



## NFL Draft 2018 Scouting Report: RB Kalen Ballage, Arizona State

*\*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.*

**Kalen Ballage** is a 'poor man's **Saquon Barkley**', and I'll explain what I mean by that in more detail...and why I apply the label as a half compliment/half insult.

The question/debate on Ballage centers around two very diverse 'things' – everyone says, and everyone can see, that Ballage is a very talented athlete...but that brings up the question -- then why did he underperform so drastically in college that he ended up essentially losing out on touches to an RB/teammate who was an inferior athlete?

The praise for Ballage's physical tools are universal – 6'1"/228 running a 4.46 40-time and possessing a sweet 6.91 three cone time. He has 'A' grade tools. How then did he wind up with 3.0, 5.2, 4.3, and 4.3 for yards per carry in his four college seasons -- and a measly 4.4 overall ypc (which is a red flag)?

I've watched, probably, more tape of **Kalen Ballage** than any other offensive player so far in 2018...because it doesn't sit right with me either. How can a guy look so good in spots on tape, at the Senior Bowl (stole the show), be great at the Combine...and not have a great college career run? The more I watched, the more I think I've figured it out.

**Kalen Ballage** has **Christine Michael disease**. It's a disease a lot of RB prospects have had over the years. It's a difficult thing to discern...but the evidence is usually spotted with a simple formula – unreal measurables + a weak (for their abilities) college performance. The tape tends to reveal the functional problem – super-athletes who run like wild stallions straight ahead but lack the vision/ability to maneuver from trouble in traffic. In simpler terms – they get hand-offs and run straight ahead like a bullet shot out of a gun and they don't stop until they encounter a tackler. If the line is congested – they're going down for no gain. If they're given a nice hole...they blast off through it and look like the second coming.

We tend to register the awesome bursts through the hole in our minds and discount the boring 1-2 yard runs. Ballage had a lot of runs to nowhere. The **Christine Michael disease** – run fast, no vision, go hard until an obstruction stops you - has an opposite counterpart – **Jordan Howard disease**. Guys without the greatest, eyepopping measurables but who excel at reading the movement in a



congested line of scrimmage. They are patient and knowing, and adept at finding thin slices in the defensive line that you didn't think were going to be there. They're like bats flying around blind, but using advanced sonar to be meticulous movers and predators. You can't teach it. **Kareem Hunt** has this **Jordan Howard disease** as well.

But Ballage has the Michael disease. And it doesn't make him an awful NFL runner/prospect...just limited and likely disappointing. If you pair Ballage with a bad O-Line/offense, you're going to get nothing from him as a between-the-tackles runner. Put him with the Dallas Cowboys O-Line and jam him 300 carries -- he might rush for 1,200+ yards and 10+ TDs in a season and become heralded as a star. Same guy, two very different results. There's a place in the world for Ballage's size and blast-off ability. It's a dangerous weapon to have...but it's not a 15-20+ carries a game, wear down a defense type of RB projection. He's a great piece of an RBBC. However, most NFL head coaches are looking for work horses with his size and get frustrated when their off-tackle running game is stymied. Ballage is more likely to frustrate a coach using him with the wrong expectations.

Early on I compared Ballage to **Saquon Barkley**...I think Barkley has a version of this issue – this **Christine Michael disease** (now to be known as RB-CMD™). Supreme athlete, but not as supreme between the tackles...better as 'homerun hitters' than traditional grind it out, bully backs. Barkley has a lot of 'nothing' runs and then 'boom' – there's a value in that but it has to be used properly or it will never materialize. Barkley is not a great worker between the tackles...but is better than Ballage.

Where Ballage could be a true NFL star is if a team looks past his size and sees him as '**big Alvin Kamara**'. Ballage has excellent hands in the passing game – he could be an NFL WR potentially. Let Ballage take 5-10 carries looking for a homerun shot but more critically get him 5-10 targets out away from the line and let him be a horse that OLBs and DBs have a hard time corralling at 228 pounds.

Ballage has all the physical tools to be a weapon in the NFL. However, the one glitch he has (between the tackles running) is likely what NFL head coaches will see when they lay eyes on him. He looks like **Adrian Peterson** or **David Johnson** at a glance...but he's not. He's '**big Alvin Kamara**'. My confidence in the NFL recognizing this opportunity is less than 1%...but the potential for success is there with Ballage if someone does.

Ballage has all the intangibles – smart, humble, good communicator, team-first guy and a team captain. No history of injuries or trouble. There's a lot to work with here...but it has to be used in a way that enhances his gifts...or he needs to land where there are awesome blocking/holes open for him.

## Kalen Ballage, Through the Lens of Our RB Scouting Algorithm:



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In 2016, in one game, Ballage rushed for 7 TDs and caught another score...an NCAA record 8 TDs in one game against Texas Tech, as a junior. He rushed for 137 yards and tallied 185 yards from scrimmage, 207 all-purpose yards in the game. It would be 21 more games after the Texas Tech historical event before Ballage ran for 100+ yards in a game.

