Seattle Seahawks

2014 Record: 12-4	**Total DVOA:** 31.9% (1st)	**2015 Mean Projection:** 10.7 wins	**On the Clock (0-4):** 1%
Pythagorean Wins: 11.9 (1st)	**Offense:** 16.8% (5th)	**Postseason Odds:** 75.0%	**Mediocrity (5-7):** 10%
Snap-Weighted Age: 25.8 (30th)	**Defense:** -16.8% (1st)	**Super Bowl Odds:** 25.2%	**Playoff Contender (8-10):** 34%
Average Opponent: 0.8% (13th)	**Special Teams:** -1.7% (19th)	**Proj. Avg. Opponent:** 1.2% (14th)	**Super Bowl Contender (11+):** 56%

2014: The most controversial play call in Super Bowl history leads to the greatest change of fortune in Super Bowl history.

2015: It's a long road to redemption, but they clearly enter the season as the best team in football.

They should have run it. Of course they should have run it. It's not the only reason they lost the Super Bowl, and it will have virtually no impact on their upcoming campaign. The fate of the Seattle Seahawks this season will hinge on names like Jimmy Graham and Cary Williams, not Malcolm Butler or Brandon Browner. On paper, the Seahawks are better now than they were when they nearly won a championship in February, and as the rest of the NFC West has fallen off a bit, their path to a third straight appearance in the Super Bowl seems clear. Whether it's fair or not, though, the lasting memory of last year's Seahawks will be the result of their final offensive play. If you're a regular Football Outsiders reader, you probably want to know what the numbers say about it. Well, the numbers are clear: they should have run it. So before we move on to the new developments of 2015, let's end the discussion of the last play of 2014.

Anyone who paid to read this book already knows the basics: trailing 28-24 in the final minute of the game, Seattle had a second-and-goal at the 1. Most expected a Marshawn Lynch run, but Seahawks offensive coordinator Darrell Bevell had other ideas, and Russell Wilson threw a slant pass to Ricardo Lockette. Brandon Browner jammed Jermaine Kearse at the line, and then Malcolm Butler jumped the route, intercepting the ball, and knocking Lockette and the Seahawks flat on their backs.

This would have been a bad call in a vacuum, but given the strengths of this particular offense, and the weaknesses of this specific defense, it is nearly impossible to defend. Seattle's rushing offense DVOA last year was 29.9%, best in the league by an enormous margin and one of the five highest we've recorded in more than a quarter-century of football. New England's defensive DVOA against the run was -10.3%, which ranked 13th last year. Moreover, Seattle's success rate in short-yardage "power" running was 81 percent, tied with Philadelphia for best in the league and one of the 20 best rates we've measured since 1989. And New England? They allowed opponents to convert on power runs 81 percent of the time, the NFL's worst mark in 2014.

Wilson's interception wasn't Seattle's only red zone failure in the Super Bowl. Their first drive in the second half ended in a field goal after Lynch was stuffed on third-and-1. On both that play and the Butler pick, Seattle spread the field with multiple receivers, and New England responded by leaving their corners on islands and packing the box with as many defenders as possible. Seattle's strategy on those plays wasn't unusual—they used three or more wideouts on a league-high 42 percent of short-yardage plays (defined here as any play with 1 or 2 yards to go) in 2014. And it usually worked; their DVOA on those plays was 20.0%, compared to 10.8% with fewer wideouts. Even when opponents responded to these spread formations by stuffing the box, Seattle had great success on rushing plays. Passing plays? Those didn't work out nearly so well (Table 1).

The argument that goal-line interceptions are flukishly rare is accurate, and also completely missing the point. To defend Bevell's play call is to suggest that the pass had a better chance of scoring than a running play, and that is simply false. The Seahawks had a perfect opportunity to win a Super Bowl with their greatest strength matched up against their opponents' most glaring weakness, and they (literally and figuratively) threw it all away.

It might have been those short-yardage incompletions that motivated general manager John Schneider to make the biggest move of Seattle's offseason, trading the team's first-

Table 1: Seattle, Short-Yardage Plays, 2014

	Runs			Passes			All		
	Plays	**Suc%**	**DVOA**	**Plays**	**Suc%**	**DVOA**	**Plays**	**Suc%**	**DVOA**
0-1 WR	7	100.0%	39.6%	4	25.0%	-48.5%	11	73.0%	8.4%
2WR	16	68.8%	15.3%	4	50.0%	-4.2%	20	65.0%	12.0%
3+WR	33	72.7%	32.6%	15	46.7%	-10.8%	48	64.6%	20.0%
Loaded Box	24	70.8%	38.9%	7	42.9%	-28.2%	31	64.5%	25.4%
3+WR, loaded	18	72.2%	50.2%	7	42.9%	-28.2%	25	64.0%	29.9%
Overall	56	75.0%	28.2%	23	43.5%	-16.4%	79	65.8%	16.3%

2015 Seahawks Schedule

Week	Opp.	Week	Opp.	Week	Opp.
1	at STL	7	at SF (Thu.)	13	at MIN
2	at GB	8	at DAL	14	at BAL
3	CHI	9	BYE	15	CLE
4	DET (Mon.)	10	ARI	16	STL
5	at CIN	11	SF	17	at ARI
6	CAR	12	PIT		

Figure 1. 2014 SEA DVOA by Week

round draft choice and former All-Pro center Max Unger in exchange for New Orleans tight end Jimmy Graham (himself a former All-Pro) and a fourth-rounder. In the last three years, Graham has caught 26 passes in 47 targets with 1 or 2 yards go, leading the league in both categories, and only one of those receptions failed to pick up a first down.

