

# How 10 NFL mock drafts predict the Denver Broncos will use their No. 5 pick

By Kyle Frederickson

Denver Post

April 14, 2018

The NFL Draft is quickly approaching but there appears no consensus about who will be taken at the top of the draft, including how the Denver Broncos will use their No. 5 overall pick.

In an analysis of 10 recent mock drafts, Broncos general manager John Elway is projected to select a quarterback, cornerback, running back or guard. Here is the latest breakdown of each prediction for the top five picks in the April 26 draft from a variety of pundits.

CBS Sports, Jared Dubin

1. Browns, QB, Sam Darnold (USC)
2. Broncos (mock trade), QB, Josh Rosen (UCLA)
3. Jets, QB, Baker Mayfield (Oklahoma)
4. Browns, DE, Bradley Chubb (N.C. State)
5. Giants (mock trade), G Quenton Nelson (Notre Dame)

NFL.com, Bucky Brooks

1. Browns, QB, Josh Allen (Wyoming)
2. Giants, DE, Bradley Chubb (N.C. State)
3. Jets, QB, Sam Darnold (USC)
4. Browns, RB, Saquon Barkley (Penn State)
5. Broncos, QB Josh Rosen (UCLA)

ESPN, Mel Kiper

1. Browns, QB, Josh Allen (Wyoming)
2. Giants, QB, Sam Darnold (USC)
3. Jets, QB, Josh Rosen (UCLA)
4. Browns, RB, Saquon Barkley (Penn State)
5. Broncos, QB Baker Mayfield (Oklahoma)

ESPN, Todd McShay

1. Browns, QB, Sam Darnold (USC)
2. Giants, DE, Bradley Chubb (N.C. State)
3. Jets, QB, Josh Rosen (UCLA)
4. Browns, RB, Saquon Barkley (Penn State)
5. Broncos, CB, Denzel Ward (Ohio State)

SB Nation, Staff

1. Browns, QB, Josh Rosen (UCLA)
2. Giants, QB, Baker Mayfield (Oklahoma)
3. Jets, QB, Sam Darnold (USC)
4. Browns, CB, Denzel Ward (Ohio State)
5. Broncos, RB, Saquon Barkley (Penn State)

FOX Sports, Colin Cowherd

1. Browns, QB, Josh Allen (Wyoming)
2. Giants, QB, Sam Darnold (USC)
3. Jets, QB, Josh Rosen (UCLA)
4. Browns, DE, Bradley Chubb (N.C. State)
5. Broncos, CB, Denzel Ward (Ohio State)

Sporting News, Vinnie Iyer

1. Browns, QB, Sam Darnold (USC)
2. Giants, DE, Bradley Chubb (N.C. State)
3. Jets, QB, Josh Rosen (UCLA)
4. Browns, DB, Minkah Fitzpatrick (Alabama)
5. Broncos, RB, Saquon Barkley (Penn State)

NBC Sports, Ben Standig

1. Browns, QB, Josh Allen (Wyoming)
2. Giants, QB, Sam Darnold (USC)

3. Jets, QB, Josh Rosen (UCLA)

4. Browns, RB, Saquon Barkley (Penn State)

5. Broncos, OG, Quenton Nelson (Notre Dame)

Rivals, Mike Farrell

1. Browns, RB, Saquon Barkley (Penn State)

2. Giants, QB, Sam Darnold (USC)

3. Jets, QB, Josh Rosen (UCLA)

4. Browns, QB, Baker Mayfield (Oklahoma)

5. Broncos, QB, Josh Allen (Wyoming)

Bleacher Report, Richard Janvrin

1. Browns, QB, Josh Allen (Wyoming)

2. Giants, OG, Quenton Nelson (Notre Dame)

3. Jets, QB, Josh Rosen (UCLA)

4. Browns, RB Saquon Barkley (Penn State)

5. Broncos, QB Sam Darnold (USC)

# Broncos reach back in their scouting reports to claim C.J. Smith

By Mike Klis

9NEWS

April 14, 2018

The Broncos will collect a few of the rookie prospects they like in this year's draft process, but there will be many more who wind up elsewhere.

