



NFL Draft 2015 Scouting Report: RB David Johnson, Northern Iowa

**Our RB 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.*

**We use the term "Power RB" to separate physically bigger, more between-the-tackles-capable RBs from our "speed RBs" group. "Speed RBs" are physically smaller, but much faster/quicker, and less likely to flourish between the tackles.*

I'm not sure how it is that **David Johnson** is not seriously discussed as a top-3 RB prospect in this draft by every draft analyst (as of this publishing). I get the small-school bias, but I'm not sure what else he needs to do to prove he is probably the only rival to **Todd Gurley** as a potential 'franchise' RB from this draft.

Let's lay out the **David Johnson** prospect time-line to what should be his ascension to the top of the RB rankings (but hasn't been ...yet).

Johnson hit the NFL Draft scene in January as a mostly unknown, 'small school sleeper' type of prospect...along with a zillion other guys. He's not within a top-20 RB prospect ranking in the 2015 class for most at this stage, and never really a top-10 RB at all. You look at his Northern Iowa career, and 'bob your head' that it looks decent enough. Last season: 287 carries for 1,553 yards and 17 TDs on the ground. A pretty 'nice' season, but not anything we haven't seen before at this lower level of play. The rushing tallies were nice, but it was the receiving numbers that were begging you to take extra notice.

I did take notice in December 2014, writing a basic 'eyeball test' scouting report on Johnson for Pro Football Spot in which I proclaimed Johnson would become a top-10 ranked RB, and likely a top-5...once people were more exposed to his talent. The reason I was so passionate about Johnson, was that I could see he had the physical tools to be an NFL runner—6'0"+, 225+ pounds with what looked like 4.5+ speed. BUT his receiving skills are what put me over the edge.

You can look at Johnson's college career numbers and see four straight seasons with 30+ catches...that's fairly impressive for a college RB at any level. However, it's not the reception tally that is the most attention-grabbing...it is the way he catches the ball. Johnson is not just a sure-handed swing pass/screen pass catcher of the ball. He is a virtual WR playing RB. He could have been a day-two draft pick as a WR, had he gone that route. At Northern Iowa, Johnson was often releasing over the middle like a tight end or kicking down the sidelines for deep passes like a WR...he also ran slant patterns. He was a WR playing RB...with true/excellent hands.

Many analysts are going to point out his superior receiving skills leading up to draft day, and one game in particular: His 2014 game at Iowa. A game in which he caught five passes for 203 yards...including a



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70-yard TD (highlights of Johnson's two big catches and him being interviewed in a near-defeat of Iowa courtesy of UNI Sports: [Game Highlights vs. Iowa](#)).

Six-foot+, 225+ pound RBs with high-end speed, agility, and power...and WR skills—that's a rare thing draft analysts should have looked more into in January. The Senior Bowl did, and Johnson received an invite to Mobile in January 2015.

He was noticed kinda-sorta during the Senior Bowl week, but really popped when he entered the actual game, here was his first touch of the Senior Bowl: [Senior Bowl TD David Johnson](#). Not that one play is the definitive argument, pro or con against a player...but if you're pro-**David Johnson**, you don't hate seeing that 'splash' against the mostly D1 all-stars.

The Senior Bowl week dragged Johnson into more of a fringe top-10 ranked RB prospect nationally. The event that really launched him into everyone's top-10 at RB, and in some top-5s, was the NFL Combine.

Drink these numbers in from a 6'0"+, 220+ pound RB: He had a 4.50 40-time with a 41.5" vertical, 25 bench reps, and a 6.82 three-cone. He is almost a perfectly constructed RB prospect—a tremendous combination of power and speed-agility. One of the closest athletic models to Johnson in our system is **LaDainian Tomlinson**. That's high praise.

Johnson's NFL Combine results across-the-board destroyed the likes of fellow RB prospects **Melvin Gordon** and **Jay Ajayi**—the two, physically bigger RBs who are always rated ahead of him nationally.

The big argument for Gordon or Ajayi as better NFL prospects than Johnson is...what? You cannot make a physical/athletic/speed-agility and strength comparison—there is no comparison between the three.

You could knock Johnson as performing well at the lower FCS level, and I would counter half the teams in the Mountain West may belong in the FCS—**Jay Ajayi** got over on weaker schools, just like **Kapri Bipp**s (Colorado State) did last year...**Robert Turbin** (Utah State) before that. If Johnson v. Ajayi is a 'draw' on beating up weaker opponents faced (and Ajayi was human vs. non-conference teams), then the measurables raise Johnson's hand in a clear victory.

