From Worst to First? What the Data Says About the Giants' Harbaugh Hire

A data-driven look at how New York fell apart and what John Harbaugh can actually fix

---

It's Official

After 64 hours of intense negotiations, John Harbaugh put pen to paper Saturday afternoon, signing a 5-year, $100 million contract to become the New York Giants' head coach. The deal makes him one of the NFL's highest-paid coaches at roughly $20 million per year, tied with Andy Reid, the 3x Super Bowl champion and head coach of the Kansas City Chiefs.

In a historic restructuring of power, Harbaugh will report directly to owner John Mara rather than general manager Joe Schoen, the first time in franchise history that a head coach has bypassed the GM in the organizational hierarchy. After meeting with Giants brass Wednesday night, Harbaugh canceled his scheduled interview with the Tennessee Titans, effectively ending the coaching carousel for the league's most coveted candidate.

The press conference is scheduled for Tuesday afternoon. But the real question isn't about introductions or pleasantries. It's this: Can a Super Bowl-winning coach with an 18-year track record of sustained success fix the NFL's second-worst franchise since 2016?

The data says yes. And here's why.

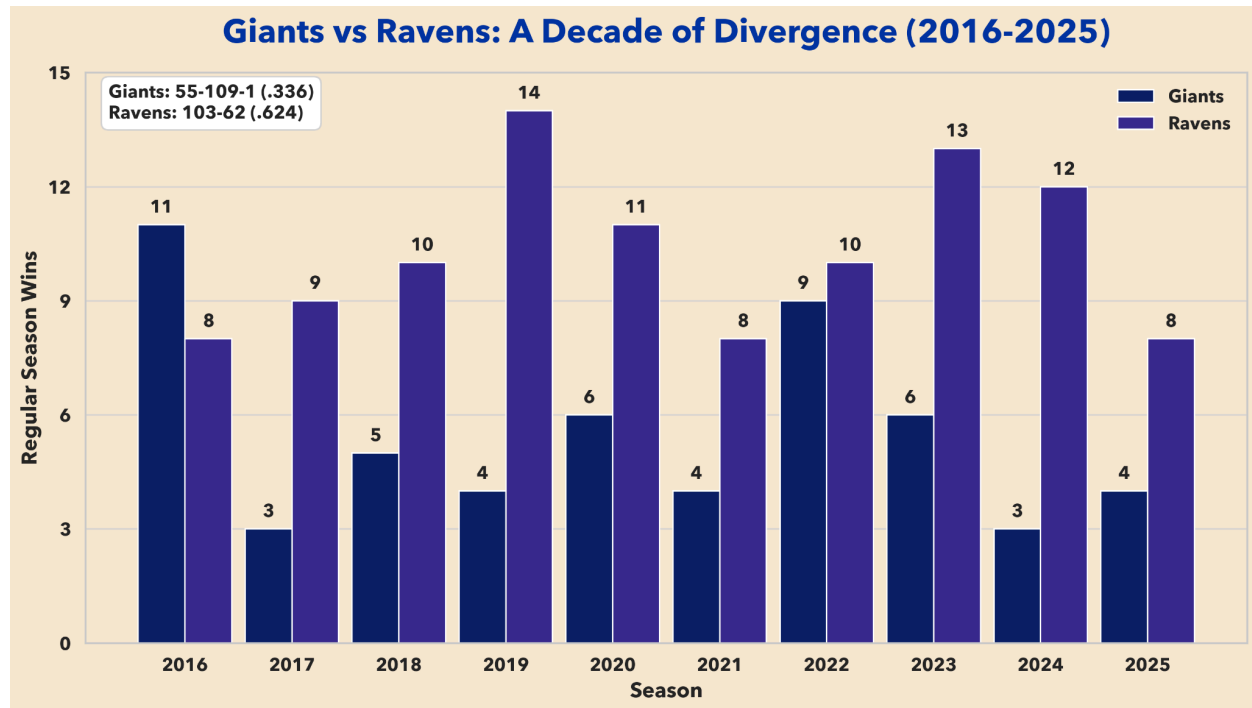## PART 1: A DECADE OF DYSFUNCTION

The Brutal Record (2016-2025)

Since 2016, the New York Giants have posted a 55-109-1 record, a .336 win percentage ranking second-worst in the NFL. Only the New York Jets (49-116) have been worse.

