MUCH LIKE AEROSMITH, NFL TEAMS WILL LOVE "LIVING ON THE EDGE" THIS DRAFT

With the 2018 season over, the all-star games took the main stage for NFL teams looking to rectify their issues at the level-one defensive unit. The NFL Scouting Combine saw several defensive end position records fall, as this class of talent could soon rival the great group that joined the league after the 2011 draft.

That year, nine players were chosen in the first rounds as defensive ends, including three that eventually starred at other positions. Edge rushers Von Miller (second overall to Denver) and Aldon Smith (seventh to San Francisco)were Top Ten choices, but few will argue that Houston did not get the better deal, securing the services of J.J. Watt with the eleventh selection.

Robert Quinn (14th to the Rams) and Ryan Kerrigan (16th to Washington) were hybrids, operating at both the conventional end spot while seeing more playing time at outside linebacker. Tampa Bay used the 20th choice to select Adrian Clayborn and four picks later, Cameron Jordan suited up for New Orleans. Muhammad Wilkerson started at end before shifting inside under Rex Ryan after the Jets took him with pick-30 and the Steelers then pounced on Cameron Heyward with the 31st selection.

Outside of Clayborn, who was recently cut by New England and Aldon Smith, on indefinite suspension by the league for numerous off-field issues, the rest are all expected to retain their starting status entering the 2019 campaign. Quinn is on the trading block, as the Dolphins, who acquired him from the Rams, are trying to entice Dallas or the Saints to take on his contract. Wilkerson is currently testing the free agent waters, but after being traded by the Jets, he spent the last two seasons with the Packers' front wall unit.

A VARIETY OF WAYS TO LINE UP FRONT

NFL teams are huddling within their complexes to analyze what their needs will be on the veteran free agent market and during the draft process. In this day and age of modern football, gone is the leather-helmeted player, replaced by specialized athletes with specific duties in a variety of formations.

In the National Football League, one of three defensive alignments are used by each team, with nine organizations relying upon the 3-4 scheme and thirteen still operating out of the classic 4-3 formation. Ten other teams use a four-man front, yet instead of the traditional interior linemen, they

utilize one as a nose tackle in two variations.

The "under" front looks like a 50 (five-man) defensive line because the strong-side linebacker is up on the line of scrimmage. However, the real for sure way to tell if it’s an Under front, is that the one-technique defensive tackle is to the strong side. Under is the only front where a one-technique will be to the strong side of the formation. This front has been made commonplace in the NFL by the Seahawks, Jaguars, Raiders, 49ers and Falcons among others.

It creates more one-one-one match-ups, with defenders and blockers than most fronts, and that puts more stress on the other offensive linemen to get to the linebackers, otherwise the linebackers have clear paths to make plays. If there is a one-technique defensive tackle to the strong side (tight end side, usually) of the formation, it’s an Under.

Another look is the "Pro" defensive front, but it isn’t a very common formation, despite it putting a lot of stress on the offensive line, as there is a defender for every gap. In the "Over" front, the strong-side linebacker is typically out of the “box”, but in a Pro front, there are seven players in the box, which causes a lot of problems for the offensive line’s angles in the run game. This is often referenced as “all squares are rectangles, but not all rectangles are squares.” All Pro fronts are Over fronts, but not all Over fronts are Pro fronts.

The biggest way to differentiate from an Over and a Pro, is the middle Linebacker. In a Pro defensive front, the “Mike” is in a 00 technique (head up on the center, second level defenders are given a second number to differ from the defensive line). This gives the offensive line very little leverage for either running inside or outside. This isn’t a common front, however, because it puts a ton of stress on your defensive ends, as well as your defensive backs. Having so many men dedicated to the box makes teams vulnerable on the outside.

The more traditional 4-3 alignment has been the “standard” for most teams in the modern era and relies upon four big defensive linemen and three linebackers. The first level defenders are assigned one-gap duties, with their defensive ends attacking from the B/C-gap areas while the interior defenders handle A-gap assignments.

Even though it is a traditional formation, the Tampa Bay Buccaneers under then coordinator Monte Kiffin made the “Cover-2” scheme popular. Kiffin incorporated the three-tech or under-tackle who would often line up in the B-gap, acting more like a run-stuffing defensive end. Success by the under-tackle would often free up the team’s other defensive end to attack the backfield from the wide side.

In another variation of the Cover-2, teams use an athletic, physical defensive tackle to occupy multiple blockers. This allows the defensive end to handle B-gap assignments to rush the passer. That defensive end is bigger on the short side of the field and usually quicker on the field side, as both ends also need to be able to contain the outside running game in those situations.

For the ten teams not using the traditional alignment, they utilize the 3-4 scheme. In that system, it is the nose guard that takes out the “trash” as he will be lining up with two smaller-type of defensive ends that are normally used in a 4-3 alignment. Those edge rushers usually stay in a two-point stance, giving them a better opportunity to explode past a lethargic offensive lineman. Behind those ends are two bigger-sized linebackers, ready to handle and first-level leakage into the second level.

The interior defender needs to be physical enough to handle combo and double-team blocking situations. If the nose guard is successful in taking out multiple blockers, it frees up the inside linebackers to penetrate vs. one-one-one blockers or drop back to cover receivers in the short area. With quicker defensive ends in this scheme handling two-gap duties, slower, bigger 4-3 types are eliminated in favor of the smaller, 250-plus pound bodies playing along the edge.

HOW THE 2019 DRAFT CLASS STACKS UP

Scouts are projecting that at least seven edge rushers will be selected in the first round. Gone are the days of the Too Tall Jones-like defensive ends, replaced by these sleek "sports car" types. The changes have occurred as teams put more emphasis on getting to the quarterback. The defensive ends at the 2000 NFL Combine averaged 6:03.5-277 and averaged 5.0/40-yard with 24 reps in the 225. The 2009 Combine group at this spot averaged 6:03.4-264, ran 4.92 with 24 reps. This year, they checked in at 6:04.5, 258, averaging 4.77 and 27 reps - obviously smaller, yet faster and stronger.

Fortunately for most NFL teams, they either utilize a 3-4 defensive scheme or incorporate speedy edge rushers at their defensive end positions. One look at the crop of conventional defensive ends – the tall, wide, run-stuffing types – and you will see why those teams are better looking at the veteran free agent route for talent.

Teams that utilize a 3-4 defensive alignment or pattern their 4-3 scheme much like Indianapolis did during the Dwight Freeney/Robert Mathis era - using cat-quick, under-sized edge rushers - will have a nice array of early round talent to choose from. While most of the top level talent here have also worked out for teams at the outside linebacker position, they are really better suited to play upfront in a stand-up position, as a lack of experience in pass coverage for a potential move to the second level might take time for those players to develop an all-around game.

Of the seven projected first round athletes at this position, three are more in tune with the "sleek" models - Kentucky's Josh Allen, Mississippi State's Montez Sweat and Florida's Brian Burns. Sweat, who was diagnosed with a minor heart issue, but was one of the Combine's main stars with a blazing 4.41-second clocking in the 40-yard dash.

The other four projected to go in Round One are more traditional types. Ohio State's Nick Bosa is an outstanding edge rusher who is also dominant working in-line to shoot the gaps. Michigan's Rashan Gary and Clemson's Clelin Ferrell might not have eye-opening statistics, but both have proven capable of filling a variety of roles at level-one. Louisiana Tech's Jaylon Ferguson has that cannibal-like hunger attacking the pocket, evident by his NCAA career-record 45.0 sacks. He also set school and Conference USA season-records with a nation-best 17.5 QB drops in 2018.

