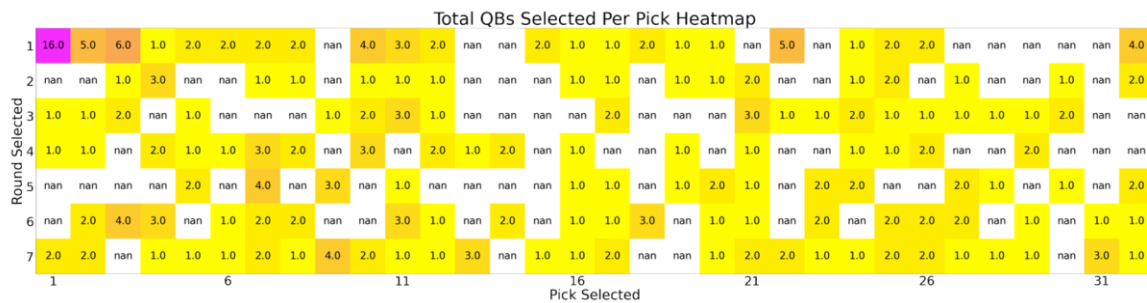


# Where Should You Draft Your Quarterback?

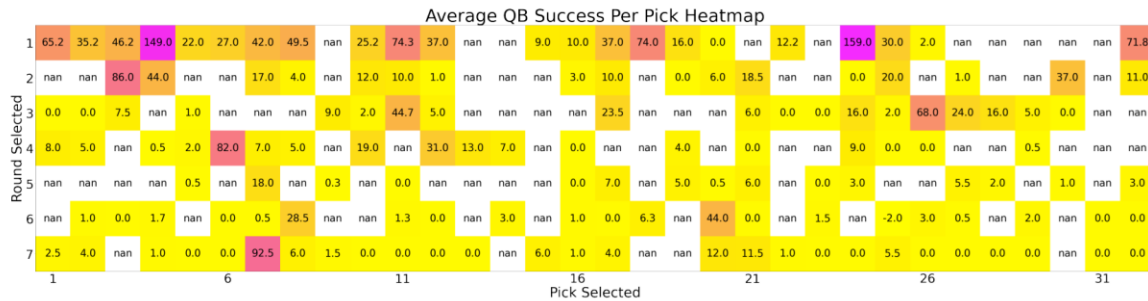
The trend for quarterbacks has been consistent recently; draft them early or don't draft them at all. In fact, six of the last eight drafts have seen a quarterback drafted with the first overall pick. Furthermore, there is serious discussion every single year regarding quarterback-needy teams trading up from the second round to late in the first in order to get an extra year on a rookie quarterbacks' contract, despite them not necessarily being seen as a first-round prospect. Sports commentators constantly weigh in on this themselves, with Nick Wright saying "If I was running a team, here's my rule for the GM: There are only 2 spots where you're allowed to draft a quarterback. In the top 10, or [in the] 6<sup>th</sup> round or later." on his show *What's Wright? With Nick Wright*.

With this being said, is there any truth to the idea that successful quarterbacks need to be drafted so early? Should teams trade up to pick their franchise quarterbacks?

