

<http://www.foxsports.com/nfl/story/brian-billick-nfl-coach-general-manager-scout-interact-draft-players-analysis-041511>

The NFL draft is a make or break deal that can set up an NFL team for success that can reach into the distant future or it can leave teams devastated and at the bottom looking up at a three to five year rebuild. The NFL draft is often seen as an inexact science, one team picks the best available player that is available to them and then look for the next person to draft. Although this may be how it looks to the arm chair quarterbacks across America and the world: it is simply not that easy. First off, a team must assess and evaluate their needs which takes plenty of insight, proactive nature, and oftentimes just a gut feeling can make the difference. A General manager may be concerned with the contract situation of his star free safety, who is set to become a free agent in the off season and will be asking for a big pay check. Or they may be looking at the age of his running back who is nearing his 30's which often tends to be the shelf life of an NFL running back in such a violent game. Or it could just be the fact that the team simply does not have the answer at the quarterback position and will do whatever it takes to get one. With all of these things running through a general manager's trade, it seems like pulling teeth attempting to anticipate who will stay and who will leave from the current roster which holds such big weight when it comes down to drafting a player.

With all this in mind, throw on top of the pile the ability to be able to trade current players to other teams for their draft picks and vice versa. There are certainly dominant strategies involved when it comes to drafting players. In today's NFL, staying as far under the cap limit as possible and keeping the team young is a dominant strategy because no matter if a team loses one of their starters or gets a player for a cheap price (like in the NFL draft). The reason why this is a dominant strategy is because the team is ultimately getting rid of cap space and veteran players for cheaper younger players for plenty of upside. Not only do they get a player that is young that they can develop and hope that they become a starter; moreover, if that young player does not pan out then they basically lost nothing because the player was not expensive to keep. So whether that meaning to draft a player to replace one that wants a pay raise or to trade for a player that is willing to get paid less from another team so that either way they end up with a young player which can pay off in the long haul or for a cheaper player that will not hurt the team's ability to buy more young talent.

Brian Billick does a great job talking about the practical draft process and how communicating with other teams and doing whatever it takes to keep the team young and cheap will always leave the team with good options. Either they develop the young players that they have or they use the extra cap space that they have to fill the holes on their rosters. All these things go into the mind of a NFL GM on draft day and the stakes are incredibly high. The NFL is a lucrative business and there are plenty of complex topics that go into cementing a team as a contender rather than a pretender.

