Deal or No Deal? - How NFL Teams May Be Better Off in the Draft

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Abstract:

In this research paper, we will identify the best strategies that successful teams use, to win playoff games and make profits for the team. It aims to uncover how strategic decision-making in team management influences both on-field performance and financial outcomes, particularly in relation to market size and economic factors**.** Through the use of historical data from the past decade, trends in draft picks, free agency spending, and team performance metrics were uncovered. Case studies of marquee draft selections and their immediate economic effects on teams were also included. Additionally, economic variables such as market size, gross domestic product(GDP), and disposable income in metropolitan areas were examined to evaluate their influence on revenue patterns. Our findings demonstrate that larger markets, such as New York and Los Angeles, maintain consistently high revenue irrespective of team performance, whereas smaller markets exhibit a strong correlation between revenue and on-field success. Special draft picks—such as Josh Allen, Aaron Rodgers, and Joe Burrow on their respective teams—serve as key revenue boosters for small-market teams. While strategic drafting contributes to long-term success, balanced spending aligned with market-specific economic conditions is critical for maximizing revenue. Strategic drafting and free agency spending significantly impact NFL team success, but their effectiveness is modulated by market size and economic factors. This research highlights the interplay between financial strategies and team performance, offering actionable insights for NFL team management seeking both competitive and economic sustainability.

Key terms: NFL, Draft strategy, free agency spending, team revenue, market size, economics, sports management.

Introduction

The purpose of this research paper is to identify the best strategies that successful teams use to win playoff games and make profits. I hypothesized that when looking at the NFL over the past 5 seasons, a team's success both via on-field play and off-field revenue is more strongly correlated to their draft strategy (number of draft picks) than "high-end" off-season spending additions (7.5 million dollar contracts and above were dubbed "big moves" or "high-end offseason additions" as that is the median contract value of the top 100 free agents and is an estimate of the money given to high-end starting players on the market.) ; success being defined as playoff appearances and total revenue.

Before examining our hypothesis, it was important to gain a perspective from executives and experts from around the NFL on a proper way to have long-lasting success in the league. Here is a detailed plan that many analysts believe is the proper way to build a franchise:

1. **Gain and invest draft capital:** For example, the Cincinnati Bengals, who had the first overall pick, reached the Super Bowl just two years later. From 2018-2021, the Bengals averaged 9.5 picks per year, two above the league average. They accumulated many picks, hitting on first-round players like QB Joe Burrow and WR Ja'Marr Chase, and found late-round gems like Logan Wilson, Germaine Pratt, and Jessie Bates II. This approach helped solidify one of the top defenses in the league, transforming the Bengals into a perennial playoff team. In 2023-2024, the Bengals had the highest revenue change at 64%.
2. **Draft strong core players:** After accumulating picks, teams need to draft strong players. Some players show early signs of success, while others take time to develop, especially in difficult positions like offensive line and quarterback. The Detroit Lions, who had been non-competitive for thirty years, drafted young players like RB Jahmyr Gibbs, WR Amon-Ra St. Brown, and OT Penei Sewell. These

players became the team's backbone, leading them to an NFC Championship appearance in 2024. Inexpensive young players allowed the Lions to use their cap space to complete their rebuild.

3. **Sign young players with potential:** Teams often sign young, unproven players with impressive athletic traits. In 2006, the New Orleans Saints signed QB Drew Brees, who had injury concerns but became a record-breaking Super Bowl winner for the team. It's important to keep cap space for future free agents when a team starts to show potential.
4. **Make strategic free agent moves:** Teams like the Atlanta Falcons, Jacksonville Jaguars, and Detroit Lions saved cap space for years, making small moves in free agency to set up for larger splashes. In 2022, the Jaguars spent $272 million on new free agents, transforming them from back-to-back number-one overall selections to playoff contenders. Once teams solidify their rosters, they can make moves to push for championships.

Additionally, it was important to look at some sample statistics on how often teams find success during the draft

Round	OL	LB	TE	DB	QB	WR	RB	DL
1st	83%	70%	67%	64%	63%	58%	58%	58%
2nd	70%	55%	50%	46%	27%	49%	25%	26%
3rd	40%	34%	39%	24%	17%	25%	16%	27%
4th	29%	16%	33%	11%	8%	12%	11%	37%
5th	16%	4%	32%	17%	0%	16%	9%	13%
6th	16%	5%	26%	8%	0%	9%	6%	13%
7th	9%	2%	0%	11%	6%	5%	0%	3%

Figure 1: Hit rate for different NFL positions by round. Joel Thorman. "What the Statistics Tell Us About the Draft by Round." ***Arrowhead Pride*****, 20 Feb. 2015.**

Overall, strategic considerations suggest prioritizing positions with lower bust rates, such as offensive linemen, linebackers, and tight ends, in early rounds while exercising caution with late-round selections, particularly for quarterbacks, running backs, and tight ends. This data highlights the importance of astute drafting decisions in navigating the NFL talent acquisition landscape.

