



## CINCINNATI BENGALS

APRIL 29, 2023

NFL DRAFT — ROUND 7 AND WRAPUP

### ZAC TAYLOR

#### Head coach

#### Initial comments ...

"Excited with how it shook out for us with the eight picks we had. It felt like we got value with all the players. I'm really excited to get them in the mix, and at the same time it hit some needs that we had as well. So, I feel really good about coming out of this draft how we had hoped and making our team better, and guys that can come in and compete, got great intangibles, and are all going to have a chance to provide value to our team, and that's big."

#### Before the draft you talked about how much you like the tight end room. Is that indicative of how this fell or just how the board fell?

"Both — I do like the room. I'm genuine when I say that. I feel like by signing Irv (Smith Jr.), and getting Drew (Sample) back, and there's a lot of guys behind there that are going to provide some competition for depth. So, we feel like they've all been trending in the right direction. They've all been here, outside of Irv, and know what we expect. We feel like we can get a lot out of that room with James (Casey) leading the charge there. And at the same time, there were certainly guys that we liked in the draft, and they weren't there when we picked sometimes, and we were comfortable with that. We were comfortable standing firm with what we had in the room if we had to."

#### How much of that is also a commitment to resources? You guys would have to take Tyler Boyd or somebody else off the field. How much of that plays into the decision not to take a tight end?

"We're predominantly 11-personnel. We have some 12. We just usually factor in the tight end room, how do we improve the tight end room? If we can or we can't, that usually drives the decisions and mostly less about the other positions."

#### Do you think with college free agency and with the final veteran free agents, you'll stay pat in the tight end room or will you be looking at that?

"There's still a chance. We'll likely add every single position in free agency, so I wouldn't take any positions off the board there."

#### How do you feel right now about the running back room?

"I feel like they've got a good mixture of guys. We've got three known quantities there with (Joe) Mixon, Trayveon (Williams) and Chris (Evans). They all know the expectations there, and now you get a chance to add another one, Chase (Brown), to the mix. Just a tremendous college career — two years of over 1,000 yards, almost led the NCAA in rushing this year, he just came up shy. Again, he's carried the load for those guys. We feel like he's got great vision as a balanced runner, and patience. I like what he's going to bring to the room as well, and then we'll see how it all shakes out from there."

#### What is next in evaluating Joe Mixon's future with the team?

"His future is here with the team. I like Joe Mixon."

#### You have added a lot of speed with guys in the mid 4.5's. Is this one of the fastest teams you've ever coached?

"I don't think we set out to say, 'Let's go get the fastest players.' I think that's just, the players that were there that we had graded high just happened to be really fast. That's great that shook out that way. You can never go wrong adding that kind of speed at all positions, even positions typically that aren't talked about as much. I feel really good about where we're at."

#### What did you like about the Brad Robbins pick and bringing him in to add competition at punter?

"Darrin (Simmons) has obviously studied these guys in depth. He really liked Brad, has been up there to see him work out and watched all the tape. The hang time is really good, he's played in cold weather, he's played in big games. I like all that stuff that he brings to the table, and it'll be great competition with Drue (Chrisman) and we'll see how it shakes out."

#### After losing Samaje Perine, do you see Joe Mixon playing the same role this year? That leaves some third-down snaps open...

"I think we'll just see how that shakes out. I'm not going to say anything is set in stone. I like Joe Mixon as our starting running

back. We get him the ball a lot of different ways. Just because Samaje played more on third down than he did didn't mean that his production really wavered. We're still going to throw him the football and hand him the football. With these three other guys, now they're going to get more opportunities. Trayveon (Williams), we re-signed him for a reason. I feel like he's improved every single year that he's been here, all four years, and that's why we brought him back for an opportunity for more growth now that Samaje is gone. Chris Evans, going into another year for him, he's got to continue to improve. Then you add Chase (Brown), who's been a really productive college back that we've really liked. We'll see how it all shakes out from a playing time, from a role standpoint, but I think we've got a good mixture of guys in there."

**How important is it for these young players to not only have character, but to have the ability to assimilate, process and get up to speed quickly?**

"I think it gives them their best chance to survive here. There's so much talent here in the building, so if you stick out in a poor way, it's going to be tough to make the team and contribute. These guys all fit in, these guys all check those boxes. They're all going to have a chance to compete. We'll welcome everybody into the locker room, regardless of who it is, but I think these guys are really going to fit in well with the different position groups that they're apart of."

