

The
PAFL
Coach
User
Manual

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Foreword

Chris has produced an engrossing analysis of the PAFL.

Veteran and Rookie Coach alike would benefit from reading this Manual.

Nick Barnett.

1997.

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INTRODUCTION

In what has been, some might say, a reasonably successful period as a PAFL Coach I have experienced a number of highs and lows and done my utmost to learn from these.

As a former NEWSLETTER Editor I have also done my stint as a PAFL Journalist. When these two prior occupations are coupled, Coaching & Quilling, perhaps you can see where my urge to document my experiences originates.

I have tried, in this (lengthy) document, to "bottle" the essence of what I have learned about PAFL and how that knowledge can be best utilised to continue building success upon success. I have tried to present these experiences as a series of Ideas/Suggestions with a detailed explanation, some measure of justification and the highlighting of the advantages (and disadvantages) of organising these ideas into a recipe for success.

It has not been as easy task in that many of the ideas overlap and are of necessity interrelated. Where this has been the case I have tried to refer back to ideas that have been previously presented and stated what the inter-dependency is and the relevance of considering the new (ly presented) concept in tandem with the old (original idea).

Each one of the ideas I shall be presenting to you is designed to stimulate your own thought processes and perhaps bring some order to what might have been chaos. Nothing in my document should necessarily be thought of as new or original, indeed many of the ideas are adapted or borrowed from my peers. What I have to offer is an orderly approach to dealing with the mundane and a consistency of action where in the past there may have been a more haphazard way of going about things.

The document is presented in a series of steps, beginning with STEP 0. STEP 0 details the tasks that can be completed prior to the receipt of the DRAFT package, based on the assumption that YOU are either a NEW Coach starting from scratch, or a veteran Coach awaiting the new season start-up package.

The subsequent stages detail all aspects of what a Coach may expect to encounter during the course of a season (or a career, the ideas hold good). The HUB of the document revolves around the ROSTA. This is where the ingredients that matter are, and it is the make-up, manipulation and utilisation of these key ingredients that is the principle concern of the majority of ideas within this document.

Read, enjoy, learn and improve. Don't take what is written too seriously and if you do have any strong feelings, in agreement or disagreement, or you want clarification, expansion, justification or a plain and simple discussion then the author is more than willing to accommodate you.

Document Summary

This document is arranged in seven sections. Each section is designed to cover a specific time, or aspect of PAFL or both. These sections are:

Step 0 -

The Step 0 section deals with Preparation.

Preparing to accept a NEW PBM (A Coach joining PAFL) or

Preparing to accept a NEW Team (A Vet Coach starting a team in a new/different League)

or

Preparing to accept a NEW Season (Vet Coach waiting for post-Superbowl ageing Rosta).

The section will help the Coach lay the groundwork for squad development/game preparation

Step 1-

The Step 1 section deals with Squad assessment/Squad Development

Reviewing the Players

Rating the Players

Identifying the future direction of the Team Philosophies

Conceiving a Coaching Plan

This section will help the Coach give direction to the future of the team.

Step 2 -

The Step 2 section deals with transacting daily business

How to - Build a Rosta, How to - DRAFT, How to - TRADE

How to - Win Games, How to - Process a weekly Turn

This section will help the Coach get up and running quickly and efficiently

Step 3 -

The Step 3 section deals with game plan preparation

Statistics compilation

Statistics interpretation

Statistical summaries and short-cuts

Field positioning

Starting bonuses

Tactical Options

This section will help the Coach extract relevant statistical summaries, interpret the data and conceive the winning formula for his/her upcoming fixture.

Step 4 -

The Step 4 section deals with local (divisional) rivalry, preparation and actions

Dominating your division - hints and tips

Learning from your mistakes and from the opposition

Dealing with personalities and egos

Adopting Coach mentality

This section will help a Coach to think more like a Coach. Detail how to deal with rivals, what to look out for and how to use their ideas to help you win games.

Step 5 -

The Step 5 section deals with example scenarios to test the Coach mentality

Preparing to beat a team with an inferior record, at home.

Preparing to beat a team with a superior record, at home

Preparing to beat a team with an inferior record, on the road

Preparing to beat a team with a similar record, on the road.

This section will help a Coach to identify key points in game-plan preparation.

Step 6 -

The Step 6 section deals with summarising everything that has been covered.

Identifies the new qualities you SHOULD have acquired as a reader of this document.

This section will help the Coach identify his new strengths and weaknesses at a glance.

STEP 0 - Let's be Philosophical

The first thing I do, and I am reasonably confident that I am not alone in this, when I receive a DRAFT package, is review my Rosta for what it has to offer (if it is a new team to me) or what has changed in the Post SUPERBOWL ageing process.

BEFORE this review of personnel takes place a few details ought to have all ready been resolved. AND, there are a few other details that could be resolved that just might make life a bit easier. It is these details that I am going to bring to your attention, and how to go about resolving them BEFORE the DRAFT Package arrives, and that is why I have labelled this particular section of the document STEP 0.

It is the action YOU should take, BEFORE you take any action!

These items are - The Coach's make up, the Offensive Philosophy, the Defensive Philosophy, the Distribution of the Rosta and the Weighting of the Rosta.

0.1 - The COACH's Makeup

As Coach you will have your own ideas on how the game should be played. You have some choice in that your Team can be an all-out Passing Team, a grind it out Rushing Team or somewhere in between with a perfect balance or with a less prevalent leaning towards the Pass or Rush oriented attack. The Options:-

Run & Shoot - An all-out commitment to Passing.

Lightning Strike - A Passing Team that likes to Rush.

Neutral - A well-balanced strategy that mixes Pass and Rush equally

Conservative - A Rushing scenario with the occasional Pass

Ball Control - An all-out commitment to the ground.

Whilst Run & Shoot is unquestionably a Pass-oriented philosophy, and Ball-Control is without question an intended commitment to the ground there is possibly some argument for the three middle options to be interchangeable.

i.e. Who is to say that a CONSERVATIVE Ball-Club shouldn't predominantly (short) pass the ball? OR, that a LIGHTNING STRIKE Team shouldn't spend more time on the ground than in the air?

Certainly the options to rearrange the Offense Formation on the field of play for any given Down make these possibilities open to Coach interpretation!

Equally, you will want to play hard-nosed Defense, Conservative Defense or the inbetweenie balance, once again with perhaps a slight leaning towards the S**T or bust or the less aggressive sit-&-read with the occasional all-or-nothing play.

The Options: -

Wild & Loose - Go-for-broke, Death-or-glory smash-mouth football.

Hangin' Free - A mellower version of the above with a little more patience

Contain - Zonal football, giving up ground but hopefully fewer points

Read - A reactive Defense that matures as the game ages.

These preferences of YOURS will shape YOUR team. Although I have my own ideas about the way a team should play I recognise that each COACH has his own style and it is ultimately this pattern

of play that a COACH must impose upon HIS team.

It is no use a Running Coach acquiring a Passing Team and expecting to make do, it just will not happen. Even if the team in question are the reigning SUPERBOWL Champions and a new COACH goes on to repeat he will never be satisfied that it is HIS team unless they play the game HIS way. So, the first lesson here is know your own mind. Conceive the philosophy BEFORE consulting what the team has to offer from its pre-ordained OFFENSE and DEFENSE. You must be sure in your own mind that the Franchise options will reflect the philosophical options that are closest to your own ideals. If not, then you will have to change one, or both, or suffer a continuing battle of head over heart in the practical application of Rosta amendments and Game-Plan submissions, trying to pretend that you are someone that you are not.

0.2 - OFFENSIVE PHILOSOPHY

This is a tougher one to call for the author.

By now you should (not have MADE your decision, but you should have identified/recognised and come to) know what you want YOUR Team to achieve, and the way in which you intend to go about achieving it. Whether you be a fan of all out Pass or more inclined to lean towards a dogged churning out of ground yards or trying to perfect the balance is not important. So long as you are comfortable with what you are PLANNING to do and the Franchise Philosophy all ready, or is about to, reflect your preference.

The rest, changing the personnel, selecting different Game-Plan strategies and formations, coaching the Mods and the specialist players you are going to need will all of necessity follow on in good order, once you have opted for a Philosophy that makes you comfortable.

0.3 - DEFENSIVE PHILOSOPHY

Once again the Franchise that you have, or have acquired, will have a Defensive Philosophy and you the Coach will have a Philosophy. All that is left to do is ensure that Coach and Franchise are in harmony. If the Team doesn't all ready have the Defensive Philosophy that YOU the Coach are happiest with then change it!

Now that you are in tune with what you are aiming for comes the moment of truth. Does the Franchise philosophy all ready match your own? If not it is going to be a painfully expensive process of change. You can Coach a change of philosophy or you can nominate between seasons. Either way is expensive so here is a word of warning.

Assuming that, worst case scenario, you are a Rushing Coach with a Run-&-Shoot Team. What do you do? I suggest that you attempt to make the change gradual. It is likely that your Rostered personnel are something like 7 Wide-Outs and 3 Half-Backs and no Tight-ends!. So that has to change. The strategic formations have most likely previously been based on 4 starting wide-outs and your introduction of a Tight-end, or two, and a Full-Back will give immediate benefits to the ground game. However, your philosophy is still way off the mark and rather than go the whole distance from one end of the scale to the other I would suggest a season by season amendment to the adjacent philosophy.

i.e. From Run-&-Shoot to Lightning Strike, in year one (with plenty of Coaching hours to compensate) with additional single step amendments in subsequent years.

After all, Rome wasn't built in day!

STEP (Aside) - The Relevance of each Position?

Before going into the subsequent Distributing, Weighting and Balancing Your Rosta, here, first, is a summarial overview of the current Rosta POSITIONS.

A breeze through the PAFL Rule Book will reveal the available positions of the Players and the potential attributes each Player may have, differing skills for differing positions. However, that does not tell the whole story, in fact it should not do much more than summarise what the New Coach all ready knows (assuming he is a student of Gridiron and not merely an inquisitive PBMer checking out a highly rated sports sim).

So, the first thing I shall do is describe the relevant advantages and disadvantages of each Position on the Rosta, or at least my understanding of them. There is an important lesson here, divorcing the TWO distinct items 1)-The Rosta Positions and 2)-The Players that you have that fill those Rosta Positions.

First of all I want to look at just the POSITIONS, the Players enter the equation later

Quarterback - A QB has two attributes (worth mentioning) PASSING and SCRAMBLING. His principal ability is the PASSING which should be no worse than GOOD and, depending upon age, up to BRILL. SCRAMBLING should not be ignored as a Coachable Attribute and Ideally should be A.AVE or better.

· Running-Back - These come in two flavours, Half-Back and Full-Back. Basically the Half-Back carries the ball and the Full-Back (when employed) blocks for the ball-carrier. There is no good reason why you cannot play with just a Half-Back but playing with Just a Full-Back can be problematic. Playing with a pair of starting Half-Backs is OK from the point of view for shared workload and is a system that I personally have employed with some success in the past. The Half-Back needs a RUSHING Rating that exceeds his BLOCKING Rating (i.e. V.GOOD -GOOD) whilst the Full-Back is so named for having his attributes the other way around (i.e.A.AVE - V.GOOD). Ideally the Full-Back will be the younger less experienced Player. Another important note here, from my observations, the Higher the RUSHING rating then the higher the average carry will be for that Player and the higher the BLOCKING rating for that player then the more successful he will be at performing in the second half of games. i.e. for BLOCKING read stamina!

· Wide-Receiver - It is the nature of the game that your star Wide-out will perform one week and be anonymous the next. This has a lot to do with being at home or away, the efficiency of the Defense in Operation (i.e. DEFENSE Team Modifier) the quality of the opposition secondary and significantly the age of the opposition secondary. (i.e. a V.GOOD Rookie will have off-days whilst a 5-year AVE guy just might play a blinder (because he is at home playing for a Team with a GOOD DEFENSE Modifier rating)). So, what I am saying here is try to share the workload between two (or more) Wide-Outs and your backup guys just might do the business. Finally, in the same way that an RB BLOCKING ability dictates stamina so it does too for the Wide-Out. So, do not ignore Coaching a Wide-Out's BLOCKING ability if you expect him to be fit enough to collect that game-winning snatch inside the final two-minute warning!

· Tight-End - There is not a lot to add to the notes above. A TE catches like a Wide-Out (but not quite as well) and Blocks like a Lineman (but not quite as well) and is dependant upon his BLOCKING rating for his stamina. I have seen both extremes used by PAFL Coaches (i.e. EX - AVE and AVE - EX), ideally your TE will be multi-talented and multi-functional but do not be afraid to use a specialist .

· Center - Under the New PAFL regime this guy is the essential pivot of your Offensive Line. Ideally he is going to be a veteran (at least 3-years experience), his attributes are going to be at least GOOD - GOOD and he is going to have a reliable backup. Despite his enormous influence upon the

Line, for reasons probably better explained when you read the notes on the Defensive guys that directly oppose the Center, you will almost certainly always be better off fielding an AVE - AVE Center of 5-years+ experience than a Rookie or 1-year man regardless of their attributes!

- Guard - A Guard has two attributes, BLOCKING (for which he should be best at) and PASS-RUSHING (for which he should be competent). Ideally your Guards will be 3-years+ in experience and have ratings something akin to GOOD-A.AVE all of the way up to V.GOOD -V.GOOD.

- Tackle - In my own personal view of PAFL the Tackle appears in one of two guises, the lone ranger (NO TE next to him) in which case he should have a PASS-RUSH rating of at least GOOD and potentially as high as EX (he does not need a BLOCKING rating) and the Tackle/Guard (the one between Guard and TE). His Ratings should be something akin to A.AVE - A.AVE (for a Vet) to V.GOOD - V.GOOD for a youngster. The PASS-RUSH rating exceeds BLOCKING ability in terms of significance, so if you are Coaching a young Tackle towards GOOD - GOOD, then concentrate on the PASS-RUSH first. (The reasoning here will become more apparent when you digest the DT and DE notes).

- Defensive Tackle - The DT has one attribute (of note) the ability to make Tackles! Ideally this is going to be somewhere between GOOD and EX. As for PASS-RUSH, the higher the better, but this is not his specialist skill, hence the name defensive TACKLE.

- Defensive End - The Def End has ONE Attribute (of importance) the ability to scare the S**T out of the opposing QB. PASS-RUSH is significantly more relevant to the Def End than in it is to the DT. If you want evidence then check out your own Stats (on the reverse side of your Rosta) the DT's will show up as the busier Tacklers and the Def Ends as the more successful Pass-Rushers. To close out these notes on the Down-Line, refer back to the Guard and Tackle notes for their attributes, Tackles excel at PASS-RUSH (opposing the Def-Ends) and Guards excel at BLOCKING (opposing the DT's).

- Linebacker - The LB has three attributes. The LB should be considered as a specialist ILB (Inside LineBacker) or an OLB (Outside LineBacker). Once an LB's role has been identified then the required attributes for Coaching can be reduced to two. i.e. ILB (similar to DT) needs to be able to Tackle (e.g. GOOD-AVE-AVE) whilst the OLB needs to double up as a PASS-RUSH/PASS-DEFENDER (e.g. AVE-GOOD-GOOD). The middle (PASS-RUSH) skill is subjective in terms of importance, so long as ILB's can Tackle and OLB's can Pass-Defend then they will do a job of work.

- Cornerback - In the NFL a Cornerback is a speedster that only makes Tackles when three of his Team mates all ready have a handle on an oncoming RB. It is his job to break up Pass Plays and he therefore needs a higher PASS-DEFENSE rating than TACKLING skill. However, Cornerbacks in PAFL do tend to be involved and so TACKLING should not be overlooked. (Ideal GOOD-V.GOOD).

- Safety - If the CB in PAFL tends to a bit NFL back-to-front then so too is the Safety. He ought to be a bit beefier, maybe a bit slower but then he is basically a TE marker and zonal Defender. However, with NFL and PAFL in reverse this guy's ability to Tackle is less important than the NFL so my recommendation is A.AVE-GOOD to GOOD-V.GOOD.

And so onto the Special teamers:

- Place-Kicker - This is one of the critical positions on the Team and should be filled with the right guy at a very early opportunity. V.GOOD - V.GOOD is not too high a rating.

- Punter - Another specialist that ought to be resolved sooner rather than later. Not quite as attribute critical as the Kicker he should be A.AVE-V.GOOD or GOOD-GOOD, Accuracy should not be overlooked, but is secondary to the ability to gain distance.

- Kick/Punt-Return - The higher the rating the better, but ideally your first choice Returner

should be a least GOOD, this will earn some respect from the opposition. Subsequent Return guys should be A.AVE, AVE, AVE. Try to keep four on the Rosta and do not be afraid to experiment. The Old guys often do well despite having the seemingly inferior Attributes.

That about covers the Positions on your Rosta and what in terms of Attributes, their requirements and why those requirements that I have suggested are important.

The next step in getting the right balance for your Rosta is to overview the Rosta POSITIONS. NOT the (currently) Rostered PLAYERS. In this way you will set out your target for achievement BEFORE looking at what you have in terms of Players, and trying to make a best fit scenario. It is all too easy to look at a Rosta and think "He'll do, he has to go, I can TRADE him, keep him as a backup, start him, TRADE him, keep him, Cut him etc. etc. ad infinitum. The major problem with looking at Players is that it is all too easy to change your mind on a regular basis. For example, a rival Coach comes in with an offer to TRADE, on paper it may seem like a good idea, but if you are not working to a plan then how can this TRADE fit into your longer term objectives? Some of the decisions that you have to make are going to be very hard, but in order to gain success there is no room for sentimentality.

