

Breaking Down Ohio State's 2020 NFL Draft Prospects

Ohio State was all over the 2019 NFL draft Thursday through Saturday in Nashville, Tenn., where nine Buckeyes from the 2018 team went to eight franchises while four undrafted players were signed by three organizations.

Shortly after former head coach Urban Meyer (2012-18) took over seven years ago, OSU reached new heights as its development evolved and the program turned into a football factory for the NFL, churning out top talent each year.

While head coach Ryan Day replaces the retired Meyer for the 2019 season and beyond, the trend is expected to continue in the near future. An abundance of Buckeyes, from fifth-year seniors to juniors and even a third-year sophomore, headline the latest wave of prospects with pro potential.

In an early look ahead, BSB breaks down OSU's fresh batch of possible NFL picks for the 2020 draft next April in Las Vegas.

Top Pick: Chase Young

After the San Francisco 49ers selected Nick Bosa with the second overall pick in Thursday's first round, Chase Young is next up and for good reason. The 6-5, 265-pounder terrorized opposing offensive lines as a sophomore in 2018 with 34 tackles (15 1/2 for losses) and 10 1/2 sacks — all while playing majority of the Buckeyes' season at 80 percent on two rolled ankles.

The moment Young stepped foot in Columbus as a freshman for summer enrollment in June 2017, the five-star recruit from Hyattsville (Md.) DeMatha was built to become a future first-round pick.

As the 247Sports composite's No. 7 overall prospect, No. 2 weakside defensive end and No. 1 player in Maryland for the 2017 class, Young made an immediate impact in defensive line coach Larry Johnson's deep rotation — which included 2019 picks like Bosa and Denver Broncos end/tackle Dre'Mont Jones (71st overall, third round) with eventual 2018 selections such as Indianapolis Colts tackle/end Tyquan Lewis (64th overall, second round), Cincinnati Bengals end Sam Hubbard (77th overall, third round) and Minnesota Vikings tackle Jalyn Holmes (102nd overall, fourth round) — en route to 19 tackles (six for losses) and four sacks.

Young can naturally expect more double-team approaches from tackles and guards in 2019, and 10 1/2 sacks are tough to beat, but he remains hungry for more as a junior while his stock is already soaring.

"I'm just trying to (do) the same thing as last spring, you know," Young said March 29. "Working as hard as we can. Coach J, he doesn't care about none of (the outside noise). To Coach J, I'm still an average player — you feel me? That's how he coaches me and that's how I like it. I've got the underdog mentality still. It's the same as last year. I'm still just trying to work as hard as I can."

With another year of physical molding by strength coach Mickey Marotti and technical development under OSU's D-line guru in Johnson, Young possesses the power, speed and IQ to immediately follow

Bosa's footsteps.



Next Pick: Jeffrey Okudah

With the 111th overall pick in the second round of Saturday's fourth round, the Atlanta Falcons selected Kendall Sheffield and continued an Ohio State streak. Throughout the past five years, the Buckeyes have seen six cornerbacks drafted in either the first or fourth rounds.

Jeffrey Okudah figures to keep the trend going in 2020, possessing the physical and mental tools NFL franchises look for. The 6-1, 200-pounder from Grande Prairie (Texas) South Grand Prairie came to Columbus for early enrollment in January 2017 as a five-star recruit — like Young — as the 247Sports composite's No. 8 overall prospect, No. 1 cornerback and No. 2 player out of Texas, contributing right away. After he spent his first 13 games mostly on special teams, Okudah notably cracked the Buckeyes' three-man rotation in the 2017 Cotton Bowl for then-junior cornerback Denzel Ward — who declared for the 2018 draft before the Dec. 29 game, eventually going fourth overall to the Cleveland Browns — and recorded four tackles as OSU shut USC down for its 24-7 win.

Okudah had highs and lows as a sophomore in 2018, along with the rest of the secondary, but finished strong down the stretch — including two pass breakups and five tackles when Ohio State held Washington off 28-23 for its Jan. 1 Rose Bowl win. If he continues to take steps in the right direction with his development, while continuing as an ace gunner on punt coverage, Okudah is primed for becoming the Buckeyes' latest first-round cornerback. Learning from new co-defensive coordinator/secondary coach Jeff Hafley — who spent the past seven years in the NFL, most recently with the San Francisco 49ers (2016-18) — should help Okudah piece together the breakout season he needs at right cornerback to boost his stock.

"Going from (Greg) Schiano and (Taver) Johnson to Coach Hafley and (special teams coordinator/assistant secondary coach Matt) Barnes, I feel like, me, at first, it was unfortunate to have your third coach in years," Okudah said March 27. "But at the end of the day, it's like, you realize how smart of a coach Coach Hafley is. Coach Day told us, when he hired him, that he'd be like one of the best coaches we ever had and so far, it seems like that'll be the case. He's really high-energy guy, his energy's actually pretty contagious and just the drills he's implemented so far — everyone's getting better, every single day."



Senior Class

Jordan Fuller (6-2, 205): While he sat out Ohio State's spring camp to recover from his lower-body injury, Fuller approaches his fourth season overall in Columbus and third year starting as the Buckeyes' free safety.

After he held off the NFL draft to complete his degree in business marketing and lead the defense during a transitional 2019 campaign, the three-time OSU Scholar-Athlete and 2018 team captain brings momentum with consecutive seasons of 70-plus tackles and at least an interception.

"(The NFL decision) definitely took some thought," Fuller said March 27. "But after I talked to my

family, some of the coaching staff, it's too good of an opportunity to come back. Yeah, I just couldn't pass it up."



