

*One of the hardest hitters in NFL history, the famed “Bear 46 Defense” was named after Doug Plank and his number. A member of the Mike Ditka Gridiron Greats Hall of Fame, this book shares the secrets of Doug's success in football and beyond.*

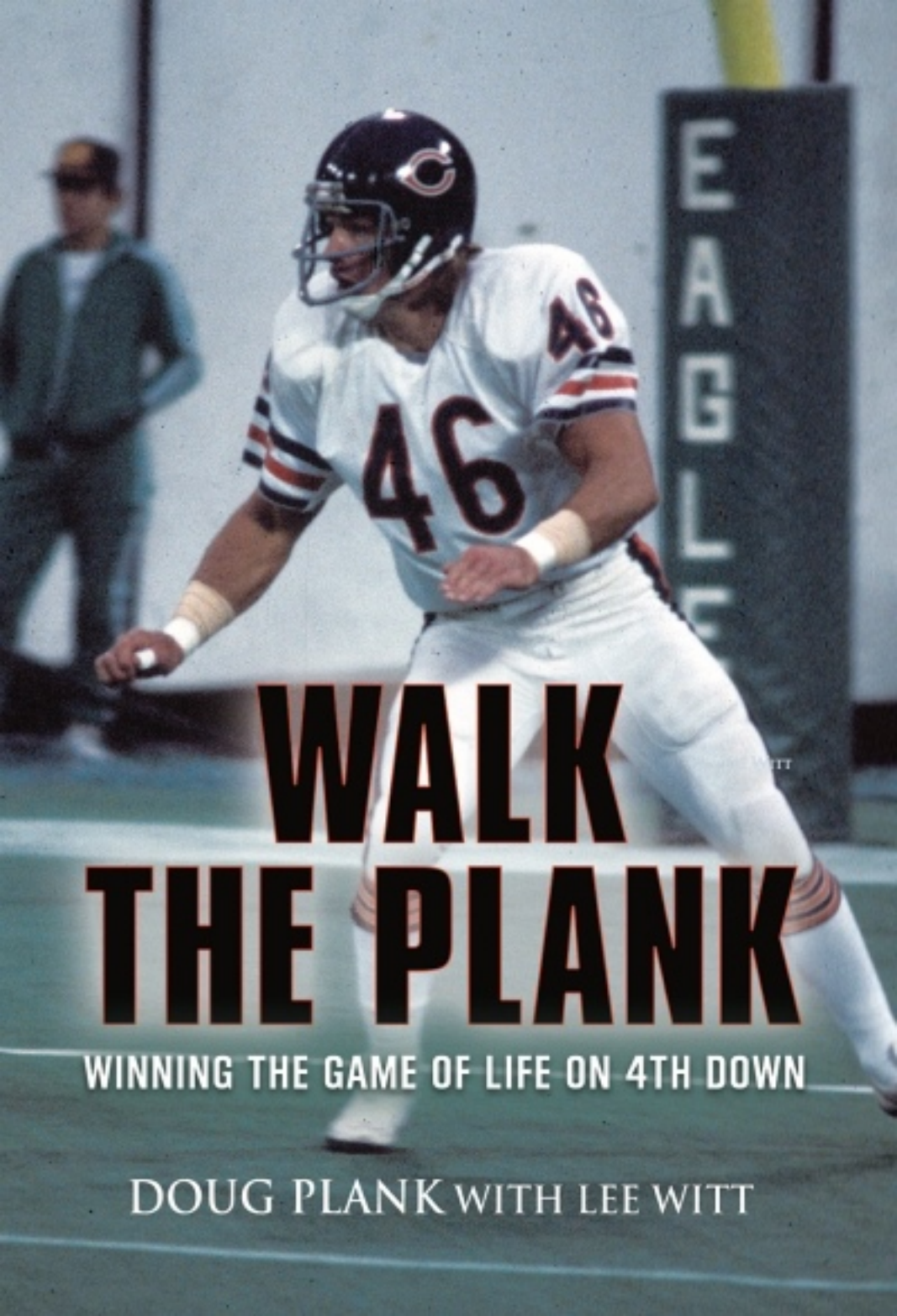
**Walk the Plank:  
Winning the Game of Life on 4th Down**

