

# Kennedale's Baron Browning on the precipice of realizing his NFL dream

By Mike Leslie  
April 29, 2021

It's a big weekend in Kennedale.

"It seems like this has been the longest week in my life," DeKisha Browning said.

The anticipation is palpable, as her son, Baron, is set to be selected in the week's NFL Draft. After a great career at Ohio State, Browning figures to be a second or third round draft pick, according to projections. "The emotions will start to pour out once I get that phone call," Baron Browning said. "You just think back to all the journey, like, where you started, to where you at in that moment."

And where it started for Baron was at Kennedale.

"Coach [Richard] Barrett was very hard on me," Browning said. "He pushed me to limits I didn't think I was capable of reaching."

And Coach Barrett fondly remembers Baron, too, with paraphernalia all throughout Kennedale's fieldhouse.

Baron Browning is 6-foot-3, 245 lbs, runs a 4.5 40, and can play just about any position on the defensive side of the ball. And then he puts on his glasses.

"He's Steve Urkel," Barrett said with a laugh.

"Ah, haha, oh okay," Browning said with a laugh. "He got jokes. Okay. Okay, Coach Barrett, you got jokes." "It's the glasses!" DeKisha said, laughing along with her memories of a young man who needed help putting his contacts in for much of childhood. The thick-rimmed black glasses were the result.

"At the talent show, way back when in eighth grade," Barrett remembered, "that's who he dressed up as." He's grown up a bit since those days. Browning made impact plays for Ohio State throughout his collegiate career, including a sack, forced fumble, and fumble recovery against Alabama in the National Championship game. Not a bad way to get the attention of pro scouts in your last chance before the draft. And now, after all his hard work, Browning stands on the precipice of realizing his dream.

"That's my heart, that's my baby," DeKisha said. "So, I'm very proud of him."

"From what he's done, the way he's worked, the time he's invested, his family, the support," Barrett listed, "everything he's getting right now, he's deserved."

This week, Baron hears his name called in the NFL Draft.

Goodbye, Steve Urkel ... hello, Stefan Urquelle.

# Kennedale LB Baron Browning ready to live NFL dream, realize can't-miss potential

By Clarence E. Hill Jr.

Fort Worth Star-Telegram

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Baron Browning left Kennedale in 2017 as a can't-miss five-star recruit.

He was the nation's No. 1 linebacker and was ranked ninth in the country and third in the state by Rivals. Browning admittedly didn't have the career he hoped for at Ohio State due to injuries, coaching changes and position switches.

But four years later, he is preparing to embark on his NFL dreams just as expected with his No. 1 fan, his dad and former TCU defensive back Barry Browning Sr., still firmly in his corner.

"He weathered the storm and did what he needed to do," Barry Sr. said. "He showed perseverance. I am very proud of him. A lot of kids get in their feelings and want to transfer. I commend him for weathering the storm. That is how life goes. I am proud of him. He persevered."

And when the NFL Draft commences later this week — it starts Thursday night and runs through Saturday — Browning will hear his name called and an NFL-destiny realized, just as expected.

Browning has talked to quite a few teams and is projected to go somewhere between the second and third rounds.

And, yes, the linebacker-needy Dallas Cowboys have made contact, and staying home could be an option. "Every future NFL player wants to play for their hometown team. My family would love that," Browning said. "I didn't have a favorite team growing up. I'm just excited. I am trying to stay calm. I feel like the closer it gets, the more my emotions will start to show. I have been doing a good job staying calm, controlling what I can control up until this point."

Let the record state that Browning was far from a disappointment at Ohio State.

After notching just three starts his first two seasons, he became a regular starter as a junior and was an impact player on a 2020 team that won the Big 10 Title and finished as runner-up in the College Football Playoff national championship.

"Toward the end, I feel like I came into my own, but not at the beginning," said Browning, who was third-team All-Big 10 in 2020. "I don't think I had the career I wanted to have. I still had a pretty good career. I am looking forward to building off my last two years at Ohio State and continue to build off that in the NFL."