Of course, Graham is a lot more than a short-yardage weapon. He is likely the most talented receiver Seattle has had since Steve Largent retired, and he'll certainly be the most talented receiver with whom Wilson has ever played. He's the most dangerous red zone receiver in the NFL, with a league-high 41 touchdowns inside the 20 since he was drafted in 2010. He also has 111 catches for 1,628 yards and 11 touchdowns over the middle, ranking in the top ten in all three categories over that same timeframe. And though there's some debate over his position—no matter what the NFL's arbitrator ruled, factually Graham is a wide receiver who sometimes plays tight end, not the other way around—the bottom line is that he can put a hand on the ground, flex out to the slot, or split out wide, creating mismatches the likes of which Seattle has never seen before.

It's that versatility that makes Graham so valuable. When he lines up at tight end, he'll draw the defense's attention to the middle of the field, creating opportunities for teammates on the outside. If he splits out wide, that bumps Doug Baldwin down to the second receiver spot and Jermaine Kearse down to third, effectively making the Seahawks better at three positions.

The only question concerning Graham's impact on the Seahawks is how many opportunities he'll get in the passing game. Since Wilson was drafted in 2012, the Seahawks have the most runs and the fewest passes of any team in the league. It's almost certain, though, that they'll be more balanced in 2015. The Graham acquisition cost Seattle not just a top blocker, but also a draft pick which they could have used to replace him. The offensive line hasn't really been a strength in Seattle, and now it's clearly their biggest weakness. Further, there's a question of how many more violent collisions Marshawn Lynch can endure—he'll be 29 this year, and he has a league-high 1,383 carries since he was traded to Seattle in 2010. What happens if he breaks down this year? Christine Michael and Robert Turbin have flashed potential, but they still have fewer than 300 NFL carries between them, and it's impossible to accurately predict how either would fare with a full-time workload. And then there's Graham himself. Seattle didn't pay the cost to get him just so he could set the edge on
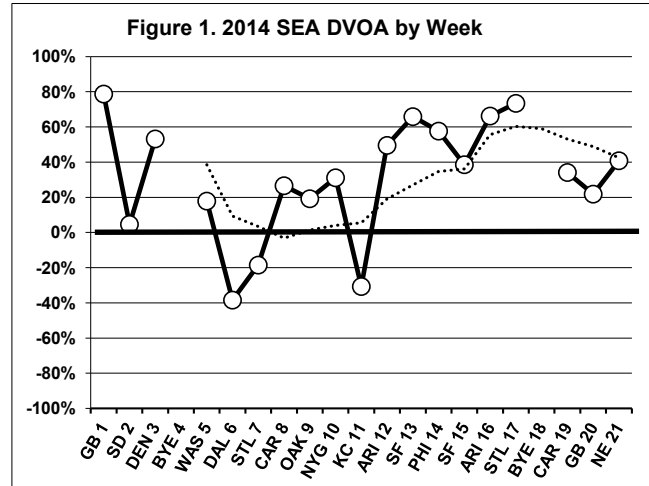
zone reads. They won't be passing as frequently as Graham's old team did, but this offense figures to revolve around Russell Wilson more in 2015 than ever before.

Will the fourth-year quarterback be up to the task? Though his standard passing stats have been remarkably consistent in his first three seasons, his advanced stats fell in 2014, and he ranked in the mid-teens in both DYAR and DVOA after finishing in the top ten in both categories two years in a row. That's partly due to the Percy Harvin effect, as Wilson threw more short passes than he ever had before, even after the mercurial (read: dickhead) wideout was traded to New York. All told, 58 percent of Wilson's passes were thrown to receivers within 5 yards of the line of scrimmage in 2014, up from 45 percent the year before. As a result of that, he threw more failed completions (83, up from 60) and averaged fewer yards per pass (7.7, down from 8.2). And it's not just the number of short passes Wilson threw, but when he threw them. On third downs (including fourth-down throws), the average quarterback throws short of the needed yards to go about 40 percent of the time. Wilson threw short a little less than that in 2013, with 38 percent of his third-down passes coming short of the sticks. That number soared to 47 percent of third downs in 2014, as Wilson was suddenly much more willing to dump off. That's bad news—as you'd expect, those short passes are much less likely to pick up a first down (converting 21 percent of the time in 2014) than throws to receivers at or beyond the first-down line (52 percent). That partly explains why Wilson's passing DVOA fell from 12.4% on first downs to 6.0% on second downs, and then to -6.1% on third downs.

Wilson's increased usage of short passes was partly due to a change in offensive philosophy, and partly due to a lack of receivers who were able to get open downfield. Seattle simply didn't have much receiving talent on hand after Golden Tate's departure in free agency and the ensuing Harvin trade. That was abundantly clear in the playoffs. The Seahawks got 78 percent of their postseason receiving yardage from players who entered the league as undrafted free agents, including each of the four wideouts who caught passes in the Super Bowl. This also explains why the front office was so eager to acquire a top-tier target like Graham.

