

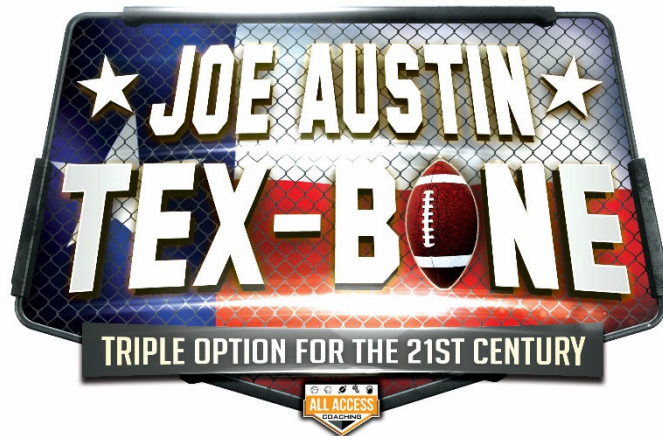
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# SECTION ONE

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## **TEX-BONE OVERVIEW**

- 1. Philosophy & Structure**
- 2. Formation Families & Personnel**
- 3. Tempo, Backfields & Fullbacks**
- 4. Numbering System**





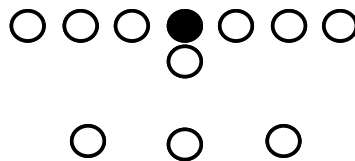
# CH 1: PHILOSOPHY & STRUCTURE

Welcome to the Joe Austin Tex-Bone: Triple Option for the 21st century. The Tex-Bone was developed with Tom Ross, my coaching colleague of more than 15 years.

## HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Before we begin examining the Tex-Bone system it is important to look at the history of triple and double option football. Looking at its history reveals the origins of the Tex-Bone system.

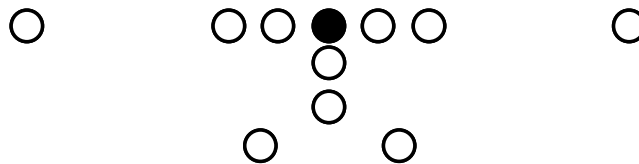
### The Split T



*Fig 1*

Option football dates back to the days of the Split T Formation (Figure 1) Don Farot used this set for the first time at the University of Missouri in 1941. Farot's development of option football was initially inspired by observations of "2 on 1" fast breaks in basketball. He liked the edge gained by the offensive team in two-on-one situations—especially when the offensive team scored a basket on almost every possession with the one-man advantage. Farot envisioned applying the concept of numerical advantage in basketball to offensive football. The University of Missouri secured the school's first Sugar Bowl invitation by going 8-2 that year using the new "option" offense.

### The Wishbone

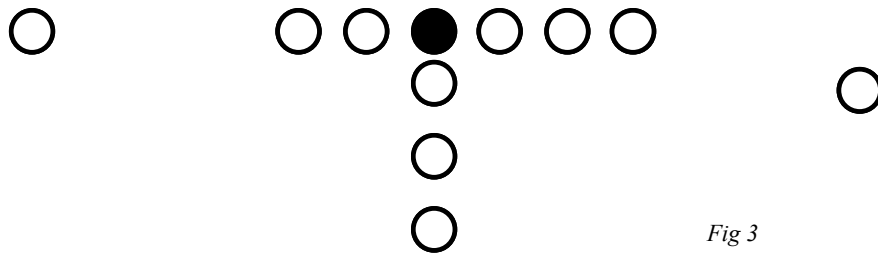


*Fig 2*

The next major innovation in option football was the Wishbone (Figure 2). The Wishbone was created at the University of Texas by assistant coach Emery Bellard. Putting this new offense into action was a potential saving grace for Coach Daryl Royal whose teams performed markedly better once the Wishbone

was in place. The Texas Wishbone offense culminated with the 1969 national championship. Daryl Royal became a UT icon while his program became one of the best in college football history. The Wishbone illustration shows similarities with the “Split T.” The primary difference is the placement of the three backs in slightly different locations. A second difference from a personnel/formation perspective is the Wishbone features split ends rather than tight ends.

