



## NFC NEWS 'N' NOTES

FOR USE AS DESIRED  
NFC-N-6 9/26/06

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION,  
CONTACT: MICHAEL SIGNORA (212/450-2076)

### THIRD DOWNS HOLD KEYS TO SUCCESS

It might be third down, but it's usually first in importance!

Perhaps more than any other statistic, the ability to succeed on third downs by keeping drives alive is a great indicator of a team's success. The NFL's top five offenses in 2006 in third-down conversions own a combined record of 11-4 (.733).

The Philadelphia Eagles have excelled in this area through the first three weeks of the season, converting 48.7 percent (19 of 39) of third downs, the second-best conversion rate in the NFL. The Eagles, who return home after earning a 38-24 win at San Francisco last week, host the Green Bay Packers this Monday night. Philadelphia has scored 86 points, second in the NFL, thanks in part to the ability to extend drives on third down.

Spearheading the offense is quarterback **DONOVAN MC NABB**, the league leader in passing yards (960) and second in touchdowns (7). McNabb has been a steady hand on third downs, posting a 95.0 passer rating, seventh-best among all quarterbacks. His fellow quarterback on Monday night, **BRETT FAVRE**, is No. 2 among passers on third downs with a 131.5 rating, including three touchdown passes and no interceptions.

So what does McNabb look for on third downs?

"You are probably more aware of the first down marker than you would be on other downs," he says. "It's not so much that you are looking for a big play or a score -- you're just very conscious of getting the first down to move the chains."

Adds Minnesota's **BRAD JOHNSON**, owner of a 101.1 third-down passer rating, fifth in the NFL: "The biggest thing to having success on third down is what you do on first and second down. You want to avoid penalties, mistakes and plays that put you in a bad third-down position. You don't want to be in third-and-nine. Just don't put yourself in a tough spot with a bad play early. That's the key."

A look at the top teams on third down in 2006 and for the past 10 seasons:

<u>OFFENSE 3RD DOWN CONVERSIONS</u>						<u>2006 SEASON</u>			
<u>PAST 10 SEASONS (1996-2005)</u>						<u>Team</u>	<u>Made</u>	<u>Atts.</u>	<u>Pct.</u>
Team	Made	Atts.	Pct.	Playoff Trips	Super Bowl Wins	Team	Made	Atts.	Pct.
Minnesota	919	2,092	43.9	6	--	Indianapolis	26	41	63.4
Indianapolis	841	2,023	41.6	7	--	Philadelphia	19	39	48.7
Green Bay	871	2,123	41.0	7	1	Arizona	19	40	47.5
St. Louis	846	2,080	40.7	5	1	Seattle	18	40	45.0
Denver	871	2,148	40.5	7	2	NY Jets	19	43	44.2

You can be certain that if offenses are concentrating on converting third downs, defenses are trying equally hard to stop them. Here are two of the NFL's top defenders on what they focus on in those pivotal third-down situations:

**DERRICK BROOKS, Tampa Bay:** "Defenses try to get teams in third-and-long when you can predict they are going to pass. By doing that, it increases our options in terms of bringing different blitzes versus playing our Cover-2, and also disguising them. I think I get to read the quarterback's body language more on third down. If we force them into a passing situation, we take away one option, so we get to focus in on the quarterback. And our defensive line, they can sit back and rush, which is what most defensive linemen want, the chance to rush."

**BRIAN URLACHER, Chicago:** "Third down is a big play because we have a chance to get off the field. If it's third-and-five or more, they're probably going to throw. If it's third-and-four or less, they can throw it or run it. We have a pretty good idea of their tendencies going into the game. The number one thing for us is, if we blitz, we have to get there and if we don't, guys have to cover. It goes both ways. It's easy when it's third-and-15. We put a lot of pressure on the quarterback and our guys do a good job of playing deep and short and getting off the field."