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Player-Aptitude Reports Are Critical for NBA Prospects

By [Kyle Stack](#)   June 22, 2011 | 3:00 pm | Categories: [Uncategorized](#)

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Does BYU star Jimmer Fredette have the intangibles and mental makeup to be a star in the NBA? Perhaps only Sports Aptitude knows for sure.

When NBA teams make their picks Thursday night at the league's annual player draft, many of them will already be well-acquainted with what makes their chosen player tick. But roughly one-third of the league will have the ability to dissect and scrutinize the behavioral patterns of nearly every available prospect.

Thirteen of the NBA's 30 teams rely on [Sports Aptitude](#) — some more than others — for a personality and behavioral assessment that's intended to minimize the risk that goes into selecting a player.

“It's about building a personalized standard measurement system for organizing and standardizing [personality] measures,” Sports Aptitude cofounder Eric Weiss told Wired.com.

Weiss said that comparing and contrasting the various behavioral and personality components of an athlete enables teams to not only find the players who have the best chance to succeed but the ones who might be an ideal fit in their environment.

While risk can't be fully eliminated, the idea is that a team invests enough time and money in each player it drafts that it should learn as much about him as it can beforehand. Sports Aptitude's system for evaluation also gives teams a better way to gauge a player in free agency or through trade talks.

Each player enters into Sports Aptitude's database by taking a 185-question assessment inside the site's client portal. (Weiss contends it's not a test, per se, because there are no “right” or “wrong” answers.) Roughly 600 NBA players are already in the database, including about 120 from the upcoming 2011 draft class.

Weiss' decade-long background as a scout and analyst for basketball websites [Draft Express](#) and [Scout](#) encouraged him to find a way to measure players' intangibles. In 2006, he co-founded the Silicon Valley Sports Aptitude with Chris Kirschke, a former security architect in the IT industry who applies the technology to the strategies Weiss devises.

Sports Aptitude finds draft prospects to be ideal for its assessments. They're well enough into their post-adolescence to ‘understand’ themselves.

As Kirschke told Wired.com, Weiss is the one responsible for the company's methodology, which includes 29 [Critical Core Dynamic](#), or CCD, categories. They range from studying a player's coachability to his leadership potential.

A look at the report profile of one guard, who plays in the NBA's Western Conference, displayed the myriad traits analyzed.

The report lists the player as being highly emotionally stable, highly relaxed, very practical, businesslike, perfectionistic, calm under pressure and lacking passion.

More categories delve deeper into the player's personality. He's measured by his capacity to negotiate (communication, not contracts), his problem-solving ability and his ability to motivate others. In all of these he scores as average.

Another layer of information shows the guard is composed, practical, not open to change and is not the voice of the group. His composure and professionalism make it seem as though he's built to succeed in a competitive environment. Yet, his strengths don't necessarily guarantee success.

As Weiss noted, a player with strengths in one area has weaknesses in another. It's why each personality trait can't be measured the same way for each person. That's what makes the ‘goodness of

fit' factor so vital for teams to understand.

“The most important thing they supply is a good sense of where red flags might be [in a player's makeup], what drives somebody, and how they'll react to certain situations,” Kirk Lacob, the Director of Basketball Operations for the Golden State Warriors, told Wired.com. The Warriors use Sports Aptitude's reports before making player acquisitions.