I have done my very best to be objective in my overview of the Rosta POSITIONS (Player reviews to follow at a later date!). At this stage I have not as yet introduced any conceptual ideas on the number of players in any position, the strength of the players in relative terms and the depth certain positions need as opposed to other positions, that all follows on in a later section.

However, I do want to at least try and pre-empt any lingering doubts that you may have after reading this section and provide some justifications and answers for my reasoning.

Starting from the top then, QB's. A lot of my contemporaries have spent a goodly number of hours producing the ultimate article in their chosen field general by ensuring that he is also a threat out of the pocket by Coaching the RUSHing ability. I do not disagree with the idea but I would suggest that hours can be spent more profitably elsewhere.

WR's. Many of the League's best Wide-Outs are proven catchers but their BLOCKing ability tends to get overlooked. Whilst it has been important in the past as a Stamina indicator I believe that it will become even more important in the future. Just imagine the difference between a V.GOOD - AVE and a V.GOOD - GOOD Wide-out to be an extra yard gained per reception and an extra reception per game. It may not be apparently significant in game terms but over the course of a season could amount to several additional first downs, a couple of TD's and of course all this adds up to denying several minutes of possession time to the opposition! RB's. Like the Wide-Outs we are talking about an extra yard, an extra first down an extra score and perhaps one fewer fumble!

TE. The BLOCKING ability for the TE has greater significance in that it is a regularly in use attribute. MY ideal TE is balanced (GOOD-GOOD, AVE-AVE whatever) but I would not be against using a specialist.

C. I believe that whilst a Center is attribute important his age and experience outweigh his published skills. Be wary about fielding a youngster.

O-LINE. I have said that a Guard Blocks whilst a Tackle defends the Pass-Rush. That may be less accurate under the PAFL re-write and even less accurate if YOU the Coach opt for a Short-Pass and Outside-Rush Offense. But I wouldn't rule out the traditional skills (in fact I intend to enhance and embrace them but that's my problem!)

DOWN-LINE. The 3-4 or 4-3 debate comes later in this document (aswell as the new 4-2-5 and 4-1-6 and 5-2-4 and so on and so on) and in a move away from tradition where on a week-to-week basis you will be confronted by all-out passing teams one week and grind-the-turf Rushers the next the skill level of your first line of Defense becomes even more important. I stand by what I have previously documented, DT's to Tackle and Def-Ends to Pass-Rush at least as a start point. Once that state of affairs has been achieved then improving the DT's Blitzing ability and the Def-Ends Tackling skills will follow later.

LB's. You may, or then again may not, have thought about your LB's as specialists. But did you also think that as a specialist you could reduce the Coachable attributes back to just two? It makes good sense, initially at least, as does the idea that your LB's can exist without coaching for a period until the rest of the house is in order!

DB's. There is something to be said for experience in this position in exchange for attributes but whoever you field in these positions MUST be able to Pass-defend first and Tackle second.

PL. MUST, MUST, MUST be a superstar. He kicks-off as well as Point-scoring and is an absolutely essential member of the squad. Should be near the top of the eligible for coaching list until his age denies it no matter how good his attributes all ready are!

PU. MUST be able to kick a good distance. Accuracy should be coached but only when Distance is at least V.GOOD.

0.4 - Rosta Distribution

So far then, you have elected (without too much hassle presumably because it should be a gut feel) your OFFENSIVE and DEFENSIVE Philosophies.

Whether you want to play Run-&-Shoot or Ball-Control, (or anywhere inbetween), it makes no difference to the next (pre-)step in the process, establishing the Rosta.

In all instances I shall be advocating the following:

QB's x 3, Centers x 2, Guards x 4 and Tackles x 4. Explanation to follow.

Run & Shoot

The Run-&-Shoot approach is a dedicated commitment to airing the ball and for this reason the Rosta should support 7 Wide-Outs, 3 RB's and one Tight-End. (Total 11).

You are going to need 7 Wide-outs to cover substitution and injury. i.e. 4 starters, 2 (minimum) back-ups and one for the margin (injury cover).

The three RB's should include two optional starters (half-backs) and the margin.

And the Tight-End exists to throw your opponents into confusion, give you an option (more to strengthen the Line than as a Receiver) and also cover (as an eighth Wide-out) in the event of a serious injury crisis.

WR = 7, RB = 3, TE = 1.

Lightning Strike

The LS Offense, in theory at least, stretches from the 4-Wide-out scenario down to the Pro-set (2-Wide-Outs, 2 RB's and Tight-end) formations with 3-Wide-Outs and 1 RB plus 1 Tight-End probably the favoured formation.

The Rosta should support 5/6 Wide-Outs, 4/3 RB's and 2 Tight-Ends. (Total 11)

To start games with a Run-&-Shoot formation 4-Wide-Outs start, 2 back-up (this could be a 5th Wide-Out and a second Tight-End) and 1 RB starts.

For the more likely 3 Wide-Outs, 1 RB and 1 TE, the 5-4-2 split is favoured (5 Wide-Outs, 4 RB's and 2 TE's.) For a Pro-Set Formation, once again the 5-4-2 Rosta split is favoured. Not forgetting that the second Tight-End can be used as backup for both Wide and End duties.

WR = 5/6, RB = 4/3, TE = 2.

Neutral

The Neutral Offense suggests that neither a Commitment to the air nor the ground is wise, but rather a harmonious balance of the two. For that reason the Rosta distribution should reflect a sensible balance of outfield players.

4 RB's should cover all contingencies, with a least one Half-Back and one Full-Back.

3 Tight-Ends will allow for the occasions when a two TE set is favoured for the Outside Loop on a Rushing Play and that leaves space for 4 Wide-Outs (if you want to keep to the 11 total that I am trying to imprint on your brain!)

Personally I prefer the idea of a 5th Wide-out at the expense of the 3rd TE but so long as you are aware that a TE is acceptable as a backup Wide-Out AND TE on the same submission sheet then the problem is more than halfway solved.

WR = 5/4, RB = 4, TE = 3/2

Conservative

The Conservative Offense is principally concerned with a prevalence upon RUSHing with maybe some associate Passing skills thrown in for good measure.

It may be more pertinent to the Ball-Control Offense to support a 5th RB (3 starters, 2 backups) but there is some merit for consideration for the Conservative approach also.

Depending upon whether or not the intention is to Run through the middle or go around the outside may dictate whether to carry a 3rd supporting TE, which once resolved leaves the number of remaining Rosta positions (to equal the magic 11 total) of up to 4. In consideration of the fact that the Pro-set is about as ambitious a formation as a Conservative Ball-club should get, then 4 Wide-outs is probably the ideal, although once again the spare TE can double as the last Wide-Out.

WR = 4/3, RB = 4/5, TE = 3.

Ball-Control

All the emphasis here is on Rushing. Although it is probably easier to look at the other positions in order to default the number of RB's to carry on the Rosta. If Passing is a shock tactic rather than the norm then it is unlikely that more than two WR's will ever appear on the field at the same time. This means that a 3rd needs to be carried as a bona fide backup. With the potential to be starting 2 TE's on a regular basis then 3 are definitely needed and possibly a 4th (considering they have both a short life and are prone to the odd injury!) Therefore, (with 3 WR's and at least 3 TE's there should be) up to 5 RB's should be rostered (3 starters, 2 backups).

WR = 3, RB = 5, TE = 3.

The total on Offense, if you have followed the plan is 24.

3 QB's, justification being the star, a 2nd starter and a backup.

3-7 Wide-Outs depending upon philosophical preference.

3-5 RB's and 1-4 Tight-Ends.

2 Centers. Ideally these guys are both going to be reliable starters, although if your starter isn't ideal (too old, average attributes) then your backup will be a young superstar in the making.

Guards. I advocate 4. 2 starters, 1 backup and one for the future Tackles. Ditto the guards.

The Defense.

I advocate :

Down-Line - 6-8 players

Linebackers - 5-7 Players
Def-Backs - 7-9 Players.

After all the hard work that went into explaining the Offense I expect you think this is a bit simplistic. The Down Line should support 3 DT's if you are going to play 3-4 or 4 DT's if you are going to play 4-3. Bearing in mind that you could be fielding up to 4 Down Linemen at a time then you need at least 6 on the Rosta, so the Down-Line should be 6-8 in depth.

The Linebackers have a significantly lesser role under the PAFL revamp, now that options for Nickel and Dime exist. It could be that YOUR idea of fielding a Defense involves one(Dime) two(Nickel) or 3(4-3) Linebackers and that is as much as you'll ever need. Fair enough, you can reduce the LB's to 5 (3 starters, 2 backups) and add an eighth Down Lineman and an eighth DB. So depth should be 5-7. Six is possibly the best compromise option, which will allow you to field up to 4 (with 2 backups) so long as you don't suffer any injuries.

As for the DB's, there will no doubt be occasions when you want to play the Dime option and when you do you will be using 6 DB's. On the basis that during any game you could lose one Safety and one Cornerback to injury there is some justification for having 8 DB's on the Rosta (6 starters, 2 backups) in the first place. So, depth should be an absolute minimum of 6 (to field 4), 7 (if you want to play the Nickel) or 8 (if you intend to play the Dime) and don't forget that ANY injury could reduce your capacity to field the Nickel or Dime options!

That makes a grand total of 24 on Offense, 21 on Defense and 2 kickers

Special Team requirements.

Do not forget that you should have up to 4 kick-returners. Some Coaches collect them like they are going out of fashion and some Coaches incorporate them as an afterthought. Personally, I believe that 4 is the optimum figure. Whether your Kick-Returners are specialists, or actually hold down a starting job somewhere else on the Team isn't really important. The Rule book states that a KR CANNOT be injured on Kick-Return Duty, so using a starter only poses problem if he gets hurt whilst doing his day job.

0.5 - Weighting Your Rosta Positions.

Assuming that you have so far recognised/identified the philosophy that best suits your style of leadership and you have also now decided upon the optimum Rosta distribution the next step in the process is to establish exactly what level of attribute you are prepared to accept in each (ALL 47!) positions. i.e. V.GOOD-GOOD principle Wide-out, GOOD-A.AVE 2nd Wide-Out, GOOD-AVE, A.AVE-AVE and finally AVE-AVE as your 5th Wide-Out.

Then, and only then, can you finally begin to compare the Players you currently have on the Rosta with your ideal of the acceptable norms. I will not try to further explain or justify this approach just yet, I'll detail it first outlining the advantages and demonstrate how much easier life becomes when you are thinking about TRADing, DRAFTing, COACHing, FIELDing and CUTting later.

Assuming that AVE(average)=0, A.AVE(above average)=+1, GD(GOOD)=+2 etc.

I offer these attribute levels as suggested ideals to aim for:

THE OFFENSE:

QUARTERBACK:	STARTER	+9	(BRILL-V.GD-A.AVE) age	4-9
	BACKUP	+6	(V.GD-V.GD-AVE) ideal age	0-3
	3rd STRING	+3	(GD-A.AVE-AVE) ideal age	5-10
RUNNING BACK:	STARTER	+6	(EX-GD or V.GD-V.GD)	2-6
	STARTER	+4	(A.AVE-V.GD or GD-GD)	2-6
	3rd string	+2	(A.AVE-A.AVE or GD-AV)	0-3
WIDE RECEIVER:	4th string	0	(AV-AV)	5-10
	STARTER	+6	(EX-GOOD)	3-10
	STARTER	+4	(V.GOOD-A.AVE)	2-10
	3rd string	+2	(GOOD-AVE)	0-10
TIGHT END	4th string	+1	(A.AVE-AVE)	0-2
	5th string	+0	(AVE-AVE)	0-10
	STARTER	+6	(V.GOOD-V.GOOD)	3-6
	BACKUP	+3	(GOOD-A.AVE)	2-4
CENTRE:	STARTER	+6	(V.GOOD-V.GOOD)	4-10
	BACKUP	+3	(A.AVE-GOOD)	2-5
GUARD	STARTER	+4	(GOOD-GOOD)	4-9
	STARTER	+4	(GOOD-GOOD)	4-9
	3rd string	+2	(GOOD-AVE)	2-10
	4th string	0	(AVE-AVE)	0-10
TACKLE	STARTER	+4	(GOOD-GOOD)	4-10
	STARTER	+3	(AVE-V.GOOD)	4-10
	3rd string	+2	(AVE-GOOD)	3-10
	4th string	+1	(AVE-A.AVE)	0-10

O.K quick explanation. These figures are largely MY ideal and so you have to come to terms with what YOUR ideals are. That said I think that my figures are both modest and to a large degree virtually unattainable. The important thing is that you review what YOUR ideals are and then you'll be in a position to set about attaining them.

Note, Don't be ridiculously over-ambitious, be realistic and bide your time, remember, patience is a virtue.

AND THE DEFENSE:

DEFENSIVE TACKLE:	STARTER	+5	4-10
	STARTER	+3	3-10
	3rd string	+1	0-10
	4th string	0	0-10
DEFENSIVE END:	STARTER	+5	4-10
	STARTER	+3	3-10
	3rd string	+1	0-10
LINEBACKERS:	STARTER(OLB)	+4	4-10
	STARTER(OLB)	+4	3-10
	STARTER(ILB)	+4	4-10
	STARTER(ILB)	+4	3-10
	BACKUP(OLB)	+2	0-10
	BACKUP(ILB)	+2	0-10
CORNERBACKS:	STARTER	+6	4-10
	STARTER	+4	3-10
	STARTER(Nickel)	+2	5-10
	BACKUP(Nickel)	0	0-10
SAFETIES:	STARTER	+6	4-10
	STARTER	+4	3-10
	STARTER(Dime)	+2	5-10
	BACKUP (Dime)	0	5-10

Again these figures are pretty subjective and really require your own thought processes on exactly what you are prepared to settle for, bearing in mind that for each coaching hour you set aside for the Offense, you are denying the Defense!

Finally, SPECIAL TEAMS:

RETURNERS:	STARTER	+2	0-10
	STARTER	+1	0-10
	BACKUP	0	0-10
	BACKUP	0	0-10
PLACE KICKER:	STARTER	+6	3-10
PUNTER:	STARTER	+4	3-10

I recommend 4 Returners, some Coaches like to use starters (from their regular positions) some coaches prefer to use non-starters, I have no preference.

One Kicker is enough, but he needs to be a bit special

One Punter is enough, and he needs to be eminently capable.

The age for Special Teamers is not really terribly important.

The Ideal Age Ranges suggested are just that, Ideal. It is highly unlikely that you will ever get anywhere even remotely close to what YOUR IDEA of ideal ages are but, at least by having a defined target you will always know what you are striving for. Without a plan to work all sorts of things can go wrong.

For example if Coach X writes, calls, faxes or electronically contacts you with the TRADE of the century the immediate impression is to accept unconditionally. If you take the time to see where PLAYER X actually fits into the greater scheme of things several possibilities exist.

- 1 - He is overqualified, I wouldn't dream of actually Coaching a Player that high.
- 2 - Coach X wants 4 of my rubbish Players, but they are KEY backups against injury
- 3 - I don't actually need a new GUARD.
- 4 - By trading out Players A, B, and C means I have to Coach Players D and E
- 5 - The addition of Player X unbalances my Team, I'll have to Coach others up!
- 6 - (if either 1 or 5 apply then,) what is his motivation for offering such a good player? (check out his past injury record)

Alternatively, because you have a weighted Rosta and you DO KNOW exactly what you are striving for, when Coach X comes in with his offer you are far better placed to overview, at a glance, exactly what he is asking you to give up and also exactly what players you consider to be more expendable. This is where subtle negotiation can make the difference between a GOOD TRADE and a GREAT TRADE. However, the section on TRADING is documented later on!

Another important message I want to get across for emphasising the benefit of weighting your Rosta is this. When, (and the pre-step steps, labelled 0 are almost over) you actually get down to inserting the currently Rostered Players into the weighted Rosta positions you will notice two things.

- 1- the surprisingly high number of positions that still need to be filled.
- 2- the number of veteran and dodgy AVE Players that fit only too well into some of the minor roles and key backups positions.

The major relevance of this will become more apparent when reviewing the next section, BALANCING YOUR ROSTA, but the important thing is that it should help you identify the major strengths and weaknesses of YOUR Team and allow you more time to develop the squad efficiently.

STEP - 1.0 - Squad Evolution, not Revolution

The Step 1 presentation is all about developing your squad.

1.1 ROSTA Balancing

You have finished with all of the pre-package preparation and reached the stage where your start up kit (or new Season start-up) has arrived. The next phase of activity (finally) involves taking a good look at what you have and establishing the quality of your Rosta, your starters, your back-ups and deciding a) where you have some gaps to fill and b) the construction of a Coaching plan to get the best from what you have. First of all let's start with what you have:-

I want you to look at your Rosta differently from the way in which you are familiar:

For Example I am using the format that you are familiar but not necessarily a Rosta you may be familiar with.

PAFL 1 - NFC EAST CHAMPIONS - PHILADELPHIA EAGLES (Season IV).

