season and also limited his effectiveness. If the knee condition persists, or worsens, his days as an elite fantasy player could be over. Westbrook saw marked declines in his yards-per-rush and yards-per-catch last year. The Eagles drafted a complementary RB in LeSean McCoy, who will be chomping at the bit to step into a large role if Westbrook can't stay on the field.

The Bottom Line - Westbrook is one of the more interesting fantasy RBs this year. Many owners will project Westbrook to return to his 2007 form after having an off-season to rest his balky knee and get healthy. Others will avoid him at his likely ADP for fear that 2008 was a harbinger of further declines. The truth lies somewhere in between. In PPR leagues, Westbrook remains a safe first round option. In traditional redraft leagues, you have to be more careful because we may have seen the last of his 1,000-yard rushing days.

8. DeAngelo Williams - CAR

5-10, 217, age: 26

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	260	1300	12		23	138	1	222	8
2008	CAR	274	1518	18	30	22	121	2	284	1
2007	CAR	144	717	4	38	23	177	1	119	31
2006	CAR	121	501	1	37	33	313	1	93	41

See Williams' full-page spotlight on Page 115.

9. Frank Gore - SF

5-10, 220, age: 26

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	245	1054	8		49	407	2	206	10
2008	SF	240	1036	6	66	43	373	2	189	14
2007	SF	260	1102	5	69	53	436	1	190	9
2006	SF	312	1695	8	86	61	485	1	272	4

The Good - Frank Gore should be at the peak of his career. He is an excellent receiver and goal line back and is an exquisite runner in general play. With the departure of Mike Martz, San Francisco is expected to be more balanced on offense. Gore presents himself as one of the more solid options towards the end of the first round in fantasy drafts, and its unlikely San Francisco will use a committee approach.

The Bad - Gore got hit by the injury bug at a rotten time for fantasy owners in 2008, missing the Week 15 and Week 16 games. Any back can get a sprained ankle, but with his lengthy injury history prior to joining the NFL one has to wonder if this is the start of a pattern for Gore. Gore also has not had a 10-TD season despite getting almost 340 touches a year over the last three seasons.

The Bottom Line - Frank Gore is one of the better options if you need a solid RB at the end of the first round of your draft. He'll get receptions; he'll get carries; and he'll get touchdowns. Rookie Glen Coffee may steal some touches but not too many. Gore is unlikely to carry you to a title, but he should be a key contributor if you need consistency each week.

10. Clinton Portis - WAS

5-11, 205, age: 28

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	315	1339	10		34	258	1	226	7
2008	WAS	342	1487	9	36	28	218	0	224	8
2007	WAS	325	1262	11	60	47	389	0	236	4
2006	WAS	127	523	7	26	17	170	0	111	36

The Good - Clinton Portis finished the 2008 season with 1,487 yards rushing and a whopping 342 carries. His 4.3 yards-per-carry average was his best in three seasons, and he had 11 games with either 100 yards from scrimmage or a touchdown. It's hard to imagine critics once questioned whether Portis could shoulder a full workload. If the Redskins passing attack can take a step forward this year, Portis could have easier lanes and that could mean a Top 5 fantasy finish.

The Bad - Portis hasn't missed a game since 2006 but has logged more than 2,000 carries in his career. It's hard to imagine that someone Portis' size can continually handle 300+ carries without breaking down, and that's always a risk because he's not the kind of back who avoids contact. More importantly, the Redskins passing game made it hard for him to find running room late in the 2008 season, and it's unclear whether the team improved in that area this offseason.

The Bottom Line - Portis has been a Top 10 fantasy running back in five of seven seasons, including three as a Redskin. As long as he remains healthy, you can be sure he'll be the centerpiece of the offense. With a willingness to pound the ball inside but the vision to make tacklers miss in the open field, few backs are as sure to perform against any level of competition as Portis. As usual, Portis is an elite fantasy back that you can probably draft a few picks later than his value.

Matt Forte Face-off

In a Footballguys.com Face-off, two writers provide an in-depth look at a player by examining either his high side or his low side. Whose argument is stronger? That is left up to you. For dozens more Face-offs, visit Footballguys.com.

The High Side

by Jeff Haseley

Last year, Matt Forte took the league by storm gaining 1715 total yards with 12 total TDs. He was the first rookie RB to eclipse 300 carries since LaDainian Tomlinson turned the trick in 2001. Forte finished seventh in rushing yards, despite the Bears as a team finishing 24th in the same category. That statistic emphasizes the fact that Forte was the featured back and it wasn't even close. In fact, he had 282 more carries than the next closest Bears RB (Kevin Jones). Wrap your brain around that. There is no doubt who the feature back is in Chicago and from a fantasy standpoint, having a RB with that distinction is hard to find in the multi-back era.

Will Matt Forte exceed expectations in 2009? Considering he exceeded nearly all expectations last year, he's not sneaking up on anyone this time around. Forte will be drafted as a RB1 this year – that much we know. In order for him to be a success at that draft spot, he'll have to at least match what he did last year.

There are two factors to consider when looking ahead to the Bears 2009 season and how it affects Matt Forte's chances of success. Both involve the trade acquisition of QB Jay Cutler from Denver.

1. Will the running game improve with Jay Cutler under center?

Yards per carry average for all seven Denver RBs last year = 5.17

Yards per carry for Matt Forte last year = 3.9

Was Cutler's presence the reason for Denver's rushing success last year? He is a downfield passer and that means opposing defenses will have to honor and respect the deep ball, thus leaving less defenders in the box to stop the run. Advantage - running game.

2. Will Forte continue to see passes come his way with Jay Cutler at QB?

Forte led the team with 63 receptions last year. Will Forte's receiving numbers take a dip with Jay Cutler at QB? Probably so. The highest number of receptions by a Denver RB in the last two years combined is 38 by Selvin Young.

How effective can Matt Forte be this year? It's hard to imagine the offense won't improve with Jay Cutler at QB. This means more sustained drives, more plays in the red zone, which leads to an increase in scoring opportunities. It is fairly safe to say that Forte will probably not come close to 63 receptions again, but his yards per carry average should increase from 3.9 YPC. I haven't even mentioned the signing of Pro Bowl left tackle Orlando Pace. His presence will help an offensive line that is evolving. The increase in expected scoring opportunities, combined with being in a one-back system, really emphasizes his potential for success in 2009.

The Low Side

by Jeff Pasquino

There is an old saying in fantasy football that you can't win a fantasy draft in the first round, but you certainly can lose it. Is that a myth? Looking back at the past five years, less than 40 percent of all Top 12 running backs from the prior season repeat. Think about that – the odds are not just against Matt Forte, but every RB that was a Top 12 guy last year. So what in particular would make you shy away from taking him with your first pick?

