



2021 NFL Draft Scouting Report: QB Zach Wilson, BYU

**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.*

You are going to hate **Zach Wilson** as a prospect.

A 'little' (listed 6'2"-6'3" but is probably closer to 6'0"-6'1") quarterback who plays at a football school you don't respect with no conference affiliation, playing opponents you don't care about, and he legit looks like he is 14 years old. He has a very punch-able face – somewhere between a frat boy and choir boy look.

Well, get used to that face – because I think, at this stage of my studies, that might just be the face of the best QB prospect in the 2021 NFL Draft.

You are not going to instantly (or ever) agree with this assessment. I know you won't. I'm having a hard time coming to grips with it too, in a sense...for some of the same reasons, subconsciously, that you are/will.

We've all been told for two years that **Trevor Lawrence** is the next elite/'generational' QB prospect out of college football. It made perfect sense to think it/buy into it...

-He won the National Championship as a freshman.

-He plays for a prestigious school always on TV and in the playoffs.

-He has the size, the stats, the generally accepted look of a top QB prospect.

-Every football person (analyst, scout, media type...and thus the sheep herd of fans) you know has agreed that Lawrence is a no-brainer elite QB prospect.

Lawrence as '*the best QB prospect in history*' is a very simple thing to agree/sign on to with the media pushing it.

In comparison, **Zach Wilson** has almost none of those 'things' from that list (above).

- He hasn't even been close to the CFB playoffs.

-He doesn't play for a prestigious team that's on TV all the time.

-Wilson is much smaller, physically.

-He does have the stats, but only for one year (2020). Is he a one-year wonder?



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-Every football person is NOT discussing him as THE TOP guy...he's more of a distrusted enigma/sleeper/suspect top name. And if there is any groundswell into February or March for Wilson as the #2 rated QB prospect for the 2021 NFL Draft...it's going to get shut down quickly/harshly by the media. Wilson is the kind of QB prospect the NFL establishment will HATE – too small, privileged background (family has some wealth), religious college. Some analysts see some positives on Wilson and debate him as the #2 overall prospect/pick today/January 2021, never #1, but my prediction is that they are going to run from that lofty #2 rating soon.

The blueprint for undermining Wilson will be to parallel him to **Johnny Manziel** (in his style of play)...which is not accurate (and shortly I'll explain why). **Trevor Lawrence** will draw **Peyton Manning**, **Andrew Luck**, and **Justin Herbert** comps all process long... you'll see nothing but puff pieces and NO ONE will say a bad word about Lawrence from any aspect. However, Wilson will be 100% compared to **Johnny Manziel** and they will question his background, strength of competition, size – which is a brilliant way to erode any confidence in him as this process goes along.

If I had to parallel Wilson to past QB prospects – it would be **Kyler Murray**, not Manziel. In fact, I'm going to make my case for Wilson by comparing him to Kyler, Manziel, and **Trevor Lawrence**.

First things first, I had no idea I would be promoting Wilson as a potential 'best in class' when I started the 2021 scouting process. I assumed that Lawrence would be the easy #1 and Wilson would be a #3-5 ranked QB prospect, potential bust/hoax QB prospect propped up by 'BYU' and its schedule – that was the early/easy narrative to assume.

When I put on the first game tape, I saw Wilson standing there prior to the first snap of his I was about to witness, I instantly knew my preconceived negative notion of Wilson was correct. *Who is the little guy and why does anyone think he's an NFL prospect?*

So I started watching Wilson play/throw, and a few passes into a long day of tape scheduled -- I thought...*OK, I see he's not that bad. He can sling it a little bit.* Then as the tape studies wore on, every other throw I'd watch, I'd go (to myself)...*wow, that was a great throw...wow, that was a smart throw...wow, how did he see that receiver and get it to him?* When I got to the second game tape and saw more of the same 'wows' I started to get the feeling that just maybe, my first/preconceived notion was way off. Maybe this guy is really talented.

After I saw that Wilson was really pretty good right off the bat...I then started looking for evidence to prove my newfound respect wrong...combing over his toughest games – 2019 v. Washington, 2019 v. San Diego State (the #2 defense in CFB that season), v. Boise State 2020, v. San Diego State 2020 (the #11 defense in CFB), v. highly ranked Coastal Carolina 2020. The more I watched, the more I knew – this guy is a real prospect/player. He's not rattled easily. He has an arm that makes every throw with ease without having to have a perfect pocket or footwork setup. He is willing to run (and has pretty good feet) as he needs to.