That doesn't mean they can't secure them later. An example: C.J. Smith, a cornerback the Broncos claimed off waivers from the Cleveland Browns on Friday.

The Broncos liked Smith going back to his days at North Dakota State, where he was a five-year teammate of Carson Wentz (both redshirted as freshmen in 2011). While Wentz wound up the No. 2 overall draft pick of the Philadelphia Eagles in 2016, Smith joined the Eagles an undrafted free agent.

The Broncos had interest in Smith at the time, but he correctly figured he had a better chance breaking in with Philly than Denver's No Fly Zone.

Smith played 10 games for the Eagles as a rookie, mostly on special teams, then began the 2017 season on their practice squad before Cleveland picked him up. He played in the final three games of last season with the Browns, then was traded to Seattle last month for a conditional seventh-round draft pick in 2020.

The Seahawks, though, voided the trade on the claim Smith failed their physical exam even though he is believed to be healthy. When the Browns waived Smith on Thursday, the Broncos pounced on the opportunity to pick up a player they've liked for a while.

Smith and the Broncos are confident he will pass his physical Monday when players report for the start of their offseason conditioning program. Smith is expected to compete for a spot on the Broncos' 53-man roster as a No. 4 or 5 cornerback and special teams contributor.

# Dez release reinforces Demaryius was better choice

By Mike Klis

9NEWS

April 14, 2018

Demaryius got 'em.

Demaryius got Dez.

It's been Demaryius and Dez, Dez and Demaryius since the 2010 NFL Draft.

They were selected two picks apart in the first round. They both took the No. 88. They were both established five seasons into their career as two of the best receivers in the league. At that point, Demaryius and Dez both received five-year, \$70 million contract extensions.

But finally, Demaryius got separation on Dez.

John Elway has decided to bring Demaryius Thomas back for a ninth season while Cowboys owner Jerry Jones released Dez Bryant on Friday.

It can be unequivocally stated Josh McDaniels, Brian Xanders and the Broncos made the correct choice when they picked Demaryius instead of Dez. The numbers say so.

Player .....	Pick ...	Rec .....	YD ...	TD ...	SB
Demaryius Thomas .....	22	629	8,653	57	2
Dez Bryant .....	24	531	7,459	73	0

In Thomas' first Super Bowl appearance following the 2013 season, his Broncos got destroyed by Seattle, but he set a Super Bowl-record with 13 catches. In his second Super Bowl appearances, Thomas had just one catch but he came away with a ring.

Advantage, Demaryius from goal line to goal line.

He also has 98 catches and 1,194 yards more than Dez.

Yes, Bryant, who at 6-foot-5 is 2 inches taller than Thomas, was a post-up, high-point, touchdown-catching machine, especially in the three-year period from 2012-14, when he scored 41 times.

And there's no question Bryant received gobs more publicity than the reserved Thomas.

But Bryant's career has pretty much overlapped with two quality quarterbacks in Tony Romo and Dak Prescott. Thomas had a terrific four-year run with Peyton Manning but that period was sandwiched by Tim Tebow and Kyle Orton on one side and Trevor Siemian, Brock Osweiler and Paxton Lynch on the other.

Brandon Marshall was a big reason why the Broncos took Thomas, and not Bryant, with the No. 22 selection in the first round of the 2010 draft.

“Didn’t expect to go there at all,” Thomas said in an interview for the book, *The 50 Greatest Players in Denver Broncos History*. “Everything was all Dez.”

But McDaniels clashed with Marshall, the Broncos’ 100-catch receiver, the previous year, and he wanted the coachable Thomas instead of Bryant, who was considered the better receiver but a huge character concern. Bryant went No. 24 to the Dallas Cowboys, and indeed, he often clashed with his coaches and teammates early in his career.

Thomas had a foot injury entering the draft and didn’t have much of a rookie season. He started to break out with Tebow – who was the No. 25 overall pick, one after Bryant, in the 2010 draft -- midway through his second season of 2011.

From there, Thomas and Bryant were in the conversation for NFL’s top receiver for a few years although both had their production slip in the past three years.

But while Bryant’s three-year decline was precipitous following his own foot injury – an average of 50 catches for 678 yards and 6 touchdowns – Thomas’ has still been efficient with an average of 93 catches, 1,112 yards and 5 touchdowns.