Forte was a workhorse for the Bears, logging 316 carries (fourth most of any RB) along with 63 catches (first amongst RBs). He was such a big part of the Bears' offense last year that no other RB had over 109 yards rushing and Forte led all Bears in receptions. To put it in perspective, Forte was on the field for 850 out of a possible 1,012 offensive plays

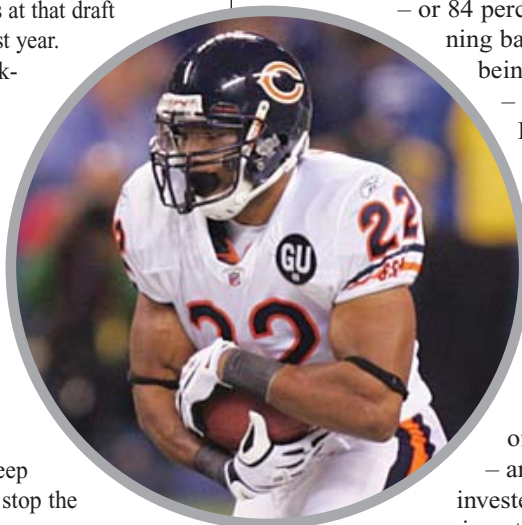
– or 84 percent of the time. No other Bear running back was over 7 percent. Talk about

being a key part of a team's offense – Forte WAS the Bears offense. The Bears' coaches recognize this issue, and they are already saying that a second back will emerge and give Forte some much needed relief. Kevin Jones is looking healthy and he has been a starter in the NFL, so he is the best candidate to give Forte some plays off.

There's another big reason to think that Forte won't be quite the offensive force that he was last year – and his name is Jay Cutler. The Bears invested heavily to improve their anemic

passing attack with the trade to get Cutler, and then the front office went and drafted three wideouts in April. Chicago seems ready to commit harder toward a balanced offense, which should reduce Forte's carries. Forte racked up over 1,200 yards last year, but he failed to reach the league average of 4.0 yards per carry and needed over 300 carries to get there. While an improved passing game is likely to open up more space for Forte to run, his number should be called fewer times in 2009 due to a bigger commitment to the passing game.

Choosing your first fantasy RB is an important decision as it will heavily influence the strength of the entire team. Selecting someone with limited upside and good reasons to expect some downside is a risk I would advise against, so that is why I would let someone else in your league take Matt Forte.



11. Chris Johnson - TEN

5-11, 197, age: 24

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	230	1081	8		45	324	2	200	12
2008	TEN	251	1228	9	62	43	260	1	209	11

The Good - Chris Johnson is super fast, and it didn't take him long to get up to speed in the NFL. He took over the starting job from LenDale White and was much more productive with his carries. He has the speed and moves to score from anywhere on the field, and has set the bar very high for himself in 2009. Johnson is also a solid receiver out of the backfield, and he scored nine rushing TDs despite losing most goalline opportunities to LenDale White. This season Johnson should improve on his rushing numbers because the Titans want to get him the ball more.

The Bad - The Titans aren't sure that Johnson can be a full-time back. They use him in a RBBC with White, but they drafted Javon Ringer to perhaps spell Johnson when he needs a breather. If the rookie flashes some ability the Titans may decide that they need to get him more carries and thus take away more from Johnson.

The Bottom Line - Johnson has lofty goals for 2009 - and they are goals that are well within his reach. He can be used on every down and may even be split out wide as a receiver. His speed makes him a threat to score every time he touches the ball so he should have good TD totals even though he loses goalline touches.

12. Steve Slaton - HOU

5-9, 197, age: 23

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	265	1179	9		44	321	1	210	9
2008	HOU	268	1282	9	59	50	377	1	226	6

The Good - Steve Slaton led all rookies with 1,282 rushing yards last season (good for sixth in the NFL). He finished as the No. 6 fantasy RB on the year and improved as the season went along. He enters 2009 as the clear-cut starter, as the Texans did not draft a running back to cut into his workload. Slaton should get plenty of touches again this season, and could find his way into the Top 5 if all goes well.

The Bad - Slaton is a smaller back, and many worry about his ability to carry a full workload over the course of a full season. Although Slaton significantly outperformed expectations last year, He has a track record of only one year and it could prove to be an aberration.

The Bottom Line - With his small stature and sparse track record in the NFL, most fantasy owners will hesitate to spend a first-round pick on Slaton this year, but he should go near the top of round two in most 12-team drafts. He has Top 5 upside and very little downside as long as he stays healthy, as he will be a huge focal point of the Texans' offense. Consider him even money to finish the season as a fantasy RB1 in 12-team leagues.

13. Brandon Jacobs - NYG

6-4, 260, age: 27

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	245	1139	11		18	117	1	198	13
2008	NYG	219	1089	15	12	6	36	0	202	12
2007	NYG	201	1011	4	38	23	174	2	154	21
2006	NYG	96	423	9	14	11	149	0	111	37

The Good - Brandon Jacobs proved last year that he's an all-around powerhouse. He averaged an impressive 5.0 yards per carry for a second consecutive season and added 15 rushing TDs, turning him from a marginal fantasy back to an elite one. He still has upside considering he could be more involved in the receiving game.

The Bad - What makes Jacobs valuable is also what makes him risky. He's built like a defensive end and runs with reckless abandon. Without Derrick Ward to spell him, the Giants may turn to Jacobs even more this year, which would increase the beating his body would take. Jacobs missed three games last year and five games in 2007, so a heavier workload is not necessarily a good thing.

The Bottom Line - As long as you're comfortable using a high draft pick on someone who probably will miss a few games, Jacobs is an attractive option as your RB1 and would be a dream option as an RB2 should he fall into the early second round. It's always tough to count on a runner replicating double-digit TDs, but Jacobs is a great short-yardage back and he should get more touches this year with Ward in Tampa Bay.

14. Marion Barber - DAL

5-11, 215, age: 26

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	230	966	7		50	350	2	186	15
2008	DAL	238	885	7	61	52	417	2	184	16
2007	DAL	204	975	10	54	44	282	2	198	7
2006	DAL	135	654	14	32	23	196	2	181	14

The Good - Marion Barber has the talent to put up Top 5 fantasy numbers, but in order for Barber to realize his potential, a lot of things need to fall into place. One, he has to stay healthy and handle more than 200 carries per season. Two, the Cowboys have to be willing to put Tashard Choice back on the bench and keep Felix Jones as a true backup. Three, the Cowboys passing attack has to remain potent in the absence of Terrell Owens.

The Bad - Fantasy owners hope that 2008 was the worst case scenario. Despite a career-high 238 carries, Barber had his worst fantasy season since becoming a full-time contributor. He only averaged 3.7 yards per carry, missed time and only started 13 games. With both Choice and Jones looking good in limited playing time last year, the Cowboys could decide to use a three-headed committee which would really hurt Barber's fantasy prospects.

The Bottom Line - Barber may be a buy-low candidate this year because of his 17th place finish last season. While owners have to be mindful of the dual threat Jones and Tashard present, Barber has been too good and is being paid too much not to have the largest role in the backfield.

15. Ronnie Brown - MIA

6-1, 223, age: 28

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	225	956	9		39	296	1	186	14
2008	MIA	214	916	10	43	33	254	0	183	17
2007	MIA	119	602	4	46	39	389	1	129	27
2006	MIA	241	1008	5	38	33	276	0	158	25

The Good - Ronnie Brown, now more than a full year away from his knee injury, should run with more explosiveness and elusiveness than he showcased last year. If his body can hold up, he should become the 20-touch per game player the

Dolphins wanted him to be coming out of college.

The Bad - Ronnie Brown's durability continues to be a concern for Miami. If the team thinks he can't handle a full load, he won't get enough touches to be an elite back. Also, the Dolphins have a first-place schedule this season. If they fall behind in games, they might be forced to the air more often.

The Bottom Line - Brown should have a strong season in 2009. He surprised by returning from injury effectively last season and this year should have more explosiveness and confidence on the field. The club really limited his carries last season, but he is capable of 20+ carries per game when healthy and on his game.

