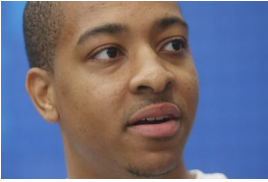


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Lehigh combo guard C.J. McCollum's projected draft range is quite narrow. While other players are yo-yo-ing up and down the board, McCollum's range has been as high as 7th ([Sacramento Kings](#)) and as low as 9th (Minnesota Timberwolves) with Detroit sandwiched in between. That's it. Three spots.

When it comes to shooting guards, McCollum is the third best prospect behind Ben McLemore and Victor Oladipo. Among point guards, he's in a dead heat with the smaller Trey Burke and the much bigger Michael Carter-Williams.

Cbssports.com's Doug Gottlieb says he's undervalued going into this draft:

[Several scouts have told me they think McCollum](#) , who is very bright with an efficient game, is one of the top 3 basketball players in this draft, and frankly I agree. Is foot speed an issue? Maybe. Is he a combo guard who has to learn to create for others as well as run a team? Yes.

But McCollum can really shoot and score, can be an effective scoring point ala [George Hill](#) and at worst is a 12 point per game combo guard off the bench. Guys that make shots are valuable, guys that win games are valuable, and McCollum does both.

While the Hill comparison may not wow you, think about McCollum's scoring numbers as a ball handling two-guard for a huge portion of his career at Lehigh, then remember that Steph Curry, [Jeremy Lin](#) , Hill and [Russell Westbrook](#) charted the same path in college.

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Draftexpress [has this to say about McCollum](#) :

At 6'3 with a 6'6 wingspan, McCollum emerged as a prolific, versatile combo guard with a shoot-first mentality early in his collegiate career. A fluid athlete who lacks top-end speed and explosiveness, McCollum has done it all for Lehigh over the last three and a half seasons, carrying the scoring load for long stretches against relentless pressure.

Known for his ability to create his own offense one-on-one and using ball-screens, McCollum's jump shot has always been a significant part of his game. With nearly 60% of his shot attempts coming from the perimeter both this and last season according to Synergy Sports Technology, McCollum's value proposition at the next level has changed this season as he's made 50.6% of his jumpers and 51.6% from of his threes, a big jump from the 36.6% and 34.1% he made last year.

I have liked McCollum for the [Phoenix Suns](#) since he visited for his pre-draft workout on June 6. He went up against MCW and Shane Larkin in that workout, with Trey Burke demanding a solo workout after the other guys were done.

"I'm not running from anybody," said McCollum, who is projected a couple spots lower than Burke and a couple higher than MCW, after the workout. "I'm working out against whoever. I enjoy this process. We're all basketball players. There should be nothing to hide."

His statements of bravado came out more matter-of-fact rather than aggressive. He was just iterating what's important to him as a basketball player: competition. He could have had a bad day and lost ground on MCW and Shane Larkin (projected mid-first), but he never questioned the need to compete.

McCollum knows he has something to prove in the NBA.

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"I had a pretty good career at Lehigh, but that's over now," he said. "It's time to start from scratch. Everybody in this league had a good career and been the man on their team. Now you've got to find your niche, find your role. I look forward to contributing any way I can."

McCollum was a scorer at small-school Lehigh, needed more for his off-guard skills than his passing ability. but despite being small for a shooting guard, he's not shying away from that part of his game if that's what's asked of him.

"I definitely feel like my game translates well to the NBA. My ability to use ball screens, and go off the ball as well, and make plays and play alongside of the guards. I think I fit in well within any system, especially Phoenix. They've got a great guard in Goran, I feel like I can play with him as well as back him up if necessary.

"My role will be defined no matter what team I go to, and I'll accept it and build on that and try to make a name for myself."

It's easy to compare McCollum to other combo guards who came from small schools, or simply played off the ball as a scorer rather than point guard.

Combo-sized guys who scored first, passed second in their small college program have made it in the NBA more often than you'd think. [Steve Nash](#) (Santa Clara), [Stephen Curry](#) (Davidson) and [Damian Lillard](#) (Weber State) come to mind. They all played all four years at their school before transitioning to the NBA.

McCollum is compared most often to Damian Lillard, probably since Lillard was drafted just last year.

"I embrace it," McCollum says of the comparison. "We are different players. I know the media loves to compare guys of similar size who went to small schools. I think his demeanor sets him apart, and I think I have the same demeanor. Nothing really fazes him. We are both heady

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players, both able to score."

McCollum took a jab at the other side of that comparison as well.

"I think it's funny, you know, [Lillard] did well so now people say 'CJ will do well at the next level'. But if he would have done poorly, or Steph Curry would have done poorly, they'd be saying small-school guys can't play in the NBA.

"I'm glad he did well."

McCollum also said he watched a lot of a couple older small-sized guards.

"I was really undersized,"he said. "I watched a lot of guys who were small, like [Allen Iverson](#) . I watched guys who weren't very fast, like Steve Nash. He does a great job of changing pace, changing speeds. I learned to play the angles. I'm not the fastest guy in the world, but I'm kind of smart. I know how to use my body and change gears a little bit."

With McCollum's draft range just outside the Suns' pick and McLemore and/or Oladipo both likely available at 5 when the Suns pick, it's unlikely McCollum will be wearing orange/black/purple next season.

But it's also possible that new head coach Jeff Hornacek would like to bring in a really smart, fundamentally sound player whose game is all about efficiency and results.

If Oladipo is gone by the 5th pick, do you take a mature alpha dog like McCollum over the younger, second-fiddle scorer in McLemore?

Maybe. In a draft devoid of sure things, maybe McCollum is the surest thing on the board at 5.

Phoenix Suns 2013 NBA Draft Preview: Is Lehigh's C.J. McCollum the next small-school guard to become

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"Since I was five years old, I wanted to be in this position," McCollum says.

Check out his DX profile: