HISTORICAL DRAFT REVIEW: LINEBACKERS by Tony Villiotti

This is one in a series of articles in which **DRAFTMETRICS** will review the draft and other relevant history) for each playing position. Each article will focus on the years from 1991 through 2010, though shorter periods will be used when appropriate. The purpose of the articles will be to provide a greater understanding of the historical results of drafting the various positions.

As with just about every **DRAFTMETRICS** article, it is inevitable that the subject of Value Groups is raised. As reminder, the Value Groups are as follows:

Value Group 1 – Selections 1 through 13	Value Group 5 – Selections 75 through 114
Value Group 2 – Selections 14 through 28	Value Group 6 – Selections 115 through 200
Value Group 3 – Selections 29 through 48	Value Group 7 – Selections 201 and later
Value Group 4 – Selections 49 through 74	

More information on Value Groups can be found in *THE RELATIVE VALUE OF DRAFT CHOICES:2010 UPDATE* which is available on this website.

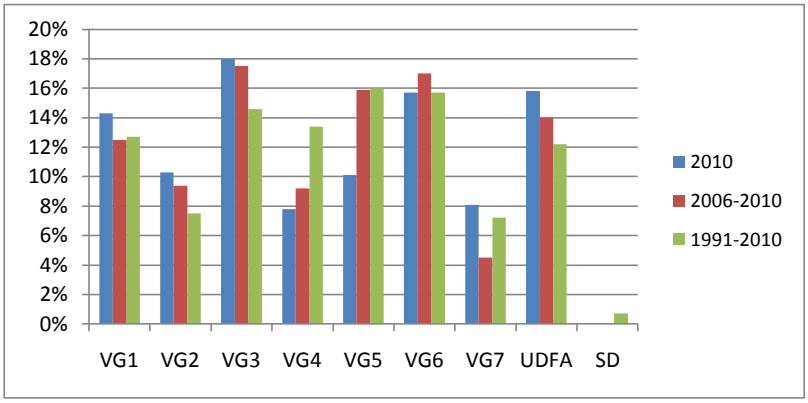
8 Things you Should know About Drafting Linebackers

1. Linebackers are among the least risky selections in the draft
2. There is a tendency not to draft many LB in the first three Value Groups
3. Only slightly more than half of VG1 LB started as rookie; only QBs are less likely
4. An average of 32 LBs per year are selected in the NFL draft
5. 70% of drafted LBs come from the Big 5 conferences, tied with RBs for the highest percentage
6. Over the past 20 years, 102 LBs have started at least 8 games in their rookie season
7. Chance of drafting a 5-Year Starter by Value Group
    a. VG1—87.5%
    b. VG2—73.7%
    c. VG3—61.3%
    d. VG4—30.4%
    e. VG5—31.8%
    f. VG6—11.7%
    g. VG7—5.1%
8. The recent trend is for more LBs to start as rookies

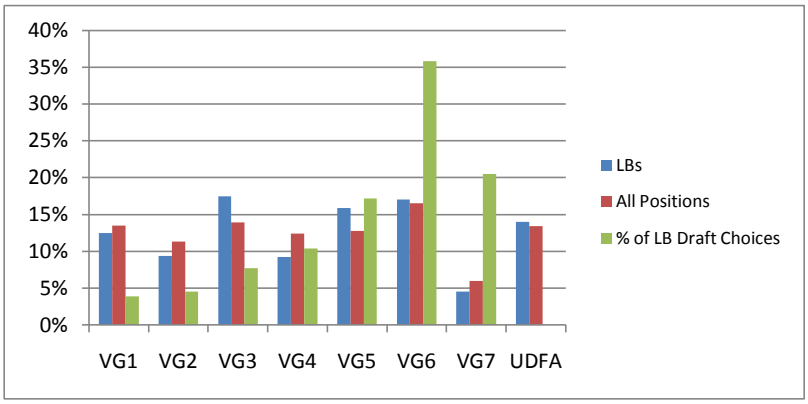
Source of Starters

DRAFTMETRICS took a look at the source of LB starters for the 2010 season, the 2006 through 2010 seasons, and the 1991 to 2010 seasons. The following chart shows the percentage of games started by quarterbacks, broken down by Value Group, Undrafted Free Agents (UDFA) and supplemental draft choices. Supplemental draft choices are those choices made in the Supplemental Draft, which is held to

accommodate players who wish to play in the NFL but who missed the draft filing date or had a change in circumstances.



The next chart shows the sources of LB starts for the 2006 through 2010 seasons compared to (1) the average of all positions and (2) the percentage of WR draft choices in that Value Group. For example, the percentage of all LB starts from VG 1 is 14.9% while the percentage for all positions in 13.5%. The percentage of all LB selections in VG1 is 5.0% (a full 20 years was used for this factor since draft selections from many years are represented in the 2006-2010 starts).



