2025 Dallas Cowboys Draft Preview

Offseason Overview

The 2024 season was a tumultuous one for the Dallas Cowboys, who finished with a 7-10 record. The year took a significant hit when quarterback Dak Prescott suffered a season-ending torn hamstring during their Week 9 matchup against the Atlanta Falcons. Following the season, the organization opted for a major overhaul of the coaching staff. Head coach Mike McCarthy was not retained, and several members of his staff found opportunities elsewhere. Notably, special teams coordinator Jon "Bones" Fassel joined the Tennessee Titans, while highly respected defensive backs coach and assistant head coach Al Harris was hired by the Chicago Bears as their defensive passing game coordinator.

Looking to turn a new leaf, the Cowboys promoted offensive coordinator Brian Schottenheimer to head coach. Schottenheimer has since assembled a seasoned staff featuring a blend of NFL and collegiate experience. He named Clayton Adams, formerly of the Arizona Cardinals and known for his expertise in offensive line play, as the team's new offensive coordinator, with the goal of revitalizing the Cowboys' once-potent ground game. On the defensive side, Matt Eberflus returns to Dallas to serve as the Defensive Coordinator, for which he is known for his strategic defensive acumen when he was the defensive coordinator for the Indianapolis Colts and reputation as a "linebacker whisperer".

The key thing is what has Dallas done over the offseason to bolster the holes left at the end of the season? How does Dallas utilize this draft to add playmakers to the offensive side of the ball and starters to the defensive side with their cornerback position not being a position of depth? This will be discussed through the breakdown in this paper.

Transactions

The most significant move of the Cowboys' offseason didn't happen on the field, it happened in the front office. Dallas re-signed Vice President of Player Personnel Will McClay to a multi-year extension, a major win for the organization given his pivotal role in the team's consistently strong drafts.

However, the roster saw notable turnover, with the Cowboys parting ways with 15 players, including quarterback Cooper Rush (Ravens), edge rusher Demarcus Lawrence (Seahawks), wide receiver Brandin Cooks (Saints), and longtime anchor on the offensive line, Zach Martin, who announced his retirement. With these key departures, addressing holes in the starting lineup, improving depth, and filling pre-existing needs became top priorities.

So far this offseason, Dallas has been 'selectively aggressive', signing, re-signing, or trading for 24 players. Among the notable additions and retentions are defensive end Dante Fowler Jr. (from the Commanders), defensive tackle Solomon Thomas (from the Jets), and returning veterans such as punter Bryan Anger and return specialist Kavontae Turpin. To create the necessary financial flexibility, the Cowboys restructured the contracts of Dak Prescott and CeeDee Lamb, freeing up nearly $50 million in cap space, according to Spotrac. This move not only enabled them to solidify the roster but also positioned them to potentially extend superstar linebacker Micah Parsons before the start of the 2025 season.

Speculation continues to swirl around a potential return of cornerback Stephon Gilmore, who spent the 2024 season with the Minnesota Vikings. Gilmore was recently spotted at The Star, sparking rumors reminiscent of Ezekiel Elliott's return last year following a similar visit just ahead of the NFL Draft.

With 10 selections in the upcoming draft, the Cowboys aim to round out the roster with young, cost-effective talent. This strategy will help mitigate the cap impact, allowing the team to prioritize extending Parsons and emerging Pro Bowl lineman Tyler Smith in the near future.

Breakdown of Offensive Stats

In recent years, the evolution of the modern NFL offense has significantly influenced how teams navigate a season's challenges and opportunities. One of the key indicators of sustained offensive success is balance, specifically, the ability to effectively mix the passing and rushing game. A prime example is the Philadelphia Eagles, whose balanced offensive approach keeps defenses guessing and limits their ability to anticipate plays. Their success has highlighted how crucial it is to maintain offensive unpredictability.

This section focuses on analyzing the Dallas Cowboys' most recent offensive numbers to identify areas for improvement based on trends from previous seasons. By comparing historical data, we can pinpoint where the offense has deviated from successful patterns, particularly in the balance between the run and pass game.

