

# Any Given Monday

HOW DO TEAMS SURVIVE A 17-WEEK SEASON? BY TAKING THE DAY OFF.

By Charles Curtis

**RIGHT AFTER MINNESOTA** throttled Detroit in Week 10, Vikings coach Brad Childress stood before his players to review the few errors they had made. Just as he was about to dismiss his 8-1 team, he uttered three words that nearly blew the roof off the locker room: "See you Wednesday."

That sentence could mean only one thing: The Vikings had earned the following day off, what the pros call a Victory Monday. Late in the season, that extra day becomes one of the biggest carrots a coach can dangle in front of his exhausted roster. "It helps us keep pushing," says Vikes defensive tackle Kevin Williams. "We've even had a few guys who have been asking for one since Week 1."

Throughout the season, Mondays are generally reserved for weightlifting (to combat the soreness players feel after every game), injury treatment and tape study. Tuesdays are off-days, during which players do everything from more weightlifting to charity work to playing golf. When a coach calls for a Victory Monday, though, players aren't required to do anything team-related for two straight days.

"It's such a blessing," says wideout Pierre Garçon, whose Colts earn a free Monday for each W, beginning in November. "Not only is it a great feeling after a win, but having those two days keeps guys fresher for practice the



rest of the week." And Sundays. Since the institution of Victory Mondays, in 2002, the Colts have recorded a .697 winning percentage in the latter half of the season.

Not that everyone in the league supports Victory Mondays. Rex Ryan and Tom Coughlin are just two of the coaches who believe an additional day off encourages players to lose focus, and a few players would rather show their commitment to their team than take advantage of the extra rest. "There's nothing different on a Victory Monday," says Chargers linebacker Shawne Merriman. "Seventy-five to 80% of us will still be in the building, working out and watching film. It's nice to hear, but Victory Monday is just words to us."

Words that could, nevertheless, lead to a win on Sunday.

THANKS TO SOME EXTRA REST, WILLIAMS IS ONE OF THREE VIKINGS WITH FIVE-PLUS SACKS.



## W2W4

SUNDAY

12.06

VIKINGS VS. CARDINALS  
UNIV. OF PHOENIX  
STADIUM, 6:20 P.M. MT

Bad news: Kurt Warner faces Brett Favre in Arizona, where his Cards have a losing record. Good news: Both QBs can hit the early-bird dinner special before the game!

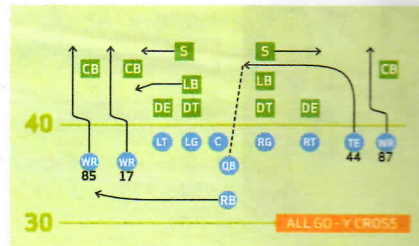
### SCOUTS INC.'S

## BEST PLAY IN THE BOOK

Even without Peyton Manning's audacious audibles, the Colts run one of the most creative offenses in the league. This season, Indy has added new wrinkles almost weekly, including the "All Go-Y Cross." In short, the play is a veritable nightmare for opposing D's.

With receiver Reggie Wayne lined up on the right side of the field and tight end **DALLAS CLARK** flexed out wide nearby, opposing defenses often struggle to cover both veterans. Forced to choose between the two, most teams focus on Wayne, Indy's biggest scoring threat. (The three-time Pro Bowler led the league with 968 receiving yards and tallied a second-best 8 TDs through Week 11.) That gives Clark a shot at a favorable match-up.

While Wayne (87) runs a deep go route, bringing the corner—and possibly a safety—along with him, Clark (44) runs a crossing pattern. At the same time, the lone Colts running back in this four-receiver set (either Joseph Addai or Donald Brown) releases on a circle route to the left. That quick move is all it takes to lure the back-side linebacker out of the hole in the middle of the field. Meanwhile, Indy's speedy young receivers Pierre Garçon (85) and Austin Collie (17) continue to confuse the defense by running clear out routes on the back side, ultimately drawing both corners away from the middle of the field and enticing any safety helping out over the top. The end result of these offensive shenanigans is a relatively open Clark left in single coverage with a linebacker. Of course, at 6' 3", 252 pounds, Clark will win that matchup every time. And once Manning hits him with a bullet, he'll have plenty of room to plow through the middle of the field.



### HOW TO BOUNCE BACK

## THE LAST DROP

**IT'S A RECEIVER'S MOST** egregious sin: dropping a pass when he's wide open. But that transgression might actually be a necessary evil.

Just ask Cowboys wideout **Miles Austin**. The way he tells it, his bobble during the first half of Dallas' Week 5 win over

Kansas City helped him break the franchise record for receiving yards. That day, he went for 250 yards, 234 gained after the drop. Since then, Austin has averaged 17.4 ypc and scored 4 TDs. We asked the four-year vet how he used his big mistake to come back big,

"Right before halftime, Tony Romo threw a fade pass to the corner of the end zone. For some reason, I lost concentration and didn't stick my arm out far enough. The ball went off my hands, and immediately I thought, *I have to lock back in*. Mentally, I treated the moment like the game had started over. Luckily, that worked. For the rest of the day, I attacked the

ball and tried to reach out and grab the ball before it hit me.

"When I drop a ball I think I should have caught, I focus more during practice the week afterward. For example, right before Wednesday practices, we run what's called pat-and-go. To warm up, the quarterbacks will throw a few fade routes to us. That's a point where you could easily lose focus, but

that's when I try to concentrate more on looking the ball in.

"In Week 9, against the Eagles, Romo threw the same type of ball to me on the opposite side of the field. I looked it in and caught it, the same way I wanted to catch the one I missed the month before. That turned out to be the game-winning touchdown."

-AS TOLD TO CC

