

BLEACHER BUZZ



2025 NFL Draft Predictions

April 17, 2025

This upcoming Thursday (April 24) marks the 2025 NFL Draft. My latest mock draft takes into account team needs, player fit and the most likely landing spots for this year's top prospects.

And for Canadian football fans, there's even more reason to watch closely—I have **two Canadians** projected to hear their names called at some point in the draft process. From potential first-overall selections to late-round steals, here's how I see the first 32 picks playing out.

Full disclosure: I wouldn't be surprised if trades happen. However, since I am not a psychic, I'm going on the basis that the draft order remains the same.

Maple Draft Watch

QB —Kurtis Rourke — Indiana Hoosiers — Kitchener, Ontario



Imagine [completing](#) 69 per cent of your passes and throwing for more than 3,000 yards—while playing on a [torn](#) ACL. The Oakville native led the Hoosiers to their first-ever postseason appearance and finished in the [top 10](#) in Heisman Trophy voting. His combination of size, experience, follow-through and precision accuracy makes him an underrated steal.

Ideally, he would land with a coach like Kevin O’Connell. Rourke could thrive in the [West Coast](#) offence, which relies on play-action passing and attacking exposed zone coverages. With J.J. McCarthy and Brett Rypien as [the only quarterbacks](#) on the depth chart, the Vikings need a backup. At the combine, Rourke [confirmed](#) to reporters he expects to receive medical clearance in time for training camp.

**WR —Elic Ayomanor— Stamford Cardinal —
Medicine Hat, Alberta**



In 2024 The Alberta native already boasts an impressive resume. In 2024, he [recorded](#) 63 catches for 831 yards and six touchdowns. The year before, he surpassed 1,000 receiving yards, becoming the first Cardinal to do so [since](#) 2018. Ayomanor not only earned second-team All-ACC honours but [also won](#) the Jon Cornish Trophy as college football's top Canadian player. What sets him apart is his ability to secure the ball through contact. While he may not rack up outstanding yards after the catch, he consistently creates separation from defenders and works the sidelines effectively.

A 34-year-old Adam Thielen [led](#) the Panthers in receiving yards last season, while Xavier Legette had an [inconsistent](#) rookie year. That's why Ayomanor could be a valuable second-round pick. Stability and youth at receiver are crucial to Bryce Young's development, and while Ayomanor may not have the highest ceiling among this year's prospects, his floor is one of the safest.

1. QB — Cam Ward — Miami Hurricanes



I know—what a shocker. There’s a reason Ward is [projected](#) to go first overall: the gap between him and the other quarterbacks is significantly wider than the gap between the second-best quarterback and the rest of the class. Watching his game tape, it’s clear how calm and collected he is in the pocket. Even when forced to scramble, he avoids unnecessary hits, often opting to step out of bounds. While some might mistake that for a lack of effort, it’s actually a testament to his poise and ability to stay composed in high-pressure moments.

Ward’s [resume](#) speaks for itself. He [broke](#) two program records, threw for more than 3800 yards against rival Florida and led a 25-point comeback against Cal—all proof of his ability to read coverages and improvise when needed. With the Titans failing to land a quarterback in free agency, they have little choice but to draft one. They might as well take the best in the class.

2. EDGE — Abdul Carter — Penn State



In terms of pure talent, Carter is, in my opinion, the second-best in the draft. No disrespect to Ward, but Carter might be the most highly touted defensive end since Aidan Hutchinson, who went second overall in 2022. The 2024 [Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year](#) put up dominant numbers—12 sacks, two forced fumbles, four passes defended, 68 combined tackles and a conference-leading 24 tackles for loss.

The thought of pairing Carter with [2023 Defensive Player of the Year](#) Myles Garrett should terrify offensive coordinators. His combined performance proved his foot injury is no concern, as he [ran](#) a 4.48-second 40-yard dash at 250 pounds. He's a fast, aggressive tackler with the ability to pursue at tight angles and diagnose outside runs. If I had to bet on one player from this draft class making the 2026 Pro Bowl, it's Abdul Carter.

3. WR/CB— Travis Hunter — Colorado



The Giants landing the best player in the draft? To [quote](#) Travis Hunter at the Heisman Trophy ceremony, “Man, that’s crazy!” Hunter is arguably the top cornerback in this class—and one of the best receivers. His ability to play on both sides of the ball adds immense value, depending on the matchup. With the recent additions of quarterbacks Russell Wilson and Jameis Winston, it’s clear the Giants are prioritizing the best player available rather than reaching for a quarterback.

