



## CINCINNATI BENGALS

APRIL 27, 2024

NFL DRAFT — ROUNDS 6a/6b AND 7a/7b AND WRAP-UP

### **ZAC TAYLOR** **Head coach**

**You took a lot of players you brought in for top-30 visits. Is it just a coincidence that you ended up drafting them, or do those visits play a significant role in your selection process?**

"Well, I think it's certainly helpful to gain information about them. Sometimes it's just the way that it falls. Duke (Tobin) has done a great job of putting the order (together). Obviously, there are other guys that didn't come on visits that are in that order. I think that just the way it came to us this year was it happened that we took a lot of the guys (we met with).

"We also felt very comfortable with them. Some guys you bring in and you (check) off the list. Those are all guys that we check-marked that were on the list as well. So I think that's a really good pre-draft process that Duke and the scouts have put in for us, and it paid off today."

**You seem to really enjoy calling the players you've drafted on the phone. Is that something that you look forward to every year?**

"I do. There's an art to it. I (try to) pace out their celebration with my words. There's also the element of not trying to repeat myself for every call, because I'm being filmed for all of them, and I'm aware of that. But it is cool. You get a chance to have that first moment ... sometimes it may be perceived as lack of emotion on their part. You can tell when they're getting all choked up, and you can tell that there's people around them so you can feel (it). I've done enough the calls now where I can feel the significance for each person. It's pretty fun.

"Somebody was screaming right behind me (on) one of them. I can't remember who it was — Daijahn Anthony, I think. That was pretty cool."

**Was there any conversation about potentially moving up and trading some of those picks?**

"No ... You field a lot of phone calls to move back, or move up. Duke handles that well, and we just make our best judgment. Sometimes just staying pat and (being) patient and (letting) your guys can come to you — it works out and you're happy to have those other picks that you didn't give up."

**Your 2021 offensive linemen that were drafted — Jackson Carman, Trey Hill, D'Ante Smith — as you look at your interior offensive line, they're continuing to be in those depth roles. How important is this offseason for them to really solidify those depth roles?**

"We always want to continue to bring in competition. Those are guys that continue to develop in our system and have opportunity. There's competition for them. That's a productive thing for our team."

**What stood out to you about tight end Erick All?**

"A lot of things. I think he can have true separation as a route runner and (receiver). You can watch him; you watch a couple those games that stand out where (you can see that) he can run some isolation routes. They used him downfield. He's got some split out as a receiver, and some down-the-field, play-action stuff. (He also is) involved in the screen game. He can be a point-of-attack blocker. He likes the physicality aspect of that, and he's willing to do it.

"Obviously the injuries are what allowed him to come to us. Otherwise, I don't think there's any shot in the world he would have been there when we got him. I enjoyed my visit with him, but again, the tape spoke very loudly for him and I think he's a really good fit for us."

**You doubled down on that position by taking Tanner McLachlan a few picks after All ...**

"Yeah."

**What stood out there?**

"The value with him. (I was) surprised that he made it that far. Again, I think (he has) a lot of similarities to what I just said about Erick. This guy, he can win in the pass game. He can win, and I think you guys and ladies at least can picture tight ends that have had success here in the past couple of years for us where they turned something short into something much bigger on a third-and-five.

They turn into first downs. They break tackles.

"He's got a really good zone awareness. He just has that savviness that I think is critical for our tight ends to have. He can be a threat down the middle of field. He's got good nuance on his routes. I think he's continued to develop as a blocker. He's got the body type for it (at) 6'5". I think he could be up in the high 240 (pounds). We did a lot of research on these guys. I don't even know how many times we've watched these tight ends, but we really like him. (Former Arizona University Head Coach) Jedd Fisch is a good friend of mine, so I've watched Arizona play for the last three years, every game probably. I'd seen Tanner, and then I studied the tape and I really liked it. It confirmed all the things that I thought about him and really stamped him as a (good) person as well, so I'm excited about those two guys."

**Yesterday you talked about filling positions of need and certain spots. It feels like as you attacked a lot of those positions. Do you feel good about where you stand today, based on what you guys did in this draft?**

"I do. I do. I think Duke did a really good job of managing it, (and) maybe just having the patience over the course of the draft to take oftentimes our best player out there that fit a position of need, and it worked out well for us. I think that his experience really kicks in there, and the experience in the room (does, too). It really paid off for us these last couple of days, and I'm really happy with how this thing played out. I think it allowed us to get much better in the short term, and long term as well. We've got clear visions for all these guys that are walking in the door here, so I think it's a really good class for us."

