

Buckeyes In The NFL: Terry McLaurin Ascends From 3rd-Round Pick To Washington's Best Player



Although the first offseason of the Ron Rivera era in Washington has been plagued by COVID-19, there are a handful of former Ohio State players prepared to make a difference in the nation's capital in 2020.

Buckeye Sports Bulletin spoke with Washington expert Ben Standig, who covers the team full-time for The Athletic, for his analysis of the team's four former Ohio State players.

With the No. 2 overall pick in the 2020 NFL Draft, Washington selected former Buckeye standout defensive end Chase Young, who was the Big Ten Athlete of the Year after setting a school record with 16.5 sacks despite missing two games.

"From the moment that we kind of knew what the draft order was and assuming that the Bengals were going to take Joe Burrow No. 1, I don't think I ever wavered the whole time that the Redskins would do anything else," Standig told BSB. "You never know if a team is going to make some massive offer to move up, but that seemed unlikely. I never really bought into the Tua Tagovailoa talk. So, Chase Young seemed to be the obvious target. I think they couldn't be more happy to have him.

"Talking to some scouts leading into the draft, the term generational talent - one of the two or three best edge rushers they've scouted ever and things like that. There's still a reality that he's not quite there yet - maybe the Bosas were a little more advanced coming out of school, but that his upside, according to some people, surpasses them.

"Defensive line was definitely not the Redskins' weakest spot. He was a fourth straight defensive lineman they've selected in the first round in four years, which is the first time in NFL history. But, the fact is that he's arguably the best of a bunch - he hasn't played, so that's why it's arguably. But adding him to that group, really could be something special for them. So, they're definitely excited to have Chase Young.

By choosing Young with the team's first-round pick, Washington selected its second Buckeye in consecutive first rounds, having drafted Dwayne Haskins in 2019.

"Fans were excited," Standig said of the selection of Haskins. "The Redskins needed a quarterback for the future, following Alex Smith's injury. Dwayne Haskins has ties to the area; he played high school ball in the area, so people were excited for that. But there were a lot of skeptics coming out of Ohio State. I mean, he got picked 15th, which is obviously a pretty good pick, but if you're a quarterback and you're not going in the top five to at least the top 10, I mean, people start to ask, 'Wait, what's wrong with this guy?' Because if you're a quarterback and people really buy into you, you're going pretty high.

"The inexperience really was a factor on multiple fronts, both on and off the field. I remember noting that he and Daniel Jones were compared a lot, because of the division and being first-round picks. And Daniel Jones threw, I think, three times as many passes in his college career as Haskins and I think we saw that for Haskins it took him a long minute to grasp the playbook and kind of understand what he needed to do to put in the work. And when he got on the field, it felt like things were a bit too fast for him, even when he had some success. That win against Detroit, he has the selfie moment at the end of the game, which is a pretty big red flag, some immaturity.

"All that said, you know, he's got great size, he's got a big arm. His last two starts were definitely his best two starts. And obviously, this whole offseason is a mess for everybody, so we really can't tell how he's progressed. We just talked to him yesterday over Zoom, he's lost weight. Ron Rivera said good things about his leadership and things like that, but until we get him on the field, it's hard to tell. But after a rocky season, at least there's a sense of some optimism right now."

Like Standig mentioned, Haskins has re-shaped his body entering year two. The second-year signal caller dropped 7 percent body fat and 17 pounds, down to 218 pounds after entering the league at 235 pounds.

Haskins, who was a Heisman Trophy finalist for the Buckeyes in 2018, will have some new competition at quarterback in Washington this season. Rivera brought in his starter from last season in Carolina in Kyle Allen, who filled in for an injured Cam Newton.

"It's definitely Haskins' job to lose; he's got the bigger upside and obviously the franchise made an investment in him and all that," Standig said. "But this isn't a normal offseason, and the new coaching staff didn't draft Haskins, so, you know, just from a reality standpoint, they're not going to be as connected and tied to him as if they had. Also, they traded for Kyle Allen to be at minimum the No. 2, but Ron Rivera has talked throughout about wanting a quarterback battle. And the reality is that if there are no practices before training camp and preseason is cut, or whatever happens leading into the season, it seems reasonable to think that Kyle Allen will have a better grasp of the playbook going into week one.

