



## CINCINNATI BENGALS

APRIL 26, 2024

NFL DRAFT — ROUND 2

**ZAC TAYLOR**  
**Head coach**  
**and**  
**LOU ANARUMO**  
**Defensive coordinator**

**Initial comments ...**

Taylor: "Kris Jenkins, defensive tackle from Michigan — a guy we're really excited about. Another guy we met with at the Combine, a guy we brought in on a 30 visit. And it's really funny, on my 30 visit one of the notes I made to myself was that I didn't have much to talk to him about, because I didn't have a lot of questions about him. He's a polished guy, captain at Michigan, checks every box. There wasn't a lot you had to dig into him with, so we just had a nice, friendly conversation, but there wasn't a lot of questions I needed to get answered because we had the information we need, and we were happy he was there at 49."

**What did you talk about?**

Taylor: "We just talked about life."

**Why is he a fit for your defense at a position of need for you guys?**

Anarumo: "I just like everything about his game. He's a tough, tough run defender. He's got great football instincts. As Zac already mentioned, he brings leadership. He's been a captain, I think second-team All-American, just a tough guy overall and plays the game the right way."

**Is he the type of guy who can play on early downs, a guy who will rush on third down? How do you see him?**

Anarumo: "We see him as a three-down player. He's already shown that in college at a high level. Right now he'll be slotted in to rotate in with the other guys, and we're very excited to have him."

**Is that the key when you're addressing defensive tackle early in the draft, finding a three-down player?**

Taylor: "It's ideal. You want to have a vision or a role for a player and how they fit with us. We felt like Kris really fits in with the guys that we have in the building, and we're excited to get him."

**Your first two picks have three national championships combined. That seems like a big part of your draft philosophy, that championship mindset ...**

Taylor: "I think that those players certainly rise. We evaluate the talent level and the person, and would you believe it, some of the top programs in the country believe the same thing we do. They get quality people that are really talented players, and so I think it's no coincidence that when we end up falling in love with guys, that those programs have as well."

**From a positional standpoint, where do you think he fits best?**

Anarumo: "Well that's the good thing about him, he's done a bunch of different jobs at Michigan. We like that about our players. He'll fit right in. I think he's played some five-technique, played some three, played some shade. (He) really fits in with the group we have now and can do a bunch of different things."

**This is the third straight year you've taken a Michigan guy early in the draft. Is there something they do philosophically on defense that makes them a really good fit for what you want?**

Anarumo: "Like Zac just mentioned, it's more about, as we evaluate the players — by the way, he happened to come from Michigan. But they certainly won the national championship for a reason. They're surrounded by a bunch of good guys, so I think it's a little bit of a coincidence there, but Kris will fit right in well with our guys."

**How important is it for any defensive player to come in and pick up systems very quickly?**

Anarumo: "Well, it's certainly a benefit. And he's a guy who we really like his football awareness, his instincts. I don't think Kris will have any trouble at all picking it up and running with it."

**Is that something that separates a later pick from a guy in the first or second rounder is how quickly they can assimilate?**

Taylor: "It factors in. I think the physical talent, number one, is something that really pops at the top of the draft like this, and that's what he's got. He also has a lot of intangibles that he gets the most out of his play and his preparation. Again, you don't want to sell a guy short. He uses every attribute that he's got to become the player that he was at Michigan — the captain, the champion, and now a top pick for us."

**He had 2.5 sacks last year. Is he a pocket pusher? What do you see from him as a pass rusher?**

Anarumo: "That's a position that where he's coming from he's facing a lot of double teams inside. I think he's got a little bit of ways to go in that part of his game, which we can help him with. But he's really demonstrated that he has been a stout guy in the run game so far, and we can kind of build on his game from there."

**Does he need to put on more weight to play the position in the NFL?**

Taylor: "We'll wait to get the player in the building and then we'll talk him through what our aspirations are for him."

**When you were watching Michigan players in past years, did a guy like Kris pop out?**

Anarumo: "That's a good question. I think any time we're watching tape, we're always making a note, 'Who is number 98?' or, 'Who is number 15?' or whatever it may be. Then, you look it up and see he's an underclassman and you have an idea of who they are if you don't know the name already. Certainly at a school like that, we'll probably know who it is. It definitely helps, and our guys upstairs do a great job of making us aware of, 'Keep an eye on this guy too as you're watching tape.' It definitely helps."

**From an intangibles standpoint, where does he rate?**

Anarumo: "He checks all the boxes on that. Especially, I just think he comes in, as we mentioned he's done a bunch of different jobs on the field — been a captain, brings leadership. I like everything about him. From that standpoint, I think we're real happy."

