



CINCINNATI BENGALS

APRIL 28, 2023

NFL DRAFT — ROUND 3

ZAC TAYLOR

Head coach

and

LOU ANARUMO

Defensive Coordinator

Initial comments ...

Taylor: "Jordan Battle — we're really excited (to add him). We have high regard for this guy as a safety. Again, coming from Alabama, (he's a) winner. He went there to compete. He went to one of the best high schools — St. Thomas Aquinas — in all of America. One the top high schools. (He) competed there and then went to Alabama to compete there with a number of great safeties in order to win championships, so he's not afraid of competition and (now he) continues to come here and help us win championships as well. We think this guy fits everything that we're about. We sit up here and talk about (it) all the time: This guy's an A-plus character leader on a great team and can be a valuable safety and special teams player in the coming year, so we're excited to have Jordan."

He seems to be a combination of all the things you like — high football IQ, and played three years in college at a top program. It's almost like he came right out of a mold you have ...

Taylor: "It's hard to miss on guys like that ... When you can set the table (with their) character and their playing experience at a high level in the SEC, and all the big games he's played (in), he's just a guy we're excited for, and we're excited he was still here in the third round, and we're excited to add him to the mix."

You often say you draft the best player available. But why at a safety when you've already got several safeties in the mix?

Taylor: "Again, it's a player that can also help us on special teams (while) coming in to be a safety. I don't think you go wrong there, adding guys that you think are valuable that maybe lingered longer than you thought he would. We're happy to have him."

Is he a guy capable being a starter in perhaps a year or two?

Taylor: "I don't think there's anything you ever want to take off the table for any player. They're always competing (and) we're always playing the best players. But we think he really fits in the locker room and safety room. We lost two safeties (this off season), we added one with Nick Scott, and so now here's another one you get to add to the room as well, and we get the return to action (with) Michael Thomas. (There's also) Tycen Anderson as well, coming off an injury, so (now) you've got five in there that can compete."

Do you have him projected as a free safety?

Anarumo: "That's what he's played, (but) he's done a number of different things at Alabama. Again, (he's) another guy that can give us some flexibility, so I'm not so much worried about that. I think we can move around some and he'll be comfortable in all of the jobs that we'll ask him to do because he was exposed to so much down there. I don't worry so much about that."

What do you like most about his game on film?

Anarumo: "He's in position a lot to make plays. He's very rarely out of position. You can see him communicating, which is really important back there obviously, so you can trust him. You can tell his teammates to trust him. Again, he's rarely out of position, (he) gets guys on the ground, and his character is off the charts. That's why he's so intriguing."

How much does the word 'versatility' stick out with a guy like that?

Anarumo: "Oh, for sure. We were always looking for guys like that. I think the more jobs that he can do, the better. Certainly, I think has the potential to do a ton of them."

You've mentioned character with three draft picks this weekend — how have you learned to judge that? Are there specific people in a player's life you like to talk to about a guy's character, and do you have a successful track record of that?

Taylor: "It starts with the scouts. They're the ones that put their feet on the ground and go to the schools and talk to all the people behind the scenes. That's where the reports are generated and it gives us the information we need to continue to move (forward) on (someone) if we need to — there's not a lot more information we need to gather. (Battle) was an A-plus all across the board. We

interviewed him at the combine as a staff (and he was) off the charts. That's oftentimes my first impression of guys, and his first impression is good as can be. That's part of the product search of the scouts, and they have to coach me to follow up. You've got people you know well ... we try to utilize all that."

Anarumo: "We went back to sophomore math class — he was in the same class with my son, so we went deep on Jordan."

Taylor: "Is that true?"

Anarumo: "It is. The only reason I know that is because my son just texted me, 'I was in Jordan's class at St. Thomas Aquinas' (laughing)."

When you know it's one of the best high school programs in the nation, how much does that matter at a young age in their development, and what kind of impact does that have long-term?

Taylor: "I don't think you ever ding a guy for that, because that's uncontrollable, but it certainly doesn't hurt in this case. If you've got a guy who's had the highest of expectations at a program like that, that's a good thing. I don't think we'd ever knock a guy if he went to a high school that was lesser, but I think you can say plus-plus for having gone through that. Kids transfer in there to play, and that's as competitive as it gets, just to earn playing time in high school. And then he signed up for it again at Alabama, so that says a lot about what you need to know about him."

You guys obviously haven't taken any offensive players. Did you come into this draft thinking that was a possibility?

Taylor: "I wouldn't say that's how you come into it. I think there's scenarios we ran through where this could happen, the opposite can happen, and it could be a mixture. Me personally, I don't come into Thursday thinking, 'Here's how it's going to shake out.' We're watching our board and where the guys fall, and taking the guys we think at the moment can help us the best. I don't really go down convincing myself we're probably going to take three defensive players with the first three picks. That doesn't cross my mind."

Happy to move down and add another pick?

Taylor: "That's a good thing. What was it — sixth round? I can't remember the number at the moment — 217? So that doesn't hurt us to move back three spots, and the player that we would've taken at that spot is still there, so we're comfortable with that."

Clemson, Alabama and Michigan — three championship caliber programs — how does that factor into everything?

