THE NFL DRAFT REPORT PRESENTS

THE 2019 OFFENSIVE TACKLE CLASS

Looking at the draft boards in NFL organizations, most team project at least twenty offensive tackles will "make the grade" and hear their names called from April 25th-27th. At least three collegiate tackles are expected to be taken in the opening round - Florida's Jawaan Taylor, Alabama's Jonah Williams and Washington State's Andre Dillard - yet, Williams might hear the offensive guard designation when a team selects him in the opening round.

Several organization also view Ole Miss tackle Greg Little, Dalton Risner of Kansas State and Washington's Kaleb McGary as the next trio to go off the board, but Little might be the only one of the three to remain at this position. Risner is that proverbial "Swiss army knife," as he can start at any position along the front wall and a few teams feel that McGary, due to strength and lateral agility issues, might be a better option as an offensive guard than at right tackle.

THE FIRST ROUND TACKLES HAVE PROVEN THEMSELVES

Since the beginning of the century, from 2000-to-2018, the NFL has drafted 367 offensive tackles, including sixty-six in the first round. Except for New England's 2018 first rounder - Isaiah Wynn - all of those first rounder have started at least 80% of their appearances, including twenty-six who have started every game during their careers. Since the 2015 draft, fifteen offensive tackles have been drafted in the first round. No longer sitting on the bench to learn their craft, ten of those fifteen first rounders have started every contest they appeared in.

The 2015 draft to present has seen eight second round selections for offensive tackles and all are still in the league, even though Cincinnati's 53rd pick in the 2015 draft, Jake Fisher, is now with Buffalo as a tight end. Except for Green Bay's Jason Spriggs (#48 in 2016), all are full-time starters, including Tampa Bay's Donovan Smith (#34 in 2015; 64 games) and the Rams' Rob Havenstein (#57 in 2015; 59 games), who have started every contest they have played in since joining the NFL.

Since 2015, teams have used twelve third round choices for the offensive tackle position. All but Antonio Garcia (#85 by New England in 2017) have played in the league since their selection, including four who are well-established as starters. The leader is Jamon Brown, who was converted to guard upon joining the league as the #72 pick by the Rams in 2015.

It has been a bit of a journey for the former Louisville prospect. He missed the end of his rookie season after fracturing his leg, but in 2017, he took over at right guard for the Rams. He was suspended for the start of the 2018 schedule for violating the NFL Policy and Program for Substances of Abuse.

In his absence, Austin Blythe took over Brown's previous starting role at right guard, and kept the job upon Brown's return from suspension. On Halloween, 2018, he was waived by the Rams and claimed by the Giants the next day. He took over right guard duties during Week Ten in New York and remained the starter. During the first day of the 2019 veteran free agency period, signed a three-year, $18.75 million contract with the Atlanta Falcons.

As expected, the talent level drops off among Day Three offensive tackles. Ten were selected in Round Four since 2015, but two never played in the league - Saints' #127 pick in 2018, Florida State's Rick Leonard and Jacksonville's #129 choice, Will Richardson, from North Carolina State.

The player with the most playing time among round four tackles is T.J. Clemmings, starting 32-of-41 appearances, to date, but currently unemployed due to knee issues. He was selected by the Minnesota Vikings in the fourth round (110th overall) of the 2015 NFL Draft, the tenth offensive tackle selected. He tied a franchise rookie record by starting all sixteen games after the Vikings lost veteran starter Phil Loadholt at right tackle for the entire season due to an achilles injury.

After starting left tackle Matt Kalil was placed on injured reserve on September 21, 2016, Clemmings was announced as the starter for the rest of the season. Then, on September 2, 2017, Clemmings was waived by the Vikings. He was claimed off waivers by the Washington Redskins the next day, but in mid-November, he was placed on injured reserve with an ankle injury. Washington waived him during 2018 final cutdown and he was claimed off waivers by the Oakland Raiders. before being placed on injured reserve in November with a knee injury that ended with the team cutting him after the season.

Of the eleven fifth round tackles drafted since 2015, nine appeared in an NFL game. Five of ten sixth round choices left their professional hopes back in training camp, but six of nine seventh round tackles made it to the pro ranks. While they were drafted more for depth purposes, several of the Day Three tackles have carved out a niche in the NFL.

