

Cal's Experiment in Football Crowdsourcing --- How the Golden Bears use input from a network of 250 high-school coaches

Clegg, Jonathan . Wall Street Journal , Eastern edition; New York, N.Y. [New York, N.Y.]19 Sep 2015: A.9.

[ProQuest document link](#)

ABSTRACT

Every Monday evening during the football season, Tony Franklin, the offensive coordinator for the Cal Golden Bears, closes his office door, kicks back in his chair and hosts a conference call. How Franklin got plugged into an exclusive community of high-school coaches dates back to his first post as a college-football offensive coordinator at Kentucky in 2000.

FULL TEXT

Every Monday evening during the football season, Tony Franklin, the offensive coordinator for the Cal Golden Bears, closes his office door, kicks back in his chair and hosts a conference call. On the other end of the line: 250 top high-school coaches from all over the country.

These sessions started as a way for aspiring coaches to seek advice from one of the most innovative offensive minds in football. Franklin's Cal offense has already racked up 108 total points in just two games this season. But in recent years, a funny thing has happened. Franklin has started using the coaches as a sounding board for his own wild ideas.

"He has an open dialogue with some of the most creative coaches in America," explains Cal head coach Sonny Dykes, Franklin's boss. "He's talking to them all the time, which gives us ideas and helps us stay ahead of the curve."

"I get to interact with these guys every week," Franklin said of his Monday focus group. "No other college coach would have the time."

The ideas that come out of these sessions have included everything from how to run against a particular defensive alignment to the most efficient way for the offensive line to communicate blitz calls. Paul Rorke, who led Syosset High School to the Long Island championship, recalled one occasion when Cal was preparing to face an All-American defensive end.

"Tony was talking about what he was thinking and then someone from Lexington, Kentucky would say this is what we've done in that situation," Rorke said. "That spurs another comment from someone else and all of sudden, you have a solution for almost any problem."

At a time when innovation in football increasingly flows upstream from high schools to colleges and then to the NFL, Franklin has found a way to tap the wisdom of the masses. Like seemingly every new enterprise coming out of San Francisco's Bay Area these days, Cal has found success by crowdsourcing.

How Franklin got plugged into an exclusive community of high-school coaches dates back to his first post as a college-football offensive coordinator at Kentucky in 2000. It lasted just a single season before the entire Wildcats coaching staff was replaced following a 2-9 record and amid allegations of NCAA improprieties.

Unsure if he would ever call plays in college again, Franklin set himself up as a consultant, installing the "Air Raid" offense at high schools across the country.

Now, 15 years on, Franklin remains president of Tony Franklin System, the company he set up to teach high-school coaches how to run his up-tempo, pass-happy scheme. But what was once a way for Franklin to make a living as he waited for another shot as a college coordinator has since become an unrivalled resource of information.

"There's nothing that one of them hasn't seen, so when a situation comes up, they can tell us what they did and whether it worked," Franklin said. "The high-school coaches are kind of like guinea pigs."

On some occasions, Franklin has even taken entirely new plays from these coaches and put them straight into his own gameplan. While coaching under Dykes at Louisiana Tech, a high-school coach from Oklahoma described a variation of the classic trick play known as the "Statue of Liberty" where the quarterback runs a draw play.

"I loved the idea of it and I hadn't seen it in forever," Franklin said. In their next game against Boise State, Franklin dialed up that same play four times. "We actually named the play after that high school in Oklahoma. But that's why I love it – these coaches are so creative."

Franklin currently has roughly 250 clients, who pay between \$1,595 and \$2,995 in annual membership fees. In exchange, they not only have the chance to ask Franklin questions about play-calling or for advice on upcoming opponents. They also have access to almost every element of his offense, from passing drills and practice plans to his entire offensive playbook.

Coaches are invited to attend spring training at Cal, take in scrimmages from the sideline and even sit in on position meetings. The only thing Franklin doesn't share is the team's specific offensive signals.

What makes this arrangement so unique is that it relies on the open exchange of ideas and information. In the secretive world of football coaching, where snap counts are treated like nuclear launch codes, this sort of transparency is unprecedented. "Even as a high-school coach, it took some getting used to," said W.C. Mephram High School coach Anthony Cracco. "To have these guys all sharing ideas and giving each other advice, it's a totally different way of doing things."

But Dykes, the Cal head coach, is adamant that sharing details of the Golden Bears offense poses few risks. "Somebody may buy the package, watch all the film over the summer and come up with the gameplan to stop us," he said. "But every game we've ever coached is on film. There's too much paranoia in this business."

Besides, Dykes notes, the benefits of Franklin's community of coaches aren't limited to ideas. The relationships Cal has fostered with high-school coaches are useful in recruiting and evaluating players from those schools is easier since they are already running Cal's offense. "We can see them doing what we want them to do," Dykes said.

In some cases, it can even help with recruitment. When Cal had an opening for an offensive assistant this summer, Dykes hired former Concord High School coach Brian Hamilton, a longtime TFS client.

Not everyone is welcome to join Franklin's fraternity of coaches, however. Shortly after moving to Cal in 2013, he received a membership application from one of the few clients with whom he wasn't all that interested in trading ideas.

"One of the other schools in the Pac-12 had one of their graduate assistants try to sign up," Franklin said. "They didn't even try to hide who they were – they used their real name and a credit card from the school. We didn't sell it to them, of course, but I almost wish I could've got their feedback. I'll take ideas from anyone."

Credit: By Jonathan Clegg

DETAILS

Subject:	Coaches & managers; Crowdsourcing; College football – University of California-Berkeley
Company / organization:	Name: University of California-Berkeley; NAICS: 611310
Publication title:	Wall Street Journal, Eastern edition; New York, N.Y.
Pages:	A.9
Publication year:	2015
Publication date:	Sep 19, 2015
Section:	Sports
Publisher:	Dow Jones & Company Inc
Place of publication:	New York, N.Y.
Country of publication:	United States, New York, N.Y.
Publication subject:	Business And Economics--Banking And Finance
ISSN:	00999660
Source type:	Newspapers
Language of publication:	English
Document type:	Feature
ProQuest document ID:	1713723539
Document URL:	https://search.proquest.com/newspapers/cals-experiment-football-crowdsourcing-how-golden/docview/1713723539/se-2?accountid=7098

Copyright: (c) 2015 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. Reproduced with permission of copyright owner. Further reproduction or distribution is prohibited without permission.

Last updated: 2020-11-19

Database: ABI/INFORM Global

LINKS

[Linking Service](#)

Database copyright © 2021 ProQuest LLC. All rights reserved.

[Terms and Conditions](#) [Contact ProQuest](#)