

The Units of a Super Bowl Champion:

*Analyzing the Strengths and Weaknesses of the NFL's Champions
from the last ten seasons*

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Abstract

The goal of this article is to examine the strengths and weaknesses of recent NFL championship teams, and find out the most notable units. Most discussions take a positional-heavy approach, and the quarterback position has always been the most revered. However, upon closer examination, it isn't necessarily most important to have a great quarterback as it is to be able to defend one.

Introduction

This article looks at the past ten Super Bowl champions, analyzing to see why winners won. We want to see if defense or offense is the most important component of a team, but more specifically, what units are the most important. They say football is the ultimate team sport but are all the parts equal? In defense, is the front seven more important or the back four? What are the correlations between the two? What are the correlations between offensive line play and quarterback performance? Are running backs really expendable?

For this, we will need access to the position performances of players over the past ten years. We will be able to find this through the season stats on NFL.com. Sports-Reference is another source. We will also go through game recaps. Due to rule changes in the NFL since 2004, the ability to pass the ball has opened up offenses, while more rule changes emphasizing safety have made it hard to defend without being penalized.

We hope to determine the direction of the game over the last ten seasons. Every team is unique, and each game has fluky elements, which is why the Super Bowls will take on a different feel than what has been established by a select team over the broader course of the regular season. In getting trends together, we hope to explain what rosters can win in the future. We will be placing values on "game-changing events" and sustainable performances, while analyzing what teams did well during the season, and how they held up in the championship.

Methodology

- We are going to Pro Football Reference, starting with Super Bowl XXXIX (Patriots vs. Eagles). Sample will be 10 Super Bowls.

- The purpose of this is to help them construct a roster. To survive a 4 month regular season (hopefully more wins than losses). Win specific games in the playoffs.

- 7 components for Breaking Games Down (Superbowl)
 - 1) Pass Offense vs. Pass Defense
 - 2) Pass Defense vs. Pass offense
 - 3) Run offense vs. Run defense
 - 4) Run defense vs. Run offense
 - 5) Offensive Line vs. Pressure (Turnovers--QB fumbles in the pocket, interceptions) --
 - 6) Pressure vs. Offensive Line
 - 7) Special Teams

- 7 components for Regular Season breakdown
 - 1) Pass Offense
 - 2) Pass Defense
 - 3) Run Offense
 - 4) Run Defense
 - 5) Offensive Line
 - 6) Pressure
 - 7) Special Teams

- SB success will be defined by:
 - 1) Pass Offense - Multiple Touchdowns, 7 yards per attempt, Completion Percentage (60%+)
 - 2) Pass Defense - Less than 7 yards per attempt, Under 60% completion, Not multiple touchdowns
 - 3) Run Defense - Less than 4 yards per attempt, 1 Rushing Touchdown, Fumbles (1+)
 - 4) Run Offense - More than 4 yards per attempt, 1 (2 is better) Rushing touchdown, 0 Fumbles
 - 5) Pressure - Sacks, Interceptions, QB Fumbles
 - 6) Offensive Line - (2 or less sacks), (1 or less interceptions/fumble)
 - 7) Special Teams - Field Goals, Punt Return Game (Yards per Return), Kick Off-return game (Yards per Return), Punt Coverage (field position), Kick off Coverage (field position)[Field goals, touchdowns, turnovers, field position].

- Regular Season success will be defined by:

- 1) Pass Offense (over 7.0 yards per attempt, over 60% completions, 2:1 TD-INT ratio, at least three strong receiving targets, top-ten ranked)
- 2) Pass Defense (under 80.0 passer rating allowed, top-ten ranked)
- 3) Run Defense (under 4.0 yards per rush allowed, top-ten ranked)
- 4) Run Offense (over 4.0 yards per rush, 10+ rushing touchdowns, top-ten ranked)
- 5) Pressure (at least 40 sacks and 20 INTs)
- 6) Offensive Line (less than 40 sacks allowed, less than 15 INTs)
- 7) Special Teams (80% field goals, at least one return TD)

- *Positive* and *Not Positive* values will be assigned to each category. Positive meaning that they fulfilled our criteria, and not positive meaning that they did not.

-Once strengths are recorded, they will be compared to the other Super Bowl winners to determine which units have proven to be strongest when building a championship team.

Results

The last ten Super Bowl champions:

- 2004 New England Patriots
- 2005 Pittsburgh Steelers
- 2006 Indianapolis Colts
- 2007 New York Giants
- 2008 Pittsburgh Steelers
- 2009 New Orleans Saints
- 2010 Green Bay Packers
- 2011 New York Giants
- 2012 Baltimore Ravens
- 2013 Seattle Seahawks

1) Let's start with the Patriots profile. They finished 14-2, winning the AFC East and the top seed:

- Pass Offense = QB Tom Brady had a 28:14 TD-INT ratio. Completed 61% of passes, for 7.8 yards per attempt. None of his receivers approached 900 yards or 8 TDs. 5th in TDs, 11th in yards. (Positive)
- Run Offense = RB Corey Dillon ran for 1,635 yards (4.7 yards per carry, 12 TDs, 5 fumbles). As a team, Patriots ran for only 4.1 yards per carry (18th) but finished 7th in rushing yards and 8th in rushing TDs. (Positive)
- Offensive Line = Patriots allowed fifth fewest sacks, threw 11th fewest INTs. (Positive)
- Pressure = 45 sacks (4th), 20 INTs (7th). (Positive)
- Run Defense = 3.9 yards per carry allowed (11th), 9 TDs (10th). 6th in rushing yards allowed. (Positive)
- Pass Defense = 75.3 passer rating allowed (7th). 17th in pass yards allowed, 18 pass TDs allowed (8th). (Positive)
- Special Teams = K Adam Vinatieri (Pro Bowl), KR Bethel Johnson (24.8 yards per return, one TD). Allowed one punt return TD, one kickoff return TD. P Josh Miller (33.7 net average). (Not Positive)

