

Personality profiling is latest method coaches are using to evaluate potential recruits

By [Jeff Eisenberg](#) | [The Dagger](#) – Mon, Jun 3, 2013 10:35 AM EDT



Marist coach Jeff Bower (Getty Images)

Before heading to the airport at the end of his recruiting visit to Marist College last month, [guard Nick Colletta](#) discovered coach Jeff Bower had one slightly unusual activity planned for him.

The Marist coach asked Colletta to take a [personality](#) assessment survey.

Colletta spent the next 10 minutes perusing two lists of 56 adjectives, one in which he had to check off the personality traits he thought best depicted the way he was expected to act and the other in which he marked the ones that he felt really described himself. Computer analysis of Colletta's answers suggested he was competitive, gregarious and

A NEW APPROACH TO RECRUITING:

When recruits visit Marist College, they're given a two-page personality assessment survey in which they choose from a list of adjectives. Recruits check the personality traits that best depict the way they think they're expected to behave on one side and the ones really describe themselves on the other. Analysis of the responses reveals a personality profile that can help the Marist coaches determine what communication style would be most effective with that player, whether he'll be a vocal leader and if he'll want the ball late in close games.

PERSONALITY TYPES REVEALED:

High A: Confident, competitive, assertive

Low A: Cooperative, shy, modest

High B: Extroverted, gregarious, people-oriented

Low B: Reserved, introspective, quiet

High C: Patient, relaxed, methodical

Low C: Intense, impatient, fast-paced

High D: Attention to detail, conscientious, exacting

Low D: Informal, nonconformist, takes risks

comfortable with the ball in his hands at crunch time, further confirming to Bower that the sweet-shooting senior from Glendora High School was worth a late scholarship offer.

"Maybe other recruits might be surprised to have to take the test, but it really wasn't that weird to me after Coach Bower explained the purpose," Colletta said. "It was an interesting test to take because it really made you think about who you were."

Bower's use of personality profiling as a tool to help assess recruits is a tactic borrowed from pro sports.

Just like NFL and NBA teams grade potential draft prospects on their speed, strength or proficiency in certain drills, they also use clinical interviews, aptitude tests and personality surveys as evaluation tools. The goal is to determine which potential draftees will thrive under pressure, respond when challenged and fit smoothly in the locker room.

During Bower's 15-year stint as a scout, coach and general manager in the New Orleans Hornets organization, he grew to trust the accuracy of the personality assessment survey the franchise used. As a result, Bower brought the Predictive Index with him when he left the NBA ranks to replace coach Chuck Martin at Marist earlier this spring, using the psychological profiling method to help evaluate recruits, assemble his coaching staff and fast-forward his understanding of his current roster.

"I've seen its value in the past in the NBA and I can see its value even more in a college setting," Bower said. "We're not looking for any one quality in particular. We're looking for how individuals function best and what their natural instincts are. We think it's a tool that will help us blend personalities together and bring the right kind of person here."

It's difficult to evaluate how common the use of personality profiling is in college basketball recruiting, but conversations with coaches, school officials and those who administer the tests suggest Marist is one of the few programs to even dabble with the idea.

Sports Aptitude co-founder Eric Weiss, whose firm conducts psychological testing on draft prospects for 11 NBA teams, says his company's attempts to break into the college market have been largely unsuccessful.

Whereas NBA franchises have the power to decide which draft prospect to select each June, college coaches are at the mercy of top high school prospects, the best of whom



Pat Summitt has long been a proponent of personality tests for recruits (Getty Images)

can often choose from dozens of scholarship offers. As a result, college coaches fear asking high school players to fill out a personality assessment test or agree to a clinical interview because some players might be turned off by having to take a test at one school that others don't ask them to do.

"The recruiting process in college is more of a courtship than the NBA draft, so there has been some hesitancy among coaches to ask a recruit to take a psychological test," Weiss said. "It's absolutely applicable in college and in fact it's more vital in a lot of ways because you have a larger pool of talent to choose from, but they're afraid to do it. Asking a kid to be tested instead of basically romancing him is the concern."

The most high-profile college coach to embrace personality profiling is legendary Tennessee women's basketball coach Pat Summitt, who was [first introduced to the Predictive Index system in the early 1990s](#) by a Knoxville car dealer who used it to hire his own employees. Each time a recruit came on an official visit to Knoxville, Summitt asked the player to fill out a Predictive Index survey and then analyzed the results with her.

Former All-American Chamique Holdsclaw's survey showed she thrived under intense pressure in the most challenging situations, so Summitt emphasized during the recruiting process that if Holdsclaw came to Tennessee, she'd be playing for a demanding coach in front of fans who'd expect Final Four runs every year. Point guard Kellie Jolly's survey suggested she was a perfectionist who was hard on herself when she made mistakes, so Summitt knew to offer encouragement after poor possessions rather than tearing into her further.

Though longtime assistant Holly Warlick has since taken over for Summitt at Tennessee, personality profiling remains a staple of the program's success. Warlick said she doesn't recall Tennessee ever rescinding a scholarship offer based on the results of a Predictive Index survey, but she conceded she'll seek out certain personality types at certain positions and she'll tailor her recruiting pitch or motivational style to what the psychological profile suggests will be most effective.

