
CHAPTER 18

STANCE & SLED PROGRESSION



THOUGHTS ON PLAYING OFFENSIVE LINE

Building a competent offensive line can be very challenging for the high school football coach. The number of kids playing high school football is twice as much as any other single sport, however, young boys don't run around the playground blocking each other. They grow up throwing, catching, and running with the ball because that is the fun part. If a kid is really aggressive, he may enjoy tackling, but he's not running around saying "I want to play offensive guard."

I found it difficult to find players who wanted to play offensive line and even more difficult to teach the position. It is **PHYSICALLY** very challenging to attempt to move someone – his size or larger – on many consecutive plays. The techniques necessary are not natural and have to be taught from the ground up. It is **MENTALLY** difficult, because the lineman must know whom to block, how to block him, and on a variety of different plays with the defense rarely in the same spot two plays in a row. Most difficult is the **EMOTIONAL** challenge – never being allowed to fulfill those desires that were most fun as a youth (playing with the ball itself) and receiving much criticism if the offense doesn't move the ball, and receiving little recognition when the offense does move the ball well.

The other challenge is finding a good offensive line coach. Since there are 22 positions in football, the chances that a coach played offensive line is 5/22, or 23%. As a head coach I understood that our offense started and ended with a good offensive line, but since I played Quarterback, I had no idea what it was like to play there. But since I knew the importance, I spent many years early in my career trying to learn everything about how to play and coach the offensive line. What I found is that I needed an offensive line coach who:

- Was very **DEMANDING**, but not a screamer or yeller. O-Linemen never get public praise or recognition, and the only people understand how important they are to a team's success are their coaches and their mommas.
- Has to be a great **TEACHER** of fundamentals and cannot get bored with repetition.
- Has to **WORK** as hard as the defensive coordinator on film study and schemes. He cannot show up unprepared.



The offensive line coach gets handed the kids who are too slow for defense and not athletic enough to play back or receiver. This coach is asked to take these slow, unathletic kids and make them into a cohesive unit where all 5 moving parts are in complete synchronization.

A great offensive lineman is going to be great in any offense, but a below average lineman can be great in the wing-t offense. The wing-T lineman can "get it done," even if he is a below-average player. Because smaller players can succeed, it also increases the number of potential linemen on your roster.

I have coached at schools with over 2,000 students and at the migrant, field worker school of McFarland with 600 students. All of the challenges that I have listed become much more difficult in small schools (with less players) and in rural areas (with less coaches). However, success for a football team cannot exist with a good offensive line. I believe that the Wing T offense offers more solutions for high school than any other offense because it does not require large, dominating linemen and does not depend on a superior athletic QB or RB.

#1) WING T OFFENSE DOES NOT REQUIRE LARGE LINEMEN

This offense utilizes gap blocking schemes, angle leverage, and pulling schemes. None of these require large linemen and in fact allow smaller players to be effective against much larger defensive linemen because the area of impact is on the side and at the hip. If I was going to fight someone stronger than me, I would not try to stand toe to toe with him. I would move around and hit him from all sides. I would also try to get a running start and hit him with a full head of steam. And if I had to move an object larger than me, I would get low and use leverage. The Wing T linemen gets to do all of that.

#2) WING T OFFENSE DOES NOT REQUIRE GREAT BLOCKS

The deception of the backfield freezes defenders and directs their attention on a back who does not have the ball. It is a lot easier to defeat someone whose eyes are focused somewhere else. Basically, a confused defender becomes easy to block. I cannot count how many long runs we had when literally all 5 linemen "missed" their block!

#3) WING T OFFENSE IS FUN

Nobody enjoys doing the same thing over and over. And nobody enjoys getting their butt kicked over and over. The blocking schemes not only put the high school lineman in a position to be successful, he gets to do different things on every play. And ask ANY linemen in ANY offensive scheme what his favorite thing to do is and his answer will be "PULLING".

Once I was able to convince a kid to play line, put him with a line coach who loved him, and we did things to make him feel special. . . . there was no turning back. In fact, we always ended up creating an environment that had kids BEGGING to play O-Line. The end of this chapter offers some ideas to promote your linemen.



One of the most important aspects of an offensive line coach's job is to make personnel decisions.

Personnel determination can be made using the following criteria, which are listed in order of importance:

- ✓ **Knowledge.** Knowing your assignments is more important than strength and size. Linemen who make mental mistakes and miss their assignments cannot be on the field. You must also find a team of 5 who works well together..
- ✓ **Toughness.** No substitute exists for toughness. A tough player is always preferable to a player who simply "looks the part." It is very important to film practices to evaluate who is your best drive blocker. Don't assume!!!
- ✓ **Execution.** Linemen, as a rule, are a great bunch to coach because they are naturally hard-working and do not feel the need to defend themselves by making excuses. It is important for them to realize that they simply have to get the job done. The player who executes the most often needs to be the starter, not the player who can squat the most or is the largest player on the team. The definition of execution for an offensive lineman is when his man does not make the play.