By Doug Plank with Lee Witt

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# WALK THE PLANK

WINNING THE GAME OF LIFE ON 4TH DOWN

DOUG PLANK WITH LEE WITT

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## Foreword

The Chicago Bears are one of the oldest and most storied franchises in all of professional football. No other team has had so many great players and so many incredible characters. From Red Grange, Bronko Nagurski and Sid Luckman to Dick Butkus, Gale Sayers and Walter Payton, this team's legacy has always been one of competitive excellence.

Having won championships as both a Chicago Bear player and coach, I was fortunate to have played with and coached many of the Bear greats. One of my favorites was Doug Plank. Doug was one of the best players I ever had – tough as nails – and I was honored when asked to write the foreword to his book.

When I took the head coaching job in Chicago, Doug had already established himself as one of the hardest hitters in the game. His ability to accelerate from his safety position to the point of impact on a ball carrier was unmatched. But most of all, I loved that Doug gave 100% in every practice and every game. That's all you can ask from a player. Doug played with both brains and brawn. He wasn't the biggest guy, but he got everything he could out of his body and mind. He was always prepared, and he went all-out every time. That's what has made him successful as a player, coach, businessman and broadcaster.

This book gives you a glimpse into the mentality that has made Doug special. He shares his successes, failures and the keys that can enable any person to get the most from his or her God-given ability. These lessons can help anyone to reach their ultimate potential. I hope you will take his lessons to heart.

Mike Ditka

## **A Note About Doug Plank**

Doug Plank is the poster boy for anyone who was ever told that they were too small, too slow, or too inexperienced to succeed. His exceptional career in the National Football League is testimony that anyone can make their capabilities exceed their limitations. Through hard work, discipline, preparation and the ability to suppress his own survival instincts, Doug Plank overcame all obstacles to reach the upper limits of his genetic potential.

This is not just another motivational self-help book – although you will certainly be motivated. This book takes you beyond motivation into the psyche of a man who “willed” himself to excellence through a relentless desire to get the most out of himself. He said “Yes” to every opportunity and in so doing, he became an example to millions when his Chicago Bear defensive coach, Buddy Ryan, named the famous “46 Bear defense” after him and his number.

To those who know football, he is a legend. True Chicago Bear fans were crestfallen that Doug retired just two seasons before they won the 1986 Super Bowl. But his toughness, grit and spirit lived through that team and the famous “take no prisoners” 46 defense was instrumental in their Super Bowl success.

When Doug was on the football field, no one was spared. He played with a headfirst reckless abandon that has influenced football rule changes to this day. Watching him was like watching an unguided missile that would launch into the fray taking out opponents, teammates and anyone in the way. Collateral damage was a given. His ability to control his mind and take this aggressive approach to football has also propelled him to succeed in both business and life.

And it’s this approach that can take you, at any age and in any profession, to the top of your chosen field.

Doug calls this approach, “The 46 Attack Mindset.” But this approach comes with a caution. There is a cost to the kind of success that Doug has enjoyed. Game after game Doug made devastating hits, sacrificing his body to succeed. You will have to make sacrifices as well to succeed at the highest level of whatever game you’re in. In any field of endeavor, there is a price to pay. That’s just how it works.

Doug Plank willingly paid that price. He recognizes the sacrifices and his shoulders, hips and knees remind him of those sacrifices every day. But the beauty of Doug Plank is that he wouldn’t change a thing. He still loves the game and he

*Walk the Plank*

values his time in it, as a player, a coach, and a broadcaster. Even with bionic body parts, there are no regrets.

In this book, you will learn how to adopt the 100% all out, old school attitude that characterizes the “46 Attack Mindset.” Doug’s willingness to take on every challenge head-on is what took him from a small town in Western Pennsylvania to unprecedented levels of success in sports and business. Adopting this mindset will enable you to reach the upper limits of your genetic potential as well.

