

Official Companion Book

REAL FOOTBALL
NETWORK

TAKE YOUR EYE OFF THE BALL 2.0

FOREWORD BY
PETE CARROLL

How to Watch Football
by Knowing Where to Look

PAT KIRWAN

with **DAVID SEIGERMAN** Introduction by **BILL COWHER**



Exclusive DVD Inside

TAKE YOUR EYE OFF THE BALL 2.0

HOW TO WATCH FOOTBALL
BY KNOWING WHERE TO LOOK

PAT KIRWAN

WITH **DAVID SEIGERMAN**



TRIUMPH
BOOKS

Contents

[Foreword by Pete Carroll](#)

[Preface by Bill Cowher](#)

[Author's Note](#)

[Introduction](#)

[1. Get in the Game](#)

[2. The 168-Hour Work Week](#)

[3. The Toughest Job in Sports](#)

[4. Ground Rules](#)

[5. There's Always a Catch](#)

[6. Laying It On the Line](#)

[7. You Say You Want an Evolution?](#)

[8. Why 7 Doesn't Equal 7](#)

[9. Feel the Rush](#)

[10. Gotcha Covered](#)

[11. What's So Special?](#)

[12. FBI: Football Intelligence](#)

[13. Getting Organized](#)

[14. Take Your Pick](#)

[15. Pain Management](#)

[16. Tough Call](#)

[17. Lies, Damn Lies, and Statistics](#)

[18. Talk the Talk](#)

[Appendix: Become A True Student Of The Game](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[About the Authors](#)

Foreword by Pete Carroll

I had just gotten to the New York Jets when I first met Pat Kirwan. It was around 1990, and he was still coaching at Hofstra University. From our very first conversation, I could tell he had an NFL-level understanding of football, and his perspective was so valuable that we immediately wanted to make him a part of the franchise.

Pat and I hit it off right away, and we wound up spending a lot of time talking about football concepts and philosophies. We didn't always agree on everything, but he had strong opinions that I always respected and an ability to analyze and evaluate players that was accurate and well founded.

When the salary cap was first instituted, I remember Pat and I sat down to read the rules together to determine what it was all about. We wanted to know it backward and forward to gain an advantage over everyone else. Pat's a great competitor. When we were with the Jets, we used to play a lot of basketball together. He was the guy in the paint, Kippy Brown was our versatile player, and they both knew they had to feed me the ball (I only pass during football season). But you can learn a lot about people when you compete together, and Pat was always fun to battle with. Whatever shortcoming that left-hander had, he would will himself to win.

When I moved on to New England and then USC and Seattle, Pat and I stayed connected, talking football and sharing ideas. He has always been an authority on what's going on in the league, someone whose understanding of players, coaches, situations, and trends has been an invaluable resource for me. That's especially true when it comes to what's important in the makeup of a player. I remember when I was in New England, Pat mentioned Sean Morey to me during the 1999 NFL Draft. He was a receiver at Brown University who had set a bunch of Ivy League records. But Pat had really studied the kid and found that he was a fine all-around player, a tough guy, and a special competitor. He kept dogging me during the draft, and we finally took Sean in the seventh round. He made the Pats' practice squad, and eventually he became a special teams captain, won a Super Bowl with Pittsburgh, then made the Pro Bowl as a special teams player in 2008. Sean probably never would have gotten drafted if Pat hadn't championed his cause. Pat was able to see the player for who he was and didn't hold his level of competition against him, and I trusted Pat enough to make the pick.

Pat and I have never really ended that football conversation we first started with the Jets. We're like football soul mates, people who just make sense to each other and have developed a level of non-verbal communication that's very special. This book will give you a sense of what it's like to watch the game of football through the eyes of a true expert.

Preface by Bill Cowher

I have spent the last eight seasons watching NFL games not from the sideline but from a television studio. As soon as we get off the air, my *NFL Today* colleagues—over the years, it's been James Brown, Dan Marino, Shannon Sharpe, Boomer Esiason, Tony Gonzalez, Bart Scott, and, through it all, Pat Kirwan—and I head to the green room at CBS Studios in New York to watch every game of the afternoon.

It's great to hear the back and forth with those guys and to get their take on what they're seeing. But as the only coach surrounded by a bunch of former players, there's no question that we just don't see things the same way.

