

## A Systematic Breakdown Of The 2009 Chicago Bears

The areas that the Bears need to improve in are pretty simple. Front Office, Coaching, Offense, Defense, and Special Teams. Pretty simple, right?

### FRONT OFFICE:

Jerry Angelo is the general manager. As the GM he is responsible for drafting new talent and bringing in new players via free agency and trades.

Kudos to Jerry Angelo for bringing in Jay Cutler. Unfortunately, that seems like the only trade, draft, or free agent signing that has been beneficial to the team. None of the other signings seem like they are going to work out for the long term benefit of the team. Or would they?

Basically, we don't know because the coaching staff seems unwilling to make any changes to the lineup with the free agents that were brought in to bolster the offensive line or replace the ones that are taking up roster space currently. They are either worthless signings because they are not better than any of the players in the current starting lineup, or they are and not getting playing time due to somebody's obstinacy. Either way, somebody is wrong. The players should not play because they were not good enough to sign in the first place, or they should be playing in place of somebody that the coaching staff refuses to remove.

Either way, it is Jerry Angelo's job to tell the franchise and the fans which it is. Yet, he is not.

The Bears are without a first round draft pick next year due to the Jay Cutler trade and they are now without a second round pick due to the late season trade to Tampa Bay for DE Gaines Adams.

The joke around town is that losing a first round pick was not a big deal since Angelo couldn't draft talent in the first rounds anyway. This is not a good thing, nor should it be a laughing matter to any fan of any NFL team. The draft is the only way to build the core of your team, while tweaking the roster with smart signings in free agency. It's the 80 – 20 rule in its most simple form. And drafting for the offensive and defensive lines are the single most important aspect of drafting year after year.

If the general manager has a record of draft busts, then maybe he should not be making those picks as he is obviously not a good judge of talent. However, one overlooked truth about the draft is that the general manager does not, nor can scout every player that is available every year. They have to rely on their scouts to do that for them and make decisions based upon their recommendations. If these scouts are continuously making recommendations that do not pan out, then they should be replaced.

The real truth to the draft though, is that it is the general manager's responsibility. All failures are theirs. If a team is not drafting successfully in successive drafts, something has to change.

As previously stated, the Bears are now without a pick in the first or second rounds of next year's draft. What can they do to help rebuild the core of their team starting next year?

The Bears are not a good football team right now. For all intents and purposes, they should consider themselves in rebuilding mode. This notion should be used in regards to the remainder of this season as well in regards to determining what level of personnel is currently on the roster.

That means that the general manager should put pressure on the coaching staff to make changes to the starting lineup in order to determine the real status of the roster. That means making some major changes to the offensive and defensive lines. Everyone gets put on notice. Play or you will be replaced.

The offensive and defensive lines have not played up to expectations. They have not shown any consistency through the first half of the season. The front office needs to push this idea through to the locker room. Play or you will be replaced. Get the remainder of the roster on the starting lines and see if they can provide any type of spark to these two failing units.

Once these changes have been made the Bears should see what they can get in trade for almost any player on their roster in the next offseason. By having these other players get in-game time over the players that you know should not be on the roster next season, you will have a much better idea of the immediate needs for the future of the franchise. There are very few players on the current roster that should be considered sacred cows: Cutler, Forte, Olson, Hester, Urlacher, Briggs, Tillman, and Gould. Everyone else is negotiable.

They should shop every other player still on the roster and see how many draft picks they can accrue for the 2010 draft. If they can get enough mid-level drafts, they may be able to package them together and slip back into the second or even first round. There are a lot of teams that are willing to trade out of the first rounds, especially due to the costs of signing first round picks. That should leave a lot of mid and late round picks to fill the remainder of the roster.

The rest of the pieces need to be picked up in free agency. The Bears will need to be very active in free agency but the core of the team will need to be rebuilt in the draft. Unfortunately, the current state of the team can not be fixed with one draft class. This is going to take several years of smart, dedicated front office work to fix but it will not begin if the general manager does not accept culpability for the current state of the team and make the necessary moves to rectify the situation.

