

'Team players' are picked earlier in NFL draft—and paid more, study shows

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Steven Whiting, assistant professor in the College of Business Administration, found that "team players" are picked higher in the NFL draft and paid more in their first year. Credit: Nick Russett/UCF

In the NFL, it pays to be a team player - literally. A study published recently in the *Journal of Applied Psychology* shows that good character boosts a player's stock in the NFL draft.

Researchers found that media reports about a college player helping a freshman teammate or putting in extra time to watch game film puts more money in his pocket. Just a few press reports of such good-guy behavior increases first-year salaries as much as \$143,000 for linebackers and \$105,000 for wide receivers.

It also moves a player up one spot in the draft, said study author Steven Whiting of the University of Central Florida's College of Business Administration.

"Players who encourage their teammates, spend more time in the weight room or volunteer for difficult duties - the ones who put the team first - are going to earn more money, be drafted earlier and be more successful in the NFL," Whiting said.

With the NFL Scouting Combine starting this week and the draft in April, analysts and prognosticators are already obsessively poring over player stats. But they're ignoring the "team player" factor, Whiting said.

At the Scouting Combine, NFL coaches and general managers look at 40-yard dash times, jump height and college statistics, too, but this research suggests they also consider whether a player showed himself to be a team player in college. That less tangible factor - known as contextual performance - turns out to be an important predictor of success in the pros, the study found.

Those players bring trust and cohesion to a team, Whiting said, and coaches can spend more time coaching than managing locker room strife. Those who displayed those character traits in college did well in the NFL, too, the study found.

NFL teams consider these factors, and their selections more accurately predict success or failure than the sportswriters and analysts who

compile draft rankings, he said.

Whiting and co-author Tim Maynes of the University of Buffalo's School of Management analyzed 218 wide receivers and 222 linebackers picked in the NFL draft from 2006 to 2012. They combed through more than 26,000 news stories spanning the 440 players' college careers to find examples of team-first behavior.

The research has implications beyond the football field.

"Many employers use teams in the workplace," Whiting said, "and when it comes to hiring they should consider applicants who show concern for teammates, and for the organization's goals."

More information: Steven W. Whiting et al. Selecting Team Players: Considering the Impact of Contextual Performance and Workplace Deviance on Selection Decisions in the National Football League., *Journal of Applied Psychology* (2015). [DOI: 10.1037/apl0000067](https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000067)

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