

What is ‘It’? Identifying intangibles in QBs

By Ralph Russo
The Associated Press

Sam Howell has been a quarterback since first grade.

His father told him then that to play the position he needed to be the leader of the team, and that more would be expected of him than other players, both on the field and off.

Howell, coming off a record-breaking freshman season at North Carolina, has come to think of quarterback as a lifestyle.

“I know everyone’s looking at me,” Howell said.

Evaluating and projecting quarterbacks at any level is probably the most challenging part of building a football team. More so than any other position, what makes a quarterback successful is almost impossible to measure or quantify. That mysterious and ill-defined “It Factor.”

“I don’t think there is a science to it,” said Ohio State coach Ryan Day, who spent two seasons as a quarterback coach in the NFL under Chip Kelly before landing in Columbus. “If there was I think it would be a lot easier for everybody. I think in 2020 they wouldn’t still be asking what it means.”

Joe Burrow, Tua Tagovailoa and Justin Herbert lead the next batch of quarterbacks set to enter the NFL. They are the consensus top three QBs available in this week’s draft, all with a chance to be selected Thursday night within the first 10 picks.

Their prodigious skills, prolific production and



Mark J. Terrill/AP file photo

In this Jan. 1, 2020, file photo, Oregon quarterback Justin Herbert passes against Wisconsin during first half of the Rose Bowl NCAA college football game in Pasadena, Calif. Herbert is a likely first-round pick in the NFL draft Thursday.

impressive athleticism are obvious. As are their few physical shortcomings. The rest? Well, there is a reason why they are called intangibles.

In the era of personal quarterback coaches, 7-on-7 summer leagues and scholarship “offers” to eighth graders, the holistic development of quarterbacks begins early.

David Morris is the founder of QB Country and best-known for a college career spent as Eli Manning’s backup at Mississippi. He works with all ages and talent levels of quarterbacks, from tweens aspiring to start for the JV team to Daniel Jones, who was selected No. 6 overall by the New York Giants last season.

For Morris there are two

aspects to the intangibles.

One is mental capacity: The ability to learn and process football. That can show itself on the whiteboard or film room, breaking down plays and defenses. The hope is that transfers to the field, but not always.

Then there are the players whose mastery of the subject matter doesn’t really shine through until they get between the lines.

For Morris it’s the difference between book smart and street smart. Both can be successful and most good players have at least some of each. There are readily available ways to identify and develop a player’s mental capacity, though projecting its growth potential can be trickier.

The second intangible is more about personality

and how it relates to leadership. One way or another, a quarterback has to be a team leader, whether he is gregarious or reticent, laid back or intense. Some quarterbacks will pick a teammate up with an optimistic ‘atta boy.’ Others get a point across more sternly.

“I’ve seen that many different personalities can get it done,” Morris said. “And so whether he is vocal or dynamic or alpha or more reserved, is he a leader? How does he lead? And then is he confident in his leadership style?”

Confidence is a word that comes up a lot when it comes to elite athletes of all kinds. With quarterbacks, it is especially important because the position comes with such a harsh and unrelenting spotlight.

Mills joins EOU staff as defensive coordinator

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

LA GRANDE — One of the assistant coaches who helped the Eastern Oregon University football team reach the national semifinals in 2016 is back in La Grande.

Bryan Mills, who spent last season as the safeties coach for Eastern Washington University, has been named the defensive coordinator for the EOU football program, the school announced Tuesday in a press release.

“His commitment to character-driven athletic programs, his knowledge and passion for the game of football, and his experience as a college coach will no doubt lead our defensive unit to a new level of excellence,” EOU head coach Tim Camp said in the release.

Mills has experience coaching on the EOU sidelines.

The Imbler High School and Pacific University graduate was the defensive backs coach for the Mountaineers during the 2016 season, which included Eastern upsetting No. 1 Marian on the road, 17-0, in the quarterfinals on the way to a semifinal berth and a final record of 10-3 for the most wins in program



Bryan Mills

history.

“I am extremely grateful and excited to be rejoining Eastern Oregon University and the Eastern Oregon community,” Mills said in the press release. “It’s always been a dream of mine to coach for the team I grew up watching and make this community proud.”

Mills has spent the last three seasons at EWU and had just wrapped up his first season as the Eagles’ safeties coach. Prior to that, he was a defensive analyst for two years. The 2019 EWU squad, which finished with a record of 7-5, had one of the better teams in the Big Sky Conference in passing defense in terms of interceptions collected (12, tied for third), defensive completion percentage (59.1%, fourth) and yards per pass attempt (6.8, second). The EWU defense allowed 266.3 yards per game last season, which was ninth in the conference.

He also was a safeties coach for two seasons at Pacific before his first stint with EOU.

Mills will take over a Mountaineer defense that struggled during the first half of 2019 but improved as the season progressed.

EOU, which went 4-7, allowed 42.4 points per game in the first five contests of the season, and 36.5 through the first six, but finished giving up just 24.2 points per game in its final five games.



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