The data used for this analysis was sourced from ESPN. To generate insights and visualize trends, I utilized Python with libraries such as Seaborn, Pandas, NumPy, and Matplotlib. These tools enabled the creation of visualizations and a dictionary-driven structure to efficiently organize and extract the necessary data.
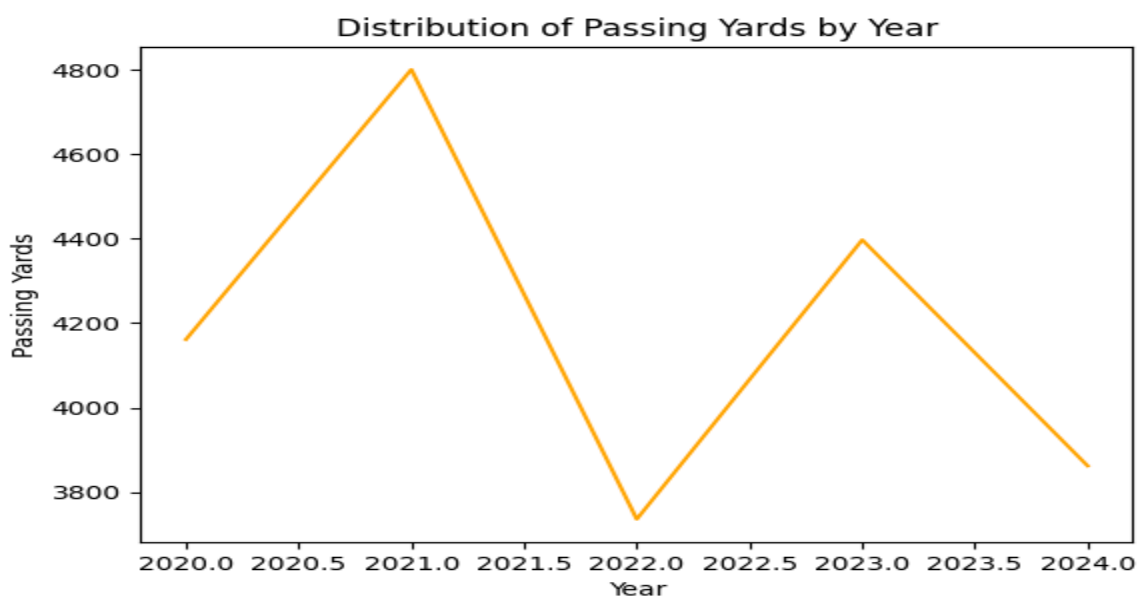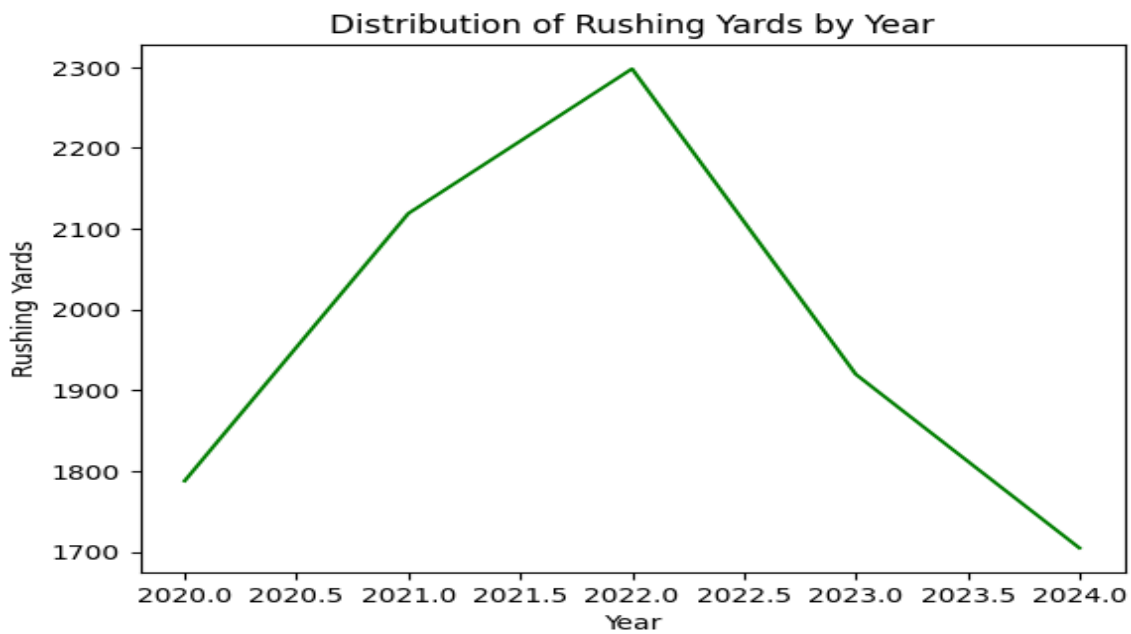
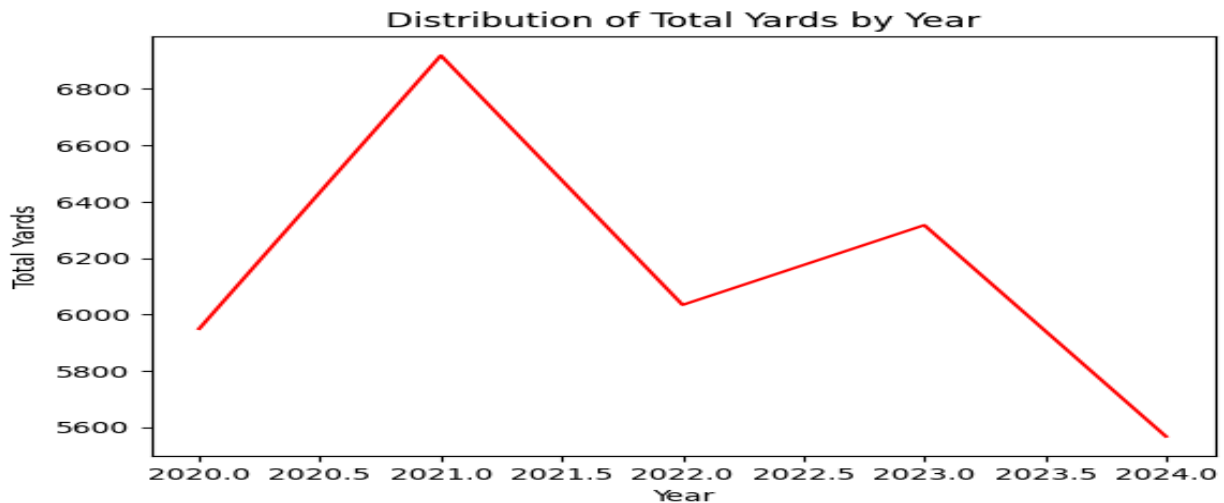| Year	Team	Passing_yards	Passing_attempts	Rushing_yards	Rushing_attempts	Total_yards
2020	Dallas	4161	639	1788	430	5949
2021	Dallas	4800	647	2119	473	6919
2022	Dallas	3736	556	2298	531	6034
2023	Dallas	4397	614	1920	468	6317
2024	Dallas	3862	637	1705	429	5567