QUARTERBACKS:				DEFENSIVE TACKLES					
11 M. Washington	V.GD	V.GD	B.AV	2	70 Joe Wolf	AV	PR	2	
13 Jeff Brady	GD	GD	AV	0	71 T. Stedman	A.AV	A.AV	3	
15 Neil Lomax	GD	A.AV	AV	5	72 Bill Maas	V.GD	GD	4	
RUNNING BACKS				DEFENSIVE ENDS					
31 Timmy Smith	GD	A.AV		5	75 M. Clayton	GD	GD	3	
33 Slip Watkins	AV	AV		1	78 R. Dent	A.AV	GD	5	
34 Allen Pinkett	AV	AV		7	90 M. Golic	B.AV	A.AV	8	
38 Tim Vesling	V.GD	V.GD		3	LINEBACKERS				
WIDE RECEIVERS				50 F. Young	GD	AV	GD	5	
80 Larry Webster	AV	AV		0	51 K. Greene	AV	A.AV	AV	8
81 Eddie Brown	A.AV	B.AV		6	53 T. Millikan	AV	A.AV	AV	2
82 Steve Largent	GD	A.AV		3	54 W. Smith	V.GD	GD	GD	4
84 Carl Bland	B.AV	GD		8	55 J. Kohlbrand	AV	A.AV	GD	5
TIGHT ENDS				56 Rod Martin	GD	PR	B.AV	10	
86 Jim Riggs	V.GD	V.PR		11	59 Tim Green	A.AV	GD	A.AV	8
87 Dana Wells	AV	GD	GD	2	CORNERBACKS				
89 Dan Plocki	AV	AV		2	42 D. Beasley	GD	V.GD	A.AV	3
CENTERS				44 B. Baker	A.AV	AV		0	
57 Mike Timpson	A.AV	V.GD		2	46 D. Brown	GD	GD	3	
58 Dwight Stephenson	B.AV	A.AV		11	48 L. Washington	A.AV	A.AV	8	
69 Bill Mackall	A.AV	A.AV		2	SAFETIES				
GUARDS				20 G. Blackwood	B.AV	B.AV		11	
62 Nick Haden	GD	GD		6	22 A. Garczynski	V.GD	GD	B.AV	3
65 Tim Vogler	AV	AV		11	24 B. Bussey	AV	AV	5	
67 Max Montoya	GD	GD		5	26 Kim Phillips	GD	GD	2	
68 Tracy Rogers	GD	AV		2	PLACE KICKER				
TACKLES				03 Mark Mathis		GD	GD	3	
60 Bill Fralic	AV	V.GD		6	PUNTER				
61 Mike Kenn	AV	AV		8	08 Chris O'Malley	AV	V.GD	3	
63 Glevin Cadres	AV	A.AV		0					
64 Curt Wilson	A.AV	GD		2					

So, what is immediately apparent? QB's O.K. Trade potential?, RB's good, but a bit thin, WR's weak, O-Line good, down line good but no depth, LB's strong, DB's strong, kickers have much promise, subject to a little Coaching. NOW, lets see the SAME Rosta balanced
A Typical Rosta, In a Different Order!

#	NAME	AGE	POST	ATTRIBUTES			S	B	T	C	RANGE
86	Jim Riggs	11	TE	V.GD	PR		WR3				10+
65	Tim Vogler	11	GD	AV	AV			GD4			10+
20	G Blackwood	11	SF	B.AV	B.AV			SF4			10+
56	Rod Martin	10	LB	GD	PR	B.AV		LB7			10+
85	Carl Bland	8	WR	B.AV	GD			TE2			10+

61	Mike Kenn	8	OT	AV	AV			OT3			9+
90	Mike Golic	8	DE	B.AV	A.AV			DE3			9+
51	K. Greene	8	LB	AV	A.AV	AV		LB6			9+
59	Tim Green	8	LB	A.AV	GD	A.AV	LB3				9+
48	L. Washington	8	CB	A.AV	A.AV		CB3				9+

34	A. Pinkett	7	RB	AV	AV			RB3			8+
81	E. Brown	6	WR	A.AV	B.AV		WR4				8+
62	N. Haden	6	GD	GD	GD		GD1				8+
60	Bill Fralic	6	OT	AV	V.GD		OT1				8+
50	F. Young	6	LB	GD	AV	GD	LB2				8+

15	N. Lomax	5	QB	GD	A.AV	AV	QB2				7+
31	T. Smith	5	RB	GD	A.AV		RB2				7+
67	M. Montoya	5	GD	GD	GD		GD2				7+
78	R. Dent	5	DE	A.AV	GD		DE2				7+

55	J. Kohlbrand	5	LB	AV	A.AV	GD	LB4				6+
24	B. Bussey	5	SF	AV	AV			SF3			6+
72	Bill Maas	4	DT	V.GD	GD		DT1				6+
54	W. Smith	4	LB	V.GD	GD	GD	LB1				6+

38	T. Vesling	3	RB	V.GD	V.GD		RB1				5+
42	D. Beasley	3	CB	GD	V.GD	A.AV	CB1				5+
03	C. O'Malley	3	PU	AVE	V.GD		PU				5+
46	Dave Brown	3	CB	GD	GD		CB2				5+

11	M Washington	2	QB	V.GD	V.GD	B.AV	QB1				4+
89	Dan Plocki	2	TE	AV	AV			TE3			4+
70	Joe Wolf	2	DT	AV	PR			DT3			4+
33	S Watkins	1	RB	AV	AV			RB4			4+

It is the same Rosta but this time arranged in AGE order, AGE being the critical factor. The columns represent # (shirt number), name, Age, position, abilities and S (=Start position i.e. WR2 is 2nd Wide Receiver), B (=Backup position i.e. GD3 is 3rd Guard), T (=Trade bait, i.e. what you do not need, but someone else might), C (=Cut, i.e. no good to you, or anyone else) and finally RANGE, of ideal ages, so that you are neither top heavy nor bottom heavy.

This is an important concept!! What difference does it make what age your players are? It is very important that you have a good mix of enthusiasm (youth) and experience. Look at any NFL ball-club they have both good old uns and good young uns and a fair few in between that are not young, not good and not old. You need to adopt a similar mentality, you cannot have 47 superstars, what you are far more likely to have is several good veterans and several good youngsters and an awful lot of average guys making up the numbers!

The final few names on the list are carefully chosen. i.e. everyone you have seen documented so far is either beyond coachable age (in the 4+ veteran age group) or have reached an acceptable playing level beyond which you simply can no longer afford to speculate the hours. So what remains are your coachable future superstars. Ideally, none of them are actually starting yet (highly unlikely), however, here is rough guide to coaching them, starters first, oldest next (i.e. the 3-year vets) and finally whatever you have left into the two-year men, one-year men and the Rookies.

The end of my Rosta looks like this:

#	NAME	AGE	POST	ATTRIBUTES			S	B	T	C	RANGE
71	T Stedman	3	DT	A.AV	A.AV		DT2				3+
75	M Clayton	3	DE	GD	GD		DE2				3+
22	A Garczynski	3	SF	V.GD	GD	B.AV	SF1				3+
82	S.Largent	3	WR	GD	A.AV		WR1				3+

08	C O'Malley	3	PL	GD	GD		PL				2+
26	Kim Phillips	2	SF	GD	GD		SF2				2+
87	Dana Wells	2	TE	AV	GD	GD	TE1				2+
57	M Timpson	2	C	A.AV	V.GD		C1				2+

53	T Millikan	2	LB	GD	AV	AV				LB5	1+
68	T Rogers	2	GD	GD	AV					GD3	1+
64	C Wilson	2	OT	A.AV	GD		OT2				1+
69	W Mackall	2	C	A.AV	A.AV					C2	1+

44	Bill Baker	0	CB	A.AV	AV					CB4	0+
13	Jeff Brady	0	QB	GD	GD	AV				QB3	0+
80	L Webster	0	WR	AV	AV		WR2				0+
63	G Cadres	0	OT	AV	A.AV					OT4	0+

The amount of time needed to effect the improvement of a player attribute is covered in a future section.

1.2 - Player Performance Ratings

Just because YOU have age ordered the Rosta and written in the perceived starters, back-ups, Trade-bait and useless articles making up the numbers doesn't mean to say that you are right!

Once I had conceived this idea of "Balancing" a Rosta to help a Coach sort out the structure of his Rosta and the direction of squad development through Coaching and Trading I found that I needed something else to help me decide on the borderline cases that I just wasn't sure about. The method I conceived proved to be so effective that I now apply it to the entire squad to help me make decisions about fielding players and also about the Trade value of my players and the players that I am after when Trading.

The formula is not very far removed from the usual deciding factors that have helped all Coaches select their starting line-ups since PAFL began. Here it is:

Where Average (attribute) = 0, A.AVE = 1, GOOD = 2, V.GD = 3 and so on.
The usual criteria when a Coach is preparing his starters for an up-coming fixture.

Plus an experience factor of the Player related to his age.

Where AGE 0=0(bonus factor), AGE 1-3 = 1, AGE 4-6 = 2, AGE 7-9 = 3, AGE 10+ = 5.

Taking the Player from the very top of my list, Jim Riggs, his figures would be:-
 $V.GD(3) + V.PR(-3) + AGE\ of\ 10+(5) = Player\ Performance\ Rating\ of\ 5\ (3-3+5)$.

I am aware that the argument against this formula is that

"Who wants to field an AVE-AVE 11-year Safety when I have a V.GD-V.GD Rookie who makes a lot of tackles and a fair share of interceptions?". Good Question!

Check out the Performance rating:

VET Safety = $0(\text{first attribute}) + 0(\text{second attribute}) + 5(\text{Age bonus factor}) = 5$

Rookie Sfty = $3 + 3 + 0 = 6$.

The point I am trying to make is that there is a smaller performance rating differential than you might think. And if the Rookie is, for example, A.AVE-V.GD ($1+3+0=4$) when he comes out of the DRAFT and before you Coach him up to the V.GD-V.GD attributes, then I reckon that the Vet is the superior Player, at least in the short-term and virtually an equally good performer after the Coaching.

If we look at the entire Rosta I think you should start to see a pattern emerge where the obvious (highly attributed) Players will produce the best performance ratings. At the bottom of the pile you will have most of the low attributed youngsters(future superstars?). The greatest advantage of performance rating your squad is seeing how high the numbers can get for your veterans in the upper and mid-section of the performance rated table which (and this is the point I am trying to get across) might make you feel better about hanging on to some of them and may even make you think twice about fielding some of them.

An important point to note here is that the Quarterback and the Linebacker have a third attribute. When assessing your Players you will have to disregard the third attribute to maintain a fair balance.

In the case of the QB you can comfortably ignore the Rushing (as discussed in the step aside section) and for the LB ignore the TACKLING skill of an Outside LB and the PASS DEFENSE of an INSIDE LB (once again you may refer back to the Step(Aside) notes for clarity.

The entire Rosta, performance rated and presented in rated order.

#	NAME	AGE	POST	ATTR1	A2	A3	S	B	R
11	M Washington	2	QB	V.GD	V.GD	B.AV	QB1		7
54	W. Smith	4	LB	V.GD	GD	GD	LB1		7
38	T. Vesling	3	RB	V.GD	V.GD		RB1		7
72	Bill Maas	4	DT	V.GD	GD		DT1		7
62	N. Haden	6	GD	GD	GD		GD1		6
59	Tim Green	8	LB	A.AV	GD	A.AV	LB3		6
42	D. Beasley	3	CB	GD	V.GD	A.AV	CB1		6
22	A Garczynski	3	SF	V.GD	GD	B.AV	SF1		6
67	M.Montoya	5	GD	GD	GD		GD2		6
60	Bill Fralic	6	OT	AV	V.GD		OT1		5
48	L. Washington	8	CB	A.AV	A.AV		CB3		5
46	Dave Brown	3	CB	GD	GD		CB2		5
75	M Clayton	3	DE	GD	GD		DE2		5
08	C O'Malley	3	PL	GD	GD		PL		5
86	Jim Riggs	11	TE	V.GD	PR		WR3		5
65	Tim Vogler	11	GD	AV	AV			GD4	5
15	N. Lomax	5	QB	GD	A.AV	AV		QB2	5
31	T. Smith	5	RB	GD	A.AV		RB2		5
78	R. Dent	5	DE	A.AV	GD		DE2		5
55	J. Kohlbrand	5	LB	AV	A.AV	GD	LB4		5
26	Kim Phillips	2	SF	GD	GD		SF2		5
57	M Timpson	2	C	A.AV	V.GD		C1		5
56	Rod Martin	10	LB	GD	PR	B.AV		LB7	5
85	Carl Bland	8	WR	B.AV	GD			TE2	4
50	F. Young	6	LB	GD	AV	GD	LB2		4
51	K. Greene	8	LB	AV	A.AV	AV		LB6	4
03	C. O'Malley	3	PU	AVE	V.GD		PU		4
82	S.Largent	3	WR	GD	A.AV		WR1		4
64	C Wilson	2	OT	A.AV	GD		OT2		4
13	Jeff Brady	0	QB	GD	GD	AV		QB3	4
61	Mike Kenn	8	OT	AV	AV			OT3	3
90	Mike Golic	8	DE	B.AV	A.AV			DE3	3
34	A. Pinkett	7	RB	AV	AV			RB3	3
71	T Stedman	3	DT	A.AV	A.AV		DT2		3
87	Dana Wells	2	TE	AV	GD	GD	TE1		3
69	W Mackall	2	C	A.AV	A.AV			C2	3
53	T Millikan	2	LB	GD	AV	AV		LB5	3
68	T Rogers	2	GD	GD	AV			GD3	3
20	G Blackwood	11	SF	B.AV	B.AV			SF4	3
81	E. Brown	6	WR	A.AV	B.AV		WR4		2
24	B. Bussey	5	SF	AV	AV			SF3	2
89	Dan Plocki	2	TE	AV	AV			TE3	1
33	S Watkins	1	RB	AV	AV			RB4	1
44	Bill Baker	0	CB	A.AV	AV			CB4	1
63	G Cadres	0	OT	AV	A.AV			OT4	1
80	L Webster	0	WR	AV	AV		WR2		0
70	Joe Wolf	2	DT	AV	PR			DT3	-1

Players with a performance rating in double figures in NFL terms would be Bruce Smith, Reggie White, Barry Sanders, Michael Irvin, Jerry Rice (to name but a few).

In PAFL terms ALL of the guys on your Rosta with 7-9 ratings should be Playing.

The 4-6 ratings make up the rest of the Team and the majority of the back-ups.

The 1-3 rated Players are your future(uncoached) young superstars.

The 0-3 rated Players (including the old guys this time) are the guys you should be off-loading.

O.K. Lets take a little time out to reflect. So far, under the STEP 0 and early Step 1 presentations, I have outlined and demonstrated a number of tabular formats:

Step 0:

1. The Positional Requirements dictated by your Philosophies (DISTRIBUTION)
2. The Positional Requirements Rosta with ideal attributes (WEIGHTED)

Table 1 you should be able to assemble for yourself.

Table 2 you should be able to realistically compile (without reference to what you already have!)

Step 1:

3. The actual Rosta as you know it (albeit with an unfamiliar squad)
4. The Rosta rearranged into descending order by ages (BALANCED)
5. The Rosta rearranged into Performance rated order (ASSESSED).

Table 3 you all ready know and love

Table 4 will require some firm decisions about players that will have to go ABOVE the Coachable Line even though they still be of Coachable age. And then you will be left with a group of Players for Coaching with no argument about priorities or ifs and buts.

Table 5 might be new to you as a concept and even if you don't like the idea I suggest that 10 minutes with a blank sheet of paper and pencil to scribble it out might just open your eyes to the potential value of one or two Players you might otherwise have written off. And possibly turn up one or two Players that you had high hopes for perhaps seemingly beyond viable salvage (too expensive to coach).

1.3 - Getting Started, the Building Blocks Approach

Now that I have introduced the concept of Weighting the Rosta it is important to note the way to go about achieving the desired result.

MOST Coaches, given a very average New Team, (e.g. New PAFL start up) would

DRAFT/TRADE/COACH towards

- 1 - An outstanding QB
- 2 - Some decent Receivers
- 3 - A good RB, to take some of the heat off
- 4 - A workable set of DB's
- 5 - A startable DT
- 6 - Maybe a kick-returner of some note
- 7 - A Pro-Bowl LB
- 8 - A couple of decent O-Linemen
- 9 - A Kicker that can stand unaided
- 10 - A Punter
- 11 - A quick overview of the Team Mods

Rosta building (and this is a tough thing to do) should be built from the bottom up!

FIRST - the Special Teams. It is the SMALLEST Unit and will therefore take the least amount of time to complete. It can win games for you, A consistent Long Punter to clear your lines, an accurate kicker that will put points on the board and a set of Returners that remain a persistent threat, even on your worst days.

SECOND - The Defense. Quality DB's and Down Linemen are a must, they are your first and last lines of Defense. On the Plus side they have fewer attributes than the LB's, which should come at the back of the queue, after the Offense.

THIRD - The Offense. This starts with the O-Line. It is no use having an All-Pro QB if he is risking life and limb at every snap.

FOURTH - The QB. Your field general, once he has the relative security of a safe Line to work behind can make things happen even with a modest set of receivers and RB's.

FIFTH - An Impact Player. Your choice, either an outstanding WR, TE or RB will take the heat and the bulk of the oppositions attention allowing the average guys to put in match-winning performances.

SIXTH - The Team Modifiers. These should really be an on-going concern and in truth you should not be starting from scratch. Coach Toughness when your Morale is low, Coach Defense to compensate for weak LB's, Coach Offense to compensate for deficiencies and Special Teams to give your guys an edge.

SEVENTH - The rest of the Offense to a reasonable standard to help you to win games.

LAST - The Linebacking crew.

1.4 - A Coaching Plan

This would seem to be an opportune time to introduce the concept of a Coaching Plan, after all, those of you that have managed to follow what is going on up to this point will have realised that the Coaching Plan has kind of written itself.