"The longer we've used it, the more I've learned it's a fairly accurate assessment," Warlick said. "I think at the key positions you've got to have leaders, but I think you have to have some kids who follow too and who want to and are good at it. The key is you need a little mix."

Much like college coaches see the benefit in assessing whether a prospective player would be a good fit for their programs, high school recruits selecting a college also find personality profiling useful.

Ex-college golfer Betty Baird Kregor [started a company that uses psychological assessment tests](#) to help high school prospects determine the communication and motivational style they need from a college coach in order to maximize their chance to succeed. Kregor's inspiration is the career-altering decision she made to play golf at the University of Alabama in 1979 under a coach who emphasized structure and technical skill, not the ideal environment for a free-spirited three-time junior All-American who did everything by feel.

Since Kregor lost her confidence and passion for her sport at Alabama and had to transfer after her sophomore year, she now tries to help young athletes not make the same mistake she did. The hundreds of high school prospects who have worked with her each take a DISC personality test that contains 28 groups of four statements and requires test-takers to select the statement in each group that best and least describes them.

"As athletes become more aware of who they are and what makes them tick, they can then look for schools that have what they need," Kregor said.

"I have students that test highly, highly competitive and to have a chair thrown at them would fire them up and make them perform better. Then I also have students that if a chair were thrown at them, there would be a lawsuit and they would leave immediately. So if you don't know who you are before you head to college, there's a greater chance you're going to be disappointed."

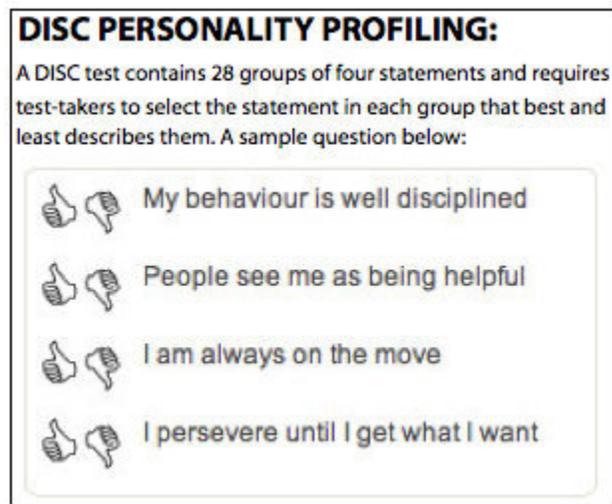
If personality profiling is a natural fit as an evaluation tool during the recruiting process, it can also help coaches figure out what motivational techniques to use to bring out the best in their current teams too.

From Loyola Marymount women's basketball, to Oregon State men's golf, to Florida women's soccer, about 30 U.S. college programs have hired [Australia-based Athlete Assessments](#) to psychologically profile their players. Founder Bo Hanson, a three-time Olympic medalist in rowing for Australia, created a sports-specific personality profiling method based on the DISC behavioral test that gives coaches insight into the strengths, weaknesses and preferred communication style of their athletes.

"I come from a sporting background, and we've lost Olympic gold medals by tenths of a second," Hanson said. "Sports today, the margins have compressed to a large degree. Teams have altitude training. They've got all this technology. The only big area where you can still get big gains is enhancing the capability of your people. Why wouldn't you be willing to try something if it's within the rules and can help your team get an edge?"

That last statement from Hanson is also reflective of Bower's coaching philosophy. Personality profiling is just one of the cutting-edge methods the new Marist coach plans to use to revitalize a program that he once helped lead to back-to-back league titles as an assistant coach in the late 1980s but has finished eighth or worse in the MAAC in each of the past five years.

He watched film and edits of all his current players via Synergy Technology and plans to extensively chart tempo-free stats and advanced metrics in addition to traditional ones. He'll work closely with



Marist's information technology department to find ways to monitor players' academic progress and watch for warning signs. And he'll track response time among high school prospects to everything from calls and texts, to pamphlets, to in-person visits in hopes of identifying which methods were most well-received and which weren't effective.

"You don't know until you track something," Bower said. "I think it can point out trends and patterns and get you to information much quicker than traditional methods of standard observation.

"I see the reaction from players when you show them the hard facts as opposed to vague generalities. Players like to be told the truth and what it is they need to improve on. Measuring and monitoring things give you the data and facts to help make those areas more evident to your players."

Of all Bower's innovative analytics methods, the use of personality profiling in recruiting is definitely the one that will set Marist apart most from its peers.

Bower has access to the [personality](#) assessment surveys of all the [NBA](#) draft prospects interviewed by the Hornets during his tenure. He believes the patterns that emerged from that data can help him find players with the proper makeup to thrive in college too.

Asked if he thinks personality profiling will one day be a trend in college basketball the same way it is among Fortune 500 companies hiring employees or NBA teams evaluating draft prospects, Bower said it will depend on how open-minded coaches are.

"All I can say is I've seen the value of it," Bower said. "I have a high comfort level with it and an understanding of how it can be applied."