



## NFL Draft 2021 Scouting Report: SAF Caden Sterns, Texas

*\*FS/SS grades can and will change as more information comes in from Pro Day workouts, Wonderlic test results leaked, etc. We will update info as it becomes available.*

As I sit to write this report, here's the current state of the safety-prospect-world we live in:

-- EVERYONE has **Trevon Moehrig** rated as the top safety prospect of 2021, and it's not even close.

Sampling three ranking sites/services, they have the #1-2 safeties as...

#17 Moehrig, #35 **Richie Grant** (random NFL consult site)

#26 Moehrig, #45 **Jevon Holland** (random NFL consult site)

#16 Moehrig, #54 **Jevon Holland** (CBS)

-- None of them rank **Caden Sterns** among their top 2 safeties...or the top 3...or the top 5 consensus-ranked safeties for the 2021 NFL Draft.

Sampling those same three services/sites on Sterns, they have him ranked...

#8 SAF, #93 overall

#13 SAF, #139 overall

#9 SAF, #147 overall

But here's my take – **Caden Sterns** should be in the running best safety in this draft. I'll get into his play and why I believe this but first, let's consider the Sterns resume going into this draft and maybe you can explain why he's being overlooked – you don't have to agree that he's THE BEST...but not even in the discussion?

Sterns' factoids, headline resume items...

-- Five star recruit out of high school.

-- Brother played in the NFL (with KC). Good bloodlines, in theory.



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-- 2018 Army All-American Bowl Game MVP at the high school all-star showcase.

-- Later in 2018, became an instant true freshman starter at Texas and won Big 12 Freshman Defensive Player of the Year, and made 1st-team all-conference.

-- In 2019, he had a solid follow up season...but a sprained knee caused him to miss several games and he lost any momentum for post season awards, stat tallies, etc.

-- In 2020, COVID shortened schedule. Named team captain. Named to the 2020 All-Academic team. Missed a few games with a turf toe, and thus lost all the awards momentum, etc., again. He skipped his 2020 bowl game to prep for the draft.

-- At his Texas Pro Day:

6'0"/202, 4.41 40-time, 2.48 20-yd, 1.50 10-yd, 4.13 shuttle, 42" vertical = **Sterns**

That's a pretty sweet profile. How sweet? Compare it to the other top safety prospects in 2021...

6'0"/202, 4.52 40-time, 2.57 20-yd, 1.59 10-yd, 4.14 shuttle, 33" vertical = **Trevon Moehrig**

6'0"/207, 4.47 40-time, 2.61 20-yd, 1.55 10-yd, 4.16 shuttle, 35" vertical = **Jevon Holland**

6'0"/197, 4.57 40-time, 2.53 20-yd, 1.54 10-yd, 4.27 shuttle, 35" vertical = **Richie Grant**

They're all about the same size, but Sterns clocked the fastest 40-time, 20-time, 10-time, and shuttle and had the best vertical...and, yet, he cannot get mentioned in the top 3-5 safeties for any websites?

Here's my case for why Sterns, not even mentioned as a top 5 safety in this class, could maybe be debated as the top safety in 2021 NFL Draft...

So Sterns is the most athletic safety in this draft (and that's not a put-down of the other very athletic guys – it's just that Sterns is more athletic than they are), but among this group, he's also shown the best safety mind/instincts, the best body construct, has been the surest tackler and well above the average in pass coverage.

I studied Sterns in the summer of 2020, as a special project – what I was so impressed with was Sterns' ability to be where the play is at...to interpret what is going on around him and not over-running plays/getting out of position. He's got a great instinct for the ball in flight – thus his 4 INTs as a true freshman in 2018. He just has a natural instinct of what is going on around him. He makes sure tackles. He picks up WRs adeptly in coverage. A lot of promising attributes I observed summer of 2020.

BUT...

Then came my 2021 study.



In 2021, I got to watch his 2020 season work...and I was jarred a little bit... actually a lot.

Let me preface this with the following statement: Sterns wasn't even named as an honorable mention all-conference DB in 2020...despite being one of the best defensive players in the conference in 2018 and a current top 100-200 overall NFL draft prospect.

I was jarred by that and I was skeptical of this slight -- but then I watched his 2020 play and I began to understand it somewhat. Sterns played disinterested way too much. I mean, Sterns plays a very low-key type of game as it is -- he's very efficient moving around, almost like he's not breaking a sweat. But in his 2020 play, I saw too much of Sterns not chasing after plays with a passion/high effort, not getting to plays like he used to...more like he was disinterested or protecting himself for his future. Honestly, I don't know what happened. The 2020 guy was not the same player the 2018 guy was.

At his best, Sterns is arguably the best SAF in the 2021 NFL Draft. But the 2020 disinterested version of Sterns casts a lot of doubt. Some top prospects have flashed their skills early in their career and then cruised after that waiting to get to the NFL -- they can crank it back up when the money is on the line (Devin White/LSU-Tampa Bay comes to mind as one of those guys). You'd think Sterns would have put his best foot forward this year knowing he was going pro, but I've said that about other top prospects in the past -- and it hasn't always been a harbinger of issues in the pros.

