

## HISTORY SPEAKS: OFFENSIVE LINEMEN 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.

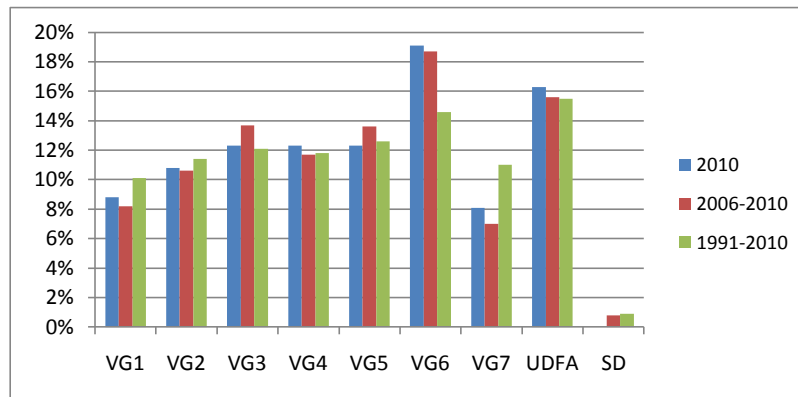
### **7 Things You Should Know About Drafting Offensive Linemen**

1. Offensive linemen are among the safest positions to draft, with the percentage of 5-year starters higher than the average for each Value Groups
2. Offensive linemen are most likely to start as rookies by a fairly wide margin
3. More OL are drafted from the Big 10 than any other conference
4. An average of 41 OL per year are selected in the NFL draft
5. Over the past 20 years, 174 OL have started at least 8 games in their rookie season
6. Chances of drafting a 5-Year Starter by Value Group
  - a. VG1 – 88.0%
  - b. VG2 – 66.7%
  - c. VG3 – 58.7%
  - d. VG4 – 42.4%
  - e. VG5 – 32.2%
  - f. VG6 – 11.9%
  - g. VG7 – 9.9%
7. There is a trend for rookie offensive linemen to start more frequently

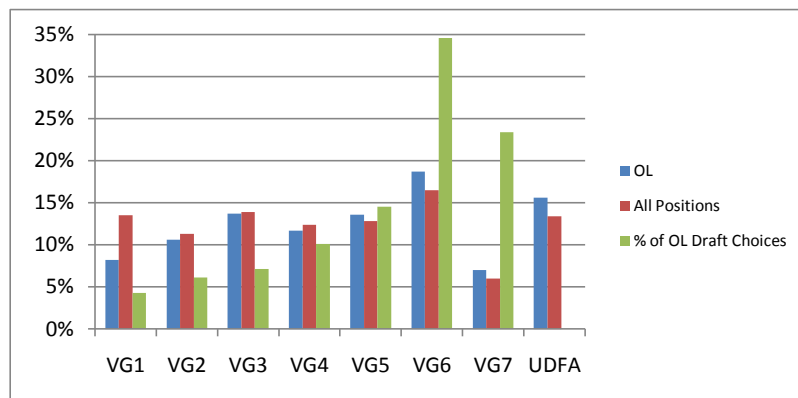
### **Source of Starters**

**DRAFTMETRICS** took a look at the source of OL 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 offensive linemen, 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 OL starts for the 2006 through 2010 seasons compared to (1) the average of all positions and (2) the percentage of OL draft choices in that Value Group. For example, the percentage of all OL starts from VG 1 is 8.2% while the percentage for all positions is 13.5%. The percentage of all OL selections in VG1 is 4.3% (a full 20 years was used for this factor since draft selections from many years are represented in the 2006-2010 starts).



A few observations on the data presented in these two charts:

- The percentage of starts OL drafted in VGs 1 and 2 declined slightly in the 2006-2010 time period but rebounded somewhat in 2010
- Starts by UDFA are slightly increasing
- The percentage of starts from VG1 is significantly lower than the average for all positions
  - This is offset by higher than average percentages in VGs 6 & 7 and UDFA