Thomas has five Pro Bowl selections to three for Bryant.

Ultimately, the two were separated when Elway exercised Thomas’ \$4 million option bonus in March – effectively assuring he will also receive an \$8.5 million salary in his ninth season in Denver – and the Cowboys decided to let go of Bryant.

Given the Cowboys waited a month after the start of free agency to release their star receiver, Bryant supporters might say the only difference between Demaryius and Dez is Elway did right by Thomas and Bryant was wronged by Jones.

But the numbers other than 88 say the Broncos did right by taking Demaryius instead of Dez.

# “The biggest sleeper”: NFL size, athleticism has made Buffs' Isaiah Oliver a popular prospect as draft nears

By Nicki Jhabvala

The Athletic

April 14, 2018

There's a secret to the play that still has many Colorado fans buzzing. In the Buffs' 2017 home opener — a blowout win over Texas State — cornerback Isaiah Oliver chased down receiver Elijah King on a deep ball up the middle. Oliver leaped over King's head to tip the ball to himself, intercept it with one hand, and then — in a split second — turn his body 180 degrees to begin a full sprint for a 41-yard return.

“How good is that?!” the Pac-12 Network's Jim Watson yelled in disbelief on the telecast. “That's why that guy is going to play in the NFL.”

But there's more to this story.

“It was a lot like the Colorado State play the week before, against Michael Gallup,” Oliver said.

In the Rocky Mountain Showdown at the Broncos' stadium, Oliver had the not-so-small task of trying to shut down Gallup, a 6-foot-1, 205-pound receiver with a physicality to match and an affinity for grabbing jump balls.

On a first-and-10 in the second quarter, CSU quarterback Nick Stevens launched the ball up the middle for Gallup, but as he stretched out for an over-the-shoulder grab, Oliver and his 80-inch wingspan broke up the pass at the edge of the end zone.

“I didn't really have the intention to go catch that one,” Oliver said. “I was kind of more like just try to break it up. Watching it on film, I felt like I could have made the play if I had more of an intent to go catch the ball.”

“So against Texas State, what I was thinking about when the ball was in the air was if I go with the intent to make the play I'll probably be able to make it. That was the difference. The ball was in the air, I went for it and I felt like I could get it.”

Those interceptions, that week-to-week progression from film study, and that unteachable athleticism and instinct have made Oliver a familiar name among NFL teams. Ask him and he'll tell you he's the best cornerback in this year's draft.

“Most definitely,” he said. “Really just because I have a unique athleticism compared to the other corners in the draft. That, along with my technique at the corner position. It's pretty rare I feel like to have a combination of both of those things.”

Ask NFL analysts and coaches, and Oliver is slotted near the top of his position. Some have given him the label of this year's “biggest sleeper.” Others have described him as a piece of clay, with the size and talent to mold into a successful pro.

Two weeks from the draft, Oliver is projected to go anywhere from the middle of the first round to the early second, and over the last month or so he has met with nearly half of the league to prove his worth.

But, like his interception against Texas State and his acrobatic breakup against Colorado State, there's much more to his story and it's next chapter.

Oliver is a physical mishap. An 80-inch wingspan? Arms that measure 33.5 inches?

"No, it's normal," Oliver said. "I always had long arms, but I didn't think they were that long. My father's arms are average I would say. My grandfather is taller and longer like I am. I don't think his arms are as long as mine. It probably comes from him."

And the speed? Well, it's no wonder where that came from. At the NFL combine in February, Oliver ran the 40-yard dash in 4.5 seconds, a number that belies his capability on the field.

For his first two years at CU, Oliver doubled as a track and football star and was a two-time All-Pac-12 selection in the decathlon. His sophomore year, Oliver finished fourth at the Pac-12 championships with 7,394 points, and he won the 400-meter dash (48.15), the 100-meter dash (10.82 seconds) and the long jump (24'01.75). Although his focus now is football, he hasn't ruled out trying to qualify for the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo.

