

CHAPTER 11: ISOS & COUNTERS

ISOS & COUNTERS: the most versatile family in the Tex-Bone

Origins of the Lead Isolation Play

The Iso (short for Lead Isolation) is most closely associated with the “I” Formation. The “I” Formation is an adaptation of the “T” formation developed in the late 1940s at the Virginia Military Institute by head Coach Tom Nugent. Figure 131 shows running backs in the “Long I” used by Nugent instead of the traditional “T” formation.

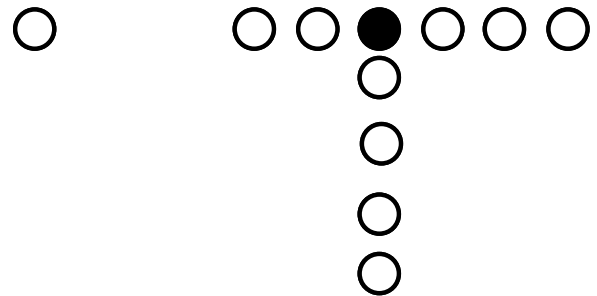


Fig 131

The modern “I” Formation became a favorite formation for NFL and college teams by the early 1960s. The Iso play (Figure 132) shows a downhill run that consistently yields positive yardage.

TEX-BONE ISOS

The Iso is the most versatile family of plays in the Tex-Bone. Isos offer opportunities for multiple lead blocker choices—including the center, guard, tackle, wing, or running back.

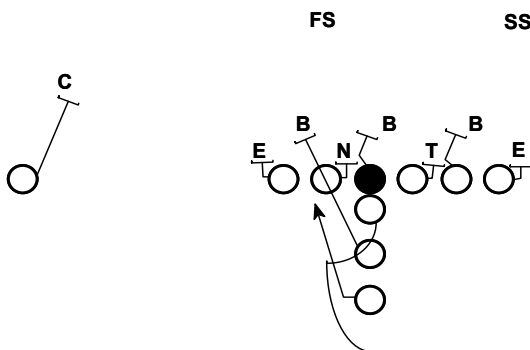


Fig 132

Benefits of Iso

Iso is a downhill, aggressive run scheme. While not blocked for a touchdown, it is blocked for first downs and blocked for consistent yardage gains. Iso plays are available from multiple formations and with multiple ball carriers. Because of its aggressive nature the Iso should yield few negative plays.

Flexbone Iso

The Flexbone Iso uses the play side wing as the Iso blocker. This puts the lead blocker one-on-one with the play side linebacker at the point of attack. All other players on the front side are man-to-man. The tackle is man-to-man on the defensive end and the guard is man-to-man on the nose tackle in the top of Figure 133.

The tackle is man-to-man on the defensive end and the guard is man-to-man on the 3-technique defensive tackle in bottom of Figure 133. The lead Isolation player works to the play side linebacker in the open gap. The wing then adjusts and works through the appropriate open gap if defensive linemen move and the open gap shifts.

All offensive linemen block gaps on the backside of the Iso. The center blocks the A-gap, the guard is on B-gap, and the tackle is on C-gap. The fullback runs an A or B-gap dive path depending on where the open gap is. The quarterback's footwork then matches the fullback's path. *Fig 133*

Flexbone Iso vs. Blitz

Flexbone Iso is doable against the blitz—even though it's not a preferable choice.

The play side wing (or Iso blocker) must adapt to wherever the blitz is coming from and neutralize it. Figure 134 shows play side blitzes. The play side wing vacates his Isolation of the play side linebacker and blocks

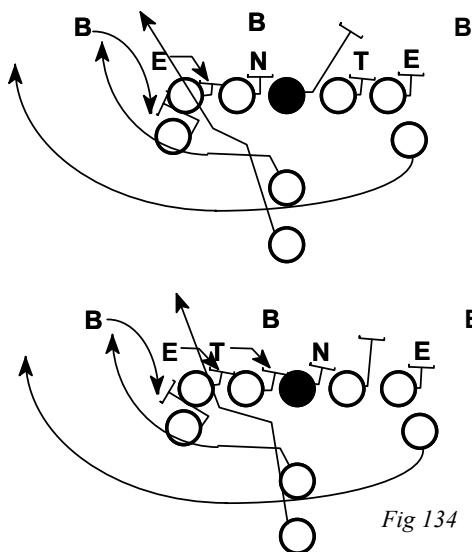


Fig 134

the immediate threat off the edge (or C-gap) in response to the blitz. This is not an ideal play against defensive pressure because it leaves the inside linebacker free. The play should still gain yardage before the linebacker tackles the fullback however.

