

QBs WATCH THE LBs

Quarterbacks under center need to make sense out of chaos. Shouting the cadence above all the other audibles flying around, they scan the defense for clues about blitzes and coverages.

Oftentimes, those hints that allow a QB to change a play at the line of scrimmage come from following the eyes of the opposing linebackers. It can make or break a play before the ball is even snapped.

Each quarterback, though, sees something different. Here's what some of them had to say:

WHAT QUARTERBACKS CAN READ FROM LINEBACKERS' EYES

Quarterback	Comments
Drew Brees, San Diego	"A lot of it is body language. You can see where they're looking, and they're usually looking where they're going. You can feel when a guy is trying to bluff you. You can feel when he's seriously coming or if he's just messing around. Obviously the better ones can bluff better."
Steve McNair, Tennessee	"It actually can tell you a lot. I feel like I am able to tell if the linebacker is blitzing or is anticipating the play coming to him just from looking at his eyes."
Jesse Palmer, NY Giants	"I really don't get that personal with linebackers during the game. I'm usually looking at numbers and spots. I just try to get as many hints and keys as I can from the secondary players and the linebacker too. Some guys wear visors so you can't always get that hint."
Ben Roethlisberger, Pittsburgh	"I look into the eyes of the linebackers for clues. Sometimes a guy won't look at you and you know he's trying to throw you off and he's probably going to be blitzing. If they look you in the eye, they probably want you to think they're blitzing, and they won't be. And sometimes, you see an excitement in their eyes, and you know they're coming at you. Sometimes they try to fake excitement – they want you to think they're coming at you—and they drop back. In a split second, more or less, you have to determine what's fake and what's real in their eyes. Sometimes I'm right and sometimes I'm wrong. I'm still learning."
Jim Sorgi, Indianapolis	"What I see is this guy wants to disrupt me; keep me from doing my job. I can see the meanness and tenacity of an NFL linebacker. I try to block that out and hope the line is going to do their job."
Michael Vick, Atlanta	"It can show you how serious and how competitive he is. How much he wants to get to me and put me out of the game. He can never give you an indication of where he is going before the ball is snapped, so you just have to watch him carefully to make sure he is going to do what you think he is going to do."



QUARTERBACKS BY CONFERENCE

At one time, the Mid-American Conference (MAC) was pretty much an afterthought when people cited the “big” conferences that contribute quarterbacks to the NFL. Now?

Three of the top young quarterbacks in the NFL hail from the MAC – Jacksonville’s **BYRON LEFTWICH** (Marshall), the New York Jets’ **CHAD PENNINGTON** (Marshall) and Pittsburgh’s **BEN ROETHLISBERGER** (Miami of Ohio). A fourth, Minnesota’s **DAUNTE CULPEPPER**, played at a school (Central Florida) which is now a member of the MAC. And the Cleveland Browns’ third-round selection (No. 67 overall) in the 2005 NFL Draft was **CHARLIE FRYE**, who played at Akron.

“We want to let people know that it doesn’t matter where you come from,” says Leftwich. “If you can play the game of football, you can play.”

Pennington, who played at Marshall before Leftwich, agrees.

“Sometimes small-school quarterbacks don’t get the recognition they deserve,” says Pennington. “But we’ve proven that we belong here.”

And boy do they belong! Pennington and Roethlisberger faced off against one another in a 2004 AFC Divisional Playoff game, won 20-17 in overtime by the Steelers.

“Ben has done a really good job,” says Pennington about last year’s NFL Offensive Rookie of the Year. “The best thing about him is that, as a young quarterback, he doesn’t try to force things. It’s hard to root for a Miami RedHawk because we were rivals. At the same time, I’m proud of what he’s doing.”

Former Miami of Ohio head coach **TERRY HOEPPNER**, now head coach at Indiana, tutored Roethlisberger and believes that people are finally catching on to the success of the MAC.

“You can only have so many guys in the conference be successful without people eventually saying, ‘Well, there’s got to be something there.’ The quarterbacks in the MAC have had some pretty good training and have seen a lot, as evidenced by the success of Pennington, Leftwich and now Ben.” Following is a list of conferences ranked by number of NFL quarterbacks who started at least one game in 2004:

CONFERENCE	STARTING QBs		CONFERENCE	STARTING QBs
Pac-10	10		Big East	3
Big 10	7		Sun Belt	3
WAC	7		A-10	1
ACC	6		Gateway	1
C-USA	4		Great Northwest	1
MAC	4		Ivy	1
SEC	4		Southland	1
Big 12	3		SWAC	1