There seems to be a trend for more UDFA starts at the LB position. Because of the tendency not to draft LBs early (see “Drafting Patterns” below), most of the starts come from VG3 through 6 draftees. There is a slight trend toward more starts from earlier selections, though.

Drafting Patterns

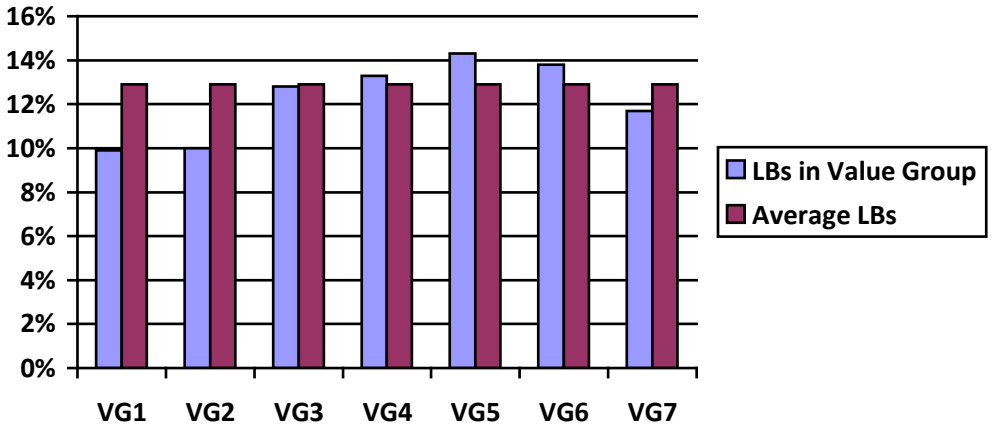
The following table shows the number of LBs drafted within each Value Group on an annual basis.

Table: Number of Linebackers Selected by Value Group and by Year

Year	VG1	VG2	VG3	VG4	VG5	VG6	VG7	Total
1991	1	2	2	6	4	9	17	41
1992	1	1	3	5	5	10	18	43
1993	1	1	3	6	7	14	5	37
1994	2	1	0	4	5	13	7	32
1995	1	1	1	3	6	17	4	33
1996	1	3	0	5	3	12	5	29
1997	1	1	1	3	8	16	5	35
1998	2	2	1	1	6	13	7	32
1999	1	2	4	3	7	12	8	37
2000	3	2	2	2	8	8	8	33
2001	1	0	3	4	6	10	4	28
2002	0	2	2	4	6	10	3	27
2003	0	0	5	7	6	8	4	30
2004	1	1	4	3	8	10	4	31
2005	1	2	4	2	5	14	5	33
2006	3	3	4	1	7	8	6	32
2007	1	2	4	2	4	13	7	33
2008	2	0	2	2	5	15	6	32
2009	2	3	3	2	3	12	4	29
2010	1	1	3	4	5	13	9	36
Total	26	30	51	69	114	237	136	663
% of Total	3.9%	4.5%	7.7%	10.4%	17.2%	35.8%	20.5%	100%

Excluding 1991 and 1992 because there were more draft rounds, an average of about 32 LBs per year are selected in the draft, with 37 in 1999 being the most selected and 27 in 2002 being the fewest.

The following graph shows the representation of LBs in each Value Group, with the flat line being the overall average of LBs selected



This graph shows that LBs are drafted at a low level in the first two Value Groups and then at a high rate in Value Groups 5 and 6.

Success Rates by Value Group

DRAFTMETRICS analyzed the success in drafting LBs by Value Group. For purposes of this analysis, the drafted LBs were divided into two groups – those drafted in 2004 or earlier and those drafted in 2005 and later. The reason for this division is that the latter group of LBs have careers that are still in flux and even a preliminary final measurement is premature.

The following table shows various performance measures by Value Group for the period from 1991 through 2004. A probability of 62.5% for rookie starters in Value Group 1 means that 10 of the 16 LBs drafted in Value Group 1 started as rookies.

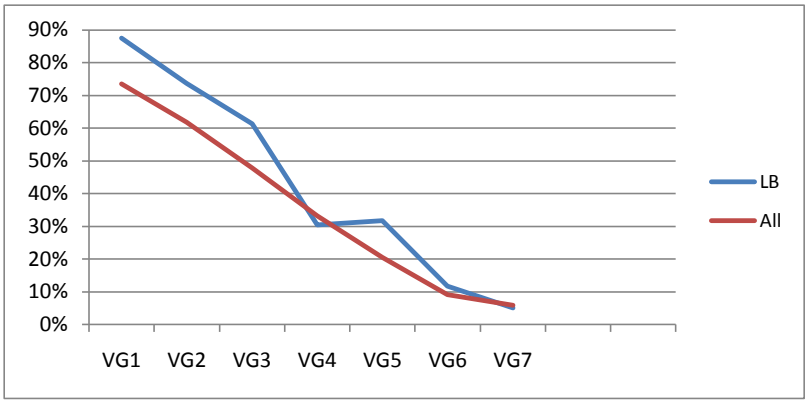
Table: Various Measures by Value Group for 1991-2004

