Copilot | NFL

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The NFL Playbook for Decisions at Game Speed

How the NFL turns real-time data into coordinated action with Microsoft AI, agents, and intelligent workflows.



From data to decision advantage

For more than a decade, the National Football League and Microsoft have worked together to change how information moves through the league: how it is captured, interpreted, and acted on. The result is a redesigned operating model, one where people, AI, agents, data, and workflows operate as a single system, so clubs and league staff can decide and act at game speed.

The same shift is now the defining question for enterprise leaders. Most organizations are not constrained by how much data they have. They are constrained by how quickly trusted information can be interpreted, routed, and turned into action, while decision cycles compress and data, systems, and accountability stay fragmented. The organizations pulling ahead, the Frontier Firms, are not simply adopting AI. They are redesigning how work gets done across people and agents, on a platform they can trust.

This playbook shows how that redesign happens, using the NFL as a stress test most enterprises will recognize: high volumes of information, distributed teams, short decision windows, and little tolerance for error. Across four capabilities, you will see how the league grounds AI in the way work actually happens, brings it into the flow of decisions, coordinates action through agents, and scales scarce expertise, all while keeping data governed and judgment with the people accountable for the outcome.

What you'll take away

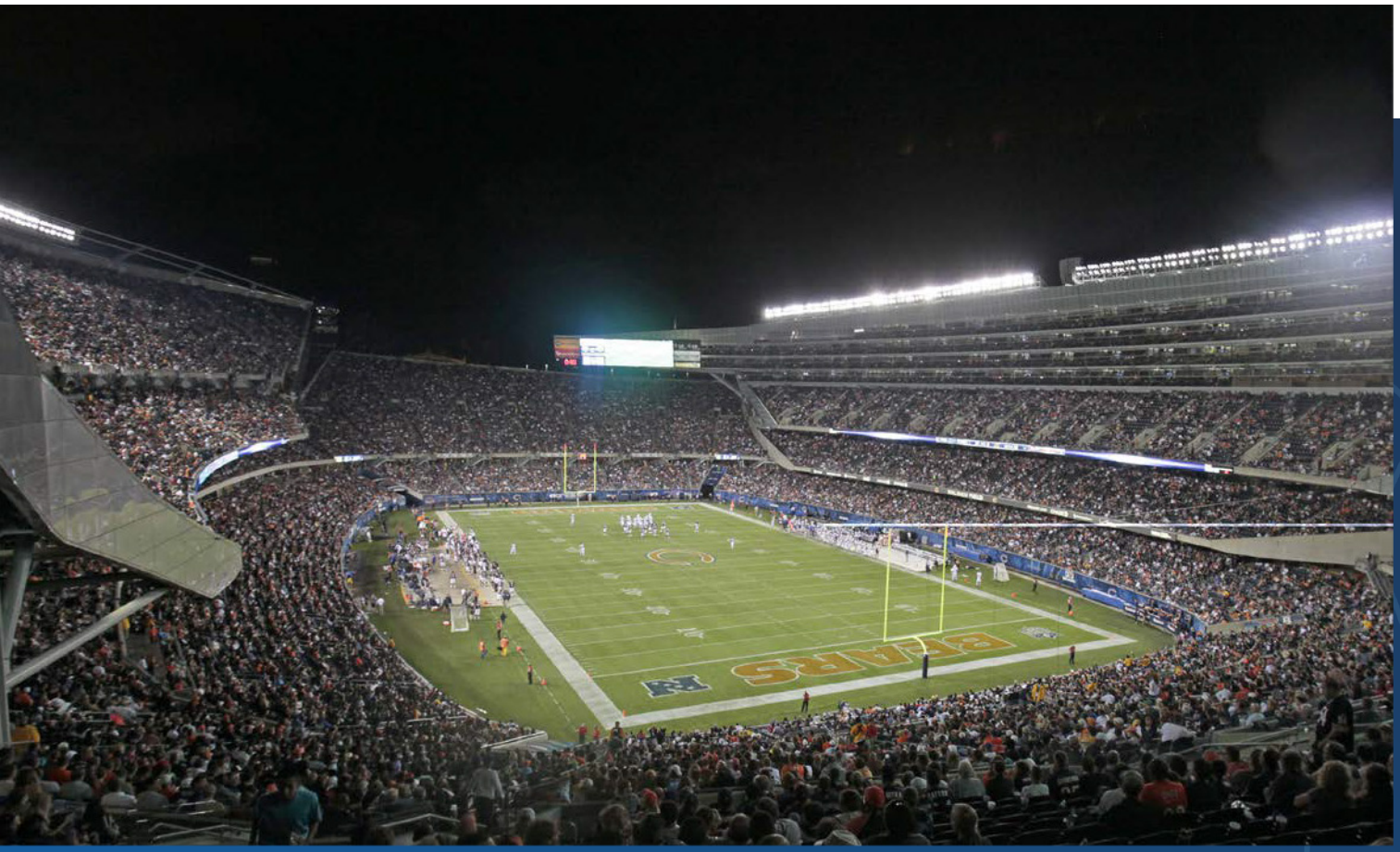
- Advantage comes from redesigning work, not just deploying tools. The gains appear when people, AI, agents, data, and workflows connect into one system of action.
- Insight only creates value when it reaches the accountable decision-maker before the decision window closes, so design the handoff from expert to operator as a workflow, not an afterthought.
- Agents are a strategic capability, not a feature. They transform workflows and scale expertise across the whole team, not just a few power users.
- Trust is what lets you scale. AI grounded in your data, embedded in your tools, and governed with visibility and control is how leaders move fast and stay in control as adoption grows.

