

CH 5: POWER OPTION

POWER OPTION: the foundational play in the Tex-Bone

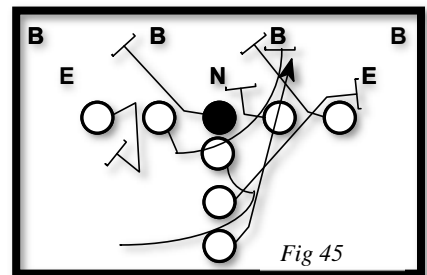
The Tex-Bone is the first option system to feature Power run as its primary scheme.

Power was first introduced at the University of Michigan by head coach Fielding Yost in 1905. Yost won 16 national championships during his tenure at Michigan. Between 1901 and 1905 his “point a minute” squads outscored opponents 2821 to 40 while posting a 55-1 record.

The Basic Power Play

The basic Power play uses two lead blockers—typically the backside guard and fullback. The front side of the play uses down blocks working through to the backside linebacker. Multiple permutations of this play include Counter Trey, H-Back Counter and Power Read.

Figure 45 shows an “I” Formation Power play.



Tex-Bone Power Option

Tex-Bone Power is the cornerstone of the 21st century triple option. Using Power as the base of the Tex-Bone offers several benefits detailed throughout the chapter.

Power creates horizontal and vertical defensive displacement first and foremost. Some Power teams rely on vertical displacement via double teams on defensive tackles to open space for the ball carrier. Other Power systems (the Tex-Bone specifically) use horizontal stretch to open running lanes.

The rationale for grounding the Tex-Bone in a foundation of Power football is rooted in two distinct advantages. First, there is never a need to “check” out of Power. A coach calls Power and is able to run it. Power is a rule based play. Offensive players aren’t thrown off by concerns over blocking assignments when the defensive front changes. If players are well versed in the rules of the play they know what the appropriate response to any changing alignment is. Slanting alignments, twisting line schemes, etc. are not difficult to deal with.

Second, Power Option easily pairs with play-action passes. Play-action from Power is something that most coaches are likely aware of already. Power Pass (a play-action three level flood) is nearly a century old. Teams potentially know this play as “Spider 2, Y-Banana” or another variation of the name.

Figure 46 details Tex-Bone Power Option against two fronts. Our analysis begins with the play side tackle. The play side tackle is the B-gap player. His assignment is to block any player aligned in his gap or any player that loops or blitzes to his gap. The play side tackle works to the backside linebacker if a defender does not appear in the gap.

The play side guard is then the A-gap player. Like the tackle, his assignment is to block any player aligned in the A-gap or any other defender that loops or blitzes to his gap (similar assignment rules to the play side tackle). The play side guard also works to the backside linebacker if a defender does not appear in the gap. Combined the guard and tackle usually account for the playside defensive tackle and backside linebacker.

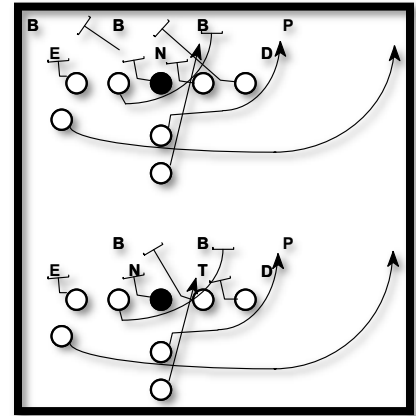


Fig 46

The center always back blocks the first player nearest him in Power. This backblock covers the space needed for the backside guard to pull and isolation block the play side linebacker. The pulling guard enters the line of scrimmage through the first open gap he finds. The pulling guard then works inside-out to the outside number of the play side linebacker (reach block).

The backside tackle works inside-out to block the defensive end. Figure 46 shows the tackle base blocking the defensive end. A backside tackle is also able to use a hinge block to reach the same result. Our block choice depends on the team we are playing and how they respond to the presentation of each block respectively. We also consider the strength of defensive personnel during the game planning process when deciding on a base or hinge technique. If the pulling guard is covered by a defensive tackle we will likely choose to hinge as this will aid the center with his back block.

