

Arif Hasan's

2015

Vikings  
Training Camp Guide

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# The Vikings' Schemes

## Offense

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Adding offensive coordinator Norv Turner to the staff was one of the best surprises of the 2014 offseason, and his addition is already returning dividends. Though an initial glance at offensive metrics would suggest there's been no effect (they ranked 21st in DVOA and dropped from 14th to 21st in points per drive), Minnesota improved throughout the season despite more offensive injuries than last year, at less replaceable positions, and without their star player; the relatively few injuries in 2013 (and to positions that are not that critical, like tight end) pale in comparison to the generally difficult to replace positions the Vikings lost to injury, like on the offensive line.

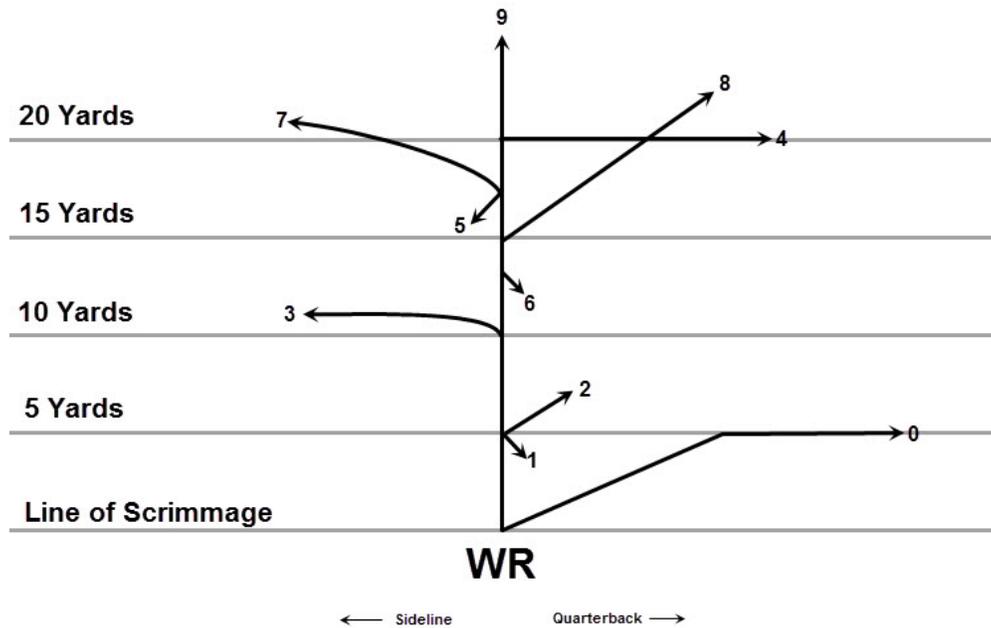
Turner's development of Bridgewater, who was not the intended quarterback to start the season, deserves praise even if throughout the season the offense seemed frustratingly slow to adapt to circumstances. The final five games were absolutely astounding, and Turner is a big part of the reason that Bridgewater placed second behind Aaron Rodgers in their player-grading system in those final five weeks—placing second in passer rating behind Tony Romo and seventh in adjusted yards per attempt.

The system Turner used is complex in execution but simple in theory. It's an evolution of the offense established by Don Coryell at San Diego State University.

Turner's history in Dallas is well-known—he took a team that placed last or second-to-last for the previous two years and a struggling rookie quarterback to one of the top offenses in the NFL. Nearly every place he's been to experienced an uptick in offensive production with his arrival and dropped off with his departure (Dallas being a notable exception, as his mentor took over the offensive coordinating job).

