

ZONE RUN GAME

It was long thought that offenses had to have a tight end and be based upon a tough, hard running ground game. Even the “father of the passing game”, Sid Gillman, did not use the 4-wide, shotgun formation as coach of the Chargers in the 1960’s. However, the spread formation was used in the 1950’s by TCU coach Leo “Dutch” Meyer and Northern Illinois led the nation in passing using shotgun formations in 1956.

For most defensive units, the goal is to stop the run first. This makes sense since there is nothing worse than having the ball crammed down your throat 4 yards at a time. We believe that defenses should be built with this in mind. Stop the run, worry about the pass next. We also believe in putting our best 11 on defense, fitting our scheme around our players instead of forcing players into a scheme. Against spread offenses, it is vital that the 11 on the field can not only run, but also tackle in the open field.

Spread offenses typically place the quarterback in the shotgun formation, and "spread" the defense horizontally using three-, four-, and even five-receiver sets. Many spread offenses employ no-huddle tempos and wide splits between the offensive linemen. Spreading the defense out sideline to sideline and making them worried about the downfield vertical passing game opens up multiple seams for the running game.

AIR RAID

Devised by Hal Mumme and Mike Leach, who were heavily influenced by BYU head coach LaVell Edward’s West Coast passing game and Mouse Davis Run & Shoot. High school variations are the Tony Franklin “System” and Noel Mazzone’s NZONE packages. The Air Raid employs multiple spread sets and QB reads at the Line of Scrimmage. While it is a pass-happy system, the modern versions of the Air Raid are using tight ends and RPO’s.

SPREAD OPTION

As the name suggests, it incorporates features from the Option offense (QB reads, option pitches) with some features of the Run and Shoot offense (Shotgun formation, QB rolling out). The scheme now has a wide variety of QB option schemes and RPOs to allow them to put conflict on defenders all over the field.

The spread option is a “spread to run” scheme that requires a quarterback that is comfortable carrying the ball, a mobile offensive line that can effectively pull and trap, and receivers that can hold their blocks. Its essence is misdirection and relies on leverage created by space and conflicts created with the option. It uses outside zone and screening techniques to open up creases, zone and power schemes that aren’t very physical at the point of attack.

SMASHMOUTH SPREAD

There’s a lot of overlap between the "spread to run" schools of spread-option ball and the smashmouth spread. Urban Meyer at Ohio State has evolved to this to take advantage of large midwestern linemen. Guz Malzahn, with his Wing-T roots, falls into this category. Chad Morris (Arkansas) emphasizes the play-action passing game and Dana Holgorsen Air Raid roots have grown into the two-back “diamond” and “spread-I” schemes. Finally, there’s the Art Briles “the veer and shoot,” using power run/play-action, down blocking angles and two-back lead runs.

PRO-STYLE SPREAD

10 years ago most spread offenses were committed to living in a 10 personnel world. Now, we are seeing the rise of a new generation of spread offenses that are re-introducing fullbacks and tight ends back into the formation with their quarterback still in the shotgun. These pro-style offenses use power plays and other run schemes to provide a very diverse running offense with the ability to throw the ball vertically down the field using Air-Raid concepts.

It's very difficult to be really good at multiple concepts due to the amount of practice time and lack of roster depth, especially tight end. They are either okay run-blockers and great receivers or vice-versa. Therefore, the challenge of the pro-style spread is how to run the ball with an average blocking TE or throw the ball when the TE can't catch.

ZONE BLOCKING SCHEME

Before diving into specific schematics to defend zone read concepts, the D-Line and Linebackers have to completely understand how to defeat the zone blocking schemes. How your Defensive Line attacks and defeats their blockers is crucial to defending Zone Blocking offenses.

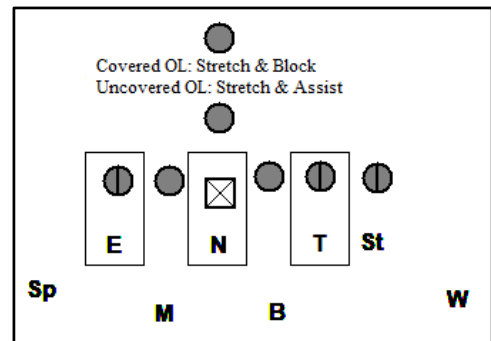
The rise in popularity of zone-blocking scheme is due its very few rules, making it easy to implement, and appealing to lazy coaches. Despite its popularity, zone blocking is one of the least understood strategies in football today which is why at least half of the high school teams running it are terrible at it. The basic premise is that the linemen are blocking zones rather than defenders.

Digging a little deeper, what this really means is that the linemen are looking for specific areas of the field to block. They block anyone in that area, offering double-team assistance if it's convenient. Working in tandem, offensive linemen will scoop the D-Lineman before one of them go "second level", chipping off to linebackers. The movement of all the blockers in one direction also gets the defense moving in the same direction, allowing the running back to look for a cut-back seam as the defense gets "washed down".

Alignments really don't matter as much as the technique when trying to stop a Zone-Blocking scheme. Slanting plays into offenses hands because they want lateral movement. The key to defeating Zone blocking is be a 1 gap team & get vertical penetration. Vertical movement forces both blockers to stay on the double team, allowing the ILB's to play free and plug lanes. Also, be creative in how you get more people in the box than the offense can block since that gives any offensive scheme problems.