There are times when teams get caught by a blitz when running Iso. A quarterback is best served to change the play to Speed Option if the correct pre-snap blitz read is made. This is the built-in advantage of running the Flexbone triple option—it dissuades blitzes.

Flexbone Iso Option

Few things change when the Flexbone Iso becomes Flexbone Option as shown in Figure 135. The first noteworthy difference is the fullback midline dive path illustrated in the two plays on the next page. This path gives the fullback a chance to work inside-out past the play side linebacker to the third level.

The wing still Iso's the play side linebacker. Off the token fake the quarterback knows he is pulling the ball and attempting to work around the edge to the pitch phase. Nothing else changes in the blocking scheme beyond those considerations.

Flexbone Iso Option vs. Blitz

Flexbone Iso Option is a better choice against the blitz than a straight Flexbone Iso. The offense gains an advantage by optioning the blitzing linebacker instead of relying on the play side wing to pick up the blitz. Nothing else changes with the blocking scheme. The play side wing works to the play side linebacker through the open gap.

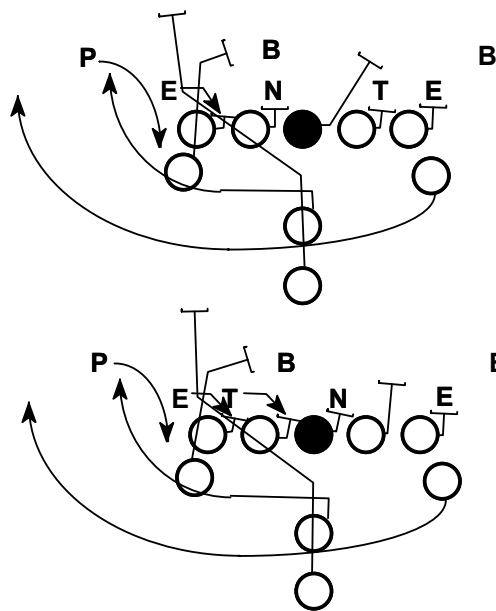


Fig 136

quarterback.

Spread Center Iso

Play callers get the advantage of choosing what player to use as lead isolation blockers. A pulling lineman becomes the lead Isolation blocker for plays illustrated on the next page. Either the center or the guard pulls. Let's start by analyzing Spread Center Iso diagrams.

Center and Guard Isos are designed to capitalize on five man boxes with zone coverage behind it. This is either an odd front five-man box (bottom of Figure 137) or an even front five-man box (top of Figure 137).

Center Iso features man-to-man blocking on the front side by the play side tackle and the play side guard while the backside uses modified zone blocking. The center pulls around as the Iso blocker aiming for the single linebacker in the box instead of inserting the wing like in earlier Flexbone Isos.

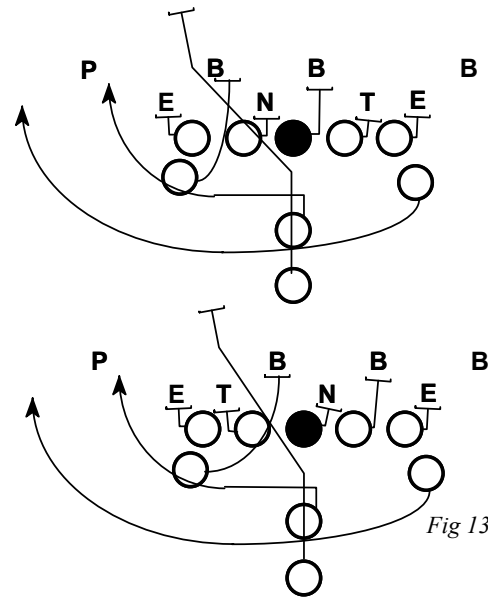


Fig 135

Figure 136

shows the C-gap open with the play side tackle man-to-man on the defensive end. The offensive tackle must follow the defensive end spiking inside and the play side wing adjusts to find the open gap in order to get to his linebacker.

The token fake to the fullback follows the midline path before attempting to sort through the moving players in front of him to reach the third level of the defense. The quarterback and backside wing then option the blitzing pitch key.

The quarterback is always well served to check into speed option if unsure about the reliability of the scheme based on the defensive pre-snap read. Speed option is always good against any front. It is a reliable safety blanket for the

The same rules apply to blocking 3-2 box defenses in the bottom illustration to the right. The play side tackle is man-to-man on the defensive end, the play side guard is man-to-man on the nose tackle, and the center pulls to the play side linebacker while the guard and tackle are two-for-two on the backside.

