

Bill Belichick On Football

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1
STRATEGY

Personnel Matchup Problems Against Spread Teams

Q: Is the safety/ linebacker hybrid position like Deone Bucannon something that's new, or something that's old but has come back?

BB: I think that you are definitely seeing a strong trend in the league towards corners that play safety or corner-type athletes that play safety, bigger safeties that play linebacker. Both of those are trends. We've always put a lot of premium on the passing game even going back to when we had Eugene Wilson, who played corner at Illinois, and started for us at corner for a couple weeks and then we moved him to free safety, but that was an advantage when teams went to the multiple receivers.

Then we already had that third corner on the field and we could go nickel or we could leave our regular defense out there, or leave our corner on the third receiver, what we call penny defense, but things like that. That was really, I'd say, pretty successful for us. Devin [McCourty's] given us some of that, so has [Patrick] Chung. Devin's a corner but not that Chung is a corner, but he has corner qualities, he's had some corner-type responsibilities, particularly in the slot, even going back to when Wes [Welker] was here, and he would cover Wes pretty competitively in practice sessions and things like that. I'd say that has always been something that's, if you have a player that can do that, somewhat appealing.

The other problem is if you get mismatched with the receiver against a safety who's not a very good coverage player, then that can blow up in a hurry. Rodney [Harrison] was a guy that you mentioned that was a very good coverage safety even though he was a big physical, and he played the run as well as anybody. He could also cover the run and that's very unusual and that made him very special. You could literally matchup on anybody, receivers, tight ends, blitz him, play him on goal line. He could do it all. He was tremendous.

I'd say, yeah, as the offenses have gotten more spread out, as the offenses have put more skill players on the field, as the tight ends have become more athletic and less of the conventional kind of power-blocking type guys, those matchups keep getting tougher and tougher.

I'd say there's definitely a movement towards safeties that can play corner or have some corner-like qualities to them and that extends to the linebacker level as well. You see less of the big run stopping Ted Johnson, Brandon Spikes type players. It's just harder when the offense spreads you out and then they go fast and you can't substitute and you're stuck with whoever you have out there, out there.

That creates some problems out there, too.

The colleges are seeing the same thing and they probably have to deal with it more than we do because there are so many fast-tempo offenses, so they are in the same boat so they are playing a lot of what we call dime defense, or little nickel, or whatever it is, but where they put a lot of fast guys on the field. Ends are playing tackle, safeties are playing linebacker, and corners are playing safety. It's just kind of getting a little bit smaller in a lot of areas.

I don't know if that's different., There are some differences but going back to Wilson and Harrison, and those guys from 02-03-04, back in there, there's a lot of similarities to the Chung-Harrison, Chung-McCourty, corner/safety type that had more coverage

ability than some other guys that you would see out there.

Defending an Opening Script

Q: Is it a matter of them scripting a certain amount of their best plays or is it too simplistic to look at it that way?

BB: You'd have to ask him about exactly what those plays are. I wouldn't necessarily say that when you go up against a script that it's necessarily a team's best plays. It's the plays they want to start with and there's a lot of things those plays can do. They can set up other plays, they can force you to show defensively what type of adjustments you're going to make to certain personnel groups, certain formations, and it probably helps them plan for maybe how they want to call other plays in the game or which plays come next, whether that's the one that they set up or whether it's based on your defensive adjustments and which of those next plays they want to attack that adjustment with.

I'm sure a lot of times it's with the idea to get the ball to certain players. Offensively you can control who has the ball. Defensively you can't control that. You just have to put your guys out there, but you don't have any idea where the ball's going or whose going to get it. Offensively you have some control over that. Those things all play into it. Each game's different and whoever's doing the script probably has different reasons and different philosophies on why they do what they do. That's defensive football.

You're on the other side of the ball - you defend what they give you. When you're on the offensive side of the ball you have some control over - well you have control over who's in the game, you have control over kind of where the ball's going and how it's going there. We see it all the time. I don't think it's like there's only two teams in the league that do a script or anything like that. I think it's pretty common every week.

Two Point Conversion Strategy and Preparation

Q: What's your approach to two-point conversions? In Sunday's game, the score was 17-12 and you chose to kick the extra point. Was there any thought to going for two there? Was there any thought to going for two before overtime?

BB: Yeah I mean I think to me the two-point conversion really doesn't come into play until later in the game. The two-point try in the first quarter, there is so much football left to play that again, I would not say never, but I think it would be a very small percentage of the time that it would really be a factor. For me the factor would come at the end of the game when you have limited possessions left and then how you want to look at those opportunities – the opportunities of two versus one – how many more possessions are left in the game. But in the end ultimately it comes down to how confident you are about the play in that situation.

If I was 90 percent confident about the play, maybe we would do it in the first quarter. If you feel that good about it, why not do it. The success rate on that is – I don't know what it is – but it's basically a 50-50 proposition. It's in that ballpark. But yeah, we considered it. We talked about it. In the end I think there was enough time left that it looks good if you get that point and then if you didn't the way the game played out you needed that point to tie the game. There are some calls that could go either way. I would say those are the ones that kind of could.

At the end of the game, that was another one. We had two timeouts so even if we hadn't made it we still would have had a chance to get the ball back with timeouts and a deep kick and all that and only needing a field goal. By kicking the extra point we felt like we ensured overtime assuming that we could stop them, which puts the pressure back on them again. They've got to either get a first down or we get the ball back with timeouts and a chance to score, which could have happened if we didn't have the

interference penalty on third down. If that play, if there is no penalty there, we have the ball back with two timeouts with good field position, then that puts us in the driver's seat in that situation. But yeah I think you could make an argument for a two-point conversion there.

Q: In both situations?

BB: I think you could look at the Cleveland-Denver game was a good example of Cleveland went for two, didn't make it, next play 80-yard touchdown, and now that point ends up being – because there are now a couple of extra scores that maybe you don't think about are going to happen there in the middle of the fourth quarter or whatever it was – now all of a sudden that point looks a lot differently than it did without those extra scores.

You get a quick score after that and now that kind of changes things. You've just kind of got to be careful about ... The more scores there are, the longer the game goes, the more that point can hurt you. With less time, fewer possessions, you need the point to either tie the game or to get into position to get the score tied and there aren't many opportunities left so maybe you take advantage of that and do it. But again if there is enough time left then there is a cost to doing that.

Q: Would you not look at the two-point conversion chart until a certain point in the game?

BB: Yeah, I would say I don't think it really comes into play until a certain point in the game. Like I said I think if you went into the game and felt like OK we feel like 90 percent about our two-point play here and use it the first time you score, it probably wouldn't make any difference if you score first or they score first. If you feel good about the play, might as well run it, unless you wanted to save it for the situation that you're talking about. Yeah, to me it's an end-of-the game chart. It's not a first-quarter chart.

Q: Will you bring in multiple two-point plays for that type of situation or are those plays similar to what you would run in short-yardage situations?

