

Masters of the Gridiron: Strategy Guide

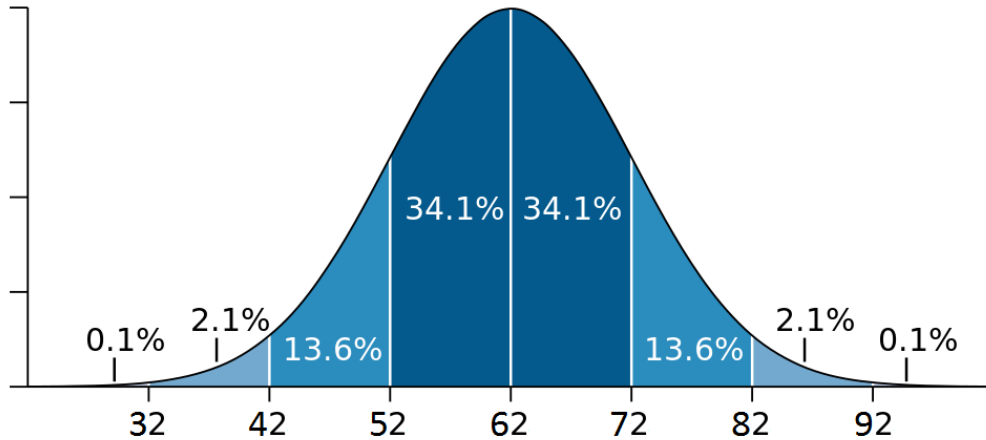
Winning at *Masters of the Gridiron (MotG)* is about playing the percentages. If you can increase your chance to score by 6% on every play, you increase your final score by about 2.75 points. Gain the same advantage on defense, and you build a 5-and-a-half point advantage. Over the course a of 16-game season, this equals 88 points, the difference between the 2013 New England Patriots and the 2013 Detroit Lions.

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Rating Distribution

Understanding the distribution of player ratings is key to maximizing your chances to win. The average for any player rating is about 62, and the standard deviation is about 10 points¹. Across the entire league, the ratings are designed to match a *normal distribution*, like the one shown here:



- Roughly 68% of player ratings fall *between 52 and 72*.
- Roughly 95% of player ratings fall *between 42 and 82*.
- A rating *above 82* indicates that a player is in the top 2% in that ability.

Knowing the shape of a normal distribution, we can estimate the chance that any one rating will be higher than any randomly selected rating:

Table 1: Player Rating Distribution

This rating is higher than this many players	This rating is higher than this many players	This rating is higher than this many players
63	50.0%	73	84.1%	83	97.7%
64	54.0%	74	86.4%	84	98.2%
65	57.9%	75	88.5%	85	98.6%
66	61.8%	76	90.3%	86	98.9%
67	65.5%	77	91.9%	87	99.2%
68	69.1%	78	93.3%	88	99.4%
69	72.6%	79	94.5%	89	99.5%
70	75.8%	80	95.5%	90	99.6%
71	78.8%	81	96.4%	91	99.7%
72	81.6%	82	97.1%	92	99.8%

¹ Quarterbacks are an exception to this rule. Because QBs have more impact on each game, there is a larger rating gap between good QBs and bad ones. This also means that QBs are the only positions that can have ratings above 90.

Offensive Strategies

This section refers to offensive strategy during game play: the process of playing the offensive players and plays in your hand in order to maximize scoring.

Your scoring attempt succeeds when your offensive player's rating (plus any play card bonus) is higher than the best defensive rating your opponent can play. The chance for any rating to beat any other randomly selected rating is shown in Table 1 (above). If the defense has 3 random cards (such as on the first turn of the game), we can estimate the chance that the defense can stop you, based upon the rating you play:

Offensive Rating	Chance to beat any 1 Defensive Rating	Chance to beat all 3 Defensive Cards
64	54.0%	15.7%
66	61.8%	23.6%
68	69.1%	33.0%
70	75.8%	43.5%
72	81.6%	54.3%
74	86.4%	64.5%
76	90.3%	73.6%
78	93.3%	81.2%
80	95.5%	87.1%
82	97.1%	91.5%
84	98.2%	94.7%
86	98.9%	96.7%
88	99.4%	98.2%

Obviously, the above odds will rise and fall throughout the game, as the defense is forced to play his better players, or has the opportunity to dump his weaker ones. Note also that these tables assume randomly selected defensive cards, as opposed to a deck constructed by an intelligent opponent. It also ignores the effect of defensive Audible cards that provide a bonus to defensive ratings.

Nevertheless, these tables give us some basic guidelines for playing on offense:

1. Touchdown cards are best reserved for a situation with a high chance of scoring, such as a rating of 76 or higher.
2. Play card bonuses are best used when they grant the greatest increase in scoring. A "+6" bonus on top of a 70 rating increases your scoring chance by 30%. The same bonus combined with a 80 rating only increases your chance of scoring by about 10%.

With these concepts in mind, here are some additional offensive strategies, with a description of when they can be the most useful.

Score Early and Often

Well, duh. Of course you want to score a lot. But you also want to score early if you can, before your opponent is able to fill his hand with his best defensive players and defensive plays. (A defensive play simply refers to an Audible card that can be played on defense; most such cards take the form of a bonus to one or more defensive ratings).

