The Mink and Cousin Obie will be watching the NFL draft at home in Naples this year. We annually match wits with the best NFL draft experts including Mel Kiper, Mike Mayock and Todd McShay. Unfortunately, we do not get paid for it, but we have a pretty good track record of picking the results.

This draft is again one of the deepest drafts in recent memory due to a large number of juniors declaring for the draft with 73 juniors/underclassmen declaring for the 2022 NFL draft. This is not as many as the last two years but will significantly add to the depth of this year's draft. Each year more and more juniors/underclassmen are declaring for the NFL draft which improves the depth of the draft. As a result, you can get first round talent in rounds 2 and 3. This draft is extremely deep at most positions particularly wide receiver, cornerbacks and edge rushers. Teams will receive value in all rounds of the draft this year. In some cases, teams will be able to draft some starters in rounds 2-4, particularly at the cornerback and edge rusher, due to the depth of this draft.

The quarterback position is the weakest in recent memory and we may not see a quarterback chosen in the top 10 picks this year.

The strengths of the 2022 draft include:

1. **Edge Rushers (DE/LB)** – This is a deep draft of edge rushers as we could have 3 edge rushers taken in the first 10 picks. Teams will also get good value in rounds 2 – 4 due to the depth in this draft. The 3 edge rushers that will be taken in the first 10 picks include: Travon Walker, DE, Georgia, Aiden Hutchinson, DE, Michigan and Kayvon Thibodeaux, DE, Oregon. Walker or Hutchinson could be the first player taken in this year's draft. In 2021, Hutchinson recorded 62 tackles, 14 sacks, three passes batted, a fumble recovered and two forced fumbles. He was a steady pass rusher and a big presence for the Michigan defense. Walker is an athletic freak and is big, athletic and speedy. At 6'5", Walker ran a 4.51 40-yard dash at the combine. Walker is a well-rounded defender with a lot of upside and versatility. Thibodeaux is another athletic edge rusher with a great combination of speed and strength – ran 4.58 at the combine. He has a tendency to take plays off but if a team can motivate him and get more consistency he may be the best player in this draft. The next tier includes George Karlaftis, DE, Purdue and Jermaine Johnson, DE, Florida State. Karlaftis was very productive at Purdue and brings a nice combination of speed and strength. Johnson played high school football at Eden Prairie, Mn with Bud Grant's son (Head Coach Mike Grant). He had 11.5 sacks last year for the Seminoles. Johnson has significant upside due to his athletic profile. We expect all five of these edge rushers to be drafted in the first round.
2. **Wide Receiver** – The draft continues to provide deep talent at the wide receiver position. This draft does not have the blue-chip talent of the 2014 and 2020 drafts but it is a very deep class of wide receivers. This position alone will dominate the first four rounds of the 2022 NFL draft. This draft will provide value at the wide receiver position in all seven rounds. Teams will find starting caliber wide receivers in the 4th and 5th round of this draft. We project up to 6 receivers going in the first round with another 7-8 going in the second and early third round. The top receivers in this draft

include two Buckeyes in Chris Olave and Garrett Wilson. In addition, Drake London, USC, Jameson Williams, Alabama, Treylon Burks, Arkansas and Jahan Dotson, Penn State are excellent receivers that will translate well to the NFL. We project that all these receivers will be picked in the first round. Drake London and the two Buckeye receivers are the cream of the crop. London hauled in 88 receptions for 1,084 yards and seven touchdowns in his eight-game 2021 before suffering a season-ending ankle fracture. There is no doubt that London has mismatch size and is a dangerous 50-50 receiver. He is a weapon for yardage after the catch and is an asset in the red zone. Wilson continued to show his game-breaking speed and electrifying playmaking ability in 2021. He runs smooth routes, showing suddenness in-and-out of his breaks to consistently generate separation. Along with being fast playmaker, Wilson has good body control to adjust to the ball and is phenomenal after the catch. Olave totaled 65 catches for 936 yards and 13 touchdowns. He showed his excellent speed, route-running and smooth athleticism. Olave became Ohio State's all-time leader in touchdown catches in 2021. The Ohio State transfer was an electric playmaker for the Crimson Tide in 2021, averaging 19.9 yards per catch for 1,572 yards and 15 touchdowns on 79 catches before tearing an ACL in the National Championship Game. The 6-foot-2, 189-pound Williams has quality height and explosive speed alongside suddenness and a burst that catches defensive backs by surprise. On any play, Williams is a threat to score because he is extremely fast, allowing him to take the top off of defenses and tilt coverage his direction. Burks totaled 66 receptions for 1,104 yards and 11 touchdowns in 2021. He was a phenomenal playmaker for the Razorbacks as a dangerous point producer, including a superb outing against Alabama (7-129-1). Burks is a big possessional receiver for the next level as he is tough, physical, and dangerous after the catch. Dotson recorded 91 receptions for 1,182 yards and 12 touchdowns. He was excellent, producing a lot of big plays for Penn State. We expect all these receivers to be drafted in the first round. The next tier includes Christian Watson, North Dakota State and George Pickens, Georgia. These receivers may also get drafted in the first round.

