

## Risky Business Week 12

### *In Like a Lion out like a Turkey*

Dan Campbell and his Detroit Lions wanted nothing more than to finally deliver a victory to their hungry fans on Thanksgiving Day. The Lions kept it close all the way and found themselves only needing to stop the Bears from scoring on the final drive to ensure the victory. However, after an extended Bears' drive, a series of miscues in the final moments of the game dissipated any remaining winning chances for the Lions.

As the Bears were carefully preparing for a game-winning field goal, the Lions were hoping to at least protect some time on the clock for a final drive of their own should the Bears be successful. With the Bears facing a third-and-9 on the Lions' 16-yard line, the Lions correctly used their first time out. If the Bears couldn't convert a first down, the Lions figured to retain about 1:45 to retake the lead. This is where things get weird.

After stopping the clock at 1:54, the Lions used a second timeout to avoid a penalty with a 12<sup>th</sup> man on the field. Obviously, this is very poor execution on the part of the Lions, and it is particularly bad coming after a timeout. An extensive customized simulation reveals the penalty would have cost the Lions -6.2% in GWC. By using their second timeout, they limit the damage to only -1.8% GWC. But the Lions didn't stop there and immediately contributed a delay of game penalty to the Bears winning prospects. Now they squandered both a timeout and field position while costing themselves -8.7% GWC. With the benefit of the five-yard penalty and the Lions' disadvantaged timeout situation, the Bears were able to convert the first down and essentially put the game away by running down the clock and kicking an easy game-winning field goal. Unfortunately for the winless Lions, they just can't seem to get out of their own way.

### **Comparison of Lions' Game State:**

Lions lead 14-13 at 1:54 of 4<sup>th</sup> quarter.

<b>Situation</b>	<b>Ball Position</b>	<b>Timeouts</b>	<b>Resulting GWC</b>
Original third down	Third-and-9 from Lions' 16-yard line	2	38.6%
Accepting 12-man penalty and saving timeout	Third-and-4 from Lions' 11-yard line	2	32.4%
After using second timeout to avoid 12-man penalty	Third-and-9 from Lions' 16-yard line	1	36.8%

After delay of game penalty and second timeout	Third-and-9 from Lions' 11-yard line	1	29.9%
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This analysis shows how important timeouts can be at the end of a close game and also how that value compares to field position. In this instance, the cost of allowing the Bears to improve their chances of making a crucial first down far outweighs the cost of a timeout. This situation also serves to shed light on a question that we often get asked regarding the importance of saving timeouts earlier in the game. Ideally, a team should not find themselves in the predicament of choosing between a timeout and a delay-of-game penalty, but it often happens. As was the case with the Lions, having access to a timeout can save considerable GWC when used to avoid a penalty at a critical juncture late in the game.

Here is a specific example of an opening drive decision that occurred during a game between the Ravens and Dolphins a few weeks ago. Facing a third-and-4 on the Dolphins' 23-yard line Lamar Jackson chose not to squander a timeout to avoid a five-yard delay-of-game penalty. Some fans even congratulated him for having the foresight to save the valuable timeout. A simulation reveals this to be a poor trade. Turning the third-and-4 into a third-and-9, even this early in the game, is more costly than the use of a timeout by a margin of 1.5% GWC. While it is possible the Ravens might have regretted the loss of this timeout later in the half it is far from guaranteed. In fact, if this exact situation occurred during the opening drive of a scoreless 2<sup>nd</sup> half, it would still be clearly correct to use the timeout to avoid the penalty. While we often condemn the "bird-in-the-hand" philosophy when it comes to field goals and fourth downs, it generally has merit when choosing to exercise a the value of a timeout instead of storing it for a later opportunity.