

Gearing Up For Fall

Like an NFL coach getting ready for the upcoming season, you as the Program Director should see yourself in the same situation---getting ready for the Fall book. The coach has his players united in their goal: a winning season which leads to the Super Bowl. You, the PD, are the coach of your team---the air staff; and must have them united in the goal of winning in the ratings. And since this column is 'Programming To Win,' what better time than now to run down your check list of 'things to do' going into the Fall book.

The Team

The NFL coach needs to know his players are conditioned to perform to the best of their abilities. Year round, the players are keeping fit lifting weights, running, etc. As camp opens, they go through plenty of agility drills, hitting, tackling, etc. The year round conditioning, in addition to drills during camp, have them fully prepared to compete during the upcoming season. If a coach were to put the players on the field with little or no conditioning, then you could expect their level of performance to be mediocre at best. Your air staff needs to be conditioned on a regular basis in order to maintain the highest level of performance. Air check sessions should be conducted with every member of the air staff. No matter if the air talent is fairly new to the team (rookie), or if they've been part of the staff for years (veteran), all of the air staff needs constant conditioning through coaching, feedback, and air check sessions. Just because the New England Patriots Tom Brady is running out of fingers to wear Super Bowl rings on, it doesn't mean he's exempt from any of the training and conditioning the other QBs must endure. Consistent reviews of your air talent's performance can only help their performance levels.

The QB

The NFL coach/QB relationship is something that helps guide the team. If this is a sour relationship, you can count on the attitude of the rest of the team falling right in step with these feelings. The stronger and more positive that relationship is, the better it will be for the whole team. The QB is often seen as the leader on and off the field. Consider your morning show the QB of your radio station air staff, while you, the PD, are the coach. Maintaining an open line of communication with your morning show is vital to the success of their show as well as the morale of the rest of the team/air staff. Keeping the morning show on track with the goals of the station, while accepting their input and feedback will help drive their enthusiasm and loyalty about being a part of your team/air staff.

Special Teams

What about the NFL special teams? These players are the utility members of the squad. They have their own specific roles as part of the kicking game, punt team, etc. From these special teams sometimes arise future stars of the starting line-up. It's for this reason these members of the team must be conditioned for game day, while also knowing the game plan and playbook well enough should they get thrown into the starting line-up. On your air staff, these are your weekend and swing air staff members. Keeping these jocks conditioned via air check sessions while also involving them in air staff meetings will

make them feel part of the team and prepare them for their opportunity to crack the starting line-up should a full time position open up.

The Trenches

It's been said in football, that games are won and lost in the trenches. Relating this to radio, many believe the ratings game can be won or lost on the streets. Is your station promotionally active in the community? How does your community involvement level compare to your competitors? Radio's ability to shine versus satellite and on-line competition can happen here. Get out in public with your station van and jocks. Create opportunities to build and strengthen that bond between your station and the listeners. While Arbitron's diary method is still being used, your station needs to be out there campaigning for listeners.

Game Plan

Successful NFL coaches have a game plan on how they'll achieve their specific goals of winning each game and advancing to the Super Bowl. Successful PDs also have a game plan on achieving their goals of winning with higher ratings. The game plan includes your station's promotions, production, and music.

Promotions should be geared towards your target audience. Keep the promotions entertaining for all listeners---the active participants as well as the listeners not actively participating. Plan ahead and maintain a calendar of dates for your promotions. Running too many promotions simultaneously will make your station sound cluttered.

Production/imaging needs to be kept fresh. Airing the same hourly ID's, sweepers, and promos will make your station sound predictable, stale, and boring. Treat your imaging as if it's a commercial with a schedule and kill date. Once it's run its flight of dates, get it off the air and bring in the next batch of imaging. Many stations, without an imaging director, will assign different areas of production to the on-air staff. For example, each week, the night jock produces 5 new top of hour ID's, the afternoon jock does 5 music sweep ID's, the midday jock handles 5 positioner/slogan ID's, etc.

And now, NFL coach/PD: what plays will you run? What plays will help you win this game---the ratings game. You've got your playbook---the music library. The music library has been well constructed using music research and advisory from your consultant. An NFL coach that runs the same plays in the same order is predictable, boring, and beatable. As the PD, you need to keep your music from being predictable. Push your music scheduling software to the limit and make sure you're getting the rotations out of it that you've designed with your clocks. Like the NFL coach that has special plays in the playbook, you can set up your scheduling software for those special plays from the 'oh wow' category, theme weekends, etc. Knowing your scheduling software inside and out will allow you to get the most out of your music library.

The Competition

NFL coaches know the strengths and weaknesses of their competition. Knowing this information allows the coach to develop the game plan. How well do you know the strengths and weaknesses of your competitors? Are you able to design a successful game plan based on this knowledge? In the past few years, expansion teams have been added to the NFL creating more competition. Your radio station's field of competition has had some expansion teams join on recently: satellite radio, internet radio, Ipods, etc. This is the highest level of competition your station has ever seen. It's time for you and your team to be at your best. Are you up for the challenge? Go team!