The fullback is aligned behind the quarterback in the Power diagram (Figure 46). Our Power option dives the fullback to the A-gap (explained in greater depth later in the chapter). The wing is the pitch player. His alignment straddles the outside leg of the offensive tackle. The quarterback then reads the dive key first and the pitch key second. The dive key is the defensive end and the pitch key is the first linebacker outside of the box.

Power Option vs. Blitz

Nothing really changes when Power Options is ran against a blitz. Figure 47 shows Power Option against edge blitzes. The pitch key (shown as blitzing off of the edge) will be responsible for the pitch player or the quarterback. The quarterback can then identify the defensive end (dive key) as responsible for covering the dive on the inside. An offense knows if the pitch key is taking the pitch or the quarterback based on what the defense does with their safeties. (In most cases the blitzing pitch player takes the pitch and the safety takes the quarterback.)

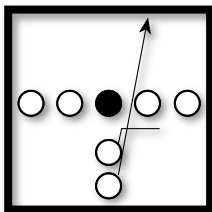


Fig 47

Nothing changes for the offense from a schematic standpoint when the defense blitzes either. The play side tackle takes the B-gap to the backside linebacker. The play side guard blocks the A-gap to the backside linebacker.

All defensive linemen along with the backside linebacker are picked up in the Power Option blocking scheme. The center always back blocks the first player he encounters. The backside guard pulls for the play side linebacker and the backside tackle blocks inside-out man-to-man on the defensive end.

The fullback still runs the dive, the wing is still the pitch player, and the quarterback still reads the dive key to the pitch key against the blitz in Power Option. It is reasonable for the quarterback to anticipate that the dive key is taking the dive away. The quarterback is also able to expect that the blitzing pitch key is going to take away the wing. This defensive shift leaves the quarterback with the ball in a position to attack the vacated alley.

Remember, these are tendencies—not 100 percent guarantees. The quarterback must still react to what is seen even when a blitz is identified pre-snap. It is critical for the quarterback to avoid predetermining his decision based on the pre-snap read in any option play. Doing so potentially negates an advantage for big gains that develop mid-play.

FULLBACK FUNDAMENTALS

Base Dive

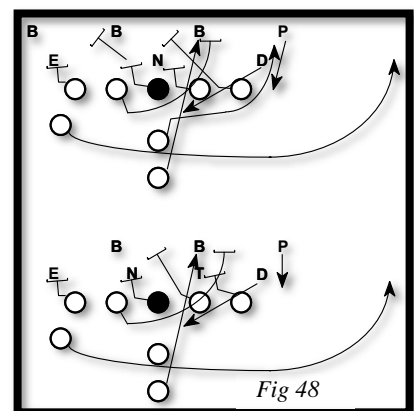
The fullback path leads him through the A-gap. All of our fullback paths appear identical to the defense through the mesh point. After clearing the mesh point with the quarterback we are able to assign the fullback to several different tasks.

The fullback must step with his play side foot first. Making the first step slightly wider to clear the body of the quarterback is also acceptable. The fullback then works downhill at the pre-snap A-gap after taking his first step.

On all run plays the ball carrier must always receive the handoff with their inside elbow up so they do not contact the quarterback.

The dive must hit fast. This is the key to success for any option dive. The quarterback is four yards behind the football and the fullback is one yard behind him. This alignment in Figure 48 promotes a fast hitting dive. Sometimes we put the fullback slightly more than one yard behind the quarterback while other times the fullback is slightly less than one yard behind. The slight variance is to account for the size of the steps of different backs. This allows the fullback to get to the mesh point quickly when the quarterback steps down hill upon receiving the snap.

