

# NFL General Manager Daily Tasks

Eric Krusinski

## Introduction

One of my favorite video games is a text-based computer simulator called Front Office Football, which is produced by a small company called Solecismic. The game is a great precursor to this Football GM & Scouting course because it prepares you to think like a general manager and become cognizant of a general manager's responsibilities. This includes how to stay under the salary cap, how to work with players' agents or coaches' agents, how to work within the calendar year, and what players to retain versus which players to release. Also, the game taught me things like the high-priced free agent doesn't always generate wins and sometimes you need to let the younger players develop before releasing them. Consequently, in this report I need to act as a general manager. To do that, I will use the tools I learned from the Football GM & Scouting course, and I will apply the philosophies I picked up from playing Front Office Football.

As part of the course, I was required to select a team of focus to apply all my coursework, so I selected the Baltimore Ravens. As a result, most of this report will use the Baltimore Ravens as a reference.

## **General Manager Responsibilities**

Football general manager responsibilities may vary depending on the league and organization, but most responsibilities are related to football operations. These can be summarized as follows:

- Managing football operations personnel, such as coaches, scouts, administration, and analytics
- Making player transactions and organizing player salaries to fit in the salary cap
- Making decisions during the NFL draft, including player selections and trades
- Finalizing roster decisions throughout the entire year
  - Filling out the roster during training camp
  - Making cuts and other decisions before Week 1 of the regular season
  - Filling out the practice squad roster
  - Making adjustments throughout the season due to injuries and other situations
  - Making transactions in the offseason
- Conducting trades with other teams

This aligns with my team of focus, the Baltimore Ravens. General manager Eric DeCosta's responsibilities can be outlined based on time of the year and what year it is. During the football season, he needs to manage the roster and adjust for injuries and who's available outside of the team, whether it's through free agency or trade. In fact, the Ravens just made two trades before the deadline this year (2024), acquiring wide receiver Diontae Johnson from

Carolina and cornerback Tre'Davious White from the LA Rams. They also just acquired free agent cornerback Desmond King.

In the offseason, DeCosta's responsibility is to focus on his staff as well as his players. The staff, of course, include coaches, scouts, and other personnel. Lucky for DeCosta, in his career he never needed to replace his head coach John Harbaugh. The offensive coordinator, however, was replaced in 2023 from Greg Roman to Todd Monken, and the defensive coordinator was replaced twice during DeCosta's tenure--from Wink Martindale to Mike Macdonald in 2022 and from Mike Macdonald to Zach Orr in 2024 after Macdonald was hired as the head coach of the Seattle Seahawks.

Lots of attention is needed for players in the offseason too. Players are either signed, re-signed, traded, released, or allowed to explore via free agency. Of course, probably the biggest challenge in this regard during DeCosta's career was the re-signing of quarterback Lamar Jackson in 2023. One of the biggest concerns at the time was how they were going to compare with Deshaun Watson's contract with the Cleveland Browns, which was \$230 million fully guaranteed.

Of course, also in the offseason is the NFL Draft, so Eric DeCosta has the responsibility of preparing and participating in the draft, which also includes meeting and evaluating prospects.

## Goals for the Future of the Team

Broadly speaking, I believe a general manager's first goal should be to help the team become profitable. Of course, this speaks to the business side of the organization, but even if a general manager is not directly responsible for business-related activities, his job can certainly affect the profitability of the team.

With that, I would say the second goal is winning football games. (This is, perhaps, the best way for an organization to meet the first goal of making a profit based on football operations.) This is a goal at its core because some will say winning championships is a goal or getting to the postseason is a goal, but it all starts with winning football games. Furthermore, some owners will say that, for example, they want the team to finish with a top ten defense, but it's almost always acceptable if a team does not finish with a top ten defense yet still wins games.

Specifically for the Baltimore Ravens, owner Steve Bisciotti preaches consistency. He wants the Ravens to at least be in the playoff hunt every year so they avoid losing their identity as an elite team. (Reference: [Stephen J. Bisciotti](#)).