According to [ESPN](#), Hunter ranked top five in receiving yards across all conferences, fourth in receptions and second in touchdowns. On defence, per [PFF](#) (Pro Football Focus), he allowed an exceptionally low passer rating. Out of 688 defensive snaps, he [surrendered](#) just 22 completions. Add in his [top-three finishes](#) in both pass deflections and interceptions, and it’s easy to see why Hunter has the potential to become the NFL’s next great gadget player.

4. OT —Armand Membou— Missouri



No player benefited more from the NFL combine this year than Armand Membou. According to the NFL's official [website](#), the 332-pound tackle posted eye-popping numbers—running a 4.91-second 40-yard dash, recording a 34-inch vertical jump and hitting a nine-foot broad jump. To put that into perspective, [NFL NextGen Stats](#) ranked Membou as the most athletic offensive tackle in this year's class. The combine has the power to shape narratives, both good and bad, and significantly impact a player's draft stock. After turning heads in Indianapolis, I expect the Patriots to take Membou off the board before any other team gets the chance.

So, what makes Membou [special](#) on the field? Teams that rely on pass protection to move the ball will value his fluid mobility, quick hands and ability to anchor against edge rushers. His [tape](#) against Texas A&M stood out, and he dominated Ole Miss defensive end Landon Jackson. Drake Maye needs time and a clean pocket to throw the ball. In my opinion, Membou is the most polished pass protector in this draft.

5. IDL—Mason Graham — Michigan



Many have projected this pick for the Jaguars, so I'm not breaking new ground. But Mason Graham was the best defensive player on a unit stacked with talent. Any lineman with a [wrestling background](#) is likely to have excellent balance, quick hands and lightning-fast decision-making—traits Graham consistently displays. His lateral quickness in diagnosing screen passes highlights what he could bring to Jacksonville's defence. In Michigan's win over College Football Playoff champion Ohio State in November, Graham was a [constant](#) presence in the backfield, disrupting plays and stopping the run.

Pairing Graham on the inside with Travon Walker and Josh Hines-Allen on the edges would make it even tougher for division rivals to move the ball. He's used to being double-teamed in run-heavy schemes and does a great job anticipating where the ball carrier is headed. In 13 games, he recorded four sacks and 24 solo tackles. There's a reason PFF [called](#) him "the best defensive tackle in the draft."

6. RB—Ashton Jeanty — Boise State



I'm a firm believer that building through the trenches is crucial. Personally, I'd prioritize an offensive lineman to give new quarterback Geno Smith more protection, but landing the best running back in the class—by a country mile—is a solid consolation prize. The Raiders struggled to run the ball last season. Via Pro Football Reference: Leading rusher, Alexander Mattison, [ranked](#) 53rd in rushing yards and 25th in first downs. Quarterback Drake Maye ran for more yards, and Daniel Jones recorded more first downs.

Landing Jeanty at this spot would be a steal. He led all conferences in rushing yards—finishing [nearly 1,000 yards](#) ahead of the second-place rusher—[topped](#) all running backs in touchdowns and placed [second](#) in Heisman voting. New head coach Pete Carroll is no stranger to elite running backs in [his system](#), such as Reggie Bush and Marshawn Lynch. With the resurgence of the run game, this pick looks like a win-win scenario.

7. CB—Will Johnson— Michigan



Earning All-American [honours](#) as a freshman speaks volumes about the dominance Will Johnson has displayed throughout his career so far. When opponents threw his way, what happened? He could take it to the house—[twice](#), in fact, last season. With the [departure](#) of D.J. Reed, teams will look to avoid [Pro Bowl](#) cornerback Sauce Gardner to instead throw to the opposite defensive back. By adding a teammate who can lock down the second-best receiver, the Jets immediately force opponents to rely more on the run game.

Johnson missed some time with a turf toe injury, which hurt Michigan's chances of finishing higher in the rankings. However, he was medically [cleared](#) before the combine. Make no mistake—he can blanket receivers whether in zone or man coverage and deliver in clutch moments, as he showed by intercepting a pass while taking a [hit from behind](#) in the 2023 playoffs against Washington. If he can improve on wrapping players for tackling, Johnson will be a Pro Bowler before he retires.

