

# Forget tests and train to be better athlete

BY DR. PHIL WAGNER  
FOR THE DAILY NEWS

Most sports fans know that the NFL Draft was held recently. What the casual fan might not know about is the frenzy of testing, evaluation and speculation that goes on before draft day.

When the college season wraps in January it marks the beginning for some of the nation's elite collegiate players. They spend hundreds of hours and thousands of dollars preparing for the NFL Combine or a "Pro Day" at their university. The combine and pro days consist of a battery of physical performance tests along with psychological and medical evaluations.

A player's performance at the combine can have a huge impact on where they're drafted,

costing or earning them millions of dollars. Combine preparation is a multi-million dollar a year industry, but do the tests these players prepare for really indicate what kind of a professional they will be?

A recent study from the College of Business at the University of Louisville examined that question. The study examined players from three positions (quarterback, running back and wide receiver) drafted in a six-year period (1999-2004). Their goal was to determine what (if any) correlation there was between the players' performance in the combine tests (both physical and psychological) and their performance in the NFL.

Players at the combine perform the 10-, 20-, and 40-yard dashes, bench press, vertical

## SPARTA POINT

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jump, broad jump, 20- and 60-yard shuttles, three-cone drill and the Wonderlic Personnel Test, a mental test. League performance was based on 10 variables: draft order, three years of salary and games played, and position-specific statistics. The researchers found no correlation between combine performance and actual game performance, with the exception of sprint tests for running backs. Let me repeat that: no correlation.

So there is an entire industry built to prepare players for a set of tests that aren't an accurate predictor of performance. A player can have an amazing

college season, perform poorly at the combine, fall many picks or even rounds in the draft and loose out on millions of dollars.

This kind of a player can eventually become great, leading his team to Super Bowl championships, making the team millions of dollars (Tom Brady was drafted in the sixth round in 2000). The recent rise of NIKE SPARQ testing and training (and their very cool TV commercials) has brought the NFL Combine to high school players all over the country. Football, basketball and baseball players are all SPARQ tested, and Velocity Sports Performance (a

national chain of gyms) even advertises their SPARQ-based training as a selling point to high school athletes.

The problem with these, and most tests, is that they are purely quantitative and not at all qualitative. They don't care how you do the movement, just what the end result is. You can have the fastest bat speed in the world, but if your swing mechanics don't allow you to keep your eyes on the ball, you're not going to hit many home runs.

At SPARTA, we test athletes in the vertical jump, but we are not as concerned with how high they jump as we are with how they actually do it. Athletes perform tests on a force plate, a scientific instrument that basically gives us an x-ray of their nervous system. We can use the

information we gather from the force plate to then train them to improve the way they do movements, dramatically increasing the speed at which they improve.

We've all seen the athlete who performs poorly on physical tests but is a great player. We usually call them gamers, chalking their success up to psychological prowess. But maybe if we trained less for tests and more for movement proficiency we could become a gamer, too. I'm sure Tom Brady isn't too bummed these days about not being taken higher in the draft.

*Dr. Wagner is the director of SPARTA Performance Science in Menlo Park. For info on this article or SPARTA, visit SpartaScience.com or join the discussion at SpartaScience.blogspot.com.*

## GOLF

From page 49

even-par 71 — good for second. Rocky Chan of Woodside Priory-Portola Valley was a stroke back, the lone golfer to shoot a 72, and Gunn-Palo Alto's Martin Trainer was in a group of five to finish with 2-over rounds of 73.

"He was happy to move on into next week," Gunn coach Chris Redfield said of Trainer. "He knew he wasn't going to win CCS today, so it was a matter of moving through to the next stage."

PAL player of the year Nick Sako was third best on his team, his 4-over 75 two strokes behind teammate Ben Jackson and one from Brian Jordan — all three of them seniors.

"No. 1, it's a team event," Giurlani said. "The team did very

well and we're going on."

M-A needed two good scores from its trio of freshmen, and Travis Anderson (78) and David McNamara (79) delivered. Anderson shot 1 over on the backside to help the Bears.

"That was fantastic," Giurlani said.

There wasn't much wind, but golfers had to contend with early fog and light rain.

For St. Francis, Sheikh's partner in crime was AJ Pargaliman, who finished tied for fourth with a 2-over 73. Matt Biggar and Joe Young each shot 76 for the Lancers.

Paly's top round in the first of two boys regionals came from a girl, as Alexandra Groetsema shot a 3-over 74 to lead the Vikings. Teammate Eliot Snow was two strokes behind her, quickly

followed by Hrishi Srinagesh and Michael Yuan, both at 77. Pierce Marchant, who finished tied for second at the two-day SCVAL tournament last week, carded an 81 to round out the team score.

Menlo finished eighth as a team, meaning Grimes will make the trip by himself to the CCS Championships.

That didn't seem to be a distraction for either Chan or Trainer, the SCVAL tournament champion.

"Golf is an individual sport at heart," Redfield said. "So Martin is used to competing as an individual. It's a player and the golf course, and I think that's how Martin treats it."

Two other local golfers competing as individuals missed the cut: Los Altos' Sean Kawaguchi (85) and Woodside's Barrett Johnson (93).

## BRIEFS

From page 51

Referee Laurence Cole awarded the victory to Seeger in the eighth round of the North American Boxing Federation fight Thursday night at the Hilton Anatole hotel.

Lenhardt said the Houston fighter was helped to his stool before lying down. Lenhardt said doctors rushed to his side and Flores appeared unconscious when removed on a stretcher.

### NBA playoffs

■ Newly crowned MVP LeBron James scored 34 points and the Cleveland Cavaliers, who waited nine days between playoff games after a first-round sweep, pulled away in the second half for

a 99-72 win over the Atlanta Hawks in their Eastern Conference semifinal opener.

Showing why he was voted the league's best player in a landslide, James added 10 rebounds, three assists and four steals as the top-seeded Cavs won their fifth straight lopsided game.

■ Carmelo Anthony led another fourth-quarter blitz by Denver, which overcame Dirk Nowitzki's 35 points and more hustle and muscle from Dallas to go up 2-0 in the best-of-seven series with a 117-105 win.

### NHL playoffs

■ Roberto Luongo made an early lead stand up and the Vancouver Canucks regained home-ice advantage by beating the Chicago Blackhawks

3-1 for a 2-1 lead in the Western Conference semifinals.

■ Teemu Selanne scored in the first period, Scott Niedermayer added a goal in the second, and Jonas Hiller made 18 of his 45 saves in the third for Anaheim, which grabbed a 2-1 lead over Detroit with a 2-1 victory.

### Elsewhere

■ Basketball legend Dave Bing was elected as Detroit's mayor through the end of the year, sweeping the incumbent from office in the city with myriad problems.

■ The NHL took control of the Phoenix Coyotes after being surprised when the team's owner filed for bankruptcy. BlackBerry boss Jim Balsillie wants to buy the Coyotes and move them to Ontario.



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