



CINCINNATI BENGALS

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NFL DRAFT — ROUND 5

BRIAN CALLAHAN
Offensive coordinator
and
JUSTIN HILL
Running backs coach

What do you like about Chase?

Callahan: "He's super productive. I think he was top-five in rushing in the NCAA — over 1600 yards I think. Really productive, has great vision and great patience. He's got good speed, good burst — just a really good ball carrier with really high character, a top level style of personality. Really, really intelligent. I really enjoyed the meetings that we've had with him. He's a great fit for us and for that running back room. He does a lot of things well, and I think he's going to be able to help us."

Is he a zone-scheme guy?

Callahan: "It's hard to put a label on a guy like that at this point. I think he's just a good runner, whatever scheme they've run in college. There'll be some similarities. We'll have some things he's never done before. All these guys are run out of the shotgun these days too, so you get a good feel for his ability to do that. But yeah, I think he's got the ability to run all the schemes, personally."

How does he project as a pass blocker?

Callahan: "We'll see. There's not as limited tape (with him) on pass protection as some of these guys. You just try to hope you find a guy that is willing to do that. He's smart enough to understand the scheme and where that fits for him and his role in it. But I think that's always an area for young backs that have to come in and earn that right to be able to protect, and he's going to be no different. He'll have to learn and figure it out as he goes and hopefully he can ascend into a role that's helpful in protection, but (there's) nothing that says that he can't do it."

Do you see him being paired with Joe Mixon in the backfield?

Callahan: "We just need guys that can carry the ball. Joe can't take every rep, and he's been a productive ball carrier, so he'll be able to spell Joe when he's needed. We'll have roles for those guys as they determine them. We've got a lot of hope and excitement about Trayveon Williams and what he did in limited roles last year. And obviously Chris Evans is still here as a guy that we've felt really good about, particularly in the pass game. As competition, as depth, as a guy that can carry the ball, he has proven effective. And those guys will be battling it out for that third back on game day."

You said at the combine that you needed to get more explosive, specifically in the pass game. Does his skill set allow that particular part of what you're trying to get in the run game?

Callahan: "Absolutely. That's what drew us to him in the first place — it's why we felt really good about him at this spot. There's a handful of good backs that are still left out there that we liked, but he had great production. He's got good speed, and he's been able to make (players) miss and make long runs, and that part was attractive about his tape."

What about pass catching? Does he have good ability to do that out of the backfield?

Callahan: "Yeah. It's a skill that we test these guys. Route trees and everything that it says on tape, he'd be an effective pass catcher. He's still a better runner than he is a catcher at this point, but he's got the skills to perform in the passing game."

What has stuck out about his qualities on tape and in meeting him that you think would be a good fit here?

Hill: "Just like Brian said, you see his speed, you see his vision. He's got good patience as a runner. He's a really good ball carrier. But to me, what stood out and what separates him from everybody else, (is our) conversation with him. He's an extremely high-character guy, with a high football IQ. Honestly, (he was) one of my favorite guys to meet with throughout this whole process at the combine, and Zoom meetings afterward as well. He's just an all-around great football player. I think he's going to be a great fit in the locker room, and obviously a great fit in my room. But (when) you have a conversation with him, you know right away. He's about his business. He's a football guy, screaming (with) high character. And selfishly, as a coach, that's the type of guy you want to work with. I think he'll be a great addition."

Instinct is a big thing also with running back to pair with vision. How are his instincts?

Hill: “Again, I think he’s just an all-around really good ball carrier. He’s got vision, he’s got instincts. And then again, he’s got good top-end speed to hit a home run. I think that’s something that we need in the room.”

Some of the knocks on him are how much he did in college, how much wear could potentially be on his body and ball protection. Did you guys view either of those two things as things that are correctable? Where are you guys at with those two specific things?

Hill: “I think that’s something you can control. There’s some things you can’t control — how tall you are, how fast you are. How you take care of the football, that’s something you can control — and that’s at every level. That’s everybody in our room right now. We talk about that daily; we preach it. I don’t see that being an issue or anything different. That’s something that we’re just going to continue to work on with him, and everybody else in the room.”

When you look at running backs across rounds, are there specific skills you’re prioritizing or are you just looking for the best back?

