



FOOTBALL PASSING GAME

CHEAT SHEETS

21 PROVEN STRATEGIES FOR AN UNSTOPPABLE AERIAL ATTACK

PRIME ROUTE CONCEPT

As discussed in the concept of having the quarterback anticipate his throws, the quarterback where he is trying to throw the ball once he has the ball. The next step after that, is having the receiver to move quickly onto the backside of the quarterback immediately if the primary route when the quarterback has hit his drop back.

CORE CONCEPT

WHY IT MATTERS

This is especially true against zone defenses. While a prime route may occasionally be used against man coverage, it is almost always going to get worst against a zone. The defense will read the quarterback's eyes and shift over to that area of the field. While this means that the prime route will likely get worse, it also means that the outlet routes will become more open.

YOU MUST THROW DEEP!



CORE CONCEPT

Most quarterbacks are very comfortable playing control passing - working the short and intermediate routes for high percentage passes that are going to chip away at the defense a couple yards at a time.

This sounds great in theory, as deep throws have a much lower percent chance of succeeding, but abstaining from throwing them completely will make it much tougher to complete intermediate throws, not to mention completely missing out on the chance to hit the home run on the deep ball.

WHY IT MATTERS

If we fail to throw the ball deep as an offense, both the defensive backs and defensive coordinator will begin to cheat, with the defensive back sitting on the intermediate throws, and the defensive coordinator ignoring deep zones, stacking the zones in the short and intermediate areas of the field.

It's a fairly simply concept to understand, yet still so many coaches fail to recognize the strategic benefits alone of blowing the top off the coverage. Of course, there is the much more obvious benefit of the occasional big play on the deep throw. If you can get one on one coverage on the outside, there is a great chance that if the pass is well thrown and the catch is made in stride, that the receiver could take the ball all the way to the house.

THROW YOUR DROPS WITH THE CORRECT

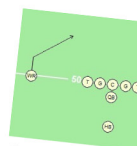
CORE CONCEPT

There are three basic distances that the quarterback is going to drop on any given pass play. As a coach, your job when designing your playbook to control the drops so that the dropback and routes are well suited to the quarterback's drop and receiver's route.

WHY IT MATTERS

Drop depths that were going to use are the five step drop, the five step drop, and the seven step drop.

Distance has several routes that are best suited to the quarterback's timing, allowing the quarterback to step back and make the throw after the receiver has cut and before the defense has time to



3-Step: Singleback Ace Pass Bunch Spacing Zone

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to “Passing Game Cheat Sheets,” your comprehensive guide to mastering the aerial attack in football. Whether you’re a veteran coach looking to refine your passing strategies or a new coach eager to build a potent offense, this guide offers practical insights and proven techniques to elevate your team’s passing game.

The passing game is a critical component of modern football, allowing teams to stretch the field, exploit defensive weaknesses, and score points efficiently. A well-coordinated passing attack can keep defenses on their heels, opening up opportunities for big plays and sustained drives. Understanding the nuances of passing game strategies and techniques is essential for any coach aiming to develop a high-performing offense.

In “Passing Game Cheat Sheets,” we break down the essential elements of an effective passing game into easy-to-understand concepts that you can immediately apply with your team.

These cheat sheets are packed with actionable advice, from the importance of timing drop-back passes to the integration of play-action passing that seamlessly ties the run and pass games together. By incorporating these strategies into your coaching, you’ll be able to develop a more dynamic and effective passing attack that can adapt to any defensive scheme.

“Passing Game Cheat Sheets” is not just a collection of tips but a comprehensive guide that empowers you to transform your team’s passing game. With this resource, you’ll be equipped to teach, refine, and perfect the elements that make for a successful aerial attack. Elevate your coaching, inspire your players, and dominate the field with a powerful passing game.

Get ready to dive in and revolutionize your passing game with these essential strategies and techniques. Let’s take your team to the next level!

USE MULTIPLICITY IN THE PASSING GAME



CORE CONCEPT

The most important part of offensive multiplicity isn't necessarily the amount of pass plays and run plays that you're going to call, but more so the amount of different ways that you can run your limited pass and run packages. To accomplish this, we make use of multiple formations, personnel plans, shifts, and motions to constantly give them different looks pre-snap, keeping the defense honest and preventing them from getting a read on what the offense is trying to do.

ON THE FIELD

On this page, we see four diagrams, each running the same route combination building off of a cross route. But each is run using different personnel and formations, and three of them make use of pre-snap motion and shifts.

Regardless, our quarterback is still making the same reads, and our receivers know it will be the same route combination, preventing the sloppiness that may occur from choosing from four completely different pass plays.

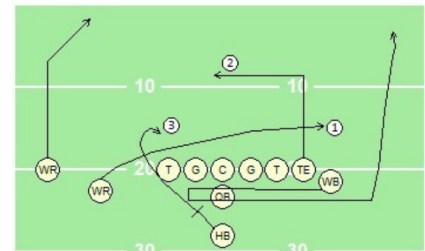
It's also important to keep in mind that when you are designing your pass plays, you have a range of plays that can effectively attack different defenses, to ensure that you have an answer regardless of what the defense is trying to do.

You need a pass package that has plays that can beat zone coverages or man coverages, and plays that can attack the safeties whether they're playing with one safety deep or two.

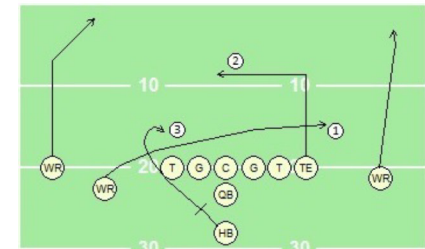
You also want routes that compliment each other. In the example plays, we see that the primary receiver is always the cross route, whether it's a slot receiver starting on the left or motioning over from the right.

From there we have our second option, the dig route from the tight end, and the halfback slipping out to the opposite side as our third option to form the triangle read for our quarterback. The receiver farthest to the left is running a post, and the receiver on the right is running the clear out.

