

# COACHING FOOTBALL

— FOREWORDS BY JON GRUDEN —

HEAD COACH, TAMPA BAY BUCCANEERS

AND TONY DUNGY

HEAD COACH, INDIANAPOLIS COLTS



REVISED  
& EXPANDED  
SECOND  
EDITION

FROM YOUTH LEAGUES TO THE PROS

TOM FLORES AND BOB O'CONNOR

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***McGraw-Hill***

*New York Chicago San Francisco Lisbon London Madrid Mexico City  
Milan New Delhi San Juan Seoul Singapore Sydney Toronto*

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Flores, Tom.

Coaching football/Tom Flores and Bob O'Connor.—2nd ed.

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 0-07-143914-5 (alk. paper)

1. Football—Coaching. I. O'Connor, Robert, 1932– II. Title.

GV954.4.F56 2006

796.332'07'7—dc22

2005029691

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1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 CUS/CUS 0 9 8 7 6 5

ISBN 0-07-143914-5

Interior illustrations by Randy Miyake

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# DEDICATION

**P**at Tillman gave up a \$3.6 million contract with the Arizona Cardinals to join the U.S. Army—and eventually the Rangers. In 2001 he turned down an offer of \$9 million for five years from the Super Bowl champions, the St. Louis Rams, out of loyalty to the Cardinals.

He left the glory of professional sports for what he considered the good of the country and the world. He was killed in Afghanistan while on a Ranger patrol. He was one person who put his personal ethics and patriotism above the everyday selfishness that is so common in our world.

Tillman played linebacker at Arizona State University and was the Pacific 10 Conference's Defensive Player of the Year in 1997. He graduated summa cum laude in only three and a half years, earning a degree in marketing.

Tillman set a Cardinals record with 224 tackles in 2000 and warmed up for his last year's training camp by competing in a 70.2-mile triathlon in June. Tillman, who at 5'11" tall and 200 pounds was considered undersized for his position, nevertheless distinguished himself by his intelligence and appetite for rugged play.

"You don't find guys that have that combination of being as bright and as tough as him," said Phil Snow, who coached Tillman as Arizona State's defensive coordinator, in 2002. "This guy could go live in a foxhole for a year by himself with no food."

"It touches you pretty deep," Cardinals head coach Dave McGinnis stated at recent NFL meetings. "Pat Tillman is a guy that is full of fiber, full of fabric, everything that he does goes right to the core of what is good and sound in our country." John McCain, the senator from Arizona who was a prisoner of war for more than five years in Vietnam, lauded Tillman as "the quintessential definition of a patriot."

"He is a hero," said Michael Bidwill, vice president of the Cardinals. "He was a brave man. There are very few people who have the courage to do what he did, the courage to walk away from a professional sports career and make the ultimate sacrifice."

Denver quarterback Jake Plummer was a teammate of Tillman for seven years, three at Arizona State and four with the Cardinals. He said, "We lost a unique individual who touched the lives of many with his love for life, his toughness, his intellect. Pat Tillman lived life to the fullest and will be remembered forever in my heart and mind."

We and our players would do well to emulate the academic and athletic excellence of this young man—and even more important, his commitment to the higher ethical principles of pursuing the greater good for our world society.

A more complete man has probably never played our game, so we dedicate this book to Pat's memory and to the ideals it should inspire for today's generation and for the generations yet to come.

# FOREWORD by John Gruden

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**W**ith over a hundred years of playing and coaching experience between them, Tom and Bob deliver the consummate book for football coaches. It is not a book on how to run the option play or how to develop a pass offense, although both of these topics are covered.

Rather it fills the gaps in many areas coaches may not understand or even think about.

Any competent coach, from the youth coach to the professional coach, must know what all the options are and why he chooses to do what he does. By looking at the history of our great game, we see that creative thinking in strategy and tactics is as old as the game itself. The illustrated old formations, used a hundred years ago, display imagination that rivals or surpasses some of the creativity we see today. Developing effective offensive, defensive, and kicking game strategies and tactics is one of the

great fascinations and challenges for every coach. Knowing what has gone before, and seeing the evolution of football thinking, can help us to put our own theories in perspective. In football, as in life, if we don't know where we have been and understand all the options, we cannot intelligently choose how to go forward.

This book covers all aspects of coaching theory, and I believe that every coach can use it as a valuable learning resource. Young coaches can learn a tremendous amount about both the on-field and off-field responsibilities of coaching from this book. There is something important here for every coach and for anyone interested in better understanding the game.

