

## Atlanta's passing game presents challenges

Contributed by J.P.  
Wednesday, 18 September 2013

The Falcons offense has a lot going for them. They have a good, accurate, smart QB in Matt Ryan, tremendous speed outside in Julio Jones and Roddy White, and great targets underneath to take advantage of that.

It's obvious to anyone that watches football what speed on the outside can do for your offense. It's more than creating big plays down the field to that receiver; it's about opening up the field for everyone else on your offense. Isn't that why Miami signed Mike Wallace? To open up the field for the TE's and other receivers?

The Falcons have a great formula and foundation in their offense that revolves around exactly this. Today, I want to demonstrate why Miami's LB's and slot corners are going to be busy all day with Atlanta's offense.

First, we have a 3rd down play to Tony Gonzalez. On this play you'll notice the speed of an elite receiver on the outside like Roddy White sucks in the safety, giving Gonzalez one-on-one coverage with a LB. The Falcons, by the way, love using this trips set in order to get great match-ups with their inside slot receivers, (in this case Gonzalez), while the slot corner is preoccupied with the outside slot receiver (Douglas in this play).

{youtube}5Ydy7pPVvg0{/youtube}

As you can see in the first freeze frame, the safety is nearly 20 yards off the line of scrimmage by the time the ball is snapped. This gives Gonzales and Ryan a huge window to work against a LB. By the time the ball gets to Gonzalez, the safety is still nowhere near the play, about 14 yards from Gonzalez. This type of play is all over Atlanta's film, as I'll demonstrate with a few more examples.

The Falcons will likely be without Stephen Jackson this weekend, leaving Jacquizz Rodgers as the main tailback. Atlanta loves using Rodgers in a similar role to how the Patriots used Kevin Faulk for a number of years. They love throwing to him out of the backfield, and will use him in the screen game quite a bit.

{youtube}yqnHeoo3Gz0{/youtube}

On this play, even though it's a short field, notice how far the safety is from the line of scrimmage when the screen develops...already 20 yards away, and 25 from Rodgers. Also notice the safety on the other side of the field. Even though this is zone coverage (given the CB's are looking at the QB the whole way), the safety is still worried about Roddy White, leaving a LB to coverage Gonzalez all the way across the field and away from the play. With Julio Jones running a 9 route to occupy both the corner and safety on the screen-side of the field, it leaves just one LB to try and deal with the screen pass.

That play went for 16 yards, despite it being inside the 30 yard line; unacceptable for any defense, and a huge chunk play for the offense on a short field.

This next example is a very similar one to the first one. This time it's a play action pass, but again the concept is the same. Julio Jones runs a 9 route to occupy the safety and corner, while Gonzalez then works that side of the field with a LB one-on-one. The window left open for Ryan and Gonzalez to work with is massive, and this is a near-impossible match-up for any LB.

{youtube}edPSmxmCfBY{/youtube}

Let's look at one final play before we move on. This one goes back to Week 1 against the Saints. A couple of things to note before watching the play; New Orleans is in a quarters coverage, meaning each of the four DB's has a quarter of the deep 3rd of the field to cover. The corner on Julio Jones will stick with him down the field as Julio is again running a 9 route to open things up.

{youtube}UeaqFolxjo{/youtube}

As you can see in the freeze frame, the safety leaves a huge window (his coverage) open for the Falcons to get the ball to Harry Douglas working a deep crossing route. The safety is worried about Jones' over the top, and leans towards the sideline in order to help out his cornerback in case the ball is thrown that way. This leaves that huge window for Douglas, who will make a big play anytime you give him 10 yards in-between him and the next defender.

So why not play these crossing routes and take away these frustrating, methodical pick-ups?

{youtube}3peA60d9V4A{/youtube}

Against elite offensive weapons like Atlanta has, you have to give them something. You can't take away everything, but the play above is exactly what you can't allow.

You need to double cover Julio Jones. Period. It will open things up for Douglas, Rodgers and Gonzalez underneath, but it's the price you pay. Miami cannot give up big plays down the field and must rely on their LB's to be stout in coverage and not allow any yards after the catch.

The other thing from this play I want you to notice is that this is partially created by blitzing. Against weapons this good and a QB this smart, you can't afford to play one-on-one, man-to-man coverage across the field. I think Miami has to trust that it's 4 man front can create pressure, and play coverage this Sunday.

To back up this point, here are some numbers to digest:

Ryan has excelled against lesser coverage this season. Even back to his Boston College days, blitzing him was the worst recipe you could have defensively.

Send four against Ryan, hope your LB's can play tight coverage and DON'T give up the big play. Do these three things, and defensively I think Miami has a chance to slow the Falcons down.