BB: It would depend on ... I mean first of all, fundamentally you have a basic philosophy in that situation, whatever it happens to be, which I think that's changed a little bit with the new rule, making it a potentially defensive play as well. I would say in the past there were a lot of teams that would run a gadget play or a play you've never seen before in that situation – some razzle-dazzle kind of play – and if they hit it they hit it and if they didn't then they didn't.

But now you do something you've never done before and you end up turning the ball over or it gets stripped or whatever, it could cost you on the other end, so I think you see a little bit less of that or I've seen a little bit less of it. But I'd say that's water under the bridge.

So you have your basic philosophy but then whatever information you have on that particular opponent that week, how they play two-point plays depending on how many of them you've seen, probably not too many, but maybe you have a history on it or just in general how they would play in that two-to-three-to-four-yard line range – whatever you have on tape, whatever evidence you have, then you would probably set up your game plan based on that.

If that's what a team calls on third-and-goal at the three or third-and-goal at the two, it's probably what they're going to call in that two-point situation. It's probably going to come from that type of menu.

On The Dick LeBeau Zone Blitz

Q: How different was Dick LeBeau's zone blitz when he came out with it?

BB: I'd say he definitely popularized it. When I was at the Giants, we ran some of that, but it was nowhere near to the degree that he ran it. We would just bring an extra guy at times based on formation or tendency or particular key, that kind of thing where we just add another guy in and still play zone behind it. When you have a 3-4 defense, the teams that ran the West Coast offense, they only had one protector on the strong side, so they get three guys out to the strong side and they would only have one blocker, so they would have to throw hot if you brought two guys over there.

But the zone blitz really killed that because there was a guy standing there to the guy that you were throwing hot to. I think once kind of everybody saw – and again the West Coast offense was pretty I'd say more prevalent and it didn't have as many variations as it has now both in the running game and the passing game. Back in the early to mid-90's with San Francisco and Mike Holmgren and all those guys, the zone blitz was a very effective way to play that offense because of the amount of three out strong, only one protector on the strong side, that if you brought two, they didn't have it. I think it really became popular there, and then that evolved into bringing two up the middle and two off the weak side and doing it out of sub and everything else. Dick was really the one who made it an entire package.

I would say at the Giants when we used it, it was more of either a very small situational call like short yardage or tight formations or that kind of thing or it was again something kind of specific. He made it just as a general defensive principle and developed it in a way that was very comprehensive on a number of levels –from a coverage standpoint, from attacking the pocket standpoint and also from a run defense perspective. Dick was really the guy that put that whole package together. Again I think there were maybe

some random satellite elements of it here and there, and again I had some experience with that at the Giants, what we did, but nowhere near to the degree that he did it and popularized it.

Using Offensive Motion

Q: You guys have been using a lot of motion right before the ball is snapped. What is the advantage of doing that?

BB: Usually when you put a player in motion it's to either gain an advantage somehow on the defense or it's to force the defense to communicate and adjust after they've already made their call and you've come out of the huddle and lined up. I'd say it would fall into one of those two categories.

Sometimes you do it just to force the defense to deal with something, change of strength or a tight split or a wide split that goes from one to the other, where the tight end aligns, which we know is important when teams are setting their front, their linebacker locations and trying get ready to set up their gap control. If you're trying to gain an advantage, that's one thing. If you're trying to in general force the defense to communicate and be ready to play one thing when you're actually going to snap the ball and do something else, then there's some subtle advantage to that that's hard to measure, but you know from experience that it's taking place and it puts more stress on your opponent.

Team Defense and Preparing For Multiple Personnel Groupings

Q: Jonathan Bostic starting at linebacker, was that package-specific? He didn't play much on defense after that first series. Did Akiem Hicks show a higher level of play last night?

BB: Akiem had a lot of production in this game and when you look at the stat sheet, it's always easy to take a production game and say it was a great game and take a game with a little less production and say it was a bad game. That's definitely not the case, that's an overreaction, but he did have good production yesterday. He's played solidly for us for a number of weeks, but it's always nice to see those plays finish with production – a tackle behind the line, quarterback sack and all that. He did a good job, but he's had some of those plays, and again some of those plays were the result of other players kind of forcing it to him or coverage relayed it and so forth. It's still team defense, he was just the guy who recorded the final stat on that play. He has a lot of plays that help us that don't show up the stat sheet so I think it all evens out. He's done a good job, played well last night.

As far as the game plan with Houston, they've used more – I think I mentioned this during the week – but they've used more personnel groups by far than any other team we've faced this year.

If there were any stats kept on that, I think they'd have to be close to some kind of record – the number of personnel combinations that they've had in the game between extra offensive linemen, receivers, tight ends, backs, quarterbacks, and then on top of that the multiplicity of formations plus the multiplicity of the groupings that are out there, it just becomes exponential. We had certain packages of players to kind of ... We grouped some of those together because to try to deal with each one individually would be beyond a nightmare.

It would just be impossible, so we tried to group it a little bit so that when they have certain players out there we have certain players out there, and we have to make a lot of adjustments but it's within a certain package or framework if you will, whereas if you leave the same group out there defensively for all their different groups and all their different formations, then you have one group that has to adjust to every single thing if you know what I mean.

The more of you have one group that has to do everything then there are a lot of things that could run together, so by having different defensive personnel groupings for certain offensive groupings and situations in a way it allows you to kind of manage the amount of adjustments and communication adjustments that you are going to have to deal with so that everybody doesn't have to deal with every single thing that could happen – Wildcat and empty and multiple guys in the backfield, nobody in the backfield, quarterback in the backfield, quarterback out of the backfield, three-by-ones, two-by-twos, three-by-0's, all the motions, unbalanced line, extra linemen and all that goes with it. Who is out there on the first play in a game like Houston was totally dependent on who they had out there on the first play.

The Hail Mary- Throwing It And Defending It

BB: I think it's not an overly strategic play. You want to get the ball into the end zone and you want to get people around it. However you orchestrate that, I mean you don't want to throw it short and you don't want to throw it out. It's got to come down in the area of a guy to go up and get it or if he can't get it, you can't outjump the team and go out and get the ball, you have players hopefully in the end zone so that if it's tipped they have a chance to catch it before it hits the ground.

You don't really want to catch it in the field of play, although we've seen a couple of those I'd say luck out. The guy catches it on the two and falls in because there doesn't happen to be anyone near him, but we've also seen a few of those where a guy gets tipped, the ball gets tipped and the guy gets tackled on the one or two-yard line. Well, whether it's on the one or if it's incomplete it doesn't really matter at that point. Trying to get the ball to somebody that has a chance to go up and get it and fight for it and then having other people there to be able to, if you will, rebound the ball if it comes up.

Defensively, it's sort of the reverse of that. You've got to have somebody go up and you don't want to get outjumped for the ball, then you never really get a shot at it, but at the same time you want to be able to box out or keep the other players who don't go up and jump for it from coming down with the rebound.

