



THE “46” IS BACK

New Baltimore Ravens defensive coordinator **REX RYAN** has blown the dust off the playbook of his father, the former NFL head coach Buddy Ryan, and re-institued the famed “46 defense” that helped the Chicago Bears thrive in the 1980s. The goal of the 46 defense, as it became known for the jersey number of Bears safety Doug Plank—who was used as an extra inside linebacker—is to apply pressure.

“We’re not going to play the 46 just because of my dad,” says Rex Ryan. “We’re going to play it because it makes sense to play it. This is going to be a big part of what we do defensively.”

The 46 defense relies on an eight-man front to stop the run and intricate blitz packages to hinder the passing game. The weak-side linebacker and strong-side linebacker line up at the line off the side of the right defensive end, and the two cornerbacks line up on the outsides. The strong safety drops down as an extra inside linebacker and the rest of the secondary plays single coverage.

Ravens linebacker **RAY LEWIS** knows the possibilities the defense brings to the team, especially when it means he gets to roam from sideline to sideline with his defensive line taking care of his opponent’s front line.

“Saying you’re going to run the 46 is like telling your premier running back that you’re going to make sure he’s not going to be touched in a football game,” says Lewis. “To have my defensive coordinator tell me I’m not going to be touched, I’m like a little kid all over again.”

Ryan, Lewis and the rest of the Baltimore defense can only hope the defense works as well as it did for Buddy and the Bears’ defenses in 1984 and 1985. Chicago won Super Bowl XX in 1985. How they stacked up against the rest of the league in those years:

BEARS VS. NFL

Year	Rushing Yards Allowed		Passing Yards Allowed		Total Yards Allowed		Points Allowed	
	Team (Rank)	League	Team (Rank)	League	Team (Rank)	League	Team	League
1984	86.1 (1)	123.9	155.4 (2)	205.9	241.3 (1)	329.8	15.5	19.9
1985	82.4 (1)	124.9	176.0 (3)	204.5	258.4 (1)	329.4	12.4	20.2

4-3 OR 3-4?

In the 1940s and early 1950s most NFL teams used “the eagle defense.” It consisted of a five-man front with two linebackers.

However, when **TOM LANDRY** became the New York Giants defensive coordinator in 1955, he introduced a shift that changed the face of the NFL. He repositioned the nose tackle in the five-man-line to a middle linebacker in a 4-3 defense. In the next five years, the Giants reached the NFL Championship game three times. Other teams took notice and followed suit.

The defensive evolution continued in the 1960s when the American Football League began using a 3-4 on the premise it was easier to find linebackers than linemen. With the AFL-NFL merger in 1970, the two schemes collided.

“After the merger, those of us in the old NFL had to adjust to the 3-4,” says Giants general manager **ERNIE ACCORSI**, who was in his first year as public relations director of the Baltimore Colts at the time. “It was confusing because they still rushed four men, but you didn’t know which linebacker was coming.”

Since the height of its popularity in 1980, when about two-thirds of NFL teams used the 3-4, only the Pittsburgh Steelers have consistently relied on the formation. But with the recent success of the New England Patriots, who use a 3-4 hybrid, its reputation has grown. In 2004, the Baltimore Ravens, Houston Texans, Oakland Raiders and San Diego Chargers all used a 3-4 base. This year the Cleveland Browns, Dallas Cowboys and San Francisco 49ers are expected to use it as well.

“Some of it is belief,” says Giants head coach **TOM COUGHLIN**, who uses a 4-3 base, but switches to a 3-4 often. “A lot of guys who have gone through Pittsburgh believe in that system more than anything else. It’s been very good to them. The Patriots, it’s been very good to them also.”

NFL.com analyst **GIL BRANDT** points out that many teams are incorporating both formations into their weekly game plans now. He believes the element of surprise is what makes dual formations so desirable.

“What happens when you play both is that it makes opponents dilute their prep time. Before, they knew they’d be going up against a 4-3 or 3-4 exclusively. Now they have to prepare to play against both.”

But is the 3-4 here to stay? Steelers head coach **BILL COWHER** isn’t so sure.

“I think it’s cyclical,” Cowher says. “There are a couple more teams that are going to do it. We’ll see how long people stay with it. It’s one thing to make the change; it’s another to stick with it.”

4-3 or 3-4 continued.....