Methods:

To conduct this research, it was important to utilize quantitative data analysis and qualitative insights to investigate the relationship between NFL offseason strategies and their impact on team success and revenue. Data on free agent moves, draft picks, and salary cap allocations were collected from official NFL and Spotrac sources, forming the foundation for analyzing team management strategies. Financial information, including team revenue and net worth per season, was sourced from reputable platforms such as Forbes and Statista. To complement these data points, expert insights into the draft process and free agency strategies were gathered from articles by trusted sources such as ESPN, The Athletic, and Medium. The collected data was analyzed and visualized through custom graphs created using Microsoft Excel and Python programming, with Python libraries such as Matplotlib and Seaborn enhancing the clarity and precision of visualizations. Graphs from UC Berkeley Sport Analytics Group were also incorporated to provide additional professional context. Performance metrics like win percentages, revenue fluctuations, and salary cap trends were plotted to identify significant patterns. This comprehensive methodological framework integrated statistical trends with expert commentary, allowing for a multi-dimensional analysis of the interplay between team-building strategies and financial outcomes in the NFL.

However, several limitations must be acknowledged to validate and build on the study done. The study focuses primarily on recent seasons, which limits its ability to account for long-term trends or shifts in league dynamics, such as changes in salary cap regulations or collective bargaining agreements. Additionally, economic factors like market size and disposable income, though analyzed, are influenced by external variables such as regional economic fluctuations or global events, which were not extensively controlled for in this study. Lastly, success was evaluated using simplified metrics such as win percentages and revenue, which may not fully encompass other critical indicators like fan engagement, social impact, or brand equity. Possible expansions to the study could include a more broad dataset – expanding over decades or maybe even the entirety of the NFL, include additional modern factors such as social media, brand equity, or fan growth, used additional advanced economic variables such as inflation rates, global events or recessions, or using AI/ML to run more specific tests using classifiers.

In the ever-evolving landscape of the NFL, success on the field and financial prosperity off it hinge on a team's ability to innovate, adapt, and strategically navigate the delicate balance between performance and economics. Although there may never be a formula, advances in NFL team strategy and using technological models to maximize success (such as Moneyball) may soon revolutionize the sport and help sports teams win games on the field and make money off the field as well.

Results

TEST 1:

To run the first test, the number of draft picks each playoff NFL team had from 2018-2022 and the number of playoff appearances from the same time frame were collected in order to test the hypothesis.

