



## *Winning Mind Sport Performance Consulting*

---

### *Mental Selection Characteristics of MLB First Round Draft Choices*



**Geoff Miller**  
**Partner**

Winning Mind, LLC  
1010 University Ave.  
# 265  
San Diego, CA 92103 USA  
[www.TheWinningMind.com](http://www.TheWinningMind.com)

619.283.6005  
[miller@thewinningmind.com](mailto:miller@thewinningmind.com)

© Winning Mind, LLC

***Predicting success of Major League Baseball draft prospects is a difficult task. A multitude of factors must be considered by baseball organizations who pore over scouting reports, stat sheets, speed gun readings and stopwatch times to find that crucial piece of information that can be used to find future stars. Physical, mental and social factors contribute mightily to which players live up to their potential.***

**The following is a review of the attentional and interpersonal characteristics of players selected in the First Round of Major League Baseball's First Year Player Draft.**

### **Assessment of Draft Potentials**

Winning Mind, LLC uses TAIS (The Attentional and Interpersonal Style inventory) to directly measure concentration, distractibility, decision-making, risk taking as well as general personality variables like confidence, competitiveness, extroversion/introversion and communication style. TAIS has been used with Olympic and professional athletes, Navy SEALs, the US Army Special Forces, and Fortune 500 executives. It has even been used to distinguish between multiple and single Olympic medal winners.

### **Player Samples**

Data has been collected on potential draft selections from December 2000 to June 2002. Prospects were given a paper and pencil version of TAIS and asked to complete the inventory with the purpose of providing a mental performance evaluation. Hundreds of high school, junior college, and collegiate players were evaluated over that time period and twenty-six were eventually selected by a Major League team in the First Round of the 2001 or 2002 MLB First Year Player Draft (their average age was 18.80 years). We examined the TAIS profile data on this group of First Round Picks and compared it to a randomly selected group of thirty picks who were evaluated and selected later than the First Round in those drafts. The average round in which these players were selected was 8.87 and the second group's average age was 18.96.

### **A Blueprint for your Scouting/Player Development Process**

We have constructed a composite profile for the typical MLB First Round Pick. This composite becomes a benchmark that may be used to measure future baseball talent scientifically. The data has value in three different ways:

1. Compare top physically talented prospects against the MLB First Round Pick group to confirm their mental toughness characteristics. Red flag prospects who have physical tools, but don't have the mental tools to make an impact at the Major League level.
2. Compare lesser physical talent against the group to find out which players have the potential, based on mental makeup, to develop into Major League talent.
3. Pinpoint developmental targets for all prospects. TAIS profile data acts as a roadmap that shows how athletes can improve performance. We can tell where players will make concentration mistakes, how they will respond to coaches and staff, what their work habits may be like, and how they will perform under pressure.

## Characteristics of MLB First Round Picks

Overall, the typical MLB First Round pick exhibits greater mental and emotional control and makes better transitions than the average MLB prospect. The First Rounder makes fewer concentration mistakes, makes quicker decisions, is more physically competitive, plays by the book and by the rules more often, and uses a combination of awareness, analysis, and action to his advantage.

### Attentional Balance

Everyone has a dominant attentional style (Awareness, Analysis, or Action) much like having a favorite TV channel for viewing the world. That dominant style is the place we feel most comfortable and the channel we “tune to” most often when we feel pressure. The dominant attentional style for most elite athletes is Action, the traditional narrow focus that we associate with blocking out 50,000 screaming fans and executing physical skills. It’s also the quality used by athletes who are the first ones in the clubhouse and the last ones to leave. People with a higher Action orientation are more likely to take extra ground balls, show up for early hitting, engage in more rigorous conditioning, because they have a need to roll up their sleeves and get things done.

