

https://upstatetoday.com/sports/college/falcons-trade-up-for-clemson-s-orhorhoro/article_7a15467e-044d-11ef-9882-477afae931ff.html

EDITOR'S PICK

Falcons trade up for Clemson's Orhorhoro

By Ian Taylor

Apr 27, 2024



Then-Clemson defensive tackle Ruke Orhorhoro, left, pressures North Carolina quarterback Drake Maye during the teams' game last season at Memorial Stadium in Clemson.

Photo by Caleb Gilbert

Another former Clemson football player is getting his chance at the next level, as defensive tackle Ruke Orhorhoro was drafted in the second round of the NFL draft on Friday night by the Atlanta Falcons.

Clemson had already seen one Tiger get selected the night before, when cornerback Nate Wiggins was chosen 30th by the Baltimore Ravens. Of the 68 picks made across the second and third rounds, Orhorhoro ended up being the only Tiger taken on day two.

Orhorhoro was picked 35th overall as the third selection in the second round. The Falcons traded up from 43rd to get him, giving up that selection and their third-rounder in a deal with the Arizona Cardinals.

"This is going to be fun," Clemson head coach Dabo Swinney said in a news release. "Ruke is a guy that I think everybody is in love with his measurables — he's big, he's athletic, he's got great length, he can really run. He's got position diversity and can play multiple spots on the defensive line. He's a high-character guy. He's a graduate."

While Orhorhoro was not ranked by most outlets as one of the top two defensive tackles in the draft, he ended up being the second player at the position to be picked after the Seattle Seahawks took Texas lineman Byron Murphy II with the 16th overall selection.

The Falcons have experience with former Clemson defensive linemen, as they have former All-Pro and Pro Bowler Grady Jarrett on the roster and drafting Vic Beasley in the first round in 2015. They also selected Malliciah Goodman in the 2013 draft. Atlanta has a habit of dipping into the talent well only a couple hours away, having now drafted nine different Tigers since 1966.

While Jarrett is coming off a torn ACL, there is a chance he and Orhorhoro could line up alongside each other thanks to the Falcons' three-man front. Meanwhile, the Falcons also feature another former Tiger in former first-round pick A.J. Terrell at cornerback.

In an interview with the Falcons' website after getting drafted, Orhorhoro said he was looking forward to teaming up with Jarrett in Atlanta's defensive front.

"Just the way they run their defense, I like the mentality," he said. "That's a place that's got guys I can learn from. Grady Jarrett, one of the Clemson all-time greats, it's just an honor to learn from a guy that's been in the league for that long. I can't wait. If I could do it today, I would do it right now."

A five-year player at Clemson who didn't break into the starting lineup until his junior year — and didn't even start playing football until his junior year of high school — Orhorhoro started 30 of the 53 games he played for the Tigers.

“Watching him develop at Clemson every single year, to me, Ruke is a great example to a lot of kids in today's world that if you'll just stay and put the work in, if you've got the talent then you will develop,” Swinney said. “He's a guy that redshirted, didn't play much as a redshirt freshman, was a rotational guy as a sophomore, and then his redshirt junior and senior years, he became a starter and now he's a high draft pick. He's just kept his head down, stayed the course, continued to work, and he has really, really developed into a great football player.

“The thing that everybody likes about Ruke is that he's not quite a blank canvas but he still very much has his best football in front of him.”

Along the way, he totaled 88 tackles, 25.5 tackles for loss and 12 sacks. Last season, he started and played in 12 games and had a career-high five sacks and tied his career-high with eight tackles for loss en route to a third-team All-ACC honors.

“Ruke's competitive nature is contagious,” Clemson defensive tackles coach Nick Eason said. “He will elevate any team and have everyone rowing in the same direction. He can dominate any industry, any market, against any competition, at any time. He is a true warrior.”

Orhorhoro was the only Tiger to be taken on the second day of the draft, but he wasn't the only one waiting to hear his name get called. Linebacker Jeremiah Trotter Jr., running back Will Shipley and Orhorhoro's longtime pass-rush partner, defensive tackle Tyler Davis, are among those still on the board.

Rounds four through seven of the draft will begin today at noon.

Ian Taylor