Wilson's passing, of course, is only part of his story. Between option runs and scrambles, Wilson accumulated 849 yards on the ground, good for 269 rushing DYAR. The latter figure is the second-best total for a quarterback in our database, and the highest since Randall Cunningham was terrorizing defensive coordinators in 1990. On the downside, Wilson fumbles a lot—five times on sacks last seasons, four times on snaps or handoffs, and once as a runner. Remarkably, Seattle covered all of those fumbles, and even though Wilson himself recovered half those loose balls (including each blown snap), he obviously won't get that lucky this year. Seattle recovered three of Wilson's six fumbles in 2012, and five of ten in 2013.

While the offense could be evolving before our eyes, the Seahawks have made few changes on defense—and why would they? They weren't as dominant in 2014 as they had been in 2013, but they still led the league in defensive DVOA for the second straight season, the first team to do so since Pittsburgh teams with Rod Woodson and Kevin Greene were running roughshod through the AFC in the early '90s. Nine starters from Super Bowl XLIX will return (and seven of those were starters in Super Bowl XLVIII too). The first of the two changes is at defensive tackle, where Brandon Mebane went on IR in November with a torn hamstring, but is expected back this year. That leaves only one true new starter: Cary Williams, who will take over at cornerback for Byron Maxwell in a free agent "trade" between Seattle and Philadelphia. Williams has started every game the last four seasons between the Eagles and Ravens. His charting numbers have left a lot to be desired, fluctuating wildly and never ranking Williams in the top 25 in either success rate or adjusted yards per pass. In Seattle, he will have the benefit of playing with Earl Thomas, a luxury the likes of which he never enjoyed in Philadelphia. The last time Williams got to play with an All-Pro caliber safety, it was with Ed Reed in Baltimore. That team led the NFL in defensive DVOA in 2011 and then won the Super Bowl in 2012.

Consistency on defense is just one of the many reasons why Seattle starts the 2015 season as clear favorites to win another Super Bowl. The Seahawks have finished first in overall DVOA for three straight years now, the first to do so since the Aikman-Emmitt-Irvin Cowboys dynasty. By snap-weighted age, they were the league's third-youngest team last season, and their key players are all under 30 years old. Their schedule strength is reasonable, and their NFC West rivals look to have taken a collective step backwards, which should clear the way to a division crown and a third consecutive top seed. That would leave them only two wins away from the Super Bowl, at home, where they have gone 26-2 in the last three years, including the playoffs. And even on a neutral field, they would figure to be favored over whichever team emerges from the AFC.

And then, maybe this time, it won't come down to one final yard.

Vincent Verhei

2014 Seahawks Stats by Week

Wk	vs.	W-L	PF	PA	YDF	YDA	TO	Total	Off	Def	ST
1	GB	W	36	16	398	255	0	79%	48%	-31%	-1%
2	at SD	L	21	30	288	377	-1	5%	26%	16%	-5%
3	DEN	W	26	20	384	332	1	53%	21%	-33%	-1%
4	BYE										
5	at WAS	W	27	17	403	307	0	18%	6%	0%	12%
6	DAL	L	23	30	206	401	1	-38%	-53%	1%	15%
7	at STL	L	26	28	463	275	0	-19%	38%	25%	-32%
8	at CAR	W	13	9	310	266	0	27%	-5%	-25%	8%
9	OAK	W	30	24	326	226	3	19%	8%	-36%	-25%
10	NYG	W	38	17	510	324	-1	31%	34%	5%	2%
11	at KC	L	20	24	372	298	2	-31%	5%	24%	-12%
12	ARI		19	3	293	204	1	49%	4%	-31%	14%
13	at SF	W	19	3	379	164	3	66%	14%	-44%	9%
14	at PHI	W	24	14	440	139	0	58%	24%	-46%	-12%
15	SF	W	17	7	290	245	-1	39%	10%	-22%	7%
16	at ARI	W	35	6	596	216	1	66%	53%	-28%	-15%
17	STL	W	20	6	354	245	1	73%	3%	-61%	9%
18	BYE										
19	CAR	W	31	17	348	362	3	34%	28%	-5%	2%
20	GB	W	28	22	397	306	-3	22%	-10%	-38%	-6%
21	vs. NE	L	24	28	396	377	1	41%	31%	-10%	0%

Trends and Splits

	Offense	Rank	Defense	Rank
Total DVOA	16.8%	5	-16.8%	1
Unadjusted VOA	17.7%	4	-12.0%	3
Weighted Trend	15.2%	5	-19.8%	1
Variance	6.1%	11	6.9%	19
Average Opponent	-1.6%	9	-0.2%	16
Passing	21.0%	10	-10.3%	3
Rushing	29.0%	1	-25.1%	2
First Down	22.8%	3	-24.3%	1
Second Down	12.3%	7	0.0%	15
Third Down	11.8%	11	-27.1%	3
First Half	6.1%	13	-11.2%	6
Second Half	27.9%	1	-23.1%	1
Red Zone	23.1%	4	9.8%	28
Late and Close	23.0%	4	-28.4%	2

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
2010	7-9	5.4	6.9	310	407	-9	-22.9%	30	-17.3%	29	12.0%	29	6.4%	2	47.1	32	9.7	4	27.8	11	27.6	10	26.4	14
2011	7-9	8.2	8.1	321	315	+8	-1.5%	19	-8.7%	22	-7.1%	10	0.2%	16	66.5	32	43.5	27	25.8	31	26.2	26	26.0	26
2012	11-5	12.5	13.0	412	245	+13	38.7%	1	18.5%	4	-14.5%	2	5.7%	3	28.0	16	8.3	3	25.9	27	25.6	31	26.0	18
2013	13-3	12.8	13.0	417	231	+20	40.0%	1	9.4%	7	-25.9%	1	4.7%	5	26.1	10	21.4	10	25.7	32	26.0	27	26.1	14
2014	12-4	11.9	12.7	394	254	+10	31.9%	1	16.8%	5	-16.8%	1	-1.7%	19	37.6	21	26.5	7	25.3	31	26.3	23	25.8	24