# SECTION ONE: Controlling the Mind

## Chapter One - Use Your Life: Your Genetic Potential Awaits

*Try running into a wall. A normal person will slow down at the last moment—a hitter will accelerate. When people say I was great in my day, I say, no, I was just able to control my mind for those few seconds before impact. I never slowed down. I sped up. That's what makes a hitter. Not size, not speed. **It's the ability to suppress your survival instincts.***

Doug Plank

Why would anyone choose to suppress their survival instincts? After all, those instincts exist for a reason.

They exist to keep you safe, to keep you alive.

Suppressing your survival instincts seems rather extreme, doesn't it? What could possibly be worth dying for? What could you want so badly that you would risk death or extreme injury?

For most reasonable people, the answer is fairly obvious and completely logical...nothing. It is very reasonable to say and understand that really nothing is worth dying for.

When you list what a person might be capable of accomplishing, such as becoming a professional athlete, an outstanding musician, or a successful entrepreneur, does any of it actually seem like something you'd be willing to die for?

In reality...

It all is.

Why?

*Because you are going to die anyway!*

It's only a matter of when. At what point will you decide that life is worth playing at 100% full throttle? A year from now? A month? A week?



You don't have to wait any longer...

As long as you have a single breath left you are still in the game. Your life matters and you can seize this opportunity. No matter what your circumstances, you still have the power of choice.

The real question is, what price are you willing to pay?

Everything comes with a price.

This book is an opportunity to explore how much you are willing to pay in order to accomplish your goals. It will serve as your manual on how to move forward in the face of any obstacle. You will be exploring a philosophy I call "The 46 Attack Mindset."

This mindset is not a gimmick nor is it some "flavor of the day" motivation-speak.

This mindset is a systematic, aggressive approach to life. It encourages you to grow in such a way that *the last thing you ever do can be the greatest thing you ever do*. It captures the 100% all-out effort and aggression that was the hallmark of the famous Chicago Bear 46 defense. That's why it's called the "46 Attack Mindset."

For a moment, stop and think about what it means to "suppress your survival instincts." It's essentially where heroism comes from.

Think of the soldiers in battle who run towards enemy fire.

Think of firefighters who willingly run into the flames.

Think of police officers who face uncertain dangers every day.

The men and women who perform these tasks are heroes who have learned to suppress their survival instincts long enough to perform the jobs that need to be done.

As you will discover, these heroes have learned something very important. They have learned the same thing that those who accomplish great things have discovered.

They have discovered that the world's greatest accomplishments have never come from reasonable people. They have always come from *unreasonable* people.

This book is about learning how to become *unreasonable*.

---

Just what are we capable of? In truth, none of us actually know. We all have different talents, strengths and weaknesses. But too often, we think success simply means not failing. We too often play not to lose instead of playing to win. So we set our goals too low, sell ourselves short, and underachieve. That's why it's important to make the decision to work towards reaching the upper limits of our genetic potential, whatever that potential is. Working to be the best that we can be and making our capabilities exceed our limitations is foundational to the "46 Attack Mindset."

For example, I'm not genetically designed to be six feet five inches tall. That was never going to happen and it wasn't something I could control. I was genetically programmed to be about 6 feet tall.

But what I did with that programmed height was up to me. That I *could* control. So I lifted weights, ran wind sprints, shocked my system, overcame pain and injury and used the intelligence I was given to make myself the best I could possibly be. Using every ounce of my potential was the only way I could have ever competed in the National Football League.

And yes, there were limits to how strong I could get and how fast I could run. But I didn't know what those limits were.

*So I took action.*

Whether in sports or life, everything begins with action. Without action you remain stagnant. The beauty of the famous Chicago Bear 46 defense was in its innovative approach to taking action. Usually, defenses would "read and react." They would base what they did on whatever the offense was doing.

The 46 defense was different. We acted first and forced the offense to react to us. It was "act, read and react." We took action immediately and that aggressive style was instrumental to our success. We focused on our strengths and what we did well – and we always got off first.

We can do the same in life and business. We can be first to the market with our products. We can be the first to implement the best customer service. We can be the best at caring for our employees and each other. We can be proactive in every aspect of our business.