## COACHING:

There is one basic law to the Universe: If you do not adapt, you will not survive. This was true in the primordial muck of the planet over 10 billion years ago, and it is equally true in football today.

This rule must be acknowledged for the offensive and defensive schemes in the classroom, practice field, and especially for the play calls on game day. Good coaches adapt their schemes to fit the talent they have and the opposition that they face. They do not try and force a square peg into a round hole. It will not work.

The Bears coaching staff constantly tells the fans that this is a good football team. The results are not backing up these statements.

That means that something needs to change. This change must be made in the schemes employed and the players that need to execute these plans.

The coaches need to rethink the way they prepare each week for the teams that they will be playing. Instead of studying film to find ways in which they can utilize their existing game plans, they need to study the film of their opponents and find out how they can do what other teams have previously done with success and adapt those schemes to fit the abilities of their personnel.

You need to attack an enemy's strength in order to expose their weaknesses.

Many coaches and coordinators script out the first 15 to 20 plays of the game. This is not a bad idea, but they must be willing to throw these plans out the window once the shooting starts.

Offensively, the play calling needs to take into account the failings of the offensive line, and the inexperience of the receiving corp. Add more plays that will be beneficial to what the Bears do have: Speed.

The receivers do not have a lot of experience. Give them quick, simple routes that can make use of their speed to gain yards after the catch. This will allow for a quicker release for Cutler who will then not have to rely upon the offensive line to protect for long periods of time. Utilize Cutler's mobility to move the pocket in order to allow longer routes. Send either Hester or Knox deep almost every play. They are two of the fastest players in the NFL. Make the opposing secondary chase them around in the beginning of the game. They will not be able to keep up for four quarters and that will create bigger cushions later in the game. Throw more passes to Matt Forte. He has good hands and is another quick, dangerous weapon if given the ball.

Trick plays and gadget plays that are dependent upon the offensive line blocking must be removed from the playbook. The only thing that they have accomplished this season is a loss of yardage and downs. Learn to walk before you learn to run.

Look into incorporating more zone blocking schemes for the offensive line. Basically, you block the person in front of you. It could not be more easy than that.

Defensively, it seems that the playbook has to become simpler and more complicated at the same time. The inexperienced secondary is out of position on most of the plays. This means that they do not have a good understanding of the playbook. Simplify the coverage schemes until they are understood.

On the other end of the spectrum is the blitz package which needs to be overhauled. Lovie Smith has said that the purpose of his blitz package was not to get to the quarterback but to create one on one matchups on the line. Apparently this is so the front four can get to the quarterback.

The whole purpose of a blitz is to get to the quarterback. Either by forcing them to throw the ball before they want to, or by knocking him into the dirt.

The current scheme does not fool any team that the Bears have played against. The opposing offensive lines are continuously shifting their protection schemes to account for the blitz and veteran quarterbacks know exactly where to get the ball and are adjusting the play at the line accordingly. The coaches need to study some of the packages developed by other coordinators and begin to incorporate them into their play calling. The NFL is a copycat league. Don't be afraid to use something if it works, even if it was developed by somebody else.

The defense needs to generate quarterback pressure if it is to survive. Blitzing is the only way to do that right now. The front four is not capable of generating the pressure needed. Kill the head and the body will die. Pressure the quarterback and the opponent's third down efficiency will wither.

The coaching staff must not be afraid to make any changes necessary to improve performance of the team. They must adapt. They must be willing to move any player or coach that stands in the way of the team. Failure to do so for fear of disrupting locker room unity should not happen. Veteran status should not be a perk, it should be a responsibility. A coaching position should be earned and not a benefit of being the head coach's best friend. Nepotism will not win football games or create locker room cohesion.

Locker room cohesion is truly formed by winning. It is not formed by the players going to dinner together or watching a concert or having a preferred parking spot. It is formed by learning to trust that the man next to you is willing to fight to win.

It is formed by knowing that the people giving the orders are doing everything in their power to put you in the best position to succeed.