MOST COMMON DEFENSIVE LINE FRONT TO BE USED BY NFL TEAM IN 2019

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Standard 4-3 | 3-4 Alignment | 4-3/With Under-Tackle |
| Atlanta Falcons | Arizona Cardinals | Cincinnati Bengals |
| Buffalo Bills | Baltimore Ravens (50% scheme) | Baltimore Ravens (50% scheme) |
| Carolina Panthers | Chicago Bears | Indianapolis Colts |
| Cleveland Browns | Denver Broncos | Jacksonville Jaguars |
| Dallas Cowboys | Green Bay Packers | Los Angeles Chargers |
| Detroit Lions | Houston Texans | Los Angeles Rams |
| Miami Dolphins | New York Jets | Minnesota Vikings |
| New England Patriots | Pittsburgh Steelers | New Orleans Saints |
| Oakland Raiders | Washington Redskins | New York Giants |
| Philadelphia Eagles |  | Tennessee Titans |
| Seattle Seahawks |  |  |
| San Francisco 49ers |  |  |
| Tampa Bay Buccaneers |  |  |

CREAM OF THE CROP-TOP THREE DRAFT PROJECTIONS

Nick Bosa-#97

The Ohio State University Buckeyes

6:03.6-266

*Agility Tests*...4.79 in the 40-yard dash…1.62 10-yard dash…2.76 20-yard dash…4.14 20-yard shuttle…7.10 three-cone drill…33 1/2-inch vertical jump…9'-08" broad jump…Bench pressed 225 pounds 29 times…33-inch arm length…10 3/4-inch hands…77 7/8-inch wingspan.

*College Career...*In 30 games (2016-18), Bosa recorded 77 tackles (47 solos) with 17.5 sacks for minus 132 yards and 29.0 stops for losses of 153 yards. He also caused and recovered a pair of fumbles.

*Background...*Bosa holds the distinction of potentially becoming the fourth member of his family to be first round draft selections, as both his father, John (Miami in 1986) and brother, Joey (Chargers in 2016) joined his uncle, Eric Kumerow (Miami) in earning that accolade. He only appeared in three games last season due to a core muscle injury and spent the rest of the year living with his brother in San Diego, where he underwent rehabilitation. Prior to last season, Bosa was a serious contender for the Heisman Trophy. The five-star recruit was also named the Big Ten Conference Defensive Lineman of the Year in 2017, as eight of his fifteen tackles-for-loss were sacks that season.

Even though a knee injury vs. Blanche Ely High in late October cut short his 2015 senior season at Florida powerhouse, St. Thomas Aquinas, Nick was the biggest jewel in Ohio State's 2016 recruiting class. The five-star recruit who was rated in the 247Sports composite rankings the best strong-side defensive end in the 2016 recruiting class is expected to make a full recovery by the opening of 2016 fall camp.

Before committing to Ohio State in July, Nick was one of the most heavily sought-after prospects in the country. He picked up offers from Alabama, Clemson, Florida, Florida State, Miami, Michigan State, Notre Dame and many others before choosing the Buckeyes. While older brother Joey is projected as a top-five pick next spring, but those around Nick Bosa say that he's even more advanced than Joey was.

Nick burst onto the high school football scene in 2012 when he captured Max Preps National Freshman of the Year honors. He followed up with All-American performances in both his sophomore and junior seasons. Through his last seventeen appearances, he recorded 54 tackles with 28.5 stops-for-loss that included fifteen quarterback sacks.

*The Scouting Report*

*Athletic Ability.*..Bosa has just average quickness, but he plays with a high motor to defeat blocks. He has the hip flexibility to drop back in pass coverage, reminding some of the Saints Cameron Jordan when he does so. He has enough quickness to run with the tight ends and backs down the seam ands very good change of direction agility. He demonstrates good balance and lateral movement working down the line. He is fluid when redirecting and does a very good job of staying on his feet. He has an above average burst off the edge and shows acceleration when working in space, but is really more of a bull rusher than a pass rusher with an array of moves. With his long reach, it is rare to see him struggle when disengaging inside, and he uses his hands very well to prevent from getting pushed back vs. the larger offensive tackles.

*Pursuit Skills.*..Bosa has the frame built for power and has shown marked improvement with his punch and good activity with his hands on counter moves. He is more prone to winning battles with strength, instincts and a high motor than with savvy, though, and this can lead to several stalemates in one-on-one battles that he should be winning (needs to know when to play off his block). He has the quick hands and feet, along with movement skills to play either standing up or with his hand down, making him a nice fit at either defensive end assignment.

He is quick to engage the offensive tackles and tight ends and has a very good feel for blocking schemes (just needs to know when to escape rather than battle one-on-one too long). While field fast in the short area, he can flash cat-like quickness covering tight ends in the second level, as he does have good retreat balance and loose hips, especially when reacting to movement.

*Strength at the Point of Attack…*The thing that fools most offensive linemen is Bosa’s ability to either play with finesse or come at them with power and excellent hand usage. He has learned how to use his size to hold up vs. double teams and plays with good leverage, as he dominates when fighting block pressure and holding ground at the point of attack. He has the hand strength to quickly shed and what really impresses is that he’s become a good hip roll tackler when working in-line. He has enough speed to get an edge and despite playing at 260 pounds, he is stronger than he looks, as he plays with leverage and keeps his pads down, making it tough to block him head-on. He can not be washed out by down blocks when he keeps his hands active to prevent from getting overpowered by double teams in attempts to turn the corner.

*Hand Usage.*. Bosa shows not only good placement, but the ability to stab and shock opponents on contact, along with the shed ability to easily disengage from blockers. He fights pressure, and uses his hands well disengage and transfer on the block. He gets his hands on the blocker immediately and does a steady job of keeping blockers off his body with his hand extension. The thing you notice on film is his ability to play with leverage and control blocks, but he must not get too caught up in those one-on-one battles (needs to recognize there are times to finess rather than overpower). When working in trash, he does a nice job of executing club moves, but needs to learn how to mix them up (add rip and swim moves) to prevent from getting too predictable battling the linemen.

*Tackling Ability.*..Bosa has the strength, arm length and reach to hit, wrap and secure. He will square up and wrap, thanks to his above average hip explosion. He plays with a good pad level and despite his lanky frame, he usually holds up well at the point of attack. If he fails to penetrate, he will make a determined effort to string the play out. In the short area, he has enough arm strength to lock up and take out the outside leg of the ball carrier to prevent forward progression after the collision. He follows through the plays in front of him with good balance and on plays against his side, but due to a lack of blazing speed, there are times he will gather before redirecting.

*Run Defense.*..Bosa has good hand placement to generally get a piece of the ball carrier (29.0 tackles-for-loss among his 77 career tackles). He plays better on the move, as he is more productive when stunting and has made marked improvements with his anchor. He uses his hands with quick, strong swipes to disengage when facing the larger blockers head-on, and he will never give up on the play. He might get stuck on big bodies when working in-line, at times, but shows very good athleticism with balance and body control to keep his feet vs. low blocks. His strength at the point of attack has greatly matured and along with his instincts, power and hand usage, he plays off blocks well. He is also a high motor type that will give chase until the whistle. The thing I like best is the improvement he’s made when rolling his hips tackling in-line.

*Pass Rush Ability.*.. While effective, Bosa really has yet to develop an array of pass rush moves, relying more on his length and raw power to beat blocks on his path to the quarterback. He is known more for that power, but as he matures, he needs to be more efficient with his swim- and rip-move techniques. He is the type that prefers to mix it up in the trenches by using his strength rather than simply play off blocks with finesse moves. He plays with good leverage when he can dip his inside shoulder, but can be steered away from the play if a blocker latches on to his jersey. He has hand punch needed to stab and collapse when working off the initial block.

Bosa is a high energy type who needs to do a better job with his pre-snap reads. He relies more on his power than his average quickness to get to the quarterback. Still, he can really chase hard to close, demonstrating good impact when he makes contact with the larger and stronger blockers. He flattens quickly and has the power to come up and under, but needs to work on getting through inside trash better (has to work the inside shoulder better). When he breaks free, Bosa shows the quickness to close, as he takes dead aim on the passer.