JON GRUDEN,  
Head Coach, Tampa Bay Buccaneers

# FOREWORD by Tony Dungy

**T**om Flores enjoyed a great career in the National Football League. He played for three different teams and later became the head coach for two different franchises. Along the way, he gained a great deal of knowledge about how to play the game of football. But it was more than his knowledge that made me appreciate Coach Flores. Whatever he did, he always did it with championship class and dignity. In *Coaching Football*, he presents a picture of how to teach young men about football and about life.

This is not just a book about strategy—what plays to run or what type of defense to employ; it is more about how the game is coached. It really talks about how to teach individuals to become not only better football players but better athletes and better young

men. Coach Flores draws from all of his experience as a Super Bowl–winning player and coach. He gives you insight into how to develop a philosophy of coaching, how you’re going to instruct players in-season and off-season, and how to get your players thinking like winners. His emphasis is not so much on *what* to teach, but *how* to teach. That’s why this book is great reading for any coach. Whether you’re at the Pop Warner level or coaching in the NFL, I’m sure you’ll learn some valuable lessons that will make you more effective at doing what we are all trying to do—help our young men be the best that they can be.

TONY DUNGY  
Head Coach, Indianapolis Colts

# PREFACE

**T**his book is designed to give you an overview of what must be considered in coaching. While it includes some specifics that should help you immensely, such as the strategy checklists or specifics on conditioning and fundamentals, space doesn't permit including all there is to know about football. We won't try to talk you into using the West Coast offense or the single wing. But we will attempt to get you to think through the whole coaching process—philosophy; theories of offense, defense, and kicking; some fundamentals; ideas on scouting and game planning; and so on. If you want to learn more on ways to block or offenses to run, you can buy books or tapes on the subject.

While we expect our reading audience to be coaches who are early in their careers (possibly high school or youth coaches) we address subjects that would be new to most pro and college coaches.

From youth football to the pro level, we coach an intensely interesting game. When we are developing blocking schemes, pass patterns, or blitz packages, we had better know something about those parts of the game; but there is much more. We must know how to motivate our players so that they will practice efficiently, learn the game, and play hard.

Young coaches often spend most of their time planning and teaching offense—even though most experienced coaches believe that defense wins championships. In spite of the importance of kicking, many coaches relegate only a few minutes of the Thursday practice to this essential part of the game. If the punt is the most important play in football, we should certainly spend more time on it

than on the flea flicker! If you don't know it when you start coaching, it doesn't take too many seasons to realize that teaching techniques effectively is more important than having the league's thickest playbook. For championship contention, however, you'd better have a squad with an outstanding attitude. A few years ago at an American Football Coaches Convention, the first speaker at the junior college session talked about tackling; the second talked about the importance of attitude. The next lecture was a high school session; one coach talked about a trap play, but the next speaker talked only about attitude. The very next session was for Division I, where the entire topic was attitude. Experienced coaches know that attitude is the heart of the game.

This book should have something for every coach from the peewee level to the pros. While we have included lots of "whats" and "hows" in many areas, we have emphasized the "whys."

So this book is not so much about plays—it's about evaluating and developing a comprehensive approach to theory and practice. Because of this focus, it is essential to look at the "whys": Why pass? Why double-team? Why use multiple formations?

Based on these we look at the "whats" and the "hows"—how to block effectively, how to develop an effective passing attack, how to develop the kicking game.

When coaches and players have thought out the "whys" and the "hows," we should all experience more success and learn more about winning in school and winning in life.

# KEY TO DIAGRAMS

Drawings in this book use this traditional method of indicating how the play is to work:

- is an offensive player.
- ⊗ is the snapper. He will not always be in the center.
- V indicates a defensive lineman.
- B indicates a linebacker.
- C indicates a cornerback or a defensive halfback in a 3-deep alignment.
- S indicates the safetymen.
- indicates the ball carrier.
- Ⓜ indicates a player who handles the ball, but does not complete the play as the ball carrier.  
An example would be the player who starts a reverse play but hands the ball off to another player.
- indicates the path of a player.
- ⋯ indicates the path of the ball—a pass or a lateral.
- ~ indicates the path of the man in motion.
- |- indicates a fake handoff.
- ||- indicates a handoff.



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## CHAPTER

# COACHING THE GAME OF FOOTBALL

**“One of America’s  
most important callings”**

**H**all of Famer Mike Singletary in his keynote address to the American Football Coaches Association in 2003 said, “If anyone would ask me what coaching really means, it’s not really about winning. It’s not really about Xs and Os. All those things go into it, but it’s about influence.” He then went on to say, “His coach would push them, would test them, would take them to the next level. But most importantly, love them.”

