

Auburn Football News: 4-23-2024

Auburn depth chart impact: DT Philip Bliidi:

<https://247sports.com/college/auburn/article/auburn-football-transfer-portal-tigers-philip-bliidi-indiana-230809924/>

Auburn lands another DL addition in USC transfer, former TAMU defender Isaiah Raikes:

<https://www.al.com/auburnfootball/2024/04/auburn-lands-another-dl-addition-in-usc-transfer-former-tamu-defender-isaiah-raikes.html>

Auburn depth chart impact: DT Isaiah Raikes:

<https://247sports.com/college/auburn/article/auburn-football-transfer-portal-isaiah-raikes-texas-am-usc-230825893/>

Auburn adds second transfer DL:

<https://auburn.rivals.com/news/auburn-adds-second-transfer-dl-tigers-football-recruiting>

Auburn adds second spring DL transfer in Isaiah Raikes:

<https://247sports.com/college/auburn/article/isaiah-raikes-transfers-to-auburn-tigers-football-recruiting-230796125/>

With Keyron Crawford, Auburn lands third transfer commit in 24 hours:

<https://www.al.com/auburnfootball/2024/04/in-keyron-crawford-auburn-lands-third-transfer-commit-in-24-hours.html>

Auburn 'definitely' stepping up pursuit of Lewis:

<https://auburn.rivals.com/news/auburn-definitely-stepping-up-pursuit-of-lewis-tigers-football-recruiting>

Reports: Auburn linebacker Wesley Steiner to enter transfer portal:

<https://www.al.com/auburnfootball/2024/04/reports-auburn-linebacker-wesley-steiner-to-enter-transfer-portal.html>

NCAA officially authorizes unlimited transfer rule, removes Pac-12 from 'Power 5':

<https://www.al.com/sports/2024/04/ncaa-officially-authorizes-unlimited-transfer-rule-removes-pac-12-from-power-5.html>

Denver Broncos add a quarterback before the NFL Draft:

<https://www.al.com/sports/2024/04/denver-broncos-add-a-quarterback-before-the-nfl-draft.html>

With the next pick: DB Jaylin Simpson:

<https://auburntigers.com/news/2024/4/22/football-with-the-next-pick-db-jaylin-simpson.aspx>

Former Auburn Tiger Predicted To Land In The NFC In Latest NFL Mock Draft:

<https://www.si.com/college/auburn/former-auburn-tiger-nfl-mock-draft-detroit-lions>

Auburn depth chart impact: DT Philip Blidi

By Nathan King

It comes as little surprise that Auburn's first transfer pickup of the post-spring cycle came at a major position of need.

The Tigers' efforts to bulk up their interior defensive front through the transfer ranks began Sunday evening, when Indiana's Philip Blidi committed to Auburn after visiting during the week. Blidi was also targeted by SEC cohorts LSU and Oklahoma, among others.

The fifth-year senior began his career at Texas Tech, where he appeared in every game over his first three seasons, contributing as a rotational player at defensive tackle, with 39 tackles and 6.5 tackles for loss. At Indiana last season, Blidi had a career-best campaign, amassing 30 tackles and four tackles for loss while starting 12 games.

Elite 11 2024: 5-star Tavien St. Clair best of the best at a loaded Ohio regional

Blidi is the first transfer addition for Auburn since the conclusion of spring practice, but he'll be far from the last for the Tigers' defensive front this offseason. Defensive tackle Gage Keys (Kansas) and nose tackle Trill Carter (Texas) already enrolled and went through spring practice.

First-year coordinator D.J. Durkin and position coach Vontrell King-Williams will look for at least a couple more transfers to fill some gaps along the defensive line, as replacing the production of first team All-SEC selection Marcus Harris is one of the biggest tasks for Auburn's staff this offseason. Blidi, Carter and Keys bring experience, yes, and Auburn also has plenty of exciting youngsters in the mix, but there's no such thing as too many playmakers at the line of scrimmage.

With more to come for Auburn through the portal, let's assess the Tigers' current personnel at defensive tackle — not including nose or end — and take a quick stab at how Blidi affects the depth chart outlook.

