

HISTORICAL DRAFT OVERVIEW: 2010 by Tony Villiotti

As the NFL draft gets closer and seemingly will be unaffected by the contentious Collective Bargaining Agreement negotiations, **DRAFTMETRICS** is publishing a series of articles regarding historical draft results for each playing position (Quarterback, Running Back, Wide Receiver, Tight End, Offensive Line, Defensive Line, Linebacker, Defensive Back). Kickers and other special teamers were not analyzed.

The purpose of the articles is to provide a greater understanding of the historical results of drafting each playing position. While the caveat seen for mutual funds and the like - - past performance is no guarantee of future results - - is certainly applicable here, the historical results do tell a story.

In this article **DRAFTMETRICS** will lay the groundwork for the remaining articles by explaining some of the rationale for the way the analyses were done and also provide some additional background to set the stage for the upcoming articles. Since the articles on each playing position focus primarily on that playing position, this article will also present some comparative information.

Value Groups

The subject of Value Groups runs through almost every **DRAFTMETRICS** analysis. Value Groups are most recently addressed in detail in *THE RELATIVE VALUE OF DRAFT CHOICES: 2010 UPDATE*, which is available on the website. As a 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	

It may be useful to relate the Value Groups to draft rounds as is done in the following table. While in theory each recent draft has 224 selections (7 rounds times 32 teams), drafts in recent years have had slightly more than 250 selections due to the awarding of compensatory selections for free agent losses. This table is based on the 2010 draft which had 255 selections.

Selection Number	Round	Value Group
1-13	1	1
14-28	1	2
29-32	1	3
33-48	2	3
49-64	2	4
65-74	3	4
75-98	3	5
99-114	4	5
115-131	4	6
132-169	5	6
170-200	6	6
201-207	6	7
208-255	7	7

A Typical Draft

Ignoring special team players (which account for about 5 picks) per year, here is the average number of players selected at each playing position in the NFL draft.

Quarterbacks	12	Offensive Linemen	41
Running Backs	24	Defensive Linemen	42
Wide Receivers	32	Linebackers	32
Tight Ends	15	Defensive Backs	47

These numbers are based on the average number of players selected during the period from 1993 through 2010. 1991 and 1992 were excluded because the draft was 12 rounds in those years.

Source of Starters

DRAFTMETRICS used a variety of sources (most frequently, footballdb.com, nfl.com and various team media guides) to aggregate and classify information on games started from 2006-2010. The use of this five year period provides current information while minimizing the impact of single year variations.

The following table compares percentage of games started by players that entered the NFL through the draft, as an Undrafted Free Agent (UDFA) or through the Supplemental Draft. For drafted players, the information is also summarized by the Value Group in which each player was drafted. The Supplemental Draft is held to accommodate players who wish to play in the NFL but who missed the draft filing date or had a change in circumstance. A regular draft choice is forfeited when a player is selected in the Supplemental Draft. The “% of all draft choices” is for the 20 year period from 1991 through 2010 because the players starting the games from 2006 to 2010 are from a variety of draft years.

Table: Percentage of Games Started by Playing Position from 2006 through 2010

	Value Groups							UDFA	SD	TOT
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7			
QB	36.3%	12.0%	7.7%	3.5%	10.9%	10.8%	6.7%	12.1%	0.0%	100%
RB	18.9%	9.4%	9.1%	11.5%	11.0%	15.6%	4.8%	19.7%	0.0%	100%
WR	14.9%	12.6%	13.8%	15.2%	16.1%	10.4%	8.0%	9.1%	0.0%	100%
TE	6.6%	10.9%	18.0%	12.1%	15.3%	19.2%	6.2%	11.7%	0.0%	100%
OL	8.2%	10.6%	13.7%	11.7%	13.6%	18.7%	7.0%	15.6%	0.8%	100%
DL	18.2%	12.1%	10.5%	12.6%	9.8%	20.1%	4.7%	11.6%	0.4%	100%
LB	12.5%	9.4%	17.5%	9.2%	15.9%	17.0%	4.5%	13.9%	0.1%	100%
DB	10.2%	12.6%	16.7%	16.4%	11.2%	14.0%	6.2%	12.7%	0.1%	100%
ALL	13.5%	11.3%	13.9%	12.4%	12.8%	16.5%	6.0%	13.4%	0.3%	100%
% of all draft choices – 2001 to 2010	5.0%	5.8%	7.8%	10.1%	15.5%	33.3%	22.5%			100%

