

## 2022 S'FELD SCOUTING SERVICES NFL DRAFT PREVIEW

### **1. Jacksonville                                      Aidan Hutchinson                                      DE                                      Michigan**

*Since the end of the college football season, it has seemed inevitable that DE Aidan Hutchinson would be the play for the Jaguars here, but as is the NFL Draft, with less than a week to go word is that the Jags are now looking at Georgia DE Travon Walker over Hutchinson. Our question is - why? Hutchinson is the safe play here as the best prospect in the draft. He can beat you in several ways and change your defense for the better the moment Commissioner Roger Goodell reads the card submitted. The Jags had the 5th-fewest sacks last season with a paltry 32 total and playing opposite WLB Josh Allen he would take significant pressure off Jacksonville's second level and secondary. No knock on Walker, but he is more of a testing specimen that everyone fell in love with after the season and his production doesn't hold a candle to Hutch's. SSS is going to lean into this being a potential smokescreen and that ultimately the Jags stay with the sure bet as opposed to spinning the roulette wheel.*

**\*THE EXTRA POINT\*** – *There are many pundits who believed that once Jacksonville owner Shahid Khan pulled the plug on head coach Urban Meyer midseason last year that the Jags were finally positioning themselves to make smart moves and dig themselves out of the enormous crater they placed themselves in. SSS does not share that belief. Nope, the Jaguars only solved half of the equation. What's worse is that it doesn't take Will Hunting to figure out that allowing GM Trent Baalke to continue to make the utmost important decisions for you is going to result in you receiving yet another F on the exam. SSS is holding out hope that Baalke realizes that the play here for Jacksonville is Hutchinson, but it won't surprise us at all if he balks at the idea and once again splits two kings against a dealer's 2 card in an attempt to do it his way once more and not take the gift horse of Hutchinson that is standing right in front of him.*

### **2. Detroit                                      Kayvon Thibodeaux                                      DE                                      Oregon**

*Speaking of defenses that couldn't find their way to the quarterback with Google Earth, welcome our favorite yearly top-10 picking franchise - the Detroit Lions. Jokes aside, the Hutchinson-Walker defensive end discussion surrounding the #1 overall pick has left many wondering, "What happened to Kayvon Thibodeaux?" Absolutely nothing has happened to KT and SSS can tell you this – while Thibodeaux's motor can sometimes be questioned, his ability to make opposing QBs look over their shoulder is unmatched. Not since Freddie Mercury have we seen a guy who could apply more constant pressure than Thibodeaux and the people on the streets will see the Lions have a better chance to restore the roar with this premier pass rusher as a cornerstone for their rebuild. SSS focuses way more on what is being said about players in November and December than what is said during late April as the true value of players is revealed on tape in game action as opposed to on the testing grounds. SSS thinks the Lions are still a few years away but the stage being set starts here with a pick that is not vanilla and that will ultimately put opposing QBs on ice.*

**\*THE EXTRA POINT\*** – This may be one of the boldest statements that SSS makes in the entire draft preview, but we (gulp) believe that the Lions are moving in the right direction and may not be the yearly disaster that we have come to expect. While the Stafford trade may look bad on its face after the Rams won the Super Bowl, it doesn't mean that Lions GM Brad Holmes made a bad move. To the contrary, this is a trade that both teams won. The Lions had proven they weren't going anywhere with Stafford and trading him enabled them to start fast-tracking their rebuild. With 3 picks this year among the first 34 overall, the Lions need to identify the best players available with as many needs as they have, and SSS trusts that Holmes will build a steady foundation.

**3. Houston Ahmad "Sauce" Gardner CB Cincinnati**

When you have as many holes as a Whack-a-Mole game, any good GM will tell you that taking the best player available in the 1<sup>st</sup> Round is a given. Texans GM Nick Caserio finds himself in the position of really not being able to screw up this pick because anybody he drafts here will fill a gap on one of the league's least talented teams. But SSS is going to give Caserio credit and predict that he makes a very smart and calculated move by grabbing the draft's top corner in Ahmad Gardner. The Sauce is Boss, and Gardner was an absolute beast last season at Cincinnati. He has ideal size at 6' 3" to match up with the tallest receivers, and long arms and speed for days clocking a 4.41 40-yard dash. That alone would make Gardner a player you would want to harvest. But when you consider that he didn't allow a single touchdown in college? My word, that is the stuff legends are made of. In a league that places such a priority on press coverage skills, Sauce Gardner is a masterpiece, who should become famous while having the fans yelling, "That sweet baby" can play!

**\*THE EXTRA POINT\*** – Back during the Obama administration, the United States ended the space program and all future space endeavors became privatized. That doesn't mean for one second that the phrase "Houston, we have a problem" was retired too. No, it is alive and well with a football team that has been so poorly run by the McNair family that even the government couldn't screw things up as badly as this team. After former head coach Bill O'Brien destroyed this team from the inside out with terrible trades and terrible personnel decisions, the Texans hired Dave Culley in 2021 and gave him quite easily the worst roster in all the NFL. Culley actually managed to turn a little water into wine by squeezing out 4 wins with a rag tag bunch that Morris Buttermaker wouldn't have agreed to coach, and what did Culley get for his troubles? A pink slip. Now maybe that would be acceptable if the Texans had a legendary coach or amazing up-and-comer on the line who was ready to take over. Instead the Texans fired Culley to replace him with a member of his own staff!!! Enter Lovie Smith, whose days are so far past him that he thinks he is coaching the Oilers. While S'feld Services believes the Lions are ready to stop being the Lions, we don't believe the Texans are ready to stop being the Texans.