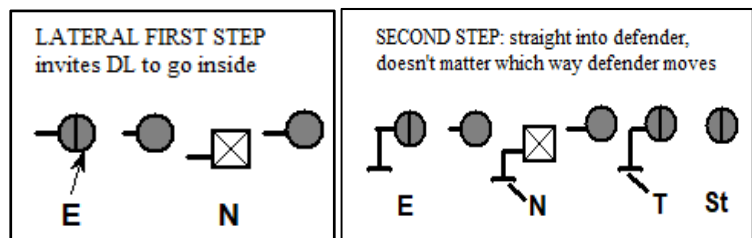
vs ODD FRONT

In this zone blocking scheme, the blockers only make two reads: "covered" or "uncovered. The covered Tackles will "stretch and block" and the uncovered guards will think "stretch and assist". *They are not looking to overpower the defenders.*



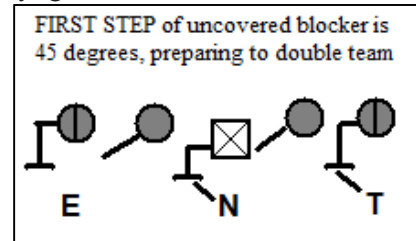
The first step of the COVERED blocker is a lateral move for position, not a forward move for blocking contact. With the second step, the covered linemen engage and follow the direction that the defender's position suggests.

If the defender steps forward, the tackle blocks the shoulder of the defender and carries him away from the play. If the defender steps sideways, the tackle pushes him momentum outward.



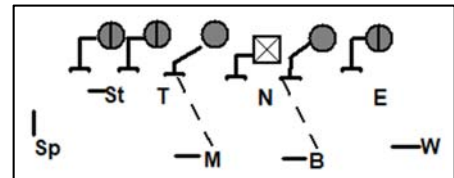
The C and LT here will try to drive their defenders laterally along the line of scrimmage. The RT will seal the outside edge and keep his man in the gap that he initially tried to jump into. The guards block toward their spots and offer assistance if it's convenient. So far, everybody ignores the other linebackers.

The UNCOVERED defender takes a 45°-degree step, looking to block a spot immediately behind the leg of the defensive end in this picture. He's double teaming a position, not a player. He ignores the Linebacker as long as possible.



Even if the defender moves away from uncovered lineman, he keeps double teaming as long as the Linebacker doesn't come forward. If the defender moves towards him, he will support the tackle by double-teaming the end in the process. *But he will not focus his attention onto the defensive end.* The double-team block occurs merely because the end is in his path.

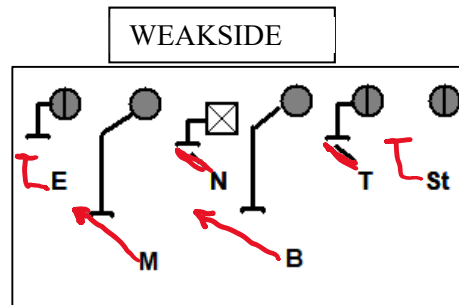
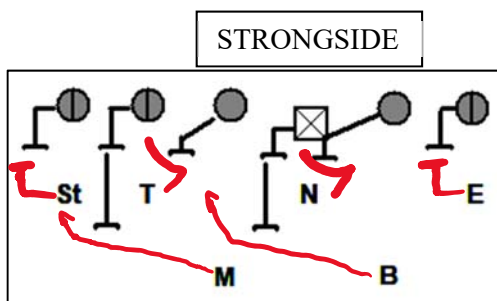
If the defensive end happens to charge straight toward the tackle's initial step, the guard's second step allows him to support the tackle long enough to (hopefully) allow the tackle to win the battle and seal up the block.



See how the covered players first stepped laterally while the uncovered players step at an angle? The first step simply establishes position; the second step is where the battle is won.

D-LINE REACTIONS

The main thing that we emphasize to our D-Line is that the gap they are responsible for moves. For example, the B-gap that the TACKLE is assigned to is really the space between the RG and RT. If the RG and RT move laterally to the TACKLE's left, that B-gap moves as well.

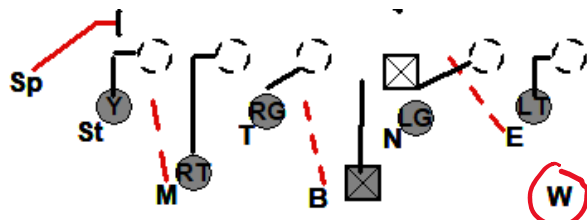
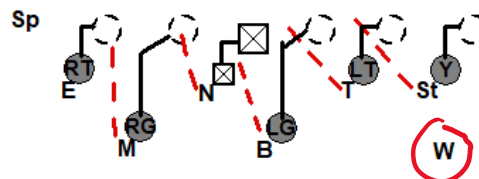


When the first step is to the STRONG side, the NG & DT are at a disadvantage since their 1st step is in the opposite direction. The RT & C will probably climb to Backer.

They cannot let either Guard cross their face and should have their left shoulders free to plug any runs into the strongside gap on their left.

The MIKE & BULL have to rip over RT & C. The STUD & END mirror step. MIKE adjusts to how the STUD is blocked and FALCON adjusts off the MIKE.

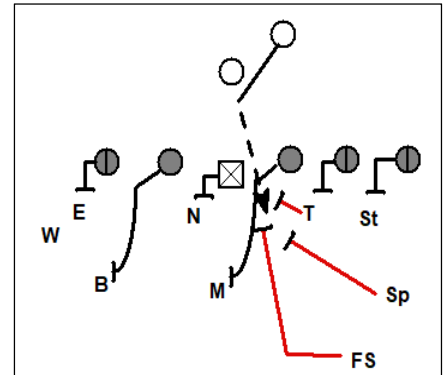
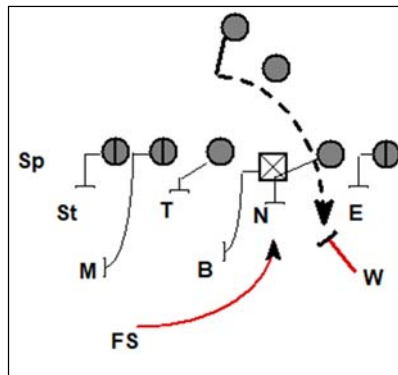
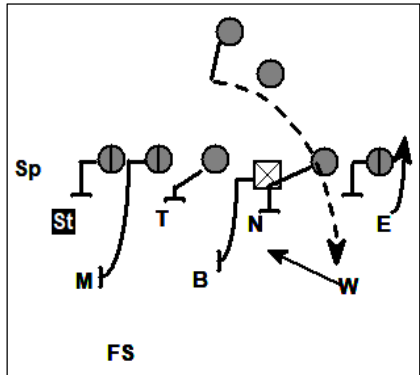
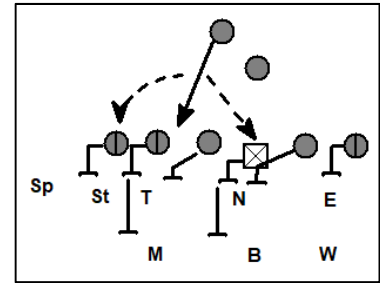
When the first step is to the WEAK side, the NG & DT must cross-face and defeat the C & LT block. The Guards, starting even with the LB, should not be able to hook MIKE or BULL.