Most triple options come from under center because teams want the dive to hit the line of scrimmage quickly. A fast hitting dive forces the defense to make quick choices in regards to who will defend it. This hasty decision often leads to defensive mistakes and big yardage gains. It also leads to definitive defensive reactions that make the decisions of the quarterback easier. Shotgun option doesn't negate quick hit advantage.

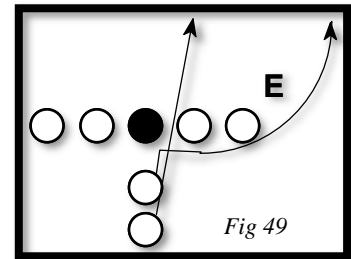


The fullback in Figure 48 moves toward the line of scrimmage at the snap of the ball to maintain the quick speed of play. The fullback will clamp down on the ball if it is still in his belly once he has passed the front foot of the quarterback.

The fullback reads level one and works to level two upon the snap. The level one read is a block on the near defensive tackle. This determines where the fullback inserts into line of scrimmage. The level two read for the fullback is based on how the pulling guard blocks the play side linebacker.

Midline Dive

Power also provides the option to execute a tight fullback path in the form of a midline dive (Figure 49). We use this when defensive ends attempt to show the quarterback a give read before collapsing to the dive. Dives that hit tighter to the center makes the defensive end react faster. This forces the defensive end to make a decision sooner than desired.



Fullback Load

Power also features a “Load” fullback path. After the dive fake is completed the fullback veers outside to block the defensive end. The fullback in Figure 50 tries to log block the defensive end and will react to kick him out if needed.

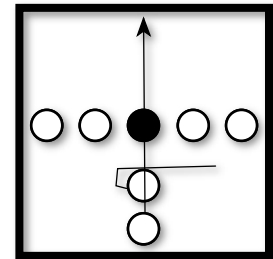


Fig 50

POSTION FUNDAMENTALS

Quarterback Fundamentals

The quarterback’s first step is to the outside leg of the center with his play side foot. The second step brings him square to the fullback and the A-gap dive path he is on. On his second step he also pushes the ball to his back hip, thus presenting it to the pocket (stomach and arms) of the fullback. The quarterback must meet the fullback on his path as he is headed to the line of scrimmage. He does not want to push the fullback wider than his own path. The quarterback also does not want to appear too shallow with his body positioning making him unable to properly seat the ball in the stomach of the dive back.

The quarterback’s feet are angled into the line of scrimmage. This establishes an attacking demeanor that sets him up for a fast departure into the pitch phase. The quarterback will be slow to get the ball to the alley where the pitch phase develops if his feet are not set toward the line of scrimmage. Any slight delay in reaching the pitch phase is detrimental to big play potential.

The ride of the mesh with the fullback is carried to the front foot of the quarterback. Once the ball gets to the quarterback’s front foot he must either leave the ball with the fullback or take it from him to the pitch phase. This is where the quarterback is forced to make a decision. If the quarterback keeps the ball for the

pitch phase we describe the next task as attacking the alley. This “attacking the alley” refers to the quarterback keeping the ball unless he is being tackled. The alley is the area outside of the dive key and inside of the pitch key.

The quarterback must have a plan of attack so he can be decisive and his thought process during the dive phase (Figure 51) is that the fullback gets the ball unless the dive key is going to tackle him. When the ball is pulled from the fullback it is now the quarterback’s ball until the pitch player commits to tackle him. These concepts refer back to the two-on-one fast break nature of option football. In a basketball application of football the quarterback is looking to “pass” the ball to his fullback teammate in the dive phase so he gets the layup.

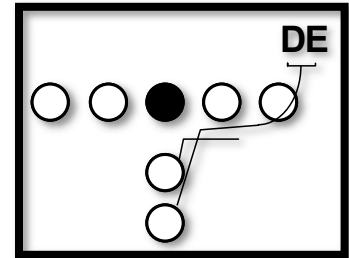


Fig 51

The critical coaching emphasis is on teaching the quarterback to get the ball to the fullback unless he is unable to do so. It is the quarterback's job to give the ball when a defender cuts off his path to the “basket.” In this case he is “passing” the ball to his pitch back for the easy layup. It is extremely important that the quarterback understands the “fullback first” principle in triple option “fast break.” The two-on-one advantage is lost without it.