Every time they see a bad play, the former players blame it on a bad call by the coach. I then have to remind them that once in a while players do need to execute a play. They're wondering, *What kind of call was that?* and I'm telling them that every play is good by design.

There's a great respect that exists between everybody on the show, and we all do get along very well. But as you can imagine, the conversation can get pretty lively. And while I'm defending coaches around the league, Pat is right there sitting next to me, shaking his head and laughing. He understands the dilemma I'm in with these guys.

Officially, Pat's an "editorial contributor" to the *NFL Today*. But the value of his football knowledge goes way beyond that.

That won't surprise any of you who know him from his show on Sirius NFL Radio or from reading his work on CBSSports.com or in the original version of *Take Your Eye Off the Ball*. He has a truly unique perspective on the NFL—he's coached in the league, he's worked on the management side of it, and he can talk to both players and owners. He has unbelievable insight into the big picture, into why certain things happen—whether it's on the field or in the front office.

A lot of people know the game of football. It's a complex world we work in, and we all tend to overanalyze it and wind up making it even more complicated than it is. But Pat is able to articulate it all in such a clear way that anyone, any fan, can get it.

I hear him do this with his listeners all the time. They call in with questions about why their team doesn't make a change or do something differently, and Pat makes them think. Rather than encouraging them to have an emotional reaction, he teaches them to see everything that's going on and to look at the entire process.

Pat wants fans to have a better understanding of the game they love. He thinks that the more fans understand the game, the more they can appreciate how complex it is and why things happen the way they do. The more you learn, the more you'll want to know.

And fans can't get enough of the NFL. It's 12 months a year of coverage now. There's the season itself, followed by everything that goes into building a team in the off-season, and fans are intrigued by all of it. Pat is unique in that he can talk with authority about every aspect of today's NFL.

I think a book like this can be so helpful to fans, and I'm flattered to be writing this foreword on behalf of someone for whom I have such great respect.

There are so many things to look at before the ball is snapped that will give you a better understanding of the game...if you know what to look for. This book will go a long way toward helping you understand what happens during the off-season, in the huddle before the snap, during the play itself, and in a team's draft war room. In short, it will teach you about all the complexities that make football America's favorite sport.

Author's Note

Many football fans who bought the first edition of *Take Your Eye Off the Ball* told us their books got so much use they were beginning to fall apart. It was the best compliment we could've received.

Readers dog-eared pages, took notes in the margins, and highlighted passages they kept referring to a season. They gave their little paperback books a workout, which is exactly what we'd hoped they would do.

So, in 2011, we released the Playbook Edition of *Take Your Eye Off the Ball*, designed to withstand the demand to use it as a workbook. We added extra space in the margins so readers would have more room to make notes. We had a sturdier cover and a spiral binding, worthy of the reference guide the book was intended to be. We added some content, updating and expanding sections throughout the book—including several pages of charts and diagrams to help you watch football in a whole new way. And, of course, there was the companion DVD, featuring Pat discussing the concepts introduced and explained in the book.

Here we are, five years after the initial release of *Take Your Eye Off the Ball*, and fans continue to ask for more. So, we created this book you now have in your hand: *Take Your Eye Off the Ball 2.0*, which is another expanded and updated version of the original book. We have refreshed our examples and topical references throughout, eliminating some content that had become dated over the years. And we've added new content throughout, making this a book even our original readers will find new and engaging.

In 2015, we are launching the Real Football Network. This book will be your first taste of the brand of smart football content we're creating that you can't find anywhere else. We have built a roster deep in football expertise, with former NFL coaches and general managers and players and scouts, all delivering real football insight to the real football fan through a variety of platforms and media partners, all centered around the digital channel, realfootballnetwork.com. We will be featuring the expertise of our longtime partners Tim Ryan and Jim Miller, and working with John Pollard of STAT LLC on a variety of groundbreaking projects in the blossoming world of football analytics (our brand new Chapter 17 introduces the many ways NFL teams are starting to open their minds to evaluating their game through real football analytics).

From the start, we have cultivated a relationship with fans rooted in guided discovery. We know what kind of appetite exists for real football content. We know what football fans want and need to know, and we're building a machine to get it to them.

So, here we are, with this revised, refined, rebooted, and rebranded version of our book. This version, like the previous iterations, exists because you—the real football fan—asked for it.

We are so grateful for all the great feedback we received on how informative and illuminating the original *Take Your Eye Off the Ball* was. We hope you get the same enjoyment out of this bigger, better version.