The collapse in numbers:

- 8 seasons with 10+ losses in the last 9 years
- 2 playoff appearances in a decade, only one playoff win in 2022
- 0 division titles since 2011 (longest active NFC drought at 14 seasons)
- 55 regular season wins since 2016 (second-fewest in the league)

By comparison, John Harbaugh's Ravens went 103-64 (.624) over the same 2016-2025 span, with 7 playoff appearances and sustained excellence.

Giants vs Ravens: A Decade of Divergence (2016-2025)

Giants: 55-109-1 (.336)
Ravens: 103-62 (.624)

The Coaching Carousel Disaster

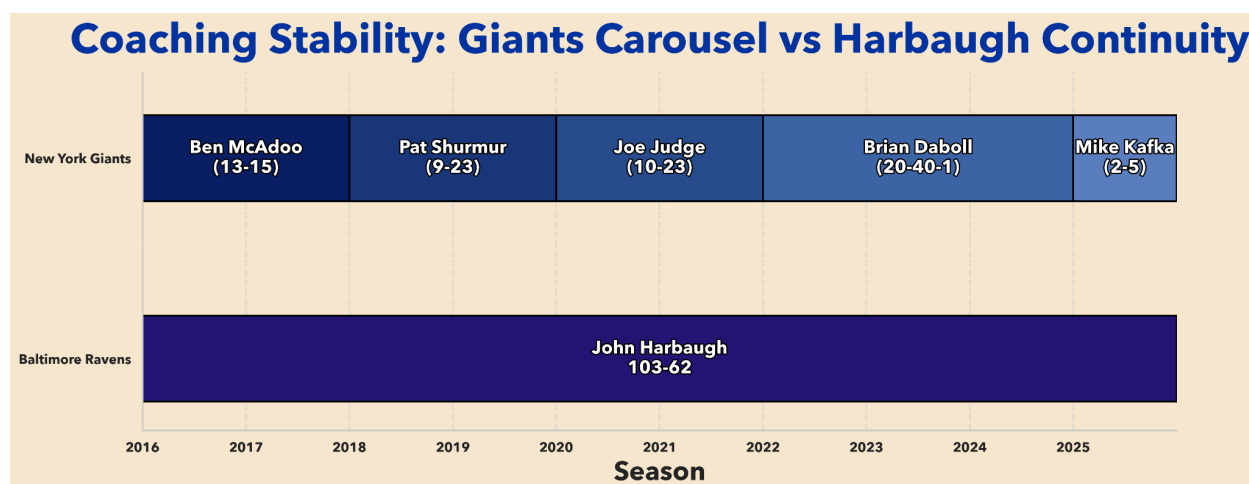Since Tom Coughlin resigned after 2015, the Giants employed 5 full-time head coaches:

Ben McAdoo (2016-2017): 13-15 record. Fired midseason after benching Eli Manning, ending his 210-game starting streak and fracturing the locker room.

Pat Shurmur (2018-2019): 9-23 record. The offense never found identity, the defense regressed, and the team showed no competitiveness in a weak NFC East.

Joe Judge (2020-2021): 10-23 record. Hired for "Patriots Way" discipline, Judge presided over a historically incompetent offense, including a Week 18 QB sneak on 3rd-and-9 inside the team's own 10-yard line. That pretty much summed up his tenure's dysfunction.

Brian Daboll (2022-2025): 20-40-1 record. Daboll was able make playoffs Year 1 (9-7-1), won a wild card game, and won coach of the year. After that, well, let's just say it did not go in the right direction. The former Bills offensive coordinator was fired midseason in 2025 after losing the locker room.

Mike Kafka (2025, Interim): Kafka, former QB-coach for the Kansas City Chiefs, took over for Daboll and led the team to a record of 2-5 to close the season.

Coaching Stability: Giants Carousel vs Harbaugh Continuity

New York Giants: Ben McAdoo (13-15), Pat Shurmur (9-23), Joe Judge (10-23), Brian Daboll (20-40-1), Mike Kafka (2-5)

Baltimore Ravens: John Harbaugh 103-62

For some context: Harbaugh coached 18 consecutive seasons with 1 team, posting just 3 losing records. Stability matters. The Giants had none.

