

With his stock rising, Damarri Mathis leads group of Pitt prospects beyond Pickett

By Johnny McGonigal
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Attention was on Kenny Pickett during the pre-draft process, understandably so. He cemented himself as one of the best players in Pitt history in 2021, and with that success comes scrutiny. But his teammates are also ready for their moments.

Beyond Pickett, Pitt could have a few more players selected in this weekend's NFL draft. Damarri Mathis has risen up draft boards into a potential Day 2 pick. Cal Adomitis is this year's top long-snapper and could latch on with a team in the later rounds. So could tight end Lucas Krull.

There's also a collection of contributors from last year's ACC champions that ought to garner consideration on the undrafted free agent market. Count linebackers Phil Campbell, Chase Pine and Johnny Petrishen, wide receivers Taysir Mack, Melquise Stovall and Tre Tipton and defensive tackle Keyshon Camp in that group.

Mathis, though, could hear his name called as early as the third round on Friday after an impressive pre-draft process. The cornerback ran a 4.39-second 40-yard dash at the combine in early March and posted a 43 1/2-inch vertical jump at Pitt's pro day. Mathis, who recently visited with the Chicago Bears and Las Vegas Raiders, also interviewed well at the Senior Bowl back in February.

"I felt like I had a really good showing at my pro day, at the combine and interviewing at the Senior Bowl, doing Zooms and going on top-30 visits. Everything was smooth," Mathis told the Post-Gazette. "It was a lot. But I enjoyed the experience."

"The biggest thing that stands out to me about Damarri is his competitiveness," Senior Bowl director Jim Nagy added. "It stands out on tape. For a corner, he's physical. He likes to mix it up. He plays with confidence. That's apparent."

Mathis enters draft weekend among the top 20 at his position. NFL.com's Daniel Jeremiah ranked him 13th among cornerbacks and 99th overall. ESPN's Mel Kiper Jr. has Mathis slightly lower as his 17th corner and 112th overall player. Still, that puts Mathis firmly in the third-round conversation, which would make him the highest-drafted Pitt defensive back since Darrelle Revis went 14th overall in 2007.

Of course, the Panthers have had other DBs taken since. Mathis is set to become the sixth selected in Pat Narduzzi's tenure, joining Jordan Whitehead (fourth round, 2018), Avonte Maddox (fourth round, 2018), Dane Jackson (seventh round, 2020), Jason Pinnock (fifth round, 2021) and Damar Hamlin (sixth round, 2021).

Mathis said Narduzzi's press quarters coverage — a scheme that puts cornerbacks on an island — was brought up throughout the pre-draft process and ultimately helped prepare him for the next level. Mathis was one of the top cover corners in college football in 2019 with his 36.8% completion rate ranking fourth

among corners who recorded at least 500 defensive snaps, according to Pro Football Focus. Mathis missed the 2020 season due to injury but rebounded with a strong 2021.

Still, Mathis thinks like he has plenty to prove.

“I always felt overlooked; I still feel overlooked right now. But that’s the story of who I am,” said Mathis, a Florida native who didn’t collect scholarship offers from Florida, Florida State or Miami. “I always played with that chip on my shoulder. I feel like that’s created the type of person I am, the type of player I am. I embrace that role. People are sleeping on me. But that doesn’t really matter. I use that to fuel my fire.”

Krull feels the same way. Despite earning second-team All-ACC honors, Krull wasn’t invited to the Senior Bowl or the combine. He took part in the interview process in Las Vegas ahead of the East-West Shrine Bowl. But he spent months training in Florida hoping for the opportunity to showcase his skills in Indianapolis.

“I was upset with that, but obviously you can’t control that,” Krull said this week. “I controlled what I could, stepped it up and did what I had to at pro day to make sure everyone recognizes that I’m in this draft and I can be a game-changer.”

Krull’s journey to this point has been unique to say the least. A former pitcher at Jefferson College in Missouri, Krull was drafted by the San Francisco Giants in the 34th round of the Major League Baseball draft in 2018. Krull transferred to SEC powerhouse Florida to play football instead and spent two seasons there. After competing with eventual first-round pick Kyle Pitts, he transferred to Pitt for more playing time.

Krull missed the majority of the 2020 campaign with a knee injury but bounced back this past season. The 6-foot-6, 253-pounder tallied 38 receptions, 451 yards, six touchdowns and six drops on 59 targets, according to PFF. Crucially, Krull caught the overtime winner in the rain against North Carolina, a play and a game that helped propel Pitt to its ACC Coastal division title.