**4. New York Jets Travon Walker DE Georgia**

SSS wasn't a big fan of the potential news that Georgia DE Travon Walker may be the first overall pick of the draft going to Jacksonville, but we absolutely love this fit with him being drafted by the New York Jets. As SSS has mentioned many times before, fit is more important than anything else and it can make average players great and great players average depending on where they go. It's the same reason WR Randy Moss was a dominant superfreak with Minnesota and New England,

but just an average receiver with the Raiders. Who you are surrounded with will dictate your fate just as much as your overall talent will. And surrounding Walker with Jets head coach and defensive savant Robert Saleh is quite possibly the best landing spot possible for Walker. Walker isn't being drafted on his college production as he only had 9.5 sacks in 29 career games, and he isn't near the complete player that some of the other DE/EDGE rushers are, but Saleh will know the right buttons to push and the right avenues to explore to turn Walker from a project into a projectile and we all know that every great Jet comes equipped with devastating missiles.

**\*THE EXTRA POINT\*** – This is the second year in a row that the Jets have 2 picks in the 1<sup>st</sup> Round. While it is too early to determine if last year's 1<sup>st</sup> rounders Zach Wilson (QB) and Alijah Vera-Tucker (OG) will pan out, we do know that the natives are getting restless with the Jets having posted 5 or fewer wins in 5 of the last 6 seasons. With three picks in the first 35 total this year and an AFC East that now has three competitive teams as opposed to typically only having one with Brady & Belichick for two decades, the Jets job won't get any easier, and while SSS thinks Saleh is the right man for the job, a miss in the 2022 draft could cause a continued grounding of the Jets.

5. New York Giants	Evan Neal	OT	Alabama
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It's a new day and a new dawn in New York and Giants fans don't have former GM Dave Gettleman to kick around anymore. The Giants are now Bills East after bringing over new GM Joe Schoen and new head coach Brian Daboll from Buffalo. There is no need in looking at Giants history in trying to determine which way the Bills will go as this regime will likely involve a mix of what Schoen was able to help build in Buffalo and what Daboll learned from Belichick during his time in New England and Saban during his time as offensive coordinator at Alabama. With that being said, SSS believes that Daboll may have some good insight on the best way to protect his franchise QB Josh Allen by talking to Saban and getting his feedback on OT Evan Neal. Neal isn't everyone's consensus #1 offensive tackle as many have NC State tackle Ickey Ekwonu listed above Neal. Neal's versatility is off the charts however as he played 13 games at right guard at Bama in 2019, 13 games at right tackle in 2020 and 15 games at left tackle for the Tide last season. While some believe he is being overvalued because of "Bama hype," SSS doesn't fall into that category and we never fall down on the job always giving you the best NFL insight around. Neal addresses one of the Giants needs at #5 and will allow Daboll to see what he really has to work with in QB Daniel Jones.

**\*THE EXTRA POINT\*** – The Giants are the fourth team in a row to pick that have multiple selections in the first round. It will be interesting to see which GMs among the Lions, Texans, Jets, Giants Saints, Eagles, Packers and Chiefs use their multiple 1<sup>st</sup> rounders the best as SSS doesn't find the 2022 class to be all that tremendously talented. A key strategy to keep an eye on is if several of these teams that have multiple selections are willing to trade out this year for what promises to be a much better class in 2023. Not all 1<sup>st</sup> round sections are created equally and a mid to high 1<sup>st</sup> rounder in 2023 will be considerably more valuable than one this year, especially with such an underwhelming QB crop.





*mocked Allen and his misfires on mid-range passes to long balls, but after working with Daboll, Allen is now considered an elite top-5 QB in the league. That is no small feat. SSS is convinced he will figure out very early in his tenure with the Giants what he has in Daniel Jones and will move quickly off him if he doesn't like what he sees or can work with. Don't be so sure that Daboll may not be able to pull another rabbit out of his hat however.*

<b>10. New York Jets</b>	<b>Drake London</b>	<b>WR</b>	<b>USC</b>
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*SSS wasn't a big fan of the Zach Wilson pick at QB last year but if anything is going to help Wilson emerge as a bona fide starter in the NFL it is getting more weapons at his disposal. Enter USC wideout Drake London. London is a versatile receiver who can be utilized outside or in the slot and with his size he can high-point a ball like no other. A great route runner, London can create space where there is none and like a bloodhound can track a ball with the best of them. A contested ball goes from being a 50-50 proposition to an 80-20 likelihood in London's favor because of his leaping skills and tremendous catch radius. This is the sort of player who can turn bad passes into completions and make average QBs look like great ones. London would pair nicely with Wilson in New York and could help open things up for an offense that has been closed for some time.*

**\*THE EXTRA POINT\*** – *The Jets may have an opportunity here to trade out of the position without having to drop significantly to make their next pick. There will be several teams that have the top 3-4 receivers in the draft all rated differently, along with a few other teams who may be QB hungry if the quarterbacks or elite corners fall. SSS would recommend the Jets continue with what they have been doing recently in stockpiling picks year over year if they can move down within 10 or so slots to receive a nice package of picks to continue to build in 2-for-1s when it comes to the draft. Much like with the housing market, and as we saw last year in this area of the draft, you can still demand over asking price here and gain significant return if you do not have a guy you are 100% locked into. The Jets could continue their run of having multiple options in future drafts if they are willing to.*

<b>11. Washington</b>	<b>Chris Olave</b>	<b>WR</b>	<b>Ohio State</b>
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*If you are going to take a whirl on everyone's favorite amusement park ride the Wentz Wagon, then you surely better do everything in your power to make it run as smoothly as possible. After a failed one-year stint in Indianapolis, which was preceded by a rough final few years in Philly, it is now the Commanders chance to see if QB Carson Wentz can recapture the magic that made Philly great in his prime. SSS has seen this pattern so often that it is easy to anticipate what Washington will do here. They will want to make Wentz feel as comfortable as possible, so they select the most NFL ready receiver in the draft with Ohio State's Chris Olave. Olave is reminiscent of Devonta Smith in that he has deceiving speed and is an excellent route runner. There isn't a route on the passing tree that Olave can't handle and in teaming with Commanders WRs Terry McLaurin and Curtis Samuel, he can be the Swiss Army knife needed to keep defenses on the razor's edge. This pick will give Wentz command of the offense and with an already strong defense in tow, Washington could finally break through in the NFC East.*

