



## 2021 NFL Draft Scouting Report: QB Sam Ehlinger, Texas

*\*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 was not prepared to 'like' **Sam Ehlinger** as an NFL QB prospect, but I wound doing just that – I'm kind of a fan of his work after my studies.

I don't know why I was against him before even really seeing him play. Nothing really stood out about him in the very brief in-season highlights I saw in years past. I didn't feel any real excitement from the media, or any fans, about his pro prospects – in fact, all I remember hearing was consternation about him even being the Texas QB.

Honestly, I only had Ehlinger on the list to study in early January because he was a Senior Bowl invite...and of the various invitees, he was the one I had the least glimpse/awareness of...so I thought, *"I better go ahead and get this over with to be prepped for the Senior Bowl week."*

I had a mildly negative attitude going in (and if you don't think 'mood' or 'bias' goes into the beginning of the scouting process, you're thinking wrong) and I flipped on a random game tape and quickly did NOT love what I saw (more on that in a moment).

I think many 'analysts' stop right there in the process. There's a consensus thought on a prospect...leading to a preconceived notion in one's own mind, and then you watch tape with preconceived notion-colored glasses on and when (you think) you see what you expected...no need to look much further. I very much have to guard against that 'bias' every day scouting for the NFL Draft for the past 10+ years.

There IS something not to like about Ehlinger, and it may be his NFL downfall...but if you fixate on that one thing, you'll confirm the early negative bias and overlook all the other positives. Ehlinger has a real problem – he is a terrible deep ball thrower. Passes over 20+ yards...not his thing. Not that he doesn't have the arm strength for it, it's that he has no accuracy for it. Watching him against tougher opponents, when he has to throw deep it is likely not being completed...or even thrown close to catchable. It's almost like he can't connect/throw to a receiver deep even when they're uncovered. He's too often WAY off throwing deep...and the throws, aesthetically, don't look good either. It was so noticeable to me right away that I really didn't want to watch any more of his tape...I damned him just for that. Anyone can make the simple throws but throwing deep is an art and an NFL 'tell' -- and Ehlinger doesn't have it, to my eyes.



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Combine that with the fact that Ehlinger doesn't throw a pretty ball in general...and your scouting mind can quickly turn on him. Ehlinger has a nontraditional throwing style...almost a **Philip Rivers** throwing style. When you watch guys like **Justin Herbert** or **Patrick Mahomes** or **Tom Brady** or **Zach Wilson** throw – you want THAT aesthetically pleasing thrower, you want those mechanics, that 'look'. A **Philip Rivers** type throwing motion won't do...it offends one's 'highbrow'/wine snob scouting senses.

But then I continued to watch Ehlinger run an entire game – and what he is good at is being a QB working from 15-20 yards or closer in. Not that he doesn't have the arm, but more because it is his bread and butter, his gift – he can run the read option-ish style of passing game like a maestro at times. He can make all the throws – far and away to the sidelines, quick slants. And he does read the defense and comes off his first read and looks at second and third reads. He can find the open receivers in the pocket or scrambling from trouble, he can extend plays. He can find proper receivers deep too...he just can't get the ball to them in a proper location most of the time.

But here's the dirty little secret... *most* QBs don't throw deep successfully. Most look prettier at their failure than Ehlinger, but an incomplete is an incomplete, a 1-on-1 coverage toss up doesn't have to look great...it just has to be near the WR. Many stunted pro QBs play the game much better from 15-20 yards and in. They are not stars, but they can be good/winners/fine. **Alex Smith** has made a career of it. Ehlinger could be an **Alex Smith** type QB option/prospect...only a more schooled up-tempo new era passer, a better/more aggressive **Alex Smith**.

Ehlinger has a lot going for him aside from his two flaws (deep passing accuracy and mechanics/look...and 'look' isn't a real issue). He is very confident running HIS game. He doesn't have a game manager mindset, like **Alex Smith**...Ehlinger is an attacker. He will slice and dice the short and medium passing game all day. He is also a savvy, tough runner – in 2018, he ran for 18 TDs...he ran for 33 TDs during his career. He's run for 50+ yards in a game 17 times in 46 college games. He has three 100+ yard rushing games. He's not a run-first QB with supersonic speed...he's just an annoying/willing/effective runner – he is not afraid to take the run if it's the best option and he will call his own number as needed. He's probably a 4.7+ runner but has a fearless heart to run...or throw.

I can tell you this... when it comes to moxie, I walked away more impressed with Ehlinger than I did with **Trevor Lawrence**. Yes, I know Lawrence is better built and more adored and will have a better career because the NFL will deem it so. But don't rule out Ehlinger being better/more respected in the long run.

If you want to get to know **Sam Ehlinger**. Set aside 10+ minutes, go onto YouTube and watch his tape from the Oklahoma-Texas game of 2020. Watch every play as the game unfolds. You'll see all the good, the bad, the ugly, the grit, the moxie.

If you want to get more excited about Ehlinger – go watch his 2019 game against National Champ LSU, back when he had pro level WR options to throw to (and working against a loaded with NFL talent defense).



Against Oklahoma and LSU...Ehlinger was the underdog/under talented versus his opponents but he just kept coming at the defense. He's impressive to watch work/lead/grind, but he may never be elite enough where anyone really cares about it.

Ehlinger is a tough, competitive, brash, confident QB who has an NFL arm and a speed/thickness to add a wrinkle to his next level game. If he could only be more accurate, more instinctive deep...he might be in the argument for best QB in the 2021 Draft class.