Dane Brugler, the lead draft analyst for The Athletic, ranked Krull as his 24th tight end overall and one of 11 tight ends to get a “priority free agent” grade. However, Brugler did have Krull being selected in the seventh round of his most recent mock draft.

Saturday, the draft’s third and final day, can be a bit of a crapshoot. Krull understands that, as does Adomitis.

At least Adomitis has a bit of history on his side. There have been eight long-snappers selected in the last seven drafts. And everywhere you look, the Central Catholic graduate is the top long-snapper in this year’s class.

Adomitis won the Patrick Mannely Award for the nation’s best long-snapper. He became the first NCAA-recognized All-American at his position. And he was the only long-snapper who was invited to the combine. So his chances of hearing his name called — even if it is in the draft’s final selections — are pretty good.

But regardless of how this weekend unfolds, Adomitis, like Mathis and Krull, knows what matters most is what happens after the draft.

“I think I’ve taken care of business for the most part and put myself in a position where on most teams’ boards, if not all of them, I’m the top long-snapper. That’s really all I can do and all I can control,” Adomitis said. “... It would obviously be a dream come true to hear my name called. But either way, I feel that I’m going to get a shot at the next level. That’s all I can really ask for.”

Pitt football | Mathis, Adomitis saw draft stock rise in 2021 season

By Amanda Filipic-Godsey

The Tribune-Democrat

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While departing Pitt quarterback Kenny Pickett got most of the attention at both the NFL scouting combine and the Senior Bowl, cornerback Damarri Mathis and long snapper Cal Adomitis were present at both events – and both showed why they shouldn't be overlooked because of their high-profile teammate.

Mathis could have headed to the NFL draft a year ago, but a non-football injury requiring shoulder surgery ended his 2020 season before it began. He returned in 2021 as Pitt's top cornerback, starting in all 13 games that he played in. Mathis recorded 44 tackles, six pass breakups, and two interceptions, including a pick-six. He allowed 33 receptions and three touchdowns on 66 targets, according to Pro Football Focus.

It's not just good cover skills and reliable tackling that Mathis brings to the table, but his ability to play in run support could set him apart from other cornerbacks in the draft. Mathis' run defense received an 87.5 grade from PFF, ranking him 19th among the 865 cornerbacks graded by the site.

Mathis ran a 4.39 40-yard dash at the NFL Scouting Combine. He chose not to jump until Pitt's pro day and he recorded a 43.5-inch vertical, which would have been the best among all players at the NFL Combine. His 11-1 broad jump would have ranked first among cornerbacks at the Combine and tied for third among all players.

Following Mathis' pro day performance, executive director of the Senior Bowl Jim Nagy tweeted that Mathis' physicality is what originally got the attention of the Senior Bowl and "plenty of examples on '21 (film). Personally haven't seen 43.5 (vertical) since Troy Polamalu in '03."

The pure physical ability Mathis showed at the combine and on Pitt's pro day could see him rise on draft boards, much like former Pitt cornerback Jason Pinnock did a year ago. ESPN's current draft rankings have Mathis as the No. 116 overall prospect, which would make him an early fourth-round pick, while The Athletic's Dane Brugler thinks Mathis is a third-round pick.

"He's impressive," Pitt coach Pat Narduzzi said of Mathis on pro day. "He's going to be really good in the NFL. He's going to play for a long time in the NFL because he's smart, he's tough, he will hit you. He's a boundary corner. We usually put our best corner in the boundary because it's shorter throws and the ball's going to go that way. He's tough, he's physical, he's got ball skills and he can jump out of the roof and he's really fast with that 4.39 that he ran (at the combine) in Indianapolis."

Pitt has had three corners drafted in the past four seasons – Avonte Maddox, Dane Jackson, and Pinnock. All have starting experience in the NFL. Both Maddox and Jackson have started playoff games with the Eagles and Bills, respectively.

Narduzzi thinks Mathis could be the next Pitt corner to make an impact in the NFL.

"He might be the most talented corner we've had come out of here in seven years," Narduzzi said.

Long snapper isn't a position that gets much attention until a mistake is made or an injury occurs, but Adomitis made an impression over the past five years at Pitt. Adomitis played in all 64 games for the Panthers during that stretch, culminating in a 2021 season in which he won the Patrick Mannelly Award as college football's top long snapper and was named to the AFCA All-America first team.