This should not be the only changes that the coaching staff should embrace. The coaching staff should also be taking a hard look into how they prepare their players every week. Any breakdown in fundamentals is going to be painfully obvious on game day. This breakdown has been evident in every game that the Bears have played this year.

Fundamentals are just that. Fundamental. They are the thing you can not do without. If players can't tackle, they will not be able to stop anyone. If they can not execute a basic block technique, they will not be able to protect the quarterback or open a hole for the ball carrier. It is that simple.

Coaches everywhere preach the fundamentals. Why is this? Because once the game starts, all of the intricate schemes and play calls mean very little based upon the speed of the game. Players are forced to react to the flow of the play in progress. This becomes even more true as the game progresses further in. The players get tired, and therefore become less able to remember the details. At that point, they can only really rely upon the memories that have been instilled into the body by practicing the fundamentals.

This is the basis behind every training program in the world. The more you practice it, the more you will be able to rely upon reacting correctly when the moment arrives.

The Bears need to get back to practicing their fundamentals. The mental aspects will begin to take care of themselves once they have regained their ability to act like football players.

Another obvious and fundamental aspect of football is physical fitness. I don't believe I am the only person who has noticed that the Bears do not seem to be as physical of a team as they have been in the past. The NFC North is called the Black and Blue division for a reason. The Bears seem to lack the physical and mental attitude required to be called the Monsters of the Midway.

If the players are not in peak physical shape, they will not be able to last four quarters of a football game. I believe that any coach will tell you that the fourth quarter is probably the most important quarter of the game. This does not discount the necessity of beginning a game with strength and determination. But while most football games are not won in the first quarter, they are lost in the fourth quarter. Finishing a game is the key to winning the game.

The coaching staff needs to reevaluate their strength and conditioning programs. This includes diet. There are really very few imposing players on the Bears roster right now. A change in training and diet could help improve that.

This change may even help their other aspect that the players don't currently seem to possess: Attitude.

Attitude does not mean that the player should be taking cheap shots at other players or mouthing off to the other sideline. It means that they should want to go out and impose their will upon the player lining up on the other side of him. That is what being a Chicago Bear used to be about. That is not what this roster is about.

The coaching staff needs to motivate this team. They do not appear to be doing so. If the coaches can't motivate these players, if they can't break through and make these players understand what it means to be a Chicago Bear, then they need to get people in who can.

It has become painfully obvious that the coaching staff and players are in need of a Dick Butkus pep talk.

There is a series of advertisements for UPS that feature Dick Butkus as a motivational speaker. He is. He works all across America in this capacity. The Chicago Bears should hire him. They should also reach out to other former players who could let these players know what it means to play for the Chicago Bears.

Additionally, I believe it would be beneficial to have the players view old tapes of these players to let them see how the game used to be played in Chicago, and how it should be played in Chicago today. I would take these clips and cut them in with tapes of the current team so that they can really appreciate the difference.

This is how an offensive line is supposed to block. This is how you block.

This is how you are supposed to tackle. This is how you tackle.

I would let that sink in and study the players viewing the film. Any player who does not respond to this challenge should be let go.

#### QUARTERBACK:

I believe that bringing Jay Cutler into Chicago was a good thing. He is a capable quarterback with a lot of upside, and will win a lot of games. But he is not going to win every game on his own.

He needs talent to throw the ball to, talent protecting him, and talent coaching him.

One peeve that I have about Cutler, and it may not be deserved, is that I never hear any reports of him doing extra work with his linemen or receivers. I hear these stories about the top quarterbacks in the league all of the time.

Manning. Brady. Brees.

I do not hear these stories about Cutler. Therefore I don't believe that this is happening.

Jay Cutler needs to start spending extra time studying the game and practicing with his receivers just like the big boys do. He has a very inexperienced group of wide receivers. He needs to spend extra time working with them in the film room and especially on the practice field. They all need to get in sync. They need to know what the other is thinking and know that they are all seeing the same thing on the field.

This will not happen without putting in the extra work.

#### RUNNING BACK:

The truth about the running back position in Chicago is that we are doing about the same as we did last year. It just did not seem that it was as bad as it is, due to the fact that we had not anything to compare it to other than the extremely lackluster final year of Cedric Benson.