**\*THE EXTRA POINT\*** – SSS believes that the Commanders will get a better product in Wentz than the Colts did. The fact that this may be Wentz's last true shot to lead a team isn't lost on us and we don't believe it is lost on him either. The window in the NFL for QBs is a short one and Wentz looked like he had things rolling with the Colts until the bottom dropped out at the end of the season as they lost their final two games to miss the playoffs. Wentz won't make the same mistake again and we believe he will bury some of the bad attitude that got him in trouble in Philly to make the most of his chance in DC.

## 12. Minnesota

Jordan Davis

DT

Georgia

It seems as though many have landed on the Vikings taking the best available corner here or potentially going for a wide receiver (namely Jameson Williams) to give QB Kirk Cousins one more weapon. While it is conceivable with a new offensive head coach in Kevin O'Connell that he would try to recreate the star-studded receiving core that he worked with in Los Angeles, SSS has the Vikings going off the reservation and grabbing uber-talented defensive tackle Jordan Davis to bolster the interior of the defensive line. Is it a stretch to think that the Vikes would go away from other core needs to draft a guy like Davis? Probably. But O'Connell has seen first hand what a dominating interior presence can present with Rams defensive tackle Aaron Donald. Davis is that type of player that would give the Vikings enviable depth upfront and allow edge rushers Danielle Hunter and Za'Darius Smith to feast and get home with great frequency. It's a luxury pick without question, but SSS has Davis among his highest-graded players in the entire draft and with the corner value diminished once "Sauce" Gardner and Derek Stingley are gone, the next best way to make sure you can cover receivers is by not allowing the QB to throw to them. Offensive linemen better be prepared to move mountains because that is the only way to stop Davis, and he will clog the middle so much that even extra strength Drano has no chance. Davis can't be blocked by a single man and the tape suggests that sometimes even two men aren't enough. Davis to the Vikings in an upset special sort of pick that brings back shades of the Purple People Eaters again.

**\*THE EXTRA POINT\*** – There may not be a more interesting team to watch draft in 2022 than the Minnesota Vikings. After several years of Trader Rick Spielman manning the controls of the Vikings war room, the Wilfs went in a different direction this offseason, letting go of Spielman and head coach Mike Zimmer. It always seems in sports like you hire the opposite of what you had, and that definitely holds true here. The Purple go from hard-nosed, defensive-minded Zimmer to a young, offensive disciple of the Sean McVay coaching tree in Kevin O'Connell. And in terms of what to expect from Spielman's replacement Kwesi Adofo-Mensah? Well, that's anyone's guess. Adofo-Mensah is not your typical GM and will do more delegating than decision making when it comes to making these selections. SSS believes the actual man behind the curtain is Ryan Grigson. Grigson will be as involved in making these selections for the Vikings as anyone and will try to wizard his way through the draft assisting Adofo-Mensah. These are definitely big shoes to fill in Minnesota with the departure of Spielman, so it comes as no shock to SSS that it would take multiple people to fill them.

13. Houston	Ikem Ekwonu	OT	NC State
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*As SSS has already mentioned, the Texans need help everywhere, but cornerback is a particularly strong position of need that they addressed at Pick #3. With a talented defensive asset already in place, the Texans look to take care of an offensive need by selecting one of S'feld Services first players to make a significant free fall in this draft with offensive tackle Ikem Ekwonu. Needs and trades can cause top 5 players to drop out of the top 10 and that is exactly the good fortune that Houston receives at the expense of Ekwonu's misfortune. When Davis Mills is your best option at QB, your margin for error on offense is slim and none, and Ekwonu becomes a perfect blend of need and best player available converging as one.*

**\*THE EXTRA POINT\*** – *I don't know how it was possible for Lovie Smith to get an NFL head coaching job in 2022 but you have to ask yourself at some point if the Texans are really even trying to be successful anymore. Odds are high that Houston will be right back where they started next year looking to hire a third coach in three years. Before trying to hire Lovie Smith did the Texans call Jerry Glanville? Rich Kotite? Were they able to get Barry Switzer on line 1? What about Jim Fassel or Wayne Fontes? I mean was Lovie Smith on any GM's top 100 list? And when was the last time a team hired an assistant off a team that fired the head coach? Houston is one of only a few teams that continually answers all of your questions with more questions.*

14. Baltimore	Jermaine Johnson II	DE	Florida State
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*The Ravens managed just 34 sacks in 2021, which ranked 31<sup>st</sup> overall in the NFL. Those are atrocious numbers for a team that has such a proud history of getting after quarterbacks. Rookie LB Odafe Oweh showed some promise last season but DE Calais Campbell and DE Derek Wolfe aren't going to strike fear into the hearts of any offenses. The Ravens identity has always been reliant on a pressure-packed defense and FSU DE Jermaine Johnson II is more than happy to jumpstart the Ravens dead battery upfront. Johnson was one of the top overall performers at the Senior Bowl and combine helping his stock to take Tesla-like leaps. Despite only being a one-year starter, Johnson will have plenty of room to grow in Baltimore and his instincts and relentlessness are intangibles that will help separate him from others.*