Tampa took Caleb Benenoch with pick #148 in the fifth round of 2016 and he's started 22-of-34 contests since. Joey Haeg, the Colts 2016 fifth round pick (#155), has started 35-of-39 games while the latest draft pick used on a tackle since 2015 (#255), Denzel Good from Mars Hill, has started 23-of-30 games for the Colts, who recently awarded him with an extension.

The New York Jets have seen South Carolina's Brandon Shell start 29 times in 34 games since the team used pick #158 in round five of the 2016 draft. The Philadelphia Eagles' fifth rounder that year, Halapoulivaati Vaitai, has logged 39 appearances that includes seventeen starts since graduating from Texas Christian. Utah's Sam Tevi, who joined the Chargers as a sixth round choice (#190) in 2017, has started sixteen times through thirty contests.

THE CHECKLIST TEAMS USE IN FINDING THE NEXT GREAT OFFENSIVE TACKLE

Most teams carry at least two reserves to play behind their starting offensive tackles. With one starter lined up on the right side edge and the other on the left flank, their jobs are quite simple - to block. It is their duty to physically keep defenders away from the offensive player who has the football and enable him to advance the football and eventually score a touchdown. The term "tackle" is a vestige of an earlier era of football in which the same players played both offense and defense.

The offensive tackle is usually the strongest player on the front line. They have to power through their blocks with quick steps and maneuverability. They are mostly in charge of the outside protection, sometimes getting assistance from the tight end (strong or right side).

If the tight end goes out for a pass, the tackle must cover everyone that his guard does not, plus whoever the tight end is not covering. Usually they measure at over 6'-04" and 310 pounds. They are likely to be some of the smartest players on the team, evident by their aptitude test scores before the draft, as they need to easily digest a playbook.

The strong-side tackle (generally on the right side, or aligned next to the tight end is usually the team's best run blocker. Most running plays are towards the strong side of the offensive line, and the right tackle will face the defending team's best run stoppers. He must be able to gain traction in his blocks so that the running back can find a hole to run through.

The weak-side tackle (usually plays on the left side, isolated on the island, with the tight end on the opposite side) is usually the team's best pass blocker. The left tackle will often have better footwork and agility than the right tackle in order to counteract the pass rush of defensive ends. When a quarterback throws a pass, the quarterback's shoulders are aligned roughly perpendicular to the line of scrimmage, with the non-dominant shoulder closer to downfield.

Right-handed quarterbacks, the majority of players in the position, thus turn their backs to defenders coming from the left side, creating a vulnerable "blind side" that the left tackle must protect. Conversely, teams with left-handed quarterbacks tend to have their better pass blockers at right tackle for the same reason. Premier left tackles are now highly sought after, and are often the second highest paid players on a roster after the quarterback.

An example of their importance was evident in the 2013 NFL Draft, as three of the first four picks were left tackles - Eric Fisher (first overall pick by Kansas City), Luke Joeckel (second overall pick by Jacksonville) and Lane Johnson (fourth overall choice by Philadelphia). Since 2015, the highest a tackle has been drafted came that year, as Washington used the fifth overall choice for Iowa's Brandon Scherff.

Fisher holds the distinction for being just one of four tackles to ever be selected with the top overall pick since the draft's inception in 1936. Two of those first overall choices - Ron Yary (Minnesota in 1968) and Orlando Pace (St. Louis Rams in 1997) are already members of the Pro Football Hall of Fame. In fact, of the 188 first round selections used to take offensive tackles since 1936, seven made it to the Hall of Fame, including the first one ever drafted - West Virginia's Joe Stydahar, the sixth overall choice by the Chicago Bears in 1936. In ten seasons, he appeared in 84 games, despite a playing interruption while serving during World War II.

Because of the rise of the edge rushers, the biggest asset an offensive tackle needs is overall quickness, the ability to handle the speed rush. The tackle needs to be explosive coming off the ball, hands on the rise in an instant. He must show the ability to slide and mirror in pass protection and for the running game, he must have that ability to lock on and ride the defender out of the rush lanes.