There are a lot of other components to the whole getting the ball off, throwing it, protection, the rush and so forth. There are other things that play into that as well. It's hard to throw the ball – I mean how far did he throw it, 70 yards? I mean it's hard to throw the ball 70 yards. You can't just stand back there and there are not too many guys that can drop back and throw it, so there's another component to have enough time, be able to create some momentum, be able to get the ball that high.

I wouldn't say it's just, I'm not trying to brush off like it's some simple thing. I think

there's really a lot of things that go into that, doing it and also defending it, but as far as the actual where the ball comes down, we want a big guy to try and go up and get it and you want as many other people as you can have there to try to get it if it's a live ball. At the same time you've got to be able to get it all off so if you send everybody down there then you've just got to be able to protect with five people. Maybe you can; maybe you can't. That's another element of the play.

Defending Chip Kelly's Offense

BB: Tempo is a problem. But I'd say the biggest thing with their offense is they make you defend the whole field. They run from sideline to sideline, they run up the middle, they throw deep, they throw outside, they throw inside, they throw short catch-and-run plays, they throw balls that are over the top behind the defense, they throw the intermediate routes, the over routes, the in-cuts, the outside scissors, sail-type routes.

There is really nothing that you can say, 'Well we don't have to worry about this or that.' You do because they run it inside, they run it outside, they throw it short, middle, deep, they have a lot of misdirection plays so you can't over-pursue because they have plays that force you to defend the backside of the plays. I'd say that's really the strength of their offense.

On top of that, they go really fast and try to wear the defense down or force the communication issue on defense so if you aren't aligned properly or you aren't able to get your assignments – even if you're aligned right, if you're not able to get your assignments done quickly the way the plays come off, there's space in there, somebody gets free, they do a good job of finding it. They're used to playing fast at that tempo more so than the defenses are because there aren't a lot of teams that do it like that. That's a lot of challenges for the defense this week.

Going Up-Tempo Offensively, And Defending It

Q: What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of going up-tempo?

BB: I think Chip and the Eagles do a great job with it. We've basically played them every year, or practiced against them, and they make it really hard. The speed that they go at, it's hard to get much communication in. It forces you to kind of simplify things defensively. You just don't have time to get some of that stuff called or can't get the right group in, or you only want to run it against certain looks, but the time you have to communicate is short.

Generally speaking, they're a lot better at it than you are because they do it more than you do. Defensive communication and adjustments and being ready to play at that speed is hard. On top of that, the Eagles have just a tremendous group of skill players. They're literally two deep at every position or more – running back, tight end, quarterback, receiver. I mean, they have two floods of groups of really good skill players at all those positions. That makes it really tough because they have so many good players, so many explosive guys.

2 PERSONNEL

The Differences Between Playing Guard and Tackle On The Offensive Line

Q: If you move a guy from outside to inside, what are the challenges they face from a physical standpoint?

BB: I think it's just a different game. I don't know if it's a big physical difference. You're seeing guards instead of tight ends and all that, but it's the way you see the game. Things happen on both sides, but you're playing the game from the inside out. As on outside guy, you're really playing the game from the outside in. You just see one side. You see the whole game from a side view as opposed to an inside view looking from the inside out. I think it's instinctively quite a bit different. Physically, there are some differences, but I don't think it's that big of a deal. I don't want to say it's like looking at it upside down, it's not that dramatic, but it's a lot different. It's seeing the game inside out as opposed to outside in.

Q: Is it kind of like how centerfielders in baseball see the ball off the bat as opposed to the view when they're playing left field?

BB: Yeah, except you've got a lot more guys you're looking at. You're not just looking at one running back. You've got blockers, receivers, it's a lot different.

Player Evaluation And Dealing With Injuries

Q: With the injuries along the offensive line, do you know now what your plan will be going into Miami or will you try to figure it out during the week?

BB: Any time there is uncertainty about a player's availability then that's something you have to evaluate as you go through the week. If the player is there, what's his role? If he's not there, who replaces him or how does that configure? That's going to be a question if any player is in that category. If a player is out, then OK, who do you replace that player with? That's fairly clear-cut. It may be taking a player who's not as good as the player that you lost, but that's more clear-cut. Read

Q: I guess what I'm saying is there have been so many moving parts, how do you go through practices this week? What's that rotation on the offensive line?

BB: The players that are available, you put them in the positions that they're going to be in. We're not going to take 10 linemen to the game, so we're going to have to have somebody play more than one position, whether that's a starter playing another position or whether that's a backup playing two positions. You've got to handle the numbers of those spots with fewer than 10 players.

That's what it is. If a player is on the fence as to whether we 100 percent can count on his availability then if he can practice we see what he can do and evaluate it. If it's more of an end-of-the-week decision then we wait until the end of the week and make the decision then. What we can't control we don't worry about. The guys that are there do what they can do. Once we have more information then we'll make a decision based on the information.

If we had to play today, it'd be one thing, but we don't so we'll postpone that until we get closer. I mean at some point you've got to draw the line so once that comes,

whether that's Friday or Saturday or it could be Sunday morning, at some point you've got to draw the line. Read

Q: How much do you factor an offensive lineman's ability to play multiple positions when deciding to acquire them as opposed to just their skill set?

BB: I think there's a place for both. Somewhere along the line you're going to need versatility, but everybody doesn't have to play a lot of positions. If they can just play one well, there is a lot to be said for that. But you've got to be able to play it pretty well. Steve Neal never played anything but right guard for us. That was it. He played right guard good – it was great.

Mike Vrabel played everything from free safety to tight end, so that was good. I don't think it's either or but somewhere along the line somebody is going to have to have some versatility. You just don't have enough guys to have depth at every position. But at the same time you're going to put some players out there that need to play well, so being able to play six different positions isn't as important as having one guy who can do one thing well, whatever that is.

The less you can do probably the better you need to be able to do it. The more you can do maybe you can be not quite as proficient in one area, but your versatility creates some value. No matter how versatile you are, eventually you're going to have to get in there and do something, whatever that is, and if you can't do it very well, then really how much value is the versatility?

Dividing Up Responsibilities Between Your Running Backs

Q: What's the value of having a guy like Brandon, who can step in?

BB: I can't even tell you how many games we've gone into with three backs and him being the third back as really being able to play on first, second, third and fourth down and play well and be one of our best fourth down players.

That's a lot, and you start talking about third-down backs and all they have to do in terms of blitz pickups, formations, coverages and all that, and then same thing on early downs being able to run the ball, handle the running game and blitz pickup on play action passes, which is a different set of protections and defensive looks.

Then you get into fourth down and a core special teams player that's involved in four phases of the game – kickoff, kickoff return, punt, punt return and all the things that go on there and all the situational plays that happen in those units – the volume there, that's a lot. That would be a lot for a guy to do one of those things – third down or special teams or first and second down. For a guy to be able to be as competent as he is in all those areas physically and mentally, there aren't many guys in the league that can do that now.

Q: How hard is it to decide how much you want to tax a player like Brandon Bolden on first and second down when he's so important on fourth down?

