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Implementing Tempo



Implementing starts with an understanding of how players learn and develop. First the must learn what they are doing. Understanding assignment is critical in this stage. Next they learn how they do it. The start to earn the techniques and refine them through repetition. Then they play fast.

Teaching tempo should start at the beginning of this process, but things may slow down because they are still learning the what and how. Be careful in how much you put on them Only you can gauge that as a coach. Once players are confident in their execution, adding more tempo and procedure wrinkles becomes easier.

Tempo as part of your call

By now it should be evident that tempo should be part of your play call in practice. It needs to become part of you thought process as much as the formation is. To make it part of what you do, make sure you have a column on your practice script for the tempo, and use various tempos throughout practice to get payers in the habit of understanding that tempo is built into how the offense operates.

Suggestions for implementation of multiple tempo:

- 1.** Know what your team needs and is capable of. The best people to answer this are you and your staff. What some “expert” coach is saying at a clinic may not apply very well to your situation.
- 2.** Define your procedures clearly both for your coaches and players.
- 3.** Make those procedures part of everything you do. If you expect to use them only on game day and they have not been practiced, confusion will ensue for both you and your players.
- 4.** Have a tempo signaler for every single play and make all eleven players look to the tempo first. This will let your offense know when to huddle, how fast to get out of the huddle, and when to align on the ball and run a play or sequence of plays without huddling.

5. Operate with full game procedures during team periods in practice. Have players handle sideline procedures in practice. Doing it helps them to understand it. Give a player a script and have others serve as signalers or send the play in with a messenger. This will also allow your coaches to stand where they need to view their players. We use head sets during this period of practice to get practice communicating as coaches. At the very least head sets should be utilized once a week in practice.

Implementing a Fast-paced Tempo

1. Develop a purpose and use for each tempo. We have 15 tempo tools with 11 of those designed to speed up play. We think of those situationally also. There are some that we designate for the beginning of the game. Others are used for certain parts of the field. The point is, there needs to be a thought process for when and where tempo will be used.
2. One thought on tempo is to start a series in a base tempo, but after picking up a first down, putting the pedal down and going as fast as possible. Another thought is to operate fast until the red zone. This is an area of the field where defenses have a tendency to change. There are two thoughts here. The first would be to continue with a fast tempo but move to the red zone section of the call sheet. The other is to go into a peek mode and ensure that the play you are running is the right one for the defense or coverage they are showing. Those are two opposite ends of the spectrum. Probably somewhere in the middle is the idea of getting the play in fast and allowing the QB to have some simple checks to put the offense in a better play. A fast pace can be maintained while running a play that is good against the look the defense is giving.
3. Script your procedures into practice. We use a “team takeoff” period early in practice to focus on procedures. We have a coach spot the ball and we work full game procedures down the field. Our players focus in this period is on tempo and procedures. We put the offense on the clock and see how fast they can run five plays. The number of groups we will run will vary. Some days we will run up to four offensive groups, other days we are running our top two. Early in camp, we make this a competition with the fastest, error-free team being exempt from conditioning.

4. We focus on a different set of procedures on different days of the week. We will practice our two-minute procedure at least twice. One time will be in a “team takeoff” period and the other will be in a live two-minute drill at the end of practice on Thursday. The head coach decides what the situation is with time, points needed, and time-outs available. Additionally, earlier in the year we will have a walk through period to get more reps. We have a high rate of success both in practice and in games in this situation because our players are comfortable running the two-minute tempo.
5. Receivers and the coach on the sideline need to understand that they are critical to keeping the tempo moving fast. If a pass has a receiver running a deep route, his back-up should be running onto the field to replace him the next play, and that player running downfield should understand that his teammate will be taking care of him and giving him a break on that next play.
6. Build up your procedures and tempo tools as you go. We didn’t start with 15 procedures. We saw opportunities where procedures would help us in our attack and added them incrementally throughout the season. Our tempos work together in a series. Some tempos are dependent on another because they are designed as a counter measure.

