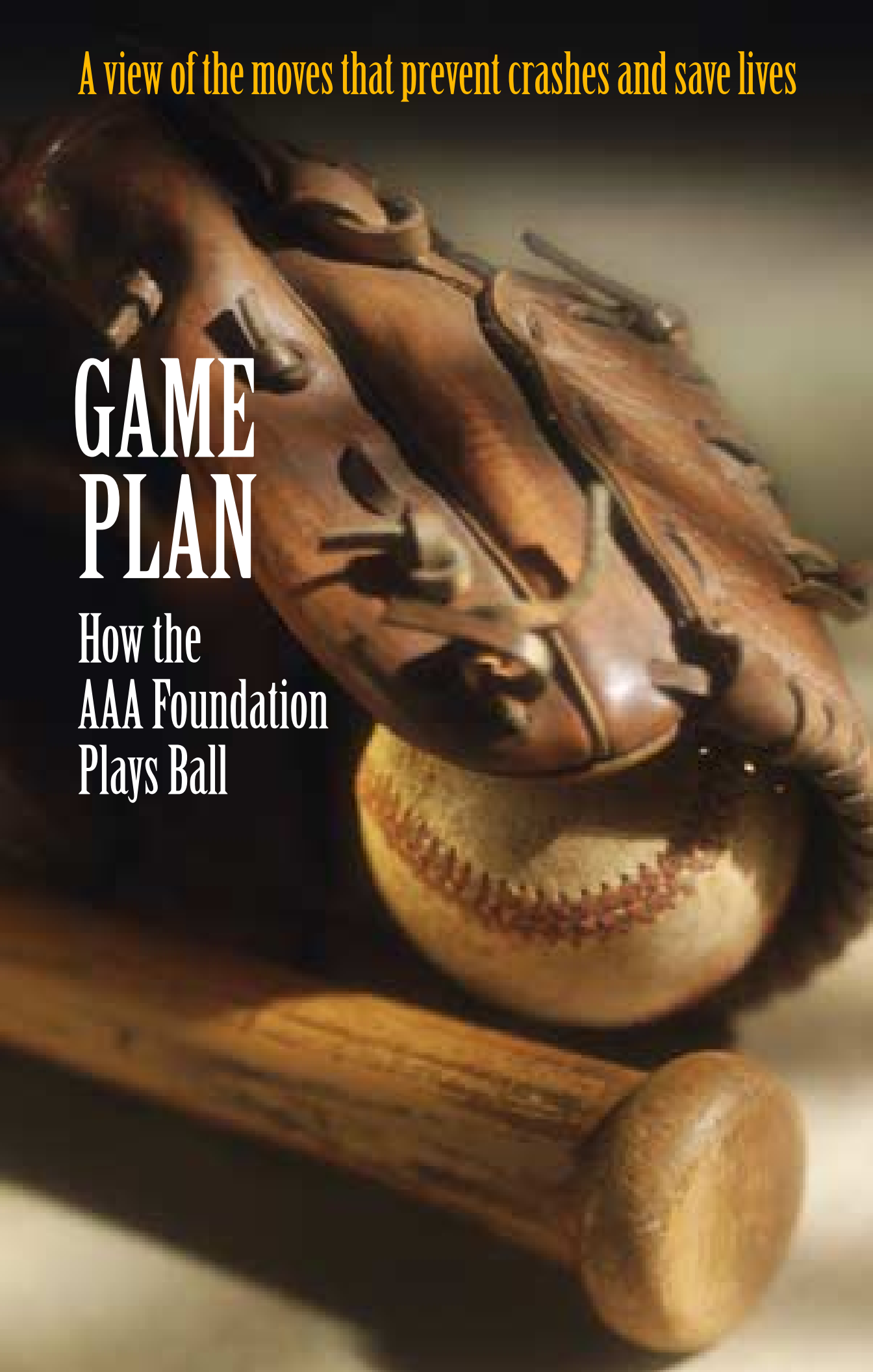


*A view of the moves that prevent crashes and save lives*

# GAME PLAN

How the  
AAA Foundation  
Plays Ball



# introduction

**N**othin' but net."  
"In the end zone."  
"Hole in one."

"At the checkered flag."