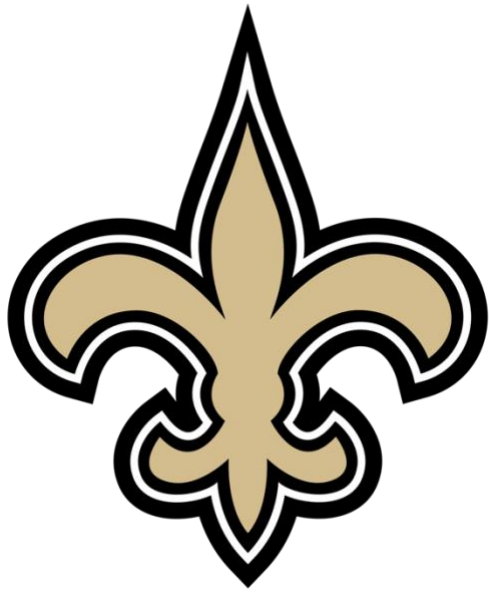
8. LB—Jalon Walker— Georgia



My favourite linebacker in this draft is heading to a team in *dire* need of defensive help. According to [Pro Football Reference](#), the 2024 Panthers finished last in point differential at -193. They also ranked third-worst in missed tackles and allowed the most rushing yards in the league. Adding Pro Bowl defensive tackle Derrick Brown will help, but why not double down and draft a player a [former Raiders general manager](#) compared to Micah Parsons?

Jalon Walker is twitchy, athletic, strong and smart. He [won](#) the Butkus Award as the nation's top linebacker after recording 58 tackles and 6.5 sacks. If he's given the green light to blitz the gaps, few players will escape his grasp. After trading last year's first-round pick and this year's 39th overall selection, the Panthers must get this one right.

9. S—Nick Emmanwori — South Carolina



This might be my *boldest* prediction of this entire list. But as I said, it's a mix of what I think the team needs and who they'll ultimately pick. Like the Panthers, the Saints need defensive reinforcements. After his [standout performance](#) at the combine, Nick Emmanwori has every general manager's full attention.

Last season, Emmanwori earned [unanimous](#) First-Team All-SEC, recording 57 tackles, four interceptions and two touchdowns. For any Saints fans still unsure, [NFL Draft Buzz](#) ranks his tackling at 100 per cent.

According to [Pro Football Reference](#), the Saints ranked fourth-worst in yards per play allowed—just 0.2 yards better than the last-place Panthers. Safety Tyrann Mathieu is 33 and set to become an [unrestricted free agent](#) next year. With owner Mickey Loomis continually [pushing](#) the salary cap forward instead of embracing a rebuild, the Saints have plenty of needs. At the very

least, drafting Emmanwori will make it harder for receivers to stretch the field over the next four years.

10. OT—Kelvin Banks Jr. — Texas



The Bears had a terrible offensive line last season, allowing quarterback Caleb Williams to be sacked 69 times—the [third-highest total](#) for a single season in NFL history. Some of that blame falls on Williams, as he held onto the ball for [an average](#) of 2.5 seconds. However, offensive coordinator Shane Waldron and head coach Matt Eberflus were *both* fired due to poor game management, bringing the focus back to the offensive line. New head coach Ben Johnson understands the value of a strong O-line, which is where Kelvin Banks Jr. could make an immediate impact.

Banks Jr. played left tackle for three seasons at Texas, earning multiple All-American selections and all-conference honours. Some believe he has the potential to be an [even better guard](#) due to his natural leverage, explosive power and ability to determine the best blocking angles. Jonah Jackson is the Bears' current right guard, but he may not be a long-term solution the way Banks Jr. could be. Pro Football Focus ([PFF](#)) gave Banks Jr. an 88.8 pass-

blocking grade, putting him in the same tier as Joe Alt. If he can excel at guard, he has the potential to become a franchise cornerstone.

11. OT—Will Campbell — LSU



Post-combine, more and more concerns emerged about Will Campbell's arm length and hand size posing a problem at both tackle and guard. I say leave Campbell where he is to serve as a future replacement for a 36-year-old Trent Williams, who [becomes](#) an unrestricted free agent in 2027. Campbell is a nasty finisher with quick recovery ability and experience facing top talent in the SEC. Finding a replacement who can match Williams' accolades won't be easy, but Campbell has a chance.

PFF [labelled](#) Campbell as having "the best hands in pass protection" because he rarely loses against rushers. His leadership earned him the coveted "[No. 7 patch](#)"—the first offensive lineman in LSU history to receive the honour. Over the span of 2,553 snaps, Campbell [allowed](#) just five total sacks. Brock Purdy will likely receive a big extension soon, and he'll need a

clean pocket to find his receivers downfield. The retool will move faster if the 49ers immediately establishes blind-side protection.