Along with consistency, I also think the Ravens believe in continuity. Currently, John Harbaugh is the second longest tenured head coach (17 years) in the NFL behind Pittsburgh's Mike Tomlin (18 years). And while Eric DeCosta has only been the general manager with the Ravens since 2019, he was the assistant general manager with the Ravens since 2012, and in

2007 he was told by Steve Bisciotti that he would be the next general manager once Ozzie Newsome retires. (Reference: [Ravens GM Eric DeCosta Always Gets His Man](#)) As a result, he was with the staff for another 12 years before advancing as the general manager, and almost his entire career was spent with the Ravens.

Personally, I agree with this philosophy of continuity and, basically, patience if the product does not turn out right the first time. When coaches and other personnel are retained for a number of years, you have that familiarity and stability. Plus, when turning over coaches and other personnel, there is a lot of extra work at the beginning of the next season to reset everything instead of just moving on ahead and making smaller changes here and there. Personally, I just believe that continuity keeps the team better organized, and it's better to work to improve with the current staff instead of replacing them.

Acting as the general manager for the Baltimore Ravens, I would try to retain as much of my staff as possible. Of course, this is fairly easy considering the team's overall success. One change I can see happening for the next season is if offensive coordinator Todd Monken moves on to take a head coaching role. There are rumors about this being discussed today. (Reference: [Ravens OC Todd Monken Downplays NFL HC Rumors: 'All I Control Is the Job I Have Here' | News, Scores, Highlights, Stats, and Rumors | Bleacher Report](#)) In that event, there may be the opportunity to promote from within the organization, but I would want to do my due diligence to make sure I interview and hire the right person the first time and try to maintain that continuity years later. Ron Wolf describes this in the book *The Packer Way*: 9

*Stepping Stones to Building a Winning Organization* by hiring the great ones instead of the good ones and taking as much extra time as needed to do so.

In regards to goals with respect to players, I am a big believer in building through the draft and trying to retain or re-sign as many of your current players as it makes sense. Once players complete their four or five-year rookie contracts, assuming they have a role on the team and assuming a new contract would be worth their value, I would rather re-sign them than take other players of equal value. This is because of familiarity and chemistry between the team and the player.

Also, I would prioritize those players that I think would be a core piece of my team for the future. With the example of the Baltimore Ravens, I know that Kyle Hamilton and Tyler Linderbaum will both be free agents in 2026, so as future cornerstones of the team, I would prioritize trying to renew their contracts.

As for 2025, the Ravens' top free agents include tackle Ronnie Stanley, offensive lineman Patrick Mekari, and fullback Patrick Ricard. The Ravens currently rank 25<sup>th</sup> in the NFL for cap space with just over \$17 million, so to keep up with my philosophy of trying to retain my own players, it will be difficult to re-sign these three players, let alone anyone else that can round out my roster for 2025. Furthermore, some of my cap space may be allocated into trying to renew the contracts of Kyle Hamilton and Tyler Linderbaum as mentioned above. I would like to at least try to keep Ronnie Stanley to solidify my offensive line, but even just signing him will

be difficult. I could make some moves to free up cap space. This could include releasing linebacker Kyle Van Noy, which would save a net of \$2,125,000, and possibly Mark Andrews, which would save a net of over \$5 million. I could also set safety Marcus Williams as a post-June 1<sup>st</sup> release, which would save a net of over \$5 million. Lastly, I could also restructure some contracts, such as for Lamar Jackson or Roquan Smith.

Releasing Mark Andrews would be risky since he has been a very reliable piece for the offense, and his release would incur almost \$6 million in dead money. They could wait it out one more year in 2026, when Andrews becomes a free agent, but if the Ravens want to try to retain Kyle Hamilton and/or Tyler Linderbaum, it will be riskier since their contracts are also up in 2026. A franchise tag or exclusive rights tag could be used, or in the case of Kyle Hamilton, the Ravens may be able to apply the fifth year option and wait yet another year to get him a better contract.