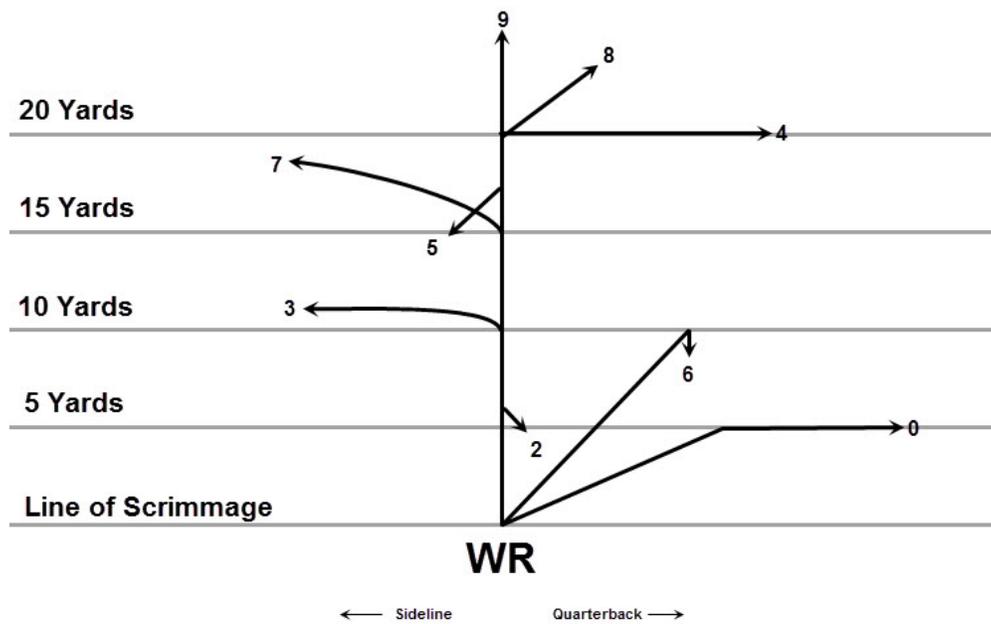


route numbers are also tagged, so “Bang 8” has a different angle than “Seam 8” despite both being “8” (or post) routes. They all also have “action” tags for play action-passing.

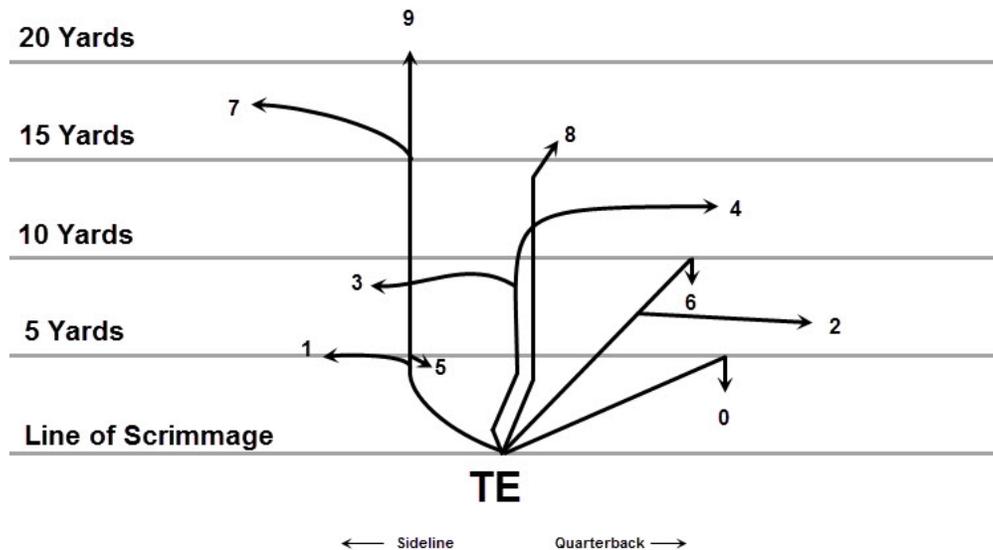


A lot of resources will switch the 5 with the 3 and the 6 with the 4, and they may be right for the offense they are describing, but above is the route tree Turner outlined in his playbooks. We'll also often see route trees where routes 3-8 all stem at the same spot, and that generally fits how many offenses work, but in this case, those routes are tagged instead of the original numbers.