None of us know our limits until we take massive action towards reaching our potential. It seems obvious that action begets results yet how many people refuse to even take that first step. And those who begin often never finish. They choose the path of least resistance in order to avoid the necessary sacrifices and pain that lead to great accomplishment. Their entire life is played at a reduced level.

If you are reading this book, I assume you are interested in performing at the highest level of which you are capable. Adopting the “46 Attack Mindset” will provide the quickest route to propelling yourself towards the results you desire. But make no mistake...there will be pain and sacrifice.

—

Winston Churchill said, “How easy it is to do nothing.”

What would happen if you did not make any calls today? What if you failed to interact with anyone, on the phone, online or in person?

The “46 Attack Mindset” begins with the premise that being proactive is always better than reactive. Positive action must be a part of your daily life.

You have a choice. You can be a spectator in life watching from the bleachers. Or you can get onto the playing field. This book is for those who want to get into the game. To help you make the choice to be a player, here is an example of a clear and primary distinction that will immediately propel you from spectator to player. This is one of the most profound understandings you can have.

I believe that fundamentally, there are two kinds of people. These people take very different approaches to life. They are:

1. People who move through life thinking about all of the things that are going to happen to them versus,
2. People who spend their time doing what they need to get done.

There are no doubt infinite shades of gray within these two categories. But for the purposes of simplicity and clarity, those shades do not matter. You can examine your life and ask yourself which category you fall under.

Person number one lives from the question, “What is going to happen to me?” Person number two lives from the question, “What do I need to get done?”

Do you see the difference? The first question is passive, reactive and reeks of fear. It locks you into a paralysis of inaction. The second question is proactive and positions you to move through and beyond fear to take action.

Too often, we get stuck in “What’s going to happen to me?” During those moments, we feel weak and powerless. We feel trapped in frustration, anger and fear. It’s not until we get into “What do I need to get done?” that we begin propelling ourselves towards our target.

These two questions are always lurking somewhere in the background of our lives. Those who adopt the “46 Attack Mindset” ask the second question, “What do I need to get done?” Making this vital distinction immediately puts you into the stance of a player. Under stress and pressure, focusing on what you need to get done drives you towards a positive outcome. And you find yourself building momentum as you continue moving forward. We will revisit this vital distinction periodically throughout the book. It is fundamental to the “46 Attack Mindset.”

---

Author Jim Rohn said that there are essentially only two pains in life; the pain of execution or the pain of regret. The pain of execution occurs whenever we take action. Yes, being a player often means that we must make sacrifices, overcome difficulties and exercise daily discipline to either succeed or fail in our chosen pursuit. It can be painful.

But the pain of regret is far worse. The pain of regret is characterized by the failure to act. There are always reasons and excuses for inaction. Usually, it’s because we’re afraid to fail. Other times, we think we’re too tired or there isn’t enough time. Sometimes, we just lack the determination required to be a player and finish what we’ve begun.

It’s important to distinguish between these two pains because if we choose the pain of execution, even if we fail, we still have the satisfaction of knowing that we put forth our best effort. We competed. *We were in the game!* This pain can be

measured mentally in pounds of effort. But the initial pain fades quickly because we know in our souls that we gave it our best shot.

The pain of regret is another matter. This pain can be measured in tons as it weighs on our conscience due to our own inaction. It dawns on us that we will never know what we missed by sitting on the sidelines. Had we taken action, we might have gone down a completely different path or landed in a different occupation. We might be experiencing an entirely different level of personal happiness. If only...

The worst part of the pain of regret is that, not only does it guarantee failure, it grows with time as we realize that time has passed us by – and time is our most valuable commodity. We only have a certain amount of time on this planet. And time is something we can never recover.

I encourage people to live life as if they only have a short time to accomplish their goals. It is better to treat every day as a sprint rather than a marathon. Certainly, you want to make long term plans. But those long-term plans should be made up of the day-to-day sprints that will ultimately get you there. It is your short-term goals – your sprints – that make up the moments of your life.