In regards to the Baltimore Ravens and the NFL Draft, I know the team believes in the “best player available” strategy (Reference: [Ravens GM Eric DeCosta explained his draft strategy: 'Best available player every single time' | Sporting News](#)) Of course, there are some limits to this, like they wouldn't draft a quarterback in the first round while they have 2-time MVP Lamar Jackson already on the team. Also, they tend to rank some positions higher, like cornerback, pass rusher, or left tackle. But generally, if they have several prospects graded similarly, they will go with the best player available.

I agree with the best player available strategy, but I don't think exceptions are that much of a concern during a draft. For example, if I have a Lamar Jackson on my roster and the best player available at my spot in the draft is a quarterback, I think players at other positions are so close in talent to that quarterback that it's really no difference if I take a quarterback or a player at a different position. Also, if there really is a big difference in talent between that quarterback and another player, I can always trade down.

### **Positions to Upgrade/Weaknesses to Address**

So far I have addressed the Baltimore Ravens' goals and philosophies (consistency in the playoff hunt, continuity in retaining their staff, and the best player available draft strategy), and I have addressed my own goals and philosophies as if I was the general manager. I haven't, though, addressed the weaknesses of the team and where the team needs to improve. I do believe that the team needs to focus on having the best talent regardless of position, but the roster needs to be filled out and areas of weakness do need to be addressed.

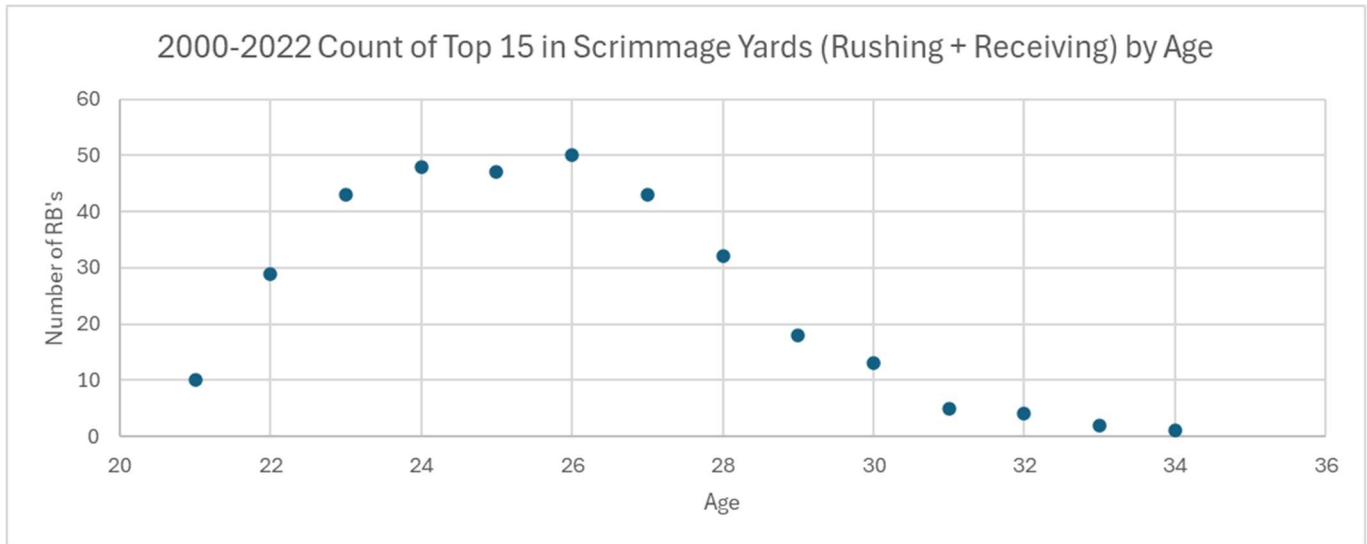
With the Baltimore Ravens, the first area I see that needs addressed is the pass defense. The defense as a whole is 26<sup>th</sup> in the NFL for points allowed. The rush defense is ranked 3<sup>rd</sup>, but the pass defense is ranked 32<sup>nd</sup>. Personnel-wise, Marlon Humphrey and Kyle Hamilton are still great in the secondary, each ranking 5<sup>th</sup> in PFF for their respective cornerback and safety positions. Nate Wiggins is struggling in his first year after being drafted in the first round, and Brandon Stephens is not doing him any favors as he's ranked 103 in PFF. Marcus Williams is ranked 86<sup>th</sup> out of 87 for free safeties. I did a scouting report on him, and I can agree to that



