

The Best and Worst Draft Classes by Tony Villiotti

DRAFTMETRICS decided to take a look at the best and worst draft classes from the 1994 through 2004 drafts. Why start in 1994? 1994 was the year the NFL cut the draft to seven rounds so including the earlier years would result in some apples to oranges comparison. For example, the Cowboys had 18 draft selections in the 1991 draft. Why end in 2004?

DRAFTMETRICS believes that it takes time for the draft classes to take shape and has consistently used “seven years after” as the fairest evaluation period.

Judging the best and worst of anything is always a subjective determination, and the draft is no different. After thoughtful consideration, **DRAFTMETRICS** identified the eight best and worst draft classes in the study period. There was no attempt made to rank the classes from best to worst, though your opinions on that subject are certainly welcomed.

A variety of factors were considered in making this judgment and included in the following tables. The tables show the average performance over the 11-year period and then each of the eight best and worst classes. **Career Years** is the total number of years played in the NFL by all players in that draft class. **Starter Years** is the total number of starter years by the draft class, with a starter year being a season in which a player started 8 or more games. **5 Year Careers** and **5 Year Starters** are the number of players in the draft class who played and started, respectively, at least 5 seasons in the NFL. **Career Starts** is the total number of games started by all players in the draft class. **Pro Bowlers** is the number of players who were selected for the Pro Bowl at least once. (The **DRAFTMETRICS** definition of making the Pro Bowl includes only players who were original selections, whether or not they actually played in the games, and excludes alternates and injury replacements.) **All Pros** are players who selected as All Pros at least once.

Eight Best Classes Compared to the Average Class

	Number Of Picks	Career Years	Starter Years	5 Year Careers	5 Year Starters	Career Starts	Pro Bowlers	All Pros
Average	7.4	36.6	16.4	3.7	1.6	257.6	0.7	0.4
Packers: 1995	10	64	35	7	3	524	4	3
Patriots: 1995	7	57	41	5	4	650	2	2
Chiefs: 1996	10	67	41	6	5	650	1	0
Bucs: 1997	10	78	45	8	4	734	3	1
Jets: 2000	8	57	42	5	5	633	1	1
Cards: 2001	10	58	36	6	4	556	3	1
Eagles: 2002	8	48	32	5	5	492	3	2
Chargers: 2004	11	59	31	7	4	469	4	2

Eight Worst Classes Compared to the Average Class

	Number Of Picks	Career Years	Starter Years	5 Year Careers	5 Year Starters	Career Starts	Pro Bowlers	All Pros
Average	7.4	36.6	16.4	3.7	1.6	258	0.7	0.4
Browns: 1995	6	14	1	2	0	24	0	0
Lions: 1997	10	22	4	1	0	86	0	0
Chargers: 1998	6	11	5	1	0	64	0	0
Panthers: 1998	8	22	5	3	0	85	0	0
Vikings: 2001	8	24	4	2	0	80	0	0
Broncos: 2003	10	19	4	2	0	76	0	0
Titans: 2003	6	26	2	2	0	64	0	0
Ravens: 2004	7	21	4	3	0	59	0	0

The Best Classes

Green Bay Packers – 1995

Pick #	Name	Pos	College	Years Played	Starter Years	Games Started	Pro Bowls	All Pros
32	Craig Newsome	DB	Arizona State	5	3	48	0	0
65	Darius Holland	DT	Colorado	9	2	35	0	0
66	William Henderson	RB	North Carolina	12	10	112	2	1
73	Brian Williams	LB	USC	8	3	61	0	0
90	Antonio Freeman	WR	Virginia Tech	9	6	91	1	1
117	Jeff Miller	OT	Mississippi	0	0	0	0	0
160	Jay Barker	QB	Alabama	0	0	0	0	0
170	Travis Jervey	RB	Citadel	9	0	5	1	1
173	Charlie Simmons	WR	Georgia Tech	0	0	0	0	0
230	Adam Timmerman	G	So Dakota State	12	11	172	1	0
Totals				64	35	524	5	3
Comments: Avoided total flops, although their first two picks didn't work out great. Hit the jackpot with a late round pick. As a bonus, Travis Jervey was an excellent special teamer who received Pro Bowl recognition.								