This scheme is available with a fullback alignment (the fullback behind the quarterback) and a running back alignment (the back offset to the side of the quarterback). We prefer to align our offset back toward the puller when running Iso. The play promotes hesitation or false movement from the isolated linebacker by meshing towards the pull. This mesh point makes the Iso gap larger and more accessible to the puller and the ball carrier.

Teams are limited to running Center Iso toward the A-gap defensive tackle out of spread. This means running the play towards a 0, 1 or 2-technique.

Spread Guard Iso

You are not limited in direction when running Spread Guard Iso however. (Running to an A-gap or B-gap defensive tackle are available choices). Both the Guard and Center Isos are designed to capitalize on a five-man box with zone coverage behind it.

The rules for Guard Iso are the same for Center Iso. Both the play side tackle and guard are blocking man-to-man. This leaves the center and backside tackle to account for the last two defenders while the backside guard makes the pull. The center in Figure 138 executes a back block to cover for the pulling guard. This scheme is similar to the back block on Power. Guard Iso is available from either a fullback or running back alignment.

Center/Guard Iso Considerations

There are several considerations worth taking into account when running Center and Guard Isos:

1. The quarterback must identify man coverage and get to Speed Option if facing pressure. These are five-man

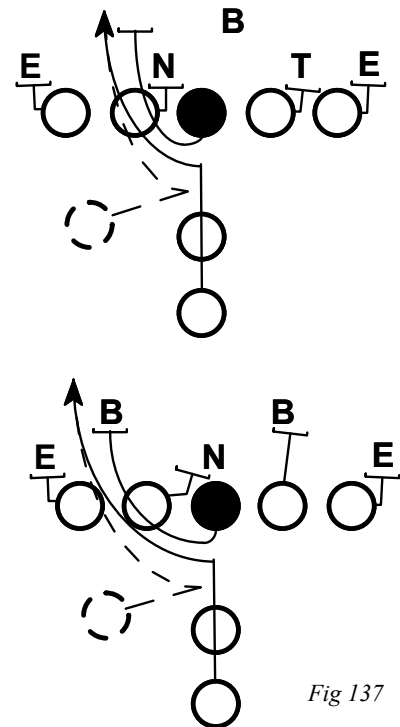


Fig 137

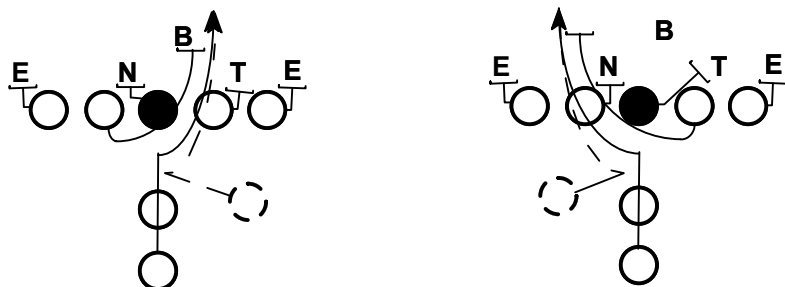


Fig 138

- box plays not designed to attack pressure looks.
2. Pull your best players. Some players are better at base blocking and some players are better at pulling. Choose the scheme that fits your personnel. Run Center Iso if your best puller is the center and Guard Iso if the best puller is the guard.
 3. Center Iso is particularly good at neutralizing guard keys. Few teams key the center pull as part of their defensive strategy. Pull the center if you want to limit guard reactions.
 4. Compliment this by selecting backfield actions that mimic other players or induce beneficial linebacker reactions away from the point of attack.
 5. Create a six-man box response. A plan including a Tackle Iso is good if you want to stay with an Iso scheme. Changing the play to Speed Option is always a good choice.
 6. Teams must pull the center to the open B-gap “bubble.” The “bubble” refers to the open area between the nose tackle and defensive end. (“I” Formation Iso coaches are already familiar with the term.)
 7. Pulling to any surface (including to or away from the “bubble”) is an option when pulling the guard. It does not matter what gap is open when pulling the guard on an Iso.