Thank you for all your enthusiastic support. Now, turn the page and get to work.

Introduction

What You've Been Missing All These Years

To the untrained eye, football is chaos—a collection of heavily armored men running in various directions and meeting in high-speed collisions all over the field. Every snap unleashes 22 players, each one with a specific assignment. It all happens so fast that most fans follow the game simply by following the ball—from center to quarterback, then on to receiver or running back, and ultimately to the bottom of a pile. They see a handful of players doing their jobs, while everything else appears to be pure bedlam.

In order to watch football from a new vantage point, I'm asking you to break the cardinal rule that every coach teaches every kid the first time he or she takes the field, whether it's a gridiron or a diamond, a basketball court or a tennis court. I want you to take your eye off the ball.

I want you to see the offensive linemen executing blocking assignments that are as intricate as they are intense. I want you to notice the safety sneaking up into the box before the snap, confusing a quarterback who's trying to figure out where the pressure will be coming from. I want you to notice which players are in the game and anticipate what's about to happen. When you take your eye off the ball, you'll be amazed at how much action, athleticism, and gamesmanship you've been missing.

If you're a football fan who loves the action—and based on the NFL's peerless popularity in America, you probably are—imagine how much more compelling the game will be when you begin to appreciate its complexity.

It's not the fans' fault that they miss out on all that action. They've been programmed to watch the game a certain way.

For most fans, their primary source of football is the game broadcast. As intricate, high-tech, and enjoyable as game broadcasts are today, they remain limited in their ability to teach the game to the millions of viewers.

On TV, you simply can't always watch everything going on at once.

And the flow of the game doesn't allow enough time between plays for the analyst to explain all the interconnected pieces that cause a play to succeed or fail. Forty seconds isn't much of a teaching opportunity. Once the play-by-play is finished and reacted to, there isn't a ton of time left for an analyst to analyze before the offense is back at the line of scrimmage and the announcers' focus moves on to the next play.

It's not like baseball, where there's more time for reaction than there is actual action.

Let's face it—when Eli Manning throws an interception, most analysts do not have the time to explain in detail what he misread in the defense's coverage that led to the pick. Too often, analysts have to offer up an ordinary explanation—“That's just Manning's gunslinger mentality”—and an opportunity to teach fans about the game is lost.

The truth is football can't be learned while it's happening. Fortunately, a few outlets like ESPN, the NFL Network, and even the late CNN/ Sports Illustrated—where I first was given the chance to talk and write about blocking and tackling and building rosters and creating game plans and all the other

things you'll find in this book—have created programming that allows for some study of strategy and execution. Television delivers a visually compelling experience when it comes to covering a live game, it's just that the in-depth football content often is unexplored.

When football fans are given the chance, they will devour a more detailed examination. Had Manning and the intended receiver read the coverage differently? Did the pressure of a pass rush force Manning to throw the ball a second earlier than he intended or keep him from stepping into his throw? Had he locked onto his target too early, giving the safety an advantage in anticipating where the throw would go? Beyond the occasional Telestrator tutorial, fans get to see the result of a play but rarely get the reason why.

The lack of football savvy can also be attributed to the fantasy football boom. There's no doubt that fantasy football has brought new eyes to the game, and that it's helped turn the NFL into the biggest show in the sports universe. It's a great entry point for millions of fans, and it's a great way for fans to get involved. But fantasy promotes another shallow side of football—statistics. If all fans are following are the numbers scrolling along the bottom of their TV screens, they are missing the game itself. They see that Arian Foster gained 1 yard; what they didn't notice was the defensive end flashing his helmet to the outside shoulder of the offensive tackle, knowing that running backs are trained to look for such cues and that it would convince Foster to turn back inside where he'd be met by an unblocked defender positioned to make the tackle. Such gamesmanship happens on virtually every play, and yet it's almost all lost on a fan base untrained to look for it. Fantasy football owners are passionate fans; imagine how much more they'd get out of watching a game if they were drawn into the inner workings of real football.

Doing my radio show on Sirius NFL Radio over the years has convinced me that fans are craving insight into the game they love. They call me all the time with thoughtful questions about specific matchups their team will face against an upcoming opponent. The more they learn, the more they want to know about everything from personnel decisions to how to play a three-technique. Football doesn't need to be discussed in either beginner-level terminology (though the last chapter of this book does include a glossary of important terms) or inaccessible coachspeak. This book, and all of the content from our new Real Football Network, is designed for the vast majority of fans who fall between these two extremes.