16. Knowshon Moreno - DEN

5-11, 217, age: 22

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	200	900	7		25	168	1	155	26

The Good - Knowshon Moreno is hyper-competitive and wants the ball in his hands during crunch time. He doesn't have ideal bulk for an every-down RB, but Moreno is a game-breaker and doesn't require a ton of carries to make big plays. HC Josh McDaniels stated that he especially loved Moreno's pass protection. Even though the Broncos have brought in four RBs through free agency, this is Moreno's job to lose, and the team is expecting him to carry the full-time load in 2009.

The Bad - The Broncos signed Correll Buckhalter, J.J. Arrington, LaMont Jordan, and Darius Walker to free agent deals, so they expect to use multiple backs. Moreno would be the lead back in the committee but could be replaced on short yardage and goalline situations by LaMont Jordan. He could also be taken out of the game on certain passing downs for Arrington.

The Bottom Line - Many expect the Broncos to run a New England-style offense and that certainly is a possibility. However, they didn't draft Moreno that high for him to simply be a committee back. They anticipate that he will be involved on every down as a runner and receiver. Moreno is a special back - the likes that Denver hasn't seen since the days of Clinton Portis.

17. Ryan Grant - GB

6-1, 218, age: 27

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	280	1148	7		21	137	0	170	20
2008	GB	312	1203	4	22	18	116	1	162	22
2007	GB	188	956	8	37	30	147	0	158	17

The Good - In a perfect world, Ryan Grant puts behind his somewhat disappointing 2008 campaign and returns to the 2007 form that made him one of the more exciting running backs in the NFL. Last year he had 312 carries but only managed four rushing touchdowns. His lengthy offseason holdout probably had a negative impact on his season, so he should have a more focused 2009.

The Bad - There is always a chance that the Grant we saw in 2007 was the anomaly. Without a Hall of Fame quarterback in the backfield, defenses were able to concentrate more on Grant and lessened his impact.

The Bottom Line - The Packers offensive line is solid, the passing game is terrific and the rushing attack should be better than last year. There is no reason for Grant not to increase last season's poor yard-per-carry average this season, and his

offense should afford him numerous scoring chances.

18. Reggie Bush - NO

6-0, 200, age: 24

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	145	595	5		75	608	5	180	18
2008	NO	106	404	2	73	52	440	4	120	35
2007	NO	157	581	4	98	73	417	2	136	24
2006	NO	155	565	6	121	88	742	2	178	17

The Good - After seven weeks in 2008, Reggie Bush was a Top 8 fantasy RB. Unfortunately due to injury, it did not last. This year, providing Bush comes back healthy, he could be undervalued for perhaps the first time ever as a fantasy option. Before his injury he was on target for over 100 receptions, so his value in PPR leagues is extremely high. With the Saints passing on a RB in the draft or not signing one in free agency, the Saints obviously believe that Bush and Pierre Thomas can share the workload this season.

The Bad - Microfracture surgery on a knee usually is a terrible thing to hear for a running back. After four injuries to his knee, resulting in him missing half of the Saints last 20 games, one has to wonder whether Bush will ever be able to handle even a reasonable workload in the NFL. It is also clear that he is never going to be a force between the tackles.

The Bottom Line - Bush finds himself at a bit of a career crossroads this year. Of vital importance will be injury news and his rehab. A full recovery and Bush could finally put together that season he's teased us with - meaning obvious fantasy stardom. If he cannot handle a full workload and only plays sparingly then his value will once again be limited, and he could be relegated to a complementary role.

19. Kevin Smith - DET

6-1, 217, age: 23

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	235	975	8		40	280	1	180	19
2008	DET	238	976	8	54	39	286	0	174	18

The Good - Smith had a very strong second half of the season last year with the Lions - especially considering just how terrible they were. He rushed for 708 yards in the months of November and December and averaged almost 22 carries per game. The best-case scenario for Smith in 2009 is similar production to his final eight games of a year ago.

The Bad - The Lions offense could improve this season but still struggle for consistency behind rookie QB Matthew Stafford. The offensive line is a weak point and will likely fail to consistently open holes to run through. New Lion, veteran Maurice Morris from Seattle, could take some of the carries away from Smith.

The Bottom Line - With a rookie signal-caller under center, expect the Lions to steal a page from the Falcons book from last season and establish a strong rushing attack to take pressure away from Stafford. Smith showcased last season that he is capable of 20+ carries per game, and he will likely receive a heavy workload even if he does lose some touches to Morris.

20. Larry Johnson - KC

6-1, 228, age: 30

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	215	914	9		16	110	0	156	25
2008	KC	193	874	5	17	12	74	0	129	29
2007	KC	158	559	3	42	30	186	1	98	40

2006 KC 416 1789 17 66 41 410 2 334 2

The Good - Larry Johnson finished the 2008 season as the 29th best fantasy football RB. His season was one to forget outside of a couple of games (specifically his 198-yard performance against Denver). Despite rumors, the Chiefs did not send him away in a trade and now are set to make him the feature back once again. We may never see 1,700 yard seasons from LJ again, but a 275 carry - 1,200 yard rushing season is not out of the question.

The Bad - Johnson wasn't used much as a receiver in 2008, and that trend should continue this year. He may also lose out on some goalline opportunities as the Chiefs try to take advantage of Jamaal Charles' quickness and agility in space. Once again in 2009, the Chiefs could be playing from behind a lot, thus relegating LJ to the bench as the team must enter pass-happy mode.

The Bottom Line - Johnson should get plenty of carries this year for the Chiefs, and he likely will be the primary option when they get inside the 5-yard line. They probably won't throw to him more than a couple of times per game, so don't expect a lot of receiving yards from the big back. That lack of receiving (and operating in a poor offense) puts a lid on Johnson's potential.

21. Marshawn Lynch - BUF

5-10, 223, age: 23

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	220	924	7		41	291	1	170	21
2008	BUF	250	1036	8	67	47	300	1	188	15
2007	BUF	280	1115	7	26	18	184	0	176	12

The Good - Although Marshawn Lynch has been suspended for three games to start the season, there still remains a chance it could be reduced. Also in his favor, the addition of Terrell Owens at WR should take a lot of defensive attention away from him and give him more room to run. If the Bills rebuilt offensive line can run block better than they did a year ago and Lynch stays healthy, he should be a borderline Top 10 RB.

The Bad - The commissioner has suspended Lynch for the first three games of the season so he'll get a late start compared to everyone else. Despite playing in two extra games in 2008 (compared to 2007), Lynch saw his total number of carries drop by 30 last year. With the added depth at RB thanks to the signing of Dominic Rhodes and return of Fred Jackson, there's a good chance the Bills will again use more of a committee approach this year and limit Lynch's touches.

The Bottom Line - The suspension will certainly hurt Lynch's overall production, but he has a chance to put up better numbers in fewer games than he did a year ago if the Owens signing has a positive impact on the Bills offense. The trade of LT Jason Peters figures to hurt the offensive line, but he was an average run blocker anyway. The RBBC approach the Bills used last year should be in place again but Lynch is too talented to not be the lead back whenever he's available. After his suspension, he should make a relatively safe option as RB2 who could certainly perform like a RB1 down the stretch.

22. Thomas Jones - NYJ

5-10, 216, age: 31

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	220	968	8		28	179	0	163	22
2008	NYJ	290	1312	13	42	36	207	2	242	5
2007	NYJ	310	1119	1	34	28	217	1	146	22
2006	CHI	296	1210	6	47	36	154	0	172	21

The Good - Thomas Jones has an excellent 2007 campaign as he shattered his personal TD record with 15 scores. The best 2009 scenario would be for the Jets to continue using him as the lead hammer in their RBBC. If rookie Shonn Greene eats into Leon Washington's touches, Jones could once again produce like a RB1.

