

# ***SPREAD PASS GAME***

**T**he spread offense has taken over from coast to coast, from high school to the NFL. Designed to be distribution-friendly, it forces defenses to worry about every eligible receiver on the field, spreading the defense out horizontally while stretching them vertically. Despite its popularity, it is difficult to define what "spread" means, given that the term has become such a catch-all.

The story of how the one-back spread offense went viral in an era without internet can be traced back to a Los Angeles high school coach named Jack Neumeier, whom Sports Illustrated credits as the inventor of the modern spread offense. Neumeier was influenced by another high school coach in Ohio, Glen "Tiger" Ellison, who wrote "Run and Shoot Football" in 1965 to win a championship in 1970 using spread concepts. Then in 1976, a quarterback named John Elway enrolled as a freshman and his college coaching father, Jack, watched Neumeier's offense from the stands. Their success made Granada Hills high school "a must stop destination for college coaches across the nation."

Father Elway took this high school, one-back spread offense to San Jose State and Stanford. His offensive coordinator, Dennis Erickson, used it to win 1991 national championships at Miami and installed it with the Seattle Seahawks and SF 49ers. Elways' coaching buddy, Mike Price, used it to win the 1997 Rose Bowl with Washington. Joe Tiller learned it from Erickson while at Wyoming and set national passing records in 1999 at Purdue with Drew Brees at QB. Urban Meyer learned it from Erickson's ex-QB and used it at Utah ('04), Florida ('06), and Ohio State ('14).

During the 1970s, Darrel "Mouse" Davis used Ellison's Run and Shoot to win the Oregon state championship and then set 20 NCAA records at Portland State, leading the nation in scoring three times. The Run and Shoot relied on *both* the QB and WR reading the defense, using pre-snap motions. It is criticized as being one-dimensional since it does not use a Tight End and the Quarterback is vulnerable to blitzes and pressure.

In the late 70's, San Diego Charger coach Don Coryell, influenced by Dutch Meyer ('50's) and Sid Gillman ('60's), introduced the NFL to "Air Coryell", using Tight Ends, backs in motion and shotgun formations. Ten years later Bill Walsh's West Coast offense also relied on precise timing, but unlike Gillman and Coryell, Walsh's schemes focused more on short routes. While the wishbone, Wing-T, and Veer were playbooks, Bill Walsh's West Coast offense was based on concepts.

This evolution has led to plenty of versions of spread offenses. There are Air Raid attacks that rely on high-percentage passing games and run-oriented attacks built with tight ends, H-backs and dual-threat quarterbacks. The one thing they all have in common is forcing the defense to cover the entire field from sideline to sideline. These innovations have made the game faster and higher scoring, there is debate whether the offensive system is as effective as it seems, especially at the high school level with teams that cannot recruit.

Despite the tons of different off-shoots, or variations, they all fall into 4 main categories:

### **AIR RAID**

One of the extreme versions is the pass-oriented Air Raid, developed by Hal Mumme and Mike Leach in the late 1990's at the University of Kentucky. They were heavily influenced by BYU head coach LaVell Edward's West Coast passing game, simplifying it to a purely conceptual level. The Mouse Davis Run & Shoot used by June Jones is a well-known variant of the Air-Raid

While the offense flourished at the college levels, its wide spread use at the high school ranks was due to former Mumme assistant, Tony Franklin. In a radical marketing move, the entire Air Raid offense was sold to high school coaches. The Tony Franklin system came complete with installation guides, DVDs, flash drives, diagrams, and practice tapes. The national exposure was created when Franklin, blackballed from the college ranks, installed to offense at Hoover High School on the MTV show, Two-A-Days. They won five straight Alabama 6A titles, proving that a college offense could be taught at the high school levels.

Some coaches have taken to packaging their offensive system and marketing them to programs around the country, such as Tony Franklin, who served as an assistant coach at the University of Kentucky under Hal Mumme where he developed his offense based on Mumme's "Air Raid" system

The Air Raid employs multiple spread sets and is heavily reliant on the quarterback and coaches being able to call the appropriate play at the line of scrimmage based on how the defense sets up. The signature concept of the Air Raid is 4-verticals in which receivers are tagged to run stop routes or comebacks in open areas.