**We know what happened last year in the AFC North. You wanted to change that, with a lot of that being at the line of scrimmage. Did that lead the conversation for you guys over this entire draft period — being stronger, being more able to handle the AFC North and set the tone of this division?**

"It's a point of emphasis. We knew it was going to be a deep offensive tackle draft, and if there was one we liked, grab him. And that's what happened. Defensive tackle was a point of emphasis for us. (In) an ideal world, we're going to get two that can contribute, and that was not a sure thing that could happen. Sometimes, runs can go on these guys, and we got two that we really liked, that we've talked about extensively how they fit us — that we have visions for. They're going to help us now, and they're going to help us in the future as well. For those three guys specifically, they really fit well for us."

"Like you said, it's a physical division. Big men that have relentless effort and play with a lot of physicality matter in this division."

**Was there a sense that maybe the guys you had ranked high would still be there when you would be drafting?**

"Yeah. That's naturally just how it works. Obviously, the guys we grade high, we think highly of, and who knows? Maybe the team behind us was going to pick them every single time? I don't know. Sometimes you're crossing your fingers as the picks are dropping by — is that guy going to be there? And he's there. The patience pays off for us."

**What can your seventh round pick Matt Lee learn from a guy like Ted Karras?**

"I think it's a great fit for him. He did a great job down there this year in Miami. So I think at that point (in the draft), that was a great pick for us. We're excited to get him in here, and I think Ted will take to him and have a chance to show him the ropes."

**What did you like about Lee?**

"I think he's got a well-rounded game. I think he's a good fit to come in here and compete."

**Was there a reason to draft players with high potential that can develop here?**

"We had a good roster coming into the draft, and so you get a chance for guys to earn an opportunity right away, if they earn it. If not, they get a chance to learn behind some really good players that are going to help them develop. They're going to compete against them, obviously. I think the character of our team, they're going to help these guys come along because they know we need them all to help us win. Again, we've got good visions for these guys. They all hit us at spots where we needed competition or we needed depth, so I think it's overall a really good draft."

**When evaluating receivers, how important was explosiveness and being able to move around?**

"Speed and play strength matter, especially in our division. You don't get a lot of free access the way this division plays out. There's plenty of guys that with clean air out there can run fast and go track down the field. We need guys that can play physical and create separation and have strong hands at the catch point. You want to talk about Jermaine (Burton) specifically, you can see him see him run all sorts of routes from all positions. You see him making contested plays down the field, you see him run away from people down the field, you see no drops on tape this year — didn't see a single one. And you saw run after the catch. You saw great scramble awareness, getting in phase with the quarterback and creating big plays on scrambles. So, I just think he's got the ability to really add to the competition in that room. I'm really excited. We obviously have two set in stone starters in Ja'Marr Chase and Tee Higgins, and now we've got Jermaine, Andrei (Iosivas) and Charlie (Jones), who we took last year, Trenton Irwin, who has always continued to roles and ways to help this team, and then there's the guys behind them as well. It's just a really deep room. There's going to be opportunity for all of those guys and I'm excited to see how it all plays out."

**How rare is it to find that ability at wide receiver in the draft?**

"You want guys that fit you. There's a lot of receivers on the board. We don't want them all. Sometimes you're happy to see them

go somewhere else, sometimes you think that's a great fit somewhere else, it just doesn't fit either what we're doing or how we're built right now in the receiver room already. You want someone that you have a vision for, this is where this guy can come in and help us short term and long term. Jermaine (Burton) is one of those guys where we see a fit now and in the future, so it's we were real happy he was there in the third round, and we could go grab him and he can help us."

**In your history with these rookies, what causes them to be successful?**

"The ones I've had the opportunity to talk to so far, stress that this is day one. You get a chance to create your own foundation and build on it from there. Like I've told some of them, when you've got veterans in your room that you should be right there on their hip doing everything they tell you to do. You've got a chance to start this thing off the right way and become a really good pro, and have really positive interactions with everybody you come across in the city because it's a great city, when you're out at to dinner on these draft nights, and all that stuff. I've really, really enjoyed the couple people we've had in the building so far. We're going to continue to get more that I'll get to know better as we get them in here. Just stressing to them that this is day one of the rest of your life and you get an opportunity with a clean slate to start it off the right way and be a great pro for us."

