



## CINCINNATI BENGALS

APRIL 29, 2023

NFL DRAFT — ROUND 4

**BRIAN CALLAHAN**  
**Offensive coordinator**  
**and**  
**TROY WALTERS**  
**Wide receivers coach**

**Initial comments ...**

Walters: "I'm excited. We added a good football player. Very productive, feel like he can play inside, outside, returns kicks. So, we're excited to have him. Playing in the Big Ten — great conference, was very productive. To me, he was one of the top receivers in college football last year. To add him to the guys already on the staff, I couldn't be more excited."

Callahan: "I think he was the 2021 Big Ten Special Teams Player of the Year. He can kick return, he can punt return, he's got versatility to play all three positions for us on offense. So, a ton of value in what he can bring to us, particularly early on. He's got a path to see the field potentially in competition as a returner and both returner spots. He's got flexibility as a receiver and he's got a ton of production in a good conference. He was at the spot that we were at in the fourth round. Felt like he was a no brainer to add with a guy that's got a lot of ability to help us down the road here."

**He's not a burner, but I'm going way back to the old school days like Fred Biletnikoff. Great route runner, great hands. Is he that type of guy if you had to categorize him?**

Walters: "Yeah, he ran a 4.43 at the Combine, so pretty good. Faster than I was. So, he has enough speed. I went to his Pro Day and saw him up close and personal. He's fast enough to give you some reps on the outside. And he's just a great route runner. Really big into technique, so he can get it out of his breaks. We're excited to have him and he'll add some value to this roster."

**Really big into technique, so he can get it out of his breaks. We're excited to have him and he'll add some value to this roster. I'm sure you dove into the Iowa film, as well. Did all of these traits shine through? The production might not have been there just because they often didn't use him ...**

Callahan: "Yeah, there's no question about that. The Iowa offense is much different than Purdue's. Purdue, in the last handful of years, feels like has put out really productive players, statistically, and he's no different. But you saw the traits at Iowa, you saw his return ability to Iowa. He really bet on himself and an offense that featured the passing game a little more, and it turns out that he was capable of being a really productive receiver, as well. So, you saw all the things that you like about him at Iowa, and then he really shined this year with more opportunities."

**He caught a lot of balls. How did he get open so much? And also, it looks like he was a red zone threat, as well. What was he doing to make plays in the red zone?**

Walters: "A combination of a lot of things. He has great ball skills. Anytime he's in a 50-50 contested catch situation, he seemed to come down with it. And so, really everybody on our roster, all the receivers that we have have great ball skills, and so he adds to that as a guy that no matter where you throw the ball, he's going to make the play. He's a technical route runner. If it's a 15-yard route, he's going to run 15. If it's 12 yards, he's going to get 12. He knows how to manipulate coverages to beat the defenders at the top of his routes. He just knows how to get open. He's a football player, and that's what we need. Very similar to when I was in Indianapolis with Peyton Manning. With Joe (Burrow), he wants you to be in the right spot at the right time, and that's what Charlie does. He's going to be in the right spot. He's someone that Joe can count on. He's going to be able to count on, and all the receivers that we have are those type of guys that Joe has confidence in. He knows they're going to run the right route, do the right things. We're excited to have him."

**Along those lines, how important is that, especially all those things, for your inside receiver to be able to do all that and set guys up and be able to be technically sound? How much more important is that given how compact everything is on the inside compared to outside?**

Walters: "Very important. You've have to have nuance to running routes, especially in the slot, and he does. He understands how to get open and so, we're excited to have him and that's going to play a huge role in what he does here."

**When you're going through all of the small receivers that were in this middle part of the draft, what do you look for to see that won't hinder him in this league? Is there a trait or some part about those guys that shines through? Was there something with him that made you believe it wouldn't slow him down here?**

Callahan: "He's not as small as some of the guys in this draft class, but you look for a trait of some kind that will let you know that player can provide something of value, whether it's a return ability, whether they are great separators at the top of the route, whether they have great speed. There's a lot of things these guys have that check boxes, and that's what you look for is a trait that you feel like can contribute to your team. The thing about Charlie is that he checks quite a few of them and he's a little bit bigger. I think he weighed in at like 175 at the combine, but he's played at a heavier weight, too. So, he's got some play strike to him. He's not going to get knocked around like some of the smaller guys do. But he has great ball skills, which is a big part of it. He can really catch the ball away from his body, he does a great job coming out of the break, getting extended, creating separation on top of routes. Those are the things you look at when you're trying to determine who can help you the most. You try to find traits like that, and he's got several of them and there's a path to him helping us quickly if he performs well as a returner."