Reasons abound for the slow start at Ohio State — from him being young and not as focused as he needed to be early on to having three different position coaches and four different defensive coordinators. He was also used in a number of different positions and never got to hone in on one thing.

Ohio State linebackers coach Al Washington bonded with Browning the past two seasons and has praised him for being versatile enough to play inside and outside, rush the passer and cover.

He also said Browning was a high-character guy and team player.

But the athletic profile that made him a highly-touted recruit still speaks to a potential that could see him making a bigger impact in the NFL than in college.

He gave scouts a glimpse with a strong showing at the Senior Bowl.

Senior Bowl executive director and former scout Jim Nagy said he could make a strong case for Browning having the highest ceiling of any outside linebacker in the draft.

Nagy called him a potential do-it-all linebacker who stood out as an edge setter, rusher and dropper in coverage.

The 6-foot-2, 245-pound Browning backed it up on his pro day, running the 40-yard dash in 4.58 seconds. He recorded a 40-inch vertical jump and a 10-foot, 10-inch broad jump.

NFL teams are looking at him as an edge rusher and outside linebacker.

"I showcased that I could do that at the Senior Bowl," Browning said. "I feel like teams wondered if I could do it. That's all I did in high school until I got to Ohio State and got moved to inside linebacker. Now, I am just trying to get back into the world and develop my skill set."

He is also back to living the NFL dreams that eluded his father and brother Barry Jr., who played defensive back at Stanford from 2010-14, as expected when he was a five-star recruit.

And while everyone is still hoping for him to go in the first round on Thursday night, the projection of a Day 2 call on Friday suits the family just fine.

"It's like the stars are lining up for April 30," Barry Sr. said. "That is my father's birthday. He passed when I was 16. That is going to be a special weekend with all this going on, and wishing that he was here. I would love for him to go on Day 1. But if he was to go on my dad's birthday, it would be just like it was meant to be."

# Ohio State football's Baron Browning went from feeling abandoned in Columbus to a blazing young bull

By Nathan Baird  
Cleveland.com  
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Ohio State linebacker Baron Browning saw his opportunity coming before Nebraska snapped the ball.

On a third-and-1 scenario in the second quarter of the Buckeyes' recent blowout in Lincoln, Nebraska tried a jet sweep with its talented freshman, Wan'Dale Robinson. By the time Robinson took the handoff and turned the corner, Browning had stormed in from his middle linebacker spot. He stood Robinson up and combined with Robert Landers on a tackle for loss.

Browning recorded six other tackles that day. That one, however, reverberated the most. A year ago, he had not committed himself to the kind of film study that makes such a play possible.

"I'd seen it so many times that week on film," Browning said. "Even when I wasn't in, especially in walkthrough, I was in the back acting like I was in, getting in mental reps, stepping through it."

Browning played a central role in the defensive performance that led to Ohio State's 34-10 victory over Michigan State last week. He raised his season total to 2.5 sacks and dropped back in coverage to tip a pass resulting in a Jordan Fuller interception.

Browning is the Buckeyes' third-leading tackler at the midway point despite sharing middle linebacker snaps with Tuf Borland. After two seasons of occasionally flashing the promise that made him a top-15 national recruit out of Fort Worth's Kennedale High School, Browning has established himself as a crucial component of one of the top-ranked defenses in the nation.

One of the men most responsible for helping Browning reach this point believes this is only the beginning.

"He doesn't even know how good he is right now," said his father, Barry Browning. "He's got a high ceiling. He hasn't reached his full potential."

## The Browning family way

Barry Browning would have named all of his sons Barry if his wife and mother had allowed him. Instead, only his oldest son received the name passed down to him by his own father.

All three Brownings still lift together in the offseason. Dad, short and stocky, once played football at TCU and can still hold his own in those lifting sessions with the sons he sent off to play college football. Those workouts quickly become "noisy," with all three talking trash and challenging each other.

Barry set that competitive vibe early on. His oldest son learned that lesson after his first game of tackle football.