"By a nose."

Even if you're not a jock, these words probably ring a bell. With all-sports radio, sports television, magazines, and an ever-increasing array of new athletic events to watch and play, nearly everyone seems to be involved in some kind of athletic pursuit, whether it's power-lifting or channel-surfing.

Sports have become deeply ingrained in our culture. Millions of fans eagerly follow every development that can affect their team's fortunes, while adults and children alike are participating in athletics in record numbers.

Few things seem to capture the public's imagination the way sports do — except maybe driving. And like sports, for most people driving is not only a useful skill, it's a national pastime.

In thinking about what we do at the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, we realized that we have a lot in common with the sporting world. So we decided to look at our own organization in sports terms — what our best plays are, how are we training, how we're moving down the field, and how well we're scoring.

To be sure, our mission of saving lives and preventing crashes is far more serious than any game. But, in the end, we think you'll see that we want to achieve what every Little Leaguer also wants: To have everyone safe at home.

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For more than 50 years, the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety has been a publicly supported, non-profit, 501 (c)(3) charitable research and educational organization.

# Foundation Mission

## *Setting the Game Plan*

**T**o say that the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety's mission is simple is sort of like saying that it's easy to win the Superbowl: All you have to do is score more points than the other team. This may be true, but it doesn't even begin to tell the whole story.

Our mission is straightforward: Prevent crashes and save lives through research and education about traffic safety. Forming a game plan to accomplish this is far more complex.

Our first challenge is trying to define and meet the needs of a vast and varied public. More than 180 million Americans today have driver's licenses. (In sports terms, that's enough people to fill nearly 3,000 Rose Bowls.) We expect the number of drivers to continue to rise as seniors stay on the road longer and the "baby boom echo" of teens gets behind the wheel. Keeping each one of these drivers safe, along with millions of pedestrians, cyclists, skaters, and others who use the road, is our most important concern.

Serving such a wide range of people means that we address issues affecting every aspect of society. We produced driver-ZED® to help promote teen driver safety, but we also created materials to help make older drivers safer. We continually research ongoing traffic safety concerns such as drowsy driving and the problem of headlight glare, and seek new strategies to address them.

We also juggle a constantly changing array of new topics that are raised by our own research, by new technology, and by the media. For example, as telematics and in-car communication systems proliferate, we have become interested in the safety impact of mobile devices such as cell phones and electronic navigation systems. Each new technology offers a new traffic safety challenge and a new opportunity to investigate the issue and provide reliable information to the driving public.

Managing our varied audiences and changing goals means that we have to maintain a responsive and nimble operation. We are organized around the two pillars of our mission — research and education. In research, we identify and investigate issues in order to develop strategies that can improve safety. When we have established our recommendations, our education and outreach programs set to work creating ways to get the information to the public.

Coaches might point out that our game plan is a twist on an old strategy — a strong defense is the best offense. We look at it as keeping crashes from getting to first base.

# Research

## *Scouting Report*

**W**e approach research the same way coaches approach a big game — by identifying likely opponents, learning as much as possible about how they operate, and formulating plays and strategies that help us win.

In our case, the “opponents” are behaviors, hazards, and situations that can cause automobile crashes. So each year the AAA Foundation’s Research and Development Committee approves a slate of research projects based on recommendations from the staff, expert consultants, and the committee members themselves. These topics can range from cutting-edge technology, such as glare problems caused by new types of headlights, to perennial concerns such as seatbelt safety and distracted driving.

Once the committee approves a topic, the real scouting begins. After determining the best research method and locating key experts, we commission outside consultants to perform research or begin investigations using our own staff, depending on the nature and scope of the project.

In 2000, for example, we commissioned the University of North Carolina Highway Safety Research Center to study the factors that contribute to distracted driving crashes, but we also performed an in-house study on safety for in-line skaters.