12. WR—Matthew Golden— Texas



Hall of Fame wide receivers [think](#) Matthew Golden is the best overall wide receiver in his class... and I agree. He adjusts his speed to set up breaks against both man and zone defences. With experience as a kick returner, Golden is a threat to rack up yards after the catch. In the game against [Georgia](#), Quinn Ewers threw a pass in an awkward spot for Golden, yet he managed to contort his body to secure the ball and pick up additional yards. Against teams like [Florida](#), he often needed to be in double coverage because defenders would bite on his hip fakes.

Last season, Dak Prescott suffered a [hamstring](#) injury, CeeDee Lamb sprained his right [shoulder](#), and Rico Dowdle signed with the [Panthers](#). This is one of the few times I'll say a team needs a receiver. The narrative fits nicely: an explosive route-runner, born and raised in Texas, who [averaged](#) 17 yards per reception and nearly 1,000 receiving yards, selected by the Cowboys. If owner

Jerry Jones wants a flashy yet responsible pick, he doesn't need to look any further than the guy in his own state.

13. G—Tyler Booker— Alabama



Tua Tagovailoa doesn't have much time in the pocket. Among all quarterbacks last season, he ranked [36th](#) in pocket time despite being [sixth](#) in pass attempts. Since 2019, he has sustained three concussions—[possibly](#) a fourth, which went undocumented.

If Alabama left guard Tyler Booker is willing to put in the work with his run-blocking, he should develop into a solid starter. He tracks defenders well when pulling, maintains a consistent grip until the whistle blows, and drives defenders away with both hands and hips. According to NFL Next Gen Stats, Booker was a member of the 2022 SEC [All-Freshman Team](#) and has experience at both left and right guard. PFF [reports](#) he didn't allow a sack on 395 pass-blocking snaps in 2024, earning an 86.5 pass-blocking grade.

14. TE—Tyler Warren— Penn State



In 2024, Penn State tight end Tyler Warren [was](#) the best in the nation at his position. He won the John Mackey Award and the Kwalick–Clark Big Ten Tight End of the Year Award — two prestigious honours that [made history](#) for the program. He can [block](#) in run schemes, run short-to-medium routes effectively, and even [throw](#) touchdown passes.

Quarterback Anthony Richardson struggled last season. He posted the lowest completion percentage among qualified quarterbacks in the league and threw [more interceptions](#) than touchdowns. He also dealt with severe [back spasms](#) that left him barely able to walk. The future remains uncertain for the Colts, but having a utility player in the mould of Taysom Hill could be invaluable. If this pick comes to fruition, it might be the best possible move to support Richardson's development.

15. EDGE—James Pearce Jr.— Tennessee



Falcons fans are saying, “*We want an edge rusher!*” OK, take James Pearce Jr. — the [fastest](#) edge rusher in this year’s draft.

With [offseason additions](#) like defensive lineman Morgan Fox, outside linebacker Leonard Floyd and safety Jordan Fuller, the only thing left to do is draft a defensive end. Last season, Atlanta finished second-last in [total sacks](#). To put that into perspective, the Falcons' sack leader had just [six](#) in 17 games. For comparison, Aidan Hutchinson had 4.5 sacks in [one game](#) against the Falcons’ division rival, the Buccaneers.

Pearce Jr. is explosive, agile and disruptive. What stands out: he [recorded](#) 110 quarterback pressures over three seasons at Tennessee. His eight sacks this past season weren’t a fluke — he had ten the year before. I believe his specialty is preventing the run and collapsing the pocket, which is huge when you’re in a division with backs like Bucky Irving, Chuba Hubbard and Alvin Kamara. This pick feels like a no-brainer. Pearce Jr. fits perfectly in a 3-4 scheme [like Atlanta’s](#), where he can align wider pre-snap to use his speed and mobility to his advantage.

16. EDGE—Mike Green— Marshall



If anyone benefited the most from the Senior Bowl, it was defensive end Mike Green. His standout moment came during a [one-on-one drill](#) against Oregon lineman Josh Connerly, when he almost immediately sent him to the ground. Watch Green's tape [against Virginia Tech](#) and you'll see a quarterback scrambling out of the pocket and a defender refusing to give up on the ball — ultimately making the tackle despite being on the ground. What stands out is his speed and ability to disengage blocks. It makes sense, considering Green's journey [from](#) wide receiver to linebacker to edge rusher.

The Arizona Cardinals [recently added](#) Super champion and Pro Bowler Josh Sweat, as well as Dalvin Tomlinson. Re-signing Calais Campbell now provides a solid balance between pass rush and run defence. I like of both Sweat and Green being able to play [on either side](#) of the defensive line to create favourable matchups. Some may dismiss the Marshall product due to a lower level of competition compared to the SEC. But his [FBS-leading](#) 17 sacks and 81 total tackles can't be ignored. If he works with Sweat to

improve his pass rush, Green could flash shades of a prime Von Miller.

