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"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

May 2021

Second City's First Pick

Bears Move Up To Take OSU's Fields

By WYATT CROSHER
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

For months, almost all the talk about Ohio State players in the 2021 NFL draft centered around quarterback Justin Fields.

That talk was on anything from Fields' arm strength, his ability or inability to read defenses, and his work ethic to his speed and pretty much everything in between. All that talk led the former Ohio State quarterback to be projected anywhere from No. 3 to No. 32 on various mock drafts leading up to the big day on April 28.

And finally, after 10 picks came and went, all that talk could be put to rest once Fields' landing spot became clear. At pick No. 11, the Chicago Bears selected Fields, a quarterback who never lost a Big Ten game at Ohio State and who threw for 5,373 yards, 63 touchdowns and just nine interceptions in 22 games as the Buckeyes' starter.

He was the fourth quarterback off the board, with Clemson's Trevor Lawrence, BYU's Zach Wilson and North Dakota State's Trey Lance going at picks 1, 2 and 3 to the Jacksonville Jaguars, New York Jets and San Francisco 49ers, respectively. With the selection, Fields became the highest-drafted quarterback for Ohio State since Art Schlichter went No. 4 to the then-Baltimore Colts in the 1982 NFL draft.

Despite not being a top-10 pick, Fields said he wasn't as nervous about his draft spot as many around him were. Instead, he kept the faith that wherever he ended up, it would be the right spot for him.

"I've been in so many different situations in my life where I think I want something, I think I want to do this, but God has a different plan for me," Fields said. "I put my full trust in God, and he's put me in a perfect place for me. Whatever his will is is what's going to happen. I'm excited to be a part of this organization and just ready to get to work."

The landing spot was also not as big a concern for Fields' former head coach, Ryan Day. He said that the most important



PHOTO COURTESY THE OHIO STATE DEPT. OF ATHLETICS
CHI-TOWN BOUND – Ohio State quarterback Justin Fields did not have to wait too long to hear his name called during the 2021 NFL draft. The Chicago Bears traded up to the No. 11 pick to grab Fields.

thing is what comes next for Fields now that he is locked into a team and that he's excited to see what his two-time Big Ten Offensive Player of the Year will do at the next level.

"It's what you do with the opportunity now, and Justin knows that," Day said. "Now he has to go about the business of putting in the work and building that reputation, the respect in that locker room, so he can go have a successful career. And that's the idea."

Heading into the draft, Fields ending up with Chicago would have meant that his stock fell to the lower range of projections set out for the 6-2 signal-caller. The Bears held the 20th pick entering the night but felt it was time to jump nine spots once Fields began to get passed on.

So Chicago general manager Ryan Pace pulled the trigger. The Bears traded their No. 20 pick and fifth-round pick from this year's draft, along with first- and fourth-round picks for the 2022 NFL draft, to move up and take Fields.

"We had multiple plans tonight, and the way the board was falling, we got excited when the quarterbacks came off that way and Justin continued to fall," Pace said. "For us, it was just executing our plan at the right spot in the draft and being patient with that, which sometimes can be difficult."

Fields was one of 10 Ohio State players to hear his name

called during the three draft days, tied with Alabama for the most in the country. But he was also the only pick in the first 59 for the Buckeyes, with the drought ending once linebacker Pete Werner went No. 60 overall to the New Orleans Saints in the second round.

Despite being the clear top player from the program in this year's draft, no one faced more public questions about his game than Fields, to the point that his former head coach and teammates were forced to defend him time and time again.

All the chatter about whether or not Fields was truly a quarterback worthy of a top pick led to plenty of annoyance from Day.

"Yeah, I get frustrated," Day said ahead of the draft on criticism surrounding Fields. "I feel like there's a lot of people in the draft and some guys get a pass and some guys don't. And certainly, people have taken shots at Justin. When I think about being the quarterback at Ohio State when I talk to families and their recruits, we always say it's like being the shortstop of the New York Yankees. With that comes great scrutiny. There are pluses and there are minuses to everything."

Continued On Page 8

OPINION

Can Fields Solve QB Puzzle In Chicago?

Aside from being a former Ohio State quarterback, what does Justin Fields have in common with Craig Krenzel, Ron Maciejowski and Don Scott? It's the same commonality each shares with George Blanda, Zeke Bratkowski, "Dandy" Don Meredith, Jim Fassel, Jim Harbaugh and Kyle Orton.

Fields has joined the aforementioned group as college quarterbacks drafted by the Chicago Bears, a proud member of the National Football League since the early 1920s when George Halas and Chic Harley – yes, that Chic Harley – were fighting over control of the fledgling franchise.

The Bears have been home to some of the most iconic players in league history including Dick Butkus and Gale Sayers, selected with the Nos. 3 and 4 picks of the 1965 NFL draft, and some guy named Walter Payton, who as the fourth overall pick of the 1975 draft came out of tiny Jackson State in Mississippi to become a pretty good running back throughout the mid-1970s and 1980s.

Truth be told, however, Chicago is a graveyard as far as NFL quarterbacks are concerned. When Mitchell Trubisky played in the Pro Bowl in 2018, he became the first Bears QB to do that since Jim McMahon in 1985. If you want to find the most recent Chicago quarterback to earn first-team All-Pro honors, you have to go all the way back to Johnny Lujack in 1950.

The Bears enjoy the distinction of having more players and coaches in the Pro Football Hall of Fame than any other franchise, but only one quarterback is in that group and he played nearly 80 years ago. Sid Luckman, the master of the T-formation, led Chicago to four NFL championships in the 1940s and was enshrined in the Hall of Fame in 1965.

Not that the Bears haven't tried. During the 1974 draft, for example, they took three different quarterbacks. But if that were a winning strategy, you probably would have heard of Alan Chadwick, Joe Barnes and Craig Holland.

Since the inaugural NFL draft in 1936, Fields was the 52nd quarterback selected by Chicago, but since 1951, he is only the seventh the team has taken in the first round. Of the preceding six first-rounders over the past 70 years, only McMahon could be considered a success. He was taken out of BYU as the fifth overall pick in the 1982 draft and played seven seasons in Chicago, producing a 49-17 record as a starter while leading the Bears to four division titles and the Super Bowl XX championship.

But McMahon was surrounded by such talent as Payton and receivers Willie Gault and Dennis McKinnon as well as a defense that included future Hall of Famers Mike Singletary, Richard Dent and Dan Hampton along with the likes of Wilbur Marshall, Steve McMichael and Gary Fenick.

Obviously, that collection of talent doesn't come around very often. Unfortunately for the other five quarterbacks Chicago has drafted in the first round over the past 70 years, the talent assembled around them wasn't even close.

Bob Williams was the starting quarterback on Notre Dame's national championship team in 1949, and the Bears made him their first-round choice and the second pick overall in the 1951 draft. But Williams never found the same success in Chicago that he enjoyed in South Bend, and his NFL career lasted only 29 games spread out over three seasons.

The Bears took Harbaugh with the 26th overall selection in the 1987 draft with an eye toward making him McMahon's heir apparent. But the team that just two years before had been on the precipice of creating a dynasty was already fracturing. Harbaugh enjoyed a 14-year career as an NFL quarterback, but only seven were spent in Chicago, where he went 35-31 as a starter and threw 50 touchdowns against 56 interceptions.

At least Harbaugh won a division championship with the Bears in 1990. Cade McNown and Rex Grossman should have been so lucky.