Yards per average is right on pace to finish as it did last year: under 4 yards per carry.

The total yards will be down this year because the team is not running it as much as they did last year. Unfortunately, the Bears also aren't using Forte as a receiver as much as they did last year. This needs to change. Forte should be used in the fashion that Philadelphia uses Brian Westbrook. Forte is not a power runner. Chicago does not have the offensive line to attempt a power run game.

If needed, the offensive coordinator needs to begin stealing plays from the Eagles' playbook in order to learn how to utilize a back with Forte's skill set.

The front office also needs to find a compliment to Forte's abilities and get a solid third down, short yardage running back. A solid running back tandem is now essential in the NFL.

Kevin Jones was a good signing this offseason. It just did not work out this year. He was going to be two years removed from his injuries and it looked like he had some burst back, and was making the cuts he couldn't last season.

Unfortunately, he got hurt again this season and has now proved that he is unable to stay healthy. He is on contract for one more year for very little money

and can still be considered a decent backup for next season depending upon how his injury heals this year.

Adrian Peterson's contract is up at the end of this season. He needs to see more playing time at the running back position this season in order to determine if he is worth signing for another season. He is a solid special teams player, and if he can be signed on the cheap, then it could be worthwhile to sign him again next year. But only if he is capable of continuing to run the ball. Resigning him solely as a special teams player should not be an option.

Garrett Wolfe is a good football player. Many fans have scoffed at this notion, but it is true. He plays hard, and is a solid special teams contributor. The truth of the matter is that he is too small to play at the running back position in the NFL. He is too small to be told to run it up the gut at the goal line. He should not be used that way ever again.

Wolfe should be used according to his abilities. He has speed, and good hands. He should be used more often in the passing game while he is still with the team.

If his roster spot can be upgraded with a three down back, it should be done with no hesitation.

Jason McKie does not appear to be a very good blocking fullback. Nor does he seem to possess exceptional receiving skills. Replace him with Lance Louis, a 300 lb former tight end that is currently listed as a tackle. He would outweigh McKie by 50lbs (248 lbs vs 300 lbs) and, according to his combine times, he ran the forty in 4.69 seconds.

As a former tight end he will be familiar with the receiving aspect of the game and should have experience as a blocker. He is listed as a tackle. If he is good enough to be listed as the second string left tackle, he should be good enough to run as the lead blocker for Matt Forte. He will do a much better job than Greg Olson in this capacity. If the coaches are going to use Olson as a lead blocker for Forte, why wouldn't they consider this option? Why haven't they used this option?

This should provide a push in the run game as well as the passing game since you would be lining up what may be considered an additional lineman behind the line of scrimmage. Let him pick up the blitzing safeties and linebackers.

As an added benefit, toss a few passes to Louis in the flats and let the opposing secondary question each other on who wants to tackle a 300lb ball carrier bearing down on them with a speed matching most linebackers.

Some may question his attitude based upon the recent events that have made their way into court. He does have an attitude. It is up to the coaching staff to

harness and focus that attitude onto the football field. If the coaching staff does not believe that they can do that, then maybe they should be looking for a new line of work.

#### WIDE RECEIVER:

Entering into the beginning of the season, this group of wide receivers may have been the most vilified group on the Bears, or any other team for that matter.

Common jokes and slights, including a piece by the infamously satirical newspaper, The Onion, all labeled this group as the worst receiving corp in the league. It features a number one wide receiver who was a player that had been drafted as a cornerback and kick return specialist and is now only in his second year as a wideout.

The three starting wide receivers have a combined five years worth of experience in the position at the NFL level.

Devin Hester is in his second year as a wide receiver, fourth year total in the league. In the past two years, he has made great strides in understanding and playing the receiver position. He needs to continue this improvement. He has amazing speed and agility. If he can combine that with a thorough knowledge of his position, he can be a very good wide receiver.

Earl Bennett has a history with Jay Cutler, and that history seems to be bearing fruit in his second season as a wide receiver. He is currently the second leading receiver behind Devin Hester and seems to be making solid progress as an NFL receiver.