2014 Performance Based on Most Common Personnel Groups

SEA Offense					SEA Offense vs. Opponents						SEA Defense					SEA Defense vs. Opponents			
Pers	Freq	Yds	DVOA	Run%	Pers	Freq	Yds	DVOA	Run%		Pers	Freq	Yds	DVOA		Pers	Freq	Yds	DVOA
11	50%	6.5	20.4%	33%	Base	39%	6.0	31.3%	60%		Base	41%	4.8	-16.4%		11	58%	5.2	-13.2%
12	16%	6.8	43.8%	47%	Nickel	41%	6.6	29.1%	38%		Nickel	58%	4.9	-18.3%		12	22%	4.5	-20.8%
21	12%	4.6	21.2%	70%	Dime+	17%	5.8	5.5%	22%		Dime+	0%	10.8	66.6%		21	6%	4.3	-24.4%
10	5%	6.8	57.6%	48%	Goal Line	0%	0.3	-58.0%	50%		Goal Line	1%	-0.5	-10.1%		22	5%	3.5	-28.0%
01	3%	5.8	36.8%	24%	Big	2%	2.7	-12.7%	75%							13	3%	6.2	7.0%
20	3%	5.6	3.7%	86%															
22	3%	4.0	24.0%	79%															

Strategic Tendencies

Run/Pass		Rk	Formation		Rk	Pass Rush		Rk	Secondary		Rk	Strategy		Rk
Runs, first half	42%	7	Form: Single Back	68%	23	Rush 3	6.4%	13	4 DB	28%	12	Play action	31%	3
Runs, first down	53%	6	Form: Empty Back	12%	3	Rush 4	66.2%	12	5 DB	71%	6	Avg Box (Off)	6.27	17
Runs, second-long	40%	2	Pers: 3+ WR	64%	13	Rush 5	21.8%	20	6+ DB	1%	29	Avg Box (Def)	6.15	27
Runs, power sit.	67%	4	Pers: 4+ WR	9%	3	Rush 6+	5.6%	23	CB by Sides	85%	9	Offensive Pace	32.38	28
Runs, behind 2H	40%	1	Pers: 2+ TE/6+ OL	26%	24	Sacks by LB	29.2%	20	DB Blitz	6%	30	Defensive Pace	31.80	32
Pass, ahead 2H	47%	19	Shotgun/Pistol	69%	10	Sacks by DB	2.8%	24	Hole in Zone	10%	3	Go for it on 4th	0.92	18

Fumble recovery luck suggests the Seattle offense may look worse this year (recovered 14 of 18 fumbles) but the defense may look even better (recovered seven of 23 fumbles). Another reason to expect the defense to look better: Seattle opponents dropped a league-low 13 passes during the regular season. ☞ Seattle had 70 offensive penalties, tied for second in the NFL. It was the fourth straight year they ranked first or second in offensive penalties. They had 142 penalties overall, tied with New England for seventh in the league. ☞ Seattle also had the fewest penalties called against its opponents—by a huge margin. Seattle opponents were flagged only 85 times. Every other team in the league benefited from at least 110 penalties from its opponents. Perhaps the strangest part of this number: opponents were only called for five false starts all year despite all the noise at CenturyLink Field. The good news for Seattle is that this appears to be a one-year fluke, as there is no trend showing similar numbers in other seasons. ☞ Seattle's offense ranked 20th in DVOA when passing the ball on third or fourth down, but blew away the rest of the league with 77.9% DVOA on third-down runs. (Denver was second at 31.9%.) ☞ We registered the Seahawks with broken tackles on 12.2 percent of all offensive plays. No other offense was above 10 percent. ☞ Broken tackles are just one reason Seattle averaged 6.6 yards after the catch. That's the second-highest figure in our data (since 2005), surpassed only by last year's Washington team which had 7.0 average YAC. ☞ Do Seattle opponents build their game plans around stopping Marshawn Lynch? No problem: Seattle was one of four offenses to go empty backfield at least 10 percent of the time, and the Seahawks gained 7.6 yards per play with 60.4% DVOA on these plays. ☞ This was the third straight year the Seahawks were 31st or 32nd in situation-neutral pace on defense, as opponents try to keep the ball out of their hands. ☞ Seattle opponents threw a league-high 23.9 percent of passes to their running backs; the Seahawks have been above-average in this stat for three straight years.

