Review of the 2025 Major League Baseball Rule 4 Draft

The 2025 MLB Rule 4 Draft featured surprising picks, standout players, and a focus on high school talent, with the Washington Nationals selecting SS Eli Willits first overall, from Fort-Cobb Broxton HS in Fort Cobb, OK, an athletic and talented shortstop that would set the tone for the rest of the draft. The draft saw a notable trend towards athletic high school shortstops, with them being five of the first top ten selections (a total of 33 were taken in the draft, 22 in the first six rounds). This reflects a growing emphasis on developing young talent at key positions. However, HS shortstops were not the only consistent trend in the draft. A significant number of college arms pitchers were taken early, indicating teams' strategies to bolster their pitching depth. With all that being said, I decided to have my own review of the 2025 draft by utilizing the great statistics and metrics available at the website "Pitcher DIGS" (Pitcher DIGS).

I. Introduction to Pitcher DIGS

"Pitcher DIGS" is run by Kyle Goings out of Northern California. In his spare time from his full-time job and as a loving husband and parent, he created and runs this website that produces an advanced statistical leaderboard of baseball players' performance for the current specific season. He had focused mainly on professional and collegiate statistics since its maiden launch back in 2023 since those were readily available through other statistical platforms, but just recently back in 2024, he started creating one for high school players. (which he was able to provide statistics and advanced metrics for over 15,000 prep players). Kyle created two new baseball metrics called "DIGS" (which is a pitching metric that stands for Defensive Independent Game Score) and "BaGS" (which is an offensive metric that stands for Batter Game Score), as these were his flagship metrics when he originally launched Pitcher DIGS back in 2023. Using the rankings and statistics provided by certain baseball media platforms, he has then been able to utilize formulas he developed to convert all the stats from those websites to create statistical leaderboards. He has also done his best to provide a consistent, similar analysis and leaderboards for other states, prioritizing state powerhouses in the Southeast and Midwest. Upon discovery of the website and the great work Kyle does, I volunteered to help him update his spreadsheets for the state of Arizona and as many high school programs as he would like, and he graciously accepted. So, during the season leading up to the recent conclusion with the respective class state championships, I supported Pitcher DIGS in entering season statistics and data for high school programs across the country, as were available from public social media websites. All in all, we have been able to produce final statistics and metrics for over 25,000 high school players from the 2025 season. There are not too many sites out there in the world wide web that have such publicly available in-depth analysis of

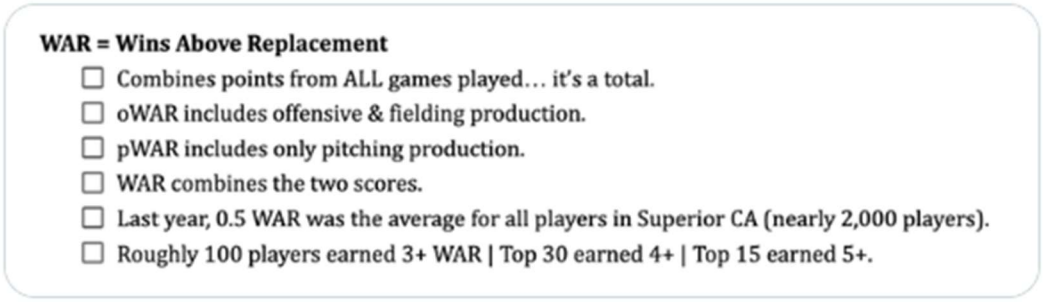
baseball amateur statistics and metric evaluations at the high school level, so I am honored to have met Kyle and been able to contribute to his endeavor.

II. My Analysis and Results

Utilized Statistics and Metrics

To give you some context, here are the definitions of certain statistics and metrics I used in my analysis as provided by Pitcher DIGS[1]:

- ***Wins Above Replacement, including offensive and pitching WAR (WAR/oWAR/pWAR):*** WAR measures a player's value in all facets of the game by deciphering how many more wins he's worth than a replacement-level player at his same position (e.g., a Minor League replacement or a readily available fill-in free agent).