The challenge: making decisions at game speed

As organizations scale, the operating model that enabled early growth becomes a source of decision latency. The problem is not that decisions are more complex. It is that the work required to prepare, interpret, and route information grows faster than the organization's ability to act, while critical information stays spread across systems. The NFL is a useful stress test because its decision windows are unusually short and its operating environment is highly interdependent.

An NFL game is a continuous sequence of decisions. Coaches adjust strategy based on field position, personnel, and game situation. Officials interpret and review plays that can change momentum. Broadcasters and league operations coordinate around a constantly evolving game environment. Each play creates new information and new decisions. Modern professional football generates more data, video, and operational signals than ever before, making connected systems essential for turning information into action across different roles, workflows, and time horizons.

The pattern the NFL has to master, capture information, analyze it, deliver insight, take action, and maintain operations, is the same pattern behind every enterprise system of action. The chapters that follow take each layer in turn.



Chapter 1: Ground AI in the work and bring it into the flow

Proof point: the NFL Game Analytics Dashboard, with M365 Copilot on Surface Copilot+ PCs across all 32 clubs.

The enterprise challenge

For many organizations, the constraint has shifted from collecting data to acting on it. Analysts spend their time gathering information, reconciling sources, validating calculations, and answering stakeholder requests, so most of their effort goes to preparation rather than interpretation. The cost is not only slower analysis. It is lost optionality when the answer arrives after the moment to act has passed.

The NFL in action

Long before analytics became a gameday capability, NFL analysts manually charted plays, tracked tendencies in notebooks, and performed calculations by hand to shape competitive insights for pregame strategy planning or post-game review. Over time, digital data sources expanded, yet many insights were still generated outside the live decision environment. As teams sought every possible competitive edge, they began to ask a new question: what if relevant insight could be delivered in time to influence the next series rather than explain the previous one? If timely insight could help identify an opponent's tendency, validate an observation, or reveal an opportunity before the next series, analytics could influence outcomes on the field. That shift changed the analyst's role from post-event reporting to in-game decision support. In 2024, Microsoft helped operationalize that evolution through a league-approved workspace for live game data access and analysis, built around the NFL Game Analytics Dashboard—an Excel-based solution with league-regulated M365 Copilot access on Surface Copilot+ PCs across all 32 teams.

NFL analysts work in an unusually compressed analytical environment. They receive one gameday analytics device in the coaches' booth just 30 minutes before kickoff. During the game, data updates continuously and they are expected to anticipate and answer a coach's question before the next series. In some situations, the sequence from observation to recommendation to play call compresses into roughly 25 seconds, making speed crucial.

"We always get questions from coaches that were not initially prepared for in game, despite us trying to build out everything as cleanly as possible. So we have tools like Copilot in Excel that really help us narrow down the data as fast as possible."

Andy Grossman
Sr. Data Analyst, Atlanta Falcons



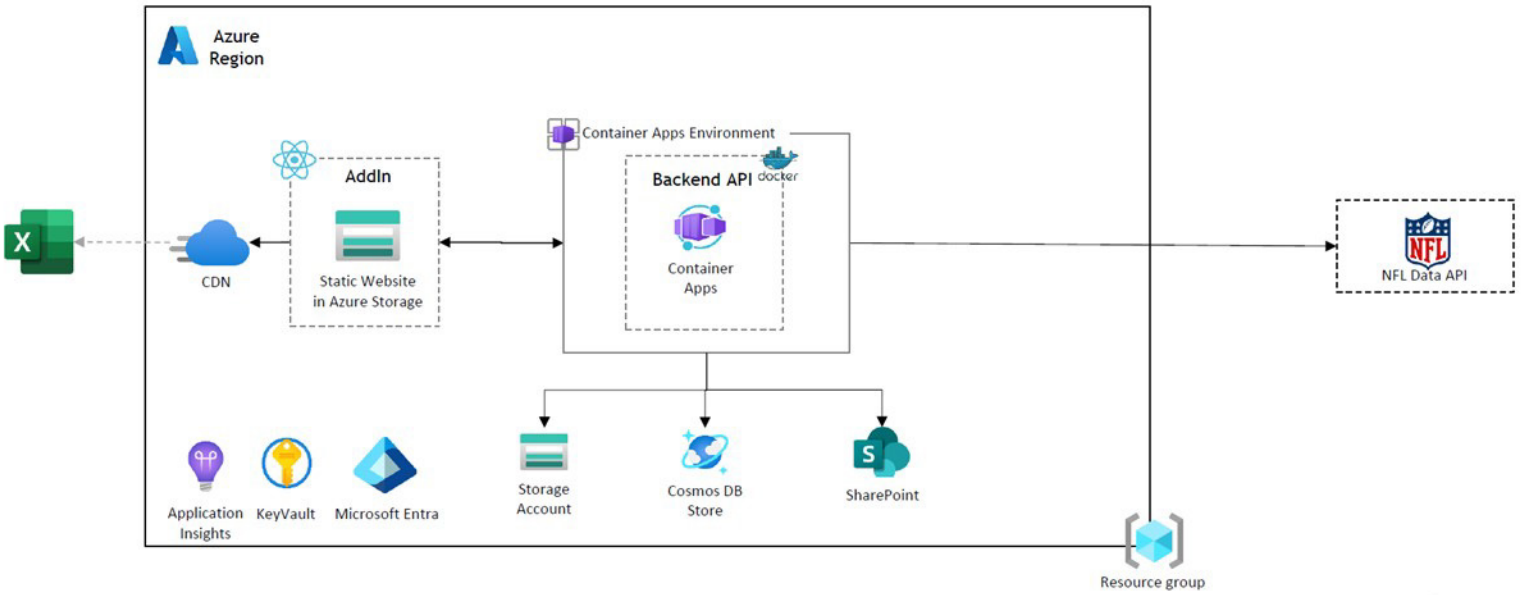
Throughout the game, Copilot in Excel helps transform analyst intent into action. Analysts can describe questions in natural language, generate formulas and visualizations, and validate outputs before sharing insights to coaches. In the fast-paced environment of game day, analysts are often balancing multiple requests from coaches and football operations staff. In those moments, Copilot in Excel can help extend the analyst's capacity by carrying out spreadsheet tasks across multiple steps, updating workbook artifacts, and iterating under analyst direction while they engage in other requests.

