



NFL Draft 2020 Scouting Reports: RB A.J. Dillon, Boston College

**Our RB 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.*

**We use the term "Power RB" to separate physically bigger, more between-the-tackles-capable RBs from our "speed RBs" group. "Speed RBs" are physically smaller, but much faster/quicker, and less likely to flourish between the tackles.*

OK, I missed it. My preview scouting was way off. Initially, I thought **A.J. Dillon** was a 'shoulder shrug' RB prospect...a really big guy with likely 4.6+ speed who was just going to be a short yardage guy or the power part of a duo/tandem backfield in the NFL. More potential 'meh' than potential star at the next level. I was wrong.

You may think – *well, here's Mr. Analytics Nerd...he sees the NFL Combine numbers that AJD put up and now he falls in love with the 'on paper' RB prospect!* I deserve the barbs because I got this wrong initially, but the Combine event/results are not the full driver of my change in thinking.

Football (or any anything) scouting is so flawed because flawed humans are doing it. It's partly science and partly art...and experience matters, but even the most gifted scouts can make major mistakes – like we all (gifted or not) did on **A.J. Dillon**. How? I can use my own example, now that I look back on it...

I previewed Dillon *like a smart scout should...* with limited time assigned (for a preview), I watched him in a few games he played against his best opposition – games against Clemson and Notre Dame (where he was 'meh' statistically). I saw a lot of *big guy smashes into the D-Line and goes for a few yards* shown on the tape. No big/exciting plays. No Heisman moments. Just this guy I knew was 240+ pounds ramming into D-Linemen for modest gains. It was easy for my brain to go...*really big guy + not really running for much in these big games = must mean he's moving slow, which makes sense for his size = therefore he's probably slow = therefore he's troubling for a translation for the NFL*. Big guy who barrels over equal and lesser opponents but not special against the better opponents.

Thus, in one brief look, I pigeon-holed Dillon into the same box EVERYONE put him in. Big guy, not a serious high-end NFL prospect, a day three draft pick.

Then he blew up (in a good way) the NFL Combine, and that should've sent everyone back to the drawing board on their initial scouting to see if they missed something/what they missed. I suspect most stuck by their initial analysis, but perhaps bumped him up a few pegs for this new, delightful data point. However, I've barely seen him move in any draft ranks yet. I just stopped writing/typing, just now, and went and took a survey of five popular non-ESPN type draft ranking websites...Dillon is #7-16 ranked



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among all RBs, an average of #11.8. There are not 11 RBs in this draft better suited for the NFL than **A.J. Dillon**...it's ridiculous.

I re-looked at his tape, watched a few more games, and added in his Combine data into our computer models -- and he's risen into our top five RB prospects...likely going to be #2 behind **Jonathan Taylor** (with still many RBs to scout/awaiting more workout numbers on, so someone/s may slip in ahead of him...we'll see).

Honestly, the more I look at Dillon...I don't think it's impossible that he'll be the best RB from this class in the long run.

Now, do I have your attention?

Sure, it's easy to go gaga over the Combine numbers on Dillon. I am guilty of just that. You know why I'm gaga with his Combine? Because we should be! That was one of the more amazing sets of measurables, considering his size, that any of us have seen from the NFL Combine. People should be freaking out with excitement. Scouts should be going back to re-look, reconsider -- but the mainstream analysts and most scouts don't believe in analytics or the Combine all that much (unless it supports their initial feeling), so Dillon has barely budged in their draft rankings (and all the herd mock drafters follow suit of sitting on their hands). Dillon is still way off in the consensus rankings from the highly lauded Swift-Akers duo...which is a joke.

A.J. Dillon at 247 pounds ran a 4.53 40-time with a 41" vertical...just those two datapoints alone are *freak city* at that size. You know how many RB prospects have run a sub 4.55 40-time and 240+ pounds pre-Draft, in the last decade+? I have five guys at the Combine, two at Pro Days. How many of those guys also posted a 40"+ vertical? Just Dillon.

If I ask my database to show me 240+ pound RB prospects who jumped a 37"+ vertical and hit a 10'5"+ broad jump and ran under a 4.60 40-time in the past decade – it's **A.J. Dillon** and **Derrick Henry**. Three other guys show up with those qualifications more than a decade ago...**Brandon Jacobs** is one of them (**Jackie Battle** and **Eric Shelton** the other two).

A.J. Dillon is a freak...like **Derrick Henry**, only, arguably, more freakish than Henry. Let that thought simmer for a moment.

The data is one thing, but when I went back to look at more tape and really dig in on Dillon...wondering if I would see this athleticism I didn't notice before...well, I did. Then I worried that maybe I was seeing what I wanted to see again...that's always possible, but let me share my two revelations from re-watching with more of an open mind to Dillon being 'highly athletic'...