*Compares To.*..Jared Allen-ex-Carolina Panthers…Bosa will be one of the first players selected in the draft, but while he has good sack numbers, he’s more of a bull rusher than a player with an array of savvy moves. If his power move fails and he does not dip his inside shoulder, more often than not, he can be contained. He’s a high motor type in the Allen mold and his big play skills are unquestioned.

Josh Allen-#41

University of Kentucky Wildcats

6:04.7-262

*Agility Tests*...4.63 in the 40-yard dash…1.63 10-yard dash…2.70 20-yard dash…4.23 20-yard shuttle…7.15 three-cone drill…32-inch vertical jump…9'-08" broad jump…Bench pressed 225 pounds 28 times…33 1/2-inch arm length…8 5/8-inch hands…80 1/2-inch wingspan.

*College Career...*In 34 games (2016-18), Allen made 34 starts, as he recorded 215 tackles (119 solos) with 31.0 sacks for minus 200 yards and 39.5 stops for losses totaling 220 yards. He posted 14 quarterback pressures, as he caused seven fumbles and recovered two others. He blocked one kick, intercepted one pass and produced eight pass deflections.

*Background.*..Allen was the most visible player on a unit stacked with seniors, as he earned national Defensive Player of the Year and first-team All-American honors after setting the school season-record with 17.0 sacks in 2018, to go along with 21.5 stops behind the line of scrimmage.

Allen left his Wildcat career as one of the most decorated Kentucky athletes of all time. His lists of awards this season include: Bronko Nagurski Award, Chuck Bednarik Award, Ronnie Lott IMPACT Trophy, First-Team All-America by Walter Camp Football Foundation, Sports Illustrated, TheAthletic.com, ESPN, Associated Press, College Football News, Football Writers Association of America, Sporting News, USA Today, CBS, Athlon Sports and the American Football Coaches Association, along with being named SEC Defensive Player of the Year by both the AP, Coaches, and Athlon Sports.

Allen was a huge reason for the defensive success, as he finished the season ranking sixth in the FBS and first in the SEC with his 21.5 stops-for-loss, as only Louisiana Tech's Jaylor Ferguson (17.5) recorded more sacks that Allen (17.0). Twelve of his 14 sacks have come in the second half, including eight in the fourth quarter. Five of his fourth quarter sacks have been key plays in close games, including two sack/fumble/UK recovery plays on the opponent's final possession. He also tied for the NCAA lead in forced fumbles (five). and closed out his career as the school's all-time sacks leader (31.0).

*The Scouting Report*

*Athletic Ability.*.. Allen has a compact build with solid overall muscle tone, long arms, good bubble, tapered thighs and calves. He has smaller-than-ideal hands, but possesses a frame that can carry some additional weight, but he is getting close to maximum bulk potential. He has a trim midsection, looking the part that teams want from a rush end/strong-side linebacker. He also displays minimal body fat, along with a well defined abdomen, along with tight waist and hips.

Allen is a strong, powerful defender with excellent explosion and quickness to get to the football. He has exceptional sustained speed, making him a perfect candidate to rush off the edge or drop back and defend in short-to-intermediate pass coverage. He shows above average flexibility and balance, along with superb body control and long arms that allow him to play off reach blocks to slip past opponents. He changes direction with no wasted motion and has the lower body flexibility, hip snap and knee bend to work down the line or stand up and cover tight ends and slot receivers underneath. For a player of his size, he displays excellent strength and a hand punch that can rock an offensive tackle back on his heels.

*Pursuit Skills.*.. Allen has outstanding take-off quickness, consistently beating the offensive tackles off the snap and up field. He has the suddenness to turn over and reach top speed and when he flashes that suddenness, he instantly gains advantage. His best asset is his initial step, as he can affect protections and be a very disruptive edge rusher. Coming off the snap, he shows excellent quickness to get into the offensive lineman. He has the closing speed and first step that lets him consistently beat tackles coming off the edge. He does a very good job of timing his jumps and uses his leg drive effectively to redirect

*Strength at the Point of Attack…*Allen has that natural overall strength to stuff blockers and plays stout vs. the run (teams have averaged just 0.52 yards per carry with no touchdowns against him on the ground in 2018). Even when blockers try to cover him or when challenged by double teams, he has good hand usage (small hands do affect his wrap-up skills, though) and a strong punch to shed when engaged. He works hard and knows how to use his natural power to stack and control in one-on-one confrontations and it is rare to see him get pushed around at the X’s, thanks to his combination of speed and strength. He understands leverage and is powerfull at the point of attack. He has very strong and active hands. He shows very good outside arm-free strength and leverage and is rarely blown off the ball. He can get across face quickly and has the lower body strength and flexibility to sink his hips, drop his weight and gain leverage. He has the arm power and body control to split double teams. It is his quickness that lets him beat most blocks. Even when he is not quick to shed, he can cross face fast.

*Hand Usage.*.. Allen hands are very active when he encounters a blocker. He uses his hand punch and arm extension to separate and shed vs. the run, doing a very nice job when ripping and pulling. With his ability to play with leverage, he has no problem maintaining separation at the X’s. He is active trying to fend off bigger lineman in one-on-one battles and can penetrate and defeat blockers with his array of moves. He shows very good effort against the double team and protects his legs by using his hands effectively to keep blockers off his body. For a player with small hands, he has very good strength and quick arms, playing with authority when he locks on. His fast-paced hand action consistently allows him to gain inside position.

*Tackling Ability.*.. Allen is a solid collision-type tackler, but needs to work on wrapping and securing better. He certainly delivers a strong strike on contact, but will sometimes duck his head, resulting in runners able to sidestep his intended hits. He has the athletic ability to adjust and finish on his own in space. When he drives with arms extended, he can instantly stop the ball carrier at the line of scrimmage. When he uses his hands to lock up and keeps his shoulders square, he can punish. He just needs to become more comfortable in playing at a correct pad level and keeping helmet placement. He is very effective as a drag-down tackler after the chase and is also adept at stopping the ball carrier at the line of scrimmage with his leg drive. He will hit with good explosion when working in the short area and makes fluid body adjustments when working in space.

*Run Defense.*..Allen is a very good chase/pursuit type with nice change of direction agility and outstanding speed to make plays in long pursuit. He has the lateral range to slide and avoid when working in-line, but when his hands gets outside his frame, there will be times that he will struggle to shed. He has quick feet to play off blocks and fights back quickly when knocked down. He can get a side and keep it, using his lower body to hold at the point of attack. When he gets a little high in his stance, he struggles to shed. He is functionally strong and plays with leverage at the point of attack. His sudden quickness off the snap allows him to disrupt the action in the backfield.

*Pass Rush Ability.*..Allen has cat-like quickness to simply run past the slower offensive tackles at the line of scrimmage. He has the body flexibility and knee bend to keep balance when suddenly having to turn. He is especially effective when redirecting and dipping back under. His long arms and strong (yet small) hands allow him to free up on twists and games, but is best when making plays on the move rather than taking on one-on-one battles from a stationary position. He has the motor and tools to run the horn to get to the quarterback.

As a pass rusher, he has very good body control and excellent hip snap. The think I like is the way he can squeeze through the tiniest of creases to get into the backfield. He uses his arm-over moves with very good quickness and rips well. He keeps himself lean to gain leverage and he excels at pressuring the quarterback. He can turn the corner and shows good counter moves to come underneath and make the play. His lower body strength lets him push the pocket and he displays very good urgency to get to the quarterback.

*Compares To.*..Terrell Suggs-Arizona…Much like Suggs and the Vikings' Anthony Barr, Allen has that incredible initial step and outstanding chase speed to make plays coming off the edge. He lacks the ideal size you look for in a classic 4-3 defensive end, making him more likely a 3-4 linebacker in a 3-4 alignment. Like Suggs, his raw power has seen him gain very good success vs. the run. Despite his sack and pressure totals, there is much more to his game than just being a pass rusher.

