

Super Bowl LI Offensive Scouting Report

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NEW ENGLAND OFFENSE

Not many offenses could lose one of the best players in the game and still reach the Super Bowl, but the Patriots managed to pull it off.

After losing Rob Gronkowski for the season, New England still managed to move the ball and score points at an impressive rate, and that's mostly because they've got another one of the best players in the game throwing the football.

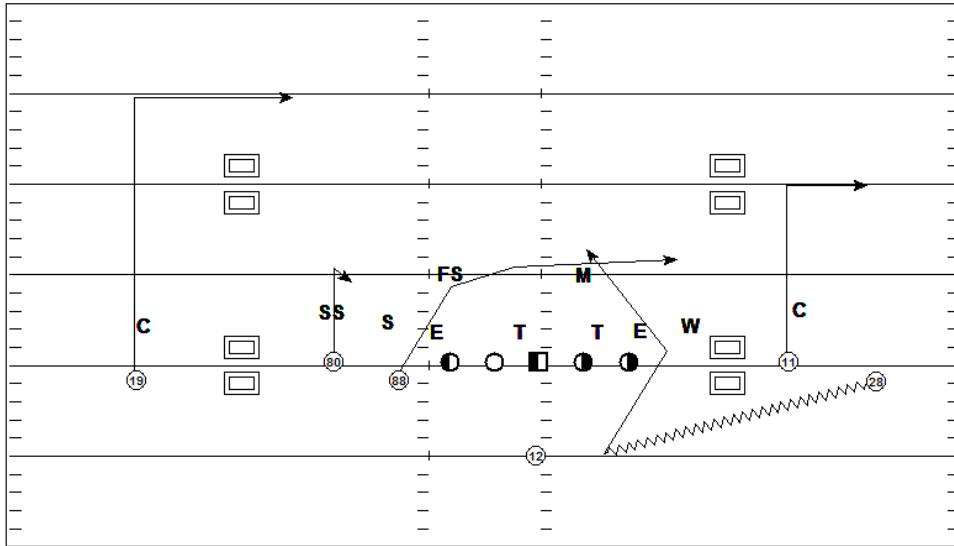
This offense is built around Tom Brady, and the scheme is designed to make his decisions as simple as possible.

New England uses a lot of motion and shifts before the snap, because they want to force the defense to show their hand early. As a result, Brady often knows exactly where he's going with the ball before he takes the snap.

That's what this offense is built around, and that's what Atlanta's defense will be forced to defend.

Let's go over some plays New England has run this season, and talk about what kinds of things you'll need to watch for on Super Bowl Sunday.

