

### **Cooper Kupp, Eastern Washington (6-2, 204)**

I think the online draft community has written off Kupp as an outside receiver because he ran a 4.62-second 40-yard dash. Not that long ago, there was a sure-handed receiver in the ACC who was listed at 6'1", 208-pounds.

This player earned early buzz for his hands and consistent play-making ability. He didn't look that fast, especially compared to his teammate whose deep speed, skill in the return game, and talent in the open field was beginning to over shadow the sure-handed prospect at the center of this little story.

When it was time to work out for scouts, this sure-handed player ran a disappointing 4.63-second, 40-yard dash at the Combine. Although he ran a 4.51 at his Pro Day, this receiver was never really a burner.

That sure-handed receiver who had moments of dominance as a starter in the NFL prior to an accumulation of injuries that robbed him of his athletic ability was Hakeem Nicks. The faster teammate was Brandon Tate, a third-round pick of the New England Patriots that never panned out.

Another sure-handed receiver with similar height-weight dimensions to Kupp who ran a slow 40-time after an excellent SEC career was Michael Clayton. Although he washed out of the NFL because he admitted to spending more time partying than working at his craft, Clayton's 4.67-second 40 didn't keep him from an 80-catch, 1193-yard, 7-score rookie year.

Kupp has better acceleration and quickness than Nicks and Clayton. He's better in the open field and has arguably has better hands. Kupp is earning comparisons to slot receivers and he might begin his career inside, but I expect him to finish it after a lengthy career as a productive perimeter player.

Kupp's hands and quickness are often associated with his pass catching and ball carrying, but where he's most gifted is the line of scrimmage. I don't remember a receiver at any Senior Bowl since 2009 who dominated one-on-one press drills with cornerbacks the way Kupp did. Not only did he rarely lose a matchup, but he rarely beat a defender the same way twice.

He has an excellent variety of one-, two-, three-, and four-step patterns the include stutters, jabs, and fluid movements coupled with chops, shakes, rips, and arm-overs. Kupp keeps his pads low and maintains an intense pace. Because he's so quick and fluid with a variety of moves, he gets the jump on defenders early and often stacks them early in a route.

Although Kupp's intensity wanes on some shallow routes and he'll tip off defenders, it's an easily corrected issue. He knows how to set up defenders with small fakes during his stem to imply a different route break than the one he'll actually make.

Capable of dropping his hips and executing hard breaks, Kupp needs to do it more often. The same applies to the length of his stems. Kupp can run routes with strong depth, but he has to be more conscientious about doing so. His stops and turns on shallow routes are sudden, and he works to the open area in zone coverage.

Kupp has excellent hand-eye coordination and concentration. He catches the ball against tight coverage on timing routes, makes plays in stride, and adjusts well to errant throws. Kupp is equally adept at winning high and low targets.

He wins back-shoulder targets and often catches throws that require awkward adjustments. Kupp has a tendency to leap unnecessarily for passes that he could catch with his feet on the ground or in stride. Kupp often makes the first defender miss once he transitions from receiver to runner. He's strong enough to run through wraps to his feet and lower legs. He also has the pad level to bounce off contact and spin away from defensive backs and some linebackers.

"Hands and feet" should be the operative phrase for describing Kupp's game. He controls his step rate as well as a runner as he does off the line or into his routes, and helps him avoid pursuit angles.

Once he defeats pursuit angles with his feet, Kupp cleans up with his aggressive stiff-arm. He can push a defender down field and drive behind it, pull a defender across his frame and deposit him to the side, or drop a diving opponent as he turns the corner.

Kupp's skill with defeating angles also has to do with his burst. He can earn separation early on and hold off safeties for long gains. If he beats his one-on-one match up on a short route with a safety on the far side of the field, expect Kupp to gain 30-50 yards before he brought to the ground.

A willing blocker, Kupp attacks with intensity in the open field. He must improve his punch and movement to stay with a defender, but he can set up good position and shield a man to a side. Kupp will deliver a shoulder and hit a man, but this isn't a block with control. When he uses his hands, he leans into contact with his pads and helmet rather than throwing a punch.

I think many people regard Kupp as a good technician and not much of an athlete when he's actually a good athlete with good, but not great technique. I believe Kupp becomes a great technician, but it will be his athletic ability that will surprise many if he has a productive career. I think he will.

**Pre-NFL Draft Fantasy Advice:** Kupp's polarizing value likely translates to value between the second and fourth rounds in April Drafts. I'd bet it's on the lower side of the range, but there will be some true believers who take him earlier. I think he's a third-round bargain in this draft if you can get him there.