3. **Cornerback** – This is a deep cornerback class with several blue-chip prospects. We project that 3 cornerbacks will be chosen in the first 15 picks in the first round including Ahmad "Sauce" Garner, Cincinnati, Derek Stingley, LSU and Trent McDuffie, Washington. However, the depth of the cornerbacks in this draft will provide great value for teams in rounds 2-4 and improve the secondary play of many NFL teams. The cream of the crop is Ahmad "Sauce" Gardner, Cincinnati. Gardner was the highest rated cornerback in college football this past season and did not allow a touchdown pass all season. Gardner is a tall cornerback who has good length to battle outside receivers in the NFL. To go along with his size, Gardner is fast and has excellent ball skills but is a little raw in his technique. Stingley played well in very brief action for LSU before going out with a foot injury. He is a highly talented corner, but he will enter the NFL having not played much football over the past two years. We love Stingley's upside, but he's inconsistent and carries some boom-or-bust risk considering how little he played in 2020 and 2021. McDuffie played well in 2021, blanketing receivers and not allowing big plays. He showed added special teams value in 2021 by serving as a punt returner. McDuffie recorded 35 tackles and six passes broken up on the year and did not allow a touchdown pass in the last two

years. The next tier includes Kaiir Elam, CB, Florida, Daxton Hill, Michigan, Andrew Booth Jr., Clemson and Kyler Gordon, Washington. These prospects may go in the first round but more likely in the second round.

The areas highlighted above will provide great value in the first day of the draft including rounds, two, three and four because of the depth at these positions. Several teams have needs at Edge Rushers, Wide Receiver and Cornerback. We see these positions dominating the first 3 rounds of the 2022 draft. Wide Receiver and Edge Rushers are particularly deep in this draft.

2022 NFL Draft – First Round

We see the first round going like this:

1. Jacksonville Jaguars - Travon Walker, DE, Georgia
Jacksonville needs to add talent on both sides of the ball which is the reason they are picking #1. There most pressing need is offensive tackle and edge rusher here.   With this pick, Jacksonville selects Walker who is a sizable edge rusher that is still growing into his 6-foot-5 frame. Walker just keeps rising in the pre-draft process, as he tested extremely well at the combine. He didn't put up "wow" numbers in college -- he had six sacks for the national champs last season -- but that's because of how dominant the entire Georgia defense was around him. He could put up better numbers in the NFL, and he's stout against the run too.

2. Detroit Lions – Aidan Hutchinson, DE, Michigan
Detroit needs to add playmakers to their defense. Pass-rusher Kayvon Thibodeaux will be in play here, but the top offensive tackles aren't an option; the Lions are set with Taylor Decker and Penei Sewell. There's more risk with Thibodeaux than we like for a No. 2 pick because there's no guarantee he'll grow into his immense upside. Detroit selects Hutchinson here which will be a popular pick as he played his college ball in Michigan. Hutchinson is a safe pick and will bring the leadership and athletic traits that will allow him to get double-digit sacks playing on Dan Campbell's defense.

3. Houston Texans - Ikem Ekwonu, OT, NC State
Deshaun Watson is gone, and it appears the Texans will move forward with Davis Mills as their quarterback. This team really needs to focus on adding talent around Mills and then see where it is in 2023. Houston is not going to compete in the AFC South this season but could be right back in the top five next year. With five picks in the top 80 in this draft -- including the No. 13 selection from the Watson deal -- it should take the best prospect available. The pick is Ikem Ekwonu who is an elite offensive tackle.
Yes, Laremy Tunsil is returning on the left side, so put Ekwonu at right tackle and the Texans can have one of the league's most talented bookend duos. This is a roster with several holes; this selection is another crucial step in a slow rebuild.

4. New York Jets - Drake London, WR, USC
The Jets have had a nice start to free agency, filling voids at tight end (C.J. Uzomah and Tyler Conklin), safety (Jordan Whitehead), cornerback (D.J. Reed) and guard (Laken Tomlinson). They haven't yet added an outside wide receiver to help Zach Wilson, though, which means they could be eyeing one with either of their top-10 picks. They could get their choice of the best receiver in the class here. London is a big 6-foot-4 athletic wideout that will bring a vertical element to the Jets passing game. London had 88 catches for 1,084 yards in eight games in 2021 before a broken right ankle ended his season. He can be a weapon in the red zone. With London and Corey Davis on the outside and Elijah Moore and Braxton Berrios working out of the slot, New York would have a young and talented receiving corps for Wilson's second season.

5. New York Giants - Evan Neal, OT, Alabama
The Giants, the other team with two top-10 picks, haven't been as active in free agency as new general manager Joe Schoen gets the team back into decent salary-cap shape. That doesn't mean they don't have needs, though, particularly at edge rusher and offensive tackle. Neal is a massive tackle who can overpower defenders in the run game and move his feet as a pass protector. Andrew Thomas, the No. 4 pick in the 2020 draft, looked much better in Year 2 and could stay at left tackle, pushing Neal to the right side. Neal also played some guard at Alabama so he brings some position flexibility.

6. Carolina Panthers - Kyle Hamilton, S, Notre Dame
The Panthers have struck out in the quarterback trade market so far -- although Baker Mayfield and Jimmy Garoppolo are still available -- but they are clearly trying to upgrade over Sam Darnold. Could they take Malik Willis or Kenny Pickett here? It's possible. Coach Matt Rhule is on the hot seat, and this could be his attempt at a big splash for 2022. Still, if he wants to win *now*, he's probably better off trading for a veteran and staying away from a rookie signal-caller. Hamilton is a playmaking safety in a 6-foot-4 frame who would immediately raise the ceiling of the Panthers defense. He can play in the box, out of the slot and as a center fielder. Safeties typically do not get drafted this high but Hamilton is a unique and special defender.