The Bad - Washington looked like one of the most dynamic players in the league a year ago. The Jets could be looking for more of a breakaway threat more often this year from their running game since the passing game lost both Brett Favre and Laveranues Coles. The big plays will likely have to come on the ground, and there's no one better equipped to do that than Washington.

The Bottom Line - Jones will still score, but his touchdown total will probably fall in between the two he had in 2007 and the 15 of a season ago. Greene is expected to fill the goal line role, which takes away a large portion of Jones' scores since he's not really a breakaway threat. He also faltered a bit late in the season last year, so the Jets could look to limit his touches while at the same time getting their other dynamic runners on the field.

23. Darren McFadden - OAK

6-1, 211, age: 22

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	225	990	7		40	320	2	185	16
2008	OAK	113	499	4	39	29	285	0	102	44

The Good - Darren McFadden flashed his playmaking ability several times throughout his rookie season. This year the Raiders are expecting even more out of him, and he's expecting more from himself. He is very dangerous when he gets the ball in his hands, and the Raiders will use him as their primary receiver out of the backfield as well.

The Bad - Darren McFadden is not an effective inside runner, so the Raiders will have to use him on plays where they can get him the ball in space. Defenses will be keyed to stop the ground game, and they'll be daring JaMarcus Russell to beat them. McFadden will not only have to produce against teams geared to stop him, he will also have to prove that he can stay injury free.

The Bottom Line - McFadden could see his carries double from his rookie season as long as he can stay healthy. The Raiders added weapons to their passing game so opposing defenses should not be able to just stack the line of scrimmage to shut down the run. McFadden can rack up yardage in several different ways and doesn't need a ton of touches to have fantasy-worthy production. Like Reggie Bush, McFadden is not a traditional back, but a team that is willing to use him in the right way will be rewarded with very good production.

Player Spotlight:

RB DEANGELO WILLIAMS CAROLINA PANTHERS

by Jason Wood – Senior Writer, Footballguys.com



ICON SM

When DeAngelo Williams was drafted in the first round of the 2006 draft, fantasy owners were excited at the prospects. The Panthers wanted to get back to running the ball with authority and Williams needed only to outplay DeShaun Foster in training camp. Yet, things didn't go according to plan as Foster had almost 2x the carries while Williams was relegated to backup duties. In 2007, it was more of the same as Foster had 247 carries to Williams' 144.

Fast forward to the 2008 NFL draft and the Panthers selection of Jonathan Stewart with the 13th overall pick. Between the coach's insistence on giving DeShaun Foster more work for two years and then using a high first round pick on another RB last year, it's understandable that fantasy owners doubted whether Williams was ever going to emerge.

Well, what a difference a year makes. Williams not only proved his doubters wrong, but smashed through all reasonable expectations. He ran for 1,515 yards on just 273 carries, averaging an impressive 5.5 yards per rush. He led the league with 18 rushing touchdowns and added another two receiving scores. When the dust settled, DeAngelo Williams was THE best fantasy RB in 2008.

You would think a first-place finish last year would have fantasy owners lining up to draft Williams this year; and yet his ADP indicates quite a few people are skeptical. The critics seem to worry about two things: 1) Williams' numbers are impossible to repeat, and 2) Jonathan Stewart will force a true time share.

Williams doesn't have to duplicate last year's stats to be a fantasy stud. His 2008 totals were elite, even by historical standards.

- Only 11 RBs have rushed for 1,500 yards and scored 20+ TDs in a season
- Only eight RBs have averaged 5.5 yards per rush on 200+ carries in a season
- Only three RBs have averaged 5.5 YPR on 200+ carries and scored 15+ TDs

By way of illustration, take a look

at the other RBs that have averaged 5.5+ yards per rush on 200+ carries in a season:

- James Brooks
- Clinton Portis
- Jim Brown (2x)
- Barry Sanders (2x)
- Eric Dickerson
- O.J. Simpson (2x)
- Adrian Peterson

We're looking at four Hall of Famers, the best young RB in the game today and two other multiple Pro Bowl runners. The important point to remember is that EVERY ONE of these backs was a fantasy star for much of their career. So yes, while DeAngelo Williams may never again match last year's feats, history suggests he's got quite a few Top 10 fantasy seasons left in him.

The Jonathan Stewart Factor

Jonathan Stewart is an imposing figure. At 5'11, 235 pounds with plenty of speed, Stewart has all the tools necessary to be a 300-carry franchise back. And his rookie numbers hint at great things in the future. He averaged 4.5 yards per rush and scored 10 rushing touchdowns, managing to finish as the 24th best fantasy RB. So why shouldn't you worry about Stewart eating into Williams' touches?

1. Williams' role steadily increased as the season wore on – In the first four weeks of the season, both Williams and Stewart averaged 50 rushing yards per game, but Stewart scored three TDs to Williams' zero. In the final month of the season, Williams was averaging 140 yards and 1.8 TDs while Stewart averaged 63 yards and 1.0 TD.

2. The Panthers have consistently given

Positives

- A formidable OL returns intact
- Williams became more dominant as the season progressed
- Every RB to do what he did has had an elite career

Negatives

- Jonathan Stewart is too good to keep off the field
- The Panthers have a very difficult schedule
- Stewart's 2008 numbers will be next to impossible to repeat

their top runner 60 percent or more of the carries – When you're coming off a 12-4 season and you've had the success John Fox has over seven seasons as head coach, you don't fix something that's not broken.

Why We've Probably Seen the Peak

Williams stands an excellent chance of enjoying many more Top 10 fantasy seasons, but he's not a strong bet to repeat his #1 ranking for a number of reasons.

1) **His YPR is likely to regress** – Only Jim Brown, Barry Sanders and O.J. Simpson has more than one season with 5.5+ YPC and 200+ carries

2) **His TDs are likely to regress** – Only five RBs have had more than one 20+ TD season

3) **Carolina has an extremely difficult schedule** – Many know that Carolina plays a first-place schedule this year, but in fact the Panthers have the second hardest schedule based on last year's win percentages

Final Thoughts

DeAngelo Williams was the top fantasy RB last year, yet somehow people seem ill at ease with drafting him as their RB1 this year. Don't make the same mistake. Sure, history tells us that the kind of season Williams had is nearly unrepeatable. But that doesn't mean he can't or won't be a fantasy star. The least accomplished runner to do what Williams did last year was James Brooks, and he had FIVE Top 10 fantasy seasons. Four others are in the Hall of Fame. The simple fact is seasons like Williams aren't flukes, and he is an elite talent. The coaches aren't going to reduce his touches simply because there's a talented backup on the roster. Jon Stewart is going to get touches, but not at the expense of Williams, who is the closest thing to a lock for Top 10 numbers as any RB.

If you'd like access to more than 120 other detailed Player Spotlights, be sure to visit Footballguys.com and become a subscriber.

24. Pierre Thomas - NO

5-10, 205, age: 25

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	200	910	10		35	277	1	185	17
2008	NO	129	625	9	41	31	284	3	163	21
2007	NO	50	251	1	23	19	152	1	52	61

The Good - Pierre Thomas grabbed his opportunity with both hands in 2008, once Reggie Bush went down in Week 10. In six games, Thomas racked up enough fantasy points to finish the season ranked 22nd. Thomas features in all facets of the game - running, receiving and the goal line. With the troublesome knee of Bush and the retirement of Deuce McAllister this six-week spell could easily be reproduced for a whole season, meaning Thomas would be among the fantasy elite.