- ***Batter Game Score (BaGS and BaGS+)[2]:***

BaGS is an offensive rating system designed around the inputs of ottoneu fantasy baseball scoring (AB, 1B, 2B, 3B, HR, BB, HBP, SB, & CS). Statcast Barrels are also incorporated when available, as are GDP & SF. BaGS can be calculated on a single-game basis, but is primarily intended for comparing season or career performance. BaGS is adjusted for park, league, & year at the MLB level; age, level, park, & league for MiLB; and age, conference, & park (where applicable) for collegiate. BaGS scoring (where 50 is average) is used to estimate a player's wOBA, then converted to BaGS+ (where 100 is average).

BaGS+ Scale
175 | Elite (+++)
150 | Excellent (++)
125 | Very Good (+)
100 | League Average
75 | Replacement

[1] Pitcher DIGS on X: https://t.co/3Bcrx1J7is" / X
[2] Pitcher DIGS - BaGS

BaGS = Batter Game Score (measures offensive success)

- ☐ BaGS awards points for things like hits (different weights for each type), BB, SB, HBP, & Sac Flies.
- ☐ BaGS penalizes (takes away points) for making outs, and doubles the penalty for strikeouts.
- ☐ BaGS is calculated as the average of all games played.
- ☐ BaGS+ means the scores are converted to a scale where 100 is average. Anything over 150 is excellent.

- ***Defense Independent Game Score (DIGS and DIGS+)[3]:***

DIGS is a game score metric measuring IP, SO, BB, HBP, HR, & H. It is designed for multi-inning pitchers, is adjusted for park, league, & year for MLB; age, level, park, & league for MiLB; and age, conference, & park (when applicable) for NCAA & JuCo. While DIGS marries a results-based model (including raw H & HR) with a batted ball regression model (where batted ball types & quality of contact are used at the MLB level & league average results are used for MiLB & college). The formula is designed so a player's reported DIGS score will lean heavily to the regression model early on, then gradually slide more to the results model as his BF total rises during the season. DIGS scoring (where 50 is average) is used to estimate a player's ERA, then converted to DIGS+ (where 100 is average).

DIGS+ Scale
160 | Elite (+++)
140 | Excellent (++)
120 | Very Good (+)
100 | League Average
80 | Below Average
60 | Replacement

DIGS = Defense Independent Game Score (measures pitching success)

- ☐ Awards points for each out recorded (extra for K's).
- ☐ Penalizes for hits, HR, BB, & HBP.
- ☐ Does NOT penalize for defensive errors.
- ☐ Adds in a "batted ball luck factor" for each pitcher to account for defensive gaps.
- ☐ Calculated as an average of all games pitched.
- ☐ DIGS+ means scores are converted to a scale where 100 is average. Scores over 140 are excellent.

- ***Two-Way Player score (TWP and TWP+):***

TWP+ = Two-Way Players

- ☐ Combines BaGS & DIGS (plus strength of schedule) to rate two-way player production..
- ☐ 100 is average. Scores over 150 are excellent.

One aspect of each of these new metrics is that each contains a "strength of schedule" (SOS) component, factoring in each respective player's class/division level of

[3] Pitcher DIGS - DIGS

competition. Here is how that SOS component is factored in per Pitcher DIGS, including points for graduation year[4]:

Strength of Schedule (labeled SOS+ on leaderboards)

- ☐ Calculated using Maxpreps team ratings & strength ratings from the past 3 years.
- ☐ Schools receive SOS points from their own opponents & their league rating.
- ☐ A 100 SOS+ score means exactly average competition.
- ☐ All players receive an SOS adjustment (either raises or lowers their score).