McNown was selected with the 12th overall

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

pick of the 1999 draft after a college career at UCLA that included throwing for 10,708 yards and 68 TDs. The Bears were so confident in McNown that they waived starting QB Erik Kramer following the draft and named McNown the starter. But in just 15 starts over two seasons, McNown engineered only three victories and was traded to Miami during the 2001 preseason for a couple of mid-round draft picks.

Grossman was the No. 22 overall selection out of Florida in the 2003 draft, and while he lasted a little longer in Chicago than McNown, his tenure was no less turbulent. His first three seasons were marred by a litany of injuries before he finally got a chance in 2006 and led the Bears to a 13-3 regular-season record and a spot in Super Bowl XLII. There, Grossman was outdueled by Peyton Manning, who led Indianapolis to a 29-17 victory, but it appeared Chicago had finally found a quarterback.

Unfortunately, inconsistency and more injuries plagued Grossman, and he left the team as a free agent following the 2008 season. Over six seasons with the Bears, he was 21-14 as a starter and threw for 33 touchdowns against 35 interceptions.

Chicago went another 14 years before trading up to select Trubisky with the second overall pick of the 2017 draft. It was a somewhat questionable move since Trubisky had started only one season at North Carolina, but it had been 11 seasons since Grossman had taken the team to the Super Bowl, and the Bears were desperate to make something happen.

Trubisky embarked upon a tumultuous four-year run in Chicago that included a division championship in 2018. He was also named as an alternate to the Pro Bowl that year after going 11-3 as a starter and throwing for 3,223 yards and 24 touchdowns. But his performance slipped a bit in 2019, and by last season, the writing was on the wall. Despite posting a 6-3 record as a starter in 2020, Trubisky was allowed to walk away as a free agent, and he signed a one-year deal in March to become the backup to Josh Allen in Buffalo.

One other thing Williams, Harbaugh, McNown, Grossman and Trubisky shared in common. During those five quarterbacks' combined years in Chicago, the Bears had only four players named offensive starters for the Pro Bowl, and just one of those four was from a skill position – fullback Neal Anderson in 1992.

OSU-Chicago Connections

Fields is the 30th former Ohio State player of all time to be drafted by the Bears, but the first since Chicago took linebacker Marcus Freeman in the fifth round of the 2009 draft. Freeman was waived just before the 2009 season began, and he never played in the NFL, officially retiring in 2010 because of a heart condition. He is currently defensive coordinator at Notre Dame.

The most recent former OSU player drafted by the Bears who actually played for the team was offensive lineman Kirk Barton, a seventh-round pick in the 2008 draft. Barton appeared in one game with Chicago in 2008, his only career appearance in the NFL.

To find a former Buckeye drafted by Chicago who had any appreciable experience in a Bears uniform, you need to go back to Krenzel. A fifth-round choice in the 2004 draft, Krenzel started five games at quarterback later that year and posted a 3-2 record before an ankle injury ended his season. He was cut by the Bears in 2005 and tried to make a comeback with the Cincinnati Bengals until suffering a career-ending elbow injury in May 2006.

Fields is the sixth former Ohio State player taken by the Bears in the first round of a draft. The others are defensive lineman Alonzo Spellman (1992), offensive tackle Rufus Mayes (1969), running back Don Clark (1959), back/end Fred "Curly" Morrison (1950) and Scott (1941).

Of that group, only Spellman and Morrison made any kind of impact in Chicago. Spellman played six of his nine NFL seasons with the Bears, compiling 32 sacks in 86 games while Morrison played four years in Chicago as a receiver, fullback and punter. He finished his career with three seasons in Cleveland where he made the Pro Bowl in 1955.

Mayes played just one season in Chicago before being traded to Cincinnati, where he spent the bulk of his 11-year pro career. Clark never played for the Bears, instead going to the Canadian Football League where he played five seasons.

Scott put his football career on hold after enlisting in the U.S. Army Air Forces to fly bombers in World War II. After completing nine successful missions, Scott was conducting a special training exercise in England on Oct. 1, 1943, when the aircraft he was piloting crashed, killing him as well as his co-pilot and mechanical engineer. Scott was only 23.

The airport at Ohio State is named Don Scott Field in his memory.


More Draft Minutiae

- In a world where the inexact science of college recruiting collides with the glorified crapshoot that has become the NFL draft comes this nugget. Of the 32 players selected in the first round of this year's draft, Ohio State offered scholarships to only six of them while they were in high school – and signed zero. Those offered by the Buckeyes were tight end Kyle Pitts (Florida), cornerbacks Jaycee Horn (South Carolina) and Patrick Surtain II (Alabama), linebacker Micah Parsons (Penn State), running back Najee Harris (Alabama) and defensive end Jason Oweh (Penn State).

- OSU defensive back Shaun Wade was a consensus All-American in 2021, but he fell to the fifth round where the Baltimore Ravens selected him with the 160th pick overall. The most recent Buckeye drafted in the fifth round was offensive tackle Jamarco Jones by Seattle in 2018. Jones has appeared in 26 games and made five starts for the Seahawks over the past two seasons.

- No Ohio State defensive player had been taken in the fifth round since the St. Louis Rams selected Jermale Hines with the 158th overall pick in the 2011 draft. Hines never played for the Rams but appeared in 10 games (five each with Carolina and Indianapolis) during his only NFL season in 2011.

- Seven players in NFL draft history have busts in the Pro Football Hall of Fame despite being selected with pick No. 200 or higher in their respective drafts. That includes Morgan State offensive tackle Roosevelt Brown, who was selected by the New York Giants in the 27th round with the No. 321 overall pick in the 1953 draft. Brown, who went on to a career that included six first-team All-Pro selections and nine Pro Bowl appearances, is the lowest draft pick ever to earn a bust in Canton.



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Fields Eager To Get To Work With Bears

Continued From Page 1

Fields was not as fazed by the outside noise. He said that the only noise he's interested in is feedback from coaches who will help him become a better football player.

"I know how much I want to be great," Fields said. "It just comes a point in time where you just have to cut all that criticism out. Of course, it's good to listen to the criticism you get from people that are actually there to help you, so if it was from a coach or anything like that, of course I'm going to take that criticism. But I feel like there's a lot of criticism coming from outside voices that didn't really matter. I just did my best to kind of cut all that out and really just get to work."

Those comments echo the sentiments that Day said about his former quarterback. After working with Fields for two seasons, earning 20 wins, two Big Ten titles, two College Football Playoff appearances and a national title appearance together, Day said he respects how much Fields can silence the talk of everyone around him.

"Justin has done an unbelievable job of handling that while he was here," Day said. "He kind of isolated himself. He didn't have a lot of people get to him. It was him and his dog in his apartment a lot, and he did a great job of handling what comes with being the quarterback at Ohio State. Along those lines, you're going to get different scrutiny along the way, and that's part of, I guess, America. They build you up then then try and rip you down. And there's vulnerability and there's exposure there, but the one thing about Justin is he never gets rattled at all. It just actually fuels his fire a little bit, which I think is a good thing."

All the positive talk from Day on Fields was not just to the media. He also said it to Chicago Bears head coach Matt Nagy as early as the end of the 2019 season, and it stuck with Nagy throughout this season and

into the Bears' selection on night one of the draft.

Nagy complimented Day – with whom the Bears head coach said he's had a relationship since he was playing at Delaware and Day was at New Hampshire – on all the assistance he has given him on all the Ohio State players the Bears have had interest in. But of all those players in two drafts, 20 draftees in all, it was Fields who stood out the most.