1. James White Motion for Coverage Identification

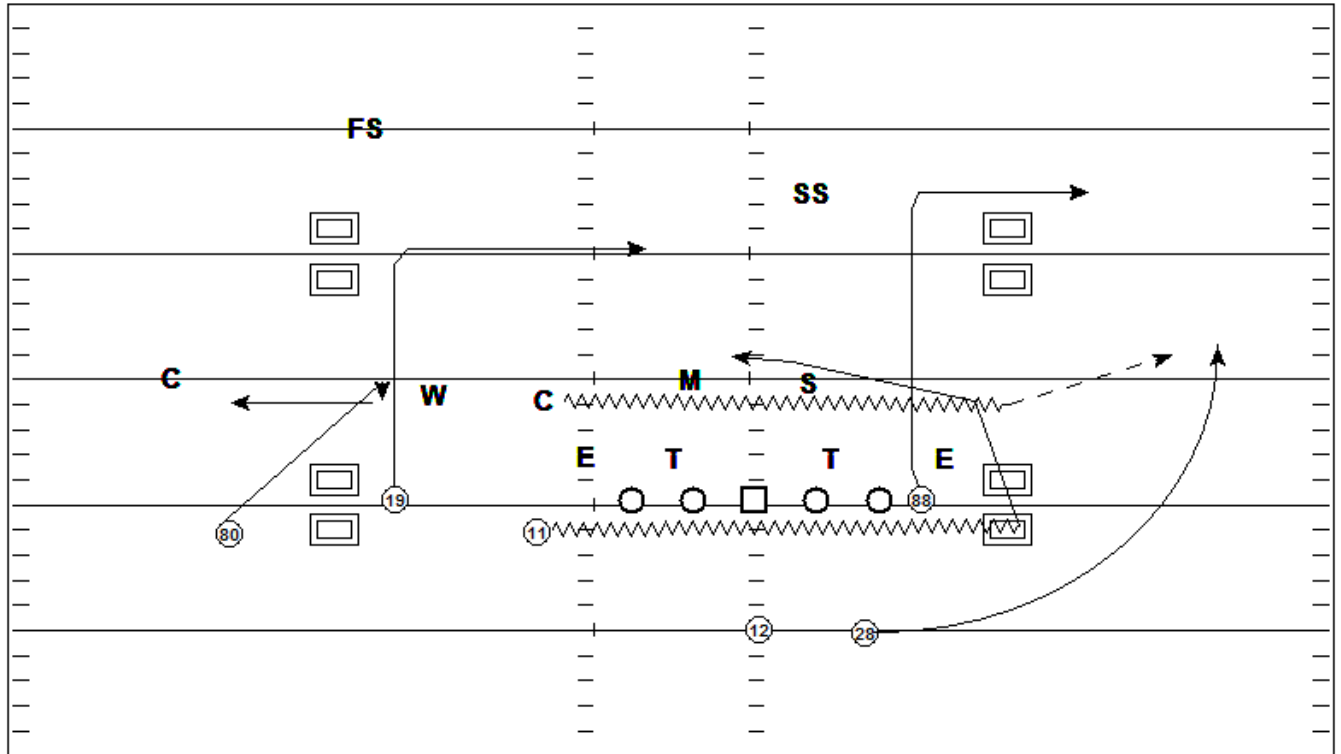


As we talked about in the introduction, this offense loves to move guys around before the snap, even if it means just lining up their running backs wide and then moving them back to their normal position before the snap.

On this play Brady has options for both man and zone coverage depending on the pre-snap picture. If White starts out wide and there is only a corner across from him, it's zone. If there is a linebacker across from him, it's man coverage.

If it's man coverage, it just turns into a matter of who New England wants to attack, and where the matchup advantage is.

2. Edelman Motion Across Tailback Wheel

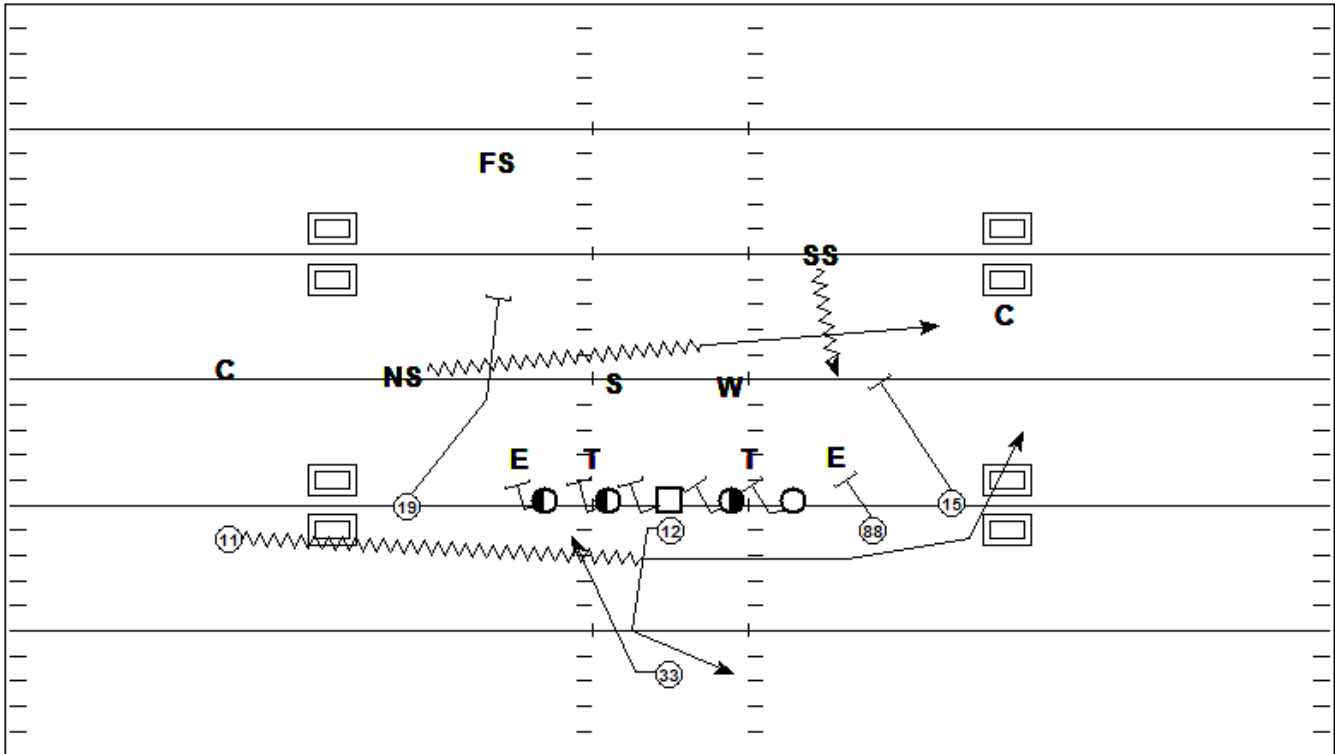


This play is an adapted version of the “spot” concept where one receiver goes vertical, one goes in, and the other goes out.

Brady sends Edelman in motion from left to right, where he’s set up to create a rub on whichever defender flies out to defend the tailback.

New England loves these kinds of formations, because just like splitting out the tailback wide, it makes it hard for defenses to disguise what they’re doing. In this case, with the Will linebacker split out across from #19 Malcolm Mitchell, it’s definitely a form of zone coverage, and if Brady decides not to take the tight end side of the concept, he’s got Edelman and Mitchell giving a high-low stretch of the middle of the zone coverage.