**What makes you confident the way he did in college will translate to the NFL and what specific traits or things you saw from him?**

Callahan: "He's a decisive runner. I'll let Troy talk a little more about all the traits of him. But you can just see he makes really good decisions. He's going to catch the ball. He's sure-handed, which is a huge part of the return game process. But I just think that he's got enough speed to go score touchdowns, and he has in his career. Those are the things that translate, particularly when you see the decisiveness in the return game that really allows him to get the ball vertical up the field and find lanes and break open returns that could be eight to 12 yards and turn it 50- or 60-yard returns."

Walters: "Ball security is No.1, and he has great hands, great ball skills, great judgment. He should be to go back there and do exactly what he did in college and adds explosive elements in the return game because of the speed and because he's decisive and he gets it. There'll be good competition for that spot."

**Troy, we've seen it with Tyler Boyd, obviously the mechanical, the skill of running routes in the red zone, how important that is. Is that something Charlie?**

Walters: "We want him to run routes all over the field, but especially in the red zone when the field gets shorter and you need to score touchdowns. He knows how to run routes. He's going to be fun to work with. I'm excited to get my hands on him and get to work and just help him to get better. But I think you'll add that element in the red zone. Wherever he plays in whatever position we are on the field, he just knows how to run routes, knows how to get open, knows how to catch the ball and make plays. That's what all the guys in our receiver room know how to do and he'll be another guy to do that."

**Is his skill set similar to Tyler Boyd? From what you've seen on TV, are they similar in what they can do?**

Walters: "TB is a little bigger, but like I said, we want guys that can catch the football, have good ball skills, they love the game. That's something that sometimes goes unnoticed is we want guys that love the game, that come to work every day ready to go, bring positive energy. And then when they get on the field, they're coachable. They're going to do what we asked them to do. And then when the ball is thrown, they're going to make plays, and he fits all those things."

**Culturally, football IQ, leadership, all that kind of stuff, what stood out about him in that process or that area of his game?**

Callahan: "You just you see a guy that wants to be a really good football player. He does all the things that you would look for, in terms of his work ethic, his preparation, the things that he does well amongst his teammates, the respect he's garnered from his teammates, especially for being a transfer player, as well. You see guys earn respect like that and earn the trust of one, a quarterback, and two, a coaching staff on those things go a long way. Troy spent a ton of time with him. Again, was at his pro day, so if there's things you want to add, Troy, to his personality, but there's a lot of things to like about how he goes about his business. It fits right in with what we want to do here and all the types of players that we have in our locker room currently."

**In terms of recognizing coverages. Coverage are multiple in the NFL, they are disguised well and all that. Is he pretty good in terms of reading coverages in the pre-snap diagnosis?**

Walters: "That's his mental makeup. He's a pro. When I went to his pro day, he approaches the game, he approaches his preparation like an NFL football player, and so he's not going to be distracted with all the other things. He's going to be focused, he's going to come in here, learn the playbook, and he's going to compete. He understands football. He's very aware of pre-snap. I had an hour Zoom with him and we went over coverages and different looks and talked football. And he was an A. I'm excited for him to get in the building and start learning this offense and getting on the field, showing what he can do."

**He's a little on the older side. He's 25-years-old, has transferred twice like you mentioned. Did that kind of factor in the decision in getting a more experienced type of veteran?**

Callahan: "I think that what you're going to start seeing more and more, and you're seeing some in this draft as well is with the college landscape the way it is with the NIL money and guys going back to school, along with players that have COVID eligibility still, you're getting guys that are playing five and six years of college football. That's just one of the things. Ideally, you'd love a guy that's always going to be 21-years-old when he's coming out. There are times and places now where that's going to be a little bit rarer as you

get into some of these later rounds, with guys that are playing five years of college football. I do think it does help these players that stay in a little longer. It gives them a chance to really grow and be developed in college. And then, when they get here, they're a little bit more polished than maybe they would have been. There's going to be that age discrepancy moving forward all around when you're talking about guys going back to school, and NIL money and all that, (which are) enticing players to stay in school rather than come out early."

