

4-3 or 3-4, cont'd:

NFL teams expected to use a 3-4 base alignment in 2005:

3-4 BASE TEAMS	BIG REASON FOR USAGE
Baltimore Ravens	LB Ray Lewis – Head Coach Brian Billick utilizes his exceptional talents by allowing him the freedom to blitz the quarterback and follow the ball.
Cleveland Browns	Romeo Crennel – The Browns new head coach and former defensive coordinator of the Patriots won three Super Bowls in four years using a 3-4 base.
Dallas Cowboys	Bill Parcells – He started his career coaching linebackers and has historically preferred a 3-4. The Cowboys’ addition of NT Jason Ferguson, one of the best in the NFL, should help them make the transition.
Houston Texans	Dom Capers – He ran the 3-4 as defensive coordinator of the Steelers and head coach of the Carolina Panthers.
New England Patriots	Bill Belichick – He was an assistant with the Giants during the Lawrence Taylor era and has guided his team to three Super Bowls in four years using a 3-4 hybrid formation.
Oakland Raiders	Experience – The Raiders implemented the 3-4 in 2004. The team hopes to combine the talents of DT Warren Sapp and an impressive linebacker corps, including rookie Kirk Morrison, to produce success this season.
Pittsburgh Steelers	History – The Steelers have enjoyed decades of success using the 3-4.
San Diego Chargers	Success – After hiring defensive coordinator Wade Phillips from Atlanta, the Chargers implemented a 3-4 in 2004 and enjoyed a 12-4 season.
San Francisco 49ers	Mike Nolan – The new boss of the 49ers comes to San Francisco from Baltimore, where he ran a 3-4. LB Julian Peterson should work well in this system.

MOST EFFECTIVE ONSIDE KICK? A SURPRISE ONE

Philadelphia Eagles special teams coach **JOHN HARBAUGH** describes surprise onside kicks as “high risk, high reward.”

If you’re successful, you secure excellent field position and increase your chances of scoring dramatically. However, if you fail, you do the same for your opponent. The Eagles have succeeded in recovering three out of four surprise onside kicks in the last five years. However, the one that got away was returned by Dallas Cowboys’ Randal Williams for a touchdown.

“The most important component is the kick,” explains Harbaugh. “Anything longer than 10 to 12 yards can get you in trouble. Ideally you would like a hang-time of about 2.5-2.6 seconds.”

The trickiest element of a surprise onside kick is the footing. Most kickers cannot deliver a traditional three-hop onside kick without first adjusting their stance, which gives away the surprise. Instead they take a normal kicking stance and attempt to execute a perfect high-hopper that takes a short bounce before dangling in the air while recovery players settle underneath it.

In the past four years more than half (58 percent) of all recovered onside kicks occurred in surprise situations, compared to the 15 percent recovered when they were anticipated. Besides being a way to steal a possession, if used often, the fear that you may execute a surprise kick can weaken the blocking corps of the receiving team.

“They have to get one of their guys up to the line to secure that extra spot for the outside, which means they have one less guy in the back,” says Miami Dolphins kicker **OLINDO MARE**. “If we decide to change and go deep, their return won’t be as effective. If they don’t (bring an extra guy to the line), then we will do the onside and our chances of recovering greatly improve.”

To take full advantage of the onside kick, a team has to be willing to do it when the opportunity presents itself, even if it doesn’t seem necessary. That takes nerve. But it works!

ONSIDE KICKS RECOVERED BY KICKING TEAM (PAST FOUR SEASONS)	
Surprise kicks	58%
Anticipated kicks	15%



WIN AFTER LOSS

Even the most efficient high-performance vehicle can burp an accidental knock or ping, but elite machines don’t clunk twice in a row. And if NFL teams were cars, the **NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS** would revolve on a showroom platform, illuminated from all angles.

The Patriots have not lost consecutive games in 33 regular-season weeks – the longest current stretch in the NFL.

“If you start looking past opponents, there is no doubt you are going to get beat,” says New England quarterback **TOM BRADY**. “And if you start taking things for granted and your preparation gets a little lackadaisical, you will get beat.”

Perhaps the Patriot “one-game-at-a-time” Way is best illustrated by the words of tackle **MATT LIGHT**, who in the midst of a 14-game winning streak entering Super Bowl XXXVIII said, “It’s hard to play them two games at a time.”

The longest active streaks of games played without consecutive losses:

TEAM	WEEKS W/O CONSEC. LOSSES	MOST RECENT CONSECUTIVE LOSSES
New England	33	12/16/02: 7-24 at Tenn.; 12/22/02: 17-30 vs. NYJ
Pittsburgh	24	10/26/03: 21-33 at St.L; 11/2/03: 16-23 at Sea.
San Diego	13	9/19/04: 28-34 vs. NYJ; 9/26/04: 13-23 at Den.
Buffalo	12	10/3/04: 17-31 vs. NE; 10/10/04: 14-16 at NYJ
Green Bay	11	10/3/04: 7-14 vs. NYG; 10/11/04: 27-48 vs. Tenn.