BB: Again, some of that is more of a product of everybody else than it is him because he can do all special teams, all third down, all first and second down. He can do all the running back stuff. I don't know. But who else do you have? Who else is part of that and what can they do?

The way James White is playing and what he's done, he's done a great job for us on third down, so maybe that's something that Brandon, he has to be ready to do it but maybe

it's not a role that's not as big for him and it's more of something else, or maybe James White's role shifts a little bit now. There are some options there, but some of that is a function of what else you have because it's not like we're sitting there saying here are the things Bolden can't do. That's a pretty short list. What he can do is pretty much everything. It's a question of where you want to use him, but he gives you flexibility that some other players don't, who can only do one thing or maybe two things.

On evaluating a player during the week coming back from an injury...

BB: I think the whole week is kind of a process. You've got to be careful about evaluating a player based on one day or one period or a couple plays or that kind of thing. If a player comes back, he goes out there, he practices at a Wednesday tempo, whatever that is, but usually it's a pretty good tempo, then we see how the player responds to that on Thursday. Is he better? Is he the same? Has he felt a little aggravation or irritation or is he tired, based on whatever the injury is – it falls into a million different categories.

Then we come back and do it again on Thursday. Sometimes a player will come in on Wednesday and feel OK and then Thursday after stringing a couple days together, not as good or maybe better or maybe it's kind of staying the same. Maybe he hasn't really fully turned the corner – hasn't gotten worse, hasn't gotten better – it's still just kind of treading water there.

Then sometimes Friday it takes a sudden spike and sometimes Saturday, we've listed guys on the injury report on Saturday. Something has come up in the last 24-48 hours before the game that is relatively unexpected. We all can come down with something or step in a hole or whatever. It's really a process and so we go by what we see.

Where a player is Wednesday, where he is Thursday, where he is Friday and even occasionally the Saturday changes are all just reflective of what the player's current condition is. How'd it go Wednesday, how'd it go Thursday, how'd it go Friday, it's not always a straight line of anything. It can go up and down, it can go down and up, it can be going good and then drop off, it could be going not so good and then all of a sudden Friday, we go out there Wednesday and Thursday, look at a player and say, 'I don't think you're ready to play. I don't think he's going to be ready to play this week.'

And then Friday all of a sudden it just clears up. It's really hard to give an answer. And

sometimes there is a straight line progression, but you don't know that until the end. You don't know it going along because you're not sure what's going to happen. I've been around long enough to see it go both ways so that's what you prepare for. You prepare for if the player's there, what's his role going to be, what's he going to do, who's he going to rotate and interact with, if he's not there, who's going to take his place and so forth.

Those are all kind of the contingencies of practice. If the player is cleared by the medical department to play, then it becomes a football decision. If the player is not cleared by the medical department to play, then there is no decision to make – that's it, he doesn't play. But just because they clear him to play doesn't mean that a coaching decision would be made to play the player. Sometimes it just depends on all the circumstances that go around that. Long answer to a short question.

3
COACHING

Treating Each Player Differently

Q: How critical has Josh Boyer been in developing this current set of cornerbacks, considering the personnel changes?

BB: There's no question Josh has done a really good job with that group, and as you mentioned, there is certainly ... Look any time you coach a unit, there is a dynamic in who you're coaching and your coaching style is somewhat altered or affected by who is in that room. When I was the defensive coordinator with the Giants and coached the secondary, Everson Walls had been in the league for whatever it was – 10 years, 50-some career interceptions.

There were certain things he did that as a coach you didn't want to change because he had so much success doing it that way and maybe he wouldn't be comfortable doing it another way, but that wouldn't work for a younger player. You wouldn't want to coach a player the way Everson played, but the way Everson played was very productive for Everson so you kind of find the balance in there. [Darrelle] Revis would be another example of that. Not every player can play like Revis, but Revis played very good the way he plays, so you're kind of coaching Malcolm one way and you're coaching Revis another way.

And a guy like [Brandon] Browner is different from Revis, different from Malcolm, but he also was a productive player. Again, whereas this year we're looking at a lot different makeup on that group – younger players who can be instructed more in the basic fundamental way to play that haven't been in other systems, that don't have other habits, that don't have other things to change that you can build it a little bit more from the ground up rather than from the top down.

And again it's not a good or a bad. It's just different. But Josh has done a good job of that, including [Justin] Coleman, [Rashaan] Melvin, Leonard [Johnson] – the guys that have come in here, the way that the whole group has evolved, even [Patrick] Chung who has played really a lot of if you will corner for us and played it well, so it's been a different dynamic, but again he's spent a lot of time with those guys, not just on the X's and O's but also off the field – preparation, the communication with the group, all the things that go in there.

I'd say Logan [Ryan] has a done a great job of – he's not a coach, but in terms of taking leadership of that unit, in terms of their preparation, their communication, their on the field adjustments, helping guys like Leonard, Malcolm, working with the safeties. Logan has been a big part of the development of that whole unit as well. But again the growth of Malcolm from somewhere in the middle of last year to probably somewhere in the middle of this year was pretty steep.

On evaluating a muffed punt...

Q: You guys have fumbled three punts in the last four games. Is that ultimately an individual responsibility or is there more to it than just the guy who fumbled the ball?

BB: Well, two of the plays were muffs where the ball wasn't caught cleanly. The one last week we had possession of the ball. That could happen on any play. It wasn't the catching of the punt. It was running with the ball, so I'd say that would go in a little different category. In the end we've got to handle the ball cleanly on the exchange and get possession of the ball. That's the first job of the punt return or kickoff return team when you put them on the field is to gain possession of the ball. That's number one; we've got to do that.

Q: When you look at muffed punt, do you look into factors like blocking that could have given the returner more space to make the catch?

BB: In the end, each punt is different, each play is different, so there are no two things that are the same, but at some point the coverage is going to be down on the returner. I mean it could be a great hang-time punt, it could be good coverage, it could be not great blocking, but if the punter hangs the ball up in the air long enough the coverage is going to be down there, so there are going to be situations where you can never just say, 'OK we're going to eliminate everybody in coverage.'

It's just impossible. At some point that's going to happen. At some point there are going to be situations where the coverage isn't down there, there will be some grey area, there will be some [punts] where the coverage definitely is, and that's part of the returner or returners if you happen to be in a two-deep situation like on kickoff returns bringing the ball out of the end zone or on punt returns where you have two deep, then you have a communication element involved between the two players.

If you only have a single player back there then that's part of his responsibility is to make that decision. I mean I don't know how you could ever take the decision making

part out of it. If the ball is short or if the ball is up in the air long enough, there is no way to prevent the coverage from getting down there. It's just impossible.

Tailoring Your Teaching Methods to Individual Players

Q: When you've talked in the past about acclimating new players to the team, you've mentioned how different players learn at different paces and in different ways. Is tailoring your system to different players always been part of your philosophy or is that something you've picked up over the years?

BB: No, I think I learned that pretty early and even going back to before I started coaching just being around my dad and other coaches and being around different players that I played with, you've just got to learn that everybody is different. Each of us is different as individuals and we learn at different rates, and some things come easier to some people and some things come harder to some people. There are some things I feel like personally I can pick up pretty quickly and there are other things that are very difficult for me to put together.