I'm at a crossroads with Sterns.

So much great data and accomplishments, but then that 2020 weak tape. He's a star in the classroom. He was named a team captain. He called the plays for the defensive backfield...but then Sterns just floated around, not-like-his-2018-self in 2020. Was it because of trying not to get hurt...or signs of an issue? I don't know.

If I need to take a stand...I'm just standing in the middle of the road, unsure what direction this is going -- but I do know he HAS shown high end ability...he has the potential.

### Caden Sterns, Through the Lens of Our SAF Scouting Algorithm:

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-- Four INTs his first 6 college games, and then just one INT in his remaining/last 23 college games.

-- Solo tackles per game...

4.89 = Sterns 2019 season

4.29 = Sterns 2020 season



4.13 per game = Sterns' career solo tackles per game

3.58 = **Trevon Moehrig's** best season per game

3.54 = Sterns 2018 season

2.85 = **Jevon Holland's** best solo tackle per game season

2.63 = **Jevon Holland's** career solo tackles per game

2.58 = **Trevon Moehrig's** career solo tackles per game

People think Sterns is playing lazy or passive, but I also think Sterns is a victim of being so fluid, moving so naturally – it comes off as effortless or 'not trying' maybe more than it really is.

Again, I'm perplexed by the 2020 fall from grace (although his numbers were still decent)...and that people in the Big 12 noticed it or perceived it to snub him so in post-season awards/acknowledgement. Was it turf toe? Was it protecting draft status/his knees? Looking back on it, he probably should've just opted-out of the season...

### **2021 Pro Day:**

5'11.7"/202, 9.5" hands, 32.1" arms (his wingspan is 4+ inches better than Moehrig's too)

4.41 40-time, 2.48 20-yd, 1.50 1-yd

4.13 shuttle, 6.96 three-cone

14 bench reps, 42" vertical (huge), 10'8" broad

### The Historical SAF Prospects to Whom Caden Sterns Most Compares Within Our System:

**Juan Thornhill** was a 1st-round pick, who was also deemed 'passive'. **Dane Cruikshank** has never made the impact we thought he might – but was very athletic/smooth coming out Arizona.

Sterns as a bigger, less aggressive **Antoine Winfield** is on the table...I guess. But Winfield plays with much more fire.



Overall	Last	First	Yr	College	HT	HT	Weig ht	Tackle Strngth Metrics	Speed Cover Metric	Strong Safety	Free Safety
<b>7.845</b>	Sterns	Caden	2021	Texas	5	11.7	202	8.23	8.44	51%	49%
<b>8.264</b>	Thornhill	Juan	2019	Virginia	6	0.2	205	7.74	8.35	45%	55%
<b>8.066</b>	Cruikshank	Dane	2018	Arizona	6	1.2	209	8.64	7.66	47%	53%
<b>8.051</b>	Winfield Jr.	Antoine	2020	Minnesota	5	9.1	203	8.17	8.06	50%	50%
<b>8.065</b>	Harper	Roman	2006	Alabama	5	11.7	198	5.44	5.10	22%	78%

*\*The ratings are based on a 1–10 rating scale, but a prospect can score over 10.0+ and less than 0.0.*

**OVERALL RATING** -- We merge the data from physical measurables, skill times/counts from the NFL Combine/Pro Days, with college performance data available on pass coverage/tackles, etc. and grade it compared to our database history of all college SS/FS prospects, with a focus on which SS/FS prospects went on to be good-great-elite in the NFL. We found characteristics/data points that the successful NFL SS/FS's had in common in college, that most other SS/FS prospects could not match/achieve.

Scoring with a rating over a **7.0+** in our system is where we start to take a SS/FS prospect more seriously. Most of the future NFL-successful college SS/FS prospects scored **8.0+** in our system, and most of the NFL-superior FS/SSs pushed ratings more in the **9–10.0+** levels overall. Future NFL busts will sneak into the **8.0+** rating range from time to time.

**TACKLE/STRENGTH METRIC** -- A combination of physical measurables and college performance, graded historically for future NFL profiling. In the simplest of terms, this is an attempt to classify the SS/FS as one more likely to be involved in a heavy amount of tackles, forced fumbles, and physical hits to separate a WR from the ball. It also gives some insight into the "toughness" of a player, if it is possible to quantify that (this is our attempt to).

**SPEED/COVERAGE METRIC** -- A combination of several speed, agility, size measurements as well as college performance. A unique measuring system to look for SS/FS prospects that profile for superior coverage skills and abilities.

**2021 NFL Draft Outlook:**

Sterns has little momentum from his 2020 campaign with the red flag/question mark about his 2020 play. I think his pedigree and size-athleticism numbers are too good to ignore and he'll get drafted 4th-round, possibly late 3rd-round.