Passing

Player	DYAR	DVOA	Plays	NtYds	Avg	YAC	C%	TD	Int
R.Wilson	503	5.5%	495	3241	6.5	6.6	63.4%	20	7

Rushing

Player	DYAR	DVOA	Plays	Yds	Avg	TD	Fum	Suc
M.Lynch	359	23.1%	280	1310	4.7	14	1	53%
R.Wilson	269	43.7%	97	872	9.0	6	4	-
R.Turbin	57	9.5%	74	310	4.2	0	1	61%
C.Michael	25	10.0%	34	175	5.1	0	1	50%
P.Harvin*	53	60.7%	11	92	8.4	1	0	-

Receiving

Player	DYAR	DVOA	Plays	Ctch	Yds	Y/C	YAC	TD	C%
D.Baldwin	137	5.5%	99	67	833	12.4	5.2	3	68%
J.Kearse	19	-9.1%	69	38	537	14.1	5.9	1	55%
P.Richardson	-8	-15.2%	44	29	271	9.3	2.2	1	66%
P.Harvin*	-40	-31.8%	26	22	133	6.0	4.9	0	85%
R.Lockette	66	50.4%	15	11	195	17.7	6.2	2	73%
B.Walters*	-12	-27.2%	11	6	57	9.5	6.5	0	55%
K.Norwood	25	19.4%	10	9	102	11.3	4.4	0	90%
L.Willson	20	0.6%	40	22	362	16.5	9.7	3	55%
C.Helfet	25	10.2%	24	12	185	15.4	5.8	2	50%
T.Moeaki*	14	9.8%	13	8	134	16.8	9.0	1	62%
Z.Miller*	13	19.2%	7	6	76	12.7	5.7	0	86%
J.Graham	*124*	*6.8%*	*124*	*85*	*889*	*10.5*	*3.5*	*10*	
M.Lynch	93	21.8%	48	37	367	9.9	10.9	4	77%
R.Turbin	104	83.3%	20	16	186	11.6	10.5	2	80%

Offensive Line

Player	Pos	Age	GS	Snaps	Pen	Sk	Pass	Run	Player	Pos	Age	GS	Snaps	Pen	Sk	Pass	Run
Justin Britt	RT	24	16/16	1057	8	5.5	30.0	8.5	Max Unger*	C	29	6/6	375	2	1.5	1.5	2.0
J.R. Sweezy	RG	26	16/16	1053	5	4.0	15.5	7.0	Patrick Lewis	C	24	6/4	269	2	1.0	5.0	0.0
Russell Okung	LT	28	14/14	872	10	2.5	18.0	9.0	Lemuel Jeanpierre	C	28	6/3	219	1	0.0	2.0	2.0
James Carpenter*	LG	26	13/13	816	9	0.5	8.5	6.0	Stephen Schilling	G	27	8/3	197	1	0.5	1.5	0.5
Alvin Bailey	G/T	24	14/5	418	5	3.0	7.5	3.0									

Year	Yards	ALY	Rk	Power	Rk	Stuff	Rk	2nd Lev	Rk	Open Field	Rk	Sacks	ASR	Rk	Short	Long	F-Start	Cont.
2012	4.83	4.42	4	70%	4	15%	1	1.42	2	0.94	8	33	7.2%	20	9	19	23	23
2013	4.03	4.05	9	49%	32	19%	15	1.17	13	0.59	23	44	9.6%	32	10	21	21	29
2014	4.62	4.23	4	78%	2	17%	6	1.34	4	0.80	11	42	8.7%	24	15	17	29	25
2014 ALY by direction:		*Left End 4.19 (13)*			*Left Tackle 3.49 (22)*			*Mid/Guard 4.21 (5)*			*Right Tackle 4.44 (6)*				*Right End 5.3 (1)*			

For a team that boasted a historically great rushing attack in 2014, the Seahawks had a shockingly bad offensive line. They owe a debt of gratitude to Marshawn Lynch, whose tackle-busting style made their numbers look much better than their actual performance on the field. Out of the 43 backs with at least 100 runs last year, Lynch was second with 2.5 yards after contact per carry, but his 2.2 yards *before* contact was just 22nd. That latter ranking is much more indicative of Seattle's run-blocking prowess, and they were even worse at pass blocking. Russell Wilson was pressured on 39 percent of his dropbacks last season, the highest rate of any starting quarterback. Only one player, left guard James Carpenter, finished in the top 20 at his position in snaps per blown block, and now he's gone, signing with the New York Jets in free agency.

Three starters return from last year's team. Russell Okung has been effective when healthy, but you never know how long that's going to last. He missed most of training camp last season following foot surgery, and was only 80 percent when the season started according to line coach Tom Cable. Then he dealt with shoulder, chest, and calf issues throughout the season, though he only missed two games. Still, he has now missed 21 games in five NFL seasons, and at least one every year. He is entering the final year of his contract, with a very real possibility of moving on in 2016. Rookie right tackle Justin Britt somehow managed to lead the NFL in blown blocks on passing plays even though Seattle had the fewest dropbacks in the NFL. It would have been nice if he had shown some improvement throughout the year, but there wasn't much sign of that—his worst game came in Week 15 against San Francisco, with six blown blocks. Still, he was a rookie, and rookies often struggle. Right guard J.R. Sweezy was a boom-or-bust player in his second year on offense, with several crushing blocks on the second level and many misses at the point of attack, plus a penchant for blowing assignments in pass protection. Still, he remains the most successful of Tom Cable's defense-to-offense conversions—he was one of nine offensive linemen in minicamp who played some defensive line in college, including sixth-round draftee Kristjan Sokoli (SUNY-Buffalo). Alvin Bailey will take over for Carpenter at left guard after three starts at guard and three at tackle (including one in the playoffs) in his first season of significant action. He joined the Seahawks as an undrafted free agent in 2013 after skipping his senior season at Arkansas.