The Patriots defeated the Colts and Steelers and faced the Philadelphia Eagles in the Super Bowl. The Patriots won 24-21:

- NE Pass Offense vs. PHI Pass Defense: Brady = 23/33, 236 yards, 2 TDs, 0 INTs. WR Deion Branch = Super Bowl MVP, 11 catches, 133 yards. (Positive)
- NE Run Offense vs. PHI Run Defense: 28 carries, 112 yards, one Dillon TD. (Positive)
- NE Offensive Line vs. PHI Pressure: Sacked twice, lost fumble on one. (Positive)
- NE Pressure vs. PHI Offensive Line: Four sacks of QB Donovan McNabb, three INTs. (Positive)
- NE Run Defense vs. PHI Run Offense: 17 attempts, 45 yards, no TDs. (Positive)
- NE Pass Defense vs. PHI Pass Offense: McNabb = 30/51, 351 yards, 3 TDs, 3 INTs. WR Terrell Owens = 9 catches, 122 yards. (Not Positive)

- NE Special Teams vs. PHI Special Teams = Vinatieri made field goal. Eagles didn't attempt one. (Positive)

2) 2005 Pittsburgh Steelers - 6th seed AFC, 11-5. First team to win as 6th seed.

- Pass Offense = QB Ben Roethlisberger 17:9 TD-INT ratio. Completed 62.7% of passes (168/268), 8.9 yards per attempt. 12th in Touchdowns, 25th in Yards. (Not Positive).
 - Hines Ward - 69 Receptions, 975 Yards, 11 Touchdowns
 - Heath Miller - 39 Receptions, 459 Yards, 6 Touchdowns
 - Antwaan Randle El - 35 Receptions, 558 Yards, 1 Touchdown
- Run Offense = RB Willie Parker (4.7 Yards per Carry on 255 Attempts for 1202 yards, 4 Touchdowns, 4 Fumbles). Team: 4.0 Yards per Carry(12th), 5th in Yards, 5th in rushing touchdowns. (Positive).
- Offensive Line = 23rd fewest interceptions (14), 16th fewest sacks (32). (Positive)
- Pressure = 4th in sacks (47), 19th in interceptions (15) (Positive)
- Run Defense = 3rd in yards allowed (1376), 8th in Touchdowns Allowed (10), 1st in Yards per Carry (3.4). (VERY POSITIVE)
- Pass Defense = 74.0 passer rating allowed (8th), 3168 yards Allowed (16th), 15 Passing Touchdowns Allowed (5th). (Positive).
- Special Teams = 82.8 FG%, 2 Return Touchdowns, 0 Return Touchdowns Allowed (Positive).

In the playoffs, the Steelers defeated the Bengals, Broncos, and Colts. They defeated the Seattle Seahawks in the Superbowl 21-10.

- PIT Pass Offense vs. SEA Pass Defense: Roethlisberger = 9/21, 123 Yards, 0 TD, 2 Int. Antwaan Randle El had a passing touchdown on an end-around. (Not Positive)
Hines Ward = 5 receptions, 123 yards, 1 TD.
- PIT Run Offense vs. SEA Run Defense: 33 Attempts, 181 Yards, 2 Touchdowns (Positive)
- PIT Offensive Line vs. SEA Pressure: 2 interceptions, 0 fumbles, (Not Positive)
- PIT Pressure vs. SEA Offensive Line: 1 Interception, 0 fumbles, 3 sacks (Positive)
- PIT Run Defense vs. Seattle Run Offense: 25 Attempts, 137 Yards, 0 Touchdowns (Not Positive)
- PIT Pass Defense vs. Seattle Pass Offense: 26 Completions, 49 Attempts, 273 Yards, 1 Touchdown, 1 Interception (Positive)
- PIT Special Teams vs. Seattle Special Teams: SEA 33 FG%, 0 Return Touchdowns (Positive).

3) 2006 Indianapolis Colts - 12-4, won AFC South, 4th seed:

- Pass Offense: QB Peyton Manning = 31:9 TD-INT ratio. Completed 65%, 7.9 yards per attempt. Two Pro Bowl WRs (Marvin Harrison, Reggie Wayne), RB Joseph Addai = 325 receiving yards. Colts = 1st in pass TDs, 2nd in pass yards. (Positive)
- Run Offense: RB Addai = 1,081 rushing yards, 7 TDs, 4.8 yards per carry, 2 fumbles. Colts = 4.0 yards per carry (16th), 17 TDs (6th), 18th in yards. (Positive)

- Offensive Line: Colts allowed fewest sacks in the league (15), threw only 9 INTs (top-4). LT Tarik Glenn, C Jeff Saturday = Pro Bowl. (Positive)
- Pressure: 25 sacks (30th in NFL), 15 INTs (21st). (Not Positive)
- Run Defense: The absolute worst. Allowed over 400 more rushing yards than 31st ranked team. Allowed NFL-worst 5.3 yards per run. Allowed 20 TDs (30th). (Not Positive)
- Pass Defense: 80.4 passer rating allowed (15th). Allowed 15 TD passes (5th), 6.5 yards per attempt (8th), 64.1% completions (30th), 2nd in pass yards allowed. (Positive)
- Special Teams: K Adam Vinatieri = 25/28 FGs. PR Terrence Wilkins = one TD, 9.2 yards per return. 3 return TDs allowed. (Not Positive)