When entering the pitch phase the plan of attack for the quarterback changes. This is now a two on one fast break and the quarterback will keep the ball for the layup unless he cannot get to the basket. If the pitch player cuts off his path he will pitch the ball to the pitch player. The quarterback will pitch the ball laterally or ever so slightly backwards. He will push his thumb down to create a soft tumbling effect on the football. Finally, he will trail towards the target. Trailing, or following, the pitch allows for accuracy and it removes the quarterback from harm’s way.

Pitch Player Fundamentals

We do not motion our wing (or any other pitch player) to get them in the proper relationship because the Tex-Bone runs out of shotgun formations. The shotgun delays the execution of the play just long enough to allow the wing player to get into the right alignment relative to the quarterback. The pitch player must get going the instant that the ball is snapped for this to work however.

It is particularly important that the pitch player gains ground with his first step for this to alignment to occur properly. The pitch player aims for the feet of the quarterback. The quarterback steps down hill toward the line of scrimmage while getting out of the way of the pitch back. This step gives the pitch back a clear and tight path to get over the top of the play into the proper pitch relationship.

The pitch player in Figure 52 must receive the football going downhill. We do not want the pitch player to catch the ball running to the sideline. It is important to note that when the ball is pitched the pitch back needs to have already achieved adequate width for receiving the ball (four to five yards from the quarterback). The pitch back is then able to receive the ball running downhill towards the end zone when he achieves that adequate width. This is the ideal way to receive a pitch.

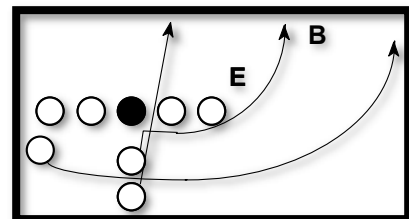
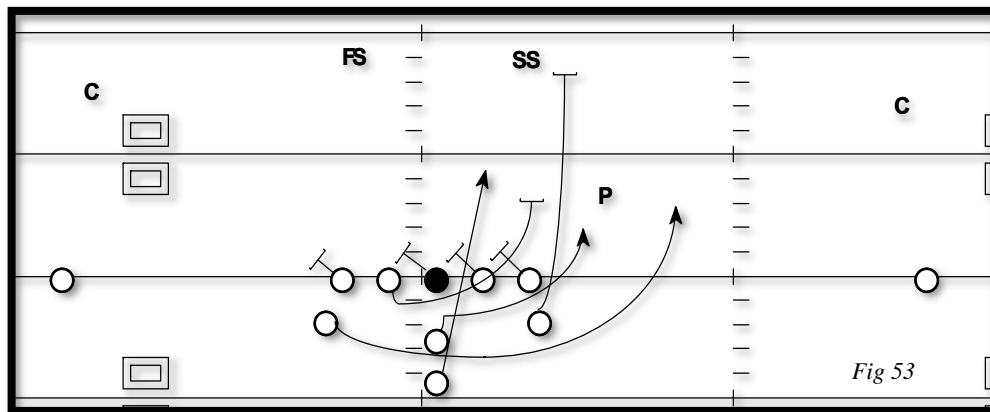