17. DT—Walter Nolen— Ole Miss



If you go online and find an article published March 7 by SB Nation’s *Cincy Jungle*, you’ll see the [headline](#): “PFF believes Walter Nolen is the best-case draft scenario for the Bengals.” Nolen earned [Consensus All-American honours](#) after racking up 14 tackles for loss and 6.5 sacks. His 2024 season culminated in being named a finalist for the Outland Trophy — awarded to the best interior lineman in football by the Football Writers Association of America.

Although he still needs to refine his pass-rushing repertoire — perhaps by studying game tape of someone like Dexter Lawrence — there’s no denying his explosive first step, which allows him to blow past offensive guards and get into the backfield. According to [PFF](#), Nolen recorded 41 total pressures last season and earned a 91.6 grade in run defence. With All-Pro Trey Hendrickson [moving on](#), the Bengals will need help plugging the

interior.

The main X-factor? The return of new defensive coordinator Al Golden. Known for his ability to teach and motivate, Golden's Notre Dame [defence ranked](#) in the top six nationally. If Nolen buys in and commits to improving his cardio and pass-rush technique, this pick could end up being a slam dunk.

18. OT—Grey Zabel— North Dakota State



Left tackle, left guard, right guard and right tackle — Grey Zabel played [all four](#) positions for North Dakota State. At the Senior Bowl, Zabel took part in one-on-one drills with no timer and no blocking help on either side — a setup designed to showcase pass-rushing talent. In 12 reps, he [allowed](#) a late pressure on just two plays. For an FCS lineman to win *Senior Bowl Overall Practice Player of the Week* gives you an idea of his potential. Zabel's ability to fire his hands into the defender's shoulder pads and quickly establish control is something special.

With the addition of quarterback Sam Darnold and receiver

Cooper Kupp, the potential is there for the Seahawks to be competitive in 2025. But the offensive line — particularly at right guard — remains a problem. When former quarterback Geno Smith was [sacked](#) 50 times, many of those breakdowns came from the right side. Move Zabel inside. He's got the experience and the footwork to angle off linebackers. A player as talented and versatile as Zabel would be a welcome addition in Seattle. But don't just take my word for it — [Sports Illustrated](#), [PFF](#), and [CBS](#) all said the same thing.

19. CB—Jahdae Barron— Texas



That playoff game was a heartbreaking loss for the Bucs to suffer at the hands of the Commanders. Losing in that manner demands immediate correction — which is why I believe Jahdae Barron could be the guy to shut down top wide receivers for years to come.

If you're not in that "Horns Up" mindset, know this: Barron smothers in zone coverage, powered by elite footwork, physicality and football IQ. In 2024, he was [named](#) first-team All-SEC and

earned multiple All-American honours. Todd Bowles loves players who can contribute in [multiple facets](#) of his defence. Barron brings versatility and toughness, whether at safety, wide corner or nickel. And anyone questioning his 5-foot-11 frame should [take note](#): five interceptions and 46 solo tackles in 2024, per ESPN.

Draft analyst Lance Zierlein has [compared Barron's game](#) to that of defensive back Tykee Smith. I haven't even bothered mocking any other player to the Bucs — Barron could be the difference-maker in a Bucs–Commanders rematch.

20. WR—Tetairoa McMillan— Arizona



While I'd personally lean toward a tight end, it feels like Denver will give in to the potential of Tetairoa McMillan. The six-foot-four receiver, known for his dominance on deep routes and contested catches, would be a major addition to quarterback Bo Nix's development. McMillan shattered school records in Arizona, finishing with more than 1,300 receiving yards on 84 catches, becoming the program's [all-time leader](#) in receiving yards.

The reason I have McMillan falling lower on the draft board than other analysts is that, when watching the game tape, it's pretty clear the level of competition wasn't very strong. On his [highlight reel](#), you can see defensive backs backpedalling and tripping over their own feet, almost Looney Tunes-style.

Still, McMillan is a talented receiver who could fit well in the slot of a Sean Payton offence. He's a consistent target on quick slants and a serious red zone threat. If that sounds familiar, it's likely because I'm subtly comparing McMillan's skill set to that of former Saints receiver Michael Thomas. Factor in the possibility that Courtland Sutton's contract could become [expensive](#), and suddenly, the Broncos might have found a commendable replacement.

