

Chargers Head Coach Brandon Staley Draft Availability — Day 1 **Thursday, April 29, 2021 ⚡ Hoag Performance Center ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.**

On culminating Day 1 of the 2021 NFL Draft:

"We were excited. Today is the culmination of a lot of work, a lot of preparation — our personnel department, our coaching staff, sports performance, our ownership — all coming together, being a team and getting a chance to compete together. There's so much work that goes into this. Tonight is just a great expression of all that hard work. We're certainly excited about our pick tonight. We're just so thankful for all of those people making tonight possible."

On T Rashawn Slater:

"He had a high level of production at a program we really respect. [Northwestern Head Coach] Pat Fitzgerald, we feel like he's one of the elite coaches in the country. It's an outstanding program playing in an outstanding league against a lot of quality players. We just felt like Rashawn fits all of the characteristics of a player that we're looking for and all of the position-critical factors for being a tackle in this league. He's a guy that has a lot of position flexibility, but on the left side of the line for Northwestern, this guy was as good as an offensive tackle that there was in college football. We feel like this guy is an outstanding athlete. He's a guy that's really strong, has outstanding balance and body control. When you think about just the way he plays the game, he understands angles, the front structures that he's playing against. You can just see that this guy really can process. He has the physicality to play the position at a high level. He comes from an outstanding family. He has the make-up, he has the critical factors, and he plays a premium position, which is left tackle, so we're really excited about him."

On Slater's flexibility:

"I think it just puts a feather in his cap, just the versatility. We certainly see him as a tackle, that's why we drafted him — to play outside. We feel like he's a natural out there. We feel like he has rare athleticism to kick to these wide rushers. I think, athletically, he had an outstanding pro day. After being out for a year, you wonder what he's going to look like. He had an outstanding workout and he had the film to match it. I mean, this guy started well over 30 games in his career and produced against a lot of quality players. We're just really pleased with this pick. Our goal going into this offseason was to become a line of scrimmage team, a bigger team, a more athletic team. Certainly, I think we achieved that tonight."

On Slater opting out of the 2020 season:

"I think you just saw the over 30 starts. You got to see him from his freshman year to his junior year. When he came to the workout, this guy was ready to play. He looked great. We feel like he's only going to get better. I just felt like the quality of competition, the quality of his play and his production — and then, all of those position specifics that we look for and the way he tested, we felt like he's a great fit for what we're trying to build here up front."

On if they thought Slater could last to No. 13:

"We felt like there was a better chance [for him to be available at No. 13]. We kind of felt like Dallas that there was still maybe a chance there that something could happen or somebody trying to trade up, but once he got past No. 8, we felt like this was a real possibility."

On Slater joining the line:

"The No.1 thing that we want to be able to do is protect the passer, but then the way we want to run the ball, too. I think he's an outstanding fit for the way we want to run the ball because he's so athletic. This guy has production in the passing game, one-on-one pass protection and he has a lot of production in the running game — both as an individual, blocking a guy one-on-one and then working in combination and really creating movement, being able to get to that second level, being able to get out to the perimeter and play on any kind of perimeter, screen plays, any of those loose space plays. We just feel like he's a complete player that way and he's really strong. I mean, 33 reps on the bench press and he has a strong lower body. We just feel like this guy is a complete player. I feel like his best ball is ahead of him. We're just really excited about his make-up, his production and his physical traits in critical factors that we're looking for."

On Slater playing in the Big Ten:

"I just think you're able to see him against rushers that you're going to face here in the NFL. You got to see him against guys that you're going to competing against, whether it was [Washington DE] Chase Young, [Bills DE A.J.] Epenesa, from Iowa, just to name a few. Just going through that type of schedule and then playing in the bowl games that they were able to play in. You saw a player and got a pretty pure evaluation on him. Then, when he came and showed up to his workout, he was just in outstanding shape. You could tell that he had just been really working at his game, working on his body. You could put all of that into one evaluation — all of his games he played for three years, the workouts, and then what you know about his make-up and the program he's coming from. We just really felt that he's a great fit for what we're trying to build here with the Chargers."