Fig 52

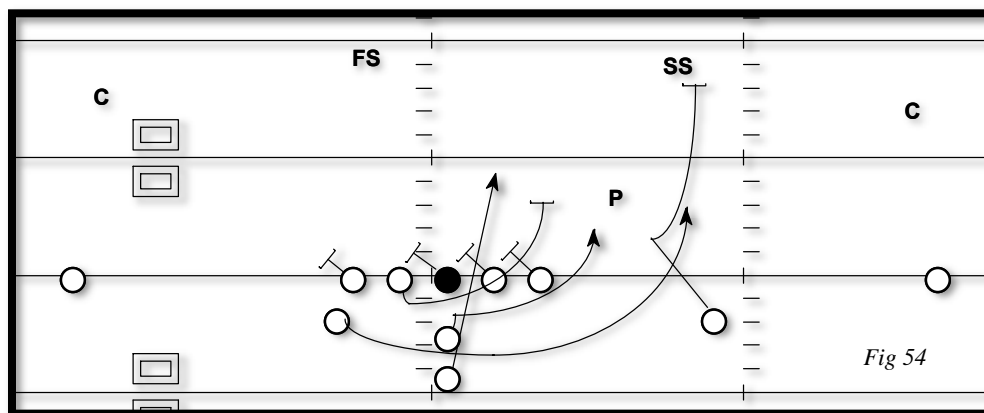
Playside Wing/Slot Fundamentals

The fundamentals of the play side wing/slot are very important. Against two high safeties the play side wing/slot releases immediately to the safety. Against a one high safety the play side slot or wing checks for a scraping linebacker out the box before releasing to the single safety.

The next two Figures (53 and 54) help illustrate these rules. The first illustration shows Shotgun Flexbone against a two high safety (Cover 4) defense. Offenses generally face a four-man defensive line/three linebacker look in Cover 4. Setting up in this formation makes it difficult for the middle linebacker to scrape far enough toward the play that the pulling guard is able to reach him. This allows the wing to work directly to the play side safety. The play side safety is an immediate threat to the play and needs accounting for. This puts the two high safety rule in place.



The two high safety rule is the same whether a wing or slot is set to the play side. Figure 54 shows the play side blocker as a slot receiver. The slot's role in this play is to go directly to the safety when there are two safeties high. This illustration shows the slot player gaining inside position before working inside out to the outside number of the safety. Notice how the illustration does not show the slot working toward the pitch player—it shows the slot establishing inside position (getting the ball behind him) before working to the safety. Getting to a position where the ball is behind him creates an advantage for the blocker.



The next illustration (55) shows a one-safety (Cover 3) defense. A one safety and four down linemen defense means there are four linebackers. In this defensive alignment there is the potential for a play side linebacker scraping out of the box (past the reach of the pulling guard) and becoming a threat to the play. Against a single high safety defense the role of the play side wing/slot is to check for a scraping linebacker and then working to the single safety. This effectively combats the play side linebacker threat.