The Colts defeated the Chiefs, Ravens, and Patriots and faced the Chicago Bears in the Super Bowl. The Colts won 29-17:

- IND Pass Offense vs. CHI Pass Defense: Manning = 25/38, 247 yards, 53-yard TD pass to Wayne, one INT. 10 completions to Addai for 66 yards. TE Bryan Fletcher lost fumble. (Not Positive)
- IND Run Offense vs. CHI Run Defense: 42 attempts, 191 yards, TD from Dominic Rhodes. Rhodes ran 21 times for 119 yards, Addai ran 19 times for 77 yards. (Positive)
- IND Offensive Line vs. CHI Pressure: Colts allowed one sack. Manning threw one INT, lost one fumble. (Positive)
- IND Pressure vs. CHI Offensive Line: One sack, 2 INTs (one returned for TD by CB Kelvin Hayden). QB Rex Grossman also lost a fumble. (Positive)
- IND Run Defense vs. CHI Run Offense: RB Thomas Jones = 15 carries, 112 yards, no TDs. RB Cedric Benson = 2 carries, -1 yard, lost fumble. (Positive)
- IND Pass Defense vs. CHI Pass Offense: Grossman = 20/28, 165 yards, one TD to WR Muhsin Muhammad, 2 INTs. (Positive)
- IND Special Teams vs. CHI Special Teams: Vinatieri made 3-of-4 FGs, 2-of-2 PATs. P Hunter Smith botched PAT hold. Bears K Robbie Gould made 2-of-2 PATs, 1/1 FGs. Colts allowed kickoff return TD to Devin Hester. Bears fumbled kickoff return. (Not Positive)

4) 2007 Giants AFC 5th Seed. 10-6.

- Pass Offense: QB Eli Manning had a 23:20 TD-INT ratio. Completed 56.1% of passes for 6.3 yards per attempt. Burress and Shockey were the only bright spots, led by Plaxico Burress' 1,025 yards, 12 Touchdowns. 21st in passing yards, 14th in TD passes. (Not Positive)
- Run Offense: RB Brandon Jacobs ran 202 times for 1009 yards (5.0 Yards per Carry) and 4 TD. Giants finished 4th in rushing yards, 7th in TDs (15), and 4th in Yards per Attempt (4.6). (Positive)
- Offensive Line: Giants allowed 12th-fewest sacks (28), threw 8th-most interceptions (20). (Not Positive)
- Pressure: Giants led the NFL in sacks with 53; Pro Bowl DE Osi Umenyiora and DE Justin Tuck combined for 23. Giants had 15 INTs (20th). (Positive)

- Run Defense: Giants were 8th in rushing yards allowed, 19th in rushing TDs allowed (12), and 5th in yards per rush allowed (3.8). (Positive)
- Pass Defense: Giants allowed 83.4 passer rating (17th). Opponents completed 58.5% of passes (5th) for 7.0 yards per attempt (19th). Giants finished 11th in pass yards allowed and 21st in pass TDs allowed (24). (Not Positive)
- Special Teams: K Lawrence Tynes made 23/27 FGs, but missed two PATs. P Jeff Feagles had a punt blocked and averaged only 40.4 yards per punt, though his high kicks aided coverage. KR Domenik Hixon scored a TD but wasn't the team's primary return specialist. Giants also allowed a KR TD. (Not Positive)

The Giants went on the road and defeated the Buccaneers, Cowboys, and Packers on their way to face the 18-0 New England Patriots. The Giants won 17-14:

- NYG Pass Offense vs. NE Pass Defense: Super Bowl MVP Manning completed only 19 of 34 passes, but for 255 yards, two TDs, and one INT. Burrell caught game-winning TD. (Positive)
- NYG Run Offense vs. NE Run Defense: Giants ran 26 times for 91 yards. RB Brandon Jacobs led the team in carries with 14, but only managed 42 yards. RB Ahmad Bradshaw ran 9 times for 45 yards. (Not Positive)
- NYG Offensive Line vs. NE Pressure: Giants allowed three sacks, two by OLB Adalius Thomas. Giants also threw an INT. (Not Positive)
- NYG Pressure vs. NE Offensive Line: Giants had five sacks, two by Tuck. One sack led to a lost fumble. (Positive)
- NYG Run Defense vs. NE Run Offense: Giants allowed goal line TD by RB Laurence Maroney, but Maroney only had 36 yards on 14 carries. Patriots gained only 45 yards on 16 rushes. (Positive)
- NYG Pass Defense vs. NE Pass Offense: Patriots QB Tom Brady completed 29 out of 48 passes for only 266 yards and a TD. WR Wes Welker gained 103 yards on 11 catches. (Positive)
- NYG Special Teams vs. NE Special Teams: Tynes made only FG attempt; Patriots did not attempt a FG. (Positive)

5) The 2008 Pittsburgh Steelers won the AFC North with a 12-4 record, securing the 2nd seed in the conference:

- Pass Offense: QB Ben Roethlisberger had a 17:15 TD-INT ratio. Completed 60% of passes for 7.0 yards per attempt. Relatively decent receiving corps, led by WR Hines Ward's 1,043 yards and 7 TDs. 17th in passing yards, 18th in TD passes. (Not Positive)
- Run Offense: RB Willie Parker ran 210 times for only 791 yards (3.8 yards per carry) and 5 TDs. Parker did not fumble. Steelers finished 23rd in rushing yards, 29th in yards per carry (3.7), and 11th in TDs (16). (Not Positive)
- Offensive Line: Steelers allowed 49 sacks (ranked 29th) and threw 15 INTs (17th). (Not Positive)
- Pressure: Steelers led AFC with 51 sacks; 27.5 by OLBs James Harrison and LaMarr Woodley, which would have been better than 8 teams. 20 INTs ranked 6th. (Positive)

