

## **Presenter's Notes for NFL Combine and NFL Study Section**

### **SLIDE 1 ("February 1, 2017")**

The NFL Combine is finally here (Feb 28-Mar 6, 2017)

What is the NFL combine?

Once a year...people who have trained their whole lives to have a shot at a professional career in the sport they love, and are talented at, turn out to be scrutinized before the NFL draft.

How old were you when you knew you wanted to do research? How long have you been in training (if not an independent investigator count all time from then to now).

How many hours a day, days a week, and weeks a year do you give to your try outs for the pros?

### **SLIDE 2**

The guys at the combine have physically trained six days a week 2 to 6 hours a day or more. Training determines their sleep, eating, free time...

Training comes with physical pain, constant critique, and verbal jabs and challenges, COMPETITION is made real 24/7.

Once in training camp a typical schedule is 8:30 to 11:00am, break 1:30 to 4:00pm team meeting, 4 to 7:00pm second practice.

(Miscellaneous factoid: One surf and turf training camp meal for a single NFL team disappears 200 lbs filet and 250 lbs lobster.)

### **SLIDE 3 ("Joining the Pros")**

Your first R01 may take inspiration, breakthroughs, good fortune but I hypothesize readiness for an R01 actually comes from drive, grit and determination to make it happen.

Odds are good you are ready to make it happen. The timelines above reflect those who "won" an R01 – you'll note the similarity between when they started their career development award (CDA) and the pace of the average timing of peer reviewed publications (small grey diamonds) and grant submissions. Those who were prepared to try out on time (top line) were those who succeeded in getting off a five year career development grant before it ended (five years max).

The bottom line had to do extra time in the trenches mostly because of what appears to be a failure of readiness to try out.

Same as the combine, knowing how to be ready for your R01 (or equivalent) is a key to knowing if you are ready. You don't want to let things drift, not have the chops at the time of the test, and need to be a walk-on. You want to prepare steadily and compete well in the usual forum.

No one should be at the combine who doesn't understand what the rules and standards are. Prospects come to the combine with real proof of readiness (certified times, performance, etc).

#### **SLIDE 4 (“NIH Recruitment Goals”)**

It is not a mystery what NFL teams are looking for and it is not a mystery what NIH is looking for. This is it:

- Relevance to human health = right sport [if you are exploring a novel cell signaling mechanism with unknown implications you may be a soccer player (NSF grants) this is not bad but it is not football]
- Research that will advance the field = they want wins
- Work that is new and unique = they want excitement
- Capacity to fill gaps in knowledge = the work will build the team  
Clear and attractive approach to the science = mad skills [must be self evident – at the combine you can see and measure performance, in study section they will do the same – what they see is what they score.]
- Plan for challenges & roadblocks = strategy & endurance [watch the game tapes, have realistic assessments of strengths, and know what play you are going to call if you are 4th and 10]
- Confidence of reviewers in expertise & resources = coaching staff believes you have potential

#### **SLIDE 5 (“What’s on the Test?”)**

(Describe a few components with typical performance; FYI:

<http://www.topendsports.com/sport/gridiron/nfl-draft.htm>; 2014 ESPN site:

<http://www.bleedinggreennation.com/2014/2/20/5428852/2014-nfl-scouting-combine-schedule-preview-date>)

How much does this look like actually playing football?

Widely acknowledged that the combine doesn't predict performance in the NFL. It is an individual test for something that requires teamwork and the individual components don't translate to optimal evaluations for all positions – but it is still the gateway to the draft.

A single R01 document likewise doesn't predict your performance as a scientist or your ability to lead and manage a research group – but it is still the gateway to scientific independence. Study the test and be prepared to perform – remember you need mad skills!

Some analogies:

- Physical measurements of players and their percent body fat are factual descriptions the same way your biosketch is.
- Drug screening is a no-brainer, but be sure each year players are thrown out the same way applicants will have grants triaged for inadequate human subjects sections. Don't fail the obvious controllable parts.

The Cybex is an assessment of joint flexibility and movement. They are looking at players to see if a history injury is likely to have lasting liabilities; reviewers are looking to see if there is evidence of weakness and if there is a high probability that you can rise above things like an inconsistent or sparse publication record, or an aim that may not pan out, etc.