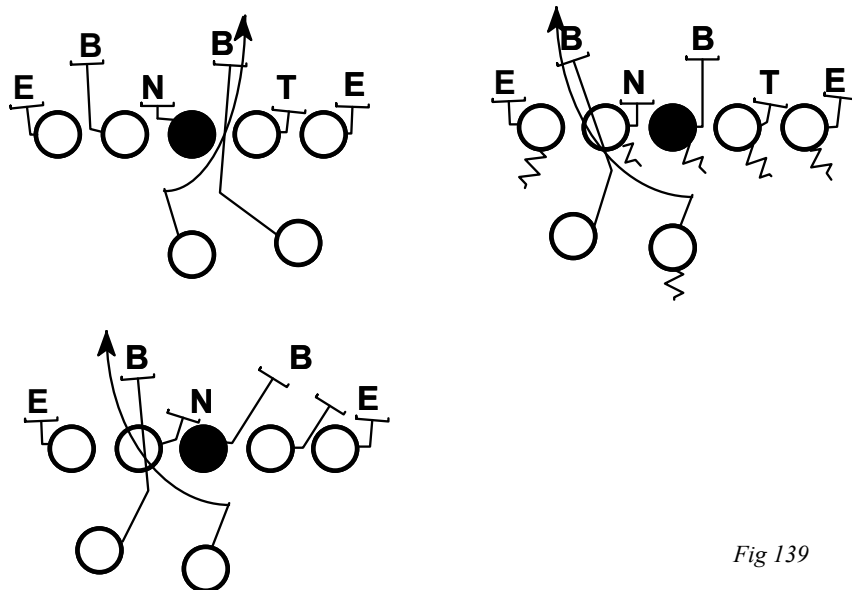
QB Iso

QB Iso is one of my favorite plays because it’s an aggressive, fast hitting, downhill play. The aggressiveness of QB Iso sneaks up on teams that expect laterally moving triple option plays.

The quarterback Iso is a running back lead play. He aligns to the side of the quarterback and attacks the play side linebacker. Teams are able to run this play to any surface and open gap. The three plays in Figure 139 show QB Iso.

Coaching point: the running back must get the ball behind him in order to create a favorable inside-out blocking angle. The running back is not running directly at the play side linebacker. The linebacker might cross his face and reach the quarterback unabated if the running back did this. This is why the running back must get the ball behind him and then work inside-out to the outside number.

The quarterback takes two steps to the opposite A-gap on QB Iso. This counter action holds the backside



linebacker and sets up a beneficial blocking angle for the running back on the play side linebacker. The misdirection aspect of the play is an important component in large yardage gains.

QB Iso turns into QB Draw when ran with pass sets. Linemen show pass influence to sell the play. The running back then slow plays his approach the play side linebacker to mimic the

Fig 139

demeanor of pass protection. Linemen still follow Iso rules even though they give ground to sell pass to the defense.

COUNTERS

Counters are considered a part of the Iso family in the Tex-Bone. The following sections detail their place in the offense.

Spread Tackle Iso

Spread Tackle Isos are some of our favorite spread run plays. Pulling the center or guard to run an Iso with five defenders in the box was discussed in previous sections. Pulling a tackle allows you to account for six defenders in the box.

Tackle Iso also provides the opportunity to incorporate counter backfield actions. Front side blockers are man-to-man in all Iso plays. Figure 140 shows the tackle and guard on the play side blocking man-to-man with the center and guard playing zone and accounting for the A-gap and B-gap on the backside. The tackle then pulls through the open gap to the front side linebacker.

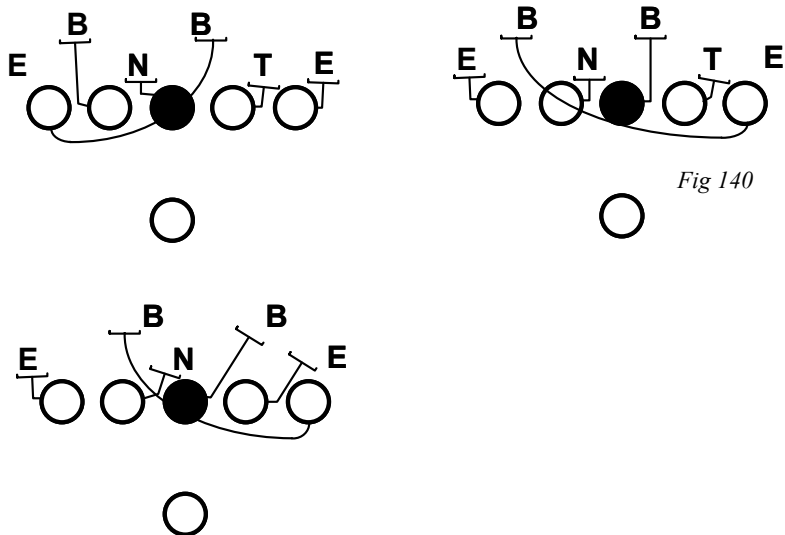


Fig 140

Adding a tight end to the backside helps eliminate the backside read.

The tight end secures the C-gap and (in most cases) counters any sort of blitz situation.