“He asked me was my jersey dirty,” the younger Barry said. “I said, ‘No.’ He said, ‘Well then you didn’t play hard enough.’”

Back home that night, in full uniform, the younger Barry ran from fence to fence, diving in the grass, until his father called off the workout. Baron said he shared similar experiences.

Father did not oblige his children sleeping in past 7 a.m. They were up, working in the yard or training in one of their sports. When he was away from home — working in the Texas oil fields or driving trucks — he sent workouts home for his wife, DeKisha, to give to the boys.

“They grinded year-round,” Barry said of his boys. “The whole deal was, you can’t be average. When it’s cold outside or it’s raining, 90 percent of people are in the house. That’s when we’re going to get our bread and butter. That’s when we’re going to eat.”

In one memorable incident, the father took his sons to a spot in west Fort Worth they called Killer Hill. Walking up the incline is a chore. Baron had been insisting he had been working out, and his father wanted him to prove it.

Baron ran the hill 10 times back-to-back.

“That young bull,” Barry said of his son, “he just amazes me all the time.”

Baron compared his father to James Evans, the tough, blue-collar patriarch played by John Amos on the 1970s sitcom “Good Times.” Some children would have rebelled against that stern upbringing — perhaps even resented their father. Baron spoke of those experiences with gratitude.

“All he knows is what he was taught — a generational thing that was passed down,” Baron said. “It worked for us into something I’m going to apply to my kids when I have some one day. I’m gonna probably do some things a little different, but the same general message would be the same.”

The results speak for themselves. Barry the son earned a scholarship to Stanford, where he played cornerback. When the family came to visit for a game during his sophomore year, he noticed his brother had grown into a 6-foot, 180-pound ninth-grader seemingly overnight.

### Chasing Expectations

Soon, Baron was recognized as one of the top football prospects in the nation. The 247Sports.com national composite for the Class of 2017 rated him No. 1 in the country among outside linebackers and the No. 11 prospect overall.

He arrived at Ohio State as a key member of the nation’s No. 2 recruiting class. Two years in, he had not cracked the linebacker rotation enough to fulfill those expectations. While Browning started three games as a sophomore, he remained the clear second option to Borland.

Browning admits he struggled to find the singular focus necessary to excel in football. He did not go into specifics, but he said distractions back home and his own lack of priorities were both factors. However, he also said he felt abandoned by someone at Ohio State. Browning declined to name any individuals, and admits some complicity in the breakdown of the relationship. Regardless, the episode contributed to his diminished role.

“One person who I didn’t expect to give up on me gave up on me, and it just didn’t sit well with me,” he said. “So then at that point, the relationship is ended. Every time you see one another, it just wasn’t what it needed to be, or the relationship it once was.”

Browning’s feelings of isolation began to change in the offseason when, after Urban Meyer’s departure, the defensive coaching staff saw wholesale changes. Jeff Hafley and Greg Mattison came on as co-defensive coordinators and implemented a scheme which Buckeye defenders say is less complicated and allows them to play looser and swarm to the ball.

The biggest influence came with the addition of linebackers coach Al Washington. A Columbus native and Buckeye legacy who most recently coached linebackers at Michigan, Washington and Browning clicked from their initial meeting. Soon, Browning became close with Washington’s family. The coach began recommending motivational books such as “Can’t Hurt Me” by retired Navy Seal David Goggins. Browning credits Washington with helping him step back and gain perspective on what he could do to fulfill his potential. The coach deflects the credit back in the opposite direction.

“I don’t instill anything,” Washington said. “All I do is if you have a spark, I’m going to pour gas on it, and hopefully it turns into a blaze. I think that’s what all coaches do.”

“He has a spark and we go about the business of trying to create a blaze, a fire. It was always there. I think it’s still there now. That confidence comes from that, for sure.”

### Rising to the challenge

Browning’s father and brother noticed the change. Barry used to call and check in with Baron regularly during his first two seasons at Ohio State. He offered advice and prodded Browning to follow through on his commitments, training and studies.