Coaching Primarily Off of Video - Food For Thought

Valuing coaching and finding the best methods to deliver instruction is at the heart of the Pro Style Pistol Offense and the coaches who have worked in implementing it. One of the biggest pieces of advice that seems to be shared with coaches implementing an uptempo offense is to coach off of video after practice. That certainly is an answer for getting as many reps as possible for the offense. However, there are some major drawbacks and misconceptions for this approach. For one, adopting this philosophy puts the focus on quantity not quality. Secondly, the coaching at practice is de-emphasized. With that being said, there is certainly a way to find that balance, and even get more quality while still adding feedback. Here are some suggestions:

1. Be very clear and concise when developing the terminology you are using with your technique. Every aspect that is coached in teaching technique should be able to be communicated in a word or two. The player can hear your voice, and if he was coached

with specific terminology in drills, meetings, and walk-thru, he should be able to hear and absorb the correction you are looking for. Using those same key words to reinforce correct execution of technique is of equal importance, but it all starts with being clear and concise about what is happening on the field.

2. Do not be afraid to replace and correct. As a rule, never let anything go un-coached in practice. The time for learning is in the moment. These indeed are your “teachable moments.” Two hours later or the next day loses impact as well as the opportunity to get it right with the next opportunity.
3. Utilize technology to create more impactful coaching. Just bringing an iPad to practice and utilizing it to correct technique by showing then and there the exact error on video can help create the execution and learning needed for success on game day. The next section covers this idea as well as other suggestions on how utilizing technology can help improve performance.

Immediate Feedback for Better Execution – Technology at Practice

At the end of his book, Homer Smith included his ideas for using technology to call plays in a game. Smith was definitely a visionary.

I don't claim to be anywhere near Smith in my contributions to this game, but in this article, I'd like to share my vision for the future, hopefully, the near future.

My vision involves rethinking how we practice in terms of giving players feedback so that they can make corrections. In the 2013 season we utilized my iPad throughout practice to provide instant feedback and the chance for immediate correction.

I was first inspired to use the iPad at practice after seeing a video of Nebraska using it in their spring practice.

As I've thought about the possibilities available to us in becoming better teachers and coaches on the field through fully utilizing the technology available, we can become much better at what we do.

The standard of what a football practice looks like seems to be shifting. "Uptempo" has become the norm. Stopping practice to correct and adjust is frowned upon. Many coaches of the no-huddle, uptempo offense will tell you that they coach off of film because they don't want to disrupt the tempo. Defensive coaches seem to have resigned to the fact that they will just have to deal with it. By definition, feedback waits until later. The teachable moment doesn't come until hours after in a film session.

I'm not sure we are doing it correctly. Granted, there are times when tempo should and must be the focus because that's how it happens on game day. Tempo for purely the sake of tempo may leave us missing out on coaching opportunities. Today's technology may bridge that gap and allow us to maintain the pace of practice while allowing for immediate feedback and correction. The challenge, it seems, is to integrate the technology while allowing for maximum repetitions during the allotted practice time.

The big question is how do we accomplish this while keeping a crisp and flowing practice? Technology should be integrated seamlessly. Part of the answer may be found in not just obtaining the technology, but more importantly, in having a sound plan to use it. Let's take a look at a possible technology plan within a typical practice session. The focus in this table is from an offense's view point.

Practice Periods	Description	Technology Use
1-2	Warm-up	-
3-6	Individual Technique by Position	iPads to film drills; players review after their rep/reps (5 iPads utilized; 1 for each position)*
7-8	Special Teams-Punt	iPads film specialists on technique; they review after their rep/reps (2 iPads utilized)
9-10	Inside Run & 1 on 1 QB/WR vs. DB	iPads film behind offense or defense). Review reps after unit is finished. (2 iPads)** QB isolated for technique; WR/DB isolated for technique; players review after their reps. (4 iPads – 2 iPads utilized in each position)
11-12	Special Teams-XP/FG	iPads film specialists on technique; they review after their rep/reps (2 iPads utilized)
13-15	7 on 7/ OL/DL 1 on 1	iPad behind QB mirroring his movement; iPad on each perimeter reviewing WR technique. QB review after his reps; iPad on OL/DL 1 vs. 1 for review after reps. (5 total)
16-19	Team – 1st team 6 reps followed by 2nd team 4 reps	3 iPads – inside view for OL/TE/RB/QB**; view from each perimeter for receivers. Receivers view reps after; OL (5 total)

*This is the difficult one for a football practice. Ideally, some kind of live stream can be used between two iPads with a pause and rewind. One device is recording live while an iPad at the back of the line is serving as a viewing station for the player. I haven't exactly

found the app or software that would accomplish this yet, but I have seen the technology in other uses, so I believe it is possible.



Live stream of drill goes to another iPad. Pause and rewind streaming video for viewing technique on the iPad used as a viewer.