Where the Giants Failed: Critical Execution

The Giants' problems weren't talent deficiency. They were execution failures in critical moments.
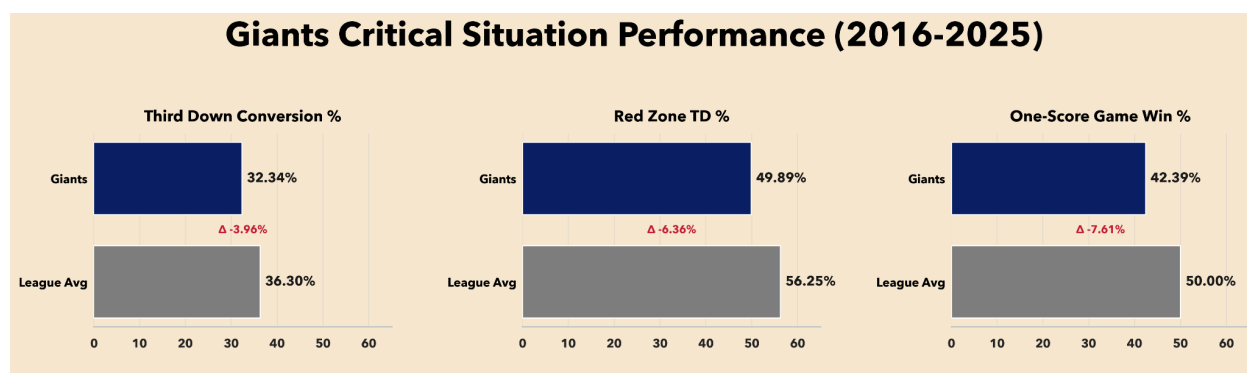
Third Down Efficiency (2016-2025):

- Giants conversion rate: 32.34%
- League average: 36.30%
- League rank: 31st
- Impact: ~13.8 failed drives per season that should have continued (0.69 wins lost annually)

Red Zone Touchdown Rate (2016-2025):

- Giants TD rate: 49.89%
- League average: 56.25%
- League rank: 30th
- Impact: ~20.6 additional field goals vs touchdowns per season (82.4 points, or 2.0 wins lost annually)

One-Score Game Record (2016-2025):

- Giants record: 39-53 (42.39%)
- League average: ~50%
- Expected wins at league average: 46.0
- Actual wins: 39
- Gap: 7.0 wins lost to poor execution and game management

Giants Critical Situation Performance (2016-2025)

Third Down Conversion %
- Giants: 32.34%
- Δ -3.96%
- League Avg: 36.30%

Red Zone TD %
- Giants: 49.89%
- Δ -6.36%
- League Avg: 56.25%

One-Score Game Win %
- Giants: 42.39%
- Δ -7.61%
- League Avg: 50.00%

The Hidden Story: The Giants' average point differential in losses (2020-2025): 12.60 points. They weren't getting blown out. They were losing winnable games. Of all Giants games over this span, 54.8% were decided by 1 score. This isn't a talent problem. This is a coaching problem.
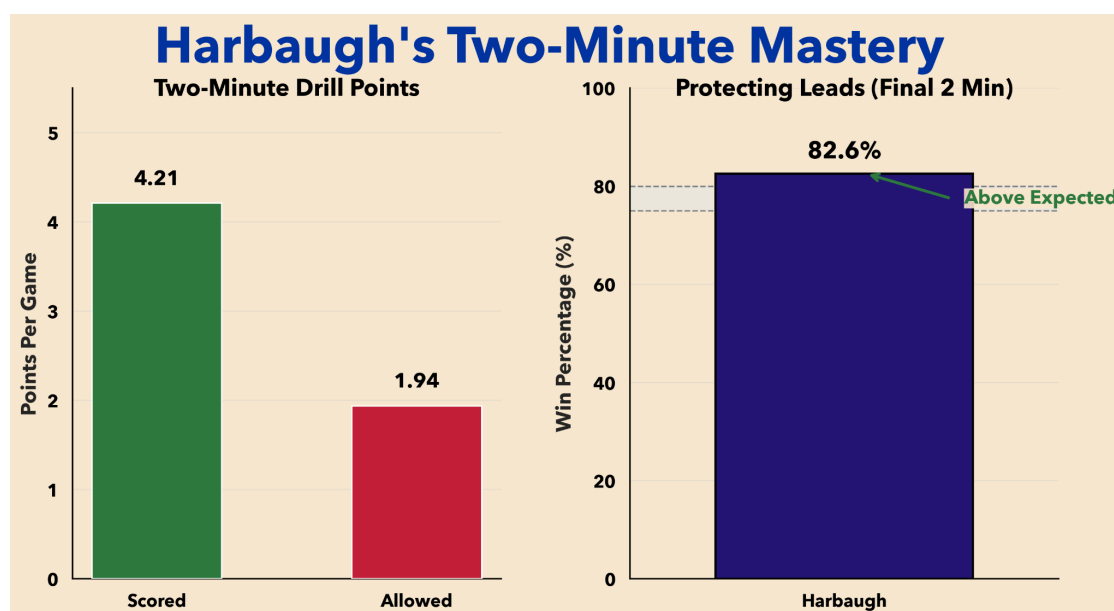

