



BLITZ22

ESSENTIALS GUIDE

VOL. 1

JEFF MONKEN'S SEVEN COMMANDMENTS OF WINNING



JEFF
MONKEN

Head Coach,
Army West Point Football

Monken, one of the most respected coaches in college football, [presented at Blitz '22](#) on the founding principles that sets up his program for sustained success over the long-term. As part of his presentation, he used data from the 2021 Division 1 FBS season to back up his “Seven Commandments” that lead to winning at his level.

Follow these seven rules, be on the right side of these percentages, and you might see a few more W's next season.

3 | JEFF MONKEN'S SEVEN COMMANDMENTS OF WINNING

We subscribe to an analytics company that helps us with decision-making on game day, and what we practice in philosophy, in terms of scheme leading up to the game. There's a lot of uses I think that are very valuable in football.

Our analytics guys will tell us that some of this plan may not hold as high a percentage as some of the other things that I could include in the plan. But there are things we believe in, and I wanted to build a plan and have things that our players can control.

1. WIN THE TURNOVER BATTLE

More turnovers than your opponent = win 78% of games

People talk about turnovers in other sports and when you look at it, the team that wins the turnover battle is often going to win the game.

And so over the course of the 2021 season, in all FBS games — not just Army games — 78 percent of the games were won by the team that won the turnover battle. That's having just one more turnover than your opponent. If you tied, I didn't include those stats. But if you want to have one more turnover than your opponent, you're going to have a pretty good chance to win a football game.

We turned the ball over on offense five times this year. We did turn it over three times on special teams, which is inexcusable. And one turnover at any time is unforgivable. But we work really, really hard to hang on the ball.

This is a huge stat, which is why it's the first thing on the plan.

“PEOPLE TALK ABOUT TURNOVERS IN OTHER SPORTS AND WHEN YOU LOOK AT IT, THE TEAM THAT WINS THE TURNOVER BATTLE IS OFTEN GOING TO WIN THE GAME.”

Jeff Monken

2. CREATE BIG PLAYS + NO YARDAGE LOST

More big plays win 72% of games

Less negative yardage plays win 60% of games

A big play would be an explosive play for us on offense or in the kicking game. On defense it could be creating a turnover or a loss yardage play. There are big plays that can be made in any phase — our return team blocks a punt, our kickoff return team gets us in great field position after a kick. There are big plays that can be made throughout the game.

Negative yardage plays, that's for our offense. Eliminating plays where we go backwards. I'm not talking about zero yardage plays, I'm talking about losing a yard or more. We have found as an organization, our offense, that when we cut down on negative yardage plays — and they are nearly impossible to eliminate — but when we cut those down, we have won a lot more football games when we've had fewer negative yardage plays, and the percentages support that.

We had a season where we had the best third-down percentage, the best defensive third-down percentage defense, the best fourth-down percentage, the fewest negative-yardage plays, and we won 11 games.

We pay closer attention as an offense to the negative-yardage plays because we're not a home run team. Frankly, we want to run the ball. We want to run for three or four yards, let the clock run all the way down, then run another play, churn out 14-15 plays in a drive and 8-9 minutes off the clock while our opponent stands on the sideline frustrated. That's our philosophy now.

We like a 70-yard run or pass as much as anybody, but that's not who we are most often. But if we eliminate negative yardage plays — which our offense really allows us to do, we're under center, it's a straight-ahead, smash mouth, tough, hard-nosed brand of football — we can continue to gain yards. And so we want to put ourselves in positions where on third and fourth down, we've got a manageable line to gain.

Eliminating negative yardage plays helps us do that. Obviously, you'd rather have it second and eight than second and 12. We want to go forward two yards rather than going back two yards. And if we keep just working toward the chains, we give ourselves a better chance for these two areas.

3. NO MISSED ASSIGNMENTS OR FOOLISH PENALTIES

Typically, missed assignments happen because either we don't teach well enough, or we've made it too complicated — and we shouldn't do that. We should make our scheme simple enough that our kids can learn it, and we should be good teachers, because that's who we are as coaches. We should teach so that they can learn. And so that's our responsibility.

Missed assignments are really completely our control, which I also think is a case with foolish penalties. We shouldn't have foolish penalties. We shouldn't have 12 guys in the huddle. We shouldn't line up offsides with our hand in the neutral zone. There's a line of scrimmage. We can all figure out what the line of scrimmage is, there's an official on each side —that's a foolish penalty.

We shouldn't retaliate. We get mad, we get frustrated. Somebody pushes and shoves us or somebody just beat us on a play and he runs his mouth at us and we retaliate. Foolish penalties that should never happen.

There's going to be aggressive penalties. Sometimes a guy is going to hold. I don't think that a guy's got to hold if he uses good fundamentals, but sometimes it happens. It's the guys trying to make a play. Sometimes we'll take a poor angle on a kick block and we'll run into the kicker. If we use good fundamentals, it doesn't have to happen, but it's an aggressive penalty.

Pass interference? A guy's going for a play, he gets his hand in there too early, it's an aggressive penalty. It happens.

The foolish penalties that we have complete control over should never happen. So, eliminating those can make a big difference in the football game.