- Run Defense: 2nd in rushing yards allowed, 3rd in rushing TDs allowed (7). Allowed AFC-low 3.3 yards per carry. (Positive)
- Pass Defense: 63.4 passer rating allowed, 2nd in the NFL. Allowed 56.5% completions (5th), 5.4 yards per attempt (1st). Allowed 12 TDs (3rd), fewest passing yards in NFL. (Positive)
- Special Teams: K Jeff Reed = 27/31 FGs. Excellent coverage units (no TDs allowed, 19.1 yards per kickoff return allowed, 6.2 yards per punt return allowed). Terrible return units. (Not Positive)

The Steelers defeated the Chargers and Ravens in the AFC Playoffs and faced the Arizona Cardinals in the Super Bowl. They won 27-23:

- PIT Pass Offense vs. ARI Pass Defense: Roethlisberger = 21/30 for 256 yards, one TD, one INT. WR Santonio Holmes caught game-winning TD, had 9 catches for 133 yards, won MVP. (Positive)
- PIT Run Offense vs. ARI Run Defense: Parker = Only 53 yards on 19 carries. RB Gary Russell scored goal-line TD, lost four yards on only other carry. Steelers gained only 58 yards on 26 carries. (Not Positive)
- PIT Offensive Line vs. ARI Pressure: Steelers allowed DE Darnell Dockett to get three sacks. Roethlisberger threw an INT. (Not Positive)
- PIT Pressure vs. ARI Offensive Line: Woodley had two sacks, one that resulted in a lost fumble. Harrison returned only INT for 100-yard TD. (Positive)
- PIT Run Defense vs. ARI Run Offense: RB Edgerrin James rushed only nine times for 33 yards. All other runners failed to gain a yard on three attempts. (Positive)
- PIT Pass Defense vs. ARI Pass Offense: QB Kurt Warner = 31/47, 377 yards (most in a loss), three TDs, one INT. WR Larry Fitzgerald = 127 yards and 2 TDs on 7 catches. (Not Positive)
- PIT Special Teams vs. ARI Special Teams: Reed made both FGs. Cardinals K Neil Rackers did not attempt FG. Steelers allowed 34-yard punt return. Cardinals averaged only 36 yards per punt. (Positive)

6) The 2009 New Orleans Saints won the NFC South with a 13-3 record, earning the top seed in the Conference:

- Pass Offense: Pro Bowl QB Drew Brees had 34:11 TD-INT ratio. Completed 71% of passes for 8.5 yards per attempt. Potent stable of receivers led by WR Marques Colston (70 catches, 1,074 yards, 9 TDs). Saints led league in TD passes, fourth in passing yards. (Positive)
- Run Offense: No Saints runner had at least 200 carries. Committee of Mike Bell, Pierre Thomas, and Reggie Bush helped lead Saints to 21 rushing TDs (3rd in NFL) and 6th most rushing yards (6th). Saints averaged 4.5 yards per carry (7th). (Positive)
- Offensive Line: Saints allowed only 20 sacks (4th). Saints also threw only 12 INTs (6th). Saints had three Pro Bowl offensive linemen (C Jonathan Goodwin, RG Jahri Evans, RT Jon Stinchcomb). (Positive)
- Pressure: Saints had 35 sacks, ranked 15th. DE Will Smith had 13. Saints had 26 INTs (3rd). Pro Bowl FS Darren Sharper had 9 INTs, three returned for TDs. (Positive)

- Run Defense: Saints finished 21st in rushing yards allowed, 29th in rushing TDs allowed (19), and 25th in rushing yards per carry allowed (4.5). (Not Positive)
- Pass Defense: Saints allowed 68.6 passer rating, which was 3rd overall and tops in the NFC. Allowed 58% completions (5th), 15 TDs (5th), 6.9 yards per attempt (17th). Saints allowed 26th most passing yards. (Positive)
- Special Teams: Saints made 22/28 FGs, missed three PATs. Poor punt return unit (4.6 yards average), strong kickoff return unit (KR Courtney Roby scored one TD, averaged 27.5 yards per return). Poor punt return coverage; allowed one TD. (Not Positive)

New Orleans defeated the Cardinals and Vikings to meet the Indianapolis Colts in the Super Bowl. The Saints won 31-17:

- NO Pass Offense vs. IND Pass Defense: Brees = 32/39, 288 yards, 2 TDs, Super Bowl MVP. (Positive)
- NO Run Offense vs. IND Run Defense: Saints ran only 18 times for 51 yards. No ballcarrier had ten carries. (Not Positive)
- NO Offensive Line vs. IND Pressure: Saints allowed only one sack while turning the ball over zero times. (Positive)
- NO Pressure vs. IND Offensive Line: Saints failed to get a sack, only intercepted one pass, though it was returned for game-sealing TD. (Positive)
- NO Run Defense vs. IND Run Offense: RB Joseph Addai rushed 13 times for 77 yards and a TD. Colts rushed 19 times for 99 yards. (Not Positive)
- NO Pass Defense vs. IND Pass Offense: QB Peyton Manning completed 31 of 45 passes for 333 yards, one TD, one INT. (Not Positive)
- NO Special Teams vs. IND Special Teams: Saints K Garrett Hartley made 3/3 FGs, Colts K Matt Stover made 1/2 FGs. Saints recovered surprise onside kick to begin second half. (Positive)