The backside defensive end is potentially unblocked without a tight end. The defensive end needs accounting for by reading (optioning) him or blocking him with some other player.

Tackle Iso Backfield Actions

There are four actions that pair well with Tackle Iso:

1. Dive counter (top left of Figure 141): off the dive mesh the running back bows out slightly to follow the tackle through the open gap. The quarterback must key the backside defensive end and keep the ball if the defensive end is going to tackle the running back.
2. Speed Option counter (top right of Figure 141): on the Speed Option counter the running back takes off laterally for three hard steps. He turns back on his third step to the inside and receives the ball from quarterback. The quarterback must position himself slightly behind the running back to mesh effectively. It's his job to press the edge quickly and get

the ball to the running back right as he pivots back to the play. Speed Option counter creates a lot of influence with the linebackers even if it is slow developing at the snap. The quarterback must key the backside defensive end and keep the ball if he is going to tackle the running back.

3. Quarterback counter (bottom left of Figure 141): this play features a dive mesh with the running back peeling off and blocking the backside end after the fake. Remember, without a tight end the backside defensive end needs accounting for. Using the running back to block the backside defensive end is one possibility on QB counter.
4. Fullback counter (bottom right of Figure 141): The fourth backfield choice is to run Tackle Iso with a fullback setting up the dive path away from the Iso before bending back to the play side and following the tackle.

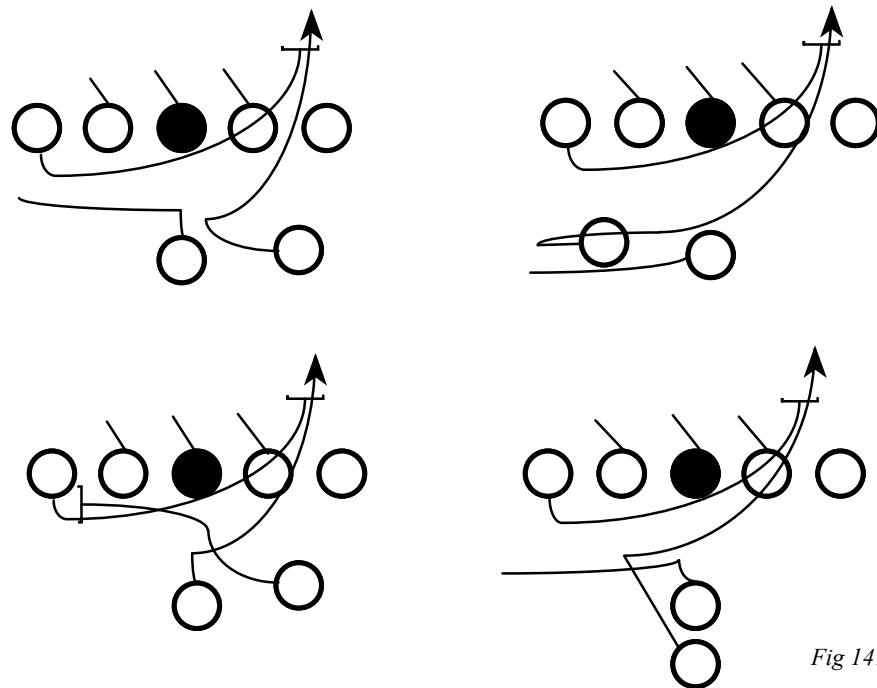


Fig 141

Spread Tackle Iso vs. Blitz

Defensive pressure should not adversely affect Tackle Iso. This is true because all gaps are accounted for. The pulling tackle accounts for the C-gap edge rusher on the blitz (see Figure 142). This essentially becomes a C-gap Iso for the tackle. The play becomes an A-gap Iso if the defense commits an A-gap blitz.

The guard and tackle are always man-to-man on the near defensive tackle and defensive end. The pulling tackle then fits to the open gap based on the blitz. The man-to-man side stays man-to-man and the backside blockers are still A-gap and B-gap.

