

## Chargers' First Round Draft Error: Passing on a Star Wide Receiver for Joe Alt

In the high-stakes world of NFL drafts, every pick carries immense weight. It's a chance for teams to bolster up weaknesses, capitalize on talent, and set the stage for future success. However, sometimes even the most seasoned teams can fumble the opportunity, as evidenced by the Los Angeles Chargers' questionable decision in the 2024 NFL Draft.

With the first pick in round one, the Chargers made some of their fans happy and analysts alike by selecting Joe Alt, an offensive tackle out of college.

Chargers General Manager Joe Hortiz in a press conference on Thursday following the draft defended the decision, citing Alt's impressive physicality and football IQ as the driving factors behind the selection. "Joe brings a level of tenacity and leadership to our offensive line that we believe will elevate our entire offense," said Horitz.

"Offensive linemen we look at as weapons," Coach Jim Harbaugh said. "That group when we talk about attacking, when we talk about attacking on offense, offensive line is the tip of the spear."

While Alt undoubtedly boasts an impressive collegiate resume at Notre Dame, it's hard to ignore the misstep in the Chargers' strategy.

The Chargers' urgent need for a top-tier wide receiver is apparent; in the 2023 season, they lost 12 out of 17 games. The Chargers traded wide receiver Keenan Allen to the Chicago Bears for a fourth round draft pick in this year's draft. Wide receiver Mike Williams, after seven years with the team was released with one year left on his contract. Williams missed 18 games over the past two seasons and played only three games in 2023 before he tore his ACL. His release saved the Chargers \$20 million toward the cap.

The team found themselves without any standout options in the receiving corps. WR Joshua Palmer and the Chargers 2023 first-round pick Quentin Johnston have both suffered from injuries last season and underperformed when they were on the field. Instead of focusing on the priority of a sturdy WR and addressing this issue head-on in the draft, the Chargers chose Alt to fill their other need of a top OT.

Alt expressed his gratitude that the team is focused on the offensive line in a press conference on Thursday night: "Being wanted is one of the best feelings in the world. Being at a position that the coaches and people feel matters makes you want to do it that much more and makes you want to do it for them because they care so much about it."

The Chargers' urgency to secure Alt came at the expense of a potential game changing talent at WR. They had WR options Malik Nabers out of LSU who went to the New York Giants with the sixth pick, or Rome Odunze out of the University of Washington who eventually went to the Chicago Bears with the ninth pick. They are both exciting prospects who remained on the board. Their college track records speak for themselves. Nabers is a well-rounded player and has high potential to do well as a pro. He is flexible, with ability to contortion for in-air adjustments on

jump balls. Nabers has quick reaction, and great post-up talent. Odunze is a playmaker, has good separation talent, highly skilled for defenders, great body control and an overall reliable player.

Investing first in a top-tier WR should have been a no-brainer for the Chargers.

Imagine in the first round, the Chargers were beat out in getting Alt by another team in need of an OT. At this point, the Chargers could have picked OT Tyler Guyton early in the second round at pick two; most likely Alt would have been picked by another team such as the Cowboys and therefore would push the rest of the OT picks down one spot. Guyton proves to be just as capable as Alt; his profile and combine results are comparable with very slight differences. Guyton stands at 6'8" and 322 lbs and completed the 40 yard dash at 5.19 seconds. His vertical jump was 34.5" and his broad jump resulted at 8'11". Guyton's build is similar to Alt at 6'9" and 321 lbs. Alt closely followed Guyton's results and completed the 40 yard dash at 5.05 seconds; his vertical jump was 28" and his broad jump at 9'4".

The Chargers totally missed the opportunity to address their obvious need of a top WR first. Their decision to pass on Malik Nabers or Rome Odunze to draft Joe Alt is their first mistake of the 2024 season— but time will tell if their strategy of prioritizing Alt in the first round will help or hurt them.