Who is ESPN's Best NFL Nation Reporter?

During the regular season each team's *NFL Nation* reporter provided predictions for each game. Now that the season is over, we can rank which reporter provided the most accurate predictions.

Brier scores are widely used to rank forecasts. Brier scores account for the amount of confidence included in each prediction. If the forecaster gives a 100 percent chance to their team winning, and their team wins, the forecaster will receive a better Brier score than if they were to have claimed a 75 percent chance. Conversely, if their team loses the forecaster would have received a better Brier score by claiming a 75 percent chance of victory than a 100 percent chance.

ESPN's *NFL Nation* reporters' predictions were not in the form of probabilities, but in spreads. To turn the spreads into probabilities, I ran the predicted point spreads through the CDF of the normal distribution with a standard deviation of 14, as proposed by Hal Stern.

In Week 11, for example, Texans reporter Sarah Barshop predicted that the Texans would beat the Cardinals 16-13. This method implies a 58.5 percent chance of a Texans win. In Week 16, Packers reporter Rob Demovsky's predicted that the Packers would lose to to the Vikings by 28 points, which implies a 97.7 percent chance of a Vikings win.

With probabilities and outcomes for each game, we can now calculate the average Brier score for each reporter. The Brier score for a binary outcome is the forecast minus the outcome squared. For example, Barshop's 58.5 percent probability attached to a Texans win in week 11, where they won, results in a Brier score of 0.17 (0.585 - 1)^2. Demovsky's aggressive, and accurate, prediction of a Vikings win translates to a Brier score of 0.00059. Had the Packers won, Demovsky's Brier score for the week would have been 0.955. A perfect Brier score is zero; the worst possible score is one.

Results

Figure 1 shows that Colts reporter Mike Wells provided the most accurate forecasts in the regular season with a Brier score of 0.136. The least accurate reporter was the Jaguars' Mike DiRocco, with a Brier score of 0.357.

But simply looking at Brier scores may be naive. Because reporters stick to the same team we could see an inherent advantage for certain reporters based on how often – or rarely – their team wins. To account for this potential bias in the scores, we can first account for the number of wins each team has going into each week. Furthermore, reporters may struggle with their predictions early in the season, especially if a team is performing much differently than they did the previous season. To account for the possibility that predictions improve as the

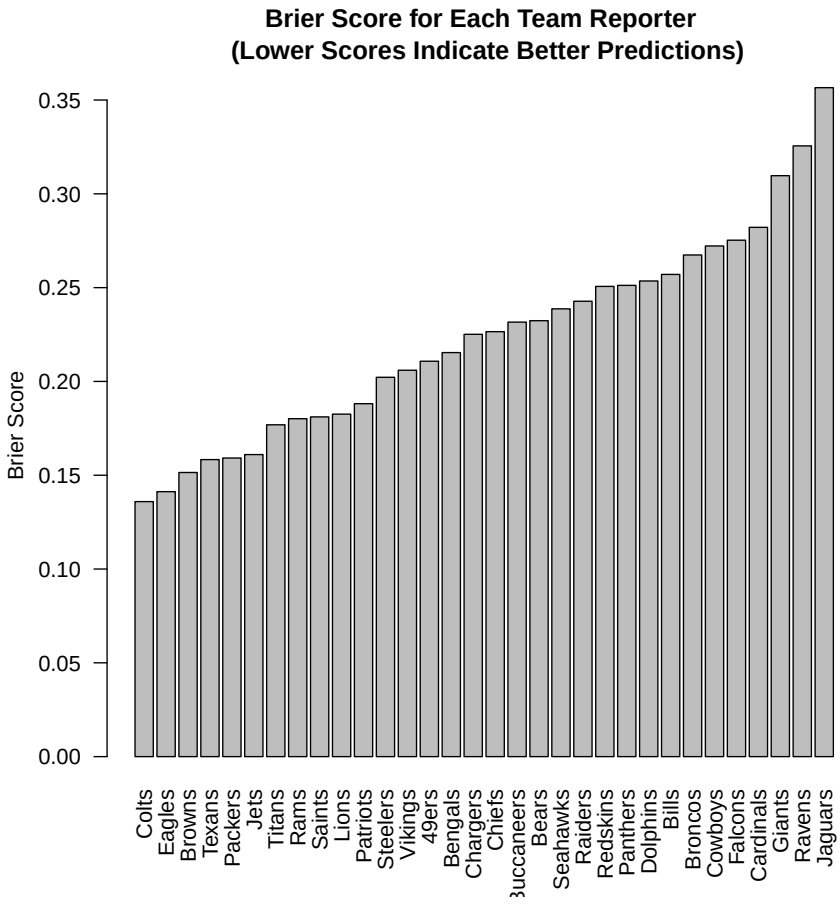

Figure 1: Raw Brier Scores

weeks pass, we can include a variable for each week. For the statistically inclined, an F-test confirms that this model fits the data better than the simple model.

After adjusting for wins and weeks, Figure 2 shows that Indianapolis' Wells still had the lowest Brier score of 0.047 while Browns reporter Pat McManamon finished just behind Wells with an adjusted Brier score of 0.048. Jacksonville's DiRocco once again had the highest score of 0.3.

