

COMMON GROUND

Plan your game strategy



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While not much of an athlete myself, I do really enjoy sports. Admittedly, I like watching college and amateur sports way more than their professional counterparts. I enjoy watching that pure “love of the game” that seems to get lost when million-dollar paychecks and endorsements are involved.

What I love most about sports is watching the strategy and game plan unfold during the competition. I enjoy hearing the great football coaches talk about the prior week’s practice and how they developed and fine-tuned their game plan, a game plan that was precisely honed to highlight their team’s strengths and expose their opponent’s weaknesses. I enjoy hearing at halftime how they evaluated what wasn’t working and made adjustments for the second half.

Ultimately, posting a win on Saturday relies much on how well the game plan was developed in the weeks prior and the observations and wisdom behind modifications made during the game.

Your game plan

While strategy is vital in a football game, a well-designed game plan for the genetics of your ranch or farm is probably a little more important to you and your banker. Having a plan that identifies some clear objectives and your strategies for reaching those goals is important to guide your day-to-day decisions.

Life on our operations can get pretty busy, and sometimes we need to refer back to the game plan to be sure we are making smart decisions and not just reacting to the biggest fire. Getting flustered when a play or two don’t go according to plan can take us out of our game plan. Instead of reacting, it’s important to evaluate the situation objectively:

Do we need to improve execution, or do we need to adjust our strategy?

For the football coach, the goal of the plan is pretty simple — put more points on the board than your opponent by the end of the fourth quarter. For the commercial cow-calf producer, the objectives are little more complex. Your goal may be to sell feeder calves, to raise replacement heifers, to turn unusable resources into a nutritious protein, to raise calves you can retain ownership on through a feedyard ... The list goes on.

When it comes to genetic improvement, we all understand the impact of bull selection. Sires contribute half of the genetics of your calf crop, so the importance of getting bull selection correct can’t be overstated. Your plan can help you identify what’s most important.

Like choosing players for a roster, consider how the bulls you evaluate will help you with your game plan. Do they have the traits necessary to advance your herd?

If you are purchasing your replacement heifers, the plan can be a little simpler. Your strategy can focus on the terminal game. There are fewer trade-offs in searching for weight traits, carcass traits and beef value index (\$B).

If you are raising your own replacements while also raising calves for a terminal end, selecting your bull roster is a little more complicated. Your herd size and management intensity may dictate whether you have the luxury of developing a game plan that allows you to find bulls that excel for either maternal or terminal plays, or if you need versatile players that can advance you on both fronts, but maybe not as dramatically.

Are your cows fitting your environment and feed resources, or do you need to make adjustments? The Association’s maternal suite of expected progeny differences (EPDs) and dollar value indexes (\$Values), including the \$M maternal index, can help you define a list of core competencies herd sire candidates should possess if they will sire your replacement females.

Game strategies vary across and between conferences, but I think most winning coaches would agree: The planning might be more important than the plan itself. |

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