Everything in life matters. You are either moving closer to your goals, staying the same, or moving backward. As I get older, I realize that every moment that I'm watching television or reading a newspaper, I'm not accomplishing my dreams.

I've also realized that making progress is mostly a frame of mind. Think about the final days before a trip or vacation. There are a number of things you must get done before leaving. You typically work at a frantic pace. You begin calling, planning, working and accomplishing a long list of items in a very short period of time. These "smart effort sprints" can sometimes lead to unprecedented levels of productivity. With focused intensity, we can get a lot accomplished quickly.

What if we performed at this pace every day? What if we approached every day as if it was fourth down and potentially the last day of our life?

We can.

If we begin each day with a plan, start early and work efficiently, we can do more than we ever imagined. The game of life is really a series of habits. When we ingrain *productive* daily habits into our lifestyle, our level of performance rises accordingly. Time becomes an ally instead of our enemy.

Make time your ally. Commit to using this present moment. No matter how old you are, how rich or poor, or whatever circumstances you find yourself in, you can begin again. Right now.

Make the choice right now to get off the bleachers and into the game. It doesn't matter if you are fifteen years old or seventy-five. Taking action makes you a player. Inaction makes you a spectator. As a player, you will never again have to feel the pain of regret.

—

My father worked twelve-hour days in manual jobs his entire life. It was either noon to midnight or midnight to noon. As hard as he worked, his only asset was the house we lived in. I knew early on that I did not want to follow in my dad's footsteps.

But I did learn about work ethic. I also learned about taking action. I can remember being nine years old and working at my uncle's garbage collection business for five dollars a day. I can still remember the horrible garbage smell. I remember being embarrassed when friends would see me hanging off the side of the garbage truck. They were out having fun. I was working.

Yet even as a youngster, I recognized that I had to find a way to use this experience to my advantage. So I turned work into a game. The trash cans became weights and I would use them to become stronger. The clock became the opponent as I worked to see how fast we could go. The sooner we finished collecting the trash, the sooner we could go home. By hustling and working hard, I discovered that we could cut the collection time in half, turning an eight-hour day into a four-hour day. It was one of the first times I learned to turn something negative into something positive. And I used it to strengthen myself. That attitude would serve me well going forward.

As I grew older, I continued to take on several difficult jobs. I delivered drywall and loaded freight trucks. With each job, I found a way to turn it into a competition and tried to use it to better myself. Sometimes, we even made it fun. But all of these jobs taught me one thing; I did not want any of them to be a career choice.

As I entered my senior year of high school, I stared into an unknown future. Life's realities were waiting. I began to plan. Being a decent football player, I decided to write letters to Joe Paterno, the head football coach at Penn State University. I asked him to take a look at my football performance in the hopes of

getting a scholarship. Even back then, I was aiming high. I wanted to play at the highest level.

After the football season, coach Paterno actually came to Norwin High School in Western Pennsylvania where I grew up. This was really exciting because few people of Paterno's stature ever came to our small town of Irwin. In fact, our home town newspaper published an article about his visit. I had been voted the MVP of our conference and I thought that Penn State might be my future.

But I was soon to be disappointed. He thanked me for the sincere letters but Penn State had already targeted other athletes at my position. No scholarship, no Penn State football.

However, that's not the end of the story. As it happened, the Ohio State Football staff read the article and thought I might be worth a look. The legendary head coach Woody Hayes also came to visit. Coach Hayes asked me, "Have you ever thought about going to Ohio State?"

I answered, "Coach, it's the only place I ever wanted to go."

My action had created an opportunity. The letters that I had sent coach Paterno set off a series of events that eventually put Woody Hayes in my living room. Had I not taken action, I might never have gone to Ohio State University; I might never have been seen by Chicago Bear scouts, and I might never have played in the NFL.

My life would have been completely different – and the pain of regret might have haunted me forever.

Ironically, I ran into Joe Paterno during my time with the Chicago Bears. I was filming a TV commercial in New York City with Pittsburgh Steelers running back Rocky Bleier. As we were walking into the studio to begin filming, coach Paterno was walking out. Joe immediately saw Rocky, who he was friends with, and they began a conversation. As they were talking, Rocky began to introduce me to Joe. But before Rocky could finish, Joe interrupted and said, "I know Doug Plank! I have not made many mistakes in my life, but he was one of them."