**What does Charlie Jones bring to the team?**

"I think he's got a value at all three spots at receiver. He can challenge for the punt return job as well. He's extremely productive. I've always been a big fan of that system (with Purdue head coach) Jeff Brohm. You see a lot of NFL concepts there, so you see guys do a lot of different things. It's not just guys lined up outside the numbers running three routes. You got a chance to see Charlie do a lot. They tried to get him the ball every which way they could. A hundred and something catches and however many targets, some of them were uncontested, some of them were contested. The guy competes, and I think he'll add value at all three spots in the receiver room. I think it's really good competition for guys that are lining up behind our three starters. Again, I like the intangibles that he brings to the table as well."

**One of the major questions coming into the draft was if you were bringing in a tackle and what that would mean for Jonah Williams. As it stands, is the plan for Jonah to be the starting right tackle?**

"Jackson (Carman) has an opportunity there as well. Jonah is a valued member of this franchise and we're extremely happy to have him. He is transitioning over to right tackle. I'm excited about that. Jackson has continued to grow in his time here, and he has an opportunity to compete as well. With Jonah being out because of the surgery, Jackson is going to be the guy that's going to get the first opportunity there — he's healthy and able. I'm excited to see what the competition looks like over there."

**Is the roster more well-rounded coming out of the weekend?**

"I just think we've done a good job of adding the guys, whether it be in free agency or developing the roster the way it's been, to where you feel like you've got all of your bases covered so now you can add guys that fits you sometimes in special teams' roles initially before they contribute in other areas. That's a great way to develop guys is to get them in the mix in special teams as they start to grow more comfortable on offense and defense before their role expands there. A lot of great players that have come through here started in those roles and expanded to roles starting on offense or defense. That's been a luxury for us to have with how the roster is built. We were able to add guys that give us value in a lot of different areas. Special teams I feel was hit in a very positive way in this draft and that's good for the makeup of our team."

**What do you want to see out of that backup QB spot moving forward?**

"It speaks to Jake Browning, number one. We feel like he's continued to grow. And so, he's the second guy in the room right now. I do think there are veterans out there, Brandon Allen being one of them, that are guys we'll continue to talk to."

**Can you tell us a little bit more about DJ Ivey?**

"DJ is a guy we got to know in the pre-draft process. He came through here on a top-30 visit. He's got good measurables and was a starter this year at Miami. We feel like in the seventh round that provided good value for us. We got to know him here in the building. I liked what he's about. We felt like in the seventh round, that was a good fit for us."

**What do you think Charlie Jones and Andrei Iosivas bring in terms of depth and traits, both in the short- and long-term?**

"I think Charlie has shown the flexibility to play a lot of different positions. They tried to get him the ball (at Purdue). Oftentimes, when you're trying to get your best player the ball, you move him around. I wouldn't say he majored in the slot. He majored more outside. But he'd be in a reduced split on the backside with a single-man concept over there. There were times he moved in the slot. He runs the whole route tree. You get to see everything from him, so it's easy to visualize how he fits. I was really impressed with how he comes off the ball and the way he sets his routes. He can put the DB in a bind with subtle technique stuff. I think that shows advanced knowledge by him. He has great contested catch ability and he's shown the ability to run away from some people, too. He can break a tackle and run. Like I said, he was targeted a lot. With Andrei, you can see pretty rare traits. He has great body type, great size, great speed. I think his acceleration really stands out. Maybe that's the heptathlete — I don't know much about that, but I'm learning. I saw him throwing the disk or something, so that's part of it I know now. You can really see the acceleration and the traits there. That's good to come in here and compete at the receiver position and see what he can do for us at this level."

### **Overall, how much faster is the league in the last 10 years?**

“That’s a very tough question. I don’t know how I can measure that. I agree, it just seems like the level of athlete — I’m probably going to offend someone from 20 years ago by saying that. It feels like you are dealing with a bunch of freaks. It’s tough, you’re always trying to keep up. You’re always trying to make sure your team is big and athletic and try to find the combination of the two, which usually equals a top-five pick. I think we built this team — this division is a physical division, so you need size. You need speed, as well, when you’re playing in this division and outside of it. You just do your best to stack it all up and make sure you have the best team.”