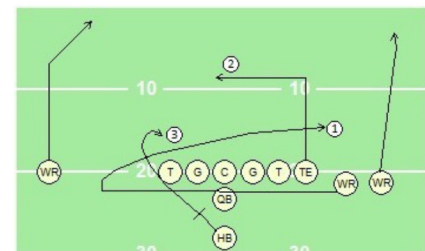
The routes are all complimentary, and avoid any congestion, stretching the defense and giving our quarterback plenty of options.



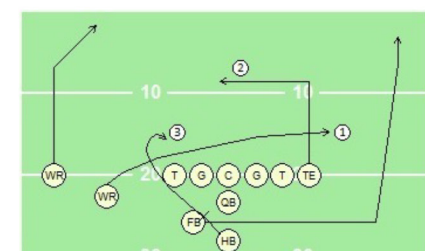
Singleback Ace Pair Slot Cross



Singleback Dice Slot Cross



Singleback Dice Slot Cross



SWeak I H Twins FB Motion Cross

ATTACK THE ENTIRE FIELD



CORE CONCEPT

It's extremely important that your pass patterns attack the entire field, both horizontally and vertically. This means that we should have pass patterns that range from sideline to sideline, and from behind the line of scrimmage to the deep routes, ensuring that the defense stays honest and covers the entire field.

WHY IT MATTERS

Failing to attack the entire field will drastically reduce the success of your offense, as both smart players and coaches will begin to pick up on it throughout the game and make the necessary adjustments. If a defensive coordinator notices that you aren't throwing any passes to any of the zones - whether that be vertically with the short zones, intermediate zones, and deep zones, or horizontally with the flat zones, curl zones, and middle zones, he will simply ignore those areas and squeeze your favorite parts of the field, making it much tougher to do what you want to on offense.

And it's not just in zone coverage that this is important. For example, a savvy defender may notice that there is no threat of the receivers ever going deep, and feel free to gamble without consequence, jumping routes and wreaking havoc on all of your short and intermediate routes.

ON THE FIELD

It can be tough to know if you really are attacking the entire field, as most coaches set out to do so, but will often neglect an area of the field without even knowing it. The best way to keep things unbiased, is to just have a look at the cold hard data. Compile all of the routes from all of your passing plays, whether it be manually drawing them out, stacking them on a projector or simply doing it on your computer. From there, you have a visual guide of exactly where the sum of all of your passing plays attack. If you do find that a certain area of the field is lacking in attention, go back to square one, and start to redesign your base package with the focus of spreading routes all over the entire field.

YOU MUST THROW DEEP!



CORE CONCEPT

Most quarterbacks are very comfortable playing control passing - working the short and intermediate routes for high percentage passes that are going to chip away at the defense a couple yards at a time.

This sounds great in theory, as deep throws have a much lower percent chance of succeeding, but abstaining from throwing them completely will make it much tougher to complete intermediate throws, not to mention completely missing out on the chance to hit the home run on the deep ball.

WHY IT MATTERS

If we fail to throw the ball deep as an offense, both the defensive backs and defensive coordinator will begin to cheat, with the defensive back sitting on the intermediate throws, and the defensive coordinator ignoring deep zones, stacking the zones in the short and intermediate areas of the field.

It's a fairly simply concept to understand, yet still so many coaches fail to recognize the strategic benefits alone of blowing the top off the coverage.

Of course, there is the much more obvious benefit of the occasional big play on the deep throw. If you can get one on one coverage on the outside, there is a great chance that if the pass is well thrown and the catch is made in stride, that the receiver could take the ball all the way to the house.

That's why it's important to keep in mind that while having a quarterback who can throw the ball 32 or 60 yards sounds great, it's pretty rare to have a quarterback who can throw the ball that distance effectively. Instead, we want to look to make the throw at around 22 yards or even shorter, and give our receiver a chance to pick up those extra yards after the catch.

ON THE FIELD

The key to throwing the ball deep is the timing of the quarterback. Whether it's a streak, a post or a corner, a quarterback's ability to time the throw properly is more important than the distance they can throw it by leaps and bounds. And the only way your quarterback is going to develop that timing, is to work on those throws in practice.

MATCH YOUR DROPS WITH THE CORRECT ROUTES



CORE CONCEPT

There are three basic distances that the quarterback is going to drop on any given pass play. As a coach, it's your job when designing your playbook to coordinate these drops so that the dropback and routes are well timed, with the quarterback's drop and receiver's route in sync.

WHY IT MATTERS

The three drop depths that were going to use are the three step drop, the five step drop, and the seven step drop.

Each drop distance has several routes that are best suited to that particular timing, allowing the quarterback to step up into the pocket and make the throw after the receiver has made his cut and before the defense has time to react.

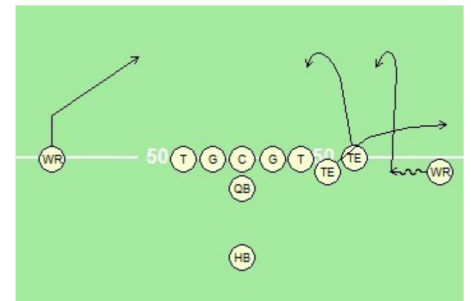
ON THE FIELD

The three step drop is used in the quick pass game. This is when we want to get the ball out of the quarterback's hands fast, and is generally more conducive to short, high percentage passes; slants, hitches, quick outs, and also the fade.

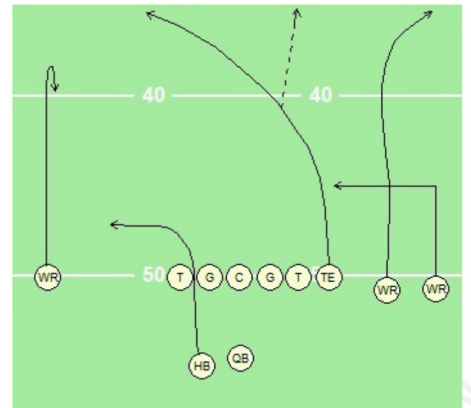
The five step drop is most appropriate when trying to complete passes in the intermediate game - your eight to twelve yard routes.

