

Atlanta Falcons

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|---|----------------------------------|---|--|
| 2016 Record: 11-5 | Total DVOA: 19.8% (3rd) | 2017 Mean Projection: 8.3 wins | On the Clock (0-4): 6% |
| Pythagorean Wins: 10.9 (3rd) | Offense: 24.6% (1st) | Postseason Odds: 41.9% | Mediocrity (5-7): 31% |
| Snap-Weighted Age: 26.9 (8th) | Defense: 7.3% (26th) | Super Bowl Odds: 6.1% | Playoff Contender (8-10): 44% |
| Average Opponent: -0.5% (20th) | Special Teams: 2.5% (7th) | Proj. Avg. Opponent: 0.0% (17th) | Super Bowl Contender (11+): 19% |
| 2016: A historically great offense... until the last quarter of the last game. | | | |
| 2017: Clemson, UNC, and the Cavs did it, so why not us? | | | |

This past spring, a vagrant started a fire that wound up burning down a large elevated section of Interstate 85, which cuts through the heart of Atlanta. The collapse of a main thoroughfare is a major challenge for any American city. But the blow dealt to the collective Atlanta psyche was a distant second to the damage caused by the Falcons' collapse in Super Bowl LI. Everyone who bought this book knows that the Falcons blew a 28-3 third-quarter lead and lost in overtime to New England, denying the franchise and the title-starved city it represents on the gridiron a long-awaited championship.

Then again, considering where the Falcons stood just a few months earlier, perhaps the only thing more astonishing than the way the Super Bowl unfolded was that the team was in the game to begin with.

Atlanta went 8-8 in 2015, listing badly after a 5-0 start. Coming into 2016, owner Arthur Blank had put a "playoffs or else" mandate on the future of general manager Thomas Dimitroff and his staff. Head coach Dan Quinn was derided locally as "Coach Bro" for his insistence on peppering all interactions with fortune cookie bromides; he was derided nationally as being well out over his skis as a rookie shot caller. Offensive coordinator Kyle Shanahan was lucky to have a second season on the job, as the team struggled to produce points and rumors of a poor relationship with his players hit the media. Quarterback Matt Ryan was coming off a terrible 2015 season in which he made several crucial, inexplicable mistakes. On the wrong side of 30, questions arose over whether he would ever be a high-quality player again. Prized rookie Vic Beasley was invisible, and the pass rush nonexistent. Not even the awesomeness of wideout Julio Jones could lift the Falcon funk.

Defying virtually all prognostications, including ours, the Falcons responded to the disappointments of 2015 with an amazing 2016, one that shoulda/woulda/coulda ended with a Lombardi Trophy. Dimitroff infused the roster with gobs of young, athletic players. Quinn learned from his mistakes and implemented a swarming defense to go with an extremely potent offense. Said attack was designed by Shanahan, who had one of the greatest seasons in the annals of coordinatordom (until the final furlong, alas). Ryan rebounded to win the MVP, one year after his worst season as a pro. Beasley came from nowhere to lead the league in sacks.

As they say on the Internet, life comes at you fast.

As it happens, "fast" was a crucial element of the turn-

around. The Falcons featured a lightning attack that led the NFL in points, touchdowns, and DVOA. The season-long efficiency was frightening to behold. Atlanta scored a jaw-dropping 540 points on just 175 drives. With a mere 11 turnovers and just 48 punts, the Falcons scored on 55.4 percent of their drives. That very nearly matches the record of 55.7 percent set by the 2007 Patriots, heretofore the team that leapt to mind when discussing unstoppable offensive juggernauts. With 3.06 points per drive, the Falcons became only the third offense since 1996 to average more than a field goal every time they took the field, though they fell short of the 2007 Pats and their insane 3.37 PPD.

The Falcons scored 58 touchdowns, meaning only one more drive ended with a punt or turnover than a touchdown. Last year's second-best team in this category, the Aaron Rodgers-led Packers, scored 51 touchdowns and had 73 drives end in punt or turnover.

Ryan was named MVP for directing this onslaught, a stunner given his 2015 struggles but not shocking when placed in the greater context of his strong, underrated career. He definitely struggled during Shanahan: Year 1, with rumors of discontent so pervasive it seemed certain the two would never fully mesh. But that undersold Ryan's adaptability and professionalism, and it stood to reason that simply erasing those terrible mistakes in key situations would turn his damp squib of 2015 into an outlier.

Still, rebounding to have a good season is one thing; playing at an MVP level is another. For that, Shanahan deserves plenty of credit. He had a season so overflowing with brilliant schematic design and timely play calls that the AP's new Assistant Coach of the Year Award, which he won, may have to be henceforth named for him—the "Shanny." Week after week, Shanahan embarrassed quality defensive coordinators across the league, while also ensuring Ryan was put into situations where he was not only comfortable but able to excel.

Shanahan surely ushered in the brilliance with an offseason move that dripped with good karma—inviting local media to watch game film with him! The underlying message of these sessions was that his offense should have worked in 2015, but for poor execution or bad luck. At the time, it seemed like a CYA maneuver disguised as PR, but in hindsight he was right.

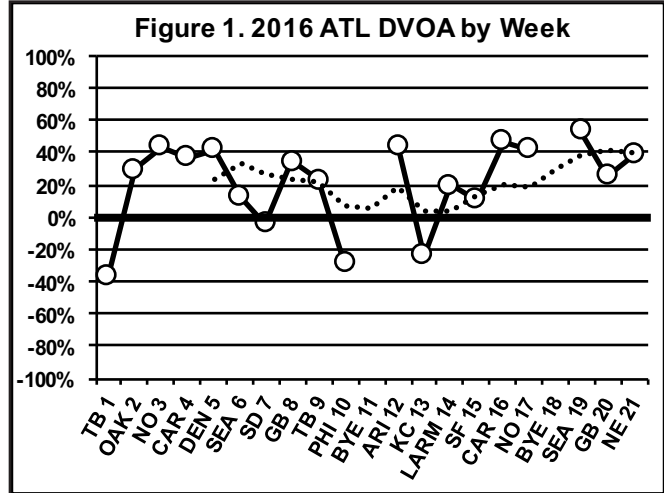
One of the most important missing ingredients from the offense was the lack of an athletic center to trigger the

| 2017 Falcons Schedule | | | | | |
|-----------------------|--------|------|---------------|------|--------------|
| Week | Opp. | Week | Opp. | Week | Opp. |
| 1 | at CHI | 7 | at NE | 13 | MIN |
| 2 | GB | 8 | at NYJ | 14 | NO (Thu.) |
| 3 | at DET | 9 | at CAR | 15 | at TB (Mon.) |
| 4 | BUF | 10 | DAL | 16 | at NO |
| 5 | BYE | 11 | at SEA (Mon.) | 17 | CAR |
| 6 | MIA | 12 | TB | | |

zone-blocking attack. That was fixed by a single flourish of Blank’s pen, when he signed the check that brought in free agent Alex Mack from Cleveland. Overnight, the offense was transformed. Ryan was no longer fielding ground-ball snaps and getting chased from the middle of the pocket, as he had throughout 2015. The outside zone run became not merely Shanahan’s core concept (Atlanta used it on more than 40 percent of its handoffs), but an effective one. Most importantly, Mack’s athleticism and caginess helped play-action off the outside zone to become almost scarily efficient. Atlanta’s ability to consistently run well with Devonta Freeman and Tevin Coleman gave the play-action increased bite, and Shanahan took advantage, riffing on the scheme with all manner of boot actions and screens. No offense used play-action more than Atlanta, and few teams used it more effectively. Atlanta ranked fifth in DVOA (53.3%) and second in yards per pass (10.3), with Ryan throwing for 1,869 yards on play-action passes. Only two other passers (Russell Wilson and Kirk Cousins) topped 1,000, and both just barely.