New England Patriots – 1995

Pick #	Name	Pos	College	Years Played	Starter Years	Games Started	Pro Bowls	All Pros
23	Ty Law	DB	Michigan	15	11	189	3	2
57	Ted Johnson	LB	Colorado	10	7	106	0	0
74	Curtis Martin	RB	Pitt	11	11	166	5	2
88	Jimmy Hitchcock	DB	North Carolina	8	3	61	0	0
112	Dave Wohlabaugh	C	Syracuse	9	9	128	0	0
195	Dino Philyaw	RB	Oregon	3	0	0	0	0
234	Carlos Yancy	DB	Georgia	1	0	0	0	0
Totals				57	41	650	8	4
Comments: Law and Martin are all-time greats. Wohlabaugh started every game he played in. Every player drafted played at least one season.								

Kansas City Chiefs – 1996

Pick #	Name	Pos	College	Years Played	Starter Years	Games Started	Pro Bowls	All Pros
28	Jerome Woods	DB	Memphis	9	7	105	0	0
58	Reggie Tongue	DB	Oregon State	10	7	116	0	0
68	John Browning	DE	West Virginia	9	6	96	0	0
98	Donnie Edwards	LB	UCLA	13	11	180	0	0
135	Joe Horn	WR	Itawamba CC	12	8	114	4	0
176	Dietrich Jells	WR	Pitt	4	0	4	0	0
199	Philip Riley	WR	Florida State	1	0	0	0	0
211	Ben Lynch	C	California	4	0	2	0	0
241	Jeff Smith	C	Tennessee	5	2	33	0	0
245	Darrell Williams	DB	Tennessee State	0	0	0	0	0
Totals				67	41	650	4	0

Comments: Solid draft class with no superstars. Each of the first five picks were five-year starters.

Tampa Bay Bucs – 1997

Pick #	Name	Pos	College	Years Played	Starter Years	Games Started	Pro Bowls	All Pros
12	Warrick Dunn	RB	Florida State	12	10	154	2	0
16	Reidel Anthony	WR	Florida	5	2	38	0	0
37	Jerry Wunsch	OT	Wisconsin	8	3	51	0	0
63	Frank Middleton	G	Arizona	8	6	92	0	0
66	Ronde Barber	DB	Virginia	14	13	200	5	3
128	Alshermund Singleton	LB	Temple	10	3	55	0	0
137	Patrick Hape	TE	Alabama	8	1	21	0	0
169	Al Harris	DB	Texas A&M - Kingsville	13	7	123	1	0
197	Nigea Carter	WR	Michigan State	0	0	0	0	0
209	Anthony DeGrate	DT	Stephen F. Austin	0	0	0	0	0
Totals				78	45	734	8	3

Comments: The most games started of any draft class. Didn't do well on 2nd and 3rd picks but made up for it. One of their most successful draftees (Al Harris), though, was cut in training camp.

New York Jets – 2000

Pick #	Name	Pos	College	Years Played	Starter Years	Games Started	Pro Bowls	All Pros
12	Shaun Ellis	DE	Tennessee	11	10	157	0	0
13	John Abraham	LB	South Carolina	11	8	131	5	3
18	Chad Pennington	QB	Marshall	11	6	81	0	0
27	Anthony Becht	TE	West Virginia	10	9	129	0	0
78	Laveranues Coles	WR	Florida State	10	9	135	0	0
143	Windrell Hayes	WR	USC	2	0	0	0	0
179	Tony Scott	DB	North Carolina St	2	0	0	0	0
218	Richard Seals	DT	Utah	0	0	0	0	0
Totals				57	42	633	5	3

Comments: Very solid draft class. First five draftees were five-year starters and all played at least 10 NFL seasons. Helped by plethora of early selections.

Arizona Cardinals – 2001

Pick #	Name	Pos	College	Years Played	Starter Years	Games Started	Pro Bowls	All Pros
2	Leonard Davis	OT	Texas	10	10	155	3	0
34	Kyle Vanden Bosch	DE	Nebraska	9	7	105	1	0
54	Michael Stone	DB	Memphis	5	0	3	0	0
64	Adrian Wilson	DB	North Carolina St	10	9	132	3	2
98	Bill Gramatica	K	South Florida	4	0	0	0	0
123	Marcus Bell	DT	Memphis	6	1	21	0	0
133	Mario Fatafehi	DT	Kansas State	4	2	26	0	0
166	Bobby Newcombe	WR	Nebraska	0	0	0	0	0
202	Renaldo Hill	DB	Michigan State	10	7	114	0	0
246	Tevita Ofahengaue	TE	Brigham Young	0	0	0	0	0
Totals				58	36	556	7	2

Comments: Solid draft yield four five-year starters, three of which were selected for the Pro Bowl at least once.