MLB First Round Draft Picks reported that their dominant style was Action and that their least preferred was Analysis. Great athletes don’t have a lot of time to engage in complex problem solving and they are naturally less likely to be caught in their heads. However, the First Rounder group is more attentionally balanced while players drafted later favor the Action channel more prominently. Under pressure, the typical prospect is likely to overuse his ability to focus even if the situation calls for awareness or analysis. In a pressure situation, the balance shown by First Rounders may help them avoid “tunnel vision,” the downside of being narrowly focused, by staying aware of their surroundings and thinking more clearly on the fly (i.e. Derek Jeter’s miracle relay against Oakland in 2001 ALDS).

### Concentration Errors

First Rounders make fewer mental mistakes than average prospects. There are three common types of concentration errors. The first two are made when players get distracted by sights and sounds around them or by thoughts in their heads. The third kind of error takes place when emotions get the best of them and keep them from paying attention to what’s most important.

First round picks are least likely to commit concentration errors that are generated by too much thinking. Any time an athlete is “in his head” thinking when he should be performing, he is internally distracted. Bill Buckner’s infamous error in Game 6 of the 1986 World Series may have been the worst concentration mistake ever. Buckner was obviously thinking about his steps to the bag before he looked the ball into his glove. Athletes can also commit thinking errors by overanalyzing problems that have simple solutions. If you’ve heard the term “paralysis by analysis”, you are familiar with this kind of mental mistake. This is a common problem with well-rounded athletes who have strong academic backgrounds.

Mistakes caused by paying too much attention to the environment are also rare in First Rounders. Examples of these errors include hitters seeing infielders shifting or paying attention to extensive mechanical movements by a pitcher (ie. Nomo’s windup) instead of focusing on the pitcher’s release point. When a pitcher gets rattled by an opposing bench or when he loses a batter because he has

been too engrossed in holding a baserunner close, he has made a concentration error in his environment.

The most common concentration mistake made by First Round Picks occurs when they become overly fixated on one subject to the point of fixation. When this occurs, it becomes impossible to switch attention between external and internal channels. Such a loss in flexibility is most often associated with an emotion, usually anger or fear. For example, a pitcher gives up a home run and gets angry at himself or begins to worry about his place in the starting rotation. The inability to control emotions makes it more likely that his mistake will snowball into more mistakes. The ballplayer who makes an error in the field after striking out at the plate may be experiencing the same problem. While reduced flexibility errors are more rare in First Round Picks than in the average prospect, they remain the most likely lapses your top picks will make and they should be identified as targets for improvement.

## **Decision-Making Style**

There is a dramatic difference between MLB First Round picks and average prospects in their decision-making styles. Decisions can be evaluated in terms of two primary dimensions: speed and accuracy, with low scores indicating speed and high scores tending toward accuracy. First Round draft choices tend to favor speed over accuracy. Their lower scores tell us that they make faster decisions than their peers. High scores on the Decision-Making Style scale indicate that athletes need to have as much information as possible before committing to action. This is a common symptom for elite golfers, whose collective perfectionism has them reading greens over and over to ensure that they plan out a precise putting line. Pitchers who get caught in this frame of mind are accused of “aiming the ball” or trying to be too fine. Athletes who report high scores on this scale may demonstrate hesitancy when placed in fast-action situations. This would certainly have implications for hitters, who have just tenths of a second to decide whether to swing at or take a pitch. In the field, low scorers would get better jumps on balls and move into position more quickly. Throughout the course of development, it is this ability to commit to quick decisions that aids First Round Picks in their transitions from high school or college ball to professional competition and determines their staying power in the Majors. People with perfectionistic tendencies don’t respond as well to failure because they obsess over their mistakes which undermines confidence in future endeavors.