For example: outs, curls, and y-option routes. For slightly slower developing routes, we can add a pop up back into the pocket after the five step dropback - this is fantastic way to throw that 22 yard streak route or a 15 yard curl.

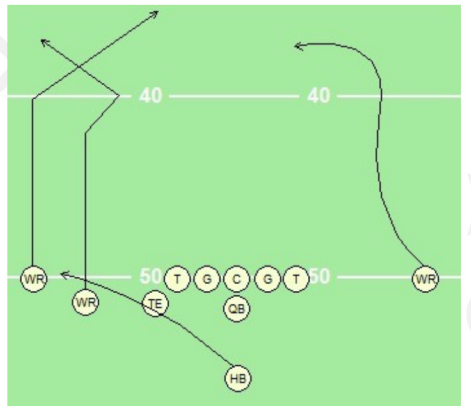
And finally, the seven step drop is for our delayed, deeper routes; comebacks, post digs, post corners, and deep hooks. These are going to be routes that are thrown for around 20 yards or more. However, you'll likely want to avoid throwing streaks when using the seven step drop - unless your quarterback has a cannon for an arm - as your receivers will be out of your quarterback's effective throwing range by the time he's able to drop back, pop up and throw.



3- Step: Singleback Ace Pair Motion to Bunch Spacing Zone



5-Step: Shotgun Trip Weak Smash Divide



7-Step: Singleback Trips Open Scissors
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AGAINST ZONE, RECEIVERS MUST FIND VOIDS AND THROTTLE



CORE CONCEPT

A receiver's routes are not written in stone. Much like the quarterback, it's important that they read the defense and react appropriately, making slight adjustments to their routes when necessary.

One example of this is that the receiver must learn to read the zone defense when he sees it, and either slow down or, depending on the route, come to a complete stop in the holes between the zones.

WHY IT MATTERS

We've all seen these receivers before. They aren't the fastest guys, they aren't the biggest guys, they might not even have the best hands, but somehow they just always seem to get wide open and often manage to break big yardage after the catch on a consistent basis. How? With great route running.

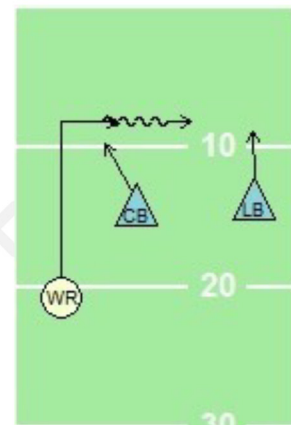
It's often misunderstood when you hear that a receiver is a great route runner that it means he's make his cuts in his routes effectively, and while this is a big part of route running against man coverage, finding the soft spots in the zone is the key to effective route running against the zone, and you should remind your receivers that this is a very easy way to quickly become their quarterback's favorite target.

ON THE FIELD

There is a real art to finding the voids in the zone and timing the throttle correctly, and a lot of it has to do with reading the shoulders of the defensive back.

Take the example of the diagram to the right. If the cornerback is working hard to the outside, moving aggressively and with his shoulders turned, then the receiver should throttle early, giving himself a chance to turn downfield before he gets to the linebackers middle zone.

If the cornerback is staying home, with his shoulders square, then the receiver is going to have to work deeper into the zone before he has the chance to throttle down.



Throttling Down in Between Zones

AGAINST MAN, RECEIVERS MUST CREATE AND MAINTAIN SEPARATION



CORE CONCEPT

There are two keys that a receiver needs to keep in mind when facing man coverage, and they are equally important. The first is to create separation from the cornerback, and the second, is to maintain the separation they have just created.

WHY IT MATTERS

The same way a receiver needs to be able to identify zone coverage so that he can take advantage, the receiver needs to be able to identify man coverage as well.

He can't make the mistake of throttling down after separating from the defensive back, as this will simply allow the defensive back to close the distance between the two.

They need to continue running at top speed, maintaining separation and giving the quarterback a window to throw the ball into.

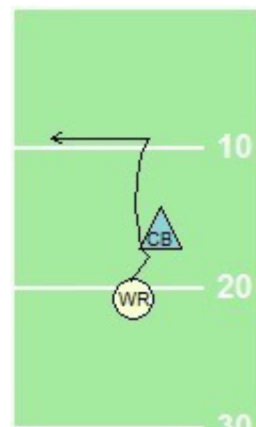
ON THE FIELD

The key to getting separation versus man coverage is getting the cornerback to lean away from where the receiver wants to go, giving him that split second advantage so that he can get open. In the example above, we see a receiver going up against man coverage.

Right away, the receiver will stick into the corner, forcing him to take away the inside, then proceed to burst downfield, driving through the corner, making sure to use their physicality. We don't want the receiver to give up and use an avoidance release, as this will simply give the corner a chance to jump right back into the body of the receiver and take back the space the receiver has just fought to get.

Next, the receiver will use a head fake, leaning away at the stem point to try to get the corner to bite inside once again so that the receiver can break away uncovered. At this point, the receiver must remember to then stay at top speed, maintaining whatever separation they've been able to create from their cut.

Stick and stem into him, force him to take away the inside, and get on his heels, then burst tightly downfield, don't give an avoidance release, will give receiver chance to jump back on us, physically drive through him, then lean away at stem point, head fake inside, get him to lean away from where we want to break hard.



Creating Separation vs. Man

CONCEPT #21 — DON'T LET ROUTES OF A PATTERN BLEED



CORE CONCEPT

'Route bleeding' is a term used to describe what happens when a number of routes on a particular pass play are all far too close together, reducing the effectiveness of all the routes in that area.

WHY IT MATTERS

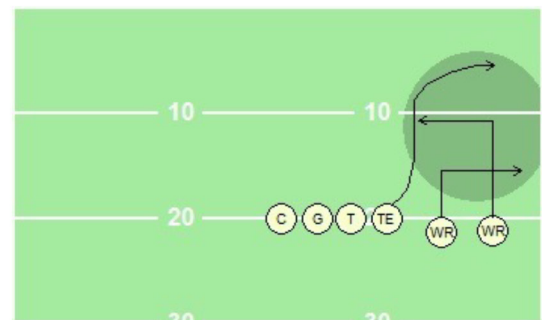
While keeping all of our routes in tight together may seem like a smart thing to do, as it will allow our quarterback to focus in on one area of the field, in reality, it will make things much tougher for him.