On Slater's strength:

"I think he's got a really good combination [of power and finesse]. He's really athletic. You're not going to find too many tackles that run 4.88 [40-yard-dash] that have that type of movement. When you watch him run, this guy is moving. This guy is out and running. He can kick to these rushers. When you have to block the guys that you have to be able to block in this league, he can get out there. He's strong enough to anchor and that's hard enough for any tackle. Sometimes it's to deal with the power element as much as the speed. The power is just as critical. You have to have that ability to anchor, too. You have to have the smarts. You're working with four other guys up front and five, six or seven with your running backs, tight ends and even your receivers sometimes. There's a lot of moving parts on a pro offensive play. The fact that he has the smarts, too and comes from a great family — has that toughness and competitive character — like I said, we're so happy to have him."

On the improvements on the offensive line:

"We're very encouraged [with what we've done]. It was our No. 1 goal in free agency and going into the draft — not just specific to the offensive line, but just our entire team. We wanted to be more of a line of scrimmage team. When we walk out there to play teams, I want to feel good about who's out there. I want to know that these are a bunch of real guys blocking for us that are really setting the tempo for our offense — not only for [QB] Justin [Herbert], but for all of our players and all of our skill players. I feel like the teams that play at the end of the year are the teams that have lines of scrimmage on both sides of the ball that can stand the test of time. We feel like what we've done over the last several months is make that a real possibility. I think Rashawn is going to fit well with the guys that we have."

On Special Assistant to the Head Coach Cody Cejda's relationship with Slater from Northwestern and the potential impact that played:

"I think it just added an extra component to it. Our area scouts do such a fantastic job. Kevin Kelly, our Director of College Scouting, and JoJo Wooden, our Director of Player Personnel, they just wrap such a tight evaluation for you — so thorough, so detailed. Then, when you have a guy like Cody, who's been in that program for over a decade and has seen a lot of players come through there, just to have his insight — that intimate knowledge of who Rashawn is on a day-to-day basis, the type of person, the type of competitor and the type of leader that he is — it just gives you an extra feather in the cap of the evaluation process. Really proud of the way that we evaluated this guy because we felt like we were getting a really clean player and a player that we had a lot of conviction on."

On Slater's arm-length measurement:

"[Former Browns OL] Joe Thomas had a really awesome NFL Network segment on that, because I think Joe [Thomas] was rated at like 33.5 [inches] or something like that. He was talking about, 'How many times do you block a guy with your arms fully extended?' It doesn't happen very often. I think what we try to factor into the equation was just his athleticism. It mitigates a lot of that, whatever the ideal length, that people would prefer, 34-34.5 [inches] — whatever that length is, his athleticism and then his strength. This guy is a very strong, heavy-handed guy who takes great angles. So much of pass protection is being able to set with great angles and understanding your protection plan and who you're playing with. I feel like Rashawn has all those things that really make him an excellent pass protector one-on-one. We're really excited about him."

On using his athleticism in run-blocking, particularly with outside-zone schemes:

"I think what we're really trying to do is force people to defend horizontally and get these guys to run. It's hard to run at these defenses consistently, the ones that have big fronts. I think that is a tough task in the NFL. We want to have the athleticism up front to be able to get these guys having to run on the other side of the football, and then be able to use guys like Rashawn in the screen game, as well. I think that's a big part of how you want to play nowadays, getting the ball to your play-makers in space. Just feel like he's the total package that way. He can give us the athleticism in the run game, in the perimeter screen game, and then, obviously, the number one priority, being one-on-one in pass protection. Just feel like he fits really nicely. Really thrilled that we were able to pick him."

On Slater's 2019 performance against former Ohio State DE Chase Young:

"I think that any time that you're studying a player, you want to see him playing against premium players. I think that it's not exclusive to his matchup against Chase, it's all of the players that we're evaluating. But, certainly, when he's in a premium matchup like that, what did he look like? How did he play? How did he compete? Certainly, Chase is held in high regard — rightfully so. I felt like Rashawn Slater played like a first-round pick against him. When you play against high-level players like that, you're going to win some and you're going to lose some, but how do you compete for four quarters? I think Rashawn certainly competed well in that game, and against a lot of other good players on that defense, too. There were a lot of other highly drafted players on that team that he was blocking. Just felt like that was a pretty thorough way to evaluate him, just within that game along. But, then, going through that whole schedule and then going back through three years' worth of work, we were able to get a pretty clear picture on him. Really excited about his body of work."