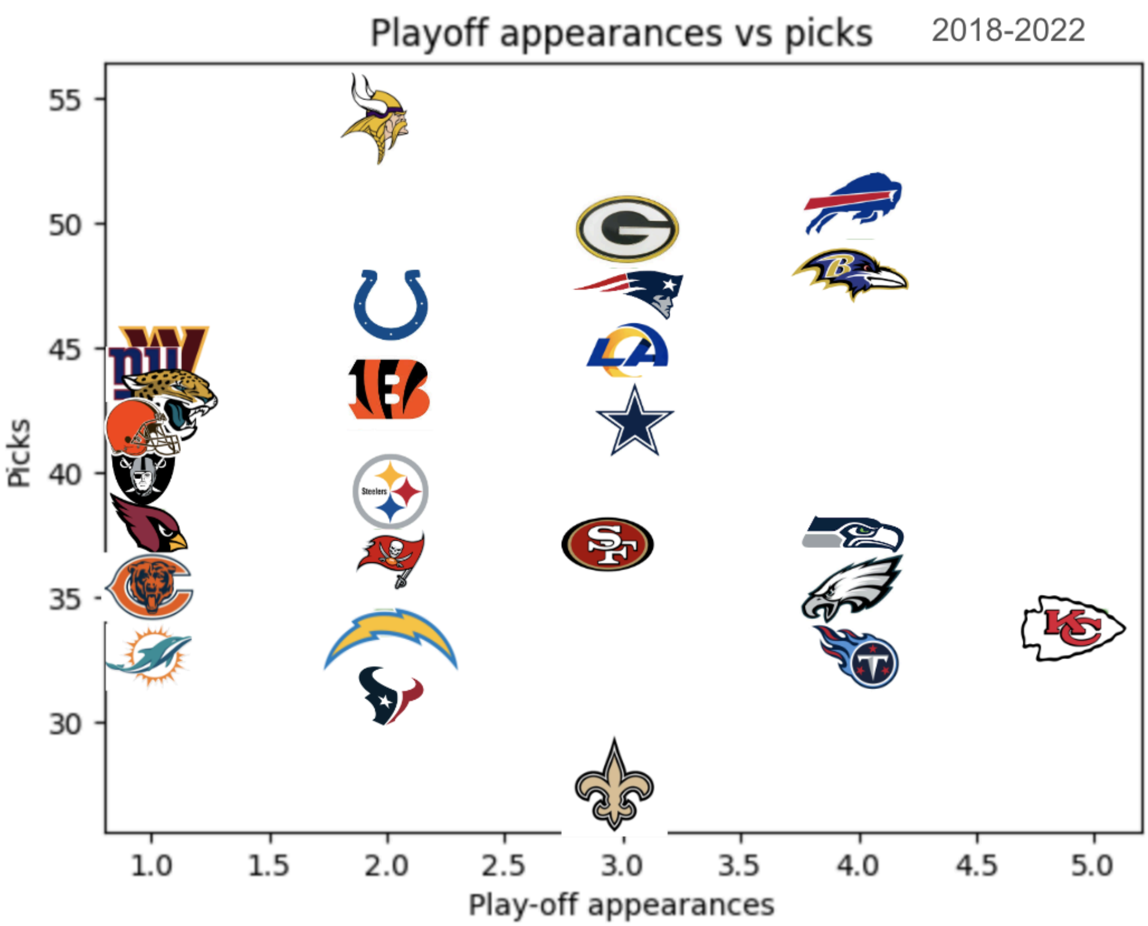

Figure 2: Playoff appearances vs. Draft picks for all teams that made the playoffs more than once from the time interval of 2018 - 2022.

Between 2018 and 2022, 27 out of 32 NFL teams made the playoffs at least once. Among these, the top 10 teams with the most draft picks saw 60% make the playoffs more than three times. In contrast, only 35% of the remaining 17 teams made the playoffs more than three times. This data indicates that teams accumulating more draft picks have historically enjoyed greater success in the NFL. Successful teams leverage the draft to maximize their chances, with data showing that this strategy has paid off over the past five years. Teams like Buffalo and Dallas, built primarily through the draft, have consistently performed well. They have drafted superstar talents such as Josh Allen, Trevon Diggs, James Cook, Matt Milano, and Micah Parsons, all of whom have significantly contributed to their teams' sustained success. Other consistently competitive teams, like Baltimore, Indianapolis, and Pittsburgh, have also thrived over the past half-decade by drafting their core players.

To further substantiate this claim, we analyzed the value of the draft picks. After categorizing the picks (Rounds 1-3 as "higher value picks" and Rounds 4-7 as "lower value picks"), we found that the top 10 teams averaged 16.1 picks in rounds 1-3, compared to 15.1 picks for the remaining 17 teams. This marginal difference suggests that trading high-value picks is infrequent and not a significant factor in differentiating team success. However, the true distinction lies in the later-round selections. The top teams averaged 31 picks in rounds 4-7, while the bottom 17 teams averaged just 21 picks.

This disparity highlights the importance of accumulating later-round picks, which allows teams to unearth hidden gems and build depth, ultimately contributing to sustained success.

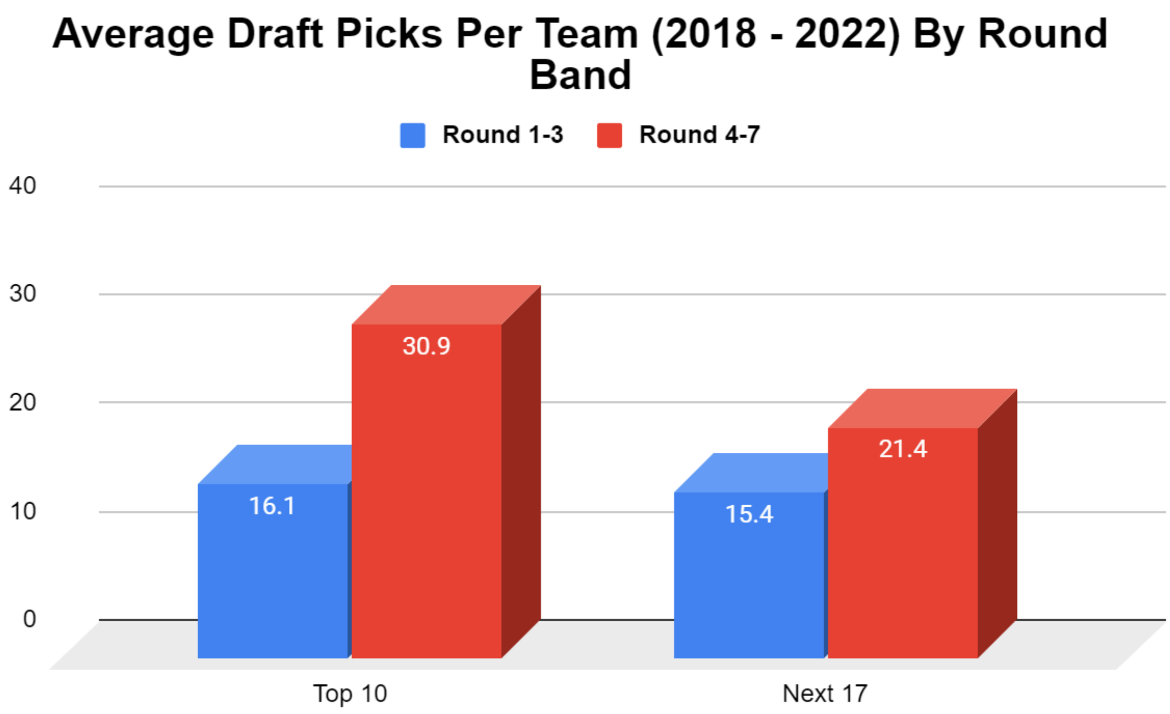

Figure 3: Average number of draft picks in each bin (rounds 1-3 and 4-7) for teams in the top 10 in draft picks and the bottom 17 from the timer interval from 2018 - 2022.