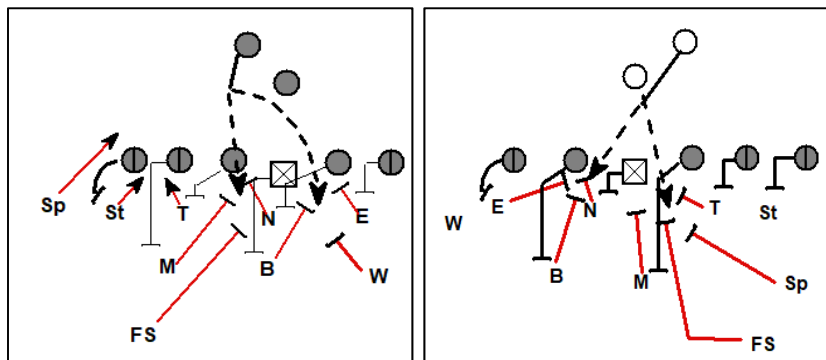
SECTION FIVE

The homerun for the offense and what we are most concerned about is the **cutback**. Watch what happens when the defense pursues the sweep:

As you can see, the STACK & STAY by the backside hybrid is very, very important. Also, you can see why we call our FALCON the “adjuster”.



Another key point is that the playside ILB does not need to over-pursue. Our STUD and END do not have outside contain. In fact they have the inside gap vs all run plays because of the help they have outside by SPUR and WILL. So if the STUD or END were hooked, they could easily plug their inside gap. Then the ILB wouldn't have to pursue to hard.



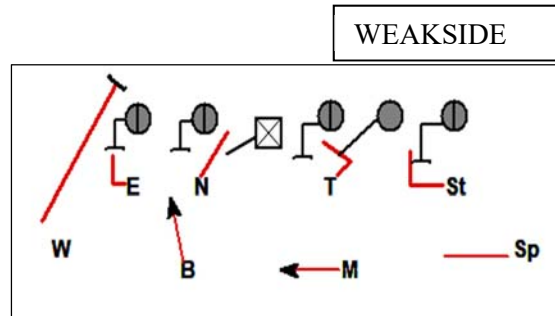
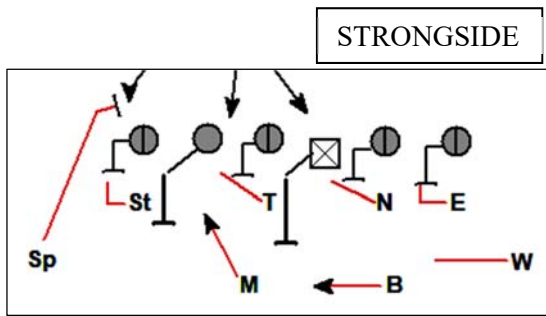
When the halfback cuts back, the defenders instinctively follow the cut and try to chase. It is important that the defenders hold their ground and not change direction when the RB makes his cut. When the defenders try to change their direction, they give up momentum in the blocking battles, and the linemen can suddenly shove the defenders - usually straight to the ground. :

Holes do not last long; so the longer the D-Line can keep their position at the line of scrimmage allows the linebackers to slide far enough into the holes to cut the space down.

Vs EVEN “G” FRONT

We feel that covering the guards and tackles in our “G” alignment gives us the most success because only the center is uncovered. This six-man defensive line forces the offensive line to block one-on-one across the front and we are not concerned with double teams. It also allows us to stunt/slant.

On the snap the defensive line are coached up to latch on their man, not get scooped, find and rip to the ball. By latching on their man it takes away the double team chip and leaves our linebackers free to flow to the ball. If they charge forward, the back gets 4-5 yards. If they over pursue towards the sideline, they cannot help on cutback.



The Guards cannot cross the TACKLE or NOSE face. The MIKE attacks inside the RT and BULL attacks inside C.
 The STUD has the inside gap between TE and RT. If he fights to far and MIKE stays inside RT, there will be a huge gap for RB between TE and RT.
 WILL has stack & stay.

The Guards will be free to climb to backer. TACKLE and NOSE must not let C or LT cross their face. The BULL attacks the RG and MIKE attacks between C & RG.
 The STUD has the inside gap between RT and RG. SPUR has stack & stay.

DEFENSIVE LINE

- Get the blockers to turn their shoulders to the sideline will defeat what they are trying to do.
- Keep shoulders square and be patient. Do not run to sideline.
- Do not run upfield
- Fall down and pull the blocker with you if you are being driven backwards.

LINEBACKERS – Mike & Bull

- Be patient with their feet while their eyes recognize the play.
- Blockers steps should match the RB. Anything else, like pullers will take LB to the play.
- As long as the Defensive Line is occupying the blockers, LB can take their time to read the play.
- Once play is recognized, they need to be extremely fast and aggressive in their attack.
- If they sit and let blockers come to them, they will be unable to stop the play. REACT & ATTACK.
- Attack the inside half of their gap. Cannot run around blocks.
- Be smart. Do not fill a gap just because it's their gap.