Graduation Year

- ☐ Minor points awarded for underclassmen (freshmen >> soph >> juniors)

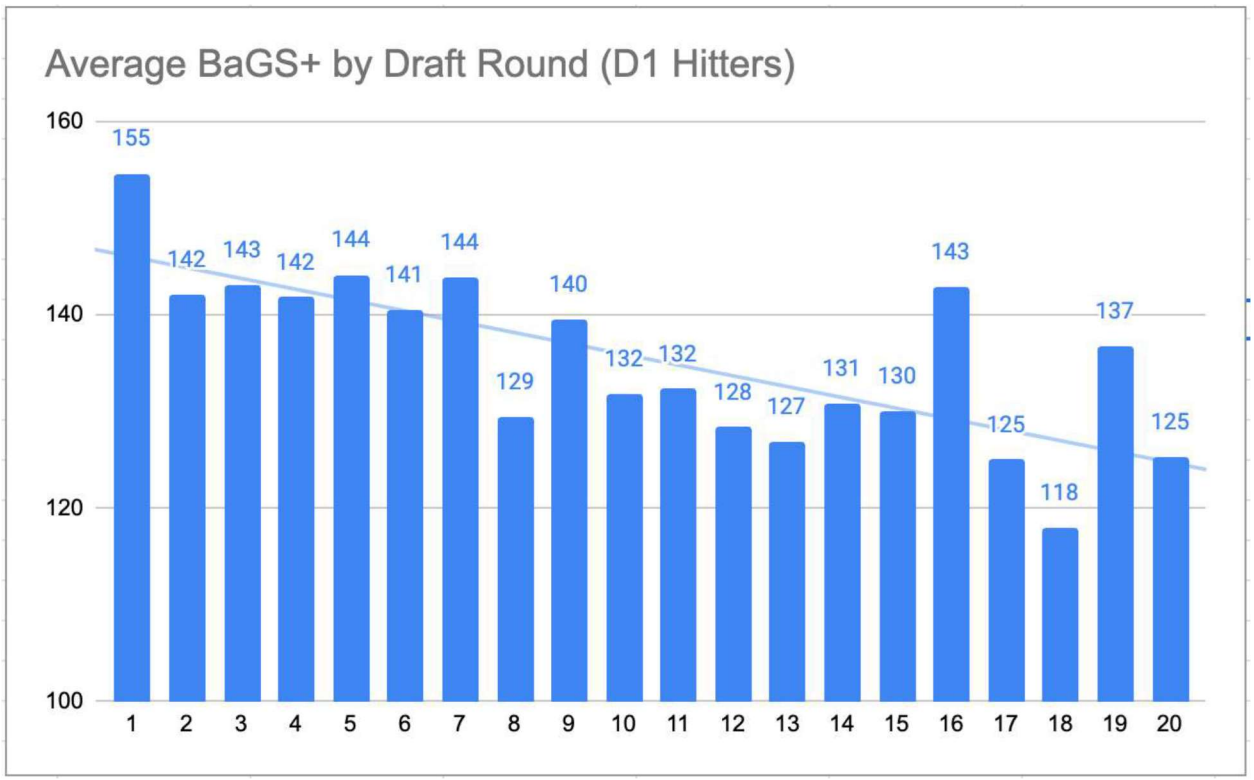
- ***Scouting Grades:*** Pitcher DIGS has also created scouting grades for certain statistics and metrics for College hitters and pitchers, using the typical 20-80 scouting grade scale:
    - ***Hitting:*** **CONT** (Contact), **WALK**, **BACON** (Batting on Contact), **PWR** (Power), **RUN**
    - ***Pitching:*** **BAA** (Batting Average Against), **HR%** (Home Run Rate), **BB%** (Walk Percentage), **K%** (Strikeout Percentage)