When you teach somebody, trying to teach anybody, there are different methods you can use. You can read it, you can hear it, you can write it down, you can show pictures, you can stand and have kind of a spatial instruction as opposed to a picture or a diagram, and again, some players, some people learn in one way, some people learn in another way.

I've done different studies or part of our testing on players includes information like that – how does a certain player learn best, what's the best way for him to process information – and again it comes in a variety of methods when you look at your entire roster. We probably do a little bit of everything and then with certain players if they want or need one more than another then the position coaches adapt to that and we give them more of that particular method that is most helpful to them. I think that's just fundamental teaching, which is really what coaching is – it's teaching.

On dropped passes, and how to look at them from both sides of the ball...

Q: What is your view of dropped passes from both an offensive and defensive perspective?

BB: I don't know. That's a tough question, it's pretty involved. Just like anything else, I think you have guys that have really good hands, really good catch skills and there will be an occasional drop from them and that's usually a concentration thing. Then you have other guys who maybe don't have quite the same hand-eye coordination skill, so catching the ball is a little bit tougher for them.

A number of those players that I've coached in the past have had exceptional concentration, so there was kind of technique drops and there is I would say concentration drops. Then sometimes it's related ... As you mentioned some degrees of difficulty are harder than others, so it's related to timing and the ball location from the quarterback and so forth. In the end, if the player is not a dependable catcher, I don't think he's going to be involved much in the passing game, but again a lot of those catches are somewhat a function of the degree of difficulty of the ball that is being thrown to them or in some cases the coverage.

That's another thing, too, where a player's got really good separation skills, it looks like he's always open and the catches are relatively easier. If a player isn't able to separate then every catch looks like a great catch because there is somebody right there on him. I would say that there are certain players that without exceptional hands wouldn't be targeted very much because they don't have the ability to create a lot of separation but because of their catching skills they can be productive because they don't need as much separation. I don't know if that answers your question or not, but I'd say there are a lot of components that go into that.

And honestly some players are better, just like anything else, like any other skill – golf or

whatever – some players are better at some type of catches than others, just like some guys are better off the tee and some are better around the green. Some players track the deep ball better than others. Some players catch moving routes and routes where the ball radius that they have to catch in is larger than other guys. I'd say not everybody's catching skills are the same on every ball either. Bottom line is you want somebody that's dependable. That's the bottom line – you want to throw to somebody that's dependable. Read

Q: Defensively if a player is open but drops the pass, do you still view that as a completion when you review it on film?

BB: There are going to be plays defensively that when you go back and look at – like you said go back and grade the film – when you look at that you're going to get off the hook occasionally on a dropped pass, maybe a quarterback doesn't see a guy who is wide open and isn't covered properly.

Maybe it's a penalty of illegal formation or something that calls back a play that you really don't have defended. Those are still concerns. They still need to be fixed. The next team that you play is going to sit there and say, 'Well if we don't drop the ball or if the quarterback reads it properly or if we don't align in the improper formation, those are good plays for us.' So you're still going to have to stop them. Yeah, the players are accountable.

Just because a guy dropped a pass it doesn't mean the defense was played well. That's not necessarily the case. That's why we talk about that after the game – just because the score of the game is what it is, it doesn't mean if you win everything is great or if you lose everything is bad. There are a lot of things regardless of whether you win or lose that are bad and good that happen in the game that you really have to address so those problems don't continue to occur.

Of course at the same time there are a number of plays that will happen defensively

where you feel like that's about as good as we can be, but the quarterback makes a great throw and the receiver makes a great catch and it's just a great play. And sometimes that happens, too, where you really want to tell the player, 'You did the job well. You did what you were supposed to do. You were in perfect position and the quarterback got the ball to a place that was a couple inches away from you and they made the play.' There are some of those, too.

On showing film to the team during the week...

Q: Brandon LaFell was talking yesterday about how when you watch film of opponents, you never show any bad plays. Can you describe your thinking when it comes to only showing plays that you think can hurt you?

BB: Well, I wouldn't agree with that statement. You should ask Brandon LaFell if I've ever shown any of our opponents missing a tackle. Just ask him that. We show plays that are relevant, whatever they are. There are good plays. There are things that we think we can take advantage of.

Whoever we play, each team has strengths and weaknesses. Each player has strengths and weaknesses. We try to identify those and give examples of how they could come up in the game or will come up in the game. Some of them are absolutely going to come up. Other things are situational and maybe they'll happen or maybe they won't, but you have to be prepared for them.

Q: Along those lines, the purpose of showing film is to show what you can do successfully, not so much what they do, right?

BB: No, I think, look, you've got to stop the other team's strengths. I don't think you want to let another team that does something well just do that. You take the strength away and then see if they can do something else, beat you with some other way. You understand what their strengths are and how to defend them and you understand what you think their weaknesses are or the weaknesses as you match up against that team. It might not be a weakness against somebody else, it might just be a weakness against you and how you're going to attack that. So, it's both.

On the qualities of a good scout team quarterback...

BB: I think the most important thing for the scout team quarterback is to know the offense and then look, our scout team quarterback may be similar to the quarterback we're facing or he may be different. You can't change physical characteristics. They are what they are. But the characteristics of the quarterback, if it's a running quarterback or if it's a quarterback that likes to throw deep or if it's a quarterback that likes to throw to a particular player in a certain situation, a tight end or whatever, then you just try to get the defense to look at that.

I think when the play is going on, the quarterback has a basic set of instructions – here's your read, here's what you're looking for – and then depending on the quarterback, what kind of movement skills he has or type of movement plays they have, that might factor into it, too. But I think really what the scout team quarterback is trying to do is simulate the cadence, the overall operation and the overall execution of the play. That's really what their quarterback does.

4
THE NFL

The Balance Between Practicing Fundamentals And Improving The Scheme
During the Playoffs

Q: How much do you get back to the fundamentals of things at this point in the season while also working on scheme?

BB: That's a great question. It's a fine line. You try to ... There's nothing more important than fundamentals, so no play is good with bad fundamentals. It's just impossible. That being said, there are a lot of scheme things that come up over the course of the season that teams keep building.

We build and our opponents build, and so each week, there's more to get ready for because they're further along. It's a lot different than the first game of the season when you only have so much time to work on stuff. We've had over 100 practices, and it keeps building and building. So you've got to deal with the scheme issues, and you've got to deal with the fundamentals. So it's trying to find that balance, but they're both critical. I mean, if you're out-schemed, you're out positioned, then you're in bad shape.

And like I said, no play is a good play with bad fundamentals. Just, it won't happen, so that's the balance.

Preparing For Peyton Manning and Not Outsmarting Yourself

Q: How do you balance the decision to react to the adjustments that Manning makes at the line of scrimmage versus staying in your defense and reacting as the play is developing?