It may not be an ideal test...but it is the test. Study section is yours – you can OWN IT - and the good news is it happens three times a year.

#### **SLIDE 6 (“What’s on the Test?”)**

[Introduce hand-out which includes:

Study Section member and chair orientation materials and review forms are available at:  
[http://grants.nih.gov/grants/peer/reviewer\\_guidelines.htm](http://grants.nih.gov/grants/peer/reviewer_guidelines.htm)

NIH Peer Review Policy and Practice guidance documents are kept current and available at:  
<http://grants.nih.gov/grants/peer/>]

#### **SLIDE 7 (“Scoring This Test”)**

People give out scores. It is NOT objective but it is anchored in standards – a five is GOOD – a moderate impact study with no major flaws. A five will get you triaged.

You must be GREAT! Train hard and understand the game.

#### **SLIDE 8 (“Scouts in Decision Mode”)**

Study section reviewers are scientists – some with relatively new R01s. They are invited by an NIH scientific review officer to serve in that role; 20 to 40 make up a typical SS; a typical section will see 40 to 100 applications. A group can cover around 40 to 45 applications in a day. Each member will have 7 to 10 grants to consider in detail and serve as a primary or secondary reviewer; they will vote on all and likely read the aims and abstract for all. Scores are provided in advance, they are ranked, and the meeting often begins with discussion of agreement about the cut-off point in the list for triage of grants that will not be discussed further. A grant may be rescued from the middle of the list but only rarely, the top half are discussed. Study section members spend from 35 to 40 hours or more in preparation for each meeting which include writing summary statements and scoring.

[See this website for more detail:

[https://www.hhmi.org/sites/default/files/Educational%20Materials/Lab%20Management/study\\_section.pdf](https://www.hhmi.org/sites/default/files/Educational%20Materials/Lab%20Management/study_section.pdf)]

#### **SLIDE 9 (“Successful Prep”)**

The book *Talented is Overrated: What Really Separates World-Class Performers from Everybody Else* by Jeff Colvin drives home the point that exceptional performance is rarely the sole result of genius or raw talent. The author, Geoff Colvin, drives home that the greats (from Ben Franklin to Michael Jordan) dedicated extreme amounts of focus and time to deliberate practice...they TRAINED.

The coaches and staff know if someone shows up at the combine naïve or poorly prepared. And they can be snide tipped by simple things like a player with shoes that aren't allowable footwear for the sprints. Don't be that player – the one who doesn't write an "anticipated results" or "challenges and alternatives" section. Neither of those is a specific section of an R01 but you can bet all the players who are in the NFL know those plays and showed it when they stepped up for the draft.

Be deliberate, use the NIH Reporter, the funded grants library, and mentoring resources to read as many aims, abstracts, and grants as you can. Explicitly ask for access to your mentors funded grants – respect or suggest restrictions that may make it easier to share. They don't suspect that you personally will sell them out, they worry about naïve mistakes that can unintentionally broadcast research strategies. (They don't think you will sell the playbook, they think the wrong people might see it by accident).

Reading lots of grants is like watching game tapes – you learn key patterns and strategies that you can adapt to your play.

#### **SLIDE 10 ("Must Ace Aims")**

At your try out, you must ace the aims.

#### **SLIDE 11 ("Catching the Eye of the Scouts")**

No notes

#### **SLIDE 12 ("Catching the Eye of the Scouts")**

Our programmatic offerings are evolving rapidly in the new funding cycle.

Our Clinical and Translational Scientist Career Development Seminar Series became so popular it was unwieldy. Gave rise to two separate seminar series with parallel themes aimed better at the stage in research life.

Our ISS has...six sessions (adding HIV/AIDS) per year with an average of 24 proposals per review session for major dates

#### **SLIDE 13 ("Ready for Try-Outs?")**

No notes

**SLIDE 14**

There are more than 65,000 NCAA football players, about 10,200 in Division 1 on scholarships, and around 250 NFL draft slots. They get one shot a year to make it into the club – you get three and you won't age out or be pushed out by injury.

R readiness is about striving. Plan it and do it!