The Pittsburgh native also made an impact off the field. In October, Adomitis announced his "Cal's Kids" fundraiser for Children's Hospital. No. 94 challenged the community to raise \$94,000 for children's cancer care by the end of the season; if the goal was met, he'd chop off his distinctive long golden locks.

"I'm proud of Cal," Narduzzi said when the fundraiser was announced. "When we talk about our program goals, we talk about graduation, winning championships, and one of those (goals) is giving back to the community."

The fundraiser exceeded the goal with the final amount coming in at over \$115,000. True to his word, Adomitis got his hair cut – with the assistance of five cancer patients from Children's Hospital doing some of the snipping at Heinz Field after the season concluded in December.

"Everybody talks about winning football games, but you can win off the field too," Narduzzi said. "I think that's sometimes overlooked, the quality of character of guys we have in this program. My hat goes off to Cal."

In January, Adomitis was officially added to the Senior Bowl roster after being invited for the first time following the 2020 season. He chose to forgo the All-Star game in Mobile, Alabama to return to Pitt for a fifth year.

Long snappers are not often drafted, though two were taken in the sixth round of last year's draft. Both Thomas Fletcher of Alabama and Cameron Cheeseman of Michigan also played in the Senior Bowl, like Adomitis did, prior to being drafted. Fletcher was also the recipient of the Patrick Mannelly Award in 2020.

If any long snapper is drafted this year, it will certainly be Adomitis. Nagy responded on Twitter on April 23 that he believes Adomitis will indeed come off the board at this week's draft.

On Pitt's pro day in March, Adomitis said he was "not trying to reinvent the wheel" after playing in 64 games at the collegiate level.

"I have plenty of good tape and with the Senior Bowl and combine, I have some more good tape," Adomitis said. "So I was really just trying to do what I do, throwing good balls, having fun. There's really not much else to it other than that today."

Damarri Mathis, Pitt CB | NFL Draft Scouting Report

By Ian Cummings
Pro Football Network
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His path has been a difficult one at times, but now, Pittsburgh CB Damarri Mathis is a well-known 2022 NFL Draft prospect, with a scouting report that's steadily carrying him up boards. Just how soon might Mathis receive a call on draft weekend? And does he have what it takes to be a starting cornerback in the NFL?

Damarri Mathis NFL Draft Profile

Position: Cornerback

School: Pittsburgh

Current Year: Redshirt Senior

Height: 5'11"

Weight: 196 pounds

Wingspan: 77 1/2"

Length: 31 7/8"

Hand: 8 1/4"

Damarri Mathis Scouting Report

Perhaps no cornerback has helped his stock more in the 2022 offseason than Mathis. He entered the offseason largely regarded as a Day 3 pick. Then he flashed at the Senior Bowl. After that, he ran a 4.39 40-yard dash at the NFL Combine. And after that, he put up an insane 43.5" vertical jump and a 133" broad jump at his pro day.

Mathis' testing numbers put him in the elite athletic tier for cornerbacks. But playing cornerback in the NFL takes a lot more than athleticism. Does Mathis have the combined athleticism and execution to lock down the boundary? Let's dive into the tape.

Mathis' athletic profile

Mathis' athletic numbers are otherworldly, but it's important to see if those numbers translate on film. For the most part, Mathis' numbers do. The Pitt CB is a springy athlete who explodes out of his stance and accelerates in a blink. He can click and close out of zone, and he has the explosiveness to erase gaps.

Beyond his explosiveness, Mathis is an incredibly twitchy athlete with fast feet at the line. He's an energetic, amped-up mover with lots of potential energy stored in his frame. He can snap his hips around

with ease, and he has the speed to run with receivers downfield and prevent stacks. Additionally, Mathis has the fluid hips and explosiveness to recover quickly when displaced at the line, and he also has the agility and recovery athleticism to run with stop-and-go routes.

Mathis does a great job lowering in his stance and sinking his hips on direction changes. But moving beyond his mobility, he also has good proportional length for his size, with arms near 32". That length allows Mathis a relatively wide disruption radius. With his vertical athleticism and length, he can high-point and make plays on the ball. Mathis' length also helps him violently extend and jam receivers at the line in press.