Callahan: “Yeah, the draft was full of a lot of different types of backs. There’s some guys that weren’t as good of ball carriers, weren’t going to carry the load for you as a first-second down, but really dynamic in the pass game — Jahmyr Gibbs for example. Those guys are really, really good players. There’s a lot of guys that excel in the protection scheme. There’s a couple of guys that fit that role really well — maybe they weren’t as good of ball carriers as some of the other guys. There’s some really good heavy-handed big backs that were available. There’s some smaller, speedier backs that were available. Really at the end of the day, it’s a preference. There’s going to be teams that like guys for a lot of different reasons. I thought it was a relatively deep draft at running back. There were a lot of good players that we would have felt comfortable with at a lot of different points in the draft. As it goes on, there’s still guys on our board that we liked, and we just felt Chase was the best of that group that was on our board currently. There’s some good players, it’s just what as a team, as an organization what are you looking for for your room, and there’s a lot of guys that fit different roles. There’s always things you’re looking for — pass pro, pass gain, ability to carry the ball. Not every back checks all three of those things, some check one or two, some might just check one. But there’s a lot of different variations in what people are looking for, and what fits at different teams. We just felt really good about Chase’s ability to carry the ball, his production, his personality and his character, and fit for us what we were looking for. It was the right time and place for us to pick him.”

I think running back is the only position where experience is viewed as wear and tear, and it can almost be a negative during this process. How did this help your evaluation of Chase?

Callahan: “Any productive college running back is probably going to have a lot of carries, just because a lot of times there’s one of them, and they hand the ball to that guy as much as possible, because it helps them win football games, and that’s all the people in charge there really cared about— they’re trying to win football games. There’s probably an argument to be made if a guy has carried the ball a ton, and you’re worried about wear and tear, but that doesn’t really concern me — it’s probably the last thing I would look at when I’m evaluating a running back prospect. I know there’s a small factor in it, it does matter to some degree. Obviously, the guys that have minimal wear and tear always feel better for their longevity, but at the end of the day we’re trying to find the best player, and if he’s got a bunch of carries and a bunch of yards that’s okay with me.”

Given the amount of carries he had at a high level, and you need him to come in and get a good amount of work as a rookie, does it help that he had so many carries so he knows what that responsibility is like?

Hill: “Yeah sure, I think at the end of the day we’re looking for production. Just kind of piggybacking off what Brian said, I don’t think a guy producing at a high level for two years back-to-back, that’s not a knock for me. I know you want guys to be fresh and healthy at the end of the day. I think the level of production that he’s had in back-to-back years just gives us confidence that he can come in and do it.”

Is Chase the kind of guy that complements the skill set of what Trayveon Williams and Chris Evans bring?

Hill: “Yeah, I think some of that is going to be determined in training camp, OTAs and preseason, but I think everybody’s got their own role, everybody excels at one thing. Obviously, you want to have a guy, or a couple guys that excel in as many things as possible. I think he’s a guy that stands possibly to be one of those guys — he’s a really good ball carrier. Any college running back coming into the league, pass protection is going to be the knock. They’ve got to learn it, figuring out protections, and third-down looks, it takes time. I don’t think it’s as big of a knock as what everybody is saying. I’m excited to see what he can do and how he fits in the offense.”

He had the best vertical jump and broad jump at the Combine. How do those test scores equate to what a player can do at the running back position?

Hill: “I think when you see his numbers at the Combine, if you watch the tape, it makes sense, because he’s explosive. You see the 40-inch vertical, you also see his shuttles, his 225, he’s got some twitch to him, he’s got strength, he’s got good top-end speed. You turn on the tape, and that makes sense, I see it, that shows up. That’s what you want to see. You want to see a guy who will test well, and then his numbers that he tested at the Combine that shows up on tape, and translates to production on the field.”

Is he a low center of gravity contact balance type guy? And a yards after contact kind of guy?

Hill: "Yeah, he's a guy that's going to finish forward. Yeah, low center of gravity. He's got good top-end speed, but he's a tough runner too — he's going to finish forward."

Brian, do you feel you have a lot of different style of running backs in that room now?

Callahan: "Yeah, I do. I like the makeup of the room. I knew we needed to add one at some point during the draft, and wasn't really sure what that was going to look like, or where that was going to be. Obviously, had high regard for Chase kind of all the way through the process. It turns out he was there at the right spot for us. But I like the makeup of the room in general. I think we have guys that have a nice blend of NFL experience. Obviously, Joe Mixon has been a fantastic player for a lot of years now, so you know what Joe brings to the table. Trayveon (Williams) I think is an ascending player. We've invested a lot of time and energy into Trayveon. I think he's made the requisite improvements, and when he had opportunities last year he performed well. So, hope to see as he gets more opportunities to perform even better. Same thing with Chris Evans — Chris has been a little bit of a limited role player for us as a pass game running back. He's got great hands, he's got really good ball skills as a back out of the backfield, and hopefully we'll see some improvement as a ball carrier in these games in the preseason, and for a chance for him to make a push too. It's a room that's got some diverse skill sets — guys that have a lot of different ways to do the job. I think that we have guys that have been productive in their careers as well. Trayveon led the SEC in rushing I think two years in a row. We've got guys that know how to do the job, and I'm very excited about that."