"He also has the ability to have an extra gear down the field," Colorado football coach Mike MacIntyre said. "I haven't coached very many guys at all that can do what he can do. He can be running with a guy who looks like he's running full speed and the ball is in the air and he can go get an extra gear to go get it. I think that's because a lot of his track running. He can pick up speed. He's quick, he's fast in the 40, but the 30-to-50 yards downfield, he can catch anybody and make the play on the ball and knock it away. Or pick it. It's pretty impressive how he can do that."

There's little question as to where Oliver gets his natural athleticism. His uncle Damon Rays was a receiver out of Missouri who went on to the NFL as a ninth-round pick by the Cowboys in 1991.

Isaiah's father, Muhammad Oliver, was a world-class decathlete and cornerback out of the University of Oregon. Muhammad was drafted by the Broncos in the ninth-round of the 1992 draft and joined a stacked secondary that included Steve Atwater, Dennis Smith and Tyrone Braxton. Muhammad played in three games for the Broncos that season, then bounced to four different teams over the next three years.

"Just from when I was younger until now, he's really been the guy that's taught me the most about football," Isaiah said. "He played corner as well, so he's taught me a lot about the position, too. Throughout this process, he's been a great support from finding an agent, then through the combine process. He's been there helping me a lot."

Search for Muhammad Oliver and one clip from his college days will pop up immediately, of an interception on a deep ball against Stanford in 1991. The pass was underthrown, and Muhammad leaped in front the receiver for a tumbling interception.

Almost exactly 25 years later, Isaiah nearly replicated his father's play, in a game-sealing interception against Stanford.

That interception against Stanford was also a bit of validation for a choice Oliver made two years earlier. Coming out of Brophy College Preparatory School in Phoenix, Oliver, then a receiver and defensive back, had few offers. He chose Colorado, switched full-time to defense and joined a secondary that included future pros in Kenneth Crawley (Saints), Chidobe Awuzie (Cowboys), Ahkello Witherspoon (49ers) and Tedric Thompson (Seahawks).

They latter three and Oliver would dub themselves the “Money Gang.”

“That’s really one of the big reasons I wanted to go there,” Oliver said. “Coach Mac has a history of producing DBs and then being a defensive backs coach in the NFL for some time, I knew I was going to be able to refine my technique. I’ve always been a good athlete, growing up and playing football and everything. But I never really had premier, top-level technique I’d say until I got to Colorado and started working on it there.”

Two years younger than the rest of the Money Gang, Oliver played in 13 games as a freshman and finished his three-year tenure with 32 pass-breakups, tied for 10th-most in school history.

But the national attention was often focused on the others.

“It’s obviously expected that they’re going to have more media attention I guess, and they were going into the draft the year after and I wasn’t,” Oliver said. “But they were great players, we all still are now. But I learned a lot from those guys and just being able to be with them was a great opportunity.”

But when the Buffs’ 5-7 season ended, Oliver declared for the draft and quickly began a training regimen geared toward the combine and his future as a pro. He spent nearly two months in California, splitting his time at his agency’s in-house training facility in Irvine and at the STARS training facility founded by former NFL defensive back Jason David. His focus was twofold: To prepare for the combine’s track-like drills and to continue to hone his technique as a defensive back.

“I just felt ready for that next step, that challenge to compete against the best in the world,” Oliver said. “When I made that transition to the mindset, I was full force with my decision.

About a month after the combine, Oliver attended Colorado’s pro day in Boulder, where Broncos general manager John Elway, senior personnel advisor Gary Kubiak, director of player personnel Matt Russell and head coach Vance Joseph stood on the sideline. Oliver had met with the Broncos in a formal interview in Indianapolis, but that the Broncos’ contingent headed to CU to see Oliver (among others) instead of flying to Alabama to see cornerback Minkah Fitzpatrick that day spoke volumes.

In the weeks since, Oliver has met with about 15 NFL teams, including 12 private workouts in Boulder, where he’ll remain for the next week or so before heading home for the draft.

In Goodyear, Ariz., surrounded by friends, family and the voice of NFL commissioner Roger Goodell, Oliver will begin to write the next chapter.

# How David Bruton Jr. and Arielle Gold formed an Olympic and Super Bowl-sized friendship

By Ben Swanson

DenverBroncos.com

April 14, 2018

As snowboarder Arielle Gold kicked off the women's halfpipe final at the Winter Olympics on Feb. 13 in Pyeongchang, former Broncos safety David Bruton Jr. tuned in from half a world away.

