

Reynolds: Offensive & Defensive Rookie of the Year Awards Analysis

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The next NFL awards preview will involve both the Offensive and Defensive Player of the Year markets. Unfortunately, favorites have won the majority of both of these awards in recent years.

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Offensive Rookie of the Year (OROY) Trends

- Over the last decade, five quarterbacks, three running backs, and two wide receivers have won the OROY.
- Over the last five years, three quarterbacks and two wide receivers have won the OROY.
- During the last decade, **Dak Prescott** and **Alvin Kamara** were the only OROY winners selected outside of the top 12 picks in the NFL Draft.
- Each of the last seven OROY winners were selected within the top 10 picks of the NFL Draft.
- Six of those seven winners were selected within the first six picks of the NFL Draft.
- Four of those seven winners were selected within the first two picks of the NFL Draft.
- Kamara is the only OROY winner during the past decade with longer than +2500 Opening Day odds (he was +5000).
- Wide receiver **Garrett Wilson** (+2000) was the only other OROY winner during this span with longer than +1400 odds heading into Opening Day.
- Last year, when the OROY market opened in May, **Jayden Daniels** was available, for a very short time, in the +1400 to +1600 range.
- There have been a few close races during this span between a quarterback and a high-performing skill player. Relative ties have gone to the quarterback in each instance.
- A specific example is when Prescott edged out teammate **Ezekiel Elliott** in 2016.
- Team success certainly doesn't hurt in the OROY race, but it is definitely not a requirement.
- A few recent OROY winners did not start on Opening Day, like Kamara and **Justin Herbert**.

What We're Looking for in an OROY Candidate

Primarily we are looking for a quarterback, running back, or wide receiver who was taken within the first 10 picks who can be the league's most productive offensive rookie. We can also consider any quarterback who is going to start by the end of September, or a later-drafted running back with a clear path to a major role.

OROY Notes

- This race reminds me of the 2018 OROY race, as Raiders running back **Ashton Jeanty** (+275) is in a similar position that **Saquon Barkley** was, while Titans quarterback **Cam Ward** (+350) parallels then Jets quarterback **Sam Darnold** as a top-of-the-draft selection who will start on Opening Day. Just like in 2018 with Barkley and Darnold, Jeanty and Ward are the two clear favorites in this race.
- Chargers running back **Omarion Hampton** (+850) is in a better environment than Jeanty, but Chargers premium LT **Rashawn Slater** is out for the year and veteran **Najee Harris** will likely cut into Hampton's workload more than anyone in Vegas will threaten Jeanty's volume.
- **TreVeyon Henderson** (+1200) is a player I love, but Patriots veteran **Rhamondre Stevenson** is expected to have a sizable workload in New England, at least early in the season.
- If Henderson was in Denver instead of **RJ Harvey** (+2500), Henderson would be my favorite option in this race. Since Harvey is in Denver's ambiguous backfield, behind that quality offensive line in **Sean Payton**'s system, Harvey's path to contention looks a lot like Kamara's when he won this award. I don't think Harvey is as talented of a player as Kamara, but a similar outcome is on the table.
- Jaguars WR/CB **Travis Hunter** (+1000) is one of the most unique prospects in recent memory, as he'll play on both sides of the ball. That said, if he's close to Jeanty, Hampton, and Henderson in raw production, Hunter may get the nod with voters due to his unheard of dual-threat role in today's NFL.
- Panthers WR **Tetairoa McMillan** (+1600) is the clear top option in Carolina's passing game, but he's more of a **Drake London** type of prospect than a blow-the-doors-off weapon like **Ja'Marr Chase** was as a rookie. If McMillan contends, expect it to be volume-based.
- **Emeka Egbuka** (+1800) is someone I viewed as an interesting long shot when this **market opened in late April**, but he was available at +4000 then. That said, there is a real path to Egbuka leading all rookies in receptions.
- The Packers have taken a spread-the-ball-around approach in recent years, but speedster **Mathew Golden** (+2000) warrants mention in this market.
- **Jaxson Dart** (+2200) is unbettable currently, but the media overreacted to Dart's preseason, and the Giants' fan base is now completely bought in on Dart. So, if New York starts slow, there will be pressure to play Dart, both from the media and the fanbase, very early in the year.
- If you want to let your hair down with a deep long shot, Texans running back **Woody Marks** (+10000) is a 100:1 long shot with a path to playing time in **Joe Mixon**'s absence.

Defensive Rookie of the Year (DROY) Trends

- Over the last decade, six pass rushers, three cornerbacks, and one linebacker have won the DROY.
- **Darius Leonard** (Now **Shaquille Leonard**) is the lone linebacker and the only recent DROY winner to not be taken inside the top 20 picks in the NFL Draft.
- Last year's winner **Jared Verse** and **Micah Parsons** are listed as linebackers at times, but I counted them as pass rushers.
- Five of these 10 winners were taken within the top five picks of the NFL Draft.
- Leonard and cornerback **Marcus Peters** were the only recent DROY winners to open the year with longer than +1400 odds.
- Both Leonard and Peters opened with longer than +3000 odds.
- Six of the last 10 DROY winners opened with +1000 or less odds.
- Parsons and **Joey Bosa** are the only DROY winners over the last decade to finish with double-digit sacks.
- When **Sauce Gardner** won in 2022, Lions EDGE **Aidan Hutchinson** was the runner-up. Hutchinson would have won the DROY in nearly any other season (and, in my opinion, he should have won that race).
- Team success certainly doesn't hurt, but it's not a prerequisite to win the DROY.

What We're Looking for in a DROY Candidate

We are looking for a first-round pass rusher who can realistically lead all rookies in splash plays (sacks and turnovers). More often than not, we want a top-of-the-draft pass rusher, as those sorts of players win this award at an abnormally high clip.

DROY Notes

- Giants EDGE **Abdul Carter** (+225) is exactly the kind of top-of-the-draft pass-rushing prospect who wins this race. He'll also be part of a Giants pass rush that our Brandon Thorn ranked second in the league, making this race Carter's to lose.

- To take that a step further, Carter is in the best position for a DROY favorite I've seen since I began tracking this market over a decade ago.
- 49ers EDGE **Mykel Williams** (+1400) is the pass rusher with the best shot to challenge Carter.
- The other first-round EDGE rushers are **Jalon Walker** (+1200) and **James Pearce Jr.** (+1600) of the Falcons, along with Bengals EDGE **Shemar Stewart** (+2500).
- The Browns spent the No. 5 overall pick on DT **Mason Graham** (+1600), but Cleveland will likely be out of the playoff picture, and it's hard to envision Graham outproducing Carter as a pass rusher.
- Ravens EDGE **Mike Green** (+1200) was selected with the No. 59 overall pick, so while his odds frame him as a contender, winning the DPOY from that draft slot would be an outlier outcome.
- Hunter (+1000) probably won't play enough cornerback to truly contend in this race, but if he finishes with five interceptions or more while also producing at a high level as a wide receiver, it would not be a surprise if voters gravitated toward him in that scenario. That said, it also wouldn't be shocking if he saw so few defensive reps on Opening Day that his odds fall into the +2000 range after one week.
- The other non-pass rusher on my radar is Eagles linebacker **Jihaad Campbell** (+1400). There is no value on him at those odds, especially given his uncertain path to a full-time role. But if he plays early, he has the best shot to lead all rookies in tackles, while playing for an Eagles team that will be in primetime showcases throughout the year.

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