**\*THE EXTRA POINT\*** – *Are the Ravens finally in jeopardy of falling out of the top tier of teams in the AFC North? The Ravens had only their second losing season since 2008, and along with being swept by the AFC Champion Bengals and the Pittsburgh Steelers, they turned an 8-3 record into an 8-9 finish and looked listless doing so. With the Bengals clearly established as a threat moving forward with a young, talented team, and Cleveland finally getting a true franchise QB in Deshaun Watson, the Ravens look as though they are competing with the Fighting Trubiskys (Pittsburgh Steelers) for 3<sup>rd</sup> place in what has now become a much more competitive AFC North.*

15. Philadelphia	Trent McDuffie	CB	Washington
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*We've heard all the talk about the top two corners in the draft (Ahmad Gardner & Derek Stingley) but the likely third corner taken is no slouch in his own right. Washington CB Trent McDuffie has been graded above Stingley in the SSS Rankings and his fearlessness and tenacious all-out attack*

mode style of play will fit right in with the Eagles faithful. McDuffie is no one trick pony and he plays press man as well as he can defend in zone. Additionally, this isn't a Deion Sanders sort of corner who loves coverage but hates to tackle. McDuffie will light up anyone in his vicinity and never shies away from contact. Bret Hart would be a big fan of McDuffie's hitman style and as a student of the game, McDuffie is a next level competitor who can fool QBs into thinking they have open windows which he soon slams shut. While many question his size, SSS doesn't as his overall skills far exceed any size limitations. Don't be surprised if McDuffie ends up being the best corner in this draft looking back in five years.

**\*THE EXTRA POINT\*** – You know what S'feld Services loves about the Eagles 2022 draft plan? We believe they will use 2022 to set themselves up for 2023. GM Howie Roseman is playing the long game, and while fans typically hate that, SSS believes it to be a master class in calculating your ultimate return. The 2023 draft class is a step up from this year's crop with better QBs and a better overall skill level. Roseman has two 1<sup>st</sup> Round picks in this draft and two more in 2023, so don't think for a second that if he can add a third 1<sup>st</sup> rounder in 2023 he won't do it at the drop of a hat. Roseman is giving QB Jalen Hurts this season to figure it out, but if he doesn't, the Eagles will be ready to swoop in and grab their next young gunslinger next year if they play their cards right. So Eagles fans should not get up in arms if Roseman trades out of the 1<sup>st</sup> Round this year as it could pay huge dividends to the long term success of the team in 2023 and beyond.

16. New Orleans	Charles Cross	OT	Mississippi St.
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The Saints are one of many teams in the league in desperate need of offensive linemen, but that isn't the extent of the Saints problems. New Orleans for the first time in forever is moving forward without the capable leadership of former head coach Sean Payton. After having to deal with Payton's offensive exploits for so long, the rest of the NFC will be like sharks in the water in 2022 hoping to drag New Orleans into the deep and off their comfy perch above the stormy seas. With two of the next four picks in the draft, the Saints can't miss if they want to remain a power player and while many believe their QB room is a cast full of misfit toys, Saints GM Mickey Loomis shows patience and doesn't panic on finding his future QB here. Loomis takes an offensive tackle to bolster a battered line. The options are Charles Cross from Mississippi State or Trevor Penning from Northern Iowa, and while both are good options, SSS has heard from a few sources that there are some teams who have Cross as the top-graded OT. Cross allowed only 2 sacks in 919 snaps in 2021 and while he may not be Christopher Cross, he does have the Saints hoping it's not far down to paradise as they start sailing into a new era with a great value at Pick #16.

**\*THE EXTRA POINT\*** – Can we let you in on a little secret that the rest of the so-called experts are unaware of? The Saints aren't going to draft a QB in the early rounds of this draft. "But S'feld, Drew Brees was gone for one year and the Saints just didn't look the same!" Really? Care to take a closer look? Jameis Winston in his first year as a starter with the Saints went 5-2 with 14 TDs and 3 INTs before his devastating ACL tear. Did you hear that last part? The same Jameis Winston who would throw 3 INTs by halftime of games as the starter in Tampa Bay, threw only 3 in 5 games with New

Orleans! And among those victories was a 38-3 thrashing of Green Bay, a 28-13 beatdown of the Patriots, a road win in Seattle, and a 36-27 pounding of Brady's Bucs. I don't know about the rest of you, but if that is considered a bad QB situation, I can't wait to see a good one.

17. L.A. Chargers	Trevor Penning	OT	Northern Iowa
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How tempted are the Chargers going to be to take Alabama WR Jameson Williams? My oh my what an offensive onslaught they would have with Jameson Williams, Keenan Allen and Mike Williams to go along with stud RB Austin Ekeler. Chargers GM Tom Telesco would love to draft like a fantasy football manager, but with only one pick in the first two rounds, Telesco decides not to gamble on Williams, but does give QB Justin Herbert something to smile about by selecting UNI OT Trevor Penning. With the Chargers releasing OT Bryan Bulaga, and with Storm Norton finishing third worst in the NFL with 42 blown assignments, it more than makes sense for LAC to go in this direction. Penning is the sort of player that won't be talked about much on draft night and will likely be forgotten a few picks after he is selected, but who will be viewed much differently with each passing year. His testing numbers were off the charts but more importantly, Penning is a Janet Jackson favorite with his nasty demeanor. SSS has him ranked as the #1 overall run-blocking OT in the draft and he is efficient in his movements as a pass blocker. To be honest, the skill position pieces are already in place for the Chargers, so adding this bulldozer to the wrecking crew only increases the Chargers chances of wreaking havoc come January.

**\*THE EXTRA POINT\*** – SSS is supposed to be unbiased in our coverage of the NFL but let us tell you this right now – we love the LA Chargers. This team should have been in the postseason last year and we guarantee they will be in the playoffs in 2022. With the addition of LB Khalil Mack at a bargain basement price from Chicago, and the emergence of Justin Herbert last year as the next big thing, SSS is going out on a limb to tell you that not only will the Chargers make the playoffs and win their division, they are going to represent the AFC in the Super Bowl. This team figured itself out last year and is going for it in 2023 with a top-flight offense paired with a much improved defense.

