

Washington Commanders 2022 SEASON RECAP





Assessing the Commanders' 2022 draft class

By Zach Selby

The Washington Commanders' draft picks are expected to offer some sort of contribution early in their careers, and that was the case once again during the 2022 season.

Whether it was on offense, defense or special teams, several of Washington's rookies became key contributors. Some dealt with injuries that limited their usage, but all have shown potential as being part of the Commanders' future going forward. Here's a look at how each rookie performed during their first seasons in the NFL.

WR Jahan Dotson (Round 1, No. 16 overall)
2022 stats: 35 receptions, 523 yards, 7 TDs

Way back when people were guessing at what Jahan Dotson could be at the professional level, NFL.com's Lance Zierlein projected the Penn State alum to be a second-round pick. Washington took him earlier than people anticipated, and he performed better than those analysts expected.

Dotson, who missed five games after sustaining a hamstring injury



in Week 4, ended up performing among the best in the 2022 class of wideouts, many of whom have received more national recognition for their production. He was seventh in yards, despite being 11th in receiving yards, third in yards per catch and tied for first in receiving touchdowns among rookies.

Dotson's quickness, route running and knack for creating explosive plays show that he will be a vital piece of Washington's receiving corps going forward.

"The one thing that we saw in Jahan was his ability to get open, especially in space and confined spaces, and then his catch radius

and his ability to go after the football," Ron Rivera said after the Commanders' 26-6 win over the Dallas Cowboys. "I think all those things combined is really what's his strength."

DT Phidarian Mathis (Round 2, No. 47 overall)

There was plenty of hype surrounding the Alabama defensive tackle, especially after the way he practiced in training camp, but we will need to wait until next season to see how he can impact the Commanders' defense.

Phidarian Mathis suffered a knee injury in the season opener

against the Jacksonville Jaguars, knocking him out for the rest of the year. He told reporters in the locker room that his recovery is going well, and whenever he does come back, he could be a nice addition to the defensive line with the way he excels at stopping up double teams.

"He comes in every morning, gets his workout in," Rivera said. "He's pretty much done with the basic rehab. Now it's all just maintenance. But getting a chance to really watch him work out and see him developing and working on his explosiveness, his overall strength, core strength, I've gotten a lot of good reports on him as far as those things are concerned."

RB Brian Robinson (Round 3, No. 98 overall)
2022 stats: 205 attempts, 797 yards, 2 TDs

The start of Brian Robinson's season was derailed after sustaining multiple gunshot wounds between training camp and final roster cuts, but he ended up being one of the more important pieces to the Commanders' offense when he returned to the roster.

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Robinson ended up leading the Commanders in rushing yards with his impressive vision and surprising amount of quickness. He excelled at finding yardage between the tackles and shedding defenders. In fact, 44% of his rushing yards came after contact. Look back at his touchdown run against the Philadelphia Eagles on Monday Night Football to see how hard Robinson fights for extra yards.

Washington began to lean on the running game more heavily as Robinson's comfort level improved. Case in point: Washington rushed for at least 100 yards in 10 of its final 14 games.

"You see a guy that does play downhill, that is a little bit of a workhorse and it's something that we can't get away from," Rivera said.

S Percy Butler (Round 4, No. 113 overall) **2022 stats: 15 games, 11 tackles, 1 pass deflection, 1 fumble recovery**

On the surface, it might not look like Percy Butler made much of an impact, which flies in the face of Rivera's assertions in April that he believed the rookie safety would have an immediate impact for the team. While he did not receive many defensive snaps until the season finale, he did find a way to make his mark on the 2022 season.

Washington's secondary is pack bunch full of talented players, so it was going to be tough for Butler to get on the field behind the likes of Kamren Curl and Darrick Forrest. Instead, Butler carved out a role on special teams, and he contributed to a unit that was second in the league, according to Pro Football Focus. His hustle also led to a fumble recovery on a muffed punt against the Green Bay Packers which put the offense in position for a field goal.

Butler also got the chance to play a bigger role on defense against the Dallas Cowboys in Week 18, and the Louisiana prospect did not disappoint.