Seniors: Philip Blidi (RS), Gage Keys (RS)

Juniors: Quientrail Jamison-Travis

Sophomores: N/A

Freshmen: Darron Reed Jr. (RS), Malik Blocton

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Way-too-early depth chart projection

DT: Gage Keys OR Philip Blidi (1)

Darron Reed Jr. OR Malik Blocton (2)

NT: Trill Carter (1)

Jayson Jones OR Quienrail Jamison-Travis (2)

DE: Keldric Faulk (1)

Zykeivous Walker (2)

T.J. Lindsey (3)

At 6-foot-3 and 295 pounds, Blidi's size and play style should remind Auburn fans of Harris, with a nice blend of power and quickness. Though Blidi's strength appears to be more as a pass-rusher; that's how he was able to do a lot of his damage for the Hoosiers in 2023.

Blidi's overall pass-rushing grade, per PFF, was the best on Indiana's defense last season. He logged 15 quarterback pressures on the year while playing 66 percent of his snaps as a 3-tech defensive tackle. Blidi was able to kick inside for Indiana to nose tackle, depending on alignments, and Harris occasionally did the same for Auburn last season. But given the Tigers' stockpiling of bigger, space-eating defensive tackles like Carter, Jones and Jamison-Travis — plus another potentially in the portal — Auburn shouldn't need Blidi to move around too much.

On paper, Blidi brings more production to the lineup than Keys, who was able to comfortably work his way into the first-team defense in spring practice. Auburn certainly hopes one of its new pieces will emerge into a stalwart like Harris, but until then, the Tigers are adding the pieces to be able to feature plenty of rotation at defensive tackle. Blidi could certainly be an SEC starter, but Auburn is also prepared to win with depth.

Auburn lands another DL addition in USC transfer, former TAMU defender Isaiah Raikes

By Ainslie Lee
al.com

Auburn adding to its defensive line wasn't a one-and-done situation.

After earning the commitment of Indiana transfer defensive lineman Philip Bliidi Sunday, the Tigers have landed another transfer defensive lineman, this time in USC transfer and former Texas A&M defensive lineman Isaiah Raikes.

Raikes, who entered the transfer portal on April 12, announced his commitment to Auburn in a post to social media Monday.

https://twitter.com/Hayesfawcett3/status/1782489097199661090?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1782489097199661090%7Ctwgr%5E59c2c2c56b3e156106d6ffc8115b7cc8a7966867%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.al.com%2Fauburnfootball%2F2024%2F04%2Fauburn-lands-another-dl-addition-in-usc-transfer-former-tamu-defender-isaiah-raikes.html

While Raikes is technically transferring in from USC, he never played a snap for the Trojans.

After playing four seasons at Texas A&M, Raikes entered the transfer portal in December and landed at USC shortly after. However, Raikes' stint in Los Angeles was short-lived and he eventually found himself back in the transfer portal.

In his four seasons at Texas A&M, Raikes appeared in 42 games, tallied 43 total tackles, 4.5 tackles for a loss and one forced fumble.

A native of Woodbury, New Jersey, Raikes was rated a 3-star defensive tackle out of high school and the 61st-ranked defensive tackle in the 2020 by 247Sports.

Measuring 6-foot-1 and 313 pounds, Raikes is set to add size to the interior of Auburn's defensive line, which has been an area of concern for Auburn since the start of spring camp.

"I think inside is where we're still a little thin," Auburn head coach Hugh Freeze said of the defensive line as the Tigers went through spring practice. "We'll be looking, maybe, for some portal help there."

And so far, the Tigers' have gotten portal help with their additions of Raikes and Bliidi.

Together, Raikes and Bliidi join a defensive line room that already featured senior Jayson Jones, senior Kansas transfer Gage Keys, senior Texas transfer Trill Carter, junior Quientrail Jamison-Travis, redshirt freshman Darron Reed Jr., freshman TJ Lindsey and freshman Malik Blocton.

Auburn adds second transfer DL

By Caleb Jones
AuburnSports
Staff

If at first you don't succeed, try again.

Auburn did just that with Isaiah Raikes.

The former Texas A&M defensive lineman transferred to USC during the winter portal window and entered the portal after USC's spring practices. Auburn, which missed on Raikes the first go around, did not miss again.

He committed to the Tigers Monday, becoming Auburn's second incoming transfer for the spring window.

Raikes, who was a four-star defensive lineman in the 2020 class, played his high school football for St. Augustine in Richland, N.J., prior to signing with Texas A&M.

He spent four seasons in College Station, where over his career he recorded 42 tackles, 4.5 tackles for loss and 1.5 sacks. However, he saw plenty of playing time while he was an Aggie.