**Linebackers have to make the Defensive Linemen right,
 Safeties have to make the Linebackers right.**

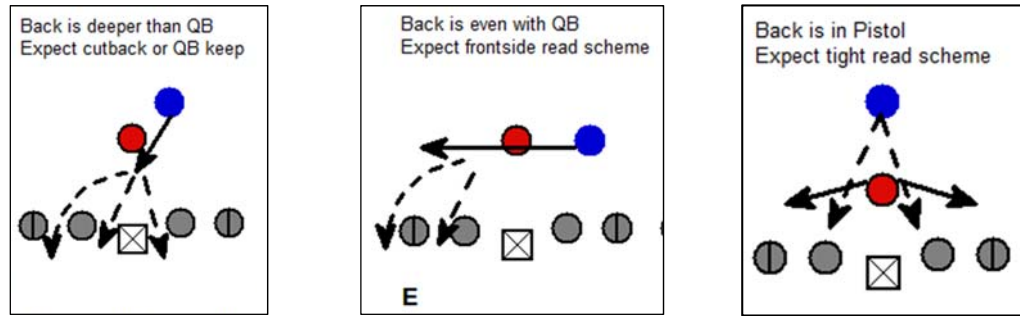
HYBRIDS – Spur & Will

Shuffle at the 4-Yard Fight Line, which means shuffle at a depth of 4 yards off the ball, not passing the center, until the ball declares to play side. If he sees the cutback off the Inside Zone by the Tailback, he's in position to fill downhill now, shutting off the cutback lane.

If the backside SPUR or WILL hybrid ever has to come BACK for the cut-back, he's out of position. At the same time, if your linemen are giving you any help at all, he can still get over the top to help on the play side. The 4-Yard Fight Line teaches him to stay out of the mess up front while keeping his eyes up for oncoming blockers.

Designing an attack

Offenses are now adjusting the running back into the following positions to get maximum efficiency:



When the RB is offset deeper than the QB, anticipate some form of inside zone read concept where the aiming point could be the play side A gap to backside C gap. In these situations, it's important to cancel out those gaps in some fashion.

When the RB is next to the QB, expect outside zone or Jet read where the aiming point could be the frontside A gap to frontside C gap.

The pistol alignment presents issues because it is difficult to determine where the ball will go, but we've found more often than not these situations should be treated as behind the quarterback alignments.

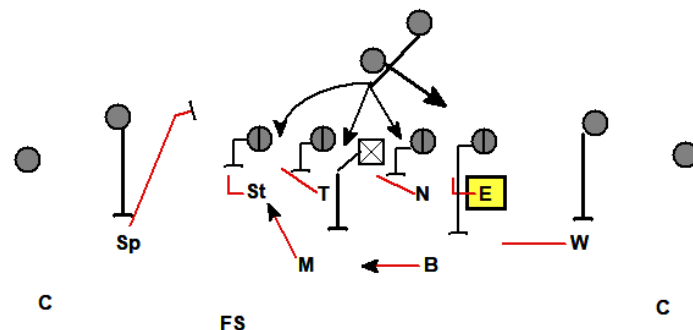
- First figure out if they are spreading you to run or to pass...
 - Spreading you to run, get 7 in the box
 - Spreading you to pass, get 5 in the box
 - Capable of both, start with 6 in the box.
- Plays you must stop:
 - Run Plays: Zone Read, Stretch, Dart, QB Counter
 - Pass Plays: Bubble Screens, Alley Screens, Verticals
- Best players are usually QB, RB, and slot receivers;
- Make them throw the ball. Be simple.

SPREAD ZONE READ PLAYS

The Zone Read is one of the most popular schemes deployed in modern offenses today. Up front, the linemen are simply zone blocking and the quarterback reads the defensive end. The QB either hands off or keeps, depending on whether he is collapsing down the line or playing up-field containment. The running threat posed by the quarterback forces a defensive lineman or linebacker to "freeze" in order to plug the running lane; this has the effect of blocking the target player without needing to put a body on him.

Knowing that the zone read has its roots in option football, we must have every gap assigned to a defender. We also know that our STUD or END will most likely to be the read defender in the offense.

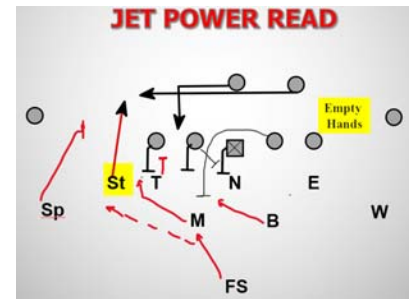
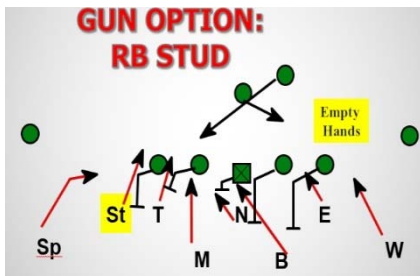
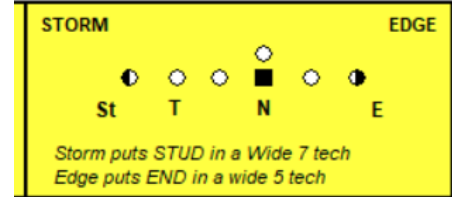
Our defensive linemen play the zone blocking scheme as previously described: squeeze their gaps, step down with any type of inside release by the offensive lineman, and latch onto their man. Our end must squeeze with the tackle when he steps on his zone track.