7. New York Giants - Kayvon Thibodeaux, DE, Oregon
Adding a talented edge rusher in this drat is a priority for the Giants. In 2021, the Giants' top pass-rusher was rookie Azeez Ojulari, who led the team with eight sacks. This is their best chance to add a young, talented defensive end. They can afford to use this pick on Thibodeaux, who has a high ceiling but was inconsistent in 2021. If Thibodeaux puts it all together, you're talking about All-Pro-level talent. He has the type of physical traits NFL teams love but taking him in the top 10 is risky. If New York passes on Thibodeaux, keep an eye on cornerback or linebacker with this pick.

8. Atlanta Falcons - Garrett Wilson, WR, Ohio State
The Falcons have a lot of needs here and could go multiple paths with this pick They have one of the league's worst rosters and could try to get by with Marcus Mariota for a season before going all-in for a passer in the 2023 draft. This is a team that is a long way from competing, so it shouldn't force the pick. Atlanta could go with the best prospect

available and fill a need position with Wilson, a field-stretcher who had 113 catches and 18 touchdowns for the Buckeyes over the past two seasons. He ran a speedy 4.38-second 40-yard dash at the combine. With Calvin Ridley suspended for the season, the Falcons don't have any starting-caliber receivers on their roster to catch Mariota's passes.

9.   Seattle Seahawks - Charles Cross, OT, Mississippi State
This is a new area of Seahawks football. Russell Wilson, Bobby Wagner and D.J. Reed are gone. Quandre Diggs, Al Woods, Rashaad Penny and Will Dissly are back. They added Drew Lock, Noah Fant and Uchenna Nwosu, among a few others. So even after parting ways with two of the best players in franchise history, we don't think coach Pete Carroll and the Seahawks want to rebuild. They have significant need along the offensive line and Cross fills that need. Cross could step in for veteran Duane Brown at left tackle. He's a superb pass-blocker who dominated in the SEC.

10. New York Jets - Ahmad "Sauce" Gardner, CB, Cincinnati
We think the Jets would be thrilled to get a shutdown corner with their second Round 1 pick, improving a secondary that allowed quarterbacks to put up a 53.5 QBR last season, which ranked 31st in the league. Signing D.J. Reed will help but cornerback is a big need. They also need a safety, but we don't have another one with a first-round grade after Kyle Hamilton. Gardner was the highest rated cornerback in college football this past season and did not allow a touchdown pass all season. Gardner is a tall cornerback who has good length to battle outside receivers in the NFL. To go along with his size, Gardner is fast and has excellent ball skills but is a little raw in his technique. He showed in the College Football Playoff against Alabama that he can hold his own against elite talent.

11. Washington Commanders - Chris Olave, WR, Ohio State
Olave can play early and often for a Washington team that has to get more out of its passing game with quarterback Carson Wentz. Washington traded for Wentz in the offseason and now need to surround with playmakers to succeed. Olave will partner with Terry McLaurin to provide quarterback Carson Wentz with two great playmakers. Olave is a speedster (4.39 40-yard dash at the combine) who had 13 touchdowns last season for the buckeyes.

12. Minnesota Vikings - Derek Stingley Jr, CB, LSU
The Vikings have used first-round picks on four cornerbacks since 2013. This list includes: Xavier Rhodes, Trae Waynes, Mike Hughes and Jeff Gladney. None of them are on their roster now, and the guys who drafted them -- coach Mike Zimmer and general manager Rick Spielman -- are gone, too. This is still a need position for new general manager Kwesi Adofo-Mensah and coach Kevin O'Connell.
As a true freshman in 2019, he was one of LSU's best players on the way to its national title. Stingley has played in just 10 games over the past two seasons and has some inconsistent tape. Stingley has significant upside and could become the shutdown corner that the Vikings have been searching for. The Vikings also have Patrick Peterson, who also played at LSU, that can serve in a mentor role for the young quarterback. Stingley would also be reunited with his former defensive coordinator, Daronte Jones, who is now the Vikings defensive backs coach.

13. Houston Texans - Jordan Davis, DT, Georgia

The Texans aren't in the position to target needs over talent. They must get the best players they can and figure out the rest later, because this is not going to be a quick rebuild. The 341-pound Davis can plug the middle of head coach Lovie Smith's defense. He wowed at the combine earlier this month, and even if he doesn't have stellar pass-rush upside, he's going to dominate interior centers and guards on early downs. He's a unique player who can be excellent if used properly, helping off-ball linebackers find space and getting in the face of quarterbacks.

14. Baltimore Ravens - Tyler Linderbaum, C, Iowa

The Ravens would be thrilled with this scenario. They just let Bradley Bozeman, who started at center in 2021 and left guard in 2019 and 2020, walk in free agency, and they don't have a replacement on the roster. Linderbaum would be an improvement, not just an instant replacement. He is one of the best center prospects of the past decade and would be a Day 1 starter.

15. Philadelphia Eagles - Jermaine Johnson II, DE, Florida State

The Eagles haven't been super active in free agency, though they did add impact edge rusher Haason Reddick and brought back defensive tackle Fletcher Cox. The Eagles need to improve their pass rush and Johnson fulfills that need. Johnson, a one-year starter who transferred from Georgia to FSU and had a stellar 2021 season. He was excellent at the Senior Bowl and NFL teams always want pass-rushers, and he could help the Eagles defense immediately.