There's no stat for foolish penalties and missed assignments. There are statistics for the most penalized teams and the least penalized teams. They don't correlate to winning and losing. But we are one of the least penalized teams in the country. Aggressive penalties often are attributed to teams who are aggressive and who win. So it's a little muddy in the stats.

But all of your teams can control these things and they should. We can control these things and we should.

4. WIN ON THE GOAL LINE

More TDs from first and goal win 56% of games

If you're a golfer and you hit a great drive, and you got a second shot and you lay it up there and you're eight feet from the pin, and you three-putt, you're going to be disappointed.

That's the same thing that happens if you get the ball down there in goal to go situations and you end up having to kick a field goal or you come away with no points. We want to win on the goal line.

When we get the ball in goal to go situations, we want to score a touchdown. When our defense has their back to the wall and another team gets the ball inside the 10 yard line first and goal, we want to stop them. We want to keep them off the board or force them into a field goal.

Winning on the goal line is more than just getting into the red zone. Red zone stats are easily found. The NCAA tracks red zone offense, red zone defense, and that certainly makes a difference because you get the ball down there in scoring position and you score.

I'm talking about getting a touchdown. We strive to score touchdowns when we get the ball in the first and goal situation. For the teams that get the ball in first and goal situations and score points more readily than their opponents, they're going to win 56 percent of the games.

This doesn't have anything to do with the down and distance getting the ball in the red zone. We're limiting all that to, when the ball is first and goal from the ten yard line in or any yard line in between there and the goal line, do you score points?

We strive to do that. We want to get seven, because seven points is really hard to get. But we know that if we went down there, both on offense and defense, if we score more points than our opponents when the ball gets into the first and goal that we'll win.

5. WIN ON THIRD DOWN

Better third down conversion rate wins 70% of games

This is a huge statistic. Everybody looks to third down percentage. Jay Bateman, our defensive coordinator here for the first five years I was here, had a sign up in the defense staff room that said "Third Down is the Only Down", and he's right.

You've got to get a team into third down and get them off the field. If they don't get into third down very often, that means they're either turning first downs on first and second down, or they're scoring really fast



7 | JEFF MONKEN'S SEVEN COMMANDMENTS OF WINNING

and not having to get to third down. If you get teams to third down and get them off the field, you have a great chance to win on defense.

Similarly, on offense, if you convert third downs, you keep the chains moving. You control the clock, you control the ball and you put yourself in a better position each time you turn a first down to score.

So, we make this a big deal. We work on third downs, and interactions, almost every day. We have a third down defense, third down offense, as everybody else does for third and short, third and medium, third and long, our favorite calls, our favorite plays.

On offense, everything we strive to do is to get ourselves into a manageable third down position. We want to get ourselves to third and two, third and one, where we can make a first down on that play or give ourselves a chance on fourth down to make the first down.

So we call the game to try to get ourselves into a manageable third down position because if you win on third down, if you have a better third down conversion percentage than your opponent, you win 70 percent of the games.

6. RUN THE BALL + STOP THE RUN

At least 1 more rushing yard = win 75% of your games

People ask us all the time, why do you run the ball so much? Why don't you pass more? Why is your philosophy to just to control the clock? Don't you want to score more points? If you score more points, you win.

Yes, that's true. All those things. You can hit chunk plays by adding more passing game. True, but the statistics will tell you—and they tell us—that by running the ball and stopping the run, we have a better chance to win. So we build our offensive and defensive philosophies around stopping the run and running the ball effectively.

That doesn't mean we can't play pass defense. We were the No. 2 pass defense in the country in 2020. We had the sacks per game leader this year on our team. We work on all that. Certainly, it's important.

On offense, we don't just run the ball in practice and don't ever pass the ball. We practice passing all the time. We got protections, and we've got routes, play actions that look like all of our run games. We are typically one of the top teams in the country every year in yards per completion. We've led the nation yards per completion at times here. So we strive to be good in the passing game as well.

But you got to run the ball and stop the run. Why? Because if you rush for just one more yard than your opponent, you'll win 75 percent of the games in college football.

7. WIN THE KICKING GAME

Better average starting field position after kickoffs = win 62% of games

People talk about having three phases, but they give lip service to the kicking game.

We don't give lip service to the kicking game. We coach the kicking game and we coach it hard. They're simple schemes that our guys can play really fast in. We don't have 14 different kickoff returns and go into a game with six different block schemes on punt block. We want it to be simple and we coach the fundamentals.

One thing we do in the kicking game, like other people do on offense and defense, is we spend a lot of time in fundamentals. We work on the skills that will help us perform in the kicking game. The kicking game is really important. Obviously, big plays can happen. But if you just win the field position battle after kicks, if your average starting field position after kicks is better than your opponent, you're going to win 62 percent of the games.

That's a huge advantage. If you spend the time on the kicking game, it's going to make a difference in your winning or losing a football game. We want to win, so we spent a lot of time in the for that.

That's our that's our plan to this point: Be the tougher team, be more fundamentally sound, follow the Seven Commandments and finally play together with superior effort — 11 guys doing their job.

Eleven guys that have a specific role on every call, on every play. Do your job, follow the plan and when we play together, we have the best chance to execute as a unit and play with superior effort. //