“Football’s been good to me. I’ve laughed and I’ve cried my heart out, just like, probably, many of you. But all in all, I wouldn’t take anything for having the opportunity to do what I wanted to do most of my life, and that is to coach football”—so said the late Charlie McClendon, former executive director of the American Football Coaches Association and former head coach at Louisiana State University, on accepting the AFCA’s highest award, the Amos Alonzo Stagg Award in 1992.

As a coach you have a deep responsibility to your players. It is your job to know the young people you are teaching, the game you are teaching, and how the game of football can bring your players to their highest potential as happy and contributing citizens, husbands, and fathers.

Those of us who have chosen to coach this great game follow in the footsteps of thousands of beloved coaches who have gone before us—from the gods of the game, Amos Alonzo Stagg, Knute Rockne, and Glenn “Pop” Warner, to the educational leaders of modern times, the Joe Paternos, Eddie Robinsons, and Grant Teaffs.

The fascination with the game continues for most of us. Amos Alonzo Stagg was still coaching after his 100th birthday. John Gagliardi of St. Johns University, at age seventy-seven, broke Eddie Robinson’s all-time college win record in 2003 and then went on to win the Division III national championship, breaking Mt. Union’s fifty-five game win streak in the finals. (His record at the end of the 2003 season was 414-114-11.) At age seventy-five, Joe Paterno is talking about another undefeated season this decade to match those he accomplished in each of the last four decades. Bobby Bowden, at age seventy-four, passed Paterno in 2003 and now holds the record for most wins by a Division 1A coach. Also in 2003, John McKissick of Summerville (South Carolina) High School increased his high school record to over five hundred wins. He is over one hundred wins ahead of his nearest rival. The beginning of the new century was a good one for old-timers!

We have a legacy to uphold. We must strive to defeat the often-believed idea that that we must win at all costs. Rather, we must always seek to win within the rules. Any victory gained by cheating is a personal loss to the players and coaches. In order to win fairly, we must understand as much of this complicated game as possible, understand our players, choose the possibilities of the game that will best fit our players, organize effectively so that we can make the most out of the limited time available, and then outthink our opposing coaches in the week before and during the game. This is the challenge of football—a challenge that no other game can match.

## Approaching Coaching

As with any other worthwhile occupation, coaching football requires a thorough understanding of a body of knowledge. Strangely, a great many coaches don't understand the complete game. Because of this they limit themselves in the potential they can offer their players. Many coaches are knowledgeable only about the system they played. This limits their understanding of the possibilities of their own team, the advantages and the disadvantages of their opponents' approaches.

There is no one best way to coach. There is no one best offensive or defensive system. The pros use a system that allows them to attack the entire field. While most pro coaches want to emphasize the run, they have to pass.

The venerable and intelligent former coach of the Ohio State Buckeyes, Woody Hayes, once outlined the structure of how we should analyze the game of football. We will utilize this outline to look at the totality of the game. Coach Hayes said that our approach to football can be analyzed according to our philosophy, theory, strategy, and tactics.

### Philosophy

Philosophy is “why” you play or coach the game. What is it that makes you play and coach? What outcomes result because of playing and coaching? Every player and every coach learns something every year from the game. Sometimes those lessons are negative. Hopefully the great majority of experiences will be positive. It is the coach's job to ensure that the experiences of his players are primarily positive ones. In the chapter on philosophy, some of the greats of the game will share with us what they have gained from this all-American game.

## The Theory of the Game

The theory of the game is the overall approach you take to winning. On offense, do you try to get a first down on every series (as most teams do), or do you play a more conservative “field position” game while you attempt to reduce your mistakes and capitalize on those of your opponents? On defense, do you attack and gamble on creating losses, or do you merely attempt to limit your opponent's gains for three downs and then force a fourth down punt? How important is the kicking game in your plans? Is it a necessary evil while you wait to play offense or is it a key part of your approach to the game? These are very real concerns that many coaches do not consciously consider. Each has its advantages.

In this book, we attempt not to give you a play-book but rather to give you a number of options you might use in developing your own theories of offense, defense, and kicking. There isn't time to teach a complete power offense, an option offense, and a complete passing attack. So where are you going to put in your planning and practice time? If the punt is the most important play in football, how much planning and practice time are you going to devote to it?

If you think that the turnover ratio is critical to your success, how much practice time will you spend on ball security and stripping and intercepting techniques? Since time is your enemy, you must decide how to spend it effectively. We are just going to lay out the possibilities and the odds of winning using various approaches to the game.

Because the time available to teach your players is limited, you will not be able to teach them everything you know. You must develop priorities based on your theory—then use the time available to teach those parts of the game that you believe are most important.