16. New Orleans Saints - Kenny Pickett, QB, Pitt

The Saints tried and failed to add Deshaun Watson and still have a need to find a long-term answer at quarterback after Drew Bree's retirement. Pickett is the most NFL-ready quarterback in this draft. In 2021, he had 42 touchdown passes and just seven interceptions. He is super accurate. He understands how to run an offense and lead a team. He could be the Saints' future. This is a strange quarterback class, and the range on when Pickett and Malik Willis come off the board has various opinions.

17. Los Angeles Chargers - Trevor Penning, OT, Northern Iowa

The Charger's run defense was awful in 2021, and they've already taken steps to improve it, bringing in two defensive tackles via free agency in Sebastian Joseph-Day, whom coach Brandon Staley is familiar with from his time with the Rams, and Austin Johnson. That probably takes defensive tackle off the list of holes to fill in the draft. So let's turn our attention to the offensive line. Starting tackle Bryan Bulaga was released and the Chargers need to find a replacement. Penning is an outstanding run blocker, and offensive line coaches love him because he's just plain nasty and plays through the whistle. This would make back-to-back drafts with first-round tackles for the Chargers, and left tackle Rashawn Slater looked like a star as a rookie.

18. Philadelphia - Devin Lloyd, ILB, Utah
Philadelphia has a need at off-ball linebacker and Lloyd is the best one in the draft. Lloyd was one of the best all-around defenders in college football last season, racking up 111 total tackles, eight sacks, 20 tackles for loss, four interceptions and a forced fumble. He has some juice as a blitzer and can cover tight ends and running backs in the passing game. Lloyd's 4.66 40-yard dash at the combine means he doesn't have the straight-line speed, but we don't think he should drop past the Eagles. That's two early starters for the Eagles here, with Lloyd and Jermaine Johnson II.

19. New Orleans - Jameson Williams, WR, Alabama
New Orleans has a significant need at wide receiver and they fill this need with Williams as the pick. Williams, who tore his ACL in the national title game, had a tremendous season for the Crimson Tide, with 1,572 yards and 15 scores. Williams indicated at the combine that he's ahead of his schedule in his recovery, but it's possible he misses a chunk of the season while rehabbing. This pick fills a glaring need on the Saints roster.

20. Pittsburgh Steelers - Malik Willis, QB, Liberty
The structure of Mitch Trubisky's new contract with Pittsburgh -- just $5.25 million guaranteed over two years -- means this organization absolutely could draft a quarterback here. Trubisky could be a bridge to Willis, who is raw but supremely talented. Willis is the most talented quarterback in this class. Willis could compete with Mitch Trubisky and Mason Rudolph in training camp, but he wouldn't be under immediate pressure to start in Week 1, which would be an ideal scenario.

21. New England Patriots - Jahan Dotson, WR, Penn State
The Patriots have been quiet in free agency, notably losing star cornerback J.C. Jackson to a huge-money deal while not adding any surefire starters. The Patriots have needs at right tackle, off-ball linebacker, defensive end, cornerback and wide receiver. They've also lost several coaches this offseason, including offensive coordinator Josh McDaniels. And yet, Bill Belichick's Patriots team won 10 games last season and still has a lot of really good players. Dotson is an explosive playmaker who is a threat to score on every touch. He had 1,182 yards and 12 touchdowns in 2021. Dotson will add the playmaking ability to the Patriots offense which has been missing in recent years.

22. Green Bay Packers - Kenyon Green, G, Texas A&M
Green Bay needs to focus on the offensive side of the ball in this draft with needs at wide receiver and offensive line. This pick was acquired in the Devonte Adams trade and picking a wide receiver would make some sense here. Green could step into the right guard spot vacated by Lucas Patrick's signing with the Bears in free agency. Josh Myers, a second-round pick last year, looked solid at center, but adding another O-lineman is important, too. Green also has some position versatility, as he played both guard and tackle for the Aggies.

23. Arizona Cardinals - Devonte Wyatt, DT, Georgia
Arizona let edge rusher Chandler Jones and wide receiver Christian Kirk leave for big deals in free agency, and it hasn't added many external free agents so far. It could go a

few different ways with this pick, including at wide receiver, which suddenly looks barren, and offensive line. The Cardinals could be a fit for Jordan Davis if he makes it here, but his former Georgia teammate, Wyatt, could be a nice pick, too. The 305-pound tackle had a great workout at the combine and impressed NFL scouts at the Senior Bowl. He had only five sacks in four seasons, but we think he could put up better numbers in the right pro scheme.

24. Dallas Cowboys - Tyler Smith, OT/G, Tulsa
The Cowboys will look different in 2022, with Amari Cooper, Randy Gregory, Connor Williams, Cedrick Wilson and La'el Collins among the notable departures. Due to these departures, offensive line and edge rusher are a priority. Tyron Smith and Zack Martin are both over 30 and the Cowboys should prioritize the offensive line first. Smith has position versatility and can play guard or tackle, and in this scenario he'd slot into Williams' left guard spot. Zion Johnson is the other possibility and he could even play some center.

25. Buffalo Bills - Breece Hall, RB, Iowa State
Buffalo needs to improve the running game to take pressure off Josh Allen and the passing game.   Hall had 3,044 rushing yards and 41 rushing scores over the past two seasons, adding 59 catches. His 4.39 40-yard dash at the combine answered a lot of questions about his straight-line speed. He is the clear No. 1 back in this class.