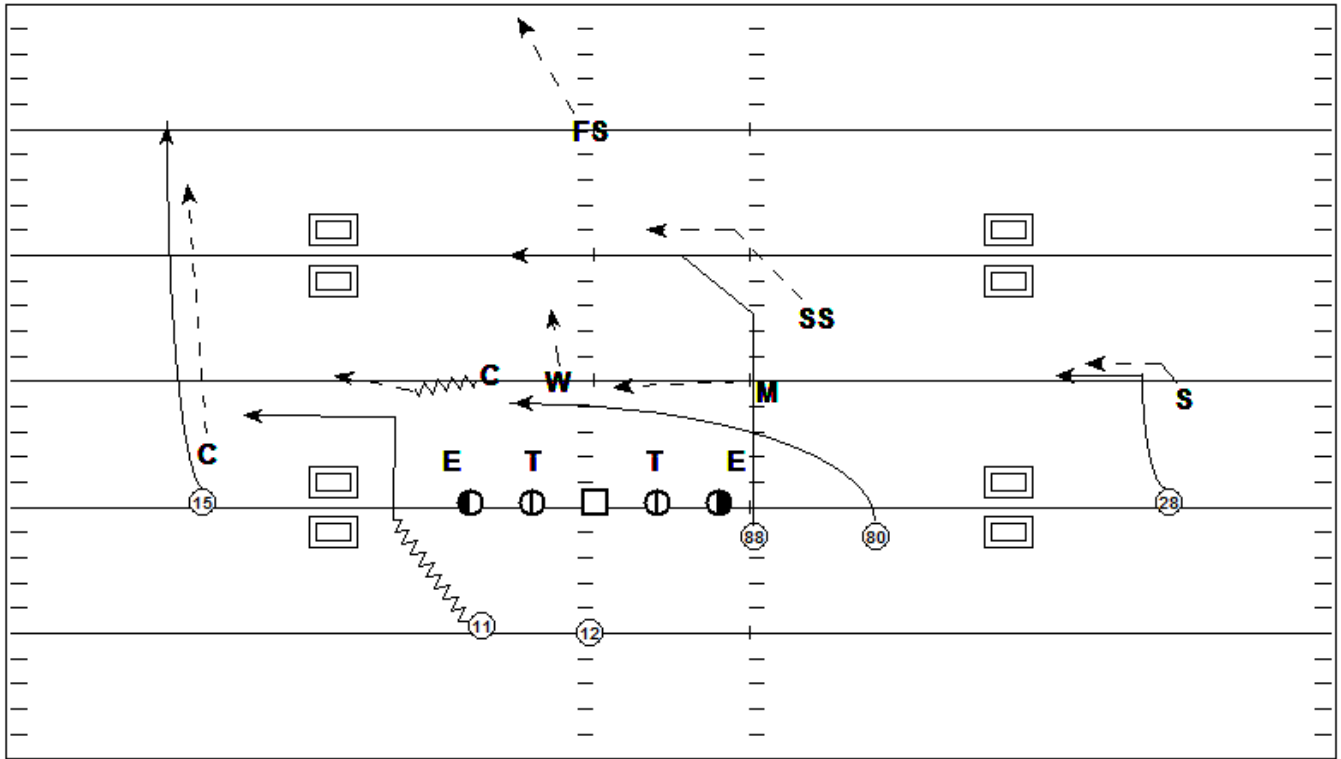
3. Edelman Jet Sweep



This is an example of the multiple ways New England can use a guy like Edelman. Usually the Patriots like to run these unconventional gadget plays after picking up the first first down of a drive.

Brady lines up under center to really give the defense a threat of a run up the middle. The compressed formation brings the defense in tight, and once Edelman comes in motion and takes the handoff, it really turns into him vs the corner on the edge. If he can make that guy miss this turns into a big play very quickly.