When we receive a research report, we send it out to other researchers for “peer

review.” These reviews include careful, thorough reading by experts in the field who know the topic and can comment on the paper’s methodology and conclusions. Sometimes this means sending the paper back to the researcher for revision. Once the research report is edited and reviewed, the AAA Foundation posts the report on our web site and produces printed copies for free distribution to research professionals, the media, and the public.

The efforts don’t stop there. As soon as we receive the findings from a study, we begin translating the information into constructive recommendations that contribute to making roads safer. We’re committed to the idea of creating tools to improve safety through our research — we don’t just report on problems in an academic or abstract way.

Depending on the topic, we might offer practical advice for drivers, suggest vehicle modifications, recommend new laws or policies, or advise changes to roadways themselves. For example, in releasing our study on unlicensed drivers, we recommended several changes to the driver’s licensing process and encouraged further study into technologies such as “smart licenses” that could help keep dangerous drivers off the road.

With our playbook in hand, we’re ready to take the field.

# Outreach and Education

## *Taking the Rock to the Rack*

**B**asketball great Charles Barkley once observed that “the only difference between a good shot and a bad shot is if it goes in or not.”

We feel much the same way about our outreach and education programs. If we can get recommendations and safety messages to our audiences in ways that resonate with them, we know we’ve sunk the basket.

When we receive new safety information or recommendations based on our research, we immediately identify key audiences and devise strategies for reaching those groups through a combination of earned media, direct outreach, and educational tools.

Since so many of our messages apply to drivers — a term that covers the whole universe of people who get behind the wheel — we often start by trying to capture the national media’s attention. We hold news conferences, give interviews, provide television stations with “B-roll” video that shows our messages, and provide background materials such as specific incidents that illustrate our point. AAA and CAA clubs help us enormously by promoting the local angle and gaining media coverage in their areas.

For example, when we released our unlicensed drivers study in 2000, we captured the attention of every major network and television news organization as well as several radio networks, key newspapers including *USA Today*, wire

services, and dozens of local media outlets that used our material to illustrate the situation in their area.

Based on this coverage, we can estimate conservatively that our outreach on this story alone reached more than 150 million people within 24 hours of its release.

Ongoing media inquiries continue to expand this story’s reach further — as well as giving “legs” to our other key messages. In a typical year, we respond to more than 500 unsolicited media inquiries on our issues. The Nexis news database records more than 1,000 stories where AAA Foundation representatives are quoted as expert sources.

Media outreach isn’t the only way to get information to the public, which is why we continue to create and distribute brochures, pamphlets, videos, and other educational tools. These materials bring the issues home to special target audiences, including schools, parent groups, police and fire departments, and local safety organizations.

Recently, we’ve explored several “new media” efforts that combine the immediacy and excitement of broadcast messages with the “go at your own pace” sensibility of traditional written material. In 2000, for instance, we revamped our website to include more background material on safety issues, as well as interactive tools that help visitors learn more about driver safety.

# Other Activities

## *Special Teams*

**L**ike any good team, the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety supplements its standard plays with “special teams” work — activities that enhance our other efforts and fill a unique niche.

### **Color commentary: THE WEBSITES**

Redesigned in 2000, our website **www.aaafoundation.org** provides a resource for anyone who wants more information about traffic safety — from new drivers looking for safety tips to research scientists who want information about the latest traffic safety research. In keeping with our mission of getting safety information to the public in every way possible, we post all of our publications on the website as soon as they are available in electronic form — often before a paper copy is available.

In addition to our general website, we also offer two special sites for key audiences. For teen drivers and their parents we’ve created **www.driverzed.org**, a multimedia site that shows off our award-winning CD-ROM, driver-ZED®. Visitors can take driving quizzes, get software updates to the driver-ZED® CD-ROM, and learn more about the unique safety challenges that confront young drivers.

A special website for mature motorists, **www.seniordrivers.org**, was launched

earlier this year. Just as teens have specific safety issues that relate to their lack of driving experience, older drivers need to adapt their driving habits to the changes that often come with aging, such as diminished vision and slower reflexes. The site also provides tools family members can use to help ensure that their senior relatives continue to drive safely.