Bruton, who is working toward a physical therapy degree at University of Colorado Denver, was studying at Auraria Library in downtown Denver, preparing for a practical exam for his anatomy lab course, when he gave himself a break to watch his friend, one of America's top snowboarders, compete for an Olympic medal.

Her first run had ended abruptly when she failed to land an ambitious first trick, a challenging 1080-degree rotation. But on the second attempt, she completed the move and finished the run with a 74.75 score from the judges, putting her one spot behind a medal finish.

To have a chance at leapfrogging fellow American Kelly Clark to move up the leaderboard, Gold needed to improve upon that second run by at least seven points. Instead, she improved by 11. When Clark's final run score fell short of Gold's by 2.25 points, the Steamboat Springs native secured the bronze medal.

After the competition concluded, Gold wrapped herself in the American flag while cheers came not just from the crowd, but also the Auraria Library.

"I started watching it and geeking out," Bruton says. "I was like, 'She did it! She landed a clean run!' I feel like tricks have gotten so much bigger that it's harder to land a big run nowadays. So I was extremely happy and so much so that I forgot where I was, because I was yelling in the library."

Bruton had hoped he would be in Pyeongchang for that moment. Unfortunately, he couldn't work the trip into his school schedule.

But that didn't mean he'd miss the opportunity to watch Gold's biggest achievement. After all, she had been there for his when he and the Broncos won Super Bowl 50.

Bruton and Gold's friendship just makes sense.

For one thing, their professions and hobbies overlap. Ever since he was drafted by the Broncos in 2009, Bruton has embraced the outdoors lifestyle that is embedded in Colorado, taking to the foothills and mountains to go mountain biking, off-roading in his Jeep or snowboarding. Gold, meanwhile, has embraced the other central tenet of Colorado life, which is being a Broncos fan.

"I grew up in Steamboat Springs, Colorado, so it was kind of in my blood," Gold says. "My dad started bringing me to games when I was maybe 6 years old. At the time, I used to come just to eat the food and

because it was fun, but as I got older I got a lot more into it. Now I know pretty much everything I could about the Broncos."

The two first connected on Instagram through a mutual friend, Keri Herman, a slopestyle freeskiier. Shortly after that, Bruton invited Gold to watch the Broncos take down the Patriots in the 2015 AFC Championship Game.

Thrilled to have witnessed the Broncos take another step toward the Super Bowl, Gold then went to take the next step in her career at the Winter X Games in Aspen.

In the week leading up her event, she was surprised to receive a Broncos jersey from Bruton — the first of two surprises he had in store for her.

"He sent me a jersey out to the X Games and I wore that in my competition," Gold says. "And I actually got silver in it, so he attributes that to his lucky jersey. After that, I was at dinner with my friends the night after I finished competing, and I was just talking to him about the Super Bowl and how cool it was and how cool it would be to go, and he just said, 'Oh, I got you!' and ended up being able to get tickets for us. So all I had to do was book my flight to get there and then he had everything set up, which was pretty unreal.

"Oh, my gosh, I was so happy. Even at the time, when he first told me, I was kind of nervous. I wasn't sure if I should go, and then I remember telling my mom and my dad and they were like, 'Of course you should go!' [I said,] 'You're right. Why am I even considering not going?' I ended up going and having the time of my life."

After the X Games wrapped up on Jan. 31, she joined Herman and Bruton's brother for the trip to the Bay Area.

Once there, Bruton and Gold got to know each other better because Bruton, who had fractured his fibula in the Broncos' Week 15 game against Pittsburgh, was on injured reserve.

"With me being on IR, I had an ample amount of time to go see the city and hang out with them when they got out there," Bruton says. "She was just stoked about being around the atmosphere, the Broncos — of course — and to get a chance hang out and shoot the crap."

As you'd expect, the experience was a whirlwind.

"I had to remind myself not to, like, fan out a little around him and at the Super Bowl being around some of the other players as well," Gold recalls. "It's a totally different world, and so it was really cool to connect and see what it's like from his perspective. He's really the only guy I know that plays in the NFL, so to be able to kind of talk to him and spend some time with him — he's just such a great guy."