This table shows that there are some pretty significant variations in the source of starters for each playing position. These variations are most likely to be caused by difference in drafting patterns (e.g., an inordinate number of QB selected in Value Group 1, etc.) or what appears to be a differing level of “draft risk” inherent in the process for the various playing positions.

Some observations based on the above table:

- Despite all the film and player study that goes into the NFL draft, UDFA are still a significant source of players, accounting for over 13% of games started in the past five seasons
 - There is a wide variation by position - - nearly 20% of RB starts were by UDFA and less of half than that for WRs
- The first three Value Groups (from the first round through the middle of the second round) account for 38% of games started
 - Highest is QB with 56% of the games started by players selected in VGs 1-3
 - Lowest is TE with less than 18%
- Players drafted in Value Groups 4 and 5 (middle of the 2nd round to middle of the 4th round) account for 25% of the games started
 - High is WR with 31%
 - Low is QB with 14%
- Players drafted in Value Groups 6 and 7 (middle of fourth round to the end of the draft) account for 23% of the games started
 - High is OL with 26%
 - Low is QB with 18%

Drafting Patterns

It is no surprise that certain positions, QBs being the prime example, are valued more highly than others. This is reflected in the drafting patterns of NFL teams. Despite being one position out of 22, QBs have represented nearly 12% of draft selections in Value Group 1 from 1991 through 2010. Defensive linemen are also highly valued, representing over 25% of the Value Group 1 selections in that time period. At the other end of the spectrum, Tight Ends comprise less than 2% of the Value Group 1 selections.

The following table is the basis for the above comments and shows the composition of the draft selections in each Value Group by playing position for 1991 through 2010. While not analyzed, **DRAFTMETRICS** has included kickers and other special teams players (designated as “ST”) in the table to give the full picture. Columns may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Table: Composition of Value Groups by Playing Position – Percentage Basis

Playing Position	Value Groups							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	All
QB	11.9%	4.7%	3.5%	2.5%	4.8%	4.1%	5.6%	4.8%
RB	10.4%	10.0%	9.3%	9.6%	10.4%	9.4%	9.7%	9.7%
WR	12.7%	10.7%	15.3%	12.3%	13.4%	11.7%	14.1%	12.8%
TE	1.9%	4.7%	6.3%	5.2%	5.3%	7.0%	7.2%	6.1%
OL	14.2%	17.3%	15.3%	16.5%	15.5%	17.2%	17.3%	16.6%
DL	25.4%	21.3%	16.0%	18.8%	14.5%	15.6%	16.1%	16.7%
LB	10.0%	10.0%	12.8%	13.3%	14.3%	13.8%	11.7%	12.9%
DB	13.5%	21.0%	21.5%	20.8%	19.9%	19.4%	15.4%	18.7%
ST	0.0%	0.3%	0.3%	1.0%	2.1%	1.9%	2.8%	1.7%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100.0%

The next table shows the same information in terms of the number of selections for each playing position within each Value Group.

Table: Composition of Value Groups by Playing Position – Average Number of Selections

Playing Position	Value Groups							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	All
QB	1.55	0.71	0.70	0.65	1.92	3.53	2.74	11.80
RB	1.35	1.50	1.86	2.50	4.16	8.08	4.75	24.20
WR	1.65	1.61	3.06	3.20	5.36	10.06	6.91	31.85
TE	0.25	0.71	1.26	1.35	2.12	6.02	3.53	15.24
OL	1.85	2.60	3.06	4.29	6.20	14.79	8.48	41.27
DL	3.30	3.20	3.20	4.89	5.80	13.42	7.89	41.70
LB	1.30	1.5	2.56	3.46	5.72	11.87	5.73	32.14
DB	1.76	3.15	4.30	5.41	7.96	16.68	7.55	46.81
ST	0.00	0.05	0.06	0.26	0.84	1.63	1.37	4.21
Total	13	15	20	26	40	86	49	249

