

Chargers Head Coach Brandon Staley Day 1 Draft Availability Thursday, April 28, 2022 ⚡ SoFi Stadium ⚡ Inglewood, Calif.

On the selection of G Zion Johnson:

“He’s really, really impressive. He’s smart, tough, really physical, versatile. He played in a pro-style offense. From a physical standpoint, he has big hands, long arms and really good feet. He can really anchor in pass protection against the biggest, strongest, best interior players in the league. We just really felt like this guy was a really complete player in both the run game and in the pass game. His intangibles really fit what we’re looking for.”

On where along the offensive line Johnson played in college:

“He played all three positions. He played tackle, guard and center. We see him as an inside player. He’s going to play guard for us. He’s just a really good football player and brings a real toughness that we’re looking for on offense. He was a really impressive guy in this process,”

On what ‘stood out’ about Johnson in the evaluation process:

“We were looking for the best player available at that pick, and I feel like he was the best O-lineman on our board, for sure. He’s just a really well-rounded player. I think when you take a look at his college film, his Senior Bowl film, Combine, Pro Day, he really aced all of those phases of the evaluation process. In the interview process with him, this guy had real presence. We really felt like solidifying the interior of our line for years to come was really, really important, both from the run game and from a pass protection standpoint. I think that from a culture standpoint, this guy, he’s the real thing, from toughness and a character standpoint.”

On Johnson being a ‘late bloomer’:

“If you take a look at where he started, at Davidson, that progression of being a guy that was 255 pounds his freshman year, to end up almost 320 pounds, and you take a look at his arm length, his hand size — 32 reps on the bench press — this is a really strong player. We were really looking for power players on offense, particularly inside. Now, we feel like we have that. You have [G] Matt [Feiler], [C] Corey [Linsley] and Zion. That’s a really impressive trio in there. Then, this guy’s got all the smarts that you’re looking forward. We really felt like this was a well-rounded, complete football player. We’re really excited to have him.”

On when Johnson ‘hit their radar’:

“Early in the process. Obviously, he had an incredible senior year there at Boston College. I’ve got a lot of respect for [Boston College Head Coach] Jeff Hafley. I’ve known Jeff for several years, he coached in the NFL. He’s done a heck of a job there. Zion played in a pro-style offense for [former Boston College Offensive Coordinator Frank] Cignetti [Jr.] there. His line coach is now the line coach for the Miami Dolphins, so he’s very well-trained. You could tell in the interview process that this guy was really sharp, that he had full command of the fundamentals, the scheme. Just a very smart guy, a tough guy and a complete player. We felt like, athletically, physical. I think coming back to that word, ‘complete player,’ that’s what made him really attractive for us.”

On if G Matt Feiler will transition to RT:

"I think for right now, we're definitely going to keep Matt on the left side, knowing that he's played right tackle and you could always do that in a pinch. But I think, for us, it was making sure that the left side stayed strong. That was the strength of our O-line unit last year, we really believe in that chemistry. The plan is to start out that way; put Zion on the right side, and then we'll see what happens here in the next few days in the draft, and then after the draft. [T] Trey [Pipkins III] and [T] Storm [Norton], those two guys, we have those guys on our team that have played winning football for us, and then we have Matt [Feiler], who's a tackle that's played on the right side that has played winning football. So, we feel like we have depth, and we still have two more days that the draft, and then after the draft, to keep working on the O-line because that was a big part of what we were trying to do this offseason, to really increase our depth on the O-line overall."

On comparing tonight to the opening night of last year's draft:

"A year ago today, we were drafting with [T] Rashawn Slater. If you took take a look at how this draft unfolded, I think that if we hadn't taken Zion Johnson, it was going to happen shortly after us — he was that highly regarded of an interior player. I think it's very rare that you have an interior player that is that highly thought of. That's really what we were trying to get, the best player at that pick, but certainly the best O-lineman. What you don't want to do is reach for a tackle and then you have an issue somewhere else. We just really felt like this guy is a really complete player and this guy is a first-round level guard. I think it was really about building that interior for the future and knowing that that group is going to be able to play together for a lot of years."

On Johnson's character:

"When you meet this guy, you're going to be very impressed. This guy has real presence. When I went to his first interview at the combine — I just kind of watched him a little bit, you're kind of preparing for the guys that you're going to interview formally — when he came into the room, this guy had a real calm presence, real confidence, real poise. You see that presence when you're with him. Then, when he starts to talk, this guy's had a really unique path to being a first-round draft pick. He started at Davidson — you know, a lot of people know [Warriors G] Steph Curry coming from there, and that's kind of where this guy started, then he ends up at Boston College as a first-team All-American, and now the 17th pick in the draft. It's one of those great stories of a guy that really worked at it, really developed his game. He worked at it, and here he is today. I think when you guys meet him, you'll see all that because he has all the smarts and the toughness that we're looking for. Then, from a physical standpoint, he has real power. This guy is a really good athlete. He's a powerful inside player. That's what we're looking for."

On where Johnson was on the team's board upon selection:

"He was the top player on our board at the time that we picked, at 17. It was a unanimous feeling from our scouts to our coaching staff. In all the evaluation components for this guy, he really excelled. When he went to the Senior Bowl, he was one of the top players there. He played a bunch of different positions there. You take a look at his college career, what he did at Boston College in a pro-style system; you're seeing him really do things that translate to the NFL. Sometimes in the offensive line position, that's what holds offensive linemen back is that they don't really perform in a pro-style system. But, from a protection standpoint, from a run game standpoint — wide zone, tight zone, gap, duo, screen game — you're really able to see this guy operate. Then, at the Senior Bowl, when it's good on good — I mean, he played in the ACC, which is a great league, but then at the Senior Bowl, you're able to see him against the best in college football, and he was outstanding. Then, in the interview process, he certainly aced that part of it, too. This is a very, very good football player."