After the Broncos secured their third Lombardi Trophy with a 24-10 win over the Panthers, after the confetti fell and after Gold returned home from the trip, she looked back on the trip in wonder.

"When I got home it was hard to be back home, because I'd had so much fun that weekend," she says.

In the years since, the two have become even better friends. Bruton has cheered her on in-person at the X Games and other competitions, and the two will occasionally go mountain biking together.

"I've been to a few of her events cheering her on," Bruton says. "I always watch her events when she's competing, whether it's on TV or if I'm in a study group and I pull up my phone to make sure I get a chance to watch her run. I've been a fan of her since we met, and that's kind of the friendship we've had. We give each other hard times and whatnot, but we're always in each other's corner when it comes to accomplishing big things."

And now that they've both accomplished big things, they can fulfill a deal they made a while ago.

"We made little deals like, 'If you get a medal, I'll let you wear my ring,'" Bruton says. "I don't know how long we're going to do that for, but I think it'd be pretty cool when we get a chance to swap our big accomplishments."

Who knows — maybe in the future he'll even have the opportunity to do so in a professional capacity, as they sometimes kid one another.

"We always joke about him finishing up PT school and then being my physical therapist once he's done with that," Gold said with a laugh. "We just have a great friendship going."

# QB Case Keenum set to accept 'Uncommon Award'

By Aric DiLalla

DenverBroncos.com

April 14, 2018

Before Case Keenum arrives in Denver for next week's offseason programming, he'll make a stop in Minnesota to accept the "Uncommon Award."

The award, which Keenum will accept at Hazeltine National Golf Club on Friday, is given to someone who is never afraid to "take the tough road, to follow a higher calling or set a higher standard."

Hall of Famer Tony Dungy will present Keenum with the award at "Arise With the Guys," an event where "professional and collegiate Christian athletes share their inspirational messages of faith, godly values and legacy-building."

Former Broncos quarterback Peyton Manning, Panthers linebacker Thomas Davis, Titans quarterback Marcus Mariota and CBS' James Brown are all previous Uncommon Award winners.

# Broncos claim CB C.J. Smith off waivers

By Ben Swanson

DenverBroncos.com

April 14, 2018

A day after the Browns waived C.J. Smith, the Broncos claimed the second-year cornerback out of North Dakota State, the team announced Friday.

Smith spent most of the 2017 season in Cleveland, signing to their practice squad on Sept. 15 before being promoted to the active roster on Dec. 16. In the Browns' final three games of the season, Smith played nine defensive snaps and 23 special-teams snaps.

Prior to his time in Cleveland, Smith was a member of the Eagles. He spent the beginning of his rookie season on the practice squad before Philadelphia promoted him to the active roster in October. He played the final nine games of the season, mostly on special teams.

At North Dakota State, Smith started 43 games and was named a 2015 All-Missouri Valley Football Conference first-team selection and 2013 All-MVFC honorable-mention selection during the Bison's five-year run of consecutive FCS national championships.

# Roger Goodell's turn to be deposed in Colin Kaepernick collusion case

By A.J. Perez  
USA Today  
April 14, 2018

NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell is expected to be deposed within the next two weeks as part of the collusion case filed by free agent quarterback Colin Kaepernick last fall, a person with knowledge of the proceedings told USA TODAY Sports on Friday.

Kaepernick filed the collusion grievance against the NFL in October, alleging the owners conspired to keep him out of the league over his kneeling protest initiated to draw attention to police brutality and racial inequality.

Attorneys for Kaepernick and the NFL deposed NFL Executive Vice President Troy Vincent and Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones this week, according to the person who was granted anonymity because of the sensitive nature of proceedings. Kaepernick was deposed on Tuesday.

A decision on the case isn't expected until later this year.

Kaepernick has been a free agent since March 2017 when he opted out of the final year of his contract with the San Francisco 49ers, a move made before he likely would have been cut by the team.

The Washington Post was the first outlet to report Goodell's upcoming deposition.

An NFL spokesperson declined to comment when reached by USA TODAY Sports on Friday.

Also on slate to be deposed within the next month: Seahawks general manager John Schneider and head coach Pete Carroll.