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Wilson instantly reminded me of **Kyler Murray**...both smaller in height, but great/strong+ arms with the key ingredient – they have an uncanny, elite level of seeing the field and quick releasing laser beam throws right to the open man, in stride, in the proper space...almost like they have a homing device in the football to be delivered to the receiver. Also, Wilson is pretty fleet of foot...he scrambles out of muddy pockets and can scoot out into the open field and make yards as needed.

That's a topside comparison...drilling down more on Kyler v. Wilson, I'd say Wilson is a lesser version of Kyler in most senses. Kyler has a little stronger arm. Kyler is probably a 4.4+ runner, where Wilson is a 4.5-4.6+ runner...and Kyler willing to run more, Wilson preferring to sling it more. Kyler is built thick/stout and Wilson is more thin framed, with smaller shoulders.

Where Wilson has an edge or is even with Kyler is – Wilson might see the field as well as Kyler, and rare few see the field and can deliver it like Kyler -- Wilson has that same ability. Wilson might be a bit more confident in his throwing ability and uses all his receivers more than Kyler, who tends to lean on one option more. In the end, it's close as to which QB has the better mind/vision/throwing downfield on these things. Wilson also has better mechanics and delivery but both guys get the ball out lightning quick and on target...a lot.

Zach Wilson is a really good quarterback. He sees the field brilliantly and has that quick trigger. He's highly accurate – 73.4% Comp. Pct. in 2020, with just 3 interceptions in 335 passes. That's a stunning run at BYU. And he's highly productive...308.3 passing yards per game, nearly 3 passing TDs per game...43 total TDs (33 passing, 10 rushing), 3.6 total TDs per game in 2020. Working with 'weapons' and O-Linemen who will likely never see the NFL in any meaningful way.

I thought/worried, early on in my watching/studying, that Wilson had an extra advantage of great pockets/time to throw (and he did somewhat/sometimes) – but when I watched him against Washington (2019) and against San Diego State (2019-2020) and against a very good Coastal Carolina (2020) team...I saw that same guy throwing bullets under duress. And Wilson isn't a dink-and-dunker, he's a thrower all over the field. He's a QB weapon that dissects the defense, and he can 'make all the throws'.

I compare Wilson to Kyler. The analysts are comparing him to **Johnny Manziel**. I understand why...both shorter/smaller in stature but highly productive in college and they had a knack for scrambling, running around to make plays great outside the pocket plays as needed.

I get the Manziel comparison, but I don't agree with it. I thought Manziel was an NFL fraud because he could not throw medium and deep with any accuracy. He was gifted at dink-and-dunk/bubble screen passing games and the moment his first option was taken away he'd run around and make plays that way or just heave deeper passes praying teammate **Mike Evans** could beat double or triple coverage (which Evans did, a lot). Manziel could make some things happen, but in a traditional offense he was lost – he couldn't play pocket QB and was too small to be a **Lamar Jackson** or **Jalen Hurts** type QB. Not to



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mention Manziel was an awful human being...whereas Wilson appears to be mostly a polite saint of a person. Wilson is far superior as a traditional passer compared to Manziel – it's not even debatable.

Speaking of not comfortable downfield passers who like to run at the first sign of trouble – Wilson, to me, is a better NFL quarterback talent/passers than **Trevor Lawrence**. If you read my scouting report on Lawrence, he's actually more **Johnny Manziel** (in the passing game) than Wilson is. Lawrence is a dink-and-dunker by nature and not a great/comfortable pocket passer/reader of defenses.

I'll tell you this, as a way to really cut to the heart of the matter -- if I had my team sitting 4th & 7 from midfield in a key spot late in a game, and we absolutely needed that 1st-down or game over...I'd want Wilson to be my quarterback at that moment...10 times out of 10. If it was 4th & 1...maybe I'd take Lawrence's size and ability to run it/push a pile, but if I needed to throw for something...I'd want Wilson, no hesitation. I never thought I'd say/write/think such a thing...but here we are.

There is a downside or risk with Wilson. It's not a clean path to 'obvious' top QB prospect-land. My risk notes...

1) He does not have an NFL body...and that's a big fear. How do you assess that? If I needed 4th & 7 to be converted – it's Wilson, all day. If I were betting which QB gets hurt first at the pro level...it would also be Wilson. Broken hand in 2019, surgery. Shoulder issues, surgery 2019. Nothing debilitating, but issues.

