



IT’S BLOCKED!!!

It certainly was last October 26, when an amazing five punts were blocked in the NFL in one day.

It was a year of thrilling blocked kicks – none more so than on September 14 when the Carolina Panthers blocked two field-goal attempts and the Buccaneers’ potential game-winning PAT with no time left in the game – the first time that had happened since 1974. The Panthers eventually won the game in overtime, 12-9. Carolina totaled five blocked kicks in their first two games.

According to Panthers special teams coach **SCOTT O’BRIEN**, “a bunch of things have to go right” for a team to block a kick.

Following are five of O’Brien’s keys to blocking kicks in the NFL:

- 1. **ATTITUDE:** “The No. 1 thing we look for in players is attitude. Players can’t just ‘lip service’ their way through special teams preparation. If one guy takes a play off, then you won’t be successful.”
- 2. **CONSTANT PRESSURE:** “Players need to apply constant pressure on every attempt. Everybody is not necessarily directly involved with blocking the kick, but they have an important role to play.”
- 3. **TAKE ADVANTAGE OF PERSONNEL MATCHUPS:** “In both areas of protection – kicks and punts – you need to matchup your personnel with theirs. It’s key to avoid tendencies, so you combat that by using some rushers as decoys.”
- 4. **BEAT THE HIDDEN PROTECTION:** “The ‘hidden’ protection is the kicking team getting the ball off fast. If they get a good snap and time the kick properly, the only way to get a block is straight up the middle.”
- 5. **LUCK:** “There is a degree of luck when blocking kicks, but it is our job is to put our players in position to be ‘lucky,’ and that’s what we try to do every week. Even if everything works well schematically, your players still have to get it to the ball in a certain amount of time.”

The Panthers took full advantage of their opportunities on special teams a year ago, and it is no accident that their special-teams prowess helped translate to victories. Though O’Brien says “all three phases – offense, defense and special teams – need to be clicking to give you an opportunity to win games,” big plays on special teams can have a huge effect on a game’s momentum and players’ confidence levels.

“Big plays like blocks affects your whole team’s psyche,” says O’Brien. “They lift everybody on the sidelines, whether they are involved or not involved. Plays like that can spark that small opportunity to win a game.”



TITANS ARE A COUNTRY HIT!

Every team has celebrities who are NFL fans, but those boys from Nashville, the Titans, have a core of country stars that could sell out a concert all by themselves.

Country music stars Brooks & Dunn – the Country Music Association’s 10-time vocal duo of the year – made it imperative that their concert tour take a back seat when the Titans played the Colts last December 7 in a battle for first place in the AFC south. The duo flew to Nashville from New York on Saturday, watched the Titans on Sunday, and flew to Las Vegas for shows on Monday.

“This is huge,” said **KIX BROOKS**, guitarist and showman half of the group with **RONNIE DUNN**. “Our whole schedule is built around this game. It’s kind of bittersweet because Colts quarterback **PEYTON MANNING** is a good friend and a great guy. It’s just going to be real hard on him today.”

Titans fans were disappointed leaving the stadium that Sunday – final score Colts 29, Titans 27.

But Brooks and Dunn were not the only screaming country music stars at the games throughout the season. The who’s who list of suiteholders includes CMA Entertainer of the Year **ALAN JACKSON**, **TIM MC GRAW** and wife **FAITH HILL**, **REBA MC INTIRE**, **VINCE GILL** and **CHARLIE DANIELS**.

“We’re all neck in neck,” says Brooks. “Tim, Alan, Charlie and Vince, everybody I know that has suites up there, we live and breathe Titans football.”

Tennessee’s titanic C&W fans, with one of their greatest hits:

ARTIST	HIT SONG
Brooks & Dunn	“Brand New Man”
Charlie Daniels	“Honky Tonk Life”
Vince Gill	“Go Rest High on That Mountain”
Faith Hill	“Breathe”
Alan Jackson	“It’s Five O’clock Somewhere”
Reba McIntire	“Somebody”
Tim McGraw	“Live Like You Were Dying”