

Top Prospects

FERNANDO MENDOZA

QUARTERBACK, INDIANA

The consensus top pick, Mendoza is a pinpoint passer with superior velocity on shorter throws and can also make big plays as a runner like he did in the national championship game. He has prototypical size and a toughness that makes him as well-rounded a prospect as Andrew Luck was coming out of Stanford in 2012.

ARVELL REESE

EDGE RUSHER, OHIO STATE

Reese is a freak athlete — he ran a 4.47 40-yard dash — who played off-ball linebacker and standup edge and was even used as a quarterback spy on occasion. He has the talent to be an elite edge rusher in the NFL with his fluidity and explosiveness. He'll also stay on the field because of his elite run defense.

FRANCIS MAUIGOA

OFFENSIVE TACKLE, MIAMI

Mauigoa started at right tackle since his freshman year at Miami in 2023. At 6-foot-6 and 335 pounds, he plays with a firm base in pass protection and has the ability to displace defenders in the run game. Scouts believe he can make an immediate impact in the NFL as a run blocker.

DAVID BAILEY

EDGE RUSHER, TEXAS TECH

Bailey is an athletic edge with elite upside. He displayed versatility by operating out of both a two-point and four-point stance at Texas Tech. After recording 22 ½ tackles for loss and 14 ½ sacks in three seasons at Stanford, he collected 19 ½ TFLs and 14 ½ sacks in one year at Lubbock.

SONNY STYLES

LINEBACKER, OHIO STATE

Styles' epic combine performance after an impressive showing against Indiana in the Big Ten title game helped him soar up draft boards. A tall, rangy prospect, Styles switched from safety to linebacker to capitalize on his multitasking skill set. He is outstanding in coverage and displays sideline-to-sideline range against the run.

CARNELL TATE

WIDE RECEIVER, OHIO STATE

Tate is a consistent route runner with excellent hands and enough speed to be a top playmaker and serve as a true No. 1 receiver in the NFL. At 6-foot-2 and 192 pounds, he covers ground quickly with his long stride, which helped him score nine TDs as a junior in 2025.

RUBEN BAIN JR.

EDGE RUSHER, MIAMI

Bain is a versatile rusher who can line up on the edge or inside against guards, creating mismatches. Sporting a variety of moves and brute strength, he is a solid disruptor who can uproot offensive tackles to get to the quarterback.

MANSOOR DELANE

CORNERBACK, LSU

Delane is the best cover cornerback in this year's class — and the top defensive back, period. He is so adept at press coverage and zone defense that he goes long stretches without getting challenged. He possesses the strength and speed to match up with any style of receiver.

SPENCER FANO

OFFENSIVE LINEMAN, UTAH

Fano started at left tackle as a freshman and right tackle the last two seasons but probably fits best on the interior in the NFL because he has shorter arms than most tackles. He has the versatility to play all five O-line positions and is adept at using his leverage and quickness.

CALEB DOWNS

SAFETY, OHIO STATE

Downs is an elite, versatile playmaker who stands to make an immediate impact in the NFL. He moved all around the Buckeyes' defense, lining up mostly underneath as a nickel, strong safety or nickel linebacker, capitalizing on his mix of speed, strength and football IQ.

MAKAI LEMON

WIDE RECEIVER, USC

Lemon is an elite playmaker who creates matchup nightmares for defenses in the slot. He plays bigger than his size (5-foot-11, 192 pounds) with great leaping ability for high throws. He brings a linebacker's temperament to the position, always fighting for extra yards.

JEREMIAH LOVE

RUNNING BACK, NOTRE DAME

Love is a top-five talent and a playmaker who can go the distance every touch. He's a terrific runner and a polished receiver. He explodes through the hole on inside runs and bounces off defenders for extra yardage. In addition to his elusiveness and electric spin move, he sports elite speed on the outside.

JORDYN TYSON

WIDE RECEIVER, ARIZONA STATE

Tyson is an exceptional route-runner with wiggle and speed who catches the ball in traffic. His explosiveness off the line and out of breaks makes him an exceptional playmaker and he has the speed to turn routine routes into big plays.

OLAIVAVEGA IOANE

GUARD, PENN STATE

Ioane is a strong, powerful, tough guard who was, well, the vanguard for the Nittany Lions. He is an adept pass protector and run blocker who is expected to be an immediate impact starter in the NFL.

