

# NFL Network Takes Viewers Beyond the Numbers at Combine

By: [Jason Dachman, Associate Editor](#) | Published: February 24, 2011

The NFL Scouting Combine is a sporting event unlike any other on television. It takes place in a stadium, yet there is no crowd. Every single aspect is timed or scored, yet there is no game clock and no scoreboard. And, this year, every player on the field will be performing for a draft (and a season, for that matter) that may not even happen, given the league's ongoing labor dispute. It is truly a unique telecast, and NFL Network's coverage this year will treat it accordingly.

"It's a private look into something that most people wouldn't be able to have access to otherwise," says Rod Conti, director of remote studio operations for NFL Network. "We try to give it that 'insider' feel that lets fans see behind the curtain. For the hardcore football fan, it doesn't get better than this."

Exclusive coverage on NFL Network and NFL.com kicks off on Thursday from Indianapolis's Lucas Oil Stadium, with more than 30 hours of live programming over six days. The opening two days feature player, coach, and GM press conferences as well as the network's NFL Total Access studio show on-site in Indianapolis. Live workout coverage will run Saturday through Tuesday.

**35 Cameras for 325 Players** NFL Network will roll out 35 cameras to cover the 325-plus NFL prospects on hand to prove their mettle leading up to the draft. Included in the camera complement are a host of handhelds, a full CableCam aerial system (in the traditional game-day setup), and Inertia Unlimited's X-Mo system (powered by Vision Research's new V642 Phantom cameras). Press conferences will be covered exclusively by robotic cameras.

Corplex Iridium, which NFL Network deploys for its Super Bowl Media Day and NFL Draft coverage, will serve as the lone mobile-production unit, running each NFL Network show as well as

supplying camera feeds to NFL.com.

“Every day, we’ve got different skills going on all at the same time. We’re building a Total Access show, and we’re building a presser show,” says Conti. “We do all this within one truck. So the biggest challenge is the rotation of the crews working these different shows in a single truck. That can be a serious task to juggle.”

**NFL Network Throws Uppercut at Combine**To facilitate this juggling act, NFL Network will use a Reality Check Uppercut production system. NFL.com uses the custom-built system, which Conti dubs “a truck in a box,” to produce its entire Combine show out of a B unit. NFL Network plans to use Uppercut to produce smaller shows, such as its press-conference coverage, to take some of the workload off its primary truck.

“We have the capability to run a full show outside of our truck through the Uppercut system,” says Conti. “Basically, it has a touchscreen switcher that allows the director to actually switch between cameras, run transition graphics, bring up lower thirds, and so on — all from a one-stop station. It allows us the option of doing one of the smaller shows while we’re prepping another show.”

**Beyond the 40 Time**The most interesting addition to NFL Network’s coverage will be the debut of Under Armour’s E39 shirt, which is equipped with an in-chest sensor that monitors an athlete’s physical exertion (heart rate, breath rate, etc.) and features a triaxial accelerometer (which measures the G-force of a player’s acceleration as well as other data). This information is sent to an NFL Network laptop via Bluetooth technology and then onto Iridium, where it is incorporated into the telecast graphically.

“For the 40-yard dash, it will start with a breath rate before the run, then will look at it during the run, after the run, and during recovery time,” says Conti. “We can then take that information and build it graphically.”

More than a dozen prospects will be outfitted with the shirt, with NFL Network focusing on a handful of prospects each day.

**More Toys**In addition to the Under Armour bodysuit, NFL Network will deploy its Simulcam and QB Tracking features.

Simulcam, primarily used for the 40-yard dash, uses background recognition and camera-matching technology to overlay the image of each prospect's dash on top of another. This provides the viewer with an in-depth visual comparison of the athletes competing ([click here](#) for video of Simulcam in action).

QB Tracking records the distance thrown, ball velocity, and time it takes to go from the hand of the quarterback to that of the wide receiver. NFL Network's graphics package ingests the data and displays it graphically for viewers.

**Broadcast, Online Continue To Converge**NFL.com essentially operates its own independent production at the combine, bringing its own reporters and arsenal of Panasonic P2 cameras to Lucas Oil Stadium as well as cutting its entire show via the Reality Check Uppercut system. However, NFL.com does incorporate NFL Network feeds from Iridium into its live stream and has begun to cross over with the television side more and more.

"NFL.com is its own independent production in many ways, but they still depend on a lot from the game truck," says Conti. "We're working closer and closer together with NFL.com. We are two different entities in terms of how TV and .com operate technically, but we find a way to incorporate them. As we do more and more events, we see it more as a single [production]. With that, comes learning each other's language in terms of how we operate."