Versus zone coverage, putting two or more routes in one area will allow the defense to cover multiple routes with one defender. And versus zone coverage, route bleeding will lead to congestion, resulting in far too many defenders in one area.

This means they will have more angles available to jump a route for an interception, or that an errant throw or tipped ball is much more likely to end up in the hands of a defender.

ON THE FIELD

In the diagram to the right, we see a route combination that is much too congested. By combining a 15 yard post route, a 10 yard square in, and a 5 yard square out, we are only attacking one area of the field and drastically reducing the likelihood of success in a throw to any of those three routes.



Route Congestion in the Highlighted Zone

PRIME ROUTE CONCEPT



CORE CONCEPT

As discussed in the concept of having a quarterback anticipate his throws, the quarterback should know where he is trying to throw the ball once the play begins. The next step after that, is having the quarterback learn to move quickly onto the backside or to checkdown routes immediately if the primary receiver is covered when the quarterback has hit his plant foot and completed his drop back.

WHY IT MATTERS

This is especially true against zone defenses. While a prime route may occasionally improve against man coverage, it is almost always going to get worst against a zone. This is because the defense will read the quarterback's eyes and shift over to that area of the field.

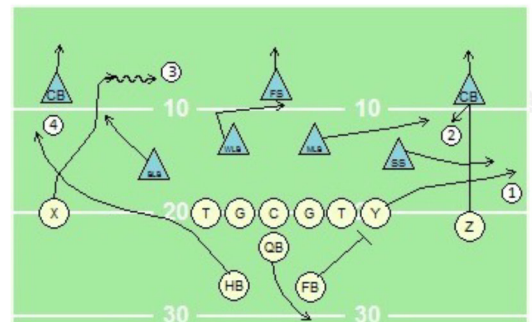
While this means that the prime route will likely get worse, it also means that the backside outlet routes will become more open.

ON THE FIELD

In the diagram to the right we see our example of the curl flat route combination against a cover three again. The quarterback will execute his drop back, reading the strong safety and looking to hit the curl when the safety buzzes out to the flat.

In this particular example, maybe the defense has been beaten with this play a couple times, and the mike linebacker reads the curl and sprints over to take it away. The quarterback sees this as he plants on his last step for the drop back, and realizes that neither the curl nor flat have a chance of getting open, so he shifts over to the back side, and looks to hit the split end as he throttles down in the void between the will linebacker and the free safety.

There are occasions where even against zone, it can be okay for the quarterback to sit on the prime route for slightly longer than normal. Say the strong safety is headed out into the flat, but is moving slow enough that the curl isn't there right away. The quarterback then has a valid reason to sit on the curl, and can wait an extra beat to see if the route becomes available.



Prime Route Concept in Practice

GIVE QUARTERBACKS EASY OUTLETS



CORE CONCEPT

To make the quarterback's job easier, design secondary and tertiary passing routes that are simple to read and complete.

WHY IT MATTERS

There are two ways that we can make the quarterback's secondary reads easier: using backside outlet routes and using short dump off or check down routes.

The backside outlet routes give the quarterback a chance to make a simple lateral read. He can start from his primary route on one side of the field and progress back across the field, with the receivers working back towards his vision. The other option is to have short dump routes right in front of him that he can get the ball to quickly.

ON THE FIELD

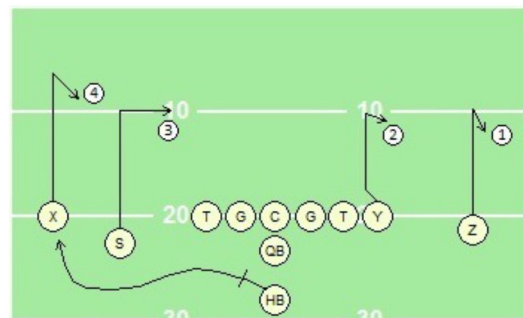
Here are two great examples, with the first showing how to setup a lateral read for your quarterback, and the second showing a high low route combination with dump offs underneath.

In the first play, our quarterback would hike the ball and drop back, looking first to get the ball to his flanker on the right side. If that isn't available, he'll work next over to the left, with the tight end breaking into the quarterback's vision.

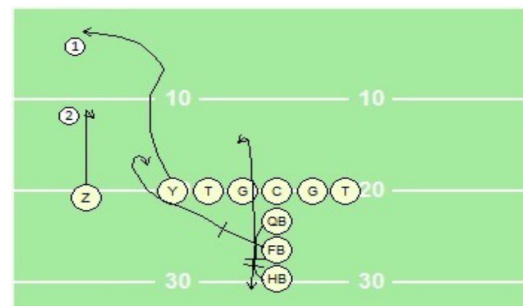
The quarterback will continue scanning over to the left, with the remaining two receivers also breaking back into his scan. And in the case of a blitz or missed block, he also has the option of dumping it to the halfback on the swing pass.

In the second play, we have the quarterback executing a high low read. We would call this play when expecting a zone coverage, so that we can isolate a defensive back and force him to make a decision between covering the flanker or the tight end. If he goes high, we go low, if he goes low, we go high.

Now in the case that the routes are covered or the defense gets into the backfield before he has a chance to make his read, we give him two dump off options, with both the fullback and halfback parking right in his line of sight for a short easy checkdown if necessary.



Right to Left Lateral Read



Easy Check down after High Low Read

USE THE 3 STEP QUICK PASS GAME



CORE CONCEPT

The quick pass game as executed off the three step drop back is often considered one of if not the most effective passing strategies.

WHY IT MATTERS

When using the quick passing game, we make things very simple for our receivers, linemen, and our quarterback as well. These are going to be short routes, limiting our quarterback's time in the pocket and thus making both his reads and the blocking for the offensive line much easier than those we might see on five and seven step dropbacks.