7) The 2010 Green Bay Packers earned the last Wild Card spot in the NFC with a 10-6 record:

- Pass Offense: QB Aaron Rodgers had a 28:11 TD-INT ratio. He completed 66% of his passes, averaging 8.3 yards per attempt. Rodgers lost TE Jermichael Finley after five games, but still had a deep receiving corps, led by Pro Bowl WR Greg Jennings (76 catches, 1,265 yards, 12 TDs). Packers finished 5th in yards, 4th in TDs. (Positive)
- Run Offense: No Packers RB received 200 carries. Green Bay finished 24th in rushing yards, scoring only 11 TDs (18th) while averaging only 3.8 yards per carry (25th). Rodgers was a major threat, gaining 356 yards and leading the team with 4 TDs. (Not Positive)
- Offensive Line: Packers allowed 38 sacks, ranked 21st, while throwing 13 INTs (11th). (Not Positive)
- Pressure: Packers led the NFC with 47 sacks (4th overall) and 24 INTs (2nd overall). Pro Bowl OLB Clay Matthews had 13.5 sacks, while Pro Bowl DBs Tramon Williams, Nick Collins, and Charles Woodson had half of the INTs. (Positive)

- Run Defense: Green Bay ranked 18th in rushing yards allowed, but allowed only 6 rushing TDs (3rd). Opponents rushed for 4.7 yards per carry (31st). (Not Positive)
- Pass Defense: Packers led the league in opposing passer rating (67.2). Green Bay allowed only 56.2% of passes to be completed (4th) for 6.5 yards per attempt (6th). Packers allowed 5th-fewest passing yards and 16 TD passes (4th). (Positive)
- Special Teams: K Mason Crosby made 22/28 FGs (79%). The Packers didn't return a punt or kickoff for a TD. P Tim Masthay was betrayed often by his coverage team. (Not Positive)

The Packers went on the road in the playoffs, defeating the Eagles, Falcons, and Bears to advance to the Super Bowl against the Pittsburgh Steelers. The Packers won 31-25:

- GB Pass Offense vs. PIT Pass Defense: Rodgers = 24/39, 304 yards, 3 TDs, no INTs. WR Jordy Nelson led all receivers with 140 yards and a TD on 9 catches. (Positive)
- GB Run Offense vs. PIT Run Defense: Excluding Rodgers kneeldowns, RB James Starks was the only player to carry the ball for Green Bay. He gained only 52 yards on 11 carries. (Not Positive)
- GB Offensive Line vs. PIT Pressure: Steelers got three sacks, but failed to force a turnover. (Positive)
- GB Pressure vs. PIT Offensive Line: OLB Frank Zombo had Packers only sack, but Packers had 2 INTs, including one returned for a TD. (Positive)
- GB Run Defense vs. PIT Run Offense: Steelers RB Rashard Mendenhall scored a 3rd quarter TD run, but also lost a 4th quarter fumble. Packers allowed 126 yards on 23 attempts. (Not Positive)
- GB Pass Defense vs. PIT Pass Offense: Steelers QB Roethlisberger completed 25 of 40 passes for 263 yards, two TDs and two INTs. (Not Positive)
- GB Special Teams vs. PIT Special Teams: Crosby made only FG, Steelers K Shaun Suisham made ½. Neither return game did much. (Positive)

8) The 2011 New York Giants were the last team to make the playoffs, finishing 9-7 and on top of the NFC East. They were the 4th seed in the Conference:

- Pass Offense: Pro Bowl QB Eli Manning had a 29:16 TD-INT ratio, completing 61% of his passes for 8.4 yards per attempt. Manning threw for nearly 5,000 yards, aided by WRs Victor Cruz (1,536 yards) and Hakeem Nicks (1,192 yards). Giants finished 5th in passing yards, 6th in TDs. (Positive)
- Run Offense: No Giants RB received 200 carries or averaged at least 4.0 yards per carry. Giants finished dead last in total rushing yards and yards per rush (3.5). Giants did score 17 rushing TDs (6th). (Not Positive)
- Offensive Line: Giants allowed 28 sacks (7th) and threw 16 INTs (20th). (Not Positive)
- Pressure: Giants finished 4th in sacks with 48; Pro Bowl DE Jason Pierre-Paul had 16.5. Giants also had 20 INTs (6th). (Positive)
- Run Defense: The Giants were 19th in rushing yards allowed, 25th in rushing TDs allowed (15), and 22nd in rushing yards per attempt allowed (4.5). (Not Positive)

- Pass Defense: The Giants allowed a passer rating of 86.1, which ranked 20th. Opposing passers completed 61.3% of passes (20th) for 7.5 yards per attempt (21st). The Giants were 29th in passing yards allowed and 25th in TD passes allowed (28). (Not Positive)
- Special Teams: K Lawrence Tynes made 19/24 FGs (79%). Giants didn't allow a return TD, but lacked big plays in the return game. (Not Positive)

The Giants defeated the Falcons, Packers, and 49ers on their way to a Super Bowl 42 rematch with the New England Patriots. The Giants won 21-17:

