

1

Introduction to Tempo



In 2003, Rich Rodriguez took the spotlight in being at the forefront of uptempo offense at West Virginia. What he said in a clinic talk impacted my philosophy on using procedures and tempo as part of an offensive attack.

At our level, I think it is the most under-utilized thing in football. Your offense has to control the tempo of the game. We do that with no-huddle and indy schemes. You don't have to be a no-huddle offense to do it. To help our defense in practice, we have huddled, broke the huddle, sprinted to the line quickly, and snapped the ball. We haven't done that in a game, but we have the capability to do it.

The two advantages you have on offense relate to the fact you know where you are going and you know when the ball is going to be snapped. We change the tempo by snapping the ball in five seconds, 10 seconds, or 15 seconds. No-huddle is the best way for us to control that part of the tempo because conditioning is always a factor.

Rodriguez point about being multiple in the way the ball is snapped, as well as his statement that this is the most under-utilized aspect of offensive football began my thought process and development of a new phase of our offensive attack. Little-by-little, research, learning, experimentation, and development of procedures, as well as understanding the effect that the use had on a defense became part of our arsenal.

Huddle or No Huddle? That is the question.

The debate on huddling versus not has been around since the game was invented. Knute Rockne was not an advocate for the huddle which began to be utilized while he was coaching. He wrote in his book that the disadvantages of the huddle far out weighed the advantages.

In fact the game used to operate without a huddle in its earliest days. I found a video clip from the 1903 Yale-Princeton game in which the ball is snapped four seconds from the time it was spotted.

I think Andrew Coverdale defines the huddle as well as anyone. He and I spoke at length about using no huddle procedures, and he decided to stick with the huddle system. It paid off as Trinity High School in Louisville, Kentucky has won multiple state championships. Early in camp during their first state championship campaign, Coverdale tried some no huddle but made the decision that it was best for them to continue operating from the huddle as their base mode of attack. With that being said, Coverdale is a big believer in multiple tempos.

If you choose to be a huddle team, I would argue that you are not getting the most out of your attack if tempo is not a thought in how you attack. You can speed up or slow down just like no-huddle teams do.

We added a huddle back into our offense as we saw both the need and desire to communicate in critical situations and to slow the game down in four minute situations. There is nothing I dislike more than to be up on the ball and waiting and showing the defense our formation for an extended period of time. In our huddle mode of attack we do use multiple tempos.

I also believe that mixing in huddle with some basic no huddle modes of attack can be incorporated fairly easily. I had several “huddle” coaches speak with me this off season on how they could incorporate some no huddle procedures. We talked about how using a simple scripted series of three plays run in sequence without huddling could put stress on a defense. Incorporating some play action after a sequence of runs could prove to be very effective.

Tempo does not need to turn into a debate of huddle or no huddle. My philosophy is that tempo is part of our attack. It’s something we include in every play call. We even game plan which tempo tools we will use.

This manual presents strategies in the realm of tempo that have proved successful at both the college and high school level. By illustrating and explaining their use, the hope is that the reader can assimilate some of these ideas into his own system to help his players and coaches succeed.