And it's not so much the injury history, it's just looking at him – 6'0" nothing...200+ pounds...small frame, small shoulders...hell of a passer. Go look at some 2020 game tape...he just doesn't 'look' the way we want our QB prospects to look. You want Lawrence's body with Wilson's arm/ability...you want that but it's not available in this draft (yet, that I see). I'm describing **Justin Herbert** (Lawrence body/Wilson arm-mind)...not describing **Joe Burrow** (differently gifted than Herbert, and with a lesser frame/body), not **Jalen Hurts**, not **Trevor Lawrence**, not **Zach Wilson**. You don't 'get it all' in one neat package with Lawrence or Wilson.

But remember, **Baker Mayfield** and **Kyler Murray** were opposed by football people on the grounds of 'size', as was **Gardner Minshew**...as were **Russell Wilson** and **Drew Brees**. The height of a QB is so played out as a real issue, but the mainstream is still sticking by it...and our eyes do too. We have that deep embedded distrust of smaller QBs. Our eyes are pulled towards a **Justin Herbert**...or **Trevor Lawrence** 'look'. But we're just not getting one of these wonderfully designed QB creatures who are great passers on top of their body advantage this year, most likely.

2) **Zach Wilson** has talent, but does he have enough chip on his shoulder to succeed? He has led a perfect, privileged life up until now. How badly does he really want this? It is a question for speculation/research. The best QBs in the NFL are usually ones who were bet against or overlooked or come from the Midwest/cold grinding situations. Wilson has had the furthest from a hardscrabble



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life...will that take an edge off him? It doesn't seem to have been an issue in college, but it will be debated all pre-Draft.

With that...can Wilson lead a locker room or a franchise? It's not going to be easy for him. Again, he has a very punch-able face/upbringing. How is he going to inspire inner city or Midwest grinder players who could physically crush him like an empty can of soda? Baker has a leadership swagger. **Kyler Murray** does not. In a different way, Wilson does not have that 'leader look' at first blush...somewhat through no fault of his own.

3) Because Wilson has so many 'negatives' having nothing to do with his play...he's an easy target for the media. They are going to undermine him right away...some 14-year-old looking, lily white, privileged kid from Utah with a strong family bond who had all the advantages coming up through the ranks of football. He's going to have to really work to overcome perceptions – a daunting task. The media will turn the fans/people against him initially (I think)...and then constantly badger him in his NFL career. I can feel it/sense it.

So, what GM wants to step up and draft **Zach Wilson**? Who wants to rate him top dog QB in the class? An excellent talent (Wilson) who the entire media is going to be against as much as they are FOR **Trevor Lawrence** – so who wants to stand with the outsider guy (Wilson)? Who wants to run with a 6'0", injury concern, silver spoon, **Johnny Manziel** label QB prospect as a top guy?

I'm not sure I do.

I can only tell you, beyond a shadow of a doubt – he's a better passing game prospect/talent than **Trevor Lawrence**, and it's not even close. What you do with that from here is your business.

Zach Wilson, Through the Lens of Our QB Scouting Algorithm:

You can see that, statistically, Wilson is right there in every category with this group...only more accurate/efficient. The other difference is...the other guys either won a Heisman or got close. Wilson was barely in the Heisman picture. Why? For the same reasons not many will believe he's 'really' a potential top prospect for the 2021 NFL Draft – we don't like or believe in small/tiny, BYU/Midwest Conference/WAC quarterbacks who aren't on TV all the time.



Wilson had four games against top 50 CFB defenses in 2020. Against them, Wilson averaged a very nice output tally of:

291.5 pass yards, 2.25 TDs/0.25 INTs, 69% Comp Pct., 0.75 rushing TDs per game.

I didn't even mention, yet...BYU was (11-1) this season. They played a game against a then undefeated/top 10 ranked Coastal Carolina (at C. Carolina) near the end of the season...a battle of undefeateds at the time...and Wilson was down 22-17 and he led a last-minute drive all the way down the field and hit a receiver 1-yard shy of the end zone with time elapsed, and the receiver was tackled inches short lunging for the end zone...ball game. A near win, which could've led to a possible opportunity for a CFB playoff spot. Only possible because of Wilson, nothing else on BYU was worthy of top ranking...it was Wilson putting a team on his back.

Zach Wilson is no joke.