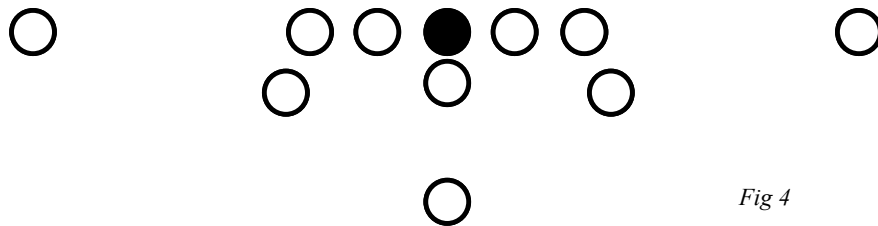
### The “I” Formation



*Fig 3*

The “I” Formation (Figure 3) became the next prominent version of option football after the Wishbone. University of Nebraska running the “I” under Coach Tom Osborn in the 1980s and 1990s heavily influenced “Tex Bone” co-creator Tom Ross. During Osborne’s tenure the “I” formation offense fueled their triple option to three national championships. Readers who study the Tex-Bone system in this book notice formation sets, play calls, strategies, personnel groupings, and other references that resemble those used at Nebraska under Coach Osborn.

### The Flexbone



*Fig 4*

The Flexbone (Figure 4) serves the dual role of both a formation and as an offense when developed in detail. The Flexbone triple option offense is what most people think of when they envision modern option football. It is closely associated with coaches including Navy’s Ken Niumatalolo and Paul Johnson at Georgia Tech as an adaption of the Wishbone offense. Different types of offenses across the country use the Flexbone formation. The formation is easily applied to diverse offensive needs because its not based on the triple option exclusively.

## Spread Read Option (Double Option)

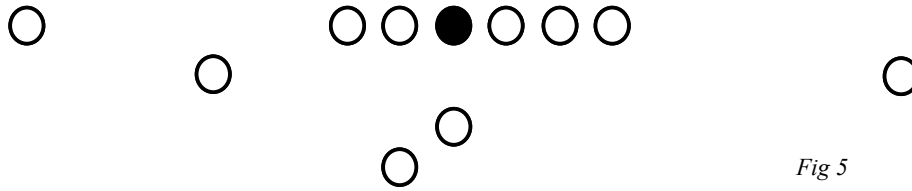


Fig 5

The spread read option (or double option) is equally noteworthy when examining the history of option football. Despite not being a true “triple option” attack, the system led to the creation of defensive schemes that in recent years inform how teams generally combat triple offense plays such as the outside veer. There are many notable coaches that ran spread read option (or zone read as it is popularly labeled). Two of those coaches were Bill Snyder at Kansas State in the 1990s and Urban Meyer at Utah in the early 2000s. Coaches in the years proceeding borrowed heavily from Snyder and Meyer in an attempt to mirror their successes.

It is important to note that the spread read option offense (Figure 5) is really a double option offense where the pitch phase is omitted. In double read option you start with the beginning phase of triple option—the “dive phase.” The pitch phase is then eliminated when the “pitch man” is blocked. Pseudo triple option schemes of the past decade such as run-pass options (popularized as “RPO” on television broadcasts) were developed to reintroduce the pitch phase by creating a downfield pass option. Upon closer examination these spread read option offenses are deeply rooted in triple option football—regardless of what they are called or whether offensive coordinators want to admit it or not.