4. Edelman Motion from Backfield

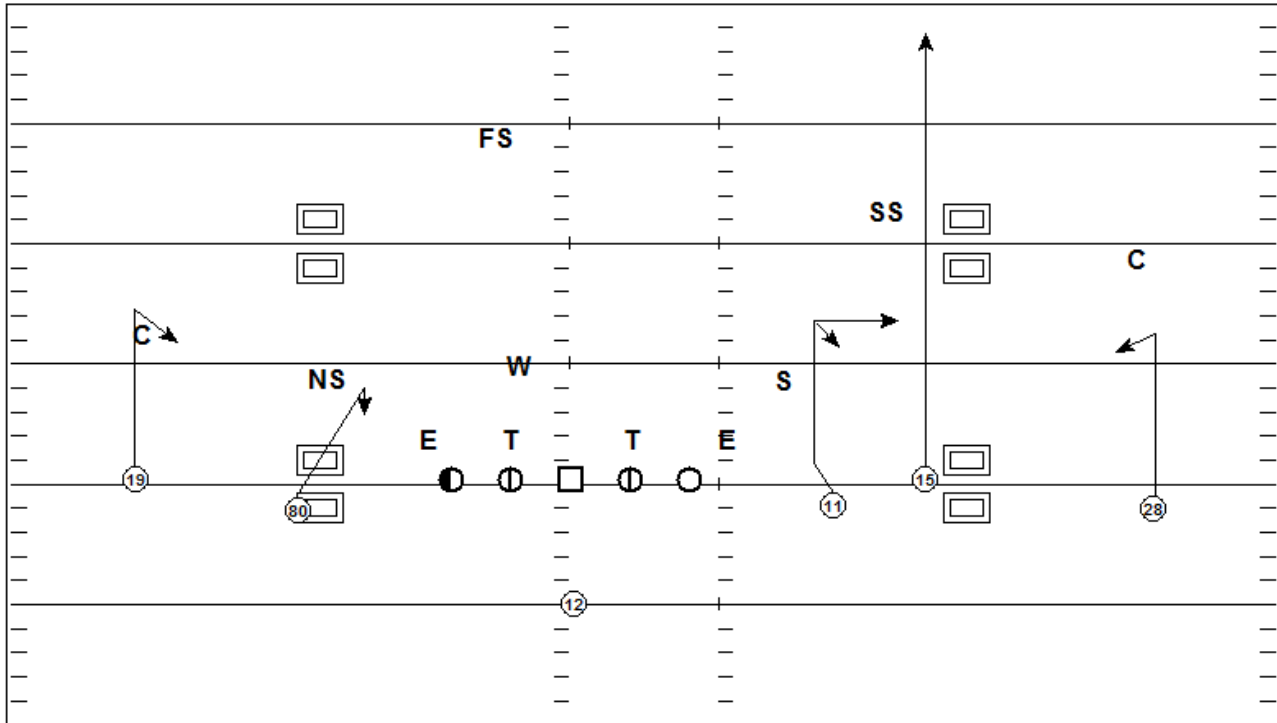


Speaking of Edelman, this is a similar concept to lining up a running back out wide and seeing what happens. In fact, on this play they do both.

The read couldn't be more clear. If New England lines up Edelman in the backfield and there's a cornerback standing where a linebacker usually lines up, it's man coverage. Brady can confirm that by peeking out at James White to the far right side and seeing a linebacker across from him.

If it's zone, Brady will attack the left side, where Hogan and Edelman will run a fade-out concept. Since it's man, however, Brady will look at the rub concept to his right involving Amendola and Bennett.

5. Edelman Stick / "Spacing"



Here's a play from the last game New England played, the AFC Championship.

Once the Patriots got down in the Red Zone, they brought four receivers and a running back (10 personnel) onto the field and spread the defense out wide.

Once again we see the running back James White split out to the right side, and with the corner giving him a nice cushion Brady can safely tell that it's zone coverage.

Here's the other important part of the equation however, in this offense, often times the receivers have to read the coverage just as often as the quarterback, so these formations help everyone.

What do I mean? Edelman's stick route tells him to either sit down against zone or run away from man coverage. Since he knows it's zone, he knows what he's supposed to be doing before the ball is even snapped.

At this point it just turns into a numbers game and Brady picking a side. The two routes to the backside are spaced out to stretch the defenders in zone coverage and put maximum stress on that side of the defense.