Your tough choices have been made, players cut for whatever reason, and Players placed above that magic line as acceptable backups or starters but inconceivable as coachable on the basis that there just are not enough hours to go around. You have even managed to define the running order for coaching, 3-year starters, followed by younger starters with the remainder going to the young non-starters. Of course, some of you out there are going to think that 4-year and even 5-year men are not beyond coaching and I confess that I do not altogether disagree. However, come Post-SUPERBOWL ageing time and it is conceivably these guys that you have worked so hard to improve that are going to go backwards on you. So, this is really a decision that you have to make. Everything I have documented holds good and true, it is just that you will find that your magic cut-off line is higher up the page for your age ordered Rosta. Perhaps when it reaches the stage where it has 12 names above the line and 35 below the line you might like to think again.

So far, and it is not an oversight, I have not covered in any great depth the sort of hours you should be dedicating to the Team Mods (OFF, DEF, TOUGHNESS and SPECIAL TEAMS). First of all I want to establish TWO ideas.

ONE - There are Twenty Coaching Weeks guaranteed (4-pre-season, 16-regular) and 600 available Coaching hours. 600 divided by 20 is 30. I therefore suggest that Coaching hours be used a rate of 30 Coaching hours per week.

TWO - Each attribute improvement will require 30 coaching hours. This is not strictly speaking true, it will actually take somewhere between 5 - 50, but 30 is at least a conservative estimate for assessing what you can expect to achieve from a season long coaching plan BEFORE putting it into effect. It also means that if you coach 30 hours per week for 20 weeks at 30 coaching hours per attribute improvement then you should reasonably expect to see one improvement per week.

So, onto the thorny question of Team Mods. I consider them to be not unlike any other attribute in that I dedicate blocks of 30 hours per Team Mod spread over three consecutive weeks of Coaching. I also like to think that my Team Mods are improving year on year and so in order to achieve this against the general wind down effect that is built into the PAFL Programming, I allocate 30 hours to the 4 Team Mods and an additional 30 hours to one of them, making a grand total of 150 (or 25%) hours. I think this is probably a minimal figure that pretty much stems the reverse flow without actually pushing me ahead towards the A.AVE and GOOD ratings that I would like to achieve.

Coaching the Team Modifiers is not unlike Coaching the Players in that ANY hours input WILL improve the target. What is less apparent, for Players and Mods alike, is the appreciable difference. i.e. after X number of hours your Player shows an attribute improvement from A.AVE to GOOD. It will, potentially, take a good deal more hours to see a similar result in the Mods AND it may be temporary as a result of the general wind-down in Modifiers. However, that said, think of your Mods in terms of percentages with, for example 40%-60% representing AVERAGE. If you are at 58% whilst your Opponent is at 44% you may both be AVERAGE but your Team is far superior! So don't shy away from Coaching the Mods, even if they NEVER seem to get above average, the Coaching WILL be making a difference.

The timing for using the Team Mod Coaching in 30 hour (3 consecutive week blocks) can be quite important. I shall give you a couple of pointers:

OFFENSE -

A number of Coaches like to put OFFENSE at the head of the list in terms of priority. Personally, I think it is neither the highest nor lowest priority but one of the middling requirements.

Tell-Tale signs for the need to input Coaching hours:

- A general drop off in the 3rd Down Conversion ratio.
- A drying up of points scored in the second-half of games.
- A gradual increase in the average number of punts per game.
- An increase in the number of Field Goal attempts.

DEFENSE -

Generally given a low rating by most Coaches it is usually the Modifier I look to first ("Offenses win games, Defenses win Championships!"). The DEFENSE Team Mod is the one that is going to allow your all-star Defense to play more consistently to their attributes and slow the opposition down enough to permit your own Offense the chance to win the game for you. Tell-Tale signs to Coach Defense:

- The Opposition have long drives late in the two halves.
- Your Play calling (PASS/RUN) is accurate, but does not stop the opposition.
- The opposition exceed their normal average 3rd Down conversion ratio.
- The opposition are not scoring Field Goals against you (converts TD's instead!)

TOUGHNESS -

The TOUGHNESS Mod can be very subjective. To my way of thinking it is the closest thing there is to MORALE. Therefore, in my opinion, when MORALE is low (less than AVERAGE) then TOUGHNESS is the place to go. Tell-Tale signs for Coaching TOUGHNESS:

- MORALE is low.
- Turnovers are killing your Team.
- Injuries during games seem to hurt you more than the opposition (regularly)
- Your Team plays well for 2 or 3 quarters but loses to 4th quarter comebacks.
- The number of Penalties given away starts to drop, (your team is a bunch of wimps!)
- Even the games in which you do well and play well are low-scoring affairs.

SPECIAL-TEAMS -

I confess that this sits at the bottom of my list of priorities but seems to be considered important by a surprisingly high percentage of Coaches. My philosophy, as all ready stated, involves creating the Special-Teams ahead of a Defense and Offense and perhaps for that reason my own Special-Teamers are more competent than most. Tell-Tale signs for Coaching:

- Your Punter is being blocked, regularly.
- Your Field Goal Kicker still does well, but misses short ones more often
- Kick-Return averages plummet.
- Opposition Kick/Punt Returners are notching up long gains and occasional TD's

MORALE -

O.K. I know you cannot Coach this one but in case you did not all ready know, this is how it works. Morale is based upon performance during the last TEN games (including PRE-Season (to a lesser degree) and POST-SEASON Games (to a marginally greater degree)).

It is assessed at the end of each Quarter during a game, so if your MORALE is low then leading a game for three quarters rather than not at all will help. And, for each result that is added to the ten-game running total, one disappears, so you can monitor your progress.

Under the PAFL revamp there is one additional detail to consider: your MORALE is increased (or reduced) not only by the margin of victory (or defeat) but also incrementally relative to the exceptional (or poor) quality of the opposition. i.e. the better the team you beat the bigger the boost (or the worse the team that you lose to, the greater the damage to your Morale).

Getting back to the Coaching Plan. If you have managed to identify your Positional requirements, (Distributed Your Rosta), decided upon the optimum attribute levels your aiming for (Weighted the Rosta) Age Ordered (Balanced) your Rosta, Assessed the quality of the Players on your rosta (RATED) and placed the Players into the best fit positions and decided who goes, who stays, who backs up and who plays then the Coaching Plan should be pretty much looking at you. I have suggested that you should Coach 30-hours per week for 20 weeks. Some Coaches are going to wince at that so I will try to explain the rationale.

TWO points to note - FIRST - In spite of the fact that you now know where every Coaching hour is going BEFORE the Season starts you ought to recognise the need for a contingency plan. i.e. You complete a TRADE in Week 6. The new guy needs Coaching before starting, where do the hours come from? Well, you just rewrite the Age Order Rosta to include the New Guy (before you TRADE, to see if you can accommodate him) and then from that react accordingly. SECOND - If you are unfortunate to suffer from the loss of a key player to injury in week 10 then once again return to your Age Order Rosta and react accordingly by allocating hours to a young back up or perhaps beef up an alternate.

i.e. Your Guards are both GOOD-GOOD. You lose one for the rest of the season. The back up is AVE-GOOD but an 8-year vet, so you have lost a BLOCKING Channel. However, the remaining GUARD is a 3-year vet so you might consider Coaching his BLOCKING to V.GOOD to compensate!

I would also like to add at this point that the Coaching of 4-year and 5-year vets upon RETURN from an injury of up to 5-Weeks to reinstate a lost attribute is acceptable i.e. GOOD-GOOD 5-year Guard returns from injury as GOOD-A.AVE. If you have spent all of your hours as fast as you could then this guy returns for active duty in Week 13, then there will be no hours left for him. However, if you Coach at a rate of 30-hours per week, then you have plenty left to accommodate his need! As for following the Normal Coaching Plan, as identified from your Aged Rosta, it will not be easy, especially in the first 4-8 weeks when you want to get off to a flyer, to limit yourself to just 30 hours per week. My advice is bite the bullet and persevere.

A little tip. When Week 14, 15 and 16 come around, regardless of whether you are Post-Season bound or not you will be down to your last few Coaching hours. Make sure that you do not get yourself into the position where you have three Players all with 10 hours Coaching going into Week 16. That is to say, when you give these three guys the last 30 available hours and none of them improve (because they all need another 5-10 hours) it amounts to a potential 60 hours wasted. To remedy this make sure that week 16 is a scheduled 3x10 Coaching hours into Team mods, or injury

recovery or LAST 10 hours (of 30) into no more than 1 Player if you can help it.

Finally, Coaches have, over the years, argued the case for, and against, Coaching hour blocks. Although I have not actually stated the ideal I have implied blocks of 10. Here is the rationale:

Hours In(i.e. 10) Minus age of Player (i.e.2-year Vet) = X hours received (i.e. 8 hours)

Width of band (i.e. top to bottom difference between one attribute level and another e.g. AVErage to A.AVErage) = 20.

Therefore 2 x 10 hours to a Rookie is an attribute improvement, 2 x 10 hours to a 2-year vet is 16/20ths.

However, 4 x 5 hours to a 2-year Vet is only equal to 12 hours input (i.e. $4 \times 5(-2)$ is $4 \times 3 = 12$). So use 10 hour blocks!

I have no evidence to support my theory that - Hours input minus Age - is the criteria. However, long experience has taught me that younger players coach cheaply whilst older players rise more steeply with age. Therefore my assumptions, whilst not necessarily wholly accurate provide an excellent guide to reality.

There is one notable exception to this rule of thumb and that is for Offensive Linemen. Since the PAFL revamp Offensive Linemen have been declared as longer lived (less susceptible to post-SUPERBOWL ageing), more prone to injury (albeit in theory, principally short-term injuries) and harder to Coach. From recent observations I would go so far as to suggest that Offensive Linemen under the age of 5 have a nominal age of 5. Therefore, they receive only half (input(10) - age(5) = hours received(5)) of the hours invested.

STEP 2 - How To

A number of ideas have been introduced so far without (fortunately) too much of an overlap. That is all about to change! The next group of ideas the "How To" group expounds upon the way in which to go about transacting daily business whilst at the same time seeking to clarify/justify/explain the logistics involved by referring back to previously documented material. The first in the series of How To is the:

2.1 - HOW TO - Build a Rosta

I have all ready outlined what is involved with the Let's Be Philosophical, Distributing Your Rosta, Weighting Your Rosta, Balancing Your Rosta and the Coaching Plan ideas. These simple methodologies should have given your Rosta a direction (towards creating the right specialists in the right areas) but what they haven't as yet provided is a good solid reason for:

- 1- Choosing a particular Offensive or Defensive Philosophy or
- 2 -Helping you determine where the priorities lie in terms of the O before the D or not.

I should just point out that I am not changing either my mind or my opinion where I am seemingly contradicting my earlier statement re: Choosing a Philosophy. I still believe that a Happy Coach is a Coach that has the Team Playing his way to get the results and not winning by any means, even if does mean abandoning his principles. So, where I state here in the How To segment "Choosing a Particular Philosophy" I am only expanding upon what the factors are that go towards helping make a decision.

1 - Choosing a Particular Offensive or Defensive Philosophy

One of the major factors involved here, and this will become a recurring theme to the point of inanity, is a factor that will crop up repeatedly in the coming sections is "Know your Divisional Rivals as you Know your Own Team".

There is perhaps no clearer explanation than the verbal reply I give to just about anybody that takes the time and trouble to ask:

"I am on first name terms with all of my Players. I know their strengths and their weaknesses. I know, before a ball is snapped to start the Season, Who is starting, in what position, who will backup, who is available for Trade and who will be cut if a better Free-Agent is available and I am fortunate enough to acquire their services and who is going to receive the Coaching time down to the very last hour. I know every Players, Shirt number, history (where I Traded /Drafted him from, what position(s) he played last year (and the year before), how many points he has scored, his average performance rating, who would be interested in acquiring him IF I put him up for TRADE, his individual worth to the team and his individual worth to me (in Trading terms once again)."

There may very well be those amongst you that believe an involvement of this depth to be a little eccentric, in which case I suggest you avoid the next paragraph.

I believe that being this close to YOUR OWN Team is essential but what you may find a little harder to accept is that you NEED to be just as close to the daily goings-on for EACH ONE of YOUR THREE/FOUR DIVISIONAL RIVALS!

OK, maybe not as close. But, consider this. HALF of your Regular Season fixtures are against your Divisional Rivals EVERY year. It is this single factor alone that makes Choosing Your Philosophy, Weighting Your Rosta and Building Your Rosta at the very least partially dependent upon what the other guys in your Division are up to. The first Rule (as you will discover when I go into greater depth in later sections) to Winning anything is the Domination of YOUR Division. I shall not expand any further on the subject for now other than to say when Choosing Your Philosophy YOU should DO what you are most comfortable with, but couple your decision with what you expect from the other Coaches in your Division.

i.e. If you are in a Division with 4 Teams, and 3 of them will almost certainly want to play Ball-Control Offense, then will your Death-or-Glory Defense be suited to Play against them? Will your Run-&-Shoot play right into their hands by giving them 50 minutes per game possession time? It's worth considering.

2 - Helping to determine whether to produce the Offense before the D.

I have all ready said (hardly original the first time around!) "Offenses win Games, Defenses Win Championships" However, Once again Your Divisional foes may have an influence in this direction. Assuming that they have all opted for the short-cut to success and produced a Match-Winning Offense that either puts 40 points on the scoreboard, or fails to get on the field (because their own D is so weak) then you might like to consider beefing up your own Offense, to make it a real slugging match, or build the D first, the idea being stop the opposition and then let your own average Offense take advantage of the oppositions weak Defenses. It is a subjective decision and I offer no immediate solution, I only highlight the existence of the potential to aid you in your own decision making process.

I should like to add to this segment on HOW TO Build a Rosta that all that was previously documented as the definitive recipe (Special Teams first LB's last AND from the Coaching Plan notes, 3-year starters followed by 2-year starters etc. etc.) is still as good a way as any. However, if you DO take into account the quality of the Divisional opposition then it just might influence you enough to include a second starting DT, or a 3rd starting Wide receiver in which case it is these guys that will surface in your Coaching Plan. So, even though you may not actually realise it, you have been influenced in your decisions to acquire, use and build the Rosta in certain departments as a result of considering your Divisional neighbours!

2.2 - HOW TO - Select your Starting Line-up

You might think that this is obvious. Look at the Rosta and the starters are there staring you in the face, not necessarily. I have all ready outlined (in Step 1.1 Performance Indicators) a methodology for rating Players which will go some way towards dictating selection. And I intend to discuss this particular aspect further in a later section.

2.3 - HOW TO - Draft for the Future

Drafting is an emotive topic that brings out the beast in most Coaches. The majority of Coaches will tell you that attendance at these events is crucial (even if THEY have never been!) and Drafting is an essential leg-up for squad development/improvement

Well, I have attended a few DRAFTS in my time and I have seen some strange events to say the least. From, the now legendary, "Who wants my V.GOOD-AVE 3-year RB in exchange for a 5th Round Draft Pick?" to the equally extreme "Who wants ALL of my DRAFT Picks in exchange for a 1st, 3rd and 5th pick at NEXT YEARS DRAFT?"

I have 3 distinct ideas/rules for going about DRAFTing.

1-If you have Distributed, Weighted and Balanced your Rosta then you know where your shortages are. Hopefully, none of those shortages are going to be in the key areas of starting positions. If you are lucky then you will figure that you have 3 or 4 Backup positions to fill and if you are unlucky then perhaps it is 8-10 positions to fill including 1 or 2 amongst the starters.

DO NOT DRAFT STARTERS.

If you can use what was a backup, whether he needs additional Coaching or not, OR play a particular player out of position in the short term OR

TRADE in a starter, then these (and I have quoted them in the order they should be considered) are ALL better alternatives to starting a rookie.

This is not as true as it once was and there are reasonable cases for exclusion, particularly now in the short-career positions of WR, RB and TE. Although I would still recommend avoiding the use of rookies it is certainly more acceptable in these positions than in any other. Which is fortunate in that these guys are generally the cream of the DRAFT.

2-DRAFT QUALITY IN PREFERENCE TO POSITIONAL REQUIREMENTS.

If your greatest need is, for example, a starting Guard and you are picking at 20, by which time both of the DRAFT's startable Guards have been snapped up BUT the overall rated 5, a GOOD-A.AVE-GOOD Safety is available what do you do?

It really is quite simple, it is a straight choice between the Safety and an A.AVE-AVE Guard (the best available), you go for the Safety every time. So what if you have 4 Safeties all ready and so what if all of them are good enough to start. You have managed to secure the services of a very TRADABLE asset. It may be that you have to TRADE your V.GOOD-V.GOOD 5-year starting Safety but at least you have a superstar coming through in the rookie AND by TRADING out that sort of quality really ought to attract a starting Guard.

3-If you cannot attend then do not bother to submit a DRAFT selection form (Unless you have a top 5 pick, and then only for the first round). In this way you will always receive the highest rated player as opposed to the player you think you need. When all is said and done you can fill backup gaps with Free-Agents and fill starting positions by TRADING, which you will be better equipped to do if you pick up the best available player in each round at the DRAFT.

IF YOU CANNOT ATTEND, THEN DO NOTHING!

2.4 - HOW TO - TRADE

There are fewer reasons to TRADE than you might think. A number of Coaches make a habit of it and almost as many simply do not get involved at all. With the exception of actually considering starting a DRAFTEE then TRADING is your last resort to filling a starting position. I may not have actually made it as clear as it needs to be in the earlier sections but there is often sufficient evidence that can be produced for the ROSTA of every single Team in the League to suggest that TRADING is either unnecessary or required for one, or in extreme cases perhaps two, places on the ROSTA. Too many Coaches are all too willing to give up valuable assets and/or perceive there to be weaknesses where either there are none or, more commonly, concentrate over much on one aspect of the Team to the exclusion of all others. i.e. this is a better example of Coaches seeking to build Championship Offenses and ignoring an ageing or weak Defense AND failing even to consider personnel changes in the very poor Special Teams Unit.