**Brian, this is the second year in a row you've had to wait until Day 3 to get a pick. What's that wait like for you?**

Callahan: "You know, it's exciting for me to watch the guys that we've picked that help our team. That's the best part about it, is I know we have a lot of high regard for the guys that we picked in the first three rounds — those guys are good players, and they're really going to help us. I'm a fan of helping the Bengals at the end of the day. I knew this was going to be a draft where a lot of the fun offensive talent was going to go earlier in the rounds. There's going to be guys available that, if we wanted them, we (would) have to take them earlier than we were probably fully comfortable doing so. That's a product of our own success — and that's a good problem to have. We're picking at the end of the round because we won a lot of games. But that also doesn't necessarily always allow you to have all the fun players that go earlier in rounds. That's OK, there's nothing wrong with that. We're going to find players that fit us, and guys that can contribute. That's the benefit of having a really well built roster. I think we have a lot of spots on offense that are accounted for. There are a lot of places that we can use some depth, and some guys that can help us, but we have a really good roster across the board, and I think that helps too, to not get down on it when all the shiny objects go well before we get a chance to pick."

**At what point did you decide the name tag was appropriate?**

Callahan: "I just felt like Lou (Anarumo) had been down here so much I wanted to make sure you guys remembered who I was (laughs)."

**There are still a lot of picks left in this draft, but where do you feel like you're at with tackle, running back and tight end?**

Callahan: "Yeah, we feel good about where we're at at tight end — I know Zac (Taylor) touched on it at the pre-draft press conference. Irv Smith was a second-round pick, he's played a lot of football, and he's a good player. We got Drew Sample back, who's done a lot of things for us as a tight end, and we've got some guys who played for us last year — Devin Asiasi played some roles for us — and he was a second- or third-round pick as well. So we've got guys that we feel like can be productive players. We've got some guys on the practice squad with Nick Bowers and Tanner Hudson that we're interested to see how they contribute for us. So, we didn't feel a pressing need. Certainly, if the right player was available at the right time, you'd pull the trigger on tight end, or running back for that matter. But the way the draft has unfolded we feel good about who we have. And if we can keep adding players, and adding depth at the right spots, we'll feel good about it. We certainly numbers-wise still need running backs, and we definitely can use one more tight end depending on how that comes. We're looking at depth positions and contributors in other ways than just probably starters at this point. We have plenty of things to still address — there are plenty of picks to go still — but there are still some good players left too that we feel really good about that can help us."

**You've had solid, reliable type return guys in recent years, but I'm not sure there's been a home run threat since Adam Jones was here. Was that a priority in this draft, to get potentially a touchdown-type guy in the return game?**

Callahan: "Yeah, it feels like for the last couple of years we've always had our eyes out for a returner we feel could help us with a little bit more dynamic ability in the return game, as far as production goes in college. There's plenty of those guys that exist. Sometimes they fall to you at the pick that's appropriate, sometimes they don't and other teams pick them. But we've certainly been on the lookout for that type of player, should they fit. It's always nice to have players that can give you value on special teams, and still provide you some value on game day on offense as well, as opposed to just a one-position player at that point on game day. Always looking to potentially find one that can do that — they're harder to find than you think. There are so many fewer returns in the NFL these days that you don't see as many guys out there breaking games open as returners, although there's a few. We're always on the lookout for guys that can make us more explosive in all three phases as a returner, (so) special teams will certainly count."

**This guy has sticky hands, jackhammer feet — has some significant traits, obviously. If you had to pick one, what do you think his best trait might be?**

Walters: "To me it's ball skills — that's probably No. 1. You can throw the ball anywhere, and he's going to find a way to make a play. And that's crucial in this league, because most of the time you're going to have a contested catch situation. It's rare that you're going to create so much separation that you're going to be by yourself. So to have great ball skills, and be able to catch under pressure with a guy on your back, to me, is his most impressive feature."

**With Tyler Boyd entering a contract year, how important was it to add depth to the position now that he's kind of getting up there in age?**

Callahan: "It doesn't really factor in necessarily. There are a lot of things that can happen between now and that point. Tyler has proven himself to be arguably one of the best slot receivers in football, so all we were looking for is trying to find ways to keep trying to upgrade our depth and our competition at the position. Whether a contract would ever factor in at any point, that's a problem for down the road. We feel really good about the guys we have and what they bring to us. We feel good about adding Charlie as a depth piece and competition, and we'll see if we can get the whole position better, from top to bottom."

**Is he the kind of guy that can dig someone out of the run game? How important is that when you're looking at traits and value in a receiver?**

Walters: "Very important. I tell the guys that we're not only catching the football, we've got to be able to block — we're an extension of the run game. And, as you've seen the last few years, Tee Higgins — he'll go and stick his nose in and block a safety, so we expect all our receivers to be physical enough to block downfield and create big runs for the running backs. We don't want anybody scared or timid — that's not that guy."

