

# [***Vikings CB Khyree Jackson has come a long way, from a deli counter to the 4th round in the NFL draft***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BWY-2221-DYMD-60KH-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

EAGAN, Minn. — Every player in the [*NFL draft*](https://apnews.com/hub/nfl-draft) has a story. Khyree Jackson’s journey to the [*Minnesota Vikings*](https://apnews.com/hub/minnesota-vikings) might well warrant a screenplay one day, if the cornerback can establish himself in the league.

The Vikings took Jackson in the fourth round on Saturday to kick off their slate of day-three picks, using the 108th overall pick on the 6-foot-4, 194-pound product of Oregon with skills in press coverage and run stopping who fits well with defensive coordinator Brian Flores' scheme.

Not that long ago, Jackson wasn't sure he fit anywhere on the field at all.

“For a bit of a second, football had got a little foggy, I would definitely say,” Jackson said.

Here's what happened: After winning two Maryland state championships as a wide receiver with Wise High School in Upper Marlboro, Jackson's academic standing forced him down an alternative path. He initially attended Arizona Western Community College, but he came back to Maryland after a couple of weeks and was so embarrassed by his dropout he laid low at home “for about six months.”

He got a got a job in the deli at a Harris Teeter supermarket, slicing ham for a living and even winning an employee of the month award. He got so good at video games he seriously considered trying to make the NBA 2K esports league and was training for a tournament when he got a call from Fort Scott Community College about getting back into football. He played there in 2019 after two full seasons off, switched to cornerback and suddenly was back on a major college track.

After enrolling at East Mississippi Community College and navigating the pandemic shutdowns, Jackson landed at Alabama. His first start came in the national championship game after the 2021 season, and one year later he transferred to Oregon to finish his college career.

The 24-year-old hit it off with Vikings coaches at the Senior Bowl.

“I just told them I was the best corner in the draft and I thought they were probably going to be getting me for cheaper because of some of the ***politics*** that go into it,” Jackson said. “Just being honest, I felt confident in my ability, and the numbers spoke for themselves. I was in a very pass-heavy conference this year. I think I showed versus a lot of top-tier receivers and quarterbacks what I could do.”

The Vikings signed Shaquill Griffin in free agency to supplement returning starters Byron Murphy and Akayleb Evans. Mekhi Blackmon is in the mix. Andrew Booth will still have an opportunity. But cornerback remains as wide-open a position as any on the team.

“We’re just watching highlights and a guy’s helmet goes flying off,” assistant general manager Ryan Grigson said. “He has a physical aspect to his game that I think he’ll fit right in.”

**FIRST LOVE**

Fitting right in won't be a problem for J.J. McCarthy in Minnesota. The Vikings [*moved up one spot*](https://apnews.com/article/nfl-draft-vikings-8bf70713064098aa94418e85830c250a) in the first round to ensure their most pressing need was satisfied with McCarthy, the national champion from Michigan who was the fifth quarterback off the board with the 10th overall pick on Thursday.

His widely lauded communication and leadership skills and renowned work ethic ought to make McCarthy an ideal teammate. Off the field, he's bound to be a fan favorite. McCarthy was an avid hockey player growing up in suburban Chicago until realizing as a freshman in high school it was time to streamline his busy schedule and focus on football.

During a video interview with Minnesota reporters the night he was drafted, McCarthy actually received a phone call [*from Wayne Gretzky*](https://www.vikings.com/news/jj-mccarthy-call-from-wayne-gretzky-1st-media-session), the hockey great he'd met through his marketing agent. The toughness he developed on the ice since he put on skates at age 5 has been a benefit to his quarterback play.

“Everything about hockey is something that helped elevate my game in football,” McCarthy said.

**SMART MAN**

The Vikings led off the sixth round by selecting Oklahoma offensive tackle Walter Rouse with the 177th overall pick. Rouse started his career at Stanford, where he wanted to go to study and football was at first an afterthought. The biomechanical engineering major started as a true freshman, though, and was quickly hooked. Suffering a shoulder injury in 2022 prompted him to put off the draft by a year and transfer to a stronger program for his fifth and final season.

Rouse is from the Washington area and attended Sidwell Friends School, where he was one class behind President Barack Obama's daughter Sasha. He has a basketball background, too, inspired by his grandfather, Vic Rouse, who tipped in the winning shot in the 1963 national championship game for Loyola University.

**FRESH LEG**

Alabama kicker Will Reichard was the team's second sixth-round choice. He set the all-time NCAA scoring record (547 points) over five seasons with the powerhouse Crimson Tide, and like Rouse he put off the draft a year ago to strengthen his profile. Specifically, he honed his kickoff skills, and he impressed the Vikings with his consistency in personality and performance.

“One thing about Will in my personal evaluations was something I borrowed called net pattern: Where’s the ball hitting the net?" Vikings college scout Steve Sabo said. “When you watch a lot of Will’s kicks? Center net, center net, center net.”

**LUCKY SEVENS?**

The Vikings wrapped up the weekend by taking Wake Forest center/guard Michael Jurgens and Texas A&M-Commerce defensive tackle Levi Drake Rodriguez with their seventh-round picks.

**LOOKING AHEAD**

The Vikings currently own only three picks in the 2025 draft, but they hung onto their first-rounder without having to use it to obtain a quarterback. They also have two fifth-rounders, though they will also likely be awarded a mid-round compensatory pick for losing Kirk Cousins in free agency.

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