O.K. I have done my very best to steer you away from TRADING (and if you still don't believe me just check out the last 10 reported TRADES and look at them as if you were first one Coach and then the other that was involved in the deal and I'll bet that for each TRADE you will either fail to see why they bothered OR you will think that one Coach involved must have hypnotic powers whilst the other is a gullible fool in 9 of the 10 transactions!). However, I do readily acknowledge that TRADING does have its uses and plays both a necessary and inevitable part of the game. AND this is how I suggest you go about do the job properly:-

IDENTIFY YOUR NEED (position).

IDENTIFY THE IDEAL (player, that is currently gracing another team)

IDENTIFY WHAT THE OTHER TEAM NEEDS (not what they might WANT)

IDENTIFY WHO YOU ARE WILLING TO GIVE UP (surplus players)

MAKE CONTACT.

1. - Make your offer appear generous (but be realistic)

i.e. You want a GUARD. The ideal is a starter for a Team in the other conference. He is a listed GOOD-V.GOOD 5-year man. You believe that the Team in question needs a quality WR (and fortunately you have an excess). So you offer your AVE-V.GOOD 2-year WR AND a 10-year GOOD-AVE GUARD (after all you have got to replace the starter that you are trading for. When discussing the deal highlight the benefits (a few Coaching hours and hey presto a potential Pro-Bowl WR) and the immediate advantages (no immediate concerns about having to fill the shortage at GUARD.

2. - Do not be deflected (accept the other Coaches terms, allow him to dictate them)

Obviously what you perceive as his weakness may actually seem to him to be an advantage. He may agree to release his GUARD, but only in exchange for your GOOD-GOOD 3-year Safety. That may seem to be reasonable, until he tells you he also expects YOUR GUARD as part of the deal and you realise that this leaves you short at DB (it also leaves you with that excess WR!)

3 - NEVER, NEVER, NEVER TRADE within the Division (it's incestuous!)

Amongst the several good reasons for TRADING one of them is countering and out manoeuvring your Divisional rivals. This is unlikely to be achieved if you merely swap strength and weakness via trade!

2.5 - HOW TO - Win Games

This is obvious, well isn't it? Not necessarily. I will try and outline all of the factors involved, I am afraid this will not guarantee success but at least it might tip the odds in your favour!

Winning is dependent upon several factors and although these factors have differing degrees of significance that can be argued between Coaches until the sun rises I shall present them in no particular order, thus allowing you to draw your own conclusions:

1 - The quality of the opposition.

Quality isn't just about attributes, it's about age, experience, where the players are fielded i.e. starting positions, the Opposition Coach and his tactics, Who is at home/away, Morale, recent form and luck (Turnovers). Look out for the positions, situations and formations that you can take advantage of. Teams that field an excess of Rookies will shine one week and be very dim the next. The principle disadvantage of fielding an excess of youth is that they have a tendency to wilt in the latter stages of games, stamina! So, if you are about to face an all-star Rookie line-up adopt a containing type of Defense to restrict their early effectiveness and a grind-it-out Offense to wear them down and deny the Offense play-time.

If you face a "veteran" team, play a more "Big-Play" type Game-Plan. They will be equal to it, most of the time but you will get your reward.

And, if you face a Veteran, all-star line-up, then you will have to rely on the stats to point the way towards their weakness, and your strength. Don't panic, in the PAFL's four League's the first four Regular seasons has produced only one 16-0 and one 0-16, everybody has an equal chance on the day, IF you field the right Players, employ the right Game-Plan for the occasion and get that element of luck on your side then truly, no-one is invincible!

2 - The quality of the opposition Coach.

A number of fairly decent teams under achieve because (refer back to "...his own little world...") some Coaches pay far too much attention to their own Team and far too little to the opposition. This is really all about Game Plan Preparation, which is covered in the next section. Almost as many Coaches spend too much time worrying over the perceived quality of the opposition and are all too ready to "write off " the odd game here and there because they believe that they could not win in a month of proverbial Sunday's. However, it is the work at it Coaches that on occasion may go just a little Over The Top (with the stats) in their preparations that are Coaching the Over achieving Teams. The ones with little quality on the Rosta but big numbers in the Wins Column. The canny Coach, the one you have got to look out for, is the guy that has a winning career record, usually makes the post-season (against all the odds), and steps up well for the big occasion. His team will probably not win SUPERBOWL, but it is his team that several Coaches at the next Draft will say stopped them dead in their tracks.

3. Tactical Selection and countering the opposition.

Choosing the right Game-Plan has all ready received several references as indeed have the benefits, if not the logistics, of statistical information collection, summary and use.

I have also mentioned the merits of playing on the opposition weakness in preference to using your own perceived strengths. This works both ways. Conceiving Your Own Game-Plan should be a cat-and-mouse tactical battle of wits. Using both your own strengths and the oppositions weaknesses to put together the definitive plan for the occasion is only half the story. You also need to be aware of Your Own deficiencies on Defense and be able to second guess exactly what the opposing Coach will attempt to exploit. This goes back to "knowing your Divisional Rivals as well as you know your own Team" and also "The quality of the opposition Coach". As I mentioned in the section on Coaches some like to fiddle with their Offensive Game-Plan to give it a perceived boost without even knowing who they will be Playing next. Some Coaches will spend a great many hours drawing up the blueprint for success in the one-off situation they face. i.e. their next opponent. So you have to sift through a number of factors when prepping your next Game-Plan:-

Who are you playing - the quality of your opponent.

Who is the Coach - the quality of the opposing Coach.

What are your opponents Offensive strengths and weaknesses - for you to counter.

What are your opponents Defensive strengths and weaknesses - for you to exploit.

What are YOUR strengths and weaknesses on Offense - to prep the right Game-Plan for the occasion

What are YOUR strengths and weaknesses on Defense - to give you the best chance of slowing down your opponent.

Picking the right formation for the occasion - don't be afraid to vary the format and keep the opposition on their toes

Keying an opposition impact player - chances are they'll try and key one of yours!

That isn't everything that you will have to consider, but it's a start and it'll give you a feel for what is involved. It is no use believing that because you won your opening fixture 42-0 that the Game-Plan must be wonderful and will therefore beat anybody. On the contrary, the more successful it is, the more necessary it becomes to vary it in order to exploit your next opponent and their attempt to counter it.

4. *Home and Away.*

Over the course of several seasons it will become very obvious that there is a distinct advantage to playing at home, and it should therefore go without saying, a disadvantage to playing on the Road! It is an acknowledged fact that it is built into the PAFL programming.

What is perhaps slightly less obvious is that you ought to be adopting the mentality of an NFL Coach inasmuch that Road games should be all about quelling the opposition, with CONTAIN Defense and BALL-CONTROL Offense and Homers should be a little more ambitious, the odd Hail-Mary, a few more speculative Medium attempts and more aggressive on Defense with a partisan crowd to make life difficult and a slight tweak in favour of the odd Blitz when it is least expected. Don't go overboard here, with an all-out commitment to the air and a D-Plan with nothing but the Blitz. It might give you a first quarter head start as a shock tactic but you will quickly get "sussed" and shot down in the latter part of the game. And, in subsequent games, where if you don't vary your approach you won't even have the shock tactic.

5. Timing .

Something you should be very much aware of as part of your preparation is the structure of your fixture list and the relationship that this has with your MORALE and performance levels. MORALE, as all ready stated, is a reflection of how well, or badly, your team has performed during the last ten Regular season fixtures. A significant factor here can be that six or seven of those fixtures may have been Home games, where with the odds in your favour you really should be building up an impressive string of results and a good head of steam for the upcoming Road games that will balance your fixture list. Or, six or seven Road games that may see your record at somewhere around the .500 mark, the Morale at no better than average and despite the fact that there are several Home games to finish the fixture list a sort of flat feeling going into them. If you are faced with a glut of upcoming Road games it becomes all the more important to conceive that trench mentality, the idea being that your team is not a winning team but a team that is a difficult team to beat. This can help keep you in the hunt for when those Home games start to arrive in the schedule.

6. Luck.

No matter how well prepared you are, or think you are, a lot of games are going to be won and lost as a result of turnovers, penalties and injuries. It isn't possible to play, or expect to play, faultlessly. However, there are a couple of things that you CAN do to tip the balance of luck in your favour. These are:

- a) MORALE. The higher your morale the less likely you are to give the ball up. So, getting your team on a roll tends to perpetuate itself in that success breeds success.
- b) TOUGHNESS. Your toughness modifier modifies the likelihood of receiving injuries, causing injuries, giving up turnovers, collecting turnovers, giving up penalties and receiving penalties. The TOUGHNESS Modifier has a lot to answer for and plays a significant part in your success or downfall!
- c) PLAYER SELECTION. The younger a player, the less reliable he is. A QB will give up

interceptions, a rookie QB will give up more. A Half-Back will drop the ball, a rookie half-back will drop more AND recover less of them. Offensive Linemen will allow the D to get at your QB, occasionally, a young line will have more gaps in it, more often. A Down-Line will fail to make a tackle occasionally and allow a big gain break-out on the ground, a young Down-line will allow this more frequently. The secondary will give up yards, and Touchdowns a young secondary will give up more, of both.

If you have, for example, 2 VG Safeties aged say 1 & 2 and 2 AVE Safeties aged say 7 & 9 then I suggest you play with one youngster and one veteran. The same applies elsewhere on the team. Do not be put off the idea of fielding your youngsters, just temper it so that the starting line-up is sprinkled with it's fair share of experience.

Finally, if you are forced to play with a young Offense, or Defense but hopefully not both, a few extra hours in the team Modifier might just help to even up the odds a bit.

7. The Gameplan.

Once again I reiterate that this has been referenced in several previous sections, so only a cursory footnote to add. If you have opted for a particular Offensive philosophy then your gameplan submissions should always lean heavily in that direction. A Ball-control Offense, if it finds itself 20 points down midway through the third quarter, is unlikely to have much success by going to an all-out passing attack, you just don't have the tools for the job. Similarly, if you an all-out passing team with a 20 point advantage going into the final quarter trying to control the ball probably isn't going to fare too well. Once you make a commitment you have to live or die with it, so play within your boundaries.

NB. I have noticed that a number of Coaches (the aforementioned 'own little world' types mostly) lack the imagination to conceive Defensive Gameplans. It seems to me that quite a few Coaches actually defend against themselves! That is to say that having conceived an Offense based on, for example, 80% Rush on first Down and 80% Pass on second Down they will then defend 80% Rush on first down and 80% Pass on second down as if they were playing against themselves without considering the actual opposition tactics and strategies. Once again you can usually identify these teams as the under performers who do not get the results that you would expect just by looking at their Rosta quality. Also, and this is the bonus, it is a lot easier (although not easy) to identify a team's Offensive strategy than it is to identify their Defensive tactics. If you suspect that your next opponent is one of those that defends against himself you will more accurately be able to 'guess' his defensive strengths and frailties and therefore be able to take advantage of them.

2.6 - How To - Process A Weekly Turn

Your weekly turn package usually averages 21 pages they are, or should be, arranged thus:

- Page 1 - Player Lines (from the last game you played)
- Page 2 - Offense submission sheet (from the last game you played)
- Page 3 - Defense submission sheet (from the last game you played)
- Page 4 - Two-Minute Drill and Tactical Options (from the last game that you played)
- Page 5 - First 2 Quarters of the match report you are expecting
- Page 6 - Last 2 Quarters of the match report you are expecting
- Page 7 - Match summary
- Page 8 - The Blue Sheet Results and Tables
- Page 9 - The Blue Sheet Stat summary Top Ten Tables
- Page 10 - Scouting Reports for games 1-4
- Page 11 - Scouting Reports for games 5-8
- Page 12 - Scouting Reports for games 9-12
- Page 13 - Scouting Reports for game 13-14(or 15 following expansion)
- Page 14 - League news, GM Messages, Trades, Free Agency, Cuts, Address changes etc.
- Page 15 - Team Modifier status, Coaching reports from around the League, Latest injuries
- Page 16 - Your own Rosta
- Page 17 - Your cumulative statistics and player statistic summaries.
- Page 18 - Player Lines (for your forthcoming fixture)
- Page 19 - Offense submission sheet (for your forthcoming fixture)
- Page 20 - Defense submission sheet (for your forthcoming fixture)
- Page 21 - Two-Minute Drill and Tactical Options (for your forthcoming fixture)

If you can arrange these sheets in the correct order without assimilating any information from them (like for instance your result!), so much the better. Now review the package one page at a time in the following manner:

- Page 1 - Check for comments, messages or changes from the GM. Occasionally you will make a mistake. i.e. You will attempt to throw a greater percentage of passes to the second receiver than the first (not permissible!) or you might have made changes on the D from 3-4 to 4-3 and forgotten to add an additional substitute Down lineman (the guy who was the substitute is now nominated as the fourth starter), or you nominate 6 DB's in your 4-3 (4 starters, 2 subs) but when you call a situational Nickel or Dime play you don't have enough DB's on the submission sheet (following an injury).
- Page 2 - Less likely to have any errors, but still possible and therefore worth checking.
- Page 3 - Also unlikely to have an errors but check anyway. I have known the printer to mess up and make my game plan submission look frighteningly unlike my input. However, fortunately, it was just the printer and not the program!
- Page 4 - You will need to check this carefully (particularly true of Page 21, the input version of this sheet) because it is allegedly the most volatile of the four. i.e. it is the one sheet of the four where the GM expects to find the most changes. The listed tactical options are game specific and with each new game you face a new opponent and therefore may adopt new strategies and tactics.

Page 5 - The meat of the submission package!

You should find a nice slim A4 booklet that adequately covers the entire page and read through the page revealing one play at a time. As you progress you should make an effort to call the next play as if you were on the sideline. This gives you the opportunity to learn what to do in similar situations in the future and also, if you are calling most plays correctly most of the time, should be a good indicator that your Team is playing well and that you the Coach prepared them well.

Page 6 - Ditto Page 5. On completion of the game return to page 5 and follow the same process of revealing play by play through to the end of the match, first for your Offense only and then for your Defense only. This time, as you proceed, count the number of occasions your Offensive play calls were correctly matched and incorrectly matched by your opponent.

i.e. 25 D/X 1 & 10 ST 80 RN 5 G,

the D called RUN against your Pass play and you OUT-COACHED them. Count the successes against the failures, convert to a percentage, add O percent to D percent, divide by 2 to calculate your Coach performance rating for the game.

Now you have 3 percentage totals.

1 for Offense game plan strategy,

1 for Defense game plan strategy and

1 for overall game plan strategy.

This is a good indicator of whether you are winning, or losing the battle to out coach your opponents in game plan preparation

Return to Page 5 and read through play by play, first for the Offense and then for the Defense. This time you are looking for the Rushing Plays only. For each of the 4 channels (OL, IL, IR and OR) assuming you use them all, count the number of times you called each one, and the total yardage. Then divide total by attempts for an average Rush per channel. Before you get wildly excited about the 6-yard average on IL, or terribly disappointed about the 2.5 average for the OR, take a look at the opposition line-up, see where their stars are and where you would have expected to do well and where you would have expected to have problems.

This isn't altogether either a valid or valuable statistic in single game plan terms.

However, if you find that your AVE-V.GD Tackle (who blocks about twice per game because you usually Run inside but include the loop to fool the inside Blitz occasionally) or conversely your twice a game blocking Right Guard who is AVE-GD and you usually play the short pass and loop Offense, and this guy is averaging big gains (over several weeks, not just as a one-off) then you might want to feature him just a little more often!

Back to page 5, check thru Offense first Defense second and count up the number of Fumbles (and recoveries) given away by your Offense and caused by your Defense. Transfer these match stats (per player, for your Offense) to the Reverse side of your Rosta, for an on-going indicator to player efficiency and Toughness.

You should find that 50% of Fumbles are recovered by the Fumbler. If you are recovering less than 50% (on Offense or Defense) your Toughness could be in need!

Back to page 5, Offense first Defense second (getting the hang of this yet?)

This time check out the number of passes thrown to each of your Receivers.

Count the times that they catch the ball against a RUN, PASS, NEUTRAL and BLITZ Defense. Keep a running total per player. It might help you decide which way around to field Receivers, to throw more (or less) in conventional Passing/Running situations, feature the Tight-End more/less etc. etc.

Return once more to Page 5, work your way through just the Offense first, Defense second, counting the number of Blitzes and the results.

You should end up with something like:

20 Blitzes, 1 Sack, 3 Scrambles, 4 completions, 4 incomplets (the rest were on Runs) for the Offense, and similar figures for the Defense. This will give you an indicator of the effectiveness of your own O-Line, and the accuracy and success of your Defense.

Page 7 - This is the game summary. It will give you a little more information than the scouting report. In most games this luxury is altogether unimportant, but if it is against a Divisional Rival, you may want to study it a little more closely!

Page 8 - The Blue sheet results and divisional standings.

I use this sheet as my starting point for the collection of data that I input into my statistical summaries. More on that at a later date. What might be of most interest to you is the on-going progress of your future opponents. You can see at a glance their record, their streak, their Coaches career performance, the seasonal Rushing and Passing figures and their seasonal Defensive Rushing and Passing record.

These details should not be overlooked when prepping a game-plan.

Page 9 - The Blue sheet "Stat Attack" listings of popular top ten high-flyers and achievers.

I tend to regard this as "entertainment" and choose not to read too much into these tables. There are one or two notable exceptions. i.e. the top Rushers and Receivers, if members of a near future opponent, may well be the recipients of my "Key" option in an effort to limit their contribution.

Page 10 - The Scouting Reports. Once again a tremendous source of input to the statistician.