---

As the story above demonstrates, taking action and initiative in a proactive manner can lead to unknown opportunities.

Just like the 46 defense advocated, whenever possible, act first. Get off first. Take the initiative. Life is simpler when you have a plan and you are executing that plan. When you're doing that, you're not reacting. You're being proactive. When you're proactive, you're not sitting back letting the tidal wave of life's haphazard events roll over you. You're getting things done. You're creating opportunities. This has the added benefit of opening up a network of unknown possibilities.

On the other hand, thinking reactively has an inherent quality of fear. Reactive thinking requires that you begin to think about what you're going to do and how you're going to do it only after an event has begun. It is passive. It is defensive. It is more spectator-oriented than player-oriented. When you are trapped in reactive thinking, you will always be one step behind, scrambling to catch up. Catching up requires extra steps. It complicates everything.

The lesson? *Don't live a life of reaction!*

Nothing gets done without action. There have been many great ideas that were never acted upon. Without action, there can be no enthusiasm, motivation, or momentum. There have been many intelligent leaders that have failed to act on their words. Words matter when they have been delivered on a platform of emotion and aimed at each individual's heart.

Does enthusiasm come before action or does action come before enthusiasm? I contend that a call to action comes only after words are spoken. Words are the most important element in getting people to act.

Communication is the first step in achieving anything. There must be a plan in place for success to happen. Those that fail to plan, plan to fail. The basics of the 46 defense were preparation, anticipation, execution, and communication. The defense was based on the tendencies of the opponent. As such, we would design the defense based on the formation of the offense. We were ready with the best defense for whatever plays the offense ran from that formation. We took away their strengths and ignored decoys and motions they would use to confuse us.

This philosophy can also be applied to daily life. We need to be enthused and driven to succeed in our lives. We need to be aware of our opponent's intentions and goals. *Too many people chase decoys that have no impact on their lives. They decide to major in minor things.* This will effectively waste time that could be used towards great accomplishments.



We must remember that life is very much like a game. There is a start and a finish. We will be touching upon this concept throughout the book. In the game of life, many of us are closer to the finish than the start. We cannot waste our time and effort. We must focus on accomplishing our goals within a specific period of time.

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The Chicago Bear 46 defense was all about aggressive attack. There was no waiting or reacting to what the offense did. *It was always attack – and that is fundamental to the “46 Attack Mindset.”*

I have always lived aggressively. Living passively diminishes the quality of who you are and most importantly, who you’re capable of being. When we sit back and wait, it’s generally because we’re constricted by some form of fear. This is like being trapped in a kind of living death. There is nothing worse than walking around in a live body with a dead spirit!

Living aggressively means not wasting the opportunity that is your life. Why waste the beauty, the magnificence and unbelievable energy that you have been given. Living in reaction is to always be one step behind. It means trying to counter moves that have already taken place. If you walk around reacting in fear, you miss your ability to choose and take action.

What is fear really? Fear is essentially the perception of an unknown threshold. It begins with an internal conversation about what you think is going to happen. How much pain and sacrifice will I have to endure? In reality, you don’t know how much pain and sacrifice, if any, you will endure.

In fact, you don’t know what’s going to happen five years from now or even five minutes from now. It makes no sense to be afraid of what you don’t know.

Two thousand years ago the great Roman Stoic philosopher Seneca said, “We suffer more in imagination than in reality.”

What was true then remains true today.

Isn’t it interesting that most fears are learned? Children are born fearless. We acquire fear through personal experience and what we absorb from other people. Fear is primarily a learned phenomenon.

To combat fear, stay centered on our question, “What do I need to get done?” To the degree that you’re connected to the thing you need to get done, fear will

diminish. When you are completely engrossed and focused in an activity, you are too mentally occupied to be afraid. You are focused on the next step. All of your attention is on moving forward.