Those calls eventually became unnecessary.

“There were some times during the summer or during the past spring where I would call to challenge him,” Barry said of his brother. “He said he was watching film or meeting with his coach. There was nothing I could ever really pick at him about because he was on top if it from a mental sense.”

Borland continues to start at middle linebacker and typically plays the first few series. Then Browning comes in, and more often than not he ends up with more snaps than the starting captain.

That is another scenario Browning believes he can handle better now than he would have a year ago. Rather than worrying about his playing time, he focuses on using his hands correctly and flying to the ball. Not every player with his credentials and NFL aspirations would accept such an arrangement. Speaking of the NFL — which could be a realistic option before next season — the father who preached the pursuit of greatness encourages his son to set those thoughts aside.

“That three-letter word, we never talk about it,” Browning’s father said. “You have to look at what’s in front of you right now or you might miss something. If it’s meant to be, it will happen. We’ll talk about it when we get there. Otherwise, that adds unwanted pressure you put on yourself.”

Browning no longer feels the pressure — he applies it. The football mentors in his family started that process. The ones he found at Ohio State are helping him complete it.

# He's one of the best DFW high school football players ever. Now he's starring at Ohio State

By Drew Davison

Fort Worth Star-Telegram

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Ohio State linebacker Baron Browning is returning to his hometown with a simple mindset this weekend.

"I'm looking forward to getting to 3-0 and hopefully getting some Whataburger after the game," said Browning, who was an All-American linebacker at Kennedale before signing with Ohio State.

But Browning knows his fourth-ranked Buckeyes will have their work cut out against No. 15 TCU on Saturday night at AT&T Stadium. He is very familiar with the Frogs.

Browning's father, Barry Sr., played defensive back for TCU in the late 1990s, including one season under then-assistant Gary Patterson. And Browning is close friends with TCU quarterback Shawn Robinson.

Browning and Robinson were two highly-touted local players in the Class of 2017, and were together at a number of camps in their high school days.

"We talk a lot ... play a lot of PlayStation 4 together," Browning said, chuckling. "That's my boy."

They'll be on opposite sidelines come Saturday, though, and each is surely looking forward to facing each other. These are two budding stars in the college football world, earning starting jobs at key spots as sophomores.

Browning climbed up the depth chart in a crowded linebacker room at Ohio State, and has five tackles through the first two games. And Robinson beat out Michael Collins for the quarterback job at TCU, and has flashed early on.

Browning sees both he and Robinson as rising players in the college game.

"Oh, yeah," Browning said.

Asked about Robinson's future, Browning said: "He's just one of those top dual threat quarterbacks. He's got a strong arm. He can throw. He can run. He can do it all.

"We can't take our eyes off him on Saturday. We've got to keep him on our radar because not only can he pass, he can run, so they can do some zone read stuff and some QB runs, so we can't take our eyes off him. We've got to be alert at all times and know where he's at at all times."

## FAMILY AFFAIR

Barry Browning Sr. isn't going to be "torn" when TCU and Ohio State meet on Saturday night. As he put it, "I love both of them."

Barry Sr. played defensive back in the late 1990s at TCU after a standout high school career at Everman. He's still loyal to the Frogs and Patterson, who coached Browning his final season in 1998.

"Barry was a strong safety for us," Patterson recalled earlier this week. "Barry was really tough. A tough player."

Said Barry Sr.: "Coach Patterson is a good guy, a good person. He's definitely going to have his team ready to play this weekend. You can make sure of that. I always knew he'd be a head coach because of his work ethic. Coach P, man, he gave you everything he had."

But Barry Sr. never pushed his son to TCU. He handled it much like the recruitment process for his older son, former Everman standout Barry Browning Jr., who chose Stanford.

TCU recruited Baron heavily and he spent a lot of time on campus, but it never came to fruition. Instead, Barry Sr. said, Ohio State and Alabama were the final two for Baron, who ranked as the No. 11 overall prospect in the Class of 2017.

