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Iron Man: Connor Barwin

By Nathan Rush
Published: March 20th, 2009

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Staff Writer
Athlon Sports
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Iron Man

Cincinnati's Connor Barwin is a throwback iron man. Having played tight end, defensive end and even basketball for the Bearcats, the 22-year-old is undeniably the most versatile prospect in the 2009 NFL Draft.

But Barwin is more than a dependable old-school blue-collar player who can do just about anything he's asked on the field. The 6'4", 256-pounder is also an athletic freak symbolic of a new era in sports.

At the NFL Scouting Combine in Indianapolis, Barwin wowed NFL scouts, coaches and executives with one of the top overall performances of any prospect who worked out — running a 4.66 in the 40-yard dash, lifting 225 pounds for 21 reps on the bench press and out-jumping all defensive linemen with a 40.5" vertical and a 10'8" broad.

Barwin's off-the-charts Combine showing followed a strong effort at the Senior Bowl in Mobile and a stellar collegiate career on the gridiron (and hardwood) in Cincinnati.

As a freshman and sophomore, the Hazel Park, Mich., native and University of Detroit Jesuit alum was a back-up tight end on the football team in Cincy's first two years in the Big East, while doubling as a walk-on power forward for the Bearcats basketball team in his spare time.

During his junior season, Barwin established himself as one of the top playmaking tight ends in the Big East with 31 catches for 399 yards and two touchdowns during coach Brian Kelly's first season in the Queen City.

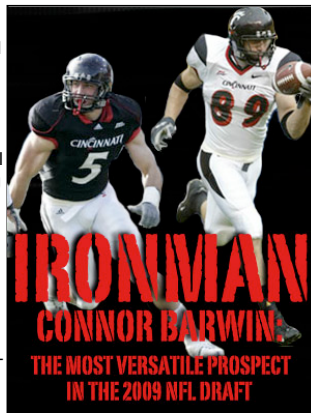
After recording 53 receptions for 692 yards and six touchdowns over his first three years at tight end, Barwin was moved the defensive end for his senior season. And the move could not have worked better, as Barwin notched 11 sacks and 16 tackles for a loss for the Big East champions.

So, as the draft approaches, which end spot will Barwin play in the NFL?

"I don't prefer either position. But I had a lot of fun really rushing the passer this year. People know what's on tape this last year," said Barwin, in a recent interview with AthlonSports.com.

"But I think what's kind of come to light since the Senior Bowl and the Combine, is people are seeing that if I would have returned playing tight end I would have been the most productive tight end returning in the Big East.

"People are starting to look back and watch that film. And a lot of coaches are coming in



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and working me out as a tight end, taking a minute to see how good I was at tight end. Because people caught on to the defensive thing this last year."

The most likely scenario for Barwin, however, is probably not at tight end, defensive end or even power forward. With more teams switching from a 4-3 defense to a 3-4 scheme, Barwin's versatility will likely land him at outside linebacker — ironically, one of the few positions he hasn't played before.



"Playing outside linebacker combines why I was good at tight end and why I was good at defensive end — as far as being good at tight end because I can play in space; you need to do that more as a standup outside backer. And obviously my ability to rush the passer as a defensive end, you'll still have to do that as a 3-4 backer," explained Barwin.

A hectic few months for Barwin are coming to an end, with his stock rising at just the right time.

"It's been a long process, but it's been an exciting one for me. Obviously, the season was the most important part. And we had a good season; I had a good season. So that was the best part of the whole process because we got to win the Big East and all that stuff," said Barwin.

"As far as the most interesting part for me was, really, going to the Senior Bowl and going to the Combine, measuring yourself up against a lot of these guys that have got the national media hype who are supposedly the best players in the country. To be able to measure yourself up and know that you're just as good or better than a lot of those guys has been really the most interesting part for me during this whole process."

To hear our entire interview with Connor Barwin, check out [Athlon Sports' NFL Rewind exclusive](#).

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