On the chances of the Chargers having the opportunity to draft Rashawn Slater increasing after Oregon T Penei Sewell was selected at No. 5 overall:

"We weren't really surprised about how the top 10 went in terms of the positions that went. I feel like we felt that rhythm of that sequencing was certainly going to express itself that way. The only component was if Rashawn going to go in the top 10. That was probably the only question mark. We felt like he was worthy of that selection, and so, would he make it past there? A lot of that had to do with the quarterbacks and who was going to try to come up. Were there going to be four quarterbacks taken that early? When that didn't happen, we were certainly glad to take him at 13."

On if he felt 'nervous' when the Cowboys were on the clock at No. 12, one pick before the Chargers selection:

"We felt very comfortable with where we were. We felt like we knew who was behind us and we knew who was ahead of us. We felt like, regardless of how it went down, we were going to be able to select a really good player. When they decided to go with [LB] Micah [Parsons], I think that our draft room was excited because we had unanimous feel for Rashawn. Felt like the position he plays, a premium position in this league, being able to get a guy at a premium position that had his type of production and his physical traits and critical factors, it just felt like, 'Man, that's an awesome pick for the Chargers.' Just really excited that it happened that way."

On athletes with parents who played professionally:

"Bloodlines are important. Any time you have been shaped by the game, I think that's always a positive. Certainly, with his father being such a big influence in his life, you can't help but factor that into your equation. His father is a big man, too, if you saw that draft video. You put all that together and then you take Rashawn, who he is as a person, and then factor the bloodlines in, it makes the evaluation even easier."

On Slater's use of the word 'technician' and how that relates to what he's seen on film:

"You'll sometimes hear the word 'raw,' or, 'Hey, this guy is going to get a lot better at the next level,' Maybe he doesn't have that polish or whatever. I feel like Rashawn, very well-schooled at Northwestern, but you can just see a guy that really understands how to play, a guy that has his own style. That's something that I really like, that he has his own style of play that he's created that works for him and that takes advantage of his gifts. Just feel like he's going to get a lot better, too. He's still a young guy. There's still so much in front of him as an NFL offensive lineman. Coming into the NFL, there's such a big transition, but he's got all the right stuff; the make-up, the body and all that physical stuff put into one. He's going to be able to get a lot better very quickly. Really looking forward to [Run Game Coordinator/OL Coach] Frank Smith and [Assistant Offensive Line Coach] Shaun Sarrett being able to coach this guy, and Rashawn being able to partner up with a really good group of guys here on our team that are going to push him, as well."

On Slater's intensity:

"One of the things we were really attracted to, in the process, is that he's an intense competitor. He has a play style that you are attracted to. This guy really competes to the end of the down and competes for four quarters. I think that shows up. When I talk about being a line-of-scrimmage team, you want to be an all-the-time line-of-scrimmage team. You don't want to have this pick and choose when you are a line-of-scrimmage team. He's one of those really intense competitors where the game means a lot to him. He works at his craft a lot, from a position skill standpoint. He's in the weight room, big weight room guy. Just studying a lot of the tape and being a gym rat. I think that you're seeing a player that has the right stuff to play one of the toughest positions in sports. That competitive nature is something we were really attracted to."

On having 'his own style' as an offensive lineman:

"Because of his athleticism and because of his strength, this guy is able to take different set angles. He's able to do a lot of things that most offensive linemen aren't able to do because he's so athletic and strong, and then he's got the brain to make it all work. There's a lot of variety in how he plays, which for young players isn't that common. That's a great sign that he's already ahead of the game. Then, there's going to be an even bigger transition coming to this level. He has an awesome make-up. Certainly excited to start working with him."