26. Tennessee Titans - Christian Watson, WR, North Dakota State
Tennessee needs to upgrade their playmakers on offense and take some of the pressure off Derrick Henry and the running game. In 2021, Watson caught 43 passes for 800 yards and seven touchdowns. He also rushed for a touchdown with 114 yards on 15 carries. Watson showed big-play ability in 2020 - 24.3 yards per catch - and 2019 - 21.5 yards per catch. The 6-foot-4, 211-pounder showed good speed and run-after-the catch ability to go along with mismatch size. After the Senior Bowl, Watson was superb at the combine, showing excellent speed in the 40 and explosion in the jumps.

27. Tampa Bay Buccaneers - Zion Johnson, G/C, Boston College
Tampa Bay has a significant need at left guard and upgrading the offensive line and protecting Tom Brady should be a priority. The Buccaneers upgrade their offensive line by picking Johnson, who spent time at multiple positions in college. He didn't allow any quarterback pressures while playing guard in 2021, and he's stout as a run blocker.

28. Green Bay Packers - Treylon Burks, WR, Arkansas
The Packers have needs at wide receiver and the offensive line. Burks will almost certainly have to get a ton of early snaps, helping to fill the void left by the stunning trade of Davante Adams. Burks is a bigger receiver (6-foot-2) who has some run-after-the-catch ability; he can break tackles and run past defensive backs, though he doesn't have blazing speed. He put up 1,104 yards and 11 touchdowns last season. For Green Bay's sake, it will have to hope Burks develops faster than Adams, who began his career with two up-and-down seasons before breaking out in Year 3. Aaron Rodgers needs help now. We expect the Packers to take multiple receivers with their picks in this draft.

29. Kansas City Chiefs - Trent McDuffie, CB, Washington
Kansas City could add a wide receiver with this pick, due to the loss of Tyreek Hill, but their focus should be on defense here. Kansas City needs to add to a secondary that is lacking talent. McDuffie is the real deal; the stat you'll see most often is that he didn't allow a single touchdown in coverage over the past two seasons, and he goes all out on every play. Expect him to be a Day 1 starter.

30. Kansas City Chiefs - George Karlaftis, DE, Purdue
If the Chiefs want to keep Chris Jones at defensive tackle where he can wreck game plans from the interior, they must add capable edge rushers. They ranked 29th in total sacks (31) last season and 31st in rushing yards allowed per carry (4.8), even though they improved down the stretch. Karlaftis is an all-around defensive end who has some pass-rushing traits and can anchor down in the run game. He had only 4.5 sacks last season, but the tools are there. The Chiefs need help right away in the pass rush and Karlaftis fills this need.

31. Cincinnati Bengals - Kaiir Elam, CB, Florida
The Bengals have significantly retooled their offensive line this offseason, adding four new starters in free agency. That takes some of the pressure off Joe Burrow (literally) in Year 3, as he was battered in his first two seasons. The Super Bowl runners-up can now afford to fill a different need with this pick selecting one of the best corners in this draft. Elam played really well to open the 2021 season, including an impressive performance against Alabama. Elam is a big corner with excellent cover skills. In 2021, Elam totaled 27 tackles, three passes broken up and an interception. He really helped himself by running faster than expected at the combine.

32. Detroit Lions - Matt Corral, QB, Ole Miss
Detroit is still in the market for a long-term answer at quarterback. Jared Goff is the current starter but the team is not sold on winning with him. This is Detroit's second first round pick so taking a flyer on a quarterback that could pan out makes some sense here. Corral throws a ball with some zip and is extremely tough, though he doesn't have a huge frame (6-foot-2, 212 pounds). He also brings excellent intangibles and leadership skills – teammates play hard for him. This pick allows them to get a potential quarterback of the future on a team-friendly five-year contract.

Minnesota Vikings Draft

The Vikings needs going into the 2022 draft include in priority order:

- Cornerback
- Defensive End (Edge Rusher)
- Safety
- Offensive Line

The Vikings need to restock the defense in this draft with a focus on the secondary.

In terms of the Vikings, they will be able to take the best player in the draft due to the fact they have a very good returning team. They need to fill some holes on their 30th ranked defense and if they have good draft it will improve their chances of an NFC North title. We see two alternatives that could unfold in the first round:

- **Take the best Cornerback/Safety** – Adding talent to the secondary must be a priority for the Vikings as they finished with the last ranked unit in the league last year. The key question for the Vikings is "Does Ahmad "Sauce" Gardner or Derek Stingley fall to them at pick #12". If these cornerbacks drop to them, it will make the decision much easier as they get the best player available that also fulfills a need. Gardner is a shutdown corner with outstanding tools. He did not allow a touchdown pass in 2021 and would significantly upgrade the Vikings last (32) ranked passing defense. He showed in the College Football Playoff against Alabama that he can hold his own against elite talent. As a true freshman in 2019, Stingley was one of LSU's best players on the way to its national title. Stingley has played in just 10 games over the past two seasons and has some inconsistent tape. However, Stingley has significant upside and could become the shutdown corner that the Vikings have been searching for in the last 10 years. The Vikings have Patrick Peterson, who also played at LSU, that can serve in a mentor role for the young cornerback. If both these players are gone by pick 12, they could also go with Trent McDuffie, CB, Washington or Kyle Hamilton, S, Notre Dame. Both of these players would upgrade the talent in the Vikings secondary, which is a priority. McDuffie is the real deal; the stat you'll see most often is that he didn't allow a single touchdown in coverage over the past two seasons and he goes all out on every play. Expect him to be a Day 1 starter. The Vikings are also lacking depth at safety and Harrison Smith is not getting any younger. Hamilton is a playmaking safety in a 6-foot-4 frame who would immediately raise the ceiling of the Vikings defense. He can play in the box, out of the slot and as a center fielder. Safeties typically do not get drafted this high but Hamilton is a unique and special defender.

