

Starting Time by Tony Villiotti

In past articles **DRAFTMETRICS** has focused on the probabilities of drafting starters. In this article, **DRAFTMETRICS** shifts gears and will look at the time element of the equation - - how long does it take a draftee to achieve various starter milestones?

This article reviews how long it took draftees from the years 1991 through 2004 to become one-year, three-year and five-year starters. To put this into perspective, a total of 3631 players were drafted in that time period. Of those draftees 1649 were starters for at least one NFL season. **DRAFTMETRICS** definition of a starter is that a player must start at least eight games in an NFL season to get credit for a “starter year” and be identified as a starter.

Summary of Conclusions

- Draftees who become starters do so relatively early
 - Of the 1649 draftees who became NFL starters, 77% did so within their first three seasons
 - DBs and LBs were the fastest to start their first season; QBs, DLs and RBs the slowest
- Not surprising, earlier draft choices earn starting jobs faster than later draft choices
 - By virtually every measure, players drafted in an earlier Value Group earn a starting role faster than a player drafted in the next Value Group
- 92% of players selected 1-48 who became starters did so within three seasons compared to 69% of players selected with the 49th pick or after
- A relatively small number of players step right in as starters and remain starters for five years
 - 238 of the 3631 players drafted (6.5%) were starters in each of their first five seasons
 - OL, DL and LB account for 63% of those players
 - Draft selections 1-48 account for 70% of the 238 players
 - Only 22 players selected with the 115th pick or later were starters in each of their first five seasons
- Less than half of players who start as rookies stay starters for five consecutive years
 - 516 rookie starters; 336 players start for first three seasons; 238 players start for first five seasons
- The vast majority of five-year starters achieve that status in their first seven NFL seasons
 - 78% of all five-year starters achieved that status by the end of their seventh season
 - OL, LB and DB had highest percentage; QB and TE the lowest
 - Players selected 1-48 account for 56%; players selected 49-114 account for 28% and players 115 and after account for 16%

The Basics

1649 draftees out of the 3631 draftees (or 45%) started at least one NFL season. Following is a summary of when they received credit for that first starter year:

- 31% (516) earned their first starter year in their rookie season
- 30% (485) earned their first starter year in their second season
- 16% (268) earned their first starter year in their third season
- 11% (184) earned their first starter year in their fourth season
- 12% (196) earned their first starter year in their fifth season or after

1101 draftees out of the 3631 (or 30%) started at least three NFL seasons. Following is a summary of when they received credit for the third starting season:

- 31% (336) earned their third starter year in their third season
- 28% (306) earned their third starter year in their fourth season
- 17% (182) earned their third starter year in their fifth season
- 12% (133) earned their third starter year in their sixth season
- 13% (144) earned their third starter year in their seventh season or after

774 draftees out of the 3631 (or 21%) started at least five NFL seasons. Following is a summary of when they received credit for the fifth starting season:

- 31% (238) earned their fifth starter year in their fifth season
- 30% (232) earned their fifth starter year in their sixth season
- 18% (136) earned their fifth starter year in their seventh season
- 12% (96) earned their fifth starter year in their eighth season
- 9% (72) earned their fifth starter year in their ninth season or after

By Playing Position

As you might expect, the results vary by playing position. The following table shows information for each starter milestone by playing position. The percentages shown are for that starter milestone. For example, 17 QBs were starters in their rookie season and $17/66$ equals 26%.