I shall provide a comprehensive overview for stats collection and compilation at a later date. Amongst the "short-cuts" to relevant data summaries I shall be suggesting compiling only the data from your future opponents for roughly 4 game weeks. You might like to do this as a "rollover". i.e. In week 5 collect the stats (for the first time) for your week 9 opponent. Also collect the stats (for the second time, having started in Week 4) for your week 8 opponent. Also collect the stats (for the third time, having started in Week 3) for your week 7 opponent. And finally collect the stats (for the fourth time, having started in week 2) for your up and coming week 6 opponent.

This sort of continuity will help you home in and focus on each of your opponents for the next month, dropping one each week (as you play them) and adding one each week (because you are due to play them a month from now). It also does away with a lot of unnecessary clutter, i.e. collecting too much data, too often (as I do!)

Page 11 - Ditto Page 10.

Page 12 - Ditto Page 11

Page 13 - Ditto Page 12.

Page 14 - You shouldn't ignore this page as just general information. It has a lot to offer.

You might identify just the sort of Free-Agent that you have been looking for being cut by another Team. Then again you might spot an address change of a Coach you have been planning to contact with regard to a TRADE, (whilst somebody else with the same idea doesn't spot the address change and posts his offer to the wrong address!). You might spot a gem of knowledge given away by the GM (it has been known to happen!).

Page 15 - This page is important for several reasons. You can monitor the progress (or lack of it) for your own Team Modifiers. You can see and record the coaching trends from around the League. You can see which, if any, of your coaching secrets are being broadcast. You can see the Injury reports, particularly important when involving one of those near future opponents.

Page 16 - A chance to see if your coaching is bearing fruit.

Page 17 - The statisticians dream. A lot of numbers, related to the superstars of your making.
If some of your guys are underperforming you need to ask yourself a few questions.
Is my V.GD Wide-Out being marked by better or more experienced DB's?
Is my Half-Back fumbling too often because my Morale or Toughness (or both) need a boost?
Is my line conceding too many Sacks because they lack experience, or because my Mods (or both) need a boost, because my game-plan is too obvious, or because the opposition make a habit of Blitzing and I played right into their hands?

Page 18 - Player line submission sheet (for your next opponent)

Page 19 - Offense submission sheet (for your next opponent)

Page 20 - Defense submission sheet (for your next opponent)

Page 21 - Two-Minute Drill and tactical Option submission sheet (for your next opponent)

I cannot know for sure whether your current approach and my documented approach are all ready very similar or totally unrelated. However, I have tried to explain and justify my reasoning. So, even if you don't fully agree with my suggestions you can see the merits and perhaps adjust your present methodology to draw the benefits from my way of doing things to enhance your own.

STEP 3 - Preparation, The Truth about Stats.

Each time that you sit down to construct that match-winning game-plan to overwhelm your upcoming opponent you are involved in PREPARATION. The time out on the practise field (COACHING HOURS Spent) and the Team selection (how many Wide-outs, RB's, TE's, DT's, LB's, CB's and Safeties?) represent only a part of the PREP.

Some Coaches will mess about and fiddle with their own strategies regardless of their next fixture, be it Home, Away, against a Divisional Rival, a Running Team, a Passing Team. To them, what is important is only their own little world, the rest do not matter. You can usually identify these Coaches in that they often play straight into the hands of the opposition and have a Rosta that looks an awful lot better than their results.

Some Coaches tend to go overboard with statistical summaries (and that includes ME!) in an effort to identify every strength, and weakness, of the next opponent. Ideally you need to find the happy medium, a set of statistics that outline exactly what you need to know for the occasion. To ensure that you are fully aware of all of the available information, and how to go about collecting it, I will be documenting just about EVERYTHING that can be extracted from the Scouting Reports. However, I do not want to completely put you off the idea of using stats to your advantage so I will also show you the shortcuts that you can use to get only what you need.

3.1 - Offensive Tables

The First port of call when in receipt of a Game-Turn Package is the BLUE sheet detailing the weekly results, Divisional tables, Passing and Rushing stats.

I begin with recording all 28 Teams in Yards Gained (Offense) and Yards Conceded (Defense). I then complete a number of columns in between Team Name and Yardage, most of the information is cumulative and collected from the Scouting Reports. As an example here is one line from the final (week 16) statistics for PAFL 1 - Season IV.

OFFENSE GAINS -

RTING-TEAM- ATTS-COMP-TD-INT-SKS-YDS-%COMP-RUSH-YDS-AVG-TOT-RTD-TDC-FDC-PR-RR-CLOCK
3 EAGLES 516 289 27 24 17 3597 56.01 566 2222 3.93 5819 19 96/232 9/13 4 11 31.27

RTING = RATING, i.e. 3rd of 28.

TEAM=FRANCHISE, i.e. EAGLES.

ATTS=Pass ATTempS.

COMP=Pass COMPlentions

TD=TouchdownS by Passing

INT=INTerceptionS

SKS=SaCKs against your QB

YDS=total number of Passing YarDS

%COMP=Passes COMPlented

RUSH=RUSHing attempts

YDS=Rushing YarDS recorded

AVG=AVerAge carry per RUSH

TOT=TOTal of pass+rush yards

RTD=Rushing TouchDowns scored

TDC=Third Down Conversion ratioFDC=Fourth Down Conversion ratio

PR=Pass Rating(compared to other 27)

RR=Rush Rating(compared to other 27)

CLOCK=time (Offense) spent on field.

PASS RATING is calculated (as in the NFL) as:-

$COMP\% + (PASSYARDS / ATTS) * 5 + (TD's / ATTS) * 400 + 2.5 - (INT / ATTS) * 500 * 5 / 6$

i.e. $56.01 + (3597 / 516 * 5) + (27 / 516 * 400) + 2.5 - (24 / 516 * 500) * 5 / 6 = 75.86$

RUSH RATING is calculated (as in the NFL) as:-

$RUSH YARDS / RUSH ATTEMPTS$

i.e. $2222 / 566 = 3.93$

Here it is, in all of its glory:

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Whilst these stats do have a meaningful contribution to make (they helped me reach a SUPERBOWL), they can be awfully time consuming to compile and, as I have already stated, they are not necessarily accurate in that they represent the entire season and not just the more relevant recent form.

I believe that if you want to be successful then you must compile these stats, but on the plus side, you only need to do it for one team at a time, i.e. your next opponent, and only for about the last four weeks, not for the whole season.

There is a down side to this! Whereas collecting cumulative stats and inputting them into spreadsheet as I have done, or compiling them by hand to a purpose designed pro-forma, as I used to do, what you have is an on-going reference document. However, in order to compile these stats, for just 4 weeks at a time, for one team only, your next oppo, means having to extract ALL of the data from the scouting reports. The Blue sheet is only usable in the first month of the season. Thereafter, the initial stats, yards for and against, are for the entire period and whilst the stats you compile are wholly accurate (assuming you own a decent calculator), what they will not tell you is where your opponent ranks compared to the other 27/29 teams in the league. This is where a League Newsletter can come in very handy and in my previous experience Leagues ONE and FOUR both had excellent periodic publications.

3.2 - Defensive Tables

A similar table can be constructed for the Defense where all the figures relate to yards, points and downs against.

These are good looking tables which are useful for reference and the extraction of a number of other interesting bits and pieces of information. However, unless you are a real stats freak (like me), then in truth these particular tables may be almost totally superfluous

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The most recent form is more relevant than what has happened over the whole year (particularly true in the last month of the season). It should only take about 5 minutes per game week, once you have a bit of practise, so you could compile a month worth of stats for your next opponent in the space of 20 minutes for each of the Offense and Defense.

For Example, the figures above for the Eagles when divided by the number of game weeks (in this case 16) will give an average performance.

On the OFFENSE:

18 of 32 passes completed for 225 yards with 2 TD's 2 INTS and 1 SACK,
35 RUSHes for 139 yards at 3.93 per carry and 1 TD.

On the Defense:

17 of 33 passes complete for 189 yards with 1 TD, 1 INT and 2 SACKS registered.
31 RUSHes for 117 yards at 3.83 per carry and 1 TD conceded.

As a little aside, something I have not documented in the past but intend to remedy in the future, you can also get a feel for the Oppositions preferences in certain situations.

i.e. If your upcoming opponent likes to play a balanced Offense (32 Passes, 35 Rushes) like me but has a first down count heavily in favour of Passing (i.e. 10 Passing first Downs, 3 Rushing first Downs, 1 Penalty first Down, per game) then the chances are He Rushes on the early Downs (First Down, Second Down) and Passes his way out of trouble on the third and short/medium situations. However, if the count for First Downs is more akin to 8 - 7 - 1 then the chances are he (short passes) early and recovers with Rushes on second/third down.

Again, if the balance of plays is 46 passes against 22 rushes the First Down tally can indicate where those Rushes are being used. A count of 12 - 2 - 2 would suggest early whereas a tally of 9 - 5 - 2 would suggest that Rushing is more concentrated on second and short and third and short! Finally, for a Rushing Team, 23 Passes against 43 rushes, you want to know when the Pass is being employed. The First Down tally just might give you a clue. Do not forget to overview the % completion rate and the Pass yardage gained for those 23 passes. It could be that this is a Rushing Team that does not bother with Passing their way out of trouble but just likes to launch a bomb once every 4 plays or so, just to keep the Secondary wary about getting too close to the line of Scrimmage and allow those Rushing Yards to accumulate.

So, the first (two, OFFENSE and DEFENSE) tables can be shortened to just a 3-5 week back view of your next opponent to collect the most recent and therefore most accurate/relevant stats. I should also mention that as well as my plans to extend the statistical summaries I all ready make, to include first downs, I do all ready collect other information that I have not recorded here. These include Penalties, given and received, Penalty yardage, given and received, these being a potential indicator to TOUGHNESS.

Having said that I record all of the STATS for all of the Teams, and having suggested that perhaps you need only concern yourself with your upcoming opponent in this respect, there is an exception to this that you may like to consider. YOUR DIVISIONAL RIVALS.

You will make acquaintances and friends through PAFL. There will be certain Coaches that you will approach first for Trading, advice and the exchange of detailed information. Equally there will be some guys that you take an instant dislike too, some because of a bad Trade deal, or some poor advice, but mostly for no other reason than they are in your Division. In short, they are the enemy!

Referring back to "Know your Divisional Rivals as you know your own Team" it is probably a good idea to keep a VERY CLOSE eye on them. I actually go so far as to PREPARE a GAME-PLAN on their behalf for each game, and look to see what I expect from their opponent and try to forecast the shape of the game as well as the result. In effect I am almost running ALL of the Teams in my Division. Frequently I am right in my forecast and can see exactly how and why they have managed to win, or lose, the game in question. Less frequently I am wrong, in my expectation of their Game-Plan or their opponents Game-Plan, but even when wrong I can manage to establish how and why they got the result that they did.

Ultimately I may not know my Divisional Rivals quite as well as I know my own Team, but in some cases I know my Divisional Rivals better than my Divisional Rival Coaches know their own Team! This amount of effort and insight would be expected of an NFL Coach, something that you and I are not. This dedication of effort will almost certainly reap its rewards in terms of results, but if you are a PBMer looking for pleasure and not pain then maybe this degree of dedication is not only beyond you but beyond your level of comprehension. For Coaches, like myself, that have been prepared to search to the nth degree for their success are liable to the tag of "Anorak, supreme" and whilst I wouldn't normally embrace such a remark, when it is applied to PAFL I hold up my hand and smile and check out the wins column.

3.3 - Preparation, Field Positioning.

The next major compilation involves recording the starting player, in every position for every Team and recording the information in a big book (I have found a Filo Fax to be the most appropriate medium) for each week of the regular Season.

This is the way I have done it for the past four seasons:

EAGLES:

Players	Week Number								
QB's	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	----->
11 M. Washington								S	S
13 Jeff Brady									
15 Neil Lomax			S	S	S	S			
17 B. Esiason									
RB's									
31 Timmy Smith	1	1	1	1	X	X	2	2	
33 Slip Watkins									
34 Allen Pinkett		2	2						
38 Tim Vesling	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	

That should be enough to give you the flavour. In the case of the QB's S=Starter for the RB's 1=Half-Back and 2=Full Back whereas X=injured (and therefore unavailable)

I have also dreamt up some original identifiers for some of the more exotic selections by my peers. i.e I use alpha characters (A, B) to indicate first and second choice when, for example a Wide-out is paired with a Tight-End on Receiving duty. (a 1 and a 2 simply would not really tell the story.)

On the O-Line and on the D I tend to reflect the Players starting positions as being important, i.e. RT=Right Tackle, LG=Left Guard, RD=Right DT, LE=Left Def-End.

The LB's are ORLB(Outside Right LB), ILLB(Inside Left LB) or MLB(Middle LB).

Again, this is a painstakingly (and some might say excruciatingly boring!) task to accomplish. For your benefit I would once again suggest that for your purposes simply going back over the last 3-5 game weeks and compiling the relative positions for only the Team that you meet next is probably sufficient for your game preparations. Once you achieve that you should, as a final check before prepping your game plan, consult the Injury Reports to see what Superstars are going to be missing from the opposition line-up, but just as importantly who will be RETURNING to the opposition ranks!

Here is an example:

My next opponent is the Eagles, this has been their line-up for the last 4 games/weeks.

WR1	LT	LG	C	RG	RT	TE	WR2
GD-A.AV(3)	AV-V.GD(6)	GD-GD(5)	A.AV-V.GD(2)	GD-GD(6)	A.AV-GD(2)	AV-GOOD(2)	A.AV-B.AV(6)
		QB	HB	FB			
		V.GD-V.GD-B.AV(2)	V.GD-V.GD(3)	GD-A.AV(5)			

Immediately it becomes apparent that the QB is well protected behind a strong line, but is a bit short on decent WR's to throw at. The RB's look very good and with that Line to block for them would seem to be the major threat. The stats bear out the fact that this is a Running Team that creates Passing Room by using their twin backfield threat.

The Eagles Defense set up for the last 4 games/weeks:

LDE A.AV-GD(5)	LT V.GD-GD(4)	RT A.AV-A.AV(3)	RDE GD-GD(3)
OLLB GD-AV-GD(6)	MLB V.GD-GD-GD(4)	ORLB A.AV-GD-A.AV(8)	
CB1 GD-V.GD(3)	SS V.GD-GD(3)	FS GD-GD(2)	CB2 GD-GD(3)

Notice that I have also recorded the ages of the Players. this may become a critical factor in deciding which channels to run down, or whether to throw or rush and perhaps even whether or not I should rearrange my front 7 to dissipate their Offensive effectiveness.

This is an apparently well-balanced D with no major strengths or weaknesses.

On the basis that the Secondary is still quite young I would not be completely put off of the idea of throwing the ball at them. And, on the basis that the LB's are old whilst the Down-line is young I would expect to make 2-4 yards rushing most of the time with only a rare break-out. In actual fact this is a surprisingly accurate summation. The Eagles are not the best Run Defense in the League, but they are very competent. And, despite what you may suspect in terms of quality DB's their age, and experience, has frequently been their downfall with a record of pass Defending that could only rank in the teens overall (something like 16th of 28, if memory serves!).

Featuring, Offensive strategies and Offensive Players

As the Season progresses it is possible that certain members of your Offense will appear in the STAT Tables.

i.e. Your principle Wide-out could be the busiest in the League (Most Catches) or perhaps he might make an appearance in the STAT Table courtesy of his average length of gain. Similarly, your Half-Back may be either very busy (number of carries) or very productive (yards per carry) or both! Some Teams FEATURE one Wide-Out, some two, some a Tight-End and some a star, or pair of Running-Backs.

Once the word gets out, your star is listed in the STAT Table, he is more likely to attract special attention, via the "KEY" player option AND/OR if you have been paying attention up to this point, if the player in question is 50%+ of your Offense then there is a very good chance that your Divisional Rivals will be structuring their Defenses with this player in mind!

One of my preferences when prepping game-plans is to largely ignore my own "strengths" and concentrate rather on my opponents weaknesses. There are two basic indicators to a Defenses weak points.

1 - The Tables you have compiled, going back about a month, will tell you whether your next opponent is mostly thrown at or mostly run at. You should be able to extract from these figures a QB Rating (indicating pass efficiency allowed) and an average gain per rush from the line of scrimmage allowed.

For every 10 teams that you have to play you should find, on average, that 3 excel at Run Defense, 5 excel at Pass Defense, 1 excels at both (this makes choosing a strategy a bit tricky!) and 1 excels at neither (they will probably be 1-5 or thereabouts and you will wish you were playing them every week!).

So, whilst you may consider that the Passing game is your strength, it is as well to try and balance your Offense in order to take advantage of an opponents deficiencies. Also, and a surprising number of Coaches fail to appreciate this, if you are constantly altering your game-plan (to exploit an opponents weak link) your upcoming opponent, as part of his game-plan preparations, may see that during the last 4 weeks you have featured the Passing game twice and the Rushing attack twice and

not be able to accurately forecast what you will plan against his team! Considering that YOU may feel the strategy you select is obvious, on the basis that you are playing on a perceived weakness, I am constantly amazed by the number of my opponents that fail to recognise this simple strategic ploy.

The conclusion that I have come to is - if you regularly pick the correct strategy then your Passing game looks good when you pass and your rushing game looks good when you rush because that happened to be the weakness of the opponent at the time. When your next opponent sees the stats and they tell him that you are good at passing AND your team is good at rushing he has an almost unfailing ability to stick with what he believes he is best at and continue to give away the yards on his weakness. It may seem to him to be a nominal success to say that he restricted your power Offense to under 200 yards passing (or 100 yards rushing) but what do you care if you are the one with the extra 1 in the wins column!

