

Jaxon Smith-Njigba Excited To Land With Seattle Seahawks As First Wideout Off The Board



Ohio State saw two players taken in the 2023 NFL Draft that were the first prospect taken at their respective positions, including offensive tackle Paris Johnson Jr. (No. 6 to the Arizona Cardinals) and wide receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba (No. 20 to the Seattle Seahawks).

Johnson's early selection was a surprise as the Cardinals traded up to take one of the top tackle prospects in the draft, but Smith-Njigba's selection at No. 20 was surprising for different reasons. Viewed by many as a top-15 selection, Smith-Njigba began to fall in the draft as the teams picking in the first round picked almost every position except wideout.

Finally, Smith-Njigba became the third Buckeye drafted and the first wide receiver off the board when selected by the Seahawks, including general manager John Schneider and head coach Pete Carroll, and Smith-Njigba was happy with his landing spot and becoming the first receiver taken.

"I know God always has a plan for me, so I wasn't stressing about that," he said. "I just really wanted to end up in a good spot, whether I was first, second or whatever receiver off the board. Just wanted to land in a good spot, first and foremost."

Smith-Njigba joins a receiver room in the Seahawks that includes D.K. Metcalf and Tyler Lockett, with both earning a Pro Bowl nod and Lockett previously earning All-Pro honors. With the talent Smith-Njigba has played alongside at Ohio State over the past few seasons, he's glad to have that development ahead of his jump to the NFL.

"I feel like we have a pro receiver room already, especially under Coach (Brian) Hartline," he said. "Just going to take everything that I learned and bring it to the next level. The development at Ohio State is second-to-none, so I appreciate my time there."

Smith-Njigba is Ohio State's third first-round receiver over the last two drafts, joining Garrett Wilson and Chris Olive from last year's draft. After spending time at Ohio State with both, Smith-Njigba has looked to the pair for advice as he begins his NFL journey.

"Coming into the NFL, they were high on their routine and just being present, enjoying the process," he said. "They tell me to just be myself and keep a straight head, and good things will happen."

And by all accounts, Smith-Njigba should be good to go as he gets to work with the Seahawks. After essentially a lost season at Ohio State in which he appeared in just three games with five receptions due to a lingering hamstring injury, Smith-Njigba is ready to move past it.

"The biggest challenge is not playing," he said. "This (was) my first time missing games, missing practice, not being there for my guys. I learned a lot. I thank God for him giving me the opportunity because I'm coming in hungry as ever, ready to get on the field and line it up."