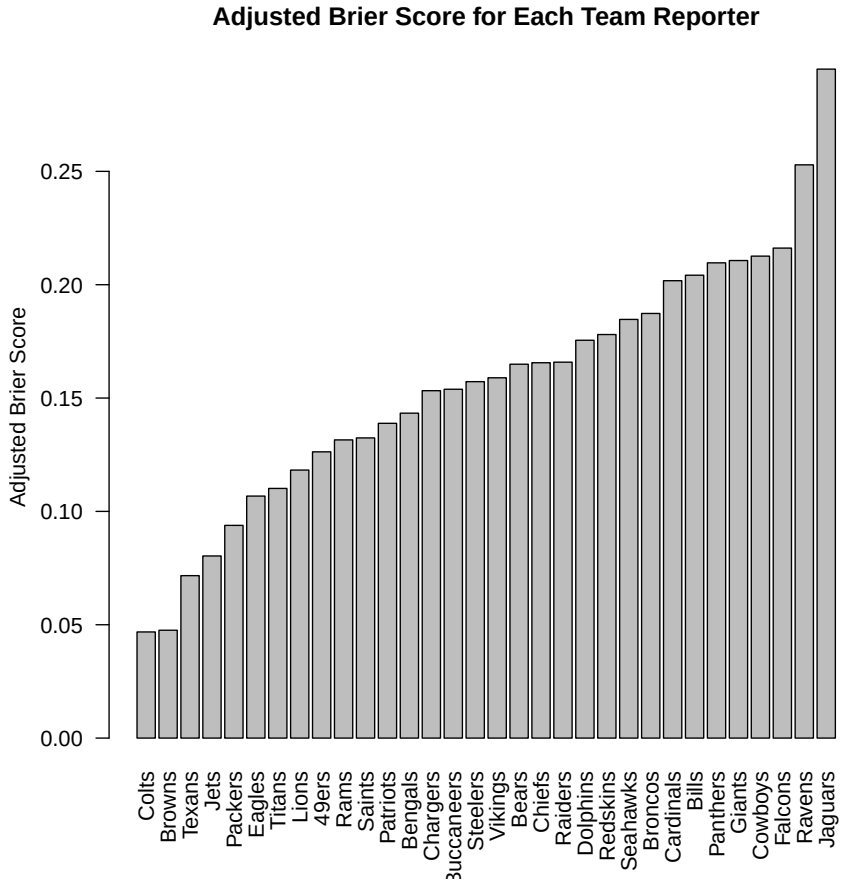

Figure 2: Adjusted Brier Scores

Reporters were both rewarded and punished for aggressive point spreads. Wells 13-point average spread was the most aggressive. DiRocco's 9.8 point average was the fourth highest. Because DiRocco's predictions were often wrong, he had the worst Brier score. Washington's John Keim had the lowest average spread and ended up with the 22nd highest Brier score, showing that conservative forecasts resulted in below-average predictions.

The table below provides shows each reporter, their team, average point spreads and Brier scores.

Rank	Team	Reporter	Av. Spread	Brier Score	Adj. Brier Score
1	Colts	Mike Wells	13.000	0.136	0.047
2	Browns	Pat McManamon	9.200	0.151	0.048
3	Texans	Sarah Barshop	9.357	0.158	0.072
4	Jets	Rich Cimini	7.769	0.161	0.080
5	Packers	Rob Demovsky	10.214	0.159	0.094
6	Eagles	Tim McManus	7.000	0.141	0.107
7	Titans	Cameron Wolfe	7.143	0.177	0.110
8	Lions	Mike Rothstein	7.067	0.183	0.118
9	49ers	Nick Wagoner	7.786	0.211	0.126
10	Rams	Alden Gonzalez	8.643	0.180	0.132
11	Saints	Mike Triplett	5.000	0.181	0.132
12	Patriots	Mike Reiss	9.462	0.188	0.139
13	Bengals	Katherine Terrell	9.357	0.215	0.143
14	Chargers	Eric Williams	5.200	0.225	0.153
15	Buccaneers	Jenna Laine	6.067	0.232	0.154
16	Steelers	Jeremy Fowler	6.538	0.202	0.157
17	Vikings	Courtney Cronin	8.467	0.206	0.159
18	Bears	Jeff Dickerson	7.000	0.232	0.165
19	Chiefs	Adam Teicher	4.357	0.227	0.166
20	Raiders	Paul Gutierrez	5.786	0.243	0.166
21	Dolphins	James Walker	6.133	0.254	0.175
22	Redskins	John Keim	4.143	0.251	0.178
23	Seahawks	Brady Henderson	6.000	0.239	0.185
24	Broncos	Jeff Legwold	6.786	0.267	0.187
25	Cardinals	Josh Weinfuss	9.429	0.282	0.202
26	Bills	Mike Rodak	8.214	0.257	0.204
27	Panthers	David Newton	9.571	0.251	0.210
28	Giants	Jordan Raanan	8.333	0.310	0.211
29	Cowboys	Todd Archer	5.643	0.272	0.213
30	Falcons	Vaughn McClure	7.333	0.275	0.216
31	Ravens	Jamison Hensley	10.071	0.326	0.253
32	Jaguars	Mike DiRocco	9.800	0.357	0.295

Note: Because the predictions were generally published on Saturday reporters did not include predictions for Thursday night games. Predictions for Week 1 are behind a paywall and therefore not included in the analysis.