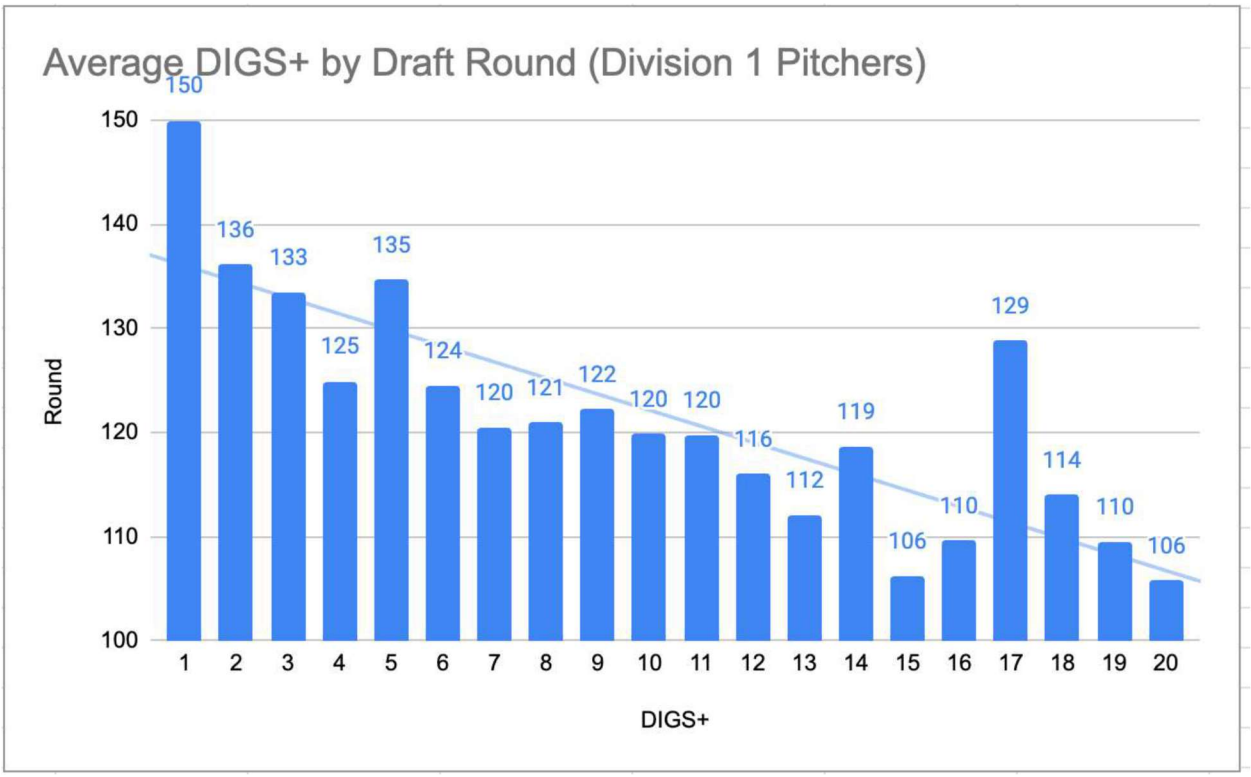
I also utilized some other standard statistics and metrics, such as Weighted On Base Average (wOBA), On Base Percentage (OBP), and On Base Plus Slugging (OPS).

Preliminary Analysis (BaGS+ and DIGS+)

With the assistance of Kyle Goings, we put together a preliminary analysis of average BaGS+ and DIGS+ by round for College Division I pitchers and hitters, respectively. Here are graphs illustrating that analysis:

