

SCREAMING EAGLE

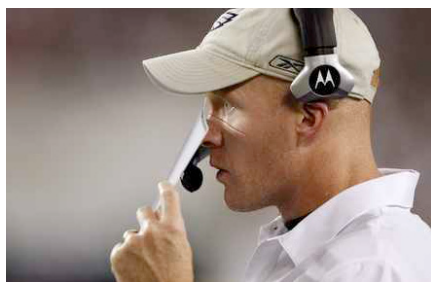


The super-abridged guide to an utterly aggravating season

By Ed Barkowitz

AND SO WE PUT HIM IN A POSITION TO COLLECT UNEMPLOYMENT

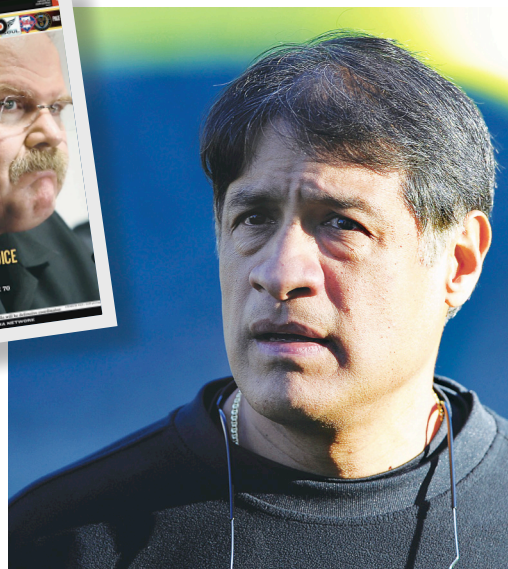
In January 2010, following the playoff loss to the Packers, Andy Reid gives a ringing endorsement of defensive coordinator Sean McDermott, calling him "a tremendous worker, a very smart individual ... [who] put us in a position to win football games." Five days later, McDermott is fired.



DAVID A. MAIALETTI / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

HERE'S MUDD IN HIS EYE

In February, after hiring offensive line guru Howard Mudd, Reid names former offensive line coach Juan Castillo as the new defensive coordinator, a position Castillo hasn't held since he coached high school football more than 20 years ago. With a protracted lockout looming — and the threat of lost minicamps and a shortened training camp a real possibility even in February — the move mystifies fans, players, and NFL execs.



MICHAEL PEREZ / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

LINEBACKER WHO?

Thoughtfully offering up an easy target for those who love to cite the Eagles ineptitude at linebacker during his tenure, Reid has rookie linebacker Casey Matthews join the first team in training camp. Matthews starts the first three games, but clearly isn't ready for prime time.



YONG KIM / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



YONG KIM / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

THE NFL'S GREATEST TEAM. OF JULY.

A day after trading Kevin Kolb for cornerback Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie, the Eagles stun the NFL by signing prize free-agent cornerback Nnamdi Asomugha. The team also signs free agents Vince Young, Ronnie Brown, Steve Smith, Cullen Jenkins and Jason Babin.

APPROPRIATELY ENOUGH, EVEN THE GOOD THINGS WERE SHADY

In the first game of the year, against the Rams, Eagles running back LeSean McCoy gives the first taste of what will be a monster season for him. He gains 122 yards in a win in St. Louis.



DAVID A. MAIALETTI / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

SINCE IT WORKED OUT SO WELL FOR THE MIAMI HEAT...

New backup quarterback Young declares that the Eagles have put together a "Dream Team," a label the team would come to wear as comfortably as a double-breasted piano.

PROVING THAT VINCE YOUNG ISN'T THE ONLY EAGLE WHO CAN'T THROW

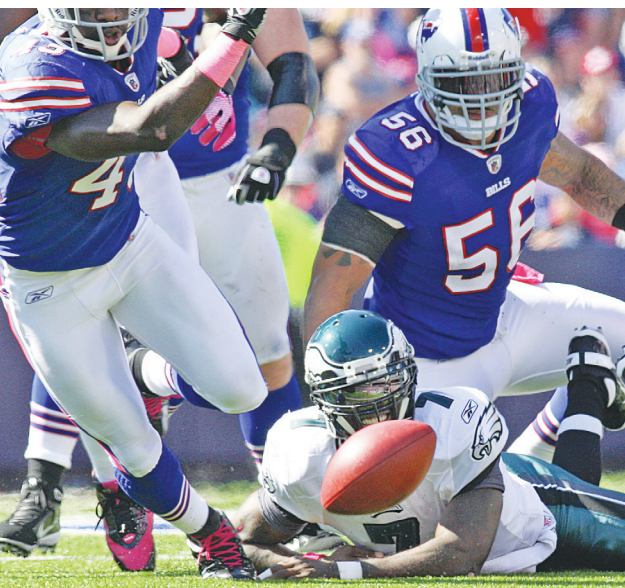
In early October, during a disappointing loss to the 49ers, running back Ronnie Brown tries something that looks suspiciously like a backward pass as he's being tackled at the goal line. The Niners recover the ball and go on to erase a 20-point Eagles lead. The "pass" becomes Brown's — and the season's — Bill Buckner moment.



