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# Weekend



## It's Electric!

Forget the Redskins ~ Anyone Can Own a Pro Team

It's a clash of the Titans in an electric preview of the Broncos - Falcons Super Bowl. Photo by Mark Finkendaedt for the Washington Post.



# Doing the Electric Slide

By DALLAS HUDGENS  
Special to The Washington Post

**D**o you want the inside buzz on the Super Bowl? Well, there's no need to call one of those 800 numbers in Vegas. A well-connected source is about to provide you with the outcome of Sunday's game. Free of charge.

All right, so the source is an electric football game (that old war horse of the Sears catalogue), and the connection is an electrical outlet in the basement of Anthony Burgess's home in Alexandria. Not exactly millennial technology. But a lot of fun, nonetheless.

Burgess, 31, and his pal, Vance Warren, 29, are electric football aficionados from way back. Yes, they can even make their plastic players run in a straight line, a feat that should boggle the collective minds of former game owners everywhere.

"I bought my first game for \$5 at a

thrift store," says Warren, a D.C. police officer. "I was 8 years old, and I've been hooked ever since."

Actually, Warren did quit playing when he was 16. But three years ago, while getting dressed for church, he heard a familiar buzz emanating from his TV. There was no mistaking the sound of an electric football game. Warren looked up, and there was Burgess, who he'd never met before, playing in the Super Bowl of Electric Football, a yearly competition organized by Miggle Toys Inc., the only company still making electric football games.

"I saw him, and I said, 'Hey, I can beat that guy,'" says Warren.

And with those fighting words, a friendship was born.

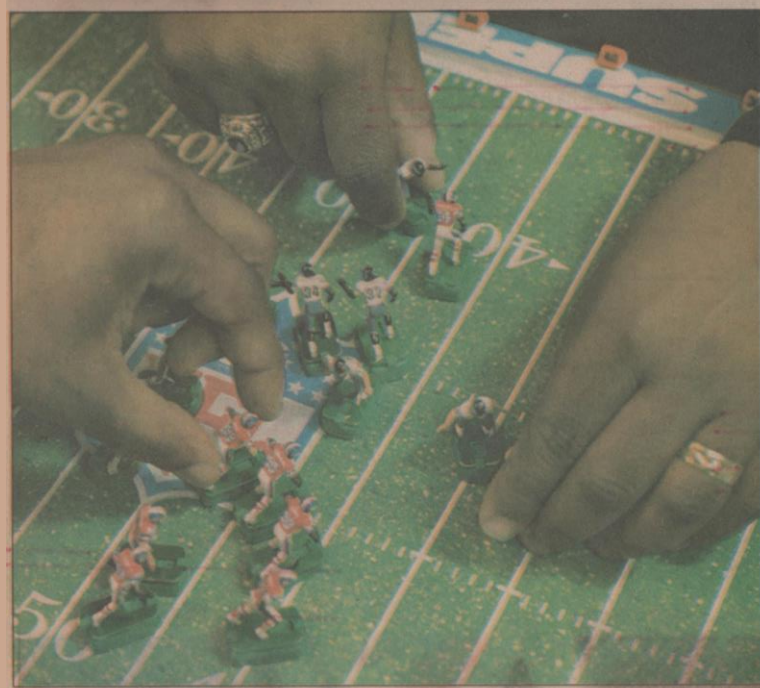
"He called me when I got back from the Super Bowl, and we got together and started developing our own playing system," Burgess says. "We've been so busy with that, we never really get a chance to play against each other."

PHOTOS BY MARK FINKENSTAEDT  
FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Amazingly detailed  
"spectators" fill  
the stands.



Anthony Burgess set the mood with the voice of NFL Films narrator John Facenda , but now it is time to get down to business



No detail is too small, whether it's a player's name on a jersey or a logo on the side of a helmet.

### Countdown to Kickoff

That's about to change, as the stage is set for their electrified Falcons-Broncos clash. The scene? Burgess's basement, which can only be described as Electric Football Nirvana. If plastic players had souls, this is where they'd want to go when they died. Hand-painted figures from the '60s and '70s, forever frozen in blocking stances and long strides, line shelves along the walls and rise from the brims of storage drawers. It takes Burgess about 15 minutes to paint each player, sometimes longer if a helmet logo requires excessive detailing. The results of his brushworks are spectacular. His John Elway figure is so realistic it makes you want to peer inside the face mask to see if he painted a big set of choppers on the legendary QB.

Steel gridirons are also plentiful; scattered like practice fields at a preseason training complex. But the centerpiece of the room is a plastic and wood replica of

Anybody who has ever played electric football must be wondering how these guys are actually completing passes. If there's one critical deficiency

in electric football, it has to be the difficulty in mastering the game's brittle-armed "triple threat quarterback. "It's a task that has frustrated even seasoned vets like Burgess and Warren.

That's why they've developed their own playing system, which benches Mr. Triple Threat. In their passing game, the ball doesn't travel through the air. Instead, a magnetic football is placed on the board where a pass is projected to land, and both the intended receiver and the defensive back are given the opportunity to chase it down.

The passing rule is just one of the duos many ideas on how to update the game and give it appeal to a new generation of players. They have even produced a video called "Professional Electric Football League", which offers tips to both rookies and veterans. They hope to start a league of their own next fall. They've already had a hand in organizing three tournaments set to be played this year, including one slated for October in Washington.