Johnny Knox is having a good season for a rookie drafted in the fifth round. He has the speed to be a continuous threat every time he touches the ball. This is a player with a lot of potential. He must take it on himself to continue to learn and improve his skills.

As a whole, this group of receivers are not that bad. Despite their level of experience, this group has a lot of speed and a lot of potential. Once they can begin learning the finer points of route running, this group has the potential to be very dangerous.

The coaching staff, and quarterback, need to be spend extra time with this group in order to hasten this process.

The remaining three receivers on the roster do not appear to be making any solid contributions to the offense.

Rashied Davis is signed through to the 2011 season and is considered a solid special teams player. I don't believe that is going to be enough to keep him on

the roster next season, nor should it. He has never made a positive impact on offense and should be treated as such.

The Bears need to get a receiver with the height (6'4 or taller) to become a viable red zone threat. The tallest receiver on the roster is Devin Aromashodu who is 6'2. Despite Jay Cutler's preseason campaigning for him to become more involved with the offense, Aromashodu has been left on the sidelines.

Ron Turner has mentioned that the tall player they have for the end zone is tight end Greg Olson. The mere idea that you should only want one solid red zone target is laughable at best, and honestly should be considered criminal negligence since it is coming from the offensive coordinator.

The Bears must get a taller wide receiver to open up the end zone. If the only way to do that is to remove the offensive coordinator from the equation, then he should have his bags packed for him by the head coach and shown the door immediately.

**TIGHT END:**

The tight end position should be considered a strength on the roster based upon the potential of the current roster. The strength is not based upon the performance of the roster, just based upon the potential of the roster.

Greg Olson is a first round pick that has yet to live up to his draft status. I don't believe that this is entirely his fault, as the offensive play calling has not utilized him fully. He is also seeing a lot more coverage in his third year, then he had seen in previous seasons.

However, he has made several crucial drops in high pressure situations. These were key plays that killed drives. This can not be tolerated. The coaching staff and quarterback need to spend more time working with him in order to stop this from developing into a bad habit.

Another area that he needs to work on is his blocking techniques. He doesn't have any. I understand that he is a pass catching tight end, but every receiver on the team is expected to block. The starting tight end should not be an exception to this. The coaching staff should be having him spend extra time working on his blocking. There is no excuse.

Desmond Clark has been a benefit to this organization since he arrived in the 2003 season. He is currently in his eleventh season and is still a solid receiver and the best blocking tight end on the team. Unfortunately, he is expendable at this point and should be traded for any draft pick available.

It's unfortunate that this is the case because he is one of the most solid members of the roster right now. But the equity is simply not there. The bulk of the money

is being spent on the first round draft choice who is constantly projected by the coaches and front office as a future perennial pro bowl tight end.

Kellen Davis is the other tight end and is currently in his second year. He has shown considerable improvement in his receiving skills and should be given every opportunity to play over Clark as the long term benefits of Davis far outweigh any immediate benefits presented by keeping Clark on the roster.

The only other change to the tight end position that should be made is the inclusion of Lance Louis into the play scheme. I have already made mention that I believe he should be incorporated into the fullback position. He should also be incorporated in as a blocking tight end in formations that require two tight ends. The same argument applies here as it did for the fullback position.

Other teams in the NFL add an extra offensive lineman in on the tight end position. The Bears should too. They need the extra pass blockers as they have often been getting disrupted by four man fronts.

It is probably not necessary to carry three tight ends on the roster in the coming year. This is probably one of the only position groups on the roster that does not need to be active in free agency and the draft in the next offseason.

#### OFFENSIVE LINE:

The offensive line has been labeled as the major woe of this team. I am having a hard time arguing against that sentiment. Between bad drafts or no picks being spent on these positions, and bad free agent signings, this is the most misaligned segment of the roster.

It took until the eighth week of the season to see any adjustment to the offensive line by the coaches. I can not say that any changes made prior to that would have helped to resurrect a season that was probably still born, but it would have been a welcome move to see the coaching staff trying something to realign these positions.

