NFL Draft 2021 Scouting Report: OLB Joseph Ossai, Texas

*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.

This draft is loaded with 'B' grade or 'good' talent at outside linebacker…whether the OLB prospect leans more 'edge' rusher or traditional linebacker. I don't see an obvious 'A' prospect, but I'm sure one will emerge from the rubble over time/when we look back. You could argue whether all these 'good' prospects are 'B' level players or 'C+' level – point is they are NFL legit and are starter-potential talents.

Joseph Ossai is another one of these 'good' options to throw into the pile.

In my opinion, it's a mistake to classify Ossai as an 'edge', but most websites/rankings have him with the edge group. He played the 4-3 edge rusher mostly for Texas in 2020 but he is not a natural pass rusher, per se. He's more of a fluid outside linebacker who can sneak-attack rush the passer but is also adept at playing the run and dropping into coverage.

The best way I can put it – I see Ossai as being more a possibly great convert to ILB than as a dominant pass rusher on the edge. Ossai has more of a 'tracking' ability versus a dominating pass rush mindset/ability. He's more graceful and well-rounded than a player to be pigeonholed as an 'edge guy'.

Watching Ossai's tape, I noted a few times – 'very easy to block' and 'poor balance'. You know how some running backs just take hits and barely budge/just keep going upright like nothing happened? Ossai is the opposite…he gets tipped off-balance too easily upon 'the right' contact. But, oddly, despite the off-balance knock I leveled, Ossai's main gift is his fluid feet…. He can maneuver around trouble and through cracks and chase down ballcarriers, but if a lineman hits him square Ossai almost looks like the sensation when you sprint straight into a body of water/the ocean or lake. You go full blast running at the water, but then the water/resistance hits your legs and your mind is going fast but your body is doing something different due to the resistance and then you can't help but lose balance and flop into the water. I'm not trying to be all 'scouty' here with micro analyzing bend and movement skills…but I can't remember ever seeing/saying this 'off balance' thing about an EDGE prospect in my scouting history, but I saw it happen so many times with Ossai that it forced me to write about it/note it/wonder about it.

You think I'm crazy (or do you just trust me wholeheartedly yet)?

Take one minute to watch this…

https://youtu.be/FpkvX0wbziE?t=66

It will open to the play at 1:06, Ossai is #46…on the lower left. Identify him before letting the tape run, then no matter where the ball goes just stay fixed on Ossai.

Do that for plays at 1:06, 5:23, 5:39, 5:56 (where he looks like he was shot by a snip[er), and 6:37.

I spent, literally, 2 minutes skipping around this one game looking for examples and stopped at the last one – that's how many times I'd see him hitting the turf (and this was his best/historic game of his career vs. Okl. State…more on that in a moment). Some of it good blocks, but usually guys get knocked off course on good blocks, not laid out or falling to the ground constantly.

Being a bit 'tipsy' does not make Ossai a bad prospect, not at all…just I never saw a real, dominant 'edge' guy on his tape. He could work it in college, but I think in the pros he fits better as a 4-3 OLB.

A lot of what I think about Ossai, as a player, could be found in his 2020 game vs. Oklahoma State…12 tackles, 6.0 TFLs (not a typo), and 3.0 sacks. That stat line may be the best for any front seven guy in one game in all of 2020. Think about the stat line and what images it conjures up…

6.0 TFLs and 3.0 sacks paint a picture of a dominant force off the edge, but that's really not what happened. Ossai was a 4-3 DE for most of this game and rushed the backfield a lot, but his TFLs were more him slipping through cracks or shedding a blocker and lassoing a back trying to cut up field. The sacks were two where Ossai was blocked away but the play extended and Ossai kept dancing and moving and was eventually in range or the QB ran his way, and he made the tackle/sack. His final sack was in OT, on a 4th & goal play, to win the game… Ossai came off the left edge, the QB rolled away/out the other direction but Ossai chased around his blocker and full sprinted after the QB and outran him as he sprinted 10-yards and Ossai dove and tripped up the fleeing QB. Ossai has a nice gift for maneuvering and chasing, but he's not just wrecking blockers and raiding the backfield as a force of QB hurries/pressures…he's more 'slippery' and 'smart' rushing the backfield.