Conversely, Atlanta used shotgun less often than any other team, operating from “old-fashioned” sets that employed full-backs and multiple tight ends. Atlanta frequently employed three at once, at least until Jacob Tamme was injured in mid-season. When passing from that “13” personnel grouping, Ryan went 24-for-29 with five touchdowns, and overall the team had a 54.9% DVOA. With the NFL massively shifting toward a three-receiver, shotgun-spread look, the Falcons and Shanahan caught defenses off guard by going retro.

What separated the Falcons attack from most mortal offenses was the ability to stretch the field to its full lateral width even when Ryan rolled out in one direction, a situation that theoretically should have cut his options in half. That was partially due to the brilliance of Jones, and his ability to get across the field with precision and explosiveness. It was partially due to wideout Taylor Gabriel’s blinding speed that defenders had to honor, clearing space for the crossers to operate. And it was partially due to Freeman and Coleman’s ability as receivers and to run various wheel route concepts. Defenders expecting them to be in one place coming off the play-action were often stunned to discover they were on the other side of the field. Or that while they had managed to locate the backs, one of the tight ends was now completely uncovered. Or that Jones had simply defeated their perfectly executed coverage. The dizzying array of playmakers enabled by Shanahan’s scheme often led to defenses exploding in anger and confusion on their sideline, as the Seahawks did in a midseason game after the



Falcons scored 21 points in 11 minutes. It helped that Atlanta receivers hung on to the ball far more often. We charted the team with a league-high 32 drops two years ago; in 2016, the unit had just 16 drops, the fewest in the NFL.

One way to measure Shanahan’s ability to get his playmakers into space is first downs created by yards after the catch—in other words, plays where the receiver caught the ball short of the sticks and converted on his own. Our Cian Fahey tracked the stat in his indispensable *Pre-Snap Reads QB Catalogue 2017*: Ryan easily led all passers with 118 YAC first downs. He also topped the league in gains on such plays of 11-plus and 21-plus yards, indicating that Shanahan was scheming receivers so wide open on third down that they could turn mere conversions into big plays. Opposing defenses might live with Jones taking a 5-yard pass and hurtling down the sideline for a big gain, but when the likes of Levine Toilolo or Aldrick Robinson did so, frustration mounted.

Of course, all of the hosannas to Shanahan come with a mighty “Yeah, but...” attached. When the situation called for slow-playing the clock and running the ball in the fourth quarter of the Super Bowl, Shanny went into “check this out” mode, and abetted the Patriots comeback by calling up deep-dropback passes that became disastrous sacks or clock-stopping incompletions. Shanahan reportedly moaned, “I blew it” after the game; certainly the Falcons’ fan base blamed him for the unthinkable loss.

Under the circumstances, then, perhaps it is best that Shanahan left for a head coaching gig. There were few illusions that Shanahan would return to the Atlanta sideline in 2017 anyway, and when San Francisco fired Chip Kelly it was obvious Shanny would return to his father’s old stomping grounds by the Bay. In his stead, the Falcons made a very surprising hire: Steve Sarkisian, best known for drinking his way out of the USC Trojans job, and fresh off his substitute teacher cameo with Alabama’s offense in the national title game.

Sarkisian is respected throughout the sport for his offensive acumen, and no doubt the team put in the requisite vetting to feel comfortable bringing someone with Sark’s troubled history on board. But he has precious little Sunday experience (he was quarterbacks coach in Oakland in 2004, and... that’s it), and has

never called a play in a pro game. Naturally, the line out of Falcon Land is “we aren’t going to change anything” and “Matt Ryan is basically the coordinator, anyway,” but every Atlanta fan has to feel a twinge of unease about the swap. Just in the last couple of seasons, Marc Trestman and Ken Zampese, both highly regarded offensive minds, struggled to replace Gary Kubiak and Hue Jackson in Baltimore and Cincinnati, respectively. That doesn’t mean Sark can’t have success, but expecting such robotic efficiency to continue seems foolish.

The good news for Atlanta is that teams that lose their offensive coordinators after awesome seasons don’t often fall off much the next year. Since 1989, the top 20 teams in offensive DVOA to lose their coordinators have dropped from an average of 23.1% to 12.4%, and from second in the league to ninth (Table 1). These numbers are virtually indistinguishable from the usual regression towards the mean seen by top offenses that don’t change coordinators.

A stronger regression trend relates to the offenses that improved the most over the previous season without changing quarterbacks. These teams tend to fall back the following season; on average, their rank in offensive DVOA rises from 19th in the league to fourth, and then drop backs to 14th (Table 2). Of course, none of these examples featured a season as excellent as the one Ryan had. Indeed, the 2016 Falcons are kind of *sui generis* in this department; no offense in the DVOA era has improved as much with the same quarterback/coordinator combo as the year before.

Table 1. Top 20 Offenses to Lose Offensive Coordinator, 1989-2015

| Year | Team | OC | Off DVOA | Rk | OC Y+1 | Off DVOA Y+1 | Rk Y+1 |
|--|------|---------------|----------|-----|----------------|--------------|--------|
| 2011 | GB | J.Philbin | 33.8% | 1 | T.Clements | 19.5% | 3 |
| 2011 | NE | B.O'Brien | 31.9% | 3 | J.McDaniels | 30.8% | 1 |
| 2005 | DEN | G.Kubiak | 26.9% | 2 | R.Dennison | -4.8% | 18 |
| 2000 | STL | M.Martz | 26.7% | 1 | B.Jackson | 20.5% | 2 |
| 2006 | SD | C.Cameron | 25.7% | 2 | C.Shelton | 4.6% | 14 |
| 1991 | SF | M.Holmgren | 24.0% | 2 | M.Shanahan | 33.1% | 1 |
| 2005 | KC | A.Saunders | 23.7% | 4 | M.Solari | 6.3% | 11 |
| 1998 | MIN | B.Billick | 23.6% | 3 | R.Sherman | 11.7% | 8 |
| 2004 | NE | C.Weis | 23.3% | 3 | J.McDaniels | 17.5% | 7 |
| 2013 | SD | K.Whisenhunt | 23.1% | 2 | F.Reich | 7.0% | 11 |
| 2012 | DEN | M.McCoy | 22.1% | 2 | A.Gase | 33.5% | 1 |
| 1993 | DAL | N.Turner | 21.8% | 2 | E.Zampese | 18.4% | 3 |
| 1991 | BUF | T.Marchibroda | 21.5% | 3 | T.Bresnahan | 9.6% | 6 |
| 2004 | NYJ | P.Hackett | 20.8% | 4 | M.Heimerdinger | -19.8% | 31 |
| 2014 | DEN | A.Gase | 20.0% | 3 | R.Dennison | -8.7% | 25 |
| 2008 | DEN | R.Dennison | 19.2% | 1 | M.McCoy | 1.3% | 18 |
| 1994 | SF | M.Shanahan | 18.9% | 1 | M.Trestman | 18.6% | 5 |
| 2000 | SF | M.Mornhinweg | 18.8% | 4 | G.Knapp | 21.0% | 1 |
| 2015 | CIN | H.Jackson | 18.6% | 2 | K.Zampese | 7.5% | 11 |
| 2001 | OAK | B.Callahan | 18.0% | 3 | M.Trestman | 22.0% | 2 |
| <i>Average</i> | | | 23.1% | 2.4 | | 12.5% | 9.0 |
| <i>Average of all offenses over 18.0% DVOA</i> | | | 24.3% | 2.3 | | 12.4% | 8.4 |

