

White Paper

Retired NFL Players, Emotional Intelligence, and Life Success

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE FOR ATHLETES' LIFE SUCCESS

Joshua Freedman, Marvin Smith

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Abstract:

Recently some NFL players have been making news, not just for their athletic prowess, but for destructive behavior off the field. Emotional intelligence has been highly correlated with health, positive relationships, and pro-social behavior: Is this true for professional athletes? If so, these skills could be a key to help professional athletes overcome a range of challenges. This study assesses 30 retired NFL players with a survey on life success (including good health and relationships, avoiding drug/alcohol use and violence, doing well at work, and creating a high quality of life) and an emotional intelligence assessment. Over 60% in the variation of the life success factors are predicted by emotional intelligence scores. Athletes with greater emotional intelligence are likely to be more successful in life.

Background

Recent headlines have emphasized the “off the field performance” of professional athletes, raising awareness that the behavior of athletes impacts team performance and finances, the athletes’ lives, and society.¹ But many athletes are incredible role models during and after their pro careers, upholding the highest standards of sportsmanship and citizenship. Given other research on the relationship between emotional intelligence and life success,² Six Seconds and Sportstech International conducted an exploratory study to assess if emotional intelligence is an important ingredient in helping professional athletes live healthy and successful lives.

¹ E.G., NFL player Adam "Pacman" Jones is currently facing felony charges after his sixth arrest since joining the league causing his suspension for the season. Or Michael Vick, who ranked 33 in the 2005 Forbes 100 most powerful celebrities, was charged with cruelty to animals and was recently called “one of the most repugnant figures in all of sports” (Mobile Register, Saturday, June 23, 2007)

² Joshua Freedman, Massimiliano Ghini and Carina Fiedeldej-Van Dijk, “Emotional Intelligence and Performance” www.6seconds.org/sei 2006.



Sample Group

The Retired Players Department of the National Football League Players Association (NFLPA) represents professional athletes who played in the NFL. In May 2007, approximately 220 members met for their annual conference in Atlanta, Georgia; the attendees are retired professional athletes, and most are leaders in their state and regional player associations. Marvin Smith, a retired NFL player and member of the NFLPA, is the co-founder of Sportstech, the human asset management firm for athletes. Smith attended the 2007 Retired Players Conference and invited a random sample of fellow athletes to complete anonymous assessments of emotional intelligence and life success.

The 30 respondents³ all are men between the ages of 37 and 52 (mean age 44). They currently work in a broad range of roles from employees in manufacturing to executives in sales to counselors; they work in finance, technology, health, sports, manufacturing, and professional services. Sixty three percent have a university degree.

To form a comparison group, random visitors to the 6seconds.org web site were invited to complete the same Life Success questionnaire. A sample was selected from these responses to form a comparison group of 48 people from North America, mean age 49 years. While they have a similar range of work experiences as the NFLPA members, 87% have university degrees.⁴

Assessments

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence was measured with the Six Seconds Emotional Intelligence Assessment (SEI).⁵ The SEI is based on the Six Seconds Model of Emotional Intelligence consisting of eight core competencies associated with three macro areas: Self Awareness, Self Management, and Self Direction.

³ An additional 10 players responded after the analysis was completed.

⁴ Not only is the education level higher, the demographics collected on each group are not adequate to form a rigorous comparison; an expanded sample with additional demographic indicators will be required for full comparison in a future study.

⁵ The only tool based on Six Seconds' model, the SEI is focused on developing key capacities for living and leading with emotional intelligence. (www.6seconds.org)



- Self Awareness, called “Know Yourself” includes two competencies: Enhance Emotional Literacy and Recognize Patterns.
- Self Management, called “Choose Yourself” includes four competencies: Apply Consequential Thinking, Navigate Emotions, Engage Intrinsic Motivation, and Exercise Optimism.
- The Self Direction area, called “Give Yourself,” includes Increase Empathy and Pursue Noble Goals.

The assessment provides an overall EQ score, scores for each of the three macro areas, and scores for each of the eight competencies for a total of 12 normative values.

Life Success

The Life Success scale was developed from a questionnaire Six Seconds has used for previous research⁶ and expanded for the purposes of this study. Using a 5-point Likert scale respondents rated themselves on 18 items related to:

- Health (physical and emotional)
- Addiction (drugs and alcohol)
- Depression
- Relationships (personal and professional)
- Pro-social Behavior (avoiding violence and legal issues)
- Quality of Life (satisfaction with work and life)
- Effectiveness

Respondents are asked to rate their agreement with a series of statements, such as, “I have had problems with alcohol,” “My personal relationships are not successful” and “I don't like the way I am living my life.” The 18 items form a combined variable called “Life Success,” with a Cronbach alpha of $\alpha = .864$, indicating high scale reliability; however, due to the small sample size a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test was run to check the sample adequacy, and $KMO = .395$, indicating the study should be expanded to include a larger sample to confirm the strength of the Life Success scale.⁷