## Drafting Patterns

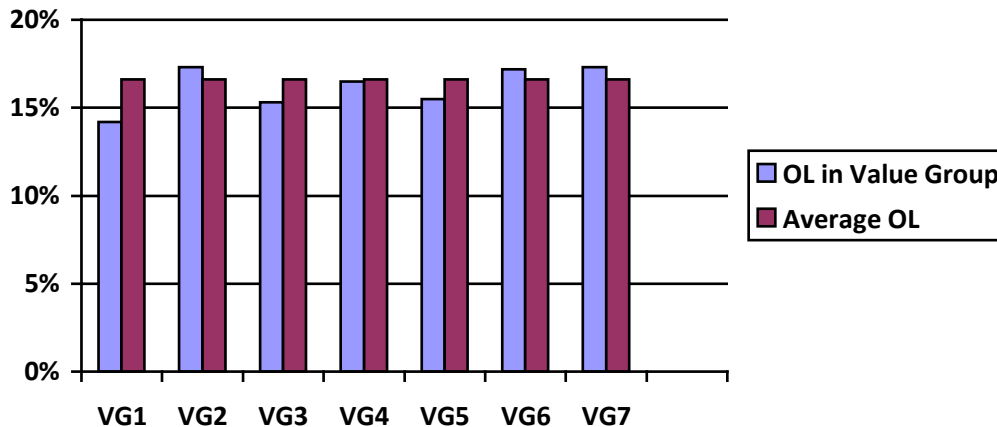
The following table shows the number of OL drafted within each Value Group on an annual basis.

### Number of Offensive Linemen Selected by Value Group and by Year

Year	VG1	VG2	VG3	VG4	VG5	VG6	VG7	Total
1991	3	1	3	5	4	17	23	56
1992	4	1	1	4	8	13	25	56
1993	3	3	1	5	5	17	2	36
1994	0	4	6	3	7	13	3	36
1995	1	3	5	7	5	17	6	44
1996	2	4	3	4	8	14	12	47
1997	3	1	4	4	10	10	2	34
1998	2	3	3	5	6	19	8	46
1999	0	6	2	8	4	13	8	41
2000	1	2	4	4	6	9	10	36
2001	1	3	2	2	8	16	9	41
2002	3	0	6	3	4	11	9	36
2003	1	3	3	3	7	15	13	45
2004	1	2	3	2	5	17	12	42
2005	1	2	3	3	10	20	10	49
2006	1	1	4	8	6	16	14	50
2007	2	1	4	4	3	19	8	41
2008	2	6	1	2	8	11	11	41
2009	3	3	1	5	6	15	8	41
2010	3	3	2	5	4	14	7	38
<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>296</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>856</b>
<b>% of Total</b>	<b>4.3%</b>	<b>6.1%</b>	<b>7.1%</b>	<b>10.1%</b>	<b>14.5%</b>	<b>34.6%</b>	<b>23.4%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Excluding 1991 and 1992 due to larger number of rounds, there is an average of about 41 offensive linemen per year selected in the draft, with 50 in 2006 being the largest number and 34 in 1997 being the fewest. Many OL are selected later in the draft, with 58% of all draftees coming from VGs 6 & 7.

The following graph shows the representation of OL in each Value Group.



**DRAFTMETRICS** takes the position that offensive linemen are under drafted. There are five starting offensive linemen on a team, representing nearly 23% of all the starters. Yet, offensive linemen account of only about 16.6% of all draft choices. Is a lower value is placed on offensive linemen? Is it just It is difficult to find draftable offensive linemen? **DRAFTMETRICS** leans towards the lower value rationale. Otherwise, if offensive linemen were hard how to find, how does one account for the high number of free agents that start games?

This graph shows that , other than in Value Group 1, OL are drafted on a pretty balanced basis throughout the draft.

**Success Rates by Value Group**

**DRAFTMETRICS** also analyzed the success in drafting OL by Value Group. For purposes of this analysis, the drafted OL 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 OL 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 5-Year Starter is a player who started at least eight games per season for at least five seasons. A Pro Bowler and an All Pro means that a player earned either or both of these honors at least one time. A probability of 80% for rookie starters in Value Group 1 means that 20 of the 25 OL drafted in Value Group 1 started as rookies.

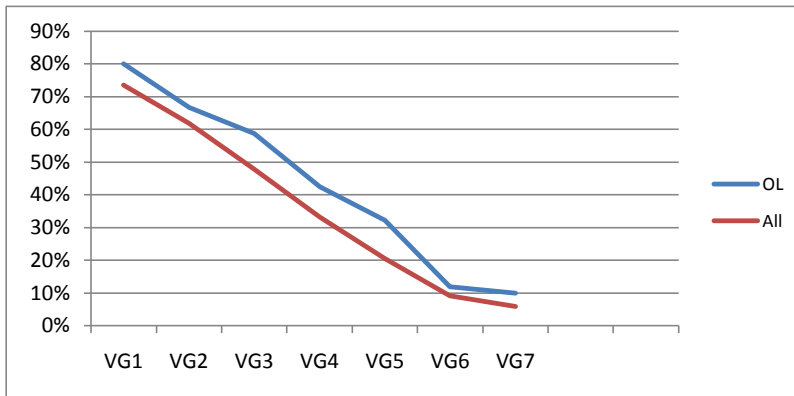
**Table: Various Measures by Value Group for 1991-2004**