If the Bears are to be considered in rebuilding mode, then they need to immediately begin to analyze the players currently on the roster. The only way to do that would be to start playing the players that might be on the roster next year.

Orland Pace should be placed on the bench. This free agent signing was a measure of broad faith that the perennial pro bowler still had enough in the tank to give another couple of seasons. He is not a player for the future of the franchise so he should not get any playing time for the rest of the season.

Left tackle should be manned by the person that was drafted in the first round to play the position, Chris Williams. The Bears need to understand very quickly

whether this position is going to be filled for years to come with the first round draft pick they used on Williams.

Williams was a first round draft pick last year that did not see the field until the end of the season due to injuries that may or may not have been a previous condition going into the draft. The Bears need to find out right now if this player has what it takes to man the left tackle position. He needs to begin playing that spot immediately.

Josh Beekman was moved back to the left guard spot that he had occupied all last season, replacing free agent Frank Omiyale who always had always played the tackle position. Keep Beekman in the left guard spot.

At this time, there is no other recourse for this team but to keep Olin Kreutz in as the center. He's smart. He knows this offense, but he has gotten slower over the years. Right now though, he is the only real player that could play this spot without completely disabling the entire offensive line. He is not going to be able to man that spot effectively for very much longer though. The center position must be addressed in the draft very soon.

Roberto Garza should continue to play the right guard position for the time being. The Bears are in need of another guard and that should be addressed in the draft or via free agency but the Bears should get a guard, not a tackle, to bolster this position and not try to force a square peg into a round hole.

The right tackle spot should be open for the taking between 2009 free agent signings Frank Omiyale and Kevin Shaffer. Omiyale had been playing left guard, and playing it badly. If he is a natural tackle, he should be given the opportunity to prove it by fighting for the right tackle spot. The same goes for Kevin Shaffer. Give each of these players a sharpened stick and let them fight it out for the opportunity to be the starting right tackle. This is another spot that must be addressed in the draft.

The offensive line must be rebuilt in order for this team to have any future as a playoff contender in the upcoming years. Repeated ignorance of the importance of drafting for these positions over the past seven years has crippled this team. This must be reversed.

#### DEFENSIVE LINE:

Lovie Smith called the signing of former Lions' head coach Rod Marinelli as the biggest signing of the offseason as he is considered one of the best defensive line coaches of the past twenty years. The thought was that if Marinelli could not get this defensive line effectively rushing the passer, no coach on Earth could.

Apparently, there is no coach on Earth that can get the current group of defensive linemen on the Bears' roster to function as a high level unit.

That means that the personnel currently on the roster is not very good. There are a lot of fans that would agree with this sentiment. The vision for this line must be recalculated and now is the time to do so.

The Bears traded a second round pick at the trade deadline for DE Gaines Adams. Adams was a first round pick by the Tampa Bay Buccaneers that they were only too eager to trade off for a high level pick. The Bears' belief was that a change of scenery and the expert tutelage of Marinelli would be able to get Adams back to the player that merited a first round pick.

Adewale Ogunleye is going to be a free agent next season. He has never lived up to the double digit sack season that bought him his enormous contract when he came to Chicago from the Miami Dolphins. Unless the Bears can sign Ogunleye for a minimum contract next season, they should sit him and begin playing Adams at every opportunity in order to find out what kind of player he really is. The continued use of Ogunleye at this point in the season is nonsensical. Play Adams and find out if he can progress to become the pro bowl level player that the coaching staff and front office believe him to be.

Alex Brown has been the most consistent player on the defensive line for the past four years. But he is now in his eighth season and should be considered as entering the final phase of his NFL career. He is currently only signed through the 2011 season and keeping him any longer than that would probably not be beneficial. Therefore the defensive end position on both sides needs to be addressed in the draft and free agency over the next several years.

Mark Anderson is the other defensive end on the current roster who becomes a free agent next year. Let him. The Bears need to move on from the one year wonder who has not been able to show any consistent ability to play the game at a high level.