That leaves center, where Patrick Lewis has the edge over Lemuel Jeanpierre (another former defensive lineman) for the spot left vacant by Max Unger's trade to New Orleans and Stephen Schilling's retirement. Lewis spent time on the practice squads in Cleveland and Jacksonville before Seattle signed him a year ago. Jeanpierre is entering his fifth year in Seattle, with 11 starts in his first four seasons. The results of 2014 suggest that either player will be a downgrade from Unger, but a downgrade the Seahawks should be able to afford (Table 3).

Table 3: Seattle's Centers, 2014

Center	Weeks Started	Starts	W-L	Off. DVOA	Rush Off. DVOA	Pass Off. DVOA
Max Unger	1-5, 10-11	6	4-2	23.0%	40.3%	19.7%
Patrick Lewis	9, 12, 16-17	4	4-0	18.4%	31.4%	22.4%
Lemuel Jeanpierre	13-15	3	3-0	16.1%	15.6%	36.6%
Stephen Schilling	6-8	3	1-2	0.2%	17.5%	0.8%

Take a look at Seattle's rushing DVOA, even with their third- and fourth-string centers. Then remember that Miami was the second-best running team in the NFL last year, and their rush offense DVOA was only 9.6%. Now you start to realize how effective the Wilson/Lynch combo was in 2014.

Defensive Front Seven

Defensive Line	Age	Pos	G	Snaps	Plays	TmPct	Rk	Stop	Dfts	BTkl	Runs	St%	Rk	RuYd	Rk	Sack	Hit	Hur	Dsrpt
							Overall					vs. Run				Pass Rush			
Kevin Williams*	35	DT	16	437	33	4.5%	49	25	11	0	27	74%	64	1.9	31	3.0	1	4.0	2
Tony McDaniel	30	DT	16	400	30	4.0%	60	21	2	2	29	69%	82	2.3	49	0.0	0	0.5	1
Jordan Hill	24	DT	13	360	23	3.8%	68	19	10	1	10	80%	32	1.8	27	5.5	4	4.5	4
Brandon Mebane	30	DT	9	278	19	4.6%	46	15	5	0	18	78%	48	1.3	16	1.0	1	2.5	0
Ahtyba Rubin	*29*	*DT*	*13*	*450*	*29*	*4.0%*	*62*	*18*	*2*	*1*	*27*	*59%*	*90*	*3.3*	*89*	*1.0*	*3*	*5.5*	*1*

Edge Rushers	Age	Pos	G	Snaps	Plays	TmPct	Rk	Stop	Dfts	BTkl	Runs	St%	Rk	RuYd	Rk	Sack	Hit	Hur	Dsrpt
							Overall					vs. Run				Pass Rush			
Michael Bennett	30	DE	16	828	37	5.0%	46	32	20	3	29	83%	20	0.6	1	7.0	13	28.5	0
Cliff Avril	29	DE	16	714	24	3.2%	76	21	13	6	14	86%	10	1.2	7	5.0	14	21.0	1
O'Brien Schofield*	28	DE	16	338	15	2.0%	--	9	4	2	10	70%	--	4.0	--	2.0	5	13.5	0

Linebackers	Age	Pos	G	Snaps	Plays	TmPct	Rk	Stop	Dfts	BTkl	Sack	Hit	Hur	Runs	St%	Rk	RuYd	Rk	Tgts	Suc%	Rk	AdjYd	Rk	PD	Int
							Overall				Pass Rush			vs. Run					vs. Pass						
K.J. Wright	26	OLB	16	919	110	14.8%	25	62	17	12	2.0	0	4	62	60%	59	3.4	44	38	50%	36	5.8	22	1	0
Bruce Irvin	28	OLB	15	692	40	5.8%	84	32	18	6	6.5	6	13	26	77%	8	2.8	21	12	48%	--	8.0	--	2	2
Bobby Wagner	25	MLB	11	658	106	20.8%	1	67	21	7	2.0	4	1.5	62	76%	10	2.7	13	34	42%	55	7.5	50	2	0
Malcolm Smith*	26	OLB	14	271	33	5.1%	--	14	3	3	0.0	0	1.5	25	48%	--	4.0	--	14	74%	--	3.7	--	1	0

Year	Yards	ALY	Rk	Power	Rk	Stuff	Rk	2nd Level	Rk	Open Field	Rk	Sacks	ASR	Rk	Short	Long
2012	4.44	4.22	21	50%	3	18%	22	1.22	22	0.86	20	36	6.1%	21	15	14
2013	3.75	3.73	13	70%	24	21%	11	1.06	11	0.55	12	44	7.6%	7	20	14
2014	3.54	3.41	5	59%	10	23%	6	0.92	4	0.59	8	37	7.0%	13	18	9
2014 ALY by direction:		*Left End 3.66 (16)*			*Left Tackle 3.67 (15)*			*Mid/Guard 3.51 (7)*			*Right Tackle 3.31 (7)*			*Right End 2.08 (1)*		

The blueprint for 2015 is the same as it was last year: a quartet of 300-plus-pound tackles getting 20 to 30 snaps each and clogging up the middle; Michael Bennett rushing from the weak side while Cliff Avril attacks from the opposite direction; Bruce Irvin setting the edge on the strong side; Bobby Wagner eliminating anything that gets to the second level; and K.J. Wright taking care of anything that gets past that. The Seahawks place a lot of value on versatility, which is why you'll see Bennett lining up at any spot along the defensive front, Irvin lining up with a hand to the ground, and tackles swapping between nose and three-technique depending on who is available. But no matter who is on the field, the basic plan remains the same.