- NYG Pass Offense vs. NE Pass Defense: Super Bowl MVP Manning completed 30 of 40 passes for 296 yards and a TD. Nicks = 10 catches, 109 yards. (Positive)
- NYG Run Offense vs. NE Run Defense: RB Ahmad Bradshaw ran 17 times for 72 yards, hesitantly scored game-winning TD. Giants ran 28 times for 114 yards and the TD. (Positive)
- NYG Offensive Line vs. NE Pressure: Giants allowed three sacks, but had no turnovers. (Positive)
- NYG Pressure vs. NE Offensive Line: Tuck sacked Tom Brady twice, and pressured Brady into an intentional grounding penalty that resulted in a safety. Another pressure led to an INT by LB Chase Blackburn. (Positive)
- NYG Run Defense vs. NE Run Offense: Patriots RB BenJarvus Green-Ellis ran 10 times for 44 yards, but Patriots ran only 19 times for 83 yards and no TDs. (Positive)
- NYG Pass Defense vs. NE Pass Offense: Brady completed 27 of 41 passes for 276 yards and 2 TDs and 1 INT. (Not Positive)
- NYG Special Teams vs. NE Special Teams: Tynes made both FGs, Patriots made only FG attempt. Giants P Steve Weatherford's 4 punts resulted in Patriots starting at their own 6, 20, 4, and 8 yard-lines. (Positive)

9) The 2012 Baltimore Ravens finished the season 10-6, which was just good enough to win the AFC North and get the 4th seed in the Conference:

- Pass Offense: QB Joe Flacco had a 22:10 TD-INT ratio, completing 60% of his passes for 7.2 yards per attempt. The Ravens didn't have a top-flight receiver, but had a well-rounded corps with WRs Anquan Boldin, Torrey Smith, and Jacoby Jones along with strong receivers in TE Dennis Pitta and RB Ray Rice. The Ravens finished 15th in passing yards and 18th in passing TDs. (Not Positive)
- Run Offense: Pro Bowl RB Ray Rice carried 257 times for 1,143 yards (4.4 average) and 9 TDs. FB Vonta Leach made Pro Bowl as well. Ravens finished 11th in rushing yards, 12th in yards per carry (4.3), and 6th in TDs (17). (Positive)
- Offensive Line: Ravens allowed 38 sacks (20th) and threw 11 INTs (6th). RG Marshal Yanda made Pro Bowl. (Positive)
- Pressure: Ravens had 37 sacks (16th) and only 13 INTs (19th). (Not Positive)
- Run Defense: Ravens were 20th in rushing yards allowed. Opponents scored 15 TDs on the ground (23rd) while averaging 4.0 yards per carry (7th). (Not Positive)
- Pass Defense: Ravens allowed 80.6 passer rating (11th). Opposing passers completed 60.1% of passes (13th) for 7.0 yards an attempt (17th). Ravens were 17th in yardage

allowed, but allowed the fewest TDs in the AFC (15, 2nd overall). FS Ed Reed made the Pro Bowl. (Positive)

- Special Teams: K Justin Tucker made 30/33 FGs, including 4/4 from 50+ yards. P Sam Koch helped Ravens allow only 7.8 yards per punt return. Jones was a Pro Bowl return specialist, scoring three TDs on punts and kickoffs combined. (Positive)

The Ravens defeated the Colts, Broncos, and Patriots to get to the Super Bowl against the San Francisco 49ers. The Ravens won 34-31:

- BAL Pass Offense vs. SF Pass Defense: Flacco took Super Bowl MVP honors, completing 22 of 33 passes for 287 yards and 3 TDs. Boldin had 104 yards and a TD on 6 catches. Rice did lose a fumble after a short reception. (Positive)
- BAL Run Offense vs. SF Run Defense: Rice carried 20 times, but only picked up 59 yards. RB Bernard Pierce (12 carries, 33 yards) wasn't any better. Ravens ran the ball a lot, but failed to break 100 yards or the goal line. (Not Positive)
- BAL Offensive Line vs. SF Pressure: Flacco was sacked only twice, while he did not turn the ball over. (Positive)
- BAL Pressure vs. SF Offensive Line: The Ravens had 3 sacks, 2 by OLB Paul Kruger. Reed also an INT. (Positive)
- BAL Run Defense vs. SF Run Offense: RB Frank Gore had 110 yards and a TD on 19 carries, while QB Colin Kaepernick gained another 62 yards and a TD on 7 rushes. RB LaMichael James lost a fumble. Ravens allowed 182 yards on 29 carries. (Not Positive)
- BAL Pass Defense vs. SF Pass Offense: Kaepernick completed only 16 of 28 passes, but for 302 yards and a TD and an INT. WR Michael Crabtree scored a 31-yard TD, gaining 109 yards on 5 catches. TE Vernon Davis added 104 yards on 6 catches. The 49ers didn't complete a pass to a back, and the Ravens stopped the 49ers on 4th-and-goal from the 5 with a 5-point lead inside 2:00 left in the game. (Positive)
- BAL Special Teams vs. SF Special Teams: Tucker made 2/2 FGs, 49ers K David Akers made 3/3. Jones returned the second-half kickoff 108 yards for a TD, a Super Bowl record. (Positive)

10) The 2013 Seattle Seahawks finished the regular season with a 13-3 record, securing the NFC West crown and the top seed in the Conference:

- Pass Offense: Pro Bowl QB Russell Wilson had a 26:9 TD-INT ratio, completing 63% of passes for 8.2 yards per attempt. Pro Bowl RB Marshawn Lynch was perhaps only above average receiver relative to position (36 catches, 316 yards, 2 TDs). Seahawks finished 26th in passing yards, but 10th in TDs despite throwing 2nd-fewest passes in the league. (Positive)
- Run Offense: Seahawks ran the ball more than any team in NFC, 2nd overall. Lynch was one of only two backs in the NFL to get more than 300 carries (301 carries, 1,257 yards, 12 TDs, 4 fumbles). Wilson added 539 yards (3rd amongst QBs) and a TD on the ground. Seahawks finished 4th in rushing yards, 13th in rushing TDs (14), and 12th in yards per rush (4.3). (Positive)