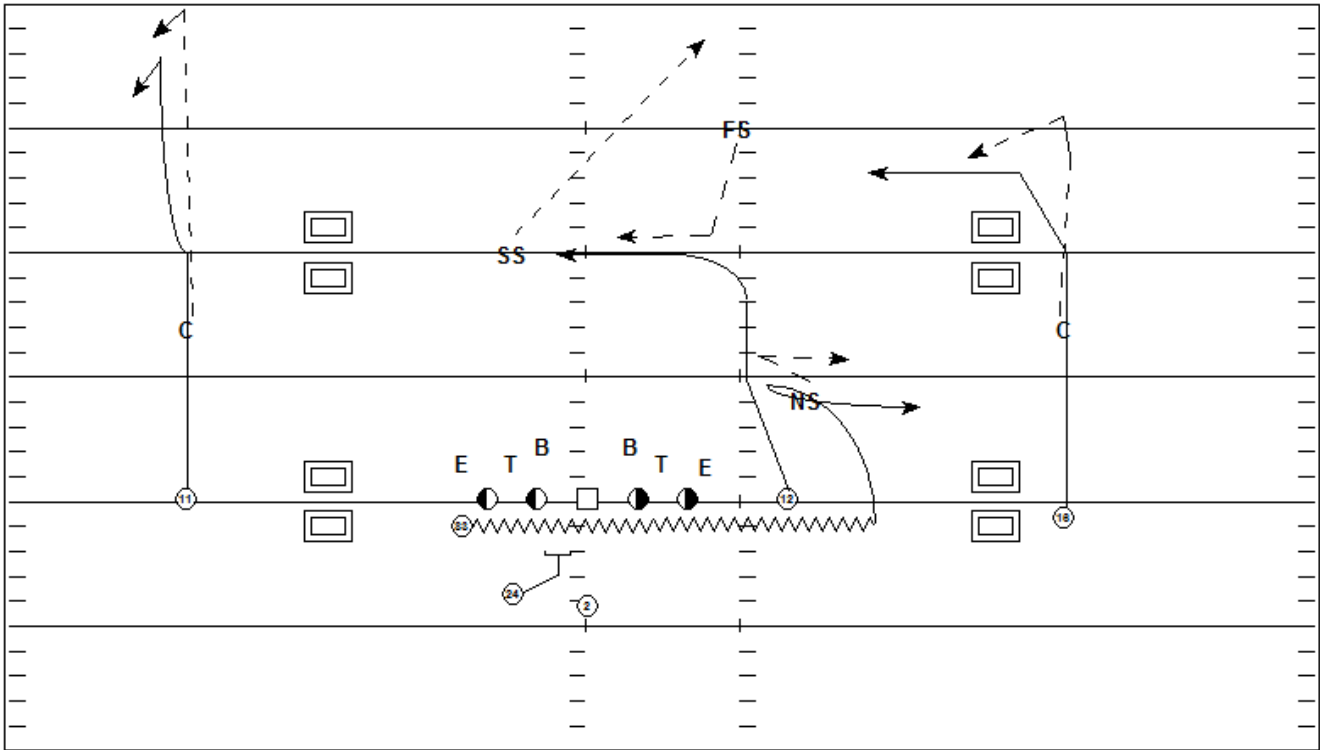
ATLANTA OFFENSE

This offense is no joke, and they didn't just get hot at the right time at the end of the season. Kyle Shanahan has put together a great scheme in Atlanta, and they're definitely good enough to win it all.

The Falcons have taken a dangerous stretch running game and paired it with one of the most talented receiving corps in the NFL, and an incredibly accurate passer for good measure. This team wants to win first down to set up 2nd and 3rd downs where Matt Ryan's patient but accurate style can pick apart your defense underneath all day long if you let him.

Over the next few pages we'll go through a few plays and give some thoughts on the kinds of things you can expect from Atlanta in the Super Bowl.

2. Double Dig Jones Comeback

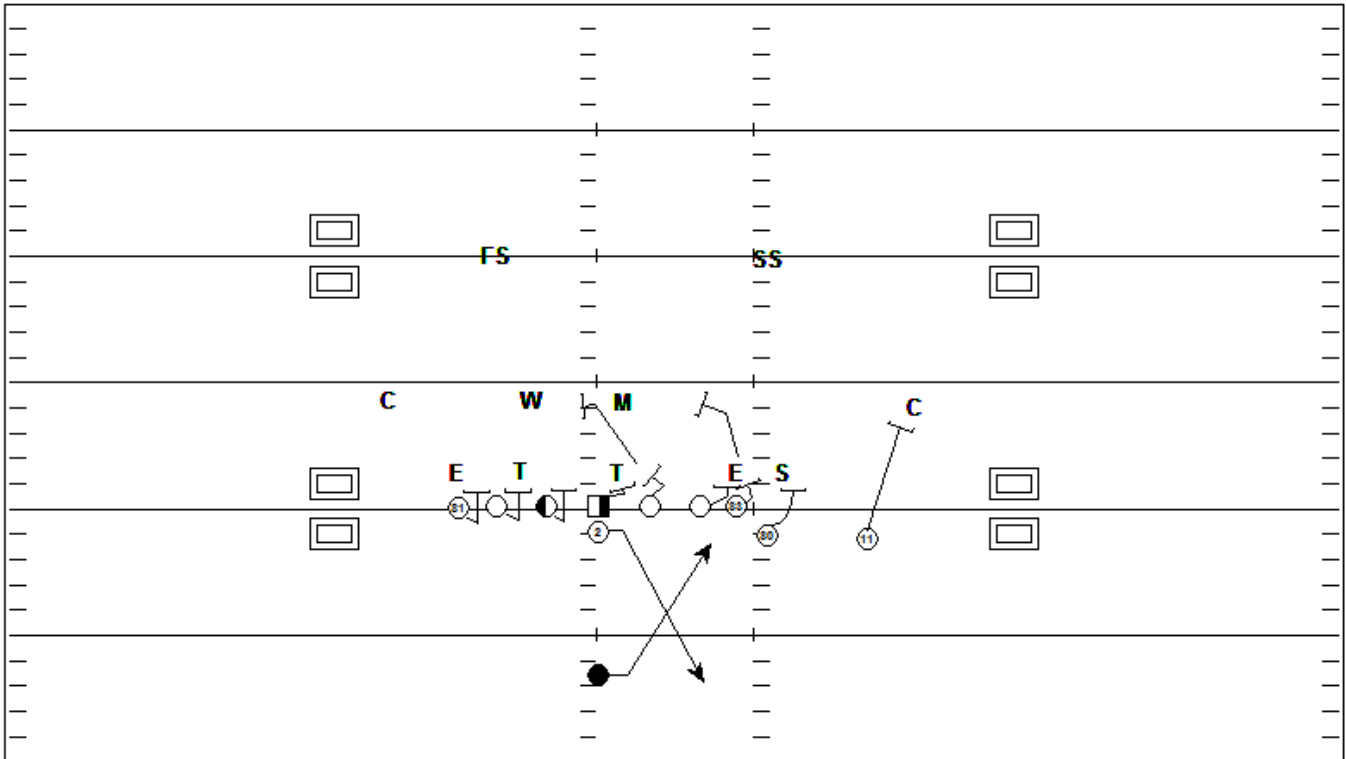


Atlanta loves to attack the middle of the field on 3rd down, and the tight end motion across the formation is a way to move the safeties to where they want them, or if nothing else, get the secondary to show their intentions.