It's a high percentage way of playing the passing game, both in terms of the completion percentage but also in avoiding interceptions. Not only is the quarterback making simple reads and throwing short passes, which will cause a drop in interceptions on their own, but since the emphasis is on getting the ball out quick, we limit the defensive pass rush, meaning we don't have a quarterback who is making the rushed decisions as a defensive lineman bears down on him that often lead interceptions.

ON THE FIELD

This is a simple concept to implement from the top down. For the quarterback, we want him to focus on making quick reads and throwing accurate passes – arm strength is great to have, but is ultimately secondary when it comes to the quick passing game.

As far as the offensive line, they have a pretty easy job protecting the quarterback when using the quick pass game as they should only have to block for a short time. They can even use a cut block technique, but only if this is something that you have spent a fair amount of time on in practice to ensure they are doing so safely and effectively.

It's an extremely effective concept against all defenses, using a variety of hitches, slants, quick outs, and fades. This is why it is also so effective against blitzes. These are all short routes and with proper route spacing, you should be able to attack any zone vacated by a blitzing defender and gouge the defense for big yards after the catch.

MOVE QUARTERBACK LAUNCH POINT



CORE CONCEPT

One often overlooked aspect of the playcalling in the passing game is moving the quarterback's launch point. While it can seem innocuous to simply call a three or five step drop back on every play, it provides a huge advantage to the defense and will ultimately make things much more difficult for both your quarterback and offensive line.

WHY IT MATTERS

When the quarterback drops straight back on every single play, regardless of the exact number of steps in the drop back, the defense has a pretty good idea where the quarterback is going to end up on any given play.

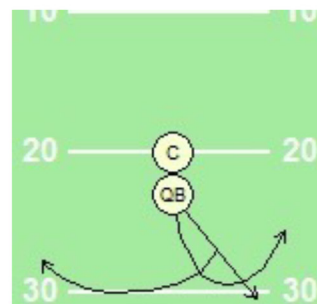
This makes pass rushing much easier on both the defense and the defensive coordinators. The coordinator can now dial up blitzes and stunts knowing exactly where the quarterback will be, and the pass rush can put their head down and attack knowing the target is always going to be in roughly the same spot.

By moving the launch point around, we slow down the pass rush, forcing them to look and analyze where the quarterback is going to be on each and every play.

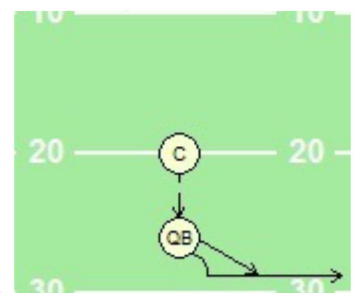
It also carries the advantage of making things easier on a shorter quarterback, getting them out from behind those behemoths and giving them a clear view where they don't have to worry about getting batted down at the line of scrimmage.

ON THE FIELD

There are plenty of ways to go about moving the quarterback launch point; from sprint outs to bootlegs to waggles. It's important to use all of these techniques to your advantage to keep the defense on it's heels, and remember to coordinate your routes with whatever launch point movement action you decide on - try to incorporate lateral reads to make your quarterback's job as easy as possible.



*I Form Flex Wing
Counter Weak*



*I Form Flex Wing
Counter Weak*

USE MULTIPLICITY IN PASS PROTECTIONS



CORE CONCEPT

A common theme throughout all 35 concepts is that you don't want to become predictable, because when you start to fall into patterns, the defense can see them and take advantage.

While we often remember to avoid these patterns with our playcalling in both the run and pass game, we often forget that it's in our best interest to vary our pass protections as well, doing our best to make the defense frown at every level.

WHY IT MATTERS

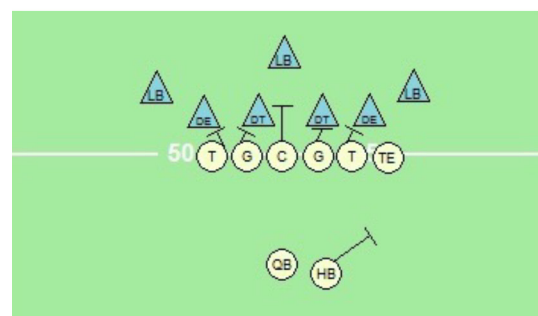
When you use the same pass protection scheme over and over, you give the defense a chance to make a plan of attack to best expose its weaknesses.

Now this doesn't mean you need 12 different pass protection schemes – this is even worse than using just one scheme the whole time, as it will lead to confusion among the offensive linemen and drastically reduce their effectiveness.

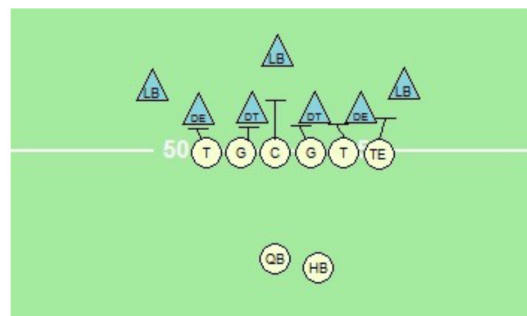
ON THE FIELD

You should have somewhere between four and six pass protections, affording you the flexibility to effectively protect your quarterback in any situation: dropback passing, quick passing, and play action passing.

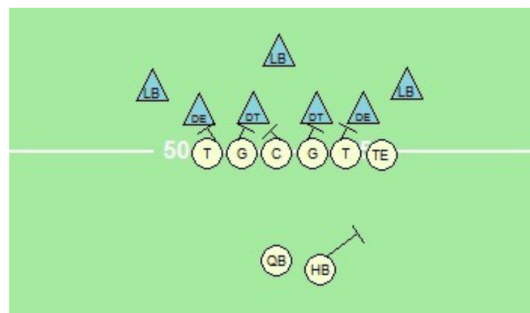
When all else fails remember – KISS! Keep it simple stupid! When in doubt, cut back on your protections.



Pass Protection – Man Blocking



Pass Protection – Zone Blocking



Pass Protection – Combo Blocking

WORK PLAY ACTION INTO YOUR PLAYBOOK



CORE CONCEPT

As the one facet of your offense that ties both the pass and run games together, it's extremely important to work playaction into your playbook, as it will maximize the effectiveness of both.