"As I was going through last year on a phone conversation, just talking with Coach Day at Ohio State, we were going through a bunch of different players just talking about different guys that he has," Nagy said. "Toward the end of it, we discussed Justin, and he mentioned that 'Man, this kid is a generational talent,' and it just stuck with me."

"When you hear that, those are strong words, but you understand the respect I have for him and what that means. Ryan told that to me last year, and so we've been keeping our eye on him."

One of the many questions surrounding Fields for the Bears, and any NFL team interested in him, was with his work ethic and desire around the game of football. Those became a major storyline when ESPN reporter and former NFL quarterback Dan Orlovsky said a source referred to Fields as a "last-guy-in, first-guy-out type of quarterback."

The comments led, again, to Day vehemently defending his quarterback anywhere he could and to Orlovsky clarifying that these were not his own opinions, just what he had heard elsewhere.

But when Pace talked about Fields after the Bears' selection, it was the signal-caller's resilience he showed against teams like Clemson and Michigan, when he battled injuries to lead his team to victories, that he mentioned first.



PHOTO COURTESY THE OHIO STATE DEPT. OF ATHLETICS

GETTING THE CALL – Ohio State quarterback Justin Fields speaks on the phone with a representative of the Chicago Bears, who took Fields with the No. 11 overall pick in the 2021 NFL draft.

"I mean, Fields' toughness on a scale of 1-10 is an 11," Pace said. "You just love that about him. Oh, and by the way, he runs a 4.44 40-yard dash. You throw that all in together, and it just feels good (to draft him)."

Fields is joining a Bears team that finished 8-8 in 2020. They had the No. 22 passing offense, No. 22 scoring offense and No. 26 total offense in the NFL. The passing numbers were almost entirely from two quarterbacks – Mitchell Trubisky and Nick Foles – who started nine and seven games, respectively.

Foles is 32 and a former Super Bowl champion, and he remains a veteran presence on the Bears for the 2021 season as he enters his 10th year in the league. Trubisky was in his fourth season as Chicago's primary starter after being selected second overall by the team in the 2017 NFL draft.

Although he boasts a winning record (29-21) as a starter, has completed 64.0 percent of his passes over his career and had a much better quarterback rating than Foles in 2020 (93.5 to 80.8), the Bears did not pursue re-signing him. Instead, Trubisky signed with the Buffalo Bills, where he will be a backup to Josh Allen.

Trubisky was another name in a long list of Bears quarterbacks who have not panned out in the way that the organization or the fans had hoped. This history may put added pressure onto Fields, but when he was asked why he believes he can be the franchise quarterback Chicago has struggled to find, the former Buckeye was confident in his own mentality.

"Just the way I carry myself, just the way I care about the game, the grit I have, the determination I have to be great," Fields said of why he would succeed. "I think nobody has the story that I have. So just everything inside of me, just wanting to be a great quarterback, wanting to be a franchise quarterback. Just me dreaming for this moment my whole life. I just think all of those intangibles, my work ethic and all that together will be different for me."

But Foles is not Fields' only competition at quarterback as he heads into his first season in Chicago. The main name in front of him is Andy Dalton, a player similar to Foles in age (33 years old) and experience (entering his 11th season).

Dalton was signed this offseason on a

one-year, \$10 million deal after throwing for 2,170 yards, 14 touchdowns and eight interceptions in 11 appearances (nine starts) for the Dallas Cowboys. He also has proved himself as more than capable in his time with the Cincinnati Bengals, where he became a three-time Pro Bowler who amassed 31,594 yards and 204 touchdowns in nine seasons.

That level of production has led the Bears front office to proclaim Dalton as the guy heading into the season while the team allows Fields to build up at the professional level.

"Andy is our starter," Pace said. "And we're going to have a really good plan in place to develop Justin and do what's best for our organization to win games."

But Fields has been doubted before. He was doubted by many for a variety of reasons leading up to the draft, and he was doubted back before he was at Ohio State in his one season at Georgia. There, Fields did not win the starting job, with incumbent quarterback Jake Fromm holding firm atop the depth chart while head coach Kirby Smart used Fields in gadget plays, primarily as a rusher.

That may have been three years ago, but it is clearly still on Fields' mind as recently as during his post-draft press conference, when he alluded to the situation after being asked about being picked after three quarterbacks and 10 total players.

"I mean, I've gone through situations where I haven't been chosen, and I think the world has seen the outcome of that," Fields said.

The outcome was Georgia missing out on the playoffs in both 2018 and 2019 under Fromm, while Fields led Ohio State to back-to-back appearances in the playoff and finished as a top 10 vote-getter for the Heisman Trophy both seasons.

Fields may not listen much to the noise, but he does use the doubts, the criticisms, the lack of winning a starting job, all as a little bit of fuel to his fire. With the draft in the rearview mirror, it is time for Fields to leave all that talk about him behind as well.

"My goal now is not to worry about those teams (that passed on him). I mean, those teams have nothing to do with me," Fields said. "My goal is, if we play that team, to beat them. I'm not worried about the draft. The draft is over for me. For me personally, I'm ready to get to work."



PHOTO COURTESY THE OHIO STATE DEPT. OF ATHLETICS

EARLY MEETING – Chicago Bears head coach Matt Nagy (right) watched Justin Fields work out during Ohio State Pro Day. The Bears selected the OSU quarterback with the No. 11 overall pick.

NFL DRAFT REVIEW

Double-Digit Buckeyes Hear Names Called

By **PATRICK MAYHORN**
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

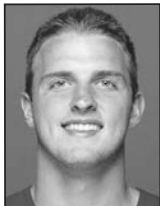
Ohio State produced double-digit draftees for the second time in as many years when 10 former Buckeyes heard their names called during the 2021 NFL draft April 29-May 1, a year removed from 10 OSU selections in 2020. Though this class was not quite as top-heavy as that one, with just one first-round pick as opposed to three in 2020 – quarterback Justin Fields in this case; defensive end Chase Young, cornerback Jeff Okudah and cornerback Damon Arnette in 2020 – it did produce quite a bit of depth, specifically on days two and three.

The Buckeyes produced five day-two picks in this draft, bookended by linebackers at pick 60 (Pete Werner to the New Orleans Saints) and 105 (Baron Browning, Denver Broncos), surrounding Josh Myers to the Green Bay Packers at No. 62, his interior line battery mate Wyatt Davis to the Vikings 24 picks later, and running back Trey Sermon to the San Francisco 49ers at No. 88.

The final day of the draft wasn't quite as explosive, but it did see a pair of longer-than-expected weekends come to a close. Defensive tackle Tommy Togiai – considered by many during the pre-draft process to be a second- to third-round pick – stayed in state and went to the Cleveland Browns with the No. 132 pick in the fourth round, while cornerback

Shaun Wade dropped all the way to the fifth round to the Baltimore Ravens (No. 160).

Tight end Luke Farrell split those two at the first pick of the fifth round, joining his old coach, Urban Meyer, at pick No. 145. Defensive end Jonathon Cooper closed out the draft for the Buckeyes in the final round, joining Browning in Denver at the 239th pick.