BB: That's a great question and that's really the basis of trying to come up with a game plan and figure out how you want to play a team like that. You don't want to put yourself in bad situations. At the same time you don't want to make it too much of a game where there are a lot of multiples – 'if they do this we do that,' 'if they do that we do this' – that just can go on forever.

At some point you've got to line up and play what you're going to play. Look, just because they know you're in something isn't always the worst thing in the world. All good teams have tendencies. All good players have tendencies. That's not a bad thing. It's a good thing. It means you're doing something well. At some point it's going to come down to you have to play well.

You have to do what you do well better than what they try to do against it. I think there are elements of all those things in a game. You certainly don't want to make it easy for them, but you can outsmart yourself sometimes by trying to play too much of a mind game. Manning's a great quarterback. He's a hard guy to fool. He has seen it all.

The Passing Of His Mentor Ted Marchibroda And Their Relationship

Q: What are your thoughts on the passing of Ted Marchibroda?

BB: Yeah, appreciate [the question]. It's with a real heavy heart that I stand here. I probably wouldn't be here if it wasn't for Ted Marchibroda. He gave me a great opportunity. I learned so much from him - a lot of X's and O's, but it really wasn't the X's and O's. It was a lot more about just being a football coach, being a professional coach - preparation, work ethic, dependability, what goes into having a good football team. Every time I heard about the Kansas City Chiefs - which they had a tremendous this year I'm not taking anything away from them - they start off 1-5 and then won 11 straight or whatever. That was us in 1975.

That was my first year in the NFL and we were 1-4 and won our next nine straight, whatever it was, and then lost to Pittsburgh in probably a game similar to this - driving down to take the lead and gave up an interception that was run back 95 yards for a touchdown, so the game kind of got away from us. But it was the same kind of team. It was a young team that got off to a slow start, but we gained our confidence, and that taught me a great lesson in football of just keep working, keep fighting, just one day at a time. Don't worry about the record at the end of the year.

Just have a good day, have another good day, win this week and then move on to next week. That's what we did in 1975. Ted gave that team great leadership. They were like 2-14 the year before we got there or something like that - 2-12 - however many games there were. They were terrible. But he gave the team great confidence, great leadership. Ted is one of the most positive people I've ever been around. He was always confident, even when it was fourth-and-17, he was always sure we were going to make the play or do what we need to do. He was such a great person for me. I lived with Ted.

We stayed in the same hotel, drove him to work every day, drove him home every day.

We had our staff meetings in the car. We ate breakfast together. He was such a mentor, and I just can't say enough about Ted.

I know everybody that's coached and worked with him probably has the same exact feelings. They'll all tell you the same story because that's what Ted was.

My sympathies to Ted's family and his two kids, his grandchildren. He's got a great family. He's a great father and great grandfather. It's a sad day - just a sad day.

Preparing For Players You Haven't Seen But Will Be Playing b/c Of Injury

Q: How do you prepare for a player like Chris Conley, who didn't have a lot of action in the regular season?

BB: You go back to where you go back to. Sometimes if they pick a player up from another team, you look at him. You look at whatever you can look at, whatever that is - preseason, maybe it's with another team, could possibly be in college, depending on what the guy's situation is. But again, that's a common thing every week.

There are always players on the roster, particularly at this time of year, that maybe haven't played a lot during the regular season but they're one play away from playing. It could be a quarterback. It could be anybody. It could be a pass rusher or receiver or corner - anybody. So you have to be ready for those guys, and we prepare for everybody on the active roster.

We don't know who they're going to play. They may put a guy in for certain plays and we need to know what his skills are and how we want to defend him or attack him as the case might be. It's really a common thing every week. It's just a different subset of players, but we always have to be ready for those guys, including the practice squad.

There have been many weeks where guys have popped up from the practice squad the day before the game or it could be the day of the game if it's a Monday night game, but it could be one of those late things and you don't want to be spend a lot of time on a player five minutes before a game, so look here are the guys on the practice squad, here are the potential guys that could come up based on an injury situation or a position on your opponent that you think this guy might factor into. I don't want to say it's common, but it's certainly not uncommon.

On Analytics And The Different Pieces Of Information That Go Into Preparation

Q: How much have you seen the use of analytics grow in football over the last several years and what can they be useful for?

BB: Yeah, I don't know. It's not really a big thing with me. I'm sure you can go to the [MIT Sloan Sports] Analytics Conference or whatever it is they have here in the summer or spring, whenever it is, and get your fill of it. I'm sure there's a lot there.

Q: Do you guys employ more math-side people to help you analyze schemes and trends?

BB: No. I mean we do some of it. I'm sure we do a lot less than what other people do. It's not really my thing.

Q: Does Matt Patricia come up with anything?

BB: Look I've done things all the way back to when I was with the Giants and before that just doing them by hand, but I mean look if you're out there coaching every day, to me if you can't see an 80 percent tendency then like what are you looking at? Now is it 51-49, 49-51? I don't know.

What are you going to do with that? Do you want to bet on 51, do you want to bet on 49 or bet on 55 or 45? At that point, what's the difference? I don't see a big difference, and I certainly wouldn't want to bet on 55 and just take my chances on 45. You've got to play it straight.

But I mean honestly I think if an experienced coach can't see 80-20 or 90-10, I mean I don't think that's very good.

Q: With that in mind, is film still the biggest tool you use preparing for a game?

BB: It's one tool. I mean you break it down and you take information from that.

Ultimately that's where it comes from, but there are other components of it.

Q: Like, as in?

BB: Like your personal experience, who the play callers are on the other side of the field – there is a philosophy that they have, which it's on film but there may be other sources of information on that – so who's calling the plays, what their philosophy is, what they're trying to do, what the skills of the players are, which again is verified on film, but ultimately you've got to watch something, so you watch them on film. If you have personal experience seeing a guy live, whether it be as an opponent or in a practice or in college or whatever it is, I guess that plays into it, too.

Building A Team Or Program

Q: How long do you think it took you to insert your program here? Do you feel like it took a couple years?

BB: Yeah, probably '03.

Q: Because of the personnel decisions you have to make?

BB: No, just because of everything. You have to change the culture. You have to change the ... I mean normally one coach is different from the previous coach. You don't see a lot of whoever the first coach is, the second coach is kind of the carbon copy of the first coach, the third coach is kind of a carbon copy of the second coach. I mean you rarely see that.

The coach that comes in usually has a different philosophy than the coach that left, so you have to try to implement that philosophy. That means you're going to turn over a high percentage of the roster because the players that the other coach had don't fit the new philosophy, so a lot of the players are going to have to change in part because of the philosophy and probably in part because of the scheme.

Those role-type players, now that role is not needed in the new scheme and a different role is needed, so you get different players, and then just getting your team acclimated to doing things the way that the philosophy of the new program. You're going to have to go through a lot of tough situations – tough games, tough losses, tough stretches in the season, whatever it happens to be, to build that up over time.