Fear will not grow when you are completely dialed in to your present-moment task. There are many acronyms using the word “fear.” The most common one is “False Evidence Appearing Real.” Another one is “Face Everything and Rise.”

The most important concept to remember about fear is that you need to recognize it and act on it with a plan of action.

---

I wish that just once in everyone’s life, they had the opportunity to cover a kickoff. It is the very definition of being immersed in the present moment. It’s a complete adrenaline rush. Running full speed and knowing that you are going to launch yourself into either a ball carrier, a blocker or maybe even three guys forming a blocking wedge (no longer legal) requires the very essence of the “46 Attack Mindset.”

My job on kickoff returns was to occupy and take out the best tackler on my side of the field. That allowed other players to focus on blocking for the kick returner. Whether on offense or defense, every special teams play required 100% old school hustle and effort. There was never room for fear in this scenario. It required complete concentration on the job.

Most importantly, it was never about what they were going to do to me. It was always about *what I was going to do to them! This is how you move through fear!*

Kickoff coverage was the very essence of aggressive attack. I was so physically and emotionally amped and so focused on my task that nothing else mattered. It was complete absorption in the present moment. There was no thought of yesterday or tomorrow. It was right now and the only thought I had was running full speed at my target.

*What if you approached every day as if you were on kickoff coverage? What if you aggressively attacked each day with the kind of energy and focus that a kickoff coverage requires?*

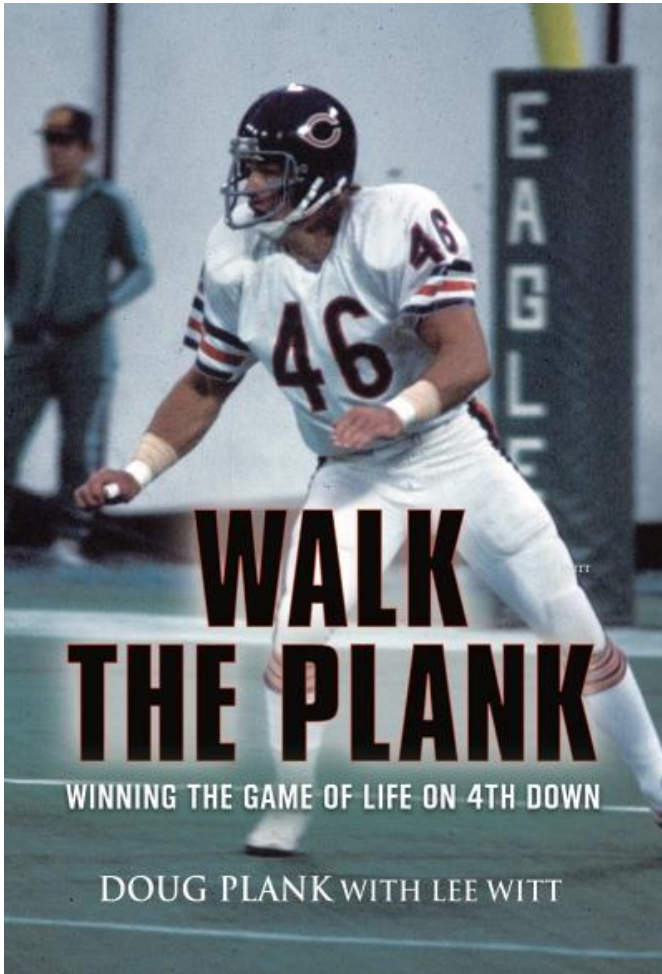
I guarantee that you would be a real-life special teams all-star within weeks. *But it requires everything you have.* It requires the courage of 100% commitment, 100%

*Walk the Plank*

proactivity and 100% aggression. It all gets back to living each day as if it's your last.

You say you can't do that? Stay with me. You are about to learn how to bring everything you have every single day. In the world of football, I was able to suppress my survival instincts in order to play without fear or threat of injury. In real life, the "46 Attack Mindset" will allow you to overcome adversity and succeed despite setbacks. Adversity will teach you what "not to do" and you will become stronger and more focused on your goals. Ultimately, you will become...

*Unstoppable.*



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