**How big of a priority was it to take a defensive tackle early?**

Taylor: "It was a priority position. But again, we weren't going to take just anybody. We were very fortunate the way it fell. We had a high marks on Kris, so thank goodness he was there. It was a priority position for us, but at the same time we weren't going to take just anybody. He was one that we specifically had targeted, and so we were happy he was there at 49."

**Was it nerve-wrecking to watch defensive tackles fly off the board?**

Taylor: "Yeah, especially when you're staring at his name for a really long time. Yes, there have been moments like that for us in the past."

**From the beginning of this round, how much of a sweat was it wondering if you should move up?**

Taylor: "It's hard to say because, again, he's one we wanted, so we're fortunate. But had he been gone, there were other guys we have a good vision for. That's just the way the draft goes. I think people that sit in there for the first time would hear who we're targeting and they'd be sweating it out. But just understand, we've got a good vision for a lot of the players who are still available. They may be there in later rounds, we may be able to grab them. So, at this point, teams see guys differently, maybe. Some guys that you're maybe crossing your fingers for that might still be there in the third round and you've got a shot to go grab them then."

**How many minutes would you estimate you were staring at Kris Jenkins' name?**

Taylor: "These are seven-minute picks, but they feel like 27. It feels like a long time."

**Was the wait similar to Logan Wilson in 2020?**

Taylor: "It was similar."

**Did the addition of Sheldon Rankins and his strength to rush the passer allow you to go for a guy like Kris who maybe isn't a pass rusher yet?**

Anarumo: "When you look at the position itself, it's rare that you get the inside guys that create and produce multiple sacks inside. There's the Aaron Donald's of the world, then there's everybody else. You've got to start with something that they do well. We'd rather start with, they're a great run defender and let's build on their pass rush. I just think that's what fits us best right now. Playing alongside of B.J. (Hill) Sheldon, Zach (Carter) and those guys, I think he fits in great."

**How much of his athleticism pops?**

Taylor: "You just see a motor. That's him using every ounce that he's been blessed with and he's developed himself. That's what shows up. You're going to get the consistent player on every single down, and that goes a long way. To the sack production, as someone who finds myself watching all the D-tackles all season long, I never really look at the numbers. It's the tape, and they fit different in schemes and they play different opponents — maybe that style of conference doesn't allow for as much. But we've got a lot of belief in his upside."

### **Talk about Jenkins being the son of a Pro Bowler?**

Taylor: "He acts like a pro. We're always a little late to the party with the background of the player. We're at the Combine and we're starting to catch up on everybody, and we'll read the bio and we're putting two-and-two together at the point. Obviously, our scouts and Duke (Tobin) knew that a long time ago. I think he carries himself the right way because that's the type of person that he is. You can tell he's educated the right way on the process, he knows what to expect. I think those are all things that benefit him. You've got to give credit to him. You can just tell the multiple interactions we had with Kris, he is grounded, and whoever gets credit for that deserves credit for that. That certainly stood out every time that I've interacted with him."

### **KRIS JENKINS**

#### **Defensive tackle; Michigan**

#### **How has it been for you tonight to get the call from the Bengals?**

"Tonight has been amazing. Nothing but a dream, surrounded by friends and family. To get this opportunity that I've been dreaming about since I was a kid. To finally make a name for myself and this Jenkins family. I'm just excited for this opportunity that the Bengals have blessed me with, so I can't wait to get started."

#### **What stood out in your interactions with the Cincinnati front office?**

"They've been nothing but amazing. Everybody in the Cincinnati front office has been nothing but humble, ready to work, about business, nothing but amazing toward me. I could just tell by the aura they generate that they're ready to get some championships, some Super Bowls and make great players. So, I'm just ready to be part of that culture and that tradition. I'm ready to go."

#### **How much do you know about this team? Dax Hill and DJ Turner II are here. How much do you know about this club and how much have you talked with them?**

"I know a little bit because I keep track with my fellow alumni being up there. Brad Robbins, Dax Hill, a bunch of my boys being up there, so I keep a little bit of track. I'm excited to get to know more guys and be a part of this culture from the inside. I'm just really excited."

#### **Zac Taylor said that when they brought you in for the visit, they didn't have many questions for you. Do you remember what that conversation was like and how was your visit with him?**

"It was amazing. We just talked life and we talked ball. I can already tell that he's nothing but a father figure and a role model. Somebody that's going to teach you and get you to where you want to be. It's been amazing to have that experience with him. I'm looking forward to more experiences that I'm going to have with him. Like I said, I'm just excited."