WHY IT MATTERS

There are many coaches who believe that the most effective way to throw the football is to use the playaction pass. The advantage is that when the handoff fake is made, the linebackers are forced to hold and the secondary may take a step or two up to the line reacting to the run.

This will have the benefit of creating voids that may no otherwise be there against the zone, and by giving your receivers a step on the defensive backs they may not have otherwise been able to create.

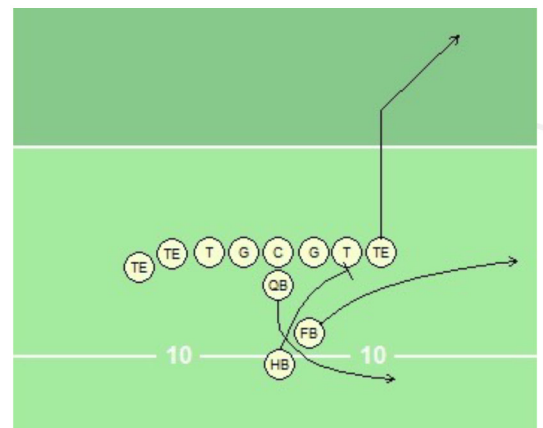
ON THE FIELD

For the playaction pass to be it's most effective, you need to do two things. First, you need to effectively run the football, and second, you need to run the playaction on the same runs you've been using against the defense.

All too often I see a coach who is killing the defense with a halfback iso, but then turns around and runs a playaction on the sprint draw.

This is a fatal mistake, as the defense won't have nearly the same reaction they would to a new or ineffective play that they would to a play that they've been giving up big yardage to the whole night.

So remember, your best playactions are always going to come off fakes on your best and most used runs.



Strong I Jumbo Flat 7

USE CONTROL PASSING



CORE CONCEPT

While attacking the whole field is important, working over the middle of the field and using short, high percentage, controlled passing is an extremely effective way to run your pass offense and move the ball downfield.

WHY IT MATTERS

As offensive coordinators, it's very easy to get sucked into trying to always get that big completion - the streak routes, the deep outs - the plays that have a good chance of taking up a good chunk of yardage. But we can do a much better job of controlling both the defense and offense by working the shorter routes, like scissors, delays, or cross routes with our running backs.

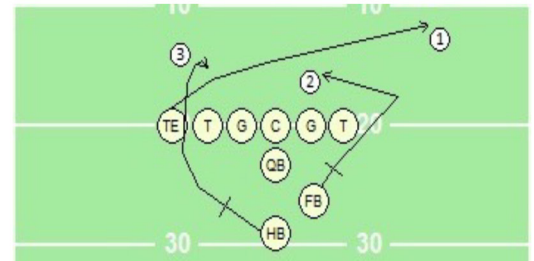
ON THE FIELD

The first play we'll look at is a fullback scissors play, where we bring the tight end across the formation and have the fullback fake as if going out into the flat before crossing back into the middle of the field.

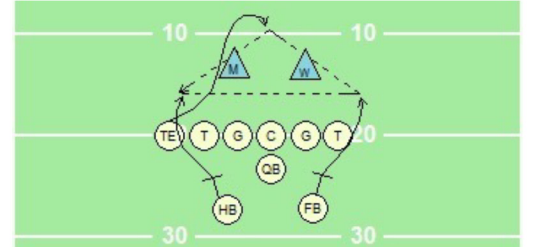
Here we have the opportunity to dump the ball to the tight end early, and if the defense over commits, a well placed pass to the fullback crossing into the middle can often lead to big yards as he attacks behind the defense after the clear out.

The triangle read is another great way to work the control passing game, especially against a zone defense. Here the tight end is going to work into the middle of the field, and the halfback and fullback will run sit routes, forming a triangle between the three receivers and allowing our quarterback to react to the two defenders, hitting the open receiver for effective short yardage.

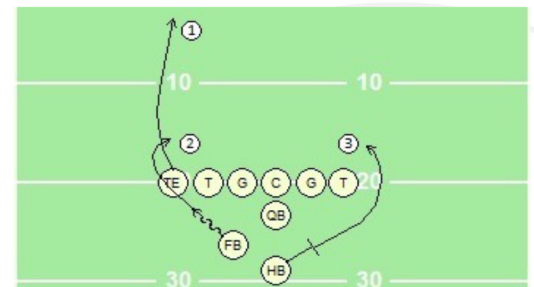
Another version of the triangle read is the high low read. In the second diagram, we are doing this with a tight end clear out and a fullback delay, working the middle linebacker and forcing him to decide which receiver he's going to cover, with our tailback as an emergency dumpoff option as well.



Weak I FB Scissors



Split Back Triangle Read



Strong I FB Delay

USE BOOTLEG, NAKED BOOTLEG, AND WAGGLE PASSES



CORE CONCEPT

We talked already about the importance of using misdirection plays in the run game. Well this same concept can be applied to the pass game by just substituting playaction bootlegs in the place of misdirection runs. You can also use a naked bootleg or waggle, a variation in which we don't send any blockers out in front of the quarterback as they roll out of the pocket.

WHY IT MATTERS

When you have a quarterback who's a threat to run, you'll quickly find that the playaction bootleg and waggle plays will be some of the most effective plays in your playbook.

The combination of misdirection, the quarterback running threat, and the under, over, and deep routes being run by the receivers makes it very difficult for the defense to defend all the options available on the play.

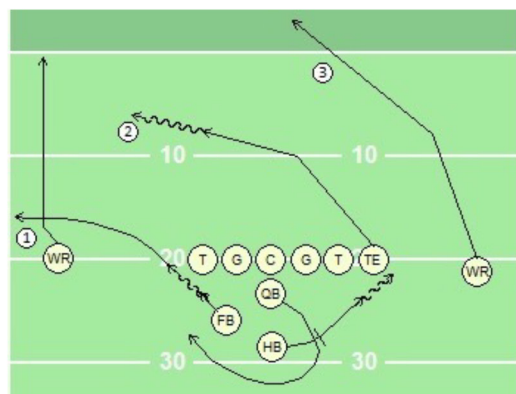
This play is so potent in fact that many teams will opt to use a bootleg instead of a counter as their misdirection run off of the inside or outside zone stretch, as it accomplishes all of the same goals as the counter and depending on your personnel, is often a more effective play.