PART 2: THE HARBAUGH SOLUTION

Elite Game Management

John Harbaugh brings 18 years of evidence that he excels where New York failed.

Two-Minute Execution:

- Points scored (final 2 minutes of halves): 4.21 per game
- Points allowed (final 2 minutes): 1.94 per game
- Win rate protecting leads (final 2 minutes): 82.6% (above expected 75-80% range)

Harbaugh's Two-Minute Mastery

Two-Minute Drill Points
- Scored: 4.21
- Allowed: 1.94

Protecting Leads (Final 2 Min)
- Harbaugh: 82.6% (Above Expected)

By contrast, the 2025 Giants blew leads of 10+ points five times. Harbaugh specializes in finishing.

Situational Excellence:

Fourth-Down Aggression (2018-2024):

- Harbaugh conversion rate: 44.08%
- Giants conversion rate: 40.47%

The gap represents countless stalled drives and missed opportunities

Timeout Management:

- Average timeouts remaining (end of Q1/Q3): 2.79
- Harbaugh saves timeouts for high-leverage situations: two-minute drills and critical end-game moments

Penalty Discipline:

- Ravens average: 6.39 penalties per game
- League average: ~6.21 penalties per game
- Reflects accountability culture translating to on-field execution

The math is simple: poor game management costs the Giants 4-5 wins annually. Harbaugh's track record suggests he'll recapture most immediately.

The Lamar Jackson Development Blueprint

Lamar Jackson was drafted 32nd overall in 2018, the 5th quarterback taken. Scouts questioned his passing ability. Draft experts suggested he switch positions.
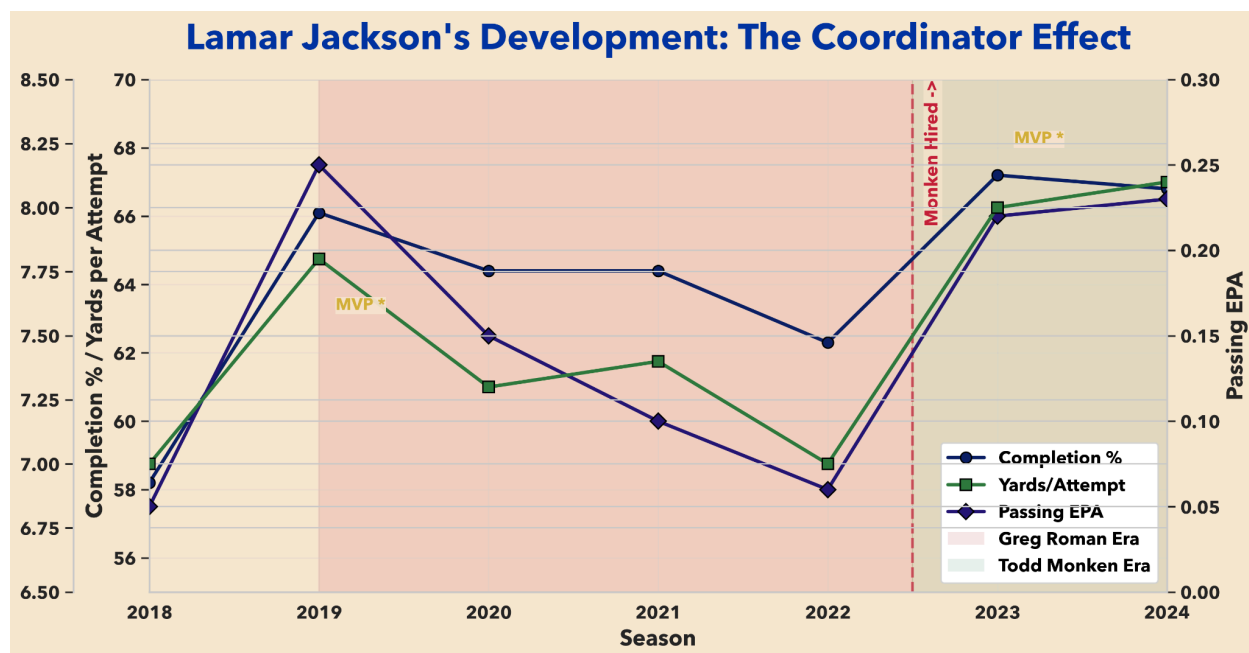
Harbaugh's methodical development plan:

Year 1 (2018): Limited role, 7 starts, 6-1 record. Carefully managed exposure while learning the offense.