**Oh, and I don't watch College Football during the season but then watch A LOT of it prepping for scouting/the NFL Draft...how Coastal Carolina was not a top 4 team that got a CFB playoff invite is a typical 'big media' and 'big college' screw job – they would have been a team to reckon with. To my surprise watching them so far, that was a really good team.*

I mention this to note...Wilson played some decent competition too – it's just that the football world is biased/blind to it (being hidden from us, which is now typical in this decade of information suppression to benefit the 'big'/powerful/elite. You're better to 'serve' Alabama and Clemson and Ohio State...there's nothing to gain from the media helping tiny, broke-ass Coastal Carolina. But just know this Coastal Carolina game/tape was a 'tough' matchup, good backdrop to scout Wilson in. Off my soapbox now, my bad).

The Historical QB Prospects to Whom Zach Wilson Most Compares Within Our System:

The **Kyler Murray** comp, we already discussed. I thought of it before I had seen that our computer models had. The **Baker Mayfield** and **Russell Wilson** comps also make sense to me – the football world had instant/loud fears on both that their size would be their downfall in the NFL.

People did not respect Baker's or Kyler's college output as 'telling'/projecting for the NFL because they played in a 'gimmicky' offense that gave them stats. The same will be said about **Zach Wilson**, I'm sure...and even worse. Which makes me laugh, since it is **Trevor Lawrence**, if anyone, given stats by his offense.



The **John Wolford** comp scares me too, because after Kyler came to my mind watching Wilson tape...Wolford popped into my head too, but that’s more a physical comp. In arm ability, it’s not even close with a Wolford comp...Wilson is much more arm talented.

| <u>QB-Grade</u> | <u>LJax Rating</u> | <u>Last</u> | <u>First</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> |
|-----------------|--------------------|-------------|--------------|-----------|----------------|----------|----------|---------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| 8.348 | 6.08 | Wilson | Zach | 2021 | BYU | 73.0 | 210 | 71.3% | 14.1 | 13.6 | 90.7 |
| 8.945 | 9.05 | Murray | Kyler | 2019 | Oklahoma | 71.1 | 207 | 68.3% | 16.4 | 10.2 | 72.5 |
| 8.895 | 1.28 | Mayfield | Baker | 2018 | Oklahoma | 73.0 | 215 | 70.6% | 15.5 | 11.2 | 58.4 |
| 10.306 | 6.83 | Wilson | Russell | 2012 | Wisconsin | 70.6 | 210 | 70.3% | 13.4 | 10.4 | 38.9 |
| 5.660 | 5.89 | Wolford | John | 2018 | Wake Forest | 72.0 | 200 | 66.0% | 12.8 | 14.3 | 53.5 |

**'LJax rating' – new for 2021, as we re-do our grading systems to better identify/reward the spread offense QB prospects...looking for the runner-passer talents.*

***“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 on to 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 the 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.

2021 NFL Draft Outlook:

I see ratings on Wilson as high as the #2 pick in the draft all the way to 2nd-round...as of early January. My bet would be, Wilson takes a number of media hits to his prospect status as we go – he’ll have everything negative thrown at him, especially when he measures in at 6’0”/6’1” and/or closer to 200 pounds -- and he will slide down draft boards because of it.

The draft board/mock draft slide will then cause some ‘smart’ team, picking later in the draft, to be in a position to make a great move – if you see the 49ers or Patriots trading to the late 1st-round and making this pick (or just pulling the trigger where they are at/middle 1st-round)...it should be a warning that the smarter teams are looking past the noise. In fact, I think the smart teams are going to fan the flames on



negative stories and scouting on Wilson – they want him to fall to them. They don't want any positive scouting on Wilson to drive him into the top 5-10.

Wilson should be a top 5-10 pick, and some will swear he is...but I think they'll be drowned out by the 'questions' and 'concerns' drumbeat to come.

NFL Outlook:

Risk-Reward...

Risk: You get a 'too small' guy who cannot physically hold up in the NFL...and he never fully becomes a franchise QB, as the fans (gassed by the media) complain about it all the way from the draft to every incompletion he throws. This is a real risk/fear...and why we can't push his prospect grade higher – his physical frame, what we know of it now, is a concern...which leads to the concern that it will become a global concern that haunts him in the draft and going into his NFL career. I hope it's not so.

Reward: Almost all the 'too small' noise that always gets hung on top 25-50 overall prospects, who are QBs, ends up being meaningless – which means it's more likely Wilson goes on to be just fine, physically, and is arguably the best QB prospect of his class.

Even if he is the best of 2021, I like him...but he is NOT as good, glamorous or fruitful as the top guys from the past class or two.

I still have many more QB studies to conduct, but it's very possible Wilson is the best of 2021, just not quite as good/exciting the top QB prospects from 2017-18-19-20.