For too long, watching football has been sort of like visiting an unfamiliar city. When you first find yourself in the middle of Paris or Rome or even New York, you recognize a couple of the familiar sights, but it's easy to feel in over your head as your senses get overwhelmed by the swirl of activity and energy. It's not until you start learning the language and recognizing certain neighborhood landmarks that you feel acclimated and comfortable. And then the fun can really begin.

That's why you're reading this book. To learn how to watch a football game and see what's really going on. To indulge your curiosity year-round, throughout the season and into free agency and the draft and then back around to training camp. You understand that nothing happens in a vacuum, and you want to see how it all comes together. The goal is to build more knowledgeable fans, and improved access and appreciation will lead to enhanced enjoyment of the entire football experience.

Baseball has always been considered the thinking man's game. The devout baseball fan finds beauty in the nuances of the game, the subtle little things that casual observers never pick up. If there's a runner on second with one out, and a right-handed hitter with good bat control is at the plate facing a pitcher who's having trouble locating his fastball, should the shortstop or second baseman be the one holding

the runner on at second? The slightest shift in positioning could make the difference in whether a groundball gets through the infield and becomes a run-scoring single instead of the second out of the inning.

This book is not about comparing football to baseball (George Carlin covered that territory perfectly years ago). Instead, it's designed to help football fans watch their favorite game with the same attention to detail that baseball fans watch theirs.

Baseball claims to be America's national pastime, but football is its true passion. And if you're ready to finally get fully caught up in the game, just sit back and take your eye off the ball.

1. Get in the Game

Uncharted Territory for Fans Looking to Follow the Action

When a baseball fan goes to a ballgame, among the first things he often does is grab a hot dog, a beer and a program before heading to his seat. Then he flips open the program and fills in the two starting lineups with his little golf pencil.

Already, there's a fundamental difference in the fan experience between baseball and football. The first pitch hasn't even been thrown and the baseball fan has had more of an interactive opportunity than the football fan will enjoy all day. There may be no crying in baseball, but there's no scorecard in football.

Until now.

Before we get to examining strategy and positional nuances and how off-the-field and off-season considerations shape the way games will unfold on NFL Sundays, let's start with an easy first step, a simple way to connect football fans to their game the way baseball fans connect to theirs. If you want to follow football like a coach up in the box, learn to chart a game—football's version of keeping score.

Just like a baseball fan diligently tracks each at-bat and records every 6-4-3 double play, you can compile the same data that coaches use to make decisions in their play-calling and begin to see trends emerge as a game evolves. You can track specific information for each play—the down and distance, the personnel on the field, and the result. And that running play-by-play will show you how the situation dictates the action and gives you a glimpse into how coaches are approaching a particular game, which will enable you to achieve a level of football sophistication that has been off-limits to too many fans through the years.

WHO'S IN, FIRST

Football, like baseball, is all about forecasting. Coaches build their entire game plans around tendencies—what their opponent's track record suggests they might do in a certain situation.

A baseball fan can look at a particular game situation—runners on first and second with one out—and predict what an infielder will do if a groundball is hit to him. Football provides the same opportunity to anticipate the action, and the empowerment of the fan begins with understanding the personnel in the game. It's not enough to know the fundamental concept that there are 11 players on each side of the ball; the composition of that 11-man unit will provide clues for what to expect on any given play.

On offense, there are five linemen and a quarterback on every play, leaving five interchangeable offensive pieces. Personnel groups are identified by the number of running backs and tight ends on the field on a given play, in that order. If a team sends out two running backs and one tight end, it's called 21 personnel. If it sends out one back and two tight ends, it's 12 personnel. In both cases, there will be two receivers on the field. The first indicator a defense looks for is the personnel package the offense is sending out. It should be the first thing you're looking for, too.

That's because personnel tips off strategy. If 22 personnel is on the field—two running backs and two tight ends—it means there's only one receiver out there. Immediately, you can make an educated

guess about what play a coach is likely to call—in this case, probably a run. You can make your prediction even before they break the huddle once you've noted who's in the game.