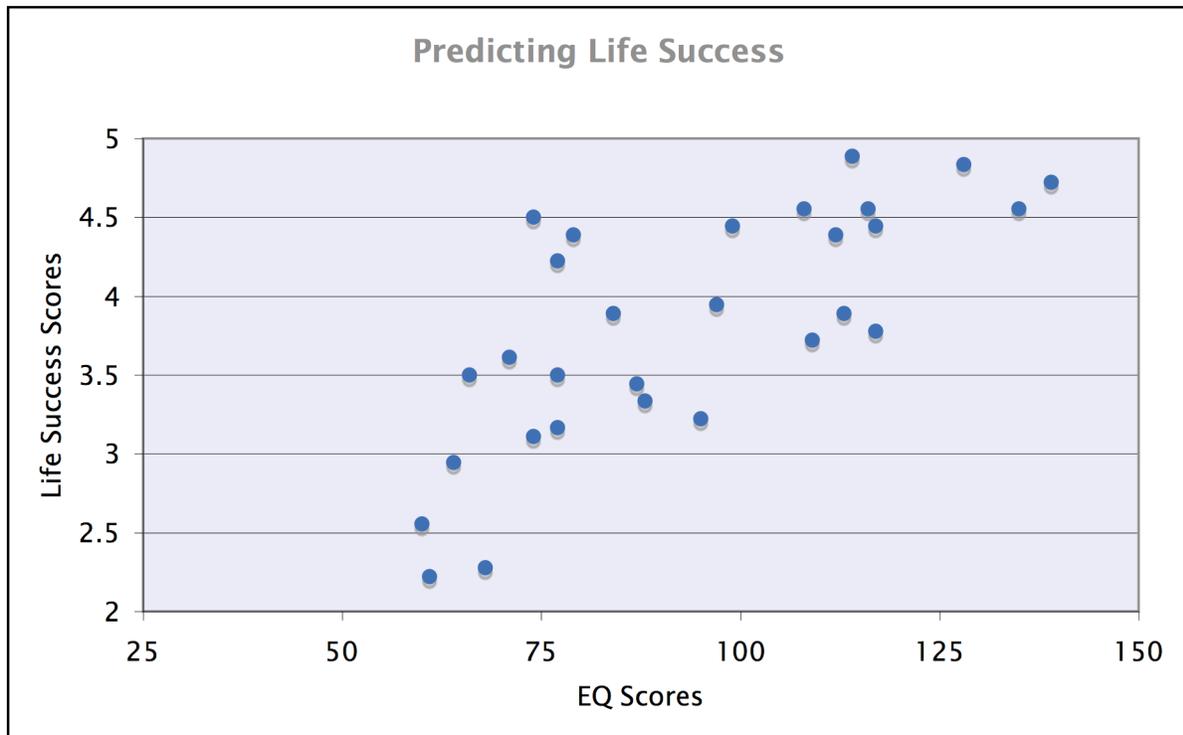
⁶ Joshua Freedman, Massimiliano Ghini and Carina Fiedeldey-Van Dijk, “Emotional Intelligence and Performance” www.6seconds.org/sei 2006.

⁷ A larger sample ($n=77$) was collected from visitors to www.6seconds.org web site, and the scale analysis was repeated showing strong adequacy with $KMO=.735$



Analysis

A high correlation appeared between the emotional intelligence (EQ) scales and the life success (LS) outcomes. As shown in this graph, there is a strong positive relationship between EQ and LS. Generally speaking those with higher EQ had higher Life Success scores:



To assess the strength of the relationship, a linear regression analysis found that for these 30 retired NFL players, EQ is a strong predictor of the Life Success Variable: $F = 32.88$, $p < .001$ (R square = .55).

One of the strongest predictive models arises from a combination of SEI scales which yields $F = 8.17$, $p < .001$ (R square = .70, adjusted R square = .62):

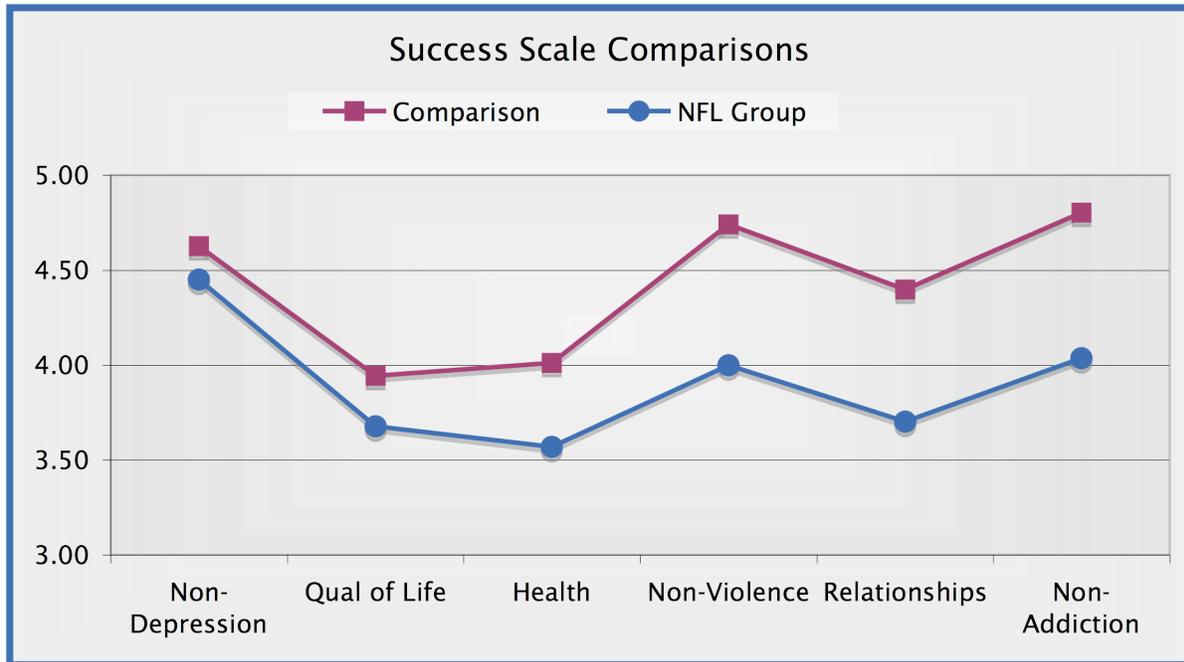
In other words, approximately 62% of the variation in Life Success among these retired professional athletes is explained by emotional intelligence.