KELDRIC FAULK

EDGE RUSHER, AUBURN

Scouts rave about the versatile Faulk's leadership, work ethic and talent. At 6-foot-6 and 285 pounds, he has an ideal frame for today's game. He's a steady pass rusher and uses good balance and length to hold his own against the run.

TY SIMPSON

QUARTERBACK, ALABAMA

Simpson's stock has risen since the scouting combine despite just 15 collegiate starts, and ESPN analyst Dan Orlovsky said he's the best quarterback in the draft. At 6-foot and 208 pounds he is a little undersized, but Simpson has the requisite confidence, boasting, "I'm a program changer."

KADYN PROCTOR

OFFENSIVE TACKLE, ALABAMA

Proctor has excellent agility for a big man. He started at left tackle as a freshman and allowed just two sacks in his three seasons. He has great size — 6-foot-7, 352 pounds — and plenty of athleticism, as evidenced by his being used as an occasional rusher and receiver.

DILLON THIENEMAN

SAFETY, OREGON

Thieneman had an impressive combine, running a 4.36 40-yard dash that was faster than some of the NFL's best receivers. A three-year starter, he was a versatile part of the Ducks' defense.

KENYON SADIQ

TIGHT END, OREGON

The best tight end in the draft, Sadiq sports excellent speed and athleticism. He has an explosive release and can separate on wheel routes. Quick screens are his forte where he can flash his skills after the catch.

JERMOM MCCOY

CORNERBACK, TENNESSEE

McCoy is a consistent, speedy player with outstanding ball skills who can anchor a secondary and should be a Day 1 starter in the NFL. After an outstanding 2024 season, he missed all of 2025 with a torn ACL but has enough power and potential to pay off the trust in his comeback.

BLAKE MILLER

OFFENSIVE TACKLE, CLEMSON

A right tackle for the Tigers, Miller started 54 games in college and can step in right away as a plug-and-play tackle in the NFL. He has prototypical size (6-foot-7, 315 pounds) for the position along with a mix of strength and smarts to excel at the next level.

AKHEEM MESIDOR

EDGE RUSHER, MIAMI

Mesidor is an older prospect at age 25 but he has an ideal frame at 6-foot-3 and 260 pounds and his talent is clear on video. With good instincts and a high, relentless motor, he'll generate pressure from the outside and is a solid defender against the run, too.

CALEB LOMU

OFFENSIVE TACKLE, UTAH

At 6-foot-6 and 313 pounds, the Utes' left tackle has an ideal frame with room to grow. He doesn't wow with his skill set but he's a technician in both the passing and running games and has what it takes to excel in the NFL.

DENZEL BOSTON

WIDE RECEIVER, WASHINGTON

Boston is strong, fast and has elite ball skills. At 6-foot-4 and 212 pounds, he's a big target lining up both outside and in the slot. He boasts strength and a long stride and can wall off defenders at any level downfield. Scouts compare him to Denver's Courtland Sutton.

CASHIUS HOWELL

EDGE RUSHER, TEXAS A&M

A shade under 6-foot-3 and 250 pounds, Howell is undersized for a pass rusher but has proven he gets to the quarterback and finishes. He's tenacious rushing the passer and chasing down ballcarriers on the backside and has the burst to knife through the line and disrupt things behind the line of scrimmage.

ZION YOUNG

EDGE RUSHER, MISSOURI

Young is a big (6-foot-6, 262 pounds), powerful rusher and a disruptive force who brings energy and leadership to the defense. Relentless against both the pass and the run, his draft stock rose with a solid showing at the Senior Bowl.

MONROE FREELING

OFFENSIVE TACKLE, GEORGIA

Freeling has elite athleticism and just needs more experience after starting just one season on the right side. He started at left tackle for the Bulldogs last season and sports ideal size (6-foot-7, 315 pounds) and agility to play in the position in the pros.

KAYDEN MCDONALD

DEFENSIVE TACKLE, OHIO STATE

McDonald is another Buckeyes player going in the first round. He's a natural run defender who'll clog the middle of the line. At 6-foot-3 and 326 pounds, he has excellent size and strength for the position.

AVIEON TERRELL

CORNERBACK, CLEMSON

Terrell is an athletic, if undersized (5-foot-11, 180 pounds), cornerback with great quickness and instincts. An outstanding blitzer, his NFL future is almost certainly at nickel as he's most effective in underneath zone coverage.

T.J. PARKER

EDGE RUSHER, CLEMSON

Parker's production dipped after big numbers in 2024 (11 sacks to five) but he's a strong, powerful edge with potential to flourish at the next level. He also has versatility to move inside if needed to plug the middle. He helped himself with a strong Senior Bowl week.