As a sophomore, junior and senior, Raikes made appearances in 12 games for three consecutive seasons with Texas A&M. He made five starts and was a team captain in 2022.

Vontrell King-Williams now has two newcomers from the spring portal window, both on the defensive front. Auburn landed the commitment of Indiana defensive lineman Phillip Blidi Sunday, who will rotate with the defensive tackles.

Meanwhile, the 6-foot-2, 320-pound Raikes will slide in at noseguard for the Tigers. He provides another big piece on the defensive front for Auburn, which needed to add a couple more linemen through the portal.

With two transfers committed in two days, King-Williams got what he needed.

Auburn adds second spring DL transfer in Isaiah Raikes

By Christian Clemente

Auburn went into the spring transfer portal with a huge focus on the defensive line. And for the second day in a row, Auburn has beefed up the interior with a transfer addition.

Isaiah Raikes, who spent the spring semester at USC after transferring from Texas A&M, has announced his commitment to Auburn. Raikes heavily considered Auburn and visited the Plains in the first portal window, but opted to instead head to USC. Now with his former defensive coordinator in D.J. Durkin running the show in Auburn, Raikes reunites with him and helps shore up a big position of need.

Defensive line coach Vontrell King-Williams landed former Indiana fifth-year senior transfer Philip Blidi on Sunday, with Blidi expected to play the 3-tech. Listed at 6-foot-2 and 320 pounds, Raikes split his snaps almost 50-50 between nose tackle and 3-tech defensive tackle.

A rising fifth-year senior from New Jersey, Raikes has appeared in 38 games over the last four seasons, with four starts. He's tallied 43 career tackles, with three tackles for loss, one sack and a forced fumble this season. He has two years of eligibility remaining.

Auburn went into the spring transfer portal window focused on the defensive line as the biggest need. Now King-Williams and Hugh Freeze shore that up, getting two big bodies on the inside to add to the room. Auburn brought former Arkansas State edge rusher Keyron Crawford on campus for a visit starting Sunday as they also push for another buck linebacker or two through the portal this window.

Auburn depth chart impact: DT Isaiah Raikes

By Nathan King

Auburn's defensive line continues to beef up through the transfer portal, this time with some SEC experience.

The Tigers' pre-spring interest in Isaiah Raikes paid off, as the former Texas A&M and USC defensive tackle committed to Auburn out of the portal on Monday. Raikes visited Auburn in January before choosing the Trojans, but his relationship with the Tigers' staff ended up being the difference and made Auburn an easy choice for Raikes this time around.

The 6-foot-2, 320-pound Raikes spent only three months at USC before re-entering the portal. He transferred out from Texas A&M back in December amid the Aggies' coaching change.

Speaking of Texas A&M coaches, Raikes has a clear connection with Auburn's staff, as new defensive coordinator D.J. Durkin held the same role in College Station last season, when Raikes played in every game for the Aggies.

A rising fifth-year senior from New Jersey, Raikes has appeared in 38 games over the last four seasons, with four starts. He's tallied 43 career tackles, with three tackles for loss, one sack and a forced fumble. The 2023 season under Durkin was Raikes' best in college so far, with three tackles for loss and a forced fumble.

Raikes is the fourth transfer portal pickup for Auburn along the defensive line in 2024 and the second in the post-spring window, joining Indiana's Philip Blidi, who jumped on board Sunday evening.

With the assumption that Raikes' primary role will be as an interior anchor at nose tackle, let's take a look at Auburn's current personnel with Raikes added to the room, and break down what another experienced transfer pickup means for the defensive front's outlook in 2024.

Seniors: Isaiah Raikes (RS), Trill Carter (RS), Jayson Jones (RS)

Juniors: Quientrail Jamison-Travis

Sophomores: N/A

Freshmen: N/A

Way-too-early depth chart

1: Trill Carter OR Isaiah Raikes

2: Jayson Jones OR Quientrail Jamison-Travis

With what could be the Tigers' final transfer pickup at defensive tackle, they've ensured they'll have no shortage of contributors. Now it's simply a question of who will step up.

At nose tackle in particular, there's now a bevy of experienced options for Vontrell King-Williams and Durkin to sort through. That should make for a fierce competition in fall camp. There's not enough playing time to go around for three experienced players at nose.