1) Much faster feet with breakaway-ish speed in many games. More shifty than I realized. I just spent extended times studying **D'Andre Swift** then **Cam Akers** then Dillon one right after another. I expected Akers to also surprise me due to his better Combine (because I was down on him coming into the



Combine too) -- I was looking for the re-watch on Akers, post-Combine, to change my thinking...I was sure it would happen. But I didn't see it. In fact, thought Akers was even worse than the negative preview I had initially. Dillon, however, a totally different vibe. I saw the light. Comparing him to Swift or Akers and having Dillon rated lower is a joke. Dillon has much quick feet (and that's a 'wow' at that size). Swift and Akers don't belong in the same conversation with Dillon in my viewing...but I'll probably be the only football analyst who will have Dillon ranked ahead of BOTH of them.

Dillon has much better east-west escape-ability compared to Swift-Akers. He also shows more acceleration, or just as good as Swift and way better than Akers. They are all tough runners, but Dillon really moves a pile. Dillon has just as good if not better vision running to holes between the tackles than Swift and way better than Akers. To me, Dillon is better or equal in every way as a runner compared to Swift-Akers, but when you factor Dillon is doing his work 30+ pounds heavier than Swift-Akers...it's no contest who is better for the next level. Swift-Akers are very 'tackle-able'...Dillon is not...not at all.

2) In my Combine previews, I thought Dillon was big and slow due to his 'meh' games with Clemson and Notre Dame the past two years. Re-looking at it...you have to consider that Boston College did not have the best quarterbacking or O-Line play, and Dillon was a sensation as a 2017 freshman and every season, every game Dillon WAS the offense, and got a ton of carries in games to prove it – so, of course, opponents were throwing 8-9 guys in the box at BC/Dillon, as they should. So, of course Dillon took a lot of line of scrimmage hits and compiled several 0-5 yard runs and not a ton of big plays against a Clemson. He had a whole defense trained on him with his O-Line at a massive disadvantage versus Clemson's or Notre Dame's D-Line. There's brilliance in 1-3 yard runs sometimes...in the right context, and Dillon qualifies here.

Dillon at BC against top opponents is like watching **Leonard Fournette** in the pros – Fournette may be the best created RB package on earth, but he is often bottled up by opponents because they throw 8-9 in the box at him and his coach just runs him right into it over and over. Statistically, you wouldn't say Fournette is the best RB in the NFL...but I think a healthy Fournette is the single best RB talent in the game – an amazing blend of size, power, speed. Heck, how long did **Derrick Henry** struggle to show his talents because defenses stacked against him...and he usually made his plays by racking up later in games as defenses wore down, but it took **Ryan Tannehill** opening up the pass game (I can't believe I typed that sentence) to help unlock Henry some from 8-9 man boxes all the time in 2019 to send Henry to the next level (go look at Henry's numbers pre and post Tannehill in 2019).

All that to say – I am not penalizing Dillon as much for 'meh' numbers against Clemson and Notre Dame. When I watch every little detail in these big matchups, you can see Dillon cleverly making hay out of impossible fronts in those games...if you really look. Initially, I didn't...I moved through too quickly and didn't really see it. I just wrote him off as a big guy doing big/slow guy things. But Dillon actually has shifty feet, avoids contact well, but when needed he will blow congestion back to take a 1-yard run and turn it into a 3-4-5 yard event. That's not sexy to watch on tape, so Dillon can feel boring as a runner, but it's a critical skill/attribute translating to the next level.



Dillon is huge, highly athletic, powerful/fearless, and has decent enough hands to be a three-down star NFL running back.

I'll leave this section with one powerful thought... If **A.J. Dillon** is this athletic at 247 pounds, what if (like **Le'Veon Bell**) he drops 10+ pounds and works at 230+ pounds instead. Is he then a 4.45 40-time, 43" vertical, 11'+ broad jump, sub-7.0 three-cone athlete – i.e. more like **Jonathan Taylor** or better? He could be even freakier with -10 pounds from here.

Bulk up Swift-Akers, and you're even more screwed than with them at their current weights (and Swift-Akers cannot afford to get any smaller for the NFL), BUT slim down Dillon...might there be a different kind of star lurking? I don't think Dillon needs to cut weight to succeed, I'm just saying there is another tool/option in this toolbox perhaps, as an added bonus.

A.J. Dillon, Through the Lens of Our RB Scouting Algorithm:

Dillon ran for 150+ yards in a game in seven of his final 10 college games.

Dillon's worst season was his 2018/sophomore season (and was still pretty/really good)...but note that he was playing with an ankle injury. He missed a few games with it, and played through it in several others.

883 career touches, 8 fumbles = a fumble every 110.3 touches. Only two lost fumbles in his career (as opposed to 15 lost fumbles for high touch **Jonathan Taylor**).

140 or more rushing yards in 17 of his 35 career games. Three 200+ yard rushing games.