**With this draft class, do you feel you got better as a team?**

"I do. We really like these guys that we grabbed. I think, like I said, that we've got great vision for these guys. I think they all serve a purpose for us. They're all going to have a chance to compete. They're going to have to earn those opportunities, but what we know about them, they're going to embrace that."

**Daijahn Anthony has an interesting background starting in Division II and ending up in the SEC. How did he earn this opportunity?**

"He's earned it. You go through how he ended up at Shepherd. You go through how he ended up at Liberty. You go through how he ended up at Ole Miss. I appreciate his story and why he did all the things that he did to get to where he's at today. To have his name called on Draft Night, I think is special to him. He's a guy that that you learn more information about when you bring him in on the 30 visit. Our scouts had done that, our coaches got a chance to do that. We really liked him, thought that was a really good fit for him. But I do appreciate his story when you hear from him and the things he's gone through to get to where he is today."

**What position room is he in?**

"Safety."

**Any update on Dax Hill?**

"No, I don't have any update. I appreciate how Dax has approached this offseason. It would be fair to Dax before everybody starts Tweeting it all out — he'll be in the corner room right now. Now that we've gotten through the draft and seen how the draft is going to lay out, it does make sense for me to address that now. He's done a good job. He's known that, and he did a good job speaking how I wanted the guys to do that until I say something. But he's going to have a chance to go out there and compete in the corner room."

**When a player requests a trade like Trey Hendrickson, what is your reaction and how do you handle that?**

"You let Trey voice his concerns. I'm listening, I've got open ear to him. I love Trey. I've told Trey that. We want Trey to play here next year for us. He's going to play here next year for us. He's going to have success, we're going to have success and I'm excited for that."

**Back to Dax Hill. Will he compete to start at cornerback?**

"One of the reasons you took him was because of all the different various things you'd seen on tape from him. He's a superb athlete. He's got great size. He did a good amount of coverage at Michigan playing inside there, covering slots, played some outside. We've seen it from him, and we think it's the best opportunity right now to help our team. Again, that versatility was what made him the pick that he was. We're really excited for his future. He has done a tremendous job embracing this opportunity and I'm excited to see him go out there and compete."

**Outside or inside?**

"He's got flexibility to do it all. Again, we've taken a lot of guys that have a lot of flexibility. Those guys, they really all start outside and then we shake it all out and they play inside. Just the way it all shakes out, they got opportunities to do both. I think there's a lot of flexibility there."

**Do you think he can compete for the starting job?**

"I do."

**TANNER McLACHLAN**

**Tight end; Arizona**

**Congratulations on being drafted by an NFL team. What was your reaction?**

"Just pure joy. I'm excited to be come be part of that organization and I'm going to give everything I've got to not only Cincinnati,

but that Bengals' organization."

**How much did your athleticism give you an advantage in your college career?**

"I think when you watch my film, a lot of scouts, GM's, whatever and coaches, you see that jump out. Hopefully it crosses over to the NFL and continues to develop as I go, and everything will continue to develop. I'm looking forward to it all."

**What has today been like for you? Did you think you might go earlier or is it a relief?**

"You know what, God's got a plan for all of us and I'm right where I need to be at. I cannot wait to get there."

**What were the conversations like with the Bengals before the draft?**

"Just routine conversations. Like I said, I'm overjoyed right now, so I'm at a loss for words and just excited to get going."

**How impressed were you with Bengals tight end coach James Casey?**

"I really liked Coach Casey. We had some good conversations and he liked my game. I'm glad he liked it enough to believe in me, as well as the rest of the staff. Once again, just overwhelmed and super excited to get out there."

**You grew up in Canada. What was your background with football?**

"It was Canadian football through high school and then I did I did one year of American football in Arizona."

**In college what was the balance of where they lined you up — in-line, slot, that kind of stuff?**

"They really did everything, and that was the beauty of playing at Arizona. I played in a pro-style offense, so I was able to line up on the outside, line up in the slot, line up in-line, so whatever they asked me I felt like I could go out and execute. I'm hoping Cincinnati feels the same way this upcoming year."

**Chase Brown, one of the Bengals running backs, is Canadian. Do you know about Chase, and any chance your paths have crossed before?**

"I did not know about Chase, and I'm going to have to reach out to him, because there's not many of us down there, so that's really good to hear."