## Spread Veer Triple Option

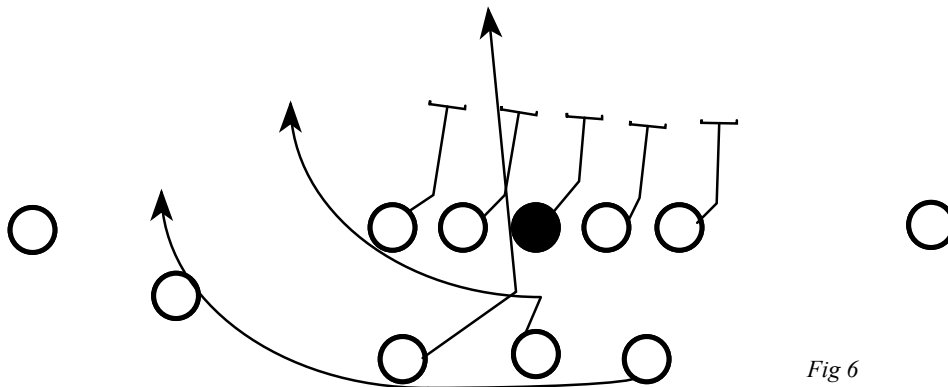


Fig 6

Triple option football is still alive in the college football landscape today—especially in the Service Academies (Army, Navy, and Air Force). Spread veer triple option (Figure 6) is a modern adaptation developed by former West Virginia Head Coach Rich Rodriguez in the 2000s. His primary-run scheme featured a hybrid veer and zone concept ran as a triple option that looked like a traditional outside veer. Rodriguez paired the hybrid with an open split-back spread formation that provided dive and pitch options. WVU also featured elements of modern spread football by operating from an open spread formation.

## **THE EVOLUTION OF THE TEX-BONE: how the Flexbone and Spread got married**

Texas is a spread offense state. From high schools to colleges the offenses run wide open and fast. Defenses match the offenses with 4-2-5 cover 4 schemes in an attempt to match field width and deal with RPOs. It's a chess match that fuels some of the best football in the nation. Naturally there are outliers. At Southwestern University a new offense was born, the "Tex-Bone." Develop in tandem with Tom Ross; it is triple option for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Our new system combines old-school Flexbone with a modern spread offense into one Texas-sized attack that leaves opponents scrambling to solve both the triple option and the spread at the same time.



Courtesy: Joe Austin

I was raised a spread coach. As an assistant offensive coordinator at Concordia University, St. Paul (MN) I helped shape an offense that finished 7th in the NCAA in total offense and 13th in scoring in 2002. The next year we finished 6th in total offense and 20th in scoring.

I began coordinating offenses at Augsburg College in 2004 before moving to the University of Dubuque in 2005. My year at Augsburg became my first experience working with Tom Ross.

At Dubuque, our offense became tops in the Iowa Intercollegiate Athletic Conference. Our achievements helped revitalize a Spartan program mired in two decades of losing seasons. In my first year (2005) the Spartans finished 20th in the NCAA in passing. By my last year at UD (2007) we placed 27th in the nation in both scoring offense and total offense and 29th in rushing offense. In 2019 our quarterback (Jermar Jackson) is being inducted into the University of Dubuque Athletic Hall of Fame.

In 2008, I became the head coach and offensive coordinator at Hanover College (Indiana). Serving as architects of another rebuild, our staff guided the Panthers to back-to-back second place finishes in the Heartland Intercollegiate Conference. My tenure at Hanover was highlighted by the performance of wide receiver Daniel



Courtesy: Marissa Austin

Passafiume who in 2009 set the all-time, all-divisions NCAA record for catches in a game with 25 against Franklin College. Two of our receivers won NCAA statistical championships for receptions: Tyler Thiems and Passafiume (#1 in the picture below). The Panthers finished 9th in the NCAA in passing offense in 2009. In my fourth year the Panthers finish 3rd in the nation in red zone offensive efficiency, 30th in passing offense and 35th in scoring offense.



Courtesy: Merry Ross

I was given the task of reintroducing football at Southwestern University in 2012. This became my greatest challenge as a coach thus far. Dubuque and Hanover were rebuild jobs—SU was a rebirth. Once a charter member of the Southwest Conference, the school dropped football in 1950 and didn't bring it back to the field until the fall of 2013.