"Very pleased with what we got from Percy," Rivera said. "Percy had a great opportunity this past Sunday and, and really showed out that he is capable, and again, he excelled

on special teams."

QB Sam Howell (Round 5, No. 144 overall) **2022 stats: 11-of-19 (57.9%), 169 yards, TD, INT; five rushing attempts, 35 yards, TD**

There was a lot of excitement from fans once it was announced that Sam Howell would be the Commanders' starting quarterback in Week 18. It was a chance for him to show what he had learned as a backup during the season, and while it was not perfect, there were encouraging signs for his future.



Howell's first completion in a game that counted was a touchdown, and as impressive as that was, what stood out more was how effectively Howell directed the offense and distributed the ball to his receivers. He made quick decisions and delivered passes to Washington's weapons in stride, which set them up for big gains after the catch. He also showed solid pocket mobility and the instincts of when to give up on a play and try to get yards with his legs.

And of course, he showed off his impressive arm strength

with a 52-yard throw to Terry McLaurin.

"Did things that we believed... he's capable of," Rivera said. "I thought he handled it very nicely, went out and did some really good things."

TE Cole Turner (Round 5, No. 149 overall) **2022 stats: 2 receptions, 23 yards**

Cole Turner's season got off to an uneven start after sustaining a hamstring injury at training camp that kept him out of the lineup until Week 5 against the Tennessee Titans.

G Chris Paul (Round 7, No. 230 overall)

It was a mostly quiet season for Chris Paul. He spent the majority of his rookie year inactive on game days, but that did not mean his work to improve went unnoticed in practice. In fact, Rivera gushed over the Tulsa prospect on several occasions.

"He's a young man that I really do think as he continues to grow, he's gonna have a bright future here," Rivera said. "He's smart. He understands the game. He's athletic, very athletic, big man. Just some little detailed things that he's gotta show up, but his time is gonna come."

Paul got his chance to start in the season finale with Andrew Norwell inactive, and the rookie lived up to much of the praise Rivera gave him. He showed power in the run game and looked impressive working with center Wes Schweitzer on double teams. The only blemishes he had on his night were a penalty and one pressure.

Washington's interior offensive line will be a priority for the team this offseason, but Paul has shown that he can be an answer and at least provide some valuable depth.

"Chris Paul is a young man we want to take a really good look at," Rivera said.

CB Christian Holmes (Round 7, No. 240 overall) **2022 stats: 12 tackles, 2 fumble recoveries**

Like Butler, Christian Holmes was mostly a special teams player during his rookie season, and he was one of the clear standouts on the unit with two fumble recoveries. The first turnover he created came in Week 6 against the Chicago Bears, which led to Washington scoring its only touchdown of the night.

Holmes got to see more action once Benjamin St-Juste started missing time with an ankle injury. He did allow the explosive play from Darius Slayton during the Giants game, but other than that, Holmes held his own against receivers and showed off the skills that encouraged Washington to take him with its final pick of the draft.

"He's a young guy that shows some promise, especially on special teams," Rivera said. "He was a tremendous contributor there for us."



After a season of growth, Brian Robinson is ready to prepare for Year 2

By Zach Selby

Brian Robinson Jr. had fun, and lots of it, during his first season in the NFL.

Despite missing the first four games of the Washington Commanders' 2022 season while he recovered from multiple gunshot wounds, Robinson established himself as a tone-setter in the backfield. He rushed for 797 yards while averaging almost four yards per carry, scored three total touchdowns and recorded his first 100-yard game.

Yep, that sounds pretty fun.

After spending the past season learning and making an impact for the Commanders' offense, Robinson's focus has shifted towards rest, recovery and preparing for Year 2.

"I'm appreciative of everything that's been granted to me," Robinson said during last week's locker room clean out. "I just have so much to look forward to."



Robinson had to be eased back into the lineup once he made his return from the Physically Unable to Perform list, but based on his workload, it was clear that he did not need much warming up. Aside from two games -- Week 5 against the Tennessee Titans and Week 8 against the Indianapolis Colts -- he got at least 12 carries on a weekly basis, including a season-high 26 against the Philadelphia Eagles.

That usage lines up with what coach Ron Rivera promised Robinson back before he was even drafted.