ON THE FIELD

In the diagram to the right we see a naked bootleg working off of a playaction fake on the outside zone run. The quarterback will roll out and look to break contain on the defense, while the fullback runs a slam release, getting out into the flat.

This will give us our under route, while the tight end runs a cross to give us our over route, and the flanker will run a deep post route. The quarterback will make his reads – one, two, three – and if he is unable to get the ball to any of the receivers keep the ball for himself and pick up some yardage on the ground.

The quarterback may need to hold up on the bootleg if he is unable to break contain, giving himself a couple more seconds to find an open receiver.



Weak I Pro PA Naked Bootleg

DOUBLE ROUTE MOVES ARE A MUST



CORE CONCEPT

Double route moves, where our receivers are making two cuts, are an essential aspect to any good route tree and any good passing offense.

WHY IT MATTERS

Much in the same way that a misdirection run or a playaction pass can punish an over aggressive defense, double move routes can do the exact same thing to a secondary. When receivers are running double move routes, the defensive backs can't just jump short routes willy nilly, as they know there is a good chance they could get burnt by biting on a fake.

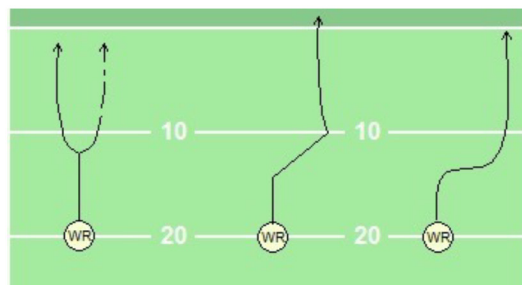
This will give us a chance at some big plays, as even though double move routes are a little bit slower developing, there is a chance to not only fool the primary defensive back, but the safeties over top may decide another receiver is a priority and move out of position just enough for the quarterback to get a completion to his receiver.

Or perhaps the vertical stretch may create seams for passes underneath that wouldn't have otherwise been there.

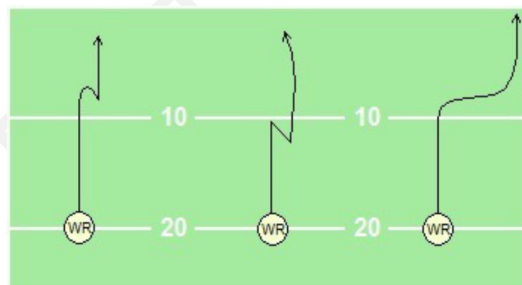
ON THE FIELD

In the two diagrams to the right, we see six extremely effective double moves. But for them to be there most effective, we need to install and practice both the double move route and the complimentary single move route.

There is no point in adding a hitch and go to a pass play when you don't use hitches. So make sure that these double moves aren't idle threats, and that your receivers will be ready and capable to punish the secondary on either of the two complimentary routes.



Routes From Right to Left: Hitch & Go, Slant & Go, Quick Out & Up



Routes From Right to Left: Curl & Go, Y-Nod, Out & Up

AGGRESSIVE RECEIVER PLAY



CORE CONCEPT

While it is true that physical strength isn't one of the first traits we're looking for in a good receiver, it doesn't mean they shouldn't still be aggressive and physical at their position. This doesn't mean they need to get in shoving matches or lay down big hits, just that they need to be aggressive and physical in whatever you ask of them in your offense.

WHY IT MATTERS

If your receivers are a weak link – literally – in your offense, your going to have a tougher time in all facets of the game. You need your receivers to be tough, hard-nosed players, working aggressiveness and physicality into everything they do on the field.

This applies to their releases off the line and running their routes, especially against bump and run man coverage – we can't afford to have a receiver jammed up at the line and just taken out of the play.

This also applies to blocking. Your offense's propensity for large runs will skyrocket with good wide receiver blocking, and the only way your receivers are going to be good blockers is if they play aggressive, using their strength and physicality to really lay down some good hard blocks.

And finally, they need to be aggressive when the ball is up in the air. When the ball goes up in the air, every single receiver on your roster needs to have the attitude that it is their football. Not the secondary's football. They need go get the football and snatch it out of the air. This will not only improve the quarterback's confidence in terms of believing he'll get a completion, but also not having to worry about a receiver of his getting bullied off the ball and allowing a defensive back to steal an interception.

ON THE FIELD

If you want your receivers to be aggressive in game, it's an attitude your going to have to demand and foster every day in practice. It doesn't matter if it's a little guy – in fact, it's probably even more important for a little guy to play aggressively.

Everyday remind your players to play with aggressive attitude – strong releases off the line, good physicality when separating in their route running, tough blocks in the run game, and attacking the ball in the air whenever it's thrown to them. Drive it through their heads every day in practice that those four skills are necessary if they want to succeed in your offense.

RECEIVERS MUST BEAT MAN BUMP AND PRESS COVERAGES



CORE CONCEPT

One of the biggest shocks to an offense is when they go into a game and are surprised by a team running man bump and press coverages.

If the receivers are unable to get off the line, the timing of the entire offense is thrown off and completing the short underneath routes is going to be almost impossible. In Superbowl 30, we saw the Denver Broncos – the highest scoring offense in the history of the NFL – get shut out in the first half and held to just one score the entire game by a Seattle Seahawks defense built on man press coverage.

Now it wasn't a surprise that the Seahawks ran press coverage, but the point remains that the Broncos receivers were unable to create separation, leading to their arsenal of quick slants, fades, and screens being taken away, and leaving us with a Broncos offense that was completely ineffective.

WHY IT MATTERS

This is why you need to work on beating press coverage both in the coaching booth and on the practice field before game day. If your team is unable to deal with press coverage it won't matter how well your routes are designed or how talented your receivers are, because your quarterback isn't going to have the time or the targets to complete any passes.

