

NFL Recap: A Regular Season In Review — Part One



Buckeye Sports Bulletin covered all 18 weeks of the 2021-22 NFL season. Former Ohio State players made their mark across the professional league, from Justin Fields' debut to Nick Bosa's monstrous defensive season. Below are the season stats for all the Buckeyes in the NFL:

Atlanta Falcons

CB Kendell Sheffield: 9 games; 4 tackles

After two NFL seasons, Sheffield had 93 tackles, six passes defended, one forced fumble and in 29 games, including 20 starts. This year, Sheffield only played in nine games, primarily in a special teams role with the Falcons.

Baltimore Ravens

RB J.K. Dobbins: Inactive

Dobbins had a breakout rookie season with the Ravens in 2020-21. He carried the ball 134 times for 805 yards and nine touchdowns while adding 18 catches for 120 yards receiving. Dobbins completed quarterback Lamar Jackson well in the backfield, creating a deadly rushing attack in Baltimore.

Unfortunately, his second year in the NFL ended before it started. The former Buckeye tore his ACL in a preseason game and underwent successful surgery to repair his knee. Next season, he will return as the organization's top running back and play beside Jackson again in 2022-23.

LB Malik Harrison: 14 games; 24 tackles, 1 pass deflection

Harrison contributed to the Ravens defense in spot roles this season. The second-year linebacker played in 14 of Baltimore's 17 games, making five starts. His best game of 2021-22 came against the Chargers when he finished with five tackles.

Carolina Panthers

OG Pat Elflein: 9 games

Chicago Bears

QB Justin Fields: 12 games; 159-270 (58.89 percent), 1,870 yards, 7 TDs, 10 INTs, 73.2 RTG

Fields' first year in Chicago was less than ideal. His head coach and general manager were fired on Black Monday after a lackluster season leaving the Bears 6-11 with no sense of direction.

Running back David Montgomery and wide receiver Allen Robinson hit the injured reserve during the year, leaving Fields with Darnell Mooney and many underperforming skill players. Still, Fields took the field 12 times for the Bears. He often had little time to process the defense and make comfortable throws as Chicago's offensive line ranked near the league's bottom in its efficiency and allowed Fields to hit the turf frequently.

Fields will look to bounce back in 2022-23 with a strong sophomore season — a tall task for most NFL quarterbacks. However, Fields regularly showcased his talent in Columbus, giving Bears fans hope that the former first-round selection can turn the team around next year.

Cincinnati Bengals

CB Eli Apple: 16 games; 46 tackles, 10 passes defensed, 2 INTs

After becoming a first-round draft pick to the New York Giants in 2016, Apple became an NFL journeyman. He spent two years with the Saints and one year with the Panthers before signing with the Bengals in 2021.

In his first six seasons, Apple played in 57 games (48 starts) and collected three interceptions, 22 passes defensed, three forced fumbles and five fumble recoveries. This year, he set a career-high in passes defensed and tied his career-high for interceptions with two.

S Vonn Bell: 16 games; 95 tackles, 0.5 sacks, 8 passes defensed, 1 INT

After four solid years with the Saints, Bell signed with the Bengals in 2020 and quickly became one of the best safeties in the NFL. In 16 games last season, Bell had 111 tackles and five passes defensed. In 2021-22, he set a career-high in passes defensed with eight and caught his second-career interception.

DE Sam Hubbard: 16 games; 59 tackles, 7.5 sacks, 3 passes defensed, 1 FF

Hubbard signed a four-year contract extension with the Bengals in the offseason, which keeps the Cincinnati native in the Queen City for the foreseeable future. The former Buckeye continues to blossom into one of the best defensive ends in the NFL, accumulating statistics at an exponential rate.

He was one sack shy of his career-high eight sacks in 2021-22, finishing with 7.5 this year. Hubbard tied his career-high in passes defensed with three and caused frequent disruption to the opposing team's quarterback and rushing attack.

OG Michael Jordan: 11 games

C Billy Price: 16 games

OT Isaiah Prince: 15 games

Cleveland Browns

CB Denzel Ward: 15 games; 42 tackles, 0.5 sacks, 10 passes defended, 3 INTs, 1 TD

Ward solidified himself as a top cornerback in the NFL in 2021-22. His statistics speak for themselves — the No. 4 overall pick in the 2018 draft tied his career-high in interceptions with three and returned his second interception for a touchdown. Ward's most significant question mark has always been his durability. However, he played 15 games this season, which is the most of his career.

The former Buckeye made the 2022 Pro Bowl and will likely be in contention for an All-Pro team after the season ends in February after the Super Bowl.

DT Tommy Togia: 6 games, 14 tackles, 0.5 sacks

Togia made his NFL debut in a blowout loss to the New England Patriots. He competed in five other games for the Browns, including snaps against the Raiders, Packers, Steelers and Bengals. Togia's best performance came against Green Bay on Christmas Day, when he finished with four tackles.

Dallas Cowboys

WR Noah Brown: 13 games; 16 receptions, 184 yards

Brown is buried deep in the Cowboys' wide receiver depth chart behind Amari Cooper, CeeDee Lamb, Michael Gallup, Cedrick Wilson and others. Still, the former Ohio State product makes a decent living in Dallas and remains a consistent threat for quarterback Dak Prescott.

RB Ezekiel Elliott: 17 games; 237 carries, 1,002 yards, 10 TDs; 47 receptions, 287 yards, 2 TDs

Elliott might not be the same running back that ran 85 yards through Nick Saban's defense and the heart of the south, but he had a successful 2021-22 campaign as the Cowboys' primary ball carrier. The former Buckeye regained some of his quickness that was absent in last year's underwhelming output. He also offered versatility as a receiver, catching an average of 2.76 passes per contest.

S Malik Hooker: 15 games; 42 tackles, 2 passes defended, 1 INT

Hooker revived his career with the Cowboys this season. The former first-round pick looked like a shell of himself with the Colts, who drafted him to be a cornerstone of their defensive secondary. Hooker played a career-high 15 games in 2021-22, which started on special teams before he carved a significant role at safety for defensive coordinator Dan Quinn.

Denver Broncos

LB Baron Browning: 14 games; 58 tackles, 2 passes defended

Browning made his NFL debut for the Broncos against the Steelers in Week 5, collecting only one tackle. He did not return to the field until Denver hosted the Washington Football Team in Week 8. From that point, Browning recorded 57 tackles in the next nine games.

He is a star in the making in Denver, mainly after Von Miller was traded to Los Angeles midway through the year. His athleticism and playmaking ability will be on full display in the AFC West for years to come.

DE Jonathon Cooper: 16 games; 34 tackles, 2.5 sacks

Cooper was an outside linebacker and defensive end for the Broncos this season, totaling 34 tackles and 2.5 sacks as a hybrid defensive player. The former Block "O" recipient was incredibly productive for a seventh-round pick (No. 239 overall) in the 2021 NFL Draft, and it seems Denver is pleased with its final-hour pickup.

DT Dre'Mont Jones: 16 games; 30 tackles, 5.5 sacks, 2 passes defended, 1 FF

Jones is the oldest of the Buckeye trio playing for the Broncos. He played under Urban Meyer before becoming Denver's third-round selection (No. 71 overall) in the 2019 NFL Draft. While he did not surpass his career-year from a season ago, Jones had a successful season in Denver, finishing second on the team in sacks behind Shelby Harris with 5.5.