[4] https://x.com/DigsPitcher/status/1775968668704506036





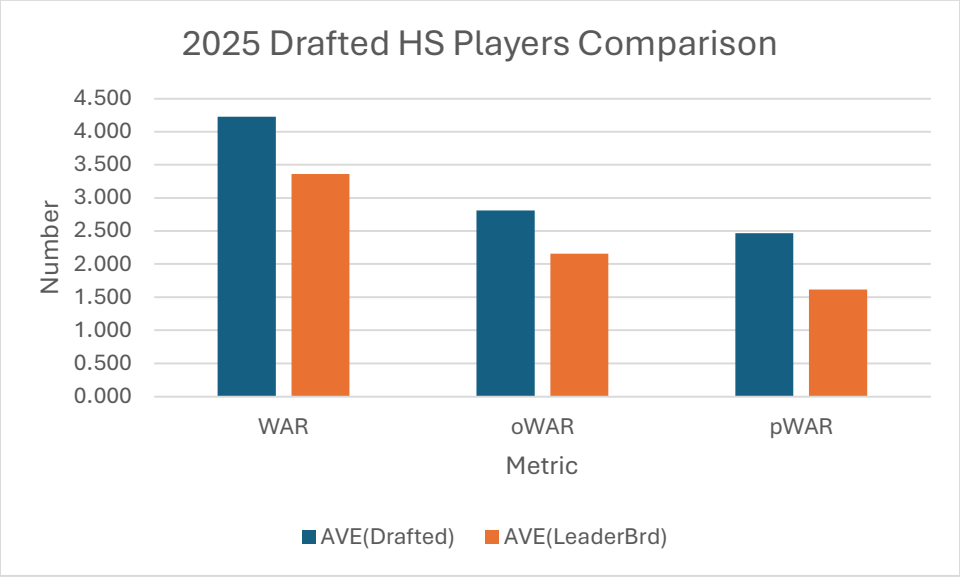
As you can see, there appears to be a strong correlation between the level of BaGS+ and DIGS+ average grade by rounds, where generally the higher graded batters and pitchers

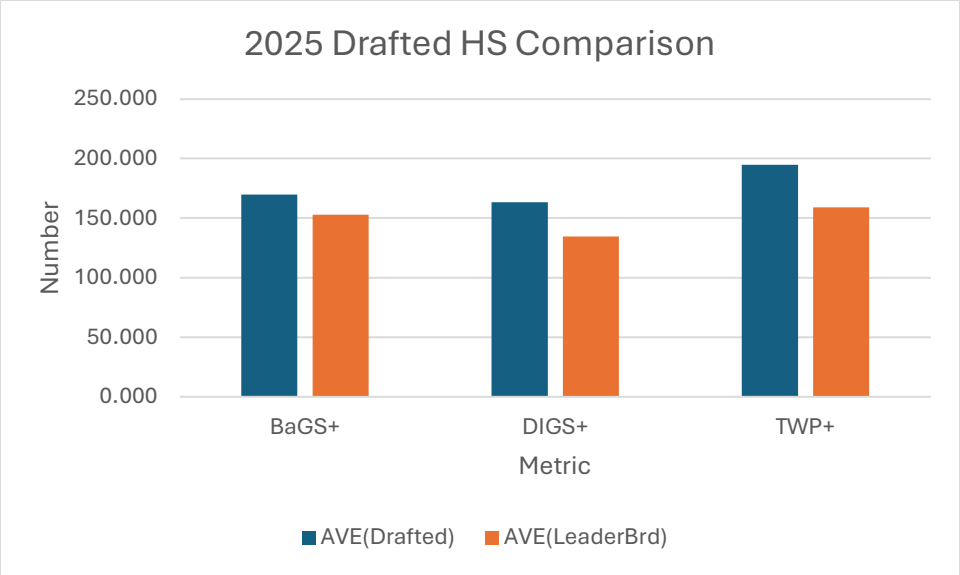
were selected in the earlier rounds (with a few exceptions that could be due to certain variables like signability and draft board fulfillment).

High School Draftees

So to start, let's analyze the high school draft class. Per Baseball America, there were 123 high school players selected (out of 615 total selections). Of those 123 selected, Pitcher DIGS had 39 on their respective territory databases, accounting for approximately 31.70% of the selected players. The next step was to see how these selected players compared to all draft available players in the database to see if there were any noticeable drafting trends by teams using the statistics and metrics available on Pitcher DIGS. Here are the results of those calculations in the table and graph shown below showing the averages of those HS players selected against the average of the entire leaderboard:

	WAR	oWAR	pWAR	BaGS+	DIGS+	TWP+
AVE(Drafted)	4.225	2.807	2.464	173.344	163.150	194.723
AVE(LeaderBrd)	3.358	2.158	1.615	152.928	134.657	159.033