Those depositions were set up before the Seahawks scheduled and then postponed a workout with Kaepernick.

USA TODAY Sports reported on Thursday that Kaepernick was slated to workout with the team on Monday before the team asked whether he would continue his kneeling protest. Kaepernick told the Seahawks he wanted to meet with the team without any preconditions and the club called off the workout a short time later.

Kaepernick hasn't had a workout with an NFL team and none are currently scheduled.

# Pete Prisco's 2018 NFL Draft Better-Than Team: 20 guys I like more than the scouts do

By Pete Prisco  
CBSSports.com  
April 14, 2018

Let's be real: I have had several bad misses when it comes to predicting the success of college quarterbacks on the next level, which many of you point out endlessly on Twitter.

Yes, I missed on Christian Ponder and several others. I can admit my awful mistakes – unlike some.

But when it comes to my Better-Than team each year – guys I like better than the scouts heading into the draft – I feel as if it balances out my quarterback blunders.

Consider some of my captains of the team over the years: Jason Pierre-Paul, Bennie Logan, Lavonte David and Grady Jarrett are among them.

Players who have appeared on the team include Arizona Cardinals running back David Johnson, Kansas City tight end Travis Kelce, Dallas Cowboys quarterback Dak Prescott, Atlanta Falcons linebacker Deion Jones and Jacksonville Jaguars defensive end Yannick Ngakoue.

There have been misses too, but that's to be expected when you are evaluating players outside the top-15.

So this year's captain of the 2018 Better-Than team is Indiana tight end Ian Thomas. I love his game.

His story is amazing as well. His parents died a year apart in 2004 and 2005 and he went to live with an uncle, but his older brother later adopted him and seven siblings. He found his way to junior college in New York, played two years, and then went to Indiana. He caught three passes in 2016, and then had 25 receptions last season.

But the tape shows a bad offense around him, including quarterbacks that were wild and far from accurate. Thomas is one of those players with so much ability that still hasn't been tapped.

He has good size at 6-3 1/2, 259 pounds and he runs well for a player his size. Pop on the Ohio State tape and you will see him make a toe-tap catch in the end zone that looks like one a smaller receiver might make. He's that athletic. He had another catch against Penn State where he took a short pass and ran away from the secondary for a big play.

Thomas is a willing blocker, but that part of his game will be something that will improve on the next level. Based on potential, he has a chance to be the best tight end in this class.

That's why he is this year's captain of the Better-Than team, joining players from the past who have gone on to big-time success. Here are the other 19 players on this year's team:

Ronald Jones, RB, USC

You have to love backs who average over six yards per carry in a collegiate career like Jones. He has the big-play ability that teams love. He can glide through holes and he can run away from defenders. He will be an explosive NFL runner.

Dante Pettis, WR, Washington

The son of former major-league baseball player Gary Pettis developed into a big-play threat for the Huskies. He averaged 15.5 yards per catch in 2016, but that number was down last year to 12.1. He's a smooth route runner who is also an explosive punt returner.

Genard Avery, LB, Memphis

He has the body type of James Harrison, which is straight power. But he can also run and chase. He played both weak-side linebacker and outside rush linebacker for the Tigers. He plays hard all the time, even when the games got out of hand. That matters.

Anthony Miller, WR, Memphis

When you pop on his tape, he jumps out. He was very productive at Memphis, but what really caught my eye was his toughness and the way he goes after the football. He isn't a big receiver, but he's fast enough and he knows how to get open. He will be a star in the NFL.

Austin Corbett, G, Nevada

He was a starter at left tackle for three seasons for the Wolfpack, but he is projected to move inside to guard. He needs to get more powerful, but he knows the tricks of the trade to be an effective pass blocker and good enough in the run game.

PAID CONTENT BY WORKDAY

Davis Love III shares a teaching moment.

A finance and HR system from Workday gives you the truth. And that sounds pretty great.

Mason Cole, C, Michigan

He started at both tackle and center at Michigan, but the NFL views him as a center. At 6-4, 300 pounds, he has the size to be a nice center with good movement. He isn't powerful, so he has to get stronger. But he has good athletic ability.

