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Perspective: The Greatest Reason for Being Uptempo

By Dan Gonzalez



The use of TEMPO

Much has been said on this topic, but I feel the need to clarify a few things. We're all aware of the flashy, video game number-producing, throw it all over the park offense that gets all the media attention. But the reality is that upper level college football is pretty much the only place where teams can play full throttle the entire game and NOT hurt the rest of the team. Either that, or a program like the one I see every Friday night (Allen High School has an enrollment of 6,000+). Even Chip Kelly adjusted last season as his numbers dictated that he do so. That being said, I think analysts often miss the purest advantages of being up tempo from a coach's perspective:

- Accelerated player development. Being "up tempo" means devoting a practice philosophy to it (or at least - it should). Working at a faster pace in practice means developing younger players at a faster pace, as backups would get as many repetitions as the starter. In a high school setting, the ability to give the backup QB as many reps as the starter will pay dividends in both the immediate and long term future.

- Allows for balance. Contrary to popular belief, I really am a proponent of balance. Even more important - I think an offense has to be able to dictate to the defense. The box count theory of running the ball is great, but the thing I have noticed is this: there is NO answer when you can run the ball right at a defense. The one problem with running it 30-40 times a game? It shortens the game too much, and can potentially let a team that is inferior STAY IN THE GAME. Being up tempo and wide open does not have to be synonymous with soft; below, we see that of the top 25 offenses in Division 1 last year, only 2 huddled on a regular basis. Furthermore, only 3 averaged less than 150 yards rushing per game. The ability to speed up and slow down the game help strike the critical balance between attacking mismatches and physically deconstructing a defense.

RK	TEAM	YDS	YDS/G	PASS	P YDS/G	RUSH	R YDS/G	PTS	PTS/G
1	Baylor	8044	618.8	4668	359.1	3376	259.7	681	52.4
2	Oregon	7345	565.0	3789	291.5	3556	273.5	591	45.5
3	Northern Illinois	7277	519.8	3116	222.6	4161	297.2	555	39.6
4	Florida State	7267	519.1	4423	315.9	2844	203.1	723	51.6
5	Ohio State	7167	511.9	2846	203.3	4321	308.6	637	45.5
6	Fresno State	7100	546.2	5133	394.8	1967	151.3	564	43.4
7	Auburn	7018	501.3	2422	173.0	4596	328.3	553	39.5
8	Marshall	7005	500.4	4122	294.4	2883	205.9	590	42.1
9	Texas A&M	6999	538.4	4593	353.3	2406	185.1	575	44.2
10	Missouri	6870	490.7	3540	252.9	3330	237.9	548	39.1
RK	TEAM	YDS	YDS/G	PASS	P YDS/G	RUSH	R YDS/G	PTS	PTS/G
11	Texas Tech	6643	511.0	5107	392.8	1536	118.2	465	35.8
12	Clemson	6600	507.7	4330	333.1	2270	174.6	522	40.2
13	Colorado State	6591	470.8	3730	266.4	2861	204.4	507	36.2
14	Washington	6491	499.3	3384	260.3	3107	239.0	493	37.9
15	Bowling Green	6432	459.4	3725	266.1	2707	193.4	487	34.8
16	Brigham Young	6417	493.6	2942	226.3	3475	267.3	392	30.2
17	Arizona State	6402	457.3	3723	265.9	2679	191.4	556	39.7
18	Georgia	6294	484.2	4085	314.2	2209	169.9	477	36.7
19	Wisconsin	6251	480.8	2562	197.1	3689	283.8	453	34.8
20	Ball State	6202	477.1	4214	324.2	1988	152.9	501	38.5
RK	TEAM	YDS	YDS/G	PASS	P YDS/G	RUSH	R YDS/G	PTS	PTS/G
21	Boise State	6188	476.0	3610	277.7	2578	198.3	488	37.5
22	Ole Miss	6153	473.3	3683	283.3	2470	190.0	390	30.0
23	Cincinnati	6137	472.1	3947	303.6	2190	168.5	417	32.1
24	Indiana	6102	508.5	3680	306.7	2422	201.8	461	38.4
25	East Carolina	6086	468.2	4265	328.1	1821	140.1	522	40.2

- Allows for "Navigation Tags." Being able to guide the QB with specialized instruction is made possible when tempo is used as a weapon. I wrote a post about these tags [here](#).

- Shifting and Motion. Having played in a college offense that shifted and moved on every snap, I saw very early on in my career the potential for stressing a defense. If there was ever an opportunity to take advantage of shifting and motioning, a no huddle offense that varied its pace could take advantage.