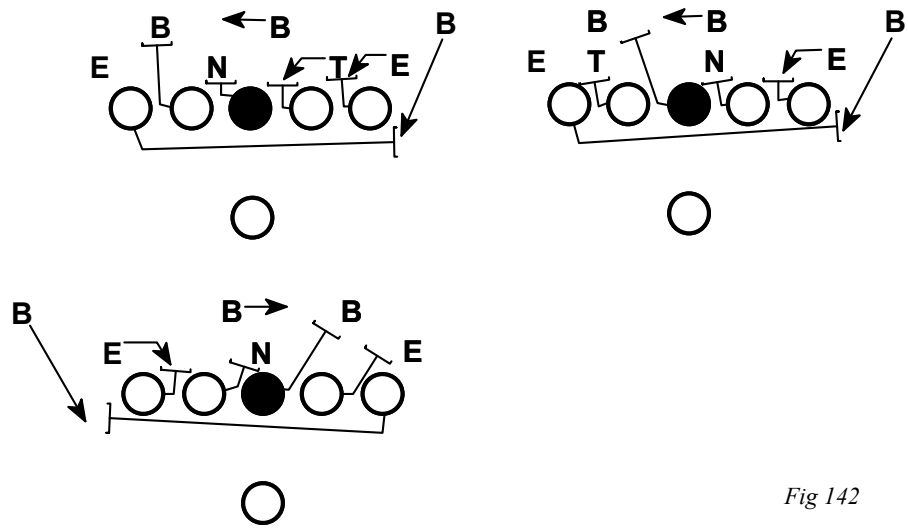


Fig 142

The unblocked inside linebacker in the illustrations to the right is held by the counter backfill action. Remember, our Tackle Isos are all counter plays. There is always misdirection working away from where the tackle is pulling to. Backfield action should pull the unblocked inside linebacker away from the point of attack.

Pre-snap communication is particularly important because the backside puller needs to know if a blitz is coming and what gap he needs to cover (either is A-gap, B-gap, or C-gap). It's also important for the quarterback to identify blitz keys so the guard and tackle make adjustments for any slanting defensive players.

The unchanging nature of Iso rules helps teams cope with pressure. Practice also assuages the blitzes that defenses apply from week to week. Quarterbacks quickly learn to audible into Speed Option if players are struggling with adjusting at the line of scrimmage.

G-T Counter

The Tex-Bone also uses the G-T Counter. It is a hybrid combination of Power and Tackle Iso concepts. The following sections detail how it works.

Evolution of the G-T Counter

Early versions of the G-T Counter date back to the Wing T. The Tex-Bone G-T Counter is a combination of Power and Tackle Iso. The play utilizes two lead blockers as pullers from the backside with down blocks on the front side.

The University of Nebraska was the first college team to use the G-T Counter from the "I" Formation under Coach Tom Osborne. Their success with the "I" Formation G-T Counter made the play popular across all levels of football. The play became the calling card of the Washington Redskins under head coach Joe Gibbs. The Redskins used this play in Figure 143 into the 1990s.

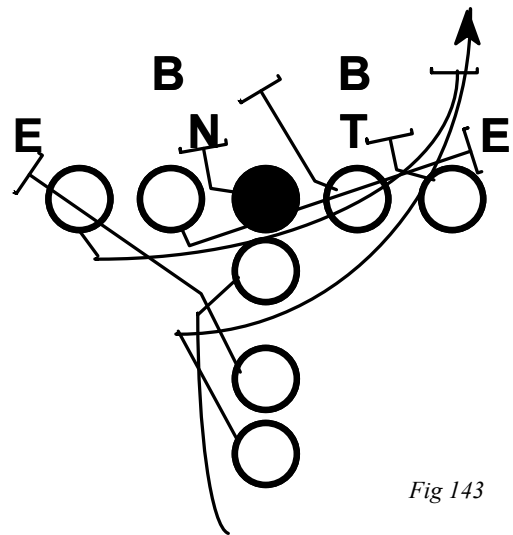


Fig 143

The term “Counter” eventually became synonymous with any two players from the backside pulling to the front side. Figure 144 shows an example of H-Back Counter. Notice the backside guard pull to the contain player and the H-Back pull to the play side linebacker in the illustration. This blocking scheme is frequently paired with run pass options in recent years.

Tex-Bone G-T Counter

The G-T Counter in the Tex-Bone offense is nothing more than a combination of Power and Tackle Iso (see Figure