"I let him pick the school because he was going to be the one who had to go there," Barry Sr. said. "TCU did a great job recruiting him – coach Patterson and coach [Jeremy] Modkins and coach [Zarnell] Fitch. It could've gone any way, didn't anyone know where he was going until the very last minute.

"But I'm very proud of him and the main thing is he's remained humble. We're a football family, but when he comes home, he doesn't really talk football. Baron is just Baron. He cuts up. He's a character. But he's really humble."

Football seems to have come full circle for the Browning family, especially this weekend. Baron is facing his dad's former school at a football mecca in the family's backyard. Oh, and we haven't mentioned the fact that Barry Sr. and Baron had the same high school coach.

Richard Barrett coached Barry Sr. at Everman in the early 1990s, and Baron at Kennedale from 2013-16.

"They're both very aggressive players," Barrett said. "I always told Baron, 'Your dad was something else now.' I mean, that guy was about 5-foot-10, 200 pounds and such a ferocious hitter. He played really physically and was one heckuva player. He had all kinds of records with weight lifting.

"But Baron is strong too. He dead-lifted 630 pounds in high school. There are a lot of similarities between the two."

## GAME DAY

Ohio State has been entrenched in controversy this season. Coach Urban Meyer won't be on the sidelines Saturday, as it's the final game of his three-game suspension for how he handled domestic violence allegations against since-fired assistant coach Zach Smith.

But that scandal hasn't seemed to have a negative effect on the field. Instead, as Patterson mentioned earlier this week, it might've actually inspired the Buckeyes more than anything.

Patterson described Ohio State as already being in "midseason form."

Baron didn't disagree with that assessment after Ohio State has cruised to wins over Oregon State and Rutgers.

"With everything that happened, with all that adversity, it did nothing but bring us closer and make our brotherhood stronger," Baron said. "So we're ready to go out and play this weekend."

The entire Browning family is going to be ready for it. It's a family reunion-esque weekend for them. Family was coming in from the Houston area as early as Wednesday.

"Everybody's fired up," Barry Sr. said. "Baron's fired up. A lot of family and friends that don't really get to see him play are coming out to support him. Baron is going to have a lot of family and friends rooting for him.

"We're ready to see him play."

This will mark the second time Baron has played at AT&T Stadium. Ohio State defeated USC in the Cotton Bowl in the stadium last season, but Baron played mostly special teams.

He's now moved into a starting role and, quite possibly, a starring role come Saturday night.

"I didn't even know he was starting until the roster came out," Barry Sr. said, smiling. "He never mentioned it. I saw the roster and said, 'You're starting?' He said, 'Yeah.' They've got a lot of competition at linebacker and he's still got some things to work on. But it's all going to come together for him soon."

Said Barrett, his high school coach: "No stage was ever too big for him. Baron always handled it well and never let the highs get too high or the lows be too low. He stayed even keel.

"It's going to be a festive atmosphere on Saturday night and he's going to do well. It wouldn't surprise me at all if he makes some really, really big plays."

# It all runs in the family for Baron Browning

By EJ Holland  
247 Sports  
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Football is part of life for the Browning family.

Barry Sr. was a multiple year starter in the secondary for TCU in the 90s, while Barry Jr. saw playing time all four years during his time as a defensive back at Stanford from 2010-13.

Now Baron, a five-star outside linebacker from Kennedale, is ready to follow in his father and brother's footsteps.

But it didn't always appear that way.

"I thought I was going to go to college for bowling," Browning said. "I got really serious about it. I would bowl with my family for fun when my brother would come into town from college. Then me and my paw started bowling every other week. He even got me a custom ball for Christmas.

"I started recording professional bowlers. I started learning how to curve the ball and everything. My family told me I was going to be the first one to go to college for bowling."

Baron, however, traded his quirky looking bowling shoes for cleats. Turns out, he made the right decision. At 6-foot-3, 230 pounds, Baron is a college recruiter's dream prospect. Not only does he have the size, he also runs a 4.5 40-yard dash, a 10.87 100m, benches around 400 pounds and squats more than 600 pounds.