IF MONTEZ SWEAT WAS ANY FASTER, HE'D GET A SPEEDING TICKET WALKING ON CAMPUS

Montez "Tez" Sweat-#9

Mississippi State University Bulldogs

6:05.6-260

*Agility Tests*...4.41 in the 40-yard dash…1.54 10-yard dash…2.57 20-yard dash…4.29 20-yard shuttle…7.00 three-cone drill…36-inch vertical jump…10'-05" broad jump…Bench pressed 225 pounds 21 times…35 3/4-inch arm length…10 1/2-inch hands…84 3/4-inch wingspan.

*College Career...*Sweat began his career as a tight end recruit at Michigan State in 2014. Converted to defensive end, he appeared in two games, delivering four tackles (2 solos) that included an assisted sack for minus two yards. After not recording any tackles during the first two Spartans games in 2015, Sweat was suspended for the rest of the year for a team rules violation. He then appeared in nine games at Copiah-Lincoln Community College in 2016, where he delivered 39 tackles (32 solos) with five sacks for minus 20 yards, six stops for losses of 28 yards and a 12-yard interception return. He caused two fumbles, recovered two others and blocked one kick in nine appearances and was rated the 47th-best junior college recruit.

In two seasons that encompassed 26 games (2017-18) at Mississippi State, Sweat made 101 tackles (48 solos) that included double-digit sack totals each campaign (22.0 for minus 160 yards) among his 29.5 stops for losses of 173 yards. He caused and recovered a fumble, along with posting eleven quarter-back pressures.

*Background.*..It was a long road for Sweat to gain national recognition at Mississippi State. He attended Stephenson High School, where current Green Bay Packers linebacker Perry Smith attended. In the prep ranks, Sweat was regarded as one of the nation's top tight ends and he later enrolled at Michigan State, where he was converted to defensive end. After playing in just two games, making four tackles with an assisted sack in 2014.

Sweat was first suspended and later asked to leave Michigan State in 2015. He saw limited action in two games, but failed a drug test (marijuana) and was later accused of stealing a bicycle, which he later said was a "misunderstanding."

A year at Copiah-Lincoln saw SEC teams come calling. He had 39 tackles that included five sacks in 2016, but was just the 47th-rated junior college prospect. He matured both physically and off the field for the Bulldogs and was a two-time All-SEC choice before putting on a blazing performance at the NFL Scouting Combine.

Sweat is just one of five defensive linemen to clock under 4.5 seconds in the 40-yard dash during the last fifteen Combine events. In fact, his 4.41 clocking broke the position record that was set by North Carolina State's Manny Lawson (4.43) in 2003.

*The Scouting Report*

*Athletic Ability.*.. Sweat has a well-built, muscular frame with a tight waist and hips, long arms, good bubble, thick thighs and room on his frame for additional growth. He is an explosive athlete that has all tools you look for in an edge rusher. He has excellent speed, fluid change of direction agility and a sudden burst into the backfield. He generates an explosive first step and is very active working down the line. He has good strength and shows good knee bend, but does tend to get a bit high in his stance when on the move. He is very effective extending his long arms to keep blockers off his chest.

The first thing you notice about Sweat is the tremendous initial explosion he generates coming off the snap. He shows urgency moving down the line and has made very good strides in improving his footwork dropping back in pass coverage (could be a good line-backer candidate in the 3-4 defense). He uses his long arms with great efficiency in defeating reach blocks and has a strong hand thrust to jolt offensive linemen coming out of their stance. His lateral agility allows him to play faster than his timed speed. He shows very good flexibility changing direction and his low center of gravity prevents blockers from locking on and dragging him to the ground. He shows very good knee bend and hip flexibility to stay up moving through trash.

*Pursuit Skills.*..Sweat has great explosiveness off the snap. He has learned the proper technique of opening his hips and dipping his shoulders to get a strong push in his initial thrust. He has the sudden burst to quickly get around the corner, evident by his play in the 2018 Kentucky, Texas A&M, Arkansas and Louisville contests. He has above average instincts coming off the snap, having that sudden burst needed to fly past offensive tackles coming off the edge. He shows no hesitation getting to top speed when moving up field. Even when he gets engulfed by the larger blockers, he can instantly redirect.

His leverage off the ball allows him to get almost instant penetration. His first step off the snap lets him beat the offensive tackle off the edge and by generating more power with his shoulders, he can time his jumps and anticipate the flow of the ball better.

*Strength at the Point of Attack.*.. Sweat generates exceptional leverage. His low pad level is a great asset, as the taller offensive linemen cannot stay low enough in their pads to get underneath him. He has great weight room strength and is just now understanding how to translate that to the field (better rip, swim and club moves). His lower body thickness and power allows him to split double teams and he demonstrates the flexibility to drop his weight and redirect when the gaps are plugged. Most rush ends struggle to play the double team, but Sweat’s balance, leverage and long arm reach allows him to defeat the combo block and reroute in back side pursuit. He has the ability to split tackles and outstanding ability to knife down the line. He shows strength at the point of attack, squeezing and leveraging blockers well. There are times where he might struggle to disengage when working in-line, but has the speed to defeat tackles coming off the edge. He plays stout, but when working around the pile, if tagged, he does not have the bulk to prevent the bigger blockers from absorbing him.

*Hand Usage.*..With experience, Sweat has now learned on how to rely upon his long reach and good hand strength. He does a very good job of defeating blocks with his powerful hand jolt. He has the ability to dip his shoulder to reach, grab and jerk the blocker off his stance. He has become very alert to use his hands to guard his legs vs. the chop block (only had three knockdowns during the 2018 season). He no longer lets blockers get into his body on run blocks, doing a nice job with his body lean and ability to slip off the offensive tackle’s inside shoulder. You can see on film his improvement of using his hands to gain inside position.

In 2018, Sweat flashed good hand power to shock and jolt blockers on contact. He's more consist in attempts to stack and hold, doing a nice job in the short area to reroute the tight ends. He is very effective with his arm swipes to defeat the cut block and can create separation with his long reach. He is very effective in attempts to lock on and run with the tight ends and backs in the short area passing game.

*Tackling Ability.*..I really like his improved tackling technique. Before, Sweat would grab and make arm tackles, but now, he understands the concept of gaining position, staying low in his pads and maintaining leverage in order to make the wrap-up tackle. He no longer over-pursues the play, showing the field vision to sift through traffic and quickly see the play develop. He makes good body adjustments to slip through trash and make plays in the short area. He has also learned how to use his natural strength and legitimate foot speed to bounce to the outside in order to string out and make plays along the sidelines.

Sweat shows explosiveness on contact and flashes above average wrapping ability in closed quarters. He gets good production on the move, but also has the power to take on and push back the lead blocker through the rushing lanes. He has the long arms to secure and strike and is a reliable tackler, but you would like to see him attack more when working in-line (better on the edge, where he is best when roaming to the ball then when trying to disengage and slip through trash).

*Run Defense.*.. Before, blockers would engulf Sweat to lock on and wall him off. But, with greatly improved hand technique, he refined his bull rush moves, utilizing his strength to deliver a thud with his club and rip moves. He might lack the ideal bulk (260) to face up to the larger blockers, so he compensates with quickness off the snap that lets him get good penetration and disrupt the play. He drops his weight and plays with leverage and has a good feel for blocking schemes. Before, when tight ends or tackles would cover Sweat up, he would lose containment. But with more confidence in his arm reach, he has shown the ability to defeat any attempts to get into his chest. His ability to play low in his pads prevents the blockers from washing him out when working in-line. His low center of gravity lets him get into the rush lane and push back the lead blocker to clog the holes.

