



NFL Draft 2016 Scouting Report: QB Cardale Jones, Ohio State

**Our QB grades can and will change as more information comes in from Pro Day workouts, leaked Wonderlic test results, etc. We will update ratings as new info becomes available.*

left the 2014–15 college season thinking **Cardale Jones** would be the top QB prospect for the 2016 NFL Draft, and that he could have worked his way into becoming a first-round pick for the 2015 NFL Draft, had he left early after his surreal rise to prominence capped off with a National Title. When Jones decided to return to school, I shook my head—I would have told that kid to leave without hesitation. Anytime you are not 100% ‘the man’ for your coach, be it college or pro...there’s trouble you don’t want. I thought his value could not be higher than post-title game.

He decided to return to OSU and was inserted into a three-headed QB battle...a battle his head coach didn’t really want him to win. How does a quarterback run the table, and lead you to a title, and not remain the hands-down starter the following season? It happens when you don’t fit the system as well. At the first sign of trouble in the 2015-16 college season, Jones was benched for a quarterback who fits the **Urban Meyer** scheme better...and down the drain Jones’s draft value began to slide. A guy who could have been in the argument for a first-round pick last January, is now closer to a “Will he be drafted?” status this January. It’s sad, really.

As I will re-state often on these reports, I really don’t watch college football in-season. I might catch a piece here or there, but I don’t really pay attention until after the season is over, when I start studying a player’s full season. However, I did know that Jones/OSU was struggling early this past season, and that he had gotten benched. I wondered if it was that Jones was a flash in the pan, or that success had gone to his head, or that he was on borrowed time before Urban went to his preferred QB, **J.T. Barrett**. I looked at Jones’s numbers from 2015, plus all the chaos/drama of battling to get/keep the starting job--and expected to see a mess on tape.

I didn’t.

I see a lot of Ohio State issues—and **Cardale Jones** didn’t seem like one...or ‘the one’. I will admit—it looked like this offense restricted Jones at times, but really—he was fine. He looked like the impressive, but ‘raw’ **Cardale Jones** from 2014–15 this past season. The OSU offense sputtered, things didn’t click, but I didn’t see it as Jones’s fault. I think it was one part the offense doesn’t fit him, and the other part he started looking over his shoulder and hearing footsteps. Had he been treated like ‘the man’, I think this season goes totally different. Anytime Ohio State doesn’t win every game by a thousand points, there’s non-stop fan base whining and complaining. I live in Ohio, and I cannot bear local radio during the football season.



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Watching Cardale play in 2015–16, it was pretty much the same guy as 2014–15. He is a highly mobile **Ben Roethlisberger**. He has an absolute cannon for an arm. He has a big sturdy frame. He stands in the pocket comfortably, and without fear. He runs the ball with above-average QB speed and excellent open field awareness—with the size of a fullback. He has instincts to run an offense and find open receivers. He is what everyone would have been craving to find in 1996 or 2006—a great pocket presence with a big arm. He has tremendous attributes as a passer, with mobility, but he is stuck in an offense built more for a gimmick college quarterback (fake handoff/keeper runs, short passes). That's a critical point to believe, because if you don't—then Jones is just the third-best QB prospect on the Ohio State roster. **Tajh Boyd** (old Clemson QB, forget about him already?) or the other two OSU QBs (Barrett and **Braxton Miller**) could win a Heisman in this OSU/Urban offense, as examples, but Cardale probably not. The other guys mentioned fit Urban Meyer's **Tim Tebow**—lite offense perfectly, they will also never get near a snap in the NFL as a starting quarterback. **Cardale Jones** is a legit starting NFL quarterback prospect, but not right for OSU.

Let me ask this if you are more 'against' Cardale's NFL prospectus, more sensing his 2015–16 flop indicates a 'weak' draft prospect. You explain to me how a guy can come from being an ignored third-stringer to shock late-season starter, and instantly walk into his first real college action ever, and obliterate top 10 Wisconsin...and then manhandle top 1 Alabama after an early deficit, and then destroy top 2 Oregon despite a million turnovers by his team within the game? How is that possible? Just a guy who held down the fort for a supreme OSU team? Hardly. You didn't watch those three games then. **Cardale Jones** was the best player on the field against Alabama and Oregon...better than anyone wearing crimson, better, and more talented than **Marcus Mariota** watching them head-to-head...it was indisputable. Where that version of Cardale went this past season, we can debate, but don't lose sight of the fact that Jones is so talented he went from never/rarely working with the first team two seasons ago, to waltzing in and winning a title and being the best player on any of the teams playing. There is some level of talent to take seriously here, you cannot deny it.