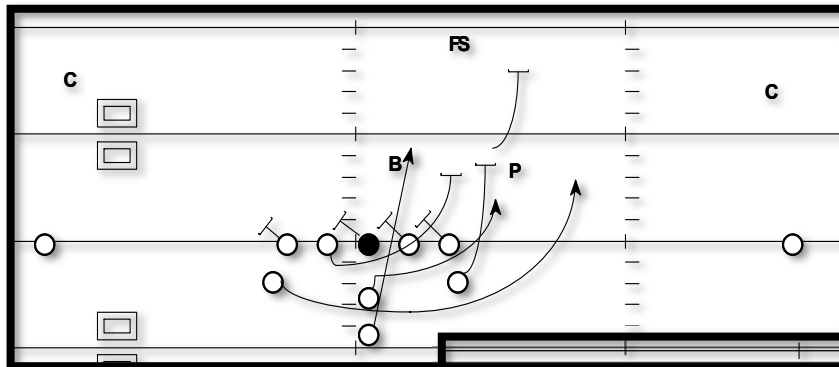


Fig 55

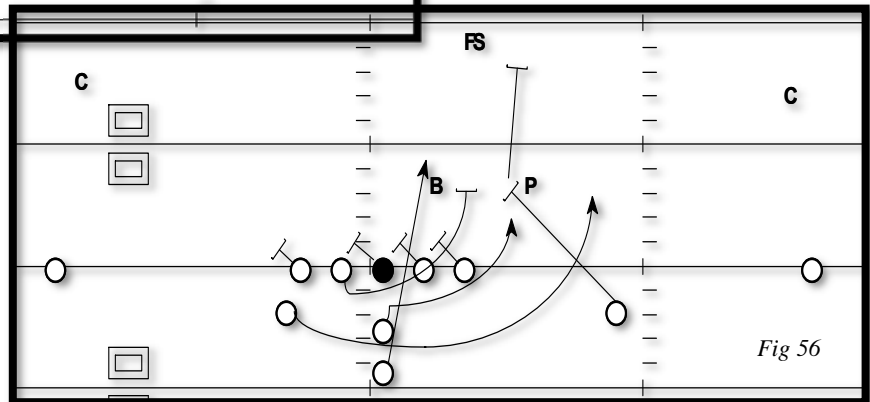


Fig 56

The rule is the same whether the play side blocker is a wing or slot. Against a one-safety defense the wing or slot in Figure 56 works down to a scraping linebacker before proceeding to the single safety.

When checking for a scraping linebacker the wing/slot player must learn not to loiter. If the linebacker is not moving quickly toward him the pulling guard will be able to block him.

Offensive Line Fundamentals

The play side blockers execute down blocks in Power (Figure 57). This is true for the tackle, guard, and center. All of the play side linemen are looking first for any immediate gap threat. This is a 2 or 3-technique for the tackle. For the guard this is a 0, 1, or 2-technique that attaches himself on the play. After seeking an immediate gap threat defender the play side linemen look for a looper. A “looper” is defined as a defensive lineman who slants to the gap they are responsible for.

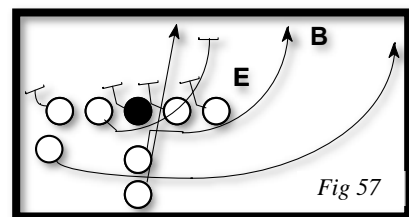


Fig 57

The Tex-Bone treats all loopers the same as linebackers in order to remain gap sound. These defenders are identified and accounted for by down blocking anytime they encounter them on their path. If the pulling guard takes the job of picking up the looper when he comes through toward the play side linebacker it creates a situation where the front side linebacker is potentially unblocked. This is clearly not an ideal

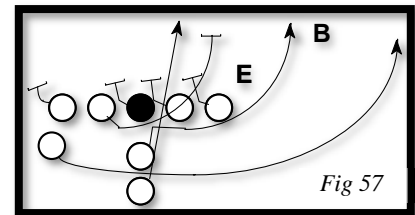
situation. For this reason gap-blocking linemen on the play side cannot overlook loopers. Play side linemen work to the backside linebacker after checking the gap threat and looking for loopers to combat this concern.

It is critical that linemen gain ground with their first step. Our linemen work especially hard to train this skill. Failure to gain ground allows level one penetration, missed loopers, and missed level two linebackers.

Offensive lineman must anticipate linebacker movement. If an offensive tackle is facing a defense that deploys a 1-technique to his side of the line it is likely that he is able to work through to the backside linebacker. After taking a hard inside step (and checking for a looper) the offensive tackle then works to the backside linebacker. The tackle must anticipate that the backside linebacker will be moving toward him because when the pulling guard leaves the backside of the formation the gap departs with him and shifts to the play side.

Defenses often combat this adjustment by mirroring the guard's trade with a linebacker trade. If the tackle moving to level two doesn't anticipate this counter maneuver he runs the risk of heading to where the linebacker was instead of where he will be. The linebacker is potentially unblocked at the point of attack if the tackle doesn't aim for where the linebacker is going end up in this case.

The backside pulling guard executes a skip pull in Figure 57. A skip pull means the guard crosses his back foot behind his front foot in a skipping motion while moving laterally. We favor the skip pull because it allows the point guard to keep his shoulders and eyes facing forward. It also allows him to work more aggressively toward the end zone. We coach our players to always move towards the end zone with their shoulders square to the line of scrimmage. This allows the puller to reach his assignment faster.