Those are just the outside receiver routes (some of which operate differently for the X receiver on the line of scrimmage than for the Z receiver off the line of scrimmage). Here are the slot routes:



And those route numbers are different than the tight end route numbers.



It gets massively more complicated than that for every route, and each route has a few tags. Not only do they each have tags (each route may have 4 or so—that’s 40 different routes!), they each have specific instructions for certain coverages. Take a look at how Mike Martz constructed his route grid for the 0 route for receivers:

vs. Retreat Zone	vs. Retreat Man	vs. Cloud
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Take one step up and release flat to ball</li> <li>- Keep eyes on the under coverage</li> <li>- Work off of the far side hook defender</li> <li>- Hook-up in open area, 4-6 yards deep</li> <li>- You must at least get over center</li> <li>- Snap around and sit, show QB your numbers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Take one step up and release flat to ball</li> <li>- Get the corner going, make staircase move</li> <li>- Come out of staircase flat, and accelerate across the field</li> <li>- Staircase around the tackle box area to your side</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Same as retreat zone.</li> <li>- Be alert for a wall tech by the ILB</li> <li>- Vs. wall, make a move upfield and slip underneath LB'er</li> <li>- Continue to your spot, working out of the location of the offside hook defender</li> </ul>
vs. Trail	vs. Bump	vs. Quads
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Take one step up and flatten hard under CB</li> <li>- Staircase the corner</li> <li>- Flatten and accelerate across the field</li> <li>- If the corner is in press trail, challenge inside. If you get it, take it. If he jumps inside, get over the top</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Press the corner off the ball with several steps</li> <li>- Undercut him and release flat inside</li> <li>- Staircase the corner</li> <li>- Flatten and accelerate across the field</li> <li>- May use stutter instead of staircase</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Same as cloud</li> </ul>

There’s no reason to include the full playbook, but you get the idea.

Generally speaking, as a pass coordinator, Norv Turner like late-developing routes and route combinations. When compared to the rest of the NFL, Turner tends to have his receivers run more dig

## Wide Receivers



The Vikings' receiver corps hasn't changed much in essence even with big turnover with their highest-paid receiver (from Greg Jennings to Mike Wallace) and a smart fifth-round pickup—it is still essentially full of players defined by their potential more than their provable talent. It's the fastest corps in the NFL while also sporting young talent across the roster. The oldest receiver in the corps exists within uncertainty as well, as he's had some of the most exciting and most disappointing years in the league.

### Mike Wallace

There's a full scouting report of Mike Wallace later in the guide.

Acquired for a fifth-round pick (receivers picked in the fifth round this year include Stefon Diggs, J.J. Nelson, Kenny Bell and Rashad Greene), the former Pittsburgh and Miami speedster is poised for a career revival in Minnesota, but carries a lot of baggage with him as well.

**Strengths:** Clearly a speed demon about to hit his athletic prime, there are very few exciting home-run hitters with the explosive ability of Mike Wallace. Wallace does like to slowplay his routes and understands the natural extension of his speed are his ability to threaten underneath. He can shoulder fake open corner and post routes, and tracks the ball well in the air. He has impressive contortion abilities and can leap for the ball.

**Weaknesses:** Wallace's speed doesn't come with a full route tree, and he has limited usage because of it. His ability to deceive is subpar, and he rounds out routes that aren't comebacks or go routes. Known for attitude issues in Pittsburgh as well as Miami, Wallace can be an enormous distraction (though has always been known as a hard practice worker). He's poor at winning contested catches and defensive backs who stay with him wash him out of the play entirely. He can't play physically (though in some part,

he's made up for this with elusiveness) and his route depths are bad—miscommunication between him and Tannehill are often because he's in the wrong place. He has little sideline awareness when making sideline catches. His acrobats when attempting to catch passes are often counterproductive.

Wallace is a one-note receiver. Sometimes, that's great because it's a really good note. Just don't ask him to do too much.

