



What I Learned Watching Rodney Rice

Taking a look at what the highly sought after 2022 Guard brings to the court.

Whenever I evaluate a player, I try to watch them play as many times as possible before heading back to the lab to cook up some “marvelous [stuff] to get your mouth watering,” as [Raekwon](#) would say. So, it was unfortunate when Rodney Rice went down with a shoulder injury during the first half of this past season. Fortunately, I was able to catch a couple of games before the injury. This is what I learned.

As one of the most coveted prospects in the DMV’s 2022 class, Rice is a gifted scorer who plays with intelligence, skill, and a bag deep enough to dive into. While showing that he is capable of playing the point, he remains more of a combo-guard for now; but refining his lead guard skillset from here on out should prove beneficial as he moves to the backcourt of a high major program, if he so chooses.

At 6’3” and increasing in strength, Rice should have no issues adjusting to the physicality of the college game, especially with another two years to develop. Importantly, he understands how to utilize his strength in various ways, such as protecting the ball with his body, creating space, or getting better angles with his shoulders and hips on his way to the basket. He moves with a mixture of purpose and smoothness, and has a deliberative quality that gives off a humble air of confidence.

Offensively, I saw a versatile scorer with a real feel for the basket. I particularly *loved* his ability to shoot off of effective dribble moves that created space for his grooved jumpshot. Rice seldom seemed hurried with the ball in his hands. He uses a deceptive change of pace with good ball control to move into an assortment of in-and-outs, crossovers, and double moves with defender-moving wiggle. I watched him consistently put good defenders on their heels, and even had some of them try on new skates.



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A common tendency I see among high school players is a preference to pull up for jumpers going to their off hand, while driving all the way to the rim with their strong hand.

Among other abilities, 2022 G Rodney Rice is able to shoot it going both ways. Kid is a tough guard.

10:34 PM · Jan 10, 2020 · [Twitter Web App](#)



One of those “other abilities” I mention in the tweet above is how he mixes his attack between levels. His game is one where he can get the rack and finish with a variety of shots, push hard off the dribble and pull up from mid-range, or shoot it from 22-23 feet with comfort. He is a shot maker. A *tough* shot maker at that. As a result of having this ability, together with the obligation of being the 1st option, his shot selection can suffer; and he can find himself forcing it to the rim, as well as shooting off balance from the perimeter. As effective as Rice proved to be in the half court, the flashes I saw in transition showed me that he could be just as impactful in the open court. He uses a very nice change of pace in semi-transition, almost like a rocker step, which would be appropriately named because he will lull you to sleep and make you pay if you relax.

A player’s ability to create with the dribble doesn’t mean as much if he can’t put the ball in the basket. This is not a concern for Rice. I *really* like the way shoots the ball. He gathers, sets, and squares nicely, then gains good power from his legs. It is one compact motion as he brings the ball slightly from the left side of his body to a smooth release at the nose level. The release is a quick snap, slightly away from his body, with a textbook flick of the wrist. He gets nice air under the ball, and shoots it well with a hand in his face. The shot trajectory flattens out a bit when he is off the dribble, but having the shot grooved from muscle memory keeps his mechanics intact.

Rice shows plenty of potential as a play maker, and also shows the feel you want to see as a passer. For instance, he fired a left-handed, across the body, off the dribble pass to the right corner from the top of the key with impressive zip and accuracy. His ability to break down and get his head and shoulders by the defender forces help side to make the decision to commit, opening the shooters up on the perimeter. However, he is generally looking to put the ball in the basket.

Defensively, I didn’t see as much effort exerted as I did on the other end. Close outs on shooters needed to be better and, although he plays defense with his feet, he was beaten several times off of the dribble. Like most at the prep level, he stands straight up-and-down off the ball, but does keep a balanced attention to ball and man. Overall, I reserve my judgment until seeing him play more on this end. However, given his aptitude on the court and his physical gifts, there is no question he is capable.

Speaking of aptitude, Rice has a mature presence on the court and presents the picture of a cerebral guard who is learning to manipulate the defense. His future is obviously promising. The recent move to DeMatha High School will be excellent for his overall development in every area. I look forward to catching more of his performances whenever he manages to get back on the court. I’m interested to see him in more pick & roll scenarios, moving without the ball, and playing against strong ball pressure. I will also be paying attention to the progression in his playmaking.