Trey Quinn, WR, SMU

He isn't as heralded as teammate Courtland Sutton, but he will be a reliable slot receiver in the NFL. He knows how to get open. He isn't going to scare down the field, but there is great NFL value for an instinctive slot receiver who knows how to get open.

Harrison Phillips, DT, Stanford

He played nose for the Cardinal, but he isn't powerful enough to play there in the NFL. He is an ideal 4-3 defensive tackle who will be able to push the pocket. Should be a rotation player early in his career, and then a good starter and maybe more shortly after that.

Mike White, QB, Western Kentucky

He has the size and the arm scouts love. Plus he was a productive passer at Western Kentucky the past two seasons after transferring from South Florida. He threw 65 touchdown passes the past two seasons. He would need to sit and learn for a while, but has a chance to be a solid starter in time.

Kerryon Johnson, RB, Auburn

He isn't an explosive runner, but he knows how to get yards. Ran for 1,391 yards last year at Auburn and showed his big-play ability as he averaged 4.9 per rush. He also had 18 rushing touchdowns. He is going to be a productive runner in the NFL, worth a second-round pick.

Nyheim Hines, RB, NC State

He is a speedy back who ran 4.38 at the combine. He's been a receiver at State, which makes him a dual threat back who is perfect for today's game. He's small at just under 5-9 and 190 pounds, but he would be a great complementary back for a team in need of a change-of-pace weapon.

DaeSean Hamilton, WR, Penn State

He isn't a burner, but he might be the best route runner in this class. He was timed at 4.53, so he isn't slow, but his calling card is his ability to win with his route running.

Brian O'Neil, T, Pitt

This former basketball star came to Pitt as a tight end, but moved to tackle in 2015. He started at both right and left tackle in his career with the Panthers. Played under 300 pounds, so he has to get stronger. But we've seen former tight ends become big-time tackles in the NFL, including Philadelphia's Jason Peters. I think O'Neil will be a good, solid starter for his career.

Arden Key, DE, LSU

In 2015, he looked like he could be a top-10 pick. But then he had personal issues and left the LSU team. He also had some disciplinary problems with the Tiger. He is a long, lean athlete who can rush the passer. His 40 time at his pro day was disappointing, but he has been schooled in the pass-rush techniques by former NFL defensive end Chuck Smith. If he stays clear of issues, he will be an immediate impact pass rusher.

Josey Jewell, LB, Iowa

He didn't work out great after the season, but put that aside. This is a kid who makes plays. Some scouts compare him to former Dolphins linebacker Zach Thomas. That's high praise. He will be a special-teams force early in his career and then take over as a starter at linebacker.

Josh Sweat, OLB-DE, Florida State

He looks the part of a true edge rusher who might be even better on the next level with a little more seasoning. At 6-4, 255 pounds, he has the frame and speed coaches love. He didn't always play to his athletic ability, but it's there and a good team will get the production out of him.

Carlton Davis, DB, Auburn

He's a 6-1, 200-pound corner who was a three-year starter for the Tigers. He's got a good feel for the position, and can play the press-man coverage that some teams love. A three-year starter in the SEC speaks volumes about his ability to play the position.

Jerome Baker, LB, Ohio State

For teams looking for a nice run-and-chase linebacker, this is the guy. Think Telvin Smith of the Jaguars. He has great athleticism and a feel for the game, Might need to get stronger.

Allen Lazard, WR, Iowa State He is a big receiver at 6-4, 225 pounds, but he doesn't run that well for the position. That's why I think he could bulk up some and become a good move tight end, capable of creating problems in the middle of the field.

# **Broncos claim C.J. Smith off waivers**

By Charean Williams

Pro Football Talk

April 14, 2018

The Broncos claimed cornerback C.J. Smith off waivers from the Browns on Friday.

Smith, 24, signed with the Eagles as an undrafted free agent out of North Dakota State in 2016. He was on and off Philadelphia's practice squad the past two seasons.

Smith did play 10 games with the Eagles in 2016.

After Philadelphia cut him September 12, 2017, he signed to the Browns' practice squad. Cleveland promoted him to the active roster December 16, and he played three games last season.

The Seahawks traded for Smith last month, sending a conditional 2020 pick to the Browns. But Smith failed his physical.

In 13 career games, Smith has one tackle.