

THE MYSTERY OF THE WONDERLIC

Contributed by Mike Fisher
Mon, Apr 14, 2008, 11:36 AM

With the NFL Draft approaching, it's time to reveal the meaning, the methods and the mystery of. ... The Wonderlic Test.

You've met a girl. And she might be "The One";

You'd first admired her from afar. Then you got to know her a bit, got a close-up look at her beauty, learned about her background, her talents, her likes and dislikes, her hopes and dreams. You know how she does her hair, you know how she smells, you even know her bra size.

Now let's say you have the opportunity to learn one more thing about your new girlfriend, your potential "The One"; You can administer to her the Wonderlic Test and learn more about her level of intelligence.

Would you?

Damn right you would — even if you'd long ago determined that as far as your concerned, "bra size"; trumps "IQ points"; any day, you'd still be in the information-gathering business.

As is the NFL.

Which brings us, again, to the controversy inherent in the NFL's Scouting Combine practice of requiring potential draftees to take the Wonderlic Test. Every year, somebody scores low — and then that somebody's representatives, defenders or rightful heirs attempts to argue that the Wonderlic is unfair, or worse, unimportant.

Allow me to explain to the contrary:

It should be understood that the measurements taken by the league and its teams at the yearly meat market in Indianapolis are extensive and exhaustive. For instance:

On the field, players run the 40-yard dash, and are timed in 10-, 20- and 40-yard increments, to gauge the player's explosion and speed. They also participate in the 225-pound bench press, showing how many reps they can do at that weight. Then there is the standing vertical jump, the broad jump, the 3-Cone Drill, the 20-yard shuttle, the 60-yard shuttle and the position-skill drills.

All of these are well-considered ways to determine an athlete's speed, agility, strength, conditioning, quickness and explosiveness.

Then there are the off-the-field events. The teams take measurements of the athlete, and not just height and weight. Body fat is gauged. Arm length is recorded. And even the "wing span"; of the guys'; hands is among the measurements.

And there are interviews, lots of interviews. Each team is allowed to grab 60 guys for 15 minutes each. It's about composure and about personality. ... it's a job interview, essentially.

The Combine also includes extensive evaluations of past injuries, a drug test, and, finally, the infamous Wonderlic Test.

The league isn't real keen on releasing the results of the Wonderlic, which is designed to measure a player's IQ through a fast-moving 50-question test. The Wonderlic company has been around for 70 years; the NFL has used its tests since 1968.

A score of 30 is considered very good. (Former Cincy punter Pat McInally, an Ivy Leaguer, scored the only perfect 50 in the NFL annals.) A score in the single digits creates the appearance that you maybe weren't even bright enough to remember to sign your name.

There could be "cultural barriers" in the test. Things can get hurried. Some questions are tougher than others. And it's all timed.

Still, it can be, you know, embarrassing.

Legend has it that Vince Young scored a 6 — and as I've written in this space before, that may or not be indicative of Young's intelligence. Because when he was at the University of Texas he did indeed participate in classes and, according to schoolmates I've talked with, handled himself just fine.

A couple of Hall-of-Fame quarterbacks, Dan Marino and Terry Bradshaw, each scored 15's. And they've done pretty well for themselves, on and off the field.

Meanwhile, QB bust Akili Smith scored a 37 and QB bust Quincy Carter scored a 30. I know Akili Smith; he's a bright man. Cowboys fans know Quincy Carter. — and his off-field decisions belie his high score.

The Chicago Tribune got hold of some of this year's scores: Boston College QB Matt Ryan scored a 32, as did Louisville QB Brian Brohm. Delaware's Joe Flacco scored a 27 and Michigan QB Chad Henne a 22.

Among O-linemen, Vanderbilt's Chris Williams (32), Pitt's Jeff Otah (28), USC's Sam Baker (27), BC's Godser Cherilus (25) and Virginia's Brandon Albert (23) did fine.

Boise State's Ryan Clady (13) did not. Other notables include Tennessee linebacker Jerod Mayo (26), USC linebacker Keith Rivers (16) and Miami safety Kenny Phillips (16).

What does it matter? Maybe it matters if one of the questions is this:

"Paper clips sell for 21 cents per box. What will four boxes cost?"

Or:

"Assume the first two statements are true.

Bill greeted Beth. Beth greeted Ben. Bill did not greet Ben.

Is the final one: True, False, or Not Certain?"

The questions do get harder. But you have scored a ‘2’ so far… right?

Reported average scores by position go like this: Offensive tackle – 26, Center – 25, Quarterback – 24, Guard – 23, Tight end – 22, Safety – 19, Linebacker – 19, Cornerback – 18, Wide receiver – 17, Fullback – 17, Halfback 15.

Reported average scores for civilians go like this: Chemist – 31, Programmer – 29, Journalist – 26 (yeah!), Sales – 24, Bank teller – 22, Clerical worker – 21, Security guard – 17, Warehouse – 15.

And what does it all mean? That Troy Aikman’s 29 makes him a better quarterback than Tony Romo’s alleged 37? No. That the Cowboys, with their two No. 1 picks, are absolutely not going to select a cornerback and a wide receiver in the first round of the April 26-27 NFL Draft because they couldn’t find a 30 in the bunch? No.

The results of the Wonderlic are just another tool. Like the seconds it takes a guy to run 10 yards, or the measurement of a guy’s hand span, or maybe even that that girlfriend of yours’ bra size.

They’re all just tools. And critics who don’t understand that? Well, maybe they’re just tools, too.