If you're in the stands, as soon as one play finishes, look over to the sideline and try to spot the offensive coordinator. There's probably going to be a group of rotational players standing together beside him—the second tight end, the fullback, and the third and fourth receivers—waiting to see who will get substituted into the game on the next play. It'll be harder to follow on TV, since the time between plays is filled with replays and cutaway shots of fans or players or coaches, but as soon as an offense gets into formation, you can quickly determine what personnel is in the game.

During every game that I watch—and I watch every game every week—I have a pad and a pen in hand to track the personnel used on every play. I keep a very basic chart for both teams, and for every possible personnel grouping—from an empty backfield with five receivers (00 personnel) to a jumbo lineup with two backs and three tight ends (23 personnel)—I mark how many times each team ran or passed the ball.

PERSONNEL	RUN	PASS
00		
01		
02		
10		
11		
12		
13		
20		
21		
22		
23		

As soon as the half ends, I already know the run-pass ratio for both teams according to the personnel that's on the field. Now I can anticipate the halftime adjustments that coaches are discussing in the locker room, because they're utilizing roughly the same data to find an edge for the second half.

TRACK THE FACTORS

Identifying the personnel grouping is a starting point, but there are other factors you need to pay attention to. Down and distance, two factors that always go hand in hand, is perhaps the most significant in terms of influencing what play a coach will call (and what personnel he'll send out on the field). When formulating his game plan, a coach usually will categorize his options by down and distance. For example, his game plan may include four or five plays that worked in practice that can be used on 2nd downs between 3 and 6 yards; four or five plays that have been predetermined for use on 2nd downs between 1 and 2 yards; and four or five more plays for 2nd-and-7 or longer. And each play may be run from a different personnel group and formation.

As you chart the plays a team runs, tendencies reveal themselves and the game plan materializes

before your eyes. The chess match is on—and if you can see what’s coming all the way up there in Section 315, you better believe the defense does, too. The offensive coordinator knows that the defense is making its decisions based on those demonstrated tendencies, and now he must figure out which play will work best against the defense he expects to face.

You can easily track the action and all the various factors in a simple play-by-play chart. It requires a bit more effort than the running totals you’re tallying in the personnel chart you began earlier, but it takes you deeper into the action and gives you a clearer picture of what’s really going on out on the field.

Look at this touchdown drive by the New England Patriots on their first possession of a win over the Cincinnati Bengals in Week 5 of the 2014 season. The Patriots were coming off an uncharacteristic performance in a Monday night loss at Kansas City that left them with a 2–2 record. Here’s how they opened against the Bengals:

TEAM	TIME	DOWN & DISTANCE	FIELD POSITION	PERSONNEL	PLAY
Patriots	15:00	1st-10	NE 20	21	LaFell 20-yd from Brady
		1 st -10	NE 40	21	Ridley 9-yd run
		2 nd -1	NE 49	12	Ridley 7-yd run
		1 st -10	CIN 44	12	Wright 30-yd from Brady
		1 st -10	CIN 14	11	Brady 6-yd run
		2 nd -4	CIN 8	12	Ridley 3-yd run
		3 rd -1	CIN 5	22	Develin 0-yd run
		4 th -1	CIN 5	22	Brady 4-yd run
		1 st -G	CIN 1	22	Brady 0-yd run
		2 nd -G	CIN 1	22	Ridley 1-yd run TD

The Patriots scored a touchdown, which obviously made it a successful possession. But there’s a lot more information to be evaluated here than just the result.

For instance, New England showed four different personnel groups. They ran and passed out of 21 personnel. They ran and passed out of 12 personnel with different tight end tandems (two plays it was Rob Gronkowski and Michael Hoomanawanui, once it was Gronkowski and Tim Wright). Tom Brady was in shotgun with 11 personnel and saw the opportunity to run. And once they got to the Bengals’ 5 yard line, they used guard Jordan Devey as a second tight end (with Hoomanawanui) and ran four times out of 22 personnel. Think that gave Cincinnati’s defensive coaches something to think about the rest of the game?

INFORMATION IS EMPOWERING

There are other factors to watch for as you track the action, field position being an essential one. A fan should recognize that coaches see the field as divided into five zones—coming out of your end zone to the 10-yard line; your 11-yard line to your 49-yard line; midfield to your opponent’s 31; the Green Zone, which is your opponent’s 30 to his 20 and your last chance to throw seam routes and deep balls; and the Red Zone, or the 20 to the end zone. Coaches approach their play-calling differently depending on where they are on the field.