This 10-pick disparity shows that top teams have more late-round selections, increasing their chances of finding late-round gems. Not only are these players available at the end of the draft, they also make an average of just $705,000 a year, which is the lowest possible salary for an NFL player. We can logically prove this data, because top teams often find ways to accumulate these picks like trading their expensive players, trading down in the draft, and getting compensatory picks for their players leaving in free agency. What makes these teams so successful is that they use these later draft selections to find draft "gems" (Players who play more than 50% of their team's snaps). If we take a closer look at some of the teams at the top, we can identify key players that have aided these teams.

According to a study by Tony Villiotti (2012), data shows that on average, teams in the league retain their players from rounds 1-3, approximately 70.8% of the time, while retaining players from rounds 4-7 69% of the time. We already determined that playoff teams have an average of 10 more late-round picks, than non-playoff teams, and we can see that they retain these players at the same rate. That shows that these teams are hitting on more of their 4-7-round picks and are clearly able to find cheap talent. In fact, if we look at every single team that went to the Super Bowl in the past five years, we can identify several players from each team who helped successfully lead their team to the Super Bowl. The San Francisco 49ers and Tampa Bay Buccaneers both made the Super Bowl with late-round quarterbacks. There were other gems on the Super Bowl participating teams like L'Jarius Sneed, Jason Kelce, Cooper Kupp, Germaine Pratt, and Dre Greenlaw. This proves that playoff teams can accumulate 10 more late-round draft picks than average teams, yet keep these players at the same rate, and these players are able to provide great financial value and are key contributors in playoff runs.

However, it is important to mention some outliers in the data. The Seattle Seahawks, Kansas City Chiefs, and Philadelphia Eagles all made the playoffs more than 4 times and were in the bottom half of the league in total draft picks. However, this doesn't mean that the NFL draft wasn't crucial to their success. These three teams all had several features in common, which helped them be massively successful. To begin, these teams were all able to draft a superstar quarterback through the draft. Because these players were so talented, they were consistently able to make up for the other weaknesses on the roster. By having a star player and guaranteed consistency, these teams had the flexibility to make big trades and free-agent acquisitions to help them compete. The Chiefs traded for Orlando Brown Jr., the Eagles traded for A.J. Brown, and the Seahawks signed some big-name talent in free agency. Even though these teams didn't have as many draft picks, they still had fantastic drafts by getting valuable talent in the first few rounds like DK Metcalf, Trent McDuffie, and

Devonta Smith and even found some late round gems like Tariq Woolen and L'Jarius Sneed. These teams were able to break the mold and didn't need to rely on the traditional strategy to build successful teams.

TEST 2:

When most fans think of success, they envision winning playoff games and Super Bowls. However, for owners, success also involves increasing team revenue and finding lucrative endorsement opportunities. All teams have the same amount of money to spend on players which is called the Salary Cap, but individual teams don't make the same revenue every year. Individual teams make money off of corporate sales, ticket sales, concession sales, and sponsorships. These cover the operating costs of each team, which are often quite high, so many owners are desperate to make money. The NFL groups its revenue into two categories, national revenue and local revenue. The national revenue is typically from large TV deals, which have exponentially increased in price since the start of the NFL. The latest deal with FOX is rumored to be $110 billion over the next ten years. Each NFL team is given an equal chunk of this money to help with high operating costs. Not only does the NFL strike deals with FOX, but companies like CBS, ABC, Amazon, and YouTube also pay the NFL hefty chunks of money to display NFL games. That's why the salary cap and team evaluation have gone up every year and allow owners more flexibility with operating costs.

The next kind of revenue is called local revenue, which comes from ticket sales, merchandise, and other factors mentioned above. While this local revenue is far less than the national revenue, this is what differentiates teams from each other. Thus the top teams in revenue per year include teams like Dallas, Los Angeles, New England, and the New York Giants. Not only are these the biggest teams from a size perspective, but also from a media perspective. These teams haven't necessarily had much on-the-field success, but are consistently the top teams in Forbes's yearly evaluation. However, by performing better on the field, we wanted to run tests to see if revenue had any correlation with the on the field success of a team.

