

Malik Willis is in the conversation for #2 overall in the 2022 NFL Draft. Should Detroit take the Liberty QB?

Okay, here's another post where I think we're going to have some interesting debates. The draft is approximately a month out. The lions haven't done much with their picks as of today, so we're still locked into 2 and 32 in this class. There's a lot of potential for this particular class, but some people have already ruled the class as a bust and therefore the draft as a whiff, because the group isn't "top-heavy." I'd argue that this makes the draft even more entertaining, since this may make the draft even more unpredictable.

A name that's been circulating around as of late has been Liberty's quarterback, Malik Willis. A few months ago, mocks had him going to Detroit... at 32nd. Some had the signal-caller in the second round. Now though? You'd likely be ostracized if you made such a prediction. The Liberty product himself is a polarizing product; he appears to be the quarterback with the highest ceiling, but is considered to be extremely raw in terms of NFL readiness. There's no question about the past month for Malik; his draft stock skyrocketed. He balled out at his NFL combine, and followed it up with a spectacular pro day; one that showcased his rocket arm, improbable deep accuracy and charisma.

Now, the conversation of Malik Willis at 2nd overall has begun. From what I've seen, the fanbase is mostly split on Willis going 2nd overall. To say it's a risk selecting Willis at 2 is an understatement. This isn't some late-first or mid-round pick that has a chance to blow up spectacularly; it's the *number two pick*. This is a selection that is intended to change the path of a franchise. If the Lions miss this pick, it will have serious implications of the teams future.

There's a good amount of pro's to taking Willis at 2. There's also a fair amount of con's as well. It's time to dive in. These are three reasons why the Lions should rush the card in to take Willis at 2... and why they should steer clear of him at all costs.

Why Detroit Should Take Willis

1. His 'timeline' perfectly mirror's Detroit's quarterback situation

Willis is firmly expected to need, at minimum, one year to season and learn the playbook. The Lions cannot be expected to trade or release Goff for at least one season, as his cap hit is nothing short of an albatross. You can't expect a quarterback to play as a game manager and win championships. Yes, you can argue Goff himself did help the Rams make it to the super bowl a handful of years ago. But when it came down to the wire, he couldn't do it. Were the Rams carrying him? Likely so.

In any event, Detroit can't be expected to win a ton of games with Goff under center. If he's your long-term solution, you may as well give it up. Willis provides some seriously needed life into an otherwise lifeless position with his elite playmaking ability, mobility and superstar-caliber arm. Since Willis needs time to adapt, letting Goff play his last year out and either trading or releasing

the ex-UCal QB before the 2023 season begins is precisely the move that lines up Malik to take the reins year two.

2. If the Lions do take Willis, they have insider access.

Don't forget this little tidbit; the Lions had a long view of Willis at the Senior Bowl. Some fans don't realize the magnitude of these days. It gives a team viewpoints that camera's and film can't break down. It gives all personnel a period of time to get to know a player and get a grip on their progress. *Everyone* saw Willis at the combine and at his pro day. *Everyone* knows the ins and outs from those two events.

The Lions undoubtedly have information that every other team in the league doesn't have. If they think there's something wrong with Willis, they'll likely avoid him. If they think the hype is overblown, they'll avoid him. He fits what they need, and they should know more about Malik Willis than any other team in the league thanks to the senior bowl.

3. Willis isn't just a blue-collar, gritty QB; he's also insanely intelligent.

His skills are on display every time he steps on the field. He can run like the wind. He can sky the ball like nobody's business. He's a down to earth dude who loves the game and wants to compete. He *welcomes* the competition. He's driven to get better. A quote from Willis:

"I swear I remember every bad throw I made, like it's ingrained in my memory." (ESPN)

Quarterback's coach Kent Austin gave an empowering quote about his quarterback. "Malik's got an unbelievable work ethic. And he takes coaching. He's a guy that wants to improve. And he doesn't want to waste a day in that improvement trajectory... he comes to work every day." (ESPN)

Some may argue that this is normal for any and all football players. It goes beyond work ethic for Willis. For one, his football intelligence is something that many argue can't be taught. The average Wonderlic score for a quarterback is around 24 or 25. The scale is anywhere from 1-50. For reference on how important Wonderlic scores are, consider this statement: these are some of the notable QB's with high-Wonderlic scores in the NFL today (wonderlictestpractice):

- Matthew Stafford – 38
- Josh Allen – 37
- Aaron Rodgers – 35
- Joe Burrow – 34
- Tom Brady – 33

Yes, I'll address the elephant in the room; you don't *need* a high Wonderlic score to be elite. You can look no further to Mahomes (24), Dak Prescott (25), or Russell Wilson (28.) However, as a 24-25 is considered to be average, it's obvious enough that the biggest names of the league are

around 30. Willis landed a 32.