The pulling guard is looking for the first opening to insert into the play. Our goal (as previously mentioned) is to gain horizontal displacement across the line of scrimmage with our play side blockers. The offensive tackle is going to try to knock the 3 technique all the way past the center. This opens an easy path for the pulling guard to fit around the tackle and get to the play side linebacker.

The backside tackle is able to execute a base block or a hinge block. We game plan this block from week-to-week based on the method we think is more advantageous for our specific players or more advantageous against the defense we face. We want to know how the defense reacts to a hinge block or base block before making final plans or making in game adjustments. We also consider if our center will need help with his back block.

PLAYS BLOCKED FOR TOUCHDOWNS

An important differentiation to make between the Tex-Bone and other offenses is plays blocked for touchdowns and plays blocked for first downs. Triple option Tex-Bone plays are blocked for touchdowns. They use a numerical, fast break advantage to reach the end zone. One-back spread offense plays are blocked to achieve first downs.

Figure 58 shows a spread Power Read run play. Analyzing the difference in blocking philosophy is not an attempt to denigrate standard spread Power Read—the play is an element included in the Tex-Bone offense. The goal is to reveal some of the built-in limitations that standard spread Read must overcome to achieve large yardage gains. What you notice below is the one-back spread alignment allows both safeties to roam free and tackle the quarterback if the play goes up the middle off a pull read. The play side safety is equally free to make a tackle if the running back receives the ball on the sweep element of the Power Read.

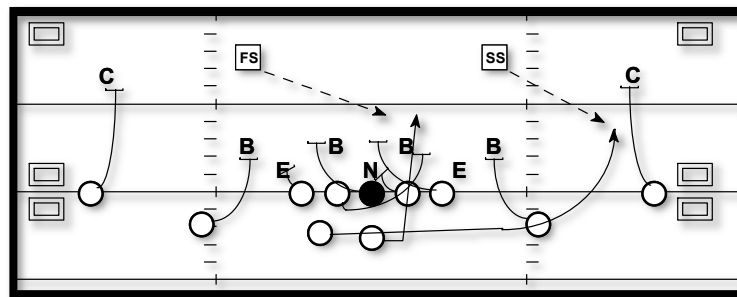


Fig 58

Plays like this are blocked for first downs rather than touchdowns. They gain yards and produce first downs in the open field. It is less likely that they yield a touchdown compared to a well-executed triple option play however. There are typically two (sometimes three) “free hitters” on the defense against a one-back spread formation whereas all play side defenders are accounted for in the Tex-Bone. Mistakes on defense create even larger gains in the triple option. Spread runs rely on defenders making mistakes or require an offensive player to beat an unblocked defender to a landmark on the field. The play ends when the defense adjusts or catches up. Tex-Bone plays continue to the end zone when properly executed.

Triple option plays account for all play side defenders by matching formations to the defense. Recognizing this difference between spread and the triple option is critical. The Tex-Bone pushes any “free hitters” as far away from the ball as possible and never at the point of attack. Accounting for everyone on defense is impossible because an offensive player always possesses the ball and is attacking the defense downfield. Triple option allows you to better control the location of the “free hitter”.

The next two Figures (59 and 60) show a Flexbone option play against two different defensive structures. Similar to the last illustration this is also a Power run play. Pay particular attention to how all of the play side defenders are accounted for. Two players are being optioned in triple option football. What this means is the offense is not physically blocking two defensive players. The speed and attacking nature of the play force defensive choices that negate the need to block the two defenders individually. This allows us to pick up an additional block at the point of attack. The extra blocker gives option plays a better chance of reaching the end zone than its one-back spread cousin.