The takeaway from history is that good old-fashioned regression, rather than merely Shanahan’s absence, is the more likely culprit should Atlanta fail to be as dominant in 2017. And regression is a virtual certainty, regardless of who calls the plays. Ryan and the offense just can’t play any better; injuries are likely to hit harder than they did in 2016; the offensive line is already less cohesive, thanks to the retirement of guard Chris Chester; and on and on. And that’s why our projection for the Falcons is more pessimistic than conventional wisdom, though we still expect Atlanta to be in the playoff mix.

It should be remembered that up until the final month of the 2016 season, the Falcons, for all their offensive wizardry, were hardly considered elite. Part of that was Atlanta’s lack of success historically, to be sure, especially at winning time—Ryan doubled his career postseason win total last January. Then there was the good fortune that greased the skids towards the Super Bowl. After losing at home to Kansas City in bizarre fashion (an Eric Berry 2-point interception return), the Falcons were 7-5, mostly written off as the “same old Falcons” at that point by the pigskin commentariat. They were not considered a genuine title threat.

But the last month of the season was cushy, featuring dates with the hapless Rams, 49ers, and Panthers, plus a home game with hated rival (and defense-free) New Orleans. Atlanta swept the quartet, scoring 38.5 points per game in the process. Meanwhile, other NFC teams slipped and fell, handing the Falcons a playoff bye that seemed unlikely when December dawned. The tournament broke their way, too: opponents Seattle and Green Bay were far too broken physically to come to the Georgia Dome and win, and Atlanta avoided the one

Table 2. Top Offensive DVOA Improvements by Teams in Top 10, 1989-2016

| Year | Team | Y-1 DVOA | Y-1 Rk | Off DVOA | Rk | Y+1 DVOA | Y+1 Rk | Change from Y-1 | Change in Y+1 |
|----------------|------|--------------|-------------|--------------|------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------|---------------|
| 1991 | DAL | -23.6% | 28 | 17.6% | 4 | 23.6% | 2 | 41.3% | 6.0% |
| 2013 | SD | -10.0% | 24 | 23.1% | 2 | 7.0% | 11 | 33.1% | -16.1% |
| 2014 | BAL | -21.7% | 30 | 9.4% | 9 | -5.2% | 20 | 31.1% | -14.6% |
| 1993 | DEN | -15.7% | 25 | 14.8% | 3 | 1.0% | 11 | 30.5% | -13.8% |
| 1989 | GB | -20.8% | 27 | 8.9% | 6 | -13.6% | 22 | 29.7% | -22.5% |
| 2007 | NE | 14.1% | 4 | 43.5% | 1 | 12.5% | 7 | 29.4% | -31.0% |
| 2006 | PHI | -7.5% | 19 | 21.1% | 3 | 12.4% | 6 | 28.7% | -8.7% |
| 1996 | BAL | -5.0% | 19 | 22.8% | 1 | 1.8% | 15 | 27.8% | -21.0% |
| 2010 | TB | -19.3% | 26 | 8.0% | 8 | -11.5% | 26 | 27.3% | -19.5% |
| 2011 | NO | 6.4% | 11 | 33.0% | 2 | 11.9% | 9 | 26.6% | -21.1% |
| 2005 | SEA | 2.8% | 12 | 28.5% | 1 | -11.2% | 27 | 25.7% | -39.7% |
| 2001 | ARI | -19.6% | 27 | 5.2% | 9 | -12.3% | 27 | 24.8% | -17.5% |
| 2002 | KC | 11.1% | 5 | 35.4% | 1 | 33.4% | 1 | 24.3% | -2.0% |
| 2013 | CHI | -10.9% | 26 | 13.3% | 6 | -0.1% | 14 | 24.2% | -13.4% |
| 1998 | SF | 5.5% | 10 | 28.8% | 2 | -1.7% | 16 | 23.3% | -30.6% |
| Average | | -7.6% | 19.5 | 20.9% | 3.9 | 3.2% | 14.3 | 28.5% | -17.7% |
| 2016 | ATL | -7.3% | 23 | 24.6% | 1 | — | — | 31.9% | — |
| 2016 | TEN | -15.7% | 32 | 10.8% | 9 | — | — | 26.5% | — |

Note: Only includes teams with the same quarterback in the first two years.

contest that seemed problematic, visiting Dallas for the NFC Championship Game. Even the Patriots were a rather favorable matchup for the Falcons, which played out for 40 minutes of Super Bowl LI before it all went pear-shaped.

As it happens, a fresh example of the post-Super Bowl regression nightmare is right there in the division, just four hours to the north (when I-85 isn't broken). The Carolina Panthers' loss to Denver in Super Bowl 50 was merely incredibly disappointing, rather than unspeakable. Yet the team wasn't the same in 2016, for various reasons, few of which seemed plausible when the new season dawned and talk in Charlotte was of "unfinished business." That may be the worst-case scenario, but even a handful of the ills that shot down the Panthers could keep Atlanta out of the post-season entirely, especially with an improved division and a first-place schedule that makes them the only NFC South team to play Seattle or Dallas.

Instead of lurking in the shadows, the Falcons will be firmly in the spotlight this season. Increasing the notice will be the grand opening of Mercedes-Benz Stadium, a monstrosity expensive edifice that will replace the perfectly fine Georgia Dome. Construction delays, mostly due to the new stadium's unique retractable roof—which doesn't, at present, fit on top of the stadium—have already pushed back the timeline, and forced Atlanta to start the preseason on the road. Few will remember come December, assuming games are happening as scheduled, but it's a dark omen coming off of that Super Bowl.

Nevertheless, optimism in the Peach City is as high as it has ever been. And there is a reason for optimism despite the expected regression of the high-flying Falcons offense. The franchise has the foundation of a viable defense for the first time in what feels like decades. A plodding group that scared no one has been replaced by high-velocity players who fly to the ball. Last year, rookies like safety Keanu Neal and linebackers Deion Jones and De'Vondre Campbell were all immediate impact defenders, if still raw in various facets. As noted earlier, Beasley led the NFL in sacks and helped transform a pass rush that was the league's worst in 2015. Young talent like Grady Jarrett, Robert Alford, and Brian Poole started to develop into quality playmakers.

It was hardly a finished product. In fact, the 2016 Falcons actually dropped five spots in defensive DVOA, to 27th (although their weighted DVOA was 22nd, indicating a glimmer of improvement over the season). To his credit, Quinn didn't stand pat in the coaching staff. Lost in all the hoopla over

Shanahan's departure is the fact that Atlanta changed out its defensive coordinator, too. Richard Smith is gone, replaced by Marquand Manuel. Manuel was the secondary coach in 2016, and has been rewarded for his role in maintaining the unit's cohesion despite losing star corner Desmond Trufant midway through the year. Defensive line coach Bryan Cox is also gone, booted for former 49ers standout Bryant Young. The Super Bowl collapse was a handy excuse for the departures, but word out of Flowery Branch is that the changes were likely regardless of the result in Houston.