By analyzing revenue changes for every team in 2018, 2020, and 2022, the top 10 teams in draft selections (who made the playoffs over the past five years) and the bottom 17 teams in draft selections were compared. The top 10 teams had an average revenue of $496.63 million and 47.44 draft selections, while the bottom 17 teams had an average revenue of $447.93 million and 36.73 draft selections per year.. By looking at this data alone, we can see that the teams with more draft picks make around $50 million more in revenue per year, so, therefore, they are more lucrative for owners. However, we have to mention some outliers with the data. To begin, the Dallas Cowboys who have a valuation of $9 billion, make around $888 million in revenue per year. Not only did this skew the data, if we take them as an outlier, the teams in the top 10 make around $453.67 million , which is very close to the average revenue of the other 17 teams. Therefore by examining this data, we find that there isn't a direct correlation by using this preliminary test

By using this data and taking more tests, we recorded the change in revenue from 2018 to 2022 as a percentage value for each team. By taking the top 10 teams in draft selections, the average change in revenue is 38.47%, whereas for the bottom 17 teams, there is a value change of 40.50%. In this shocking test, we see that the teams with fewer draft selections have a higher change in revenue. Once again checking for outliers in the data, the Las Vegas Raiders had an uptake in revenue by 117.61% over the past 5 years skewing the data. This massive uptick can be explained as the Raiders moved from a small market in Oakland, California, to a large market in Las Vegas, Nevada. They received a new stadium, were accessible to more people, and were more profitable contributing to this revenue increase. By taking Raiders as an outlier in the data, the revenue change of the bottom 17 teams in draft selections is 35.69%. While this does not constitute a plausible correlation, the revenue of the bottom 17 teams, excluding the Raiders, is around the same as the top 10 teams in draft selections.

While in the first test, we saw that teams with more draft selections lead to more on-the-field success, it posed the question of whether this on-the-field success directly correlates to off-the-field success? By taking the most successful teams in the past 5 years, we wanted to see the average revenue change compared to the league average which was around 36.2%. We took the average revenue of the 10 most successful teams in the NFL based on playoff appearances, which were Kansas City, Buffalo, Baltimore, San Francisco, Philadelphia, New England, Greenbay, Los Angeles, Tennessee, and Dallas. By taking the average revenue, We found that the average revenue increase for the most successful teams over the past five years is just 35.30%. With this data, It can be seen that revenue isn’t strongly related to on-field performance, as even the most successful teams don’t see much revenue change.

However, looking at cases like the Raiders and the Rams who switched to much more lucrative markets in Las Vegas and Los Angeles strongly correlates to revenue. Additionally, these teams both constructed billion dollar stadiums which hold more fans and make the experience more enjoyable. These factors also strongly contributed to the uptick in the revenue. While the tests show no strong correlation between revenue, success, and draft picks, there have been cases in the NFL and other sports franchises of how success can help a team with revenue. The most significant one-year revenue growth from NFL teams between 2022 and 2023 came from the Cincinnati Bengals, Cleveland Browns, and Denver Broncos, despite these teams not having notable on-field success. Several factors contributed to this revenue surge. For the Bengals, the lowest-revenue team in the NFL, star players like Joe Burrow and Ja'Marr Chase drove jersey sales and attracted new fans, showcasing their significant impact both on and off the field. The Cleveland Browns, also low in total revenue, made the playoffs as the 5th seed for only the second time in nearly two decades. The excitement around their playoff appearance and the acquisition of superstar quarterback Deshaun Watson, despite his polarizing presence, generated considerable fan interest.The Denver Broncos experienced revenue growth due to hiring a new coach and acquiring a superstar quarterback, leading to heightened expectations and increased fan engagement. These examples highlight that on-field success does not always correlate directly with revenue growth. However, it's important to note that the top four playoff teams contributed nearly a quarter of a billion dollars to the NFL, indicating that while individual team success may not always drive revenue, overall league success is bolstered by successful teams. This underscores the complex relationship between on-field performance and financial outcomes in the NFL.

In Forbes' ranking of the top 10 most lucrative NFL teams, we observe that these teams are predominantly located in large markets such as Philadelphia, Dallas, Los Angeles, New York, Boston, and Las Vegas. To understand why these markets generate substantial revenue, it is crucial to examine the underlying economic factors. The largest markets, including New York, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and Washington, consistently exhibit the highest gross domestic income. These cities, with their robust economies, naturally support their football teams financially. Larger markets also mean a bigger fanbase, larger stadiums, and consequently higher revenue from ticket sales, merchandise, and other sources. Additionally, these cities have the highest mean disposable income—money left over after taxes and essential expenses—indicating that residents have more money to spend on tickets and memorabilia. This financial capability explains why teams in these large markets have a substantial revenue pool, relatively independent of their on-field success. In contrast, smaller market teams rely more heavily on on-field success and star players to drive revenue. Teams like the Los Angeles Chargers, Miami Dolphins, Indianapolis Colts, and Buffalo Bills, which have seen the highest revenue growth in recent years, illustrate this point. Each of these teams experienced prolonged periods of mediocrity and missed the playoffs. However, the drafting of new, high-profile quarterbacks and subsequent playoff appearances have significantly boosted their financial performance. This trend highlights the importance of the draft in affecting a team's financial fortunes.

As we look ahead to the 2024 NFL draft, the Chicago Bears, who hold the number one pick, are expected to select Caleb Williams, a highly touted quarterback from USC. The Bears have also made significant trades and signings in recent years, positioning themselves for a potential resurgence. Given the trends observed in the NFL, it is likely that the Bears will experience a substantial revenue increase in the upcoming season.