Philadelphia Eagles – 2002

Pick #	Name	Pos	College	Years Played	Starter Years	Games Started	Pro Bowls	All Pros
26	Lito Sheppard	DB	Florida	9	6	72	3	1
58	Michael Lewis	DB	Colorado	9	6	108	3	0
59	Sheldon Brown	DB	South Carolina	9	7	114	0	0
91	Brian Westbrook	RB	Villanova	9	6	90	1	1
124	Scott Peters	C	Arizona State	1	0	4	0	0
162	Freddie Milons	WR	Alabama	0	0	0	0	0
198	Tyreo Harrison	LB	Notre Dame	2	0	0	0	0
238	Raheem Brock	DE	Temple	9	7	104	0	0
Totals				48	32	492	7	2

Comments: Three Pro Bowlers in first four picks. Five of the eight players are still active.

San Diego Chargers – 2004

Pick #	Name	Pos	College	Years Played	Starter Years	Games Started	Pro Bowls	All Pros
1	Philip Rivers	QB	North Carolina St	7	5	80	3	0
35	Igor Olshansky	DT	Oregon	7	7	98	0	0
65	Nate Kaeding	K	Iowa	7	0	0	2	1
66	Nick Hardwick	C	Purdue	7	6	87	1	0
98	Shaun Phillips	DE	Purdue	7	5	80	0	0
133	Dave Ball	DE	UCLA	6	1	15	0	0
154	Michael Turner	RB	Northern Illinois	7	3	43	2	1
169	Ryan Krause	WR	Nebraska – Omaha	3	0	1	0	0
204	Ryon Bingham	DT	Nebraska	4	0	2	0	0
209	Shane Olivea	OT	Ohio State	4	4	63	0	0
254	Carlos Joseph	OT	Miami (FL)	0	0	0	0	0
Totals				59	31	469	8	2

Comments: I know, they really drafted Eli Manning in the first round but they immediately traded him so Rivers was effectively their first pick. Four five-year starter plus a Pro Bowl kicker and Michael Turner. Arguably the best class of the study period.

The Worst Classes

Cleveland Browns – 1995

Pick #	Name	Pos	College	Years Played	Starter Years	Games Started	Pro Bowls	All Pros
30	Craig Powell	LB	Ohio State	3	0	0	0	0
84	Eric Zeier	QB	Georgia	6	0	12	0	0
94	Mike Frederick	DE	Virginia	5	1	12	0	0
136	Tau Pupua	DT	Weber State	0	0	0	0	0
147	Mike Miller	WR	Notre Dame	0	0	0	0	0
231	A C Tellison	WR	Miami (FL)	0	0	0	0	0
Totals				14	1	24	0	0
Comments: Small class but got almost zero value from it. Only three players lasted even one season.								

Detroit Lions – 1997

Pick #	Name	Pos	College	Years Played	Starter Years	Games Started	Pro Bowls	All Pros
5	Bryan Westbrook	DB	Texas	6	4	55	0	0
35	Juan Roque	OT	Arizona State	2	0	3	0	0
54	Kevin Abrams	DB	Syracuse	3	0	11	0	0
130	Matt Russell	LB	Colorado	1	0	0	0	0
135	Pete Chrypiewicz	TE	Notre Dame	3	0	3	0	0
161	Duane Ashman	DE	Virginia	0	0	0	0	0
168	Tony Ramirez	G	Northern Colorado	3	0	10	0	0
206	Terry Battle	RB	Arizona State	0	0	0	0	0
232	Marcus Harris	WR	Wyoming	0	0	0	0	0
239	Richard Jordan	LB	Missouri Southern	4	0	4	0	0
Totals				22	4	86	0	0
Comments: Had an early pick who wasn't a complete flop but got nothing else out of the draft.								

San Diego Chargers – 1998

Pick #	Name	Pos	College	Years Played	Starter Years	Games Started	Pro Bowls	All Pros
2	Ryan Leaf	QB	Washington State	3	2	21	0	0
59	Mikhael Ricks	WR	Stephen F. Austin	6	3	43	0	0
126	Cedric Harden	DE	Florida A&M	1	0	0	0	0
155	Clifford Ivory	DB	Troy	0	0	0	0	0
194	Jon Haskins	LB	Stanford	1	0	0	0	0
234	Kio Sanford	WR	Kentucky	0	0	0	0	0
Totals				11	5	64	0	0
Comments: The Ryan Leaf pick lives on in infamy and it pretty much cost them the rest of the draft.								