Johnson v. Gordon is no contest physically, in any category. All you have to argue is that Gordon blew up the Big-Ten, just like all the Wisconsin RBs before him (**James White**, **Montee Ball**, etc.), as did half the RBs in the Big-Ten. What if the Big-Ten just features all awful run defenses? All you have with Gordon is—he was awesome at the D1 level...just like all the prior Wisconsin RBs.

If I enter the passing game skills into the equation—it's a further 'boot to the eye' of Gordon and Ajayi vs. Johnson.

Additionally, you won't find any off-field flaws with Johnson at this stage. He's been trouble-free and injury-free and appears to be a solid student going all the way back to high school. He carries himself well in any interviews, that I've seen him a part of.



Aside from **Todd Gurley**, I don't know how Johnson is not considered the clear #2 RB in this class. If you think Gurley's ACL is a big red-flag...one could then make the argument that Johnson is the best RB in this class. Gurley is obviously 'special', but he's one more ACL on the same knee away from becoming a tragic NFL Draft story.

David Johnson, Through the Lens of Our RB Scouting Algorithm:

If I were to slam Johnson's college resume, I would look at this first two games of the 2014 season-- which is the only two-times he faced D1 schools in 2014. In one-score losses at Iowa, and at Hawaii, Johnson only averaged 15.5 carries for 40.0 yards rushing (2.6 ypc). Those are feeble numbers, but in watching the tape, I did not see where Johnson was a problem running the ball. He always runs pretty decisively on all his carries, displaying power and shiftiness as needed—but you cannot argue with the weak game output numbers. His overmatched O-Line didn't help a ton. However, Johnson also averaged 138.0 yards and 0.5 TDs receiving in those two games on 5.0 catches per contest. With all yards combined, Johnson accounted for 100+ total yards in each game against the two D1 foes in 2014, and 178.0 total per game as an average.

To defend Johnson against D1 opponents: The year prior UNI went to Ames, Iowa and defeated D1 Iowa State. All Johnson did in that game was run for 199 yards and caught 41 more yards worth of passes— 240 yards total...and oh, by the way: 4 TDs (2 rush, 2 rec.) in that ISU game.

Against the Big-Ten in his career (two games), Johnson racked up 200+ total yards in each game (23.8 yards per game) with 2.5 TDs per game.

A stat trend our computer noticed: In Johnson's last eight college games he averaged: 19.4 carries, 118.4 yards rushing, 6.1 ypc, 1.8 rushing TDs, 2.9 receptions for 29.6 yards and 0.1 receiving TDs per game. All combined: 148.0 total yards and 1.9 TDs per game in his last eight contests.

If you extrapolate his final eight college games into a traditional 13-game season: 1,500+ yards rushing, 1,900+ total yards, and 24 TDs.

That's the kind of dominance you want to see from your D2 runner with NFL 'star' aspirations.



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Here...marvel at the NFL Combine workout numbers compared to Gordon and Ajayi:

40-time:

4.50 = **Johnson** (2nd fastest of any RB over 215-pounds)

4.52 = Gordon

4.57 = Ajayi

10-yard split:

1.57 = **Johnson** (THE fastest of any RB over 215-pounds)

1.60 = Ajayi

1.63 = Gordon

Vertical:

42.5" = **Johnson** (The best of any RB...of any size)

39.0" = Ajayi

35.0" = Gordon

Bench Press reps:

25 = **Johnson** (Tied for 3rd best of any non-Fullback among all RBs)

19 = Ajayi, Gordon

Three-Cone:

6.82 = **Johnson** (THE fastest of any RB over 215-pounds)

7.04 = Gordon

7.10 = Ajayi



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Why is it that Johnson is universally ranked beneath **Melvin Gordon** and **Jay Ajayi**?

The Historical RB Prospects to Whom David Johnson Most Compares Within Our System:

Your eyes light up when you see **LaDainian Tomlinson** as a comparison, and there are a lot of traits in common...but that was also a different era. Tomlinson was way ahead of his time. The more proper comp, to me, is **Latavius Murray**...a slower, less injury-history version of **Latavius Murray**. Coming out of Central Florida, we were totally excited about Murray when our computers laid eyes on him. Murray can catch much like a WR too, but Murray is a faster runner...Johnson the more polished receiver. Both great prospects.