In summary, while larger markets inherently support their teams through robust economies and high disposable incomes, smaller market teams can significantly enhance their revenue through strategic drafting and on-field success. This dual dynamic underscores the complex relationship between market size, team performance, and financial outcomes in the NFL. The upcoming draft and the Bears' anticipated moves are poised to continue this trend, potentially making them one of the highest revenue-growing teams next year.

TEST 3:

A common way that NFL teams try to improve is by signing free agents to contracts and trading draft picks for these players. While teams get a proven player with NFL tape, they often have to pay a premium price for these players. Additionally, scheme issues, health concerns, and poor production can be hard to predict and cause many of these free agents to be released. Pioneered from Moneyball by Michael Lewis, teams often try to identify hidden gems with analytics and sabermetrics to find talent to fill out their roster. However, in this test, we will identify how many "**big moves**" NFL teams make per offseason, and how much it correlates to their success as a team.

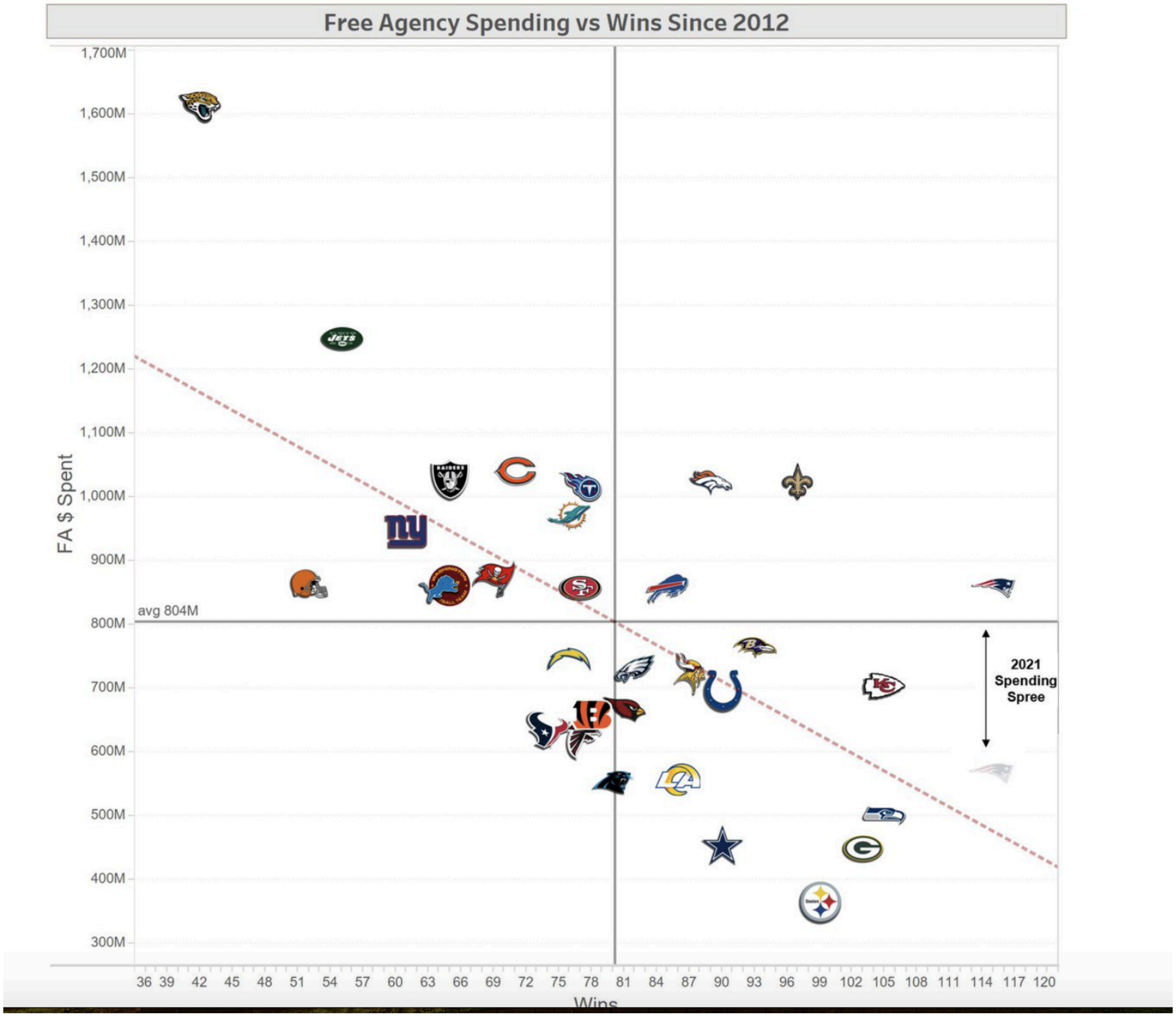

Figure 4: Total free agency spending vs total wins from 2012 - 2020. Duddu, Sampath, William Wu, Austin Macdonald, and Rohan Konnur. *Developing a Metric to Evaluate the Performance of NFL Franchises in Free Agency*. Sports Analytics Group at Berkeley, University of California, Berkeley. Accessed April 2025. https://sportsanalytics.studentorg.berkeley.edu/projects/far.pdf

Figure 3, which shows wins vs money spent, clearly shows that teams who spend less money have had more wins. The most successful teams in the past decade like the Patriots, Chiefs, Seahawks, and Steelers are always toward ends of the spectrum in terms of spending.

