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DEFENSES COMMIT TO LIMIT BIG RUSHING DAYS

As youngsters, NFL defensive coordinators were most likely told not to run in the house, in the library, or around the neighborhood swimming pool.

Fast-forward to 2005 and it's those defensive minds that mandate no running through their defenses – at least not for 100-yard performances. Through five weeks of play, 34 NFL players have rushed for 100-yard games compared to 50 such ground-gaining outbursts a year ago.

Conversely, through five weeks, a total of 18 NFL clubs (56.3 percent) are averaging more passing yards per game this year compared to last season.

So, how are defenses limiting big rushing days?

"It's just got to be that defenses are scheming with an emphasis to stop the run," says offensive coordinator **BOB BRATKOWSKI** of the 4-1 Cincinnati Bengals. "It's basic defensive philosophy that stopping the run is your first priority, but even though everybody talks about it, it's not always fully put into practice.

"This year, it's evident that it's a little more the case."

A look at NFL rushing figures through five weeks of play:

YEAR	100-YARD RUSHERS	TOTAL RUSH YARDS	RUSH TDS
2004	50	16,906	115
2005	34	16,058	107

"All of our corners have to be physical, we expect corners to be tacklers here," says Washington Redskins defensive coordinator **GREGG WILLIAMS**, whose unit has helped the club reach a 3-1 record. The Redskins' defense stands fifth in the NFL in total yards allowed per game (282.0). "Our safeties are like mini-linebackers. This keeps any type of a run game to a minimum and that is what you want.

"A lot of people overthink on how you rush the passer in this league," adds Williams. "The way you rush the passer in this league is stopping the run. You need to stop the run first and get them in those longer down and distances so you get a chance to rush the passer. If you don't stop the run, it is going to be a long day."

The Pittsburgh Steelers customarily reside at or near the top of the league's rushing defense standings and 2005 is no different. Pittsburgh defensive coordinator **DICK LE BEAU** has his group perched sixth in the league in fewest rushing yards allowed (89.0 per game) and, not coincidentally, ranked third in the NFL in sacks per pass play with one sack for every 9.6 of its opponents' pass attempts.

"One of the benefits of slowing down the running game is that you can make the opposition one-dimensional," says LeBeau. "It is a lot easier to defend a team if they are not able to run the ball. You end up only having to defense one-half of their offense."

So, what is the best countermove against a defense that succeeds in stuffing the run?

"Throw the ball deep," says Bratkowski, whose Bengals, led by the play of quarterback **CARSON PALMER**, have seven pass plays of 25 or more yards this season – up from only two such plays last year after five games.

"Defenses focusing on stopping the run give you the opportunity to throw the ball deep, as well as to the other perimeters of the defense."