

# Reynolds: Protector of the Year Awards Analysis

RYAN REYNOLDS // JUL 28, 2025



## 2025 NFL Best Ball

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The Protector of the Year Award presents a rare opportunity for bettors, as this is a brand-new market with zero direct historical precedence to build a betting process from. Since we're starting from scratch, let's build a baseline to work off of before hunting for some edges and discussing some players.

You can find the details of this new award [here](#), but below you'll find quick hits on criteria and who will decide the winner of the first Protector of the Year Award.

The Criteria:

- Skill Metrics
  - Pass/Run-Block Win Rates
  - Sacks Allowed
  - Penalties Allowed
  - Helmet Contact
- Impact
- Leadership
- Durability
- Strength of Opponent

The Panel:

- LT Andrew Whitworth
- LT Orlando Pace
- C Jason Kelce
- C Shaun O'Hara
- G Will Shields
- C/ G LeCharles Bentley

As we've been saying for years, when it comes to betting in awards markets, it does not matter who you think will win; what matters is who voters will vote for and why.

Right off the bat, this group of high-caliber former linemen all came up before the heavy rise of data usage in the NFL and will likely all veer more toward "football guy" measures when push comes to shove. What makes that even more interesting is that it's pretty safe to assume most of these former players won't be analyzing film every week on every starting lineman in the league, nor should they from a time management standpoint.

So, the first step in reverse engineering the panel's likely evaluation process is through the lens that performance metrics and/or player reputation will qualify various linemen for the panel. From there, the panel will do deeper dives on those players through film study, asking both teammates and opponents about the impact each of these linemen have, etc.

When this award was first announced, my initial reaction was that the Defensive Player of the Year was the closest match in terms of what kind of player wins this award. To that end:

- Positional Value: i.e., OT = Pass Rusher
- Team Success: Making the playoffs may be a silent requirement.
- The production metrics in the above criteria will matter, as they largely mimic what matters in DPOY races.
- Name Value Matters: You have a much better chance to win DPOY if you had a big year and you're already a household name.
- The last quarter of the season matters more than any of the three previous quarters.

The panel being filled with former players changes that framework somewhat, as each position group has at least one panel member that played that position.

Rewarding legacy could also play a factor, especially since there are just a few linemen left in the league who played at the same time as some of the older members on this panel, which means the window to vote for one of their own is closing rapidly. The leadership criteria is an obvious way that they could rationalize the impact of a player's legacy as well.

The Favorites

- Lions RT **Penei Sewell** (+450 DraftKings)
- Eagles RT **Lane Johnson** (+750 DraftKings)
- 49ers LT **Trent Williams** (+1000 to +1100 Caesars)

The market has the favorites right, though you could argue the order could be different.

**Trent Williams** and **Lane Johnson** are the legacy candidates, where I'd be surprised if one of them doesn't win barring injury or an uncharacteristic down year.

Our Brandon Thorn is the authority on offensive-line-play analysis, and he framed Johnson as the best pass blocker in the league on a recent episode of the [Establish The Run podcast](#). There's also a historic correlation of what happens to the Eagles' offense when Johnson misses time. With **Jason Kelce** now two years out of the picture, Johnson is the veteran lynchpin in the league's best offensive line. He's also surrounded by premium talent in Philadelphia, a team that is widely viewed as having the league's best roster.

That's one advantage Williams has, as Thorn [pointed out](#): The rest of the 49ers' offensive line is underwhelming, making him the clear star of the group. Williams will benefit from San Francisco having the league's easiest schedule, which positions the 49ers to return to the playoffs. Williams also plays left tackle, which could be a tiebreaker in a close race as both Johnson and **Penei Sewell** play on the right side of the line with right-handed quarterbacks.

Speaking of Sewell, Detroit is undergoing some major changes this year, losing stud center **Frank Ragnow** to retirement, both of their coordinators, and huge chunks of their overall coaching staff. The NFC North is also filled to the brim with dangerous teams, giving Detroit a few realistic paths to taking a small step back in 2025. That said, expect Sewell to be a perennial preseason favorite in this race for years to come, which could also cost him in this race this year if he's up against Johnson and/or Williams at year's end.

Mid-Range Options

- Chargers LT **Rashawn Slater** (+2500 DraftKings)
- Chiefs C **Creed Humphrey** (+2500 DraftKings)
- Bears G **Joe Thuney** (+2800, DraftKings)

I agree with Thorn that **Rashawn Slater** and **Joe Alt** likely galvanize each other a bit in this race, but Slater is now the highest-paid offensive lineman in the league, on a well-coached team, with a premium quarterback. That makes him warrant mentioning as a mid-range option.

**Creed Humphrey** is [Thorn's top-rated center](#) and the lynchpin of the Chiefs' consistently strong offensive line. It's difficult to see any other center truly contending in this race other than Humphrey.

**Joe Thuney** is not only Thorn's top-rated left guard, but he has the exact kind of profile that could put him in contention with the top tackles. Thuney played at a high level with both **Tom Brady** and **Patrick Mahomes**, so he is already as high-profile as it gets for a guard. He's also in the perfect situation because

if the Bears move from a bottom-tier offensive line, as they were last year, to a top-10 group as Thorn has them ranked, while **Caleb Williams** ascends enough to push the Bears into the playoffs, Thuney is going to get a lot of credit for that transformation. If the Bears start slow and Thuney's odds dip, we'll revisit this during the season.

My Favorite Misprice

Vikings LT Christian Darrisaw (+3000 to +4000 DraftKings)

The Vikings are one of the league's most interesting teams, as they are an obvious regression candidate. They went 8-1 in one-score games in 2024 while losing their quarterback in free agency this offseason. Despite that, Minnesota still has elite coaching on both sides of the ball, one of the league's best skill groups, and they significantly improved their roster this offseason, particularly on both sides of the trenches.

Similar to the situation Thuney has in Chicago, if J.J. McCarthy takes advantage of the premium situation he inherits, where he approaches Sam Darnold's level of production, it will elevate **Christian Darrisaw** in this race.

Not only can you get Darrisaw at a good value on DraftKings, but if I were an oddsmaker, I'd have him in the same cluster as Slater.

Very few non-tackles will be on my radar for this race. At the end of the day, in the first year of the Protector of the Year, I am looking for a name-brand offensive tackle who:

- Is on a playoff contender
- Is on a top-10 offense that ideally is elite through the air or on the ground
- Has some legacy attached to his career
- Is well positioned to finish strong

We'll be discussing awards market options in the betting channel of Discord throughout the year. Line values given in this article often change soon after publication.

[Lane Johnson, Philadelphia Eagles, NFL Draft Kit, NFL Draft Kit Pro, Ryan Reynolds' Awards Betting Analysis](#)



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