Luckily for Auburn — and those players — the likes of Raikes and Carter were able to kick inside to a 3-tech defensive tackle spot at their previous schools. As already mentioned, Raikes split his snaps about 50-50 last season at Texas A&M between defensive tackle and a true nose spot. Carter spent most of his time at nose for Auburn in the spring but can also move around. The same can be said for Jamison-Travis.

It shouldn't come as a big surprise that Raikes' strongest quality at Texas A&M was stuffing the run. His run-defense grade by PFF was the fourth-best — and the best among Texas A&M's defensive tackles — on an Aggies team filled with talent along the defensive front seven. Only five SEC defensive linemen who defended at least 100 rushing plays had a better run-defense grade than Raikes.

The No. 1 player on that list? Marcus Harris, whose first team All-SEC production is what is most pressing for Auburn's defensive front to replace this offseason. With Raikes on board, Auburn has more than enough names to choose from in terms of aligning on the defensive line. Figuring out the proper personnel and groupings this preseason will be key in synthesizing a unit that can disrupt over the course of a season against big and physical SEC offensive lines.

How Much Will The Transfer Portal Help Auburn?

By Brian Smith
Auburn Daily

Auburn gaining the commitment of Indiana Transfer Portal defensive tackle Philip Blidi represents a great start to filling Auburn's 2024 roster needs.

Will the Tigers leave the spring Transfer Portal window further unscathed though?

Auburn is already without wide receiver Jay Fair, a recent Transfer Portal entree. Will there be more? Here are questions and comments that combine to define what Auburn needs from the Transfer Portal, as well as what's most realistic for the next two seasons.

1) The Transfer Portal giveth and it taketh away.

It's not a secret that Auburn needs experienced defensive line help; that's no easy task for Hugh Freeze and his staff to accomplish. Most top-end transfers want to start and gain the bulk of the reps. The good news is defensive tackle is at the top of the board and Blidi helps quite a bit.

Adding another defensive tackle is still ideal for the Tigers. Auburn is likely to come up at least a little bit short because there are few defensive tackles who fit the needs of the Tigers as numerous college football teams are also seeking a top defensive tackle.

To be honest, Auburn could use more linebacker talent, at least as quality backups, as well. Hard to say if the Tigers take a swing at the linebacker position but it's something to think about considering true freshmen are key backups right now. That's far from ideal.

There's also the obvious concern at wide receiver. While anyone who's scouted Cam Coleman should assure you he's the real deal, an 18-year-old being a team's most talented – and possibly depended upon – wide receiver is generally not a good thing.

If Auburn does not sign former Penn State receiver KeAndre Lambert-Smith, there will still likely be continued growing pains at the position. Then again, maybe someone else surprises us all and steps up from the current Auburn roster. It's possible.

As for expectations, will the receiver corps be improved? Yes. Any place near what Auburn fans want? Not very likely.

2) Expect Auburn to lose someone else to the Transfer Portal

It's all but inevitable. Gone are the days when the vast majority of players just want to play for ol' "State U" (or insert school name) and many are instead seeking NIL deals and the most opportunity to gain reps to place on film for even a sliver of a chance at NFL riches. That brings up a key question.

Which Auburn player surprises everyone and enters the Transfer Portal? Will it be a true gut punch? Every program goes through this, even Kirby Smart and Georgia could be susceptible.

The next week will be pivotal for Auburn because the roster is far too thin to sustain any further defections. To that point, it's not an automatic lock that Auburn is a bowl team next year as is. Losing a key player could be the death knell of Auburn's chances to be 6-6 or better next season (Auburn is far too young and there's nothing Freeze and his staff can do about it).

3) Could Auburn be a true SEC contender if it hits the Transfer Portal jackpot?

That question depends on the way one defines it. Long-term? Sure. That also means landing a few players who possess multiple years of eligibility and at key positions like defensive tackle and wide receiver.

As of today, that is simply unknown. Related, most indications are that Freeze and his staff understand Auburn is a long-term rebuild. They certainly want to win as much as possible now but also understand that winning is a subjective term. The 2025 season is the beginning of the true turnaround, most likely, and the Auburn staff knows that behind closed doors.

Come 2025, Auburn will have far more depth and talent returning. That also means the December Transfer Portal window is more valuable to the Tigers than the current one.