Being multiple, in addition to having the capacity to being up tempo, is invaluable in terms of creating stressors for the defense. In business terms, these methods can be thought of as the "delivery" side of the offense. Just as important is the production aspect -- the overall design.

I have always thought this: the most successful head coaches are defensive guys who let their offenses go attack opposing defenses. History is littered with great defensive minds who prefer to try to keep scores close, only to end up in the coaching recycle bin. History shows that the most successful coaches (winning year in and year out) are often defensive minded guys whose offenses STRESS the defense:

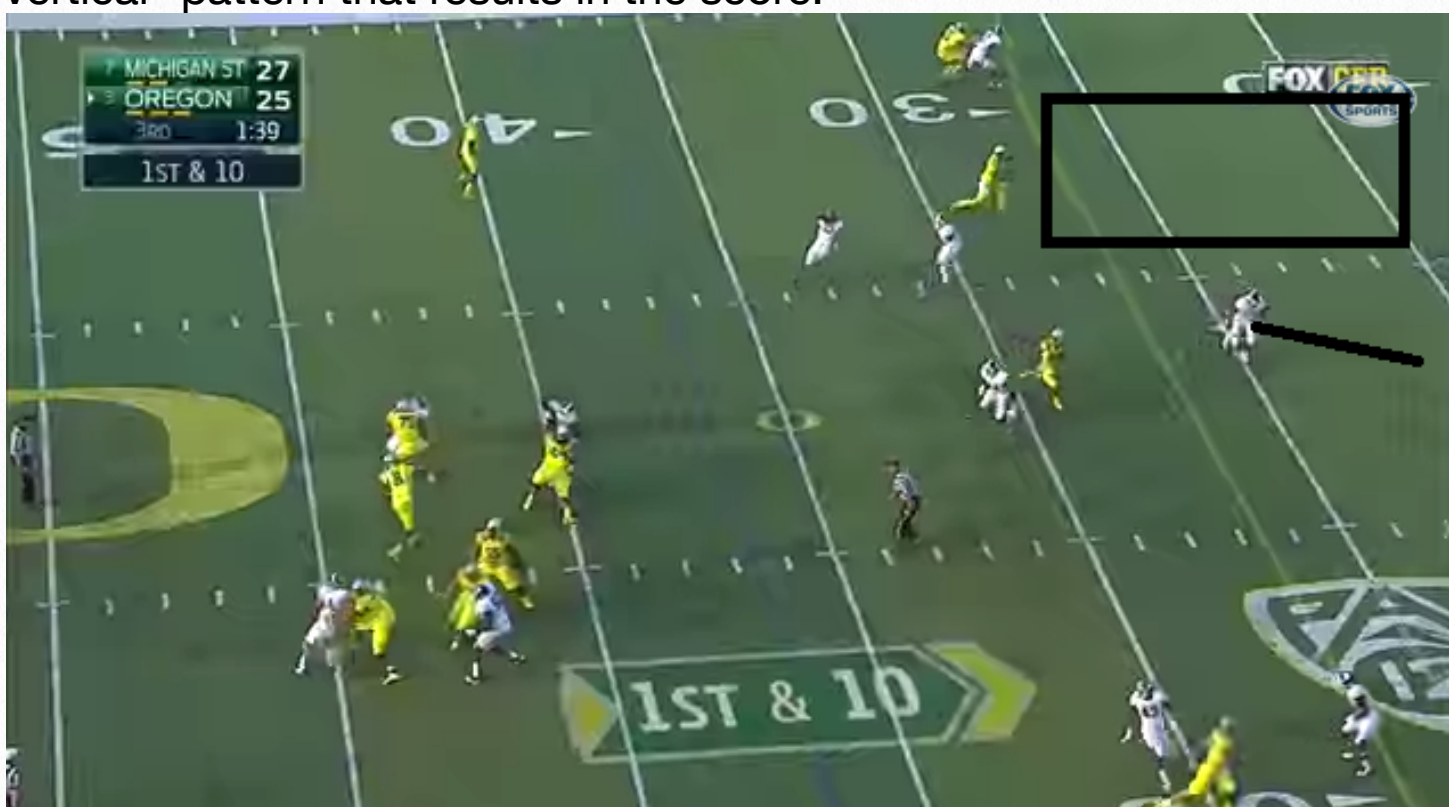
- Belichick
- Cowher
- Dungy
- Landry

Even in college football, the last two "dynasties" (USC and 'Bama) were led by defensive head coaches who schematically stressed opposing defenses with their offense (on a side note - Jim McElwain, former OC at Bama, now at head coach at CSU - does a superb job of blending the shifting-motioning-formationing attack with no huddle delivery). The thing is, these two schools' rosters were/are filled with NFL talent few could match.

