

Voices ▾

Search

Hi, Daniel Lewis ▾

Mail

Entertainment Auto Business Creative Writing Health Home Improvement Lifestyle News **Sports** Tech Travel All Categories
Recreation

Why Are the Philadelphia Eagles Struggling? Blame Rests on the Offensive Line



[Daniel Lewis](#), Yahoo Contributor Network

Oct 28, 2012

MORE: [Offensive Line](#) [Juan Castillo](#) [Right Guard](#) [Mike Nolan](#)

Flag

Post a comment

The [Philadelphia Eagles](#) will come out of the bye at 3-3, but it almost feels as though the team is 0-6 based on the loud grumblings coming out of The City of Brotherly Love.

The Eagles front office raised the noise level of the chatter surrounding the team even more when head coach Andy Reid dismissed defensive coordinator Juan Castillo last Tuesday.

However, there are no huge changes on the other side of the ball. All the offensive coaches return to their jobs and will maintain their responsibilities. The job now for Andy Reid and Marty Mornhinweg is to make the appropriate adjustments to ignite the offense.

Even with a stable of talented players at the skill positions, the Eagles have yet to put it all together. The team ranks 30th in the NFL in scoring at just 17.2 points per game.

However, Atlanta defensive coordinator Mike Nolan referred to the Eagles' offense as "[a sleeping giant](#)" in his weekly press conference on Thursday.

"It's surprising when you watch the tape...It's surprising to me that they haven't scored as much because they move the ball very well. I don't know exactly what their issue is...They are a sleeping giant in a lot of cases as far as their offensive output."

Despite Nolan's praise, the sleeping giant that is the Eagles offense may never awaken this season. Indeed, the problems with the Eagles offense run very deep.

As Nolan noted, the Eagles have moved the ball well this year, ranking seventh in the league in total offense. Turnovers and a failure to finish drives, though, have plagued the team all season.

Michael Vick has received the brunt of the criticism, but the offensive line is the real culprit.

According to ProFootballFocus, [the Eagles' offensive line has ranked 20th in the NFL this season](#), an alarmingly poor ranking for a team with [Super Bowl](#) aspirations. The big men in midnight green make up the fourth best run-blocking unit, but they come in at 28th in pass blocking and 25th in penalties.

The struggles on the offensive line this year begin with the absences of Jason Peters, arguably the league's best offensive lineman in 2011, and Jason Kelce, a very good young center who was on track for a Pro Bowl nod this year. Without them, the offensive line has been in shambles.

There is no doubt that the potentially season-ending injuries to Peters and Kelce have hit the team hard. While Todd Herremans and Evan Mathis continue to play well, the injuries have contributed to a steep drop off from 2011, a season that featured LeSean McCoy gashing defenses for huge gains.

In Peters' absence at left tackle, free-agent signee Demetress Bell started off as the starter this summer at Lehigh, but it quickly became clear that he was having difficulty adjusting to the unorthodox techniques of offensive line coach Howard Mudd. As a result, King Dunlap entered the season as the starter, and he turned in two solid performances until he too suffered an injury. Bell was then given a chance to earn his contract in four consecutive starts, but he has struggled to deliver.

Related Content

[2011 NFL Draft: Players Who Will Have a Better NFL Career Than Many Drafted Higher...](#)

[5 Reasons Michael Vick Will Play in the NFL Again](#)

[Michael Vick Reinstated by the NFL](#)

[Michael Vick Reinstated by NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell](#)

[Michael Vick: Scapegoat](#)

[Why I Support Michael Vick](#)

[Idaho Bar Boycotts Michael Vick and NFL Games He Plays In](#)

Per ProFootballFocus, Dunlap gave up only one quarterback pressure every 17 plays in the first two weeks, whereas Bell gives the opposing defensive lineman a shot at Vick every 8.25 plays. In short, Dunlap is more than twice as effective as a pass blocker. In fact, Bell has already given up 24 combined pressures.

Even worse is the manner in which Bell is yielding pressures on Vick. A number of rushers have sneaked inside Bell, putting Vick under immediate pressure. He has also committed blatant mental errors, such as blocking inside on passing downs when the defense is only rushing four men.

He was flat-out abused against the Lions, as he was personally responsible for Vick getting hit four times and hurried on five other occasions. He also committed a penalty and was routinely pushed backwards directly into Vick's face by defensive end Kyle Vanden Bosch.

Bell's putrid play has made it clear that the Dunlap injury has only compounded the Peters injury.

Meanwhile, left guard Evan Mathis has been one of the more solid Eagles linemen, but even then he has yet to live up to his play from 2011. The loss of the All-Pro who lined up to his left side last season may be the reason, but he has made a number of mistakes in pass protection, already giving up more quarterback hits and the same number of penalties during all of last year.

The biggest problem on the line, though, lies at center. It was painful to see Kelce tear his ACL against [Baltimore](#) and have to sit out the rest of the season, and now it is even more painful considering how mightily [Dallas](#) Reynolds has struggled as the replacement. Reynolds' snapping errors, communication breakdowns, and poor overall play are a serious issue for this team.

He was thrown into a difficult situation as the line's primary signal caller, but he has looked overmatched and overwhelmed in every game, especially against the Giants and Lions.

Simply put, Reynolds has been getting blown off the line of scrimmage, often ending up four or five yards behind the line on a number of snaps against the Lions.