## **Orientation Towards Rules & Risk**

This scale measures impulsiveness versus conformity. Lower scores indicate rule bound people and higher scores are associated with persons who march to the beat of their own drummers. High scorers exhibit creative, outside-the-box thinking, but can get in trouble because their willingness to take risks defies societal standards (and sometimes laws of gravity!). Low scorers are more conservative, but can become rigid in thought under pressure. First Round Picks are more conservative than typical prospects and are more likely to exhibit “by the book” behavior when placed in pressure situations. You are more likely to see First Round picks taking pitches outside the strike zone and laying off “pitcher’s pitches” early in the count than prospects with more risk-taking tendencies.

## **Confidence/ Leadership Style/ Competitiveness**

Confidence plays a critical role in performance situations. The more confidence a player has in himself and his abilities, the easier it will be to stay focused on the right channel under pressure. This is most important after a mistake has been made. All of your prospects are going to make

physical and mental errors as they make transitions to professional baseball. Confident players are able to quickly recover from their mistakes and regain focus. Players without this confidence are prone to repeated concentration mistakes and choking. The First Round picks we studied are a highly confident group, more so even than world class athletes in other sports.

First Round picks are hands-on leaders who relish the opportunity to take charge. This characteristic is needed for athletes to step up when called upon, but it can be tough to manage 25 players who all have high needs for control. The typical first rounder will flourish on his own and will be able to maintain his own training regiment without much supervision. Development targets should be aimed at helping top prospects understand how to use their abilities to lead to maintain team chemistry. Physical Competitiveness measures a person's willingness to engage in physically demanding tasks. High scorers play to win and maintain high standards of physical fitness. First Round picks have a great desire to compete physically, even more so than the average baseball prospect. You can expect First Round picks to keep score in non-competitive situations and to push themselves with their own competitive standards, rather than simply on commonly accepted ones.

### **Summary**

At the moment of truth, elite performers must be able to maintain focus, control emotions, and communicate effectively with teammates. MLB First Round Picks are less likely to make concentration errors and more likely to exhibit mental and emotional control than the average baseball prospect. Key characteristics of First Rounders include a reliance on Action, a healthy balance of all three Attentional channels, a lower likelihood of making concentration mistakes, quick decision-making skills, less risky behavior, and a high degree of Confidence, Leadership, and Physical Competitiveness.

The true test of this data, and of the prospects themselves, will be to track the progress of drafted players and see which ones do make an impact at the Major League level. We plan to continue this research by keeping internal records of the success of the players sampled to this point and in future data collection as well.

### **About Winning Mind**

Winning Mind, LLC (WM) has developed its reputation working with elite level performers in sport, business and the military. All WM service consultants have advanced degrees and significant experience working with clients on the cutting edge of performance requirements. WM has taken a leadership role in the identification and measurement of highly specific concentration and communication skills—skills that ultimately determine the difference between success and failure, between winning and losing.

Winning Mind places a heavy emphasis on the ethical uses of its technology. WM has provided selection, training and teambuilding services to Olympic and professional athletes, Military Special Operations Units and Fortune 500 companies.

The Winning Mind process for providing selection information is to deliver information about each player's mental makeup that can be used to determine an appropriate fit for the organization. Evaluation does not take a "thumbs up or thumbs down" approach. TAIS data is best employed as part of a comprehensive selection and development program or as a key consideration when physical talent and athlete motivation are equal between a number of candidates.

## TAIS Profile Data

<b>TAIS Scale</b>	<b>MLB First Round Picks (Percentile Scores)</b>
Awareness	82
External Distractibility	24
Analysis	77
Internal Distractibility	15
Action	88
Reduced Flexibility	37
Information Processing	81
Orientation Towards Rules and Risk	30
Control	94
Self Confidence	95
Physically Competitive	93
Speed of Decision-Making	48
Extroversion	80
Introversion	22
Expression of Ideas	51
Expression of Criticism/Anger	23
Expression of Support/Affection	86
Self Critical	16
Focus Over Time	83
Performance Under Pressure	81
Average Age	18.80

**For more information, please contact Geoff Miller at Winning Mind, LLC  
([miller@thewinningmind.com](mailto:miller@thewinningmind.com)).**