Year 2 (2019): MVP season. Harbaugh redesigned the offense around Jackson's strengths: run-heavy scheme with designed QB runs and RPOs. Jackson threw 36 TDs against 6 INTs.

Years 3-4 (2020-2022): Defensive adjustments exposed passing weaknesses. Yards per attempt dropped to 6.63, completion percentage fell to 58.23%, offense stagnated under Greg Roman.

Years 5-6 (2023-2024): Harbaugh fired Roman, hired Todd Monken. Jackson's passing EPA more than doubled from 0.061 to 0.220, completion percentage jumped to 62.38%, yards per attempt reached 7.83. Second MVP in 2023.

Lamar Jackson's Development: The Coordinator Effect

QB Development for Jaxson Dart

The centerpiece of the Giants' future is Jaxson Dart, the 25th overall pick in 2025, who showed flashes of brilliance and stretches of inconsistency during his rookie season.

Dart's Promising Rookie Season:

Dart led all first-year quarterbacks in total touchdowns, passer rating, and rushing yards. He finished in the top 10 among all NFL quarterbacks in QBR 3 separate weeks across his 12 starts, demonstrating elite upside even as the team crumbled around him.

2025 Stats:

- 63.7% completion percentage
- 2,272 passing yards
- 15 passing touchdowns, 5 interceptions
- 487 rushing yards, 9 rushing touchdowns

His dual-threat skill set mirrors young Lamar: explosive rushing ability, dynamic playmaking, inconsistent passing mechanics needing development.

The Harbaugh-Dart Connection:

Before accepting the job, Harbaugh spent 2+ hours one-on-one with Dart, evaluating arm talent, football IQ, work ethic, and coachability. Sources indicate Dart's presence was a major factor in Harbaugh's decision.

With Todd Monken expected to join as offensive coordinator, the Giants are bringing the infrastructure that transformed Lamar into a complete quarterback. Monken's scheme increased Baltimore's offensive EPA by 30% (2023-2025) and will be tailored to Dart's strengths while developing his weaknesses.

This isn't a 63-year-old coach stuck in his ways. This is a proven quarterback developer who reinvented his entire offensive philosophy at age 56 and again at 60.
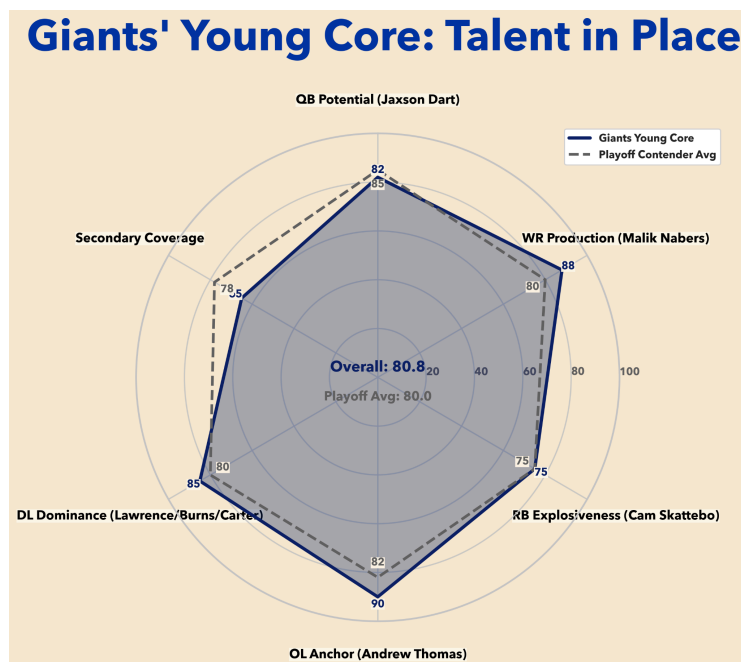
Building the Culture

Defensive Foundations:

When paired with the right coordinator, Harbaugh fields elite defenses. In 2023, under Mike Macdonald, the Ravens ranked #1 in points allowed with a defensive EPA of -0.082. The system generated pressure at 22.5% despite dropping the blitz rate to just 20.3%.