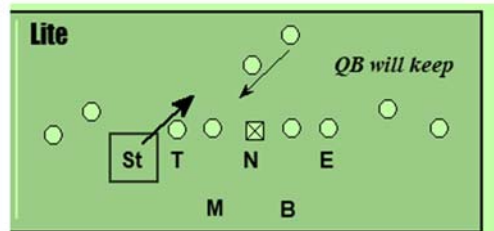
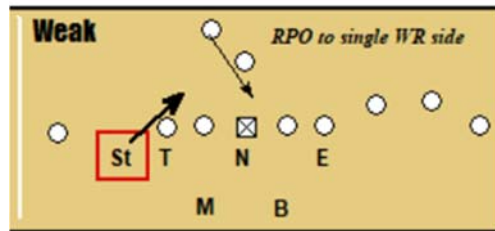
The biggest coaching point is that the END keeps his shoulders squared to the line of scrimmage, so he is in the best possible position to play the quarterback keep off the zone read. A solid step down with his shoulders staying square will most often result on a give by the quarterback. If the QB is a running threat you must tackle him on every snap, whether he has the ball or not.

We feel that the weakness of this play is that everything hinges on a 17-year old QB making the right decision. We are going to force him to make the decision that WE want him to make.

- Set the strength of the defense away from the player we want to keep the ball.
- Setting the STUD on the edge is our STORM call, which is an automatic when we set the strength to RB (heavy/lite) or WR (strong/weak).
- These are covered in Chapter 3 on page 34.



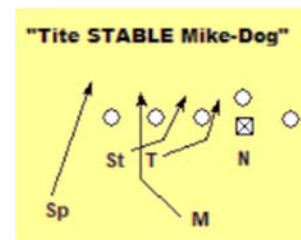
Calling the strength based on backfield or receivers allows us to line up our defensive TACKLE or best linebacker away from their best player. This is because the back has to cross the QB face in order to receive the ball, which means either the back or the QB will run to the other side of the formation if they are the ball carrier.

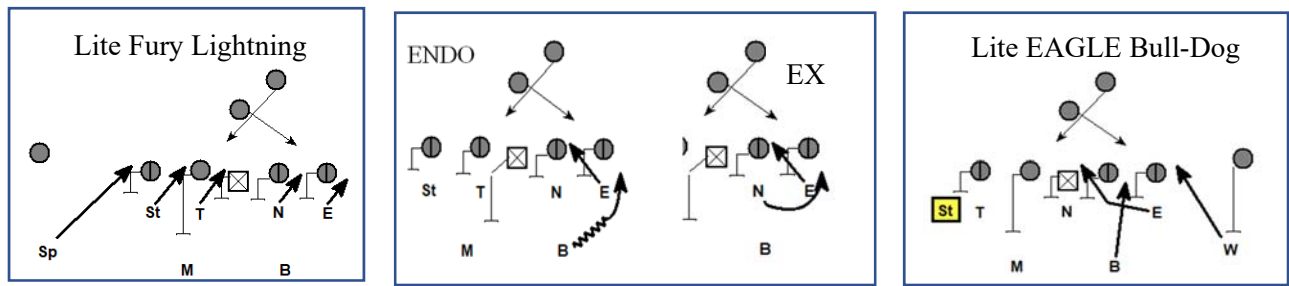


Chapter 3 covers how we set our strength to the BACKFIELD (Heavy / Lite) or to the multiple receiver side (STRONG / WEAK). Knowing who is going to carry the ball allows everyone to play aggressive.

We will also **GAP EXCHANGE** via blitzes and movements in order to force the ball into the quarterback's hand. We can just crash our STUD or END inside, which tells the Linebackers on that side that the QB is probably going to keep it and run their way.

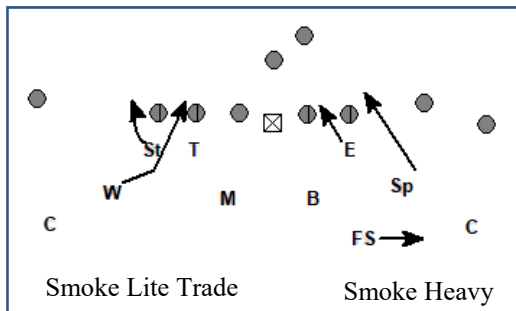
- Slant all the D-Linemen the direction you want to dictate the handoff.
 - FLAME (to strength) or FURY (away from strength)
- Run SLICE, STABLE, ENDO, or EAGLE
- Run EX or STORM twists.



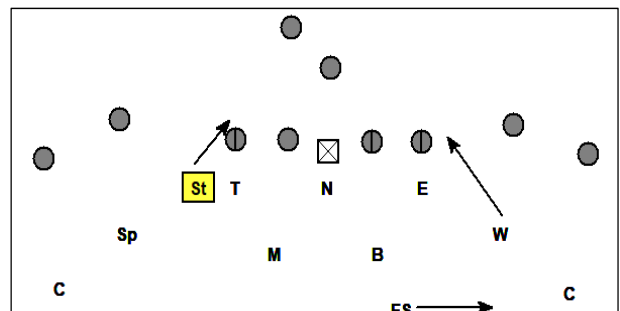


We can also **BLITZ** into areas that we are forcing them to run the ball into. Since we already have the STUD coming off the edge when setting our strength to Backfield (heavy-lite) or Receiver (strong-weak), we would never make a THUNDER call with these strength calls.

- THUNDER blitzes tied to strength call. Only used with TE, Field, or direction strength calls.
- LIGHTNING blitzes tied to strength call. Used with Backfield and Receiver strength calls.
- SMOKE blitzes are independent of the Strength call.