As you can see from the table and charts, there was a noticeable trend of teams selecting the more "valued" high school player according to these advanced metrics, which by itself is not surprising (but it does give merit to these metrics). Next, I wanted to see if the priority of shortstops was also consistent in terms of selection priority based on these stats and metrics. In reviewing the HS leaderboard, we had stats and metrics on eight on those 33 selected SS (NOTE: Statistics for Overall No.1 selection SS Eli Willits were not publicly available). Here is a table breakdown of those available SS:

Rank	Player	State	School	oWAR	BAGS+	Round	Pick	Team
1	Ethan Holliday	OK	Stillwater	4.7986	227.5996	1	4	COL
3	Tate Southisene	NV	Basic	4.7049	223.3775	1	22	ATL
4	Quentin Young	CA	Oaks Christian	3.7769	202.9520	2	54	MIN
5	Billy Carlson	CA	Corona	3.6562	194.0660	1	10	CWS
7	Brady Ebel	CA	Corona	3.3338	188.5091	1C	32	MIL
8	Cooper Fleming	CA	Aliso Niguel	3.0607	185.4062	2	53	TBR
9	Elijah McNeal	CA	Dublin	1.6363	143.4946	20	596	SFG
38	Gavin Fien	CA	Great Oak	1.5603	131.0078	1	12	TEX

As you can see, the teams placed a premium on offensive hitting shortstops, as seven of the top 10 offensive shortstops according to Pitcher DIGS were selected, and seven also went in the first 54 selections of the draft.

But what about the draft overall? Was there a premium placed on a certain skill set for high school players regardless of position, such as athleticism and the ability to play multiple positions? One statistics/metric called "TWP+" may give use the answer. In reviewing the drafted HS players, 22 of the 39 selected HS players in the Pitcher DIGS leaderboards had a

TWP+ calculation. So here are those 22 players and there vitals, including their TWP+ leaderboard ranking:

Rank	Player	State	School	TWP+	Round	Pick	Team
1	Seth Hernandez	CA	Corona	242.3026	1	6	PIT
2	Talon Haley	MS	Lewisburg	238.3660	12	349	LAA
3	Ethin Bingaman	CA	Corona	233.3797	20	603	ARI
4	Conor Essenburg	IL	Lincoln-Way West	227.4677	5	157	ATL
20	Cooper Flemming	CA	Aliso Niguel	215.1544	2	53	TBR
27	Jacob Parker	MS	Purvis	207.3668	19	573	ARI
28	Mason Pike	WA	Puyallup	207.2544	19	561	WAS
31	Cameron Appenzeller	IL	Glenwood	206.9984	19	572	SEA
36	Gavin Lauridsen	CA	Foothill	204.6695	13	395	MIL
45	Luke Roupe	NC	Grace Christian	200.3846	17	515	MIL
57	Cooper Underwood	GA	Allatoona	195.7770	12	365	MIL
61	Vaughn Neckar	CA	Vista Murrieta	195.5840	20	612	CLE
63	Josh Hammond	NC	Wesleyan Christian Academy	195.4455	PPI	28	KCR
66	Alex Barr	IN	Kankakee Valley	194.4617	12	350	ATH
67	Grayson Boles	CA	St. Augustine	194.4617	18	548	KCR
110	Billy Carlson	CA	Corona	184.6213	1	10	CWS
146	Blaine Bullard	TX	Klein Cain	178.2369	12	352	TOR
148	Kaleb Wing	CA	Scotts Valley	177.9759	4	121	CHC
150	Jay McQueen	MS	Brandon	177.8368	20	595	TEX
206	Blake Fields	FL	The First Academy	171.4388	14	423	ARI
277	Dillon Stiltner	GA	Trinity Christian	165.1843	18	553	NYM
767	Elijah McNeal	CA	Dublin	133.3527	20	596	SFG
790	Josh Flores	IN	Lake Central	130.6568	4	125	MIL

In reviewing the above table, it shows that of those 22 available players from the Pitcher DIGS TWP+ leaderboard, 20 were from the top 277 and 14 in the top 67, including the top 4 So based on this, it shows that not only did major league teams seek athletic shortstops, but top overall athletic high school players in general.