21. QB—Shedeur Sanders— Colorado



The Steelers are *forced* to draft a quarterback at this point. Losing not one but two starters in the off-season leaves the franchise

with no other choice. What stands out to me about Shedeur Sanders is his short-game accuracy, highlighted by his [FBS-leading](#) 74.2 per cent completion rate (via *NFL Draft Buzz*). Even amid the chaos in Colorado's backfield, Sanders maintained strong throwing mechanics rather than forcing bad decisions — a trait reflected in his [67 touchdowns to 13 interceptions](#) over two years. On the field, he's calm and collected — a demeanour that would pair well with targets like DK Metcalf, George Pickens and Pat Freiermuth.

Throughout the 2025 off-season, analysts projected Sanders as high as [No. 2 overall](#) to the Browns, but I never saw him as quite that talented. One concern is maturity. Despite his offensive line giving up a staggering 94 sacks over two seasons, Sanders publicly [called out his teammates](#), which raises questions about his leadership. Now, father Deion Sanders is [calling out an anonymous head coach](#) for allegedly spreading lies about Shedeur's interview process.

According to [Pro Football Reference](#), the Steelers ranked 10th in pressures allowed and seventh in hits allowed — a middle-of-the-pack line that will require a mobile quarterback. Given the options available, Sanders is Pittsburgh's best shot at landing a quarterback who could make plays on the run.

22. TE—Colston Loveland— Michigan



Reunited, and it feels so good. Having Michigan tight end Colston Loveland join former Wolverines head coach Jim Harbaugh in L.A. would be enough to have the coach [squatting in his khakis](#) again. The familiarity between player and coach makes for a seamless fit, giving Loveland a clear path to a starting role. During Harbaugh's final two seasons at Michigan (2022–23), Loveland [averaged](#) more than 14 yards per reception. As *NFL.com* analyst [Rhett Lewis](#) put it in his 2025 mock draft: "The connection is obvious ... tight end is a need."

If I had to make a player comparison for Loveland, I'd (respectfully) call him a slightly less talented version of Tucker Kraft. Both tight ends share a similar frame and are tough to bring down after the catch. And despite the difference in NFL vs. NCAA competition, their production — receptions, yards and touchdowns — is [strikingly similar](#).

If quarterback Justin Herbert gets blitzed and can't get the ball to receiver Ladd McConkey in time, Loveland's [crisp](#) route running makes him a reliable threat on any pattern in the passing tree.

23. WR—Emeka Egbuka— Ohio State



Via *Spotrac*, here are the contract statuses of the Green Bay Packers' top receivers: [Christian Watson](#) (2026 UFA), [Romeo Doubs](#) (2026 UFA), [Jayden Reed](#) (2027 UFA) and [Dontayvion Wicks](#) (2027 UFA). Assuming the Packers extend cornerback Jaire Alexander and safety Xavier McKinney, the chances of retaining all four pass-catchers are slim to none.

So who's a trustworthy receiver with a high football IQ and polished route-running? Ohio State's Emeka Egbuka fits the bill. He runs crossing routes with the precision of Jaylen Waddle (in my opinion) and plays with a selfless, competitive edge. Hall of Fame receiver [Steve Smith Sr.](#) summed it up best on his YouTube channel: "My sources said we don't win a championship without him."

Some reports have raised concerns about Egbuka's lack of top-end speed to consistently win outside and lingering injury issues dating back to 2023 (via [Bleacher Report](#)). But Egbuka participated in the NFL Combine and is [coming off](#) a 1,000-yard season. A

product of a program known for producing elite wideouts, Egbuka came close to breaking the Buckeyes' [all-time receiving yards record](#).

If this pick becomes reality, Egbuka could be the best Packers receiver since Davante Adams.

24. S—Malaki Starks— Georgia



In the NFC North, three divisional teams boast high-end receivers — and that number could grow to four if the Packers draft one. For the Minnesota Vikings, that means their defence needs to hold its own, especially to protect rookie quarterback J.J. McCarthy from feeling pressured to carry the team. With [Camryn Bynum](#) gone, free safety is an area of need, which is why I think the Vikings should target the best player available: Malaki Starks.

What I like about Starks is his ability to communicate pre-snap adjustments, come down with contested passes, and shed blockers to deliver explosive tackles. It's no surprise [CBS Sports](#)

[and NFL.com](#) have recently mocked him to Minnesota.

That said, there are concerns. As [The 33rd Team](#) notes, 2024 was statistically the worst season of Starks' career, with noticeable declines in interceptions and pass breakups. He also surrendered six receptions of 25-plus yards and allowed more total yardage than any other safety.

Still, learning under [two-time](#) First-Team All-Pro Harrison Smith could help Starks develop into a key piece of the Vikings' secondary.