How it works

The Game Analytics Dashboard brings live data access, refreshable analytics, Excel-native workflows, and AI-assisted reasoning into the environment analysts already use. As plays occur, an NFL-specific Excel add-in streams gameday data directly into the workbook, where dynamic arrays automatically expand to incorporate new information in real time. Rather than exposing data as static rows and columns, each play is represented as a structured Excel object, enabling analysts to surface relevant attributes, apply existing models, and explore trends without manual data preparation.

Once live game data is available in Excel, analysts can use familiar formulas, templates, and visualizations to evaluate tendencies and identify opportunities as the game unfolds. Copilot in Excel further accelerates analysis by helping generate formulas, summarize patterns, and build workbook content from natural-language prompts, while analysts remain responsible for interpretation, validation, and communication of insights. Together, these capabilities create an analytical workspace that adapts to each club's coaching philosophies, operational priorities, and gameday workflows.

The Game Analytics Dashboard Architecture



The workspace is designed to meet NFL operational requirements and the realities of professional football operations, where reliability, governance, and consistency are as important as analytical capability. The solution incorporates club-specific data boundaries, controlled workflows, and support for restricted connectivity environments while maintaining a consistent, league-approved source of truth. Agent-powered audits help keep workbooks within policy, and every output stays transparent and reviewable, so accountability and judgment remain with the analyst.

What it unlocks

The result is faster analysis at greater scale, with answers that arrive while the decision window is still open and workflows that become repeatable across users and teams rather than locked in a few experts. Because the outputs are transparent and reviewable, the formulas, charts, tables, summaries, and validation checks, the business value is not simply productivity. It is better decisions made in time to matter, on results the organization can trust. This is what it looks like to ground AI in the work and bring it into the flow.

Apply it in your organization

Before AI

Your analysts and specialists spend most of their time gathering data, reconciling sources, and building reports by hand, so answers arrive after the decision-making window has passed. Insight is a bottleneck, and it lives with a few skilled people.

With AI

Your teams describe the analysis they need in natural language inside the tools the already use, AI handles the mechanics, and a trusted, reviewable answer arrives while the decision window is still open, with people keeping the judgment.

Wherever a decision waits on analysis, shorten the path from data to a trusted answer:

- **IT**: give analysts governed, natural-language access to data inside the tools they already use, with outputs IT can review.
- **Operations**: read live operating signals and adjust within the shift, not in tomorrow's report.
- **Marketing**: turn campaign and customer data into decisions while the spend can still move.
- **Finance**: model scenarios and surface variances the same session, while positions can still change.

Signals to track

Watch whether AI is shortening the path from data to a trusted decision:

- **IT**: the share of analytical work running on governed, reviewable AI outputs rather than unmanaged tools.
- **Operations**: decision cycle time from the moment data is available to the moment action is taken.
- **Marketing**: analyst and specialist hours redirected from preparation to interpretation.
- **Finance**: consistency and repeatability of analysis across teams, periods, and reviews.

Chapter 2: Put trusted insight at the point of decision

Proof point: the Microsoft Surface Sideline Viewing System, from black-and-white printouts to AI-assisted play discovery.

The enterprise challenge

Decision support fails when insight stays separated from the people accountable for action. In many organizations, analysis is concentrated among specialists, parked in dashboards, or passed through manual handoffs, so frontline teams, executives, and operators receive it after the decision point or without the context to use it. Every manual step in that handoff adds delay and strips away context.

The NFL in action

The NFL sideline is an extreme version of this challenge. Not long ago it ran on black-and-white printouts that were slow to produce, delivered by hand, and useless the moment rain, snow, or glare hit the page. In 2014, the NFL introduced the Microsoft Surface Sideline Viewing System (SVS), so coaches and players could access high-resolution play images moments after a play, compare views, annotate, and adjust during the game. Information that once required printing, distribution, and sideline review became available directly to coaches and players.

As access to information improved, the next challenge became meeting the speed demanded by an NFL gameday. Football decisions are made in seconds, leaving little time to search through game footage and play data between snaps. In 2025, SVS evolved again with AI-powered filtering that helps teams surface relevant plays, including scoring drives, turnovers, and penalties, with less manual searching.

Play printout process before SVS



SVS with AI-powered filtering



The latest evolution of SVS shortens the handoff between analysts in the coaches' booth and decision-makers on the sideline. Beginning in the 2026 NFL season, analysts can cast observations from their Game Analytics Dashboard straight into the SVS interface through an Insights tab, embedding analyst derived insights directly into the live decision environment. By reducing reliance on headset communication in a fast-paced, high-noise environment, SVS helps coaches and players spend less time searching for information and more time evaluating formations, identifying coverages, and making informed adjustments between plays.

