



NFC NEWS 'N' NOTES

FOR USE AS DESIRED
NFC-N-11 10/31/06

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION,
CONTACT: RANDALL LIU (212/450-2382)

DOUBLE TROUBLE: RUNNING BACKS AS RECEIVERS

Much like a Swiss Army knife, running backs in the NFL are capable of doing a multitude of things. Whether it's rushing the ball or catching a pass out of the backfield, more running backs are finding a way to make an impact.

"Having a running back that can play every down makes it difficult to distinguish when a team is going to run the ball or pass the ball," says St. Louis Rams running back **MARSHALL FAULK**, who is working as an analyst for NFL Network as he rehabs an injury.

These versatile running backs are an offensive coordinator's dream and a defensive coordinator's nightmare.

"Running backs are the hardest thing to account for in the passing game," says Detroit Lions offensive coordinator **MIKE MARTZ**, who coached Faulk and **STEVEN JACKSON** (fifth in the NFL with 884 scrimmage yards) in St. Louis and currently designs plays for **KEVIN JONES** (third in the league among running backs with 37 receptions). "Once you get a back with speed matched up with linebackers and safeties, usually that's a mismatch."

In San Francisco, where **FRANK GORE** is one of four NFL running backs to lead his team in rushing and hold at least a share of the club lead in receptions (Minnesota's **CHESTER TAYLOR**, San Diego's **LA DAINIAN TOMLINSON**, Philadelphia's **BRIAN WESTRBOOK**), 49ers offensive coordinator **NORV TURNER** agrees.

"Being able to use your backs in the passing game is big," says Turner. "In this league, there are some teams where it is difficult to run the ball against. But if you have backs that are versatile enough to catch the football, that's almost like calling runs. If you get the ball out to them and it ends up being a six- or seven-yard gain, that's like running the ball. And you can take the pressure off your offensive line by using them. When you have success throwing to backs underneath and people have to work to take them away, it opens things up for the receivers up the field."

On the other side of the ball, defensive coordinators rack their brains trying to stop these versatile players.

"A lot of good backs are good receivers, so they become dangerous not just running the football, but also catching the football," says Tampa Bay defensive coordinator **MONTE KIFFIN**.

One back that Kiffin singled out as a "great back" is **TIKI BARBER** of the New York Giants (9,502 career rushing yards and 4,960 receiving yards), who needs 40 receiving yards to join **MARCUS ALLEN** (12,243 and 5,411) and Faulk (12,279 and 6,875) as the only players in NFL history with at least 9,000 rushing and 5,000 receiving yards in a career.

"The biggest problem is that these backs present matchup problems and create mismatches," says Philadelphia Eagles defensive coordinator **JIM JOHNSON**, who sees a player like this every day in Westbrook, who is second among running backs with 38 catches. In fact, to prepare for a meeting this season with New Orleans rookie **REGGIE BUSH** -- the leader among running backs with 42 receptions -- the Eagles practiced against Westbrook.

"Reggie is a lot like Westbrook," says Johnson. "They do a lot of things with Reggie like we do with Brian."

This season, nine of the top 15 players in scrimmage yards come from the NFC. After league leaders **LARRY JOHNSON** of Kansas City and Tomlinson, the next seven on the list are NFC backs (in bold and italics):

PLAYER	TEAM	SCRIMMAGE YARDS		PLAYER	TEAM	SCRIMMAGE YARDS
Larry Johnson	KC	973		<i>Julius Jones</i>	<i>Dal</i>	<i>702</i>
LaDainian Tomlinson	SD	959		Willis McGahee	Buf	691
<i>Tiki Barber</i>	<i>NYG</i>	<i>957</i>		Fred Taylor	Jax	683
<i>Brian Westbrook</i>	<i>Phi</i>	<i>901</i>		Ronnie Brown	Mia	680
<i>Steven Jackson</i>	<i>StL</i>	<i>884</i>		<i>Edgerrin James</i>	<i>Arz</i>	<i>678</i>
<i>Frank Gore</i>	<i>SF</i>	<i>842</i>		<i>Warrick Dunn</i>	<i>Atl</i>	<i>675</i>
<i>Chester Taylor</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>776</i>		Andre Johnson	Hou	669
<i>Kevin Jones</i>	<i>Det</i>	<i>740</i>				