### Charles Johnson

Johnson's career path is exactly the kind of stuff NFL fans love to see. From a small-school and drafted in the seventh round, Johnson bounced around on two practice squads and suffered an injury in the process before landing on a team, and mostly as a flier. Johnson took advantage of his opportunity to become a starter, and before long was called the best receiver on the roster by the offensive coordinator—not a sign of desperation, but hope.

**Strengths:** Johnson is a fast, tall receiver with good leaping ability and a lot of promise. He's improved on his route running from Grand Valley State. He has good hands and the ability to make difficult catches on the sideline. His ability to keep defensive backs guessing allows him to get open deep and though his track speed hasn't fully materialized into deep speed, it's there and it shows up when he accelerates mid-route. Johnson's release off the line has improved since he took preseason snaps in Green Bay two years ago, and he's developed a fuller arsenal of moves to get off of jams. There were concerns coming out of the draft that he may not have the right football character to succeed because he switched schools so often. That really turns out not to be the case—he's an incredibly dedicated worker with high character; he had transferred schools to be with his sick father, who had survived four heart attacks and has multiple types of cancer—giving up what he thought was an NFL career in the process.

**Weaknesses:** Now that Justin Hunter has run into legal trouble, Johnson may be the worst starting receiver in the NFL at contested catches. The former Grand Valley State receiver still needs to work on exploding out of sharp cuts, but he still creates separation on routes with 90 degree breaks. Over time, that tendency will decrease, so it's better to fix it sooner than later. He is slow to decelerate on comeback and curl routes, and that would be the perfect complement to his ability to get open on the nine and post routes. Johnson is familiar with the offense but still needs to make sure he's making the right decisions against zone coverage and optioning routes correctly. Johnson is not a very physical blocker. Though he has more release moves, he still needs to integrate them naturally into his running so he doesn't lose timing on routes—if he ends up starting opposite Wallace, he'll see a lot of press coverage on the line of scrimmage, so this will be critical.

### Jarius Wright

Originally the third man left out of Arkansas's famed class of receivers, Wright is the only one left standing, ahead of injury-retirement and former Viking Greg Childs and former Carolina Panthers receiver Joe Adams. Though he played a possession role at Arkansas, he's turned himself into a speedy slot receiver in Minnesota, one who could make some big money on an upcoming second contract.

**Strengths:** Last year, the fledgling version of the guide mentioned that Minnesota had not taken advantage of Wright's ability after the catch. That problem seems to be solved now. His vision and

**Weaknesses:** Vardaro *can* be quick, but he's shown a lot of sluggishness. His agile upper body doesn't match his slower lower body and it's difficult for him to keep up with faster defensive linemen and pass-rushers. Vardaro is not an athletic person, so none of this is surprising. His second-level movement is weaker and uncoordinated, but he doesn't block into the second level that often.

### Tom Farniok

It's hard not to cheer for Farniok, an Iowa State alum whose only offers were from two FCS schools until the Iowa State head coach recalled the undersized center at one of their camps. Farniok wasn't expected to ever work his way into the starting rotation, but did so as their most valuable lineman—so valuable in fact, that he drew up plays and adjustments on the sideline that the team would use throughout games—with a marked drop in performance when he wasn't in.

**Strengths:** Obviously, Farniok is an extremely smart football player who understands everything going on around him and what their function is. He has a nasty attitude when playing and also plays as a mobile center making second-level blocks. His targeting in space is pretty good, and his agility is fine for a center. Farniok's use of angles and positioning is excellent. An obvious leader that players respect.

**Weaknesses:** Undersized and underpowered, Farniok's nasty attitude as a player doesn't translate to push on the field or strength at the point of attack. He also needs to improve his leverage and stamina, as he flags at the end of games, neutralizing some of his natural mobility. He has some penalty issues, but the injury issues are potentially bigger—with an MCL sprain as well as various other maladies that kept him off the field for random drives.,

### Isame Faciane

There's not much to say about Faciane as a guard, as this will be his first year playing the position. He originally joined the Vikings as a nose/three-technique hybrid (like Shamar Stephen) and was recruited by his old defensive line coach at FIU. Now working with Jeff Davidson, Faciane figures to get some time on the practice squad if he shows quick learning.