18. Philadelphia	Jameson Williams	WR	Alabama
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Perfect spot. Absolutely perfect spot. They won't tell you so, but the Eagles are still one year away, and while they will try to win in 2022, they know they are still building toward something bigger and can let the injury that Williams suffered last season heal without being rushed. But at Pick #18, the Eagles never thought they would see JW here and while we believe this could be a trade out spot for Philly, that possibility disappears like Keyser Soze when the Bama receiver falls to them here. A Williams-Devonta Smith 1-2 punch at WR becomes the envy of the entire league and the Eagles return to dominance seems closer to completion than what they originally thought. Make no mistake about it, prior to his ACL injury this was the best receiver in the draft. Williams can go 0-to-60 faster than a Ferrari and any cushion given to him from opposing corners is a recipe for 6 when he blows your doors off. There isn't another guy in the draft who screams big play or YAC more than Williams. The fuel injector in his legs is next level and should he fully recover from his ACL in good working order, then this is a 10-to-12 spot 1<sup>st</sup> Round value for Philly.



**\*THE EXTRA POINT\*** – Can you name the NFL team that has gone the most consecutive years without a losing season? Patriots? Nope. Saints? Not even close. Chiefs? Ravens? Packers? No, no, and one more no. The Pittsburgh Steelers have not had a losing season in 18 straight years and head coach Mike Tomlin hasn't had one since he took over from Bill Cowher in 2007. That is such an underrated accomplishment in NFL history that it is hard to believe in this day and age of parity that it would even be possible outside of New England. I know critics will say that Tomlin only has one Super Bowl and that if you have won that much you should have more championships, but my gosh it sure beats the other side of the equation. The Lions, Browns, Bengals (until last year) and Jets can't even comprehend that something like this is even possible among all their ineptitude. It is another example of why the Steelers are such a well-run organization and that their continuity has led to success beyond their wildest dreams.

<b>21. New England</b>	<b>Andrew Booth Jr.</b>	<b>CB</b>	<b>Clemson</b>
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Everybody knows by now that the hardest thing in the world to do is figure out Bill Belichick. Each of the last 7 1<sup>st</sup> Round picks made by Belichick have featured a different position so trying to follow a trend is out of the question. While the WR corps in New England is extremely weak with no true #1, I don't think the value is here for the Patriots with who has already come off the board. And if you look at who the Pats have as their starting corners – Malcolm Butler and Jalen Mills – those two aren't exactly world-beaters. That's why SSS believes we can nail down Double B's here and project that he is taking the fourth corner of the draft in Andrew Booth Jr. of Clemson. An inside linebacker like Devin Lloyd or Nakobe Dean may also be an option, but the Pats are in win-now mode and winning now with corners like Butler and Mills is not going to be an easy task. Booth improved each year he was at Clemson and his aggressive style is a perfect fit for a Belichick defense. Booth only allowed 312 yards passing against him in 2021 and with an explosive burst and better than average ball skills he definitely belongs in the 1<sup>st</sup> Round.

**\*THE EXTRA POINT\*** – Do you get the impression that for the first time in a long time we are seeing some tried and true teams finally in situations where success isn't guaranteed? New England, Pittsburgh and New Orleans are all going through a massive reset while at the same time trying to reload and not relapse, but it may be a foregone conclusion that all good things must come to an end. Pittsburgh has the biggest adjustment to make with a new QB who has never been thought of as elite, let alone an upper half of the NFL QB. New Orleans is still trying to figure out life without Drew Brees (and now Sean Payton as well), and the Pats are in Year 3 of trying to navigate their divisional bunch without Brady. SSS believes the Saints have the best chance to hold onto what they've built, while New England is facing a tipping point season in 2022 where we will figure out if Mac Jones can handle the torch that was passed or if his flame is soon to be extinguished.

<b>22. Green Bay</b>	<b>Tyler Smith</b>	<b>OT</b>	<b>Tulsa</b>
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It is no secret that the Packers needs include wide receiver, edge rusher, safety and offensive tackle, and while you could probably find a little better value at WR, EDGE and safety here, we think the Pack goes need over value and takes the fourth offensive tackle in the draft in Tulsa OT Tyler Smith. Every year, the Packers seem to have multiple injuries on the offensive line and manage to find a way to duct tape things together. With that being said, QB Aaron Rodgers is getting older and the

clock is starting to wind down on the Packers winning one more championship with Rodgers at the helm. So GB will try to stock up on offensive linemen. Would Smith be a 1<sup>st</sup> rounder in most drafts? No. But this draft class is less than stellar and he is the best remaining tackle on the board. Smith is a powerful tackle and more importantly for the Packers, he could play either tackle or guard if they run into more injury problems. Smith would give the Packers a mauler, who excels at the point of attack and who doesn't believe that violence in any form should be considered a bad thing.

**\*THE EXTRA POINT\*** – Listen – no one is more trusted when it comes to draft day information than S'feld Services. We don't need to tell you what you already know. And never was that more evident than last year when S'feld warned you that his prediction that the Packers were going to take a wide receiver was more than likely wrong. How many draft gurus give you that type of honesty? Yes, the Packers continued their streak of never taking a wide receiver in the 1<sup>st</sup> Round no matter how desperately they need one. The Pack's last 19 1<sup>st</sup> Round picks have not included a receiver and since 1979 Green Bay has only taken a wideout twice in Round 1 (1988 - Sterling Sharpe & 2002 - Javon Walker). What we can tell you is that when the Packers do select a wide receiver in early rounds that have typically done very, very well, which again is why S'feld is so confused as to why they don't do it more often, especially with a Hall of Fame quarterback. But I digress. SSS knows that fool me once, shame on you, fool me twice, well, well, we can't get fooled again! The Pack has two 1st round picks and SSS may not be from Missouri, but the Pack are going to have to show me if they expect SSS to ever give them a 1<sup>st</sup> Round WR again.