- **Take the best Defensive End/Edge Rusher** – Continuing to add athletic playmakers on the defensive line to pressure the quarterback is a priority. The Vikings will be moving to a 3-4 base defense so they need to add players that fit this defensive scheme. Three players that may make sense at pick #12 include Jermaine Johnson, DE, Florida State, Keyvon Thibodeaux, DE, Oregon and George Karlaftis, DE,

Purdue. Johnson played high school football at Eden Prairie, Mn with Bud Grant's son - Head Coach Mike Grant. Johnson totaled 70 tackles, 11.5 sacks, two forced fumbles and two passes batted in 2021. He made big plays in run defense and the pass rush. Johnson was a high-effort player for the Seminoles, making a lot of stops in the ground game along with putting steady pressure on the quarterback. Johnson has significant upside due to his athletic profile. Thibodeaux recorded 49 tackles, seven sacks, one pass batted and two forced fumbles in 2021, but he also spent much of the year dealing with a bad ankle. Thibodeaux has a high ceiling but was inconsistent in 2021. If Thibodeaux puts it all together, you're talking about All-Pro-level talent. He has the type of physical traits NFL teams love but some question his leadership and he has a tendency to take plays off. If the Vikings can coach him up, he may be the best player in this draft. In 2021, Karlaftis recorded 36 tackles, 4.5 sacks, two passes broken up and two forced fumbles. He is an outstanding pass rusher but he needs to improve his ability to stop the run. He brings excellent intangibles and leadership skills. We really like these players and pairing them with Zaddarius Smith and Danielle Hunter would give the Vikings a formidable pass rush.

We believe the Vikings will stay at pick 12 and either address cornerback/Safety or defensive end. We think the choices will come down to the following: Derek Stingley, CB, LSU, Trent McDuffie, CB, Washington, Kyle Hamilton, S, Notre Dame, Jermaine Johnson, DE, Florida State, Keyvon Thibodeaux, DE, Oregon and George Karlaftis, DE, Purdue.

If Derek Stingley, CB, LSU, falls to the Vikings at pick 12, they should immediately pick him. However, they may need to trade up to select Stingley. We believe he will be there and at pick #12 the Vikings will select Derek Stingley. Stingley is a shutdown corner that the Vikings have been searching for the past 10 years. He will immediately upgrade the secondary which was ranked dead last in the NFL last year. Patrick Peterson, who also played at LSU, can serve in a mentor role with Stingley. Stingley would also be reunited with his former defensive coordinator, Daronte Jones, who is now the Vikings defensive backs coach.

They will then target Defensive End, Guard, Safety, Wide Receiver and Cornerback in round 2 and beyond.

This draft will continue to infuse young talent on both sides of the ball for the Vikings. They still have one of the youngest teams in the NFL and they will continue to build young talent. These picks fill needs while at the same time fits into the best-athlete-available mantra the Vikings have maintained. Based on the Vikings choice of Stingley in round one, the Vikings will then look to add a defensive end, safety, guard and wide receiver in the remaining rounds of the draft.

ROUND TWO - Options in round 2 that the Vikings could draft:

If they Vikings take Stingley with their first-round pick, the options for the second-round pick include:

1. **Kyler Gordon, CB, Washington -** Gordon recorded 45 tackles, two interceptions and seven passes broken up in 2021. He played well against good competition. Gordon is a smooth cover corner who has good discipline and fundamentals to go along with a quality skill set. We like his well-rounded skill set and coverage ability. Gordon has the solid frame and strength of an outside corner for the NFL. He has zero picks thus far in college, so improving his ball production would help him to rise.

2. **Travis Jones, DT, Connecticut -** Jones went under the radar in 2021, but he is a big nose tackle who flashed some pass-rush ability over the past two years, putting up 3.5 sacks each season. Jones also was a solid run defender with 126 tackles over the past three seasons. He then had a good week of practice at the Senior Bowl. Jones is a heavy nose tackle who could be a tough run defender in the NFL and contribute to the pass rush by creating a push. At the 2022 NFL Scouting Combine, Jones continued his strong postseason with a very good workout, showing impressive speed for a large nose tackle.

3. **Lewis Cine, S, Georgia -** Cine was a valuable defender for the Bulldogs in 2021, locking down the deep middle of the field. He totaled 73 tackles, an interception and nine passes batted. As a sophomore in 2020, Cine had 52 tackles and three passes broken up. Cine has a good skill set with upside and he has a chance to get drafted in the first round. He is versatile and could play either safety position but Cine is at his best closer to the line of scrimmage as a strong safety. He helped himself at the combine with his interview, as he his football IQ was very impressive to go along with his work ethic, character, and leadership skills. He then had a good field workout with a fabulous 40.

4. **Andrew Booth Jr, CB, Clemson -** Booth collected 37 tackles, three interceptions and three passes broken up in 2021. He has a good skill set and is a talented cover corner. Booth's draft stock was hurt by having double hernia surgery in the spring of 2022. If the Vikings do not drat a corner in round 1, Booth could be an option in round 2.