The drafting pattern for each playing position can be summarized as follows:

- QBs are drafted early
- RBs are drafted at a relatively balanced level throughout the draft
- WRs are drafted on somewhat of a roller coaster basis
 - Up in one Value Group then down in the next
- TEs are ignored early and drafted most heavily late in the draft
- OL are drafted less frequently in VG1 than in other Value Groups , then relatively heavily in VG2 and then again late in the draft
 - OL appeared to be “under drafted” overall as they make up only 1/6 of the draft choices but 22.7% of the starting positions (5 out of 22)
- DL are drafted heavily early and not so much in VGs 5-7
- LBs are lightly drafted in VGs 1 and 2, then at a relatively balanced level thereafter
- DBs are relatively lightly drafted in the beginning (VG1) and end (VG7) of the draft

Draft Success by Value Group

There is no single measure that can be used to perfectly evaluate the success of draft choices in the various Value Groups. **DRAFTMETRICS** decided that it was important to focus on a single measure, though, to keep the analysis straight-forward and focused. The measure selected was the percentage of five-year starters. Although, **DRAFTMETRICS** recognizes that all five-year starters are not equal (e.g., both Peyton Manning and Rick Mirer are five-year starters), but on balance it seems to be the most appropriate measure. The definition of a five-year starter is that a player starts at least eight games per season for at least five years.

The following table shows the percentage of five-year starters for each position by Value Group for the period from 1991 through 2004. This represents the probability that of a player drafted in each Value Group starting at least five years in their career. The probabilities represent a “batting average”. That is, for every 10 QBs drafted in Value Group 1 almost seven of them have become five-year starters.

Table: Probability of Drafting a Five-Year Starter by Value Group and Playing Position: 1991-2004

Position	Value Group							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	All
QB	68.2%	12.5%	44.4%	14.3%	6.7%	15.6%	3.5%	18.6%
RB	62.5%	29.2%	23.3%	20.0%	10.3%	7.7%	3.6%	12.7%
WR	65.4%	50.0%	37.2%	18.8%	18.0%	2.7%	3.3%	15.5%
TE	100.0%	63.6%	64.7%	30.0%	24.0%	7.1%	6.7%	19.9%
OL	88.0%	66.7%	58.7%	42.4%	32.2%	11.8%	9.9%	27.5%
DL	76.3%	58.7%	36.2%	44.6%	20.7%	11.1%	5.1%	24.8%
LB	87.5%	73.7%	61.3%	30.4%	31.8%	11.7%	5.1%	24.6%
DB	69.2%	62.8%	57.9%	37.8%	15.7%	8.3%	8.5%	23.0%
Composite	73.6%	61.9%	47.9%	33.2%	20.5%	9.1%	5.9%	21.5%

The analysis was cut-off at 2004 because the careers of players drafted after that are still in their early stages. For example, it is impossible for any player drafted in 2007 or after to be a five-year starter. Also excluding 2005 and 2006 recognizes that not every player steps into a starting role on day one and it would bias the results to include those years.

The above table demonstrates that skill positions (QB, RB, WR) are the riskiest position to draft.