K.J. Hill (6-0, 195): Hill had every reason to follow graduated fifth-year seniors Parris Campbell, Johnnie Dixon and Terry McLaurin into the NFL draft after the wide receivers fueled Ohio State's home-run offense with big numbers on the end of the passes thrown by record-setting quarterback Dwayne Haskins throughout the 2018 season, but he returned for his own fifth-year campaign and is a likely 2019 team captain candidate.

Returning the surest hands in the Buckeyes' deep rotation of receivers, Hill split H-back duties with Campbell over the past two years, but is now OSU's go-to guy from the slot — horizontally and vertically — after recording 123 receptions for 1,405 yards (11.4 average) and nine touchdowns over the past two falls.

"It's just big shoes to fill, and I'm willing to do that," Hill said March 6. "I feel like me going out there, I have to work harder for me individually to show everybody how we keep the standard, even go higher than the standard we had last year."



Malik Harrison (6-3, 245): Ohio State's only sure bet to start among its linebackers, Harrison has not looked back on the outside since he overtook Dante Booker down the stretch of his sophomore season in 2017.

At weakside linebacker, Harrison broke out as a junior in 2018 and tied Fuller for 81 tackles, pacing the Buckeyes while adding an all-around presence from the line of scrimmage to the secondary — a big reason why legendary linebacker James Laurinaitis said on OSU's spring game broadcast April 13 that Harrison is "a guy that can take a step and possibly be an All-American" come 2019.

"Malik Harrison, for example, he's a fourth-year guy — senior — clearly he's not on the same level as a freshman," first-year linebackers coach Al Washington said March 21. "So when I say that nobody's comfortable, Malik Harrison has earned enough equity in his body of work. He's an excellent talent."



Junior Class

J.K. Dobbins (5-10, 217): The junior said he took a step back during his sophomore season in 2018 — which is true, to a degree — but Dobbins still projects as one of the top running backs available after proving an all-around threat from Ohio State's backfield over the past two years.

"I'm not going to make any excuses — it was me. I regressed last year," Dobbins said March 6. "I didn't have the year that I needed to have and so I put that on myself and I'll get back to that this upcoming year."

Dobbins desires to become the Buckeyes' 2019 workhorse after he took 424 carries for 2,456 yards (5.8 average) and 17 touchdowns, catching 48 passes for 420 yards (8.8 average) and three touchdowns, across 28 straight games, proving versatility and durability on top of his power and shiftness in OSU's

high-octane offenses.



Brendon White (6-2, 215): As a four-star athlete from Powell (Ohio) Olentangy Liberty in Ohio State's 2017 recruiting class — the 247Sports composite's No. 126 overall prospect, No. 3 athlete and No. 2 player out of Ohio — White's ability was always evident, but the Buckeyes bounced him between wide receiver and defensive back before he found his home at strong safety.

After he emerged as OSU's starter next to Fuller down the 2018 season's stretch, White (46 tackles with four for losses and an interception in 14 games) enters his junior campaign in 2019 with an opportunistic year ahead of him, showcasing his ability from the box to coverage as the new defense's hybrid linebacker/safety at the "bullet" position.

"(The 'bullet' is) a Jamal Adams (6-1, 213) kind of (position)," White said March 27, referencing the New York Jets' third-year strong safety. "When he comes down in the box a little bit, he can guard tight ends, also play the post as well."



Thayer Munford (6-6, 310): After he made 12 appearances as a freshman in 2017, Munford stepped into Ohio State's void at left tackle as a sophomore for the 2018 season and started 13 games before an injury sidelined him for the Buckeyes' Jan. 1 Rose Bowl against Washington and sat out all of spring camp with a lower-back issue.

"The cohesive of the group that's playing — obviously, with Thayer out, it's not there," fourth-year offensive line coach Greg Studrawa said April 1. "So what we have to focus on is the development and building some depth."

Ahead of his junior campaign, Munford is OSU's only returning starter on the offensive line and was solid in year one, which sets up an interesting scenario for the draft depending on how he recovers from the injury and performs throughout the fall.



Wild Card

Shaun Wade (6-1, 194): Among the Ohio State secondary's key players, Wade came to Columbus for early enrollment in January 2017 from Jacksonville (Fla.) Trinity Christian Academy as a five-star recruit — 247Sports composite's No. 17 overall prospect, No. 2 cornerback and No. 4 player out of Florida. After he redshirted his freshman season in 2017 due to an abdominal injury that required surgery, Wade came back for his 2018 campaign with 31 tackles, seven pass breakups, three interceptions and a forced fumble as he played all 14 games for the Buckeyes' secondary.

A Swiss Army knife for OSU's defense, currently the starting strong safety and slot cornerback, the third-year sophomore has the prototypical length, ballhawking instincts and natural toughness to potentially emerge as an intriguing defensive back prospect with another strong fall.

"To be honest, whatever they need me to do," Wade said March 27. "So if one game they need me at corner, I'll play corner. If they need me at safety, I'll play safety. If they need me at D-line, I'll play D-

line.”



Other Prospects

Seniors: Fifth-year (left) cornerback Damon Arnette (6-0, 195), “X” receiver Binjimen Victor (6-4, 205), defensive tackle Jashon Cornell (6-3, 280), “Z” receiver Austin Mack (6-2, 215), tight end Rashod Berry (6-4, 259), defensive end Jonathon Cooper (6-4, 257), middle linebacker Justin Hilliard (6-1, 235), defensive tackle Davon Hamilton (6-4, 308), defensive tackle Robert “B.B.” Landers (6-1, 285), fifth-year tackle/guard Branden Bowen (6-7, 315) and Rutgers graduate transfer center/guard Jonah Jackson (6-4, 310).

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