

Jordan Fuller Mulling NFL Draft As Rose Bowl Approaches



Among the draft-eligible players Ohio State boasted ahead of its 2018 season, Jordan Fuller figured to be near the top of the list. After he began his freshman campaign with 13 games played on special teams in 2016, Fuller started 13 contests as a sophomore in 2017, beating out Erick Smith and starring beside Damon Webb at safety. Fuller finished second on the 2017 team in tackles with 70 (three for loss), just two behind Jerome Baker's 72 (eight for loss), adding two interceptions and two pass breakups as he showed his nose for the ball and became a ball hawk in the Buckeyes' secondary.

By the numbers, Fuller's junior campaign has been even better. Despite defensive woes for OSU, which ranks 84th nationally in passing yards allowed with 239.8 per game, he has been a bright spot. His 72 tackles (2 1/2 for loss) are second to junior linebacker Malik Harrison's 74 (8 1/2 for loss), adding an interception, four pass breakups and two fumble recoveries in 12 games (all starts).

Fuller considers his fall successful, but not because he had an outstanding individual season. Ohio State's 45-24 win over Northwestern in the Big Ten Championship Game on Dec. 1 capped a second straight conference title for No. 6 Ohio State (12-1) and punched a ticket to the Rose Bowl on Jan. 1 for the first time in 10 years. But since he expected more out of himself, the perfectionist in Fuller made his Dec. 12 reflection at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center sound somewhat disappointed.

"It wasn't the season I wanted to have," the 6-2, 204-pounder said. "But that's not really important. We won a Big Ten championship. I really couldn't ask for much else, to be honest.

"I have a lot of goals for myself, as well as the team. The team goals come first. I am definitely so happy that we finished the way we did. We've got one more task."

After the Buckeyes battle No. 9 Washington (10-3) at 5 p.m. ET on New Year's Day in Pasadena, Calif., Fuller has a decision to make. With the deadline for underclassmen to declare set for Jan. 14, the NFL draft is closer than its April 25-27 stretch appears. While the focus for Fuller and OSU is centered squarely on sending head coach Urban Meyer out with a win before retiring officially on Jan. 2 and handing the team over to offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach Ryan Day, the junior safety has had to give some consideration to the potential process.

"I will just write out the pros and cons with my family and make an informed decision," said Fuller, who added that he entered his name into a college advisory committee in December to make an informed NFL decision in January. "That's not the main focus right now. I just want to get better every day and give my all for my teammates because they deserve it. I want to give my all for Coach Meyer as well."

Meyer and defensive coordinator Greg Schiano recruited Fuller to Columbus from Old Tappan, N.J., where he was a four-star athlete in Ohio State's 2016 recruiting class. While his head coach for the past three seasons steps down after the Buckeyes play the Huskies, Fuller feels confident in the coaching staff under Day. Among the continuity, co-defensive coordinator/safeties coach Alex Grinch is expected back for another year in 2019, an assistant Fuller forged a strong relationship with in 2018.

"He's great," Fuller said of Grinch. "I always say there were a few times in the season where I would not be as confident as I should be or the defense wasn't playing as well as we want it to. He would always have something good to say about getting my mind right and forget about everything that happened in the past. He would say, 'Go play and let it loose.' I just appreciate him for that. In terms of scheme, I think he is one of the best in the country. I really appreciate him."

Fuller was one of OSU's eight Big Ten honorable mentions on Nov. 27 — also named a first-team Academic All-American by the College Sports Information Directors of America for the second straight season on Dec. 10. He capped his semester with a 3.81 overall grade point average as a business major. Those numbers might not necessarily factor into Fuller's draft stock, but he takes just as much pride in his classroom accomplishments.

"There were a lot of hours that went into that," Fuller said. "There was a lot of studying. It's a great honor, especially to get first team this year. I didn't know I could be on it with just how hard my classes were. I was able to pull it out."

"Business calculus was tough. Stats was tough, too. It's the classes along with just the stress of football. You're so tired and sometimes you don't feel like doing the work. I think that is the biggest challenge instead of just the material of the classes."

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