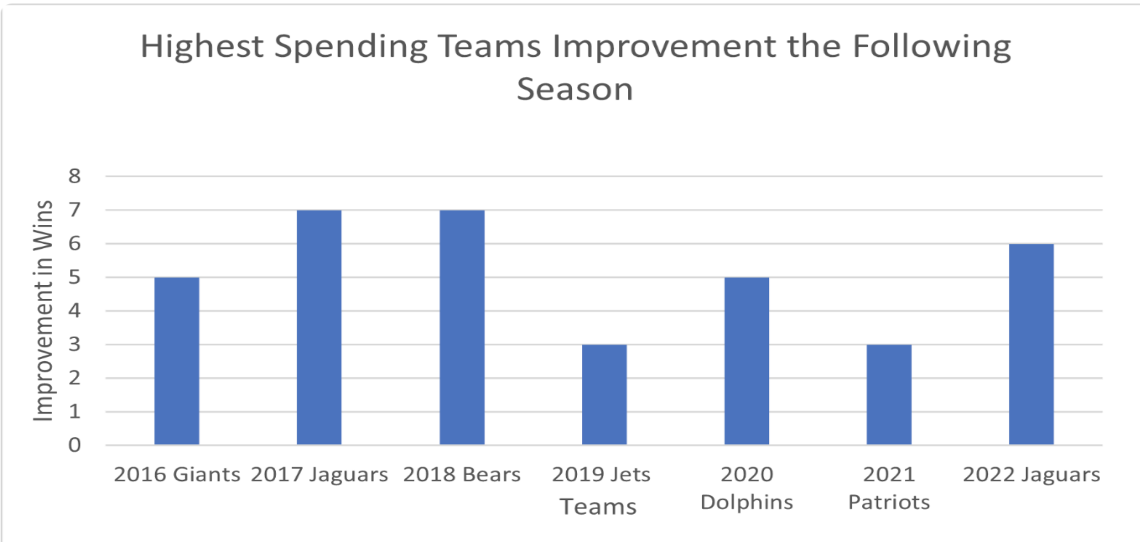

Figure 5: Highest spending offseason teams vs improvement in wins from 2016 to 2022. Duddu, Sampath, William Wu, Austin Macdonald, and Rohan Konnur. *Developing a Metric to Evaluate the Performance of NFL Franchises in Free Agency*. Sports Analytics Group at Berkeley, University of California, Berkeley. Accessed April 2025. https://sportsanalytics.studentorg.berkeley.edu/projects/far.pdf

This graph also provides an interesting perspective, as the team that spent the most money in free agency consistently improved their record and won a minimum of at least 3 games; however, only in 2 instances the team actually made the playoffs, none of which resulted in a superbowl victory.

In the tertiary test, I identified how much money each NFL team spent every year from 2018 - 2022 as well as how many **“big moves”** they made in that off-season (A **big move in this analysis** is a Free Agent Signing over $7.5 million OR a trade with compensation over a third-round pick).

For some baseline statistics, in 2018 each NFL team spent an average of $74.11 million, but this figure increased to $90.14 million per year in 2022. While this can be partly attributed to the rising salary cap, it is still a noteworthy trend. Interestingly, in 2018, each team made an average of 2.18 significant moves per year, whereas in 2022, this number decreased dramatically to just 0.55 significant moves per team. This reduction in major transactions may indicate that NFL teams are becoming more cautious, possibly due to the high failure rate of previous big moves. The data consistently shows that teams spending above the average often struggle to make the playoffs. Successful teams like the Baltimore Ravens (spending $72 million), Kansas City Chiefs ($78.6 million), Los Angeles Rams ($38.4 million), and Pittsburgh Steelers ($54 million) consistently spend less than the league average per year. These teams can re-sign their draft picks, reducing the need for heavy spending in free agency.

Conversely, teams at the bottom, who often fail to find talent in the draft, tend to spend exorbitantly in free agency. Recent examples include the 2022 Jacksonville Jaguars, who spent $272 million, the 2018 Chicago Bears at $202 million, and the 2021 New England Patriots with a staggering $291 million in just one offseason. Despite these massive expenditures, none of these teams have won more than one playoff game and have struggled to consistently reach the playoffs. This pattern suggests that heavy free agency spending does not correlate with sustained success and underscores the importance of strategic drafting and fiscal prudence.