Value Group	Number Of Choices	Probability of				
		5-Year Career	5-Year Starters	Rookie Starters	Pro Bowlers	All Pros
VG1	16	93.8%	87.5%	56.3%	62.5%	37.5%
VG2	19	84.2%	73.7%	68.4%	26.3%	31.6%
VG3	31	83.9%	61.3%	51.6%	12.9%	9.7%
VG4	56	71.4%	30.4%	21.4%	7.1%	5.4%
VG5	85	62.4%	31.8%	10.6%	4.7%	1.2%
VG6	162	41.4%	11.7%	3.7%	3.7%	1.2%
VG7	99	26.3%	5.1%	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%
Total	468	51.9%	24.6%	14.1%	7.3%	4.7%

Observations are as follows:

- LBs are among the safest draft choices pretty much throughout the draft
  - Only exceptions are VGs 4 and 7
  - See the following chart for how LBs stack up versus the average
- There is very little difference in the results between VGs 4 and 5
- Compared to other positions, the number of rookies starters is relatively low

Probability of Drafting a LB 5-Year Starter vs Average of all Positions by Value Group



The following table shows various measures for the period from 2005-2010.

Table: Various Measures by Value Group for 2005-2010

Value Group	Number Of Choices	Probability of				
		5-Year Career	5-Year Starters	Rookie Starters	Pro Bowlers	All Pros
VG1	10	40.0%	30.0%	90.0%	40.0%	30.0%
VG2	11	36.3%	9.1%	45.5%	27.3%	18.1%
VG3	20	30.0%	5.0%	60.0%	10.0%	5.0%
VG4	13	15.4%	7.7%	23.1%	0.0%	0.0%
VG5	29	13.8%	6.9%	13.8%	0.0%	0.0%
VG6	75	14.7%	2.7%	2.7%	2.7%	0.0%
VG7	37	0.0%	0.0%	2.7%	0.0%	0.0%
Total	195	15.9%	5.1%	18.5%	5.6%	3.1%

As with what seems to be the case with most of the other playing positions, there does seem to be a trend for rookies to start more frequently.

Producing LBs – Who Does It Best?

In order to address this issue, **DRAFTMETRICS** developed the following table which lists the number of LBs drafted by conference and by Value Group from 1991 through 2010. The conference affiliations are those in place during the 2010 college football season. Five conferences (ACC, Big 10, Big 12, PAC 10 and SEC) dominate production of players and are referred to as the "Big Five". The "Mid-Majors" included the Big East, the Independents, the Mid-American Conference, the Mountain West Conference, Conference USA and the Western Athletic Conference.

Table: LBs Drafted by Conference and Value Group

Conference	VG1	VG2	VG3	VG4	VG5	VG6	VG7	Total
ACC	9	9	11	11	27	28	12	107
Big 10	3	6	8	9	18	35	14	93
Big 12	4	4	6	11	16	28	15	84
Pac 10	4	2	7	3	14	34	19	83
SEC	5	4	11	13	11	26	26	96
Total Big 5	25	25	43	47	86	151	86	463
Mid-Majors	1	4	7	14	21	52	30	129
Other	0	1	1	8	7	34	20	71
Total	26	30	51	69	114	237	136	663

The ACC has had the most LBs drafted, both overall and in the early selections. The Big 5 account for 25 of the 26 VG1 selections, indicating that NFL teams tend to take few chances with early LB picks. The Big 5 produced 87% of the LBs drafted in Value Groups 1 through 3, the highest of any position, and 70% of all LBs drafted overall, tied with RBs for the highest percentage.

DRAFTMETRICS then addressed the issue of whether any of the conferences have had better (or worse) than expected success from their drafted LBs. This was done by focusing on actual versus expected 5-Year starters for players drafted during the years 1991 through 2004. The cut-off of 2004 was used in order to allow the draftees adequate time to become a 5-Year starter. Obviously a player drafted in 2007, for example, cannot have achieved 5-Year starter status because he has not been in the NFL for five years.

The expected number of 5-Year starter was calculated by applying the probabilities calculated in the "Success Rates by Value Group" section of this article (which follows) to the number of selections from each conference in each Value Group. The following table shows the findings.

Table: Actual vs. Expected Number of 5-Year Starters: 1991-2004

Conference	Number Drafted	5-Year Starters		Rookie Starters
		Expected	Actual	
ACC	74	24.7	24	18
Big 10	64	16.7	17	8
Big 12	61	15.7	16	9
Pac 10	59	13.1	14	9
SEC	73	18.4	17	10
Total Big 5	331	88.6	88	54
Mid-Majors	85	18.2	16	7
Others	52	8.2	11	5
Total	468	115	115	66

A few observations are as follows:

- There was very little difference between expected and actual performance by the Big 5 schools
- The Big 5 schools did have a higher rate of rookies starting than the rest of the schools