5. **DeMarvin Leal, DT, Texas A&M -** In 2021, Leal had 58 tackles, 8.5 sacks, one forced fumble and two passes defended. The Aggies played him at end and tackle, but his pass-rushing talents are most dangerous on the inside. He provides excellent pass rushing skills from the inside and he's instinctive versus the run.

6. **Devonte Wyatt, DT, Georgia -** Wyatt is a tough nose tackle who is adept at stuffing lanes and making stops in the ground game. In 2021, Wyatt collected 39 tackles, 2.5 sacks, two forced fumbles and one pass batted. Wyatt helped himself with a strong finish to the season capped off by a good week at the Senior Bowl and an excellent combine workout.

7. **Daxton Hill, S, Michigan -** Hill flashed some nice ability over the past few seasons for the Wolverines. His best trait for the NFL is his ability to line up and cover slot receivers. Hill's quickness, flexibility and fluid athleticism allow him to line up at the line of scrimmage or pick receivers up in off-man coverage. The tape of Hill as a safety is not as impressive compared to when he played nickel corner. In 2021, Hill recorded 69 tackles, two interceptions and eight passes broken up. In 2019, he had 36 tackles, an interception and three passes defended. Hill was even better in the shortened 2020 season, recording 45 tackles, an interception and four passes broken up.

8. **Cristian Watson, WR, North Dakota State -** The Tampa, Florida native Watson was a good player for the Bison, but he set his draft stock on fire with an excellent Senior Bowl. The 6-foot-4, 211-pounder showed good speed and run-after-the-catch ability to go along with mismatch size. After the Senior Bowl, Watson was superb at the combine, showing excellent speed in the 40 and explosion in the jumps. In 2021, Watson caught 43 passes for 800 yards and seven touchdowns. He also rushed for a touchdown with 114 yards on 15 carries. Watson showed big-play ability in 2020 - 24.3 yards per catch - and 2019 - 21.5 yards per catch.

9. **Jaquan Brisker, S, Penn State -** Brisker is a talented player with speed, instincts and versatility, plus he is willing to get physical. He recorded 43 tackles, two interceptions and four passes broken up in 2021. Brisker is a well-rounded talented safety with run defense and coverage skills. Brisker projects as a free safety for the NFL, and he has a good skill set for the next level. With his size, speed and athleticism, he will definitely improve a team's secondary at the next level.

10. **Logan Hall, DE, Houston -** Hall broke out for the Cougars in 2021, showing length, strength, quickness, and athleticism to set the edge. On the year, he had 47 tackles and six sacks. The 6-foot-6, 260-pounder has the strength to set the edge in the ground game and has the length to play 3-4 five-technique defensive end. Hall looks like the rare five-technique prospect who is capable of putting pressure on the quarterback.

11. **Desmond Ridder, QB, Cincinnati –** Ridder had some inconsistencies in 2021. He led the Bearcats to blowouts over Miami of Ohio and Murray State before having some ugly moments in a back-and-forth game against Indiana. Ridder came back to play well overall in leading Cincinnati to a road win over Notre Dame, but he struggled against and almost gave the game away to a bad Navy team and also struggled against Alabama. In 2021, Ridder completed 65 percent of his passes for 3,334 yards, 30 touchdowns and eight interceptions. He did not impress at the Senior Bowl, but he worked out well at the combine. The Vikings have met with Ridder.

Assuming the Vikings pick Stingley with their first pick we believe the Vikings will look to improve the safety position by selecting from the following: Jaquan Brisker, S, Penn State, Daxton Hill, S, Michigan or Lewis Cine, S, Georgia.

We believe the Vikings will pick Lewis Cine, S, Georgia in the second round.

ROUND THREE - Options in round 3 that the Vikings could draft – this is where you start to build your team

1. **Kerby Joseph, S, Illinois -** Joseph put together an impressive senior year, recording 57 tackles, five interceptions and two passes defended. He showed a huge improvement over the previous three years, over which he notched zero interceptions and 60 tackles. At the Senior Bowl, Joseph had a solid week of practice. Joseph brings deep free safety ability as he anticipates passes well and is a threat to make big plays with impressive ball skills. Joseph needs some development and must become stronger, but he has upside to be a starting free safety at the next level.

2. **Marcus Jones, CB, Houston -** Jones was one of the most dangerous ball hawks in college football in 2021, putting up some fabulous ball production. He notched five interceptions, 13 passes broken up and 47 tackles on the year. Over his career, he totaled 32 passes broken up and 10 interceptions. While Jones (5-8, 185) plays the ball well, his size limitations make him a slot candidate only in the NFL. Teams are mostly interested in Jones because of his return skills as he projects to be a dangerous punt and kick returner in the NFL.

3. **Myjai Sanders, DE, Cincinnati -** Sanders had a quality year for Bearcats even though he did not produce a big stat line. He totaled 41 tackles, 2.5 sacks and six passes broken up in 2021. In 2020 Sanders was a dangerous edge rusher for the Bearcats, notching seven sacks with 31 tackles and five passes batted. He had 40 tackles and four sacks in 2019. Sanders has speed and athleticism on the edge, but he needs to get stronger and fill out his frame. His best fit in the NFL could be as a 3-4 outside linebacker which would fit the Vikings defensive scheme.