"If you are versatile, tough and smart you will be a successful offensive lineman."

-Grey Ruesgamer (Offensive Lineman for the New York Giants).

That's a great Wing-T offensive lineman quote. We talked about it, the way we check plays, the way we try to get our kids to perform different blocks. You have to be versatile, tough, and smart. It didn't say anything about being big and fast. Those things help, don't get me wrong, but those three things right there, versatile, tough, and smart, I believe can win you a lot of games in the Wing-T.

TRAINING THE WING T LINEMAN

My name is Lance Helton. I'm the head football coach of Jeff Davis High School in Hazlehurst, Georgia. Prior to being at Jeff Davis, I served as Coach Holmes' offensive line coach for 8 years. I grew up in a system that was an I-formation, downhill football team. We took pride in knocking you around and being downhill in everything we did. As a collegiate player, I played in the pro-style offense at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana and in the Tony Franklin Air Raid type of system at Valdosta State. Coming into coaching, I fell in love with the system that was the Wing-T offense, but more so than that, Coach Holmes' system of offense. That is what I still do today and that's what I'm here to share with you guys right now. I believe this wholeheartedly: our system is the most versatile and best offensive system in the country.

I think the most important thing first and foremost when training offensive linemen is as an offensive line coach especially in this offense, have to find a way to have your kids buy all the way in to your approach. For example, every guard in our offense if we were an I-formation will be a Fullback. What are we going to do to make that guy believe that playing offensive guard position in the Wing-T is the premier offensive position in football? For us, it's about the 5 guys moving as one. When you hear me out in practice, you're going to hear me talk about our Guards and Centers as Cadillacs. We're the baddest dudes on the road. Find an identity for your guys and make sure that the offensive line position is known as the most sacred position on your football team. Buy in and have your kids buy in, because if you believe in it and get them to believe in it, this offense is as successful as anything in the country.

THOUGHTS

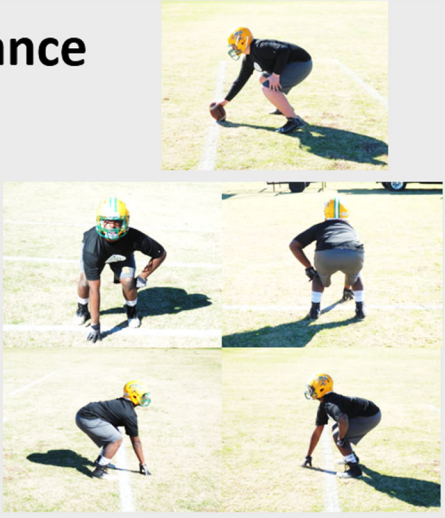
- **This isn't the right way or only way, it's just our way.**



- We believe fully in what we do, and we try to convey that to our kids. We believe this that it ties so well into our schematic approach, it ties so well into the type of players we have. Like I said, we're going to sell our way because it's our way.
- **Shoulders vs. Hands**
 - Once again, I played at the Division 1 level and coached at the Division 2 level and everything we did, it was with our hands and with our face. I believe blocking with shoulders gives us an advantage. What it teaches is the art of pad level. So, blocking with shoulders for us, has given us a distinct advantage over the years from an offensive line stand point.
- **Collision vs. Contact**
 - This is a collision sport. Contact sport is playing in the low post in basketball. You have got to be able to have a train wreck atmosphere from play to play on what you do. Also, you can get by with being a collision man if you have perfect angles and perfect execution of your blocks being a shoulder block.
- **If you believe, and get your players to believe, you can be successful.**
 - We believe that is an art here and we buy fully into that.
- **The measure of who we are is what we do with what we have. -Vince Lombardi**
 - That's the beauty of coaching high school football. We don't recruit our players. We're able to develop and get the most out of our people. We try to have our kids understand this. Raise your hand as high as you can and get them to be able to raise two extra inches even if they got to stand on their tip toes. Get the most out of it if you can and that for us is being the Wing-T offensive linemen in the system is about.

Stance

- Feet just wider than shoulder width apart
- Feet are always Parallel
- Flat footed as possible in stance
- Back should always be flat with solid bend in knees
- Player should be able to pick their hand up without a change in their stance
- Players eyes should always be up so that they can see the field



- **Feet just wider than shoulder width apart**
 - What we try to tell our guys is big toes through our armpit. That allows us to push either way through our check system. Also, it's going to allow us the base we need on our base blocks and down blocks to be in a blocking position. We'll talk more about that in a second.
- **Feet are parallel at all times.**
 - To me, the most imperative thing about stance is parallel feet. Since our QB checks plays at the Line, our linemen have to be prepared to go in any direction.