By 2016, we built the top offense in the Southern Collegiate Athletic Conference. The season culminated with a conference championship. I was humbled to receive Coach of the Year honors by my peers.

Tom Ross joined our staff in 2008 at Hanover College as the defensive coordinator. Coach Ross always provided excellent insights on offense at both

Augsburg and Hanover even though his focus was on defense. Tom stayed on the defensive side until 2016 when the time was right for him to move to offense with me.

Tom was head coach of the Stuttgart Scorpions in the first division of the German Football League after our time together at Augsburg and prior to us reuniting at Hanover. Tom's Flexbone attack with the Scorpions was the equivalent of a Panzer tank—running roughshod over the south conference of the GFL and landing them in the German Bowl for the first time in team history. Tom was elected to the Scorpions Hall of Fame in 2016. He remains the most iconic coach in the history of the organization today.

Back to the evolution of the Tex-Bone...

Tom joined me on the offensive side in 2016. The original idea was to add Tom's Flexbone as an auxiliary offense to complement our spread. This hybrid system became the top offense in the SCAC,



powering us to a 6-0 conference record. At that point the Tex-Bone really didn't exist yet—the spread and option offense remained separate components used in different situations depending on the game plan.

Bryan Hicks, (our senior quarterback and a spread expert) didn't even practice the option. Don't feel bad for Bryan though (#14 below). The 2019 season marks his third year playing professionally. During this season he set the National Arena League all-time record for touchdown passes in a single game with nine. Our freshman understudy (Fred Hover) ran the option in 2016. The task of mastering the option and the spread was especially challenging and rewarding for Hover. Hover's year as a playing understudy became a key element in the emerging Tex-Bone system.

The idea of using a primary and auxiliary offense wasn't a new one for us. We did this previously at Augsburg College in 2004. Coach Ross (Associate Head Coach and Defensive Coordinator at the time) suggested to me that we add some Flexbone triple option to the team's repertoire for our last game of the season against St. Olaf College. We wanted to see how it looked and explore if it was something to carry forward into the future. The first triple option litmus test yielded 364 rushing yards (526 total yards) and 42 points. With that the seed was planted.

Though the experiment didn't continue into the next year (we both exited Augsburg College after the 2004 season), I carried the lessons learned about triple option to the University of Dubuque. As a way to help our rebuild at Dubuque I incorporated the Flexbone into several game plans for two seasons until our primary spread offense was running at breakneck speed. At that point triple option was relegated to the back page of the playbook—put into hibernation until 2016 when the marrying of the Flexbone and spread resumed.

The Tex-Bone was really born in 2017. Our plan at the time was to keep the primary and auxiliary offenses separate after the previous year's successes. There was one complicating factor with this decision: our new quarterback (Fred Hover) was able to adroitly run both offenses. We knew we needed to start developing ways to make everything congruent. This dual skilled luxury led to the organic evolution of game plans that included more and more triple option from traditional spread formations.



Courtesy: Chuck Pledge



Naturally there was still plenty of pure Flexbone and pure spread. Ultimately the hybrid elements—the 21<sup>st</sup> century triple option—became the big play catalyst. The results spoke for themselves as the Pirates finished 2<sup>nd</sup> in the nation in rushing and 9<sup>th</sup> in the nation in total offense in 2017. Defenses didn't know what was coming with different formations, different personnel, and different schemes. Was it a spread play? Was the triple option coming? It was hard to defend by design.

Over our first two years in the American Southwestern Conference we faced eleven opponents ranked in national polls, five play-off teams, three conference champions, and two national champions. To say we played good competition is a strong understatement. Against the best of what Division III offers we averaged 36 points per game with the Tex-Bone. In the process we posted our second and third consecutive winning seasons. The Tex-Bone is here to stay.

## **PHILOSOPHY: what is the Tex-Bone and how does it work?**

The Tex-Bone is triple option for the 21st century. It combines triple option with spread concepts. The Tex-Bone allows teams to take traditional option schemes and run them from nontraditional option alignments and formations.

