

Chargers Head Coach Brandon Staley Day 2 Draft Availability **Friday, April 29, 2022 ⚡ Hoag Performance Center ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.**

On the selection of S JT Woods:

“JT played on an outstanding defense at Baylor. I have a lot of respect for [Baylor Head Coach] Dave Aranda, [Baylor Defensive Coordinator] Ron Roberts. As you saw tonight, several of his teammates were drafted. That was definitely the top defense in the Big 12 [Conference] and one of the top defenses in the country. We just really see him as one of those secondary players that we really value. Can't have enough of them. You guys saw that the record amount of receivers that were drafted in the first two rounds in this year's draft. JT has a lot of rare DB stuff. He's six-foot-two-plus, 195 [pounds]. He runs 4.3 [40-yard-dash]. He had a 10'8" broad [jump], 39.5" vertical [jump]. Those are rare DB numbers. Then, he led the nation in interceptions. He had six interceptions. He returned a couple for touchdowns. He was a multi-year starter on that team. He ran track at Baylor. He was really sharp in the interview process. He can really run the show, which is something that we really value back there at safety, or just in our secondary, in general. We really think that he's versatile to play in a lot of different places, but specifically, he can play in the slot, he can play deep. You know how we use [S] Derwin James [Jr.], going down in the slot and playing Dime-Money or Star. Now, you have a guy in the deep part of the field. You have him and [S] Nas [Nasir Adderley] who can play the deep part of the field with a lot of range. You have really three guys with a lot of gas back there that can go make plays and get you the football. So, we felt like this would just really be an outstanding addition to the secondary because of those reasons. Then, we think he'll have kicking game value. This guy can really run and he's a really good tackler. He can play a bunch of different positions as a gunner, on kickoff, just all of those types of things. We just think that we're getting an outstanding player. He has a really good pedigree. We're excited to get him in our DB environment and get him going.”

On if having Woods in the deep part of the field helps S Derwin James Jr. 'move around' underneath:

“I think that when you play five and six DB groupings, if you do move Derwin closer to the line of scrimmage or in the slot somewhere, you don't want to lose that play-making ability in the deep part of the field. I think that what JT gives you is premium range back there. Now, you have two guys back there, with him and Nas, and Nas can play in the slot, too — I mean, he's done that in his career, too. He didn't do it last year, but depending on how the rest of our secondary shakes out, you have really three safeties, and then four if you really count [DB] Mark Webb [Jr.] because Mark Webb played in the slot at Georgia. Now, you have four safeties who all have slot flex. We really value that — the more DBs that you have in your secondary that can play the slot, whether it's Star or Money, it gives you a numbers advantage in how you cover these guys. When the money is on the line on third down in two-minute, you're going to have five and six DBs in the game. We play a lot of different types of five and six DBs, depending on the matchup, so it just gives us more flexibility. This guy's got a rare engine back there. His game speed, I mean he's running over 21 miles an hour, but it's the speed plus the way he processes. He has a great processor because he's really smart. When you put the physical speed with that mental speed, you're getting a really high-end secondary player.”

On if Woods' missed tackles 'are a concern':

"I think that he's coming out of the top. The way he runs the alley, I think that this guy has real speed to get there. I think that on his finish, he just has to use those 32-inch arms to wrap up. This guy is making really good contact. Sometimes you get a missed tackle because you didn't wrap it up. I think his angles, his tracking — I think the big part of playing safety, when you're coming out of the top, is you're assessing his angles. Does this guy play with good pace on the football? Those things are excellent. His tracking, his pace is excellent. I think his best football is ahead of him. I think that that's the intel we got from Dave Aranda and Ron Roberts, that this guy is a guy that throughout his college career, really, really improved, so we think that he can definitely hit another gear in our environment. Then, his defensive coordinator [Renaldo Hill] is a 10-year NFL safety. [Secondary Coach] Derrick Ansley is one of the superstar coaches in the NFL — with [Assistant Secondary Coach] Tommy Donatell, that's a superstar coaching staff, that trio right there. We think that he's going to get a lot better. Then, he's going to be with one of the top secondary players in the league every day in Derwin James. Then, teaming up with [CB] J.C. [Jackson], [CB] Asante [Samuel Jr.], [S] Nas [Nasir Adderley], Vato [CB Michael Davis], there are a lot of quality guys that he is going to be able to learn from."

On the potential of Woods' contribution in the secondary:

"I really think that this guy is going to be a factor early. I think we're going to have great competition in our secondary, but I would expect him to come in here and compete for a role. I think that all of that is going to express itself when the pads come on training camp, when there's live tackling. I think so much of playing in the secondary is that you have to remember that you're tackling these big runners, receivers and tight ends. A lot of that will work itself out when we get pads on in training camp, but we definitely drafted him because we have a vision that he's going to come in and help us."

On if Woods playing cornerback 'is a consideration':

"We don't really see him like that. We kind of see him as a safety, and then a Star and Money type of flex. He has that movement to play in the slot. When we kind of assess DBs that play safety, it's playing the ball in the deep part of the field, man-to-man coverage ability in the slot, and then open-field tackling. Then, obviously, [an ability to] key diagnose, communication, processor and all of that type of stuff. He really checks all of those boxes. At the Senior Bowl, they put him at corner and he had some reps there, where you kind of saw him play man-to-man, which helped in the evaluation, but at Baylor, they play a really pro-style defense, so you're getting a very pure look at a secondary player. I think that he just really fits with how we want to play, in particularly in the deep part of the field. I think what makes him unique is how he plays deep because he can really find the angle and he can get there. We're excited to work with him."