Of course, this is fundamentally Quinn's defense, and he is still apparently searching for the right coaches to help him implement his vision (i.e., a southern replica of the Legion of Boom). As mentioned above, Quinn possesses a bumper sticker-ready slogan for every possible scenario, and he is ready for 2017 with the motto "Embrace the Suck." It is designed to meet the Super Bowl disaster head-on while encouraging the team to rededicate itself to the little things that breed success, all in one pithy shibboleth.

Of course, DQ is a product of the Pete Carroll coaching tree, a cadre bound by nature to espouse relentless enthusiasm in the face of professional horrors. The truth is, no t-shirt platitudes can counteract the aftermath of such a devastating defeat, and no mathematical equation can quantify it. For example, an ESPN The Magazine article in May¹ traced Seattle's surprising openness to trading Richard Sherman this offseason directly to the team's mind-blowing loss in Super Bowl XLIX, an unthinkable setback that has lingered even as the Seahawks returned to the playoffs twice since and remained one of the NFL's top teams. Sherman, it seems, just can't get over the game. Now New England has destroyed the dreams of another franchise, one that, unlike Seattle, doesn't have a recent title to fall back upon in the darkest hours.

It's an uncomfortable thing for an analytics-based publication to admit, but the Falcons season may rest less upon on-field efficiency and more upon off-field psychotherapy. Whatever happens, Super Bowl LI will hang over the team in Sword of Damoclesian fashion until they return to the big game—and win it this time. Fortunately, taking a roundhouse kick to the testicles and coming back to win it all is quite the rage of late, as proven in Clemson and Cleveland and Chapel Hill.

Hey, even I-85 was repaired in record time, so anything is possible.

Robert Weintraub

¹ http://www.espn.com/nfl/story/_/id/19446657/seattle-seahawks-cornerback-richard-sherman-let-go-problem-nfl-2017

2016 Falcons Stats by Week

| Wk | vs. | W-L | PF | PA | YDF | YDA | TO | Total | Off | Def | ST |
|----|---------|-----|----|----|-----|-----|----|-------|-----|------|------|
| 1 | TB | L | 24 | 31 | 374 | 371 | +1 | -36% | -9% | 31% | 4% |
| 2 | at OAK | W | 35 | 28 | 528 | 454 | -1 | 29% | 43% | 30% | 16% |
| 3 | at NO | W | 45 | 32 | 442 | 474 | +2 | 44% | 40% | 3% | 7% |
| 4 | CAR | W | 48 | 33 | 571 | 378 | +1 | 36% | 47% | 13% | 3% |
| 5 | at DEN | W | 23 | 16 | 372 | 267 | 0 | 42% | 18% | -19% | 5% |
| 6 | at SEA | L | 24 | 26 | 362 | 333 | -2 | 12% | 17% | 3% | -2% |
| 7 | SD | L | 30 | 33 | 386 | 426 | +1 | -5% | 0% | 8% | 4% |
| 8 | GB | W | 33 | 32 | 367 | 331 | 0 | 34% | 42% | 0% | -7% |
| 9 | at TB | W | 43 | 28 | 461 | 396 | +1 | 23% | 41% | 21% | 3% |
| 10 | at PHI | L | 15 | 24 | 303 | 429 | 0 | -29% | -6% | 14% | -9% |
| 11 | BYE | | | | | | | | | | |
| 12 | ARI | W | 38 | 19 | 360 | 332 | 0 | 45% | 42% | -1% | 2% |
| 13 | KC | L | 28 | 29 | 418 | 389 | 0 | -24% | 18% | 46% | 5% |
| 14 | at LARM | W | 42 | 14 | 286 | 312 | +5 | 19% | 15% | -3% | 2% |
| 15 | SF | W | 41 | 13 | 550 | 272 | 0 | 11% | 19% | 17% | 8% |
| 16 | at CAR | W | 33 | 16 | 408 | 302 | +2 | 47% | 26% | -25% | -4% |
| 17 | NO | W | 38 | 32 | 465 | 473 | +1 | 42% | 28% | -10% | 4% |
| 18 | BYE | | | | | | | | | | |
| 19 | SEA | W | 36 | 20 | 422 | 309 | +2 | 54% | 50% | -12% | -9% |
| 20 | GB | W | 44 | 21 | 493 | 367 | +2 | 25% | 25% | 1% | 2% |
| 21 | vs. NE | L | 28 | 34 | 344 | 546 | +1 | 39% | 40% | -10% | -12% |

Trends and Splits

| | Offense | Rank | Defense | Rank |
|------------------|---------|------|---------|------|
| Total DVOA | 24.6% | 1 | 7.3% | 26 |
| Unadjusted VOA | 23.4% | 1 | 6.7% | 25 |
| Weighted Trend | 23.3% | 2 | 4.1% | 22 |
| Variance | 3.3% | 5 | 3.5% | 6 |
| Average Opponent | -2.2% | 4 | -2.3% | 26 |
| Passing | 50.8% | 1 | 10.7% | 18 |
| Rushing | 3.6% | 6 | 1.7% | 28 |
| First Down | 29.2% | 1 | -1.5% | 17 |
| Second Down | 22.9% | 4 | 13.2% | 27 |
| Third Down | 16.2% | 7 | 14.6% | 26 |
| First Half | 23.5% | 2 | 0.8% | 18 |
| Second Half | 37.4% | 1 | 1.9% | 20 |
| Red Zone | 3.0% | 14 | 23.3% | 29 |
| Late and Close | 63.9% | 1 | 14.2% | 24 |

Five-Year Performance

| Year | W-L | Pyth W | Est W | PF | PA | TO | Total | Rk | Off | Rk | Def | Rk | ST | Rk | Off AGL | Rk | Def AGL | Rk | Off Age | Rk | Def Age | Rk | ST Age | Rk |
|------|------|--------|-------|-----|-----|-----|--------|----|-------|----|-------|----|-------|----|---------|----|---------|----|---------|----|---------|----|--------|----|
| 2012 | 13-3 | 11.2 | 9.1 | 419 | 299 | +13 | 9.1% | 10 | 6.1% | 12 | -2.9% | 12 | 0.1% | 16 | 17.3 | 7 | 35.6 | 21 | 28.6 | 1 | 28.0 | 3 | 26.5 | 9 |
| 2013 | 4-12 | 5.9 | 6.5 | 353 | 443 | -7 | -10.4% | 25 | 3.2% | 14 | 13.5% | 29 | -0.1% | 17 | 53.9 | 27 | 36.1 | 23 | 27.6 | 7 | 26.7 | 15 | 25.9 | 21 |
| 2014 | 6-10 | 7.1 | 7.2 | 381 | 417 | +5 | -5.4% | 20 | 7.2% | 10 | 15.7% | 32 | 3.0% | 9 | 60.6 | 30 | 33.2 | 12 | 26.8 | 16 | 26.6 | 21 | 26.4 | 7 |
| 2015 | 8-8 | 7.8 | 5.8 | 339 | 345 | -7 | -16.3% | 26 | -7.3% | 23 | 6.9% | 22 | -2.1% | 22 | 10.9 | 2 | 17.8 | 5 | 27.5 | 8 | 26.9 | 14 | 26.7 | 5 |
| 2016 | 11-5 | 10.9 | 11.8 | 540 | 406 | +11 | 19.8% | 3 | 24.6% | 1 | 7.3% | 26 | 2.5% | 7 | 19.3 | 2 | 32.9 | 16 | 27.8 | 5 | 26.0 | 25 | 27.3 | 2 |