Of course, there are two mitigating elements: time remaining and the score. But all that really

determines is how much a coach's menu of plays may shrink. For example, a coach is not going to call short-yardage plays out of 22 personnel if he's trailing by a touchdown with less than two minutes remaining.

Keeping score not only affords you an interactive opportunity; it teaches you how a coaching staff watches a game. Your play-by-play account will enable you to assess what's working in certain scenarios, the same kind of evaluation process that coaches go through all game long. Baseball fans develop a sense of what a pitcher will throw in a particular situation, and over time you'll have similar insight into your own team's tendencies.

An ambitious fan doesn't even have to wait until game day to start gathering this information. You can log on to NFL.com or team websites and find the play-by-play of every game played on every weekend. Just a little homework can show you what to expect from the opponent your team will be facing the following week.

Let's say you're a Redskins fan, and Washington is preparing to face Minnesota in Week 9 of the 2007 season. You're trying to get a sense of what to expect from the Vikings, whose offensive identity is still evolving. Rookie Jerick McKinnon has emerged as the starting running back in the absence of Adrian Peterson, and rookie quarterback Teddy Bridgewater has four starts under his belt. If you were to track the Vikings' three games leading up to the Redskins game—the ones with Bridgewater and McKinnon in the starting lineup—you'd see a picture starting to develop. Through those three games Minnesota was balanced in its run-pass calls on inherited first downs (the start of a possession): 18 run plays, 19 pass plays. But on made first downs (conversions during the course of a drive), it was a different story: 16 runs, 31 passes. Doing a little homework would have prepared a Redskins fan for precisely what they got from the Vikings: balanced play calls on inherited first downs (6 run, 5 pass) and far more of a willingness to use Bridgewater on made first downs (6 run, 13 pass).

Watching a football game doesn't have to be a reactive experience. Every play doesn't have to be a mystery. A baseball fan can complain when he sees his pitcher throwing a first-pitch fastball to a first-pitch fastball hitter. You, too, have the right—and now the opportunity—to follow the nuances of your favorite sport just as closely.

The information is out there, right before your eyes. You just need to know where to look.

2. The 168-Hour Work Week

Designing and Installing a Game Plan Is a Round-the-Clock Occupation

The general who wins a battle makes many calculations in his temple ere the battle is fought. The general who loses a battle makes but few calculations beforehand.

—Sun Tzu

Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the mouth.

—Mike Tyson

It was the first play of the second quarter of a Sunday night game, Week 12 of the 2014 NFL season. The New York Giants led 7–3, and with a first down on the Dallas Cowboys’ 43-yard line, they were looking to expand their lead.

Eli Manning took the snap from under center, faked the handoff to rookie running back Andre Williams, and dropped back across midfield. His play-action fake was designed to freeze the Dallas defense just long enough for a receiver to get open downfield. And it worked.

Giants receiver Odell Beckham Jr., another rookie, had lined up wide on the right side of the Giants formation. With a stutter step off the line, coupled with the run fake, Beckham had gotten a step on Cowboys cornerback Brandon Carr and was flying down the right sideline. Manning spotted him right away.

Manning looked for a moment down the middle of the field to freeze the safety, then launched a pass that would come down as one of the most famous completions in NFL history.

Of course, it wasn’t the throw so much as the catch—or “The Catch,” as it was immediately dubbed by the social media masses. Beckham fought through interference by Carr so blatant that it drew flags from two directions, reached up, back and beyond with his right hand and at full extent, and hauled in Manning’s pass. It wasn’t even a one-handed catch; Beckham needed just his thumb and two fingers to make a catch that inspired awestruck reaction for days.

Whether or not it was the greatest catch in the history of football can be debated. But what’s indisputable is that Beckham’s catch was just one play on a given Sunday full of them. It was one of 10 catches made by Beckham that day, one of 47 catches made in that game—which Dallas came back to win, by the way.

There were 1,938 offensive snaps that occurred during Week 12 of the 2014 NFL season. Whether you’re talking about Beckham’s grab for the ages or the 9-yard touchdown from Derek Carr to James Jones that gave Oakland its first win of the season or the 3-yard touchdown run by LeGarrette Blount on his first carry since re-signing with New England, each is just a single entry in the play-by-play world of the NFL.