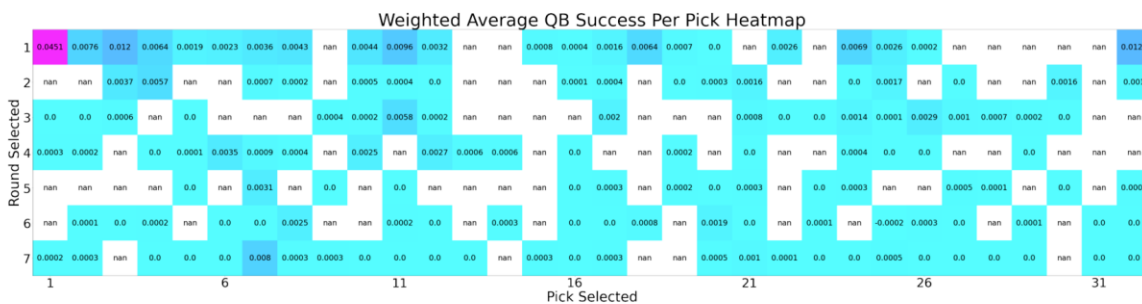


The above heatmap shows where quarterbacks are selected most in the draft since 2000. As you can see, the first overall pick is the most popular selection point, while other areas such as 2, 3, 10, and 32 trail closely behind. quarterbacks also seem to be less likely to get picked in the second round than in any other. In fact, the round totals are as follows: 67, 22, 28, 28, 26, 38, and 43, for rounds 1-7, respectfully. Perhaps this dip in round 2 is because teams are indeed reaching in round 1 for an extra year on the contract, leaving a skill void in round 2?

Now that it is known where quarterbacks are being selected in general, it must be figured out if teams are actually having success when they trade up.



The above heatmap shows the average success of quarterbacks picked at each selection, according to weighted career approximate value (WCAV) (PFR). quarterbacks selected in the top 12 have some of the best success, all picks considered. We also see good quarterbacks selected around picks 18, 24, and 32. The problems with this chart, of course, is that it benefits draft selections that only have one quarterback selected in them. For example, picks 4 and 24 have the top two scores in the second heatmap, but the first heatmap exposes them both as averages taken over just one quarterback. Both of the above heatmaps have their benefits and can be used efficiently, however the best heatmap would be one consisting of weighted averages, as seen below:



$$W = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n w_i X_i}{\sum_{i=1}^n w_i}$$

These values are shown using the weighted average formula: . They aim to give us a more accurate average of the quarterback success per each pick, taking in to account

the amount of quarterbacks selected at each pick. This is best seen by relooking at picks 4 and 24, which are now overshadowed by multiple other selections throughout the draft. The evidence is beyond clear now that the best quarterbacks are taken with the first overall selection. In fact, the difference between the value at the first selection and at any other selection is so difficult, that it makes the color differences at any other pick difficult to see. Despite this, there is still discern that the values at picks 3, 11, and 32 are all noteworthy. We even see small spikes in round 3 at pick 11 and in round 7 at pick 7, where Russell Wilson and Tom Brady prove that it is possible, albeit rare, to hit on a later round quarterback (Brady is moved to the 7<sup>th</sup> round in this display due to the presence of compensatory picks, which are not separately labeled in the graphic).

What can be taken from these heatmaps? First of all, quarterbacks are taken early, and often in the first round. This is for good reason, as, generally speaking, the best quarterbacks are taken early in the draft. The “trade up for pick 32 in order to get an extra contract year” trope has certainly had its success as well. Furthermore, it is possible to hit on a quarterback after the first round, although the best quarterbacks are taken in the top 12 and with pick 32, while the second-tier quarterbacks are usually picked elsewhere in the first round. While Nick Wright was correct in his opinion that top-10 selections yield the best quarterbacks, his assertion is still missing out on a wealth of talent later in the first round.

All things considered; the following conclusions can be made based on the above heatmaps:

- 1) The first overall pick is indeed the most valuable in the draft (no surprise here).
- 2) Trading up for a non-first-overall quarterback when your original selection is in the top 12 is silly, as you are still in the hot zone for tier 1 quarterbacks.

- 3) Trading up from picks 13-31 could be beneficial, especially in such a hot quarterback market. It is not, however, 100% necessary.
- 4) Pick 32 may well be the second most important selection in the draft. Use it wisely. If you're not in the position to select a quarterback, its trade value is much higher than any draft pick trade chart would have it.
- 5) Drafting a quarterback outside of the first round is akin to playing the lottery:

Everyone thinks they're getting a Russell Wilson, but most end up with a Josh Dobbs.

Ultimately, draft history can play a pretty large role in deciding present day drafting. While the variations of talent from draft class to draft class can and should affect one's draft decisions, the average success by pick over 20-plus years of drafting should have a considerable effect on a team's draft process and selections.