



NFL Draft 2021 Scouting Report: OLB Zaven Collins, Tulsa

**Our LB 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.*

My one sentence scouting summary: *A good/very good football player had a bunch of fortunate interceptions thrown to him (4 of them) in 2020 and returned two of them for TDs...and on the basis of these mostly random events, **Zaven Collins** somehow won the CFB Defensive Player of the Year award.*

Collins was not top five in his (weak) conference in total tackles (he was #7).

He was not top five in the conference in sacks (he was #8).

Nor was he top five or ten in TFLs or passes defended.

He did lead the conference in INTs and INT TDs, as an OLB...with passes thrown right to him or tipped by someone and caught off the rebound. *Ladies and Gentlemen...your 2020 Defensive Player of the Year in ALL of college football!?!?!?!?*

I'm not saying **Zaven Collins** is a 'bad' football player...I'm just saying all the headline reasoning for his high prospect status is built on a lie...the lie of 'interceptions' as some leading indicator of defensive greatness for a linebacker.

If you watch a **Zaven Collins** highlight package, it's a lead punch showing you his INT return TDs. *This is the most impressive thing you want me to know about this outside linebacker?* He got lucky a few times against bad teams/QBs (his return TDs were vs. South Florida and Tulane. Collins went his first 25 college games with one pick...got three of them in his final 7 games...and a star is born, I guess.

Remember **Manti Te'o**? *How soon they forget...*

Do you remember Te'o almost won the Heisman Trophy his senior year of CFB play? Why? Because he played three seasons/38 games WITHOUT an interception, as the middle linebacker of renown for Notre Dame, but then had a whopping 7 picks in his final season – and it almost got him the Heisman. Football analysts then speculated he might be a top 5-10 overall pick, THEY were SO excited about him. THEY just knew he was a franchise player.

Te'o subsequently fell in the draft, as a 'Catfishing' story emerged...or he would've been a top 5-10 pick. He ultimately went #38 overall. He then went on to be a 'bust' in the NFL. His interception reign of terror was limited to that one magical college season – he had 2 picks in 62 games over 7 seasons in the NFL. The college senior year spike of picks did not translate at all to the NFL.

The bad news from the Te'o story for **Zaven Collins** is – there's precedent for this type of CFB folly by empty football analysts...them overhyping INTs with linebackers without it meaning anything for a



translation to the NFL. The good news for Collins is – he’s a bigger, faster, better all-around player than Te’o ever was (and, oh yeah...when our computer scouting models were calling Te’o a bust in pre-Draft 2013, I was maligned by the Draft-smart media mob. I eagerly await your 7+ years overdue apologies).

Collins is actually a good football player, but the interceptions were fluky (as they mostly are for non-CBs-and-SAFs). He’s a sound, solid, instinctual player who is not elite, but can be useful...and has signs of being a ‘tweener’ problem.

Collins’ game is more finesse – he loves to drop back in coverage more than anything, and he’s good at it. He’s very smart snuffing out screen passes ahead of time. He plays them well. He has an OLB mindset/comfort, thus Collins is not showing a penchant for a move to middle linebacker to patrol the center of the universe...it’s just not his game. He is a ‘meh’ tackler in the open field. He’s not an edge rusher despite height/weight and 40-time that says he might be decent at it. It’s just not his game.

So, what is an average/OK athletic cover OLB worth in the NFL Draft? It has some value. There’s a body and good instincts to work with. But is it a 1st-round pick worthy prospect? I don’t think so. Collins won’t be a bust...but he probably won’t be a memorable player in the league. Maybe respected by serious fans for his low-key versatility and dirty work and special teams, etc.

Collins is a very sound, solid OLB with legit/average-good NFL athleticism...but I don’t see any hot 1st-round material. What is his draft stock? We’ll discuss in a moment.

Zaven Collins, Through the Lens of Our OLB Scouting Algorithm:

-- A three-year player who cannot be found in top 5 in any output in tackles, TFLs, sacks, PDs in his time in the American Athletic Conference. Nor is he tops in interceptions all-time in conference...just the one nice stretch in 2020.

-- Had a 6 tackle, 3.0 sacks game vs. Oklahoma State to open 2020 season. One sack he just stunted and went untouched up the middle. Another he chased a QB who was heading out of bounds, so Collins was credited with the ‘closest guy to the QB’ sack. He wasn’t a real pressure rusher in and of himself. Much of Collins’ headline-grabbing ‘numbers’ are fraudulent, but it doesn’t make him ‘bad – just not ‘great’.

2021 Pro Day:

6’4.7”/259, 9.4” hands, 33.6” arms

4.66 40-time, 2.78 2-yd, 1.62 10-yd



4.36 shuttle, skipped three-cone

19 bench reps, 35" vertical, 10'2" broad jump

The Historical OLB Prospects to Whom Zaven Collins Most Compares Within Our System:

If Collins develops into a **K.J. Wright**...it would be a very good, solid NFL career. It's a possible career outlook.

OLB Grade	Last	First	Draft Yr	College	H	H	W	Tackle Strgth Metric	Spd Agil Metric	Pass Rush Metric
7.171	Collins	Zaven	2021	Tulsa	6	4.7	259	8.19	6.17	4.69
5.123	Wilber	Kyle	2012	Wake Forest	6	3.5	249	7.52	5.42	3.57
5.826	Wright	K.J.	2011	Miss State	6	3.3	246	7.12	3.53	2.68
4.919	Elliott	Jayrone	2014	Toledo	6	3.2	255	6.35	6.16	3.97
8.716	Edmunds	Tremaine	2018	Va Tech	6	4.4	253	7.75	9.38	8.99
6.051	Wilson	Martez	2011	Illinois	6	3.6	250	8.72	9.58	8.41
1.859	Webb	Nick	2012	Weber St	6	3.0	245	6.14	5.51	5.03

**A score of 8.00+ is where we see a stronger correlation of LBs going on to become NFL good/great/elite. A score of 10.00+ is more rarefied air in our system, and indicates a greater probability of becoming an NFL elite LB.*

All of the LB ratings are based on a 0–10 scale, but a player can score negative, or above a 10.0 in certain instances.

Tackle-Strength Metrics = A combination of several physical and performance measurements. An attempt to classify the LB prospect's ability to stop the run, as well as a gauge of how physical the player is and the likelihood of higher tackle counts in the NFL. All based on profiles of LBs historically.

Speed-Agility Metrics = A combination of several speed, agility, and size measurements...as well as game performance data to profile a LB for speed/agility based on LBs historically. A unique measuring system to look for LBs that profile for quickness, pass-coverage ability, and general ability to cover more ground.

Pass Rush Metrics = A combination of the physical measurements, but also proven on-field ability to get to the QB/backfield in college.



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2021 NFL Draft Outlook:

I sampled three random draft sites, and Collins is #20-33 overall pick range among them. He will probably go late 1st-round.

If I were an NFL GM, I think Collins is a fine/solid hand – but I ain't paying top 50 money for this. It doesn't make him a bad prospect, just bad business to take him that high.

NFL Outlook:

Collins is a solid C+ type athlete...but he's better graded on his instincts. He moves to the ball well and is smart in zone coverage. He sees the field and situations well on a B+ level or better. Because he's a smart player, I think he'll make it as a starter in the NFL someday (as a 4-3 OLB) and be a solid, underappreciated cog in the machine (like **K.J. Wright**).

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Signature _____

Date _____

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