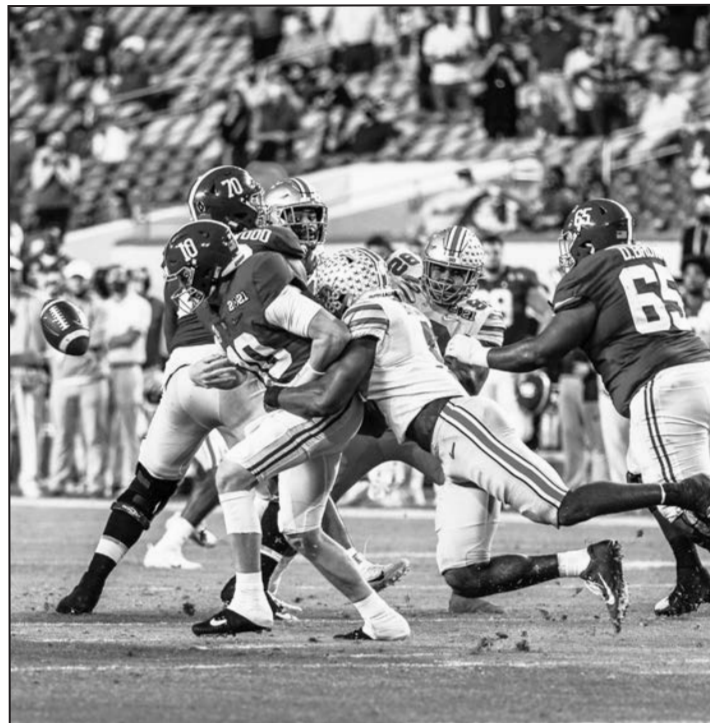


Drue Chrisman

Ohio State's former players who could catch on in the NFL didn't stop with that last pick, though. Linebacker Tuf Borland, projected as an undrafted free agent, took just that path, signing with the Minnesota Vikings shortly after the end of the draft. Fellow linebacker Justin Hilliard joined Sermon in San Francisco, where he'll look to find a spot in both the linebacker rotation and on special teams.

Tight end Jake Hausmann caught on with the Detroit Lions, kicker Blake Haubeil signed with former Ohio State assistant coach Mike Vrabel, now in charge of the Tennessee Titans, and punter Drue Chrisman stayed home, heading to Cincinnati to join the Bengals.

The following are Buckeye Sports Bulletin draft boxes for 12 former Buckeyes either drafted or immediately signed as undrafted free agents, complete with pre-draft measurables, the team that selected them (and that team's 2020 record), where they were selected, an expert's take and where they project in the depth chart.



FILE PHOTO

OFF TO DENVER – Baron Browning (in white) was one of 10 Ohio State players selected in the NFL draft and will join fellow teammate Jonathon Cooper in Denver.



TUF BORLAND

Linebacker
6-0 • 229

Recruit Rank: Overall 324; OLB 22
The Athletic Prospect Rank: No. 26 LB
Pro Day 40: 4.98 seconds



DRAFTED: Undrafted Free Agent

NFL TEAM'S 2020 RECORD: 7-9

EXPERT'S TAKE: "An occasional lightning rod for his play from some outside of the Ohio State program, Borland was always capable of playing in the NFL. Now he's headed there, given an opportunity by the Vikings as an undrafted free agent.

"For whatever he lacked in athleticism, the former Buckeye linebacker made up for with his innate leadership qualities. He leaves Columbus as only the second three-time captain in Ohio State history. A member of the 2016 recruiting class, many of his classmates left for the NFL while he spent five seasons in Columbus. He made up for a lack of speed with instincts and toughness. Playing at inside linebacker, he was the constant in the position room when Ohio State had turnover in its program." – Pete Nakos, Lettermen Row

DEPTH CHART: Danny Trevathan, Roquan Smith, Josh Woods, Joel Iyegbuniwe, **Tuf Borland**



BARON BROWNING

Linebacker
6-3 • 245

Recruit Rank: Overall 11; OLB 1
The Athletic Prospect Rank: No. 7 LB
Pro Day 40: 4.58 seconds



DRAFTED: Round: 3 Pick: 105

NFL TEAM'S 2020 RECORD: 5-11

EXPERT'S TAKE: "Browning was a 'do whatever was asked of him' type of linebacker and it really speaks to his versatility and how quickly he can pick things up. The problem that arises with that is, there isn't a clear transition on where to play him in the NFL because he has strengths and weaknesses that are major for each linebacker position he might project at.

"There also are some issues with the mental aspect of Browning's game, far more here than physical, that coaches will have to spend time fixing in the film room. He has all the physical traits and athleticism to be great but has to put it all together to reach greatness.

"The fact he can do a little bit of everything is one reason he fits in so well with the Broncos. Vic Fangio likes players that can do a lot of different things in his defense. However, Browning's concerns with the mental aspect could be an impediment with the Broncos because a lot falls on them mentally." – Erick Trickett, Sports Illustrated

DEPTH CHART: Von Miller, **Baron Browning**, Derrek Tuszka, Jonathon Cooper



JONATHON COOPER

Defensive End
6-3 • 253

Recruit Rank: Overall 33; WDE 3
The Athletic Prospect Rank: No. 30 DE
Pro Day 40: 4.69 seconds



DRAFTED: Round: 7 Pick: 239

NFL TEAM'S 2020 RECORD: 5-11

EXPERT'S TAKE: "In the system he played in at Ohio State, he wasn't out in space very much. That's a big transition for a lot of guys, one that we do each and every year with one or two guys from college. We'll see how he does with it, but we like the makeup. You've obviously had a taste of it already, so when you have that kind of makeup, you can fight through and make the transition and not get too discouraged." – Vic Fangio, Denver Broncos head coach

"Most these players we drafted – all the players – we're looking for that type of makeup. And he's special with the makeup. I went to the Ohio State pro day and just watching the way he competed and went about his workout and took it serious and how he worked out and what type of shape he was in, and then you speak with the kid. He's everything you want in a teammate, in a player and representing the organization." – George Paton, Denver Broncos GM

DEPTH CHART: Von Miller, Baron Browning, Derrek Tuszka, **Jonathon Cooper**

NFL DRAFT REVIEW



WYATT DAVIS

Offensive Guard
6-4 • 315

Recruit Rank: Overall 24; OG 1
The Athletic Prospect Rank: No. 5 OG
Pro Day 40: Did not run



DRAFTED: Round: 3 Pick: 86

NFL TEAM'S 2020 RECORD: 7-9

EXPERT'S TAKE: "Davis played right guard for the Buckeyes, which is where Ezra Cleveland played last year as a rookie. Cleveland did spend some time at left guard in training camp, so I'd imagine he'll move there and Davis will slide into the RG spot. That gives the Vikings an offensive line, from left to right, of (Christian) Darrisaw, Cleveland, Garrett Bradbury, Davis, and Brian O'Neill.

"That unit has a chance to be the best O-line of the Mike Zimmer era right away in 2021.

"Davis was considered a potential first-round pick at one point, but didn't have the dominant 2020 season that some thought he was capable of. Still, he has an incredible combination of balance and power in pass protection, very rarely losing 1-on-1 reps. He's athletic enough to fit the Vikings' zone-blocking scheme in the running game, as well." – Will Ragatz, Sports Illustrated

DEPTH CHART: Wyatt Davis, Ezra Cleveland



LUKE FARRELL

Tight End
6-6 • 251

Recruit Rank: Overall 191; TE 7
The Athletic Prospect Rank: No. 23 TE
Pro Day 40: 4.79 seconds



DRAFTED: Round: 5 Pick: 145

NFL TEAM'S 2020 RECORD: 1-15

EXPERT'S TAKE: "I think if you talk to Ohio State staff, they'll tell you (he was) underutilized. If you look at their tight end corps as a whole last year, they have a young man that's on that team right now that's going to be one of the top tight ends in the country. His production, when you look at the stats, isn't great. I think they would say that that's one thing they're going to be working on too.