There are plenty of options at tackle, with Brandon Mebane returning from injury to join Tony McDaniel in the starting lineup. Former Browns starter Ahtyba Rubin replaces Kevin Williams as the veteran backup, with Jordan Hill bringing interior pressure—the 2013 third-rounder finished his second NFL season on a strong note, with 4.5 sacks in December. Depth at end,

on the other hand, remains a concern. Seattle's pass rush in the Super Bowl essentially vanished after Avril left the game with a concussion. To that end, the Seahawks used their second-round draft choice on Michigan's Frank Clark, hoping that athletic potential could overcome inexperience and off-field scandals. Clark played defensive back and ran track in high school, and didn't move to end until joining the Wolverines. He collected only 11 sacks in his NCAA career, and was kicked off the team following a domestic violence arrest in November. He then excelled at the scouting combine, ranking seventh or better among defensive line prospects in the broad jump, 40-yard dash, three-cone drill, and vertical jump, and first in both the 20- and 60-yard shuttles. Still, SackSEER was unimpressed with Clark's lack of college production, projecting him with only 5.0 sacks in his first five seasons. Most draft experts expected he would go in the seventh round, not the second. The Seahawks insist they did due diligence investigating Clark's arrest and have claimed it would still be a dealbreaker if they believed he had hit a woman, but Seattle media spoke to several witnesses who claimed the team had never reached out to them. It's a very ugly situation, and at least from a public relations standpoint, Clark is entering the NFL with one strike already against him.

The other concern here might be a handful of players unhappy about their contracts. Bennett has hinted at a holdout just one year after signing a four-year, $32 million contract extension, though he made it clear that he wanted to stay in Seattle. The same can't be said of Bruce Irvin. After the Seahawks declined to pick up the fifth-year option of their 2012 first-round draft pick, Irvin told Samuel Logan of Black Sports Online he wanted to reunite with Falcons coach Dan Quinn, former defensive coordinator in Seattle: "I'm going to be in Atlanta next season… Atlanta is where I want to be. Believe that." While Irvin's agent probably wasn't happy to hear his client harpoon his own market value, Seahawks management probably wasn't happy to hear that their linebacker mentally has one foot out the door. Still, Pete Carroll has put up with worse than this, and it appears Irvin will play out his final year in Seattle.

Finally, there's Wagner, drafted one round after Irvin in 2012 and also entering the final year of his deal. Unlike Irvin, Wagner can legitimately lay claim to being one of the best players at his position. Over his first three seasons, he has ranked third, eighth, and first among all players in percentage of his team's plays, and given his age he's surely the highest defensive priority on Seattle's list of upcoming extensions.

Defensive Secondary

Secondary	Age	Pos	G	Snaps	Plays	Overall TmPct	Rk	Stop	Dfts	BTkl	vs. Run Runs	St%	Rk	RuYd	Rk	vs. Pass Tgts	Tgt%	Rk	Dist	Suc%	Rk	AdjYd	Rk	PD	Int
Richard Sherman	27	CB	16	965	64	8.6%	37	26	11	4	19	63%	10	5.3	22	62	17.5%	6	15.1	59%	8	6.5	14	8	4
Earl Thomas	26	FS	16	958	100	13.5%	9	28	15	7	38	26%	58	7.0	41	22	6.2%	18	11.7	62%	12	5.5	14	3	1
Kam Chancellor	27	SS	14	833	81	12.5%	15	40	6	8	47	60%	10	5.8	24	28	9.0%	38	7.9	51%	50	7.4	39	7	1
Byron Maxwell*	27	CB	13	700	51	8.5%	40	18	11	2	3	33%	44	3.3	4	66	25.4%	52	12.9	51%	39	6.9	17	11	2
Marcus Burley	25	CB	13	320	37	6.1%	--	19	9	0	9	33%	--	8.6	--	27	22.9%	--	11.7	58%	--	8.5	--	5	1
Tharold Simon	24	CB	10	298	14	3.0%	--	6	2	0	2	50%	--	4.0	--	21	18.7%	--	14.8	63%	--	4.8	--	2	1
Cary Williams	31	CB	16	1149	67	7.7%	54	21	6	6	16	19%	67	10.8	70	92	21.4%	22	14.0	52%	29	9.1	58	11	2
Will Blackmon	31	CB	8	351	28	6.5%	--	11	5	7	9	56%	--	5.1	--	21	19.6%	--	11.5	38%	--	8.8	--	0	0

Year	Pass D Rank	vs. #1 WR	Rk	vs. #2 WR	Rk	vs. Other WR	Rk	vs. TE	Rk	vs. RB	Rk
2012	3	-37.5%	1	-7.4%	10	-6.0%	10	-1.6%	17	-9.3%	9
2013	1	-18.0%	4	-13.4%	7	-27.1%	3	-34.2%	3	-32.7%	1
2014	3	-22.0%	4	-18.3%	6	-19.2%	4	-0.8%	18	-2.0%	16

If the Legion of Boom is the NFL's answer to the Four Horsemen, it's pretty easy to spot the counterparts. Sherman is Ric Flair (he's got the biggest mouth), Chancellor is Arn Anderson (the Enforcer), and Thomas is Tully Blanchard (uh… he's from Texas). In both factions, the fourth spot was something of a revolving door. Just as the Horsemen went from Ole Anderson to Lex Luger to Barry Windham, it follows that the LOB has gone from Brandon Browner to Byron Maxwell to Cary Williams. Williams figures to see a lot of action playing opposite Sherman, but that's nothing new; we charted him with 93 targets in 2012 (then with Baltimore) and he led the league with 110 targets in 2013, so he's certainly used to a heavy workload. His charting stats, though, have been pretty ugly. He ranked 79th in adjusted success rate and 58th in adjusted yards per target in 2012, and 67th and 28th in those same categories in 2013. Note that until last season, Williams always ranked better in yards per target than success rate. He's used to safety help that keeps him from getting beat deep, and in Seattle, he'll have it.