The Bad - There are two Pierre Thomases: One with Reggie Bush and one without. The one that exists when Bush is fit averaged a full yard less per carry and barely registered on fantasy radars in 2008.

The Bottom Line - Pierre Thomas must have been one happy camper when the Saints didn't draft a running back or add one in free agency. Even sharing time with Bush, Thomas has significant value for fantasy owners and given the injury history of his counterpart, Thomas could be one of the most underrated running backs this season.

25. Jonathan Stewart - CAR

5-10, 235, age: 22

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	165	759	8		10	60	0	130	31
2008	CAR	183	833	10	17	8	47	0	148	24

The Good - Jonathan Stewart now has a year of experience in the NFL and has shown he can thrive in a by-committee situation. If he continues to improve, Stewart could eat into DeAngelo Williams' touches and add on a few more rushing TDs. If Williams misses time for any reason, Stewart would become an instant RB1 in fantasy leagues.

The Bad - Stewart and the Panthers scored a lot of rushing TDs last year - if he sheds just a few TDs, his numbers would be less impressive to fantasy owners. If the offensive line suffers some setbacks in training camp, the big holes that Stewart exploited to walk into the end zone last year might suddenly be narrower.

The Bottom Line - Jonathan Stewart is a great complement to Williams. Stewart was still a marginal fantasy starter despite playing second fiddle in Carolina - in basic touchdown leagues Stewart was a gem to have. Given the run-first focus of the Panthers' offense, it seems likely that Stewart will easily be able to post similar numbers during 2009. Remember that the Panthers rushed the ball 504 times last year. That's more than enough work to keep two running backs happy.

26. Chris Wells - ARI

6-1, 235, age: 21

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	220	869	8		5	33	0	138	27

The Good - A good analogy for Chris Wells' skill set is somewhere between Jerome Bettis and Ron Dayne. While those backs were shorter and heavier, they were college big backs with burst through the line. If the stars line up, Wells will be the team's starter with an improved offensive line and a passing game that prevents eight in the box. Bettis' first year

was a 1,400-yard, seven-TD campaign for the Rams. Similar numbers would be the best case scenario for Wells.

The Bad - The flip side is that Wells could have a first year like Ron Dayne's. Wells might not ever start in 2009. The offensive line might not improve over last year. Wells might struggle in a split time situation with Tim Hightower. In Dayne's rookie year, he had less than 900 total yards and five TDs on around 225 carries. Statistics that low, or lower, are Wells' downside.

The Bottom Line - Realistically, Wells will split time with Hightower between the 20s, but will not see much goal line work. His load might increase over the season, but he is not likely to score double-digit TDs with Hightower there, or pass 1,000 rush yards in a spread offense. Keep an eye on training camp reports. If he is an early-season starter, Wells would be a borderline RB2.

27. Willie Parker - PIT

5-10, 209, age: 29

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	215	871	5		16	112	0	128	33
2008	PIT	210	791	5	11	3	13	0	110	40
2007	PIT	321	1316	2	31	23	164	0	160	16
2006	PIT	337	1494	13	41	31	222	3	268	5

The Good - Even though they are defending Super Bowl champions the Steelers' schedule shouldn't be as brutal in 2009, and Willie Parker would be in for a better year for that reason alone. Improved play from their offensive line will only help Parker and the ground game. The Steelers also cut Gary Russell, so some of the goalline work may go back to Parker this season.

The Bad - Rashard Mendenhall was lost for the season, but is expected to be the primary backup to Parker in 2009. We could see a decline in Parker's stats because it may evolve into a three- or four-headed RBBC in Pittsburgh. Mewelde Moore was a more dangerous RB for the team in 2008 and is a much better receiver. Parker has struggled to stay healthy the last two seasons and the Steelers are set to move on without him if he gets hurt again this year.

The Bottom Line - The Steelers want to see if Rashard Mendenhall can be the feature back and will give him every opportunity to succeed in 2009. Parker's carries will be reduced if Mendenhall can stay healthy, and Mewelde Moore should retain his role as the third-down / change-of-pace RB. That's a lot of competition for touches.

28. Joseph Addai - IND

6-0, 205, age: 26

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	190	732	6		27	211	1	136	28
2008	IND	155	544	5	39	25	206	2	117	39
2007	IND	261	1072	12	49	41	364	3	234	5
2006	IND	226	1081	7	50	40	325	1	189	11

The Good - Addai finished as the #5 fantasy RB in 2007 when he got about 63% of the touches from the Colts' RB position. Last year he missed time with injuries, but if he can return to his 2007 level of production, a Top 10 season is well within reason. The obvious obstacle is that he may not get 63% of the touches again now that first-round pick Donald Brown is in the mix. But if the Colts decide to work Brown into the rotation slowly, and if Addai performs well enough to

make it hard to take him out of games, he could return to fantasy prominence.

The Bad - While most casual observers believe that Addai will get a larger share of the workload than rookie Donald Brown, that view is not unanimous among well-informed analysts. Brown has a better size-speed combo than Addai, and if he outperforms Addai early, Brown could take over the lead role as early as midseason.

The Bottom Line - Addai and Brown will most likely share the workload during the regular season, keeping each other fresh for the playoffs. While the Colts offense is expected to put up, once again, way more than its fair share of yards and points, it will need to be consistently solid to make Addai anything more than a fantasy backup.

29. Cedric Benson - CIN

6-0, 225, age: 27

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	240	900	8		23	173	1	161	23
2008	CIN	214	747	2	26	20	185	0	105	42
2007	CHI	197	678	4	27	17	123	0	104	36
2006	CHI	157	647	6	10	8	54	0	106	38

The Good - With a big new offensive tackle to run behind and Chris Perry out of the way, Cedric Benson is finally in a position to redeem himself after several years of being considered a bust. As the full-time starter, Benson comes into the season ready to run wild. With Palmer back under center, defenses can't stack eight men in the box, so Benson has a chance to exploit the holes that the offensive line opens for him.

The Bad - Benson is a classic under achiever, never playing a full 16 game season or touching the ball more than 240 times in a season and has a 3.7 career yards-per-carry average. Benson alternately performs just well enough to make you want him on your roster, and just poorly enough to make you wish he were on somebody else's.

The Bottom Line - Opportunities abound for the Bengal offensive players, and Benson is no exception. After setting career bests in touches and yards, Benson seems poised to finally shake off the label of fantasy bust. All he has to do is perform. Yet he has squandered such opportunities in the past and could very easily do it this season as well. For 2009, expect Benson to push the envelope that is his career best, but don't be surprised if that isn't good enough to crack your starting line up either.

30. Donald Brown - IND

5-11, 210, age: 22

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	160	640	6		23	168	1	123	35

The Good - Rookie running backs tend to adapt faster to NFL life than players at other positions. Joseph Addai will still have a role in the offense, but Donald Brown could get the majority of the workload right off the bat, in which case he'll have Top 15 potential. (Note that Addai was the 11th best fantasy RB as a rookie when he took the lead in a shared workload with Dominic Rhodes.)

The Bad - While Brown could get the majority of the Colts' RB touches as a rookie, it's at just as likely that he'll fill a complementary role. Addai is a fairly accomplished NFL running back, and a player like that generally sees more time on

the field than on the bench.

The Bottom Line - Brown will be expected to contribute right away in the high-powered Colts' offense. The question is whether he'll (a) take over the lead role by midseason, as some people expect, (b) split the workload with Addai in an even rotation, or (c) play a complementary role as a rookie while Addai gets 65 percent to 70 percent of the work. With all three scenarios in play, opinion on Brown may not reach a general consensus, and you can expect to see his draft position vary quite a bit from league to league.

