

2022 NFL Draft Preview: Olave, Wilson And Company Heading For The Pros



This weekend, several former Ohio State football players will become professionals at the 2022 NFL Draft. From first-round locks Chris Olave and Garrett Wilson to mid-round prospects Nicholas Petit-Frere and Jeremy Ruckert, plenty of Buckeyes will keep cell phones within reach as they eagerly wait for a phone call from an NFL executive.

According to mock drafts from various media outlets, seven former Buckeyes have a significant chance to be drafted this weekend, including Olave, Wilson, Petit-Frere, Ruckert, Haskell Garrett, Thayer Munford and Tyreke Smith. Beyond them sits Master Teague III, Demario McCall and Antwuan Jackson Jr.

Here are all their outlooks at the 2022 NFL Draft:

CHRIS OLAVE

Olave broke Ohio State's all-time receiving touchdown last season and solidified himself as one of the best wide receivers in the school's storied history. With an impressive NFL Combine performance that included a 4.39-second 40-yard dash, Olave solidified himself as an early first-round pick in the draft.

While he's not projected with the same consistency as Wilson or former teammate Jameson Williams, Olave will offer teams a smooth and polished route runner capable of taking the top off the defense. He will be a consistent deep threat for quarterbacks looking to throw over the top and can also break free for 15 to 20-yard routes.

"The quiet storm of the Ohio State wide receiver corps, Olave is smooth, steady and makes things happen," NFL.com analyst Lance Zierlein said. "His movements are fluid and easy from snap to catch and all points in between. He's fast but efficient and plays with the bend and foot agility to uncover on all three levels."

PROJECTION: FIRST ROUND

GARRETT WILSON

After receiving first-round projections for most of the last season, Wilson decided to forgo his senior year and enter the 2022 NFL Draft. He left Ohio State with 143 receptions, 2,213 yards and 24 touchdowns in a loaded Buckeye receiving room, including Olave, Williams, Jaxon Smith-Njigba and others.

Wilson's athleticism makes him an exciting prospect for professional teams. NFL executives and scouts love his athleticism, hands and route-running, claiming he can be a versatile weapon at the next level. Wilson is not the consensus No. 1 receiver at the draft, but he is a sure-fire talent that won't fall out of the top 15 picks.

"Garrett Wilson is a dynamic receiver who has the lateral quickness and explosiveness to take any throw or handoff the distance," Bleacher Report's NFL analyst Matt Miller said. "His foot speed and balance let him consistently miss the first defender on underneath throws and screens to create yards after the catch."

PROJECTION: FIRST ROUND

JEREMY RUCKERT

Death, taxes and Ohio State refusing to throw to its tight ends — Ruckert's NFL Draft stock took a significant hit from his lack of usage in the Buckeye offense. However, the tight end will suffer when a passing game involves two first-round picks in Olave and Wilson and budding star Jaxon Smith-Njigba. Still, Ruckert finished his five-year career with 54 catches, 615 yards and 12 touchdowns.

Ruckert shined with his athletics and run-blocking at Ohio State. While NFL executives and scouts don't have a consensus landing spot for Ruckert, he will likely hear his name on the second day of the draft because of his blocking prowess and ability to grow as a pass-catcher.

According to The Draft Network's Kyle Crabbs, Ruckert could be the steal of the 2022 NFL Draft because of his potential.

"The ceiling is there for Ruckert to be a better pro player than a college receiver," Crabbs said. "In the blocking phases of the position, Ruckert is often used in split-flow fits and has the mass necessary to crack the end man on the line of scrimmage effectively. That experience will prove helpful as he looks to acclimate to an NFL responsibility that is likely to ask him to play in the box."

PROJECTION: THIRD ROUND

NICHOLAS PETIT-FRERE

Petit-Frere collected experience at right tackle and left tackle in his Ohio State career. In both positions, the Tampa, Fla., native proved to be one of the best offensive linemen in the Big Ten. His athleticism, comfortability and versatility will take him far in the NFL, according to multiple mock

drafts.

NFL teams will always need depth on the offensive line, making Petit-Frere an intriguing option for teams in the second and third rounds. The Cincinnati Bengals, Chicago Bears and Denver Broncos have all expressed interest in the Ohio State product and all three organizations have picks in the middle rounds. Wherever Petit-Frere lands, he will look to impact the franchise immediately.

"Petit-Frere has the athleticism, violence, size, and urgency to be a scheme-versatile blocker, especially for teams that value run blocking," Pro Football Network's Ian Cummings said. "Even after an up-and-down 2021 campaign, there's upside worth investing in. He'll land either in late Day 2 or early Day 3. Petit-Frere can be a solid swing tackle early with starting potential."

PROJECTION: THIRD ROUND

HASKELL GARRETT

Garrett is a traditional three-technique defensive tackle and will need to land with a team that runs a 4-3 scheme. If he can prove that he can move to nose tackle, Garrett would offer much more versatility to an NFL franchise that runs a 3-4.

The former Buckeye does not have ideal size or athletic numbers, but he did produce impressive statistics at Ohio State and finished his super senior season with 7 1/2 sacks. He also was a consistent contributor in the running game, clogging holes and making frequent stops behind the line of scrimmage.

"Garrett provides alignment flexibility and versatility to a defense," The Draft Network's Damian Parson said. "He can align at the one-technique, three-technique and five-technique at any time. This fits his single-gap penetrating style of play. He offers special teams value as he plays on the punt return and field goal block units."

PROJECTION: FOURTH ROUND

TYREKE SMITH

Smith battled through several injuries and finished with only seven sacks in his Ohio State career. When he was healthy, Smith produced for the Buckeyes, using his athleticism to create disruption for opposing offenses. The Cleveland native recorded a 34-inch vertical and 117-inch broad jump at the NFL Combine, which are impressive numbers for a lineman with his size.

Ideally, Smith fits into a 3-4 defensive scheme. Still, he could also fit as an outside linebacker in a 4-3 defense. He will likely be a mid to late-round pick, but teams could fall in love with his athleticism and choose him earlier than expected.

"Smith is an elastic, long-limbed edge defender whose unbridled attacking style brings both highs and lows in every game," Zierlein said. "His urgent motor is an ingredient that gives him a chance to find some success in the pros, but his inefficiencies and lack of body control limit his ceiling."

PROJECTION: FIFTH ROUND

THAYER MUNFORD

Munford was the Block “O” recipient for Ohio State in 2021 — one season after Jonathan Cooper became the first-ever Buckeye to win the award. Munford was a multi-year starter at left tackle before moving to left guard last year. His move offers him versatility for NFL executives and scouts to see on film. However, not all the film will translate accurately to the next level.

The long-time Buckeye will bring a lot of experience to the professional league, which could help increase his draft stock. According to Crabbs, teams might also see his size as a valuable asset. He projects as a fifth-round pick or later in the 2022 NFL Draft, which isn’t the number he’d hoped for when he returned to Ohio State for a super senior season.

“He’s got the strapping frame to be an NFL tackle if need be, but his most recent play has cast some doubt on a projection there,” Crabbs said. “With a successful career at Ohio State behind him, Munford will be an option for NFL teams who run a lot of inside zone concepts as the Buckeyes have offered him as both a tackle and guard.”

PROJECTION: SIXTH ROUND