The defensive tackle position is very important to any defense. For years, the Bears have been trying to find 3 technique tackles to keep the Tampa 2 defense that Lovie Smith has installed from falling apart.

That defense fell apart three years ago. It is time to start drafting defensive tackles the way the rest of the league has for several years now. Build them big, and build them strong. Do not look for pass rushers from the defensive tackle position. Draft big, strong players that will lock up the interior of the line and draw double teams. This allows your pass rushing defensive ends and blitzing linebackers, safeties and corners to run in, contain the pocket, and knock the quarterback down. These types of players also clog the interior gaps in the running game.

Get big. Get strong. Get mean. Get rid of Tommie Harris.

Tommie Harris was signed to a forty million plus contract after missing out the end of the Super Bowl season. He has not been the same player since. Injuries, attitude... the list goes on. Free up a tremendous amount of cap space and cut him at the end of the year. In the meantime, he should be forced to practice every week and used as a rotation player while the rest of the players are given preferential playing time to determine their future value to the franchise.

Jarron Gilbert was drafted in the third round this year. He has been seeing limited playing time at the tackle position. He is only 285 lbs. He is too small to be an effective tackle. Move him to defensive end and start getting him snaps rushing the quarterback. If he has any future in the NFL, it will be as a pass rusher, not a defensive tackle.

Marcus Harrison and Anthony Adams are the two largest tackles on the team. These two players should get the majority of the snaps at this position with the remainder of the squad getting rotated in to keep the line fresh.

Free agency is probably going to be best short term solution for any failing this position currently has on the Bears' roster. But even if a high profile and beneficial signing is made in free agency, this position must not be ignored in future drafts. The position must simply be drafted in a different direction than it has in the past.

#### LINEBACKER:

Heading into the beginning of the season, the linebackers were considered the one strong position on this team that had quality depth. That statement was quickly put to the test within the first game of the season as the starting middle linebacker and strong-side linebacker both went out with injuries.

Brian Urlacher was done for the season midway through the first game of the season. Pisa Tinoisamoa was also hurt in this game but managed to come back in the sixth week of the season. Unfortunately, Tinoisamoa suffered a season ending injury in that game.

What was once a strength now became a position in dire need of readjusting itself to make up for losing two former pro bowl players.

Chicago has a long lineage of tough as nails linebackers. This is the identity of the team. This position must be rebuilt.

Brian Urlacher should be available to play again next year, but his position must be scouted in the upcoming draft classes and it should be considered a matter of priority. He is not the player that he was five years ago. A lot of fans are calling for the franchise to cut ties with the former pro bowler. I do not agree with this notion for a couple of reasons.

The first reason is that the defense needs a smart, veteran linebacker in the middle of the field calling the plays and making adjustments. Football intelligence is going to make up for a loss of physical ability. Urlacher can not be let go at this time for this reason alone. There is no one currently on the roster that would be able to handle the position with the ability that Urlacher can. Hunter Hillenmeyer can be considered the best alternative for the remainder of the season, but he is not a quality replacement for Urlacher.

The second reason is that Brian Urlacher is currently the identity of this team. Cutler may be the new face of the franchise, but the middle linebacker is its identity.

As I stated before, Chicago has a long lineage of legendary linebackers. Urlacher was that linebacker for this decade. He was not Dick Butkus, and he was not Mike Singletary, but he was the closest thing we've had to these two players in twenty years.

He will probably only be able to play for another couple of seasons, and it would be beneficial to the franchise as a whole if Urlacher plays out the remaining couple of seasons and then retires as a Bear. He is respected among the press, been voted the Defensive Player of the Year, and been to numerous pro bowls. There is a good chance that he will be voted to the Hall of Fame. Casting him off at this point would not be beneficial to the franchise.

Additionally, there is always the possibility of moving Urlacher to the safety position in his final years as a Bear. He has had experience as a safety in the college level and there is no substitute for football intelligence as long as the player is still able to play the game within the physical demands of the position. After the next couple of seasons, he might not have the physical skills to continue to play the middle linebacker position, but he would probably still be able to play as a safety.