2016 Performance Based on Most Common Personnel Groups

| ATL Offense | | | | | ATL Offense vs. Opponents | | | | | ATL Defense | | | | ATL Defense vs. Opponents | | | |
|-------------|------|-----|-------|------|---------------------------|------|-----|-------|------|-------------|------|-----|--------|---------------------------|------|-----|--------|
| Pers | Freq | Yds | DVOA | Run% | Pers | Freq | Yds | DVOA | Run% | Pers | Freq | Yds | DVOA | Pers | Freq | Yds | DVOA |
| 11 | 45% | 6.2 | 21.0% | 24% | Base | 46% | 7.4 | 39.6% | 51% | Base | 19% | 5.9 | 9.8% | 11 | 68% | 5.9 | 9.3% |
| 21 | 26% | 7.2 | 30.9% | 56% | Nickel | 46% | 6.6 | 23.1% | 32% | Nickel | 63% | 5.9 | 9.9% | 12 | 11% | 6.4 | 3.5% |
| 12 | 17% | 7.7 | 36.8% | 50% | Dime+ | 7% | 5.7 | 6.4% | 6% | Dime+ | 18% | 5.3 | -12.7% | 21 | 5% | 5.2 | -15.9% |
| 13 | 7% | 8.5 | 54.9% | 42% | Goal Line | 1% | 2.8 | 34.8% | 70% | Goal Line | 1% | 0.8 | 27.2% | 10 | 4% | 4.7 | -30.3% |
| 22 | 2% | 6.2 | 12.6% | 65% | | | | | | | | | | 00 | 2% | 5.4 | 6.8% |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 611 | 2% | 8.2 | 42.8% |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 13 | 2% | 4.2 | 30.1% |

Strategic Tendencies

| Run/Pass | Rk | Formation | Rk | Pass Rush | Rk | Secondary | Rk | Strategy | Rk | | | | | |
|-------------------|-----|-----------|-------------------|-----------|----|-------------|-------|----------|------------------|-----|----|------------------|-------|----|
| Runs, first half | 36% | 25 | Form: Single Back | 63% | 30 | Rush 3 | 8.2% | 14 | 4 DB | 19% | 29 | Play-action | 27% | 1 |
| Runs, first down | 49% | 12 | Form: Empty Back | 8% | 12 | Rush 4 | 74.7% | 3 | 5 DB | 63% | 11 | Avg Box (Off) | 6.53 | 1 |
| Runs, second-long | 28% | 21 | Pers: 3+ WR | 47% | 31 | Rush 5 | 15.3% | 29 | 6+ DB | 16% | 9 | Avg Box (Def) | 5.65 | 32 |
| Runs, power sit. | 54% | 21 | Pers: 2+ TE/6+ OL | 27% | 18 | Rush 6+ | 1.8% | 31 | CB by Sides | 60% | 30 | Offensive Pace | 29.10 | 4 |
| Runs, behind 2H | 31% | 5 | Pers: 6+ OL | 1% | 29 | Sacks by LB | 45.6% | 16 | S/CB Cover Ratio | 32% | 6 | Defensive Pace | 31.36 | 25 |
| Pass, ahead 2H | 51% | 11 | Shotgun/Pistol | 40% | 32 | Sacks by DB | 8.8% | 12 | DB Blitz | 5% | 28 | Go for it on 4th | 1.10 | 16 |

The biggest transformation of Atlanta’s offense was on routes over the middle of the field. The Falcons were 31st in DVOA on passes up the middle in 2015, but improved to third in 2016. By comparison, DVOA on passes to the left improved from 19th to second, and on the right they improved from fifth to second. Atlanta’s pace stats show what happens when a team goes 11-5 with a strong running game. The Falcons offense was fourth in situation-neutral pace but 23rd in total pace, as they slowed things down with a lead. The defense was the reverse: 25th in situation-neutral pace as opponents tried to keep it slow early on, but third in total pace because opponents tried to catch up late. While the running game was strong, the Falcons hardly ever used it when Matt Ryan was in the shotgun. The Falcons only ran the ball 13 percent of the time from shotgun, 27th in the NFL. And they were awful on these plays: a league-low 2.6 yards per carry with -34.2% DVOA. One strategy that worked against Matt Ryan: during the regular season, Ryan averaged only 4.9 yards per pass against a DB blitz. The Atlanta defense ranked fifth against the pass on first downs, but 31st against the run. Falcons opponents dropped 44 passes, third in the NFL. This year’s reminder that time of possession doesn’t really matter: three NFC South teams ranked in the top 10 of average time of possession in 2016. The team that didn’t rank in the top 10 was Atlanta, which ranked 18th and won the division easily.

Passing

| Player | DYAR | DVOA | Plays | NtYds | Avg | YAC | C% | TD | Int |
|--------|------|-------|-------|-------|-----|-----|-------|----|-----|
| M.Ryan | 1885 | 39.1% | 573 | 4690 | 8.2 | 6.1 | 70.0% | 38 | 7 |

Receiving

| Player | DYAR | DVOA | Plays | Ctch | Yds | Y/C | YAC | TD | C% |
|-------------|------|-------|-------|------|------|------|------|----|-----|
| J.Jones | 458 | 31.7% | 129 | 83 | 1409 | 17.0 | 4.7 | 6 | 64% |
| M.Sanu | 123 | 6.5% | 81 | 59 | 653 | 11.1 | 4.9 | 4 | 73% |
| T.Gabriel | 181 | 33.7% | 51 | 36 | 579 | 16.1 | 7.7 | 6 | 71% |
| A.Robinson* | 91 | 24.5% | 32 | 20 | 323 | 16.2 | 3.8 | 2 | 63% |
| J.Hardy | 70 | 14.8% | 31 | 21 | 203 | 9.7 | 2.3 | 4 | 68% |
| N.Williams | 25 | 28.8% | 7 | 5 | 59 | 11.8 | 8.2 | 0 | 71% |
| A.Roberts | 32 | 3.2% | 25 | 14 | 188 | 13.4 | 4.5 | 1 | 56% |
| J.Tamme* | 25 | 4.7% | 31 | 22 | 210 | 9.5 | 4.4 | 3 | 71% |
| A.Hooper | 106 | 46.8% | 27 | 19 | 271 | 14.3 | 3.8 | 3 | 70% |
| L.Toilolo | 85 | 57.5% | 19 | 13 | 264 | 20.3 | 11.3 | 2 | 68% |
| D.Freeman | 141 | 24.9% | 65 | 54 | 462 | 8.6 | 7.7 | 2 | 83% |
| T.Coleman | 136 | 48.8% | 40 | 31 | 421 | 13.6 | 12.1 | 3 | 78% |
| P.DiMarco* | 18 | 19.5% | 10 | 7 | 52 | 7.4 | 4.1 | 1 | 70% |