I entered this study process with a perception that **Cardale Jones** might be a knucklehead, maybe '*not too swift*'. That's my bias. He had that snarky tweet about a college class in his freshman season, "*Why should we have to go to class if we came here to play FOOTBALL, we ain't come to play SCHOOL, classes are POINTLESS.*" OK, that is 'not good' on so many levels—and it conjures up images of trouble ahead. If you let that comment rule your judgement of Jones, then you're making a mistake...like I did.

I have watched several interviews with Jones. I've watched him play. He's not stupid. I thought he might be, honestly. Why send that tweet? Why did **Urban Meyer** not really like him? Why would he come back for this 2015–16 season? Why isn't Urban fully committing to him? There had to be something, and maybe there is. But what I see--Jones is very gracious, and genuine in interviews. His reasoning for returning to OSU were all for academics and more training at quarterback—does that seem like a shortsighted fool? He handled his benching this season with dignity and is about to get his degree. What else do you want?



The only real negative I might see/perceive is that he lacks a killer instinct personality. He's between level-headed and laid back. Football may not be his passion—it's hard for me to tell. However, I fear that his laid-back personality is not going to endear him to NFL grinder head coaches and GMs who think it matters because they think they're supposed to think it matters—testosterone 'good'...mild-mannered 'bad' (even though most NFL GMs are scared to death to make a legit player-for-player trade in their jobs).

Some team, some GM with vision, is going to have to see Jones as a near 'five-tool' type talent at quarterback. Arguably, the most all-around gifted in size, arm, athleticism (ignoring mental makeup) to come into the NFL since **Cam Newton**. After watching the extremely talented **Brett Hundley** fall in the 2015 NFL Draft, while teams jumped at future 'nothings' **Garrett Grayson**, **Sean Mannion**, and **Bryce Petty**...I assume most/all in the NFL will look right past Jones. Too many question marks, not enough experience/tape—it will be very easy to pigeonhole him.

I think it's a massive mistake. There are only so many guys you could label as possibly 'elite' or 'special', 'freaks' if you like that better. At quarterback it's beyond rare to find prospects you could assign those labels to. **Cardale Jones** is a possible 'freak'. I agree...he's inexperienced, and 2015–16 was confusing...obviously, don't use your #1 pick on him. I get it. However, you have to make a play for Jones if you're like the Pittsburgh Steelers—a team that can sit on Jones for years, grooming him as an heir apparent, and if he doesn't work out...what? It cost you a #100–150+ draft pick...so who cares? You took **Senquez Golson** in the second round in 2015...and ten picks later **Tyler Lockett** was drafted. Don't tell me how precious your picks are. Use them on something potentially special, and then hope you are right 25–50%+ of the time. A team that doesn't need a quarterback right now, a team that is already rich in talent is going to make this pick...and possibly advance the franchise more than they know. Cardale would be a nice gamble for like the Cowboys—the NFL's smartest personnel and proper salary cap—allocating group. He's perfect for Pittsburgh (or most teams).

The draft mindset I would like to leave people with is—what if Jones had been pushed to play as a starter for three years, for a team with an offense that featured him—like maybe a USC or Texas, and he was treated like the hands-down starter with no questions...how good, how developed would Jones be today? Jones was like a neglected pet at Ohio State...and he still had moments of brilliance. He abused the vaunted Crimson Tide in his second ever start. Imagine what would have happened to his development on a team that gave a crap about him? That's the guy I want a team to draft, and groom.

Cardale Jones, Through the Lens of Our QB Scouting Algorithm:

In case you are wondering, **Cardale Jones** has registered a stat in 23 games at Ohio State, and the team is 23–0 in those games. Obviously, Jones is undefeated as a starter as well. Do you think that will earn him the label 'winner', and that football analysts will float that term around every two seconds all draft



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season and on draft day? No, they won't. Why? 'Winner' is code for *'crappy quarterback prospect except we're used to seeing him for ___ college team for years, and he won a lot of games...so maybe we should draft him just in case the 'winning' rubs off on us'*. There is one big 'winner' in the 2016 NFL Draft...the college undefeated, title-winning quarterback **Cardale Jones**...and it will probably never be uttered about him one time...because at the end of the day, people are going to think any QB could win at Ohio State...so they are going to discount/write off Jones—it's a mistake.

In his three game, magical run to win the Big Ten title and first ever college playoffs, Jones completed 70.7% of his passes for 247.7 yards per game and 5 TD/2 INT...defeating three top 10 teams in the process—his first three college starts.

