
CHAPTER 2



The Wing T Lineman

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 determinations 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.

THREE COMMANDMENTS OF BLOCKING

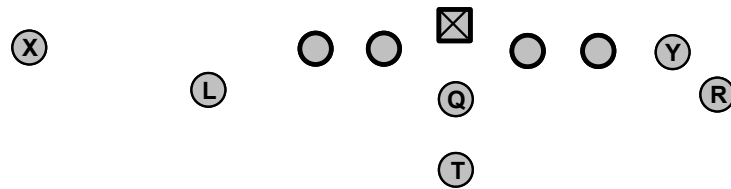
1. **Explosiveness.** This trait can make up for lack of size and talent. Since FORCE equals MASS times ACCELERATION, if the mass (size) of your player is small, then you have to compensate with more Explosive Acceleration. Because many of the angle based schemes and ability to pull, the quickness of the get-off is very important.
The quicker off the ball a lineman is, the better his chances of overcoming the defender's use of hands. A quick getoff also neutralizes slants, twists, and "reading".
2. **Good Initial Contact:** It is important that proper contact is made and have a great surface area. The more of the offensive lineman's body that is in contact with the defender gives him a better chance to stop the defender's charge and move him.
3. **Acceleration on Contact:** Once contact has been made, the blocker's objective is to move him. He cannot put all of his effort in his getoff and contact, only to fall to his knees because he did not accelerate his feet on contact. Other sports call this the "follow through" and it is so important that a lineman who is slow off the ball can still do his job if he pumps his feet after contact.

A couple of closing thoughts about the Wing-T lineman. First, they are not "finesse" players. This offense will breed a toughness that will be contagious to other players and carry over to your defense. The offense requires a "pound the rock" attitude and the type of practice required to run this offense will make your team tougher. Secondly, the wing-t linemen will be the smartest players on the team. Don't underestimate their capacity to learn, challenge them to be much smarter than their defensive counterparts.

Don't let any coaches on your staff refer to backs and receivers as "skill players". This is insulting to the linemen because a skill is a learned or acquired trade and every coach knows that their linemen must become "master craftsmen." The backs and receivers do not have to learn their skill because they are gifted athletes who have been picked first all their lives. Your linemen will work harder than any other position learning their techniques and skills so make sure they great pride in that fact. And by no means do you let any coach demean or devalue this effort by calling the other positions the "skill players".



PERSONNEL



We “cross-train” all of our players because in high school football injuries happen and we seldom have 4 good players at any position. So our depth chart will have 3 tackles, 3 guards, and 2 centers. We will have 3 Halfbacks, 2 Tailbacks, and many times only 1 QB.

We do not flop our linemen because we believe it slows down the tempo and gives the defense tendencies. Coaches will argue that flopping provides a shorter learning curve, but even if this were true, it is negated when a left guard has to play right guard due to injury. However, the PISTOL WING T is so versatile that we run Belly away and to the TE side. We will run G.O. away from the TE side. We will run counters and traps to both the strong and weak sides as well. Also, we are in non-TE formations 40-60%. Flopping the line would require each lineman to be proficient at angle blocking and pulling in both directions, which is difficult to do.

Tackles: Our Tackles are the larger players on the team. The only player larger might be our Defensive Tackle. The size is necessary for the Down Blocks, however, they need to have some agility because they have to pull and escape to Backers. The Left Tackle should be the quicker, better pass blocker if you have a right handed QB.

Guards: Our Guards would play fullback for an I-back team. They have to be quick and have good lateral agility because of all the pulling and blocking players in open space. However, they must still be strong enough to move a NG or DT. They can be your weakest pass protectors. They have to be smart football players because they have the most to learn with the exception of the QB. This is the funnest position to play.

Center: Making the snap is the most important aspect. Durability and dependability are the next most important characteristics. Shorter players, with strong legs are good so a strong NG does not drive him back. Of the 5, your center can be your weakest player because he can chop block a dominant NG or 1 tech. A good NG versus a weak center only takes away guard trap, but a good End on a weak tackle takes away Jet, Down, G.O. and sprint passing.

Tight End: The offense is very difficult to stop if the Tight End (“Y”) can be a physical down blocker as well as being an effective split-end Wide Receiver. If we don’t have a player at TE, then our blocking TE is our 3rd best tackle wearing an 80’s number. We cross train all of X’s to play both sides so our 2 best WR enters the game when we take the TE out.



Substitutions

Coaches might fall into the trap of rotating their linemen on gamedays to keep them fresh. This is a huge mistake. The offensive line is not a position where you can afford to have new players in the game who are not familiar with each other. This position requires a high level of comfort and understanding which only happens when the same 5 are constantly playing together. We believe very strongly that rotations and fresh legs should be on the defensive side of the ball where cohesion is not as important. Two things that we did for our 2-way players were:

- Played 2 series of defense and then took one series off.
- If the other team's offense had 70 or more yards to go, we took out our 2-way linemen and kept them out until the opponent's offense crossed the 40-yard line, approaching the fifty.

FEELING SPECIAL

Offensive Linemen are the most UN-selfish players in any sport. They practice the hardest, running under chutes and driving sleds. They get knocked down, stepped on, and collide with blitzers on every play. Their assignments are the most difficult to learn of any position. Offensive Linemen do all of this for little to no extrinsic rewards. No name in the paper, no touchdowns, no name over the public address system. No, offensive linemen do all this work for the personal gratification of knowing that they are helping the team. No pass will be completed or touchdown scored unless they do their job. The only praise they get is from their coaches and their mommas. The only gratification they get is from each other.

Because of this, we do some things in our program to show our appreciation:

- FIRST to be dismissed for water;
- First in line for team meals;
- First to get equipment
- Get the most helmet stickers;
- The media only interviews linemen;
- They are selected for pictures in newspaper pre-season preview stories

Another really special thing that we do for our linemen is MONDAY NIGHT FOOTBALL parties. During the season I give our O-Line coach \$50 every Monday to buy pizza and have the linemen over his house to watch Monday Night Football. Sometimes, one of the linemen's mother will volunteer to cook. Not only do our linemen love this special treatment, but it really helps form an even tighter bond amongst the unit.

There is another thing that has happened in our program that demonstrates linemen solidarity. If a lineman has to stay after practice for extra conditioning (championship reminders), all the other linemen have elected to do the conditioning together, as a unit, with the lineman who has gotten in trouble.



NOTES ABOUT YOUR POTENTIAL LINEMEN NEXT YEAR

LT	
RT	
3 rd TACKLE	

LG	
RG	
3 rd GUARD	

CENTER	
BACKUP C	