31. Derrick Ward - TB

5-11, 233, age: 29

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	200	890	5		42	328	1	158	24
2008	NYG	182	1025	2	54	41	384	0	153	23
2007	NYG	125	602	3	40	26	179	1	102	37
2006	NYG	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	170

The Good - The Buccaneers are hoping that Derrick Ward's part-time success with the Giants will translate to even greater success as the primary ball carrier in Tampa Bay. If Ward maintains his 5.1 career rushing average, look out as a huge season would certainly be possible.

The Bad - The Buccaneers may have selected Ward as their first free agent acquisition in the offseason, but it could mean that he's just another body in the their backfield. Earnest Graham is one year removed from a 10-touchdown season, so he is more than capable of providing a legitimate one-two punch in what could be a potent backfield.

The Bottom Line - The Buccaneers signed Ward to be a key participant in their 2009 running game. The question is, just how often will the team turn to him? Keen observation in camp will be a must in this situation - if he takes to his new surroundings, Ward could be a surprisingly effective fantasy player this year.

32. Jamal Lewis - CLE

6-0, 240, age: 30

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	220	814	7		12	78	0	131	30
2008	CLE	279	1002	4	32	23	178	0	142	25
2007	CLE	298	1304	9	39	30	248	2	221	6
2006	BAL	314	1132	9	26	18	115	0	179	16

The Good - Jamal Lewis is getting a little long in the tooth, but he still has a few carries left in him. The Browns obviously believe in him this season as they added no one of significance to the backfield. Jerome Harrison will get some looks, but this is still Lewis' team. He will be their primary back.

The Bad - Lewis' rushing average is pretty abysmal for a lead back - he has been over 3.6 YPC only once in the last five years. While he generally plays hurt, Lewis does experience a variety of nicks and bruises. These minor ailments add up and reduce his overall effectiveness.

The Bottom Line - The 2007 season looks like a blip on the radar now, and it appears that Lewis has fallen into that RB3 range where he'll be good enough to have on your roster, but not productive enough to start every week. A new offensive line helps, but with 2600 touches under his belt already, his best years are obviously in the past.

33. LenDale White - TEN

6-2, 235, age: 25

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	165	693	10		8	50	0	134	29
2008	TEN	200	773	15	10	5	16	0	169	19
2007	TEN	304	1108	7	31	20	114	0	164	15
2006	TEN	61	244	0	20	14	60	0	30	71

The Good - LenDale White lost his job as the feature back for the Titans to Chris Johnson in 2008 and will not get it back unless there is an injury situation. White still produced enough to be the #19 fantasy RB because he was a goalline vulture for Johnson. He will again be asked to plunge the ball into the endzone whenever the Titans get close so his fantasy production should be similar to his 2008 numbers.

The Bad - White is not much of a receiver out of the backfield and turns into a non-factor when the Titans have to play from behind.

The Bottom Line - While it's popular to poke at White's girth, but he reportedly has shed 23 pounds since last October. Before you get carried away, he still weighs 238, which of course means he tipped the scales at 261 pounds in 2008. This change comes at a good time for White as the team seems prepared to move on from him after this season if he does not become more productive.

34. Felix Jones - DAL

5-10, 207, age: 22

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	100	490	4		18	133	1	92	49
2008	DAL	30	266	3	2	2	10	0	46	73

The Good - Felix Jones needs only to pick up where he left off as a rookie as he was explosive as a tailback, averaging a mind-boggling 8.9 yards per rush, and also was a dynamic kick returner. Unfortunately, Jones' rookie season lasted just six games, and he succumbed to a toe injury that required surgery. Ideally, Jones will step back into the same role in 2009 and split carries with Barber. If he can do that, and maintain his explosiveness, Jones could have a Maurice Jones-Drew type of season and be a surprisingly strong fantasy play.

The Bad - Jones' injury opened the door for another rookie, Tashard Choice, to make an impact. Choice showed that he too is capable of playing a major role, and it would be foolish for the Cowboys to relegate him to the bench. Jones could end up part of a three-man RB rotation in which case all three will struggle to have consistent fantasy value.

The Bottom Line - Jones should back up Marion Barber and get more touches than most RB2s around the league. His ability to hit the home run makes him someone worth drafting. You can never predict when he'll break a big run or catch, but if you have to play three RBs in most weeks, Jones could be a daunting option as your RB3 or flex. And obviously if Barber gets hurt, Jones would be a stud-in-the-making.

35. LeRon McClain - BAL

6-0, 260, age: 25

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	115	437	8		15	98	0	102	43
2008	BAL	232	902	10	30	19	123	1	168	20
2007	BAL	8	18	0	13	9	55	1	13	103

The Good - Since Le'Ron McClain burst onto the scene unexpectedly a season ago, it's tough to expect a repeat per-

formance. Things broke right for him a year ago, though it wouldn't be a total shock to see him approach double-digit scores once again. With Willis McGahee almost constantly banged up and Ray Rice a bit undersized, McClain could get just about all of the goal line and short-yardage work.

The Bad - McClain's role might become a bit more specialized this year. He did a fantastic job in short yardage situations last season, but with the passing game expected to open it up a bit more and McGahee seemingly healthy from day one, McClain could find himself as ONLY the short yardage/goal line back. If that's the case, he'd make for a nice spot starter but nowhere near a reliable fantasy contributor.

The Bottom Line - McClain was an afterthought coming into the season but ended it with over 1,000 yards from scrimmage and eleven total touchdowns, en route to a Top 20 fantasy finish. Considering that just about everything went right for him last year and you can't expect McGahee and Rice's roles to be so limited again. The team has a lot invested in Rice in particular, so he'll likely get a few more touches to see what he can do with them this season. What's more, McClain isn't sneaking up on anybody this time around.

36. Willis McGahee - BAL

6-0, 228, age: 28

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	135	527	4		20	140	1	97	45
2008	BAL	170	671	7	32	24	173	0	126	32
2007	BAL	294	1207	7	49	43	231	1	192	8
2006	BUF	259	990	6	28	18	156	0	151	26

The Good - Willis McGahee is arguably the most talented runner on the Ravens but has slipped a bit in the minds of fantasy owners recently. He had a decent season a year ago when given the opportunity, but didn't even lead the team in carries. McGahee was the go-to guy at crunch time in the postseason. If that suggests the Ravens trust him above everyone else, then there is no reason to think he can't return close to 2007 level type of production this season.

The Bad - McGahee was passed up on the depth chart by unheralded fullback Le'Ron McClain a year ago. If he can get beaten out for carries by an almost unknown, then certainly second-year man Ray Rice is a threat to his job. The two players together could relegate McGahee to an afterthought in most fantasy circles.

The Bottom Line - McGahee enters the season as the "starter", but what that means is really anybody's guess. As evidenced by our staff rankings, just about everyone is split on how the team plans to use their running backs this year.

37. Ray Rice - BAL

5-8, 199, age: 22

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	160	656	3		35	273	1	117	38
2008	BAL	107	454	0	43	33	273	0	73	55

The Good - Willis McGahee's knee gave him a lot of trouble last season in the early going. And for all of his production, Le'Ron McClain still averaged fewer than four yards per carry. Ray Rice, meanwhile, was drafted in the second round, produced when the team needed him to, and led the three backs in yards per carry. He has excellent skills and should have earned himself a greater piece of the rushing pie in 2009.