The left tackle must be more agile that his right side counterpart, as he needs the ability to retreat and stay with the edge rushers to prevent them from impacting the pocket. While not required to trap and pull, like the guards, you still want a tackle with the agility and balance to work his way down the line. Good vision is required and for those that will stalk into the second level, balance on the move and ability to locate and stalk targets are essential.

The right tackle is usually more physical in nature that his left side mate. He is used more often for power running plays and he has to have that strong hand punch to dominate. He will generally lock on to a moving target, so he needs the balance, anchor and change of direction agility that rivals a dancing bear. Upper and lower body strength need to be well-balanced, as they combine with hand positioning and reach to prevent the defender from impacting the backfield on a bull rush.

Chemistry takes time for a line to develop, but you need tough hombres in the trenches, those that play until the whistle. The bigger, more grizzled veterans have learned the tricks of the trade and you see them very active with their hands. Still, they take advantage of their size to handle one-on-one blocking. High body contact allows you to see their pop and strength. The ability of the tackle to turn into his opponent and sustain, get the proper blocking position and adjust to movement leads to a strong running attack.

HOW VETERAN FREE AGENCY IMPACTS THE OFFENSIVE TACKLE DRAFT CLASS

Prior to the start of free agency, Arizona, the Chargers and Minnesota were three teams in dire need for an offensive tackle upgrade. Jacksonville, the Giants and Philadelphia were three other organizations that were contemplating using a first round selection to address their issues at that position, with Cincinnati, Miami, Buffalo, the Jets and Green Bay targeting Day Two draft maneuvers to restock their front walls.

Looking for upgrades, but not in desperation, Cleveland, the Rams, Atlanta, Chicago and Houston were also expected to look for big mollies before the draft's mid rounds, if the veterans on the market were not able to be lured. Thirty-seven veteran tackles entered the free agent market - twenty-two are still seeking employment.

Of the fifteen to go home with new deals, just six received multi-year contracts, including two four-year deals given to lure left tackle Trenton Brown away from New England to Oakland for a tidy paycheck of 66 million, including 36.25MM in guarantees. This is the second year in a row that New England will be on the hunt for a left tackle, as Nate Solder bolted for New York last off-season.

Ja'Wuan James, subject of trade rumors during the 2018 deadline, also walks home with a four-year deal, leaving South Beach for the Rocky Mountains (Miami to Denver) for 32 million in guarantees on a 51MM contract. For some reason nobody could figure out, Cincinnati re-signed their own, giving right tackle Bobby Hart 16.15MM on a three-year deal. Of the eighty offensive tackles graded last season, Hart checked in at 69th.

The Redskins brought back sixth man Ty Nsekhe for five million per over the next two years and Cameron Fleming received 7.5MM for two seasons by the Cowboys, further depleting the Patriots' front wall depth. The other six to sign managed just one-year deals, but Matt Kalil, cut by Carolina, received 7.5 million to join Houston. Carolina had to dole out six million to prevent Daryl Williams, who played in just one game last year due to injuries, from following Kalil out the door.

Fourteen of the twenty-two veteran free agent tackles have seen birthdays north of the thirty-year mark, but New England is keeping tabs on the oldest blocker here, 36-year-old former Raider, Donald Penn. The youngest tackle with starting experience is T.J. Clemmings, but the former Raider/Viking was cut by Oakland after he damaged his knee last year and is still not fully recovered.

Below is a list of the veterans who signed new deals during the 2018 free agency period;