College Players (D1/D2/JUCO)

a) Pitchers

Of the 490 4-Year college and junior college players selected in this year's draft, 304 were pitchers. Of those 304 pitchers selected, 220 (72%) had stats and metrics available on

Pitcher DIGS. So my initial analysis was to see how those stats/metric stacked up against averages of the top 220 in MLB, which are also available on Pitcher DIGS, with one exception, K-BB%, which I collected from Fangraphs.

	H/9	HR/9	BB/9	SO/9	ERA	K-BB%	DIGS+
AVE. (Draft)	7.8793	0.851	3.411	10.485	4.06	17.79%	122.494
AVE. (MLB 2024)	8.3126	1.14	3.12	8.6	4.08	14.40%[5]	98.797

So at first blush, the statistics and metrics show that teams were generally looking to get high performing arms, especially when it came to missing bats and getting Ks. With that in mind, let's take a look at some of the averages in terms of the pitching scouting grades:

	BAA	HR	BB	K
AVE. (Draft)	61	49	54	65

This shows that the strikeout scouting grade was the highest for the entire draft at 65 FV, which is consistent with the prior evaluation. So if teams were trying to seek out arms that missed bats, then it begs the question, how did teams probably measure the value of its pitchers in terms of getting Ks. Let's first look at the K-BB ratio, using any rate above 25% as the cutoff:

Name	Throw	School	K-BB%	Round	Pick	Team
Gabe Craig	RHP	Baylor	42.48%	5	161	PHI
Gage Wood	RHP	Arkansas	41.33%	1	26	PHI
Liam Doyle	LHP	Tennessee	34.29%	1	5	STL
Antoine Jean	LHP	Houston	33.83%	7	197	COL
Michael Lombardi	RHP	Tulane	30.95%	2	61	KCR
Landen Payne	RHP	Southern Miss	30.83%	18	526	CWS
Sean Episcope	RHP	Princeton	30.56%	5	155	MIL
Kade Anderson	LHP	LSU	30.15%	1	3	SEA
Tyler Bremner	RHP	UC Santa Barbara	29.68%	1	2	LAA
Colton Book	LHP	St. Joseph's	29.23%	9	271	CHC
Ty Van Dyke	RHP	Stetson	29.10%	10	300	STL
Blake Gillespie	RHP	Charlotte	29.09%	9	284	NYY
Sawyer Hawks	RHP	Vanderbilt	28.92%	6	183	ARI
Tanner Franklin	RHP	Tennessee	26.38%	CBB	72	STL
Kaden Echeman	RHP	Northern Kentucky	26.23%	12	360	STL
Joel Sarver	RHP	Charlotte	26.21%	17	513	ARI
Jamie Arnold	LHP	Florida State	26.21%	1	11	ATH

[5] Major League Leaderboards - 2024 - Pitching | FanGraphs Baseball

Patrick Forbes	RHP	Louisville	26.02%	1C	29	ARI
Kyson Witherspoon	RHP	Oklahoma	25.90%	1	15	BOS
Anthony Eyanson	RHP	LSU	25.89%	3	87	BOS
Lucas Mahlstedt	RHP	Clemson	25.85%	7	199	LAA
Zane Taylor	RHP	UNC Wilmington	25.75%	4	141	ATH

Of the above 22 pitchers having a K to BB ratio of at least 25%, the above list shows that 19 of these players were selected in Rounds 10 or earlier, thus showing that teams placed a premium on college pitchers who missed the most bats while having the least walks.

b) Hitters

Of the 490 4-Year college and junior college players selected in this year's draft, 186 (38%) were position players. For those 186 position players selected, 172 were made available on Pitcher DIGS. So my initial analysis was to see how those stats/metric stacked up against averages of the top 172 in MLB, which are also available on Pitcher DIGS.