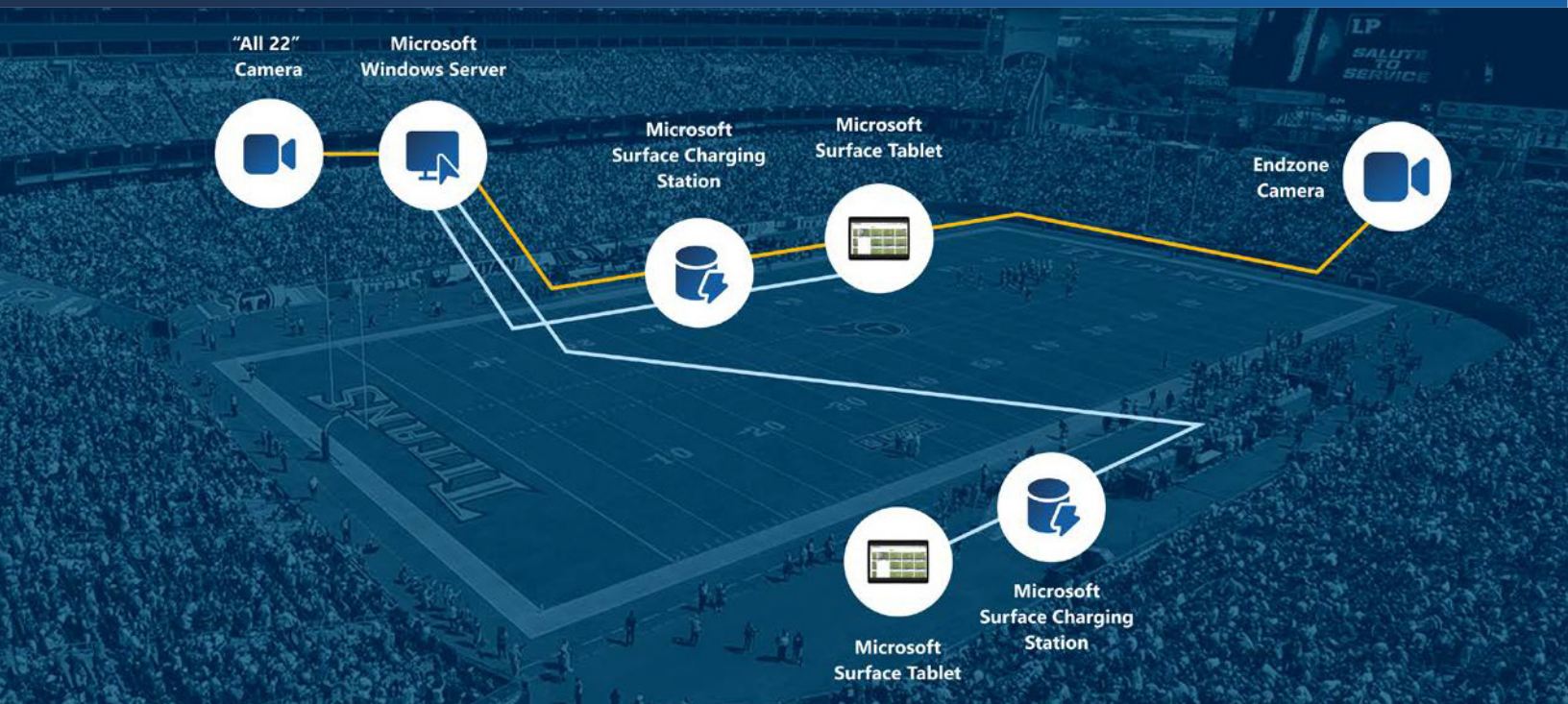
> "We're getting real-time data pushed to us on the sideline, which helps us process faster, make better decisions in the moment, and share the right information with our players so they can go out and execute."
>
> **Mike Macdonald**
>
> **Head Coach, Seattle Seahawks**

How it works

Microsoft Windows Server infrastructure processes and distributes game data at game speed. Play images captured from six endzone and sideline cameras are tagged with metadata within seconds and delivered across devices in near real time. Coaches and players can immediately review formations, defensive coverages, and player movement after each snap, while interactive review tools enable users to annotate plays, compare camera angles, zoom into key situations, and access role-specific views. Annotations are synchronized across devices tied to the same team profile, allowing coaches in the booth to share notes that instantly appear on sideline devices, creating a connected decision-making environment during the game.

Built with GitHub Copilot, Teams can create customized filtering experiences using club-specific terminology and strategic priorities to surface the most relevant plays. Through the Insights Tab, analysts can also deliver findings from the Game Analytics Dashboard directly into the SVS experience, making observations available alongside annotations, and filtered play views.

SVS Solution Architecture



What it unlocks

Frontline value grows when insight delivery is designed around the moment of use. Analysts, coaches, and players work inside one connected workflow, with role-based access that puts the right view in front of the right person, so observations reach decision-makers while they can still act. For enterprises, the lesson is direct: the handoff between experts and operators should be engineered as a governed workflow, not left to ad hoc communication, so expertise reaches the front line without losing speed or control.

Apply it in your organization

Before AI

Insight is produced by specialists and passed to the front line through dashboards, reports, and manual handoffs, so the people accountable for the decision get it late, or without the context to act on it.

With AI

The right insight reaches the right person directly in their workflow, filtered to what matters and governed by role-based access, so frontline decision-makers can act while conditions are still changing.

Move trusted insight to the person acting on it, while the window is still open:

- **IT**: deliver role-appropriate insight into the tools the frontline already uses, under managed access.
- **Operations:** route demand, capacity, and readiness signals to the supervisor on shift, not to a report.
- **Marketing:** put live campaign performance in front of the owner who can reallocate spend now.
- **Finance:** surface risk and exposure alerts to the people who can still act on them.