He relies a lot on his quickness to avoid blocks working inside, but does have the power to stack (needs to do this more often). He is effective to fill the holes when he stays low in his pads. On the outside, he shows excellent chase and pursuit effort. He has the burst and acceleration to string out plays and is a very good perimeter tackler for a player of his size. He has more than enough speed to run sideline to sideline and track the ball well on the corners. I like the way he attacks the outside run to seal the edge and force the plays back inside. When he avoids trash, he will usually make the tackle.

*Pass Rush Ability.*..Sweat is relentless in pursuit. He sees the field very well and is quick to spot even the slightest of creases in order to shoot the gaps. He is very effective with his counter moves working to the inside. His spin moves and quickness lets him easily defeat the slower offensive tackles when working off the edge. He has very good hand usage that he combines with his burst to play off blocks and consistently pressure the quarterback. He has the strength to bull rush and push the pocket, but if he leaves his chest exposed when powering inside, he can be absorbed. His flexibility has also improved, as he does a better job of opening his hips (used to be a little stiff and took false steps when changing direction).

Sweat has a very good burst to close and creates havoc in the backfield. He can sink his hips and shows solid second effort to slip off blocks when his initial move fails. He has the pass rush speed and flexibility to turn the corner of the edge almost instantly. He blitzes with good desire and takes proper angles in pursuit. You notice on film that he is very active with his hands in attempts to defeat the block.

*Compares To.*..Jadeveon Clowney-Houston Texans-Both are incredible physical specimens that add a nice element with their blazing speed coming off the edge. Simply put, Sweat looks like the prototype NFL defensive end from his long athletic build to his extra long arm length. Yes, he made many of his plays unblocked, but if you can't catch him, you can't stop him. Like Clowney, he has an explosive arm-over move, but while he is a rising star as a pass rusher, when he leaves his body exposed, a blocker can wall him off.

STATISTICS DON'T SHOW THE REAL VALUE IN RASHAN GARY

Rashan Gary-#3

University of Michigan Wolverines

6:04.3-277

*Agility Tests*...4.58 in the 40-yard dash…1.61 10-yard dash…2.67 20-yard dash…4.29 20-yard shuttle…7.26 three-cone drill…38-inch vertical jump…10'-00" broad jump…Bench pressed 225 pounds 26 times…34 1/8-inch arm length…9 5/8-inch hands…81 7/8--inch wingspan.

*College Career.*..Gary has appeared in 35 games for the Wolverines, lining up at a variety of positions on the front wall. He delivered 137 tackles (84 solos) with 10.5 sacks for minus 70 yards, 24.0 stops for losses of 105 yards and nineteen quarterback pressures. He also caused one fumble.

*Background.*..Coming out of Paramus Catholic High School, Gary was the consensus best recruit in the country and was twice named New Jersey Defensive Player of the Year. The 2015 USA Today Player of the Year was teammates with current New York Giants safety, Jabrill Peppers. He joined Peppers and another teammate, lineman Juwann Bushell-Beatty in becoming a Wolverine in 2016 after he recorded 110 tackles that included 27.5 sacks his last two years in the prep ranks.

A reserve as a freshman, he was limited to 27 tackles in 2016, but five were accounted for behind the line of scrimmage. As a sophomore, Gary received All-Big Ten Conference honors. Often playing more of a run-stuffing role, he posted 66 tackles, adding six sacks among his twelve stops-for-loss as a full-time starter.

Gary was one of several high-profile Wolverines that decided to bypass the team's bowl season in 2018, a pattern that more and more collegians seem to be following. In the industry, that becomes a "bad mark" until fully explaining their decision at the Combine. In twelve games as a senior, he collected 44 tackles, seeing his sack numbers dip to 3.5 and his tackle-for-loss figures close at seven. The notable drop was more due to a position responsibility, as U-M down linemen usually clear the gaps for their linebackers to blitz. With Gary doing the "grunt work," it freed up fellow end, Chase Winovich, who made fifteen stops-for-loss. Later in the season, Gary played more of an interior position in order for the staff to get Kwity Paye opportunities to come off the edge and get to the opposing passer.

*The Scouting Report*

*Athletic Ability.*.. Gary has a well built, thick frame with impressive muscle tone in his shoulders, chest, arms and back. He has a good bubble with thick thighs and calves, along with good arm length to stave off blockers and big hands to wrap and secure as a tackler. He looks to have room to add at least another 15 pounds of bulk without it affecting his overall quickness and timed speed.

Gary has above average timed speed for a player his size. He fires off the snap at a low pad level, keeping his hands inside his frame to prevent blockers from getting into his chest. He is a combative type that hits with a thud and displays more than enough hand strength to dislodge the ball from the running backs. He is genetically gifted, as he flashes excellent acceleration closing from the backside and the powerful burst to be quite effective splitting double teams and impacting pocket pressure when working towards the inside gaps. He has that short, sudden burst off the line to surprise a lethargic offensive lineman and has shown decent leaping ability (prep basketball player with a verified 38-inch vertical jump), along with the long reach to knock down passes at the line of scrimmage. His suddenness off the snap allows him to consistently gain penetration.

*Pursuit Skills.*..Gary has an impressive blend of quickness and power, especially as a pass rusher. He has that initial explosion to fly past slower offensive linemen and simply beats most blockers coming off the edge. He has the balance and change of direction agility to slant and shoot the gaps, staying low in his pads while using his reach to keep blockers away from his legs. When he moves laterally, you can see the way he easily blows past the gaps. He has the same burst whether standing up or in a two-point stance and consistency gains advantage with his ability to pin the offensive tackle’s ears back. He has that low center of gravity to quickly crash inside coming off the snap and very good balance when bending back inside. With his hand usage, upper body strength and punch, more often than not, he can walk any offensive tackle back into the quarterback.

*Strength at the Point of Attack.*.. This is where Gary is greatly underrated. With a 400-pound bench press, big hands and long arms (81 7/8-inch wing span), he is a nightmare for offensive tackles in one-on-one confrontations. He might get too caught up in the battle at times, but utilizes his quickness and explosion off the ball, along with active hands to consistently gain block separation. He shows much quicker counter moves as a senior than in previous seasons and shows the lower body strength and leg drive to get opponents off-balance when shooting the gaps. He uses his hands well to discard blocks and even when double teamed, he’s not blocked for long, as he uses his strength well to lock out and shed. He also uses his hands with force when attempting to rip through holds.

*Hand Usage.*.. Gary has outstanding ability to swipe at and knock down offensive linemen coming off blocks, as his hand quickness is very beneficial when executing pass rush moves. He uses his length like a weapon – constantly stabbing in attempts to gain separation. He is also very effective when trying to pull and jerk on offensive tackles to break free coming off the edge.

*Tackling Ability.*..Gary is a solid wrap-up tackler with good range, especially when making plays from the backside. He hits with a good thud and knows how to bring his arms to wrap and secure. He is not the type that will take a side, which results in a few runners getting away. He shows good vision working at the X’s and comes to balance quickly to stave off low blocks and make plays when clogging the inside run lanes. He has more than enough strength to discard blockers and makes plays because of his hunger to do so (will never throttle on a play).

Some teams might consider Gary linebacker material due to his pursuit quickness and ability to work down the line. He is more effective locating the ball on the move. He takes very good angles to the ball and flashes the short area burst needed to maintain acceleration while pressuring and chasing the quarterback (see 2018 Nebraska, Indiana games). The thing you notice on film is his outstanding eyes, as he always seems to be able to locate the ball through a crowd and give chase.

*Run Defense.*..Understand, this is a player that constantly saw multiple blockers attack him. Gary is a beast when giving chase in the backfield. He has that instinctive ability to know when to shoot his hands in attempts to hit and shed. He plays much bigger than his size indicates in run force and has the lower body strength to hold ground firmly at the point of attack. He runs and chases the ball down all over the field and is very consistent in finding the football when on the move.