It doesn't happen in training camp. I mean look training camp is training camp, but those games don't count. Even in the early part of the season, you might have some tough games, but it's not like playing in January, playing in December. It takes some time to go through that. I don't think there is any shortcut to it. I know there are a lot of

other people in the league that think there is, that after two weeks all of a sudden everything is going to change dramatically, but I'm not really part of that, I don't buy into that. So, I mean we won in '01. In '02, we had a lot of issues. '03 – that was a good football team. '04 – that was a good football team. So I don't think there was any doubt about ... '01 wasn't the best team, but that team played the best, so we won.

But I think we saw in '02 more of probably overall where the '01 team was. Just the '01 team played great when they had to in critical situations in big games and that's why they won. You can't take anything away from them. They deserved it because they were the best team. But it wasn't the case in '02.

Building A Roster

Q: How important is the bottom third of the roster when you're constructing your roster?

BB: I don't think we really look at it that way. I would say the way that I look at it is every roster spot is important. You can number them however you want to number them. I'm not sure who's one and who's 53, but everyone is important and there has got to be a reason for each one and an expectation for each one and a role for each one or a potential role for each one.

What we try to do is based on those criteria the best person that we can have for that spot, that's who we want. We try to make the most out of every opportunity we have. That also includes the 10 practice squad spots because those players are really part of your team, too. I mean they're not on your team, but they kind of are on your team. In a lot of cases they're certainly the next guy – they're in the on deck circle.

All those spots, they're all important. I wouldn't single any of them out or dismiss any of them. I think they're all important. Read

Q: Is the best way to win in the NFL to have a good quarterback? How important is that position?

BB: There are 32 teams. There are 32 different ways of doing things. In our case, we just again try to do what we feel like is best for our football team. And again that's at each position and then at some point there has to be an overall integration because some positions play off each other, even though they're not the same position. But as you get in the kicking game, tight ends and linebackers and fullbacks and things like that, there is some type of interplay there.

Again, all the positions are important. We want to have the best quarterback that we

can. We want to have the best center that we can. We want to have the best left guard, right guard, left tackle, right tackle, nose guard, inside linebacker. I mean we're trying to get the best we can at every position. Linebacker, coach, trainer, video person – you name it – we're trying to get the best person we can at every position in the organization to be competitively the best at that spot in the league.

I think that's how you get good, is you get good at everything. You don't just pick out one thing and try to be good at that and then give back that advantage by being bad somewhere else. That's just our philosophy and that's the way that I look at it.

Q: Obviously you take talent into consideration, but what other factors do you look at when evaluating a guy from a smaller school, like Malcolm Butler?

BB: It's a pretty long list. It starts with I would say just the overall program. The commitment in a Division I program is pretty much 12 months a year in terms of offseason training, offseason summer program, class schedule, practice. It's every day. It's like being a professional player. Not quite the same, but between your class commitments, your academic commitments, your football commitments, your offseason training and all that, you're always going.

You have to do a lot of things just to be able to be compliant – your grades have to be up, you can't be missing stuff. Like the NFL, you have to be here every day, you have to be accountable, you've got to be dependable, so in other programs, that just isn't required or not anywhere near to the same degree. Level of competition is obviously a big gap.

You see a lot of talented players at a lower level of competition, but then when the competition changes and it's a little more equal, are they really able to compete at that next level? Do they have the competitiveness, the drive, the whatever it is to go out there and outwork and outcompete and out-tough the guy that has just as much talent as they do versus just being better than everybody else and going out there and just being themselves but they're just better than everybody else. That doesn't really last.

Schematically the same thing, teams that don't have as much time, don't have the same kind of resources, the game is narrower, fewer coverages, you're defending less, you're playing with less defense, a couple of coverages, that kind of thing, and now you come into a more expansive system and you've got the volume of we've got more, there is more on the other side of the ball.

When you start putting all those together, it becomes really exponential the number of

variables – playing one position versus both sides, inside, outside, factoring the kicking game into it, all that. So there is the on the field, there is the talent and I'd say there is the overall program and being a professional, being a solid, dependable consistent player, which is what all great players are – they're consistent.

They're not just making one play. Those guys aren't the great players. They might have highlight plays, but the great players are the ones who can sustain it over a game, over several games, over seasons. Those are the guys who stand out. It's hard to measure until you put a guy in that situation.

On making decisions once you've clinched a bye week

Q: You've earned a first-round bye. How do you balance trying to win these final two games and also rest players who have some injuries or are recovering from injuries?

BB: That's a good question. I think we just probably do the best we can to manage all those things that you talked about. They are all somewhat of a consideration and we've just got to try to balance it out. I think each part of your question requires some thought and every decision impacts other things as well, so you just can't act independently when one thing happens when there is a residual effect to it one way or another as part of the conversation.

We'll just have to do the best that we can to balance all those things out. That's something we'll have to give some thought to and get as much information as possible because there are some guys that are in various states of physical health. We'll have to work our way through all that. It's definitely a challenging situation. I wish I had a cleaner answer on it, but really we're just going to have to work it out.

Q: Considering that nobody is truly 100 percent healthy at this time of year, how do you decide when somebody like Dont'a Hightower is healthy enough to play?

BB: That's another good question that relates to I'd say a whole number of factors – one, just strictly what's the player's medical condition, and so that can define it right there. If he's out, he's out. Then it's can play but less than 100 percent and then that depends on or that conversation continues into how it goes in practice, how it looked in practice, how the player feels, possibly what you're going to be asking him to do in the game if you can determine that, but sometimes depending on what position it is, you can possibly narrow down sort of what the role would be or what you'd ask them to do.

How long is another question – how many and how long – so could the player go out

there and play two or three plays – yeah, probably. Could he play 60 plays – no, you wouldn't want him to do that. So what's the right number in there? Maybe you could talk about that during the game or maybe it's something you try to define before the game and work the player's role into that.

But again at the same time you have to play the game and there are circumstances and events that happen within the game that you can't plan for. You don't know how it's going to go, so once you get into the game you have to be able to utilize the players that are available in a competitive way during the game. It's again a long kind of complicated discussion, but again once the player is cleared to play and he's able to play and he feels confident that he can play and so forth, then some of these other things come into play. Until that point, then there's nothing really to talk about.

Evaluating College QB's In the Spread Offense Era, Specifically Marcus Mariota

Q: Marcus Mariota ran a different system in college. What do you see when you watch him and is it harder to evaluate quarterbacks now because of the spread offense?

BB: It's definitely harder to evaluate, there's no question about that. Look when I came into the league, you go to the combine or you interview quarterbacks and you talk about reading the coverages, reading the safety, reading the middle linebacker, understanding where the rotation is or if there is a rotation or if it's split safety coverage or all those kind of things. Now you go to the combine they tell you about reading the end, reading numbers, we have three guys out there and they have three we throw it, if they have four ... So it's an addition game. Reading the end, reading the tackle, that was a different concept.

When I came into the league there was no quarterback reading the defensive tackle, like you've got to be kidding me. Different type of offense, but that's what they've been brought up on. The thing I've learned about all that is guys learn what you teach them. If you teach them to do something different, then they learn something different. Some learn it better than others, quicker than others, it comes easier.