	BaGS+	HR	SB	BB	SO	BA	OBP	OPS
AVE. (Draft)	136.834	11.82	10.90	32.67	40.81	0.328	0.433	1.011
AVE. (MLB 2024)	126.707	17.53	9.23	41.66	100.35	0.243	0.312	0.711

So in reviewing these measures, it would appear teams placed an emphasis on selecting players with contact and on-base rates (and possibly slugging). Knowing this, I decided to look at the hitting scouting grades for the drafted college hitters to see if the theme continues:

	CONT	WALK	BACON	PWR	RUN
AVE (Draft)	54	53	59	59	53

So these scouting grades confirm that the top skills sought after were batting average on contact (BACON) and power/slug (PWR), with straight contact (CONT) 3rd most important. With these grades being at the forefront, I then reviewed the various stats and metrics to see which one showed the most consistency when matching up with these scouting skill priorities. After an extensive review, I came across the BaGS+ metric as showing the most consistency, as it rewards players who consistently make contact and high on-base and slug (hence a high OPS). With a 150 grade being the threshold to evaluate the BaGS+ metric for any draftee, below are top 32 draftees with a BaGS+ score of 150 or higher and where they were selected:

Name	POS	School	BaGS+	Round	Pick	Team
Ethan Conrad	CF	Wake Forest	173.853	1	17	CHC
Alex Lodise	SS	Florida State	168.312	2	60	ATL
Aiva Arquette	SS	Oregon State	168.196	1	7	MIA
Gavin Turley	LF	Oregon State	167.333	4	110	ATH
Wehiwa Aloy	SS	Arkansas	166.709	1C	31	BAL
Mason Neville	CF	Oregon	163.143	4	114	CIN
Charles Davalan	LF	Arkansas	162.620	CBA	41	LAD
Marek Houston	SS	Wake Forest	161.161	1	16	MIN
Kane Kepley	CF	North Carolina	160.958	2	56	CHC
Jace LaViolette	CF	Texas A&M	160.076	1	27	CLE
Ike Irish	RF	Auburn	160.007	1	19	BAL
Ethan Hedges	3B	USC	158.544	3	77	COL
Cam Cannarella	CF	Clemson	157.872	CBA	43	MIA
Ryan Wideman	CF	Western Kentucky	157.332	3	99	SDP
Riley Nelson	1B	Vanderbilt	156.435	5	162	CLE
Slate Alford	3B	Georgia	156.033	9	259	LAA
Jacob Walsh	1B	Oregon	155.999	15	441	WAS
JC Vanek	1B/OF/P	*Chipola*	154.879	14	428	KCR
Kerrington Cross	3B	Cincinnati	154.725	7	220	SDP
Mitch Voit	2B	Michigan	154.565	1	39	NYM
Jamie Quinn-Irons	OF	George Mason	154.485	5	147	TBR
Anthony DePino	3B	Rhode Island	154.084	7	196	CWS
Kaeden Kent	SS	Texas A&M	153.403	3	103	NYY
Andrew Fischer	1B	Tennessee	152.147	1	20	MIL
Colby Shelton	SS	Florida	151.740	6	166	CWS
Luke Stevenson	C	North Carolina	151.189	CBA	35	SEA
Kade Snell	LF	Alabama	150.905	5	151	CHC
Cam Lee	OF	*Mineral Area*	150.788	9	274	BAL
Kaleb Freeman	2B	Georgia State	150.663	16	466	CWS
Wallace Clark	SS	Duke	150.445	9	273	ARI
Cam Maldonado	CF	Northeastern	150.159	7	206	SFG
Nolan Sailors	LF	Creighton	150.105	4	128	KCR

As you can see, of the 32 players selected with e BaGS+ metric of 150 of higher, 29 of them were drafted in Rounds 9 or earlier. So coupled with those three important scouting grades (BACONT, PWR and CONT), this proves that teams sought players with a high contact/high on-base/high slug statistics and metrics at the college level.

Conclusion

So in reviewing our assessments, it appears that teams sought the following types of amateur players:

- Top athletic offensive graded high school shortstops and overall multi-position players;
- College arms that exhibited a high/strong proficiency to miss bats/gets lots of strikeouts and minimize walks; and
- College hitters/position players that show high contact rates with a focus on high on-base and slugging statistics and metrics.