Teams want to know it all: NFL prospects take psychological, personality tests before draft

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Jenny Vrentas/The Star-Ledger

Andrew Mills/The Star-LedgerAhmad Bradshaw was one player the Giants took a chance on, after he "fed it straightforward" in his pre-draft interview with the team.Will Beatty remembers sitting at a desk last spring, with a pencil and hundreds of true/false questions to answer, trying not to get overwhelmed.

Before the Giants selected the offensive tackle in the second round of last year's Draft, he was a hopeful prospect navigating his way through tricky personality tests.

"You're reading a question," Beatty recalled, "and you're thinking, 'I read this same question four

minutes ago, and one word changed.' "

As pro teams sort their draft boards each year, they factor in 40-yard dash times, injury histories —
and these kinds of psychological evaluations.

From clinical interviews and personality tests, psychologists create for teams a profile of a prospect,
and also grade the risk of drafting him. The aim is to bring in players who not just improve the team
on the field, but who also fit in smoothly in the locker room.

"The psychological and character piece is probably 10 percent of the whole process for a team," said
sports psychology consultant Robert Price, who conducted pre-draft evaluations for the Giants for a
decade. "You don't make it because you do well in an interview. But if you don't have a good grade,
you will drop off someone's draft board pretty quickly."

In the months leading up to the draft, teams screen as many players as possible at the NFL Combine,
senior all-star games and pre-draft visits.

Players are classified as one of 16 personality types through the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, and
scored on traits like dominance, independence and leadership via the California Psychological
Inventory. In interviews, they're asked simple questions like "Where did you grow up?" and tougher
ones about family tragedies or legal trouble. Over the last three years, Price said players have also
been asked about gun and animal ownership.

Each team has its own grading scale, but a common rubric is: A (no problems), B (moderate risk), D
(major risk) and F (severe risk). There is no C, so that evaluators are forced to polarize players.

"We have a profile that we like," Giants general manager Jerry Reese said of how his team uses the
evaluations. "You can never get all of the same guys. Everybody has different personalities, so it is
hard to fit it. But we do look for certain qualities in players."

Teams may have different priorities as they compare players. One heavy on leaders may be looking for good followers, Price said. Or, a team with a poor track record at one position may look to bring in players at that position with different personality profiles than in the past, he explained.

And sometimes, a team is willing to take a chance on a guy who slipped down other teams' boards due to character concerns — like the Giants did with running back Ahmad Bradshaw in 2007. With two arrests in college, he fell to the seventh round, where the Giants took a gamble that has, so far, been worth it.

"With me, I just fed it straightforward," Bradshaw said. "I think they could see which way my life was going. I told them I had kids; that I had to move forward in life. It was a good thing the Giants gave me this chance."

Teams keep every psychological evaluation they run, compiling a sizeable archive that can come in handy a few years down the road, when the same players are available in free agency.

After 10 years of helping to stock the Giants' database — and also doing similar work for the Bears and Nets — Price focused on the other side this year. He worked with pro prospects at TEST Sports Club in Martinsville and Perfect Competition near Miami, preparing them for the questions teams ask and helping them communicate more clearly.

On both sides, the stakes are high.

"It is their largest and biggest job interview," Price said.

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