Depending on the matchup to the left side, Matt Ryan can choose to drop back, hold the safety with his eyes, and wait for Jones on the deep comeback route, or he works the right side with the two dig routes.

The tight end's pivot route is mostly a way to hold the underneath coverage but he can also be a great checkdown option if the defense covers everyone up downfield.

4. 13 Personnel Stretch Play



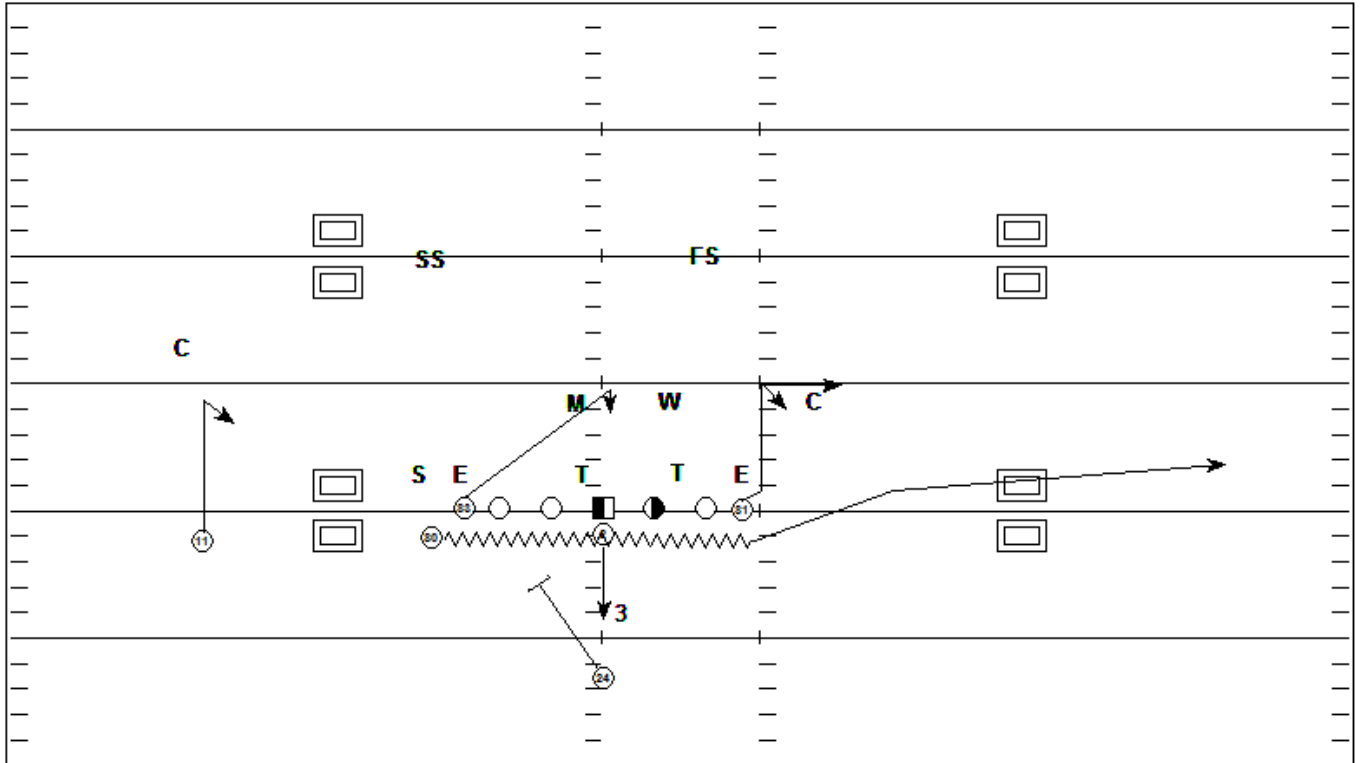
At some point in the game, especially if Atlanta is unsure of what New England is doing up front against the run, the Falcons may jump into their 3 tight end package in the middle of the field.

This can be a real pain, because Atlanta runs the outside zone play, or the stretch play, better than anybody in the league. Just because you know it's coming, doesn't mean you can stop it, and this formation gives the defense a lot of gaps to worry about.

This play is drawn up against a front Tampa Bay played against this formation earlier in the year, and as you can see, they've got a double team on the frontside defensive end and are able to pin the Mike linebacker inside without much trouble. Add a great blocking receiver like Julio Jones to the mix, and you've got a lot of muscle in front of your running back.