Signals to track

Watch whether trusted insight is reaching the point of action in time:

- **IT:** coverage of role-based access controls governing who sees which insight.
- **Operations:** time from insight generated to insight in the hands of the frontline decision-maker.
- **Marketing:** share of frontline decisions informed by current data rather than after-the-fact reports.
- **Finance:** reduction in costly errors caught before, rather than after, the decision.

Chapter 3: Connect agents, data, and workflows to coordinate action

Proof point: the NFL Game Operations Dashboard, built on Microsoft Power Platform and Copilot Studio.

The enterprise challenge

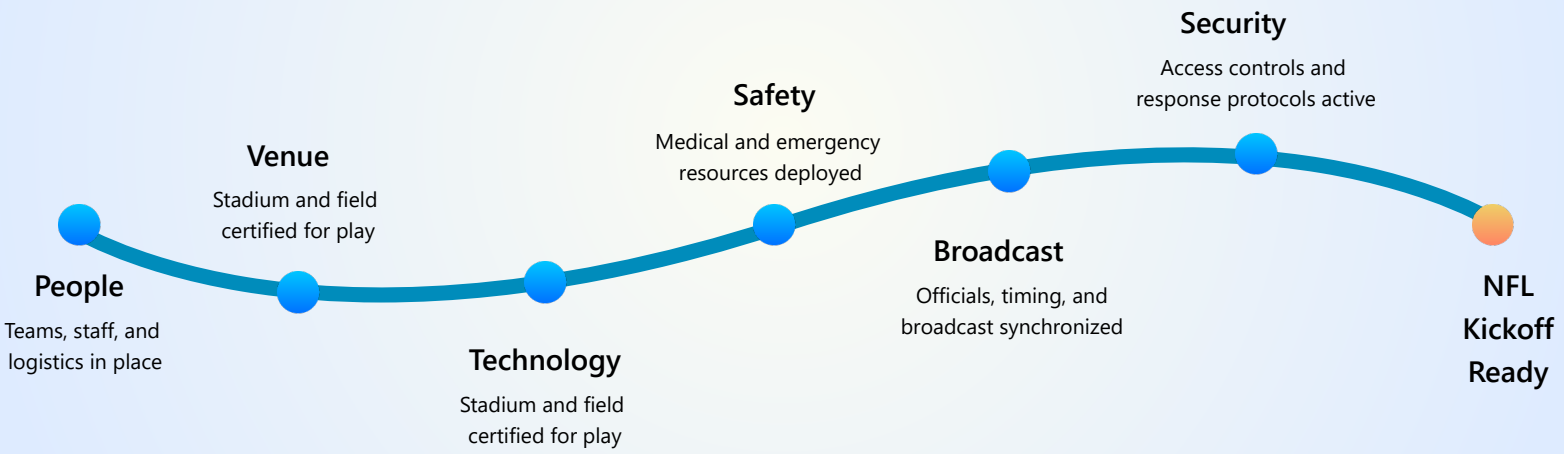
Many organizations have digitized their records, dashboards, and collaboration channels without digitizing the coordination required to act on them. Data, business rules, decisions, and follow-up work stay scattered across separate systems and routines, so a signal becomes another notification rather than coordinated action. AI creates operational value when it connects information, decision logic, and follow-up work into a single, governed execution loop.

The NFL in action

For NFL Game Operations, delivering a consistent gameday experience means coordinating hundreds of people, thousands of tasks, and critical systems before, during, and after every game. What looks effortless to fans depends on constant visibility into conditions across every venue and the ability to respond quickly when they change. Game day readiness requires visibility across every operational layer.

The Checkpoints to NFL Kickoff

Game Operations begin long before NFL kickoff. Across each venue, league and club teams coordinate logistics, technology, safety, officiating, broadcast, and field readiness through a precise operating rhythm.