Carolina Panthers – 1998

Pick #	Name	Pos	College	Years Played	Starter Years	Games Started	Pro Bowls	All Pros
14	Jason Peter	DT	Nebraska	4	2	20	0	0
62	Chuck Wiley	DE	Louisiana State	6	1	23	0	0
73	Mitch Marrow	DE	Pennsylvania	0	0	0	0	0
106	Donald Hayes	WR	Wisconsin	5	2	32	0	0
136	Jerry Jensen	LB	Washington	1	0	0	0	0
165	Damien Richardson	DB	Arizona State	5	0	10	0	0
196	Villami Maumau	DT	Colorado	1	0	0	0	0
228	Jim Turner	WR	Syracuse	0	0	0	0	0
Totals				22	5	85	0	0
Comments: Peter started as a rookie, but a chronic neck injury shortened his career. Back problems grounded Marrow's career before it started.								

Minnesota Vikings – 1998

Pick #	Name	Pos	College	Years Played	Starter Years	Games Started	Pro Bowls	All Pros
27	Michael Bennett	RB	Wisconsin	10	2	52	0	0
57	Willie Howard	DT	Stanford	1	0	0	0	0
69	Eric Kelly	DB	Kentucky	3	2	23	0	0
130	Shawn Worthen	DT	Texas Christian	1	0	0	0	0
131	Cedric James	WR	Texas Christian	1	0	0	0	0
157	Patrick Chukwurah	LB	Wyoming	6	0	5	0	0
189	Carey Scott	DB	Kentucky State	2	0	0	0	0
225	Brian Crawford	OT	Western Oregon	0	0	0	0	0
Totals				24	4	80	0	0
Comments: Bennett wasn't terrible and Kelly saw starting action his first two seasons, then slid down the depth chart. Rest of the draft yielded nothing.								

Denver Broncos – 2003

Pick #	Name	Pos	College	Years Played	Starter Years	Games Started	Pro Bowls	All Pros
20	George Foster	OT	Georgia	6	4	57	0	0
51	Terry Pierce	LB	Kansas State	2	0	0	0	0
108	Quentin Griffin	RB	Oklahoma	2	0	5	0	0
114	Nick Eason	DT	Clemson	7	0	14	0	0
128	Bryant McNeal	DE	Clemson	0	0	0	0	0
157	Ben Claxton	C	Mississippi	1	0	0	0	0
158	Adrian Madise	WR	Texas Christian	1	0	0	0	0
194	Aaron Hunt	DE	Texas Tech	0	0	0	0	0
227	Clint Mitchell	DE	Florida	0	0	0	0	0
235	Ahmad Galloway	RB	Alabama	0	0	0	0	0
Totals				19	4	76	0	0
Comments: Foster had a reasonable career and Nick Eason has been a backup in recent years for the Steelers. Zero contribution from the rest of the draft.								

Tennessee Titans – 2003

Pick #	Name	Pos	College	Years Played	Starter Years	Games Started	Pro Bowls	All Pros
28	Andre Woolfolk	DB	Oklahoma	4	0	11	0	0
60	Tyrone Calico	WR	Middle Tenn. State	3	0	8	0	0
93	Chris Brown	RB	Colorado	6	2	33	0	0
126	Rien Long	DT	Washington State	3	0	4	0	0
154	Donnie Nickey	DB	Ohio State	8	0	8	0	0
225	Todd Williams	G	Florida State	2	0	0	0	0
Totals				26	2	64	0	0
Comments: First two picks flopped. Everyone drafted played in the NFL at least two seasons.								

Baltimore Ravens – 2004

Pick #	Name	Pos	College	Years Played	Starter Years	Games Started	Pro Bowls	All Pros
51	Dwan Edwards	DT	Oregon State	6	3	34	0	0
82	Devard Darling	WR	Washington State	5	1	10	0	0
153	Roderick Green	LB	Central Missouri	5	0	0	0	0
187	Josh Harris	QB	Bowling Green	0	0	0	0	0
199	Clarence Moore	WR	Northern Arizona	3	0	8	0	0
244	Derek Abney	WR	Kentucky	0	0	0	0	0
246	Brian Rimpf	OT	East Carolina	2	0	7	0	0
Totals				21	4	59	0	0
Comments: To be fair, the Ravens didn't have an early pick. But this draft just didn't help them at all.								