

QB “ADJUSTING” CAN MEAN A TD

The plays are all there on paper, nice and neat. In reality, quarterbacks will tell you, once you’re on the field and the ball is snapped, things sometimes become unraveled.

Take the touchdown scored by Green Bay Packers tight end **BUBBA FRANKS** against Seattle in the team’s NFC Wild Card game last year. Franks recognized a wide-open lane to the end zone and broke off his route to a streak down the middle of the field. Seconds later he was standing triumphantly in the end zone.

“Adjusting is what it’s all about,” says Packers quarterback **BRETT FAVRE**, who identified the same weakness as Franks and hit him in stride for the score. “You draw all these plays up and you never get exactly what you study. But it’s all about how you adjust.”

“If teams are going to put eight or nine guys in the box, I wouldn’t want to match up against Brett and our receivers,” says Packers guard **MIKE WAHLE**. “Those guys really step up and make plays.”

When faced with a schematic wrinkle or a breakdown in protection, quarterbacks have two options: adjust the play or scramble from the pocket.

Here are three of the premier out-of-pocket QBs in the NFL today:

- **MICHAEL VICK, Falcons** – One of the shifتيest quarterbacks ever to bark signals in the NFL, Vick creates a laundry list of problems for a defense once he leaves the pocket. The threat of Vick flinging the ball deep or tucking it down to run forces defenders in pursuit to pick their poison. More often than not, new passing lanes reveal themselves. If they don’t, Vick has already proven to be a highlight machine once he commits to a scramble.
- **DONOVAN MC NABB, Eagles** – Though he is still a threat to run, McNabb’s ability to identify and exploit holes in the defense with his arm has increased exponentially over the past few years. With newly acquired wide receiver **TERREL OWENS** now in the mix, McNabb’s ability to make plays in the open field – be it via the run or the pass – will be augmented with T.O. in the lineup.
- **JAKE PLUMMER, Broncos** – This former Sun Devil became an Arizona legend for his ability to make things happen, especially when his team is trailing. A scrappy playmaker cut from the **DOUG FLUTIE** mold, Plummer isn’t afraid to take his share of chances in hopes of hitting the big play.

Here are three of the purest “pocket passers” in the NFL today:

- **STEVE MC NAIR, Titans** – Just like McNabb, McNair relied heavily upon his ability to run the football early in his career. But Tennessee’s gritty 2003 co-NFL MVP has become more of a traditional pocket passer over the past few seasons. He has more than lived up to his nickname, “Air McNair,” which has stuck with him since his days as a record-breaking QB for Division I-AA Alcorn State.
- **PEYTON MANNING, Colts** – Manning’s reputation as a student of the game grows along with his passing stats every year. After countless hours of film study per week, Manning always knows where the weaknesses in a defense will be before snap of the ball. It also doesn’t hurt that he is one of the most accurate quarterbacks in NFL history (62.9 percent completion rate, 88.1 career passer rating).
- **BRETT FAVRE, Packers** – Instinctive and unafraid of taking chances, Favre can sneak passes into even the tightest of spots. So if one of his targets adjusts his route to make a play, Favre is second to none in recognizing the adjustment and making it work to his advantage.



PENNINGTON PERFECT IN RED ZONE

It’s the paydirt area, inside the 20. The last thing you want to do is to throw an interception. And that’s something that New York Jets quarterback **CHAD PENNINGTON** has not experienced as an NFL quarterback. He has never thrown a pick in the red zone – but has 30 TDs in the area.

In his 85 red-zone attempts since 2002 when he became a starter, Pennington is perfect. Taking a look at other quarterbacks with favorable performances inside the 20, Pennington has some good company. Super Bowl MVP **TOM BRADY** (just three interceptions in 178 red-zone attempts) and Pro-Bowl selection **DONOVAN MC NABB** (two interceptions in 239 attempts) are also adept at avoiding interceptions from the 20, in, headlining a list that also includes Seattle’s **MATT HASSELBECK** and Cleveland’s **JEFF GARCIA**.

But with his gaudy numbers since 2002 – his career passer rating is 95.1 and he has thrown 37 touchdowns against only 18 interceptions – the pressure-packed red zone has seemed most like a comfort zone to Pennington.

"Focus and intensity in the huddle is turned up a notch inside the red zone," says Pennington. "Those are opportunities that you can’t let pass by. You can’t give them back."

The top five quarterbacks in avoiding interceptions in the red zone since 2002:

QUARTERBACK	INT	ATT	PCT.
Chad Pennington	0	85	0.00
Matt Hasselbeck	1	143	0.70
Donovan McNabb	2	239	0.84
Jeff Garcia	4	258	1.55
Tom Brady	3	178	1.69
Minimum 80 attempts			