

What law firms can learn from the NFL combine

I am a serious football fan. From summer's end to the start of February, football is another member of my family. So, as I sat and watched the NFL combine a few weeks ago, anticipating the 2017 season, my mind started comparing this coveted recruiting tradition to the hiring process of law firms.

For those of you unfamiliar with the NFL combine, it is a yearly event where hungry college players showcase their skills for professional team owners and coaches. Each player performs a series of events and challenges to determine their speed and abilities. Teams use this information to decide which players they want to pursue. While all of this is fascinating (at least to me), the part that matters for this post is the behind the scenes research that takes place before any final offers are made.

Combine numbers are just the tip of the iceberg. They place a player on the radar, just like a candidate's resume sparks the interest of firm leaders. But combine numbers don't guarantee a seat at the table. Once coaches identify players with potential, they do the less glamorous (but even more important) work of determining whether these individuals are the best fit for team. This process involves personal interviews, reference checks and honest evaluations of what the team truly needs.

Just as teams take extra steps to pick the perfect additions to their rosters, law firm administrators need to take extra steps when identifying the best additions to their payroll. Law firms are a lot like sports teams. Each person plays a part in reaching one common goal. Adequate teamwork not only requires skilled players, but it also necessitates:

- Effective communication
- Willingness to compromise
- Adaptability

- Commitment to the common goal

These attributes may not be apparent from transcripts and resumes. To adequately assess these traits, administrators must ask the hard questions and do the behind-the-scenes work. Here are some suggestions for meeting this responsibility:

- Bring candidates in for a panel interview, but don't just include partners and administrators. Have some trusted associates take part in the process and solicit their honest input on each prospect.
- Contact those references. Many employers fail to use this valuable resource, but former employers are often more credible than personal references. Ask questions that specifically relate to job performance and don't forget the standard ending inquiry... "Would you hire this employee again?" State laws vary in regards to employment reference checks, so make sure you adhere to yours.

Take a note from the NFL combine. Talent is just the beginning. What you do after identifying the talent is what really leads to a successful hire.

About Erika Winston:

Erika Winston is a Virginia based writer with a passion for all things legal. As a former domestic relations attorney, she understands the challenge of determining the best fee structure for your practice. Erika is a regular contributor to [TimeSolv](#) and a variety of other publications.