Cardale didn't throw for a ton of TD passes per game, but he also wasn't asked/allowed to throw a ton of passes in most of his games either. In 2015–16, OSU ran for 3.0 TDs per game, and passed for 1.5 per. Of the 128 FBS teams in 2015, Ohio State threw the 112th most passes. On a per-game basis, OSU was in the bottom 10 of all college football (D1) in passing attempts. However, the Buckeyes were top 12 in rushing yards per game and rushing TDs...they were a rushing team with a raw **Ben Roethlisberger** at the helm—square peg, round hole.

The Historical QB Prospects to Whom Cardale Jones Most Compares Within Our System:

I was both surprised, and not surprised, when **Ben Roethlisberger** came up as a match in our system/models. Honestly, I see three parts of quarterbacks making up the whole of **Cardale Jones**—a little **Byron Leftwich** plus some of **Cam** and some **Big Ben**. My fear is he has the passion for football of Ryan Leaf.

The comedy is that **Jameis Winston** is pushed as 'a winner' with a big arm. Cardale has as many college titles (in less games played), is undefeated in his college career...and is bigger, taller, faster, with a stronger arm than Winston. Cardale also has fewer arrests and interceptions. However, Winston will get a hundred chances and excuses over his NFL career, and Jones will probably wind up in the CFL.

<u>QB Grade</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Yr</u>	<u>College</u>	<u>H</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>Adj. Comp. Pct.</u>	<u>Adj. Yds per Comp</u>	<u>Adj. Pass per TD</u>	<u>Adj. Pass per INT</u>
7.95	Jones, Cardale	2016	Ohio State	76.5	240	58.9%	15.6	17.1	35.9
8.21	Leftwich, Byron	2003	Marshall	77.0	250	63.6%	12.4	16.4	44.1
7.96	Newton, Cam	2011	Auburn	77.0	248	63.7%	14.1	11.6	49.2
6.94	Winston, Jameis	2015	Florida St	76.0	235	63.7%	13.5	17.3	30.2
7.00	Leaf, Ryan	1998	Wash State	77.0	235	52.0%	18.3	18.2	39.5
10.04	Roethlisberger, B	2004	Miami, Oh	77.0	241	69.5%	13.7	17.4	50.6



*“Adj” = A view of adjusted college output in our system...adjusted for strength of opponent.

**A score of 8.5+ is where we see a stronger correlation of QBs going onto become NFL good-to-great. A scouting score of 9.5+ is rarefied air—higher potential for becoming great-to-elite.

QB's scoring 6.0–8.0 are finding more success in the new passing era of the NFL (2014–on). Depending upon system and surrounding weapons, a 6.0–8.0 rated QB can do fine in today's NFL—with the right circumstances...but they are not ‘the next Tom Brady’ guys, just NFL-useful guys.

2016 NFL Draft Outlook:

Jones is getting fair enough treatment in early QB prospect rankings...he's sitting as high as a second-rounder for some, a fourth- or fifth-rounder for others...mostly third- or fourth-round grades. That's fair given his rocky 2015–16. I don't know how this is going to go. There are so many early ‘pretender’ top-ranked QBs, and Jones has all the physical attributes analysts love—Jones might catch some heat coming out of the NFL Combine. In the end, I think some ‘smart’ NFL team makes the reach, bucking expert rankings, and taking him in the #75–100 overall range.

If I were an NFL GM, I don't take Jones as my one and only hope for a franchise quarterback—if I need one—but I take him at fair value whether I need a QB or not, because rare are quarterbacks who come along with these attributes and did what he did in 2014–15. You use a third-round pick, and if it doesn't work out—who cares? He would be an excellent backup for a team, because he's already shown he can walk into extreme pressure on short notice and produce.

NFL Outlook:

It all depends on where he goes. You'll agree with this: If he is picked by the Steelers, we're all going to go, “Smart move, with Ben so injured in 2015. Jones is built like him. What a smart pick!” If Tennessee drafts him mid-draft for some bizarre reason (everything the Titans do is bizarre), we'll all forget Jones ever existed. If **Chip Kelly**/49ers draft him ahead of expectations...we'll all be like “Holy \$#!&. he might start this year in a wonderful system!”

Jones needs a year or two to learn and gain the pocket-passer teachings and experience he didn't get at Ohio State. If a team takes him as a serious prospect to groom like in Dallas or Arizona, Jones might be ready to splash in 2018, and be looked back at as a draft steal.



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Signature R.C. Date 1/21/2016