25. OT—Josh Simmons— Ohio State



The 2024–25 season didn't go according to plan for the Houston Texans. First of all, I'm sending prayers for a speedy recovery to wide receiver [Tank Dell](#). I can only imagine the physical, mental and emotional struggles he's facing. Losing both Dell and Stefon Diggs could push the Texans toward drafting another receiver — or perhaps investing in a new left guard with major upside. Quarterback C.J. Stroud was the [third-most sacked](#) QB last

season. [Pro Football and Sports Network](#) also gave Houston's offensive line a last-place ranking, pointing to the trade of Laremy Tunsil and a lack of depth as major issues.

For offensive tackle Josh Simmons, early draft projections once had him coming off the board quickly — until a [season-ending patellar tendon injury](#) changed that. [News outlets](#) have Simmons landing in Houston. To quote football analyst [Joe DeLeone](#), “Despite going down with a season-ending injury, Simmons had the best tape of any of the offensive tackles in the 2025 NFL Draft.”

According to NFL insider Ian Rapoport, Simmons received [positive medical evaluations](#) at the combine. If other teams pass, the Texans could land a lineman with refined blocking technique, quick footwork and the strength to go toe-to-toe with just about anyone.

26. EDGE—Mykel Williams—Georgia



Mykel Williams is a fascinating prospect. On tape, he doesn't play like a typical edge rusher. His game is more methodical—he waits to see where the runner goes rather than reacting on instinct. If he were strictly a defensive end, I think his draft value would be a little high. Honestly, the reason I like Williams as a fit for the Rams is because he plays more like a linebacker than a traditional defensive end.

Defensive co-ordinator Chris Shula runs a [Cover 3 scheme](#), which helps explain why the team [finished](#) 14th in interceptions and sixth in pick-sixes. The pass defence is solid. The problem is the run game. In the semifinals, Saquon Barkley ran for [over 200 yards](#), and the Rams [ranked 28th](#) in rushing yards allowed per game last season.

Shula is [a talented coach](#), and adding a player like Williams—who [led Georgia](#) in hurries as a rookie with 31—could strengthen the front seven. His linebacker instincts could be exactly what this defence needs to become more balanced.

27. OT—Jihaad Campbell— Alabama



Drafting linebacker Jihaad Campbell is a move focused on long-term upside rather than immediate impact. The 235-pound defender impressed with a 4.52-second 40-yard dash at the combine before [undergoing labrum surgery](#) shortly after. His status for the start of the season is uncertain, but the Ravens can afford to be patient.

Baltimore already boasts strong linebacker play. Kyle Van Noy [finished](#) fourth in sacks last year, and Roquan Smith [ranked](#) 11th in total tackles. With Van Noy set to hit free agency in [2026](#), and Smith and Tavius Robinson following in [2027](#), now is the time to invest in the next wave of talent.

Campbell, a former high school [wide receiver](#), has developed into a highly versatile off-ball linebacker. He can drop into coverage, pressure the quarterback and line up at [all three](#) linebacker spots. Giving him time to recover and absorb defensive schemes could pay off big in the future.

A [semifinalist](#) for both the Bednarik and Butkus Awards, Campbell

had [top-10 draft potential](#) before the injury. With the right development and recovery, the Ravens may have landed a steal.

28. EDGE—Donovan Ezeiruaku— Boston College



By the time the Detroit Lions faced the Packers back in December, a whopping [12 defensive players](#) were out due to injury. Watching the Lions unravel as the season progressed was heartbreaking—even for non-Lions fans. That’s why, given the injuries to [both edge rushers](#), investing in Donovan Ezeiruaku makes sense.

The 2024 season saw Ezeiruaku [win](#) the Ted Hendricks Award as college football’s top defensive end. He finished second in the nation ([behind](#) Mike Green) in sacks and logged more than 20 tackles for loss, per [Sports-Reference](#). Technically, he’s the most refined edge rusher in this draft class.

The only reason he’s projected to go this low is because of limited anchor strength. But his highlight [reel](#) makes it clear: quarterbacks and running backs alike struggle to outrun him. If he gets drafted higher than expected, it wouldn’t be a surprise.

Overall, the *PFF College Football Show* [put it](#) best: “Don’t let him get hot.”

29. CB—Shavon Revel Jr.— East Carolina



In 2025, the Commanders lost [several key pieces](#) in the defensive secondary: Jeremy Chinn, Darrick Forrest and Canadian Benjamin St-Juste. Rookie cornerback Mike Sainristil finished in the [top 45](#) for solo tackles, but if the Commanders want to contend with the one-two punch of divisional rivals A.J. Brown and DeVonta Smith, they’ll need more talent in the secondary.