AU fans should rally behind the moves the Tigers make this spring but the true fruits of the labor that Freeze and his staff are putting in will not likely be seen until 2025 and beyond. For now, the Transfer Portal helps the Tigers to fill holes far more than it is building a top-end roster.

Patience Auburn fans, patience.

With Keyron Crawford, Auburn lands third transfer commit in 24 hours

By Matt Cohen
al.com

A full overhaul of Auburn's defensive front continued Monday with the signing of Keyron Crawford, Auburn's third addition on the defensive line out of the transfer portal in 24 hours.

Crawford has two remaining years of eligibility coming to Auburn from Arkansas State.

<https://twitter.com/i/status/1782533255129903439>

Crawford joins interior defensive lineman Philip Bliidi from Indiana and Isaiah Raikes from USC out of the transfer portal since Sunday afternoon. Head coach Hugh Freeze emphasized adding more talent out of the portal up front of defense and he has delivered on that promise.

Auburn allowed the fourth most rushing yards per game in the SEC last season and seventh in sacks.

That coupled with the loss of Marcus Harris to the NFL Draft made these additions important.

And there is new coaching. Auburn moved former linebackers coach Josh Aldridge to be in charge of the edge rushers while new defensive coordinator D.J. Durkin was assigned the linebackers. Former defensive line coach Jeremy Garrett left for the same time with the Jacksonville Jaguars and Auburn promoted Vontrell King-Williams to its new defensive tackles coach.

King-Williams is largely responsible for the addition of Raikes and Bliidi.

Auburn has made several additions on the defensive front out of high school highlighted by Amaris Williams and Jamonta Waller. In the winter transfer window, Auburn brought in Gage Keys from Kansas and Trill Carter from Texas as interior defensive linemen.

Yet Freeze wanted more. So he added Crawford and Raikes and Bliidi.

Crawford is unlikely to start. Auburn has its two exterior defensive linemen set in buck linebacker Jalen McLeod and rising star defensive end Keldric Faulk.

Crawford started all 13 games for Arkansas State last season and had 6.5 sacks along with 11.5 tackles for loss. He had 45 total tackles along with two forced fumbles and two fumble recoveries.

He is initially from Memphis where he played at Briarcrest High School — the same high school Hugh Freeze coached at in various roles from 1992-2004 before moving to coach in college.

Freeze's first Division I head coaching job was at Arkansas State in 2011.

There are enough new pieces in the defensive line and pass rusher groups for Auburn to expect to see significant improvement there — given that it gambled properly in the portal.

Auburn does not appear finished in the portal for the spring window, still recruiting on both sides of the ball.

The roster will have more than 30 new faces next season between high school recruiting and the transfer portal. Crawford is the 12th Auburn transfer added this offseason.

Auburn 'definitely' stepping up pursuit of Lewis

By Caleb Jones
AuburnSports
Staff

Quarterback seems to be the talk of the town in Auburn.

Whether it's the Tigers' current rotation, or what's the next step in recruiting, the position is the centerpiece of any offense. Auburn signed Walker White in the 2024 class, but it's looking to bolster the room with another in the 2025 class.

There's been a lot of moving parts lately for Auburn's recruitment of quarterbacks this spring. So, let's get into the most obvious question heading into the summer.

Are the Tigers stepping it up with their pursuit of USC commit Julian Lewis?

"Definitely," Lewis said. "I love the coaching staff there, going to spend time out there is always a good experience."

The No. 1 overall player in the country, who reclassified from the 2026 class into the 2025 class, verbally committed to USC in August of last year. Auburn, along with Georgia, Colorado and Alabama, have all continued pressing for a flip.

He plans to officially visit all previously mentioned programs, including USC, this summer. Auburn will host him June 14-16, but being on campus won't be anything new for the five-star. Lewis already took two unofficial visits to Auburn earlier this year — one in January and one in March.

What's he looking forward to about his official visit?

"I mean, shoot, just going to hang out with the guys," Lewis said. "I've toured the town, talked to all of the coaches about football, talked to the school about academics, all that stuff. Just going to see if I could feel the living out there and just the vibe. I live in Carrollton, which is a small town, too, but just going to feel."

Auburn missed on one of its quarterback targets earlier this month when Husan Longstreet committed to Texas A&M over the Tigers. It makes the recruitment of Lewis that much more important, but some other dominos might have fallen in Auburn's favor.

Georgia, who at one point seemed like the favorite to flip Lewis, took the commitment of Ryan Montgomery last week.