"We don't want new players to be intimidated," Warren says. "I'll sit down and work with anybody. I won't tell you all my secrets, but I'll help you."

## Throwbacks

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The second half is nothing but offense, Burgess throws on operatically every down, while Warren mixes the run and the pass. With the game tied at 35, there's time for one last play. Elway takes a shot at the end zone. Incomplete.

"Overtime", says Warren with a relieved sigh. "See. This is better than the real Super Bowl."

Both of them are smiling, clearly enjoying the game and each other's company.

If you had asked me 20 years ago, would I still be playing this, I would still be playing this, I would have laughed," says Burgess, who works for the Alexandria Sheriff's department. "I would have said, 'Yeah, by myself, maybe.'"

So, why do he and Warren still play the game? Wouldn't be more fun to toss those 110-volt dinosaurs into a closet and buy a PlayStation?

With a video game, you're getting John Madden's evaluation of a particular team," Warren says. "But with this game, you build the team from scratch. You fine-tune the players, clip their prongs and attach weights to their bases to get them to run a certain way."

He's not exaggerating when he talks about controlling a player's movements. his halfbacks run

fast and straight. his receivers can be altered to run slants, sideline patterns and deep routes. As for linemen, their bases are loaded with copper weights to help them win the wars in the trenches. Both he and Burgess are truly the architects of their teams - owners, coaches and general managers.

"When I first started playing, winning a game was 85 percent luck and 15 percent skill," Burgess says. "With our new style of play, its 85 percent skill and 15 percent luck."

And so, there'll be no joysticks in the Burgess basement. Instead, he reaches into his pocket and pulls out a quarter for the overtime coin toss.

## OT

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The Falcons win the toss. Their return man, Tim Dwight, streaks through an opening in traffic and heads down the sideline.

"Take it to the house," says Warren.

But alas, his little hero runs out of bounds on the Broncos' 19-yard line. The Falcons push the ball inside the 5-yard line before the Broncos make a stand. On fourth down, Warren brings out his hinge-legged version of Falcons placekicker Morton Anderson.

"Morten better not miss," he says.

He sets Anderson up at the 23-yard line. There's a slight cross breeze coming out of the air duct above the game, but Warren blasts the foam ball through the uprights and right out of the stadium. And just like that, Super Bowl XXXIII is history. The Dirty Birds put Elway out to pasture with a big L.

"Morten made sure," says Warren. "Somebody got a nice souvenir."

"What a game," Burgess says. "Now that's a game."

"Goal-line stand and everything," Warren says.

They exchange high fives and hugs and then set to work on the final task of the evening - finding the game ball. ■

# Electric Football Coaching Manual

**Y**ou don't have to understand the West Coast Offense in order to coach an electric football team. However, it will take practice to develop a feel for the game. Here are some playing tips to help you enjoy the game while you are learning.

**1. THE CLOCK:** Rookie coaches might want to play without a game clock. Instead divide each quarter (or half) into a certain number of plays. Start with 15 plays per half. you can add or subtract plays depending on how long you want the games to last. You can prepare yourself for the pressures of the game clock and keep the game moving by instituting a one-minute play clock.

**2. TACKLING:** A tackle occurs when an opposing player's base touches any part of the ballcarrier's base. The ball is then spotted at the front of the ballcarrier's base. If the ballcarrier suddenly turns and starts running toward his own goal line (this might happen until you learn how to fine-tune your player bases), The game is stopped at the position of the carrier's forward progress.

**3. PASSING:** You might want to give the Triple Threat QB his walking papers right out of the box. Few people have managed to tame this guy's crooked barreled shotgun of a right arm. Out of necessity, they usually turn to the running game. Boring!

Burgess and Warren may have come up with the best alternative to the Triple Threat: a passing system in which the ball never travels through the air. It



On this playing field, Anthony Burgess (left) and Vance Warren could teach Mike Holmgren and Jimmy Johnson, a thing or two.

works like this: The play starts, and the offensive coach spots an open receiver. He then calls, "pass" and turns off the game. Then, a magnetic ball is placed on the field a certain distancer from the receiver (5 yards for a 6-to 20-yard pass, 7 yards for a 21- to 30-yard pass and 9 yards for a 31- to 40-yard pass). The ball is placed on a trajectory line from the quarterback. Once the ball is spotted, the coaches can reposition players to chase down the pass. Then the game is turned on again. If the offensive player touches the ball first, it's a completion. If the defensive player touches it first, it's an interception. The player who gains possession may then advance the ball. If neither touch it, it's an interception.

**4. THE KICKING GAME:** Keep the kicking game simple. On kickoffs, position the kicking team at its own 30-yard line, the receiving team at midfield. Place a return man at the goal line, turn on the game and hope for a wedge to develop.

On field goal attempts, position your Triple Threat QB (he also kicks, though much better than he passes) 10 yards behind the line of scrimmage. Turn on the game for three seconds to simulate a snap, hold and a defensive rush. Turn off the game and boot the ball through the uprights.

For punts, position the punter 15 yards behind the line of scrimmage, a receiving man 50 yards downfield. Tun on the game for three seconds. Turn it off, then kick.

**5. POSTGAME CELEBRATIONS:** Don't give the winning coach a Gatorade bath while the game is turned on. You might electrocute him.

- By Dallas Hudgens