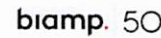
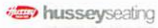




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Dolphins Use Psychologist to Evaluate Draft Prospects

AB Staff

Apr 25, 2017

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AB LEADERS

As the Dolphins consider the players they'll select in the NFL draft this week, some measurables have been staples for years: height, weight, speed, strength and tackles and touchdowns.

But in an effort to improve their chances of drafting a successful player, Miami has asked a Harvard-educated performance psychologist to interview more than 50 college prospects at the scouting combine in Indianapolis and the team's headquarters in Davie.

"While the NFL will spend millions and millions and millions of dollars assessing from the neck down, really assessing from the neck up is where the future will be and where it goes," Dr. Rick Perea told The Palm Beach Post. "The teams that put the emphasis on that piece will be the ones that win."

Perea is no stranger to Davie or the Dolphins. Behind the scenes, Perea worked with Dolphins coaches and players during all of their 10-win, playoff season last year.

A former undrafted free-agent linebacker with the Denver Broncos, Perea has been tapped by many pro and college sports teams, including the Chicago Bears and Broncos, two former organizations of Dolphins coach Adam Gase.

Perea says he has also worked with as many as 16 current NFL quarterbacks. Perea's strengths are multi pronged.

From AB: [Getting into athletes' heads and hearts, sports psychologists say, will boost the effectiveness of their arms and legs](#)

When it comes to in-season work with athletes, for example, Perea says he helps players take an active role in how to control their human behavior. He says he can help players use techniques and protocols to get their thoughts in the right place. While he declined to get into specifics, Perea was able to speak in generalities.

"It comes down to helping them shape their thoughts, so their thoughts don't shape them," he said. "Thoughts lead to feelings. Feelings lead to moods. Moods lead to behavior. Behavior is the performance on the field. So we can actually influence that behavior by shaping our thoughts on a daily basis."

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As it relates to pre-draft evaluation, Perea conducted "qualitative discussions" as part of two-day player visits that typically include meetings with executives, coaches, trainers, strength staff and security as well as Miami's highly respected sports performance staff.

Miami owner Stephen Ross has invested heavily in second-level resources designed to help players and, in turn, the organization. For example, Miami operates a full-time sports performance group led by director Wayne Diesel.

The consultation of Perea can be compared with strategies companies such as Apple and Google use in their hiring screening processes.

For all of the fancy words that can be used to explain what Perea's objective, it can really be boiled down to this: Does this prospect have high or low self-motivation?

"One of the things we do is we assess personalities," Perea said. "Personality is assessed by five major domains that we look at in psychology.

Conscientiousness is really about someone's drive and motor and motive to perform on a daily basis. Their drive and their DNA. Is it in their DNA? Do they wake up in the morning and say, 'I can't wait to do this' or do they need a carrot dangled in front of them to do something? When we talk about motivation, the root word is 'motive.' What is our motive in what we do? So we analyze conscientiousness as a core level."

One player who said he met with Perea in Davie was an SEC lineman who may be drafted in Rounds 2 or 3 on Friday night.

"His session was inspiring," the player said. "He really helped me. I learned a lot about myself, and he showed me ways to think about things in life. We spoke about how you can train your brain to think differently. He wanted to learn about you as a person and get deeper into what type of person you are and who you are. Talk about things to help figure out who you are and what your purpose is and what you want you want to get out of life. You can run a 4.2 at the combine or break records, but at the end of the day, it's about how badly do you want it?"

How badly do you want it?

If only NFL teams had more honest information about that seemingly unquantifiable character trait.

Yet that's exactly what Perea is trying to quantify.

"We want to understand what level of conscientiousness they have at what we call a covert level," Perea explained. "Covert means things that you can't see, like thoughts, feelings and perceptions. If I were sitting there right next to you, you would not be able to tell what my covert behavior is. My overt is something you can see, like anger control, relationship experience, anger management. Those are things you can see."

"My piece is really to understand their psychological core. I don't really care about how their ability to process information rapidly. That's not my area of expertise. My expertise is who are they at a psychological core. Because who they are will determine how they react to certain situations."

Perea notes the success of coaches he believes are open to performance psychology.

"It's about understanding how much the brain influences the body," he said. "And we now have some people in the NFL that are now driving that ship. And, oh, by the way, coincidentally it's people like Pete Carroll, Bill Belichick, Adam Gase and Nick Saban. So all four of those guys have something in common. I don't have to tell you what that is."

Miami has openly discussed how it is important to draft -- and retain -- players with not only the physical skill set to achieve high levels of on-field success, but who also fit into a positive culture.

"We don't want the guy with a low level of conscientiousness," Perea said. "We don't want the guy that needs the carrot. We want the guy that has the motor. And we can actually measure that. We can really make a determination of what that person is at a core level."

jschad@pbpost.com

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April 26, 2017



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