### **SPREAD OPTION**

Rich Rodriguez (West Virginia) and Bill Snyder (Kansas State) developed it during the mid '90s. In 2006, the Spread Option really made a splash when Vince Young and the Texas Longhorns won the national championship, while the Urban Meyer Utah Utes went undefeated with Alex Smith. Meyer then led Florida to a national title featuring QB Tim Tebow in the Spread Option. It has since had great success with Chip Kelly (Oregon), Hugh Freeze (Ole Miss), Gus Malzahn (Auburn)

### **SMASHMOUTH SPREAD**

The "spread-to-run" philosophy uses a power run game to set up play-action shots down the field. The 3-receiver sets use wide splits to create intense spacing and the passing game focuses on attacking deep or wide with screens and vertical routes. Even the personnel are chosen for their extremes, using big OL and the fast WRs to punish teams for failing to use numbers to stop either the passing game or the runs

### **PRO-STYLE SPREAD**

Then there are the teams that want to run pro-style concepts but love the way in which going up-tempo and spreading out your opponent makes everything easier. However, it is difficult to mix in spread formations and concepts with pro-style language and approaches. These teams call themselves "multiple," but are inefficient at most everything. The answer has essentially been the RPO game, which combines drop-back West Coast passing staples with power run game on the same play.

## **PASS PROTECTIONS**

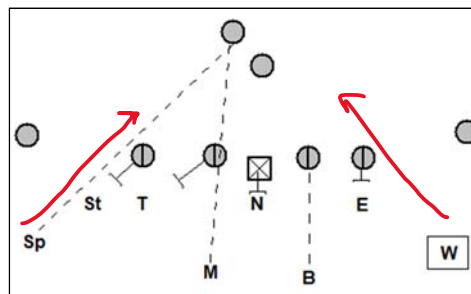
Discussion of pass blocking schemes could be an entire book unto itself. The multitude of defensive fronts and pass rush strategies mandate blocking schemes designed for adaptation. With a quarterback in shotgun, the pass blocking is almost entirely centered around drop-back cup protection versus sprint-out..

Pass blocking schemes themselves are fairly consistent team to team; the lingo may be different, but the schemes are essentially the same. Three major blocking schemes are called "B.O.B." (for Big On Big/Back On Back), "Slide", and "Combination".

**Big On Big**

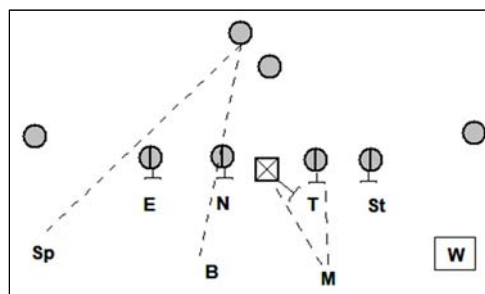
"Big on big" means you have lineman blocking lineman and running backs blocking linebackers. either way this is a 6-man protection scheme.

Versus our Base front, the O-Line will treat it like an odd front with an OLB blitz. The RG and RT can block "back-back" on our D-TACKLE and STUD. That leaves the RB to take care of any MIKE or SPUR blitzs. The Left Guard will handle the BULL blitzes. If we blitz the WILL, they can again block it "back-back", pull the LG around, or pick it up with the RB. The double SMOKE blitz off both edges could give this protection some problems.



Versus our "G" even front, the center will "combo" block with either the LG or RG, typically whoever is slanting into the A-gap. However, our even alignment does not give them any pre-snap reads of who will rush in the A-gap.

The Center and Guard that he helps will combine to pick up the Inside linebacker should he blitz the A or B gaps. While the RB will also be assigned a Linebacker, one of the playside backers will be the hot read for the QB (Will in the picture). No one is assigned to block him. If he blitzes, the hot route should occupy the space he vacates. If he doesn't blitz, either the play call or the pass protection needs to change. The QB is said to be "responsible" for the Sam blitz; a sack by that player is entirely on the QB.