Execution beyond the physical traits

Both with his processing and technique, Mathis shows promise. The Pitt CB often uses his feet first in press. He can match receiver releases and carry players upfield with his speed. He has a fairly good balance of patience and aggression in press. With his fast feet, Mathis can quickly set his feet before jamming, and he's aggressive and active with his hands.

Mathis has a strong technical floor, but his physicality just magnifies his appeal. The Pitt CB is a chippy competitor who doesn't shrink when receivers impose their physicality. Mathis can squeeze receivers to the sideline, taking away space. He's incredibly proactive at the catch point, using his long arms to disrupt the catch process. He can get his head around and track the ball, and he also has great ball skills and coordination. And he competes to the end of the rep, eager to rip the ball from the WR's cage.

That physicality also translates for Mathis in run support. The Pitt CB brings a willingness to attack downhill, and he uses combative hands against blockers. He can use his length to shed blocks and surge into the backfield, and he wraps up fairly well with his frame.

Circling back to Mathis' coverage ability, the Pitt CB has upside in zone as well. He's shown he can process quickly and adapt, and he watches the QB's eyes for intent. He also flashes good awareness and positioning in zone. Mathis can identify and close in on underneath routes.

Areas for improvement

There's a ton to like with Mathis, but the Pitt CB isn't a perfect prospect. Mathis' technique, while promising, does have room to improve. Mathis sometimes gets flat-footed on transitions, delaying recovery. He can also be a bit uncontrolled with his movement. He has spry athleticism, but he doesn't always stay tight or composed. The Pitt CB can be baited into over-setting and has room to be a more efficient mover.

Going further, Mathis sometimes gets caught with lead feet at the line. While he's normally good with his jams, he occasionally reaches before moving his base. He also sometimes gets worked too far upfield by releases allowing WRs to break inside. Furthermore, Mathis can attain better leverage downfield at times, as he'll occasionally give too much cushion and be late to react to in-breaking routes. Mathis is also prone to occasional communication mishaps and can have better discipline with his blind spots.

Mathis' physicality and tenacity, meanwhile, can be a double-edged sword. The Pitt CB can be over-aggressive and bite on underneath routes, leaving WRs open up top. He can also be overly grabby in close

quarters, and he sometimes relies on tugs when receivers get a step on him. His style draws flags at times, and that issue could be exacerbated in the NFL.

Among other things, Mathis doesn't always show the strength to make solo tackles. Additionally, while he's solid in run support, he can get washed out at times, and he can take better attack angles.

Mathis' 2022 NFL Draft scouting report overview

Athletic testing merely confirmed what's visible on tape for Mathis. While he's fallen under the radar for a large part of this cycle, Mathis was quietly one of the better cornerbacks in the league last season. Mathis is explosive, fluid, twitchy, and physical. On top of that, he flashes great press technique at the line, can run with receivers downfield, and has the ball skills to be a playmaker and turnover generator.

Mathis isn't quite an elite size threat, and he can also stand to clean up some parts of his technique and reduce positioning errors. But all the tools are there for Mathis to be a quality starter, especially in a press-heavy scheme. He also flashes the awareness and closing speed to make plays in zone.

Mathis does have a notable injury history, which may dull his stock a bit. But the soon-to-be 23-year-old is easily worth a Day 2 pick based on his tape and testing. His elite athletic makeup and steely physicality would be maximized in a press-heavy scheme, but he has the traits to become a relatively scheme-versatile starter on the boundary.

Mathis' Player Profile

Talent always rises to the top. That's a mantra that Mathis has lived at multiple levels — because he's never started at the top. He always has to work his way up, but he has no problem doing just that.

Mathis was a productive starter for three years at Lakeland High School in Lakeland, Florida. He amassed 5 picks and 27 pass deflections over that span and also tested well, running a 4.69 40-yard dash and logging a 40.6" vertical.

Despite his production and testing, Mathis was just a three-star recruit in the 2017 class. He earned interest from some SEC schools, including Ole Miss and South Carolina.

Mathis originally committed to South Carolina, where he would've potentially played alongside 2021 first-round pick Jaycee Horn. But just a few months after, he de-committed and soon joined the Pittsburgh Panthers.

Mathis' career at Pitt

Mathis had to earn his keep at Pitt. He started on special teams as a true freshman in 2017, picking up his first in-game action as a gunner and reserve cornerback. In 2018, Mathis slowly gained more experience. He played in 14 games and made two starts, collecting 18 tackles, 2.5 tackles for loss, a pick, and a pass deflection.