**Strengths:** Luckily for him, Faciane had a reputation for being a coachable player, and that probably figured into the Vikings' decision to convert him to an offensive role instead of cutting him outright. This may better fit his body type, as he wasn't athletic enough to play three-technique, but not big enough to play nose tackle. His ability to anchor will come in handy, and the aggressive style of play he had at FIU may be something the Vikings are looking for in a drive blocker. He's a strong player with a lot of leg drive.

**Weaknesses:** Aggression is good, but it's a completely different mentality on the offensive line, and one that will be difficult to pick up, especially in pass protection. He isn't particularly quick or agile and who knows if he can meet players at the second level. Learning new footwork and adapting to blocking schemes will be extremely difficult. Faciane is a longshot looking for a practice squad spot, just like when Mike Zimmer was on staff in Cincinnati and Jason Shirley switched from defensive tackle to guard.

## Implied Depth Chart

Below is the implied depth chart for the team heading into training camp, which is not a roster prediction, but rather a chart gathered from how the Vikings have rotated their players through OTAs and minicamp, after accounting for injury. Some positions, like right guard, do not have a clear starter, so I went with intuition. Joe Berger could very well be the leader in the locker room for that position, and we wouldn't know because the Vikings don't need to play him to see what they have.

This will likely be wrong on the very first day of training camp.

### Offensive Depth Chart

QB	Teddy Bridgewater	Shaun Hill	Mike Kafka	Taylor Heinicke		
HB	Adrian Peterson	Jerick McKinnon	Matt Asiata	Joe Banyard	DuJuan Harris	Dominique Williams
FB	Zach Line	Blake Renaud				
WR1	Charles Johnson	Cordarrelle Patterson	Donte Foster	Gavin Lutman		
WR2	Mike Wallace	Adam Thielen	Jordan Leslie	Isaac Fruechte		
WR3	Jarius Wright	Stefon Diggs	DaVaris Daniels			
TE	Kyle Rudolph	Rhett Ellison	MyCole Pruitt	Chase Ford	Brandon Bostick	
LT	Matt Kalil	Tyrus Thompson	Carter Bykowski			
LG	Brandon Fusco	Joe Berger	Austin Shepherd			
C	John Sullivan	Zac Kerin	Tom Farniok			
RG	T.J. Clemmings	David Yankey	Bobby Vardaro	Isame Faciane		
RT	Phil Loadholt	Mike Harris	Babatunde Aiyegbusi			

### Defensive Depth Chart

RDE	Everson Griffen	Danielle Hunter	Justin Trattou	Leon Mackey		
UT	Sharrif Floyd	Tom Johnson	Chrishon Rose			
NT	Linval Joseph	Shamar Stephen	Chigbo Anunoby			
LDE	Brian Robison	Scott Crichton	B.J. Dubose	Caesar Rayford		
SLB	Anthony Barr	Gerald Hodges	Edmond Robinson	Josh Kaddu		
MLB	Eric Kendricks	Audie Cole	Michael Mauti	Casey Matthews		
WLB	Chad Greenway	Brian Peters	Brandon Watts			
LCB	Terence Newman	Trae Waynes	Marcus Sherels	DeMarcus Van Dyke		
SS	Robert Blanton	Antone Exum	Anthony Harris			
FS	Harrison Smith	Andrew Sendejo	Shaun Prater			
RCB	Xavier Rhodes	Captain Munneryn	Josh Robinson	Justin Coleman	Jalil Carter	
*SCB	Captain Munneryn	Jabari Price	Marcus Sherels			

### Specialists

STs	Blair Walsh (K, KO)	Jeff Locke (P, H)	Cullen Loeffler (LS)	Kevin McDermott (LS)
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