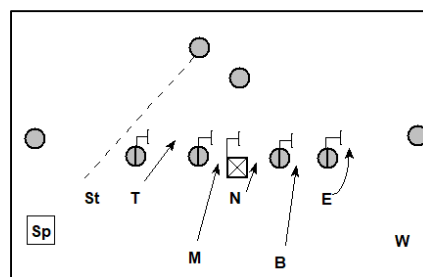
Since pass rushers are assigned pre-snap to certain blockers, line stunts and twists can cause confusion. Zone blocking assignments are designed to switch on stunts so that lineman take whoever comes into their respective zone.

**Slide**

Slide is a zone, or "area" blocking assignment. All of the offensive lineman slide to the gap to their left or right during their drop steps, usually to the backside of the play, and pick up whoever comes at them.

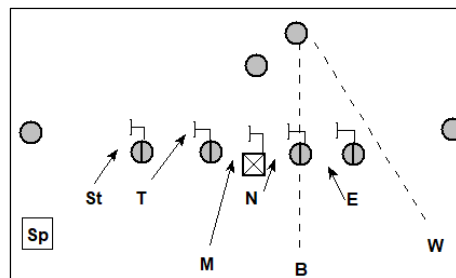
- Full Slide protection is a gap-based protection rather than a man based protection. As the name suggests every offensive lineman is involved in the slide. The RB always works opposite of the OL to account for all 6 gaps.

The strength of this protection is that the blockers are protecting gaps and should be solid vs anything because they are letting the defense come right to you. Bull rushing from our head up alignment can cause OL problems because we are attacking the man rather than a gap. Also, send the blitz into the gap that the blocker you are bull rushing is responsible for. For example, bull rush the Center with the NOSE and blitz the BULL into the A-gap.



- Half Slide might be the most common pass protection scheme used in HS football. This is a zone/man combination and essentially combines the BOB and full slide. The BOB rules essentially turn into half slide when the defense starts blitzing and stunting.

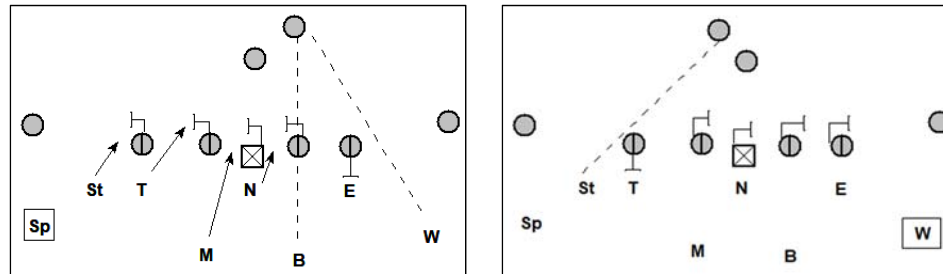
The RB is responsible for the LB to the side that the QB or Center declares. (same as BOB). Let's say the offense puts the RB in charge of protecting his left. This tells the LG and LT that



## SECTION FIVE

they are in man to man (BOB) protection, and the Center-RG-RT are sliding right. The LT will be locked on with the DE and the LG would BOB a guy head up on him.

Versus our NG, the LG will also be a part of the half slide, and would slide to his right gap as well, the LT will still stay locked on 1 on 1 vs the DE no matter what.



### **Combo**

Half of the line slides for zone blocking (usually to the backside) and the other half is B.O.B. Most 6-man pass blocking schemes devolve into some form of this combination coverage as a play develops.

### **Defeating Pass Protections**

- **PERSONNEL:** Replace the big run stuffers (unless they are also your best rushers), with quick guys, even backup Linebackers.
- **ATTACK RB:** Find out who he is responsible for. He will be a weaker blocker than OL.
- **FIND THE FISH:** Put your best guy on their worst guy and simply race to him and bull rush.
- **STUNTS:** Do what you might normally do against a man pass pro, only now do it 4-5 yards deep. Practice them 4 yards or so up the field. Get upfield first, then twist.
- **GET OFFS:** Work your DL getting upfield all week. Have the D-Line coach backpedal and they have to beat him to a certain point. Or have the DL tag the OL as quickly as possible as the blocker sprints backwards.