## **Planning Strategy**

Planning strategy is one of the most interesting parts of the game for most coaches. After scouting your opponent, you attempt to find how you can match your strengths against the weaknesses of your opponent—in personnel, formations, and situations.

## **Handling the Tactical Situations in the Game**

Handling the tactical situations in the game is often the key to winning—especially in close games. Here is where knowledge and experience really count in coaching. How can you cope with your opponent's unexpected changes in attack and defense? How can you force your opponent to play your game? If an injury occurs to either team, how will that change

your plans? Remember that every technical strength of a team will result in a technical weakness somewhere on the field. Can you find it and exploit it?

## **The Joy of Coaching**

Yes, being a football coach takes a great deal of time. It requires constant studying to keep up. And it requires long hours with the players in conditioning programs, working on fundamentals, and meetings and functions with people outside of the team members. Few individuals ever make a significant amount of money in coaching—but that's not why we get into coaching. We coach because our lives are enriched by the people with whom we work and those whom we teach. We are rich because we are spending our time doing what we enjoy most. Aren't we lucky!



## CHAPTER

# 2

# A PHILOSOPHY OF COACHING AND PLAYING

## “Why do we play and coach this very special game?”

**T**he great composer Franz Liszt once said, “Every theater is a lunatic asylum and opera is the ward for the incurables.” The same might very well be said about football coaches and players at the higher levels—for whatever reason, FOOTBALL IS FUN.

Every type of game excites its participants. Whether it is Monopoly, hide-and-seek, or football, people play for enjoyment. Those of us who have made lifelong commitments to the game of football obviously have some deep attachments to this very special game.

Players want to have fun. Will they have it only when playing a game? Will it occur in blocking drills, Oklahoma drills, playing keep-a-way with a football for conditioning, playing volleyball over the goalposts, running 7 on 7? In America, football is part of the total educational program. Therefore, we have a duty to help develop our players as total people.

Football tests a man’s raw physical courage more than perhaps any other sport. Robert Lewis Stevenson once said, “Courage is the footstool of other virtues.” In nearly all cultures, it is the badge of courage that separates the desirable young men from the rest of the pack. Whether it is the killing of a lion by a young African, the lonely battle against the elements of a young Native American during his initiation into the circle of braves, or the tackling of an opponent by a young football player—courage is exhibited. Every society recognizes that courage and applauds it.

### What Is Your Philosophy of Life—and Your Philosophy of Coaching?

Why are you coaching? Is it for your ego or to develop young people to be the best they can be? At the Pop Warner and high school level, it is far more important to put the player’s total development far ahead of your own interests. At the college level, the players are more developed, and winning becomes more important as a goal of the program. By the time you reach the pro level, it is all about winning—but even here helping the players to be the best they can be, to push them harder, becomes more important, if not vital.

The philosophy that we live by is a combination of psychological needs, such as the power drive, or love needs; it may be based on our religion, our upbringing, or the images presented by the media. But whatever elements make up our philosophy of life (such as the need to control and win, the drive for fame or fortune, the need to help our family grow and mature, or the necessity of following our religious beliefs), we should be aware of the forces that drive us. The Greek philosopher Plato popularized the idea that it was essential to know ourselves.

We should also understand our coaching philosophy. Certainly, no matter what level we are coaching we want to win. But at the youth level, the emphasis should be on making the young players the best people they can be. Even at the high school level, this is important—but the need to win games

becomes much more important. This trend becomes even more important at the college level and all-important at the pro level. So readers of this book will primarily fall into the category of character-developing teachers rather than “win-at-all-cost” coaches.

### Why I Played the Game

The reasons that men have played and the outcomes gained from playing are often different. It is not like building a house. When a person has the goal of building a house, he designs it and builds it. His goal is then attained. In football, a boy may begin to play because it is *the* prestige sport, or because his father wants him to play, or because it is the only thing to do after school. However, the outcomes may be a feeling of accomplishment, the development of a concept of self-worth, a college scholarship, or a lifetime job in playing or coaching.

Hall of Fame linebacker Sam Huff, of the Giants and Redskins, told us that he started playing just because it was expected. In the small coal-mining town in West Virginia where he grew up, boys were expected to go out for all three sports—football, basketball, and baseball. “I was pretty good at football and baseball, but I never could dribble, shoot, or jump! And I liked the contact inherent to football. I liked the contact in baseball, too. I was a catcher.”

The outcomes were different from what originally attracted Sam to playing. He summarized his gratitude to the game by stating, “It taught me how to compete in life. It taught me patience. It taught me to give and take. But most of all it taught me to survive in a tough world.” Sam’s drive for success landed him the vice presidency of Marriott Hotels.