Spread defenses are often predictable. Teams set defensive philosophies around how they align and handle the spread because spread formations are almost exclusively what defenses see in today's game. Defensive coordinators are prepared to line up against 2x1 Open, 2x2 Open, and 3x1 Open. They know how they prefer to line up against TE trips as well as H-Back formations. This predictability is an advantage for Tex-Bone triple option coaches.

Standing in direct contrast to the predictability of spread offenses is the unpredictability of the Tex-Bone. Every play is available in spread or option formations. Tex-Bone teams are less predictable in terms of formation tendencies than their spread counterparts. Every formation is an option look. Traditional option formations (such as our Shotgun Flexbone) are also home to a variety of non-option runs and passes. In aggregate the spread and option becomes a unified system with nearly innumerable variances.

A goal of the Tex-Bone is to eliminate predictability. Defensive coordinators look for predictability in personnel, down and distance, etc. Elements of predictability are reduced in the Tex-Bone. Aspects that coordinators typically look for become increasingly difficult to identify. Film study of the Tex-Bone is extremely difficult. Normal tendencies of cookie-cutter spread offenses are gone. Game planning against the Tex-Bone is now a complicated proposition.

The Tex-Bone provides modern advances to time-tested schemes. They come in the form of minor adjustments such as operating from the shotgun for example. These modern advances create competitive advantages over standard spread offenses.

Old school limitations are gone. Starting in the shotgun means we do not motion our wingback pre-snap to get into pitch relationship. The play hits at a speed that allows the pitch player to start from a stationary position. Previous iterations of the triple option—particularly those that are ran from under center—hit at a

speed that require the pitch back to motion toward the pitch relationship prior to the snap. Eliminating the need to motion the pitch player creates a tremendous advantage because the defense does not know which way the play is going.

Spread formations plays get a “free pass” when all of your opponent’s prep time is spent on learning how to defend the triple option. When opponents design a defense for the Flexbone formation and adjust their base spread defense to cover the dive, quarterback, and pitch they gloss over game plan adjustments that change how spread formations are defended. This advantage flips the script by making spread the unaccounted-for element.

Because of this, Tex-Bone teams are likely to see a predictable defensive alignment when they line up in spread. This defensive predictability increases the likelihood of spread play success. Defensive preparations are a difficult task because the Tex-Bone is a triple option attack with a wide variety of formations and personnel groupings. Spread formation plays in the Tex-Bone gain an in-game advantage because the defensive game plan isn’t geared towards defending them. Defenses often run a base defense when they see a spread formation because every defensive alignment must be sound versus triple option. The result is an instant advantage.

Teams put a high priority on run defense when preparing for the Tex-Bone. They are forced to put an extra emphasis on who covers the dive, the quarterback, and the pitch specifically. Defenses are forced to combat the triple threat for every formation they potentially see (and there are many). Opponents often get lost in the details of three responsibilities for each play in multiple formations—moving play action pass coverage to the back burner. This is an offensive advantage come game day.

Disguised looks are an additional advantage at the line of scrimmage. Lining up “properly” against the Tex-Bone doesn’t necessarily mean the defense will get the desired result. Runs and passes look identical in the Tex-Bone. Opponents do not know what is coming until it happens. The deception makes play action pass opportunities plentiful. All Tex-Bone plays—no matter if it’s a run or a pass—look identical through the mesh of the quarterback and fullback. Runs and passes look identical even longer depending on the play. Plays that begin with the same appearance greatly enhance the ability to execute play action.

## **Why the Tex-Bone?**

The uniqueness of the Tex-Bone makes it difficult to defend because running triple option from spread formations is a fairly unique approach. Defenses are tasked with stopping both spread formations and the Shotgun Flexbone. Advantages are multiplied when opponents lack experience against the Flexbone. Individualized game plans for Tex-Bone teams from school-to-school and week-to-week assure that even if an opponent sees the Flexbone before they are still guessing come game day. This inexperience is an additional challenge for the opponent and an additional opportunity for you.