The D-Line coach is assigned to figure out their protections, what techniques they use, and who the weakest blocker is every weekend.

### **Pass Set Technique**

There are two types of techniques used: Kick-Slide or Vertical Sets. The Kick-Slide is a backwards kicking of the outside leg while sliding the inside leg back. Vertical setting is more of a backwards run, where the OL steps backwards with his inside foot first then his outside foot.

It is important to get the DL to understand that they need to penetrate the OL with their stunts. It doesn't do any good to run stunts if everything is happening in front of the OL. The D-Line manual in Chapter Four goes into great detail, but if the DL is better than the blocker, use Pull & Swim or Pull & Rip moves

### **Contain-**

Young Quarterbacks will scramble or roll out when flustered. No matter what you do, make sure the STUD, END, or Smoke blitz understands to rush in a contain path. Collapse whatever pocket they have from the outside-in, but be sure to squeeze and constrict those inside running lanes all the while maintaining an outside arm free policy with contain rushers.

Spy a good running QB-

Regardless of how many are rushing, dedicate your best open field tackler to spy the QB. This defender should mirror the QB's actions, as well as being in the QB's vision at all times. This defender should always maintain inside leverage on the QB's position on the field, as the contain players will always maintain outside leverage.

Mix things up-

Don't just constantly drop 7, 8, or 9 defenders, get after it and mix things up. Use blitzes/stunts, then bluff and drop off 8 guys in coverage. Use a 3-man stunt and drop 8 in coverage. The key here is not just attacking the pass protection, but attacking the entire scheme.

**4-2-5 PASS CONCEPTS**

**Counting Receivers**

We number the receivers from the outside in (sideline to center). The receivers are numbered independently as #1, #2, and #3 on the read side or #1, #2, and #3 on the away side. In teaching pattern progression, it does not matter who the receivers are; only the final number that they are positioned matters. The figure on the right illustrates an example of a final count of receivers.

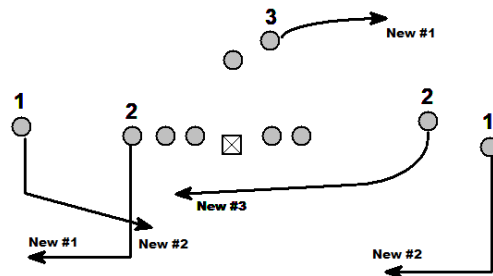
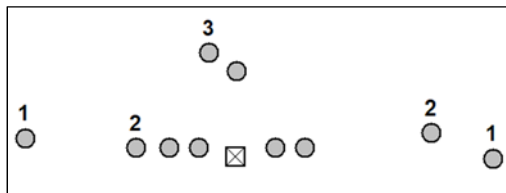
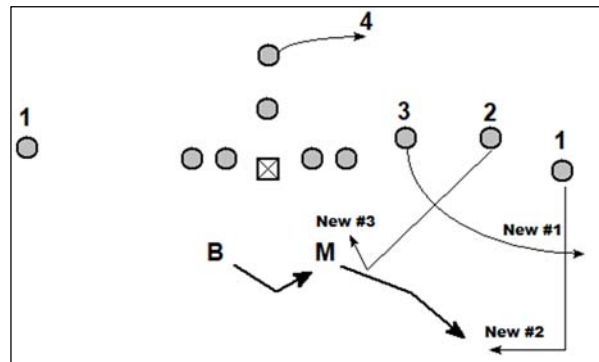
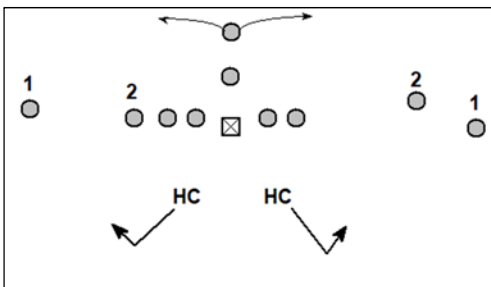


Fig 2: Final Numbering of receivers after the snap

**Importance of the #3 Receiver**

Knowing the final location of the #3 receiver after the snap dictates how and where the help is for the hook/curl defenders. This determines which side to "push" toward and how the defender away from the #3 receiver will play his zone coverage. This is very important when defending crossing routes.