Otto Graham, the all-time Hall of Fame quarterback, started playing for the same reason as most other boys—because it was fun. Otto had another motivation as well. His father had a great interest in music. Otto learned to play several instruments. While the violin and French horn did provide some

enjoyment, they did not offer the excitement of sports that so many young men crave. So basketball and football soon took up more of his time than did the strings and woodwinds. Otto’s fascination with both playing and coaching has always been for the fun of the game, even at the professional level.

Otto went to Northwestern on a basketball scholarship. He didn’t decide to play football until he was a sophomore. Of course, he had great success as a quarterback. Paul Brown, coaching Ohio State, was impressed. So when Paul approached Otto about signing with the new pro league (the All American Conference) he knew whom he was signing. Otto signed for \$7,500 a year and by the end of his career he was the highest-paid pro, making \$25,000 a year.

The outcomes players have gained included developing pride in themselves, learning patience, encountering the “give-and-take” of the game, which teaches them about the real world, developing a sense of purpose in life, the place of discipline in accomplishing one’s goals, developing leadership abilities, and for some, a lifelong profession in the game.

Detroit GM Matt Millan now has four Super Bowl rings—one with the 49ers, two with the Raiders, and one with the Redskins. He says that football helps you to learn a “zillion” things about yourself. One of the major lessons is to take care of the little things and the big things will take care of themselves.

He credits both his father and his high school coach, Andy Melosky, with developing his work ethic. His father would accept no marks in high school under 95 percent. His coach showed him the importance of working on the field.

Matt sets goals for himself daily. By working he was able to achieve them. Work will help everyone to get better. While you may not achieve your goals, you will come closer to them if you work hard. The poor player, with work, will get better. It became clear to Matt that the expectations in life are greater than their realizations. “Nothing is as good as you expect.” You must come to terms with that concept so that



you don't give up when life isn't perfect. Just work harder at the game, at your studies, in your business, in your marriage. Move up—don't give up!

In football, as in life, you must keep to the fundamentals. Even in the Super Bowl, when you are not playing your best, you must go back to fundamentals. Look first at your stance. Check your read progression to make certain that you are not overlooking an important key. The same is true in life. Check your fundamentals. When things are not going well in your personal or business life, check your fundamentals. Are you doing what you should be doing?

### The Fascination of Coaching

Perhaps John Robinson said it best when, after leaving the head coaching position at USC for a three-month stint as a university vice president, he took the job of head coach of the Rams. "The thing that shocked me the most was that outside of the sports world, there isn't the passion for what you do."

John Madden got into coaching prematurely. An injury while working out with the Eagles gave him an opportunity to watch films with Norm Van Brocklin. The technical aspects of the game began to make an impact. He had a meteoric rise from junior college to college to pro coach. I think that a good part of his drive to succeed as the Raider head coach was to show Al Davis that he had made the right decision in giving John the job. He worked endlessly to develop the best team in pro football. He won the first Raider Super Bowl.

One of the things that excites coaches is the challenge of molding a team from a group of individuals. Former San Francisco 49er coach Bill Walsh had a reputation of being an innovative "Xs and Os" coach. Like many coaches, he had a penchant for drawing plays on tablecloths, napkins, and scraps of paper. He admitted, "Our fans liked our technical football, but I was really more concerned with two other things—the chemistry of the team and the proper evaluation

and selection of talent. Nothing on a pro football team is more important than the talent."

### The Joy of Coaching

For many high school, college, and Pop Warner coaches, there is a keen desire and ability to help the youngsters of America. As Otto Graham said, "The high school coaches are the unsung heroes of America because so many of our youths will listen only to their coaches." Certainly knowing that they can be an important instrument in directing the lives of our youth is enough to make many coaches feel that they are living worthwhile lives.

There is certainly a feeling of power that a coach derives when he develops a new concept of offense or defense or when he develops a strategy that helps beat a favored opponent. There is a feeling of satisfaction when he makes personnel evaluations that turn out to help the team. There is the joy when he can help a player or the player's family. And there is the feeling of accomplishment when his team has won a game—especially a big game.

### The Place of Football in American Society

Former football player General Douglas MacArthur said, "Football is the closest thing to war, that's why it would always be played at West Point." Football allows for a great deal more strategy than other games because after each play the teams can regroup and, based on the situation, can plan how to attack and how to defend the enemy.

Many former players testify that football has given them the means to be mentally tough. Successful programs emphasize the setting of both individual and team goals. Successful programs also give young men the hope and the heart to accomplish their goals in life. In an effective football program,