Rushing

| Player | DYAR | DVOA | Plays | Yds | Avg | TD | Fum | Suc |
|-----------|------|-------|-------|-----|-----|----|-----|-----|
| D.Freeman | 99 | 3.8% | 182 | 791 | 4.3 | 11 | 0 | 48% |
| T.Coleman | 93 | 17.1% | 87 | 328 | 3.8 | 8 | 0 | 46% |
| T.Ward | 7 | -1.6% | 25 | 99 | 4.0 | 0 | 0 | 56% |
| M.Ryan | 29 | 14.4% | 19 | 116 | 6.1 | 0 | 0 | - |

Offensive Line

| Player | Pos | Age | GS | Snaps | Pen | Sk | Pass | Run | Player | Pos | Age | GS | Snaps | Pen | Sk | Pass | Run |
|----------------|-----|-----|-------|-------|-----|-----|------|-----|---------------|-----|-----|-------|-------|-----|-----|------|-----|
| Chris Chester* | RG | 34 | 16/16 | 1039 | 5 | 6.0 | 14 | 9 | Alex Mack | C | 32 | 16/16 | 1018 | 4 | 1.0 | 7 | 4 |
| Ryan Schraeder | RT | 29 | 16/16 | 1038 | 10 | 5.0 | 18 | 7 | Jake Matthews | LT | 25 | 16/16 | 978 | 8 | 5.5 | 17 | 7 |
| Andy Levitre | LG | 31 | 16/16 | 1018 | 5 | 3.0 | 10 | 8 | | | | | | | | | |

| Year | Yards | ALY | Rank | Power | Rank | Stuff | Rank | 2nd Lev | Rank | Open Field | Rank | Sacks | ASR | Rank | Press | Rank | F-Start | Cont. |
|------------------------|-------|--------------------|------|-------|-----------------------|-------|------|--------------------|------|------------|-----------------------|-------|------|---------------------|-------|------|---------|-------|
| 2014 | 3.93 | 4.23 | 14 | 67% | 13 | 21% | 20 | 1.02 | 24 | 0.68 | 17 | 31 | 5.1% | 11 | 26.4% | 22 | 16 | 27 |
| 2015 | 4.07 | 4.17 | 15 | 61% | 21 | 22% | 22 | 1.33 | 1 | 0.67 | 19 | 32 | 5.4% | 9 | 24.3% | 13 | 12 | 36 |
| 2016 | 4.66 | 4.40 | 10 | 61% | 17 | 22% | 23 | 1.30 | 7 | 1.20 | 3 | 37 | 6.5% | 23 | 29.5% | 25 | 19 | 48 |
| 2016 ALY by direction: | | Left End 4.04 (22) | | | Left Tackle 4.74 (10) | | | Mid/Guard 4.58 (4) | | | Right Tackle 5.14 (4) | | | Right End 3.39 (22) | | | | |

The key number here is 80/80, as in 80 games started by the first stringers out of a possible 80. That stat, more than any individual mark, highlights how a good-but-not-great group buoyed such a high-powered attack. 🏈 Alex Mack was, of course, the linchpin. His acquisition stemmed the broken dike that was the Falcons' interior in 2015. His athleticism and familiarity with Shanahan's scheme (they were together in Cleveland) allowed Atlanta's zone-blocking runs to work. Notably, whenever the Falcons backs ran anywhere near Mack, the results were near the top of the league. When they ran to the perimeter, the numbers plummeted. 🏈 Surprisingly, Mack was in the bottom half of league centers in blown blocks, with 11, double his number with the Browns the season before. It was a trend that extended to the rest of the line, all of whom ranked 23rd or lower at their position. The caveat here is that our charting is not grading how often a block is good or average, just counting the ones that are obviously really screwed up. 🏈 Left tackle Jake Matthews was the highly regarded early draft pick, while right tackle Ryan Schraeder wasn't drafted at all, but it's the mammoth (6-foot-7, 300-pound) Schraeder who has been the better pro, and who was rewarded with a \$33-million extension last fall. Matthews had his fifth-year option picked up despite ostensibly regressing in his third season. Matthews ranked in the top five among left tackles in snaps per blown block two years ago, only to plummet to the bottom five in 2016. Thus far he has scarcely resembled his Hall of Fame father, Bruce. 🏈 Andy Levitre has been passable as a Falcon, but is 31, and Chris Chester, who was mediocre last season, has retired, leaving guard an area of concern. Wes Schweitzer, a sixth-round pick out of San Jose State in 2016, enters training camp as the frontrunner to succeed Chester. A chemistry major, Schweitzer should understand the importance of working well together with his linemates. The Falcons picked Sean Harlow out of Oregon State in the fourth round this April to compete for the spot as well. Both Schweitzer and Harlow are strong, unathletic types who are transitioning from collegiate careers spent at tackle. Harlow at least has the bloodlines—his father Pat was a star tackle at USC and was a first-round choice of the Patriots back in 1991.

Defensive Front Seven

| Defensive Line | Age | Pos | Overall | | | | | | | vs. Run | | | | | Pass Rush | | | | |
|---------------------|-----|-----|---------|-------|-------|-------|----|------|------|---------|------|-----|----|------|-----------|------|-----|-----|-------|
| | | | G | Snaps | Plays | TmPct | Rk | Stop | Dfts | BTKl | Runs | St% | Rk | RuYd | Rk | Sack | Hit | Hur | Dsrpt |
| Grady Jarrett | 24 | DT | 16 | 630 | 48 | 5.7% | 25 | 32 | 10 | 7 | 41 | 66% | 75 | 2.2 | 39 | 3.0 | 7 | 20 | 0 |
| Jonathan Babineaux* | 36 | DT | 16 | 426 | 23 | 2.8% | -- | 17 | 4 | 9 | 19 | 79% | -- | 2.4 | -- | 0.0 | 2 | 12 | 1 |
| Courtney Upshaw | 28 | DT | 13 | 310 | 24 | 3.5% | -- | 21 | 6 | 4 | 18 | 89% | -- | 1.9 | -- | 1.0 | 2 | 7 | 1 |
| Dontari Poe | 27 | DT | 16 | 821 | 30 | 3.5% | 65 | 22 | 5 | 5 | 22 | 68% | 66 | 3.0 | 72 | 1.5 | 9 | 18 | 6 |

| Edge Rushers | Age | Pos | Overall | | | | | | | vs. Run | | | | | Pass Rush | | | | |
|------------------|-----|-----|---------|-------|-------|-------|-----|------|------|---------|------|-----|----|------|-----------|------|-----|-----|-------|
| | | | G | Snaps | Plays | TmPct | Rk | Stop | Dfts | BTKl | Runs | St% | Rk | RuYd | Rk | Sack | Hit | Hur | Dsrpt |
| Vic Beasley | 25 | OLB | 16 | 671 | 41 | 4.9% | 48 | 32 | 24 | 7 | 18 | 67% | 76 | 1.9 | 29 | 15.5 | 5 | 38 | 1 |
| Adrian Clayborn | 29 | DE | 13 | 583 | 21 | 3.1% | 83 | 16 | 8 | 6 | 15 | 73% | 53 | 2.9 | 66 | 4.5 | 12 | 22 | 0 |
| Brooks Reed | 30 | DE | 15 | 425 | 21 | 2.7% | 93 | 17 | 5 | 3 | 16 | 75% | 42 | 2.1 | 35 | 2.0 | 5 | 17 | 1 |
| Dwight Freeney* | 37 | DE | 15 | 415 | 8 | 1.0% | 100 | 7 | 6 | 0 | 4 | 75% | 42 | 3.0 | 67 | 3.0 | 7 | 29 | 2 |
| Tyson Jackson* | 31 | DE | 16 | 329 | 14 | 1.7% | -- | 9 | 1 | 3 | 12 | 58% | -- | 3.0 | -- | 0.0 | 1 | 3 | 1 |
| Ra'Shede Hageman | 27 | DE | 12 | 265 | 18 | 2.9% | -- | 12 | 3 | 1 | 13 | 69% | -- | 2.1 | -- | 2.0 | 3 | 7 | 0 |
| Jack Crawford | 29 | DE | 16 | 529 | 25 | 3.1% | 84 | 16 | 7 | 4 | 19 | 58% | 94 | 3.5 | 87 | 3.5 | 2 | 8 | 0 |