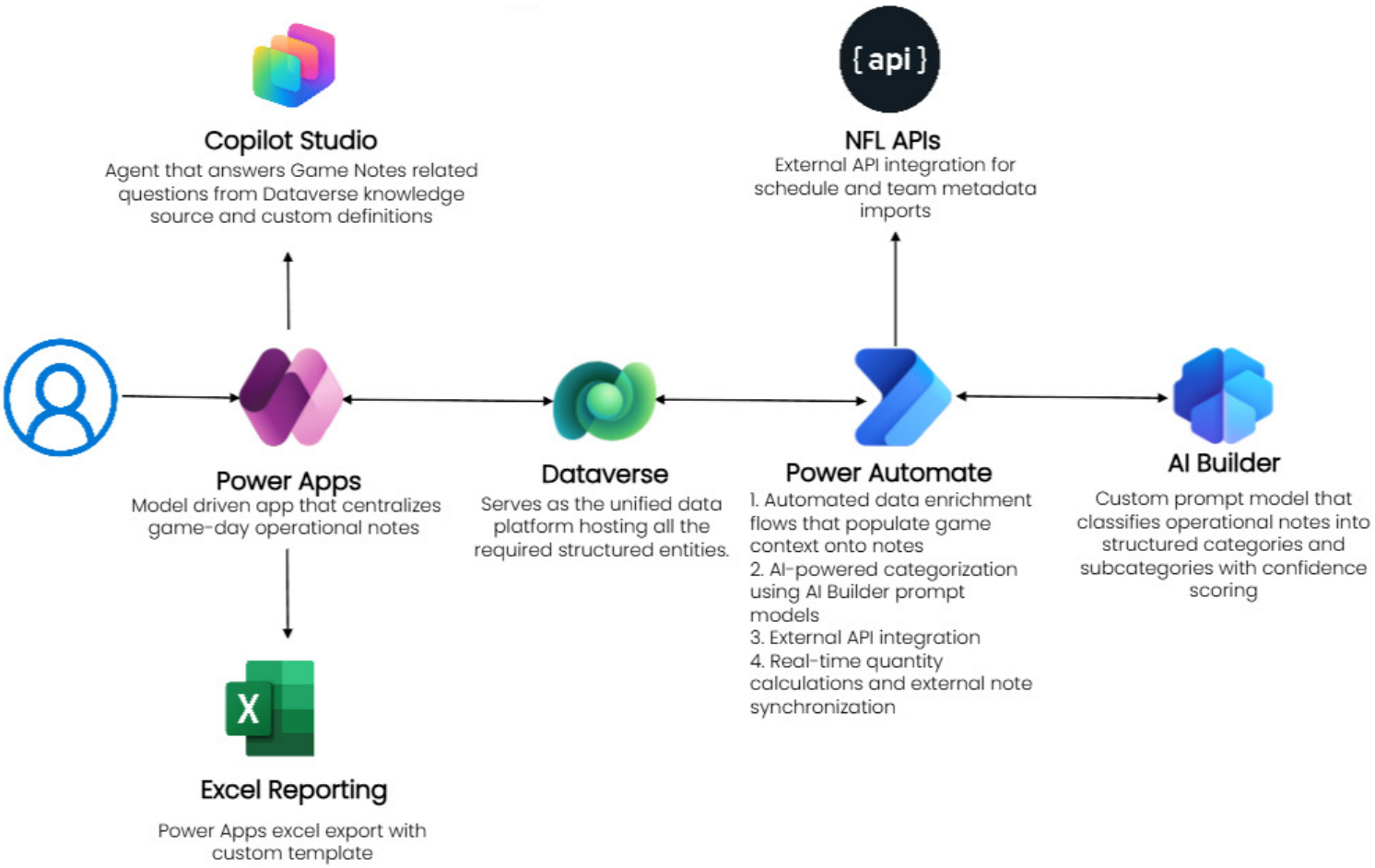


The NFL Game Operations Dashboard turns that complexity into a shared operational view. Built on Microsoft Power Platform and Copilot Studio, it brings stadium, technology, security, medical, officiating, and operational signals into one command view, and uses a custom AI agent that lets staff query operational data in natural language, so they retrieve what they need and coordinate responses with less manual searching. It went from concept to stadium deployment in just three weeks.

How it works

A custom Copilot Studio agent helps staff retrieve operational information through natural-language queries, reducing lookup time and making operational context easier to retrieve during active coordination. As a staff member enters a short description and timestamp for an incident, the model predicts the appropriate category (e.g., broadcasting, uniform policy, game presentation, or stadium facilities), subcategory, and priority level, along with a confidence score. These automated game-note categorization predictions are grounded in domain-specific knowledge about stadium operations, including historical data of previous incidents stored in Dataverse. Using Power Automate, the system also pulls official NFL game schedules and metadata via league APIs. This ensures that every incident is associated with the correct game, teams, venue, and kickoff time. Excel export capabilities make reviews and reporting more consistent, and integrated collaboration workflows keep personnel working from the same status view as conditions change.

The Game Operations Dashboard Architecture



The dashboard runs on a governed Power Platform foundation with a Copilot Studio agent IT can manage, so staff gain natural-language speed while the organization keeps visibility and control over how agents operate.

What it unlocks

The dashboard helps league operations catch emerging issues earlier and with more shared context, so staff spend less time gathering updates and more time keeping games running safely and without disruption. The recurring constraint it solves is coordination: teams usually have the information, but not in a form that supports synchronized action. Coordinating that action through agents, on a platform IT can see and control, is how a system of action scales safely. This is a connected ecosystem doing the work, not a single feature.

Apply it in your organization

Before AI

Your data, decisions, and follow-up work live in separate systems, so a signal becomes another notification and coordination depends on who happens to be in the loop. Work stalls in the handoffs between teams.

With AI

A shared view and governed agents connect the signal, the decision, and the follow-up into one loop, so issues surface early and the next action is coordinated across teams from a single source of truth, with IT keeping visibility and control.

Connect the signal, the decision, and the follow-up into one governed loop:

- IT: stand up agents in a governed low-code platform so business teams can automate without creating sprawl.
- Operations: build a command-center view that connects status, risk, escalation, and agent-assisted summaries.
- Marketing: let an agent track performance across channels and coordinate the next best action with the team.
- Finance: connect reconciliations, variance analysis, and approvals into a workflow where agents coordinate follow-up.

Signals to track

Watch whether agents are turning signals into coordinated, governed action:

- IT: share of coordination workflows running through governed agents with full visibility and control.
- Operations: time from a readiness signal to a coordinated response across teams.
- Marketing: multi-step campaigns and handoffs completed without manual chasing.
- Finance: cycle time and exception handling across reconciliation and approval workflows.

Chapter 4: Scale scarce expertise across the team

Proof point: the NFL Combine App, built on Microsoft Azure.

The enterprise challenge

Critical decisions often depend on two scarce assets: trusted information and the expertise to interpret it. The data is usually scattered across reports, spreadsheets, notes, and systems, while the expertise sits with a small group of specialists. When both have to be assembled by hand, timelines stretch and decision quality is hard to scale. The management challenge is making trusted knowledge answerable at the point of decision.