Life Success

The athletes' scores on Life Success were 14.5% lower than the comparison groups' scores. The sample size is too small to achieve an even demographic distribution, so



this finding requires further study. However, for the purposes of discussion, the results are:



	Non-Depression	Qual of Life	Health	Non-Violence	Relationships	Non-Addiction
Comparison	4.63	3.94	4.01	4.74	4.40	4.80
NFL Group	4.45	3.68	3.57	4.00	3.70	4.03
Difference	-3.97%	-7.23%	-12.37%	-18.49%	-18.77%	-19.03%

To further understand the relationship between EQ and Life Success, several of the components of Life Success were examined separately:

Violence

Participants were asked, “I have not been violent to others,” and “I have not been abusive to others.” These two items were combined to form a variable called “Violence.”

A combination of EQ factors (Pursue Noble Goals, Apply Consequential Thinking, Increase Empathy, Recognize Patterns, Enhance Emotional Literacy, Exercise Optimism) predicts over 28% of the variation in scores on violence.⁸

⁸ EQ vs Violence: $F = 2.77, p = .038, R \text{ square} = .44, \text{ Adjusted R Square} .28$



Substance Abuse

Participants were asked, “I have had problems with alcohol,” and “I have had problems with drugs.” These two items were combined to form a variable called “Addiction.”

Having low emotional intelligence scores is extremely predictive of problems with drugs and alcohol. This model is highly significant, **over 49% of the variation in the “Addiction” variable is predicted by components of EQ.**⁹

Relationships

Participants were asked, “I have many excellent friendships,” “My marriage(s) / relationship(s) have been excellent,” and “My personal relationships are not successful.” These were combined to form a variable called “Relationships.”

Emotional Intelligence components (Pursue Noble Goals, Navigate Emotions, Apply Consequential Thinking, Recognize Patterns and Engage Intrinsic Motivation) combine to **predict over 44% of the variation in relationship quality.**¹⁰

Quality of Life

Participants were asked, “I don't like the way I am living my life,” “I have had financial problems,” and “Overall, my life is great.” These items were combined to form a variable called “Quality of Life.”

Total emotional intelligence is highly predictive of Quality of Life; **almost 45% of the variation in Quality of Life is explained by EQ scores.**¹¹

⁹ EQ vs Substance Abuse: $F = 4.274$, $p = .004$ (R square = .643 ; Adjusted R square = .492)

¹⁰ EQ vs Relationships: $F = 3.47$, $p < .02$, R square = .44, adjusted R square .31

¹¹ EQ vs Quality of Life: $F = 23.60$, $p < .001$, R square = .47, adjusted R square = .45)



Conclusion

It appears that emotional intelligence, as measured by the Six Seconds Emotional Intelligence Assessment, is a significant (perhaps even essential) capacity for professional athletes to live successful and healthy lives. These findings suggest that since players, teams, and the association are concerned with the lifelong wellbeing and life success of athletes, it is in their interest to ensure that athletes develop or strengthen these competencies.

In short: It appears that athletes who develop greater emotional intelligence are more likely to succeed in life.

While this athlete sample is small, it represents almost 15% of the participants at the Retired Player Association conference, a group of leaders who are among the most successful members of the association. It is important to conduct a larger scale study of retired and current NFL players, and to expand the study to other sports to more fully understand what it takes for athletes to win at life.

About Six Seconds and Sportstech

Six Seconds is a 501(c)3 organization based in California (USA) with offices in Bologna, Brisbane, Beijing, London, San Francisco, and Singapore. Established in 1997, Six Seconds exists to help all people develop emotional intelligence so communities, businesses, schools, and families can thrive. For more information, please visit www.6seconds.org

Sportstech International is a human asset management firm helping athletic teams optimize their people so teams are more successful. Sportstech partners with Six Seconds to bring emotional intelligence programs to professional athletics. For more information, please visit www.sportstechintl.com

