NFL Draft 2014 Scouting Report: DT Aaron Donald, Pitt

*DL 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.

Randomly, from my memory banks on great prospects I can recall watching/having a lasting impression: **Ndamukong Suh** was pretty amazing, but also had many off-field questions. **Ryan Kalil** was an effortless blocker at USC, but I am not as much of an O-Line guru in visual scouting. I remember writing an alert to folks that **J.J. Watt** was surreal on paper, but that I was more a novice scouting defense at the time...we were still tinkering with our defensive formulas. I think **Robert Griffin III** was the most amazing QB that I had ever seen with my eyes. His foot speed and uncanny deep ball combo was astounding, but our scouting formulas dinged him a little for physical size and a sketchy Wonderlic score.

About the only prospect that I had studied fully, prior to his NFL experience, that I would have bet the farm on becoming an NFL star/HOF'er was **Luke Kuechly**. He had off-the-charts physical gifts, stupendous on-field output-- tackles, TFLs, etc., and he was pristine off the field. **Aaron Donald**, for us, is in that realm.

Let me just say what is great on Donald first, and then the very minor question mark.

First, watching him play on the field is breathtaking. You rarely/never see a DT get off the snap so quickly. He is so fast and quick that Guards and Centers cannot handle him one-on-one. You watch his game tape, and you almost always see one of three things:

(1) He blows his opposing O-Lineman backwards...partially on strength, partially on his quickness that forces the opposing O-Lineman into a backpedal to try to contain the dam-break.

(2) He slices so quickly through a narrow space between two blockers that the O-lineman have to race backwards into the pocket, the QB is disrupted by Donald plus one or two O-lineman all crashing his party.

(3) Two O-Lineman double-teaming Donald into no action for Donald...but that has massive value in its own right by tying up two blockers.

It's one thing to see his awesome tape, it's another when it translates into actual, statistical output. The only statistical output from a DT's final season which are comparable to Donald's 2013 were by **Justin Smith** in 2000, **Jonathan Babineaux** in 2004, and **Ndamukong Suh** in 2009.

Donald had 28.5 Tackles for Loss (TFL) in 2013. The best total in the NCAA in 2013...at any position. The most TFLs we've recorded in a final season of play for any DT...25 is the next closest we show. His 11.0 sacks were 10th in all the NCAA this season. It's the second season he has had with 11.0 sacks...which is

just amazing from a true DT. In 2013, Aaron Donald won every award you could possibly win for defensive lineman. He is simply awesome.

The thing about being a perfect prospect is that you have to be unblemished off the field. Donald has never had any recorded 'issues', and is always known to be smiling and gregarious on the sidelines or in the locker room. Anytime I saw him at the Senior Bowl week, he was smiling off the field. On the field, he was going 100 mph.

The one flaw...maybe. Donald is a touch small/short for an NFL DT. He is 6'0.6" and 285-pounds with average-to-short arms. He is not the perfect height-weight-wingspan combo, but that hasn't hampered him destroying college football. If he pushed up toward 290-295 pounds, he could possibly lose a tick of his speed, perhaps. He'd still be faster than 99% of DT prospects. People say he tends to be easily locked up by long-armed blockers...that also may be a myth. The only time I see Donald stymied is when a double team does a good job of walling him off. Other than that, whatever size he is, he is usually in the backfield making a tackle...so maybe smaller, shorter, speedy is the new wave of DT in the NFL?

Aaron Donald, Through the Lens of Our DT Scouting Algorithm:

We have already raved about his 2013 output, but I would just like to compare Donald's final college season to those of other elite DTs that were not Nose Tackle types of DTs. On a per game basis:

6.1 tackles, 1.46 TFLs, 0.85 sacks = **Ndamukong Suh**

7.3 tackles, 2.18 TFLs, 1.00 sacks = **Justin Smith**

4.6 tackles, 2.08 TFLS, 0.91 sacks = **Jonathan Babineaux**

4.5 tackles, 2.19 TFLS, 0.84 sacks = **Aaron Donald**

The above would be like the basis of a Mt. Rushmore for 4-3 DT performances in college (and **Justin Smith** could arguably be with the DEs) over the past decade. **Nick Fairley** and **Derek Wolfe** would be an honorable mention, but a step behind. Historically, I'm not sure anyone gets into the backfield, as a DT, like **Aaron Donald**.

Athletically, **Aaron Donald** is a freak for a 4-3 DT. The only other sub-4.7 40-time that we show at that position is **Justin Smith**...and again he could be classified as a DE. No DT in our database has the speed-agility numbers of Donald. Eagles DT **Fletcher Cox** is in range, but a big step behind. No 4-3 DT we've ever studied, not even **Ndamukong Suh**, is as athletic as **Aaron Donald**. Other DTs are a step behind in athleticism but are taller-thicker so it gives them a frame edge (like Suh). However, in athleticism, none can compare to **Aaron Donald**. People talk about "freaks" like **Jadeveon Clowney**...**Aaron Donald** is the true freak of the 2014 NFL Draft class--with the output to back it up.