"And the Redskins are already going to have a completely new left side of the offensive line; there's questions at receiver beyond Terry McLaurin; the tight end position is kind of a mess. There's a lot of things working against whoever the quarterback is, and I wouldn't be stunned at this point if Kyle Allen starts week one just because of the circumstances.

"That said, I mean, Dwayne Haskins is the likely starter if not week one, the whole season. And you would imagine that's where they're going to try to get him into work, but at the same point the circumstances are what they are and Kyle Allen is more familiar with the system that Ron Rivera brought over because he was with him last year."

Like Standig alluded to, Haskins' top target in Washington is his former teammate at Ohio State -

standout wide receiver Terry McLaurin. When Washington selected McLaurin in the third round (No. 76) of the 2019 NFL Draft, not many outside of Columbus or his hometown of Indianapolis had heard much about the talented wideout.

The standout wide receiver/special teams performer quickly became a fan favorite in Washington from his excellent performance in the team's first game. McLaurin went on to haul in 58 receptions for 919 yards and seven touchdowns across 14 games, earning a spot on the Pro Football Writers Association All-Rookie Team.

"I didn't really think too much about him going into the draft, and you heard more about him as a special teams worker," Standig said of McLaurin. "So, then he gets drafted and then you hear he's got this great speed, and that's great. But then once you started watching him at practices and training camp, you could see there was something going on here.

"And then, literally the first game of the year, he explodes for a big touchdown and made some big plays. And it just kept going - I was really blown away by how impressive he was last year. His speed is obvious, but the route-running was really precise. And he just came across as super mature. He's a little bit older than the average rookie, but he just came across as super mature. And I was really impressed, and I've been talking him up big time throughout the offseason. He's the one receiver they have that kind of a looks to me like a proven thing. Everybody else is pretty young or hasn't done anything yet.

"And that's the question, what happens now? Teams have had a year to study him; they've got tape, are they just going to send double teams his way and let other people beat you and all that kind stuff. I'm expecting another pretty impressive season for him. The Dwayne Haskins part obviously has to help. They obviously know each other and have a great connection there on and off the field. But the fact that McLaurin put up the stats he did, even with Haskins having some big struggles - three different quarterbacks started games last year - that really says a lot about what he was able to do. And he even missed two games and he almost had 1,000 yards, so very impressive for McLaurin and I'm excited to see what happens next."

In his NFL debut, McLaurin burst onto the scene with a five-reception, 125-yard performance with a 69-yard touchdown in a 32-27 loss to the division-rival Eagles.

After Washington moved on from standout left tackle Trent Williams, who held out last season, the question arose about who is the best player on the team's roster. For Standig, it was none other than the third-round pick he knew little about just a year ago.

"Trent Williams had been long considered their best player but now he's gone so I was like, 'OK, who is their best player now?' And I don't know if everybody would agree with this, but I went with McLaurin," Standing said. "It may be a little bit of a stretch, but I mean, maybe that says more about the Redskins' roster at the top than it does McLaurin. But I argue that look how impressive he was last year and if you anticipate he's better moving forward, I don't know who I'm saying would be better. The one guy you could maybe make the case with is a guy we just talked about in Chase Young, but he hasn't played yet, so I couldn't quite go there."

The fourth Buckeye on Washington's roster is tight end Marcus Baugh, who started two seasons in Columbus from 2016-17 and signed with the team on March 3. As a senior in 2017, Baugh brought in 28 catches for 304 yards and five scores. Although they didn't start together, Baugh and Haskins worked

together in practice, which could factor into why the team added him as a free agent.

“The tight end position is a mess; they don’t really have much,” Stading said. “But that said, it’s all relative and I honestly don’t know a ton about him. OTAs and these types of practices are the type of place where you take a longer look at these guys, but I haven’t seen him on the field. I wouldn’t say that anybody is like a lock to stick a tight end definitively other than maybe Logan Thomas who they signed as a free agent. But they also signed Thaddeus Moss as an undrafted free agent; Jeremy Sprinkle was a hold over.

“There’s room for a legitimate tight end; I don’t know if there’s room for a sleeper. I honestly just don’t know enough about him to have a sense. Anybody who’s a longer shot is really hurt by the lack of practices, because they just can’t get on the field so the coaches are going to have to go with more assumptions rather than what they actually watch.”

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