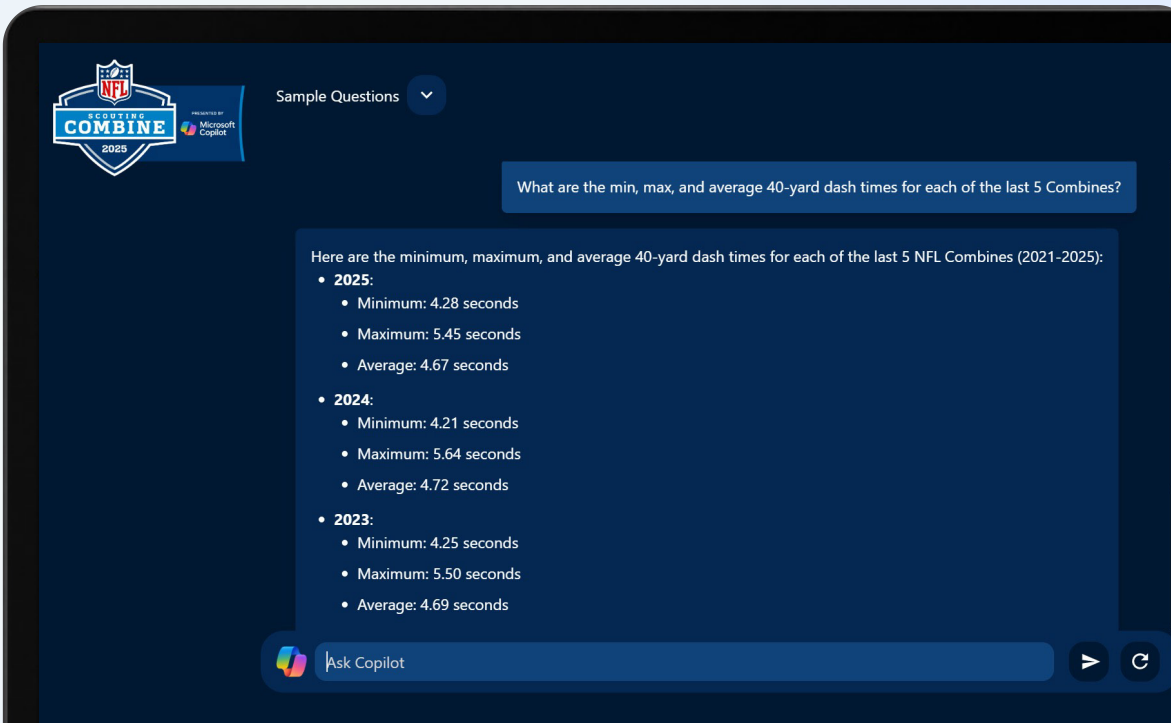
The NFL in action

The NFL Scouting Combine concentrates this challenge into a short, high-stakes window. Each year it brings more than 300 top college prospects and representatives from all 32 teams into one of professional sports' most intensive evaluation events, compressing months of evaluation into a few days, which makes timely access to trusted information essential.

The NFL Combine App changed the operating model by creating a secure environment for collecting, analyzing, and sharing evaluation data in real time. Built on Microsoft Azure, it brings performance metrics such as 40-yard dash times and vertical jump results together with drill schedules, prospect profiles, and a decade of historical scouting information. Data is captured once and made immediately available, so evaluators compare players side by side, analyze results as they happen, and hold a consistent view across the event. A custom AI agent lets them ask questions in the Combine-specific language they already use and get answers in seconds, and access extends beyond the event so personnel who cannot attend can evaluate remotely on the same information.

"Now I just ask a question as I would ask you a question, and get what I need in seconds. It used to take hours, sometimes not even possible until after the Combine."

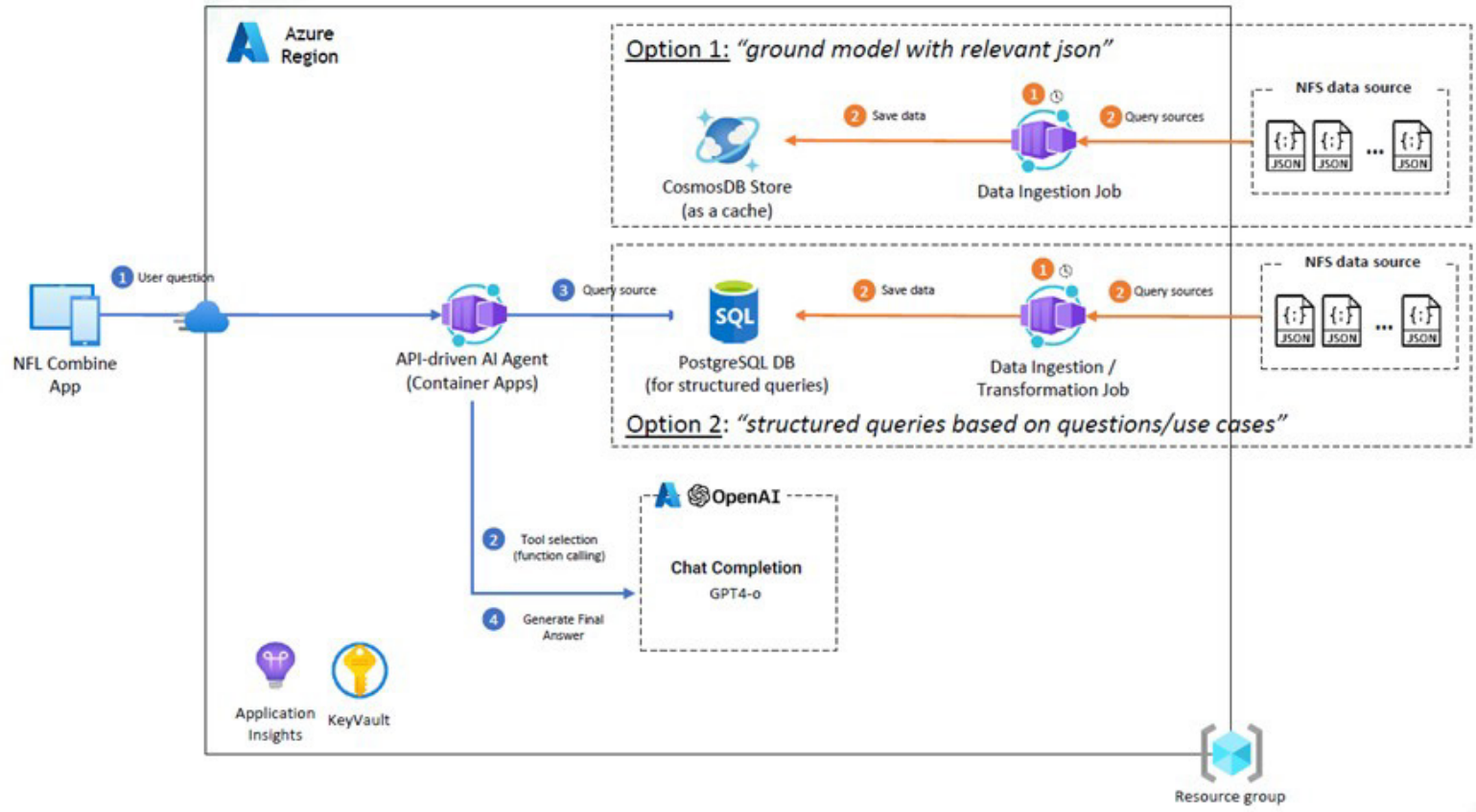
Jackie Davidson
VP of Football Research, Tampa Bay Buccaneers