In fact, he has given up more interior pressure than all but one center in the league—who has played more snaps, much less—and ranks third worst in quarterback knockdowns, allowing five.

Despite Reynolds' struggles, arguably the biggest disappointment along the offensive side of the trenches is the regression of right guard Danny Watkins in his second year.

He improved week-by-week in 2011 to the point that it looked as if he might actually develop into the player the Eagles envisioned when taking him 23rd overall in 2011 draft. This year, though, Watkins has been noticeably worse, and the 27-year-old taking such a large step backwards has been a big blow for the organization that drafted him.

Much like Reynolds, Watkins has been consistently dominated when attempting to protect Vick. His seven allowed quarterback knockdowns leave him tied at the bottom of the league, and he has also surrendered a large number of hurries.

Even worse, when Watkins has been beat, it has been clean, leaving Vick exposed to big hits from big linemen. He simply has not performed well, even against average opposing defensive linemen.

At every spot besides right guard and right tackle, the offensive line has in large part contributed to many of the problems on offense. Vick has turned into a turnover machine because his time to survey the field is so limited. McCoy cannot find any running lanes to pick up consistent yardage. The big plays that have been the hallmark of the Reid-Mornhinweg offense have been nonexistent. The screen pass has been lost and has yet to be found.

Ultimately, the struggles of the offensive line highlight a greater problem: the team's complete dependence on Jason Peters and Jason Kelce in setting up the offense.

Instead of installing certain plays to take advantage of Peters' and Kelce's freakish athleticism, the Eagles made them such big focal points in 2011 that they have essentially been irreplaceable this

season.

The offensive line struggles to execute simple base blocks, with every lineman other than Mathis and Herremans simply incapable of pushing the nearest defender away at the point of attack on a consistent basis. Moreover, the offense has no conventional running game-one in which the team does not have to rely on a left tackle like Peters who can pancake a defensive end and then run upfield to block a cornerback or a center like Kelce who can pull on sweeps to block safeties.

Credit Reid, Mornhinweg, and Mudd for maximizing the talents of Peters and Kelce, but creating such a high level of scheme dependence on two players has backfired this season due to injuries to these two pivotal players.

Despite all these deep-rooted problems, there are some reasons of optimism. The return of Dunlap from a hamstring injury against Atlanta should help shore up the left side. Reynolds, as dreadful as he has played, should improve each week with experience. Lastly, [there remains a slim chance that Peters returns](#) this season if the Eagles play late into January.

Most importantly, though, the Eagles are coming off a bye week, one during which Andy Reid and the coaching staff surely focused on ways to improve the play of the offensive line.

A perfect 13-0 in games after the bye, Reid and his staff have historically done a good job in making adjustments during the week off. They will surely devise new schemes to put more points on the scoreboard. Expect them to place a greater focus on quick, high-percentage passes to help offset the shaky offensive line-a heavy dose of three-step drops, quick slants to the Jackson and Maclin, and swing passes to McCoy-throws with which Vick has enjoyed success this year.

The offensive line has collapsed like a house of cards, and the sleeping giant that is the Eagles offense may never fully awaken in 2012, but trust Reid to make the necessary adjustments.

1. D. Orlando Ledbetter. "[Atlanta Falcons Atlanta Falcons: Nolan thinks Eagles' offense is a 'sleeping giant'](#)", *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*.
2. Khaled Elsayed. "[Offensive Line Rankings](#)", ProFootballFocus.
3. Jeff McLane. "[King Dunlap starting for Eagles; Jason Peters making progress](#)", *The Philadelphia Inquirer*.

Published by [Daniel Lewis](#)

I have a passion for sports, be it playing, watching, or writing. I enjoy watching professional basketball, football, and tennis. I treat sports almost as a field of study, watching highlights and attempti... [View profile](#)



Michael Vick Press Conference a Bit of Staged Humility; Should Philadelp...

To say that Michael Vick's official donning of the green of the Philadelphia Eagles has been acceptable to Philadelphia fans is to ignore half of them. As there are those who b...



Michael Vick Gets Second Chance

after meeting with commissioner Roger Goodell, Michael Vick received the good news that he will be reinstated to play in the NFL



12 Best Eagles Draft Picks of the 12 Year Andy Reid Era

12 players, 12 reasons why they turned out to be great draft picks for Andy Reid.



What My Child Thinks About Micha...

Michael Vick: Should He Be Allowed to Return to the NFL?

Michael Vick is a talented athlete. Michael Vick is Black. Michael Vick confessed to dog fighting. So how does this all play out in the world we live in? Personally, I abhor anyone that fights animals of any kind.

What Michael Vick Really Did that Cost Him His Career: Do We Do This as Well?

Michael Vick and his rapid descent into a hell of his own making was really the result of one action. What did he do that was so very wrong?

[Block All Comments](#)

Post a Comment as Daniel Lewis

Post Comment

YAHOO VOICES

- Entertainment** **News**
- Auto** **Sports**
- Business** **Tech**
- Creative Writing** **Travel**
- Health** **Slideshow Library**
- Home Improvement** **Video Library**
- Lifestyle**

ALSO ON YAHOO

- Autos Mail Shine
- Celebrity Maps Shopping
- Finance Movies Sports
- Games Music Travel
- Groups My Yahoo TV
- Health News Contributor Network
- All Yahoo Services »**

YAHOO CONTRIBUTOR NETWORK

- Help** **Community**
- Resources
- Blog
- Forum
- Promotional Tools
- User Search