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# Speed It Up





Having used the no-huddle for over six years, I grow impatient watching a game in which both teams huddle on offense. We play in a league in which just about every team runs no-huddle, so I'm used to seeing very fast-paced offenses. I first started studying no-huddle about a decade ago. I thought of it as a procedure for spread teams that aligned in one or two formations and ran only a handful of plays from those formations. In continuing to research the no-huddle, then adopting it, and refining it, we realized that we could do anything from a no-huddle that we did huddling, and we could do it at a ridiculously fast pace.

I've heard the laundry list of things that can't be done with the no-huddle. For instance, you slow down if you change personnel, or use many formations. You can't make line calls. Shifts are difficult to incorporate. However, we've been creative in finding ways to do all of those and more.

If there is one word I would use to describe our offense, I would use "multiple." We use multiple personnel groupings, multiple formations, and multiple tempos. Our tempos fall into three basic categories – speed-it-up, slow-it-down, and situational.

The hottest topic seems to be being able to speed up play. It's almost become synonymous in offense to use the words spread and no-huddle. While our offense has spread principles in it, we run more of a pro-style attack with multiple tight end and H-back formations. However, we can run our offense at a blistering fast pace. In fact, the way we set our procedures up, we teach our players to align as if they are going to snap the ball immediately as it is set. We want to force a defense to get in their call and align. Many times we are working to get the snap off as fast as possible.

As described earlier, our procedures allow us to get personnel on the field very quickly so that we can maintain that fast pace even when changing personnel. Communications and procedures are the key to moving fast. Many methods exist for accomplishing this. Some teams use a live signaler and a dummy signaler with everyone but the offensive line getting the signal from the sideline. The quarterback then will relay the play to the offensive line with code words or numbers or both.



Some teams have a signaler for the offensive line and a separate signaler for skill positions. I know of a college team that even flips their line using this method. With this method, the offensive line gets the blocking scheme or protection from their signaler and the skill players get the run or pass concept from the other.

There are even methods in signal procedures. One is communicating all information in order. The other is to have one signaler giving formation and motion and the other giving the play. A third signaler can be added for personnel. Typically, if teams are using signalers with this method, the signalers will cycle their call repeating it until all personnel on the field have looked away. Personnel on the field read the signaler like they would read a book, going from left to right.

Other teams use wristbands with a variety of different methods. Some teams have a wristband that only indicates the assignment for the player wearing the wristband. For example, the play number signaled in may indicate a post pattern for the X receiver, dig for the Z receiver, and drop back protection for the offensive line. Other teams may just list the name of the play for each player. Furthermore, a wristband may indicate the entire call, formation/motion and play, while others may use the wristband to only list the play while using a signaler for formation.

**INTERACTIVE 1.1**  
**Southern Oregon Signals & Boards**



The newest advent in no-huddle communications is the use of picture boards. An icon or a picture indicates the play to the offense. These picture boards are creative to promote the fastest possible tempo. Players are able to process a picture quicker than a series of hand signals.

Watching the offense signal a play on the sideline can be entertaining. Some teams will use up to four signalers. Others use a combination of signalers and players or coaches holding up boards with words, numbers or pictures on them. In his book, Gus Malzahn, now the head coach at Arkansas State, detailed a procedure for using a combination



of signalers and a person holding a board with a series of three numbers.

### INTERACTIVE 1.2 Oregon using Boards



I've used all of these methods or combinations of them at one time or another. Any and all of them work. We've settled in on a method in which our players have wristbands, and we have signalers and boards on the sideline. For the sake of discussion, I will refer to personnel on our sideline as communicators. At any time, any of our communicators can be live or dead. It all depends on what tempo we are in, which is also a signal. Each communicator that we use is relaying a separate piece of information.

Based on the procedure we are using, players know which communicator(s) to get their information from. To keep our fast pace, as part of our procedures, we can limit how much our players must get from the communicators. For example, if we have the personnel and formation we want already in, we eliminate it from the play call and only give the play.