How it works

Player data is captured at the source when National Football Scouting (NFS) representatives record drill results on Microsoft Surface Pro devices. The data is standardized and stored in a secure cloud foundation. When an evaluator asks a question, Azure OpenAI Service interprets it and maps it to a structured query, Azure Cosmos DB returns cached player data in milliseconds, and Azure Container Apps scales the experience to meet event-day demand without the team managing infrastructure. Container Apps give the NFL a fully managed compute layer that not only scaled on demand for event-day traffic, but supports enterprise-grade reliability, security, and compliance—all without the overhead of managing infrastructure. The intelligence layer sits on top of the data of record, making trusted information easier to retrieve while preserving the underlying source of truth.

The NFL Combine App Architecture



Learn more about the NFL Combine App development approach.

What it unlocks

Work that once took hours, or was not possible until after the Combine, can now be done in seconds and shared with authorized evaluators wherever they are, with the source of truth preserved underneath. Evaluators spend more time judging players and less time assembling information, and scarce expert attention stretches across more decisions in one of football's highest-stakes windows. That is expertise scaled: a custom agent lets people ask questions in their own language against a governed system of record, so the knowledge, not just the data, becomes available on demand.

Apply it in your organization

Before AI

The knowledge to interpret your data sits with a small group of experts, and everyone else waits in line or works around them, so decisions rely on a few people and slow to a crawl under deadline.

With AI

Anyone on the team can ask questions in plain language against your governed systems of record and get trusted answers in seconds, so expertise reaches more decisions without adding more experts, and the source of truth stays intact.

Make your systems of record answerable, so expertise scales beyond the few who hold it:

- **IT:** put governed, natural-language access on top of your systems of record while preserving the source of truth.
- **Operations:** let frontline teams query structured performance and readiness data without a specialist in the loop.
- **Marketing:** give the whole team self-serve answers from customer and campaign data in plain language.
- **Finance:** compare deals or portfolios against structured criteria and align reviewers across locations quickly.

Signals to track

Watch whether expertise is reaching more decisions without more experts:

- **IT:** share of systems of record made securely answerable through governed natural-language access.
- **Operations:** decisions supported per expert and time saved assembling information.
- **Marketing:** speed and consistency of insight available to non-specialists across the team.
- **Finance:** time to evaluate and compare options against structured criteria before a deadline.

Scaling with a trusted platform

Transforming how work is done is only half of the operating model. The other half is the platform that lets you scale AI with confidence, so innovation and control are delivered together rather than traded off. The same discipline visible across the NFL examples, league-approved workspaces, role-based access, agent-powered audits, and governed low-code foundations, is what makes speed safe at scale.

Looking forward

The organizations that gain the most from AI will be those that connect data, people, processes, and agents into repeatable systems of action. The NFL shows the operating discipline this takes when decision windows are short and execution depends on coordination across many roles. Decision advantage comes from reducing the time and effort required to move from trusted information to coordinated action.

Every enterprise faces moments when speed, context, and coordination shape the outcome: customer escalations, operational disruptions, risk events, workforce decisions, and market shifts. In each one, advantage comes from reducing the friction between information, judgment, and execution. AI is most useful when it works against trusted data, appears inside existing workflows, adapts to role-specific decisions, and connects analysis to follow-through.

Microsoft brings the productivity, low-code, data, AI, agent, security, and governance capabilities to support this operating model in one connected platform, so transforming how work is done and governing the agents that do it are not separate projects. For leaders, the priority is to name the decisions that matter, redesign the workflows around them across people, AI, agents, and data, and measure whether AI reduces latency, improves consistency, and expands access to expertise, all on a platform you can trust as adoption grows.

To explore how organizations across industries are transforming with Microsoft Cloud and AI, visit **Microsoft Customer Stories**.