

Paris Johnson Jr. Felt Connection With Arizona Cardinals Ahead Of Draft Selection



When former Ohio State offensive tackle Paris Johnson Jr. was selected with the No. 6 overall pick by the Arizona Cardinals in the first round of the 2023 NFL Draft on Thursday - with the Cardinals trading up to grab Johnson, no less - he became the second Paris Johnson to be taken by the Cardinals in the draft.

The first, of course, was his father, a safety who the Cardinals selected in the fifth round of the 1999 NFL Draft out of Miami (Ohio). Though Johnson said he no longer has a relationship with his father, he said those connections made Arizona the place that he wanted to land for his NFL career.

"As kid, he was a Cardinal, (so) I wanted to be a Cardinal. He went to Miami University, (so) I wanted to go to Miami University in college," Johnson said. "(My) mom didn't want me to play in the MAC. But this is huge. Told the coaches I want to finish what my dad couldn't. I want to finish what he started originally as the original Paris Johnson, so to be able to carry that legacy to the Cardinals is everything."

Johnson had met extensively with the Cardinals' brass ahead of the draft, including general manager Monti Ossenfort and head coach Jonathan Gannon, and those conversations had Johnson looking forward to the possibility of being selected by the Cardinals.

"The first two picks, I was chilling," he said. "As soon as the Cardinals came on the clock, I was staring at my phone the entire freaking time. I was locked in from that moment. I told everybody when we were coming in on the red carpet, 'I feel like I'm going to be a Cardinal today. If I'm not, I'm going to be a little bit sad.'"

Johnson will go from protecting C.J. Stroud - who went No. 2 to the Houston Texans - to protecting Cardinals franchise quarterback Kyler Murray, who will be entering his fifth season and coming off a torn ACL. In his first four seasons, Murray has thrown for 13,848 yards and 84 touchdowns while

rushing for 2,204 yards and another 23 scores.

"He's a beast," Johnson said. "I've been watching him since I was in high school and back in his college days at Oklahoma. I love the hustle he plays with and the way he extends plays. I love the way he trusts his tackles and stays in the pocket. If something breaks down, he fights to the finish."

Johnson ended up in Arizona was a possibility that Murray had looked forward to, as the pair connected on one of Johnson's pre-draft visits to the team's facility.

"I'm walking through the facility and I saw him and gave him a head nod," Johnson said. "Then he said, 'Hey, Paris, come here.' I reached for my phone and texted my teammate, Luke (Wypler), and I said, 'Hey Luke, dude, Kyler knows my freaking first name.' I had never met him in my life."

"I was like, 'Whoa, there could be a chance here.' We talked. He said, 'I saw your tape, I saw your pro day, I saw how you move and how you play.' He said, 'I would love for you to be a Cardinal.'"

And now that wish has come true for Johnson, who has the full support of the Cardinals as he prepares to take the next step in his football career.

"When things align like this that are so incredible that you can only imagine, that just shows you that all this was meant to be," he said. "I'm just ready to work because I know I'm supposed to be here. I'm supposed to be here right now."