



2021 NFL Draft Scouting Report: QB Trey Lance, North Dakota 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.*

Where to begin here?

The scouting case/dilemma is intriguing...

Trey Lance's first season as a starter in 2019 was surreal... a 16-0 record, FCS National Champs and Lance won every FCS award they have ever created for his 28 TD/0 INT passing tally with 1,100 rushing yards with 14 rushing TDs. Video game type numbers.

But... Here's the dilemma:

This happened at the FCS level...so, how much of a grain of salt do we take it with?

After the 2019 season, football analysts immediately latched on to him as a 2021 draft sleeper, their great small school find to share with the world. His name raced up mock draft boards and he flew up all the various ranking services' draft ratings.

Everyone wondered how Lance would follow up on that amazing 2019 season. Well...not so great, as it turned out, but it wasn't his fault. The 2020 FCS regular season was cancelled/moved to the spring of 2021. Lance decided to opt-out of the spring season and enter the 2021 NFL Draft, but NDSU did somehow have a 'showcase' game approved in the fall of 2020, and so Lance did play one game in the 2020 season -- and it was OK...but not a Superman event. His 'showcase' performance didn't turn doubters into believers.

So here we sit...no more college games of his to study. We have to project everything off his stunning 2019 and one 'meh' 2020 game. Is Lance the next **Lamar Jackson** or **Jalen Hurts**...or is he an overrated FCS prospect?

The current lean for the NFL Draft community is that he's a top 15 overall prospect, an enigma too tantalizing to bypass.

I studied some of his work in the summer of 2020 and I was let down...I expected to see something amazing, but instead I saw a talent, but not the obvious 'wow' prospect that the 2019 FCS numbers seemed to scream.



JANUARY 8, 2021

After really digging in on the tape here in 2021 and looking more deeply at his 2019 FCS run and studying his preview game from the 2020 season...I'm becoming less and less enthralled, and more and more perplexed.

Here's my scouting dilemma...

a) He's not 'ready' for the NFL right now. Not today. He's a terrific athlete who can play run first, pass second football at the FCS level...on a team that's utterly dominant in the FCS ranks (they have won seven of the last 8 FCS championships).

Lance has had every advantage... He's bigger and faster than most FCS-level defenders, so of course he can run by them or over them...and then of course he can throw the ball from the comfort of a clean pocket with the best surroundings that any FCS QB is afforded.

But when I watch him throw, I'm not seeing a legit NFL passer right this moment. I see an athletic thrower given every advantage to find wide open guys, but not much of him sitting in the pocket making NFL reads and throws. Mostly I see a guy literally taking shotgun snaps and then just running the ball, and even though everyone knows it's coming, he's too big/fast to keep contained for long – but it's 'FCS fast' not blinding speed and agility off the charts. He needs time to develop...and who knows if he can?

Versus...

b) He has all the tools/makings of a new age NFL runner-thrower QB. He is a very good athlete. He does have a strong arm. He can run for yardage. He is a 'playmaker' to some degree...maybe an 'A' someday, maybe just a solid 'B' grade...maybe a worrisome over-his-head 'C' or maybe a 'D' grade FCS-great who would've been just 'good' in the SEC.

There's no way to really know/compare him. He's not playing D1 competition. He's not had to grind...he didn't put a mediocre team on his back and carry them to new heights – he's just the next QB to win a title at NDSU, they all win titles as a QB there...no matter who they are.

When D1 programs looked at him back in 2017-2018, they wanted to sign him to a scholarship as a safety or linebacker or wide receiver...not as a QB. Head coach **P.J. Fleck**/Minnesota saw a safety (offered him as such). Iowa saw him as an outside linebacker (and offered him as such). Were they dumb or did they see the flaws with Lance? Either answer is possible. Because I see some problems with him at QB, so I can see why D1 programs didn't entertain it seriously either.

In his 2020 showcase, Lance was just 15-of-30 passing for 149 yards against an FCS good Central Arkansas team. Lance threw for 2 TDs, but also threw his first interception in college. The thing is, I counted five times in this game where his passes were touched by defenders before they could reach receivers. He could have/should have had 2-3 picks in this game.



JANUARY 8, 2021

Of course, Lance ran the ball 15 times for 143 yards and 2 TDs in the showcase...the best play, and at times it seems like the only play in the NDSU playbook is a shotgun snap to Lance and he runs from there, and everyone knows it's coming, but it is tough to stop at the FCS level.

So how high can you rate an FCS QB whose best play/tape is him taking a shotgun snap and immediately running? He was the **Tim Tebow** of the FCS. A faster, but smaller Tebow.

When I watched his 2019 season title game against the then #2 ranked James Madison Dukes...same deal – Lance running a lot but not really dominating as a passer. NDSU beat James Madison for the title with Lance completing 6-of-10 passes for 72 yards...but running 30 times for 166 yards and a TD. Who runs that kind of offense in the NFL?

I am making it seem like Lance is some run-only, terrible passer athlete running around like crazy. But actually, everything about that sentence is wrong/the opposite.

Lance is not a terrible passer...not a Tebow-bad passer. There is some hope here. His low passer numbers were somewhat from the fact he could just run over/past everybody. He has a good arm with decent accuracy with time in the pocket (which was a luxury afforded to him a lot) and can scramble away and improvise on throws. He has good NFL size, a good arm, with some vision to make plays. He's not **Tom Brady**... he's more of a lesser **Jalen Hurts** to me...but that's not terrible either. Lance's biggest issue is he is not schooled in an NFL-type passing game. Maybe he flops when pushed into it...maybe he flourishes?