"We had a lot of collaboration obviously with Ohio State and their staff and how he was used, and you went to his pro day and you saw things in him on pro day that made you believe there's some upside as a receiver and he's not limited to just being a blocking tight end." – Trent Baalke, Jacksonville Jaguars GM

DEPTH CHART: Chris Mahnertz, James O'Shaughnessy, Luke Farrell



JUSTIN FIELDS

Quarterback
6-2 • 227

Recruit Rank: Overall 2; DUAL 1
The Athletic Prospect Rank: No. 4 QB
Pro Day 40: 4.45 seconds



DRAFTED: Round: 1 Pick: 11

NFL TEAM'S 2020 RECORD: 8-8

EXPERT'S TAKE: "Perhaps the less-than-thrilled expression on Fields' face after he was drafted was just a misleading moment of television. Or perhaps it reflected how a lot of fans of Fields were feeling. The Bears' trade up to No. 11 for Fields was a wise maneuver by a general manager (Ryan Pace) and coach (Matt Nagy) whose jobs appear to be on thin ice. But that's part of why it's one of the worst possible fits for Fields.

"If Nagy can't orchestrate a winning record with Fields and Andy Dalton in 2021, the entire Bears operation could restart next season. No. 1 receiver Allen Robinson is set to play this season on the franchise tag. The offensive line and running game look average at best, and Nagy's ability to scheme guys open hasn't been apparent the last two seasons. Fields is talented enough to overcome it all, and Bears fans should absolutely be thrilled, but the Ohio State product is fighting an uphill battle." – Gregg Rosenthal, NFL.com

DEPTH CHART: Andy Dalton, Justin Fields, Nick Foles

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NFL DRAFT REVIEW

**JUSTIN HILLIARD**

Linebacker

6-1 • 229

Recruit Rank: Overall 35; OLB 3
The Athletic Prospect Rank: No. 21 LB
Pro Day 40: 4.81 seconds**DRAFTED:** Undrafted Free Agent**NFL TEAM'S 2020 RECORD:** 6-10

EXPERT'S TAKE: "Despite never becoming a full-time starter with Ohio State, Justin Hilliard saw significant playing time in a rotational role with the program, even earning captainship as a senior. Injuries stunted his career a bit, as did the influx of talented defenders on the Buckeyes roster, but he is a violent player who is willing to play special teams, which opens a way for him to stick on an NFL roster."

"His athleticism is not up to par with NFL starters, but he may be able to see the field as a starting linebacker off the bench in an injury situation." – Bleacher Report Scouting Department

"Former five-star recruit who saw portions of his career derailed by injury. Hilliard is beloved by his teammates and is a great example of resilience and perseverance through adversity. He possesses quality football character and did a very nice job of stepping up at the end of the 2020 season when injuries struck. Unfortunately, he lacks the athletic and skill components needed as a position player on the NFL level." – Lance Zierlein, NFL.com

DEPTH CHART: Dre Greenlaw, Mark Nzeocha, Justin Hilliard

**JOSH MYERS**

Center

6-5 • 310

Recruit Rank: Overall 53; OG 2
The Athletic Prospect Rank: No. 3 C
Pro Day 40: Did not run**DRAFTED:** Round: 2 Pick: 62**NFL TEAM'S 2020 RECORD:** 13-3

EXPERT'S TAKE: "Myers probably has a better chance to play right away than Packers first-round cornerback Eric Stokes. Let's say David Bakhtiari's reconstructed knee is healthy enough to start Week 1. He'd play left tackle, with Elgton Jenkins at left guard, Myers or (Jon) Runyan at center, Myers, Runyan or (Lucas) Patrick at right guard and Billy Turner at right tackle. If he doesn't start Week 1, perhaps it's a situation in which he sits behind Patrick to start and splits reps shortly into the season before taking over for good like Jenkins did early in 2019 after Lane Taylor's injury."

"The pick might also affect interior offensive lineman Simon Stepaniak, a 2020 sixth-round pick who spent the majority of last season rehabbing a torn ACL suffered in college. In terms of knocking a starter off the first-string offensive line, Patrick is my best guess. I'll say Myers starts at center and Runyan at right guard, with Patrick a backup for both spots."

– Matt Schneidman, The Athletic

DEPTH CHART: Josh Myers, Jake Hanson**TREY SERMON**

Running Back

6-0 • 215

Recruit Rank: Overall 191; RB 12
The Athletic Prospect Rank: No. 6 RB
Pro Day 40: 4.57 seconds**DRAFTED:** Round: 3 Pick: 88**NFL TEAM'S 2020 RECORD:** 6-10

EXPERT'S TAKE: "It's hard to say how the 49ers will divvy up the workload, but it's obvious that they are trying to avoid the depth issues they experienced – almost immediately – last season. Sermon gives them three viable candidates. He's not a speedy back like (Raheem) Mostert, and he's not a powerful inside runner like Jeff Wilson. He's somewhere in the middle."

"The biggest misgiving about Sermon might be his injury history. According to (Dane) Brugler, he suffered a cracked vertebra in high school, he tore the LCL ligament in his left knee in 2019 and dislocated his left shoulder early on in the recent national title game against Alabama. Mostert has had trouble staying healthy in recent seasons, and Wilson missed four games last year as well. The 49ers could use the depth at running back, but cornerback seemed like a bigger overall need on Day 2 of the draft." – Matt Barrows, The Athletic

DEPTH CHART: Raheem Mostert, Trey Sermon, Jeff Wilson

**TOMMY TOGIAI**

Defensive Tackle

6-2 • 296

Recruit Rank: Overall 55; DT 3
The Athletic Prospect Rank: No. 8 DL
Pro Day 40: 4.97 seconds**DRAFTED:** Round: 4 Pick: 132**NFL TEAM'S 2020 RECORD:** 11-5

EXPERT'S TAKE: "We think there is upside there as a pass rusher for him as well. He is a good, powerful, explosive and quick guy to add to the room. So again, you can never have enough defensive linemen, and we are excited to get him in the mix and see what he can do competing with the rest of the crew here." – Dan Sagany, Cleveland Browns director of player personnel

"Interior defender with tight hips, good upper body power and improved tape from 2019 to 2020. He's fairly disciplined to come off the ball with proper pad level and attack blocks with a proactive demeanor, but the lack of arm length will show up if asked to stack blocker or free himself from a strong sustain block. He's more active than athletic as a pass rusher and plays with hustle and pursuit as a secondary rusher. He has rotational tackle potential but may not offer enough in the traits or rush categories to become much more than that." – Lance Zierlein, NFL.com

DEPTH CHART: Andrew Billings, Tommy Togiai**SHAUN WADE**

Cornerback

6-1 • 196

Recruit Rank: Overall 17; CB 2
The Athletic Prospect Rank: No. 23 CB
Pro Day 40: Did not run**DRAFTED:** Round: 5 Pick: 160**NFL TEAM'S 2020 RECORD:** 11-5

EXPERT'S TAKE: "If he had come off what we saw in 2019, (he) probably is a second-round pick. (He) comes back in 2020, made the move from a nickel as an inside corner in 2019, where he played very well, to sliding outside, and just had a rough go of it." – Daniel Jeremiah, NFL Network

