



**DAN POMPEI'S INSIDER**

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**SPEED READS**

■ Eric Mangini, secondary coach of the Patriots and Bill Belichick's right-hand man, will be one of the hottest coaches in the NFL this year. Mangini, 33, who already has turned down coordinator offers, is so respected that Marvin Lewis and Belichick were instructors at Mangini's youth football clinic in Hartford, Conn. Lewis taught press coverage at the camp, and Belichick taught zone coverage. Remember this when there's an unusually high number of defensive backs from Connecticut in the 2012 draft.

■ The Rooneys are classy owners. Though the Steelers drafted Ben Roethlisberger, they signed Tommy Maddox to a contract extension with a \$2 million signing bonus. The Rooneys made this move because salary cap limitations prevented them from properly rewarding Maddox in the past.

■ Though coaches such as Carolina's John Fox establish strong bonds with players, Butch Davis doesn't get it. Some of his players feel as if they're treated like high schoolers.

—The War Room

# Crunching numbers to gain an edge

The NFL is a long way from undergoing a statistical revolution similar to what baseball is experiencing, but several coaches, in the quest of gaining an edge, are taking numbers interpretation to a new level.

Statistics are being used more than ever by men such as Chiefs coach Dick Vermeil, Titans defensive coordinator Jim Schwartz, Saints coach Jim Haslett and Patriots research director Ernie Adams. They rely on numbers to determine what their teams are doing right and wrong, to assess opponents' strengths and weaknesses and to make critical decisions.

The statistics they study aren't the typical league leaders you see printed in the newspaper. Schwartz, in fact, crusades against the widely accepted practice of ranking offenses and defenses by yards, much as Oakland Athletics general manager Billy Beane scoffs at judging baseball players by batting averages. "The way the league judges offense and defense is the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard," Schwartz says. "Yards allowed or gained has nothing to do with winning. It's about points allowed or scored. You see so many people, coordinators who have been in the league for a long time, who ... try to find ways to steal yards." If coordinators can manipulate statistics to make their units appear more effective than they are, they can justify shortcomings.

Most teams generate their own numbers to some degree. Some rely on specially produced packages from STATS Inc., Elias Sports Bureau and stats expert Bud Goode, whom Vermeil has been working with since 1969, when they were introduced by George Allen. Vermeil's reliance on statistics has increased nearly every year since meeting Goode.

Each week during the season, Vermeil spends about four hours with a 500-page book he receives from STATS Inc. He spends another two hours studying pregame and postgame reports from Goode that cover everything from predicting the scores of every NFL game to comparing what a given team's offense is

producing with what its defense is giving up. Vermeil pays particular attention to Goode's Achilles' heel section, which points out the statistical weaknesses of an opponent.

During one afternoon in his wood-paneled office overlooking the playing field at Arrowhead Stadium, Vermeil keeps digging out red three-ring binders, charts and books full of statistics. By my unofficial count, he brings out 22 books of statistics, some of them as thick as a triple-layer cake. He talks about a 20-year profile of Super Bowl teams, comparing averages from every NFL victory with every NFL loss, a quarterback study that goes back to 1984, the point value of fumbles (minus-1.66) versus interceptions (minus-6.35), and how a strength-of-schedule study points out which games are most important to win.

There are so many numbers in football that the greatest challenge may be identifying the meaningful ones.

Haslett focuses on red zone efficiency. Schwartz emphasizes third-down efficiency—and it helped the Titans' defense rank first in the NFL in that category last season. Vermeil forever is emphasizing turnover differential to his players. Last year, as he points out in one of his statistical compilations, even teams with losing records won 74 percent of the time when they were plus-1 in turnover differential. Playoff teams won 93 percent of the time when they had more takeaways than giveaways.

Late in Kansas City's 38-5 victory over the Bills last season, Chiefs defensive end Eric Hicks tapped Vermeil on the shoulder



Vermeil dwells on turnover differential, and the Chiefs led the NFL in that category last year.

ILLUSTRATION BY CHRIS CALLAN / TSN

and said, "Hey, coach, we're plus-5 (in turnover differential). What's the winning percentage on that?" Vermeil loved it. "You tell your team, 'We have to play smart today,'" he says. "Our guys know what smart is. We led the NFL (last season) with plus-19."

Vermeil shares his weekly turnover research with Cowboys coach Bill Parcells. In turn, Parcells shares his weekly statistical profile of NFL officials with Vermeil.

In the offseason, Vermeil spends hours poring over statistics. He earmarks some of them for speeches to be used in training camp and beyond. If the Chiefs lose a key starter to injury, for instance, he'll be prepared to present statistical evidence to his team that demonstrates it can overcome the loss.

By early May, Vermeil already had charted every practice session of training camp based on statistics from last year. For instance, Vermeil looked at where his offense ranked in third-and-1 situations, third-and-2 to 3, third-and-4 to 5,