Also, Lance is not this amazing, lightning quick runner embarrassing tacklers... he actually looks like a 4.55-4.60+ runner, which is NFL good-not-great and it looks to my eye like he doesn't have very good agility/shiftiness/elusiveness. He's a straight-ahead FCS runner... a 6'3"/220+, 4.5+ running athlete at the FCS level...he's a god in the FCS, but just another good athlete at Alabama.

I guess I'd try to explain my dilemma here as...I think an NFL team is getting a 'B' runner and 'C-D' passer right off the bat, but I could see where he could become a 'B' runner and 'B' passer, given time and experience – and that isn't the worst thing in the world. He's a worthy NFL prospect, but to take him as a top 10-15 pick and 'hope' it works out...that's scary in an era where rookie QBs (rookie anything) are hitting the NFL and dominating right away.

Lance is an 'A' grade character. He is a 'face of the franchise' type of human being. He does a lot of charity work and is smart/disciplined and determined. GMs and owners will fall in love in their discussions with him...probably enough to gamble that the coach will fix/groom what needs fixing/grooming.

There is a risk that Lance is not ready and never will be fully ready to throw the ball/play QB effectively at a high level in the NFL. However, he's a better gamble/investment than (what should have been) obvious duds like **Sam Darnold** or **Daniel Jones**, etc. Watching **Daniel Jones** have moments of NFL success gives me some hope that Lance wouldn't be a bad pick/investment after all. The NFL is easier for



rookies than it has ever been, as the rookies are more prepared than they have ever been – Lance might take right to starting in the NFL because he's a good, smart, hard-working above-average athlete+ for the NFL.

I'm rooting for Lance, but I'm suspicious/scared at the same time...and sometimes, that's what the draft is all about...no?

Trey Lance, Through the Lens of Our QB Scouting Algorithm:

-- 16 games in 2019 season...one game over 250 yards passing. Only one game over 23 pass attempts in a game. 1,100 yards rushing but only two games with over 100+ yards rushing.

-- Three of Lance's last 5 games of his 2019 run...zero TD passes in a game, most of them FCS playoff games.

-- His last 4 games in 2019, his playoff run...41 completions on 68 pass attempts = 60.3% Comp. Pct. His final three games, as the playoffs went on...31 completions on 52 pass attempts = 59.6% Comp. Pct.

-- His last 11 games of 2019...13 TD passes, for a weaker 1.2 passing TDs per game trend.

Lance has a lot of great raw total tallies in 2019, but remember he also logged 16 games due to the FCS playoffs, and NDSU going all the way. His raw numbers can't be compared to another QB prospect playing 12 games at the D1 level.

NFL Combine Projected Measurables...

6'3"/220 pounds, 9.5" hand size

4.50-4.60 range 40-time (if he weighs in at 212-215, he might run closer to 4.50)

7.2+ three-cone



The Historical QB Prospects to Whom Trey Lance Most Compares Within Our System:

Not as good as **Jalen Hurts**, but better than **Tyrod Taylor**...that really sums it up nicely. And, honestly, I don't know whether Lance hits an upside to a smaller-scale Hurts or falls to a 'useful' but not overly exciting **Tyrod Taylor** type of limited but safe passer-runner.

<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>
7.599	7.55	Lance	Trey	2021	No. Dakota St.	75.0	220	58.7%	13.1	13.9	80.4
6.637	8.02	Taylor	Tyrod	2011	Virginia Tech	72.8	216	59.6%	13.3	13.8	49.2
5.318	6.21	Rourke	Nathan	2020	Ohio U.	72.5	210	58.2%	13.4	22.3	41.1
8.081	8.33	Hurts	Jalen	2020	Oklahoma	73.0	222	64.5%	14.3	16.1	36.0
6.381	5.78	Franklin	James	2014	Missouri	73.4	228	58.9%	12.8	16.5	57.6
4.494		Harnish	Chandler	2012	No Illinois	73.5	220	58.3%	13.8	13.3	170.4

*'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.



JANUARY 8, 2021

2021 NFL Draft Outlook:

It wouldn't shock me if Lance went in the top 10 for a team reaching for their runner-thrower QB hope to change over their offense to the read option. It wouldn't surprise me if he fell all the way out of the 1st-round and into the early 2nd-round.

I see Lance with mostly 1st round projections from #10-25 in most cases early January among scouting websites. I have no idea if Lance would be helped or hurt by the NFL Combine...his foot speed will be key for his hype.

If he runs in the 4.4s at the Combine, he'll go top 10...and his scouting grade rockets for us.

If he runs in the 4.5s and he'll be #10-25 overall pick range...and our grade on him will tick higher.

If he runs in the 4.6s with a bad three-cone and he falls out of the 1st-round.

I think he'd be best served by the Combine getting cancelled and letting teams have to guess, unless they make him run it at their facilities...but those in-person meetings may be cancelled for 2021 in favor of Zoom calls as well – we don't know how it will go.

My bet would be Lance taken in the #17-30 range overall pick, but not betting heavy on it today.

NFL Outlook:

My strongest inclination about his pro experience is – he'll need some time. He might be able to get thrown into the mix and make some plays as an athlete, but if he could get a year of grooming in an offense that is dedicated to the read option future...maybe he's got a shot to be a solid NFL starter.

I see flaws that worry me, but I also see the potential for an upside that could render my fears dumb when we look back over time. I try not to take both sides of an issue...anyone can do that (he might be good...or he might not!). My current prediction would be he winds up a 'C+' to a 'B' NFL QB and it takes a year or two to really see what he's got. But...small scale 'bust' is not totally off my radar either.

If I wanted a read option QB to be the face of my franchise right away in 2021...I'd rather have **Justin Fields**, from what I've seen so far (full Fields study has not begun yet because as of this writing, he has the 2021 CFB title game to go). But it wouldn't surprise me if after their rookie season, Lance grows into becoming better version of Fields.



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Signature _____

Date _____

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