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| PLAYER | POS. | AGE | FROM | TO | YRS | DOLLARS | AAV | TOTAL GTD | GTD AT SIGN |
| Trenton Brown | LT | 26 | NE | OAK | 4 | 66,000,000 | 16,500,000 | 36,250,000 | 36,250,000 |
| Ja'Wuan James | RT | 27 | MIA | DEN | 4 | 51,000,000 | 12,750,000 | 32,000,000 | 27,000,000 |
| Bobby Hart | RT | 25 | CIN | CIN | 3 | 16,150,000 | 5,383,333 | 5,500,000 | 5,500,000 |
| Ty Nsekhe | LT | 33 | WAS | BUF | 2 | 10,000,000 | 5,000,000 | 6,200,000 | 6,200,000 |
| Matt Kalil | LT | 30 | CAR | HOU | 1 | 7,500,000 | 7,500,000 | 2,250,000 | 2,250,000 |
| Cameron Fleming | T | 26 | DAL | DAL | 2 | 7,500,000 | 3,750,000 | 1,500,000 | 1,500,000 |
| Daryl Williams | RT | 27 | CAR | CAR | 1 | 6,000,000 | 6,000,000 | 3,000,000 | 3,000,000 |
| Kendall Lamm | RT | 27 | HOU | CLE | 2 | 4,500,000 | 2,250,000 | 600,000 | 600,000 |
| Ereck Flowers | RT | 25 | JAC | WAS | 1 | 3,250,000 | 3,250,000 | 1,500,000 | 1,500,000 |
| LaAdrian Waddle | RT | 28 | NE | BUF | 1 | 2,000,000 | 2,000,000 | 400,000 | 400,000 |
| Cedric Ogbuehi | LT | 27 | CIN | JAC | 1 | 895,000 | 895,000 | 90,000 | 90,000 |
| Chaz Green | T | 27 | OAK | OAK | 1 | 805,000 | 805,000 | - | - |
| J'Marcus Webb | RT | 31 | IND | IND | 1 | N/A | - | - | - |
| Leonard Wester | T | 26 | TB | JAC | 1 | N/A | - | - | - |
| Josh Wells | RT | 28 | JAC | JAC | 1 | N/A | - | - | - |

THE 2019 DRAFT CLASS HAVE SOLID, YET UNSPECTACULAR PROSPECTS

No, there are no Joe Thomas clones in this draft class. While three college tackles are targeted as first round prospects, teams are regarding Alabama's Jonah Williams' shorter-than-ideal arms as a reason that they regard him more as a guard prospect. Florida's Jawaan Taylor is positioned as the best in this class, with Jacksonville possibly keeping him in-state by using the seventh overall pick to select the Gator right tackle.

Taylor shows very good agility and balance for a player his size. He has good foot speed and quickness getting out of his stance and runs with a normal stride, showing a strong concept for angling when working into the second level. He demonstrates the body control to make hits on the move and on contact, he delivers the strength and hand punch to shock and jolt his opponent. He displays fluid change of direction agility, doing a nice job of using his long arms effectively to pinch the defensive line back inside.

The Gators offensive tackle has the straight-line speed to surprise a lethargic defender and has become a power-oriented blocker who has developed an aggressive nature. He is very smooth and sudden coming out of his stance and has above average lateral range. He maintains balance on the move and is efficient when having to redirect and recover working in-line.

After Taylor, many anticipate that Washington State's Andre Dillard will be the next tackle selected. The top rated tackle on The NFL Draft Report's board, Dillard might not impress body-wise, but few have the pass protection ability that this Cougar possesses. He uses his foot quickness well to shuffle his feet and slide back with ease when taking on edge rushers. He stays square and balanced while keeping his pad level low. Even when he gets over-extended, he is quick to recover. He generates a strong anchor and good field vision to recover vs. double moves.

Dillard is quick to pivot in attempts to counter the speed rush, as he shows good urgency getting to his reach point. He uses his long arms effectively in attempts to extend and lock on to the defender’s jersey. He has the speed to mirror and square up with an opponent, as his strong anchor lets him maintain position when trying to neutralize the pass rush charge. He excels with edge blocking, showing the foot quickness in his kick slide to mirror (rare to see him drop his head when making contact).

With his lateral quickness, he has no problems when trying to slide and readjust. He plays with good awareness and has the flexibility along with functional lower body strength to anchor. The Houston Texans are coveting Dillard (#23), but might have to wait to see if the Vikings at #18 make him their first round target.

The big question is not if Alabama's Jonah Williams is a first round talent. Rather, it is what position he might be better suited to play - right tackle or either of the guard spots. The Crimson Tide blocker

has outstanding quickness and foot work in his kick slide. He shows the agility and balance to make plays into the second level and shows good lower body flexibility in attempts to change direction.

Williams has excellent open field acceleration, moving well and adjusting easily while taking angles to neutralize the linebackers. He is an above average knee bender who can recover on the rare occasions that he waist bends. He has very good quickness and movement ability to mirror edge rushers. He plays on his feet with very good balance and body control, doing a nice job of adjusting and picking up defenders in space. He is also a solid leverage player who can slide and sustain. With the scheme change in Atlanta, if they fail to grab Ed Oliver for the defensive line at #14, logic says Williams is a valid alternative.

