

Following are the players with the most third-down receptions for first downs last year:

PLAYER	3RD DOWN REC. FOR 1ST DOWN
Jerricho Cotchery, New York Jets	26
Marques Colston, New Orleans	24
Reggie Wayne, Indianapolis	24
Laveranues Coles, New York Jets	23
Donald Driver, Green Bay	23
Tony Gonzalez, Kansas City	23
Marvin Harrison, Indianapolis	23
Terrell Owens, Dallas	23

## **CORNER CLUES: HOW TO KEEP YOUR MAN COVERED**

When a wide receiver does his job well on a given play, it can engender fireworks (or cannon fire in the case of San Diego and Tampa Bay), in addition to a throng of 70,000 fans celebrating as one. Conversely, when a cornerback takes care of business, it can simply translate to a pass thrown in another direction.

Fair trade-off? Perhaps not, but such is the life of an NFL corner – run step-for-step with an opponent who’s as fast and oftentimes taller and keep him from making a difference in the game.

Effective man-to-man cover cornerbacks are few and far between, but they all have one thing according to Jacksonville Jaguars defensive backs coach **ALVIN REYNOLDS**: “fundamentals.”

“Working on your skills – the skills of a back pedal and drilling consistency of using your eyes of playing a guy one-on-one – that’s what it’s going to take,” says Reynolds. “A lot of times guys want to use false steps when they break and also they want to look at the quarterback when they should be focusing on the receiver. That is the first key thing we teach. Pace is another thing. You work on your pace and not creating too much cushion between you and the receiver. And don’t let him close on you too quickly.”

Mastering and executing these skills may be easier said than done, but players who can consistently survive in man-to-man coverage are invaluable to their respective clubs. The biggest advantage is the flexibility it provides to other defensive players, allowing them to support the run when necessary.

“Bottom line, going with man coverage allows you to load up the box to stop the run,” says Reynolds. “If you’re playing a good running team, you can go from six men in the box to seven or eight to load up on the run.”

How some NFL cornerbacks prepare:

CORNERBACK	TEAM	OBSERVATIONS/CLUES SOUGHT IN FILM STUDY OR AT SCRIMMAGE LINE
Champ Bailey	Denver	“I watch the receiver and the quarterback on film. I watch when the ball is delivered. I watch when the receiver gets in and out of his breaks. When I was younger, I didn’t look at enough film. Now, I watch more of it and notice a lot more things. I think that comes with learning how to watch film.”
Rashean Mathis	Jacksonville	“First, (in film study) I want to see how fast he is to see if I have to worry about him running away from me. Second, I need to see how well he runs his routes in case I am ‘off’ and not pressing up on him. Third, I have to see how well he gets off the jam. When I’m at the line, if I’m pressed, I’m concentrating on just getting my hands on the receiver. If I’m ‘off,’ then I’m just staying down in my backpedal and pacing myself, because I know if I’m at a good pace then I have a great chance of getting my hands on the ball.”
Terrence McGee	Buffalo	“Basically, I like to watch how the receiver reacts to the defender. If he’s up in press, how does he react to it? If he’s in off-man, what type of stuff does he do? I look at how he comes out of his break. I watch how other defenders defend that receiver. You really want to read a quarterback’s steps once the ball’s snapped. You read your keys – look at the quarterback. See if it’s a quick pass. If it’s not, then you get back into your pedal and read the receiver and what type of break he’s about to make. But these days you can get double-moved real quick, so you have to read their hips also.”
Ike Taylor	Pittsburgh	“I watch the way a receiver breaks the huddle. I read his body language. Is he coming out with pep in his step for a pass or is he jogging out because it’s a run? His mouthpiece, is it in or out? Maybe he only has a mouthpiece in if it’s a pass. Splits, lineup, there are a whole lot of little things that I maybe shouldn’t be saying, but hey, those are some of the details I look at. That’s what my coaches tell me – ‘Look at the little things,’ and you’d be surprised what you find.”