

Photo:  Commanders Draft Party Photo 2026

Caption: Washington fans celebrate at Northwest Stadium during an NFL draft party as the Commanders announced that Ohio State linebacker Sonny Styles was the team's No. 7 overall pick on April 23. (Marcus Relacion/The Washington Informer)

HED: Commanders Kickoff 2026 NFL Draft Selecting Ohio State Linebacker Sonny Styles With No. 7 Overall Pick

By Skylar Nelson

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The Washington Commanders opened the 2026 NFL Draft, with a bold and dynamic choice aimed at transforming their defense, selecting linebacker Sonny Styles with the No. 7 overall pick. The selection signals a clear commitment to reshaping a defense in need of impact talent, landing one of the most versatile and dynamic defenders in the 2026 draft class.

“So much joy. So blessed. I told my whole family this morning, I was like, I’m going to be a Commander,” said Styles. “And, no one really thought [about it]. So, I just had this feeling. I’m super excited. I love this organization, I love the people.”

[Tweet Embed:](#) <blockquote class="twitter-tweet"><p lang="en" dir="ltr">SONNY STYLES!@sonnystyles_ | #RaiseHail pic.twitter.com/esHCnCRybA</p>— Washington Commanders (@Commanders) April 24, 2026</blockquote> <script async src="https://platform.twitter.com/widgets.js" charset="utf-8"></script>

[Tweet Embed:](#) <blockquote class="twitter-tweet"><p lang="en" dir="ltr">all smiles 😊 pic.twitter.com/84vwdBPpPv</p>— Washington Commanders (@Commanders) April 24, 2026</blockquote> <script async src="https://platform.twitter.com/widgets.js" charset="utf-8"></script>

For Styles, the fans and the franchise truly make coming to Washington special.

“I told one of my teammates here, what was different about Washington. I said the people in the building, just a bunch of great people,” he said. “So, I’m super excited to be a part of that.”

Thrilling Athleticism Backed by a Historic NFL Combine Performance

The 21-year-old linebacker turned heads throughout the offseason, but his performance at the NFL Combine back in February firmly placed him in rare historical territory.

At 6-foot-5 and 244 pounds, he recorded a thrilling 4.46 40-yard dash time, with a massive 43.5-inch vertical jump, and an 11-foot-2 broad jump. This showcased Styles' elite blend of speed, explosiveness and power, rarely seen at his size.

His vertical jump was the highest recorded by any player at any position weighing more than 240 pounds since 1999, highlighting just how exceptional his explosiveness truly is. Styles also tied for second-best broad jump in the 2026 draft class further emphasizing his elite low-body strength.

Styles from the combine earned a 9.99 Relative Athletic Score (RAS), ranking fourth among 3,480 linebackers evaluated from 1987-2026.

Now his rare athletic profile makes its way to the nation's capital becoming the Commanders' newest game-changing assets.

"I mean, he's huge." Commanders General Manager Adam Peters said while laughing. "It's just amazing. He is 21 years old. He is a young guy... but he is an elite athlete, elite size, elite length and he's just scratching the surface as a linebacker, and he is already really good, and he is only going to get better."

[Tweet Embed:](#) <blockquote class="twitter-tweet"><p lang="en" dir="ltr">A reminder about Sonny Styles:

- Same height as Calvin Johnson (6'5")
- Same 40 time as Bijan Robinson (4.46)
- 8 lbs lighter than Derrick Henry (244 lbs)
- Same broad jump as Julio Jones (135")

Watch out, NFC East 🙄 pic.twitter.com/WmBYYP730D</p>— DraftKings Sportsbook (@DKSportsbook) April 24, 2026</blockquote> <script async src="https://platform.twitter.com/widgets.js" charset="utf-8"></script>

From Safety to Linebacker, He Remained a Game-Changing Force

One of the most compelling aspects of Styles' development is his positional evolution.