During the pre-draft process how much did you interact with him?

Callahan: "Between Justin, you had the Combine and Zoom meetings."

Did you have any one-on-one with him?

Callahan: "One-on-one, no."

Samaje Perine was more than a third-down back, but he was a third-down back last year. With the guys you have, do you see a specific third-down back or a rotation? How do you see that?

Callahan: "We're going to find out. That's kind of the fun part. Samaje was proven, he was proven in that role, he was proven as a protector, he's a very experienced football player. I think that's evident by the fact that there were places that wanted him to ultimately be an almost starting caliber back for them in Denver. He performed well in that role here, and he earned that contract and the ability for that play time increase for him as he saw it. Hard to replace that player with guys that haven't done what he's done. We have guys that are a little bit unproven in that regard. Obviously, Chase is coming in as a rookie, Trayveon has limited reps, Chris has limited reps, so it's going to be a work in progress, and we're going to have to find that guy, and someone's going to have to step up and rise to that occasion for us. And we believe that they can — we've got guys in the room that can do it."

CHASE BROWN

Halfback; Illinois

Initial comments ...

"I feel extremely blessed. It's a great organization and I'm just ready to come in and learn and fit in with the team."

What makes your style of running conducive to the NFL and the Bengals?

"I've got speed, I've got burst, I've got patience and vision, and I use them to my advantage in every way possible. They have a great running back there right now, Joe Mixon, who I grew up watching and watched a lot through college, so I'm excited to come in, learn from him, learn from the coaching staff and produce on Sundays."

What do you like about Joe Mixon's game, and how do you see yourself applying what he does to your own game?

"He's versatile. His jump cut, his ability to get in and out of breaks — he's an overall great running back. His ability to stretch on outside zones and in the zone game is a lot of fun to watch."

How effective do you think you are in blitz pickup and pass protection?

"It's definitely something that I need to work on. Coming in, it's going to be something I'm extremely focused on. I'm blessed to have this opportunity to come in and get better."

Is that self-awareness to know you need to improve in pass protection, or have you heard that from scouts and coaches?

"It's an awareness thing, but also throughout meeting coaches, it's something that comes up. This is the longest interview that all football players go through. They break you down in every single way. They openly talk about your weaknesses and what you need to work on. I just know going in that that's something that I need to work on, and I'm not going to shy away from that."

How comfortable are you running routes out of the backfield?

"Extremely comfortable. It's something I do a lot in my offseason training. I didn't have a diverse route tree while I was at Illinois, but it's something that I'm confident in and something that I'm looking forward to once I get to Cincinnati."

How will you improve your ball security?

“Obviously, I’ve got to keep the ball close to my body, close to my chest. Definitely see improvement in that area.”

The Illinois offense is very different than the Bengals’ offense. Is there a part of your game that you’re excited to see translate in an offense that lets running backs do different things?

“Yeah. That’s the main thing, is being able to use my versatility. Things that I wasn’t able to do at Illinois, I’m going to be excited to do in Cincinnati.”

Have you talked to Ted Karras?

“I spoke with him on the phone.”

How would you classify your running style?

“I’m a patient runner. I allow things to develop up front, and when the opportunity is there to make a play and get through a tight gap, I do it right there. Especially coming into Cincinnati, in a really good offense, a good team that’s a playoff caliber team, I’m just blessed to be in this position to come and help them.”

Is there something about facing Big Ten defenses that you think will help you prepare for the NFL?

“It’s a competitive conference. The NFL is a pro league, it’s as competitive as it gets. The fact that I was able to play against Michigan and other Big Ten opponents on a weekly basis will help me in the NFL.”

What has this weekend been like for you and your brother, Sydney Brown, who was drafted by the Eagles in the third round?

“It’s exciting. I was able to sit there with Syd yesterday and watch him go, and there’s nothing but love. But at the same time, it was stressful. My mind doesn’t know where I’m going and where I’m going to end up. I’m just blessed that my name was called.”

Did you guys have a friendly bet on who would get drafted first?

“No, we didn’t. We just wanted the best situation for each other, and I’m happy for him.”

Was there ever a point where you thought about Cincinnati during the process?

“Honestly, multiple times. When I saw the pick coming up, I knew that it was a possibility because I met with them at the Combine and also on Zoom after the Combine. It was a lot of things going through my head, but I definitely knew it was a possibility.”

How does it sound playing with Joe Burrow?

“I watched him in college — absolute dog. He’s a tremendous player, getting better every single year and I’m excited to get to work with him.”