"Coach Rivera told me that if he brought me in here that he wasn't gonna sit around and let me develop," Robinson said. "He felt that I was ready to come in, ready to play. That was the expectation. That's what I did."

Robinson played the lynchpin for several of the Commanders' wins, whether it was running the ball or even as a pass-catcher.

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He pushed his way through Eagles defenders on his way to the touchdown that gave Washington the lead during the Monday Night Football game; the first score of his career led to his team getting a win over the Chicago Bears; and he plowed over Atlanta Falcons defenders for his first receiving touchdown in Week 12.

All the while, Robinson continued to gain confidence in his skill set each week.

"I'm starting to get more comfortable in my second level play," Robinson said after the Falcons game. "Just getting up on the second level and making a second level move. At first it was just kind of like get me that pump to get back up on that second level, but now I want to take that next step and play on the second level and finish on the second level."

Robinson could see the difference, too. He saw improvements in the way he ran each week on film, so much so that he said the version of himself that first took the field against

the Titans "wasn't even close" to how he looked near the end of the season.

"It was a year where I just had the chance to grow as a professional and watch myself develop this year," he said. "I saw myself make those strides week in and week out."

Robinson was ruled out of the Commanders' season finale against the Dallas Cowboys, so for now, his focus is on getting some mental and physical relaxation before jumping back into training for his second season. His plan is to come back for training camp fully healthy and build off what was a strong start to his career.

It will be important for Robinson that he is ready to go in July, because he feels that he and his teammates are close to a breakthrough.

"We showed ourselves what we can do," Robinson said. "We showed ourselves what type of potential we can play to, what we can build around. It's...good energy to go into the offseason with. Hopefully, guys feed off that and come back with a chip on their shoulders."



Season Snapshot Gallery



Season Snapshot Gallery





Four takeaways from Ron Rivera and Martin Mayhew's joint press conference

By Zach Selby

Washington Commanders head coach Ron Rivera and general manager

Martin Mayhew spoke to the media following the team's 8-8-1 finish to the 2022 season. Here are some of the top takeaways from their joint press conference.

Questions at quarterback

Rivera is heading into his fourth offseason as the Commanders' head coach, and there is a chance that he will need to address the quarterback position once again.

As it stands right now, Washington has three signal-callers on the active roster. Sam Howell is locked into his rookie contract, while Taylor Heinicke is set to be a free agent. Carson Wentz played in seven games but was inactive for the season finale.

As usual, Rivera and Mayhew were tight-lipped about their plans, but they are in the process of reviewing the position and team as a whole.

"We're currently working through all that and having discussions," Mayhew said. "Over the next few days, we'll be talking about all those things."

Over the past two seasons, Washington has looked to outside sources for its starting quarterback. It signed Ryan Fitzpatrick in 2021, but the veteran suffered a season-ending hip subluxation in the season opener. It traded for Wentz this past offseason, but injuries and uneven play plagued him all season.

Just as Washington has done in recent years, it will examine all options at the position, including the draft, free agency and current players on the roster. Howell ended the season as the starter, leading the Commanders to a 26-6 win over the Dallas Cowboys.

"What we saw from him in practice was very good. It translated to the game, which doesn't always happen."

Washington will continue to evaluate depth at defensive back

Washington knew it would need to start digging into its depth once the team traded William Jackson III to the Pittsburgh Steelers. There is still much to discover about the secondary, but from what Rivera has seen, he is pleased with the group's progress.

"We've got a good group of young guys that we're curious about," Rivera said. "We most certainly do look to add to that group."

Rivera was complimentary of the Commanders' two rookies, Christian Holmes and Percy Butler. Holmes had a tough outing, as Rivera put it against the New York Giants, but he is a player who showed promise, particularly on special teams. Butler, another special teams player, got an opportunity on

Sunday against the Cowboys and showed what he was capable of with four tackles and a pass breakup.

Danny Johnson was another player that Rivera praised because of his tendency to be prepared for any circumstance. That has put him in a good position to take advantage of his opportunities, such as in the season finale. Johnson led the team with seven tackles and also had a pair of pass deflections.