SARAH J. GLOVER / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



SCREAMING EAGLE



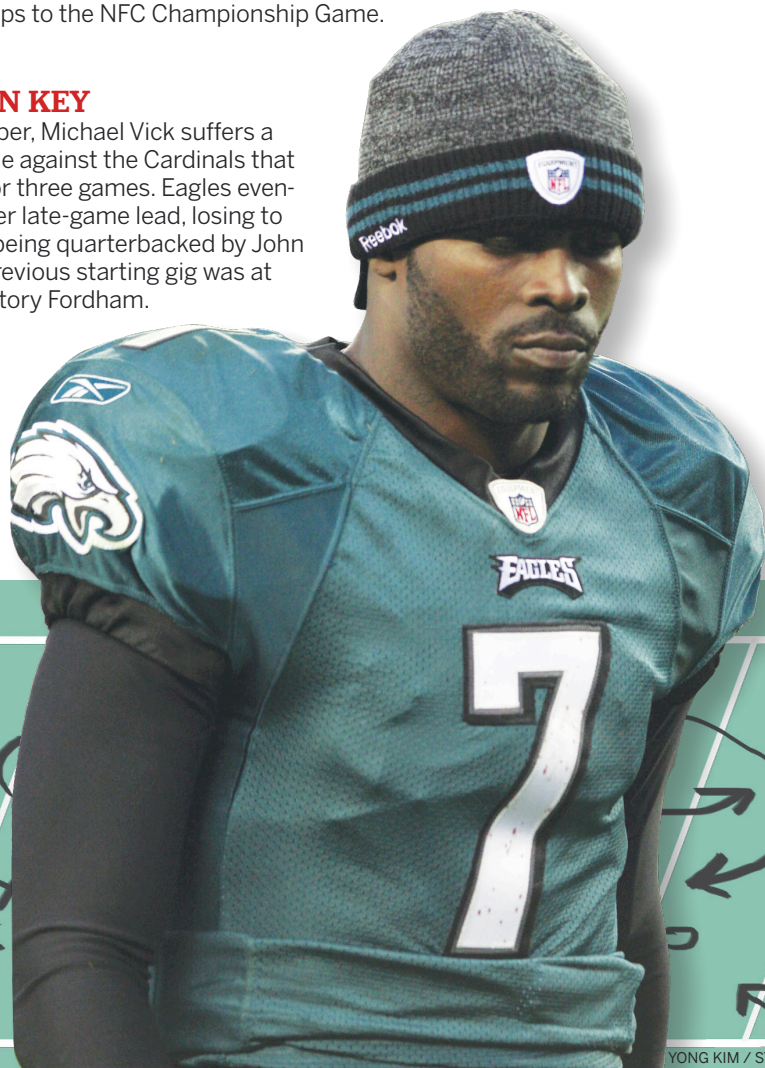
STEVEN M. FALK / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

ONCE AGAIN, THE DEFENSE FAILS TO SHOW UP

The next week, the Eagles commit five turnovers in a loss to Buffalo and fall to 1-4. Afterward, a couple of fans hold a sign across from the NovaCare Complex urging Andy Reid to step down; they're confronted by offensive linemen Jason Kelce and Evan Mathis. Though things never get physical, the incident is a reminder of just how far the team has fallen from those five trips to the NFC Championship Game.

THE SKELTON KEY

In mid-November, Michael Vick suffers a rib injury in a game against the Cardinals that knocks him out for three games. Eagles eventually blow another late-game lead, losing to an Arizona team being quarterbacked by John Skelton, whose previous starting gig was at noted football factory Fordham.



YONG KIM / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



HILLARY PETROZZIELLO / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

NOW WE GET IT: THEY WERE SIMPLY DRESSED UP AS A COMPETENT TEAM FOR THE OCCASION

The day before Halloween, the Eagles destroy Dallas, — 34-7 — in front of a national TV audience, bringing their record to 3-4. The win offers fans a glimmer of hope-cruelly, it turns out.

IT SEEMED LIKE HE JUST WANTED TO TAKE HIS DROPPED BALLS AND GO HOME

At the end of November, DeSean Jackson, upset all season that the Eagles did not renegotiate his contract during the offseason, drops two potential touchdown passes and is benched in the fourth quarter of a loss to New England.



DAVID A. MAIALETTI / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

THE DEFENSE RESTS...AGAIN.

During a Dec. 1 game against at Seattle, Seahawks running back Marshawn Lynch eludes a half-dozen half-hearted tacklers for a 15-yard touchdown run. The Seahawks roll the Eagles, 31-14. Though the Eagles are mathematically still alive for a playoff spot at 4-8, the fat lady starts to warm up.



YONG KIM / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

SO IT WASN'T ALL BAD: FIVE THINGS THAT WENT RIGHT FOR THE EAGLES IN 2011.

- 1** LeSean McCoy set team records with 17 rushing touchdowns and 20 total touchdowns.
- 2** The Birds won their final four games (though none was against a playoff team).
- 3** Rookie kicker Alex Henery made 88.9 percent of his field goals, an Eagles record. He also connected on his last 16 FGAs, nine of which were on the notoriously bad turf at Lincoln Financial Field.
- 4** Jason Babin had 18 sacks, tied for third-most in franchise history.
- 5** Jason Peters was the best left tackle in the NFC.

PROFILES IN EXECUTIVE COURAGE

On Jan. 3, irate owner Jeffrey Lurie holds a press conference at which he finds approximately 37 ways to say he is "frustrated" and "disappointed" with the Eagles season. His plan for fixing the team? Announcing that both Andy Reid and Howie Roseman will be back for next season. On the fate of defensive coordinator Juan Castillo, however, he draws a hard line: "That's up to Andy," Lurie says.



DAVID A. MAIALETTI / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

ON THE UPSIDE, THERE'S NO MORE NEED TO WORRY ABOUT DRESSING FOR JANUARY IN GREEN BAY

Dec. 24: A Giants win over the Jets eliminates the Eagles from the postseason chase. The Eagles, who were one of the Super Bowl favorites in September, fail to make the playoffs for the first time since 2007.



DAVID A. MAIALETTI / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

