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Malachi Corley prepares for NFL draft

By BEN SHEROAN THE NEWS-ENTERPRISE
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Campbellsville High School graduate Malachi Corley excelled at Western Kentucky University and is preparing to improve his status in the NFL draft.

WKU ATHLETICS

After success under the Friday night lights at Campbellsville High and a standout college experience at Western Kentucky University, Malachi Corley is preparing for the biggest stage football offers.

The 21-year-old is preparing for the NFL draft in hopes of being recognized as one of the premier wide receivers about to turn pro.

His WKU statistics are impressive enough. In four seasons with the Hilltoppers, Corley caught 259 passes for 6,001 and 16 touchdowns in an aggressive offensive system.

He has been invited to showcase his talents for NFL evaluators and will take part Feb. 3 in the 75th annual Senior Bowl in Mobile, Alabama, where he'll go up in practices and the game against elite defenders generally a notch above his competition in Conference USA.

He's also going to the NFL Combine, which is Feb. 26-March 4, in Indianapolis, where talent evaluators, scouts, general managers and coaches will interview and observe players as they go through drills to demonstrate strength, speed and agility. Players also go through all manner of physical examinations as comparative data is accumulated ranging from speed in the 40-yard dash to width of their hands.

Corley took a few moments from training to discuss his plans. A man of few words, Corley has a clear vision of his goal: "I'm going in the first round, sir."

The NFL draft is the most watched off-season event and numerous websites are dedicated to forecasting the outcome or assessing players to include evaluations of Corley. Many of the handicappers consider him to be a second-day selection going somewhere in the third round.

Universally, major college receivers such as Marvin Harrison Jr. of Ohio State, Malik Nabers of LSU and Rome Odunze of Washington are near the top of these mock drafts.

Pro Football Focus, which creates a detailed draft board much like the NFL teams, lists 20 other receivers before Corley. Among receivers, he is listed between Jamari Thrash of Louisville and Jacob Cowing of Arizona — both of whom also plan to play in the Senior Bowl. In that PFF projection, Corley is ranked as the 94th best prospect in the entire draft.

Despite differences in assessments, the appreciation and praise for his talents are plentiful.

NFLdraftbuzz.com describes Corley as "a dynamic playmaker" and calls him "a terror in run-after-catch scenarios, exhibiting the ability to bulldoze through defenders with exceptional balance and vision."

It goes on to describe "a natural instinct once the ball is in his hands" and says he is "adept at securing catches away from his frame."

The scouting report from profootballnetwork.com outlines similar attributes.

It considers him an "evasive playmaker," saying he has rare play strength and contact balance that allows him to shed tacklers easily and can accelerate to top speed very quickly.

A site known as firstroundmock.com, which is operated by a former NFL scout, projects Corley to be taken in the second round. It raves about his powerful running style and compares him to Detroit Lions' WR Amon Ra-St. Brown as someone who can be counted on for timely first downs.

NFLdraftbuzz says he also must demonstrate his football IQ and ability to learn because the Hilltoppers' receiving routes are more limited than the typical NFL playbook.

In the Senior Bowl, for example, NFL experts will be looking at how quickly he can understand complex pro offenses.

The evaluation on firstroundmock describes a need for more crisp route running, particularly on downfield patterns.

The profootballnetwork site says his smaller stature — listed at 5-10 or 5-11 depending upon the site — could lead to some teams pigeonholing him as a slot receiver only.

It says a team drafting Corley has to love his unique play style and strengths but be patient with the rest of his game. Because of his unique skill set, it considers his draft position tough to project. It says he could go anywhere from Round 3 to a late first-round selection where this year's playoff teams are

slotted.

It only takes one team to decide it fits their scheme or needs and he's off the board early — just as Corley is predicting.

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