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Is Jets' DJ Reed actually better than Sauce Gardner?

A recent PFF grade suggests that DJ Reed actually may be a better cornerback than Sauce Gardner for the Jets

By Jim Cerny Nov 8, 2023 at 9:28 AM PST 2 min read



In NFL circles, it's generally agreed upon that the [New York Jets](#) have the best cornerback tandem in the League. Not surprisingly, Pro Football Focus' grades back that take.

But football experts and fans might be a bit surprised that PFF grades D.J. Reed higher than

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[Sauce Gardner](#). And in fact, PFF has Reed graded as the [top corner in the NFL](#) this season.

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In their latest weekly position rankings, Reed has the highest overall grade (86.9) for any NFL cornerback. The 26-year-old is slightly ahead of Chicago Bears corner Jaylon Johnson (86.3) and Paulson Adebo of the New Orleans Saints (86.2).

Gardner is ranked seventh with an overall grade of 81.7. He and Reed are the only teammates ranked in the top-10 at the cornerback position.

The new ranking raises an interesting debate.

Both D.J. Reed and Sauce Gardner are stars for Jets

Gardner took the NFL by storm as a rookie last season. He led the League with 20 defended passes, was selected to the Pro Bowl, earned All-Pro honors and was voted NFL Defensive Rookie of the Year. His overall grade of 87.9 was tops among 118 corners in the NFL, per PFF.

This season, Gardner has been very good, just not quite as elite as last season. The 23-year-old has broken up five passes, [including two last week](#) against the Los Angeles Chargers, and allowed only 171 yards and one touchdown on 21 receptions against them.

The rub with Sauce is that his overall grade takes a hit because of tackling issues and how he's graded against the run. He has a missed-tackle rate of 19.4 percent and PFF grades him 53.2 in the running game, 74th out of 99 corners.

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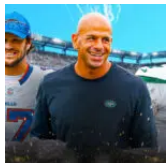
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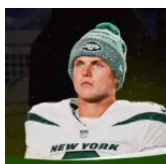
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Reed is viewed as the more complete player because he's solid both against the run (82.5; 9th) and in pass coverage (85.5; 5th), where he's yet to allow a TD this season. Reed was ranked 23rd overall by PFF last season with a 72.5 grade.

Interestingly, neither Reed nor Gardner is a ball hawk. Reed has not picked off a pass in two seasons with the Jets; Gardner had two interceptions in 2022 and has none this season.

But make no mistake, each is a shutdown corner. It says here, Reed is elite but Gardner is a generational talent.

Fortunately for the Jets, they have [Reed and Gardner](#) in the same secondary.



About the Author

Jim Cerny is in his third decade as a sports media professional, with...

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