THE ARGUMENT TO SEND SKYLER BELL DOWN THE ROAD TO FOXBOROUGH

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For what seems like the tenth year straight, the New England Patriots are once again expected to spend a pick on a wide receiver in the upcoming NFL Draft, which begins this Thursday.

The team's positional group has seen improvement compared to some very dreadful past years (and may continue to with the likely addition of a certain Eagles receiver). Even so, consensus around the league and the media remains that the organization will likely look to acquire another young pass catcher for their league-leading offense. The only question is who.

As a fan of both UConn's team and the Patriots, it's difficult for me not to think about standout receiver Skyler Bell getting picked up by New England during the Draft. Admittedly, I initially wanted this to happen for purely selfish reasons. Most would agree it's undoubtedly exciting to see a player you watched in college play for the professional team you also support.

Yet, after spending time analyzing mock drafts these past few days instead of studying for finals, I've realized that New England drafting Skyler Bell isn't just fanfiction. There is actually a logical basis for this move to occur at the end of this week.

Bell produced a fantastic 2025 season, accumulating 1,278 yards and 13 touchdowns on 101 receptions, enough to earn him AP All-American first team and a Biletnikoff Award nomination. Though all of these stats and accolades place him as one of the best wide receivers in college football, the general opinion among the league's scouts is that Bell just barely falls within the top ten receivers available.

This notion primarily arises from the fact that UConn played Group of Five and Atlantic Coast Conference teams, which don't exactly comprise programs deemed the pinnacles of college football. His numbers were essentially generated against weaker opponents compared to other prospects graded ahead of him.

Because of all of this, Bell is expected to go somewhere on Day Two in round two at the earliest and on Day Three in round four at the latest. Though this isn't stellar for the value of Bell's future rookie contract, it's perfect for a team such as the New England Patriots.

Since the team's wide receiver corps isn't too bad in its current iteration, a wide receiver in the first or second round simply does not make sense. A receiver in the late third or early fourth does, however. Coincidentally, the team does have a late third-rounder, and it's conceivable they could get an early fourth with a trade. Therefore, Bell provides tremendous positional value for the Patriots if they do decide to pick up a receiver. Unlike previous early picks spent on receivers such as Tyquan Thornton (2022) or N'Keal Harry (2019), Bell in these rounds would not be a reach—it's exactly where he's "meant" to be.

Additionally, Bell won't just be the "best player available" in certain rounds this week; he also has the potential to be a good scheme fit for the team in general. If they do draft him, there are a couple of ways that he can contribute meaningful production for one of the league's best offensive units, outside of just being a good athlete.

There are many basic things that Bell excels at that may be useful to the Patriots' longtime offensive coordinator, Josh McDaniels, and ascending quarterback Drake Maye. For instance, McDaniels has implemented bootlegs as a staple of the Patriots' offense, allowing Maye to scramble out of the pocket to make dynamic throws down the sideline. According to the NFL's draftee profile page, Bell excels at contested sideline catches, which would allow him to shine in this aspect of the Patriots' system.

Another aspect of Bell's play that works well for the Patriots is his ability to attract attention in the short, middle and deep passing game. Maye is one of the most versatile passers in the league, being able to dish the ball consistently at all depths. Even if Bell doesn't always get targets on routes, what he can do is clear space for other players in the receiving corps by drawing defensive players towards him. This could work well for offensive strategies surrounding levels concepts, another component of a McDaniels offense.

Lastly, it would be difficult to talk about the Patriots' offensive scheme without addressing the elephant in the room: the Erhardt-Perkins offensive system run by the Patriots for decades. It's particularly difficult for wide receivers since they are often asked to learn concepts—a set of optional routes—rather than a specific route for each play. They then must determine what route to run based on the defensive coverage shown. It's been cited as a contributor to why previous receivers drafted by New England bust within a few years.

In my opinion, Bell would be a good candidate to try to learn such a system. This is less about him specifically, but more about the fact that he's a mid-round receiver.

It takes a certain amount of humility to learn such a complex system, something which is rare for wide receivers who've been told their entire life they're the best at what they do. Guys who go earlier often don't have this character trait. However, the guys who go later often do because they recognize the uphill battle ahead of them. There's a chance that Bell has the same mindset, and can get help from fellow late-round positional teammates Kayshon Boutte and DeMario Douglas if needed.

Ultimately, it would be cool to see Skyler Bell wear the jersey of my favorite team, not just because of the Connecticut connection, but because with the right mindset he can provide genuine value to a team primed for his offensive potential.

Skyler Bell is a wide receiver for UConn Huskies and is a possible contender to be drafted by the Patriots. Bell previously played for the Wisconsin Badgers and transferred to UConn in 2024. PHOTO COURTESY OF @JU1CEBELL ON INSTAGRAM

New England Patriots logo. The Patriots are projected to pick a wide receiver for the NFL draft on Thursday. PHOTO COURTESY OF @PATRIOTS ON INSTAGRAM