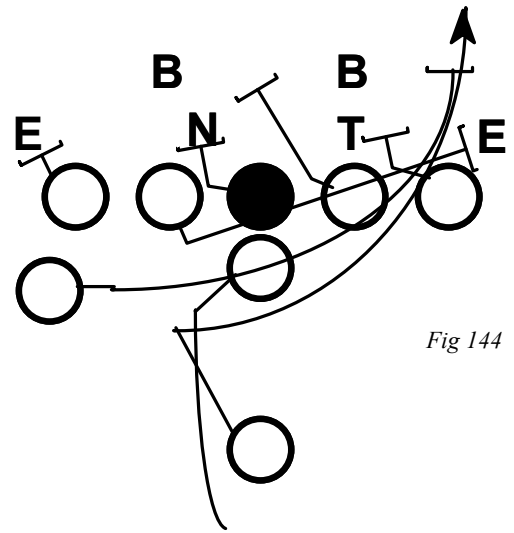


Fig 144

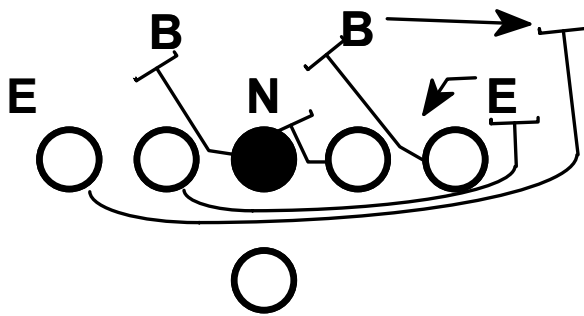
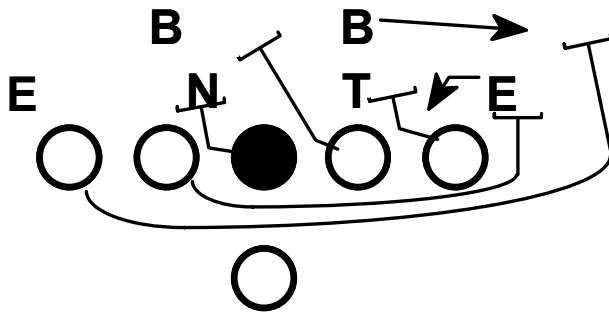


Fig 145



log block is available—a kick out is used if not).

Figure 146 shows kick out blocking against odd and even man fronts. The pulling guard is forced to kick out if the defensive end works too far up field for log blocking. The pulling tackle then makes an adjustment by pulling up inside of the kick out in order to reach the play side linebacker. The ball carrier sees the new path and adjusts to match his block.

145). We like G-T Counter because it adds versatility and misdirection choices to the Tex-Bone spread playbook. We like to run G-T Counter as a Counter Read play and we also run G-T Counter with Jet Motion.

The backside guard pulls while the front side players down block. The G-T Counter and Power blocking schemes are the same in this regard. The backside tackle then pulls and Isos just as he does on Tackle Iso. These blocking rules are highly effective and do not require players to learn an entirely new blocking scheme in order to run G-T Counter.

We always want to log block. The pulling guard always pulls with the intent of logging. He then reacts accordingly if a kick out is required. The pulling backside tackle works outside the log on his way to the play side linebacker (assuming a

G-T Counter Backfield Actions

We like to run G-T Counter with Jet Motion. We already examined a few different blocking schemes for Jet Motion in previous sections.

With Jet Motion the play is somewhat unique in that there is no read. The quarterback must remain patient on the fake to help the counter action develop however. Any need for a read on Jet Motion is eliminated with the running back block of the contain player. The Jet Motion in the top part of Figure 147 goes away from the counter block. This movement away from the play side negates the need for a counter read.

We also run G-T Counter with a read (bottom portion of Figure 147). This is known as “Bash” in many spread circles. We run this by bringing the running back across the face the quarterback on a sweep path. The quarterback gives the ball to the running back if the defensive end doesn’t take away the sweep. Pulling the ball and following the counter blocking is the best decision when the defensive end works up field to cover the sweep.

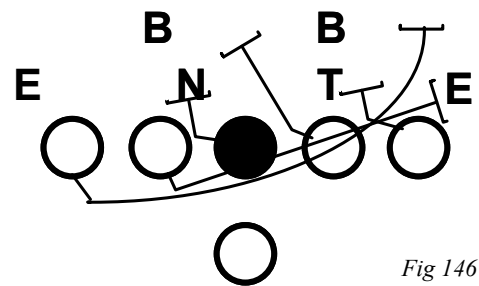
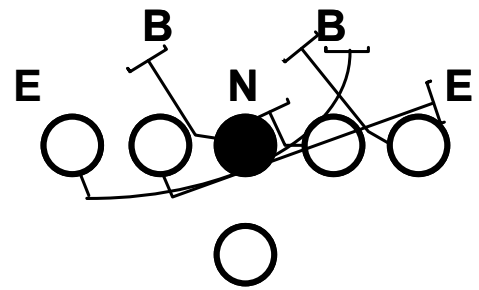


