

IN THE ZONE

It's that feeling when the game is moving in slow motion. The running lane appears to be wider than ever before. The ball is enlarged -- impossible to drop. There is not a throw on the field you cannot make.

Players refer to it as being “*in the zone*” -- a feeling that seems to make the impossible, possible. Your physical ability appears effortless, flawless.

“It’s one of those times when you start the game feeling fresh and good,” says Seattle Seahawks running back **SHAUN ALEXANDER**. “You’re breaking tackles, outrunning folks. As the game progresses, you realize they are not moving as fast as you are.” NFL players describe what it feels like to be in “the zone”:

NO-STOPPING ZONE

PLAYER	“IN THE ZONE”
QB David Carr, Texans	“You drop back and throw the ball and you know it’s going to be complete.”
S Mike Doss, Colts	“It’s mental state that takes your physical abilities to a new level. It’s almost surreal.”
QB Jeff Garcia, Browns	“Nothing disrupts your concentration, every decision is right on and everything slows down.”
RB Eddie George, Titans	“You see everything quicker than anybody else. Everything is just right.”
DB Aaron Glenn, Texans	“You just feel like you have it. You are going to make some big plays that day.”
LB Ed Hartwell, Ravens	“There is nothing like it. It is an amazing rush of adrenaline and passion. You feel unstoppable.”
DE Aaron Kampman, Packers	“When you’re in a zone, your confidence is at an all-time high. You’re not worried.”
LB Ben Leber, Chargers	“It’s like you don’t even have to think. You just feel like you don’t have to think.”
S John Lynch, Broncos	“The game just slows down and it becomes a lot more fun. It’s like everything is in slow-motion.”
WR Derrick Mason, Titans	“Nobody can cover me. It’s like I’m on the field with nobody but me and the quarterback.”
DB Charles Tillman, Bears	“It’s about feeling supremely confident, like everything is going to work.”
RB Moe Williams, Vikings	“You don’t really hear anything. You see things but you don’t remember them after it’s over.”
S Rod Woodson, Raiders	“Everything goes the right way. You have a feel for everything that it is going on around you.”

SPEED ZONE

Players often cite one major difference between college and the pros -- **speed**. Linemen are now the same speed as tight ends, tight ends run like wide receivers and quarterbacks run like running backs.

How quickly a player adjusts to the tempo change is often the determining factor in how soon they will be able to make immediate contributions.

“The tempo is completely different than college,” said Detroit Lions first-round draft choice **ROY WILLIAMS** at a minicamp this spring. “At Texas, we walked to the line of scrimmage. Here, we are running, and the action is so much faster.”

Some thoughts on just how fast the NFL game is:

SPEED CREED

• Vikings defensive coordinator TED COTTRELL	“In the NFL, the speed and strength that made you good in college is nullified. The guy across from you is just as strong and fast.”
• Giants C CARSON DACH	“It’s faster than college. The guys are bigger, stronger, faster.”
• Lions rookie RB KEVIN JONES	“How did minicamp feel? It felt fast. It’s a little overwhelming.”
• Steelers QB TOMMY MADDOX	“The game’s fast. As much as you play in the preseason, the game – especially on opening day – only gets faster.”
• Jets DT DEWAYNE ROBERTSON	“In football, things get different when pads are on. Some guys might be even faster.”
• 49ers consultant BILL WALSH	“This is an incredibly fast-moving sport. Getting acclimated to that really takes some time. Everything’s moving so fast. A player has to adapt to that. Regardless of the ability or the potential of the quarterback, he’s going to have to make split-second decisions.”
• Giants QB KURT WARNER	“(At minicamp) I was a little bit off. The game was moving fast.”

NFL “SIDE JOBS”

Football takes up a lot of their time, but that has not prevented a good number of NFL players from preparing for life after the game by jumping into some other lines of work even as they “moonlight” on the football field.

Denver Broncos wide receiver **ROD SMITH**, for example, has started his own real-estate company in Texas with the help of his sisters. In addition, Smith recently bought the franchise rights to two hair salons in Colorado Springs and intends to open barbershops in the future.

“That’s me, blue-collar,” says Smith. “I don’t want to be sitting up in some big old high-rise with a suit on someday. I want to be out there teaching other people how to do it.”

Ten off-the-field career interests of NFL players:

PLAYER, TEAM

Warrick Dunn, Atlanta
Tim Dwight, San Diego
Eddie George, Dallas
Aaron Glenn, Houston
Kevin Houser, New Orleans
Garrick Jones, Houston
Ray Lewis, Baltimore
Larry Smith, Green Bay
Robaire Smith, Tennessee
Rod Smith, Denver

CAREER(S)

Launching his own apparel line.
Owns yoga studio.
Landscape architecture.
Real estate developer and investor in Williams Chicken restaurants.
Runs “Life’s a Snap” foundation helping other players set up charities.
Owns graphic design and music production company.
Owns barbeque restaurant.
Owns music production company, record label and trucking company.
Plans to open hamburger restaurant.
Owner of real estate company and two hair salons.