The Giants have talent: Dexter Lawrence (premier interior defender), Brian Burns (16.5 sacks in 2025), and rookie Abdul Carter (5th overall pick, 2025). The problem isn't entirely personnel. It's scheme and consistency, exactly what Harbaugh specializes in fixing.

Young Core Already in Place:

- Jaxson Dart: franchise quarterback
- Malik Nabers: elite young receiver (109 catches, 1,204 yards, 7 TDs as rookie)
- Cam Skattebo: dynamic Day 2 rushing threat
- Andrew Thomas: one of league's best left tackles
- 5th overall pick (2026 draft): ammunition to add another blue-chip talent

Giants' Young Core: Talent in Place

Harbaugh's Specialty:

In 2008, Harbaugh inherited a 5-11 Ravens team and went 11-5 in Year 1. He didn't rebuild. He installed a culture of accountability, competitive stamina, and attention to detail that immediately translated to wins.

The 2026 Giants are in a similar position. The pieces exist, just poorly managed and unable to execute in critical moments. Harbaugh's $100 million contract and direct reporting line to ownership signal organizational dysfunction is over.

PART 3: THE WARNING SIGNS

The Playoff Problem

For all Harbaugh's regular-season excellence, the postseason haunts his resume. In 8 seasons with Lamar Jackson, Harbaugh went 3-6 in playoffs, never advancing past the AFC Championship Game.

The Ravens led the NFL in point differential 3 times with Jackson, demolishing opponents September through December. But when January arrived, dominance evaporated.

Key Playoff Heartbreaks:

2024 Divisional Round vs Buffalo (27-25 loss): Trailing 27-19 with 1:33 left, Jackson drove 88 yards for a touchdown. Down 27-25, needing a 2-point conversion to tie, Jackson found tight end Mark Andrews wide open near the goal line. The ball hit Andrews in the hands. He dropped it. Season over.

2023 AFC Championship vs Kansas City (17-10 loss): Down 17-7, rookie Zay Flowers caught a pass at the Chiefs' 7-yard line and dove for the end zone. L'Jarius Sneed punched the ball out inches from the goal line. Kansas City recovered in the end zone for a touchback. Baltimore's best chance evaporated.

These aren't coaching failures in the traditional sense. They're execution breakdowns at the worst possible moments. But after 8 years, the pattern is undeniable.

For the Giants, this creates interesting calculus. They haven't made the playoffs since 2022, and have only reached the postseason twice since they last won the Superbowl in 2012. They need to reach January before worrying about winning in January. But any honest evaluation must acknowledge regular-season dominance hasn't translated to championships in over a decade.
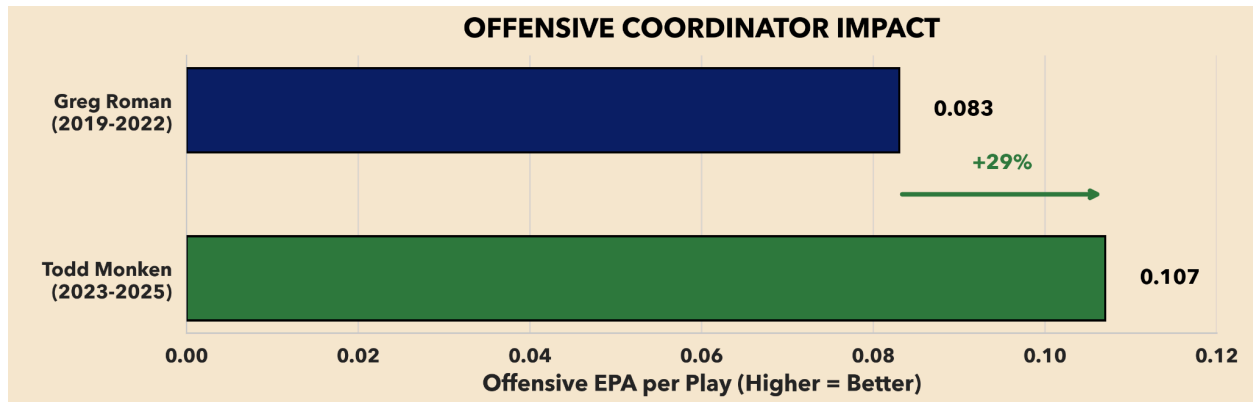
The Coordinator Question