"Had he come out last year, he probably would have been a first-round pick, at least in the conversation for a first-round pick. He tried to do the right thing, went back to college, just a really brutal year. I talked to several scouts and evaluators about Wade. As one said, this year's film is really bad. The (Pro Day) workout is just okay. I know that the scouts on this evaluator's team just didn't really like him. There's some upset. He put on some good tape last year, but this year it wasn't good." – Ian Rapoport, NFL Network

DEPTH CHART: Tavon Young, Shaun Wade**PETE WERNER**

Linebacker

6-3 • 238

Recruit Rank: Overall 277; ILB 14
The Athletic Prospect Rank: No. 9 LB
Pro Day 40: 4.58 seconds**DRAFTED:** Round: 2 Pick: 60**NFL TEAM'S 2020 RECORD:** 12-4

EXPERT'S TAKE: "It's Demario Davis and everyone else at linebacker for the Saints right now. Yes, the Saints drafted Zack Baun in Round 3 last year. But he's never truly played as a traditional linebacker. Werner is by far a more natural linebacker. Baron Browning (No. 91 overall) is rated higher on (Dane) Brugler's big board, but I pointed out earlier this week how Werner seemed more of a fit for the Saints than Browning."

"This is a need position, so this makes far more sense than defensive end Payton Turner in Round 1. Maybe the Saints considered cornerback or wide receiver with this pick. Still, linebacker ranked near the top of the wish list for New Orleans this week-end."

"Werner certainly has a chance to win a starting job as a rookie. Davis needs a stable piece next to him given how the Saints typically play with two linebackers in their 4-3 scheme. I would assume Werner would play middle linebacker leaving Davis to be more free on the weakside." – Larry Holder, The Athletic

DEPTH CHART: Pete Werner, Zack Baun

OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

Wade Enters NFL With Chip On Shoulder

By JOE DEMPSEY
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

When Shaun Wade was ejected from the 2019 College Football Playoff semifinal showdown with Clemson for targeting, the Buckeyes led 16-0 and appeared to be on their way to their first national title game in five years.

Wade had dropped Tiger quarterback Trevor Lawrence for an 8-yard sack, which would have set up fourth-and-13 from the Clemson 47-yard line with less than five minutes until halftime. Instead, Wade was ejected for targeting, and Lawrence and the Tigers picked up 15 yards and an automatic first down at the Ohio State 30.

Clemson capitalized by capping the drive with a touchdown, prompting 21 unanswered points on the way to a 29-23 win, ending the Buckeyes' season.

Although he was getting shots and painkillers just to make it onto the field, the chance at winning a national championship made playing through a painful microtear in his abdomen worth it to Wade. A similar injury had forced him to redshirt as a freshman in 2017 after he had arrived as the nation's No. 2 corner and No. 17 overall prospect in his class.

Following the disappointing Fiesta Bowl loss, Wade had to decide whether to move on to the NFL with backfield mates Jeff Okudah, Damon Arnette and Jordan Fuller or return for another season at Ohio State.

With his eyes set on stepping up as a leader, earning his degree and winning a national championship for the Buckeyes, Wade decided to return for the 2020 campaign as a fourth-year junior.

Shortly after Wade underwent surgery to repair his torn abdominal muscle, however, the COVID-19 pandemic shut down all sports-related activities at Ohio State and across the country.

The risks associated with the coronavirus caused the Big Ten to postpone the football season on Aug. 11. As the likelihood of football being played in the conference decreased, a frustrated Wade announced Sept. 14 that he would opt out and prepare for the 2021 NFL draft if there were no season.

Just two days later, the Big Ten announced a football season would begin in October. The announcement came on the same day that Wade had planned to sign with his NFL agent, but he said he needed a day to think following the news.

The next day, Wade announced that he would no longer be opting out of the newly planned Big Ten football season, citing his aspirations to help Ohio State win a national title. Defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs, who had recruited Wade out of high school, was thrilled when the physical defensive back announced his return.

"This is a kid that loves his team. He loves his university," Coombs said. "You guys remember, he committed all the way back when we won a national championship in 2014. He loves to win. I just think he's an extraordinary kid."

With the season approaching, Wade suffered an undisclosed knee injury while still striving to return to full strength following his abdominal surgery.

Entering the season, ESPN's NFL draft expert Mel Kiper rated Wade as his seventh overall prospect for 2021, implying that the talented cornerback could have opted out and maintained first-round consideration.

The hype surrounding Wade was understandable after he had packed the stat sheet with 56 tackles (43 solo), four tackles for loss, two sacks, four interceptions, 19 passes defended, two forced fumbles and one blocked kick in his first two seasons.

At 6-1 and 196 pounds, Wade projected to be the Buckeyes' next lockdown corner in an elite lineage of first-round picks including Okudah, Arnette, Denzel Ward, Marshon Lattimore, Eli Apple, Gareon Conley and Bradley Roby.

However, moving from his inside corner spot to the outside proved to be detrimental to Wade's draft stock.

"If he had come off what we saw in 2019, he probably is a second-round pick," NFL Network draft analyst Daniel Jeremiah said. "He comes back in 2020, made the move from a nickel as an inside corner in 2019, where he played very well, to sliding outside and just had a rough go of it."

Though defense is a group effort, Wade struggled when left alone in man-to-man coverage against some of the top receivers Ohio State faced in 2020. Penn State's Jahan Dotson caught eight passes for 144 yards and three touchdowns on Oct. 31; Ty Fryfogle of Indiana snagged seven receptions for 218 yards and three scores on Nov. 21; and the campaign concluded with Alabama's DeVonta Smith corralling 12 catches for 215 yards and three touchdowns in the first half of the CFP national championship on Jan. 11.

The COVID-riddled 2020 season compounded a difficult year for Wade, who privately dealt with turf toe, which hindered his speed, explosiveness and ability to change directions quickly.

"I had a lot of things going on," Wade said. "Family situations, injuries, surgeries, turf toe, knee problem, people dying, Granny died, cousin died, cousin on my mom's side died, so there were just a lot of things going on. But at the end of the day, it's called adversity, it's called growing up and going through adversity. And that's something that I've been through, and everybody's got a different story."

Despite enduring such difficult circumstances, Wade ended the 2020 season as a consensus All-American and won the Big Ten Defensive Back of the Year honor. He also earned his degree in sport industry and represented his team as a captain. The Jacksonville (Fla.) Trinity Christian Academy product recorded 35 tackles (24 solo), one TFL, six passes defended and two interceptions, including a 36-yard pick-six in a 42-35 win over Indiana.

Even though Wade raked in numerous postseason honors, evaluators expressed concerns about the struggles he had in one-on-one situations on the perimeter. After entering the season as Kiper's No. 7 overall prospect, Wade entered the draft as his No. 16 cornerback.

"Wade just didn't have the cover skills this year playing outside that he did when he was in the slot," Kiper said. "I think he could end up being an inside safety type or a slot corner, where he felt more comfortable rather than being out on an island. He's going to be an interesting guy. I think he would have been a first-round pick had he played up to the level you expected or certainly as he did in 2019 when he was playing in the slot."