The Bad - McClain is still likely going to handle the major-

ity of the goal line work, and McGahee is still the de facto starter, so Rice's role could be a bit unclear week-to-week. While he is the future of the team at the running back spot, for 2009 he might be nothing more than a change of pace back. If McGahee is working between the 20s and McClain is working at the goal line, Rice will have nothing more than scraps to pick up along the way.

The Bottom Line - Rice is probably going to increase his total number of touches this season. Rice certainly doesn't have ideal size to be a feature back and despite being the future at the position, he needs a qualifier. He probably isn't going to be an every-down back even when McGahee is gone, so the team would do well to find out just how much of a role he can handle.

38. Julius Jones - SEA

5-10, 205, age: 28

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	205	882	4		24	161	0	128	32
2008	SEA	158	698	2	25	14	66	0	88	49
2007	DAL	165	585	2	26	23	203	0	91	44
2006	DAL	267	1084	4	15	9	142	0	147	27

The Good - Julius Jones was part of a committee last season, but with Maurice Morris headed to Detroit, Jones should see a greater number of carries in 2009. The Seahawks will move to a zone blocking scheme this season, which suits Jones' one-cut style of running. If Matt Hasselbeck can stay healthy and T.J. Houshmandzadeh proves to be an effective threat on the outside, Jones could see running lanes open up for him along with more scoring opportunities. If everything goes right, Jones could creep into the Top 24 at his position.

The Bad - Jones was the Seahawks' most effective running back last season, but he was generally erratic from week to week. The Seahawks could still sign a free agent RB like Edgerrin James or Warrick Dunn, who could come in and steal carries from Jones. With T.J. Duckett likely to get most of the goal-line work, Jones relies on yardage for his fantasy production.

The Bottom Line - Jones had a much more productive first half of the season (70 fantasy points) in 2008 than second half (19). While he should see 200+ carries this season, his lack of opportunities on the goal line substantially deflates his fantasy potential.

39. Earnest Graham - TB

5-9, 215, age: 29

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	150	623	4		23	170	0	103	41
2008	TB	132	563	4	33	23	174	0	102	45
2007	TB	222	898	10	70	49	324	0	182	11
2006	TB	11	59	0	4	1	4	0	6	120

The Good - Earnest Graham was slowed by an ankle ligament injury last year, but all signs point to him being fully healed. Graham is only one year removed from being the 11th ranked fantasy RB and could find himself as a major contributor in the Buccaneers running game, teaming with Derrick Ward to give the Bucs a solid one-two punch.

The Bad - Graham fell flat in his attempt to assure that his 10-touchdown season in 2007 was not a fluke. Last year, it was Warrick Dunn who took over the rushing duties for Tampa Bay, and this year it could be Derrick Ward filling that role. It's very possible that Graham could once again see his role

diminished due to a quicker, more agile RB.

The Bottom Line - On paper, the 2009 Buccaneers running game looks to be a RBBC approach. Both Graham and Ward are capable of being heavily involved in the passing game, but Ward appears to have more of an edge due to his 1000-yard rushing performance last year. Expect Graham to occupy a complementary role in the offense this year, but his presence could still garner significant touches.

40. Fred Taylor - NE

6-1, 229, age: 33

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	150	645	6		14	98	0	110	39
2008	JAX	143	556	1	22	16	98	0	71	56
2007	JAX	223	1202	5	14	9	58	0	156	18
2006	JAX	231	1146	5	28	23	242	1	175	18

The Good - Fred Taylor seemed to drink from the fountain of youth in 2006 and 2007, averaging over five yards a carry each year in a job-share situation with Maurice Jones-Drew. Taylor should take over as the primary back for New England this season. He won't be a workhorse, but he could still see 10-15 carries and maybe more if he got it going in any given game.

The Bad - Last year, Taylor's production took a hit with some nagging injuries and he looked his age and a step slower. He also suffered from a banged up Jaguars' offensive line, but overall his 2008 campaign was not very noteworthy.

The Bottom Line - Taylor landed in a good spot after being shown the door in Jacksonville. The Patriots will likely use a rotation of backs or substitute players based on game situations and field position. Taylor probably won't see more than 10 or 12 carries a game (and not near the goal line) unless the other backs can't go for some reason. He should play a role, but he probably won't be a centerpiece any longer.

41. Rashard Mendenhall - PIT

5-10, 225, age: 22

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	125	494	6		12	83	0	94	48
2008	PIT	19	58	0	3	2	17	0	8	118

The Steelers are hoping that Rashard Mendenhall can take over for Willie Parker in 2010. This season he should be the primary backup to the injury-prone RB and is a must handcuff for Parker owners. With Gary Russell gone the Steelers could try Mendenhall out as the goalline back even though that's an area he struggled with in his rookie season.

42. Leon Washington - NYJ

5-9, 199, age: 27

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	120	588	3		51	383	2	127	34
2008	NYJ	76	448	6	60	47	355	2	128	30
2007	NYJ	71	353	3	51	36	213	0	76	48
2006	NYJ	151	650	4	31	25	270	0	116	35

Leon Washington will be an excellent option should something happen to Thomas Jones. But assuming Jones keeps plugging along as he has been, Washington's role isn't likely to increase very much in 2009 as the team also added rookie Shonn Greene. Washington will still be an adept receiver out of the backfield and will still fill a role on third downs in passing situations. About the only significant increase in playing

time could be if the team opts to split him out wide and utilize his receiving skills more. They have a lot of inexperience at the wide receiver spot and could use all of the help they can get there.

43. Jerious Norwood - ATL

6-0, 204, age: 26

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	90	473	3		32	262	1	98	44
2008	ATL	94	489	4	54	36	338	2	119	37
2007	ATL	102	615	1	39	28	277	0	95	43
2006	ATL	99	633	2	16	12	102	0	86	43

Jerious Norwood is a fine pass-catching RB who is a perfect complement to Michael Turner. He was the 37th-best fantasy RB in the land last year, making Norwood a viable fill-in player in weeks when the matchup was particularly good, and he's a spectacular insurance policy for Turner. Norwood is a threat to take the football to the house on any given play - he has killer speed. If the need arises, he could step into the starting/featured role in Atlanta - his career average rushing the ball is 5.8 yards per carry, and he has averaged 9.4 yards per reception during his time in the NFL thus far.

44. Darren Sproles - SD

5-7, 180, age: 26

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	115	552	3		37	329	2	118	36
2008	SD	61	330	1	34	29	342	5	103	43
2007	SD	37	164	2	12	10	31	0	32	78

Darren Sproles is a classic boom-or-bust fantasy player. He has potential to be the Chargers' lead back if LaDainian Tomlinson is injured, and the Chargers' lead back is typically a fantasy stud. On the other hand, if Tomlinson stays healthy, Sproles will have too many unproductive games (from a fantasy standpoint) to be a worthwhile cog in your lineup. His greatest value will be as a handcuff for Tomlinson owners.

45. Fred Jackson - BUF

6-1, 215, age: 28

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	125	525	3		33	251	1	102	42
2008	BUF	130	571	3	45	37	317	0	107	41
2007	BUF	58	300	0	29	22	190	0	49	65

At 28 years old, Jackson is much older than most players entering their third year in the league. He took an unusual route to the NFL but has clearly proved that he belongs. The suspension for Marshawn Lynch is good news for Jackson early on, but the signing of Rhodes probably means an overall drop in his playing time. Look for both backups to split carries for most of the season. If either gets injured, then bump up the value of the other considerably.

