# Scouting Quarterbacks by Scouting Wide Receivers

An argument often heard when discussing any sport is that player X is only good because of player Y. Sometimes this argument is looked back on fondly. For example, the "Bud Dupree was only good in Pittsburgh because he had TJ Watt playing across from him" crowd would brag after Dupree's first year in Tennessee. Alternatively, it was the "Brady is boosted by Belichick" crowd who was left behind after Brady's Super Bowl win in Tampa. While the argument had mixed results in the pros, can it be applied more successfully in the case of scouting college quarterbacks?
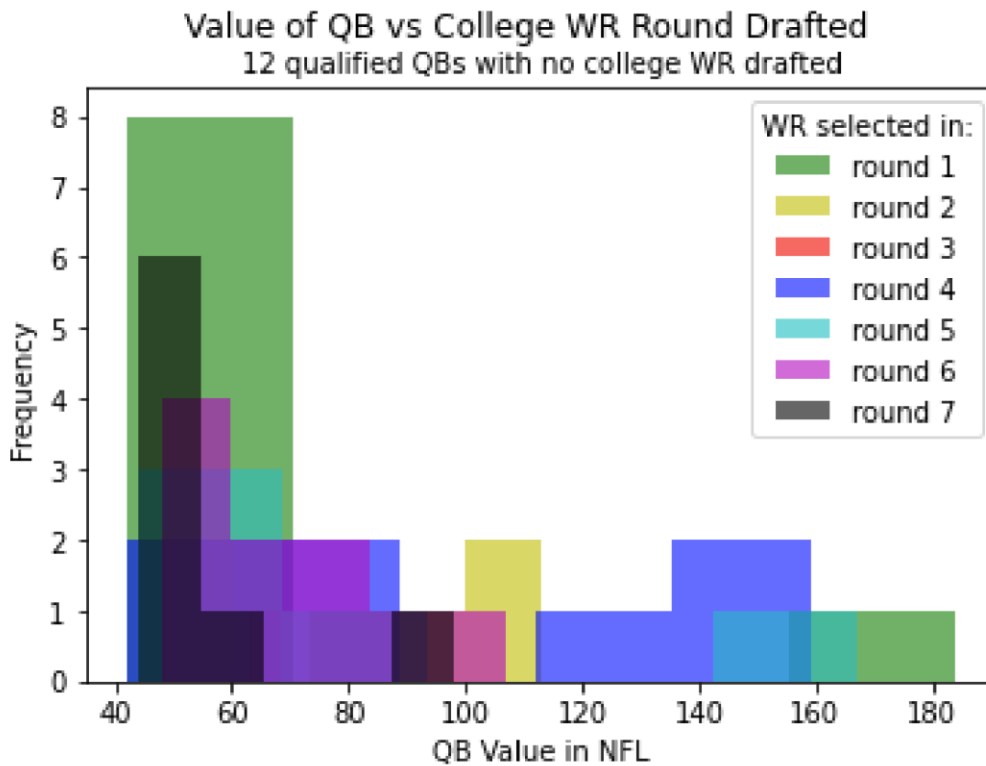
The above chart is a histogram representing the number of wide receivers drafted, grouped by round selected, per quarterback with a weighted career approximate value (WCAV) (PFR) above 40. More specifically, for every quarterback with a WCAV greater than 40,

represented is the number of and round(s) selected of their college wide receivers. For example, Pat Mahomes has a WCAV of roughly 70, and attended Texas Tech from 2014-2017. During this time, he played with wide receiver Keke Coutee, who was drafted in the 4th round. Therefore, there is a blue bar of frequency 1 sitting around the 70-mark on the x-axis (it is tucked in between and behind a few purple bars).

A WCAV cutoff of 40 was chosen to prevent cluttering of the chart. For perspective, 40 represents the difference between the career of Robert Griffin III, who scored just below 40, and Baker Mayfield, who scored just above 40 during his time with the Browns. Given that this is a career value, very young quarterbacks who haven't had the opportunity for multi-year success have not surpassed the cutoff. For further perspective, some of the youngest quarterbacks with a qualifying WCAV include, but are not limited to, Pat Mahomes (70), Lamar Jackson (59), Deshaun Watson (52), Josh Allen (51), Kyler Murray (44), and Baker Mayfield (42).