**In the AFC Championship, Tyler Boyd was hurt on the first scoring drive. Could Jones have gone in the slot and given you that kind of play and really helped?**

Callahan: "That's the hope. That's the hope — that we've got enough competition, and if he's gotten to that point, and he's earned it. I don't want to diminish at all the contribution that Trenton Irwin has given us over the last couple years. He's really stepped in and made some big plays for us. We've counted on him, and he's answered that bell when we have. To say that Charlie's going to come in and take that spot if we need him to come do that ... that's ideally the hope when you're drafting players — that they can ascend to those roles. But he's got to come in and earn it, just like all these guys do. We've got good players in our receiver room — guys that have pelts on the wall, for lack of a better term, that have really done it for us in big moments. And Trenton Irwin has as well. He (Jones) is going to have to earn it. Trent Taylor has been our returner, and he's done a nice job at it. Nothing's getting handed to anybody at this point, but we feel like he (Jones) really has a chance to drive the competition, and hopefully get the best out of everybody in that room. If that's the case, and he's ascended to that role, he certainly would have earned it, and we feel like at that point he can help us win a game."

**CHARLIE JONES**

**Wide receiver; Purdue**

**What's it like knowing you're going to catch passes from Joe Burrow?**

"It's awesome. It's an unbelievable feeling, for sure, to get the news, and then to be on a team with a quarterback like Joe is awesome."

**How do you feel about being in a wide receiver room with Ja'Marr Chase and Tee Higgins?**

"It's awesome. I'm going to be able to come in, learn a lot from these guys and just be able to improve every day with people like them in that room."

**What was last season at Purdue like for you?**

"Last year was an opportunity that I've been waiting on for a long time. It's really why I made that decision to go to Purdue, to be in an offense like that. I just always believed in myself and believed in what I could do, and being able to go there with Aidan (O'Connell), our quarterback, and just actually do it was an amazing feeling."

**How do you think you can help the Bengals right away?**

"I think I can help in a lot of ways. I think I'm very diverse, I can be a weapon on special teams and definitely in the receiver room, helping out whenever I can."

**How do you see yourself making a contribution in the kick return game?**

"It's something I want to do, something I've loved doing. I definitely understand the importance of special teams. It's really how I got my foot in the door. I want to be able to come in and make an impact any way I possibly can on special teams."

**Were you blessed with good hands, or did you work hard to make that a skill set?**

"It's definitely both. I'm definitely blessed with a lot of abilities and blessed with opportunities in front of me, but it's also a lot of hard work every single day working on it. It's something I've been doing a really long time, just reps after reps after reps, kind of building that confidence and that muscle memory."

**What do you think your biggest strengths are as a receiver, and what are you looking to work on in your first year in the NFL?**

"I think I can track the ball really well. I think I can in and out of my breaks well. I use speed off the line of scrimmage, and I'm really just a competitive all-around player. My size is what it is, but when that ball is in the air I'm going to get it. Then, I'm always trying to work on my hand placement and stuff like that throughout my routes. That's something I think at any point in your career, you can use some work on that."

**Were you tracking when Purdue QB Aidan O'Connell was drafted?**

"Yeah, definitely. I was waiting on Aidan. I love him and he's a great quarterback. I think he's one of the best and he's going to have a great career. I've been waiting for his name to be called, and then when everybody said he was gone the next pick, I was so happy for him."

**What were the different ways Purdue used you offensively?**

“Most of the time I was on the outside, but I was definitely used on the inside. I kind of switched from the inside to the outside, left to right. So, just in whatever way we needed to have an advantage that week or get the ball in my hands.”

**How unique will it be practicing against CB DJ Turner II, who you face in last season’s Purdue-Michigan game?**

“That’s awesome — another Big Ten guy. I got to go up against him quite a few times in our game against Michigan. He’s definitely a competitor and someone who’s going to help this team moving forward, and just someone I’m going to be able to get better with as we compete for years to come.”

**What is the key to consistent production in the receiving game for you?**

“I think it starts with consistency within the way you work, the way you practice, the way you work when no one is looking. I think that’s where all the confidence and where all the work comes in, so when you get onto the field it’s easy. It’s just second nature.”

**Your path to the NFL wasn’t easy. What does this day mean to you?**

“It’s amazing. A lot of emotions going on. I took a lot of chances with transfers and just believed in myself the whole time. I really had to build myself up from the bottom and this has been a dream of mine forever, so to be able to have this moment with family and friends is incredible.”

**What was your communication like with the Bengals before the draft?**

“Honestly, not too much. Some at Pro Day. I had a meeting with them over Zoom, but there wasn’t too much communication leading up to this moment.”

**What do you think is your biggest attribute between your hands and your quick feet?**

“I think they’re pretty similar. If I had to pick one, I’d probably say hands. I think they’re both up there.”