DRAFTMETRICS also reviewed the likelihood of drafting a rookie starter for each playing position. A rookie starter is a player who started 8 games or more in the year he was drafted. This review showed that drafted offensive linemen were far and away the most likely to start as rookies, with over 20% of the draftees achieving that milestone. The remaining playing positions ranked as follows:

Defensive Backs	17.4%	Defensive Line	13.3%
Linebackers	15.4%	Quarterbacks	12.1%
Running Backs	14.2%	Wide Receivers	11.8%
Tight Ends	13.6%		

Source of Draft Choices by Conference

In analyzing draft information by conference, **DRAFTMETRICS** grouped certain conferences together for ease of analysis. The ACC, Big 10, Big 12, PAC-10 and SEC were analyzed both individually and as a group (dubbed the “**Big 5**”). The Big East, Mid-American, Mountain West, USA and Western Athletic Conferences plus Independents (most notably Notre Dame) were analyzed as a group only and called the “**Mid-Majors**”. **DRAFTMETRICS** apologizes if anyone regards that terminology as demeaning to those conferences (or Notre Dame) but a short phrase was needed to refer to those conferences and that’s the best **DRAFTMETRICS** could come up with. Other suggestions are welcomed (and no, Notre Dame will not be included individually and be part of the Big 6). All other conferences were included as “**Other**”.

The following table shows the number of players drafted by playing position (excluding special team players) during the period from 1991 through 2010 in accordance with the preceding paragraph.

Table: Number of Players Drafted from Each Conference Group by Playing Position

	QB	RB	WR	TE	OL	DL	LB	DB	All
Atlantic Coast	26	63	80	43	108	136	107	139	702
Big 10	30	81	78	41	131	94	93	103	651
Big 12	19	59	67	39	107	116	84	130	621
PAC-10	40	61	71	45	105	89	83	118	612
Southeastern	25	87	95	31	116	164	96	132	746
Total Big 5	140	351	391	199	567	599	463	622	3332
Mid-Majors	69	96	147	71	187	138	129	197	1034
Others	37	54	123	46	102	126	71	144	703
Total	246	501	661	316	856	863	663	963	5069

On an overall basis the Big 5 account for 66% of all draft choices, the Mid-Majors account for 20% and the Others account for 14%. This varies by position:

- Highest percentage for each group:
 - RB, LB and DL for Big 5
 - QB, WR and TE for Mid-Major
 - WR for Other
- Lowest percentage for each group:
 - QB and WR for Big 5
 - DL for Mid-Major
 - LB and RB for Other

DRAFTMETRICS then looked at the breakdown by Value Group for each of the Conferences in the following table:

Table: Percentage of Players Drafted from Each Conference Group by Value Group

	VG1	VG2	VG3	VG4	VG5	VG6	VG7	All
Atlantic Coast	21%	20%	16%	14%	16%	13%	11%	14%
Big 10	15%	17%	17%	11%	14%	12%	11%	13%
Big 12	15%	12%	11%	13%	13%	12%	11%	12%
PAC-10	16%	11%	16%	11%	13%	10%	12%	12%
Southeastern	20%	21%	18%	17%	15%	13%	13%	15%
Total Big 5	87%	81%	78%	66%	71%	60%	58%	66%
Mid-Majors	11%	15%	16%	23%	19%	23%	22%	20%
Others	2%	4%	6%	11%	10%	17%	20%	14%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Not surprising, the Big 5 are very dominant in the early Value Groups, accounting for 87% of the Value Group 1 picks, but that trails off to around 60% later in the draft.

The final issue addressed by **DRAFTMETRICS** was how the draftees from the conference groups performed versus expectations. To measure that, **DRAFTMETRICS** used the number of five-year starters as the measure and calculated how many such starters should have resulted from the conference groups draft choices. This considered the Value Group of the draft choices and the overall performance of choices within each Value Group for each playing position. These measurements were performed for the 1991 through 2004 draftees. The following table shows expected versus actual five-year starters.

	Calculated 5-Yr Starters	Actual 5-Yr Starters
Atlantic Coast	130.5	127
Big 10	113.8	106
Big 12	98.1	90
PAC-10	101.7	92
Southeastern	131.4	138
Total Big 5	575.4	553
Mid-Majors	130.1	148
Others	75.2	80
Total	781	781

This analysis indicates that fewer 5-year starters than expected come from the Big 5. In fact, only the SEC has produced more 5-year starters than expected. What does this mean? There is no way to document this, but **DRAFTMETRICS** believes it is due to Big 5 players being drafted higher than may be appropriate based on their level of competition.