ranking as I was underwhelmed. He reacts well and has good overall awareness, but he clearly lacks playing speed and aggressiveness. As a result, he tends to be a step behind many players, and he'll overcompensate by playing a lot of deep coverage, which keeps him out of the play. This, then, supports what I stated earlier that Marcus Williams could be a good candidate as a post-June 1<sup>st</sup> release (and then save a net of over \$5 million in cap space).

The secondary, then, can certainly be an area that needs improvement. Although, I think I would like to give Nate Wiggins a little bit of time to develop since this is his first season. The pass rush can also improve too to help this pass defense. While the Ravens rank 3<sup>rd</sup> in the NFL for sacks, their pressure rate (hurries, knockdowns, and sacks per dropback) is ranked 19<sup>th</sup>, so that is an area that can help improve the passing defense.

Another area I believe that can be improved for the Ravens is running back. Derrick Henry in 2024 is having an incredible year, ranking 2<sup>nd</sup> in rushing yards and 1<sup>st</sup> in rushing touchdowns, but he is 30 years old and only signed up through 2025. I'm sure his contract was only done for two years because of his age. To illustrate how age correlates with a running back's performance, I did an analysis showing the top 15 running backs in terms of scrimmage yards per game (rushing yards plus receiving yards per game). I also did this for each of the years between 2000 and 2022, so a total of 345 running backs were reviewed (15 times 23 years). The graph below shows how many players at each age made it in the top 15 for any of these years. For example, there were 50 running backs that were 26 years old and made it in the top 15 for scrimmage yards per game.



In conclusion, Derrick Henry breaks the trend of running back performance at age 30, but his risk increases the older he gets.

### General Managers of Smaller Professional Leagues

Most of the content in this discussion is focused on the Baltimore Ravens and the NFL, so how does the role of the general manager differ for smaller leagues, like the IFL and NAL? I believe the goals are the same as I stated earlier. Goal #1 should be to make the team profitable, and goal #2 should be to win football games. There are two main differences, though, I can see between NFL general managers and general managers for smaller leagues. The first is that the staff on a non-NFL team is significantly smaller, so the general manager has directly more to do for his team. The second is player acquisition. The indoor professional leagues, in particular, often have open tryouts for players instead of drafts. Players will also usually sign just one-year contracts. Rosters, therefore, are basically reset year after year. Scouting, as a result, is minimal.

## **Next Steps to Entering a Career in Professional Football**

It takes a lot of work and experience to reach a level of general manager. Even Eric DeCosta had to work 22 years in various roles within the Ravens organization before becoming the general manager. As a result, my goal is to do something in statistics, analytics, and/or scouting. Moreover, as I picked up in the Football GM & Scouting course, I can do internships or start at entry level positions, such as a researcher position, to get to know more people in the business. Also, I can continue my work as a volunteer for the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Though I am not supposed to seek employment while volunteering, I will be immersed in football and still get to meet a lot of people.

As I discussed in an informational interview I had for the course, I learned that there are lots of opportunities to work in professional football outside the limited roles within the 32 teams of the NFL. Therefore, it looks like I have some options. Also, when I asked the person I was interviewing how I, an engineer, can enter the field of professional football, he suggested for me to leverage my engineering skills, be a good communicator, meet a lot of people, and maintain a contact list.