ON THE FIELD

There are a number of ways to prepare your receivers to deal with man bump and press coverages. The first is to have a package of plays – even if it's against a team that has used press against you before – that are specifically designed to beat man press coverages. Quick hitting routes like slants and fades have a chance to go for massive gains, as every defensive back on the field will be so preoccupied with their own responsibilities they won't be able to help on a teammate's assignment.

The second is to develop the skills they need to beat man press coverages in practice. They need to learn how to stick into their defender and then break away, creating separation and then maintaining it. By giving them time to work on these skills in practice we give them the best chance to be ready to handle them come game time.

It's also important that the quarterback do his job as well. They need to understand that with such small windows, ball placement is going to be important, and if they can lead a receiver tightly, hitting him in stride, there's a good chance the receiver will be able to catch on the run and knife downfield for a big gain.

MUST BEAT THE BLITZ



CORE CONCEPT

Learning to deal with the blitz is one of the most important skills for any quarterback, but a big chunk of that is the coaches' responsibility as well. Every team will have it's own way or ways of dealing with different blitzes, and it's vital that a coach develop his own systematic answer that the team and quarterback can then understand and get comfortable with.

WHY IT MATTERS

The consequences of not being able to beat the blitz are simple and numerous - we don't need to go over them here. But figuring out your strategy for effectively dealing with the blitz, whatever it may be, is absolutely vital.

You need to figure out your team's strengths and weaknesses and choose the plan of attack so that when the defense comes out in a blitz, your quarterback knows what his options are and can make the right checks at the line.

Having a systematic answer as well as a package of seven to eight different plays for dealing with the blitz is essential to getting your entire team ready and comfortable with handling the blitz in-game.

ON THE FIELD

There are a number of popular strategies for dealing with blitz packages. Some of the most effective and popular ones include going to the quick pass game, minimizing your quarterback's time in the pocket and giving him short routes to dump the ball off to.

You can also have your receivers run sight adjustments, where they ditch their route and instead fill in the hole where the blitzing defender is coming from. A more conservative approach would be to keep extra blockers, going to seven and eight man maximum protections to deal with the extra defenders rushing the quarterback.

Whatever you decide to do, you need to develop a system that your players can know and understand that will allow you to deal with any blitz package you might see. Your quarterback needs to be able to make adjustments at the line, checking out of plays and into the blitz beater package.

This doesn't mean that recognizing the blitz lies solely on your quarterback's shoulder though. You need to recognize patterns in the defense and based on the situation sometimes call a blitz beater out of the huddle. If you do so and the defense shows blitz, you can have your quarterback run a lock; this is where the quarterback fakes as if checking out of the play called in the huddle to deceive the defense.

IMPLEMENT A SCRAMBLE CONCEPT



CORE CONCEPT

The scramble concept is something that's really easy to take for granted, as your quarterback is likely only going to be scrambling a couple times a game and it seems like something that receivers would just figure out on their own. In truth, the scramble concept is something that you're going to have to put time into before you'll see consistent results.

WHY IT MATTERS

The scramble concept needs to be built into the offense, something that you work on with both your quarterback's and receivers so that you can maximize your chances of a completion and good yardage on even a broken play.

Scrambling out of the pocket with a couple behemoth defensive linemen chasing him down is one of the highest pressure moments for a quarterback, and it can be very easy for him to try and force a throw or miscommunicate with a receiver, leading to an interception.

By establishing a system with firm rules, we cut down on these kinds of errors and give ourselves a chance to turn plays that might be sacks, incompletions, or interceptions into big plays for the offense.

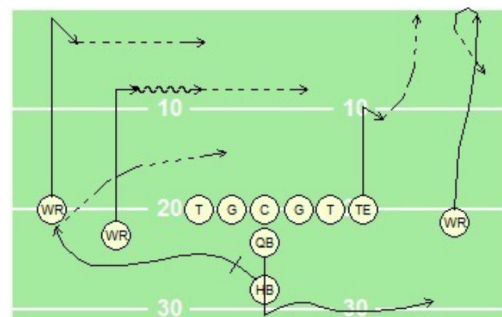
ON THE FIELD

If a receiver is to the side of the field the quarterback is scrambling to they do one of two things. If they are in the low to intermediate area, they go deep. If they are deep, they come back to the ball. The rest of the receivers, on the opposite side of the field, will trail across the field, trying to get back into the quarterback's vision.

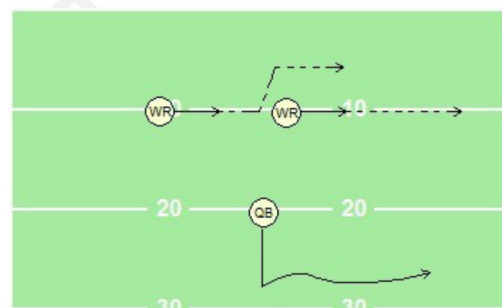
If the quarterback were to extend the play, and scramble to the other side, the same rules would apply.

Also, your receivers must 'stair-step' when they are trailing receivers in front of them.

This means that if both receivers are trailing towards the quarterback on the same plane, the second receiver will break five yards down field and then re trail. This maximizes the quarterback's throwing windows and reduces the possibility of route bleeding and congestion.



Scramble Concept Example



Wide Receiver Stair-Stepping

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

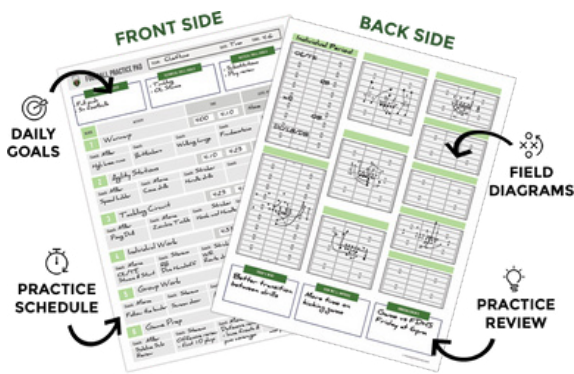


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