Another top college tackle who could be stationed elsewhere in the pros is Kansas State's Dalton Risner. He started at right tackle the last two years, but began his career at center, moving to guard with the first unit before setting in on the outside. Compared to former Wildcat and current Chicago Bear, Cody Whitehair, like his former teammate, his versatility is a major bonus for his resume.

Risner has excellent athletic ability, displaying good initial explosion off the line. He is very nimble for a lineman and while he has just adequate strength, he gets out on traps and pulls in a hurry, maintaining balance throughout his stride. He has the physical tools to be a productive starting guard or center at the next level, if moved to those spots, due to his quick feet to get into position to make the blocks on the edge. With lots of trouble on the right side of the line and a less mobile passer in Joe Flacco, if Risner slips out of round one #32 New England), the Broncos would love to find the Wildcat there in round two (#41) to solve right tackle issues.

The tough hombre is an exceptional hand puncher with the arm quickness to possibly find a home at center at the next level. He demonstrates very good balance and agility for the position to also perform capably as a pulling guard. He shows good explosion off the snap, the ability to out-muscle and wall off his man in isolated coverage and the upper body power to lean into the defender and use his size to sustain. He is a natural knee bender who does a nice job of keeping his pads down due to his lateral agility and loose hips. With his reach and big hands (10 1/4-inches), he is capable of pushing and controlling his man in the short area.

One more college tackle who might have to move inside while he works on adding needed strength is Kaleb McGary. In addition to strength issues, teams might be a bit hesitant to draft him early due to him being diagnosed with a heart arrhythmia. His family has had their share of woes. His father suffered with multiple sclerosis and his family was forced off the family farm when he was in high school. In 2018, the family was living in RVs while restoring his mother's childhood home, but a fire partially burned down the home and one of the RVs.

McGary shows good initial quickness to engage and reach his pass set point. He plays on his feet with good balance, but needs to show better lower body flexibility when redirecting. He has good mobility to stay with his man, but you would like to see him finish better and show more aggression. He gets into his blocks quickly, thanks to above average knee bend and his natural foot quickness. Even when he is late off the snap, he shows good adjustment skills on the move (very good leading on outside sweeps). He has good initial quickness to slide, drop back and anchor in one-on-one confrontations with edge rushers (struggles vs. the bull rush). He could be a second round pick by the Packers, as they realize that former second rounder, Jason Spriggs, might never pan out.

One of my favorites is Greg Little of Ole Miss. A poor postseason at Mobile and Indianapolis might have taken some of the shine off his draft stock, but with patient coaching, I see him emerging and performing better than other tackle candidate listed in this class not named Dalton Risner or Andre Dillard. He has the frame to develop more bulk, but he possesses above average strength, especially in the lower frame and appears to be stout at the point of attack, despite possessing a linear, basketball player-like physique with incredibly long arms (85-inch wing span is the second-longest for all offensive linemen in this draft).

You can see on film that he has the suddenness getting out on the edge to block for the outside running game. He shows good change of direction agility, loose hips and good agility to sit and anchor. Despite his tall frame, he has become quite adept at keeping his pad level down. He might lack explosive speed, but is fairly nimble for a down lineman, displaying good body control moving down the line, as he has probably the best change of direction agility of any SEC lineman this year. The Jets and the Browns have Little well-placed on their draft boards as a second round target.

Our staff loves the sleeper types, as it seems each year that a small college blocker captures the attention of the NFL. Alabama State's Tytus Howard is this year's candidate for that honor. Howard has excellent athletic agility for this position. He possesses the loose hips, lower body flexibility and valid quickness of a tight end, coming off the snap with very good explosion. He is quick to get out on the edge and shows very fluid knee and ankle bend when changing direction.

