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## Turner the latest young receiver to turn heads, just as Swinney predicted

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By Ian Taylor

The Journal

CLEMSON — For years, the company Pro Football Focus has been analyzing the sport of football, breaking down the numbers and plays and producing grades for players in every area imaginable at both the professional and college levels.



Clemson freshman receiver Cole Turner hauls in a catch against North Carolina in the ACC Championship Game in Charlotte, N.C., on Dec. 3, only his second college game. (Bart Boatwright | For The Journal)

By Ian Taylor

It's become a useful metric for analysts, scouts and fans to perform deep dives into how a player's season worked out and ranks players at every position. That usually comes with a 250-snap minimum, as that is considered enough playtime to show how good a player actually is.

However, ignoring that minimum offers glances at the hidden gems of college football and — in theory — gives insight into how a player has done in limited action. Without that minimum snap count being factored in, Clemson freshman wide receiver Cole Turner is the 12<sup>th</sup>-best receiver in college football and the second-best player on the No. 10 Tigers' (11-2) roster behind linebacker Jeremiah Trotter Jr.

It's imperfect, there's not really too much that can be learned about a player in just 17 snaps over the course of an entire year — one where he can still be redshirted — but what Turner has done with those limited opportunities has certainly turned heads.

His debut was a one-catch, nine-yard performance against Miami, but his second game saw the first year pull in three catches for 101 yards in the ACC Championship game against North Carolina. It was Clemson's first 100-yard receiving performance of the year, and it came not from one of the highly touted recruits head coach Dabo Swinney had pulled in recent years, but a guy who was only playing in his third year of organized football.

"He's just an athlete. He's a guy who's dependable and a guy that I can trust," Clemson quarterback Cade Klubnik, another impressive freshman, said. "I can throw it out there and he's going to go get it or jump up and get it. To have a guy out there like him is so good."

Most of Turner's yards in the championship game came on a deep pass down the left side from Klubnik, who said that he knew Turner was getting the ball when he saw man coverage.

"Cole can outrun anybody, just kind of trusted him with that and let it fly," Klubnik said. "He went and got it. It was a great route."

Turner joined the Tigers alongside Adam Randall, one of the gems of the recruiting class, and Antonio Williams, another guy who started the year in the shadow of Randall's buzz. However, Randall tore his ACL in the spring and admitted that even in December he still is working to get back to what he used to be, while Williams ended up being the team's leading receiver and go-to target for former starting quarterback D.J. Uiagalelei.

While the outside expectations of the freshman receiving class and how they would be viewed as the Tigers prepare for the Orange Bowl on Dec. 30 may have been turned around, Swinney was high on all of them back in August.

“I love our group. This is a fun group,” Swinney said. “Cole, he might be a top-three fastest kid on this team. He can fly and he’s got a high skill set.”

It made sense Swinney would think highly of Turner, he’s known the receiver for years. Swinney and Turner’s father, Kevin, were teammates at Alabama and worked together selling commercial real estate after Kevin Turner retired from football and Swinney was in between coaching at Alabama and Clemson in the early 2000s.

Swinney would begin coaching Nolan Turner, Cole’s older brother and a former Clemson safety, in 2016, just a few months after Kevin Turner died after a long battle with ALS.

When Cole Turner arrived at Clemson, it didn’t take long for Swinney to start raving about him.

“This kid has unbelievable long-term potential,” Swinney said after a scrimmage in fall camp. “He could help us this year. I’m hoping we don’t have to have him but he’s making it hard on us. He makes plays every day.”

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