2 - When it comes to featuring players I personally am very much in favour of sharing the workload. i.e. distributing the passes fairly evenly and trying not to overload the Running-Backs. I know what you are thinking, that is all very well if you have the personnel! Well I do not necessarily believe that you need a Rosta chock full of superstars to be able to distribute the workload. The most important factor is the Defense in operation that will be lining up against you. There are two major considerations:-

a) - The Down line. You will be facing three, or four, Down Linemen and the chances are that they will either be bloody good (attribute wise) or very experienced. It is possible, but far less likely, that they will be both good players and experienced players. The principle factor when regarding the Down Linemen is their skill factor. If you are thinking about playing a pre-dominantly Rush oriented Offense then the thing to look for (when deciding which channels to Run down) is which of the Down Linemen you are up against has the weakest Tackling skills. Only if all three, or four, are roughly equal do you subsequently worry about the subsequent factors, who is the least experienced and which of my Offensive Linemen are the superior Blockers.

b) - The Secondary. You will be throwing into traffic, either 4, 5 or 6 DB's most of the time (Blitzes may feature a DB). Most teams are going to have 2, 3 or 4 competent DB's, very few are going to have depth. The old guys (10-year AVE) will outperform a youngster (2-year V.GOOD) over the course of a season, but on a game by game basis the youngsters will often submit the better stats. It works both ways, a rookie will pick up more INTerceptions but will also miss more break-up plays and tackles. It is a complicated formula but try this for size: If you have better MODS (O. Vs. D) and you are at home, and you have a decent set of Receivers and a competent QB then you may lose the odd battle but you should win the war. IF, however, you are out-MODed, on the Road with any lingering doubts about the age, or experience of either your Wide-Outs or QB then the chances are that you will win some battles, but not the war!

Once you have completed your assessment and concluded that the odds are for or against you then tailor your plan to exploit your advantage with more Long and medium attempts, OR help to tip the balance back in your favour by opting for Short and Screen passes where you think you will be outgunned by the Opposition Secondary.

The Starting Line-Up

First of all you need to recognise that there are THREE parts to the Season and you need to know that each demands a slightly different approach. First of all there is the :

Pre-Season - You do not have to prove anything during the pre-Season. If I had my way the Pre-Season would just be a bad dream that went away. There is nothing to gain (not even MORALE, assuming you can win all four games) and quite a bit to lose. There are usually 6-12 Season ending

Injuries during the course of a PAFL Season, an average of ONE every other Game Week. So, there is a potential for TWO to occur during the Pre-Season! Why risk it being one of yours?
DURING THE PRE-SEASON, FIELD ONLY THE ROOKIES AND BACK-UPS!

Regular Season - Whatever you believe to be your starting line-up when you fill in a submission sheet for Week One will have changed before the Season is over. This will be because some Players just don't cut the mustard, some players will get hurt, some will get Traded and some stand-ins will get play-time as subs, injury cover or for variety and will earn their starting place on the Team in spite of seemingly inferior attributes.

KEEP AN OPEN MIND ON PLAYER ABILITIES AND DON'T BE AFRAID TO EXPERIMENT.

Post-Season - It is often advisable to keep a Trump Card for Post-Season play. In my three visits to the Post-Season I have unveiled a newly Coached Kick-Returner (who carried a 53-yard punt-return into FG range) I have moved my TE from Right to Left, for the first and only time and I have played a 3-4 D, instead of my usual 4-3, for the first and only time.

These are small details, but anything that can give you an edge in the big-game has to be worth considering. Note, that on each occasion I made one subtle change to the Game-Plan. You cannot expect your Team to grasp a re-arrangement of the O-Line, a reversal of first and Second Wide-out, a change of sides for your TE and a concentration on the Ground game when you have been Passing all year long. Keep the change (singular, not plural) simple.

SAVE A TRUMP CARD FOR THE POST-SEASON, BUT KEEP IT SIMPLE.

As with so much of the documentation by the time I have actually reached the section header, in this case The Starting Line-Up, I have just about covered the topic all ready. So, once again all I shall do here is summarise:

Do not assume the players with the superior attributes are the best players!

Mix up the age balance of the starters, blend in the experience with the young superstars.

Do not be afraid to experiment. Replace an under-performer with a veteran (or occasionally a Rookie).

Do not be afraid to reverse roles. i.e. Average Vet principle Receiver/Safety and Rookie second-string.

DO PLUG UP DEFICIENCIES BY BOOSTING THE MODIFIER.

Step 3.4 - Starting Bonus

The PAFL revamp has made a big difference in terms of both strategic preparation for a game and situational ploys per down within a game. Here a few ideas that are left over from the original PAFL concept that I believe hold good and true.

You will need to be aware of the PAFL Rule-Book limitations on formational changes and Line-ups. These are some of the documented highlights for your consumption, some of it has been written before in various PAFL periodic Newsletters and some of it has previously been documented earlier in this document:

STARTING BONUS - The Offense will accrue a bonus for starting regularly in the same field positions over a lengthy period. This is particularly important for your Offensive Line. The Offensive Line hasn't attracted much by way of comment or opinion up to now mostly because it is the only area of the Team that is measured in negatives rather than positives. i.e. How many SACKS they give up and their specific input to the Ground Game (which is largely overlooked as most people tend to credit a Half-Backs stats strictly to the Half-Back and ignore the contribution of the Offensive Line). I stated earlier in the document that the Offensive Line is the first part of the Offense that needs building, after all how long can you expect your all-pro QB to survive behind a leaky line? The other members of the Offense will generally tend to be fairly consistent anyway, after all most Teams do not have the luxury of multiple QB's, Wide-Outs and Backs to choose from. It is hard enough to establish one key Player in each position without worrying about the squad depth. So, as long as you get the idea fixed in your mind that a Right Guard plays on the right and a Left Tackle plays on the left and don't keep switching sides, or heaven forbid, play Guards in Tackle positions and Tackles at Guard (unnecessarily) then you should be all right on the Offense.

Defensively, you have greater room for manoeuvre. The starting bonus applies to the guys on the field, not to their positions. So, you can rotate a front 7, with 3-4 and 4-3 in the same game and equally change sides with your Def-ends and OLB's. The same is true of your DT's and ILB's but experience tells me that it is usually less frequent in these specific positions.

There probably isn't a case to be made for the Special teamers in that they are NEVER keyed and so their contribution will depend upon attributes, experience (age) and the Modifiers in effect (yours Vs. the opposition.) However, to chop and change the Punt and Kick-Returners on a regular basis will most likely be more detrimental than effective, so by all means experiment occasionally, if some-one isn't performing then give him a rest, but on the whole try and maintain a sense of continuity. And, if you believe that the Punter, Kicker and Returners are all performing below par, try pushing a few hours into the Mod to see if you can help them return performances more akin to their attributes.

That just about covers my observations on the subject. However, I have just revisited the document that prompted me to cover this particular subject and it deals with the problems far better than I have, so I have reproduced it here. Apologies to those of you that have read this (several times) before but I believe it is an incisive article on the subject and well worthy of inclusion.

IS YOUR LINE OFFENSIVE? (copywrite S. Cox PAFL-1 JETS)

The hardest group to evaluate in this game is undoubtedly the Offensive Line. So here are my thoughts on the subject, not necessarily for you to agree with but to stimulate your own grey matter.

First let's recap on the rules.

Centers, Guards and Tackles can all play in one another's position (this will incur a small penalty, for playing out of the recognised position)

Fielding a Player consistently in the same position on the Offensive Line will give the Player a "boost" for his length of tenure.

O.K. that about sums up the rules as we know them. They do raise some important questions, like "How much is a player penalised for playing out of position?" or "How much of a boost does he receive for consecutive appearances in the same position?" or "Is the bonus finite?"

O.K. so having established that we need to "plant" our Offensive Linemen and leave them to flourish (collecting bonus ability) we need to determine our five leading linemen, position them and pray that they don't receive any serious injuries. This will reap the aforementioned benefit, but it does not allow for tactical positioning to counter the opposing Defense, but more on that subject later.

Now, who plays where? Ideally we all have a ready equipped front 5, but alas, life is just not like that. If we have a reasonable player for the right position for each hole on the Line then (you'll probably be very popular in the Trading stakes) the problem is half way solved, the only decision left to make is which side of the field you prefer the player to play on, but more on that subject later. More often than not, if you have 5 startable Linemen then the combination will likely be One Center, Three Guards and only One Tackle. So Trade, isn't that the answer, well not necessarily. This is where the Commissioner can be very devious. By flooding the League with specialists in one position whilst maintaining an unhealthy drought in another. Offensive Linemen are fairly typical of this scenario. However, even when a Trading opportunity exists, if your need is acute, and your fellow Trader astute, the price can rapidly rocket, so it is advantageous to have the option to say "NO".

NOW is the time to consider playing that extra Guard out of position. Let me say straight away, if the guy you are planning to start is a Rookie, either he is an exceptional talent or else you are desperate! Sure, you can put Coaching hours into him but he is going to be inconsistent, even more so than usual if he is forced to play out of position, and that is going to hurt you! Your best alternative is to search the Free-Agency lists for a Veteran (for veteran read 4+ years experience) to fill the gap. He may not look the part but he'll give you more consistency and you may be able to Coach around his deficiencies. Even an AVE veteran, given good Team Modifiers will give you a fair Linemen, a GOOD rated Lineman (in both Attributes) especially when coupled with an ABOVE AVERAGE/GOOD Offensive Modifier and you are in clover.

Well, there is the theory, and it does work. Last year I fielded 3 guards (and reached the SUPERBOWL) although I wouldn't consider it an ideal situation and I have taken steps to remedy the problem this term. So, if you have a problem, sort out your priorities and if you simply cannot address it this year it will wait. But it is a problem and it will not just take care of itself, you are going to have to do something about it, sooner rather than later.

Another thing to be considered when filing your Game-Plan is how many Tight-Ends do I field? and, on which side do I play him if I only field one? You have total flexibility here in that you can field TWO, ONE or NONE at all. Your Tight-End isn't just another outlet option either. He is an integral part of the Line and, depending upon the Play-Call, a potential Pass-Rush defending

Lineman, or Blocking Lineman. If, as most Coaches will most likely do, you choose to field just the one (and traditional NFL tends to suggest that the One usually plays on the right, which considering that most QB's are right-handed gives additional protection to the strong-side (vision wise) and no protection to the blindside!) then that One can play either Left or Right, or both alternating as the mood takes you, because the Tight-end isn't included in the Offensive Lineman fixed position bonus. The advantage of a regular side switch can be to add some beef to the resident Tackles' Blocking ability for the Running game, or to "double-team" a particularly viscous Def-End/Outside LineBacker in your up-coming fixture.

When sitting down to conceive a Game-Plan for your next game I recommend that you begin by writing down their front SEVEN. Check out the squad, to ensure that no-one is unavailable through injury, or returning from injury, and go back several weeks through the Coaching reports to see if anybody is receiving Coaching hours. Then check the Scouting reports for several previous weeks and see if this particular Coach keeps his front SEVEN static, or likes to shuffle them around. Remember, bonuses for Defense Men is related to number of starts, not to a fixed position like the O-Line.

Now, if your opponent is the type to change formation do you do the same with your Offensive Line? (This question was raised on the previous page as tactical positioning). NO, of course not, you'll lose your bonus! So what can you do? Well, you don't want to concentrate the run straight down the throat of his all-star linebacker, so it becomes a game of cat-and-mouse. Many Coaches seek to 'weight' their offensive line, and force the run off just one side. Most Defenses are capable of mounting one 'good side' so it may depend on how weak the other side is to consider running at it.

Where to start your linemen is another important question (issue raised earlier). If you look carefully at the turn-sheet you will see that the Offense is listed from left-to-right, whilst the Defense is listed as right-to-left. This is important for the match-ups during a game and, possibly almost as important, where the substitutions will take place. So what? Well when do you want to make substitutions? When you have a big lead? When you are being well beaten? So what is the point of substituting? To my mind the whole point is to 'rescue' your stars for another day and field the backups, let them take the late game injuries.

So, back to the original point - if you field your best players with weighting to the right side of the field (most common, as this is where the tight-end most frequently plays) and you have only one-named substitute (at Guard, Tackle and Center) , when you find yourself 28-00 down midway through the 3rd Quarter and your tactical options throw in the backups, then the one-named sub will go to the LEFT, and your 'weighted' superstars are still on the field. At this point you have given up the game for lost BUT still have the cream of your lineman risking serious injury in a cause that is even more lost because many key positions are filled by backups and they become even more vulnerable because of the relative weakness of the guys alongside them!

I hope that this brief overview of the most difficult area of the team to assess has given you food for thought and will help you by adding to your enjoyment of the game. So, is your Line Offensive????

Steve Cox - 1991.

Once again, apologies to those of you that have seen this article, a number of times, before. Hopefully it will have served as a refresher to you about the things you ought to be considering for your offensive line, and for those of you digesting this article for the first time, I hope it has achieved its objective by stimulating that aforementioned grey matter and if it hasn't scared the pants off you, at least helped to identify some of the concerns you may have had (plus a few that maybe you didn't realise) in order that you can take positive steps to resolve them.

Step 3.5 - Tactical Options

Referring back to Page 41 (and the "How to Process your Weekly Turn" section) the recommended page 4 is the Tactical Options sheet. Whenever you receive a turn from Nottingham (applies equally to page 21, the input version of this sheet) this is always presented to you the THIRD page i.e. it precedes the DEFENSE sheet. So remember to shuffle these pages into the suggested order.

The Tactical options sheet is the departure from the norm. In the NFL a game follows a definite pattern. First comes the Normal mode, the attempt to stamp your authority on the game by using a mixed game-plan of clock-control (Rushing) and forward momentum (Passing). In addition to Normal mode there is Hurry-Up (the 2-minute drill) for when you are losing and Ball-Control, for when you are leading. Equally, the Defense is a mix of Pass/Run Defense in Normal Mode, Prevent, when leading and Blitz happy, when trailing. So the primary use of the PAFL Tactical Options sheet is to select a 2-minute Offense and Defense.

It may seem to be stating the obvious but having encountered the brilliantly conceived 2-minute drill of a number of my contemporaries it is worth stating again:

- * DO NOT use the 2-minute drill in judiciously, use ONLY when absolutely necessary.
- * DO NOT run inside, it WILL NOT stop the Clock!
- * DO NOT attempt to throw the ball 100% of the time, it plays into the oppositions hands.
- * THINK about when you are going to use the 2-minute drill in tandem with your substitutions, i.e. there is precious little point in upping the stakes to a low percentage game-plan when (because you are 20 points behind) you have sent the subs into the game! The chances are that you will simply give the opposition the opportunity to score another 20 4th quarter points!
- * DO be more extreme with your situational formations. IF you are going to PASS the Ball, then use an A-Formation. IF you are going to RUN the Ball, then use an E (outside bonus) Formation.
- * DO be conservative with your 2-minute Defense. i.e. By all means use a V-formation (in expectation of the Pass) but DO NOT go overboard with the Blitz, you may get burned once or twice and that may be all that the opposition needs to get back in the game.
- * DO NOT leave the Tactical Options sheet static. Review it BEFORE EACH game. Each opponent has different strengths and weaknesses, including their 2-minute Offense and Defense. This includes some of the lower listed options:

QB Sneak may work against one oppo, but not another (check out Run D rating)

Fake kicks, may also work against some but not all, check out 4th downs conceded.

Kicking distances. If your Kicker makes a 52-yarder, then increase his distance by 1-yard. Do this each time he shows you his limit and see if he can stretch that limit.

Key an opposition stand out guy. However, if your opponent has 2 or more stand out guys, then key no-one.

Blitz Inside against D and F-formation opponents and Outside against A,B,C,E, in an effort to stuff the Run, if the opposition Rushes rather than Pass when your make your Blitz call.

Use the Safety Blitz sparingly. They generally yield positive results but they can be expensive.

Coaching Psyche:

This is the new option under the PAFL revamp. The option to "Psyche" out your opponent by enhancing your own performance, and degrading theirs, with an investment of a one-off 10-40 hours.

At the time of going to press I have participated in 25 games under the revamped PAFL with a 0.740 record. I am disappointed that I cannot say for sure how often (or even IF) I have been the subject of another Coach's choice to "psyche" me out. However, I have done a little research and I can suggest some of the tell-tale factors that happen when you are "psyched" or "psyching". The "physched" team are more likely to have a QB on an off-day (low completion rate), miss FG's, have punts blocked, have drives stall as a result of Penalty or Turnover. The "Psyching" team are more likely to have a QB on a career day (with high completion percentage), keep drives alive with penalties and convert FG's (even incredibly unlikely FG's!) The "psyching" team also plays with a greater intensity with raised performance levels, when the score is close, both on Offense and Defense.

I have three comments I would like to make regarding the "Psyche" option:

1 - The Coach that uses the Psyche is CHEATING himself. By using up to 40 hours as a tactic against an opponent that is designed to win the game (and more often that not will succeed) he will never know if he, and his team, were good enough to win the game without the Psyche.

2 - The Coach that uses the Psyche is CHEATING his team. By using up to 40 hours as a tactic against an opponent designed to win the game he is denying his players the development hours needed to provide a greater performance level over a period longer than merely a single game.

3 - The Psyche option is a legitimate tactic and I will defend any Coaches right to use it. However, I have never used it and I never will because I will not Cheat either myself or my Team by investing the hours in a single game.

I can only think of two legitimate cases where the psyche option might be valuable:

1 - In the SUPERBOWL.

Which of course is non-sensical. After all you cannot guarantee reaching the SUPERBOWL.