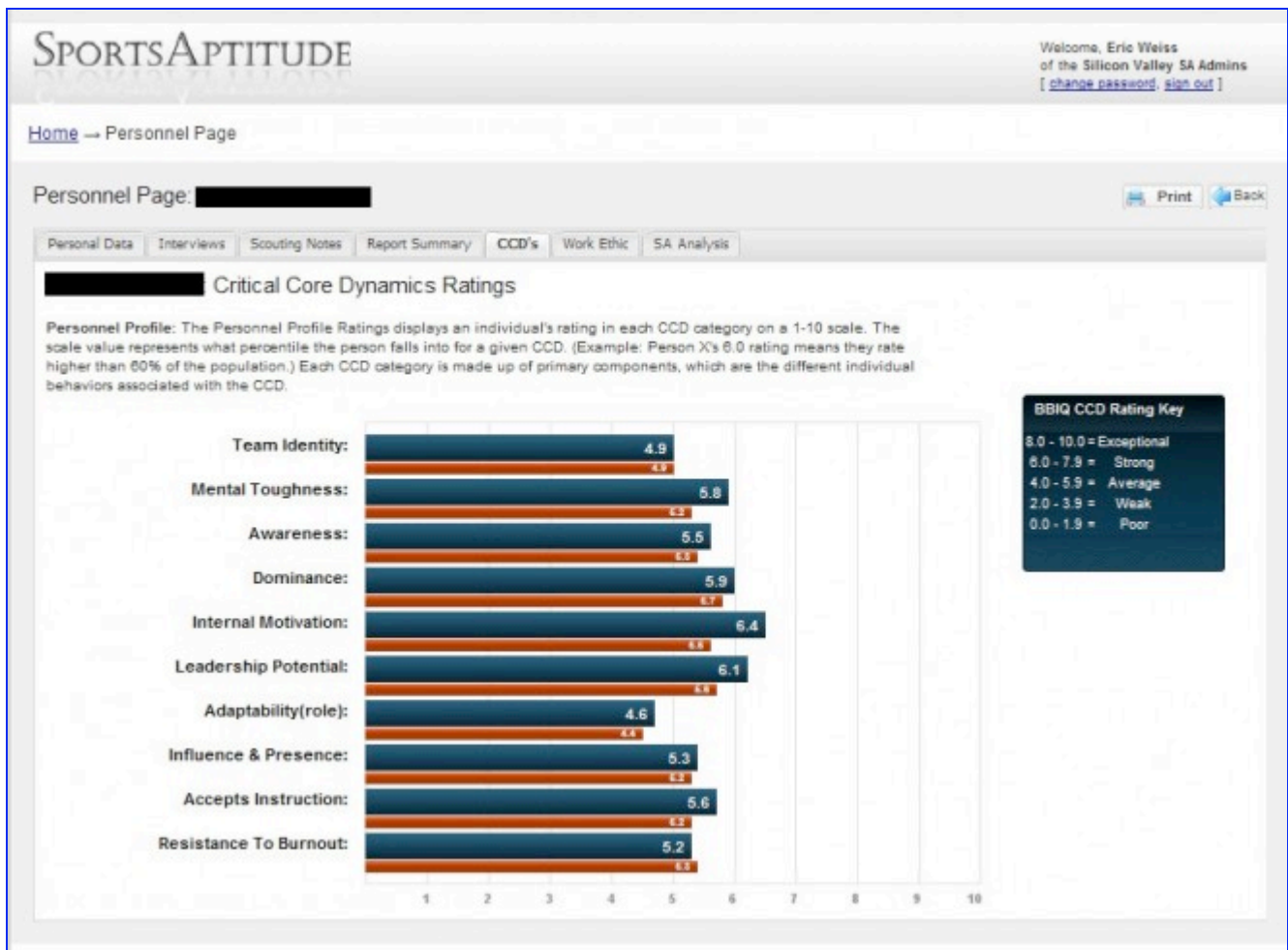
Players can also be scrutinized too deeply, according to Weiss. Sports Aptitude is trying to do smarter analysis than any sports psychologist or outside consultant.

“They focus too much on the fact that there are weaknesses, instead of accepting the fact that there is going to be a mix and trying to appreciate the ratio of talent to the degree of difficulty in accessing that talent,” Weiss said.

He used Milwaukee Bucks guard Brandon Jennings as an example. Admonished as cocky and immature heading into the 2009 NBA Draft, Jennings slipped to the 10th overall pick. Yet he has [excelled on the court](#), averaging 15.8 points and 5.3 assists through his first two NBA campaigns.

While he certainly had his faults, Weiss noted Jennings was more a victim of perception leading up to the draft. “I think he got too much blowback, where it's not necessarily indicative of who he is as a person,” Weiss said.

Sports Aptitude finds draft prospects to be ideal for its assessments because they're well enough into their post-adolescence to “understand” themselves. They are still young, though, which means Sports Aptitude builds control measures into its assessment to guard against a player giving faulty answers, whether it's due to apathy, dishonesty or something else.



An anonymized example from one of Sports Aptitude's proprietary player evaluations.

The assessment is available to NBA coaches and front-office personnel. In fact, teams can target any kind of player, coach or front-office person they want through a targeted search. For a player, that might mean a top-five shooter when his team is within three points on the road. For a coach, it could be one who is “player-friendly” and likes to foster a family-like environment on the team.

The prospects for analysis are nearly unlimited, which is why Weiss and Kirschke plan to branch out beyond the NBA to the NHL and collegiate sports. In five years, Kirschke would like to have 95 percent of NBA players and 80 percent of NHL players cataloged in Sports Aptitude's database, and an 18-month compliance review by the NCAA that was completed late last year will permit Sports Aptitude to [bring colleges aboard as clients](#).

The ongoing development of an athlete portal will encourage what Kirschke called a “sports marketplace” to develop. The marketplace, which could be available by the start of the upcoming 2011-12 school year, will work by Sports Aptitude placing its logo and a code on the tag of apparel and sports equipment from various apparel manufacturers.

An athlete who buys an item with the Sports Aptitude logo on the tag can enter the code inside the portal to get a CCD assessment. The manufacturer of that product can then get information on who

that buyer is, thus helping them better target their advertising.

The company also plans to release Android and iPad apps, geared toward their clients, later this summer, and an NBA salary-cap management system is also the works.

Sports Aptitude will unveil that feature after a [new collective bargaining agreement](#) is settled between the NBA and its players union. But the fun really starts tomorrow night when the [Cleveland Cavaliers make the first pick](#) in the draft.

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Kyle is a [New York-based sportswriter](#) who has written for [SLAM](#), ESPN the Magazine, SI.com and ESPN.com. Follow [@kylestack](#) on Twitter.

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