

# Field Guide

PAT KIRWAN helps you get in the game by ignoring the pigskin.

To the untrained eye, football is chaos. Every snap of the ball puts 22 players in motion, resulting in a flurry of action so frantic that most fans are resigned only to follow the ball. But if you really want to appreciate the strategy that separates football from all other sports, you need to look elsewhere. Pat Kirwan, author of the new book *Take Your Eye Off The Ball*, shows you where to direct your attention on first-and-ten.



## At the Line of Scrimmage

**CHECK OUT:** The hips of the cornerback.

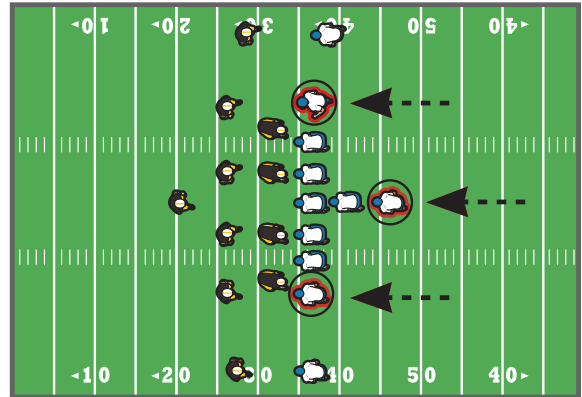
**WHY:** "Quarterbacks and receivers need to identify before the snap whether the defense is in man-to-man coverage or zone. A cornerback's hips can be a dead giveaway: If his butt is toward the sideline, he's playing zone and will try to funnel his man to the inside. If his hips are square to the receiver or angled toward the middle of the field, he's in man-to-man and wants to force the receiver outside, so he can use the sideline as an extra defender."



## Once the Ball is Snapped

**CHECK OUT:** The helmets of the offensive linemen.

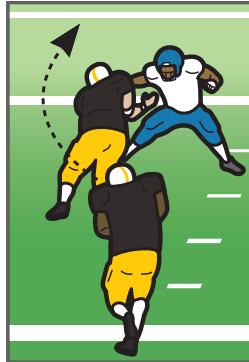
**WHY:** "Want to be the first to call whether a play is a run or a pass? When the ball is snapped, look at the height of the linemen's helmets. If they rise up on the snap, they're dropping back into pass protection. If they stay low, they're run-blocking. Call it even earlier by watching the pre-snap stance of the left tackle. If he's down with his hand on the ground in a three-point stance, it's most likely going to be a run. If he's standing up in a two-point stance, it's likely to be a pass."



## Before the Snap

**CHECK OUT:** The offensive personnel.

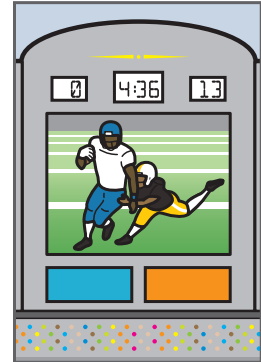
**WHY:** "The key to anticipating what play may be called is recognizing who's in the game," Kirwan says. "Count the number of running backs and tight ends on the field. One running back and two tight ends means '12 personnel'. Two running backs and one tight end is '21 personnel'. The digits indicate the formation, not the number of players on the field. In both cases, there are two receivers on the field. As the game develops, you'll notice a team's play-calling tendencies when certain personnel packages are on the field."



## As the Play Unfolds

**CHECK OUT:** The helmet of the lead blocker (on a run).

**WHY:** "A running back follows his lead blocker and keys on that guy's helmet. If the helmet is outside the body of the defender he's blocking, the back needs to take the ball outside, and vice versa. So if the run gets stuffed, you'll often know why. If the helmet was outside the defender, and the back cuts inside, the failed play is the back's fault. If the back took the ball to the correct side and still got stuffed, the blame falls instead on an ineffective block."



## After the Play

**CHECK OUT:** The replay

**WHY:** "When watching the replay of a blown tackle, there are several things to look for: Did the defender accelerate his feet through the tackle? If his legs are still, he's not maximizing his power. Did the defender make contact with his knees bent and his head up? A defender who lowers his head or bends at the waist negates his power. Did he take the correct angle of pursuit? If the defender's head is behind the runner, he's tackling only with his arms. If he can keep his head in front of the ball carrier, he'll be able to utilize his hips and legs on the tackle."