I stated earlier that there are very few players that should be treated as sacred cows in the upcoming offseason. Brian Urlacher is one of the franchise's sacred cows.

One of the others is Lance Briggs. He is locked up for the next couple of seasons. There is no need to worry about this position other than making sure that quality depth is in place.

The strong-side linebacker position remains a position in flux. If this position can be strengthened, it will go a long way to ensuring that the road of recovery is underway for returning this defense to its former self.

Pisa Tinoisamoa is a good player that had signed a one year contract this season. He would be worth signing to a new deal if the price is right. A bloated, long term contract for a player of his abilities is not an option. Especially not after only having played in two games this season. Load the contract with incentives, and let him earn a longer contract two years down the road. If he is unwilling to accept that agreement, let him go.

Nick Roach has shown some potential at this position and is currently locked to the roster for the next season. Scout this position in the draft and try to get additional depth to this position.

Currently, Roach has not shown the necessary ability to deserve a long term contract. Do not sign him to one, as that can be handled after the following season.

Almost every other linebacker on the roster could be replaced or traded next season.

#### CORNERBACK:

Three years ago, Charles Tillman and Nathan Vasher were considered one of the better cornerback tandems in the NFL. That is not the case anymore.

Charles Tillman is still the best cornerback on the team. He is currently untouchable on the roster at this point and is signed through the next couple of seasons.

Every other cornerback on the team can be cut or traded.

Nathan Vasher's contract expires at the end of the 2012 season. Even if he were willing to resign for the league minimum, I do not think it would be worthwhile to keep him. Trade him or let him go. He has become an empty uniform.

Zach Bowman has taken over as the starting cornerback from Nathan Vasher. He has shown flashes of playmaking ability through the nine games he has played in his first two seasons in the NFL. He is signed through the next season and would be worth keeping for the next season unless an offer that can't be refused is made by another team. He should not be resigned to a new contract until after next season. It must be made clear to him that he needs to earn a new contract and not get one by having become a starting cornerback by default.

There is a lot of room for maneuvering in this position but the end result next season should be finding another starting cornerback. That player may be Zach Bowman, but he must prove it by continuing to progress in his understanding of the position. Corey Graham may be available next season at a reasonable price and might be worth resigning in order to maintain depth.

#### SAFETY:

Safety was one of the positions widely recognized as an area of immediate need heading into the draft after cutting fan favorite Mike Brown. This is despite the fact the Bears have used a lot of draft picks over the past five years for this position.

Most of these players' contracts will be expiring over the course of the next two seasons so it appears that there will be the need to continue to spend draft picks on these slots over the next few years.

There are three players currently on the roster that have shown some ability to play the position: Danieal Manning, Kevin Payne, and Al Afalava.

These players would be worth keeping on the roster if only for the sake of depth at the position and one as a potential starter next season. But another starting safety should be found on the free agent market next year. It will be very important, again, to address this position next year.

The remainder of the players should be cut if the Bears are not able to trade them.

#### SPECIAL TEAMS:

This has been an area of strength for the past four seasons. A lot of that credit has been given to Special Teams Coordinator Dave Toub.

There has been some drop off in the coverage units that the Bears must continue to work on.

Other than that, I really don't have too many complaints about how this section of the team plays. They are continuously giving the offense good field position and often giving the defense a long field to work with.

Robbie Gould is an accurate and consistent kicker. He doesn't have the leg strength of some of the other kickers in the league, but accuracy is far more important.

Brad Maynard has been a good punter since coming to the Bears in 2001. He has had some poor performances this season but should still be considered an asset.

#### SUMMARY:

The bottom line is that the Chicago Bears need to add quality starters and depth to practically every position on the team:

Running Back  
Wide Receiver

Offensive Line  
Defensive Line  
Linebacker  
Cornerback  
Safety

This is an incredibly long shopping list, and it will not be filled overnight or in one season. But the change must come if this franchise is to become a contender in the NFL again.

No one expects this franchise to be able to fix these issues with a wave of a magic wand. What the fans want to see though is that a commitment to change is in place and that the steps are being taken to bring this team back to the level it deserves as one of the most historic franchises in the league.