Big yardage totals, but on heavy rushing attempts...24.1 carries per game averaged in his three-year career. #3 all-time in the NCAA in career carries.

Dillon's career is pretty much wrecking every opponent except for Clemson and Notre Dame (5 games total with them). He rolled over Florida State (3x), NC State (2x), Miami, Pitt (and lower) type opponents every time he faced them.

Only 21 career catches, and most of them in 2019 when they decided to work him more for his NFL prep. He has OK hands. Better than **Derrick Henry's** by far. Not as good as **Leonard Fournette's**.



2020 NFL Combine Measurables...

6'0.3"/247, 9 5/8" hands, 31 5/8" arms

4.53 40-time, 1.53 10-yard, 7.19 three-cone

23 bench press, 41" vertical, 10'11" broad jump

The Historical RB Prospects to Whom A.J. Dillon Most Compares Within Our System:

I like **A.J. Dillon** as a potentially better version of **Derrick Henry** – Dillon is more compact, more athletic, better hands. Dillon is not as good as **Leonard Fournette**...he's a watered-down Fournette, but with some key similarities. Being a lesser Leonard Fournette is not an insult at all.

RB Score	RB-Re	RB-ru	Last	First	College	Yr	H	H	W	Speed Metric	Agility Metric	Power Metric
8.887	3.14	8.29	Dillon	A.J.	Boston Coll.	2020	6	0.3	247	6.24	2.61	10.56
8.374	4.30	8.76	Henry	Derrick	Alabama	2016	6	2.4	247	4.13	2.52	10.59
10.970	7.42	10.88	Fournette	Leonard	LSU	2016	6	0.0	228	10.42	9.57	10.87
9.737	9.95	9.37	Bell	Le'Veon	Michigan St	2013	6	1.3	244	4.36	10.43	11.24
8.020	4.87	8.00	Foreman	D'Onta	Texas	2017	6	0.2	237	7.78	6.88	8.35
7.203	6.12	5.91	Watson	Terrell	AzusaPacific	2015	6	0.9	239	6.40	5.68	9.64
6.597	4.94	5.53	Warren	Chris	Texas	2018	6	2.0	247	2.13	6.33	9.75
8.887	3.14	8.29	Dillon	A.J.	Boston Coll.	2020	6	0.3	247	6.24	2.61	10.56

**A score of 8.50+ is where we see a stronger correlation of RBs going on to become NFL good/great/elite. A score of 10.00+ is more rarefied air in our system, and indicates a greater probability of becoming an elite NFL RB.*

All of the RB ratings are based on a 0-10 scale, but a player can score negative, or above a 10.0 in certain instances.

Overall rating/score = A combination of several on-field performance measures, including refinement for strength of opponents faced, mixed with all the physical measurement metrics—then compared/rated historically within our database and formulas. More of a traditional three-down search—runner, blocker, and receiver.

**RB-Re score = New/testing starting in 2015. Our new formula/rating that attempts to identify and quantify a prospect's receiving skills even deeper than in our original formulas. RB prospects can now*



make it/thrive in the NFL strictly based on their receiving skills—it is an individual attribute sought out for the NFL, and no longer dismissed or overlooked. Our rating combines a study of their receiving numbers in college in relation to their offense and opponents, as well as profiling size-speed-agility along with hand-size measurables, etc.

**RB-Ru score = New/testing starting in 2015. Our new formula/rating that attempts to classify and quantify a RB prospect's ability strictly as a runner of the ball. Our rating combines a study of their rushing numbers in college in relation to their offense and strength of opponents, as well as profiling size-speed-agility along with various size measurables, etc.*

Raw Speed Metric = A combination of several speed and size measurements from the NFL Combine, judged along with physical size profile, and then compared/rated historically within our database and scouting formulas. This is a rating strictly for RBs of a similar/bigger size profile.

Agility Metric = A combination of several speed and agility measurements from the NFL Combine, judged along with physical size profile, and then compared/rated historically within our database and scouting formulas. This is a rating strictly for RBs of a similar/bigger size profile.

2020 NFL Draft Outlook:

Dillon should be the #2-3 RB off the board, but he will probably only go as high as the 3rd-round and is possibly a 4th-rounder. It's a shame. That so many RBs will be drafted over him, and get more money, is a crime. Had Dillon gone to Clemson or Alabama...he would have been the first RB off the board this year.

If I were an NFL GM, and if I was trying to fill a spot in my power running game...Dillon as a 3rd-round pick would be pretty enticing. The Bears traded up to the 3rd for **David Montgomery** last year, which ended up a waste...which by comparison would make Dillon in the 3rd-round a massive bargain.

NFL Outlook:

Because he won't get the draft treatment he deserves, he'll likely be taken by a team with an established RB and he'll be forced to sit or take limited carries until he gets his chance. **Derrick Henry** has to deal with that too. But like Henry, once Dillon gets his chance...it should be game on as a main-carry, three-down back starter.