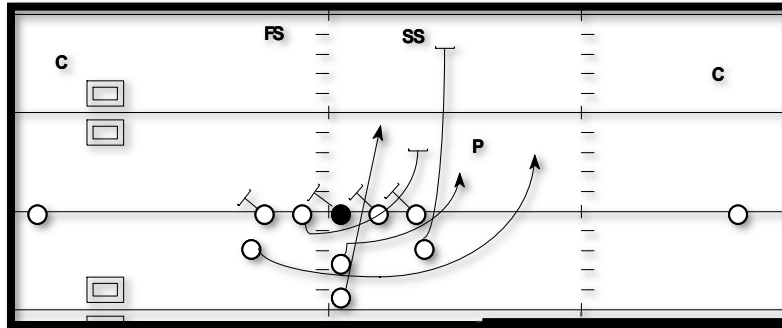


Fig 59

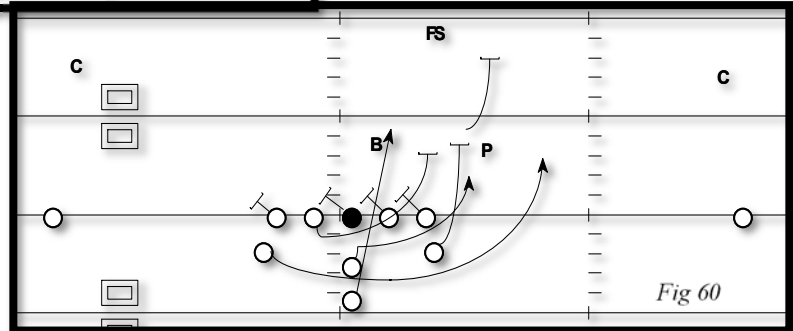


Fig 60

The same is true when running triple option from spread. Splitting a wing out to a slot position does not mean a safety is left unblocked. Because we option the play side linebacker the slot is free to work to the safety (see Figures 61 and 62). This increases the chance the play results in a touchdown. Naturally a defender is unblocked somewhere on the field. The triple option advantage is this unblocked defender is farther away from the ball than in most one-back formations.

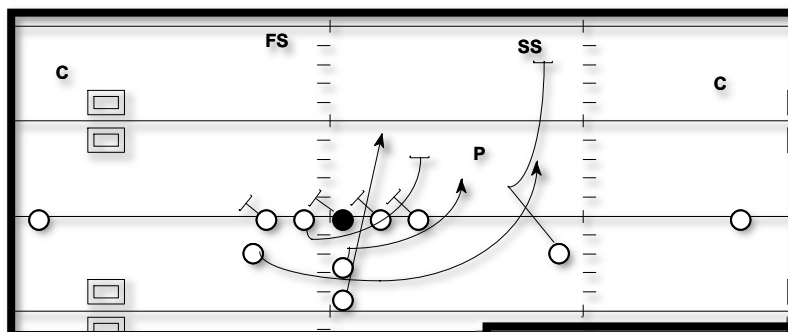


Fig 61

Most big plays in triple option football occur when the ball gets to the pitch phase. Plays that get to the pitch phase and block the play side safety are most likely to reach the end zone.

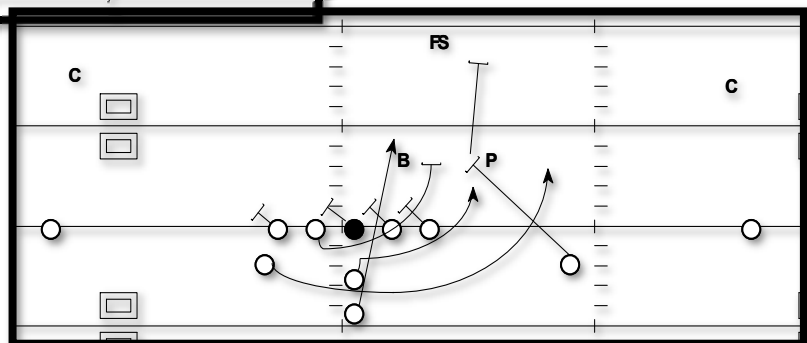


Fig 62