Earl Thomas' low target rate doesn't do justice to how active he is and how much range he can cover—according to play-by-play data, only two safeties were responsible for a bigger share of their team's pass plays (combining tackles, assists, and passes defensed). Meanwhile, Kam Chancellor was seventh at the position in percentage of his team's run plays. You'll find few safety duos with such a clear deep/box disparity, and even fewer with this kind of talent.

It's not clear in the charting totals, but Richard Sherman probably had his finest season in 2014. Like many other Seahawks,

he suffered a midseason slump, surrendering 197 yards (exactly half his season total) in a four-game stretch against the Panthers, Raiders, Giants, and Chiefs. Rookie phenoms Kelvin Benjamin and Odell Beckham both beat him for memorable receptions. And then Sherman caught fire, not allowing a single completion in his next three games, shutting out the Cardinals, 49ers, and Eagles. He gave up only 15 first downs all season, only six third-down conversions, and not a single touchdown. These numbers are even more impressive when we consider that the Seahawks finally took advantage of Sherman's talents and occasionally moved him away from the defensive left to track the opponent's top receiver, such as Dez Bryant in Week 6. (Seattle's "CB by Sides" number in the Strategic Tendencies table was 85 percent after being 99 percent in two of the last three seasons.) And then, somehow, he improved in the playoffs. Cam Newton, Aaron Rodgers, and Tom Brady threw a combined 120 passes against Seattle's defense. Only ten of those passes were thrown in Sherman's direction, resulting in three catches, 26 yards, one first down, and two interceptions. Aaron Rodgers—league MVP, DVOA king, and pretty much everyone's choice for best passer alive—completed one pass against Sherman in two games, and that one catch was a 6-yard gain on third-and-10. It will be very, very hard to top this performance in 2015.

The Seahawks came out of the Super Bowl with some damage. Chancellor played through a deep bone bruise *and* a torn MCL suffered in his final practice, while Thomas battled through a separated shoulder and a torn labrum. Thomas underwent surgery in February, and there's a small but realistic chance he'll miss the start of the regular season. Throw in Sherman's torn elbow ligament suffered in the NFC title game, the broken wrist and torn ACL that knocked nickelback Jeremy Lane out of the Super Bowl (and, likely, part of training camp as well), and backup safety Jeron Johnson's free agent exodus to the Redskins, and depth starts to become an issue. Reserve corners Tharold Simon and Marcus Burley are at least battle-tested, but backup safety DeShawn Shead played only 88 defensive snaps in 16 games last year, 60 of them coming in his only start against Oakland. Seattle's defensive DVOA was -36.2% in that game, for what that's worth.

Special Teams

Year	DVOA	Rank	FG/XP	Rank	Net Kick	Rank	Kick Ret	Rank	Net Punt	Rank	Punt Ret	Rank	Hidden	Rank
2012	5.7%	3	1.9	11	8.5	5	9.1	4	12.0	6	-3.0	19	-6.4	25
2013	4.7%	5	4.3	8	5.6	7	-3.8	22	10.4	4	7.2	6	-2.6	19
2014	-1.7%	19	0.8	12	4.5	11	-7.5	31	-4.0	21	-2.4	15	5.3	8

The natural assumption would be to blame Seattle's horrible kickoff return numbers on the vacuum left by the Percy Harvin trade, but surprisingly, between his stints with the Seahawks and the Jets, Harvin finished last in our kickoff return metric a year ago. He returned a dozen kickoffs in a Seattle uniform last year, and was tackled inside the 20 on half of them. Meanwhile, the Seahawks started the year experimenting with Earl Thomas returning punts, a high-risk strategy with no reward; Thomas was so bad at it he was relieved of the job after just one game. Paul Richardson took over kickoff returns (poorly, but still better than Harvin) while Doug Baldwin and Brian Walters split punt return duties (adequately) the rest of the way. Enter third-round draft pick Tyler Lockett. Lockett returned four kickoffs and two punts for touchdowns in his career at Kansas State, and he figures to take over both jobs in Seattle right away.

Jon Ryan's punts had gross negative value for the second year in a row. The Seahawks ask him to sacrifice distance for hang time in an effort to limit opposing returns, and to a degree it works: Seattle gave up only four punt returns of 10 or more yards, fewest in the league. The Seahawks coverage ranked 23rd in the value of opposing returns, but if we ignore one terrible game against St. Louis, Seattle would jump to seventh in punt coverage, and to 11th in net punt value. Of course, every team would look better if we removed their worst performance, but not every team gives up a 90-yard touchdown on a trick play. Steven Hauschka was third in kickoff value, his third straight season in the top five, but Seattle's kickoff coverage teams were just average. No Seahawks special-teamer made the top 50 in kickoff tackles, or the top 60 in punt tackles.

Hauschka had some struggles with long field goals in 2014, but he has been automatic at shorter ranges. In his last three seasons, he has gone 57-of-58 on kicks shorter than 40 yards.