Observations regarding performance by playing position are:

- RB, OL and DB have the highest proportion of first-year starters who start in their rookie season; QB, DL and TE are the lowest

- Offensive linemen have by far the highest percentage of five-year starters who accomplished that feat in five seasons
 - OL accounted for 26% of all such starters
 - OL, DL and DBs represent 63% of all players who start in each of their first five seasons
- QBs are the least likely to start in each of their first five seasons, followed by RBs
- Less than one-third of the RBs who start as rookies go on to start for five consecutive seasons
 - This is by far the lowest of any position
 - Due to injuries at the position?
- On a percentage basis, TEs have the fewest number of one-year starters who become three-year starters
- OL and defensive players are the most likely to have become five-year starters by the end of their eighth season
 - QBs rank lowest indicating that players serve in backup roles longer than other positions

	QB	RB	WR	TE	OL	DL	LB	DB	ALL
Number Drafted	172	369	466	221	596	612	468	665	3569
1st Starter Year									
Number of Starters	66	153	167	112	310	313	224	304	1649
By End of 1st Season	26%	36%	33%	27%	35%	26%	30%	35%	31%
By End of 2nd Season	56%	59%	56%	55%	68%	56%	61%	65%	61%
By End of 3rd Season	73%	73%	75%	73%	79%	73%	81%	82%	77%
By End of 4th Season	80%	86%	87%	84%	92%	85%	89%	91%	88%
3rd Starter Year									
Number of Starters	38	89	113	61	224	214	158	204	1101
By End of 3rd Season	32%	27%	29%	26%	36%	27%	30%	32%	31%
By End of 4th Season	61%	51%	56%	57%	63%	52%	60%	63%	58%
By End of 5th Season	82%	63%	73%	70%	78%	70%	78%	81%	75%
By End of 6th Season	89%	74%	85%	84%	90%	82%	91%	91%	87%
5th Starter Year									
Number of Starters	32	49	71	44	160	151	114	153	774
By End of 5th Season	22%	24%	31%	32%	38%	30%	29%	29%	31%
By End of 6th Season	47%	57%	54%	52%	72%	58%	61%	61%	61%
By End of 7th Season	69%	76%	76%	70%	84%	73%	82%	81%	78%
By End of 8th Season	81%	84%	87%	86%	93%	91%	94%	93%	91%

The total number of players drafted (3569) shown above does not equal the total number of draftees (3631) due to the exclusion of special teams players from this table.

By Value Group

It is no surprise that the differences by Value Group are pretty substantial. The following table shows information by Value Group for each of the three starter milestones being considered in this article.

Observations regarding Value Groups are:

- With only one exception (out of 84 data points) draftees from higher Value Groups move into starting roles faster than the next Value Group
- Draftees taken in the first 13 picks of the draft account for over 30% of the players that are starters in each of their first five seasons
 - Over 40% of the first 13 picks are starters in each of their first five seasons
- 70% of the players who started their first five seasons were drafted in selections 1 through 48
- Almost 60% of the players who start as rookies come from selections 1 through 48
- Only 22 players taken with selections 115 and after were starters in their first five seasons

	VG1	VG2	VG3	VG4	VG5	VG6	VG7	ALL
Selection Number	1-13	14-28	29-48	49-74	75-114	115-200	201+	
Number Drafted	182	210	280	364	560	1204	831	3631
1st Starter Year								
Number of Players	176	191	222	248	284	377	151	1649
By End of 1st Season	68%	49%	44%	31%	20%	15%	11%	31%
By End of 2nd Season	90%	83%	74%	66%	51%	44%	29%	61%
By End of 3rd Season	96%	92%	88%	81%	73%	66%	49%	77%
By End of 4th Season	99%	97%	94%	90%	88%	83%	67%	88%
3rd Starter Year								
Number of Players	155	146	175	179	165	201	80	1101
By End of 3rd Season	65%	43%	38%	26%	18%	12%	9%	31%
By End of 4th Season	88%	79%	67%	60%	42%	36%	28%	58%
By End of 5th Season	95%	92%	83%	76%	68%	55%	48%	75%
By End of 6th Season	97%	98%	93%	88%	83%	77%	65%	87%
5th Starter Year								
Number of Players	134	118	133	121	111	110	47	774
By End of 5th Season	55%	41%	33%	22%	21%	15%	11%	31%
By End of 6th Season	82%	77%	67%	60%	46%	38%	30%	61%
By End of 7th Season	93%	90%	82%	79%	69%	65%	51%	78%
By End of 8th Season	98%	97%	92%	93%	85%	82%	77%	91%