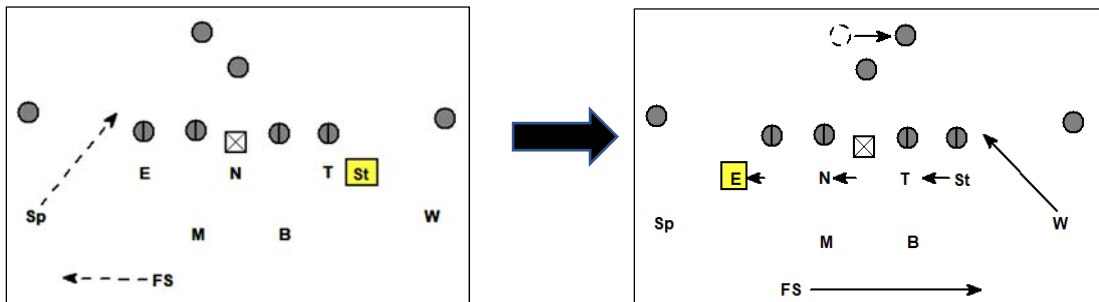
Run strength to TE, but blitz based on RB



Heavy Lightning

Any good zone read running offense is going to have answers to a lot of the curveballs that we can throw at them on defense. To counter gap exchanges, the offense will block the END with the backside tackle and read the linebacker. You must be sure that the DE can get into the B gap and not get blown off the line. Also, who does the QB read since we can do gap exchanges with either the NOSE, the Inside Linebacker or the outside Hybrid backer.

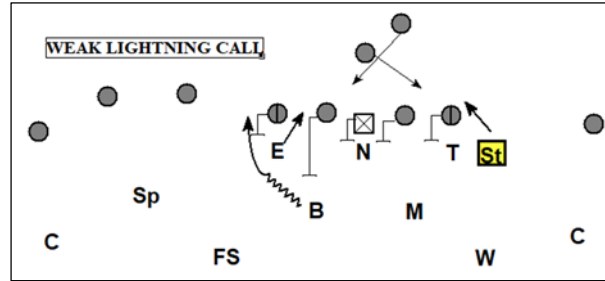
Another offensive counter move is to move the RB to the other side of the QB after we set our defense. Here is an example of a LITE-LIGHTNING call.



It is not hard for us to slide our D-Line opposite the Back. The Lightning edge blitz tells our players to blitz opposite the strength call. There are no new techniques since our NOSE and TACKLE are used to playing head up in their "G" alignments. The END is rushing off the edge in his Edge technique.

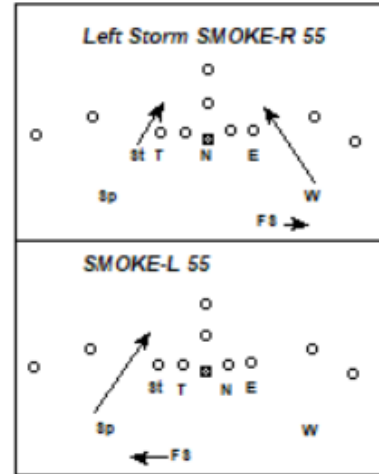
RPOs and multiple receiver formations (twins/trips) does hinders our edge blitzing. However, the divorced concept means that our interior D-Line movements (slants, twists, etc) and Inside Linebacker blitzes are not affected.

Since blitzing our Inside Linebackers does not affect our coverage of receivers, our SWITCH Call is very effective. This tells the MIKE or BULL to blitz off the edge instead of the SPUR or WILL. In other words, it is a SMOKE blitz by our MIKE or BULL. We can either send it in from the sideline with our play call or the SPUR / WILL make the call when they cannot blitz.



SPUR switched his blitz with BULL

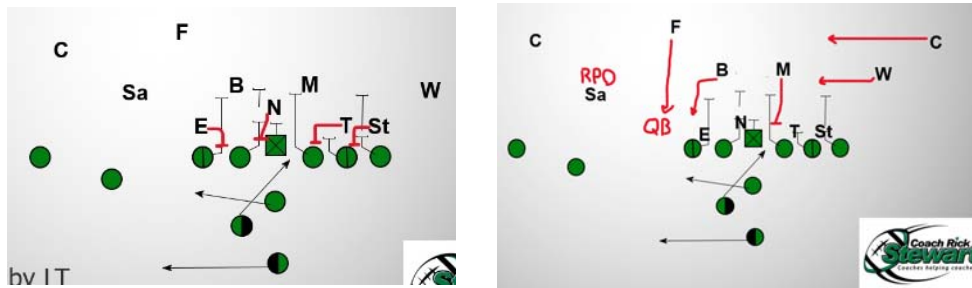
The Pistol formation actually presents more challenges since it is hard to predict which way the option is going to be ran. This formation is why we put in strength calls that are set to the FIELD (wide-short) or simply to the left or right (liz-rip). Here are two examples where we set our defense to the left but wanted an edge SMOKE blitz from the right.



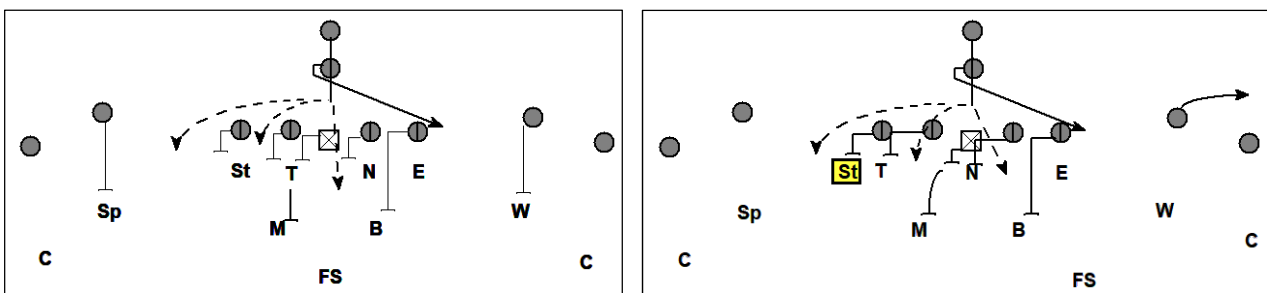
The challenge of the Pistol is that we do not know which Defensive End the QB will read. Now we don't know which side to call a twist or blitz from.