Howard needs to work on his field strength though, as he lacks the core strength needed to handle the more physical edge rushers at the NFL level (has been able to use his size vs. inferior, smaller defenders at his collegiate level of play). He does strike with a quick hand jolt, though. He moves well in the open, doing a nice job of locating and neutralizing linebackers. He shows very good acceleration on pulls and traps, running with short pitter-patter steps with the plant-&-drive agility to redirect. The Eagles have given Howard lots of attention and with injuries and age creeping up on Jason Peters, Howard could be a nice understudy in round two.

One of the major college late Day Two targets could be Northern Illinois left tackle Max Sharping. The NIU senior plays with good balance. He has the foot quickness and knee bend to easily mirror and slide to challenge edge rushers, along with good overall flexibility. He is a power-oriented blocker who has developed an aggressive nature. He is smooth and sudden coming out of his stance and has above average lateral range. He maintains balance on the move, especially when having to redirect and recover working in-line. Dallas is showing interest, but more so for moving him to the right side of the line.

Southern California's Chuma Edoga might remind New York football fans of a familiar blocker - Kelvin Beachum. Edoga shows good initial quickness to engage and reach his pass set point, along with the athletic suddenness to gain advantage when he maintains good pad level. He plays on his feet with good balance, but needs to keep his hands active and inside his frame when trying to gain movement.

Edoga demonstrates good lower body flexibility when redirecting. He has impressive mobility to stay with his man, but you would like to see him finish better and show more aggression. He gets into his blocks quickly, thanks to above average knee bend and his natural foot quickness, making him a nice fit for Miami on the right side of the wall.

Wisconsin's David Edwards is another in a long line of technically solid Badgers blockers. He is a better fit on the right side, as he has quick, nimble feet with good balance and body control playing in the trenches (struggles playing in space). He moves well going forward off the snap and does a nice job of using his frame to pinch the defenders back inside. When he stays low in his pads, he can fire low off the snap with good explosion to gain instant advantage.

While not explosive, he is rarely late off the line and is quick to make contact and impact the defender. With those long arms and strong hands, he is very good at gaining advantage on a defender when he flashes suddenness coming off the ball. With a good get-off and proper hand technique, it should put him in the right place to make the block most of the time. Two teams looking for right tackle plug-ins are Green Bay and Houston.

Will Grier was able to stay intact most of the year, thanks to the protection West Virginia's Yodny Cajuste. The Mountaineer has good timed speed and footwork, along with the ability to quickly recover when out on an island with an edge rusher, but might find a quicker route to an NFL starting job on the right side of the line. When he gets out of position, he is quick to redirect, thanks to good hip snap.

Cajuste shows very good strength and good explosion out of his stance, as he consistently plays with a good base. He doesn’t bend too much at the waist and is a solid second level blocker, thanks to his foot speed and good agility in the open field. He’s the type of athlete that “looks better” on tape, as he will surprise a lethargic defender with his quickness anchoring and establishing position. The Chargers and Pittsburgh have shown Cajuste the most attention as a Day Two possibility.

While Tytus Howard is our top rated small college tackle, one of the stars at Senior Bowl practices was Elon College's Olisaemeka Udoh. "Oli" could also be utilized as an interior blocker, as he does a nice job of pulling and trapping, reaching and logging. He has the speed to cut off the linebackers when leading through the inside holes and looks very fluid, with good feet adjustment to make solid contact in the open. He is athletic and smooth when moving off the line and has the body control to execute blocks in space. He has very good athleticism to stay up and play the game on his feet.

You can see that Udoh is very capable of coming off the snap smoothly to pull, some-thing teams require from a potential offensive guard candidate. He has better quickness out of his stance and a first step than any other draft eligible guard, even though he is a collegiate tackle. He also hits his targets well with intent to finish, along with very good agility to kick out or seal with high efficiency. The Kansas City Chiefs could be the first team to call out his name in the fourth/fifth rounds.

Day Three tackles to keep an eye out for are Mitch Hyatt-Clemson, who some teams like better at an interior position. Missouri's Paul Adams' stock continues to rise and he could be the first tackle selected during Day Three. Martez Ivey is another Day Three blocker, but might be a better fit at guard. Ohio State's Isaiah Prince, North Carolina's William Sweet, South Carolina's Dennis Daley, Utah's Jackson Barton and two small college standouts, Trey Pipkins of Sioux Falls and Tennessee State's Chidi Okeke are others expected to be off the board later in Day Three.

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