



# 2021 NFL Draft Scouting Report: QB Justin Fields, 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.*

I'm having a difficult time trying to rate/evaluate **Justin Fields**...as a pro prospect. So, I'm just going to start typing from my notes and see where we land...

I have two competing thoughts, and a third nagging at me.

1) **Justin Fields** is a very legitimate, solid NFL QB prospect. I don't think there is any doubt he is worthy of being considered a starting NFL QB talent. I'm not fully solidified on whether he's an A-B-C-D grade level of pro prospect yet...I think I see a B-C grade, 'good' prospect. Not a superstar. Not a bust. Closer to 'B' than 'C', I'd guess.

A new era read-option QB raised in the passing game – these types of QBs find the NFL easy (consider Burrow and Herbert and Hurts not missing a beat when thrown in). I don't think Fields will find the NFL that difficult.

vs.

2) Something does not feel right to me here about Fields...as a scout. Something isn't sitting right with me in getting excited about his pro prospects. I can't put my finger on it. I can see that he is capable, but I don't know whether I expected to see an 'A' and just saw a B-C talent, or that my subconscious is telling me it's more 'C' with 'D' risk. Whatever it is, I'm having a hard time getting fully excited about his pro prospects.

I watched/studied **Sam Ehlinger** in the same time frame as Fields – and I was actually a little more impressed with Ehlinger. Not saying that our computer model is going to grade it that way, but there is something about Fields that makes me worry that his hype is too far ahead of his reality.

I was more excited (pro prospect-wise) watching/studying **Jalen Hurts** in January of his draft season than **Justin Fields**. Make me choose between them – I take Hurts, but that doesn't mean Fields fails.

3) One of the things nagging at me is – Fields seems like a first-class jerk of a player to me. That doesn't mean he's not a pro prospect talent, but man did his background check and interview observations turn me right off.

Watch the first 15-20 seconds of this post game where OSU beat Indiana in 2020, but Fields didn't play all that well: <https://youtu.be/vGJ7tP4m3I>



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Watch 30-60+ seconds of that with the sound off and just look at his demeanor. If it were a one-off event, just a bad day, then any young person gets a pass – but I almost always see Fields coming off dismissive, arrogant, unprofessional in interviews/exchanges...and that could potentially be a problem at the next level.

Here's how he decided to 'look' post game Alabama title game loss (you can just watch the first 5-10 seconds to see what I'm saying): <https://youtu.be/-jUkz4xlSgq>

I'm sure that professional handlers will clean him up for the upcoming media events/circus, and get him to smile more, etc., but his natural habitat is very low key, dismissive, disinterested...bordering on arrogant.

It makes me wonder more about his one year at Georgia -- head coach Kirby Smart picking **Jake Fromm** over Fields, after Fields had flashed as a couple of snaps per game freshman runner-passer talent (and just more talented than Fromm in general). That 'choice' (of Fromm) has been criticized by the media and is looked back on as a very 'stupid' decision by Smart. And from a talent standpoint, it's obvious Fields was more talented...so why did Smart stick with Fromm and not give into the five-star recruit freshman who was proving himself on the field right away? Could it be Fields's attitude already, behind-the-scenes as a freshman?

When Fields then wanted to transfer, he didn't want to wait a year sitting out (and who can blame him), so he sued to get an immediate transfer under a little-known gray area ruling/allowance about personal safety, etc. -- someone at the school made a racist slur from the stands against Fields during some game and that was used to leverage into a lawsuit challenge and ruling to allow him to transfer and be eligible right away.

I don't doubt the incident...the person who was accused apologized, so I'm sure it happened. I'm not saying Fields' desire to transfer wasn't warranted, or that he wasn't smart to use the situation as leverage. It just makes me wonder: (a) So many QBs (or any player) get negative comments, or even death threats on social media after a bad performance/loss, should they be able to use those to transfer around at will? If I saw what Fields did...if I were an unhappy college player...I'd try and do the same. (b) **Justin Fields** comes off to me in interviews as all about **Justin Fields** and no one else matters except for what they can do to help Fields – just my take. Fields suing to transfer right away, just feels like it fits his brand – and I'm not saying it's not smart. I just wonder how coachable and resilient to criticism and disappointment he's going to be in the NFL. He's never really had to deal with criticism. He often looks like he's absolutely not interested in what anyone else is saying.

I say this is all 'just my opinion' but it's been my job for 10+ years to study these prospects and their interviews (whether I conducted them or watched what others captured) and their backgrounds. I'm not just throwing a wild dart here. Nor am I saying I'm right about my perceptions here...I just have this weird feeling looking at Fields' off the field interactions, etc., and it doesn't sit well. He reminds me a bit



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of how aloof **Kyler Murray** is/was pre-Draft, but Fields seems much more savvy/cunning (Kyler comes off borderline 'dumb' in conversations).