"He's just a freak," Barry Jr. said. "To be as big as he is and move as gracefully as he does is impressive. I watched him in the 4x2 relay, and he ran away from a guy that he outweighed by 50 pounds. He just does amazing things. He hasn't even peaked yet."

Kenedale head coach Richard Barrett added:

"He's very athletic. He's long with great speed. He can cover in the open field makes him even more attractive. He can play inside, outside or with his hand in the ground. He's smart and knows the game. He's a power lifter. There's just so much that separates him."

Bowling and football aren't the only sports Baron has found success in. He actually thought he had an opportunity to go to college in baseball and played through his sophomore year. He also excels on the track and as a power lifter.

An injury put an end to Baron's baseball aspirations as a sophomore. But even around that time, Baron, who actually played running back in junior high, knew football was the route he was going to end up taking in order to earn a free education.

After making a big impact as a freshman at Kennedale, Baron started to get some early attention on the recruiting trail and picked up his first offer from Baylor in June of 2014.

"I was just shocked," Baron said. "It happened a while ago now, but I know it was crazy when I got it. It's just something that you always dream about growing up. It was a great feeling."

Oklahoma State came next just four days later. Arkansas soon followed suit. By the start of the following summer, Baron was one of the most sought after underclassmen in the country.

Baron made a verbal commitment to Baylor last summer but backed out of his pledge in February.

"I felt like I rushed it," Baron said. "I knew I rushed it. I just wanted to take my time with it. I wanted to look at all the schools. I talked it over with my brother and my mom and dad, and they felt the same way about it."

Baron currently holds 40 offers from schools across the nation, including Alabama, Florida State, LSU, Ohio State, Oklahoma, Texas, USC and a number of other major programs.

But he won't let it get to his head.

"It's just my personality," Baron said. "I'm really laid back. I always try to stay humble. It's just the way I was raised. It's not that I wasn't excited, but I just have to remain humble. That's important."

Barry Jr. recently went through recruiting and knows the ins and outs of the process. A three-star cornerback out of Everman, Barry Jr. committed to Stanford over a handful of other offers.

While the education at Stanford is invaluable, Barry Jr. also looked at a number of other factors and tries to advise his younger sibling that there is more to making a decision than just the football aspect.

"I tell him not to get blinded by the football side of it," he said. "Every school is going to come in and tell you they can get you to the next level. But it's about the stuff outside of football. Academics. Alumni relations. Football wise, it's more about how they'll use you than how big a stadium is."

Barry Sr. hasn't been involved in the recruiting game for more than a decade, so he leaves most of the counseling to his eldest son. But he does try to help out any way he can.

"I just tell him to relax and take it all in," Barry Sr. said. "Enjoy yourself because it only happens once. He's doing the best thing by staying humble and not letting it all go to his head."

For Barry Sr., it's more about helping Browning become a better player and a better man. His one phrase that always sticks with Baron is 'eat greedy.'

"If you're hungry, you have to eat," Barry Sr. said. "So when you're in a game, eat greedy and make a big play. Do everything you can. Do as much as you can. Eat greedy. Don't stop until you're full. And when you're full, get you some more."

After missing most of his sophomore year due to injury, Baron followed the saying to a T as a junior as he notched 74 tackles, four forced fumbles, one sack and two interceptions en route to leading Kennedale to the third round of the state playoffs.

Baron is focused on being more dominant as a senior and wants to get his decision out of the way before the first week of the season. An early enrollee, Baron knows what the biggest factors in his decision will be.

“I think it’s just going to come down to the all-around vibe,” he said. “It’s just how I feel about the school, the coaches and my position coach. It’s also about how I fit into their scheme and how they plan on using me.”

The next few months will be crucial in Baron’s recruitment. Luckily for him, he has two veterans to guide him through the rest of the process.

“I don’t like them at all because they’re mean to me,” Baron said with a laugh. “I’m just playing. I look up to my dad and my brother a lot. I probably look up to my bother the most. But they are both great to have around. They mean a lot to me.”