Even if you preserved the hours (120) for three Play-off games you could not guarantee that you would win the first one and that would amount to a potential 80 wasted hours.

2 - If you start the season 1-3.

Perhaps, at this still early stage of the season, risking 80 hours on 2 consecutive games in an effort to get your season back on track may be a worthwhile investment. It will not guarantee victory but it might tip the odds back in your favour. If it works and you can get to 3-3 then it might just have been enough to kick start your season. However, I have a nagging doubt at the back of my mind in that every team I suspect of having used the psyche have suffered in the subsequent games, like a junkie getting withdrawal symptoms! Perhaps there is a price to paid, a side effect of "risking" the use of the psyche option?

STEP 4 - Divisional Dominance.

Several times now you will also have come across that age old question:

"what about my divisional rivals, what are they up to and how do I nullify it?"

Well, hopefully, here are at least some of the answers.

In just about every division there is the traditional whipping boys, the 3-13(ish) team that work hard, play hard and just do not seem to make any progress.

There is also the current dominant force. Just like the NFL the dominant team in each PAFL division will be going through a period of 3-10 seasons of apparently "do no wrong". The remainder of the division will be made up of 3 potential wild-card teams that will cut one another's throats during the course of a season and generally manage something like 24 wins between them (9-7, 8-8 and 7-9, or 10-6, 8-8 and 6-10, you get the idea!).

As these teams (3 in each division) represent the majority of the League the chances are that you are going to be coaching one of them, either because you joined the League with a whipped team and aspired to mid-table, or because you acquired a mid-table under-achiever. The renaissance teams that repeatedly win their division (even if they win nothing else!) have a tendency to remain loyal to their coach (or the coach to the team in PAFL). The whipping boys also seem to manage to remain fairly consistent in their Head-Coach ("I have something to prove, and I am going to stick it out until I have proved it" mentality?). So, surprisingly it is these very mid-table types that most often find themselves coachless.

Perhaps the most frustrating thing about kicking off your PAFL Coaching career with an 8-8 team is to try and figure out what makes your team good enough to win 8 games and bad enough to lose 8 games. You need to be careful that what you perceive to be the weaknesses are in fact the deficiencies and the strengths are in fact the pluses. If you get this fundamental understanding wrong you will find that it is a lot easier to go from 8-8 to 4-12 than it is to go from 8-8 to 12-4.

So here is my suggested rationalisation. Forget that you are 8-8 and look instead at just the divisional record. If it is 1, 2 or 3 wins from the previous season then that is good news. Now you can set about a closer inspection of how to combat your divisional foes, improve your in-house record and expect to finish with a winning record.

If however it is 5, 6 or 7 wins then you have a problem!

If your team is managing, for example, 6-2 in the division and 2-6 outside then you are all ready pretty well prepared for your regular divisional matchups. It is much harder to prepare for interdivisional and interconference games (on a seasonal basis) because the opponents change from year to year. AND, on that basis, knowing that you are well prepared for your division you can only hope that the coming season fixtures are going to be kinder to you and also help turnaround those scores.

The best example I can give is the PAFL 1 Tampa Bay Buccaneers. They finished 3rd in the division with a 10-6 (8-0 in the division, 2-6 outside) and followed it the next year with a divisional championship 11-5 (6-2 divisional, 5-3 outside). This is a pretty good emphasis of maintaining your divisional dominance and taking advantage of the remaining fixtures which by definition will change, sometimes quite dramatically, year after year.

I have all ready discussed a number of the aspects governing a winning season, the luck of the draw (in terms of opponents), the fixture list configuration (home and away grouping of fixtures, and getting the stronger teams on your turf whilst visiting the weaker teams), the timing of the opponents (are they in a slump, or having a purple patch?), your own strategy, the availability of your star players and so and so on.

All of that is outside of your control and so you must concentrate upon what you do have control over. Once again much of the following text is a reiteration of earlier detail but this time in a different context.

Your philosophies dictate the way in which you play. Your divisional rivals philosophies may help you to decide which way that is. You must consider that the divisional games are the cup-finals of your season, particularly the 4 home fixtures. 8-0 in the division is the target, 4-4 (with 4 home wins) is an absolute MUST, 5+ wins is a bonus. 3 wins or fewer is a disaster. Consider finishing your season at 11-5 with a divisional record of 3-5. The chances are that you will have to travel to a neighbour at some point in the Play-Offs, and nothing irks more than to be dismissed from the picture on their turf when you know that your 8-0 outside of the division means that you fear no other team!

This (for the third time!) is the point at which I consider "Defenses win Championships" comes into the reckoning. If, for example, the 4 teams in your division are split 2 in favour of aerial combat and 2 in favour of trench warfare then you are forced in your approach to put together a SUPERBOWL Defense to counter both Air and Ground attack. This can only serve to help you in the other 8 fixtures. Stopping the opposition is only half the battle, you still have to win games, but your multi-talented Defense is equipped to ensure that you will always be in with a chance. Even if you can only feature a one-dimensional Offense (Pass OR Rush) the other teams in your division may be

equipped only to deal with one another (the Passing teams cancel one another out and the Rushing Teams cancel one another out). So whilst they are working their way towards winning most of their Home games and losing most of their road games you will have the ability to sneak a 5-3 or 6-2 divisional record.

IF YOU ARE GOING TO BE SUCCESSFUL IN PAFL THEN FIRST AND FOREMOST YOU MUST BE THAT ONE TEAM THAT DOMINATES ITS OWN DIVISION.

4.1 - Buddies and Baddies

During the course of your PAFL Career (as previously documented) you will come up against a variety of styles in coaching and coaching ability. Do not be afraid to "steal" a good idea that you see in a game report where an opponent has beaten you with a specific tactic. I remember my first ever game as a PAFL coach, on the road, against a mediocre Miami. They too had a novice coach, but obviously one with a greater tactical awareness than me at that time. After the game (a 23-10 defeat) I noticed that the Miami coach had followed a set pattern of Defense, namely - 1st Down - RUN Defense

2nd & 3-7 - BLITZ

3rd & 3-7 - BLITZ.

There was sufficient variety in the other situations but these 3 held true throughout the game, which unfortunately for me meant playing right into his hands. I learned a lot in that first outing and I would like to think that I have been learning ever since!

**WHEN YOU GET A GAME REPORT DON'T JUST LOOK AT YOUR TEAM,
SEE WHAT YOU CAN LEARN, AND USE, FROM YOUR OPPONENT!**

Another thing I mentioned earlier was dealing with coaches and how some are going to become good buddies because they TRADE fairly, offer sound advice and are willing to exchange information on up coming opponents. Ensure that you cultivate these interests, but beware, PAFL ultimately has only one winner and you should not be giving away the sort of information that might harm your chances, only the sort of information that both helps a colleague but just as importantly helps YOU. For instance, by all means tell somebody in the other conference what their best chance of beating one of your divisional rivals is, it helps them to win a game, but equally importantly helps you by getting one over on a divisional rival WITHOUT allowing a conference rival a leg up towards a wild-card position that you might be chasing!

**SUBTLE INFORMATION EXCHANGE CAN HELP YOU, IT SHOULD NEVER BE GIVEN TO
ANOTHER COACH WHO IS IN A POSITION TO PROFIT AT YOUR OWN EXPENSE!**

There will be many occasions when you will have to play against coaches that you don't like, because they are good, they are in your division, they have beaten you before or because it is that time of the month PMT! (Pafl Mania Tension).

You have to remember that no coach with a better than a .650 record is lucky, it takes a good deal of effort. The guy cannot be held responsible for being in your division, that is at least as much your fault as it is his. It is no use being bitter about losing, revenge although sweet, should not be the motivation. Success is the target, and you need to be objective about which play to use in a given situation, objective about which strategy to employ against a given opponent, objective about the direction your players and team should develop and objective about the hopes, dreams and aspirations you have.

Which is the more realistic, Winning most of your divisional games
 Winning all of your Home games,
 Making the Play-offs,
 Winning the SUPERBOWL.

In theory they are all achievable. But, concentrating on the small details like being bloody awkward to beat on home turf and winding up to a special effort for the divisional contests just may get you into the play-offs. Thereafter, despite what people might say, it all becomes a bit of a lottery anyway once you get into the knock-out phase.

STAY COOL, CONCEIVE YOUR MASTER PLAN FOR SQUAD DEVELOPMENT AND TEAM STRATEGY, IF YOU CAN OUT COACH THE OPPOSITION YOU WILL WIN MORE OFTEN THAN YOU GET BEAT. SET ACHIEVABLE MILESTONES AND TICK THEM OFF AS YOU PROGRESS, IF YOU SUFFER A SETBACK, LEARN FROM IT.

STEP 5 - Finding the winning formula

Scenario 1 - At home against a team from the other conference.

You are 7-3 they are 4-6.

They like to Pass a lot and Rush occasionally

Their Defense allows a 3.2 yards per carry average on the ground

Their Defense allows 55% completion through the air

Their Defense averages 1 interception and 3 sacks per game.

They have a pro-bowl bound QB.

Their Punt-Returner tops the averages

What do you do?

Scenario 2 -At home against a team from the other conference.

You are 3-7 they are 8-2

They like to play pre-dominantly on the ground

Their Defense allows 3 yards per carry on the ground

Their Defense allows 45% completion through the air

Their Defense average 2 interceptions and 2 sacks per game

They have a pro-bowl bound Half-Back

Neither Punter, Kicker nor Returner appears in the top 10 stats.

What do you do?

Scenario 3 - On the Road against a conference rival

You are 7-3 they are 5-5

They like to mix it up

Their Defense allows 4.1 yards per carry

Their Defense allows 57% completion through the air

Their Defense averages 1 interception and 4 sacks per game

They have a pro-bowl bound Middle Linebacker

They have the league leading Punter.

What do you do?

Scenario 4 - On the road against a DIVISIONAL Rival

You are 8-2 they are 7-3 (you beat them 28-27 at your place)

They like to play it by air

Their Defense allows 2.6 yards per carry on the ground

Their Defense allows 39% completion through the air

Their Defense averages 2 interceptions and 5 sacks per game

They have an awesome Down-Line

Their Place Kicker leads the league by 20 points

What do you do?

Suggestions -

- Scenario 1 - You are at home, that is a good start. As your opponent is 4-6 it is most likely (although not guaranteed) that they tend to win at home and travel badly! Teams that live and die on the strength of the QB's arm frequently have difficulty on the road because travelling tends to drop the average completion ratio a little, whilst homefield tweaks it up a little. Because you know they are a Passing Team you can tailor your Defense accordingly, which makes life a little easier when you know what to expect. They play aggressive Defense (3 sacks per game) but allow 55% completions, probably a little more on the road, and as you are a 7-3 team maybe even closer to 65%. So you Pass defend and Pass attack to win this!
- Scenario 2 - You are at home, that is a good start. As your opponent likes to play on the ground your biggest problem is going to be one of ball-control and adequate clock control. The Defense has a look of invincibility about it but that just may be because they are not used to being on the field too often. Having Homefield will knock their averages back a little and improve your own fractionally. I would suggest competing with them for the clock by featuring a Rushing attack, with the odd bomb, and playing a virtual 100% Run Defense, on the basis that you will be right more often than wrong. Playing from start to end with a 5-2-4 formation probably wouldn't do too much harm considering that at 3-7 you are playing for pride whilst they expect to win.
- Scenario 3 - You are on the road, that makes it tricky from the word go. You have the better record but at 5-5 they are no mugs and probably no pushover on home turf. As they like to feature a varied attack you will have to do a lot more research than for Scenarios 1 & 2. You may get an indicator from their first down count (12 passing, 3 Rushing per game average would suggest Rushing on first down, passing on subsequent downs, 9 Passing, 6 Rushing would suggest both rushing and passing on second and third downs). It could just be that they are a passing team with a leaky line where the QB spends half of his life scrambling to prolong his life! Because you are on the road your averages will dip a little and the oppositions improve marginally. Their Defense looks poor but it could be that they suffer on the road and do a lot better at home (might be worth checking out in the stats). I would suggest playing on the ground (trying to take advantage of that 4 yards per carry average) and thus take control of the clock in an effort to minimise the impact of their varied Offense. Defensively I would try to stop whatever they are best at. (I said they mixed it up, I didn't say that they were particularly good at either!)
- Scenario 4 - On the road again. This time against a good team and a bitter Divisional rival at that! The fact that they like to play by air should give you an excellent

indicator to the type of Defense strategy that you will conceive for the day. Their Defense looks impregnable but it will have a weakness. I suggest that their aggression might be the key. They average 5 sacks per game but also allow only 2 and a bit yards per carry average on the ground. I would suggest that their Blitz happy D is stuffing most Runs against them, however (you have all ready played them!) you should know if they Blitz inside, outside or blanket Blitz. This just might help you to decide to swap sides with your Tight-End or perhaps even feature a second TE for the occasion. Alternatively, featuring a third Running-Back if you are going up the middle. Needless to say I would advocate the Rushing attack for this game, it will keep the opposition Offense off the field, control the clock and hopefully make the Blitz look like a major error in judgement.

These Scenarios and suggestions are a little too simplistic and lack the detailed information that you need to devise your game strategies. However, they do provide an insight to coach mentality and the way in which you ought to be thinking. Looking for the weakness, looking to see what you can exploit.

Unfortunately these scenarios do not detail your own strengths and weaknesses, those details upon which the opposition will be pinning their hopes. YOU will have to be aware of your deficiencies and take active steps to counter them. If you don't you will find that they are perpetuated. For example, in the NFL a QB will spend all day throwing at one Cornerback and completely avoiding the other. The Wide-outs may take it in turn to line-up against the CB in question and this single coaching decision alone may tip the balance of the game for or against his team!

In PAFL we do not quite have that level of detail (singling out a specific CB) although if your next opponent is fielding a V.GD-V.GD 5-year CB and a GD-A.AVE 1-year CB then you will want to take advantage of the relative inexperience of the second stringer. This is where changing your player percentage line from 60% (first Receiver) and 30%(second receiver) to something like 40% (first) and 40% (second) means that the young CB will see more action and you just might get the one missed tackle that allows the 65 yard TD that breaks the game.

Also, and I have mentioned this before, if your team is allowing 1 TD through the air per game, but collecting 2 interceptions and claiming 3 QB sacks, on average, with a 43% completion ratio BUT is allowing 4.5 yards per carry average it will not take long for your up coming opponents to exploit your poor ground coverage and frustrate you into defeat with clock control. It works the other way around too, if you allow only 2.5 yards on the ground but concede 60% through the air then your Down line will soon be suffering from stiff necks as they continually see the ball sailing over their heads. They will stop recording tackles and your DB's will suddenly become very busy. I say again, a weakness will be perpetuated! It is no use stacking up against RUN (or PASS) every week, because your D is good at it, because they will just get better at it (as your opponents stop trying) whilst your weakness continues to get weaker and weaker (as it is exploited again and again).

Don't be put off by these comments. If your team has a tendency to defend well against one but not the other then you just need to work harder at equalising your statistical returns. Coach up a player to shore up the front 7 (or the secondary), TRADE in a player to help redress the balance, Call more RUN (or PASS) Defense in the submission sheet to get the D in the right place at the right time. As another example I offer you the PAFL-1 Pittsburgh Steelers. During the pre-season and first month of the year they were the worst Pass Defense in the League. After TRADING in an AVE-AVE-EX 5-

year LB and an A.AVE-GOOD 2-year DT they upped their aggression factor, turned the corner and finished the year with a Divisional Championship, and the 3rd rated overall Pass Defense. It can be done!

Step 6 - In Summary

That just about wraps up my thoughts and feelings on the subject, you should now be familiar with, if not a fan of, the C J Sheehan School of PAFL Excellence.

You can Identify your preferred Philosophies (and consider them against Divisional Rivals)
You understand the value of each position (and each Positional attribute) on the Rosta
You can Distribute your Rosta (in line with the formations applicable to your philosophies)
You can Weight your Rosta (identify the most desirable attributes per position on the Rosta)
You can Balance your Rosta (aim for a good spread of experience and young players)
You can assess the strengths and weaknesses on your team by rating each player
You can devise a sound approach to coaching and squad development
You appreciate the relevance of Team Mods and have an idea when further input is required
You can identify priority ordering for building a Rosta from scratch
You can attend a DRAFT with confidence
You can TRADE competently
You can process the 21 page turn package, extracting all relevant info.
You can identify the component parts for game submission consideration
You appreciate the difference between Pre-Season, Regular-Season and Post-Season
You know about, fixture timing, luck (turnover/injury), Opposition team and Coach quality
You know how to prepare for games
You know how to extract statistical summaries
You know how to interpret statistical summaries
You know about field positioning (your team and the opposition)
You know about identifying and exploiting opposition weaknesses
You know about sharing the workload between your outfield players
You know that you can learn from your opponents
You know that experimentation can solve potential problems (e.g. Replace KR with veteran)
You know about the Offensive Line and the bonuses attached to them
You know about rotating your Defensive front 7 to counter opponents
You know the importance of Divisional domination
You know how to approach and deal with fellow Coaches

What you may not know and what I have not documented here are those final small details that just might tip the balance between a 10-6 season and a 12-4 season. (I am assuming that anyone who follows my teachings explicitly WILL have winning seasons!)

It is those final small details that help me maintain an edge over most of my opponents. I too have a 'bogey' team, I too have opponents that I cannot 'read', opponents that will beat me even though I know I am a better Coach and I know I have a better team. But, by the same token these small details help me win games that no-one else thinks I can win, help me consistently make the Play-Offs and consistently want to continue playing PAFL.

I hope these notes help you to think in much the same way!

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