Whether you're just an introvert or you're a straight up jerk...if you can play football at a high level, you're going to play. Maybe Fields will react well to tough coaching...or, maybe they'll need to find him a coach who'll stroke his ego his first 2-3-4 years into his career (Like Kingsbury and Kyler). I'm sure Fields will be a choir boy at first...he's not dumb, not at all. But once Fields has control, he's going to go into Fields-first mode. And I don't blame him...but what if he's so obstinate no one can help him/coach him/improve him when he struggles adjusting to the pro level? Just random thoughts.

Let's go back onto the field...

Fields is not an elite passer, though he is very solid/capable/good.

Fields is not an elite runner of the ball, though he is very solid/capable/good at it most times he does.

Fields does not have an elite personality/charm.

So how excited can we be? How high can we rank him if he has no 'elite' traits? Can we say for sure he's a franchise QB?

I think Fields is a 'B-C' grade passer, more 'B' than 'C'. He runs the read option offense well enough. He is willing to hang in the pocket and make throws. His arm strength/speed is OK/fine. He shows an ability to read defenses, work past his first read and doesn't always run away when the first option is gone. He wants to stay in the pocket, and he shows no fear inside it (unlike **Trevor Lawrence**). In college, Fields had games where he smoked opponents with his passing...and other games where he struggled a bit. Overall, to me, he always looks good/competent throwing the ball, and not giving me major red flags.

People love that he's a runner-thrower weapon or threat, but I don't see him with a huge desire to run the ball. He can and he will, but he is not looking to run all the time. **Trevor Lawrence**, **Zach Wilson**, and **Sam Ehlinger** (just to name some top names) ran as/more effectively than Fields did in college. Fields is not **Lamar Jackson 2.0**...he's more **Deshaun Watson** – reluctant/not immediate to run but more than willing if he has to.

As a passer talent, Fields falls somewhere between **Deshaun Watson** and **Jalen Hurts** – read-option talents who benefit as passers by the defense worrying about them running. Watson-Hurts-Fields are not meticulous **Tom Brady** or **Joe Burrow** throwers, or electric passers like **Patrick Mahomes**, **Herbert**, or **Josh Allen** – but they are very solid, perfectly capable of finding receivers and delivering the ball. I don't think **Deshaun Watson** is a great passer talent, but his style works and is effective and good enough. So, why doubt Fields transitioning to the NFL...when he's just as good, maybe better, a passer than Watson in college?



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I see a lot of 'B' grade things with Fields...and that shouldn't be a bad thing, just don't mistake him for the next **Joe Burrow** or **Justin Herbert**. Know what you're buying – not an 'A', more of a 'B' with 'C' risk...and that's fine, until people don't think it's fine over time.

**Justin Fields** was having a somewhat shaky 2020, statistically...and then he dropped 6 TD passes on Clemson in the CFB playoffs. In his prior three games to the Clemson event, he had 4 TDs/5 INTs...and was lucky to win 1-2 of those games. Had the Clemson game never happened, Fields might be considered a suspect late-1st-round or early 2nd-round draft pick QB today. The Clemson CFB playoff game saved him, to a degree. On one hand, you can think it should...if you can squash Clemson and throw 6 TD passes doing it, then you're pretty good/great...but how should the three games prior and one game after (Alabama) which weren't as good/great factor in?

You're getting a perfectly capable, athletically talented starting NFL QB right away when you draft Fields. The question is – will he be good enough to get your team to division and Super Bowl titles, or is he just better than the schmo QB you had before? Also, in question...will Fields be coachable and continually improving or is he bound to just be 'good' for years and then 5+ years goes by and your team is always 7-8-9 wins and nothing great ever happens? What if Fields is too good to move on from but not bad enough to just cut or draft competition in to challenge him?

Is this a different/similar version of the **Derek Carr** or **Matt Stafford** or **Kirk Cousins** story?

Regardless...Carr, Cousins, and Stafford have been solid pros. I'm guessing Fields will be too...with the risk he's not a leader of a team and doesn't improve/gets more demanding and too relaxed once the big second contract is inked.

### Justin Fields, Through the Lens of Our QB Scouting Algorithm:

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-- 60.6%, 262.4 pass yards, 2.2 TD/1.0 INTs, 31.6 rush yards, 0.0 rush TDs per game = **Fields** in CFB playoff or Big Ten title games with OSU.