So, if you are able to play a *Touchdown* card with an 80 rating, the likeliest possibility is that your opponent has about 1 defensive player in his deck that can stop you. At the start of the game, he has only drawn 3 of his 11 defensive players. Therefore, his chance of stopping you is only about 27% ($3/11 = .273$). As the game progresses, the chance of your opponent having this “stopper” card goes up.

Similarly, if you hold onto your best offensive players, you give the defensive a change to accumulate defensive Audible cards.

Use the Best Player for each Play

One of the great things about *MotG* is that you always have the opportunity to use every single player on your team. If you have a playbook card that provides a significant bonus for a specific player that you haven't yet played (such a bonus for your tight end), it is generally a good idea to wait for that player.

This strategy is more effective late in the game, when you know you will only have to wait a few turns to draw the player in question. If you hold onto that tight end bonus card early in the game, it might eat up space in your hand for most of the game.

If it is early in the game, and you have other plays in your deck that match well with that player, it is less important to hold onto that play card. For example, it's okay to use a passing play with a tight end bonus with one of your wide receivers if you know that you have a few more passing plays in your deck that also provide bonuses for your tight end.

Wait For Plays that Fit your Current Players

The flip side of waiting for the right player is waiting for the right *play*. For example, you have your tight end in your hand, and you know you have two touchdown cards in your deck that provide bonuses for tight ends – but you haven't drawn either one yet.

The problem with this strategy is that you have at least 24 offensive plays and you only get to see about 12 of them during a game. So it's much riskier to try to wait for the right play card. There's a good chance that the game will end with you holding your tight end, still waiting for the right play card.

For example, on your 6th turn, you only have 3 turns remaining (as each team gets 9 scoring drives per game). This means that you will only get to draw 3 more play cards. You have 4 in your hand and you have already played 5, leaving 15 cards in your Playbook deck. The chance of drawing the one play card that you are looking for is only 20% (3 out of 15).

Get Unstuck

If you are in a position where you don't have a strong move, consider dumping your worst player and worst play card -- or punting -- instead of making a mediocre move. This will allow to draw both a new Offense card and a new Playbook card, creating a significant chance of opening up your game plan. It's even possible that you may go from having no good plays to have 2 or 3 good options.

Play Conservatively if You Have the Lead

It's usually best to save your best scoring threats to use with Touchdown cards. However, high-percentage field goals are a good way to add to your lead as time runs out. If you hold out for the perfect combinations, you might get unlucky and find yourself unable to score at all, allowing your opponent to mount a 4th-quarter comeback

Also, pass plays are more vulnerable to defensive scoring plays. For example, the "Pick Six" card lets your opponent score a touchdown if he defeats you using *Coverage* by 12 or more points. There are no run plays that are stopped by *Coverage*, so a running play is a good way to prevent a "Pick Six".

Defensive Strategies

Use Your Entire Defense

The most basic defensive strategy is to use the *weakest player possible* to stop a scoring attempt. For example, if you can stop a play with a 74 *Tackling* rating or an 84 *Tackling* rating, it is obviously better to use the player with the 74 and save the 84 for later in the game.

However, remember that the other ratings on each card also matter. In the above example, if the player with the 74 *Tackling* also has an 87 *Coverage* rating, you might be better off saving that player to use against an important pass play.

Finally, your choice should be guided by the game situation. If your opponent has already played his running back and doesn't have a good run-blocking offensive line, then you can probably use up a high *Run Defense* rating without it coming back to haunt you.

Bend but Don't Break

It can often be this best decision to intentionally allow your opponent to score a field goal and save your most valuable defensive players to stop touchdowns.

Items to consider:

1. *The scoring environment.* In a game between two teams with strong defenses, it is more important to stop field goals when you can. If your opponent has a weak offense and you have a strong defense, then it is more likely that you will be able to stop any later touchdown plays with other players. This strategy aligns with real football, where giving up a field goal in a shoot-out can sometimes be seen as a "success", but that same field goal is much more likely to be the margin of victory in a low-scoring game.
2. *Other defensive players in your hand.* If you choose not to stop a field goal, you will have to choose a player to dump. If you can dump a weak players, this is a good thing. But if all of the defensive players in your hand are useful, then you might as well just use a good player and stop the field goal.
3. *Your opponent's playbook.* If the other team has already played a high number of field goals, their remaining playbook cards are more likely to be touchdowns. The reverse, of course, is also true. For some basic information on a playbook's balance between touchdowns and field goals, see *Appendix I: Playbook Composition* (below).

Appendix I: Playbook Composition

Although we cover playbook design in a separate article, understanding the way playbooks are constructed can be useful in deciding how to manage your cards during play. The typical *MotG* Playbook deck has 28 cards, broken down as follows: 4 *Audibles* (14%), 10 *Touchdowns* (36%) and 14 *Field Goals* (50%).

During a normal game, each team will see about 12 Offensive Play cards. This is because you start the game with 4 Playbook cards and draw 8 more during play. If any of these cards are *Audibles*, you can either play or discard them, creating more room in your hand, and meaning that you should almost always draw 12 actual scoring plays. For the typical deck, five of these scoring plays will be *Touchdowns* and seven will be *Field Goals*. However, because you choose which cards to play, you may be able to go for touchdowns in five of your nine scoring drives. (If this happened, you would have three *Field Goals* and no *Touchdowns* left in your hand at the end of the game).