To better understand offseason strategies, I examined the Jacksonville Jaguars, who spent an average of $162.4 million per year and made eight significant moves, the most over a five-year span. The Jaguars' situation is particularly intriguing. In 2017, they were Super Bowl contenders, known for their strong defense. However, the following year, they plummeted to a 5-11 record due to poor performance, coaching issues, and locker-room turmoil, foreshadowing a dismal stretch for the franchise. By 2019, the Jaguars were mediocre, and in 2020-2021, they had the worst winning percentage in the NFL (4-19 combined). With a depleted roster, they amassed considerable cap space and committed to a rebuild, accumulating 42 draft picks (13th highest in the league). They used their two number one overall picks to draft a quarterback and an edge rusher, yet still had many roster gaps to fill. In 2022, the Jaguars adopted an aggressive approach, spending $272 million—the most in NFL history. They bolstered the offensive line with Brandon Scherff, added defensive talent at linebacker and cornerback, and acquired offensive weapons for their new quarterback. Despite these efforts, the Jaguars remain a fringe-playoff team, which is arguably the worst position for an NFL franchise. Their offseason signings over the past five years have been hit or miss. They found a few good starters like Evan Engram, Darious Williams, and Foyesade Oluokon but have not transformed into the championship-caliber team fans hoped for, winning just one playoff game in the past five years. This analysis underscores the complexity and uncertainty of building a successful NFL team through aggressive offseason spending.

On the opposite side of the Jaguars, we have the Los Angeles Rams who spent a league-low $38.4 million over the past few years, which is less than half of the average spending from teams, but they have made about 1.6 **big moves** per year, which is more than the average in the league. To begin, it is important to note that the Rams have had a unique strategy when having success, one which is very risky, yet has brought them a Super Bowl title. The Rams are the definition of a boom or bust team, making it to the Super Bowl twice, yet missing the playoffs as well. The Rams rarely signed any free agents, yet they made many trades for star players. The most interesting part of the Rams's strategy was that they never had a first-round pick from 2018 - 2022, as they were extremely aggressive in the offseason. In that 5 year span, they traded for the best cornerback in the league, a former Super Bowl MVP, and most importantly for their quarterback. However, they still built their roster through the draft as Super Bowl MVP and offensive player of the year Cooper Kupp was a late-round pick, Aaron Donald a four time defensive player of the year, and other impact players such as Ernest Jones IV, Darious Williams. The Rams have shown that through spending less money, retaining their players, and drafting well, teams can be successful.

While these are two extremes, we can examine one final team which is a great example of this strategy, which is the Green Bay Packers. To begin, outside the 2019 season, the Packers spent a maximum of just 45 million dollars per year. They also made just 3 **big moves** in the five year period, but had 48 draft picks (4th most in the NFL). Through this data-backed strategy, the Packers made the playoffs three times in five years, making them very successful. While this team had the support of one of the best players of all time, Aaron Rodgers at quarterback, they surrounded him with talented players from the draft. They had All-pro receiver Davante Adams, and studs like Kenny Clark, Jaire Alexander, and David Bhaktiari. Only after the core was built, they went out and made some big trades for win-now pieces. While the team didn't win the Super Bowl, they were consistently competitive and built their team through the draft. The data shows that building teams through the draft consistently works, and splurging on big-name free agents is unsustainable.

Conclusion / Discussion:

This research provides interesting insights into NFL team strategies for achieving on-field success and generating off-field revenue. Our hypothesis, "A team's success in both on-field play and off-field revenue over the past five seasons is more strongly correlated to their draft strategy than high-end offseason spending (>$7.5M), with success defined as playoff appearances and total revenue," has been largely validated. Our analysis shows that draft strategy is crucial for success. Nearly 60% of the top 10 teams in playoff wins were also in the top 10 for draft selections over the past five years. Successful teams averaged 10 more late-round draft picks, retaining them at similar rates to less successful teams. Furthermore, teams like the Green Bay Packers, with high draft capital and low free agency spending, demonstrated consistent success. Conversely, teams with high free agency spending and gutsy offseason moves, like the Jacksonville Jaguars and Los Angeles Rams, struggled to achieve sustained success. Interestingly, our analysis revealed no direct correlation between on-field success and revenue change. The highest-grossing teams had a lower average revenue change than the league average, with revenue and valuation largely influenced by market size. However, smaller market teams like Buffalo and Cincinnati saw significant financial gains through on-field success and homegrown star players. In conclusion, while draft strategy is critical for on-field success, it does not directly translate to off-field financial success, which is more influenced by market size and other economic factors. Our research underscores the importance of strategic drafting in building competitive NFL teams.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my parents for their unwavering support, encouragement, and belief in me throughout this journey. Their constant motivation and guidance have been instrumental in helping me pursue my passions and achieve my goals. I am also profoundly thankful to my mentor, Gregory Krug, whose expertise, insight, and feedback were invaluable to this research. His guidance provided me with not only the necessary resources and knowledge but also the confidence to refine my work and approach challenges with a critical eye. This project would not have been possible without his mentorship and dedication. To my parents and Mr. Krug, thank you for being an integral part of my growth and success. Your contributions to this project have made it a truly enriching and rewarding experience.

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