

## The Case for . . .

# Chip Kelly

BY MELISSA JACOBS

### ■ A SECOND CHANCE:

Imagine if one hadn't been granted the Patriots' Bill Belichick after he flamed out in his first stint as a head coach with the Browns in 1996? Or what if Steve Jobs hadn't been rehired by Apple after being pushed out of the company he helped create?

Calling Chip Kelly's migration from Philadelphia's land of judgment to Silicon Valley's nation of innovation a second chance is actually a bit odd given his track record. In three years with the Eagles, Kelly's record was better than .500 while fielding quarterbacks named Sam Bradford, Nick Foles, Mark Sanchez and Michael Vick. Under Kelly's tutelage Foles was named to the Pro Bowl in 2013; when he was shipped off to St. Louis, he was eventually benched for Case Keenum. But in the NFL you are as good as your most recent headlines, and in Kelly's case those told of a disappointing 6-9 season following an ill-fated power grab to commandeer control over personnel decisions. He was fired before Week 17.

So despite some success in the NFL, and four BCS bowl appearances in four years at Oregon before that, Kelly heads to San Francisco searching for a new beginning. And Chip Kelly 2.0 is presumably a changed man, focused solely on coaching while GM Trent Baalke handles personnel. Truth is, Kelly won't need



to play mad scientist with the 49ers' roster because his centerpiece is already in place. Colin Kaepernick—who, like his new coach, has experienced an abrupt fall from grace—is the perfect quarterback for the Kelly system, which uses sight reads instead of audibles, operates out of the shotgun, moves at high-octane speed and relies on a multidimensional running game. Kaepernick led the Niners to a 21-7-1 record in two seasons as a dangerous, prolific read-option threat, yet after coach Jim Harbaugh left, a new regime tried to mold Kaepernick into a pocket-passing game manager. Kelly

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should help Kaepernick rediscover the better parts of his game.

Kelly and Kaepernick will be assisted by an offensive line on the mend (center Daniel Kilgore from a broken left leg and guard Alex Boone from a torn right MCL), and they should receive a boost when right tackle Anthony Davis returns after a one-year sabbatical from football.

Of course, the issues in Santa Clara have extended beyond a thin roster and poor performance. The front office has been fraught with infighting and suspect decisions. CEO Jed York has borne the blame for replacing Harbaugh with defensive line coach Jim Tomsula after the 2014 season. (Harbaugh's blink-of-an-eye turnaround of Michigan has been a gut punch to 49ers management and the team's fans.) If anyone needs a second chance, it's York, who openly asked for one during a Jan. 4 press conference to announce the firing of Tomsula after one season. No-shows have become common at the 49ers' shiny new stadium.

Kelly's emphasis on sports science—GPS systems, heart-rate monitors, accelerometers, personalized smoothies—may be too rigid for some, but you needn't be a Belichickian to understand that decoding these competitive advantages goes a long way in the salary-capped NFL. Players and fans will embrace anything that results in wins, especially in San Francisco, about to host a Super Bowl in which it almost never had a shot to play.

After a pulseless 5-11 season, the 49ers didn't need an upgrade; they needed a system overhaul. They have to think different. □