ZONE READ OPTION from Pistol

Some of the Pistol teams will run 2-RB sets which is an obvious easy key. The reactions to the zone blocking schemes do not change based on the backfield.



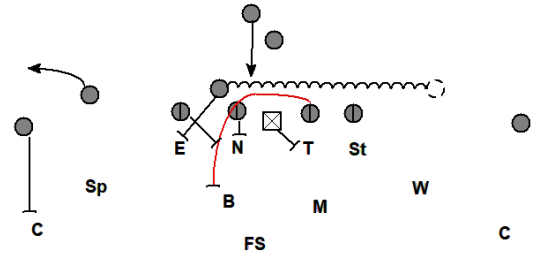
While I believe our "G" front (stacking both Guards) is better than the odd front, moving the D-Line around forces the balanced, PISTOL Backfield to go in the direction you want and dictate the QB reads. The balanced "G" front requires both the STUD and END to be ready for option. This is OK because our stimulus-response reads are drilled and the D-Line reactions are based on the first 2 steps of the blockers.



Setting the STUD off the edge with a storm call will probably force the QB to read the opposite END. The Edge call accomplishes the same thing by bringing the END off the edge.

POWER FOOTBALL

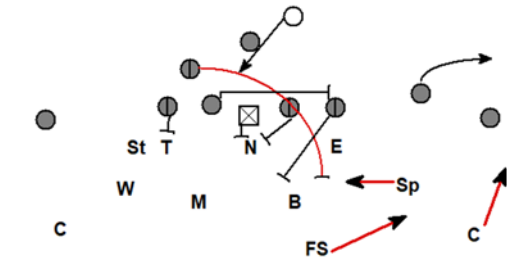
With the rise of RPOs and true dual-threat QBs, teams with good running QBs are eliminating the option reads and simply running normal power with the QB as the featured runner. However, there are fewer blockers in a spread formation, so teams are using pulling linemen, tight ends, and H-Backs to execute both the kick-out and the lead blocks.



COUNTER

This is a devastating play in the smashmouth spread especially when the defense is overloaded to one side. The offense can run at the weakside and get an easy double team on the nose tackle.

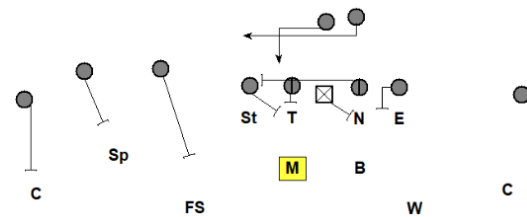
Our stimulus-response keys make it easy to defend any counter run by any offense. MIKE & FALCON reads the pulling Guard, BULL fills the open window of the double team on the NOSE, END has QB, and SPUR is a “stack & stay” player.



POWER READ / INVERTED VEER

This is a sweep to the edge while the QB reads an interior defender (DL or LB). The defensive pursuit on the sweep creates running lanes up the middle for the QB. This variety is typically called "power-read" or "inverted-veer".

Teams can leave both the End and playside LB unblocked. The QB first read is the LB. If the linebacker gets too wide the QB pulls the ball and runs inside. The unblocked DE is usually frozen up for a moment by the sweep, and just when he realizes the QB has kept the ball, the pulling guard shows up to kick him out.

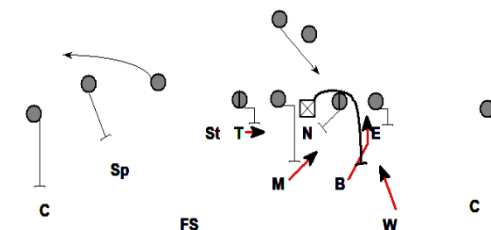


Like any play, we cannot change our stimulus response reads. The End, Linebacker, Hybrid, Corner, and Falcon play the Jet Sweep. The other 3 D-Linemen, the backside Linebacker, and backside Hybrid have to account for the QB. When the Guard pulls, the BULL follows his “pull away, I have A” rule. The TACKLE splits the double team and creates a pile. The WILL does not “stack & stay” very long since he sees the G pull and there are no counter threats. He follows the BULL very closely, eyes glued to the QB.

DART

Combines man and zone blocking while pulling the center or tackle, since most spread teams put their biggest, strongest blockers at Guard. When the tackle pulls, the END must wait for to see the QB “empty hands”. The tackle can either kick out the End or lead up through the hole.

The pulling of the Center is unique and not something we teach our players to read. When the center pulls, the tackles will execute outside zone-like reach blocks while the guards block down inside. The center will then pull inside or outside of the play-side tackle. MIKE fills his open window of the G and T, but that week we will have to teach the BULL to read pulling Centers.

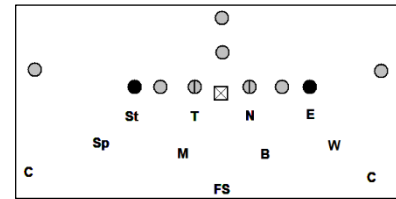
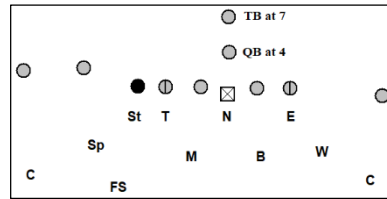
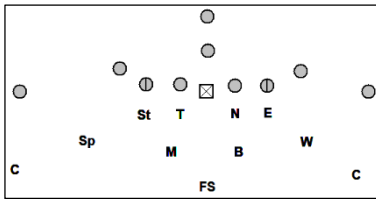
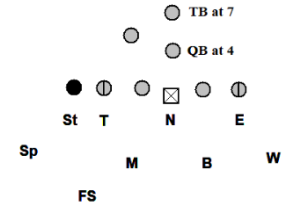


The RPO pass options on the outside occupies 4 of our players. MIKE & BULL play the handoff, so the STUD will have to make a 1on1 tackle on the QB. He will have late help from FALCON and SPUR.