**Joe Burrow, Ja'Marr Chase, Tee Higgins, obviously a lot of well-known star skill position players on this Bengals roster. How do you feel about joining that group?**

"I can't wait. I can't wait to be around guys like that. Whatever is asked of me, I'm excited to go do it, and do it to the best of my abilities. Overwhelmed again, and I'm so excited to go play with those guys, and I'm just looking forward to it all."

**Do you feel like your age is a benefit to you?**

"Yeah, and through the process some said it was a benefit, some said it was a negative. I believe it to be a benefit. I've always been kind of a late bloomer, and I'm going to ride with it. My age is what it is, and I'm excited to go out there and continue to develop. I think my best ball is ahead of me."

**Did you know that Joe Burrow's dad played in the CFL?**

"I did not know that."

**A little icebreaker for you when you meet him ...**

"Yeah, for real."

**Have you paid attention to the draft closely the last couple of days? Do you know you are already the second tight end selected by the Bengals?**

"Yeah, 100 percent. Erick (All) and I got to know each other at the Combine, so looking forward to getting to work with him, and the rest of the tight end room. It's just going to be development for both of us, so I'm looking forward to it all."

**Do you model your game after any current NFL players?**

"There's a few, but none in particular at the moment. I'm just excited to get going."

**What about putting your hand in the dirt at the end of the line of scrimmage, blocking defensive ends, outside linebackers at the NFL level, is that something you look forward to as a competitor?**

"One hundred percent. I kind of touched on it earlier, but any situation that they trust me to go in and execute, and I'm going to do it to the best of my ability. Again, I mentioned it before, I've got lots to develop, and lots of room to grow, and I'm just going to have that chip on my shoulder and continue to work through this year, and hopefully the next few years."

**Cedric Johnson**

## **Defensive end; Mississippi**

**Tell us a little bit about your playing style and what you hope to bring to the Bengals as an edge rusher ...**

"I hope to bring my speed, my strength, my versatility to the team. I'm just simply ready to be a part of it. I don't even know too much to say really, but I'm just excited to bring everything I can."

**What was it like when you got the call?**

"Honestly, I'm just sitting here waiting and waiting, and I finally got the call, and they're like 'Is this Cedric?' (I responded) 'It is,' and they're like 'This is the Bengals, we're going to take you in the sixth round.' I don't know, I kind of just froze for a second, and didn't know what to think. I'm just super happy and blessed to be a part of this team."

**This time in the draft, the Bengals usually take the best player on their board, and a lot of times they anticipated that player being drafted maybe a round or two earlier than they thought. Did they communicate anything like that to you, or just haven't gotten to that point yet?**

"We haven't got to that point yet. I'm happy wherever I landed. I'm just happy to be a part of the team."

**Day three can be stressful. How did you pass the time until you got the call?**

"Just talking to my friends and family that are here, a little bit of Tik Toking, just trying anything to pass the time, really."

**How would you describe the athleticism you bring to the defensive line?**

"I bring a lot of athleticism. My explosion with my get off, my speed when I'm running, my strength — I feel like I've got a lot to bring to the team."

**You won the Chucky Mullins award. One of those former winners is Bengals cornerback Mike Hilton. Do you know him at all?**

"Yes, indeed."

**How well do you know him, what's that relationship?**

"I don't really know him like that. I know he's one of our Ole Miss guys, one of our legends from here."

**What were your connections with Cincinnati? Did you talk to them or Zoom with them at all, or have any idea this could happen?**

"I had some Zoom meetings with two of the coaches there — Coach (Marion) Hobby and Coach (Mark) Duffner. We had some good conversations. I talked a lot with the scouts, and had some great conversations. They showed some interest in me from the start."

**A lot of scouting reports indicate that you're versatile. How versatile are you up and down the defensive line?**

"Very versatile. I've played a zero-technique, three-technique, all kinds from a zero to a five — I can do it all. I feel like I'm going to add a lot of versatility to the team."

**One of the NFL's better pass rushers is here in Trey Hendrickson. Do you plan to be a sponge, and try and learn as much from him as you can?**

"Absolutely. I'd be a fool not to. I want to soak up as much knowledge as I can from all the guys there, just keep adding to my game, just keep getting better and better so I can be a great asset to the team."

**Are you better as a run defender or pass rusher?**

"For sure pass rush, and I'm continually always working on the run game."