Where Wade would wind up remained a mystery with the draft approaching, with mock drafts differing on projections from the second round to the sixth. The suspense ended when the Baltimore Ravens chose



FILE PHOTO

SOMETHING TO PROVE — After falling to the fifth round and pick No. 160 to the Baltimore Ravens, Shaun Wade, seen here tackling Clemson's Trevor Lawrence, is ready to bring a chip on his shoulder to the NFL.

Wade in the fifth round with the No. 160 overall pick.

Many might be bitter in Wade's position, having been discussed as a first-round pick in August and becoming a fifth-round selection less than a year later. The former Ohio State defensive back holds the opposite perspective, however, emphasizing how grateful he is for the opportunity to play in the NFL.

"It's just a blessing to be drafted," Wade said. "I'm part of the one-percenters. That's what one of my coaches texted me, saying, 'You've got to enjoy the moment that you're part of the one-percenters.' This is everybody's dream just to get drafted. There's only 32 that go in the first round, so just being able to be drafted is a blessing, and I'm just excited."

Wade was ecstatic to achieve his lifelong dream of reaching the NFL, and his passion for giving back was a big reason why. Prior to the draft, he began a program called "Cleats on the Ground" in the Jacksonville area, where he speaks to athletic programs, juvenile detention centers, military groups and more.

The former Ohio State corner said he works to inspire youth so that they realize they can also overcome an array of obstacles and achieve their dreams.

"I've been through a lot during my childhood, living in Italy, coming back to the States," he explained. "I used to live with foster kids. My grandma took care of a bunch of foster kids, so I understand that lifestyle. I understand the lifestyle of having a single mom because my dad was always gone in Afghanistan or Kuwait. It just was a learning experience for me, and it shows me that you can't take anything for granted. That's what I took out of it, and that's why I love giving back and helping other kids that are going through that everyday lifestyle."

In Baltimore, Wade will be reunited with former Ohio State tailback J.K. Dobbins and former linebacker Malik Harrison, who both last played with Wade when he was ejected from the Fiesta Bowl in 2019.

"I'm just excited to be back with my guys," Wade said. "J.K. and I have got some stories from freshman year. And Malik was somebody that brought me in when I first got there, and he's a Columbus native. So

just being around those two guys in the future is something great, and I'm very, very excited."

The Ravens already have solid veterans at outside cornerback in Marlon Humphrey and Marcus Peters, and the organization likes Wade as a slot corner or safety. In spite of his struggles last season, Wade expressed confidence in his ability to play anywhere when at 100 percent.

"It doesn't matter what position I play," Wade said. "At the end of the day, if I have to play inside, I'll play inside. If they need me at corner, they need me at corner. If they need me at safety, they need me at safety. I still have versatility and I still can do everything. My No. 1 thing is to be healthy, and when I'm healthy, you get the best Shaun Wade."

The Ravens went to the playoffs each of the past three seasons, and Wade was excited at the idea of learning from the talented players in the secondary.

"I can't wait to get around those guys," Wade said. "Marcus Peters, Marlon Humphrey, and all those guys, I watched them when I was younger, and I'm just excited to be around them. Because I know that they're GOATs (greatest of all time) and they're vets, and now it's time to learn from them. And they can teach me a couple things, and I can probably teach them a couple things because I know I'm a smart player too. I can't wait to learn from them and be around those guys, and I know the Ravens have a great secondary for sure."

After sliding from a first-round prospect to a fifth-round selection, Wade was asked if that gave him a chip on his shoulder as he entered the pros. For Wade, the chip has always been there, and it's not going away anytime soon.

"It's not even a choice," Wade said. "I have had a chip on my shoulder since the 2020 season ended and the things that I've been through," Wade said. "But I'm always going to come in with a chip on my shoulder regardless, and I know what I am going to do on the field. I know what I can do. I know my smartness, my talent, and like everybody said, they know I've got first-round talent. And I know I've got first-round talent. So right now, it's just putting it on the field and doing it every day, for sure."

This Year's NFL Draft Proved Unpredictable

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

Here's a quote from Ohio State defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs that appears in a story this issue on Ohio State's bullet position:

"I think that anytime you're putting together a personnel package, you're trying to make sure the defense is emphasizing your players' strengths *and not exposing their weaknesses*."

I'm simply curious to know if any of you, when you read this quote (with my italics), immediately visualized the same player in the same game as I did. Think about it and I'll come back to the player and game later.

Here's another question. Do any of you recall an NFL draft where the projections for potential Buckeye draftees were so all over the map? Do you recall a year where the draft projections for some changed so radically over the course of the just played season? Granted, unless you were around in 1918, you never witnessed a season quite like this one, and I think the Spanish flu predates the NFL draft.

Let's start at the top.

At the end of the 2019 season, I think most had quarterback Justin Fields right below Clemson's Trevor Lawrence as they looked toward the 2021 draft. Some might have even had them as equals. At the least, Fields would go among the top couple of picks, the second quarterback to be taken.

But a couple of subpar games (at least by Fields' standards), whispers about his work ethic – after he played effectively with that bulky brace at the end of the 2019 season and took that shot from Clemson this past season and returned a play later to continue one of the greatest passing performances in school history to key one of the biggest wins in school history, you weren't going to hear me question his work ethic – and maybe even concerns about his having epilepsy and suddenly some of the "experts" had him barely being taken in the first round.

Pro teams sometimes start rumors about players to try to get them to drop so they become available later, or to disguise their intentions. Maybe that was the case with Fields because I have never heard a peep about his work ethic – or lack thereof. Maybe it was even the Bears who floated the rumors. After all, they kind of came out of the blue when it came time to select him and they traded up to do it. Still, Fields fell to No. 11 and was the fourth QB taken.

And let's rewind to last summer. The Big Ten postpones the 2020 football season due to the pandemic. Offensive lineman Wyatt Davis and defensive back Shaun Wade, both projected as possible first-round selections, elect to opt out of the season to prepare for the draft. When the conference decides to go ahead and play, the two decide to come back.

Davis tumbles to the third round to Minnesota.

"Davis was considered a potential first-round pick at one point but didn't have the dominant 2020 season that some thought he was capable of," said Will Ragatz of Sports Illustrated.

And then there is the case of Wade. I don't think anyone could have foreseen his draft freefall when he opted back in with the Buckeyes. But even a casual Ohio State fan could see him struggling in 2020, and most of us in our office were completely perplexed at how he was able to pick up so much post-season hardware after routinely being beaten by opposing air attacks.

However, the NFL loves measurables, and many, me included, thought he would still be drafted highly. Maybe not first round anymore, but *fifth*?

"Had he come out last year, he probably would have been a first-round pick, at least in

the conversation for a first-round pick," said Ian Rapoport of the NFL Network. "He tried to do the right thing, went back to college, (and had) just a really brutal year. I talked to several scouts and evaluators about Wade. As one said, this year's film is really bad. The (Pro Day) workout is just okay."

Do you think Wade wishes he hadn't come back? He seems to deny that in a story elsewhere in this issue, but you have to wonder.

And then there is the case of linebacker Pete Werner. Most of the guys in the office seem high on him. Mark Rea and I appear to be the only ones on staff who didn't get the memo. Most importantly, the scouts have been talking him up since the end of the season.

A solid, reliable player? Yes. But second round?

"Werner is a do-it-all guy – not great at any one thing but good at everything," said our own Mike Wachsman. "He has good instincts, is good sideline to sideline, very solid in coverage and is a fine tackler. Barring injury he will be in the NFL for 10 years."