### **Pedal to the Metal**

In some of my first research of the no-huddle, I was able to obtain a copy of Rich Rodriguez's playbook from Clemson. This was about 2001. We immediately found some tools that we could use to help our offense. We huddled at that time, but we installed a procedure called "Xerox" which simply meant to run the previous play again or "Opie" in



which we ran the same play but flipped the formation the opposite way. If we had a play that ripped off a big gain, we wanted to align with the defense on their heels and do it again very quickly. The procedure was successful at times, but teams certainly caught on to what we were doing if we tried it more than a couple of times in a game. In other words, we developed a tendency that when we aligned without a huddle, we were running the same play again. At that time, I started thinking about how it would be possible to set up a tendency with procedures and then to come right back with what looked to the defense that we would do one thing, and then we do something completely different, and thus, confuse their keys and recognition. We thought of it as running a counter to our base play. The defense would start keying our procedure as their recognition and we would be able to use that recognition and ensuing reaction against them.

That thought I had years ago when experimenting with “Xerox” and “Opie” has now become a set of tempo tools for us to speed up play. We are able to, and we frequently do run the same play two or three times in a row. We also have developed procedures to allow us to have multiple answers in situations that we create where it appears that we will run the same play. Calling two plays in the huddle is nothing new. It’s been done for decades. We put that method of running plays into our no-huddle. When we align quickly in the same formation, we may be running the same play, or we may be running another play in a sequence that has been signaled. Furthermore, we can follow-up a play that we have run two or three times in a row by quickly aligning in the same formation, and using a false cadence at the line of scrimmage and looking to the sideline. The tendency for a defense, however, will be to encroach on our false cadence because we are running at a very fast pace.

Here is an example of a drive in which we ran two different runs from the same formation and personnel. We ran our counter play three times in a row, followed by our outside zone from the same formation and personnel three times in a row. This was a seven play scoring drive that took just 1:28. As a point of reference to the pace we are running, you can watch either the chains being set, or the official putting the ball into play.

In the final play of the drive, we aligned quickly, snapped the ball and executed what appeared to be a run to the defense. Again, we were allowing very little recognition and ad-

justment time between plays. This is stressful for a defense, and we trained their eyes to see run all the way down the field. Eleven defenders ran to the ball leaving our receiver wide open in the corner of the end zone. I should note that this was a very good opponent. The procedure became the weapon. It's something we use in practice against our own defense with success even though they are well aware of our procedures. Speaking with bunch formation guru, Andrew Coverdale, he called it psychological warfare. He said, "You are really messing with the psyche of the defense when you go at the fastest pace possible."

#### EXAMPLE VIDEO IS IN THE INTRODUCTION

I provide this as an example to spark your own creativity. What are you doing right now, whether you huddle or not, that you can develop a procedure and counter-procedure around and use as a weapon in your arsenal?

#### **Set the Pace Early**

We have procedures that allow us to run our opening script at a very fast pace. This was an idea I first used in 2001 while I was a high school coach. We were playing an opponent that had just defeated their previous two opponents pretty handily. They had a big and strong front eight that had at least a 50-pound advantage over us per man. All of their linemen were on a power lifting team that placed in the state. We knew we couldn't stand toe-to-toe with them and slug it out. We decided to run no-huddle to begin the game. We had our first 12 plays scripted on a wristband and we practiced running those as quickly as possible all week long.

The night set up to be perfect for our plan. It was hot and humid, and we were able to gas their linemen early. The score was 28-0 after the first quarter, and the final was 53-0. If we used our traditional huddle offense in that game, the results would have been much different. Using the 12-play script two times in a row at a fast pace was the key to tiring out and putting away a superior opponent.

#### **Why Have a Two-Minute Procedure When You Already Run Fast?**



Our pace is like a two-minute drill at times. About 47% of our scoring drives in 2011 were possessions of less than two minutes. We use our base personnel and a small set of plays in our two-minute drill. Like any two-minute procedure, plays are designed to stop the clock and move the chains with chunks of yardage. The situation requires something different than the thought process of running in normal situations. Defenses will play a certain set of coverages and personnel. We know through studying our opponent that we want to do certain things against them based on how they play in those situations. The procedure for our two-minute offense is very fast. Because the clock is a major concern, we want to limit the amount of information being signaled. Our players are looking for one signal only in this procedure if the clock is moving. Also, our receivers will stay on one side of the field eliminating the time needed to switch to an alignment across the field.

Tempo is definitely a weapon. Like any aspect of offense, it takes planning and practice in order to use it effectively. These methods have worked well for us, but certainly using a different method can work just as well. The astute coach will find ways to assimilate what works best in his system. Utilizing the procedures outlined in this chapter as weapons is discussed in detail in Faster, Faster, and Fastest chapters.