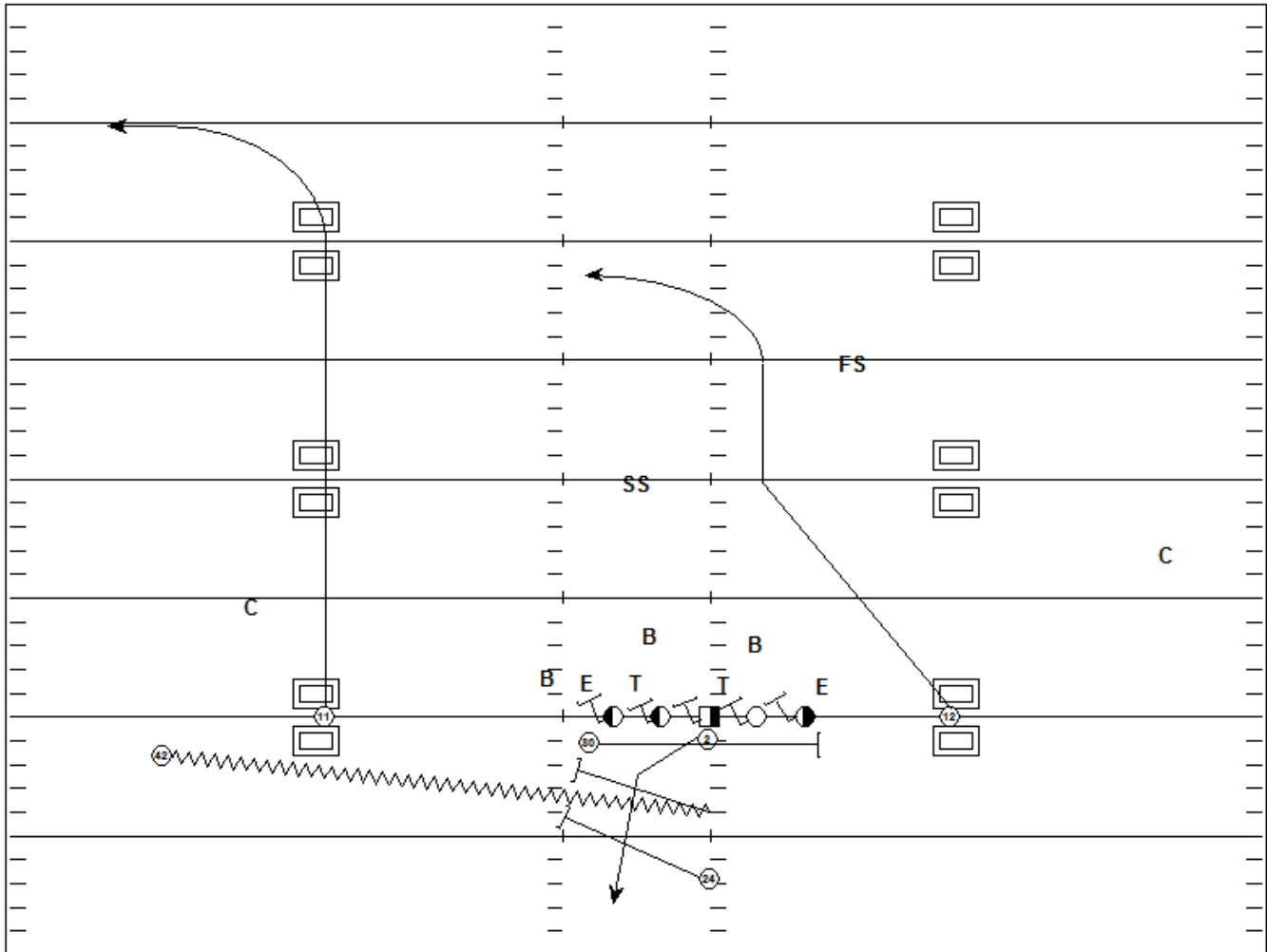
The Falcons can move guys around, especially whichever receiver happens to be on the field, but if New England's defense is leveraged too far to one side or the other, they could find themselves pinned inside in a hurry.

5. 13 Personnel Stick X Hitch



And now here's an example of the passing game out of that same personnel package. Matt Ryan has the ability to check to a run whenever he sees a chance to take advantage of the defense, but Kyle Shanahan also wants the ability to present the threat of a pass whenever he brings 3 tight ends on the field at the same time. They'll motion the wing across the formation, which changes the strength and forces the defense to adjust. At that point, it's up to Ryan whether he wants to check to a run or keep the pass play on. This has the effect of matching up Julio Jones one-on-one against a corner, or if Ryan likes the numbers to the right side he can try the Stick concept.

6. FB Motion to I Formation Stretch Fake Jones Deep Out Route



When the Falcons bring the fullback onto the field, you're almost guaranteed to get some kind of motion, and a lot of times the man in motion is the fullback.