Roughly 130 plays are run during the course of an NFL game, not counting special teams. And while fans are quick to question the wisdom of almost any play called in a given situation, few have any sense of the time and attention to detail that goes into preparing for every decision a coach will make over the course of a football game.

BIRTH OF A GAME PLAN

A coach's master playbook can contain about 1,000 plays—pretty much anything he would ever consider calling in a game. Every bomb, blitz, and blocking scheme is in there somewhere, along with every gadget play and goal-line scenario. And every call has its roots somewhere in that all-encompassing bible, which every coach is forever adding to and carrying with him from job to job.

The process of paring down that playbook into a single Sunday's game plan begins pretty much as soon as the previous season ends. Coaching staffs spend most of January (if they're out of the playoffs) and February going through some critical self-analysis, evaluating what they did well and what they did poorly during the season that just ended, and starting to decide what they're going to retain or change for the following year.

I know one assistant coach who spent six hours a day for a month during the 2015 off-season studying the Seattle defense. He did this in part because his team played the Seahawks in 2014, but also because he knows there will be teams across the league looking to incorporate some of Seattle's defense into their own schemes. The head coaches in Jacksonville and Atlanta are former Seahawks defensive coordinators; this coach wanted to prepare for what concepts might soon be spreading across the NFL.

At the same time, they are preparing for the start of free agency and the upcoming draft. The personnel plan takes shape based on what the coach envisions being able to do in the upcoming season. He'll want to target players and prospects who will fit what he plans to run. You better believe offensive coordinator Mike McCoy's playbook for 2012 changed the instant the Broncos signed Peyton Manning. Those early decisions are the building blocks of an eventual game plan.

As a team's personnel changes and its personality evolves through free agency and the draft, the overall game plan is steadily refined. Through organized team activities (OTAs) and minicamps, coaches whittle away at their playbook, identifying the plays that best fit the team they'll have to work with. They try to maximize the strengths they see emerging, eliminate the obvious problem areas, and anticipate the matchups they'll be facing. Coaching staffs meet after practice every day, debating the pros and cons of every play they can imagine using in a game situation. The accumulation of those plays becomes the playbook for the next season, and by June 15, that actual playbook goes to the printer. A coach is now committed to his philosophy for the year.

FROM THE PLAYBOOK TO THE PRACTICE FIELD

Once the playbook is officially down on paper, it then has to be taught.

A coach will develop a summer camp installment schedule, during which he takes everything in that playbook and practices every bit of it with his team. Much of it will have been carried over from the previous season (a real benefit to teams with minimal roster turnover), some of it may have been introduced in the spring, and all of it will be reviewed during the preseason. But every play will be installed during the 55 or so practices—from walkthroughs to double sessions—that make up training camp. What a team does there determines for the most part what it's going to be that season; by this point, it's already too late to dramatically change what a team is going to do.

Heading into the last week of the preseason, it's time to develop the game plan for the first game of the regular season. A coach may look at his opponent and see, for example, that he's going to face a 4-3 defense. The first thing he does is scour the playbook for plays he thinks will work against a 4-3; suddenly, his playbook has been roughly cut in half.

- [download online *Wrightscapes: Frank Lloyd Wright's Landscape Designs*](#)
- [An Awkward Lie \(Sir John Appleby, Book 26\) here](#)
- [download An Introductory Course in Functional Analysis \(Universitext\)](#)
- [download online Talking to Girls About Duran Duran: One Young Man's Quest for True Love and a Cooler Haircut](#)
- [**Another Fork in the Trail: Vegetarian and Vegan Recipes for the Backcountry online**](#)
- [**download online Nick & Norah's Infinite Playlist for free**](#)

- <http://www.satilik-kopek.com/library/Amnesia.pdf>
- <http://thewun.org/?library/An-Awkward-Lie--Sir-John-Appleby--Book-26-.pdf>
- <http://creativebeard.ru/freebooks/An-Introductory-Course-in-Functional-Analysis--Universitext-.pdf>
- <http://metromekanik.com/ebooks/Talking-to-Girls-About-Duran-Duran--One-Young-Man-s-Quest-for-True-Love-and-a-Cooler-Haircut.pdf>
- <http://test1.batsinbelfries.com/ebooks/Another-Fork-in-the-Trail--Vegetarian-and-Vegan-Recipes-for-the-Backcountry.pdf>
- <http://www.rap-wallpapers.com/?library/Young-Architects-11--Foresight.pdf>