The Ohio native was ranked No. 3 in the state and starred as a safety at Pickerington Central High School before becoming a Buckeye.

Early in his tenure at Ohio State (2022-23), he recorded 62 tackles, 5.5 tackles for loss, two sacks, one pass defended, and one forced fumble. His 53 tackles in 2023 were ranked fifth on the Buckeye team, while his 32 solo stops ranked fourth.

In 2024, the year the Ohio State Buckeyes won the football playoff National Championship, Styles made the full-time transition to linebacker and quickly made an impact. Starting in all 16 games he finished with 100 tackles, 10.5 tackles for loss, six sacks, five passes defended, and one

forced fumble. He earned second-team All-Big Ten honors showing his continued growth in the secondary.

The position change paid off, as he finished his college career with 244 tackles (131 solo) most of which came from the linebacker position, nine sacks, 22.5 sacks for loss, 10 passes defended, three forced fumbles, one fumble recovery, and an interception.

“It was just an adjustment really just being closer to the ball,” said Styles. “Things are happening faster. And then probably my footwork being a linebacker, footwork is crucial. If you’re late, you’re done. So, I think that was something I really had to work on with my feet getting right. And that’s still something I’m still trying to work on, get better at.”

He Wore the Prestigious Buckeye “Block O” Jersey Last Year

Styles’ 2025 season not only showcased his defensive production but also his player leadership. He led Ohio State with 82 tackles (46 solo), with 6.5 tackles for loss, one sack, four passes defended, and one interception. His performance earned first-team All-America honors and unanimous first-team All-Big Ten recognition.

He was also voted a team co-captain and selected to wear Ohio State’s prestigious “Black O” jersey, an honor given to the player who best represents accountability, character, and toughness. This Buckeye tradition started in 2020 to honor the legacy of Bill Willis, one of the program’s most decorated figures.

Styles became the sixth recipient of that honor, joining a select group that includes Johnathan Cooper, Kamryn Bobb, Thayer Munford, Cody Simon, and Xavier Johnson. This honor puts further underscores on the respect Styles earned within the program, while also signaling Washington’s continued commitment to adding high-character leaders on defense. A philosophy that took shape in the Commanders’ new era with linebacker Bobby Wagner.

“And getting that number my last year, it meant the world to me because my freshman year I came in seeing guys like [former Ohio State wide receiver Kamryn Babb], [former Ohio State wide receiver] Xavier Johnson, [and former Ohio State linebacker] Cody Simon,” said Styles. “I looked up to those guys throughout my first three years, and I was hoping I could aspire to be like those men, just who they were off the field. And then to get that number my last year, I mean, it was just a blessing. It was a full circle moment, I was hoping I could be an inspiration to a younger guy in our locker room this past year.”

A Dynamic Force for a Defense in Need

The Washington Commanders entered the offseason with the intention of upgrading a defense that lacked consistent playmaking. After locking in key additions in free agency, the

Commanders positioned themselves to select the best player available, selecting Styles as the missing piece to their dynamic defensive chess board.

“To pick Sonny Styles with the seventh pick... [I] didn’t think he was going to be there,” said Peters. “[I] thought there was a low chance... but it was an easy pick when he was there and we were on the clock.”

Styles is now set to embark on his NFL journey joining a Commanders’ defense led by newly appointed coordinator Daronte Jones, whose creative approaches could maximize Styles’ versatility. With the ability to rush, cover, and disrupt across the formation, his profile sets him up to be an immediate contributor with long-term star potential.

For a defensive unit searching for identity and impact players, the Commanders may have found both in their first draft pick.

“I think it goes back to kind of what we wanted to do, just get younger and faster,” said Peters, “and I think we’ve done that.”

The NFL draft for the Washington Commanders continues as they are set to make their next selection in round three at Pick No. 71, followed by picks No. 147 in round five, and No. 187, No. 209, and No. 223 all set to be in round six. The 2026 NFL draft will conclude on Saturday, April 26.