The Tex-Bone is the first triple option system that uses the Power Run as the foundation play. Even defensive coaches that are adept at stopping the option are forced to pay close attention to the Power Run orientation of the Tex-Bone.

The Tex-Bone gives teams the opportunity to play against predictable defensive alignments. When Tex-Bone teams line up in a spread formation they are likely to see the opponent’s base spread defense. Every

defense knows how they like to defend spread formations. In preparation they are likely to use this familiarity as the base of their game plan against the Tex-Bone. Some variations are likely to occur. Because opponents emphasize triple option readiness those defensive adjustments are most likely basic variations of their base defense.

The Tex-Bone builds in defensive disincentives. Option football (of any variety) builds in line game and blitz dissuasion. The speed of play, run-pass deception, multiple pre-snap looks, and triple responsibilities in the Tex-Bone discourages the use of twists, stunts, or blitzes. Putting option plays in a team's arsenal naturally limits the likelihood of seeing line games or blitzes as a regular in-game defensive tactic.

The Tex-Bone provides two offenses with one set of players—successfully combining the triple option with modern spread offenses. This combination allows teams to become more diverse and complex with the same number of players.

The triple option system works with your personnel—to a certain extent. Many coaches subscribe to the pre-conceived notion of “Run option if you lack talent”. There are two reasons I believe coaches feel this way.

1. Teams avoid blocking players by optioning them. Physically not blocking players is an advantage when a team is physically outmatched.
2. Option teams with superior execution are sometimes able to beat teams with superior talent. Coaches begin to assume option football is a magical solution after witnessing it firsthand.

The reality is option football bolsters your personnel. What needs remembering is that teams with inferior personnel struggle against exceptional opponents regardless of the offense implemented. Option football isn't a quick fix and the Tex-Bone isn't a magic bullet for overmatched teams. The year before this book was written we played the eventual national champion. They made us look bad. The triple option was unable to overcome an immensely talented opponent in that situation. Conference champion and national champion teams are made up of eleven talented players on each side of the ball. While the triple option allows teams the luxury of not blocking two defenders it still means the other nine must be dealt with.

Option football teams need talented athletes at quarterback and wing/slot positions to function effectively. Teams that lack players with the ability to move the ball downfield often struggle against equal or greater opponents over the course of the season. Finding the right personnel for the offense (or creating the right offense for the personnel) is the primary responsibility of a coach or offensive coordinator.

The only limit to the Tex-Bone is coaching imagination. Later in this chapter we present twelve different ways our team executes triple option from the Tex-Bone. The list we provide is in no way exhaustive. We used many additional alignments over the last two seasons to supplement the twelve we illustrate.

The Tex-Bone offers an advantage in game planning because the Flexbone is hard to predict. Teams see an opponent's game plan-specific defense against the Flexbone. The reason it gets game planned is the Flexbone is not part of most team's base defensive package. Few teams see the Flexbone and triple option during the course of a season. They are particularly unlikely to see a Power-based Shotgun Flexbone triple option scheme. An opponent needs to see two Tex-Bone teams on the schedule to enter a game prepared

to defend the Shotgun Flexbone triple option. This is highly unlikely given the newness and uniqueness of the offense.

Spread-based defenses generally do not scheme to combat the Flexbone before game week. Because of this factor a Tex-Bone/Flexbone team is able to present something unique on game day that was not previously seen on film. Defensive inexperience with the Flexbone is an advantage when leveraged properly. A team's own familiarity with executing the Flexbone outweighs the potential disadvantage of not seeing how a defense plans to defend before game day. In this case the proactive advantage is gained from the Flexbone making opponents react to what they see. The difference is best explained as the Flexbone makes defense respond to it instead of the Flexbone responding to the defense.

Spread defenses are fairly easy to predict (this idea was mentioned previously). This is another advantage. Even if a team sees a different than expected spread defense on game day it doesn't matter because Tex-Bone schemes are rules based. The rules of the Tex-Bone let teams run Flexbone and spread formations regardless of defensive alignments and strategies.