**Ideally, a viewing station is set up, possibly under a pop-up tent for glare and visibility issues. The iPad is utilized through airplay so that it is easier for a group of players to view.



Managers or injured players would man the iPads. The iPad isn't meant to be something that stops or slows down practice, but rather in an uptempo environment allows the player to understand a coaching point that was made by the coach "on the fly." At the appropriate time when that player has a minute or so for review, he can go to the iPad on his own or with a coach to review the coaching point that was made during live action. The idea of having some application that allows for live streaming to an iPad during individual periods allows for players to quickly review their technique while they are waiting to get to the front of the line again. The goal is to increase player understanding so that execution of techniques on the field improve.

The Coach's Role

I believe in the beginning, as a skill is being taught for the first time, having a coach running the drill and a coach reviewing with the player would be ideal. Eventually, players begin to see key body positions to look for. For example, we teach our receivers a double leg explosion out of their stance. It's easy for the receiver to go to an iPad on his own and identify how he did. He can easily see if he drove off correctly or false stepped or sunk his hips. The feedback from video gives him a focus the next time that it is his turn. If there are two coaches available, this makes great use of both coaches. One coach is giving feedback live while the other is showing the video to the player seconds after it happened, further illustrating the coaching point and solidifying the player's understanding of exactly what he must do.

At any time in practice, the coach needs to be vocal and have very concise coaching points that identify an error as he sees it live. For example, if he sees an offensive lineman with incorrect hand placement, teaching the lineman to understand a word like "target" enables the lineman to go back and view the video looking for that exact error and giving him the ability to understand what he must do the next time. This is something that every coach should aim to do regardless of if there is the technology there or not. The technology doesn't necessarily change the coaches role.

The Player's Role

The player's role is to develop an eye for what the coach is looking for. Most staffs only have one coach at a position. Possibly a student manager, or an injured player can film the drills, but the player still needs to have a sound understanding of what the terminology of the position coach means. This is done in the installation process. The player must be held accountable for learning the terminology. Creating a library of short videos which illustrate your coaching points and techniques will help players have a better understanding of exactly what they are supposed to do to perform their job correctly.

Using the technology on a limited budget

Having multiple iPads and viewing stations around the practice field would be the ideal situation. The reality is most of us don't have that budget. An iPad wasn't in our budget at BW, so I used my own. To me, the value of giving players immediate feedback was well worth using my own iPad.

We did use the iPad in different drills. Players were told that they could use the iPad at any point during the drill to review what they did. That meant that filming of the drill stopped, but the drill continued. At times the player would go to the video on his own to better understand what he did right or wrong. Video is a great way to solidify the correct technique, just as much as it is to correct an error. Other times I would instruct the player to look at the video, and even go to the iPad to review it with him.

Our specialists used the iPad to review their technique. Our kickers would have the student manager film the field goal/extra point periods. After, the kickers would use the iPad to review their technique so they could work on perfecting their technique during the remainder of practice.

We used the iPad for inside run periods. Our tight ends coach used the iPad to review the inside run period with his players in the period immediately following inside run. He felt it was very valuable because we would be running those plays again in team, and he wanted his players to understand exactly what they were doing right or wrong so that they could perform correctly when those plays were repped again.

We used the iPad in team for a view of the offensive line, TE, QB, and RB from behind. We instructed players and position coaches that they use it at any time to review a play and make corrections. At times, the use was player initiated. Hearing an offensive lineman say, "Let me see the iPad" was common. The running back coach might grab it to show the running back an aim point or footwork error. The offensive line coach might grab it and take the entire line to show them a certain defensive stunt and how he wanted them to pick it up. Our student manager was instructed to keep filming each play until someone wanted the iPad to view, and to resume filming as soon as they were done viewing it.

While having a team of managers filming with iPads all over the field would be ideal, we found a way to make just one iPad beneficial to us. Again, the technology must be integrated seamlessly, and coaching must be concise. Doing these two things can put the technology to work for you and help improve performance on the field, which is the ultimate goal.

Final Thoughts on Implementing Tempo

Tempo is not an excuse to stop coaching on the field. The responsibility is on the coach to adopt new methods, and to be clear and concise with coaching points and communication both corrections and reinforcing proper performance. Finding a way to utilize technology can help a coach in his efforts to improve execution. Having a well thought out coaching plan is just as important as planning how tempo tools will be installed.