46. Chester Taylor - MIN

5-11, 213, age: 30

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	110	462	4		45	356	2	118	37
2008	MIN	101	399	4	55	45	399	2	120	36
2007	MIN	157	844	7	43	29	281	0	154	20
2006	MIN	303	1216	6	51	42	288	0	186	12

Chester Taylor is a very good back in his own right. In fact, he could likely start for a number of NFL teams around the

league. However, Adrian Peterson is poised to be dynamite this season, and the addition of rookie WR Percy Harvin could cut into Taylor's production. Harvin has amazing quickness and will have a number of plays called for him throughout the season. Those include a few runs and hitch passes every game. Taylor could finish with fewer touches than last season.

47. Ricky Williams - MIA

5-10, 228, age: 32

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	130	527	4		34	238	1	106	40
2008	MIA	160	659	4	38	29	219	1	118	38
2007	MIA	6	15	0	0	0	0	0	2	142

Expect more of the same from Ricky Williams this year. The limited carries are helping to extend his career, and he has become a respected veteran in the locker room. He may finish with fewer carries this season if Ronnie Brown can handle a bigger workload, but Williams could also get a couple of starts should Brown get nicked up.

48. Tim Hightower - ARI

6-0, 226, age: 23

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	110	402	4		15	95	0	74	52
2008	ARI	143	399	10	49	34	237	0	124	33

A possible scenario for Tim Hightower, given his talent at blocking, catching, and running near the goal line, is that he is named the starting RB for the Cardinals and sees extensive time in the red zone. However, he is also likely to lose a significant number of plays between the 20s to Wells. That means Hightower is in a committee situation this year.

49. Justin Fargas - OAK

6-1, 220, age: 29

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	115	454	2		12	78	0	65	58
2008	OAK	219	855	1	15	10	52	0	97	46
2007	OAK	222	1009	4	32	23	188	0	144	23
2006	OAK	178	659	1	21	13	91	0	81	44

Justin Fargas has to stay injury free, and if he does he will be the change of pace back to the explosive Darren McFadden. The Raiders should give him a good number of carries on the season, but Fargas won't be used much as a receiver.

50. Ahmad Bradshaw - NYG

5-10, 195, age: 23

year	team	ratt	ryds	rtds	targets	rec	cyds	ctds	FP	FP Rank
2009	PROJ	115	546	4		11	76	1	92	50
2008	NYG	67	355	1	6	5	42	1	52	64
2007	NYG	23	190	1	5	2	12	0	26	85

Last year, the enthusiasm for Ahman Bradshaw was overdone, as Derrick Ward was far too talented and established to give up touches. But this year Bradshaw should see 2-3 times as many touches, and if he can maintain his per carry averages with the increased workload, Bradshaw is a compelling fantasy sleeper in the event Brandon Jacobs gets hurt.

Others:

Ladell Betts, WAS

Ladell Betts should be counted on as Portis' handcuff and

is someone you have to target in the event of a major injury to Portis. Absent an injury opportunity, Betts is only worth a roster spot in deeper redraft leagues.

Andre Brown, NYG

Andre Brown is a talented but oft-injured runner. He will likely start the season as the Giants' third rushing option behind Brandon Jacobs and Ahmad Bradshaw. However, if the versatile Brown can remain healthy (he has had two surgeries on his left foot), his hard-nosed style could possibly push Bradshaw for the RB2 spot.

Correll Buckhalter, DEN

Correll Buckhalter is good at everything but not great at any one thing. He should spend 2009 as the primary backup to Knowshon Moreno and will see some time on third downs. His fantasy value shouldn't be too high if Moreno lives up to the hype, but Buckhalter will be a valuable handcuff for all Moreno owners.

Michael Bush, OAK

Many were wondering how Michael Bush would bounce back after missing essentially two years on the field because of his broken leg. He proved the doubters wrong with his last game of the season, and the Raiders will be forced to find him carries in a crowded backfield. Still, he's the third option right now in Oakland.

Jamaal Charles, KC

HC Todd Haley knows that he can't go to Larry Johnson in passing situations, and this could be a year where the Chiefs are forced to throw the ball a lot while they play catch up. It's not crazy to project Charles to get a significant number of touches this season.

Tashard Choice, DAL

Tashard Choice is one of those backups fantasy owners need to have an itchy trigger finger over. He's not worth drafting in 10-team redraft leagues, but he's someone that could actually be a starting-caliber RB if his role was redefined due to injury or in a year or two when he gets to test free agency.

T.J. Duckett, SEA

T.J. Duckett showed a great nose for the endzone last season and scored eight TDs on only 62 carries. If the offense can get back on track, he could approach double-digit scores.

Shonn Greene, NYJ

Barring injury to Thomas Jones and Leon Washington, Shonn Greene isn't going to be a feature back in 2009. He probably wouldn't even be a feature back if one of the two got hurt - it would be more of a timeshare situation than anything. Thus, his upside is fairly limited for 2009 in terms of being a consistent fantasy contributor. He should, however, be fun to watch.

Brandon Jackson, GB

Brandon Jackson has good size and quickness but did not seize his opportunity for an increased role last year. As such, Jackson remains the third-down / change-of-pace back while

Ryan Grant will once again handle the majority of the work.

Kevin Jones, CHI

Kevin Jones turns just 27 years of age this year, and he still has the talent to surprise football fans if he stays healthy. Forte is without question the starter for the Bears going forward. However, the opportunity is there for Jones to turn heads in the preseason and emerge as a viable second option for the Bears throughout the season. He is the player to take if you want to handcuff the backup to your first round pick Forte.

Laurence Maroney, NE

Laurence Maroney recently announced that he had a broken bone in his shoulder last season. That likely impacted his effectiveness in 2008, but it remains to be seen whether HC Bill Belichick will give Maroney another run at starting. For his part, Maroney has averaged a shade over 12 carries a game but his role has been limited to first and second downs. While he's been very effective after the catch, Maroney has generally been an afterthought in the passing game. The most likely outcome in New England will be another year of multiple backs filling specialized roles and no true workhorse.

LeSean McCoy, PHI

LeSean McCoy should find a role as the RB2 and see several touches per game, which would make him worthy of a roster spot. Should Brian Westbrook get hurt, McCoy would be an immediate starter in most fantasy leagues and an absolute no brainer in PPR leagues.

Mewelde Moore, PIT

There is a good chance that Mewelde Moore could once again lead the Steelers RBs in fantasy points scored. He is a dynamic receiver, an effective runner, and instantly makes an impact when he comes into the game. However, Moore is a player that may be best used in a limited role and the Steelers could have a three- or four-headed RBBC in 2009.

Maurice Morris, DET

Maurice Morris is a dependable veteran running back. However he doesn't have much upside and is on the down slope of his career. He is still capable of stepping into an offense for a few games and carrying the ball 20+ times, but he has only nine career TDs. He'll be a nice second option to Kevin Smith this season.

Sammy Morris, NE

Sammy Morris may end up the best value of the NE RBs and the last one drafted. He could produce as a borderline Top 25 running back (if he plays each week) but may be had as the 50th back off the draft board. If he stays healthy, he could see 10 touchdowns this season. That said, this is a very crowded backfield.

Dominic Rhodes, BUF

There are some rumors that Fred Jackson is unhappy with his contract situation so he could be a holdout risk if that doesn't get settled. That, along with the Marshawn Lynch suspension could give Rhodes an opening. Most likely scenario is that he'll split time with Jackson while Lynch sits out.