On if QB Justin Herbert understands the value of drafting an offensive lineman in the first round in back-to-back drafts:

"He and our skill players. It's Justin, for sure, but it's also [WR]Mike [Williams], [WR] Keenan [Allen], [RB] Austin, [WR] Josh [Palmer], our tight end group, who we're really excited about — [TE] Gerald Everett, [TE] Tre' [McKitty], D.P. [TE Donald Parham Jr.]. It's really about beat becoming a complete offensive football team. I think that that's what we're after. This was just about value. This was the best player that we had on our board at the time, and he happens to you really fit a position — much like last year with Rashawn. It's a different position, certainly for an inside player, but really a component in our offense that can really help us become a complete offense."

On if Herbert was in the draft room when the selection was made:

“No, he wasn’t. He got out of here. He was in here, did his thing, and then after we picked, I was able to call him on his way back. It was great to have the guys here tonight. I think that was one of my favorite parts of today, just our players being here. It really makes it feel like it’s a team. To be in front of our fans and in our locker room making this pick, it was a special, special day. I know that Justin was excited about the pick.”

On if ‘any part of him was tempted’ to select a defensive player at No. 17 overall:

“I really believe, in the NFL Draft, about value. I really believe in trust in the board. I really think that that’s important. You put in all this work, and I think that that’s something that [General Manager] Tom [Telesco], myself, the Spanos Family, [Director of Player Personnel] JoJo Wooden, [Director of College Scouting] Kevin Kelly, our area scouts and our coaching staff, that’s something that we’re really committed to. I think that a lot of people talk about our defense and our kicking game, which we made big investments in, but we also invested in our offense with [WR] Mike Williams and [TE] Gerald Everett. Like I said, it’s about building a team, and we felt like Zion Johnson was a big addition in making that complete team come to fruition.”

On trades made before the club’s selection:

“Yeah, it started to go with the trades. I think people were kind of anticipating that type of movement. I think that people maybe anticipated it happening sooner, but then when it happened, it didn’t really stop there for a while they’re in the middle. Then, you saw a couple of player trades, which is kind of uncommon. I think what you’re seeing in the NFL is you’re seeing that innovation, that different way of thinking, maybe, than the way it’s always been done. I think people are trying to get creative with their strategic process. I think that’s a good thing for the league. I think it’s really, really good for the league because people are trying to be at the forefront of building their teams. There are a lot of different ways to do it and I think that tonight was a really good example of it.”

On developing as a ‘line of scrimmage team’:

“I love what you brought up there because that’s what stands the test of time in the league. In the game of football, what stands the test of time is what happens up front. Specifically, on both sides of the ball, none of your scheme comes to life if you’re not good up front. It’s the one place I feel like on the field that it’s really hard to make up for. If you’re not good up front, it’s really hard, as a play-caller, to make up for that. If you do, you have to overcompensate in such a way that it really inhibits your ability to make plays on both sides of the ball. Then, I think from a cultural standpoint, what you’re trying to do is build a rugged, tough football team because that’s what it takes in this league. That’s what I want to be known for here; I want to be known as a rugged, tough football team that can beat you any way imaginable — offense, defense, kicking game. I think that we’re a lot closer to that, and we still have two more days, and then post-draft, and then going all the way to our first game. I think that that’s what we’re committed to, exploring all of those avenues. But I think, up front, we’re a lot closer, on both sides of the ball, to being where I expect to be.”

On if Johnson ‘addresses the run game situation’:

“The run game is an 11-man operation, including quarterback. I think what we did by getting Zion here, it really balances our run game. I think, last year, we were predominantly a left-side running team. In got-to-have-it situations, that’s where we were trending, running the football. What Zion does is he gives you a two-way go. I think the other thing that he does at a high level, which is the most important thing, is he can pass protect inside. You can help tackles in this league a lot more than you can help inside players. It’s a lot easier to neutralize an edge rusher than an interior rusher. So, when you have to go block the [Rams DL] Aaron Donalds of the world, the [Chiefs DT] Chris Jones of the world, the [Colts DT] DeForest Buckners of the world, when you have to go block those types of players inside, with the money on the line, you have to have an inside three they can get it done, and we feel like Zion can do that at a really high level.”

On when he became aware that the Chargers were facing the Chiefs on the first Thursday Night Football game exclusively on Amazon Prime (Week 2):

“I think I found out a couple of days ago. Then, there was that way of how it was going to all express itself and all of that. But, it’s exciting. I think it’s a good sign for our team. Obviously, we had two incredible games with those guys last year. If I were an NFL fan, that’s what I would want to open up with — I would want to see these two teams go at it. It’s exciting for our team, exciting for their team, but at the same time, you have one game before that. You have an opener long before you play on Thursday. But, it’s awesome to be a part of it. Al Michaels was able to announce it — a legend. He’s going to be calling that game, so it’s really special for our team and our fans.”

On if it is ‘advantageous’ to play the Thursday night game early in the season:

“I’ll tell you on Friday after the game whether it was or not [laughter].”