AFTER MENDOZA, FIRST ROUND LOOKS TO BE

Defense Heavy

BY MARK LONG
AP PRO FOOTBALL WRITER

The first round of the NFL draft is essentially shaping up to be Fernando Mendoza and guys trying to stop him.

The former Indiana quarterback is close to a lock to be the No. 1 overall pick in the draft, with the reigning Heisman Trophy winner seemingly headed to Las Vegas to compete with veteran Kirk Cousins for the Raiders' starting job.

After that, most of the draft's opening night looks like it could be a version of college football's all-defensive team.

Dominant pass rushers. Play-making

linebackers. Ball-hawking cornerbacks. Possibly the highest-drafted safety in nearly two decades. And maybe even a couple of run-stopping defensive tackles.

In a copycat league that's seen seven of its last eight champions hold opponents under 23 points in the Super Bowl, general managers and coaches have to be salivating at all the possibilities on that side of the ball.

And several of those guys could hear their names called early. In fact, six defenders are widely considered top-10 picks: Texas Tech edge rusher David Bailey, Miami edge rusher Rueben Bain, LSU cornerback Mansoor Delane and a trio from

Ohio State — edge rusher Arvell Reese, safety Caleb Downs and

linebacker Sonny Styles. "If I would say I walked on the field and thought anyone was better than me, that's not true," Downs said at the NFL combine.

Indiana quarterback Fernando Mendoza.
AP PHOTO



Bailey or Reese to the Jets at No. 2?

The New York Jets ranked 31st in the NFL with 26 sacks last season, and with former defensive coordinator Aaron Glenn beginning his second season as the team's head coach, adding talent on that side of the ball is a priority with the second overall pick.

Bailey led the Big 12 with 14 ½ sacks last season and should be a plug-and-play starter from Day 1. He played four years of college football, including his first two at Stanford, and finished with 29 career sacks.

Reese, meanwhile, stood out on a stacked defense at Ohio State and finished with 69 tackles, including 6 ½ sacks, last season.



Downs could be the highest-drafted safety since 2017

No one should be surprised if Downs get drafted in the top five. The Alabama transfer racked up 150 tackles in two seasons at Ohio State and notched two interceptions in each of his three years in college.

Only three safeties have been drafted higher than seventh since 2000 — Jamal Adams (sixth in 2017), Eric Berry (fifth in 2010) and Sean Taylor (fifth in 2004). Eric Turner was drafted second overall by Cleveland in 1991.

"At the end of the day, it's, 'Who's the best defender?'" Downs said. "It's not about positional value. It's about who affects the game."



Styles on the rise after historic NFL combine

Styles, another Ohio State standout, delivered one of the more impressive combine performances in league history, especially for his size.

The 6-foot-5, 244-pound linebacker covered the 40-yard dash in 4.46 seconds, turned in a vertical jump of 43 ½ inches and reached 11 feet, 2 inches in the broad jump. Turn on the tape, and he's even more of a specimen.

"I think it starts with being a versatile linebacker," Styles said. "I think I can play (all three linebacker spots) and do all three at a high level. I think I'm a very athletic player, and I think that shows up in my game. ... I think I showed I can stop the run. I showed some physicality this year."



Will Bain's legal past affect his NFL future?

Bain, who helped lead Miami to the national title game against Indiana and Mendoza, was involved in a 2024 traffic accident that resulted in the death of a passenger. Bain was driving a 2021 Land Rover that crashed around 4 a.m. on March 17, 2024, in Miami, according to documents obtained by The Read Optional. It resulted in the death of 22-year-old Destiny Betts, whose family members say they are not seeking public attention and wish Bain "the best as he continues his life and career."

Bain was cited for careless driving at the time of the crash, but the charge was later dropped.

"We've known that for a while, so that doesn't really change anything from our standpoint," Detroit general manager Brad Holmes said.

Delane is expected to be the first cornerback off the board

Delane was a first-team All-America selection and a finalist for the Jim Thorpe Award, given annually to the nation's top cornerback, following his lone season at LSU. He led the Tigers with 11 pass breakups in 11 games and finished with 45 tackles.

He spent his first three seasons at Virginia Tech and is looking forward to the NFL. "I want to be a sponge," he said. "I just want to learn from (top) guys. That's the biggest thing for me. I like to surround myself with high-caliber talent that I just soak up. I try to bring and add new things to my game."