Those are solid not spectacular numbers, especially considering over half the passing TDs came in one game (Clemson 2021).

-- 69.0%, 245.0 pass yards, 2.3 TDs/0.7 INTs, 48.7 rush yards, 0.7 rush TDs per game = **Fields** all 2020 minus the Clemson game

Fields kinda settles in as a 250 pass yards, 2+ pass TDs, 30-50 yards rushing per game college QB...not phenomenal in any area, but really solid/good in every area.



Before we marvel at how productive **Justin Fields** was in college, especially in 2019 (last full season) and want to leap too fast towards how ready he will be for the next level – should we stop and ask (same with Alabama and Clemson QBs)...does playing at a great football factory school surrounded by all NFL prospects on the O-Line and skill positions provide a head fake as to how good these quarterback prospects really are?

Ohio State last couple starting QBs (and their best season)...

67.2%, 3,273 pass yards, 41 TDs/3 INTs (14 games) = **Justin Fields** (2019)

70.0%, 4,831 pass yards, 50 TDs/8 INTs (14 games) = **Dwayne Haskins** (2018)

64.7%, 3,053 pass yards, 35 TDs/9 INTs (14 games) = **J.T. Barrett** (2017)

How much of ‘the numbers’ are due to their surroundings – their top blocking, weapons, defense, coaching...how much better Ohio State is than any Big Ten team?

### The Historical QB Prospects to Whom Justin Fields Most Compares Within Our System:

It's **Jalen Hurts** and **Deshaun Watson** as top computer comps, as previously mentioned. It makes all the sense in the world – read-option, 4.5+ running, good size, decent enough passers. Only...

If there were a draft of just the 3 of them, Fields would be my 3rd pick.

Hurts is a much better runner with purpose (and size) while Watson is maybe the better passer, with Fields not too far behind either of them in those aspects.

The other big distinction is that Watson and Hurts are 10x better leaders and franchise faces than Fields.

*\*Note...I did not grade Watson this well out of college initially. When Lamar Jackson (and Deshaun) broke out and we got the rise read-option QBs being accepted (not shunned), I changed my QB scouting analytics/algorithms to reflect the changing environment.*



## 2021 NFL DRAFT SCOUTING REPORT

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<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>
7.845	7.91	Fields	Justin	2021	Ohio State	74.5	225	61.7%	13.7	12.0	30.0
8.081	8.33	Hurts	Jalen	2020	Oklahoma	73.0	222	64.5%	14.3	16.1	36.0
7.047	7.89	Watson	Deshaun	2016	Clemson	74.4	221	64.7%	11.5	18.8	34.8
4.102	7.23	Boyd	Tajh	2014	Clemson	72.8	224	64.9%	12.2	14.9	23.6
4.226	4.40	Sims	Blake	2015	Alabama	71.4	223	63.6%	12.8	16.8	31.4
2.605	5.10	Smith	Troy	2007	Ohio State	72.0	225	58.3%	12.4	15.4	35.4

*\*'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.*

### **2021 NFL Draft Outlook:**

**Justin Fields** will get the football media push to be the #2 QB in the class and the #2 pick overall. Any January-February mock draft or rankings you see with **Zach Wilson** or **Trey Lance** above Fields...just know by April it will have all changed. The media is going to promote Fields.

Why?

Fields is the 'big football' candidate over Wilson or Lance – there will be more 'fake news' pushing an Ohio State guy than a BYU or North Dakota State guy (and they'll do hit pieces on the small school guys). There's more money and job security pushing the Ohio State candidate over the QBs from schools there are no benefits in supporting. That narrative will come from on high, and then the regular media downstream will gobble it up and make Fields their #2 guy without even realizing how it happened.

I think by March there will be more whispers trying to push the narrative that Fields is better than Lawrence, than there will be any love/passion/debate for Wilson or Lance over Fields. Big media ESPN



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and State sponsored NFL Network – they are going to push Fields when they're ready (after the Super Bowl)...and then over the course of a few weeks past the Combine it will be Lawrence-Fields 1-2 talk.

For those reasons, among others, I think Fields will go top five overall and be the #2 QB taken.

### **NFL Outlook:**


Fields is going to work fine in the NFL...whether that is 'B' or 'C' level work is up for debate, and 'A' is not off the table. 'D' is also not off the table. My guess is B-C range is more likely than A or D possibility. He's built and ready for the NFL, but to me – he's just not an elite prospect. Just 'solid', 'good', runs a nice read option system. Won't totally burn you. There's value in that. It's rare that a draft has an obvious 'A' or two like 2020 did (Hebert, Burrow).

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