| Linebackers | Age | Pos | Overall | | | | | | | vs. Run | | | | | Pass Rush | | | vs. Pass | | | | | | | |
|--------------------|-----|-----|---------|-------|-------|-------|----|------|------|---------|------|-----|----|------|-----------|------|-----|----------|------|------|----|-------|----|----|-----|
| | | | G | Snaps | Plays | TmPct | Rk | Stop | Dfts | BTKl | Runs | St% | Rk | RuYd | Rk | Sack | Hit | Hur | Tgts | Suc% | Rk | AdjYd | Rk | PD | Int |
| Deion Jones | 23 | MLB | 15 | 896 | 117 | 14.9% | 22 | 54 | 22 | 12 | 48 | 58% | 64 | 4.6 | 80 | 0.0 | 3 | 2 | 54 | 49% | 38 | 4.8 | 8 | 10 | 3 |
| DeVondre Campbell | 24 | OLB | 11 | 547 | 55 | 9.6% | 60 | 26 | 11 | 5 | 27 | 59% | 62 | 3.0 | 19 | 0.0 | 0 | 3 | 30 | 40% | 64 | 6.3 | 34 | 7 | 1 |
| Philip Wheeler* | 33 | OLB | 16 | 339 | 27 | 3.2% | -- | 20 | 8 | 6 | 19 | 74% | -- | 3.1 | -- | 0.0 | 2 | 4 | 9 | 40% | -- | 10.0 | -- | 0 | 0 |
| Sean Weatherspoon* | 30 | OLB | 4 | 190 | 27 | 12.9% | -- | 9 | 3 | 4 | 11 | 18% | -- | 5.5 | -- | 0.0 | 0 | 0 | 14 | 50% | -- | 9.2 | -- | 0 | 0 |
| Paul Worrlow* | 27 | MLB | 12 | 162 | 20 | 3.2% | -- | 11 | 4 | 3 | 12 | 58% | -- | 3.2 | -- | 0.0 | 1 | 2 | 7 | 62% | -- | 7.0 | -- | 2 | 0 |
| LaRoy Reynolds | 27 | MLB | 16 | 138 | 23 | 2.8% | -- | 12 | 3 | 4 | 11 | 73% | -- | 2.6 | -- | 0.0 | 1 | 1 | 6 | 34% | -- | 9.0 | -- | 0 | 0 |

| Year | Yards | ALY | Rank | Power | Rank | Stuff | Rank | 2nd Level | Rank | Open Field | Rank | Sacks | ASR | Rank | Press | Rank | |
|------------------------|-------|------|--------------------|-------|------|-----------------------|------|-----------|---------------------|------------|------|------------------------|------|------|---------------------|------|--|
| 2014 | 4.09 | 4.45 | 24 | 80% | 30 | 15% | 30 | 1.11 | 12 | 0.54 | 6 | 22 | 4.5% | 30 | 22.2% | 26 | |
| 2015 | 4.06 | 4.14 | 19 | 73% | 27 | 18% | 22 | 1.15 | 20 | 0.80 | 17 | 19 | 3.7% | 32 | 21.5% | 31 | |
| 2016 | 4.28 | 4.47 | 25 | 63% | 16 | 19% | 18 | 1.29 | 26 | 0.64 | 13 | 34 | 5.4% | 24 | 26.4% | 20 | |
| 2016 ALY by direction: | | | Left End 3.83 (12) | | | Left Tackle 3.94 (13) | | | Mid/Guard 4.56 (26) | | | Right Tackle 5.37 (32) | | | Right End 4.28 (24) | | |

Vic Beasley had an unusually high success rate when it came to sacks. His 15.5 led the NFL, but he only knocked the quarterback down five other times, easily the fewest among players with double-digit sacks. We charted him with 38 hurries, giving him a sack/hit/hurry total of 58.5, good but hardly in the vicinity of Kahlil Mack (81) or Olivier Vernon (88). Even a relatively unheralded rusher like Philly's Brandon Graham amassed 77.5. Such a ratio naturally suggests a 2017 regression in his sack total. ☹ Beasley feasted on rookie quarterbacks—8.5 of his total came against Jared Goff, Paxton Lynch, and Carson Wentz—and benefitted from poor pocket awareness on many of his takedowns. His favorite ploy was to swat away the ball as he flew by. Beasley forced a league-leading six fumbles (tied with Bruce Irvin). ☹ The Falcons may list Beasley as a linebacker on their depth chart, but 13 of his sacks came from a three-point stance. ☹ Beasley disappeared completely in the postseason (no sacks and just two tackles in three games), part of why Atlanta traded up to draft what it hopes will be a bookend pass-rusher, Takkarist McKinley out of UCLA. McKinley was a relentless, high-energy player in college, to say nothing of the relentless high energy he showed on stage in Philadelphia after the Falcons selected him. He comes with injury concerns (he needed shoulder surgery in March, which could keep him out through training camp) and a lack of refinement to go with his all-out aggression. Beasley needed some coaching up too, so the hope is Dan Quinn and his staff will unlock similar production given the talent they have to work with. SackSEER penalizes him slightly for his poor testing numbers (his 3-cone time ranked in the 14th percentile among edge rushers), but his elite junior-year production leads to a promising overall outlook. If nothing else, McKinley can club enemy passers with the giant portrait of his late grandmother that he toted to the draft. ☹ Atlanta had major issues when teams ran to the right, finishing last in the NFL in that split. Neither Adrian Clayborn nor Dwight Freeney, last year's left defensive ends, are really employed for their run defense. ☹ Atlanta's poor numbers in second-level yards suggest a weakness at linebacker. Deion Jones had a quality rookie season but needs help, so the Falcons went back to Baton Rouge and picked up another LSU linebacker, Duke Riley, in the third round. Riley is a reliable tackler who lacks athleticism but should be an improvement over the likes of Paul Worriow and Philip Wheeler. ☹ Grady Jarrett's breakout Super Bowl hinted at his immense gifts, mainly his quick first step. Jarrett doubled his defeat total from his rookie season and accrued 20 hurries after just two in 2015. He could form a dastardly tackle combo with free-agent pickup Dontari Poe. Poe fell out of favor in Kansas City due to weight, back, and character issues. But if focused and healthy, he can be a tremendous interior disruptor. He fits Atlanta's scheme better than the one in K.C. and is a bargain on a one-year, \$8 million deal. Even in a down season he hit/hurried the passer as often as Jarrett, to go with six disruptions. So long as Poe sticks to ordering his Waffle House hash browns merely scattered, as opposed to smothered and covered, he should beat out Derrick Shelby as the starter. ☹ Tackle Jonathan Babineaux retired after seemingly 1,119 seasons with the Falcons, but Atlanta added free-agent end Jack Crawford from Dallas, giving the team enviable depth along its front.