*Pass Rush Ability.*..Gary has that sudden initial step to gain advantage coming off the edge. His balance is evident by his ability to easily bend back inside. He has the leg drive to get under offensive tackles and push his man back into the pocket. He flashes the short area burst needed to shoot the gaps and very good ability to dip and rip while turning the corner. He bends and flattens with good body control and speed, but he also knows that he has to keep his hands active and not allow himself to get tied up at the X’s to have the success he has had pressuring and collapsing the pocket.

While he has just average sack numbers, Gary shows valid initial explosion off the snap to gain penetration. He shows good urgency and effort in his chase and has the speed in the backfield to regularly disrupt the pocket. With his ability to come off the edge, using him at 277 pounds, standing up in a 3-4 alignment, could see him wreak havoc vs. the passing game.

*Compares To.*..Richard Seymour-ex-New England Patriots...Yes, a lofty comparison for a player with average statistics, but Gary often played out of position at Michigan. He has the potential for being a top-north inside-outside rusher, much like Seymour was. Gary has that innate ability to quickly spot blocking schemes, making plays before they can even develop. He has patience while playing in run containment and the balance to change direction to shut down the reverse. He shows very good eyes to locate the ball on the move. He knows how to use his arm length to get block separation while he locates the football and consistently shows the ability to make plays when working down the line.

FLORIDA STATE'S BURNS RESIDES IN AN OPPONENT'S BACKFIELD

Brian Burns-#99

Florida State University Seminoles

6:04.6-249

*Agility Tests*...4.53 in the 40-yard dash…1.54 10-yard dash…2.62 20-yard dash…no 20-yard shuttle…7.01 three-cone drill…36-inch vertical jump…10'-09" broad jump…No bench press...33 7/8--inch arm length…10 1/2-inch hands…83 5/8-inch wingspan.

*College Career.*..Burns played in 38 games for the Seminoles, as he registered 124 tackles (72 solos), 24.0 sacks for minus 171 yards, 39.5 stops for losses of 218 yards and fourteen quarterback pressures. Additionally, he caused seven fumbles and recovered two others while blocking three kicks and defending seven passes.

*Background.*..Despite being a five-star recruit, few outside the Florida State staff expected Burn, a whole 218 pounds at his enrollment, would one day turn into one of the school's most prolific pass rushers. He had guided American Heritage High School to back-to-back state titles, coming up with a combined 135 tackles and 28 sacks over his junior and senior seasons.

Burns seized a starting opportunity at strong-side end in 2016. Despite his slight frame, he paced the Seminoles with 9.5 sacks that year, making 10.5 stops-for-loss among his 24 tackles. With ten pounds of bulk added prior to his sophomore season, Burns saw his sack numbers drop to 4.5 in 2017, but he led the team with 48 tackles and excelled in other areas of his game, accounting for 13.5 stops behind the line of scrimmage, four pass deflections and three forced fumbles.

Burns arrived on campus a solid 235 pounds last season. With the team struggling, he was one of their few bright spots, as he led the team with ten sacks (15th on FSU's season list) and 15.5 stops-for-loss among 52 total tackles. He pressured the pocket eight times, causing three fumbles in the process. He currently ranks sixth in both tackles-for-loss (39.5, seventh-best in school history) and sacks (24.0) among current NCAA FBS performers. Only Reinard Wilson (35.5; 1993-96), Peter Boulware (34.0; 1994-96) and Ron Simmons (25.0; 1977-80) have ever recorded more sacks in a Florida State uniform.

*The Scouting Report*

*Athletic Ability.*..Burns has an angular frame with developed upper body muscle tone, thick and long arms, large hands, good bubble and solid thickness in his thighs and calves. He has the ability to add at least 10-15 pounds to his frame with no loss in quickness and actually added fifteen pounds after the 2018 season, but still ran 4.56 at the Combine. He has the build that you look for more so in a strong-side linebacker than a down lineman, but will need to add more bulk if a team plans to play him with his hand down at the next level.

Burns has the sudden initial quickness needed to gain advantage on a slower offensive lineman. He shows very good flexibility and balance working down the line and does a nice job of flattening and changing direction to provide inside gap containment. He has the speed to chase and run coming from the backside and impressive strength for a 249-pound player. He’s a quick twitch athlete with good hand placement to keep blockers away from his feet. He shows good agility to split traffic and takes good angles coming off the edge as a pass rusher. He carries his weight well, showing good balance and body control working his way down the line and has the second gear to generate long pursuit. When playing on the edge, he keeps his pads down and head on a swivel, as he compensates for a lack of ideal bulk with very active hands to deliver counter moves and slip off blocks. He is very shifty on the move, with the stop-&-go agility to immediately change direction. He has the vision to locate the crease and does an excellent job of using his burst to close and pressure the pocket.

*Pursuit Skills.*.. Burns has that quick first step that will usually see him gain advantage on a slower offensive lineman. He can get up field quickly and reaches the corners with good urgency to push the outside running game back in (see 2018 Virginia Tech, Syracuse, Miami games). He has the lateral range to slip into the backfield when working in-line and with his quick hands and feet, he has no problem retreating and chasing down receivers when working in the second level (might be considered as a Sam linebacker because of this).

He has the acceleration to take a wide loop around the corner and still pressure the pocket. He stays low in his pads and has the loose hips to redirect, also displaying the second gear needed to excel in long pursuit. He is a quick twitch type with very active hands and good balance, keeping his feet on the move while doing a nice job of avoiding low blocks.

*Strength at the Point of Attack…*Despite being just 249 pounds, Burns’s weight room strength (370-pound bench press) easily translates to the football field, but when he exposes his chest and gets his hands outside his frame, blockers do have success in washing him away from the play (trick is to lock on to his jersey when he fails to protect his chest). He relies more on beating blocks with his quickness, but has the hand punch to push back lead blockers when playing in gap containment. Earlier in his career, he did not use his hands effectively to get off blocks and that would open the rush gate. He is much more effective utilizing his power when on the move, rather than when trying to maintain position at the line of scrimmage. He will still occasionally get stuck on “big people,” but when he keeps his hands active, he has good success in attempts to play off blocks.

*Hand Usage.*..Burns has become more conscious in keeping his hands inside his frame and staying active with them to play off blocks. His ability to reroute tight ends and short area receivers might benefit him greatly, if he moves to linebacker. He has the strength to shock and shed quickly, especially when he explodes into the blocker. With his reach and hand strength, he has become much more effective in keeping separation vs. the run and to press the edge when rushing the quarterback. He has a good array of moves and cross-over action to slip off the shoulder of a blocker and pursue the quarterback.

*Tackling Ability.*.. Burns has that ease-of-movement that most linebackers wish they had, making him very dangerous as an edge rusher. He is an active, high energy type that plays the game on his feet. He can disengage quickly on the move and shows the burst needed to chase down the ball when in pursuit. He is very good at running down plays along the perimeter and opponents have averaged just 0.39 yards per rushing attempt vs. him in 2018, a stark contrast from his freshman campaign (5.64-yard average).

Burns became much more assertive as a tackler during his junior year. He has the quickness to slip off blocks and the strength to deliver explosive pop on contact. He might lack the size you look for in a down lineman, but is functional in attempts to roll and drive when taking on initial contact. His body control lets him stay low in his pads and his loose hips are evident by the way he fluidly changes direction. When he wraps up an opponent, he will generally make the tackle.

*Run Defense.*.. Burns might lack the “sand in his pants” to win one-on-one battles with much bigger offensive linemen, but he has become an effective leverage player, thanks to his hand usage and ability to generate a strong punch to shock and jolt upon contact. He might not be able to hold ground firmly at the point of attack at the next level, but he sheds in timely fashion and is a much more productive tackler when on the move. With his closing burst and overall speed, he is best served playing off the line, making him a better fit for linebacker at the next level. On 37 running plays he made tackles on in 2018, just two of those carries produced first downs by the opposition.