Furthermore, to ensure that the quarterback actually played with the wide receiver in college and wasn't just a backup on his team when they were together, the wide receiver must have been drafted within one year of the quarterback. That is, if quarterback X was drafted in 2015, only wide receivers attending their college drafted in 2014-2016 are considered.
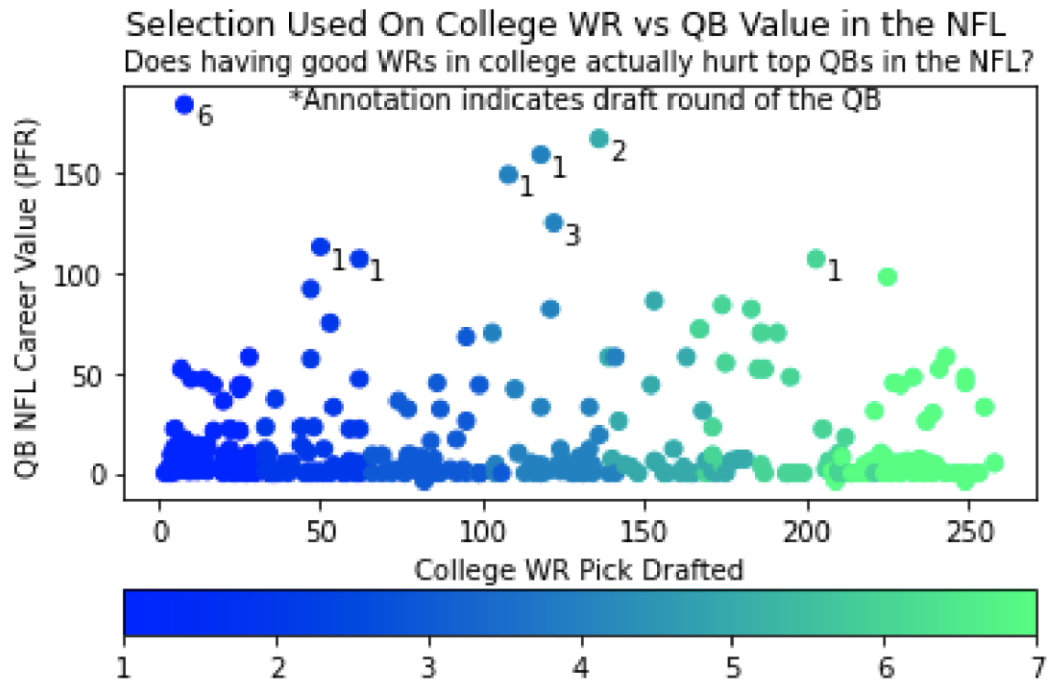
So, what does this all mean as far as drafting a quarterback? Looking at the histogram, there are interesting trends, particularly surrounding the success of quarterbacks who played with top tier wide receivers in college. The color green represents wide receivers selected in round one. The largest bar in the entire graph is green, sitting as far left as possible. This means that quarterbacks who play with very skilled wide receivers in college tend to be the least successful of the bunch (remember, everyone on this list is at least as successful as Baker Mayfield). Were

these quarterbacks over-drafted due to the talent of their wider receiver cores? Interestingly, the black bar, for wide receivers drafted in round 7, follows a similar trend.

You will also notice a small green bar to far right of the graph, where Tom Brady lies. Brady, as you know, was a 6th round pick, who went to college with a wide receiver who would end up getting drafted in the 1st round, David Terrell. Terrell would have a rough career, only amassing a WCAV of 11. It's safe to say that the scouts of the time got these two mixed up and that Brady should have been the 1st round pick and Terrell the 6th, making the purple instead of green like it shows.

Furthermore, you'll notice that a majority of the graph consists of bars colored blue, light blue, and purple. This indicates that most successful quarterbacks in the NFL played with wide receivers in college who were deemed to have round 4-6 talent. Are these wide receivers legitimately mid-round talents? Or are they just playing up to that level due to great quarterback play?

Finally, it is important to note the 12 quarterbacks who had *no* college wide receivers drafted. That is, 12 quarterbacks with careers better that Baker Mayfield's, who didn't once throw a competitive ball to an NFL caliber wide receiver until after the NFL draft.

Selection Used On College WR vs QB Value in the NFL
Does having good WRs in college actually hurt top QBs in the NFL?
*Annotation indicates draft round of the QB

The above graph shows the same trend as the histogram, but on a scatter plot and including quarterbacks with a WCAV less than 40. You will notice many of the trends discussed when looking at the histogram are confirmed here. There are the largest clusters in both of the bottom corners of the graph, where less successful quarterbacks who played collegiately with 1st and 7th round wide receivers are located , as well as in the upper middle, where you see a small cluster of 4 very successful quarterbacks who played with mid-round wide receivers in college. A trendline on this graph would likely show a slight rainbow shape.

There are a few interesting quarterbacks to monitor over the next few years. Can Kyler Murray (CeeDee Lamb) or Deshaun Watson (Mike Williams) break this trend? The two show promise but have a combined 1 playoff win in 8 years played. What about Joe Burrow (Jamar Chase, Justin Jefferson)? His data point is particularly interesting, as one of the highly touted wide receivers he played with in college is now on his same NFL team; a very rare scenario

within the league. What about Kenny Pickett (Jordan Addison?) or CJ Stroud (Garret Wilson, Chris Olave, Jaxon Smith-Njigba?).

So, what conclusions can ultimately be made about quarterbacks by looking at their college wide receivers? Here are a few that stand out to me:

1) Top tier college wide receivers (round 1 selections) make quarterbacks appear better than they are.

2) The best quarterbacks will create mid-to-late round (4-6) selections out of their college wide receiver cores.

3) 12 qualified quarterbacks had none of their college wide receivers drafted, which is a trend worthy of further investigation

As a result, staying away from quarterbacks who had great wide receivers during their college careers could increase a team's odds of hitting at the position. In their stead, teams should favor quarterbacks who played with mid-round talent in college. Quarterbacks are difficult to scout. Why not use the easier-to-scout talent around them to help predict their NFL success?