"You gotta do what you gotta do as a coach so I'm definitely understanding about all that," Lewis said. "Did it take [Georgia] off the table a little bit more for me, start sliding it off? Yeah, but it just comes with the game."

Now, Auburn and Colorado appear to be the prime candidates for a flip, but Alabama is also working its way in the mix. Lewis will officially visit Colorado June 21-23 and plans to set up an official visit with Alabama.

It's also important to remember that Lewis will visit USC June 7-9, as the Trojans try to hold onto their highly coveted commit.

There's a lot to love about Auburn for Lewis, with a lot to think about over the coming months.

"Auburn's great people," Lewis said. "I love it out there overall. I love the town, love the people out there, they got some great fans out there. You know it's gonna be deep. Just getting a chance to play in something like the Iron Bowl is always something to look at."

Another thing to look at will be Auburn's offense going forward, as head coach Hugh Freeze becomes more involved in play calling.

"They're turning it into an RPO passing thing," Lewis said. "Coach Freeze took over the offense now, he's gonna want to throw the ball. He did it back at Ole Miss with all the other guys. I definitely like it out there."

It's been a long process for Lewis. He's tired of taking visits. He's ready to wrap it up.

"I just want to get it over with," Lewis said. "Of course I'm gonna enjoy my official visit experience because that's a once in a lifetime type thing, but I'm ready to shut it down."

Reports: Auburn linebacker Wesley Steiner to enter transfer portal

By Ainslie Lee
al.com

Auburn senior linebacker Wesley Steiner is expected to enter the transfer portal, 247Sports' Matt Zenitz reported.

https://twitter.com/mzenitz/status/1782498274093551800?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1782498274093551800%7Ctwgr%5E6d9fd35408366b0c5a847770b3b9c3ec7e5079dd%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.al.com%2Fauburnfootball%2F2024%2F04%2Freports-auburn-linebacker-wesley-steiner-to-enter-transfer-portal.html

Steiner's decision to test the transfer waters comes after spending four seasons at Auburn, first arriving as a freshman in 2020.

However, despite his experience on The Plains, Steiner has struggled to work his way into a starting role.

In 2020, Steiner appeared in nine games and tallied three tackles. During his sophomore campaign, Steiner's role grew as he appeared in 13 games and tallied 21 tackles. Steiner's biggest year in terms of production came in 2022 as he played in 12 games and logged 46 tackles.

However, Steiner was reeled back in a bit last fall as he recorded 16 tackles across 13 games.

Between being primarily used as a reserve linebacker throughout his career and Auburn bringing in veteran Duke transfer Dorian Mausi, as well as adding a pair of freshman with high ceilings in Demarcus Riddick and DJ Barber, Steiner's path to a starting role wasn't going to be any easier come the fall.

A native of Warner Robbins, Ga., Steiner was a 4-star prospect out of high school.

NCAA officially authorizes unlimited transfer rule, removes Pac-12 from ‘Power 5’

By Creg Stephenson
al.com

The NCAA Division I Board of Directors ratified a number of new policies on Monday, including two major ones regarding transfers and Name, Image and Likeness.

Effective immediately, undergraduate student-athletes can now transfer an unlimited number of times provided they are in good academic standing at their previous institution. Previously, undergraduate athletes could transfer only once without having to sit out a year.

In addition, schools will now be able to facilitate NIL deals between student-athletes and third parties. Beginning Aug. 1, schools will be able to increase NIL-related support for athletes who disclose their NIL arrangements.

Finally, the Pac-12 loses its “Power 5”/autonomy conference voting status as of Aug. 2. This move comes in response to 10 members of the league leaving for the Big Ten or Big 12, leaving only Washington State and Oregon State as Pac-12 members.

Washington State and Oregon State remain Pac-12 members, but have reached a scheduling agreement with the Mountain West in various sports. However, any future iteration of the Pac-12 will be considered a non-autonomy (“Group of 5”) conference such as the Sun Belt or Conference USA.

Denver Broncos add a quarterback before the NFL Draft

By Mark Inabinett
al.com

Former Auburn standout Jarrett Stidham has competition to be the Denver Broncos' starting quarterback in the 2024 season, and it didn't come out of the NFL Draft.

The Broncos are trading the 203rd choice in the 2024 NFL Draft to the New York Jets for quarterback Zach Wilson and the 256th selection in this year's draft, NFL Network and the New York Post reported on Monday.