In the example, the BULL pushes the MIKE to the next threat, or new #2 receiver. Once players master the technique, it becomes easy.

Communication is also very, very important. Your players must not only know when to communicate but also WHY they communicate. There also needs to be a set of fail-safe rules, because putting the word "always" into your rules is a bad thing. Build in flexibility and allow your players to adapt to what they are seeing.

## What Is Pattern Reading?

Pattern matching is reacting to what a receiver is doing instead of dropping to a spot on the field and wait for the quarterback to throw the ball. It's the best of both worlds. It begins like a traditional zone, with all 11 eyes on the football at the snap of the football, which helps immensely with stopping the run. But it quickly evolves into man-to-man coverage after the pass pattern expresses itself that decreases the holes in a zone pass defense.

Pass drops are based on receiver location rather than spots on the field. While there is an initial aiming point, the depth and angle while dropping is based on the location of the receiver's route.

Pattern reading requires breaking the old teachings of Inside Linebackers never turning their backs to the QB. ILB must turn their backs to locate the receiver and get in throwing lanes. They only look back at the QB once they are an arm's distance from the receiver.

The advanced development of today's QBs requires the elimination of throwing lanes in zone coverage. How many times have you seen receivers slide past a defender who is looking back at the quarterback and has lost sight of the receiver? Today's high school QB do not stare down target receivers early in coverage, they are looking for holes in the defense. Therefore, reading quarterbacks early in coverage is a moot point.

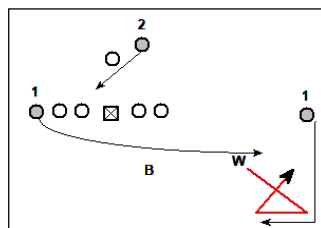
Just because we are reading the offense doesn't mean we're passive, Our rule for our safeties is **'Don't go till you know,'** which means our safeties don't backpedal, but so a flat-foot shuffle. We can't be worried about being beat deep because we want to take away the short game, combination routes, and the run."

### "Cutting" to a Receiver

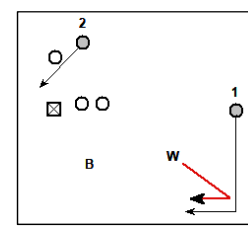
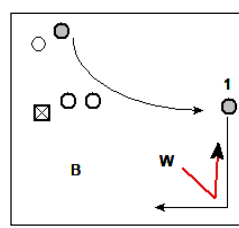
"Cutting" is when the ILB drops under a receiver breaking in towards him when another receiver breaks out towards the sideline. Again, he turns his back on the QB to quickly get into the throwing lane.

### Flat Defenders Avoid "Guarding Grass"

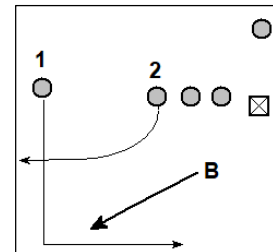
The technique of flat coverage in pattern reading is different from "buzzing the flat." The drop is about 8-10 yards at a 45-degree angle to the widest receiver, never allowing a receiver to cross his face while going to the flats. The flat defender should try to force a cushion through the curl area to the flat area.



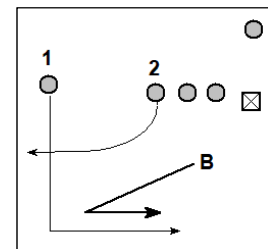
Can't cross defenders face on flat route



Slide inside with WR but never crosses the widest receiver



WR sliding past a "spot dropping" LB.



LB dropping to WR before looking at QB

**ALERT CALL:** is made when the RB is the #3 receiver in a 2x2. This tells the Inside Linebacker to take the back out except when the back flares or runs an arrow route to the flat. When this happens, the Inside Linebacker gives a **"PUSH"** call to the SPUR or WILL and the Inside Linebacker plays any Dig routes by #1 or #2. This tells the other Inside Linebacker to carry any crosser because the Mike and the SPUR are both gone.

