

Game Management

From [Complete Quarterbacking](#) by [Don Read](#)

Game management begins with the kickoff and ends when the final gun sounds. What happens during this period gives every contest its direction and personality. Controlling and influencing the happenings during this 48 or 60 minutes is game management.

A quarterback always performs as if on a mission, and his contribution is monumental. Nothing is more important, however, than how the quarterback manages the game. Manipulating the offense on the field is the quarterback's job. No one, other than the coach, can affect the outcome more than the quarterback.

The quarterback starts every play, by way of a silent count, foot movement, or just going when the ball is snapped. Although these methods of starting a play are less common than the traditional cadence, they nonetheless have a place in today's game. Many factors influence the method a team uses to start play. The quarterback is the key regardless of the system.

For a silent count, the quarterback starts the count with a word or hand signal. Then the team picks up the cadence and counts silently. Currently, this approach is seldom used, but in the days of Knute Rockne it was a popular system. Overcoming crowd noise is generally the reason for using silent cadence today.

Foot movement is commonly used for a detached receiver off the line of scrimmage who can't see the football move or hear the cadence. The quarterback simply picks up his heel when the ball is to be snapped. This snap count approach can be used whether the quarterback is under the center or in shotgun position.

Going when the ball is snapped rather than on cadence is a technique employed by detached receivers or when a back is in motion facing the ball. The quarterback just calls the signal, and these players if they can't hear release upfield when the football comes up.

The signal caller's leadership, experience, preparation, poise, and competitiveness tend to show up during a game and are instrumental in game management. Some quarterbacks are better than others at guiding a team through good times or crisis after crisis. Because there is no precise formula or method of managing, a quarterback has to draw from his personal assets and readiness to make things happen.

Where game management differs from other elements of quarterbacking is that the opposition and personal performance attract less focus. The primary mission for the field general is to generate, maintain, and overcome on-the-field hazards, both routine hazards

and those unique to each game. The following should be the quarterback's concerns during the game:

- Get first downs.
- Don't turn over the ball.
- Take advantage of personnel.
- Manage the clock.
- Mix up the cadence.
- Avoid sacks.
- Make timely plays.
- Keep morale and enthusiasm alive.
- Communicate effectively with teammates.
- Keep good discipline in the huddle.
- Share thoughts with the coaches on the sideline.
- Handle crowd noise.

For a quarterback, managing a game is a four-quarter deal. Game tempo and knowledge of the opponent's personnel and strategy are learned on an "as you go" basis. A signal caller should get a feel for the what, how, when, and where as the game progresses. The quarterback should accomplish all the things he is not supposed to be capable of doing and do so as if it's normal!

There are other aspects of quarterbacking during a contest: making sight adjustments when needed, changing plays on the line of scrimmage, anticipating blitz and coverage, communicating with the referee as appropriate, conferring about strategy between plays and on the sideline, and directing and correcting the receiver splits to the advantage of each play.

Because offensive plays generally begin in the huddle, a more in-depth analysis of the huddle is covered in the next section. The importance of the huddle can't be stressed enough. Momentum for every play begins in the huddle.