PISTOL ZONE OFFENSE

The PISTOL is not just a formation and is not just for Triple Option teams. Zone Read Option, Power, and Counters can all be ran from this formation. Putting the RB behind the QB presents problems for us because it takes away tendencies.

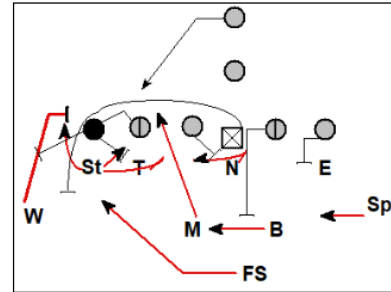
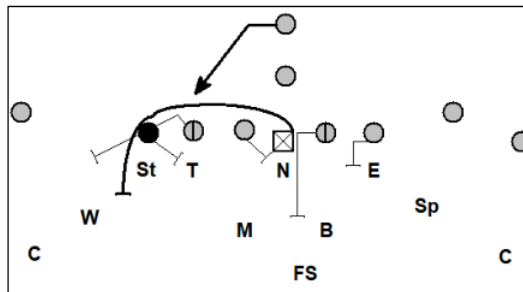
- Combines Zone & Power Concepts: (inside / outside zone; plus Zone Read Option)
- Jet Read with QB reading and running ball up the middle if defense over pursues.
- Power run game with double teams at point of attack.
- Will pull the Center if uncovered.
- OPTION: (midline and veer).
- Spread Passing Concepts that Air Raid runs



HORN

Similar to the Dart play on the previous page, the center pulls with another lineman. Many Pistol coaches call the Horn the “buck sweep” of the Pistol Offense.

- NOSE & TACKLE cross faces the down block by the Guard and Tight End.
- We prefer the MIKE shooting thru the open window, but might have to scrape over.
- BULL has to read pulling Centers that week in practice. He has A-gap unless MIKE shoots thru.
- STUD squeezes the TE down block, TACKLE scrapes over in a twisting technique.
- SPUR squeezes the alley and forces RB to turn up into the FALCON.



BASIC OPTION RULES for STUD and END

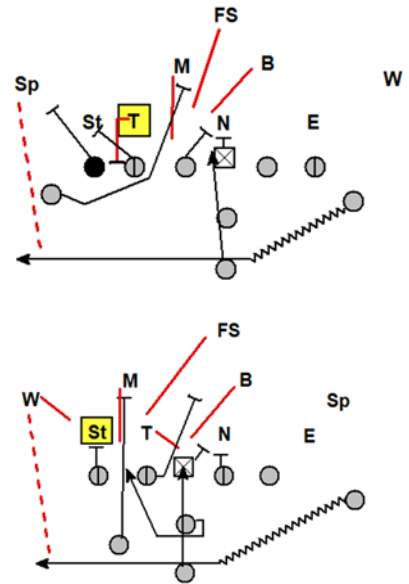
- *If Dive man goes away...*
 - *End has QB. OLB has pitch*
 - *ILB is QB to pitch*
- *If Dive man on your side of Center*
 - *End has Dive. ILB & F has QB*
 - *OLB has QB to pitch*

MIDLINE

Due to our stimulus-response, our D-TACKLE will step out with the offensive Tackle, so this is a rare case of our TACKLE having the QB keep. Both MIKE & BULL will hit the Diving FB at the line of scrimmage, with help from FALCON. STUD and SPUR take care of QB / pitch.

If our D-TACKLE is stacked on the Guard in a "G" alignment, he squeezes hard and does not let the LG escape to Backer. The TACKLE, NOSE, and BULL have dive. The MIKE and STUD take QB. WILL has pitch.

Our kids are not confused with the changing job responsibilities, because they are actually just reading the first 2 steps of the blockers and doing their stimulus-response that they have been taught all year. Who has QB and who had dive happens naturally.

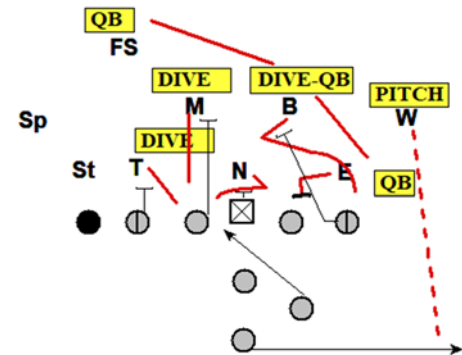
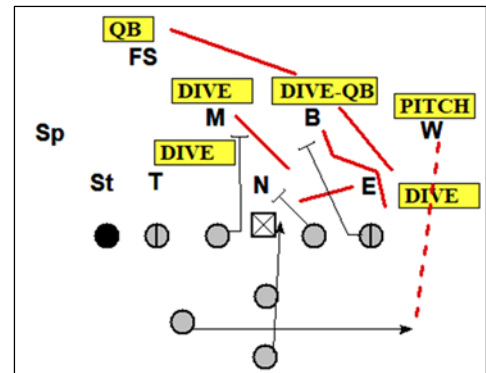


VEER

As long as we follow our stimulus-response, QB-Dive-Pitch assignments happen naturally.

NOSE steps weak A-gap, splits the double team, and had dive. The END squeeze down so RT does not escape to backer, and has dive. **"tackle the dive back no matter what"**. The MIKE fits off the double teamed NOSE and has dive.

The BULL fits outside the squeezing End and helps the FALCON with QB. WILL has pitch but **"slow plays"** the QB to buy the FALCON and BULL time to get to the QB. But under no circumstances does the pitch man get outside our WILL.



JET SWEEP

Just about every play can be ran with Jet Sweep motion. Bottom line, the edge players (end, olb, playside ILB, CB, FS) will be assigned to defend the Jet. The other 3 D-Lineman, backside ILB, and backside OLB will be in charge of any QB keeps or FB dives off a Jet Sweep fake.