**WHY NOT JUST RUN MAN-TO-MAN?** Pattern dropping zone coverage allows defenders to get a jump on routes with underneath defenders helping inside. It allows tight coverage after the pattern expresses itself. Defenders are coming up to receivers instead of catching up to them in man-to-man coverage. It eliminates one-on-one coverages and allows an inferior player to get a jump on routes.

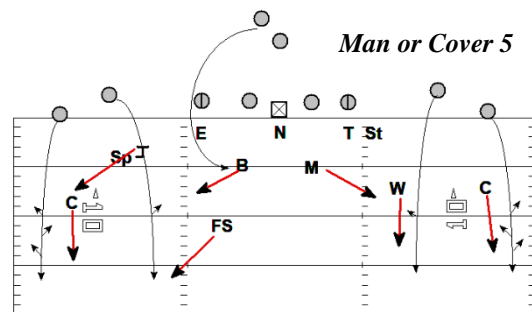
The TCU 4-2-5 uses four zone coverages in the secondary:

1. A Robber coverage they call Cover 2;
  - ◆ READ & REACT uses “robber” concepts in our Cover 3 and Cover 4.
2. A traditional two-deep zone they call Cover 5;
  - ◆ This is traditional squat Cover 2. The READ & REACT does not run this.
3. A Quarters coverage they call Blue.
  - ◆ This is not traditional 4-deep Quarters. It is the READ & REACT Cover 5. If the #1 and #2 receivers run vertical, it’s man coverage. But if the #2 runs to the flats, the coverage morphs into a traditional Cover 2, with the cornerback covering the flat and the safety rotating to defend any downfield route by the outside receiver.
4. A hybrid man/zone concept called Bronco.
  - ◆ The corner plays man on #1 receiver. The safety follows his robber rules and guards #2 vertical and takes #1 if the #2 receiver runs an inside slant. What is different is that the safety takes #2 on outside-breaking routes.

### 4 VERTS

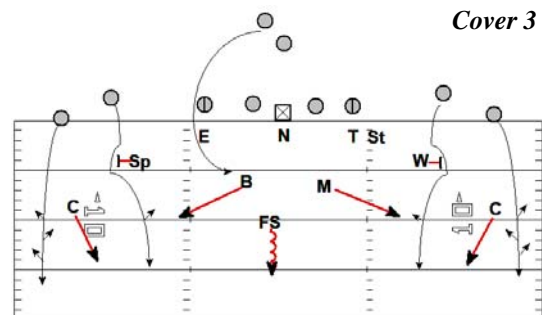
The mother of all Air Raid plays. The last concept added to the arsenal by Leach, it is not simply sending fast receivers deep with a big armed QB. The receivers will adjust to coverage while running their routes. Wide outs release outside the numbers and slots go down the hash. Cover 4 or Man are ideal coverages against 4 Verticals.

In our Cover 4 we are vulnerable to fades on the away (WILL) side. An intentionally under thrown ball (“back-shoulder” fade) is tough to defend. On the read (SPUR) side, the SPUR is re-routing and then dropping underneath to help on comebacks and underthrown balls.



We would want our best Corner on the AWAY side. Run Cover 5 on the side of the receiver they never throw to or man WILL and CB on the Away side, blitz MIKE, put BULL on the RB, and commit the FALCON to the SPUR’s side.

Against Cover 3, WILL & SPUR must be violent re-routers to widen the seam routes closer to the CB’s zone. After re-routing, the SPUR & WILL drop under #1 to help on deep comebacks or back-shoulder fades.



BULL & MIKE drop under #2 to not give up easy seam throws. The Corners split the distance between #1 and #2. Our FALCON is in his “weave” backpedal, not committing until he sees “palm off” arm motion by the QB. Our Corners split the difference between the 2 receivers, actually playing both receivers.

On paper this play looks like 4-Verts will kill the defense, but it requires that the QB and WR are making the same post-snap reads. Also, the “back-shoulder fade” and comebacks off the fade take great timing. None of this is easy for high school kids to do.