The Jets acquired Wilson with the second selection in the 2021 NFL Draft. Wilson has started 33 games in his three seasons, producing 12 victories. Last year, New York replaced Wilson with four-time NFL MVP Aaron Rodgers. But when Rodgers sustained a season-ending injury in the first game, Wilson came back for 11 starts in 2023, with Tim Boyle and Trevor Siemian also making starts at quarterback for the Jets last season.

In 2023, Wilson completed 221-of-368 passes for 2,271 yards with eight touchdowns and seven interceptions and ran for 211 yards on 36 carries. Among the players who have at least 900 passes over the past three seasons, Wilson's career passing-efficiency rating of 73.2 is the worst, with Justin Fields at 82.3 next up on the list from Wilson.

The Broncos released Russell Wilson on March 7 after they had made a massive trade to obtain the quarterback from the Seattle Seahawks in 2022. Wilson started 30 games over the past two seasons for Denver. But Stidham was in the lineup for the final two games of 2024 as the Broncos prepared for an offseason decision on Wilson's contract.

Denver holds the 12th pick in the first round of the NFL Draft on Thursday night, and the Broncos trading up to add a quarterback has been a popular prediction in mock drafts.

While attending the NFL's annual meeting last month, Denver coach Sean Payton said Stidham would have the opportunity to compete for the starting quarterback job for the first time in his NFL career.

"He's definitely competing to be the starter," Payton said. "I don't think we have a term 'driver's seat' really, but he is going to compete for that position. I know he's anxious and excited to do that, and I'm sure there'll be other candidates that will be competing with him."

Payton said at that time the Broncos were "still in the quarterback market."

"We like Stiddy, but we're going to add," Payton said. "But we're not panicked. We don't play a game for a while, and we feel like we'll add a vet, and we'll see about the draft."

Denver won Stidham's first start for the team 16-9 over the Los Angeles Chargers on Dec. 31. In their season finale, the Broncos fell 27-14 to the Las Vegas Raiders, who sacked Stidham five times. In the two games, Stidham completed 40-of-66 passes for 496 yards with two touchdowns and one interception.

After Stidham closed his career at Auburn by throwing for 373 yards and five touchdowns in a 63-14 victory over Purdue in the Music City Bowl on Dec 28, 2018, he joined the New England Patriots in the fourth round of the 2019 NFL Draft.

In his first NFL preseason, Stidham completed 61-of-90 passes for 731 yards with four touchdowns and one interception as he led the AFC in passing yards and beat out veteran Brian Hoyer to serve as Tom Brady's backup during the three-time NFL MVP's final season with New England.

Stidham played in three NFL regular-season games in 2019 and five in 2020, when he backed up another former Auburn quarterback, Cam Newton.

In 2021, Stidham never got in a game after sustaining an offseason injury, and New England went with rookie Mac Jones as its starting quarterback and Hoyer as the backup. Stidham had surgery on July 28, 2021, because of a back injury and spent the first nine weeks of the season on the reserve/physically-unable-to-perform list.

Stidham joined the Raiders in May 2022, when Las Vegas sent a sixth-round choice in the 2023 NFL Draft to New England for the quarterback and a seventh-round pick. The trade reunited Stidham with Las Vegas coach Josh McDaniels, his offensive coordinator for three seasons with the Patriots.

In a similar situation as 2023, Stidham made his first two NFL starts in the Raiders' final two games of 2022 as Las Vegas prepared to part ways in the offseason with No. 1 QB Derek Carr.

In 16 NFL games, with four starts, Stidham has completed 117-of-197 passes for 1,422 yards with eight touchdowns and eight interceptions and run for 97 yards on 32 carries.

With the next pick: DB Jaylin Simpson

In the transfer portal era, Jaylin Simpson exemplifies an exception to the rule.

He came to Auburn, and here he stayed. Through five seasons and three head coaches, Simpson made his mark, enjoying an All-SEC senior season that positioned him for an NFL opportunity.

The 6-1 safety made four interceptions in 2023, finishing with 118 career tackles and seven INTs.

"It's been a long waiting game," he said. "Now after the Senior Bowl and the Combine, you're just waiting, doing interviews. It's been good. I'm just ready to get to that next level, start all over and continue to show why I think I'm one of the best.

