

Film at 11 (yard line)

Video crew shoots each Falcons play in practice, games

By KAREN ROSEN
krosen@ajc.com

Flowery Branch — Keith Phillips runs a precise route during Falcons practices. It's the only route not captured on film.

Phillips is a member of the four-man video team that records every move a Falcons player makes in uniform. When the horn sounds to signal the end of a practice segment, Phillips runs to one of two 43-foot towers. Simultaneously, a cameraman at the top of each tower is popping out a tape, putting it in a laundry bag and lowering it to the ground on a rope.

Phillips collects a tape from each tower then makes his cut for the video department's control room. If the Falcons are practicing outside, it's a quick sprint. If they're practicing inside, he makes the trip in a golf cart.

► Please see **VIDEO, E2**

ODD JOBS

Second in an occasional series featuring a behind-the-scenes look at some of the more unusual jobs in sports



CURTIS COMPTON / Staff

The Falcons' **Keith Phillips** prepares to run a tape of practice from a lift to the video room.

Video: Crew knows every cut in practices, games

► Continued from E1

He rushes into the room and shoves the tape into a machine, cueing it up before dashing out again.

Phillips, who says his time in the 40 is "not too fast!" makes the trip about a dozen times during a typical practice and every 10 minutes on Fridays when practices are only 75-80 minutes.

By the time coaches leave the field, film of the practice is digitized, organized and ready to be called up on computer monitors or projected onto huge screens in meeting rooms. Coaches can even "v-mail" clusters of plays to other coaches.

"Our goal is to go through an entire season and never miss a single play that they want to see from practice or games," said Mike Crews, 33, the video director who has been with the Falcons nine years. "This year, we may during training camp have missed one or two plays where a tape would jam."

But missing a play during the season?

"That's not an option," video assistant Rocky Sabbatini said.

At practice, Crews operates one of the tower cameras and Sabbatini and Phil Tiemann alternate on the other. If they're not filming, they're editing in the room that has 20 recorders, 10 VHS machines, a couple of DVD recorders, a couple of DVD duplicators and stations with monitors and computers.

"It's very fast-paced, very hectic," Sabbatini said.

Outside, the towers have been known to sway in the wind, which Crews figures has reached 25-30 mph.

"Lightning's not fun either," he said. "Because you're basically on a 40-foot lightning rod in the middle of the practice field. Coach [Jim Mora] is real good, though. He listens. It's our call when we feel unsafe. We come down and that's when



Photos by CURTIS COMPTON / Staff

Keith Phillips (foreground) and assistant **Phil Tiemann** process practice tape in the video room.

the team goes off."

The players also know who makes the call. "We've even had a few times where we've had quite a bit of money thrown our way to end a practice in training camp," Crews said.

Phillips, 24, is in charge of the hand-held camera on the field besides being the runner.

"I know you've got to work from the bottom up," Phillips said of learning the ropes.

Actually, the ropes are the only low-tech part of the extremely high-tech operation.

"To do what we do," Crews said, "it actually serves a better purpose to have a football background and a football knowledge and then we can teach you the technical side."

Crews was a wide receiver and defensive back at Brookwood High School and got a full scholarship to Georgia Tech — to do video. He was the video director for the Yellow Jackets for three years before joining the Falcons.

"When I stopped playing," Crews said, "I wasn't ready to be away from the game, and it



Keith Phillips rushes tape of a segment of practice to the Falcons' video room.

still gives you that connection of feeling like you're a part of the team."

Practice is only a sliver of what the video department does. Before each season, Crews orders 20,000 tapes, mostly Beta SX. They also film every game, edit tapes from the

opposing team and put together scouting tapes for college players and free agents. Crews also does a motivational tape for the Saturday night team meeting where he can be creative and use music and film clips.

The video department "is our lifeline because film is our lifeline," said Ed Donatell, the Falcons' defensive coordinator. "I do appreciate it, because this stuff just doesn't show up magically when we walk in. They're working around the clock. ... They're always backing us up. The job directly aligns with the coaching."

That means they often work the same hours.

But the long days are offset by such perks as sitting on the 50-yard line at every Falcons game. Well, actually Tiemann is sitting on the sideline behind the bench so he can provide coaches with still pictures of each formation.

"I get to watch the football game every Sunday," said Tiemann, who then added, "I don't really get to watch it, but I'm there at one."