### **What’s it like pitching this franchise now to undrafted free agents compared to 2019 when you got here?**

“I think there’s a strong history — that’s the number one selling point — of undrafted free agents making this team, contributing to this team, being on the practice squad, getting opportunities at a later date because they were on the practice squad. There’s as strong of a history here as anywhere else in pro football of guys getting an opportunity. We’re not going to discriminate against anybody because they’re a third-round pick or undrafted free agent. If you come in here and you maximize your reps, you’re going to get an opportunity to play. Hopefully guys understand that. You’re starting this recruiting process as really an hour recruiting process and you’re trying to get that across to guys as quickly as possible. Sometimes it takes, sometimes it doesn’t. But again, I think that if you just look at the history of undrafted free agents here, as far back as the last 15 years, I think it’s been really strong.”

### **Was there a memorable call you made to a draftee this year?**

“There’s two of them, actually. You might not even know the other one. Brad (Robbins), for sure. It was a great reaction, a very genuine reaction from him, which is good. That gives me a little juice as well, because I’ve said this before, you can’t tell what’s on the other side of the call, so it was good to hear that kind of energy from him. DJ (Ivey), as it goes at the end of the seventh round, you’re getting a lot of calls maybe free agency as well, and I couldn’t get him to answer the phone, and so I’m texting him on my personal phone trying to get him to answer the main phone, and eventually with about 10 seconds on the clock we got him. (Mike Potts) had already submitted the pick so we were good, but that one was a little stressful there for a moment. But we got him to answer the call, and he jumped in the boat.”

### **How has coaching and evaluating players changed since 2020 with guys taking sixth years now?**

“That’s probably a better scouting question for those guys. There’s some 21-year-olds we had in this draft, and there’s some 25-year-olds in this draft. I try not to hold it against a guy if he’s 25 years old. There’s still a lot of valuable years there. We’re trying to take the best player. Often times you can sell yourselves, ‘Okay, he’s 21 years old, his best days are ahead of him, he’s got so much room to growth,’ or ‘Oh, he’s 25, he’s mature.’ You can make the argument for however you want to make the argument when a player comes in the building, but I think we got some guys at positions where maybe older, mature guys is maybe a good thing, some of the other guys maybe the youth is good to develop them for a couple extra years. I don’t have a solid answer on how COVID has affected these COVID years, where guys are in there for maybe five or six years, or maybe a little bit longer. I don’t have the evidence to suggest which way that has taken things in this league or not.”

### **Have you noticed a difference in talking with players who have played for multiple programs as transfers?**

“That’s a good question. I don’t feel that. Again, I do think our coaches do a good job teaching our systems, so I can’t think of many guys where we said this guy just can’t learn it to help us. Maybe if guys maybe had that M.O. that they struggle to learn, maybe our position coaches have done a really good job of getting them to do what we need them to do. So, there’s always examples where guys can’t do it and you cut them, but I can’t think of any that come to mind, just because I think we bring in the right people, but also because I think our position coaches do a really good job of making sure they get to the player, and getting them to a place where they can play their best on the field and put their best foot forward.”

## **DJ IVEY**

### **Cornerback; Miami (Fla.)**

#### **What is your reaction to being selected by Cincinnati?**

“It’s amazing. I’m just happy to be a part of the organization. I can’t wait to get there.”

#### **What were your roles in the secondary in Miami?**

“I played outside corner.”

#### **What do you think your strengths are?**

“I think my strengths are at the line of scrimmage — being in press man, being able to get hands and be physical at the line of scrimmage with receivers.”

#### **What do you like about Lou Anarumo and the way he runs the Bengals’ secondary?**

“I like the way they swarm the ball. Last year, they made a lot of turnovers. It was good to watch those guys fly around and make plays on the ball. They’ve got a good coach there, so just can’t wait to be a part of it.”

**When you're on the clock for that long then to get the call, how relieving is that for you?**

"It was very relieving. We were trying to plan our next couple steps going forward with the undrafted process, but the Bengals gave me the call, gave me the opportunity and it's just an exciting moment."

**You've had 58 games of college experience. How do you think that might help you going into the NFL?**

"I think that will help me. A lot of game experience — other guys probably haven't played as much college football as I've played. But just from that alone, I think that'll help me at the next level going into the games."

**Who are you with today? It sounds like there is excited family in the background ...**

"I'm with the fam right now. They're very excited for me. It's been a party ever since I got my name called."