#### **When you're on a top-30 visit, how do you know if a team is giving off good aura? How do you know they are generating some good vibes?**

"You could just tell. For me personally, it's just that gut feeling when I was with them. They were nothing but authentic, nothing but about the truth and kept it real with me. I'm just blessed to have this opportunity."

#### **How would you explain your role on the Michigan defensive line that obviously accomplished a lot last year?**

"I just played my role. We had a loaded team all across the board. Every single play did what was asked of them, and I was blessed to be a captain on such an amazing team like that. We just did our thing and played ball."

#### **You mentioned you were a captain, won a national championship. The Bengals just took another player (Amarius Mims) from a perennial national championship contender last night. Is that a conversation you had with the team when you were here with Zac Taylor and the guys about winning at every level?**

"Yes sir. We talked ball and we talked about winning. The Bengals have a winning culture and they're all about winning. Nothing but winning. That's what I look at contributing to that team — bringing wins to the team. Yeah, I'm excited."

#### **What kind of advantage is it to have a father who played in the NFL?**

"It's nothing but a blessing for me because I'm blessed to have that knowledge from my dad and my uncle with that mentality to teach me to be a better player and a better man every single day. Regardless of what position and what adversity you face, to overcome that and prove people wrong."

#### **Where are you now? Are you in Detroit?**

"No sir. I'm with the family in my family's hometown of Belleville, Michigan. Here with the whole family."

#### **Who are the defensive tackles you study and model your game after?**

"Honestly, I model my game after my dad and my uncle because I feel like I have characteristics from both of them. We always watch film, talk ball with each other and just think of ways how I can improve my game."

**Is your nickname “the mutant”?**

“Yes sir. My nickname is ‘The mutant.’”

**What makes you “the mutant”?**

“Coach (Ben) Herbert gave it to me because I just went above and beyond in the weight room and did things that people wouldn’t expect me to do. And he said my mentality, how I carried myself, how I pushed through adversity, anything, is a mutant mentality. That’s why he gave me that nickname my sophomore year and it stuck ever since.”

**I saw a pre-draft writeup that said you were a run-stopper at heart. Is that accurate?**

“Honestly, I look at myself as a D-tackle and look forward to becoming a complete D-tackle at the next level every single day, every single year. Regardless if I’m a run-stuffer, if I’m an elite pass rusher, I’m looking forward to being the best at each and every single aspect of my game. I know coach is going to get me there.”

**Do you feel like you have to get bigger, stronger? What part of your game do you think you have to advance physically when you get to the NFL?**

“I feel like I have to be me and trust the process with coach, with the team, be the best teammate I can be and completely buy into all of the resources they give me to be the best player I can be and be a complete D-tackle.”

**To what extent do people call you “the mutant”?**

“To the extent that every single staff member on my team started calling me that my sophomore year, to the players, to the fanbase. Just basically how I try to carry myself every single day. It just kind of stuck. From that nickname, I try to embrace that identity that I’ve been blessed with.”

**If we go up to Dax Hill, DJ Turner II or Brad Robbins and mention “the mutant,” they’ll know exactly who we are talking about?**

“All I would say is ask them.”

**What was the reaction when you got the call and heard your name?**

“I can’t even tell you. I have had adrenaline and have felt like running through a wall for the past day and a half. There’s still adrenaline but just happiness and excitement. I just can’t wait to be part of the team, get to work, prove myself and earn my stripes.”

**Five of the 14 picks before you were defensive tackles. What was it like watching that run and wondering when your name would be called?**

“All I’m going to say is that I’m ready to prove myself to every single person that I can be the best defensive tackle I can be. That’s what I plan to prove.”

**Both Zac Taylor and Lou Anarumo said they were squinting at your name in that defensive tackle run early in the second round. Did you have a feeling the Bengals were in on you? What were your vibes going into this?**

“I’m going to be honest, I had an amazing visit while I was there. I loved my visit, I loved the environment I was in, all of the coaches I met. To be honest with you, I didn’t know where I was going to end up, but I knew if I was blessed to come here, I knew I was going to have an amazing opportunity. That’s why I’m nothing but excited to be part of such a great team.”

**Could you repeat the name of the coach who gave you “the mutant” nickname and what’s his job title?**

“Ben Herbert. He was the head strength coach for the Michigan Wolverines but is now with the Los Angeles Chargers, so we’ll be seeing him soon.”