



# Covering the Super

Film Stock  
KODAK VISION3 500T 7219

Post production  
Spirit DataCine, da Vinci 2K Color Enhancement System and Pogle MegaDef controllers.

Since 1962, the National Football League (NFL) Championship game has been captured for posterity by NFL Films. During that time, professional football has grown to be among the most popular sports in the world, and NFL Films has been an integral part of that success.

To document this year's Super Bowl in Glendale, Arizona, between the New York Giants and the New England Patriots, NFL Films Director of Photography Hank McElwee instructed his team of cinematographers to load their Super 16mm cameras with the new, KODAK VISION3 500T 7219 color negative film.

"We shot about 125,000 feet of Super 16 film," McElwee estimates. "We used it exclusively. The latitude of this new film is incredible. Five of our cameras were shooting at 120 frames per second (fps). I told those operators to rate the film at an exposure index of 1,000 because I knew it had the latitude. That means most of my high-speed cameras were shooting at a stop of around T4, which is amazing for an indoor stadium. There was very little grain, and in my view it was the best-looking Super Bowl that we have ever done."

NFL Films had tested the stock on some episodes of a television show that appeared on the Versus Network called *Greatest High School Football Rivalries*. The series gives the NFL Films-treatment to a high school game each week.

"High-speed stocks are very important for sports photography," says McElwee. "We are there to capture the raw emotion of the game, and sometimes that includes the weather. Often in the high school stadiums, we are dealing with bad lighting conditions. The classic NFL Films-look is slow motion at 120fps, but in these situations, the low light levels often limit us to 60fps."

"We were extremely impressed, even astounded, with the 7219 stock," he says. "I had no worries whatsoever about using it on the Super Bowl. I personally shot 34 rolls that day.

This new stock digs into the shadow areas and captures an amazing amount of detail with extremely tight grain structure."



Each week during the season, NFL Films provides a huge volume of high-definition television images to a range of sports highlights programs, including *NFL Total Access*, *NFL Game of the Week*, and *NFL Films Presents*. At the company's headquarters in Mt. Laurel, New Jersey, the complete end-to-end facility includes a film lab and five Thomson Spirit DataCines, which are used to transfer more than 225,000 feet of Super 16mm film every week. Over the course of the 2007-08 season, they shot and processed more than two-and-a-half million feet of film.

"This new 7219 film stock gives us increased headroom in the top-end highlights as well as in the bottom-end shadows," says NFL Films Telecine Manager Bob Johanson. "The film, along with the Spirit DataCine, gives us the ability to handle greater contrast range. It means that we can achieve our signature, consistent NFL Films-look more quickly and efficiently."

The Spirit DataCines are paired with either a da Vinci 2K Color Enhancement System or Pogle MegaDef controllers. Johanson says that the team of colorists generally keeps electronic grain reduction to a minimum.

"These systems have very efficient grain reduction systems but if it's overused, it tends to smear the pictures," he explains. "The organic texture of film is part of our unique look, and the low grain



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# Bowl with VISION3

of the VISION3 stock allows us to minimize grain reduction and maintain that texture under almost any shooting conditions."

The NFL Films brand is reinforced by a signature look that has been immediately recognizable since the 1960s. The classic NFL Films feel includes slow motion, sonorous narration and grandiloquent music.

## 16:9 aspect ratio

"Sports fans know that our films give them a different perspective," says Johanson. "Our 120-frame images show you that fumble and recovery in a whole different light. There might be a dozen television cameras covering a typical game, and 40 to 50 at the Super Bowl. But when you see our highlight show, you see the game in a different light, which affects your thinking about next week's game."

McElwee says that the 16:9 aspect ratio in which his cinematographers frame their images is perfect for the game of football.

"It is essentially a rectangular game, including the shape of the field, or long passing plays," he says. "The classic NFL Films shot where the ball leaves the quarterback's hands, travels through the air in slow motion, and meets the receiver as he enters the frame has only become more beautiful as the shape of television becomes more horizontal. The portability of the Super 16 format helps, but it takes a unique talent to capture that shot consistently. We have some legends in sports photography shooting."

Since 1962, NFL Films has depended on 16mm film to document games

and deliver highlights to fans. But from the beginning, they've also kept an eye on the long term, and that strategy has paid off handsomely, in financial terms as well as in building the NFL brand. Every fan has seen the footage of Bart Starr plunging across the goal line in the 1967 Ice Bowl, or Dwight Clark snagging Joe Montana's touchdown pass in the play known as "The Catch." That might not be the case if those plays had been captured and stored on videotape, which is inherently more volatile.

"We call ourselves 'the keepers of the flame' for the NFL and its fans," explains Johanson. "Everything that we do, all the images we capture, are not just for that week's highlight reel. We transfer it all into our treasure trove, our vast and carefully indexed library. We make meticulous notes and file a trouble report if there is anything wrong with the images. Years from now, somebody is going to be using this footage. Film's archival qualities mean that the images from the 1960s still look great, even in HD, and this year's terrific Super Bowl will be entertaining football fans for decades to come. Our attitude is that this is part of our ongoing history, and we take it seriously."

Johanson was previously the first-call colorist for TV commercials for glamour clients in New York City. "We feel we're at the cutting edge of television because so many people view sports as part of their introduction to HDTV," he says.

"When I was a kid, my friends and I pretended to be football players in slow motion because of NFL Films. So this is a dream job for me."

McElwee says that NFL Films plans to use KODAK VISION3 500T 7219 color negative film exclusively next season.

