



### '04 Xs & Os

In the earlier days of the NFL, things used to be as simple as **HANK STRAM**'s "65 Toss Power Trap" – a simple toss play to the right that resulted in a **MIKE GARRETT** touchdown in the Kansas City Chiefs' 23-7 Super Bowl victory over Minnesota.

As the game of football and its players continue to evolve, so do the offensive and defensive playbooks, which thicken in size each and every season.

With such a fine line between winning and losing, coaches are involved in a never-ending arms race to see who can game plan better and outsmart their opponents.

So, as coaches brainstorm and rookies do their best to memorize, here's a guide to **Xs and Os five teams are working on for 2004:**

- **MORA BRINGS THE WEST COAST EAST:** New **ATLANTA FALCONS** head coach **JIM MORA** will be looking to utilize **MICHAEL VICK**'s myriad talents this season, and that will entail changing up the Falcons' offensive scheme into a wide-open, "west coast" attack. Atlanta added speedster **DEZ WHITE** through free agency and **MICHAEL JENKINS** via the draft to shore up the receiving corps, giving Vick plenty of weapons. With those new additions complementing a pair of talented holdovers from last season – wide receiver **PEERLESS PRICE** and Pro Bowl tight end **ALGE CRUMPLER** – the Falcons should be a formidable offensive force. Crumpler, in particular, will be used in a more varied role this season after a breakout campaign in '03. New offensive coordinator **GREG KNAPP** plans to split him out wide with more regularity and game plan more plays for him. "With his size, speed, athletic ability... you just don't see tight ends who catch the ball away from their body like he does, just snatch it," says Mora of Crumpler. "Plus, he's dangerous when he has the ball."
- **SAINTS WILL SET THE DEUCE LOOSE:** Running back **DEUCE MC ALISTER** has emerged as one of the most dangerous feature backs in the league. To take full advantage of his myriad talents, the **NEW ORLEANS SAINTS** plan to feature him at all of the wide receiver positions, depending on the game plan or situation. "Deuce is talented enough to line up outside as opposed to have him coming out of the backfield," says Saints offensive coordinator **MIKE MC CARTHY**. "We have got to find different ways to get him the ball in space because he's definitely a problem when he gets in the open field." McCarthy is also planning to use more formations featuring extra tight ends or wide receivers rather than two running backs.
- **VILMA'S VERSATILITY A BOON FOR JETS:** The addition of first-round pick **JONATHAN VILMA** to the **NEW YORK JETS** defense will alter the expectations the team has for the position. With his youthful enthusiasm and athleticism, Vilma will be counted on to make sideline-to-sideline pursuit of ball carriers, cover running backs and tight ends on pass plays, and eventually take a leadership role as the middle linebacker. "Vilma stood out to me a couple times," said Jets cornerback **RAY MICKENS** after an early mini-camp session with the rookie. "Just his speed and awareness. I saw him covering a couple of receivers in the open field. That caught my eye."
- **'SKINS WILL MAKE ARRINGTON A THIRD-DOWN THREAT ONCE AGAIN:** Having one of the most athletic linebackers in the NFL can give a defense much-needed flexibility. And **LA VAR ARRINGTON** will offer just that for the **WASHINGTON REDSKINS** more so than ever this season. Just like he did two years ago under **MARVIN LEWIS** when he was with Washington as a defensive coordinator, look for Arrington to line up in a three-point stance on third down with much more frequency this year. "I want to win before it gets too late," says Arrington, who led all NFL linebackers with 11 sacks two years ago. "I don't want to... look back and say, 'Had I played defensive end... that might have made the difference.'"
- **RUNNING BACK Xs & Os:** The **DALLAS COWBOYS** and **BILL PARCELLS** are expecting a lot from rookie running back **JULIUS JONES** this season. One thing they aren't expecting from the recent Notre Dame grad is fumbles – Parcells' biggest pet peeve. Jones coughed up only two fumbles on 229 carries last year for the Fighting Irish... **STEVE MARIUCCI** and the **DETROIT LIONS** are hoping for a similar jumpstart to their running game from a rookie – Virginia Tech's **KEVIN JONES**. Jones spent his first college season as an understudy to then-starter **LEE SUGGS**, who is now a member of the Cleveland Browns, and later emerged as a consistent big-play threat... The **TAMPA BAY BUCCANEERS** have been searching for a versatile tailback to replace **WARRICK DUNN**, who signed with Atlanta two seasons ago. **JON GRUDEN** thinks they have filled that void with **CHARLIE GARNER**, who played for Gruden in Oakland. "He's just so hard to tackle," says Bucs quarterback **BRAD JOHNSON**. "And as a pass catcher, he doesn't trick you with his routes. He just catches the ball and really knows where to be. I'm really happy to be playing with him."