### 23. Arizona

George Karlaftis

DE

Purdue

Are you ready for it? Because here it comes – a S'feld Special! It's our annual "Play The Tape" pick and that pick is George Karlaftis. SSS has no idea why Karlaftis is ranked so low by so many teams but we know this – our money is that he could quite easily be the steal of the draft. If this guy played for Alabama, Michigan, Ohio State or USC you would be hearing about him all day long. But because West Lafayette isn't a media hotbed, Karlaftis gets lost in the mix. We are here to tell you he is next level special. The gap between where EDGE rusher Kayvon Thibodeaux and King George will be picked is wide, but the gap in actual skill set is negligible. Karlaftis is half man, half amazing, and on a Boilermaker team where the entire offensive game plan of the opponent was to neutralize him, it couldn't be done. His motor never stops. The explosiveness is off the charts. The moves? Travolta-like. Not many offensive linemen will be staying alive vs. Karlaftis. He fits DC Vance Joseph's Zona defensive scheme perfectly and is pro-ready from the jump. With Chandler Jones moving on to the Raiders, the Cards find themselves out of sorts in terms of edge rushing. More young, energetic pressure is needed upfront to pair with Markus Golden, and our breakdown leads us to GK.

**\*THE EXTRA POINT\*** – What we love about what Arizona is doing here is that they are eschewing all the overrated analytics and measurements and ridiculous tests that don't matter when you truly get in the trenches, and just going after a hungry, passionate player that eats challenges and adversity for breakfast. If you ever look at a draft projection immediately after the college season and a draft projection a week away from the draft you will find a couple interesting things. The first

*is that the projection you make in early January has way more to do with what you have seen on the field in the fall. That is what makes it more accurate and more indicative of who can really play. The projections in April are fake news littered with smokescreens, misinformation and considerations for factors that can't help you as much as you would think when you get punched in the mouth. Give me a George Karlaftis who plays with his hair on fire over a guy who was average on the field but can do the cone drill in record time every day of the week and twice on Sunday.*

#### **24. Dallas**

**Tyler Linderbaum**

**C**

**Iowa**

*A nice little run is forming among teams with mid to late 1<sup>st</sup> Round picks in the SSS Draft Preview and that continues here as Dallas continues their tradition of investing in the offensive line with Iowa standout Tyler Linderbaum. Linderbaum has been on the wrong side of the information war as his production has taken a back seat to silly talking points like, "He has short arms." You know who else had short arms? Mike Tyson. Remember all those dudes Iron Mike knocked out? Do you ever remember any of them saying this after Mike knocked them into another galaxy - "Yeah, Mike knocked me out, but it wasn't as bad as I thought it was going to be because he had short arms." It's ridiculous. A football player is a football player. Wouldn't surprise me if we eventually get to the point where people say, "Yeah Player A is really good, but I noticed at Subway that he doesn't get his sandwich toasted and he didn't add oregano. Huge red flag! Can't trust a guy who doesn't toast his sub or add oregano." Trust SSS when we tell you that Linderbaum toasts his sub and usually leaves opposing defensive tackles burnt from being an absolute road grader. You will never have to question his heart and effort, and he will be placed into a great O-line setting in Dallas. The Cowboys may have some issues, but offensive line has rarely been one of them. Linderbaum fortifies the Cowboys line and star running backs Ezekiel Elliott and Tony Pollard are the beneficiaries.*

**\*THE EXTRA POINT\*** – SSS is not a believer in putting pundits on blast but we do have to take issue with a few things. A couple well-known ESPN prognosticators – we are not going to name names so to protect their identity we will call them Tad McShane and Mo Kipen – have said recently and projected that Tyler Linderbaum won't be drafted in the 1<sup>st</sup> Round. Where do I get in on that bet? Tyler Linderbaum is most definitely getting drafted in Round 1 and SSS is willing to put our money where our mouth is. Which insiders are Tad and Mo talking to? And why are they believing what those insiders are saying? SSS is convinced that Tad and Mo may talk to too many people and that they lose their bearings when it comes to just spotting talent and placing it accordingly. Just remember this point when Goodell calls Linderbaum's name on Thursday night.

#### **25. Buffalo**

**Breece Hall**

**RB**

**Iowa State**

*At this point what doesn't Buffalo have? They are the team in the annual SSS Draft Preview that has the fewest true needs, but the one need they have could be the difference between them hoisting the Lombardi Trophy in the near future. The Bills running game is not elite, but it can be. We have seen what RBs Devin Singletary and Zack Moss can do and it isn't impressive. Moss was a healthy scratch for a few games last year and Singletary is the guy you keep waiting for to emerge. But just like Judge Elihu Smails so accurately expressed – "Well, we're waiting!" That's why the play here is Iowa State running back Breece Hall. He's the top running back in the 2022 draft class and as a 3-*

down back, he can hurt you with his legs and out of the backfield as a pass catcher. That would give the Bills options, options, options, and cause opposing defenses to pick their poison when facing Buffalo's elite offensive weapons. Hall can get you the short yardage or he can break the big ones as witnessed by his five TDs of over 75 yards. Buffalo can't just expect that the AFC will bow down to them now that they have had a few years of success. They need to continue to reload this offense with talent to stay ahead of the curve and with a straight-line runner like Hall, consider that accomplished.

**\*THE EXTRA POINT\*** – Cincinnati may be the new kid on the block in the AFC, but SSS feels that with a strong coach in Sean McDermott and a nucleus of solid if not spectacular players on both sides of the ball, the AFC is Buffalo's to lose in 2022. There will be challengers without a doubt, but S'feld sees the Chiefs taking a step back, and while New England would love to recapture the AFC East, that is a pipe dream at this point. The burn of losing in the most heartbreaking fashion possible last year to the Chiefs should be all the motivation the Bills need to not only capture the AFC flag but potentially the Super Bowl championship as well.