### **Team Stats: FRONT OFFICE**

The AAA Foundation spends less than 12 percent of its total budget on administrative expenses. In other words, we focus our efforts in the field, not in the front office.

**Roster:** Six full-time professionals

**Home Field:** Washington, DC

**Annual Budget:** \$2,400,000

**Rookie Year:** 1947

### **Bench Strength: FELLOWSHIPS**

In 2001 we entered the fourth year of our Fellowship in Traffic Safety program at Texas A&M University. Through the program, we have awarded doctoral-level students \$15,000 grants to help future traffic safety experts support their studies. We believe these grants will help develop a new and youthful pool of high-caliber traffic safety expertise.

## **Designated Hitters: OTHER ORGANIZATIONS**

We collaborate with our colleagues in many other transportation and safety organizations around the world. Through these efforts, we not only gain insights into new developments in the field, but also create additional opportunities to disseminate our own research and expertise. For example, each year we contribute financial support to LifeSavers, an annual convention of traffic safety specialists, and AAA Foundation researchers often present research findings in the convention's breakout sessions. Foundation President David K. Willis serves on the Transportation Research Board's Research and Technology Coordinating Committee, its Committee for the Study of a Future Strategic Highway Research Program, and its Committee on the Safe Mobility of Older Persons.

## **Fielding: RESEARCH STATISTICS**

- Supported more than 300 research and educational projects since 1947.
- Currently undertaking 11 new and ongoing research projects, including:
  - Better approaches to combat drunk driving
  - Children seated for safety
  - Countermeasures against headlight glare
  - Driver distractions
  - Model alternative transportation programs for the elderly
  - Police enforcement of moving violations by large trucks
  - State laws and policies that prevent unlicensed driving
  - Technologies to reduce truck splash and spray
  - Unsafe actions that lead to car/truck crashes
  - Vehicle-related road debris

## **Hitting: OUTREACH AND EDUCATION STATISTICS**

### **Runs batted in – OUTREACH**

- Respond to more than 1,000 media inquiries annually
- Distribute “state-of-the-industry” bi-monthly newsletter to more than 6,000 traffic safety professionals and media contacts
- Reach more than 200 million people annually through earned media hits in television, radio, newspaper, and magazine stories
- Logged nearly 200,000 unique users on the AAA Foundation websites

### **Base hits – EDUCATION**

- Provided speakers for local and national safety meetings
- Distributed nearly 400,000 free brochures to schools, hospitals, police and fire departments, fraternal organizations, clubs, and other groups

# Addressing the Ball

## *Frequently Asked Questions*

### **Who funds the Foundation's work?**

The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety is a non-profit 501(c)(3) charity, supported by voluntary contributions from AAA and CAA clubs, club members, and other benefactors. No bonus babies here.

### **Is the AAA Foundation part of the American Automobile Association?**

No, we field our own teams. The AAA Foundation is an independent tax-exempt organization that serves all members of the public. It is entirely separate from AAA and CAA.

### **Have you won any Stanley Cups or Golden Gloves?**

No, but we do have a Golden Eagle award from the Council on International Non-theatrical Events (CINE) for driver-ZED®. We've also won awards from the Public Relations Society of America, the New York Governor's Traffic Safety Committee, the New York Film Festival, and others.

### **Does the media cover home and away games?**

We try to get them to cover all our games — and we always give them the

inside line. In fact, the media uses the Foundation as a preferred expert resource on traffic safety issues, inviting staff members to appear on television and radio as well as quoting us extensively in traffic stories. We encourage this by providing 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week access to staff members and providing a balanced, accurate perspective on issues.

### **Does the Foundation use a coin-toss, a face-off, or a tip-off to decide research priorities?**

As a matter of fact, none of the above. We're always developing research ideas — originated by the staff, sent in as unsolicited proposals, and developed through contacts with known experts in the traffic safety field. Ultimately, our Research and Development Committee reviews the proposals and votes on which ones will receive funding.

### **What's the staff's batting average?**

Well, let's just say that our goal is to be batting a thousand.

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( ) = year term expires

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