However, Rivera did admit that the Commanders are not done evaluating the group. The current players on the roster will get more chances to prove themselves in the offseason workout program, and the head coach hinted at possibly bolstering the group even further.

"That's one of the positions we most certainly want to see if we can add some more depth to, whether it's through free agency or through the draft. But

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it is a position of interest for us.”

Exploring the possibility of joint practices

Washington has elected not to have joint practices with other teams during training camp, but there is a possibility that could change this offseason.

Rivera brought up the potential of joint practices when asked about why the Commanders have gotten off to slow starts during his tenure. He mentioned that there were several soft tissue injuries in training camp, which to Rivera means they will need to look at how the team practices in warmer temperatures.

Rivera added that Washington will “most certainly” look at working with another team.

“I go back to some of the experiences I had in my previous stint, we actually did it three times and two of those three times we came out and we had really good years.”

Joint practices have been a popular choice for teams in recent years. Not only does it allow for a week of

competition with another opponent, but coaches are also able to control scenarios more effectively than they would in a preseason game.

Washington is 3-7 in September over the last three seasons, so perhaps getting extra work against a different team could help the team avoid their early struggles.

Offensive line is a priority

Mayhew was blunt when evaluating the Commanders’ offensive line when asked about possible changes to the position. “Obviously,” he said, “there’s a need.”

“I think to continue to add young people to that group to get younger there.”

Washington’s offensive line has been decimated with injuries over the past two seasons. The Commanders were able to stay afloat in 2021 and still had one of the better groups despite dealing with backups at multiple spots. The same could not be said for last season, as Chase Roullier dealt with another season-ending injury and Tyler Larsen suffered the same fate

later in the year.

At guard, Washington rotated multiple players with Trai Turner going in and out of the starting lineup. In addition to Turner, Saahdiq Charles and Sam Cosmi also played at right guard, although those options dealt with a concussion and hand injury, respectively.

Mayhew said he wants to evaluate why the Commanders have had issues at that spot over the last two seasons, and Rivera added that center is a particular area of interest.

“We’ve got to look at and figure out how we can solidify that group and hopefully not have to go through that again.”

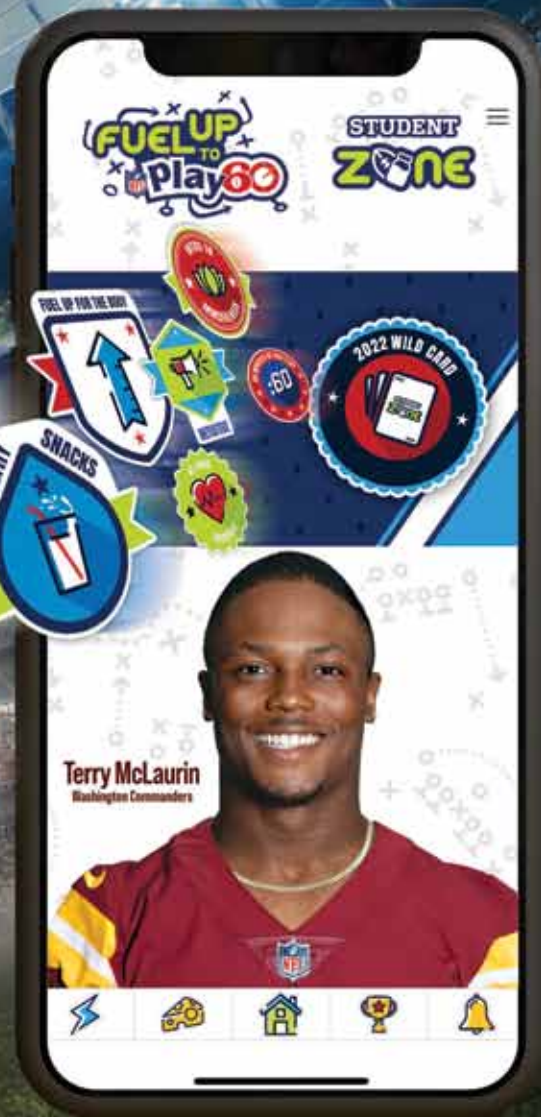


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