[Jeremy Brener](#) of *Sports Illustrated* believes Shavon Revel Jr. could be a risky but worthwhile pick—and I completely agree. Revel Jr. has slid down draft boards after [tearing his ACL](#) during practice in September. It’s understandable that teams would be cautious with a player recovering from such a serious knee injury. However, the doctor who performed the surgery said Revel Jr. [will be ready](#) to participate in all strength and conditioning activities following the draft.

Revel Jr. also [met](#) with the Commanders’ staff at the East–West

Shrine Bowl. He's an excellent tackler with impressive recovery speed—something that was on full display during his [near one-handed interception](#) against Michigan.

30. IDL—Kenneth Grant— Michigan



Since 2020, the Buffalo Bills have [lost twice](#) in the AFC Championship Game. The kryptonite? Patrick Mahomes. The most effective way to disrupt him is by collapsing the pocket—and with a signature bull rusher like defensive tackle Kenneth Grant still available, the Bills could finally make Mahomes' life a little harder.

Grant wraps up anything in his way like a blanket. If a runner tries to slip by, he's going down. If there's a loose ball, it's not seeing the light of day. At 330 pounds, he's almost impossible to move. One question, though: how much did playing opposite Mason Graham impact Grant's ability to avoid elite blockers and limit double teams? In my opinion, he still needs to refine his hand placement when disengaging and improve his lateral movement. But over the last two seasons, Grant [averaged](#) 17 solo tackles, more than four pass deflections and three sacks.

If the Bills want to take down the Chiefs, they should draft Grant to collapse the pocket—and then target a linebacker with [great](#) lateral movement, such as Chris Paul Jr., in the second round.

31. WR—Luther Burden III— Missouri



Burden excels at creating plays after the catch. In [2024](#), he led all college receivers with 30 missed tackles forced and averaged more than six yards after the catch per reception, ranking fifth nationally. Over the past [two seasons](#), he maintained a drop rate below five per cent and caught over 55 per cent of contested targets. The best way to describe his play style is as a blend of [George Pickens](#) and [Deebo Samuel](#).

However, there are areas Burden III needs to [improve](#) upon—namely, his route diversity and sharper cuts. While he looks polished on intermediate routes, his experience running [deep routes](#) is limited. Another concern is his inconsistent [effort](#), particularly when he's not the primary target. This could raise questions about his focus and professionalism at the next level.

If Burden is committed to being a team player, the Chiefs' offence could become even more difficult to defend. Wide receiver Xavier Worthy [made history](#) by becoming just the third wideout to record both a rushing and receiving touchdown in the same game. Burden has also been deployed in multiple roles, even taking snaps from the [backfield](#).

With tight end Travis Kelce likely nearing [retirement](#) and wide receiver Rashee Rice facing [legal](#) issues, the Chiefs may need to take a calculated risk to keep Patrick Mahomes' championship window wide open. Burden could be that swing-for-the-fences pick.

32. EDGE—Shemar Stewart— Texas A & M



For the final pick of my article, I'm going with a player I believe is slightly overrated. But if he can refine his fundamentals with the NFL's most recent Super Bowl-winning team, edge rusher Shemar Stewart could turn into something special.

Let's start with the negatives and work into the positives. The

biggest concern with Stewart's game is his tackling form. He struggles to wrap up and finish plays properly. At times, it looks like a high school player trying to drag someone down by the jersey. That's a serious red flag for an edge rusher—especially at the pro level. Aside from his [31 total tackles](#), his stat line doesn't jump off the page. Connor from [NFL Stock Exchange](#) ranked Stewart as the fourth-best edge rusher, ahead of players like James Pearce Jr., Mykiel Williams and Donovan Ezeiruaku—and frankly, I just don't see it.

Now, the positives. The Philadelphia Eagles just [lost](#) Josh Sweat to the Arizona Cardinals, leaving an opportunity for a new pass rusher to step in. Defensive co-ordinator Vic Fangio [runs](#) a four-down front (meaning four defensive linemen line up on the scrimmage to contain the run and apply quarterback pressure) — [just like](#) Stewart saw at Texas A&M. That scheme works best with freak athletes like Stewart.

At the combine, Stewart measured in at 267 pounds and still [posted](#) a 4.59-second 40-yard dash, a 40-inch vertical and a 10-foot broad jump. His physical tools are elite—that's what makes him so intriguing.

Ultimately, Stewart might be the riskiest pick in the first round. But if Fangio and his staff can clean up his tackling fundamentals, Eagles fans could be looking at a long-term difference-maker off the edge.

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