4. **Boye Mafe, DE, Minnesota -** Mafe collected 34 tackles, seven sacks and one forced fumble in 2021. He helped himself with a good week at the Senior Bowl and worked out well at the combine posting a 4.53 in the 40. If Mafe were taller and had more length, he would have a better shot at being first-round pick. Mafe played well in the shortened 2020 season, totaling 27 tackles with 4.5 sacks and two passes batted. The NFL advance scouts listed Mafe as an outside linebacker, but at his size, he could grow into being a defensive end in a 4-3 scheme. Mafe's best fit might come as a 3-4 outside linebacker which would fit the Vikings defensive scheme.

5. **Nick Cross, DB, Maryland -** Cross was a decent defender for Maryland over the 2019 and 2020 seasons. As a sophomore, he notched 45 tackles and two interceptions and five passes defended. Cross was solid in the shortened 2020 season with 23 stops, an interception and three passes broken up. He put together his best season in 2021 with 66 tackles, three sacks, two forced fumbles, five passes defended and three interceptions. Cross has good size for a strong safety in the NFL and he has posted tremendous workout numbers.

6. **Cole Strange, G, Chattanooga -** After redshirting a season, Strange broke into the starting lineup at guard and locked down the position for the next four years. His steady and productive play earned him a Senior Bowl invitation. For the NFL, Strange could stand to fill out his frame with more strength, but he has good height and length. Strange brings a nasty steak and plays through the whistle which was

evident at the Senior Bowl. He also adds position flexibility as he can play center or guard.

7. **John Metchie, WR, Alabama -** Metchie was solid in 2021, but not as impressive as he was in 2020 when DeVonta Smith and Jaylen Waddle were commanding the attention of defenses. If Metchie did not tear hos ACL, we may project him higher. When healthy, Metchie can make big plays in the passing game. He does not have mismatch size or game-breaking speed but he produces big plays on the field. Metchie was also very good in 2020, producing some huge plays for the Alabama offense. He averaged 18 yards per reception with 782 yards on 44 catches with six touchdowns. Metchie (6-0, 195) could produce at the next level but he is not considered a number 1 wideout.

8. **Perrion Winfrey, DT, Oklahoma -** In 2021, Winfrey totaled 5.5 sacks and 23 tackles. Winfrey has good speed but he lacks instincts, especially in the run game. Winfrey had an excellent week of practice at the Senior Bowl, causing havoc behind the line by using his speed to fire gaps and make plays. In the pass rush especially, Winfrey got the better of the offensive linemen. He really helped himself in Mobile.

We believe the pick will come down to Boye Mafe, DE, Minnesota or Cole strange, G, Chattanooga. We predict the Vikings will select Cole Strange, G, Chattanooga with their third-round pick.

ROUND FOUR – The Vikings do not have a pick in Round 4 this year.

ROUNDS 5 - 7: Options for Vikings in Rounds 5 -7:

The following players are options for the Vikings in rounds 5-7:

1. Jack Jones, CB, Arizona State
2. Jalen Pitre, CB, Baylor
3. JT Woods, S, Baylor
4. Mike Harley Jr., WR, Miami
5. Tay Martin, WR, Oklahoma State
6. Danny Grey, WR, SMU
7. Corey Sutton, WR, Appalachian State
8. Romeo Doubs, WR, Nevada
9. Alex Wright, DE, UAB
10. Esezi Otomewo, DE, Minnesota
11. David Anenih, LB, Houston
12. Cameron Goode, LB, California
13. Darien Butler, LB, Arizona State
14. Rasheed Walker, OT, Penn State
15. Jarrid Williams, OT, Miami
16. Kalon Barnes, CB, Baylor
17. Percy Butler, S, Louisiana Lafayette

The Vikings will draft a wide receiver in rounds 5-7 and hopefully they find a talent like Stefon Diggs who was drafted in the fifth round in 2015. They will choose from the following NFL prospects:

- Mike Harley Jr., WR, Miami
- Tay Martin, WR, Oklahoma State
- Danny Grey, WR, SMU
- Corey Sutton, WR, Appalachian State
- Romeo Doubs, WR, Nevada

Another intriguing prospect is Kalon Barnes, CB, Baylor. Barnes ran a 4.23 40-yard dash at the combine, which is the second fastest time in the history of the combine. He is raw and must improve his technique but one thing is always true in the NFL draft is you cannot teach speed and speed kills.

2022 NFL Draft Sleepers:

1. Aaron Johnson, OT, South Dakota State
2. Calvin Austin III, WR, Memphis
3. Charlie Kolar, TE, Iowa
4. Coby Bryant, CB, Cincinnati
5. Dontario Drummond, WR, Ole Miss
6. Jalen Nailor, WR, Michigan State
7. Malcom Rodriguez, LB, Oklahoma State
8. Kyle Phillips, WR, UCLA
9. Ty Davis-Price, RB, LSU
10. Dane Belton, S, Iowa
11. Thomas Booker, DT, Stanford
12. Jeffrey Gunter, DE, Coastal Carolina
13. Micah McFadden, LB, Indiana
14. Kyle Phillips, WR, UCLA
15. Zach Tom, G, Wake Forest
16. Jalen Wydermyer, TE, Texas A&M

These NFL prospects will not be drafted in the early rounds of the NFL draft but they have the potential to be very good football players at the next level.

The Vikings have a total of 8 picks this year. They can fill depth needs in several areas in this draft and obtain a starting offensive lineman. Most notably, the Vikings needs are:

- Cornerback
- Safety
- Defensive End
- Offensive Line

We will update our readers with a post-draft report after the draft.

Mink and Obie!