



WIDE RECEIVER

THE YEAR WE FIGHT BACK

1. Antonio Brown, PIT

Age: 30 | 5'10" | 181 lbs. | Injury: 2

2018 Stats: 101 Rec • 1,533 Rec YD • 9 Rec TD • 10.5 AY@C • 38 Routes/Game • 13% Slot • 11 Targets/Game
14 Games • Top 12 Finishes: 9 (STD) / 9 (PPR) • Top 24 Finishes: 10 (STD) / 10 (PPR)

Film Grades: Speed: B+ • Elusiveness: A+ • End Zone: A- • Hands: A • Situation: A+ • Sensitivity: ✓

'17 Preseason Rank: 1 • '17 Final Rank: 2 • '18 Ranks Range: 1-3

Pod Nickname: The Phylum

There are two types of people in the world, and one of them laughs out loud at Geico commercials. For the sake of brevity, we will call them: “slack-jawed nitwits.” In fantasy football, these are the people who wildly change their minds about overall strategy every year. Don't. Don't do that.

Nobody argues that Antonio Brown isn't fantasy's WR1. He still is. Give him good health and he's getting you 1,500 yards and double-digit TDs. His combination of quickness and smarts makes him the game's best route-runner, a wee uncoverable sprite who almost never *doesn't* see some form of safety help or amorphous coverage cheating his way, but who's always open. There'll come a point in a future season when some of that quickness goes away and we'll learn a hard lesson about failing to see the downfall before it arrives, but I simply don't believe '18 is that season. In fact, last year Brown made *more* big plays.

So instead, let's once again use Brown's profile as an opportunity to reflect on how we devise one of our most important overall fantasy approaches: positional strategy. The market is dumb—some might say Geico dumb—in the way it overreacts to prior seasons. If we get a year like '15, in which many of the high-profile RBs flop, the market will tell us: Zero-RB! Draft Brown or Julio or Beckham first overall! If we get a year like '17, in which several of the high-profile WRs flop, it'll be just the opposite. The “right” answer, of course, is that there is no right answer: each NFL season is a discrete data point only vaguely related to its forbears, and deciding that coins are inherently biased toward “tails” because of the last time you flipped is dopey. If you're at all familiar with my work, you know my primary drafting objective is to manage scarcity, and it still seems clear to me that the best RBs are scarcer than any other position, so that's where I'm going early in first rounds. But it's also clear to me that Antonio Brown is absolutely a first-round pick—and even defensible as the #1 pick in some formats—because what he lacks in positional scarcity, he makes up for with security. The larger point is: read the league, find the scarcity, draft into it...but within reason. Don't be taking Jordan Howard over Antonio Brown, right?

That would be dumber than Dave Coulier being discovered under a couch cushion.

2. Julio Jones, ATL

Age: 29 | 6'3" | 220 lbs. | Injury: 2

2017 Stats: 88 Rec • 1,444 Rec YD • 3 Rec TD • 10.7 AY@C • 29 Routes/Game • 23% Slot • 9 Targets/Game
16 Games • Top 12 Finishes: 3 (STD) / 3 (PPR) • Top 24 Finishes: 6 (STD) / 6 (PPR)

Film Grades: Speed: A- • Elusiveness: B+ • End Zone: A- • Hands: B+ • Situation: A • Situation: ✓

'17 Preseason Rank: 2 • '17 Final Rank: 6 • '18 Ranks Range: 1-5

I think Julio represents a buying opportunity in '18. Heck, when it looked like he might hold out because of contract dissatisfaction, I *really* thought he might be cheap. Alas, that hullabaloo ended before

training camp began, as the Falcons agreed to pay him more. But still, if there's value in the market perception of Jones, it's probably his touchdowns, or lack thereof.

Why doesn't Julio Jones score more TDs? It's weird! A pure stat-hugger looks at the back of his football card and proclaims, "I don't care why! It's obvious there's something about Julio's game that caps his fantasy upside! I'm not drafting him!" But I don't buy it. I watch every dang snap, and there isn't some fatal flaw here. Yes, I gave him a slight downgrade in his "end zone" ranking, but that's me copping out. I don't have a good explanation. Last season, Jones had a healthy 16 targets thrown into the end zone, tied with Antonio Brown for seventh in the NFL. I just re-watched them all. He caught one (Week 7 at New England). He dropped one (Week 9 at Carolina, an unforgivable fourth-down bomb drop). One was intercepted (Week 14 vs. New Orleans, a terrible QB decision late in the play). These are deep passes and red-zone passes, crosses and fades and jump balls, and trust me when I tell you: there's nothing inherently wrong with Julio Jones in the end zone. This was a Matt Ryan problem. Most of these balls were uncatchable, thrown late, thrown poorly, thrown into coverage. As I said in Ryan's profile, he had a bumpy '17 ride. But he's not *bad*. For as long as Jones is getting that kind of love, dude, the TDs are gonna go up.

