Evaluating the Efficacy of Talent Selection and Development in the National Hockey League Entry Draft

Lou Farah

Supervisor: Dr. Joe Baker

School of Kinesiology and Health Science

Background: The entry draft is a process by which National Hockey League (NHL) teams identify and select athletes at 18 years of age based on their future potential. However, forecasting future performance is highly uncertain and involves a great degree of risk.

Objectives: (1) to assess the accuracy of selection by comparing NHL performance across draft rounds. (2) To determine how predictors of draft order fair in predicting subsequent performance. (3) To rank all NHL franchises based on their selection accuracy. (4) To examine whether playing time is disproportionately allocated based on draft order (sunk cost effect). Studies 1-4 of this project will address each objective, respectively.

Methods: A sample of all NHL draftees from 1990-2015 will be collected (N = 6395). In Study #1, Kruskal-Wallis tests will be conducted to compare differences in NHL performance metrics across draft rounds. In Study #2, scouting reports and junior/collegiate performance metrics will be regressed against draft order, and then against measures of NHL success. Study #3 will rely on a multiplicative non-parametric regression model to find residual values between the expected number of games played and the actual number of games played for each franchise’s draftees. As for Study #4, draft order will be regressed against playing time while controlling for performance, injury, being traded, and teams’ winning record.

Significance: From an academic standpoint, this research will address many gaps in hockey-related talent identification literature. As for the practicality of this project, we hope to develop a tool that assists NHL executives in making more informed decisions when evaluating and selecting athletes in the entry draft.