But as a poster reminded us on our BuckeyeSports.com Forum, second round is the round in which Chris Spielman was drafted. I remember Spielman altering games on defense. I don't necessarily recall Werner doing the same, though I am not sure I recall anyone on the 2020 defense altering the outcome of games – except perhaps negatively. Of course, Spielman didn't have the measurables. He was considered too small and too slow. Werner, on the other hand, is listed at 6-3, 238 and ran a 4.58 40 at his pro day.

Spielman had a 10-year NFL career with Pro Bowl and All-Pro honors. Who knows how long he might have played if not for a career-ending neck injury? We'll see if Werner also logs 10 years, as Mike predicted.

And what about Urban Meyer plucking tight end Luke Farrell, projected as an undrafted free agent, out of the fifth round, ahead of Wade and defensive end Jonathon Cooper? I don't know how many people saw that one coming.

Another question. Was Tommy Togiai a bargain for the Browns in the fourth round?

When it comes to Buckeyes in the draft, 2021 was a wild and wacky year!

Was It Just Me?

When Coombs was talking about fielding a defense that emphasizes players' strengths and doesn't expose their weaknesses, I couldn't help but think about the last vision we will have of Tuf Borland as a Buckeye – chasing speedy Alabama pass catchers from well behind in the national championship game. Since that day in January, I have told anyone who will listen that Borland should never have been put in a position where he was left trying to cover pro-caliber speedsters with his 4.98 pro day speed.

You've got to give Borland credit for hustle and effort. He certainly tried on those plays against the Crimson Tide.

With a year under his belt as Ohio State defensive coordinator and a full spring of practice this time around, not to mention a summer of workouts followed by fall camp, hopefully Coombs will have crafted a defense that does, indeed, spotlight each of his players' strengths but just as importantly tries to shield their weaknesses.

As for Borland, he is off to the Minnesota

Vikings as an undrafted free agent. I'm rooting for him.

He has become a bit of a punching bag for Buckeye fans, who sometimes have short memories. When he was a freshman, fans were clamoring for his insertion into the lineup after a 12-tackle (nine solo) performance against Army, a run-oriented team obviously more suited to Borland's skill set. Here's what I wrote in this space following that effort back in 2017:

"I would have expected a guy named Tuf to be strong against a run-oriented attack like that of Army, and the 6-1, 230-pound Bolingbrook, Ill., native didn't disappoint in his first significant action, which came in place of an injured Chris Worley. However, amid calls from Buckeye fans after just one extended playing stint to start Borland over fifth-year senior and captain Worley, let's wait and see how the redshirt freshman does against a team that can run and pass.

"Regardless, we should be seeing plenty of Borland the rest of this season and beyond."

I was right about waiting to see how he did against teams that "can run and pass," and I was certainly right about "seeing plenty of Borland" going forward.

During the draft, one of the posters on the Forum suggested (and I assume it was meant mockingly) that Borland could end up as Mr. Irrelevant, the last person drafted. That was really singling out the three-time OSU captain, because the "honor" could have just as easily gone to Cooper, Farrell or Justin Hilliard. As it turned out, the title went to Houston linebacker Grant Stuard, who was chosen by Tampa Bay with the 259th and final pick.

It's not like Borland is the first Ohio State linebacker to have trouble in pass defense.

For our April 29 edition of Reprint Thursday at BuckeyeSports.com, we featured our coverage of the draft from 25 and 20 years ago, 1996 and 2001, respectively. As a bonus, we ran reprints of this column from the editions covering both those drafts.

In this space in the April 28, 2001, issue of BSB, I wrote of refreshing comments from junior linebacker Matt Wilhelm that spring:

"Wilhelm was talking about his problems with pass coverage last season," I wrote. "That was one of the main reasons they took me off the field last year – because I wasn't good at it," Wilhelm said of his coverage skills. "To get better at those things this spring would be great for me."

"When was the last time you heard a player acknowledge that he was taken off the field because he wasn't doing something well? The first key to getting better is to recognize that you have room for improvement and that you aren't riding the pine because the coach is picking on you."

That was 20 years ago, and frankly I can't remember if Wilhelm improved his pass defending skills or not. But I know that he helped lead the Buckeyes to a national championship as a senior, earning All-Big Ten and All-America honors along the way. And I can read a stat sheet. Not only did he lead the team with 121 tackles, but he had two interceptions and three pass breakups from his linebacker position. So I'm guessing he improved.

As for the drafts in 1996 and 2001, Ohio State had a combined five first-round draft choices.

In 1996, wide receiver Terry Glenn was the seventh pick to New England, tight end Ricky

Dudley went to Oakland in the ninth spot, and Heisman Trophy winner Eddie George was chosen 14th by the then-Houston Oilers. The man who helped all that offensive firepower light up the draft board, quarterback Bobby Hoying, was chosen in the third round by Philadelphia.

In 2001, cornerback Nate Clements joined the long list of Buckeye first-rounders, going 21st to Buffalo. I had forgotten that defensive tackle Ryan Pickett was also a first-round pick going at No. 29 to the St. Louis Rams that spring.

"Many analysts projected Pickett to be taken in the third round or later, but Rams head coach Mike Martz cited his unique ability to rush the quarterback from the middle of the line, an oddity in the NFL," BSB's Jeff Rapp wrote at the time of the draft.

Martz or someone on the Rams staff must have done their homework, because Pickett would go on to a 14-year NFL career with St. Louis, Green Bay and Houston, including 185 starts in 207 games and winning a Super Bowl with the Packers (XLV). He was also named to the St. Louis Rams' All-10th Anniversary team.

One last comment on Ohio State and the NFL draft.

The Buckeyes have had a Mr. Irrelevant. Wide receiver Everett Ross earned the distinction in 1989, going 335th in the 12th round to Minnesota, ironically the same team that signed Borland.

Ross caught 44 passes for 876 yards and seven TDs for the Buckeyes in a career that was limited to three years because of academic issues. According to BSB's Rea, writing at the time, "His athletic ability, which included a 40-yard dash time of 4.45 seconds and ability as a special teams player, made him attractive in the draft."

Ross said of the Vikings, "They talked to me and told me they wanted me as a receiver and a punt returner. I'm very happy about that."

He said he didn't mind being taken last.

"I'm going to give it 110 percent," he said, "so maybe some of the teams that passed on me will begin to wonder why they did."

Unfortunately, Ross never played in the NFL.

But don't feel completely sorry for Ross or any of the Mr. Irrelevants. Not only do they receive the Lowsman Trophy, an award that mimics the Heisman, but with a player fumbling the football, but also Mr. Irrelevant and his family are invited to spend a week in Newport Beach, Calif., for festivities that include a trip to Disneyland, a golf tournament, a regatta and a roast giving advice to the new draftee.

Cards And Letters Please

There are plenty of topics for those of you sending letters to the editor. Everyone had an opinion on the plight of Justin Fields and the draft. What surprised you most about the draft? Did Tuf Borland get a fair shake from the fans during his career at OSU? Any more thoughts about the quarterback fight or the Ohio State defense? Please don't feel limited to topics that I suggest.

Send your letters to BSB at P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio, 43212, or email them to bsb@buckeyesports.com.

Also, don't forget to send in your ballot for our Greatest Ohio State Quarterback 2.0 poll. See page 9 of this issue for details.

And finally, please note that this is the last print issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin until June 8. Be sure to follow all the Buckeye Sports news at BuckeyeSports.com, free to all BSB subscribers. For simple instructions on accessing the site, see page 6.