But, in principle, we learned that perhaps more defensive head coaches (and offensive head coaches, for that matter) should take a cue from what is working; if one is to feature a power running game, the way to maximize an offense's potential to break a defense is through the use of tempo. Just this weekend, we were given three major examples of this:





Michigan State at Oregon:

In a truly great matchup, an outstanding defense simply could not keep pace with the balance and tempo that Oregon presented. On the go-ahead touchdown, Oregon catches MSU spinning to an 8 man front (resulting in 1 high safety), leaving the defense vulnerable to the "4 Vertical" pattern that results in the score.



BYU at Texas

After intercepting a pass in the end zone just before the half, the Texas Defense had given up 2 field goals at the midway mark. The box score, however, reveals the inability of the Texas Offense to keep the ball for any time, allowing to Cougar offense to hammer away at the Horns. This wasn't the 1980's BYU offense that passed on virtually every play; BYU had 59 rushing attempts to go along with 27 pass attempts - numbers only reached in an uptempo mode.

Scoring Summary					
FIRST QUARTER				BYU	TEX
	FG	3:30	Trevor Samson 21 Yd Field Goal <i>Drive info: 8 plays, 71 yds in 2:54</i>	3	0
SECOND QUARTER				BYU	TEX
	FG	6:34	Trevor Samson 29 Yd Field Goal <i>Drive info: 6 plays, 12 yds in 2:16</i>	6	0
THIRD QUARTER				BYU	TEX
	TD	12:06	Taysom Hill 30 Yd Run (Trevor Samson Kick) <i>Drive info: 9 plays, 75 yds in 2:54</i>	13	0
	TD	9:22	Adam Hine 16 Yd Run (Trevor Samson Kick) <i>Drive info: 5 plays, 55 yds in 1:09</i>	20	0
	TD	5:51	Taysom Hill 2 Yd Run (Trevor Samson Kick) <i>Drive info: 7 plays, 29 yds in 2:31</i>	27	0
	TD	4:33	Taysom Hill 1 Yd Run (Trevor Samson Kick) <i>Drive info: 4 plays, 24 yds in 1:08</i>	34	0
	TD	0:29	John Harris 13 Yd pass from Tyrone Swoopes (Nick Rose Kick) <i>Drive info: 13 plays, 75 yds in 4:04</i>	34	7
FOURTH QUARTER				BYU	TEX
	TD	8:05	Adam Hine 8 Yd Run (Trevor Samson Kick) <i>Drive info: 9 plays, 45 yds in 3:35</i>	41	7

Jaguars at Eagles

The snapshot of the Eagle's second half drives who the ability to remain balanced. With the exception of the 68-yarder in the 4th quarter, each was a mixture of runs and short passes. Even the big play was delivered off of play action. Again, the key is the ability to give the defense a 2-dimensional threat.

15:00	3	03:16	PHI 20	10	80	Touchdown
09:29	3	02:10	JAX 40	6	40	Touchdown
06:57	3	01:20	PHI 49	3	2	Punt
05:09	3	01:51	PHI 40	4	16	Punt
00:05	3	04:10	PHI 12	12	55	Field Goal
07:10	4	00:11	PHI 32	1	68	Touchdown
05:56	4	03:59	JAX 29	7	20	Field Goal

While there are adjustments made during intermission, coaches know the "halftime adjustment" moniker that has overrun TV and radio broadcasts is not what it is portrayed in the media. Certain elements of the existing game plan are emphasized, and while there are "tweaks", wholesale changes that have not been practiced simply do not happen.

What happened in these three cases is this: good defenses simply could not hold up to the offensive barrage. Michigan State's defense was lauded as the nation's finest, and still might be. Texas' defense only gave up 6 first half points, despite being put in bad situations. The Eagles were able to create more opportunities for themselves because of the nature of their attack.

Operating from a no huddle environment allows the offense to be MORE physical because they can call more downhill runs while still making the defense honor the pass, giving them more opportunities to test the soundness of each play. Anyone whose ever coached can realize HOW CLOSE every play is to being a big gain for the offense; simply giving the offense more chances to give playmakers the ball AND punish the defense physically also simplifies the defense for the offense.

There are very few reasons why an offense should play a grinding, low-output style of offense; the refusal to accept change simply is not one of them.