**Great Expectations: Examining the draft success of NFL teams using Pro Football Reference's Approximate Value statistic**

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**ABSTRACT**

**INTRODUCTION**

The National Football League (NFL) has conducted an annual draft of collegiate and amateur players every year since 1936. The NFL Draft takes place in a fixed reverse order relative to the winning percentages of each team in the previous seasons; the team with the worst record picks first and the Super Bowl winner picks last in each round. The current format consists of seven rounds, with each team is typically awarded one pick in each round. 32 additional picks are awarded to various teams who lost talented players in free agency but did not sign comparable free agents. These “compensatory picks” are awarded at the end of rounds 3-7. This brings the total number of drafted players in any draft to approximately 256 players, 7 picks for each of the 32 teams and then the 32 compensatory picks.

The NFL Draft forms the foundation for talent turnover and parity in the NFL. The majority of young football talent enters the league through the draft. By having the worst teams pick earlier across each of the rounds, the idea is that those teams will have access to better talent in each round and improve their team over time, thus overtaking the better teams.

And yet, this is not always the case. The Cleveland Browns, New York Jets, and Jacksonville Jaguars despite consistently having access to high draft picks, have the three lowest win totals from the years 2010-2020. The Seattle Seahawks, New England Patriots, and the Green Bay Packers rarely pick inside the top 10, but represent the three winningest clubs in the same time span. Do the winning teams draft well? Do the losing teams draft poorly?

The NFL Draft is also an exciting event for fans. Done correctly, the NFL draft can provide a team with a foundation for success. Because of this, fans are heavily invested in players drafted to their favorite teams. Expectations for each draft pick are outlined in the “dead months” of the NFL news cycle between the NFL Draft and the start of training camp. First round picks are expected to become starts, while even later round picks are occasionally expected to be solid starters. When players do not hit these “great expectations”, they are heavily criticized. But are they actually worthy of this criticism? Did the player fail to meet reasonable expectations or were the expectations unreasonable to begin with?

The Approximate Value (AV) statistic from Pro Football Reference (PFR) can be leveraged to answer these questions. According to the PFR website, The Approximate Value (AV) method, created by PFR founder Doug Drinen, is an attempt to put a single number on the seasonal value of a player at any position from any year since 1950. This statistic was designed to serve a similar purpose to advanced statistics in baseball and basketball and to help identify which teams are the best at drafting talent, as outlined in the introductory blog post on PFR’s website. It is designed to replace typical measures of NFL success like games played, games started, All-Pro nominations, Pro Bowl nominations, and other awards. Using this one statistic, we can “approximate” the value that a given player provided to their team in any one season.

This manuscript aims to take an in depth dive into NFL drafting success over the period of 2010-2020. We will determine which teams had the most draft success, which teams had the least success, which players were the draft steals and busts of the decade, and take a more individualized look at each team’s draft success over the decade. We will also show that many high profile NFL draft “busts” actually met their expectations according to the value provided by their peers drafted at the same point in the draft.

**RESULTS**

**Draft Pick Efficiency is positively correlated with winning in the NFL**

We first sought to determine whether teams drafting good players and keeping those good players would contribute to winning. We collected data on all \_\_\_\_\_ players drafted from the 2010 to 2020 NFL drafts using PFR databases. For each team, we collected the AV that all drafted players by that team provided to the drafting team (DrAV) and the AV that the drafting team lost to other teams by not retaining drafted players (AVlost). We then divided this number by the number of picks made by the team across the 2010-2020 drafts. The pick efficiency formula is outlined below.

For example, the

**DISCUSSION**

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Detailed methodologies are outlined in the compiled code summary in the Github repository at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

STILL WORKING ON THIS

**AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS**

Myron Gibert: Workflow design and implementation, manuscript drafting

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