Value Group	Number Of Choices	Probability of				
		5-Year Career	5-Year Starters	Rookie Starters	Pro Bowlers	All Pros
<b>VG1</b>	25	100.0%	88.0%	80.0%	56.0%	36.0%
<b>VG2</b>	25	86.1%	66.7%	61.1%	25.0%	11.1%
<b>VG3</b>	46	78.3%	58.7%	54.3%	21.7%	8.7%
<b>VG4</b>	59	72.9%	42.4%	20.3%	8.5%	6.8%
<b>VG5</b>	87	63.2%	32.2%	11.5%	1.1%	0.0%
<b>VG6</b>	201	36.3%	11.9%	7.0%	1.5%	0.0%
<b>VG7</b>	142	23.9%	9.9%	3.5%	2.8%	0.7%
<b>Total</b>	596	49.8%	27.5%	18.1%	7.7%	3.7%

Observations are as follows:

- Offensive linemen are among the safest Value Group 1 selections
- Offensive linemen are more likely to start as rookies than any other playing position
- Offensive linemen are more successful than average in every Value Group.
  - See the following chart

**Graph: Probability of Drafting an OL 5-Year Starter vs Average of all Positions by Value Group**



The following table various measures for OL drafted between 2005 and 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	12	16.7%	16.7%	83.3%	41.7%	33.3%
VG2	16	18.8%	18.8%	81.3%	6.3%	0.0%
VG3	15	40.0%	33.3%	80.0%	20.0%	20.0%
VG4	27	33.3%	7.4%	48.1%	0.0%	0.0%
VG5	37	24.3%	8.1%	24.3%	2.7%	2.7%
VG6	95	13.7%	2.1%	4.2%	1.1%	0.0%
VG7	58	10.3%	0.0%	8.6%	0.0%	0.0%
Total	260	18.5%	6.5%	25.4%	4.2%	3.1%

The table shows that the rate of rookie starters for offensive linemen has been even higher in recent years. Over 80% of offensive linemen in each of the first three Value Groups have started as rookies, and even Value Group 4 is nearly a 50-50 proposition. Overall, 25% of drafted OL started as rookies versus 18% in the period from 1991 through 2004.

### **Producing Offensive Linemen – Who Does It Best?**

In order to address this issue, **DRAFTMETRICS** developed the following table which lists the number of QBs 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.

The Big 5 provided 81% of the OL drafted in VGs 1-3, with only QBs and DBs being lower. The 66% of overall draft choices from the Big 5 is in the middle of the pack.

**DRAFTMETRICS** then addressed the issue of whether any of the conferences have had better (or worse) than expected success from their drafted OL. 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.

**Table: Offensive Linemen Drafted by Conference and Value Group**

Conference	VG1	VG2	VG3	VG4	VG5	VG6	VG7	Total
ACC	8	7	4	7	20	33	29	108
Big 10	6	8	18	10	17	42	30	131
Big 12	7	3	6	9	19	39	24	107
Pac 10	6	7	8	19	9	31	25	105
SEC	5	14	14	13	20	34	16	116
<b>Total Big 5</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>567</b>
Mid-Major	5	11	6	21	25	73	46	187
Other	0	2	5	7	14	44	30	102
<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>296</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>856</b>

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	71	20.2	20	10
Big 10	99	29.7	27	24
Big 12	73	19.0	17	13
Pac 10	74	22.8	23	15
SEC	84	29.0	29	23
<b>Total Big 5</b>	<b>401</b>	<b>120.7</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>85</b>
Mid-Majors	118	28.0	32	20
Others	77	15.3	16	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>596</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>108</b>

- There were no significant variations between actual and expected 5-year starters
  - The Big 10 had about 10% fewer 5-year starters than expected and the Mid-Majors had about 14% more than expected
- As might be expected the Big 10 has the highest number of offensive linemen drafted
- The SEC, though, has the most 5-year starters
- The Mid-Majors numbers were helped by the inclusion of Notre Dame in that group
  - Notre Dame, the Big East and the Mountain West all had seven 5-year starters
- The ACC had the most OL drafted from 2005-2010 and number of OL from “Others” trailed off in that time period