- Offensive Line: Seahawks allowed 44 sacks (20th), an alarmingly high number considering how seldom the team passes. Seahawks were one of only four teams to throw fewer than 10 INTs, but Wilson had 12 fumbles on the season. (Not Positive)
- Pressure: Seahawks had 44 sacks (8th) and league-leading 28 INTs. (Positive)
- Run Defense: Seattle allowed 7th-fewest rushing yards, fewest rushing TDs (4), and 11th fewest rushing yards per attempt (3.9). (Positive)
- Pass Defense: Seahawks allowed lowest passer rating in the league (63.4). Opposing passers completed 59% of passes (11th) for league-low 5.8 yards per throw. Seahawks allowed fewest passing yards in the league and fewest passing TDs in the NFC (16, 2nd overall). Three Pro Bowl DBs (CB Richard Sherman, FS Earl Thomas, SS Kam Chancellor). (Positive)
- Special Teams: K Steven Hauschka made 33/35 FGs, including 3/3 from more than 50 yards. P Jon Ryan had 2 kicks blocked, but Seahawks allowed only 82 punt return yards all season. Seahawks did not have a return TD, though PR Golden Tate averaged 11.2 yards per return. (Positive)

The Seahawks defeated the Saints and 49ers to get to the Super Bowl against the Denver Broncos. The Seahawks won 43-8:

- SEA Pass Offense vs. DEN Pass Defense: Wilson completed 18 of 25 passes for 205 yards and 2 TDs to 8 different receivers. (Positive)
- SEA Run Offense vs. DEN Run Defense: Lynch had a goal line TD, but only gained 39 yards on 15 carries. Seahawks gained 96 yards on 11 non-Lynch attempts. (Positive)
- SEA Offensive Line vs. DEN Pressure: Seahawks didn't allow a sack and didn't turn the ball over. (Positive)
- SEA Pressure vs. DEN Offensive Line: Seahawks only had one sack, but recovered a fumble from that sack. Opening snap of the game resulted in a safety. Seahawks had two INTs, including a pick-six by Super Bowl MVP LB Malcolm Smith. (Positive)
- SEA Run Defense vs. DEN Run Offense: Broncos ran only 14 times for 29 yards, failing to score. RB Knowshon Moreno never had a carry longer than 9 yards. (Positive)
- SEA Pass Defense vs. DEN Pass Offense: QB Peyton Manning set a Super Bowl record for completions with 34 out of 49 attempts. However, Manning only gained 280 yards and 1 TD to go with his 2 INTs. WR Demaryius Thomas had 118 yards and a TD on 13 catches, but lost a fumble as well. (Positive)
- SEA Special Teams vs. DEN Special Teams: Hauschka made both FGs; the Broncos didn't attempt a kick. Seahawks KR Percy Harvin returned the opening kickoff of the second half for a TD. (Positive)

Regular Season Success

Team	Pass Offense	Run Offense	Offensive Line	Pressure	Run Defense	Pass Defense	Special Teams
2004 Patriots	+	+	+	+	+	+	X
2005 Steelers	X	+	+	+	+	+	+
2006 Colts	+	+	+	X	X	+	X
2007 Giants	X	+	X	+	+	X	X
2008 Steelers	X	X	X	+	+	+	X
2009 Saints	+	+	+	+	X	+	X
2010 Packers	+	X	X	+	X	+	X
2011 Giants	+	X	X	+	X	X	X
2012 Ravens	X	+	+	X	X	+	+
2013 Seahawks	+	+	X	+	+	+	+

Based on the regular season, the strongest units of the past ten Super Bowl teams have been based on defensive pressure (8/10) and pass defense (8/10). Only the 2006 Colts and the 2011 Ravens didn't have great pressure profiles, and both had strong pass defenses. Neither of the Giants teams had strong pass defenses, but they both had strong pressure profiles. The weakest units of the past ten Super Bowl teams have been special teams (3/10). The last two champs have used strong special teams, along with the 2005 Steelers, but the others were able to overcome less than stellar play in the kicking game.

Super Bowl Success (a “!” indicates a change from regular season norms)

Team	Pass Offense	Run Offense	Offensive Line	Pressure	Run Defense	Pass Defense	Special Teams
2004 Patriots	+	+	+	+	+	x(!)	+(!)
2005 Steelers	x	+	x(!)	+	x(!)	+	+
2006 Colts	x(!)	+	+	+(!)	+(!)	+	x
2007 Giants	+(!)	x(!)	x	+	+	+(!)	+(!)
2008 Steelers	+(!)	x	x	+	+	x(!)	+(!)
2009 Saints	+	x(!)	+	+	x	x(!)	+(!)
2010 Packers	+	x	+(!)	+	x	x(!)	+(!)
2011 Giants	+	+(!)	+(!)	+	+(!)	x	+(!)
2012 Ravens	+(!)	x(!)	+	+(!)	x	+	+
2013 Seahawks	+	+	+(!)	+	+	+	+

In order to win Super Bowls, the strongest unit has proven to be the pressure package, as all ten Super Bowl champs have shown the ability to get heat on the passer, forcing sacks and turnovers in winning performances. The biggest “surprise” change in the positive direction was special teams, by far (6/10). In the Super Bowl, teams that had middling special teams units have used either small advantages (i.e., making field goals) or big plays (i.e., surprise inside kick) to take control of the game in unexpected ways. The biggest “surprise” change in the *negative* direction was pass defense (4/10). The winning teams were under attack from strong passers, and they took a lot of hits in terms of yards and scores, despite a typically strong secondary. However, note that all of these teams made the over-aggressive offenses pay with sacks and turnovers. Pass defense, along with run offenses, gave the most inconsistent Super Bowl performances (5/10).