"I'm ready to continue to do what I was destined for. Continue to grow as a player, continue to show everybody why I feel like I'm one of the best players in the country, one of the best safeties in the draft."

Before Auburn's A-Day scrimmage, Simpson received the Zeke Smith Award for being the Tigers' defensive player of the year in 2023.

"Blessed and thankful for these fans and my teammates who are getting ready to play," Simpson said April 6 on Pat Dye Field. "I couldn't have done this without them."

Simpson leaves with fond memories of his time on the Plains.

"People ask me all the time what's the best stadium you played at," he said. "It's this one. This helps you win games. They love you until the very end. I received nothing but love my entire time here. That always drove me and pushed me to play for them and play for the guys to the left and the right of me."

NFL Combine

40-yard dash: 4.45 seconds

Bench press: N/A

Vertical jump: 40.0" (Pro Day)

Broad jump: 11' 1"

<https://twitter.com/i/status/176372077772200405>

Draft Analysis

A one-year starter at Auburn, Simpson played a free safety/nickel role in former defensive coordinator Ron Roberts' man/zone coverage looks (played for four different defensive coordinators). After serving as a rotational corner as an underclassman, he moved inside in 2023 and delivered an impactful final season with a team-best four interceptions (all in the first five games), spending most of his time in the slot and playing a mix of press and off coverage. A long, rangy athlete, Simpson anticipates well in coverage, and he has the explosive lower body to

transition and drive on throws with impeccable timing. With the ability to play man-to-man or line up in the post, his experience across the secondary is a strength — but he also has some cornerback-safety tweener traits, including his slight, under-powered size.

Overall, Simpson's inconsistencies in the run game aren't ideal for a nickel role, but his reactionary athleticism and ball-hawking instincts are superb and what will drive the discussion when NFL teams put his tag on the draft board. Although he is off some NFL boards because of his size, he projects best as a versatile role player in the secondary and potential special teamer.

Grade: 4th Round

- Dane Brugler, The Athletic (@dpbrugler)

Signature Moment

Simpson's first career interception was a biggie, helping then-No. 18 Auburn defeat No. 10 Ole Miss 31-20 in 2021 with a fourth quarter pick in the end zone that preserved the Tigers' two-score lead.

"Matt Corral rolled out of the pocket and I plastered with the nearest guy to me. He threw across his body and I capitalized on it," Simpson said. "Once I saw the ball I just played my keys and did my job, and the ball hit me right in the face."

Two years later, Simpson started his senior season in style, recording a 50-yard pick-six and recovering a fumble in Auburn's season-opening 59-14 victory over Massachusetts in Hugh Freeze's debut on the Plains.

Setting the tone for a banner season, Simpson intercepted passes in Auburn's first three games and tallied four interceptions in the Tigers' first five games to earn midseason All-America honors.

Former Auburn Tiger Predicted To Land In The NFC In Latest NFL Mock Draft

By Zac Blackerby
Auburn Daily

The Auburn Tigers will have some former standouts get selected this weekend in the 2024 NFL Draft.

Auburn saw a huge part of their defense enter their name in the NFL Draft after this season, several from the defensive backs room. The former Tigers are populating the middle rounds of mock drafts everywhere.

In the latest 2024 NFL Mock Draft on Walter Football, former Auburn cornerback Nehemiah Pritchett was predicted to go to the Detroit Lions with the 73rd overall pick.

"Here's another cornerback for the Lions, who really need to address their secondary," Walt writes detailing the selection. "Nehemiah Pritchett is coming off a down year, but has enough talent to rebound and become a starter."

Pritchett is one of three Auburn Tiger defensive backs expected to get drafted. He played alongside DJ James and Jaylin Simpson in Mobile, AL earlier this offseason during Senior Bowl practice. Pritchett impressed scouts and seemed to be the Auburn Tigers who raised their stock the most while working out in front of NFL scouts.

Other Auburn standouts that could be selected this week in the NFL Draft are defensive lineman Marcus Harris. His size could hold him back but it's hard to knock his production. His 40 tackles and seven sacks while playing as one of the better defensive linemen in the SEC will garner some attention.

Fellow defensive lineman Justin Rogers could get some attention. The former 5-star recruit is getting some buzz to be a potential selection in the last few rounds of the draft.

There hasn't been much draft buzz around former Auburn offensive lineman Gunner Britton but his frame, skillset, and approach to the game could be a solid under the radar add for an NFL team this week.