Defensive Secondary

| Secondary | Age | Pos | Overall | | | | | | | | vs. Run | | | | | vs. Pass | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------|-----|-------|---------|-------|-------|-------|----|------|------|------|---------|-----|----|------|----|----------|-------|----|------|------|----|-------|----|----|-----|
| | | | G | Snaps | Plays | TmPct | Rk | Stop | Dfts | BTKl | Runs | St% | Rk | RuYd | Rk | Tgts | Tgt% | Rk | Dist | Suc% | Rk | AdjYd | Rk | PD | Int |
| Ricardo Allen | 26 | FS | 16 | 1101 | 93 | 11.1% | 22 | 11 | 6 | 7 | 44 | 14% | 73 | 12.5 | 73 | 27 | 5.0% | 3 | 17.2 | 48% | 32 | 9.0 | 41 | 3 | 2 |
| Robert Alford | 29 | CB | 16 | 1080 | 78 | 9.3% | 30 | 35 | 12 | 6 | 15 | 27% | 70 | 7.8 | 59 | 87 | 16.8% | 23 | 12.0 | 50% | 37 | 7.5 | 42 | 19 | 2 |
| Keanu Neal | 22 | SS | 14 | 920 | 111 | 15.2% | 3 | 33 | 10 | 7 | 35 | 31% | 54 | 5.0 | 12 | 71 | 16.1% | 73 | 8.3 | 49% | 26 | 6.3 | 7 | 9 | 0 |
| Brian Poole | 25 | CB | 16 | 835 | 68 | 8.1% | 52 | 30 | 13 | 10 | 18 | 50% | 19 | 6.9 | 47 | 55 | 13.7% | 2 | 8.4 | 46% | 61 | 7.2 | 30 | 10 | 1 |
| Desmond Trufant | 27 | CB | 9 | 591 | 34 | 7.2% | 70 | 9 | 5 | 1 | 5 | 40% | 41 | 5.6 | 21 | 44 | 15.3% | 10 | 12.3 | 49% | 43 | 6.1 | 11 | 4 | 1 |
| Jalen Collins | 24 | CB | 8 | 424 | 40 | 9.6% | 26 | 16 | 11 | 6 | 5 | 20% | 78 | 10.0 | 74 | 51 | 24.8% | 82 | 11.9 | 51% | 32 | 7.7 | 47 | 9 | 2 |
| Kemal Ishmael | 26 | SS/LB | 13 | 310 | 51 | 7.5% | -- | 16 | 8 | 7 | 19 | 42% | -- | 4.3 | -- | 19 | 12.8% | -- | 4.9 | 37% | -- | 7.4 | -- | 2 | 0 |

| Year | Pass D Rank | vs. #1 WR | Rk | vs. #2 WR | Rk | vs. Other WR | Rk | vs. TE | Rk | vs. RB | Rk |
|------|-------------|-----------|----|-----------|----|--------------|----|--------|----|--------|----|
| 2014 | 31 | -12.9% | 8 | 28.9% | 28 | 15.7% | 27 | -8.9% | 12 | 27.4% | 30 |
| 2015 | 22 | -11.1% | 7 | 8.0% | 20 | -11.7% | 7 | -14.0% | 6 | 31.9% | 32 |
| 2016 | 18 | -3.4% | 11 | -5.6% | 8 | 14.5% | 27 | -5.6% | 12 | 16.5% | 25 |

The offense got all the credit for the Super Bowl run, but the secondary's performance in the second half of the season and the playoffs was a crucial element in the Falcons' success. Three of their best four pass defense performances by DVOA came in the final month—even more impressive since these games came after the unit's best player, Desmond Trufant, was lost for the season with a torn pectoral muscle. ☹ Trufant should be healthy to start 2017, meaning Robert Alford and Brian Poole can return to their more natural spots while Trufant takes the top role. The lack of depth turned up in the splits of DVOA against types of wide receivers, as the Falcons were significantly worse covering slot receivers. You can also see this in Poole's placement as one of the most targeted cornerbacks in the league. ☹ We charted only two cornerbacks with more passes defended than Alford (one of whom, Brent Grimes, Alford was drafted to replace). Like Trufant, Alford was rewarded with a contract extension.

If both are healthy, it's a sturdy, unheralded corner combo. ☹️ The Falcons moved cornerbacks around the field much more in 2016 than they did the year before, dropping from eighth to 30th in "CB by Sides," and the usage pattern did not change after Trufant's injury. ☹️ Running backs also hurt Atlanta in the passing game, which is ironic given both Dan Quinn's emphasis on speedy personnel and Atlanta's own success throwing to its backs. Apparently practicing against the likes of Devonta Freeman and Tevin Coleman didn't help much. ☹️ Strong safety Keanu Neal turned in a solid rookie season, particularly against the pass, where his willingness to thump dudes and generally play on the margins of the law clearly affected opposing receivers. He also missed just seven tackles, good for a 10 percent missed tackle rate which ranked in the top 25th percentile of all DBs with at least 25 tackles. Not bad considering his weakness coming out of Florida was bringing down ballcarriers. ☹️ The Falcons had the biggest gap between average location of tackles by their two starting safeties, showing the preference for playing Ricardo Allen in centerfield with Neal close to stop the run. Seattle-influenced defenses ranked 1-2 in this stat, with Jacksonville second while the Seahawks themselves were seventh.

Special Teams

| Year | DVOA | Rank | FG/XP | Rank | Net Kick | Rank | Kick Ret | Rank | Net Punt | Rank | Punt Ret | Rank | Hidden | Rank |
|------|-------|------|-------|------|----------|------|----------|------|----------|------|----------|------|--------|------|
| 2014 | 3.0% | 9 | 8.8 | 2 | -6.2 | 26 | -0.3 | 16 | 5.2 | 8 | 7.7 | 6 | -1.2 | 20 |
| 2015 | -2.1% | 22 | -4.3 | 28 | -3.9 | 26 | 0.2 | 13 | -4.6 | 21 | 2.1 | 12 | 7.8 | 5 |
| 2016 | 2.5% | 7 | 11.1 | 2 | -3.0 | 25 | -1.7 | 19 | 2.1 | 12 | 3.8 | 9 | -4.3 | 22 |

The high overall unit DVOA was mostly driven by the continued excellence of kicker Matt Bryant. Only the otherworldly Justin Tucker had more value on field goals and extra points, though comparisons between the two aren't particularly relevant. Bryant was two points ahead of the third-place kicker, Chris Boswell of Pittsburgh, but 14.4 (!) points behind Tucker. ☹️ Matt Boshier handled punts and kickoffs, though far more of the latter. His 44 punts were the fewest in the league, while his 105 kickoffs were the most in the NFL since Matt Prater in 2013. In this case, the higher the workload, the lesser the efficiency, as Boshier was a good punter (seventh in gross punt value) but below-average on kickoffs. ☹️ Eric Weems pulled double duty as a return man, but has left for Tennessee. He will be most likely be replaced by free-agent signee Andre Roberts, who was even better than Weems on punt returns last year with Detroit, though not as good on kickoffs. Receiver Justin Hardy should get some opportunities as well.