

Week 14

This week's topic is: Fourth Down Strategy

Game Example: Dallas at Pittsburgh

Generally, the offense punts the ball away on fourth down. If the score is close, the yardage needed is small and the end of the half or the game is near, a team might try to convert on fourth down.

On Sunday (12/7), the Pittsburgh Steelers went into the 4th Quarter trailing the Dallas Cowboys 13-3. They went for the conversion, instead of kicking for a field goal which would have put them within one score of tying Dallas (if the kick was good, the score would have been 13-6, and a Pittsburgh touchdown would have tied the game). They didn't convert on fourth down, so the score remained 13-3, and Pittsburgh needed two scores to win. There was plenty of time remaining in the quarter, and being 10 points behind is certainly not insurmountable for a team like Pittsburgh.

Dallas got the ball back in their own territory when Pittsburgh didn't convert. Dallas ended up punting the ball away, and Pittsburgh got the ball back. Their scoring drive ended with a field goal, with 7:15 left to play in the 4th Quarter. The score was 13-6, and Pittsburgh needed a touchdown to tie the game.

Pittsburgh kicked off, and Dallas again failed to score. Pittsburgh got the ball back, and scored a touchdown on a pass from QB Ben Roethlisberger to Heath Miller, with 2:04 left in the game. The PAT (Point After Touchdown) kick was good, and the score was now tied at 13.

Pittsburgh kicked the ball to Dallas, and Dallas regained possession of the ball. Pittsburgh's Deshaea Townsend intercepted a Tony Romo pass, and ran it back 25 yards for a touchdown. The PAT kick was good, and Pittsburgh now led 13-20, with less than 2 minutes to play.

Pittsburgh kicked off to Dallas, and Dallas was unable to score. Pittsburgh got the ball back when Dallas punted, and the game ended with a Pittsburgh win/Dallas loss.

Game Lesson:

Game strategy isn't just about trying to convert on fourth down. Pittsburgh won the game, but could have just as easily lost by not going for the field goal early in the 4th Quarter. With the score 13-3, if Dallas had scored only a field goal, the score of 16-3 (13 point difference), would have been not only a two-score game, but a two-touchdown game. Pittsburgh did it in the end because Dallas didn't score again and Pittsburgh took the lead when they scored on an interception. With as much time as Pittsburgh had to kick a field goal and get the ball back from Dallas for a touchdown to tie it up, the safer strategy would have been to score 3 points, get within a touchdown to tie, and then win in regulation or overtime.

If you watched the game, some of the commentators didn't agree with the attempt to convert on fourth down for the reasons given. Some coaches like to shake things up and call plays that are unexpected; in this case it worked out for Pittsburgh in the end.

STANDINGS
2008 - Week 14

AFC											
East	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA	Home	Away	v AFC	v NFC	v Div
NY Jets	8	5	0	.615	354	292	4-2-0	4-3-0	6-4-0	2-1-0	3-1-0
New England Patriots	8	5	0	.615	301	276	4-3-0	4-2-0	5-5-0	3-0-0	3-2-0
Miami Dolphins	8	5	0	.615	269	260	4-3-0	4-2-0	6-4-0	2-1-0	3-2-0
Buffalo Bills	6	7	0	.462	279	275	3-4-0	3-3-0	4-5-0	2-2-0	0-4-0
West											
W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA	Home	Away	v AFC	v NFC	v Div	
Denver Broncos	8	5	0	.615	316	336	4-3-0	4-2-0	5-5-0	3-0-0	3-2-0
San Diego Chargers	5	8	0	.385	324	281	4-3-0	1-5-0	5-5-0	0-3-0	3-1-0
Oakland Raiders	3	10	0	.231	179	299	1-5-0	2-5-0	3-7-0	0-3-0	2-4-0
Kansas City Chiefs	2	11	0	.154	233	364	1-5-0	1-6-0	2-7-0	0-4-0	2-3-0
North											
W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA	Home	Away	v AFC	v NFC	v Div	
Pittsburgh Steelers	10	3	0	.769	289	183	5-2-0	5-1-0	8-1-0	2-2-0	4-0-0
Baltimore Ravens	9	4	0	.692	316	200	5-1-0	4-3-0	7-3-0	2-1-0	4-1-0
Cleveland Browns	4	9	0	.308	222	275	1-6-0	3-3-0	3-7-0	1-2-0	1-3-0
Cincinnati Bengals	1	11	1	.115	154	345	1-4-1	0-7-0	1-9-0	0-2-1	0-5-0
South											
W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA	Home	Away	v AFC	v NFC	v Div	
Tennessee Titans	12	1	0	.923	332	184	6-1-0	6-0-0	8-1-0	4-0-0	4-0-0
Indianapolis Colts	9	4	0	.692	292	253	4-2-0	5-2-0	8-2-0	1-2-0	2-2-0
Houston Texans	6	7	0	.462	306	331	4-2-0	2-5-0	4-6-0	2-1-0	1-4-0
Jacksonville Jaguars	4	9	0	.308	251	293	1-5-0	3-4-0	3-7-0	1-2-0	2-3-0
NFC											
East	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA	Home	Away	v AFC	v NFC	v Div
NY Giants	11	2	0	.846	366	226	6-1-0	5-1-0	3-1-0	8-1-0	4-1-0
Dallas Cowboys	8	5	0	.615	312	280	5-1-0	3-4-0	2-1-0	6-4-0	2-2-0
Philadelphia Eagles	7	5	1	.577	339	263	4-2-0	3-3-1	1-1-1	6-4-0	1-3-0
Washington Redskins	7	6	0	.538	218	246	3-4-0	4-2-0	1-2-0	6-4-0	2-3-0
West											
W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA	Home	Away	v AFC	v NFC	v Div	
Arizona Cardinals	8	5	0	.615	372	323	5-1-0	3-4-0	2-1-0	6-4-0	5-0-0
San Francisco 49ers	5	8	0	.385	286	327	3-4-0	2-4-0	2-1-0	3-7-0	2-3-0
Seattle Seahawks	2	11	0	.154	237	335	1-6-0	1-5-0	0-3-0	2-8-0	2-2-0
St. Louis Rams	2	11	0	.154	169	394	1-5-0	1-6-0	0-4-0	2-7-0	0-4-0
North											
W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA	Home	Away	v AFC	v NFC	v Div	
Minnesota Vikings	8	5	0	.615	307	276	5-1-0	3-4-0	2-2-0	6-3-0	4-2-0
Chicago Bears	7	6	0	.538	304	278	4-2-0	3-4-0	2-1-0	5-5-0	3-2-0
Green Bay Packers	5	8	0	.385	355	319	3-4-0	2-4-0	1-2-0	4-6-0	3-1-0
Detroit Lions	0	13	0	.000	219	413	0-7-0	0-6-0	0-3-0	0-10-0	0-5-0
South											
W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA	Home	Away	v AFC	v NFC	v Div	
Carolina Panthers	10	3	0	.769	323	254	7-0-0	3-3-0	3-0-0	7-3-0	3-2-0
Tampa Bay Buccaneers	9	4	0	.692	303	238	6-0-0	3-4-0	1-1-0	8-3-0	3-2-0
Atlanta Falcons	8	5	0	.615	323	271	5-1-0	3-4-0	3-1-0	5-4-0	2-3-0
New Orleans Saints	7	6	0	.538	366	326	6-1-0	1-5-0	3-1-0	4-5-0	2-3-0