This should be viewed as a big plus for the Liberty man. He's got the traits. He fits the timeline. He's football savvy and welcomes competition. So what's the problem with him? Well...

Why the Lions should avoid Malik Willis at 2

1. Look at the rest of their roster

I know Campbell and Holmes have plenty of time before their contracts run out. Holmes and company nailed their first draft, landing a handful of starters such as tackle Penei Sewell, wideout Amon-Ra St. Brown and nose tackle Alim McNeill. Despite that though, there's a ton of holes to fill across this entire lineup; and, spoiler... the biggest holes are on defense. They haven't done much of anything on the defensive side on the ball in free agency, so it can only be assumed that the holes will be plugged from the draft.

What's on the wish list? A safety to pair with Tracy Walker? At minimum two linebackers to bolster what has to be the league's worst core? An edge rusher? Another corner perhaps? Another defensive tackle? This doesn't include the team's wideout needs, where another fresh face is needed to pair with the newly signed DJ Chark and young superstar St. Brown.

While Goff is expected to be gone next year, the team has plenty of capital to work with next season as well. It could be too soon to jump the gun on a quarterback that has insanely high risk attached to his resumé.

2. Drafting Willis doesn't give Detroit wins immediately

You may argue that the Lions aren't ready for a playoff run. You may argue that Detroit isn't built to compete with the big boys yet, and therefore drafting Willis is fine.

I completely agree with you. I'll even double down on that compromise by saying if the Lions select Willis, it gives us a better chance of tanking this upcoming season for a player like Will Anderson from Alabama, since Willis shouldn't be starting by any stretch of the imagination. It's a sneaky tank move that could actually *help* Detroit.

The problem? We're speaking in hypothetical situations here.

Willis may be a bust. Willis may be a superstar in the making. We don't know. We likely won't know for several years. Here's what we do know:

The second overall pick is expected to be an immediate, game-changing pick. Sure, this draft doesn't feature a Trevor Lawrence or a Myles Garrett. That's acknowledged at this point around the whole league. That being said, stars like Travon Walker or Kyle Hamilton could be slam-dunk picks here instead. These players are considered to be safe selections and provide immediate bursts of life to the squad. Willis, if he pans out, likely won't begin to show his true stuff in at minimum a year.

3. Risk/Reward Value for number two overall could spell disaster

Is any quarterback worth a pick this high? It's consensus now that, if any quarterback is, it would be Willis. The issue is, as high as his ceiling is, don't forget how low his floor is as well. This guy didn't face the highest level of competition at Liberty. His decision-making leaves a lot to be desired. Can a suitable transition from Liberty's offense to an NFL offense be made? Will his age of 23 be an issue? When will the Liberty QB first take a snap in the NFL? Will his learning curve, which is expected to be longer than any of the other quarterbacks in this year's class, take more than a year?

There's many questions that line up for Willis. In a draft that is expected to be the defining moment for the Lions quiet offseason, is Willis worth the monstrous risk of missing?

My Take:

If I'm the Lions, and nothing at the senior bowl tipped me off that Willis has 'bust' written all over him, I'm taking Willis at 2. I know how controversial this would be. I know the value may not line up, but I'm thinking for the future of the Lions organization.

In my eyes, Willis' ceiling is too good to pass up on. The situation Willis would be coming into would be perfect. Willis would develop for hopefully a year behind Goff before taking over next season. The Lions are hopefully aware they're not quite ready to compete now. With that in mind, they can use the picks they have this year to upgrade where they can. Next year, their draft pick will hopefully be a great one, and they won't have any pressure to try and trade up for a quarterback, since their future starter is already in the system.

What do you think? Willis is obviously a gamble at 2nd overall, is it one you'd take? Let me know!