All of us are individually different on that, but just because a player has been taught one thing definitely doesn't mean when you teach him something else that that's going to be a problem or that he can't do it. You don't know that that's how it's going to turn out, but I wouldn't just rule that out out of hand. Just because a guy hasn't been asked to do something doesn't mean he can't do it.

Then you have to make the determination if it's like that, a player coming out of college, you have to make the determination of how you think he'll be able to do the things you ask him to do, whether it's learn them, execute them, physically change a little bit so he can fit more into that type of style that you're looking for, whatever it is. You just have

to make that calculation. It's an inexact science. Some guys do, some guys don't, some guys you judge right, some guys you misjudge right.

It's a lot easier to scout them in the NFL because you see them against the same people we play against. You see them in a similar environment in terms of the routine, the schedule, the length of the year and so forth and so on. There's a lot more in common even though each team is different. When you look at guys coming out of college there are a lot more variables and the level of competition is a lot different, too, so it's a little bit harder.

Q: Do you think Mariota is making that adjustment?

BB: The offense he's running is definitely not the offense he ran in college, so there's no question about that. But yeah, I think he's done a good job. He's hitting a lot of passes, hasn't turned the ball over a lot, has had his share of touchdown passes, makes his share of big plays, reads coverages.

I think you see him throwing the ball to the right spot. I don't know exactly what he's being told to do but generally speaking it looks like he's throwing the ball to the right spot, throwing it where he should be throwing it. I think he's coming along well. I'm sure they have a lot of confidence in him and he's shown toughness coming back from an injury and taking some hits and all like every quarterback does. He's done a good job for them.

Bringing A New Player Onto The Team In The Middle Of The Season And Getting Them Ready

Q: You've brought in a couple offensive players last week. At this stage in the year, what is the process like of getting new players up to speed on the playbook and game plan for the coming week?

BB: That's challenging. We do it on a number of different levels. There is just the component of just getting the guy into our organization – here's how we do things. Forget about the X's and O's, there's that aspect to it. Then there is kind of learning what some of the basics are in terms of terminology and formations or alignments or whatever it happens to be, and then it's pretty much game plan-specific.

What do you have to learn to play this week and then whatever you can get beyond that in terms of general fundamental foundation building, you do the best you can, but you're usually pretty consumed with trying to get in what we're doing this week. Here's how we adjusted against the different things our opponents do and then next week is next week. In some of those windows where you have possibly extra opportunities, you try to build a better foundation, a better base, so even though this doesn't apply this week here's what this means because at some point you're going to want to build on that.

It's a tough catch-up process, it really is.

For a player like Keshawn Martin, who at least from an X's and O's standpoint and probably a program standpoint, too, had some familiarity with protections and adjustments and basic concepts, probably the learning curve for him would have been easier than say a player that comes in with very little in common. Maybe their routes are numbered and ours are named or vice versa. Or the protections were names and

ours are numbers – that kind of thing where you're trying to put together a whole different language, trying to learn a different language as well as what to do but also trying to learn what different words or concepts mean, I think that's probably the hardest part of a new player.

As you go through that process with a player, there are some things you'll talk to him about where he'll say, 'Oh I got that. That's what we did here. That's this, this is that; OK good.' Then there are other things that are going to be different that are foreign that are new and those are going to take more time, and you don't really know what those are until you actually go through the process with the player, start talking to the player, get questions, get feedback, quiz him on the information you've given him to try to understand what he's getting, what he isn't.

Some guys learn better by walking through it, some guys learn better by seeing it on film, some guys can look at it on a piece of paper and understand, some guys need to see it on the field. There's that whole process of getting to know the player and his best learning techniques. A lot of different components to it, but obviously you're fighting a losing battle in terms of a race against time that you're just already too far behind in to get all the way caught up. You just have to catch up enough so he can be functional for that particular game and then worry about next week next week.

Seeing Coaching Potential in Mike Vrabel

Q: When he was here as a player, did Mike Vrabel strike you as the kind of guy that would go into coaching?

BB: Yeah, absolutely. Mike and I talked about that a lot. He'd give me advice and I would tell him, 'Mike when you're a coach and you're calling the defenses, you should go ahead and do that. Here's why we're not going to do that. Or that's a great idea. We can do that, that's good, I'm glad you brought that up.'

Mike is not afraid to make a suggestion, and we've had a lot of good discussions even when he was at Ohio State or when he was in Kansas City for that matter, we would bump into each other from time to time, but when he was Ohio State particularly when he got into coaching, we discussed a lot of ... My daughter was out there at that time – Amanda was at Ohio State – we saw Mike and we would talk about different things, whether it would be X's and O's or managing players or practice tempo or whatever it was. It could be general coaching things.

I think Mike has a great mind for it, great passion for it. He's got great playing experience, so he can draw on things that honestly I can't. I've never played in this league. I can't draw on those, so I think there is definitely some advantage to that. I don't think that's a ticket. There are a lot of other things that go into it, too, but if it's used properly I think it's valuable.

Mike was a great player. He's played different systems, he's played different positions. He's played offense, defense, special teams. He's played end, he's played linebacker. He would play free safety in practice for us probably once or twice a year, especially when we were up against a guy like Ed Reed or somebody who you really didn't know what he would do. You would just say go back there and go with what you see and if you want to gamble, gamble. Mike, he would love that.

He would drive [Tom] Brady crazy doing that, like, 'He'll never be there on that pattern,' but it's Ed Reed – you didn't know where Ed Reed would be. He was usually wherever the ball was. He somehow got there. So Mike did that. Again you could just see his overall passion for the game, whether it be playing multiple positions, playing offense, defense, he had a great awareness of the total game and loved to play it, loved to play tight end. If we'd be up against a big receiver, he would go in there and take a couple plays at receiver.

Q: Have there been many guys like that where you can tell right away that they would make a good coach?

BB: I think there are a lot of guys that probably fall in that category, but I would say Mike probably as much as anybody. Even when he first got here, that was only his fifth year in the league or whatever it was, you could even kind of see it then and his career wasn't even half over and he was already thinking about coaching. You could kind of tell when he got done playing that's what he was going to do. That came up pretty early. But he had a real passion for not just knowing his position but understanding the total game.

He was always very good on things like being able to anticipate what the offense was going to do, hearing a call and then that call coming up later – maybe not even that game, maybe it was like the next year we played them – a guy like [Peyton] Manning who is making checks at the line of scrimmage or things like that. He had a lot of those little things that you never see on film but somehow he knew them or he figured them out or anticipated them and made a lot of instinctive plays or plays based on experience and just knowledge. Mike was really tough. He was a tough football player.

I'm sure that comes across in his coaching as well. I don't think he babies them. I don't think there's a lot of sitting around eating marshmallows. That's not really his style.

Mike played hard, he coaches hard, and I think the players respect him because he puts in as much work as he demands. I don't think he would ask anybody to do anything he hasn't probably done more of.

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