Ossai had 12 tackles in that game as well – pure edge pass rushers don't register tackle counts like that, they are too busy head-down and trying to get their sack. Ossai plays more cerebral and fluid and chasing things. He had three games with 10 or more tackles in 2020 season. He's a true linebacker at heart, not an edge rusher.

Ossai has a middle linebacker-ish instinct with an outside linebacker's body/ability to chase things all over and rush the passer on occasion.

Whether Ossai is installed as an EDGE or as a 4-3 OLB or as a convert to middle linebacker…he's going to be a useful-to-good player for sure. He might develop/work his way to Pro Bowl level work. He's just a good, solid defender with flexibility on how he can be used.

Off the field, Ossai is a very nice/affable young man who was an Honor Roll student and up for the 2020 LOTT award highlighting players who were great on the field as well as in the classroom but most importantly as leaders and community volunteers, etc. His family immigrated from Nigeria when he was

10 years old, and he and his parents are just super-nice, well balanced, happy people. NFL locker rooms will like and respect Ossai, and he will not embarrass an organization.

Joseph Ossai, Through the Lens of Our OLB Scouting Algorithm:

-- 15.5 TFLs in 2020 season, 6.0 of them in that Oklahoma State game…but that was still 9.5 TFLs in his other 8 games. Ossai has the ability to get into the backfield, but it's more on stealth and nimbleness than brute force. He had 13.5 TFLs in 2019 season…back-to-back seasons with high TFL production - 29.0 TFLs in 22 games in 2019-2020.

-- The past two years…top five in the Big 12 in TFLs, top 10 in sacks and total tackles, top 5 in forced fumbles, top in interceptions among front 7 guys (had 2 in 2019 season). Ossai is just 'a ballplayer'.

Zaven Collins is a similar sized OLB, but he had a blip season of interceptions in 2020 and won Defensive Player of the Year in CFB 2020 because of it. Ossai is a much better, more well-rounded version of Collins.

2021 Pro Day:

6'3.6"/256, 9.4" hands, 33.8" arms

4.63 40-time, 2.56 20-yd, 1.58 10-yd

Skipped shuttle, three-cone

19 bench press, 41.5" vertical, 10'11" broad jump

The Historical OLB Prospects to Whom Joseph Ossai Most Compares Within Our System:

Ossai comps with a wide range of skilled defenders but note the highest matches/comps (below) are/were all very productive players in the NFL. Ossai comps with 'good football players'…because he is one.

OLB Grade	Last	First	Draft Yr	College	H	H	W	Tackle Strgth Metric	Spd Agil Metric	Pass Rush Metric
8.014	Ossai	Joseph	2021	Texas	6	3.6	256	8.68	7.75	6.47
8.140	Ryan	Jake	2015	Michigan	6	2.3	240	9.30	7.43	5.33
9.483	Barr	Anthony	2014	UCLA	6	4.7	255	8.19	12.71	10.75
10.113	Mack	Khalil	2014	Buffalo	6	2.5	251	9.18	9.05	7.79
10.724	Collins	Jamie	2013	So Miss	6	3.4	240	10.02	9.00	7.39

*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.

2021 NFL Draft Outlook:

I see Ossai ranked mostly as an early 2nd-round pick, but some have him in the late 1st-round. I wouldn't be shocked if he was a 1st-rounder. He's likely to go around picks #25-40.

If I were an NFL GM, I see him as fair value around #20-50 overall.. Depending upon my team's need...I could be willing to pay the price, but I like to 'get deals' and Ossai is fairly priced. He's just a really solid football player.

NFL Outlook:

He's going to be a good-to-very good football player for a very long time at whatever position he winds up at. He's not going to disappoint a team that takes him, wherever they take him.