

NFL players to get tracking chips in shoulder pads

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Beginning with the NFL's regular season, players will be equipped with tracking technology in their shoulder pads measuring how fast, far and what routes they run - in real time.

The small [radio frequency identification](#) chips were designed by Lincolnshire, Ill.-based Zebra Technologies and communicate data to receivers installed in 17 NFL stadiums.

All NFL players will be equipped with the chips, which will be installed before the season starts and turned on when they play in those 17 stadiums. They're washable and sturdy to sustain hard hits, a spokesperson said.

The Chicago Bears' first game with the technology will be the team's first regular season game on Sept. 7 at noon against the Buffalo Bills. Receivers will be installed at Soldier Field in August.

Last year, Zebra conducted a pilot program with the San Francisco 49ers and Detroit Lions.

"You can track exactly how they run the entire game," Zebra CEO Anders Gustafsson said in an interview. "You can see how far they run, you can see how quickly they run in the first quarter versus the fourth quarter. You can see three times out of four they will break left versus right."

The information will instantly provide accurate statistics and player comparisons, Gustafsson said.

Vishal Shah, NFL vice president of media strategy, said the technology will provide valuable information to players, coaches, fans and broadcasters. Zebra staff will work each game to make sure everything is running smoothly, a company spokesperson said.

Jill Stelfox, vice president and general manager of Zebra's location solutions team, which developed the chips, said one can liken the technology to a home Wi-Fi system.

"Just like your Wi-Fi system at home, your laptop communicates to your Wi-Fi access point and then you get on to the Internet," Stelfox said. "It's exactly the same the only difference is, it's at a different frequency."

For those who like to play [coach](#) from their living room, Stelfox said they'll be able to tell not just that a player squeaked out 4 rushing yards - but that they ran 10 yards total to gain those 4.

They'll also be able to see information about how quickly a wide receiver ran and how quickly and how far linemen were able to push the defensive team back to make a hole for a running back to run through.

Broadcasters will have instant access to this information, which they can use as they call the game.

Zebra uses this technology with a few cars in NASCAR, Stelfox said, and has for several years worked with a women's soccer team in China and a hockey team in Russia.

"We're pretty proud to say that it's not new, but it's been tested for a long time," Stelfox said. "The part that is new for us is the software around

the rules of the game of football."

Zebra also uses similar technology to track the locations of U.S. soldiers and nurses.

The company, which recently purchased the enterprise unit of Motorola Solutions, anticipates growth among sports analytics.

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