Taylor: "You're really judging the player — we want the player first of all. But a lot of the traits we're looking for are developed at these great programs. I know he's playing guys that come from other ones too, but I don't think it hurts that these guys have played in playoff games, they've played for championships. That's what we want to do, so I think anytime you can add guys to the locker room that understand what that feeling is and what that standard is, that's a good thing."

He checks boxes for playing in championships, character and versatility. Does the coaching staff have a clear vision for players now after being together for five years?

Taylor: "Yeah, clear vision. We've seen the locker room, our players have seen the locker room, they know guys that fit, they want guys that fit. And as you get there in the draft, and there's a guy staring you in the face that has all this intangible stuff, it becomes very difficult to pass on them."

How would you describe the running back landscape as you enter Day 3?

Taylor: "I still think there's players there at a number of positions that we haven't addressed yet. I think there's going to be value there tomorrow, not only at running back, but a couple other positions too."

Lou, just to clarify, you learned about the connection with your son over text?

Anarumo: "Yeah, just before I walked up here. We have a little family group chat, and he said Jordan was in my class, so here we go."

Are you eager to follow up and get more nuggets?

Anarumo: "Uh, no (laughs)."

Can he play the slot?

Anarumo: "Nickel? He's a safety. Yeah, he's a safety."

JORDAN BATTLE

Safety; Alabama

Why do you think being a character guy matters when you're coming into the NFL?

"I feel like I am a guy who developed that character and that discipline over my years at Alabama. Just bringing that to the NFL, I just want to bring a positive mindset that I'm going to have coming in and try to make sure it spreads throughout the organization. I'm already joining a winning program that can go get a Super Bowl."

What was your reaction when the call came in?

“It was just chills. Funny thing, I was playing UNO, and then I got the call and everybody just dropped everything and wanted to share the excitement. It was an amazing moment for my family, my friends, everybody in my support system. I couldn’t ask to join a better team.”

Do you prefer to play free safety or strong safety?

“I’m a guy who wants to play both. I’ll play whatever I can to help the defense. Whether that’s in the deep part of the field or the slot, I just want to show my versatility on the next level. That’s something hopefully I get a chance to do. In college, I played only strong safety and would come down and cover the slot and play the box. One thing coming into the league, I want to show my versatility and my ability to play football to my full capabilities.”

What do you know about the Bengals?

“I was actually learning my Griddy for Joe Burrow and Ja’Marr Chase. But they’re a great organization of course, with a high-powered offense, a great defense. They’re a winning program, which was something I was hoping I got drafted into. Coming from Alabama, you’re probably going to hear that a lot — a guy from Alabama that’s joining a team that knows how to win.”

What do you remember from playing in the Alabama-LSU game in 2019?

“I was actually a freshman, and that was one of the games I started in as a freshman. I remember the environment from that game. It was probably the loudest game I played in at Bryant-Denny. Having that feeling and knowing I competed against guys like that from when I was a freshman, then coming into the big leagues and playing with guys like that and being able to build that chemistry, now coming into an organization where we know each other and do what it takes to win.”

How would you describe your game and strengths?

“The first thing I’ll always say is just how smart I am. I’m also very instinctual, play fast and downhill, and just being able to attack the ball in the air when it is in the air in my direction. Being able to take the ball to the next level and scoring when I get the ball in my hands, just turning into a football player at that point when I have it in my hands.”

Is there anybody in the NFL you model your game after?

“I like to watch a lot of Minkah Fitzpatrick. I love the way he’s used. I love how he plays in the box. He’s one of those guys when I talk about versatility, one of the guys who does that at the next level. They move him around the slot, the deep part of the field, and in the box. He’s a guy I like to watch because he comes down, he does tackle the way he does, and has that playmaking ability in the deep part of the field in making plays and being rangy. He’s a guy I like to watch a lot.”

How much experience do you have playing on special teams?

“I have a lot of experience. My first two years I played every single quarter of special teams. It will be a great thing for me coming into the league. Coming from Alabama and already having special teams ability, just going out there and playing hard, playing aggressive, knowing how to take that part of the game serious because you can lose the game when you’re playing special teams. Having that mindset coming into the league is going to be a part of my game.”

Do you remember your combine interview?

“I remember they stood out because of how cool the coaches were, how they came off, how the vibes were, how supportive they were. Having that relationship early from the combine, and to now, was great.”

What do you think of Joe Burrow?

“We can say he’s arguably one of the top three best quarterbacks to ever play college football. That says a lot right there. He’s obviously brought that from his college game to the big leagues. He’s a winner still. The way he plays the game, thinks the game, how he throws the ball, how he plays like he’s a vet already in the league — high praises only.”

Has playing in the NFL been your expectation, given your pedigree in high school and college?

“Yes sir, ever since I was a little kid, I’ve always wanted to play this game. I went through hardships and adversity, being able to fight through coming from a neighborhood where not too many people get a chance to play in the league like this. It’s great. I just want to thank the organization for including and believing me to come in and be that x-factor at safety for them.”

Do you know any St. Thomas Aquinas alumni? The Bengals have had several ...

“I know Giovani Bernard. Was Geno Atkins one? I know a couple guys.”

Did you ever meet Giovani Bernard?

“No but I did meet James White, his teammate. They were the two running backs at that time.”

Do you remember an Anarumo in math class in high school?

“That is crazy. I don’t remember that. It’s crazy how the world works and how that can come back to you in moments. That’s cool.”