26. Tennessee	Zion Johnson	G/C	Boston College
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Speaking of teams losing in heartbreaking fashion, the Titans championship hopes were dashed before they had even begun last year at the hands of the Bengals. That will leave Titans brass questioning some of their personnel decisions, but the decision that doesn't need to be questioned is who to take at Pick #26. This offensive line needs help and versatile guard/center combo lineman Zion Johnson may not get a lot of attention on Thursday night, but he can help a line that has issues from tackle-to-tackle. Johnson might as well be called "Eclipse" because with his size he can block out the sun, and his playing power is a sight to behold. His brute force can make a lot of other issues on the line disappear, and inadequate linemen don't look as bad when they play beside Johnson. He might as well be a lawyer, because leverage is his strong suit and despite his size, he can get to the next level to take on linebackers. The Titans don't need to overthink this one and definitely don't need to travel to Israel, as their Mount Zion is only a draft pick away.

**\*THE EXTRA POINT\*** – What are the Titans going to do with QB Ryan Tannehill? He seems to excel when RB Derrick Henry is lined up behind him, but once the big fella went down last season, the ugly form of Tannehill re-emerged. I don't know if anyone believes that Tannehill is a franchise QB but he is currently getting paid like one. Fortunately for the Titans, they can escape the Tannehill situation after this season as his dead money would drop by over \$40 million. So while the Titans could draft a QB in 2022, SSS feels as though they will give Tannehill his "prove it" year before making a decision.

27. Tampa Bay	Travis Jones	DT	UCONN
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The Bucs Super Bowl run a few years ago focused mainly on Tom Brady, but the true analysts know that Super Bowl championship wouldn't have happened without the Bucs amazing defense. While the 2021 version of Bucs D didn't quite live up to the 2020 version, it is safe to say that new head coach Todd Bowles recognizes the same thing that SSS does. That being that Brady isn't going to

win you the championship again. It's going to have to be the defense in a repeat performance. That's why DT Travis Jones becomes the play as he can take Ndamukong Suh's spot on the line and play alongside Vita Vea. Jones is no Jordan Davis, but he is not too far off of Devonte Wyatt in terms of SSS player grades. Jones was a standout on a terrible team and served as a 1-man James Gang for the Huskies. He won't be asked to revolutionize the defense in Tampa, only to become a serviceable piece in the middle of the line to provide more depth. Playing alongside Vea will also help to elevate his game.

**\*THE EXTRA POINT\*** – The actual over/under for total wins for teams hasn't been set for the 2022 season but SSS wants to let you know right now to take the under for the Bucs. The magical two-year run in Tampa Bay is about to come to an end as there is more going on in Tampa than meets the eye. Bruce Arians resigning as coach. Tom Brady retiring, then unretiring, and then being linked to the 49ers and the Dolphins. It just doesn't seem like there is any cohesiveness with the Bucs and let's be honest, can they really keep this up? Players are getting older and more injury prone and eventually that which can go wrong, will. SSS sees regression coming Tampa's way in 2022 in what could be a very frustrating year for TB12.

<b>28. Green Bay</b>	<b>Kyle Hamilton</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>Notre Dame</b>
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What a gift. Only the Packers could get this lucky to have the #1 safety in the draft and a potential top-10 pick fall all the way to Pick #28 for them to take. The Packers have a need at safety and get a kid who is heads and tails above any other safety in this draft. Hamilton has been ranked as the top overall prospect in some rankings, but drafting a safety high is not something any GM is ever excited about. As a 2-year starter at Notre Dame, Hamilton recorded 138 tackles, 7.5 TFLs, 8 interceptions and 16 passes defensed, so needless to say he can do it all. He suffered a season ending knee injury in 2021 but that is not thought to be a factor moving forward. His recognition is second to none and he has the length and athleticism to be a major disruptor in the secondary.

**\*THE EXTRA POINT\*** – What are we to make of the Devonte Adams departure from Green Bay to Vegas? That is as big of a loss as any this offseason and outside of Jordy Nelson, no other receiver has had a bond with Rodgers like Adams did. With the Packers continued struggles in NFC Championship games, it is hard to believe that the loss of Adams could be filled by even multiple receivers. The trio of Allen Lazard, Sammy Watkins and Randall Cobb may be the least talented comprehensive group of receivers in A-Rodg history. At 38 years old, there is no reason to believe that this could in any way be the final product of receivers the Pack trots out for 2022, so look for the Pack to grab a WR as soon as the 1<sup>st</sup> Round concludes.

**\*\*\*TRADE\*\*\* (Kansas City trades with Atlanta, giving up Pick #29 to acquire Pick #43, #74 and 2023 3<sup>rd</sup> Round)**

<b>29. Atlanta</b>	<b>Desmond Ridder</b>	<b>QB</b>	<b>Cincinnati</b>
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The dirty birds are not waiting around and even if they have to overpay to move back into the 1<sup>st</sup> Round it doesn't matter as they have identified their future QB in Cincy's Desmond Ridder. Not many have Ridder going in the 1<sup>st</sup> Round but in actuality, the difference in the top 5 QBs in this draft

is not significant. None of them are sure-fire guarantees and none compare that well to last year's class however, they can all succeed in the right situation. For Ridder, the key to success will be patience. Plenty of patience. The Falcons aren't ready to win and they aren't tremendously talented on offense after seeing WR Calvin Ridley have mental health issues and Russell Gage leave for greener pastures in Tampa. So bringing Ridder along slowly will be the plan and it is not as if Ridder is coming in with production issues. He made a significant leap from 2020 to 2021 at Cincinnati and confidence has never been a problem with this kid. He moves well in the pocket and keeps his eyes downfield. His passes have touch and he seems to process what the defenses are giving him very quickly. For a team that is starting from scratch, the opportunity to move back up and get a QB is smart and in time the Adventures of Ridder could pay off handsomely.