On if Woods' 'proven track record' of takeaway abilities 'fit a need' for the defensive unit:

"I think that we're going to improve our rush. Obviously, you add [OLB] Khalil Mack, and when you have Khalil Mack and [OLB] Joey Bosa rushing the passer, we feel like that's why it's important to get secondary players who can get you the ball, because we feel like people are going to be sped up and you want people back there who can catch a mistake and make plays back there. We really feel like he can do that. With his range, and then his size and his concept trigger, he can really get us the football. That's what he did for Baylor and that's what we are going to hope that he can do for us."

On Woods' ability to contribute on special teams due to his speed:

"Yeah, I definitely see that in his future. The more team speed you can get — the thing that people, I think, sometimes fail to realize on [special] teams is how much ground you're actually covering, so the faster you are, that works to your advantage. We're definitely going to try and get him, and everybody that can run, on [special] teams, so that we can really cut the field in half and win the vertical field position. I think that we've tried to really do a good job in this offseason of making our special teams as strong as they can be, certainly, with the specialists — deep-snapper, punter, kicker and then returner — but then, it's your core guys that really have to come on. I think last year, that second half of the year, our young guys really came on stronger. Now, we have to keep building this nucleus today and tomorrow with more guys that you can add to your core group that gives you that quality of depth on special teams."

On the value of C Corey Linsley and S Derwin James Jr. on aiding in the development of this year's first two draft selections:

"I think it's really important. I think when that you get a guy that you feel like has a lot of potentials, has a lot that's made up of the right stuff, it really reminded me of a couple of years ago when Utah's defense had a bunch of secondary guys. They had an incredible defense when I was with the Rams in 2020. That secondary group that they had was incredible. All of those guys are really playing at a high level in the NFL, and I see a lot of JT Woods in that group, where this Baylor group was really loaded. They had a bunch of ballers on that team and they had a really special chemistry. That's why they won a lot of games there. That's why they did a lot of things that that program had never done before, and that was a big factor of it, too. We want to bring people from winning environments in, and I think that's exactly what we did with [G] Zion [Johnson]. He comes from a pro-style coaching staff. They did a lot of really special things at BC when he was there transforming that place and getting that place going. JT was the same way. Where they started, at Baylor, and where they finished, he was part of program history. Then, specifically on defense, the way they played, you're matching up against Oklahoma. I'm watching this guy versus Oklahoma. I'm watching this guy against [former Oklahoma QB] Caleb Williams and all of those guys. I'm watching him against Oklahoma State, Texas and TCU. I'm watching him against Ole Miss in [the Sugar Bowl] and this guy, he's lighting the field on fire. Then, he had an awesome all-star game [Senior Bowl]. Much like Zion, this guy was at the all-star game, and so you're seeing him against the best in the country. Then, the Combine and then his Pro Day, you were just able to get a very full evaluation, and we really value that. We're excited about the pick."

On the amount of time Woods spent covering the slot at Baylor:

"He was there. [Former Baylor S Jalen and current Texans S] Pitre did that so much for them at Baylor, he was more like a Nickel Star, playing a little bit lower. But, JT did that, too. A lot of times in their rotations, he was kind of in that lower zone, in the slot covering. You got to see him doing a lot of things that we do, so it was very easy to project the fit. Then, you got to see him in the deep part of the field. I think in college football now, it's a lot harder to see safeties playing the deep part of the field because the passing game isn't as deep — it's quick game a lot, RPOs and just get it out quick, where you were able to see this guy in the deep part of the field track it and find the angle. We've been around a lot of great safeties. I've been fortunate, in my NFL career, and [Defensive Coordinator] Renaldo [Hill], obviously having played 10 years, and DA [Secondary Coach Derrick Ansley], [Assistant Secondary Coach] Tommy [Donatell], we've been around a lot of great secondaries. We feel like we're onto something with our group here. That was something that's really important with the passing game and where the NFL is going; you've have to have secondary players, and you can't have enough of them. We just really feel like there was great value for this guy."

On if the transactions made by other teams within the AFC West Division 'increased the urgency' to select a coverage player at a premium draft position:

"I think, philosophically, I've just always been that way. Really, I tried to bring that mindset to the Rams when I was the defensive coordinator — I was playing a lot of five and six DBs to everything, and then moving guys around. I think we've had really good success doing that, especially when you have the players with the flexibility to do it, because I think you can get really specific with the matchup and really put your guys in premium spots. I think that's just part of the passing game. Just because a team is a good passing team, doesn't mean it's the same as the next passing team. What we try to do with our guys is to kind of fit it to the game, and we're lucky that we're kind of building a secondary where we can play that way. I think that in our first two years here, we've been able to kind of get off to a good start and we'll see where it goes tomorrow. We're hoping to keep moving in that direction because, again, the other reason why you need a lot of secondary players is for special teams, because they're the ones that are covering the kicks."