Conclusion

Over the last ten seasons, Super Bowl champions have been built in a variety of ways. There have been passers in a variety of stages in their NFL careers, some as inexperienced as Year 2. There have been teams that rely heavily on the run, while others that could care less. Some teams were stockpiled with Pro Bowl offensive linemen, while others had to completely change their lineups for the postseason. There have been odd fronts and even fronts (five each). Teams that blitz relentlessly like the Saints, or choose a more conservative approach defensively like the Colts. Some squads are known more for their bend, don't break strategies. Some teams were known for explosive special teams play, others were terrible.

This study here shows that the most important element of a Super Bowl winning team is the ability to get to the passer and take the ball away. In an era where the best passers rule supreme, it is more important to be able to *stop* the great passer than it is to possess the great passer. Several great, Super Bowl-winning passers have *lost* Super Bowls in the past ten years: Tom Brady twice, Kurt Warner, Ben Roethlisberger, and Peyton Manning twice. All of those players brought their teams to the Super Bowl, only to meet defenses that would hit them often, or worse, make them flinch just enough to lose possession. The last ten Super Bowl champions averaged 42.9 sacks per season and 19.6 interceptions per season. In the Super Bowl, the winning team has averaged 2.2 sacks a game, 1.4 interceptions, and 0.5 pick-sixes over the last ten years. The pick-six has been a huge boost: teams are 5-0 when returning an interception for a touchdown in the Super Bowl over the last ten years, and 12-0 overall all time.

Having a big play defense that is built to survive strong passers when they are at their best while taking explosive advantage of them when they aren't is the best way to ensure a strong Super Bowl team. Offensively, no team was able to survive having a weak run game or pass game in the Super Bowl, but less than half had both in the regular season, while even fewer had both going in the Super Bowl.

Obviously, scoring by any means necessary is what it takes to win one game, especially the most important game of the season. There are roster shortcuts, and most will have to do with the run game. But the teams that allow their pressure packages to shine brightest will have the best chances to win titles. There have been only five Pro Bowl QBs to win Super Bowls over the last ten years (Tom Brady, Peyton Manning, Drew Brees, Eli Manning, Russell Wilson), but eight Pro Bowl safeties, the highest for a position group in that time (Troy Polamalu twice, Darren Sharper, Roman Harper, Nick Collins, Ed Reed, Earl Thomas, Kam Chancellor). All of these defensive backs were known for sacks or forcing turnovers. When the Giants won in 2007, they had the fewest number of Pro Bowlers ever for a Super Bowl-winning team. That player was DE Osi Umenyiora.

Future Research Note:

If we were to inquire further into this matter we would perform a multi-variable regression analysis. The model would have to be corrected for certain factors, such as a QB TD:INT ratio for interceptions that were a result of a tip from the WR, or garbage time plays. The main limitation of our experiment is that we did not analyze the numerical correlations among the components of the teams. A multi-variable regression analysis could help us determine if there are any relationships between the components. Say for example, having an effective running game leads to higher passer performance because the majority of pass plays were play-action. Ultimately, what these results show are the stepping stones and building blocks necessary to a championship team. Of course, there are myriads more yet to be discovered, but perhaps knowing what pieces are essential will reveal what pieces are X-factors (hint: Miracle at the Meadowlands, Kyle Williams). Another stepping stone off this data would be an analysis of the relationship between position performance and payment. Assuming we know the order of need, how much should a franchise *really* pay its position groups. Could this elevate the values of the men in the trenches (O-line, D-line)?

Bibliography

<http://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/mia/2012.htm> - We will use pro-football reference for the data of the Super Bowl winners. This will allow us to identify the components of the team that overperformed and underperformed.

<http://wp.advancednflstats.com/defenderstats.php?pos=CB> - Once we have identified the components of the Super Bowl winner that we would like to explore, we will use [advancednflstats.com](http://www.advancednflstats.com) for player performance grades and to see which players, as the French say, "carried the team on their backs". And which players put themselves on the back of their teams.

[http://www.sportingcharts.com/nfl/teams/355/arizona-cardinals/#Offensive%20Yards\\$SeasonMax=999&SeasonMin=1990](http://www.sportingcharts.com/nfl/teams/355/arizona-cardinals/#Offensive%20Yards$SeasonMax=999&SeasonMin=1990) - Another source of "team stats" for the research. A bit more limited than Pro Football Reference but helps create a larger picture. We'll mostly be using the first two websites for our numerical data.

<http://www.sportsdatallc.com/2012/02/03/analyzing-super-bowl-winning-quarterbacks/> - This article goes into what it takes for a QB to win the big game. We will use this article to analyze the performance in quarterbacks in past superbowl and compare their performance to team performance.

This article analyzes whether offense or defense wins championships. We will use it to delve into the position groups of each side to further specify which position groups are most crucial for a championship run.

<http://www.sportingcharts.com/articles/nfl/does-offense-or-defense-win-super-bowl-championships.aspx>

This final article examines Super Bowl contenders' past two years prior to the season they played in the Super Bowl to see what they were before they became a championship team.

<http://www.sportingcharts.com/articles/nfl/back-to-the-futures-analyzing-the-3-year-path-of-super-bowl-champions.aspx>