Harbaugh's success is increasingly tied to coordinator quality.
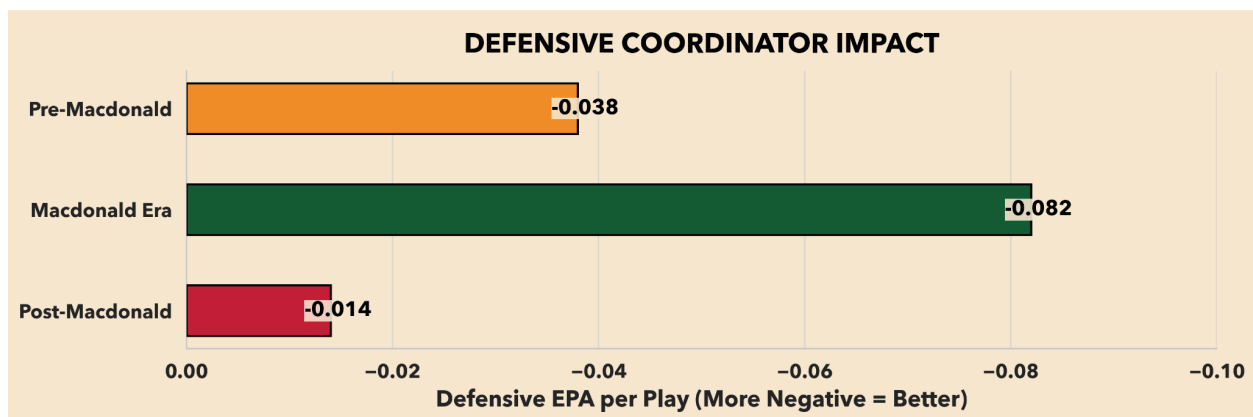
Offensive Coordinators:

- Under Greg Roman (2019-2022): 0.083 EPA, stagnant passing (6.2 yards per attempt)

- Under Todd Monken (2023-2025): 0.107 EPA (30% improvement), passing EPA doubled from 0.065 to 0.133

OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR IMPACT

	Offensive EPA per Play (Higher = Better)
Greg Roman (2019-2022)	0.083
Todd Monken (2023-2025)	0.107

+29%

Defensive Coordinators:

- Under Mike Macdonald (2022-2023): -0.082 EPA, #1 in points allowed
- Post-Macdonald (2024-2025): -0.014 EPA (barely above average)
- Impact: ~0.068 EPA per play difference, or ~4.3 points per game

DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR IMPACT

	Defensive EPA per Play (More Negative = Better)
Pre-Macdonald	-0.038
Macdonald Era	-0.082
Post-Macdonald	-0.014

The Giants have an advantage: they can bring Monken for offensive continuity. But they must hire an elite defensive coordinator. The data shows Harbaugh needs the right architects to execute schemes.

The risk? Harbaugh's loyalty to assistants reportedly became a pressure point in his Baltimore dismissal. He refused to consider moving on from Monken despite organizational concerns. For the Giants, this loyalty could be strength (continuity) or weakness (refusing necessary changes).

The Age Factor

At 63, Harbaugh is the oldest coach to take over a new team in recent memory. Concerns: energy, scheme modernity, connecting with young players.

But the data tells a different story. Harbaugh reinvented his offensive philosophy at 56 (Lamar Jackson), then at 60 fired a coordinator who won 43 regular-season games in 4 years because the offense stagnated.

The willingness to evolve, to blow up what worked before in pursuit of what works now, suggests age hasn't calcified his thinking. Few coaches make such dramatic philosophical shifts in their 60s. Harbaugh has done it repeatedly.

The Close Game Reality

Harbaugh's record in 1-score games reveals an uncomfortable truth: he's great with talent, average without it.

From 2008-2017:

- Overall 1-score record: 45-47 (48.9%)
- With elite rosters (2010-2011): 13-8 (61.5%)
- With mediocre talent (2015-2017): 8-11 (42.1%)

When Harbaugh had Ray Lewis, Ed Reed, and a dominant defense, he turned close games into wins through superior execution. When the roster declined during the rebuild, he couldn't manufacture victories from thin air.