The table above breaks down five key statistical categories, grouped by year, providing a clear snapshot of the Dallas Cowboys' offensive production from 2020 through 2025. At first glance, the 2021 season stands out as the most productive offensive year, totaling over 600 more yards than any other season within that

span. That success can largely be attributed to a well-balanced offensive attack, Ezekiel Elliott and Tony Pollard both surpassed 1,000 rushing yards, while Amari Cooper, CeeDee Lamb, and Michael Gallup each recorded over 1,000 receiving yards. Quarterback Dak Prescott also had a career year, throwing for approximately 4,800 yards. Despite this offensive firepower, the Cowboys were eliminated in the first round of the playoffs by the San Francisco 49ers.

In contrast, the 2025 season marked the lowest total offensive yardage, with just 5,567 yards. Interestingly, this season featured the third-highest number of passing attempts but the fewest rushing attempts during the six-year stretch. The heavy reliance on the passing game, especially in the early part of the season with Dak Prescott under center, resulted in games where he threw between 45 and 60 times. Following his season-ending injury, Cooper Rush stepped in, but the offense continued to lean on the pass. It wasn't until Thanksgiving that the team began shifting to a more balanced approach, highlighted by Rico Dowdle's first 100-yard rushing game.

The contrast between the two seasons underscores a vital takeaway: the Cowboys' most successful offensive year came when they effectively balanced the run and pass. Replicating that formula, establishing the run to complement the air attack, will be essential for Dallas as they look to regain consistency and progress as an offensive unit moving forward.

Distribution of Rushing Yards by Year

Distribution of Passing Yards by Year

Distribution of Total Yards by Year

The three graphs presented above offer a visual representation of the Dallas Cowboys' offensive trends over recent seasons. A clear pattern emerges: the offense began to stagnate following the 2022 season. While there was a modest uptick in production in 2023, it was followed by a notable decline in 2024. When contextualized, several factors help explain this trajectory.

A key contributor to the 2022-2024 downturn was the absence of quarterback Dak Prescott due to injury and loss of weapons on the offense. However, systemic changes also played a major role, most notably the transition from offensive coordinator Kellen Moore to head coach Mike McCarthy taking over play-calling duties. Under Moore, the offense leaned heavily on the passing game, with a less impactful run presence, which led to inefficient drives during the game and offensive droughts in season. In contrast, McCarthy's philosophy favored a slower-paced approach, emphasizing quick, short passes and a more deliberate run game. Unfortunately, this strategy often struggled to gain traction and lacked the explosiveness needed to sustain drives.

These tendencies led to periods of offensive stagnation, where the Cowboys became overly dependent on rhythm and timing. As the data suggests, once that rhythm was disrupted, it became increasingly difficult for the offense to regain momentum mid-game. This pattern contributed to their overall drop in efficiency, even before Prescott's injury further compounded the issues in 2024.

Draft

The focus of the draft is on the offensive playmakers in the early rounds while drafting depth pieces on the offensive and defensive lines.

Pick	Player	Position/School
12.	Matthew Golden	WR Texas
44.	TreVeyon Henderson	RB Ohio State
76.	Alfred Collins	DT Texas
149.	Danny Stutsman	LB Oklahoma
175.	Craig Woodson	S California
204.	Jake Majors	OC Texas
211.	Cam Jackson	DT Florida
217.	Caleb Rogers	OT Texas Tech
222.	Raheim Sanders	RB South Carolina
239.	Luke Lachey	TE Iowa

As shown above, I prioritized adding offensive playmakers, starting with the explosive Matthew Golden to complement CeeDee Lamb as WR2, and TreVeyon Henderson, a dynamic back with vision, speed, and strong receiving skills. The next three rounds focused on defense, adding Alfred Collins to bolster the D-line, Danny Stutsman as a plug-and-play linebacker, and Craig Woodson to strengthen the secondary.

Later picks included key depth pieces, highlighted by center Jake Majors, a potential late-round steal who drew strong praise during the draft process. The draft wrapped with another versatile running back in Raheim Sanders and Iowa's Luke Lachey, a well-rounded tight end from a proven TE pipeline. Overall, I leaned toward the offensive side of the ball in the draft to balance out the defense-heavy additions made during the offseason.

Conclusion

The Cowboys are set to begin a new era under head coach Brian Schottenheimer, entering their first draft with a renewed focus on establishing a run-first offensive identity. The goal is clear: use the ground game to unlock the full potential of the passing attack, while continuing to add key playmakers through the draft and possibly in the post-draft free agent window.

With the team's core players aging and big contracts beginning to stack up, Dallas must capitalize on its current window of opportunity. All eyes will be on how Schottenheimer navigates his inaugural season at the helm. With less than 24 hours until the 2025 NFL Draft, plenty of movement is expected in the final hours. Soon enough, we'll see how it all unfolds once the dust settles.