Fig 146

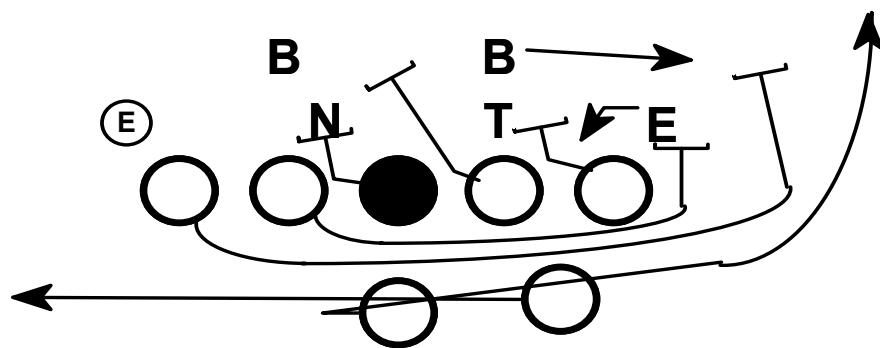
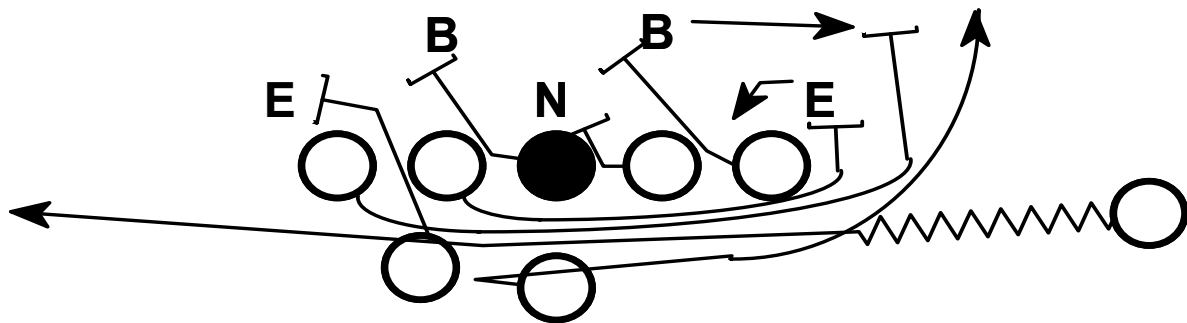


Fig 147

Spread G-T Counter vs. Blitz

G-T Counter (like Power) is good against pressure. The only change (similar to one-back Power Read) is assigning the play side tackle to block man-to-man on the play side defensive end. This allows the pulling guard to take the blitzing linebacker while the pulling tackle works inside to kick out to isolate the play side linebacker (see Figure 148). Failure to identify the blitz leads to a poor numbers situation. Identifying the blitz transforms the G-T Counter into a good play call against pressure.

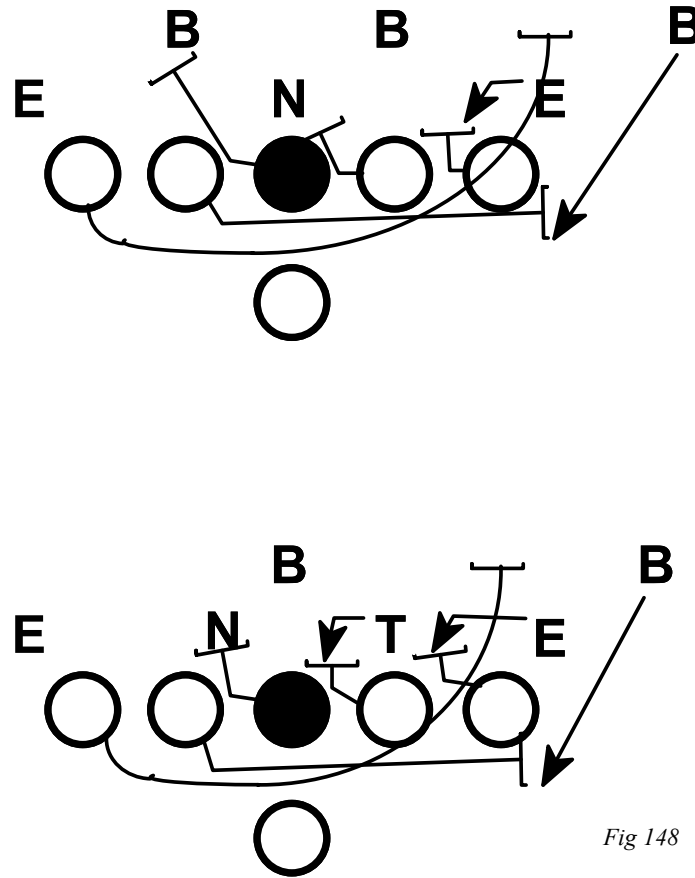


Fig 148