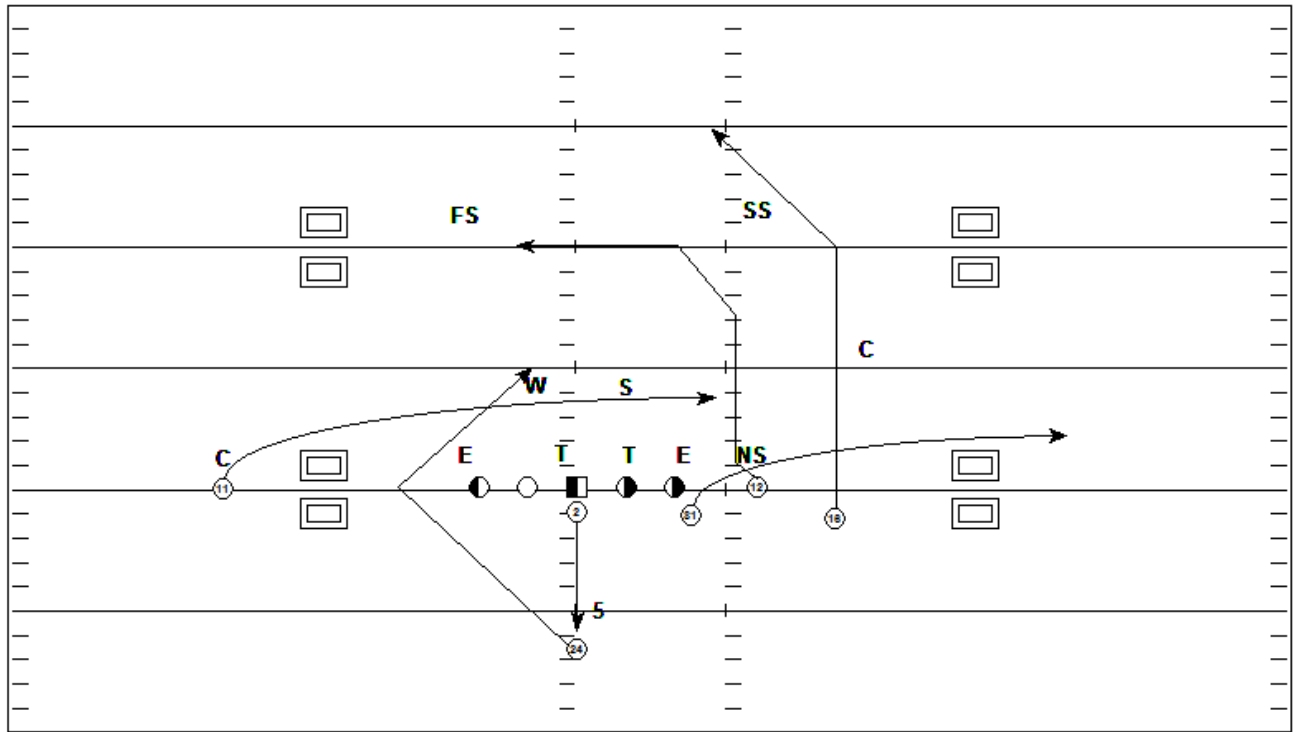
We've already gone over how both teams like to line up the running backs out wide to get an idea of the coverage, as well as the outside zone play that Atlanta loves to use. This play uses both of those principles.

In this scenario, the fullback Patrick Dimarco lines up wide, and since it's only a corner sitting across from him, the offense confirms it as zone coverage.

The tight end is sitting off the line of scrimmage, and fakes the "wham" play, blocking back on the defensive end. The Falcons rarely run the actual wham play, but they love it for play action, since it means they've got players moving in separate directions in the backfield, and creates a lot of misdirection to hold the defense.

This is a shot play designed to hit Julio Jones on the deep out route, and Sanu comes open behind him if the secondary rotates too far to his side.

7. Jones Shallow Cross



The closer you get to the goal line as an offense, the less space you have to stretch the field vertically. As a result, you've got to start stretching the field more horizontally and/or attacking smaller and smaller portions of the field.

This concept does the latter, and by flooding the right side of the field with four routes it's just a matter of blocking long enough for the entire concept to develop. The dig and post routes are deep enough that this is not a call you can make on the goal line, but even as close as the 15 yard line, you're still able to use them to clear out the underneath coverage for the crossing route, here being run by Julio Jones.

The back will come out late on an angle route if Jones takes the underneath defenders with him. The defense can't cover everyone forever after all.

CONCLUSION

This will not be an easy game for either team, mostly because the two quarterbacks are very experienced and have a sound scheme working in their favor.

That being said, Atlanta relies much more on the run game than New England, especially on 1st down, and uses their agile receiver Mohammed Sanu to attack the soft spots in the secondary on 3rd down.

In order to win this game Atlanta must be able to work the middle of the field on 3rd down like they have all year, and get Sanu several touches. If the Falcons are forced to rely exclusively on Julio Jones, this works in New England's favor.

Atlanta is 4-0 this year when Jones is held to 35 or fewer receiving yards, but 4-4 when he has a big day of 100 yards or more.

As for New England, they need to find a matchup that works for them in both the pass game and the run game. Losing Gronkowski earlier in the year means that they've had to get more creative in the red zone, and that ultimately may mean the difference in this game.