The **Todd Gurley** data on here is from 2013 and was just a projection we messed with last year...hypothetical partially, because there was no Combine data on him then either, obviously.

| RB Score | Last | First | College | Yr | H | H | W | Speed Metric | Agility Metric | Power Metric | Hands Metric |
|-----------------|-------------|--------------|----------------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|---------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| 9.260 | Johnson | David | No. Iowa | 2015 | 6 | 0.5 | 224 | 8.0 | 10.52 | 9.30 | 11.98 |
| 10.210 | Murray | Latavius | C. Florida | 2013 | 6 | 2.5 | 223 | 12.1 | 8.55 | 8.53 | 11.04 |
| 12.020 | Tomlinson | LaDainian | TCU | 2001 | 5 | 10.2 | 221 | 10.9 | 11.38 | 8.45 | 5.39 |
| 8.470 | Hardesty | Montario | Tennessee | 2010 | 5 | 11.6 | 225 | 7.4 | 9.15 | 7.98 | 8.84 |
| 10.450 | Leshoure | Mikel | Illinois | 2011 | 5 | 11.5 | 227 | 6.2 | 10.09 | 8.53 | 7.09 |
| 10.260 | Tate | Ben | Auburn | 2010 | 5 | 11 | 220 | 15.8 | 9.58 | 8.98 | 7.32 |
| 8.780 | Michael | Christine | Texas A&M | 2013 | 5 | 9.8 | 220 | 8.3 | 16.4 | 9.23 | 6.74 |
| 10.470 | Gurley | Todd | Georgia | 2014 | 6 | 0.3 | 228 | 11.1 | 14.43 | 8.05 | 10.09 |
| 7.250 | Henry | Chris | Arizona | 2007 | 5 | 11.2 | 230 | 9.2 | 5.18 | 9.51 | 8.71 |

**A score of 8.50+ is where we see a stronger correlation of RBs 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 elite NFL RB.*

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

Overall rating/score = A combination of several on-field performance measures, including refinement for strength of opponents faced, mixed with all the physical measurement metrics—then compared/rated historically within our database and formulas. More of a traditional three-down search—runner, blocker, and receiver.



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**RB-Re score = New/testing in 2016. Our new formula/rating that attempts to identify and quantify a prospect's receiving skills even deeper than in our original formulas. RB prospects can now make it/thrive in the NFL strictly based on their receiving skills—it is an individual attribute sought out for the NFL, and no longer dismissed or overlooked. Our rating combines a study of their receiving numbers in college in relation to their offense and opponents, as well as profiling size-speed-agility along with hand-size measurables, etc.*

**RB-Ru score = New/testing in 2016. Our new formula/rating that attempts to classify and quantify a RB prospect's ability strictly as a runner of the ball. Our rating combines a study of their rushing numbers in college in relation to their offense and strength of opponents, as well as profiling size-speed-agility along with various size measurables, etc.*

Raw Speed Metric = A combination of several speed and size measurements from the NFL Combine, judged along with physical size profile, and then compared/rated historically within our database and scouting formulas. This is a rating strictly for RBs of a similar/bigger size profile.

Agility Metric = A combination of several speed and agility measurements from the NFL Combine, judged along with physical size profile, and then compared/rated historically within our database and scouting formulas. This is a rating strictly for RBs of a similar/bigger size profile.

2015 NFL Draft Outlook:

David Johnson has moved to a projected 3rd-round RB with occasional late 2nd-round labels. I see him going in the 2nd-round for sure. He doesn't have the media hype to get into the 1st-round, like **Melvin Gordon**, but should have enough NFL lust to chase him into the 2nd-round...and should be taken ahead of **Jay Ajayi** on draft day.

If I were an NFL GM, this would be a tough one for me. I really like what I see from Johnson, but I'm not sure in today's NFL/RB-economics that I would use a 2nd-round pick on a RB. If my team had just that one hole, maybe. He's worthy of it, but I'm not sure I could do it—but he is worthy of it. Technically, he should be a 1st-rounder if **Melvin Gordon** is, but that's another debate...one I cannot win with the mainstream.

NFL Outlook:

I hate to keep saying, *"It depends on what team he lands on,"* but it does. **Latavius Murray** was a ghost for 1.5+ years before forced into finally getting carries. The same thing could happen with Johnson if he lands on some loony team...which means 50-50 odds at least. Whatever team he goes to—he's going to pressure the starter. He can be used on kick returns and passing downs, so he can at least get on the field...and maybe force his way into carries. I hope he is drafted as a feature back, but he probably joins an RBBC...and then, 'we'll see' if he can win the job.

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