Burns knows he has to compensate for a lack of bulk when taking on bigger blockers, but will surprise a lethargic lineman with quick spin moves and can rock the offensive tackle back on his heels when he keeps his hands inside his frame to generate a strong punch. He is a disciplined player who won’t get reckless and take himself out of the play. He might lack the bulk and strength to face up to the bigger offensive linemen, but with his hand technique, placement and array of moves, he will generally make the play and not get washed out at the line of scrimmage.

*Pass Rush Ability.*. Burns shows good urgency closing on the quarterback. He takes good angles to the passer and has that explosive burst off the edge, along with a high, non-stop motor to disrupt the pocket. When free from the lineman, you can see him utilize his hip turn to press the corner. While Burns has a good deal of sacks, he is also very effective at generating pressure due to his speed and second gear. He bears down on the pocket and has the acceleration to get to the quarterback, even when he has to take a wide loop. He has the explosive burst to flush the passer out and stays in control when closing (when he takes aim on the QB, he will get there in an instant). You can see his athletic agility when he flexes and bends his knees to get down the line of scrimmage.

Burns appears to be very nimble and keeps his hands active. He has become very comfortable using his punch when working off the edge of a blocker. When he gets a little too high in his attack, he struggles to finish, but has become much more alert to playing at a low pad level. Speed is his best rush move, but Burns has great hand placement to slip out and avoid blocks on the move. He comes off the edge with a sudden burst and when asked to shoot the gaps, blockers are often surprised by his explosion through the holes (see 2018 Syracuse, Louisville, Miami, Wake Forest games). The thing you see on film is that he combines his speed with efficient inside counter moves to pressure the pocket. He has also developed swim and rip moves working inside, but is better at getting to the quarterback when playing off the edge.

*Compares To.*..Jason Taylor-ex-Miami Dolphins...Some teams feel that Burns lacks the bulk to face up to the bigger offensive tackles at the next level, but, like Taylor, he is blessed with excellent quickness, good balance and body control and very active hands to counter. He is best playing on the move, as his bulk issues do come into play when trying to combat double teams, but he has that lateral agility and closing burst to get serious consideration as a strong-side linebacker or edge rusher.

CLEMSON'S FERRELL EMBRACES THE TRUE TEAM CONCEPT

Clelin Ferrell-#99

Clemson University Tigers

6:04.3-264

*Agility Tests*...Due to a toe injury, Ferrell only did limited workouts at the NFL Scouting Combine and Clemson's Pro Day.

4.40 20-yard shuttle…12.10 60-yard shuttle...7.26 three-cone drill…Bench pressed 225 pounds 25 times…34 1/8-inch arm length…10 1/2-inch hands…82 3/8-inch wingspan.

*College Career.*..In 44 games at the university, Ferrell collected 164 tackles (83 solos) with 50.0 stops for losses totaling 227 yards. He registered 26.5 sacks for minus 154 yards, as he caused five fumbles and recovered another.

*Background.*..For Ferrell, his troubles might be coming full circle. He has been hampered by a toe injury that prevented him from working out at the school's Pro Day and the few drills that he did perform in at the Scouting Combine were in the bottom of his group. He's had his fair share of adversity, which began as a freshman at Benedictine College Prep, a military school in Virginia. His first year at the school saw his father, who was a career military man, pass away. He never took the field during his senior season due to a torn knee anterior cruciate ligament.

Hoping for a fresh start on campus, Ferrell was red-shirted in 2015 after he suffered a hand injury during fall camp. In 2016, he went on to start all fifteen games he appeared in, but missed a good portion of the national title clash vs. Alabama with a foot sprain. Sharing team defensive rookie-of-the-year honors with Dexter Lawrence, Ferrell produced 50 tackles, including 12.5 for loss and six sacks, to go along with a team-high 24 quarterback pressures.

In 2017, was again the Tigers' full-time starter. The strong-side defensive end was a finalist for the Ted Hendricks Award, given to the nation's top defensive end. He also became the Tiger freshman or sophomore in history to earn first-team Associated Press All-American honors, joining Sammy Watkins and Deshaun Watson. The unanimous All-Atlantic Coast choice made 63 tackles, 18.0 tackles for loss, 9.5 sacks, 12 quarterback pressures, a pass breakup and two caused fumbles in 717 snaps over fourteen games.

The coveted Hendricks Award now sits on Ferrell's mantelpiece, taking home the hardware in 2018.

The Bednarik Award semifinalist was a consensus first-team All-American, joining former Tiger Terry Kinard (1981-82) as the only players in school annals to earn that distinction from the AP in consecutive years. The ACC Defensive Player of the Year was voted team captain and rewarded his coaches' faith, as he was credited with 53 tackles (19.5 for loss), 11.5 sacks, four pass breakups, three forced fumbles and two fumble recoveries including one recovered for a touchdown in 691 snaps through fifteen contests.

*The Scouting Report*

*Athletic Ability.*..Ferrell has good arm length and reach, showing a tight abdomen and a frame that can carry at least another ten pounds of bulk with no loss in quickness, as he has the stout frame to slide inside and play tackle, but is more likely a 3-4 end in the NFL. He has the balance and agility to shoot the gaps and make plays in the backfield, showing good lateral pursuit ability.

*Pursuit Skills.*..Ferrell has nice bull-rush moves, as he consistently gets under the blocker's pads and pushes them into the backfield. He tries hard to get to the quarterback, but must do a better job locating diving blockers, as he does not do a good job of protecting his feet. He can sniffs out misdirection and quick screens to his side, but is not really that agile working in space.

*Strength at the Point of Attack…*Ferrell keeps his feet moving after initial contact, but is inconsistent disengaging from the blocks of better linemen. He needs to be more violent with his hands and take advantage of his speed vs. slower blockers tackles. One important reason to doubt that he will be a blitzing linebacker at the next level is that he has only adequate flexibility and change-of-direction agility to turn the corner or be effective on twists.

*Hand Usage.*..The Tiger is a strong wrap-up tackler who is still working on developing better hand usage, but he compensates with excellent playing strength. His versatility could see him be fit as a possible under-tackle in a 4-3 defense or align outside as an end in a 3-4 formation, but his previous weight issues make him unlikely to be a full-time linebacker at the next level, unless he can maintain a lower weight.

*Run Defense.*..Ferrell plays at a high pad level, using his strength effectively to push the blockers back through the rush lanes. He has the short area burst to string plays wide. When he stays at a good pad level, it makes it very difficult for defenders to move him off his anchor. The Tiger needs to use his hand punch more often and must do a better job of keeping those hands inside his frame. He has the upper body strength to impact a ball carrier with a good thud. He will drop his hands quite a bit, which lets blockers get into his chest.

*Pass Rush Ability.*..As a pass rusher, Ferrell has good first-step quickness – just not elite. He has a nice variety of pass rush moves and possesses enough quickness to get around edge, but needs to show better quickness executing his hands on rip- and swim-moves. While his get-off from the snap is quick, his closing burst is just average. He does get his hands up in passing lanes when seeing the quarterback start his wind-up, resulting in seven break-ups and one interception as a Tiger.

In the trenches, Ferrell has good hand strength, but he must learn counter pass-rush moves to get past tackles at the next level, as he tends to lose his balance and backfield awareness when attempting the occasional spin move.

SACK ARTIST JAYLON FERGUSON POSSESSES THE BEST HANDS IN THIS GROUP

Jaylon Ferguson-#45

Louisiana Tech Bulldogs

6:4.6-271

*Agility Tests*...4.79 in the 40-yard dash…1.69 10-yard dash…2.75 20-yard dash…5.12 20-yard shuttle…8.08 three-cone drill…33-inch vertical jump…9'-09" broad jump…Bench pressed 225 pounds 24 times…34-inch arm length…10-inch hands…79-inch wingspan.