And TDs are all that's been missing. Julio is an annual candidate for 100 grabs and 1,500 yards, and that's all you can ask from an elite receiver. The case against Jones is far too "past-stats-indicate-what-he-really-is" for me. He's huge, fast, jumps great and whenever Ryan sees him singled-up, he's at least thinking about taking a shot. Last year notwithstanding, Julio feels relatively safe *plus* still gives you the shot for 1,800 yards and double-digit TDs.



HARRIS'S RESEARCH PROJECT

How historically unlikely was it for a wideout with Julio Jones's yardage to only catch three TDs in 2017?

It was, to coin a phrase: "Damn unlikely." Here's a post-merger list of the wideouts who had at least 1,400 yards receiving, sorted by fewest TDs:

Player	Season	Yards	TDs	Following Season TDs
Julio Jones	2017	1,444	3	??
Andre Johnson	2012	1,598	4	5
Tim Brown	1997	1,408	5	9
Calvin Johnson	2012	1,964	5	12
Andre Johnson	2013	1,407	5	3

Let's acknowledge a couple things. First off, I won't be disingenuous: Julio himself has two other seasons where he almost made this list. In both '14 and '16, he eclipsed 1,400 yards and scored six TDs. So I can't just broadly proclaim that anyone worrying about Julio Jones TDs is foolish. Also, it's not like everyone on the list instantly became a huge TD maker the following season. *Et tu*, Andre Johnson? But! If you even grant Julio three more TDs to crank his total to six, he'd have finished last season as the WR3. Even if we grant that Jones has some end-zone-adverse aura that won't let him score a bunch (and remember, he did have 10 TDs in '12), just a slight improvement that takes him out of world-historic-unlucky territory would add a strong element of safety to his draft stock.

3. Odell Beckham, NYG

Age: 26 | 5'11" | 198 lbs. | Injury: 12

2017 Stats: 25 Rec • 302 Rec YD • 3 Rec TD • 9.7 AY@C • 36 Routes/Game • 12% Slot • 10 Targets/Game
4 Games • Top 12 Finishes: 2 (STD) / 2 (PPR) • Top 24 Finishes: 2 (STD) / 3 (PPR)

Film Grades: Speed: A- • Elusiveness: A+ • End Zone: B+ • Hands: A+ • Situation: A- • Sensitivity: ✓

'17 Preseason Rank: 3 • '17 Final Rank: N/A • '18 Ranks Range: 1-5

Pod Nickname: ODB

It's another Odell Beckham summer of thinkpieces and thinly veiled references about "how committed" he is, what "kind of teammate" he'll be, and whether he's "distracted by outside influences." I can already hear journalist monocles popping!

Plus Beckham's looking for a new contract! What joy we'll have not clicking on *those* articles! Listen, as is always my point: it's not that these NFL players aren't human beings—and often extremely immature human beings—but rather it's that anyone writing columns as though they *understand* them as human beings, and can *predict* how what's going on in their lives will affect their play is full of poo. Some guys probably do get distracted or emotional and let it change them on the field. Some guys absolutely don't. Pretending you're the Sigmund Freud of the NFL is merely a way to get clicks from dopes, and you're no dope. You bought this Almanac! Ahem!

Obviously, ODB's '17 was disappointing. He hurt an ankle in the preseason, missed Week 1, started slowly after that, then broke the same ankle in Week 5 and went on IR. No boxing matches with Josh Norman. No boxing matches with Alec Ogletree (who's Beckham's new teammate). No boxing matches with locker room walls. No boxing matches with kicking nets. That's a lot of missed boxing matches!

So is Beckham the most stable dude? You know he's not. But he's as unguardable as Antonio Brown and comes in a slightly bigger package. People on other shows will lecture you about how Saquon Barkley changes things in New York, there's only one ball to go around, ODB's production will necessarily suffer. I dunno. It's possible. But insofar as I'm aware, every NFL team is fueled on at least 60 offensive snaps per game (and steroids...lots of steroids). Okay, maybe in a worst case Barkley siphons off more touchdowns than you're comfortable with, but it's difficult for me to imagine Beckham can't get a minimum of five or six for himself. I think in the cases of players like ODB and Julio Jones—dudes we *know* have extraordinary talent—we use the prior disappointing season as a way to find value. Let other folks whinge about tattoos and hairdos and mouthiness and contracts. Draft the best players, and more often than not, you win.

4. DeAndre Hopkins, HOU

Age: 26 | 6'1" | 215 lbs. | Injury: 1

2017 Stats: 96 Rec • 1,378 Rec YD • 13 Rec TD • 11.3 AY@C • 38 Routes/Game • 16% Slot • 11 Targets/Game
15 Games • Top 12 Finishes: 10 (STD) / 8 (PPR) • Top 24 Finishes: 11 (STD) / 13 (PPR)

Film Grades: Speed: B • Elusiveness: B- • End Zone: A- • Hands: A- • Situation: A- • Sensitivity: ✓✓✓

'17 Preseason Rank: 15 • '17 Final Rank: 1 • '18 Ranks Range: 1-12

Are you ready to ride the seesaw with Nuk? In two of the past three NFL seasons, perhaps no receiver has