The Tex-Bone features an economy of techniques from a player perspective. What this means is the offense does not require a large set of individual skills for different positions. This reduction of specialized skills is advantageous. Skills are broken into components that are easily digested by players new to the system. Practicing those component skills in detailed, strategic repetition allows players to develop better Tex-Bone specific skills in a shorter amount of time. Players are then able to move from the learning to execution stage of the offense more quickly. This economy of technique puts athletes in a better position to react and play faster. This is especially important when considering the skill level of opponents. It is a distinct disadvantage at the college level when players end up slowing down because they are unsure about their assignment. The Tex-Bone helps remediate this concern.

We break our positions into smaller subgroups for specialized training whenever possible. We split our inside and outside receivers into two smaller groups for example. It makes sense to differentiate the positions and focus specifically on their required skills given that their responsibilities are different.

Offensive line demands are similar to those of skill position groups. We do not expect our linemen to execute a multitude of blocks. Our footwork is simplified in a manner that allows us to let our athletes focus on aggressive, physical play. The net result is we present an opponent with the appearance of doing a lot without overburdening our linemen with too many individual skills.

### **Why Coaches May Not Like the Tex-Bone**

A fair overview of the Tex-Bone requires an examination of the offense in a manner that invites skepticism. This skepticism is healthy and welcome. It helps answer questions about the system and leads to further innovations that keep the Tex-Bone successful.

Double teams are deemphasized in the Tex-Bone system. On most schemes the intent is to create displacement horizontally along the line of scrimmage rather than vertically. If a team is committed to double teams—particularly on Power—this system potentially yields limited results. Step together double teams in the Tex-Bone that move the line of scrimmage vertically are not a primary blocking technique. Horizontal movement in triple option is important because it opens lanes for dive backs and quarterback

inserts. Double teams tend to limit or slow the opening of lanes. Because of this risk the double team is not used in the Tex-Bone.

Versatile wing and slot players in the Tex-Bone are a must. These are the players a Tex-Bone team relies on heavily whether it's an option pitch or a forward pass. Tex-Bone teams must also possess an instinctual, intelligent triggerman at quarterback. This does not mean a team needs a 1,000-yard quarterback rusher. What it does mean is that a team needs a quarterback that effectively distributes the football by making quality dive and pitch reads. To maintain effectiveness the quarterback must make a few simple checks in various situations and react to the defense as the play unfolds.

### **Shotgun vs. Under Center**

The Tex-Bone operates from the shotgun for everything we do. There are certain advantages to this. As mentioned before, a key advantage is eliminating pitch back motion before the play. Pre-snap motion by the pitch player is a limiting factor for other option systems as the pre-snap motion tips off where the ball is going. The ability to create misdirection is now enhanced with the offense in control of when to motion and when not motion before the play. Operating from the shotgun also increases the number of possible pitch players and formations.

The tradeoff accompanying this advantage is that option schemes such as midline or freeze option become difficult to execute. It is difficult to read the 3-technique when operating from the shotgun because the play does not hit fast enough. Loss of effectiveness for these schemes are a clear limitation.

### **The Shotgun QB Sneak**

The Shotgun QB sneak is probably my favorite play in all of football. Running out of shotgun makes the quarterback sneak an essential, advantageous component of our offense. Working downhill by running through the snap lets the quarterback gain a bigger head of steam than if he starts from under center. This momentum leads to sizeable gains by putting the defense on its heels from the time the play starts. This quick start also gives the quarterback better vision for the play as its unfolding—seeing where to insert himself into the line of scrimmage on the designed run.

When running quarterback sneak from the shotgun we produce touchdowns from plays that hit as wide as the C-gap. Lining up in shotgun gives the quarterback better vision before the snap as well—allowing him to adjust when defenses pinch in anticipation of the run. Adopting this play is something for all shotgun teams to consider.