2019 was the Pitt CB's breakout. Mathis started 10 games for the Panthers and emerged as a premier playmaker on the defensive side of the ball. He amassed 23 tackles, 2 tackles for loss, 2 interceptions, and 11 pass deflections, earning a reputation as a dynamic defender at the catch point.

Mathis built a lot of momentum with his 2019 campaign, but that momentum came to a crashing halt in 2020. In August, just before the start of the 2020 season, it was announced that Mathis had suffered a season-ending shoulder injury. It was a tough blow, but Mathis used his redshirt and worked his way back. And by the end of 2021, he'd come back stronger.

In 2021, Mathis started 13 games for Pitt as the team's alpha CB, picking up 43 tackles, 2 picks, 5 deflections, and a defensive touchdown. He earned All-ACC honors, earning a place on the honorable mention squad.

Mathis' NFL Draft ascension

Consensus holds that Kenny Pickett is the Panthers' highest-rated Pitt prospect. That likely isn't changing anytime soon. But perhaps Mathis isn't as far behind as originally expected. Mathis is an elite athlete at a position where elite athletes are heavily coveted. And on top of that, he's a physical competitor and a proactive playmaker, with the building blocks to be a stifling press cornerback.

Since the Pitt CB is 23 years old, has an injury history, and still has things to clean up on tape, Round 1 is likely too high. But on Day 2, Mathis could provide great value with his tenacity and playmaking ability. He has great explosiveness and fluidity, the corrective twitch to stick to receivers all through the rep, and the ball skills to convert.

Damarri Mathis: A DB prospect that demands your attention

By Ryan Fowler
The Draft Network
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In a campaign that has centered around the exponential rise of Pitt Panthers quarterback Kenny Pickett, it's time we turn our attention to the opposite side of the football, where one of the ACC's premier boundary corners calls home. Absent the entire 2020 season, Damarri Mathis entered the fall with the heaviest of chips on his broad shoulders. A three-year starter in the Pitt secondary, the former South Carolina commit has progressed into a defender NFL scouts have begun to turn their attention to when Pickett is on the sideline.

Behind an average build, what Mathis lacks in stature, he makes up for in his aggressive, physical style of play that you simply can't teach. Targeted nine times in Pitt's recent win over Clemson, Mathis allowed just three receptions for 18 yards, including an interception of Tigers quarterback D.J. Uiagalelei. An in-your-face style of corner with excellent mirroring ability and outstanding hands, his ever-growing skill set as a 205-pound defender is awfully enticing considering what works in today's NFL.

As offenses continue to diversify themselves in both the run and pass games, the importance for teams to acquire talent with the fundamental ability to not just compete but win with consistency in both facets has become paramount for defenses around the league. And while you surely don't want your corners to be overly involved in either facet, similarly to how Los Angeles Rams corner Jalen Ramsey makes his impact felt when put on an island, deploying an outside presence who isn't afraid to stick his face in the mud and compete from whistle to whistle—someone who enjoys the violence of the LOS—has become an ever-important asset for general managers to place stock in. Mathis fits the script.

A secondary that has produced five drafted secondary defenders since 2018, Mathis looks next in line to hear his name called. One of the more underrated prospects in the entire class, Mathis has seen his name slipped under the rug due to the blue-chip talent set to come off the board on night one. From LSU's Derek Stingley Jr. to Clemson's Andrew Booth Jr. and Cincinnati's Ahmad "Sauce" Gardner, the impressive traits shown from Mathis have the chance to represent one of the more high-value selections come the end of Round 7 in April.

An outside defender with the ability to remain on the hip of opposing wideouts, Mathis thrives best when confined to a phone booth on 50/50 balls. His suddenness and physicality both at the start of the route and through the stem often allow him to remain chest to chest with pass-catchers, presenting him with a clear window to bat down passes with regularity or take it the other way. While he has room to grow in his fluidity and can get flagged for being too grabby at times, it's a simple fix, and corners like the Lakeland, Florida native are few and far between.

While his initial projection as a pro could see him allotted in the slot, his physical nature and alpha-mentality could see him dominate initially on special teams if he finds himself in a crowded room for snaps. With the third-lowest completion percentage allowed since 2019 heading into the fall—higher than that of the aforementioned Stingley, Booth, and slew of potential future first-round corners—the floor for Mathis continues to rise as the weeks churn on.