The 2025 Giants went 1-7 in 1-score games, catastrophic. They have young talent in Dart, Nabers, and a strong defensive line, but that talent is raw and undeveloped.

The key insight: Harbaugh + developed talent = elite. Harbaugh + raw talent = question mark.

The Giants are betting Dart develops like Lamar, Nabers becomes a true #1 receiver, and the defense coalesces under a competent coordinator. If those things happen, Harbaugh's track record suggests dominance. If they don't, the close game curse could persist.
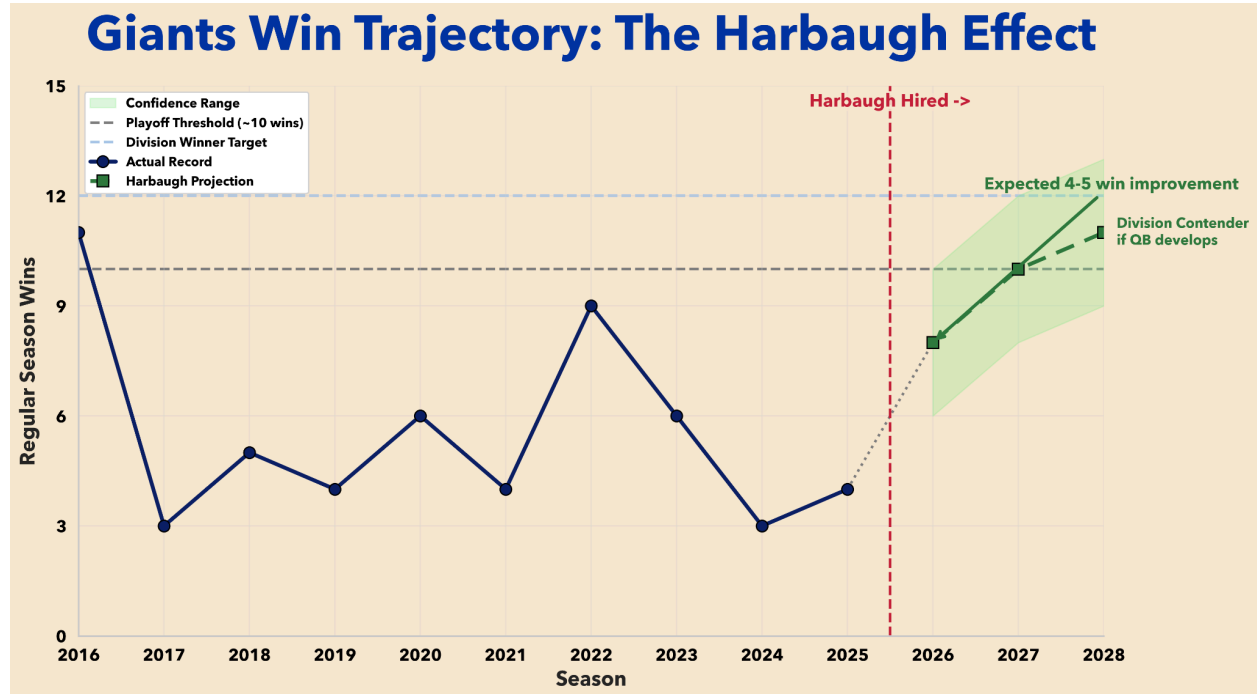

CONCLUSION: THE VERDICT

The data makes the case: the Giants' problems are fixable. Game management, quarterback development, and organizational culture are Harbaugh's specialties. When paired with talent, he excels in all three areas.

The young core is in place: Dart at quarterback, Nabers at receiver, Skattebo in the backfield, elite defensive line anchored by Lawrence, Burns, and Carter. The historic organizational commitment (direct access to ownership, 5-year runway) signals this isn't another quick fix.

Realistic Year 1 projection: 8-9 wins, playoff contention. The data suggests a 4-5 win improvement is achievable immediately through better game management and situational execution alone.

Year 2-3: Division contender if Dart develops like Lamar Jackson did.

This isn't a rebuild. It's a culture reset with pieces already in place.

Giants Win Trajectory: The Harbaugh Effect

The stakes: The Giants haven't won a division title since 2011 (14-year drought, longest active in NFC). They've had 2 winning seasons in 13 years and 5 head coaches in a decade. The Harbaugh hire is the organization's best chance to break the cycle.

The numbers say it can work. The more than $100 million investment says ownership believes it. Now we'll see if the execution matches the analytics.