In 2016, in his last 4 games of the season, Ballage averaged 6.8 catches, 76.3 yards per game as a receiver out of the backfield...a four-game span with 27 catches, 305 yards receiving – but in 2017, in 13 games/the entire season, Ballage caught only 20 passes for 91 yards total. Part of Ballage's issue was that his college team went through multiple offensive coordinators, and the Sun Devils weren't a very good team...and Ballage was used incorrectly, constantly. Some of the whining over Ballage's weak college numbers, at times, can be blamed on poor coaching. Heck, in 2016, he was almost running every play as a wildcat QB...I'm not kidding. The 228-pound force...rushed for all of 2 TDs in his final 10 college games. Some of that his issue...some the coaching/usage.

Since his 137 yards rushing/8 TD event as a junior versus Texas Tech, Ballage carried the ball 270 times to finish his college career...for 3.99 yards per carry. I don't care how bad the coaching and usage is – if you're a 228-pound RB who can run a 4.46 40-time, you have to do better than 3.99 yards per carry to be taken seriously for the NFL.

The best rushing defense in the PAC-12 the past two years, by far, were the Washington Huskies. Ballage had 6 carries for 9 yards against them in 2016, 9 carries for 17 yards against them in 2017...15 carries for 26 yards rushing (1.7 ypc).

Against USC, Utah, UCLA, Oregon, Arizona, top/decent other PAC-12 teams the past two seasons – (11 games) 122 carries for 409 yards (3.35 yards per carry).

In their 2017 bowl game against loaded-with-draft-prospect-DLs/N.C. State...Ballage had 4 carries for 12 yards.

Ballage's performance issues...are an issue -- on him as well as coaching and O-Line.

*2018 NFL Combine measurables...*

6'1.4"/228 pounds, 9.5" hands, 32.75" arms

4.46 40-time, 6.91 three-cone, 4.35 shuttle

15 bench press reps, 33.5" vertical, 10'2" broad jump



The Historical RB Prospects to Whom Kalen Ballage Most Compares Within Our System:

When I saw the Mike James comp pop up, it really registered with me – a really good athlete that had sparks of NFL success running the ball but didn’t sustain as a starter/power runner...but I remember him having these great hands as a receiver, but the NFL never used him for that because it wasn’t as en vogue yet.

If Ballage is the next **Mike James**...it’s going to be a frustrating career of being overlooked or utilized in the wrong manner.

<u>RB Score</u>	<u>RB-Re</u>	<u>RB-Ru</u>	<u>Last</u>	<u>First</u>	<u>College</u>	<u>Yr</u>	<u>H</u>	<u>H</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>Speed Metric</u>	<u>Agility Metric</u>	<u>Power Metric</u>
<b>7.477</b>	9.69	6.25	Ballage	Kalen	Arizona St	2018	6	1.4	228	8.94	6.80	7.56
<b>7.250</b>	7.38	7.06	Henry	Chris	Arizona	2007	5	11.2	230	9.22	5.18	9.51
<b>7.292</b>	5.07	6.12	James	Mike	Miami, Fla	2013	5	10.4	223	4.98	3.64	9.97
<b>7.112</b>	8.28	7.24	Lattimore	Marcus	So Carolina	2013	5	11.6	221	6.51	8.05	6.72
<b>6.193</b>	2.15	5.33	McCants	Ryan	Oregon St	2012	6	1.4	234	4.15	4.85	9.89
<b>4.192</b>	7.19	3.64	Saine	Brandon	Ohio State	2011	5	11.3	220	11.40	6.40	8.29

*\*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.*

*\*RB-Re score = New/testing starting in 2015. 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 starting in 2015. 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.*

### **2018 NFL Draft Outlook:**

Ballage's draft stock is all over the place as of this writing. Some say top 50 overall, others have him as a 5th-round flyer. There's a lot of chatter about Ballage...mostly by analytics types. The NFL usually breaks opposite analytics when the production was questionable. I'll project Ballage as a 4th round gamble by some team, but a 3rd round reach wouldn't shock me.

If I were an NFL GM, I'd be intrigued by Ballage to use as my '*big Alvin Kamara*'. I see other RBs who I could mold like him as well, so I wouldn't reach for Ballage. I'd be interested if Ballage fell in the draft past 150+ overall, but I wouldn't press for him in the top 75.

### **NFL Outlook:**

Ballage has a chance to be a solid pro, maybe even a star if utilized in more of a 3rd down back type of role. The odds, though, are that he'll be asked to be **Adrian Peterson**...and fail and get a bad reputation and then kinda get forgotten, like **Mike James** did (and he had a pop early in his NFL career and looked like he might be something).

I hope for the best for Ballage...but I fear the worst.

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