Speaking of confident/brash...Ehlinger has a **Baker Mayfield** vibe as a leader. Outsiders will be appalled, but football people will love it, and his teammates will too if he gets a chance to lead. You get quite a package here with Ehlinger – arm talent and pocket vision/awareness enough to start in the NFL. A tough, capable, physical runner to keep defenses honest. A leader by his toughness. Opponents and the media (against him already) will see him as bordering on arrogant, but his teammates will be behind his confidence.

NFL people won't like him pre-Draft because they are told/pushed that they aren't supposed to (no one will entertain Ehlinger as a top QB prospect, they'll be blasted if they do)...so, Ehlinger will be a day two pick who has to hope he lands in the right place – but eventually, I bet, Ehlinger overcomes the odds, breaks down the biases and ends up having some kind of run (good or mediocre) in the NFL...even if it takes 3-4-5 years to materialize. He would be the perfect heir apparent to **Ben Roethlisberger** for example.

### Sam Ehlinger, Through the Lens of Our QB Scouting Algorithm:

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-- He played some his freshman year, and then became the starter his sophomore year on...and over his career he scored 127 TDs. That's #4 all-time in the Big 12 and #17 all-time in all of college football. That ain't bad!

**Trevor Lawrence** had 125 TDs in his career.

-- 11,436 passing yards, 1,903 rushing yards, 13,339 total yards in Ehlinger's career...20th all-time in the NCAA.

**Trevor Lawrence** posted 10,098 passing yards, 943 rushing yards, 11,041 total yards by comparison.

\*The only stat/output Lawrence really has over Ehlinger is...a much higher completion percentage, but that's because Lawrence is a dink-and-dunk/screen-swing-bubble pass master and Ehlinger throws real passes short-medium all over the field all game.



- 83 TDs/20 INTs with 31 rushing TDs his final three seasons in 37 games...3.1 TDs per game.
- (4-0) in bowl games in his career.
- 4 or more TD passes in a game in seven of his last 23 games. By comparison, **Trevor Lawrence** has four career games total with 4 or more TD passes (40 starts).

-- 2019 season is the one to really scout Ehlinger as a passer...when he had NFL WR talents to work with (Duvernay and **Collin Johnson**). Do you remember Ehlinger's game in 2019 vs. the going-to-be National Champs LSU? He completed 66.0% of his passes for 401 yards, 4 TDs/0 INTs (plus 60 yards rushing on 19 carries and a TD) Ehlinger went toe-to-toe with that great defense. That's the game to watch to see how good Ehlinger can be as a passer, as a leader/QB.

### The Historical QB Prospects to Whom Sam Ehlinger Most Compares Within Our System:

When I saw this list produced from the computer analysis, I was thinking **Joe Callahan** (long time NFL backup) made some visual sense but to my mind, not a perfect fit...but the **Dak Prescott** comparison really threw me at first. Then I remembered – a lot of the same fears I had on Dak; I have on Ehlinger. And I was pro-Dak before it was cool – I thought Dak wasn't ready to be a pro level passer all over the field, but that he ran a great short and medium passing game and could run the ball like a bully when needed...and that he was just going to be a tough-minded QB who would hit the ground running if he ever got a shot...but I mostly thought he would just be OK/good in the NFL (and might not ever get a real chance), not good/great.

I have that same pre-Draft Dak vibe/fear on Ehlinger, but that being the case – I'm buoyed by the Dak similarities in the two coming out of college. The thing to watch now would be – Dak was lightly regarded with 'character concerns' pre-Draft, and then he went out and tore up the Senior Bowl game (not practices as much) in his opportunity (coached by the Dallas staff). If Ehlinger does the same thing...then we might have a Dak-like/2.0 on hand with Ehlinger – drafted middle rounds, expected to be a backup...then just needs a freak accident to force his chance to shine.



## 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>
<b>7.690</b>	6.80	Ehlinger	Sam	2021	Texas	74.0	222	63.6%	11.9	13.7	74.6
<b>7.129</b>	6.67	Prescott	Dak	2016	Miss State	74.0	230	64.3%	11.3	22.3	89.0
<b>6.732</b>	4.33	Callahan	Joe	2016	Wesley	73.1	216	69.8%	14.6	9.0	41.3
<b>6.287</b>	5.87	Pipkin	Antonio	2017	Tiffin	72.7	225	64.5%	13.2	11.9	56.3
<b>8.340</b>	5.25	Bridgewater	Teddy	2013	Louisville	74.0	215	66.5%	13.6	16.5	47.7
<b>6.179</b>	5.15	Carr	Derek	2014	Fresno State	74.8	218	64.0%	10.3	15.3	86.7
<b>3.965</b>	5.68	Rivers	Roland	2020	Slippery Rock	74.0	225	58.2%	12.0	13.0	49.8

*\*'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 mostly see Ehlinger with 3rd-5th-round grades this early in the process. I don't know how he'll improve on that. If he runs in the 4.5s or low 4.6s it would help. If he comes in 6'2"+ and not under 6'2" would be another little boost.

Ehlinger was mostly a disliked/distrusted/disrespected college player outside of Texas (and to some degree inside of Texas)...so, I think he'll be that as an NFL prospect pre-Draft as well – overlooked, undervalued. And NFL teams who'd like a shot him will love/bolster the negative talk to drive his draft stock down.

In the end, I believe he goes 3rd-round. 4th-round wouldn't shock me, and 'shock' late 2nd-round wouldn't surprise me either.

