

Texans take South Carolina standout Clowney 1st overall

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NEW YORK — For nearly three years, Jadeveon Clowney couldn't wait to get to the NFL, and the league was just as eager to add the player some called the best defensive prospect in a decade.



No surprise: Clowney is the Texans' man.

But Thursday's first pick of the 2014 NFL draft didn't come without some intrigue about how it would all turn out. There had been criticism of Clowney's work ethic last season and questions about whether the Texans would hold or trade the No. 1 slot.

Frank Franklin II/AP

No. 1 overall draft pick Jadeveon Clowney holds up the jersey for the Houston Texans with NFL commissioner Roger Goodell on Thursday night in New York.

"I just been proving a lot of people wrong throughout my life," Clowney said. "Growing up, I grew up hard. I always said I'm going to do something great. Hopefully, I'm going to be a Hall of Famer one day."

Houston will take that.

Rarely does a team not reveal the top overall choice until it is announced, and there was wide speculation the Texans had soured on the defensive end, whose junior season at South Carolina was accompanied by criticism he played it safe to stay healthy for the pros.

After Commissioner Roger Goodell announced the pick, fans filling Radio City Music Hall to capacity applauded Clowney as he held up his index finger, his eyes moist, a relieved look on his face. Just like the 30 prospects on hand, the fans were extra eager to see who would wind up where after the draft was pushed back from late April because the theater was unavailable.

"It's been a long time. It just kicked in at the end there, man, I've been drafted," he said.

Clowney, 21, brings size, speed and power to a lineup that already has 2012 NFL Defensive Player of the Year J.J. Watt. His diligence had been questioned after he slipped from 13 sacks to just three in 2013. Critics said he was protecting himself from injury in his junior year before declaring early for the draft.

He is the first defensive player taken first overall since Houston selected another end, Mario Williams, in 2006. Williams now is with Buffalo. Houston also made the top pick in its first season, 2002, taking quarterback David Carr. He never lived up to that billing; the Texans hope Clowney has more of an impact.

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