**\*THE EXTRA POINT\*** – The Falcons should approach this season as a 1 step back, 2 steps forward proposition. Head coach Arthur Smith did a pretty decent job getting this team to 7-10 last year among quite a bit of turmoil. In his second year, he will be without Matt Ryan, who was traded to Indianapolis, so expectations aren't exactly through the roof for this team. Unlike the Texans, who didn't recognize a coach who did a good job with very little to work with last season, owner Arthur Blank has never been a rush to judgment owner, and we see him having a long leash with Smith in order to help the Falcons fly again.

<b>30. Kansas City</b>	<b>Jahan Dotson</b>	<b>WR</b>	<b>Penn State</b>
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It was only a matter of time before the salary cap gods paid a visit to Kansas City, and with all that talent on offense, there was no way to keep it all past last season. The cap casualty ended up being speedster Tyreek Hill, but give the Chiefs credit in adding JuJu Smith-Schuster to the roster for pennies on the dollar compared to what they would have owed Hill. Head coach Andy Reid likes to make moves that are fun in the draft and adding new toys to his Romper Room has never been a problem. He adds another one here with the addition of WR Jahan Dotson from Penn State, The advantage with Dotson as opposed to other receivers is that he is fully functional on all three levels of the field and will be an outlet for QB Patrick Mahomes when he needs to McGyver his way out of some sticky situations. Dotson's route running is effortless and he can't be intimidated by physical corners.

**\*THE EXTRA POINT\*** – While many Chiefs fans are lamenting the loss of Hill to the Dolphins, SSS feels that the Chiefs got rid of the right asset. Don't get us wrong, Hill is a freak of nature and his speed and elusiveness haven't been replicated by anyone else in the league, but Mahomes doesn't need several elite options to win. He just needs TE Travis Kelce and some serviceable receivers. Andy Reid helps to reset the deck by adding a ready-made superstar in Dotson to the Chiefs already dominant offense.

<b>31. Cincinnati</b>	<b>Kaiir Elam</b>	<b>CB</b>	<b>Florida</b>
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Well, well, well would you look at what we have here. The Cincinnati Bengals picking at #31! SSS has been doing these draft guides for a long, long time and I can tell you that we always expect to complete the writing of the Bengals preview before the 10<sup>th</sup> pick is done. All kidding aside, the

*Bengals as referenced in last year's SSS guide have become the stalwarts of the NFL Draft if you can believe it. In three consecutive 1<sup>st</sup> rounds they have knocked it out of the park including the last two by taking franchise QB Joe Burrow and WR Ja'Marr Chase. The Bengals marketing department better get Wendy's on the horn for a sponsorship deal because if the Bengals nab another perennial All-Pro this year that will be 4-for-4! Unfortunately for the Bengals it is a little harder for the leprechaun to find the pot of gold from pick #31 than it is picking in the top 10, but the Bengals don't have to hit a home run here. They just need a solid player. That player turns out to be Florida corner Kaiir Elam. Florida has a long lineage of great corners and the Bengals hope they find another in Elam, who has the size and strength to play press coverage and is physical as a tackler. The Bengals need more depth at corner as Eli Apple played out of his mind last season but SSS thinks he may fall further from the tree this year as he has never shown great consistency. Tight end is also of great need but there aren't any tight ends worth taking here.*

**\*THE EXTRA POINT\*** – *Tampa Bay's run to the Super Bowl in 2020 was filled with difficult challenges of the highest order with playoff road games at New Orleans and Green Bay before facing mighty Kansas City. As amazing as that run was, had the Bengals been able to hold on to win the Super Bowl last season SSS thinks it would have been even more impressive. Road win at #1 seed Tennessee, road comeback win on the road at Kansas City when they appeared dead in the water, and then they had the Rams right where they wanted them before Matt Stafford led an amazing game-winning drive. It would be hard to believe after last year going through the wringer that the Bengals will ever feel like they don't belong moving forward.*

32. Detroit	Nakobe Dean	ILB	Georgia
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*The Lions helped open the Thursday night festivities with pick #2 and now they close it out with the 32<sup>nd</sup> pick via the Rams in the deal for Matt Stafford. Having already added a young stud pass rusher, the Lions stay in defensive mode to add inside linebacker Nakobe Dean from Georgia. This is a guy who has mid-1<sup>st</sup> Round grades who almost falls into the 2<sup>nd</sup> Round before the Lions nab him. When you have as many defensive holes as the Lions do, a draft night grabbing the two best defensive players you can is the wise move. Kudos to Detroit for landing the top linebacker in the draft and yet another Georgia defensive player. Dean is fearless and can play sideline to sideline with great lateral flow. Dean excels in blitz packages as he exudes great speed and often gets home to the QB. He won't shy away from covering backs out of the backfield and his quick twitch allows him to get off blocks easily. The Lions wrap up the night with a great selection for a city that is starving for a winner.*

**\*THE EXTRA POINT\*** – *When the Lions first hired head coach Dan Campbell, SSS was very critical of the choice. But the more we see of Campbell the more we enjoy the many letters in his soup. He reminds SSS of Arkansas Razorbacks head coach Sam Pittman in that what you see isn't necessarily what you get. Players love Campbell and while the Lions struggled to a 3-13-1 record, they never gave up on him when it appeared that they might set a new record for futility at 0-17. SSS hopes that Campbell continues to lead the Lions in a positive direction because he is personality plus and he wears his heart on his sleeve in all he does.*