The Historical DT Prospects to Whom Aaron Donald Most Compares Within Our System:

Honestly, there is no comparison. **Nick Fairley** is kinda close but is three inches taller. **Geno Atkins** comparisons are thrown around in the media, but he was nowhere near the performer that Donald was in college. Atkins at least proves a DT that size can flourish in the NFL. Donald is more one-of-a-kind because of his short stature and surreal athleticism and performance combo.

DT Grade	Last	First	Draft Yr	College	H	W	Power Strgth	Speed Agility	Pass Rusher	Tackle rating	NT Profile
13.30	Donald	Aaron	2014	Pitt	72.6	285	11.68	14.10	12.88	12.90	6.19
12.65	Fairley	Nick	2011	Auburn	75.7	291	8.49	10.71	11.41	7.77	3.26
8.21	Cox	Fletcher	2012	Miss State	75.5	298	7.76	9.11	7.86	7.17	4.11
8.01	Howard	Jaye	2012	Florida	75.0	301	7.14	8.96	7.80	8.34	3.40
6.89	Atkins	Geno	2010	Georgia	73.3	293	6.77	8.26	5.49	6.12	5.00
6.33	Austin	Marvin	2011	UNC	73.5	309	7.80	7.20	6.25	5.30	7.76

A score of 8.00+ is where we see a stronger correlation of DTs 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 DT.

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

Power-Strength Metrics = A combination of several measurements. An attempt to classify the DT prospect as more of a battle-in-the-trenches type of DT, and/or a DT prospect who has nose tackle capabilities.

Speed-Agility Metrics = A combination of several speed, agility, size measurements. A unique measuring system to look for DTs who profile for quickness, and/or a DT prospect who might have some DE capabilities.

Pass-Rusher Rating = A combination of physical measurables, and college performance, graded historically for future NFL profiling. In the simplest of terms, this is an attempt to classify whether a particular DT is likely to achieve high sack totals in the NFL. We know the 'system'/scheme the DT goes on to play in has a part in future success...but so do the player's skills and performance history.

Tackling Rating = A combination of physical measurables, and college performance, graded historically for future NFL profiling. In the simplest of terms, this is an attempt to classify the DT as one more likely to be involved in a heavy amount of tackles, tackles for a loss, and forced fumbles. Lower scoring DTs in this sub-category tend to be more pure 'pluggers', and not as active on the stat sheet. It also gives some insight of the 'toughness' of a player, if it is possible to quantify that (this is our attempt to).

NT Profile = This is an attempt to show which of these DT prospects has a profile to become a pure nose tackle/'space-eater' in the middle. It is not a 1–10 scale rating of a prospect's skill/profile, it's an attempt to point us in a direction of what this DT can be useful as (or not). Some DT prospects will grade off the charts on the NT profile, essentially a worst-case scenario of "put him in the middle and just let him be a wall." There is NFL value in that 'ability'.

2014 NFL Draft Outlook:

When I first teased **Aaron Donald** as our unnamed better than **Jadeveon Clowney** defensive prospect, he was not in any national 1st-round mock draft I looked at. He was in that #30-40 overall range for most people. Now with his excellent NFL Combine, he is going to race into the 1st-round for all, for sure. He will probably crack the #20-30 range for a bit, before he glides into a #10-20 range. He became one of the darlings of the 2014 NFL Combine, so the green light has been given to love him. He should be a top-10 pick, if not top-5, but his height is probably going to hold him back from that. The draft pundits will settle him between #15-25, but I would bet a team trades up to snag him between #10-15. I am going to bet a nickel on Donald drafted by the Minnesota Vikings or St. Louis Rams.

If I were an NFL GM, employing a 4-3 defense, I might center my draft around how best to land **Aaron Donald**. If he was a #15-25 projection. I would trade into #9-13 to take him, etc. etc. Whatever it took, if I had DT need. Donald is likely going to be one of our top-5 best rated players in this draft, and I might guess he will be our #1 overall player...in a draft that I am not totally blown away with the talent on yet, nor have we fully let the computer run all the data on all players. Based on what I know now, this is a top prospect for this draft, and instant impact starter. I am not worried about height with all the other attributes I am going to get.

NFL Outlook:

We project that Donald will have a good-great NFL career, but who knows if anyone will notice it, because general football fans rarely know 4-3 DTs in depth. Example...outside of Philadelphia, and somewhat in Philadelphia, how excited are you about **Fletcher Cox**? He was a great pick in 2012 and has

been a very nice performer…and long forgotten post-draft hysteria. That will probably be Donald's path…quietly good-great. Consider yourself lucky if your favorite team drafts this 'boring old DT'…

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