Note...Ferguson was not allowed to work out at the NFL Scouting Combine and his figures are from the school's recent Pro Day.

*College Career.*..In 51 games at Louisiana Tech, Ferguson started 43 times at strong-side defensive end, recording 187 tackles (111 solos) that included 45.0 sacks for minus 287 yards, 66.5 stops for losses of 340 yards and 24 quarterback pressures. He caused eight fumbles, recovering four others, as he deflected seven passes and blocked two kicks.

*Background.*..The major college's record-holder with 45.0 sacks, he topped the previous FBS mark of 44.0 sacks by Terrell Suggs of Arizona State (2000-02). The only other FBS player to post at least forty sacks during a career was Arkansas State's Ja'Von Rolland-Jones (43.5; 2014-17). Ferguson broke that record with 2.5 sacks in his final collegiate game - a win over Hawaii in the 2018 SoFi Hawaii Bowl. His 17.5 sacks in 2018 broke the school and Conference USA season record and rank seventh in NCAA annals.

Ferguson's 66.5 tackles-for-loss are other Louisiana Tech and league records, ranking fourth in FBS history behind Jason Babin of Western Michigan (75.0; 2000-03), Khalil Mack of Buffalo (75.0; 2010-13) and George Selvie of South Florida (69.0; 2006-09), moving past Aaron Donald of Pittsburgh (66.0; 2010-13).

One of the most coveted recruits in the South while attending West Feliciana High School, Ferguson lettered four times in both football and basketball. He received all-state honors and was an East all-star his senior year while garnering district and metro MVP honors in addition to his all-metro and all-district honors. He decided to remain in-state, enrolling at Louisiana Tech in 2015.

After sitting out his first season in college, Ferguson started five of twelve games during the 2016 campaign. He totaled 35 tackles (22 solos) on the year with a team-high 15 tackles for loss, tying for the team lead with six sacks while also recording two forced fumbles. He had a career day at UTSA in first career start, recording seven tackles (five solo, two assisted), two sacks and four tackles for loss.

Starting every game in 2017, Ferguson set the school season-record with 14.5 sacks (old record was set in 1986), which ranked third in the nation that campaign. He posted 49 tackles (27 solos), with a team-high 16.0 tackles for loss, earning All-Conference USA recognition. He would elevate to All-American status as a senior, as the league's 2018 Defensive Player of the Year broke league standards with 17.5 sacks. He registered 64 tackles, with 26.0 stops behind the line of scrimmage, another school and conference mark.

*The Scouting Report*

*Athletic Ability.*..Ferguson has a solid, yet angular frame, but shows good upper and lower body muscle definition. He is most comfortable playing a 260-265 pounds, but has added bulk since the end of the 2018 season and feels that he has the frame that can carry additional bulk (will basically build to suit, depending if he is asked to play 3-4 linebacker or 4-3 rush end). He has a good bubble, quadriceps and calves, long arms, broad shoulders and tight waist.

Ferguson comes off the snap with good explosion. He has the athletic burst from the edge to surprise a slower blocker and shows a quick stride closing in the backfield. He runs with good body lean, but does have obvious hip stiffness for a defensive end. He also does not show the hip snap you look for in a linebacker and could struggle getting good depth in his pass drops, as a result, if moved to a stand-up position. He has just marginal lateral agility working down the line, relying more on his straight-line burst to angle to the quarterback. Still, for a defensive end, he shows quickness, good foot speed, fine balance, but only marginal change of direction skills. He generates a good push off the Xs on the pass rush, but is not the type that will leverage. He is a swift-moving player into the backfield, but not as good when working his way down the line.

*Pursuit Skills.*..Ferguson shows good snap anticipation and wrap-up tackling technique, using his arms well (hands and arms are his best weapons) to try and dislodge the quarterback or runner from the ball. He is very alert to backside movement, but does have problems reacting to blocking schemes when working in-line, as he can be tripped up by low blocks. He needs to avoid double team activity, as he lacks the hip swerve to split or escape in a crowd. He does play with a good motor, but has to perform with better discipline, as he does not have the loose hips to recover when he out-runs the play. He shows better instincts and awareness coming off the edge than when working inside the box, but struggles some locating the ball in pass coverage. He has a keen nose for the ball in pursuit, but has to show that he can readily adjust on the move playing down the line.

*Strength at the Point of Attack…*Ferguson shows good explosion and suddenness coming off the snap. He closes with a quick burst and is very comfortable working in space. His speed coming off the edge will generally surprise an offensive tackle. He shows good bend coming off the corner and keeps his hands active, while displaying the quick feet to execute double moves. He has good playing strength, but is not the type that can stack and control in isolated situations. He generates very good pop with his hands, but is best when he tries to slip past tackles rather than engaging. *Hand Usage.*..This is his best asset. Ferguson shows good hand usage to press, lock out and keep separation when trying to disengage from tight ends or lead blockers. He has the long arms to protect his legs from low blocks on the corner, but for some reason, loses sight of the same type of blocker when working in-line. He is quick to get his hands on the tight ends in attempts to reroute. He does a good job of stepping up and taking on the lead block, but reverts to giving a shoulder, causing him to get washed out of the play. When he gets good hand placement, he can control, get off the block and attack the ball.

*Tackling Ability.*..Ferguson is an efficient wrap-up tackler who has the long reach-around agility to dislodge runners from the ball. He will square up and wrap, generating good explosion taking out the outside leg of a runner. He just struggles to shed when taking on bigger blockers. He wraps up and makes secure tackles on the move. He has the functional strength to drag down the ball carrier working on the outside and when he collides with the opponent, he hits with a thud. He does a good job of maintaining his base when meeting blockers head on, but when he leaves his chest open, the larger blockers can stymie him.

*Run Defense.*..When Ferguson keeps his pads down, he can get under and around the blocker with ease. When he gets erect his stance and drops his hands, he is quickly engulfed. He has the burst to wreak havoc in the backfield and the speed to take the wide loop needed to avoid, but if he thinks he is going to win physical battles with an offensive lineman, he is soon defeated. He has good stacking ability vs. smaller blockers, but offensive lineman have great success containing him, once they get a piece of his jersey.

*Pass Rush Ability.*..Ferguson’s explosive first step gets him most of his success as a pass rusher. He comes off the snap with suddenness and when he gets a clear lane, can zero in on the quarter-back in an instant. He has enough balance to sift out the screens and can get to the flat. Because of hip stiffness (5.12 20-yard shuttle, 8.08 three-cone drill is the worst for any down lineman in this draft - end or tackle), he struggles too much shooting the gaps, as he lacks spin moves to beat the double team (uses just a rip move there). If not for marginal hip snap and just adequate change of direction agility, he would be an ideal outside backer in a 3-4 due to his blitzing and pass rush ability off the edge. He runs with a quick burst to close on the quarterback and shows very good timing to get a jump on the blitz. His quickness and athletic agility lets him flush the quarterback out of the pocket and he shows good urgency getting to the ball. Because he lacks ideal hip swerve, he needs to develop a much better array of moves (swim, spin) to get leverage.

*Compares To.*..Cameron Jordan-New Orleans Saints...Some scouts liken him more to the other Saints' pass rusher, Marcus Davenport, but Ferguson has much better hand grab/placement skills.

There is one area of concern - his lack of hip flexibility. As you can see from his shuttle and three-cone drills, he does not have even decent numbers for a down lineman. He has good straight-line suddenness, but does not have the body torque or hip snap to suddenly redirect working down the line than he can when just firing off the edge. He gets too tall and erect when trying to change direction, as he lacks fluidity in his hips. When he uses his hands, he can get balance to thread through traffic.

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