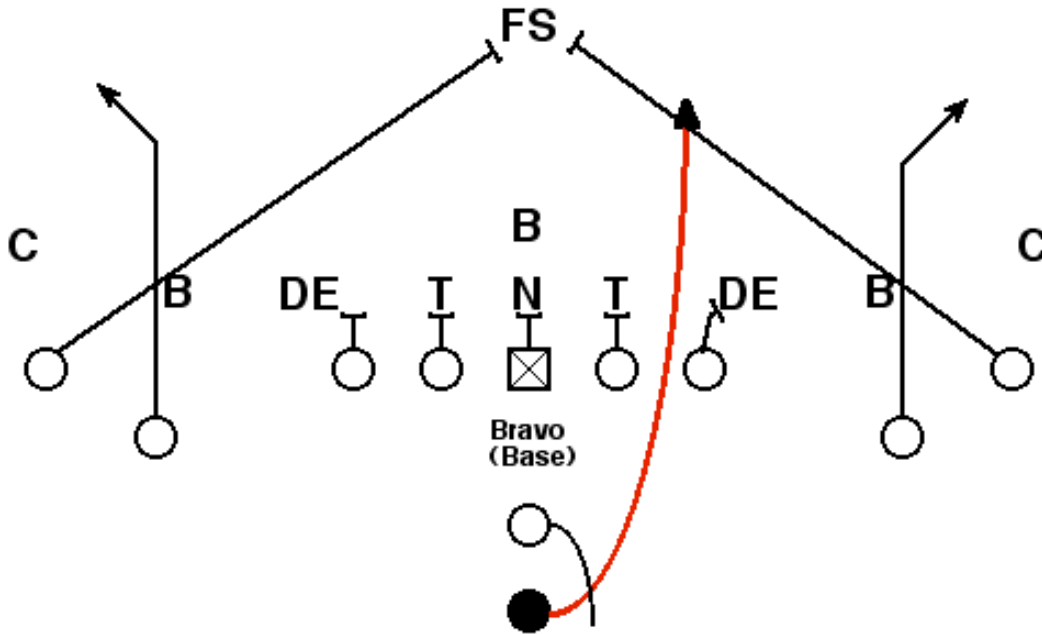


# THE PISTOL OFFENSE



## FOR YOUTH FOOTBALL

By Derek A. “Coach” Wade

Brought to you by [Football for Youth!](http://FootballforYouth.com)

*“If we can help just one coach, that’s twenty kids that got more out of football!”*

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## INTRODUCTION

### The Pistol

The "Pistol" is a spread-based offense designed to force the defense to cover the entire field. It uses motion to overload defenders and put receivers in position to lead block while setting the quarterback deep in a shotgun to give him more time to read the defense on passes.

Although the roots of the Pistol run as deep as football—all the way back to the Glenn Warner "Single Wing" of the early 1900s, the first time it was used as an offense in the modern era and given the name "Pistol" (derived from the common phrase "shotgun" to denote a quarterback who is taking a long snap) was in 2005 at the University of Nevada under head coach Chris Ault. Primarily, Nevada used the offense to improve their perimeter option offense while still keeping the flexible passing attack of the four-wide spread. "Despite its unconventional and unorthodox appearance, the system should be considered when listing the more explosive offenses in college football."<sup>1</sup>

At first glance, the system doesn't appear suited for youth football, since youth football offenses are primarily run-oriented and do not option. However, the deeper quarterback set provides improved pass protection, generally the weakest link of the youth passing attack. This forces defenses to cover instead of pressure. At the youth levels, coverage is generally spotty and ineffective, and well-protected quarterbacks can significantly terrorize a defense that relies solely on pressure to stop the passing game.

Additionally, the I-formation depth of the running back and his location in the middle of the offense allows him to hit any gap almost immediately after the snap while still running downhill rather than laterally to the line of scrimmage. With proper footwork, a talented running back should be able to provide a complementary advantage to the increased passing attack.

Where the system really shines is in its ability to use the quarterback as a noteworthy addition to the running game. His location in the center of the formation, and no deeper than the fullback in a Double Wing system, provides the quarterback with the ability to strike the same points of attack as the running back, while still remaining a legitimate passing threat.

Although this playbook does not cover it in detail, a perimeter option game can be used that allows for midline, speed, load, belly, and veer

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<sup>1</sup> [Pistol Offense](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pistol_Offense). Accessed 22 January 2008 at [http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pistol\\_Offense](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pistol_Offense)

options to further pressure the defense. These plays, however, take many, *many* repetitions to become effective, and a corresponding trimming of the playbook must be taken into account. (A simple rule of thumb is to consider an option play to be the equivalent of a number of plays equal to the number of points of attack it threatens. So, if the coach wishes to use a speed option, which threatens the off-tackle and the perimeter, he should consider removing two basic plays from the playbook in order to free up enough practice time to adequately exercise the single option play.)

## Personal Experience

In 2007 as a member of the coaching staff for the Valley Wolfpack Youth Football program in Washington State, I had the opportunity to face the Pistol offense twice. Although we won both games, including a league championship in the second, the flexibility and versatility of the offense intrigued me.

Careful analysis of the game film and scouting reports led to this playbook, which is a reverse engineering of the system we faced. It should be noted that this is a similar nature to the methodology used by Hugh Wyatt when he developed his Double Wing offense; Coach Wyatt lost a game to Don Markham, father of the Double Wing, and spent hours breaking down his game film until he felt he had a functioning set of systems and terminology that he could use to teach and run the offense himself.<sup>2</sup> After more than thirty successful years with the offense, it seems to have worked.

Although I am not a coach of Hugh Wyatt's caliber, I believe that a combination of the passing principles from Coverdale and Robinson's *The Bunch Attack* (ISBN: 1585181781), coupled with the blocking schemes and rules of the basic Double and Single Wing (rather than the more complex zone schemes actually used by Nevada) leads to a very effective offense for the youth level.

## Warning!

It must be noted that *caveat emptor* must apply to this situation; this offense has never been tested on grass as drawn. Although the principles of football are sound, specific coaching trial and error will be needed in order to fine-tune blocking schemes, timing, and other miniscule aspects of the system.

## How We Stopped It

In keeping with that theory, this section will denote specific things we did defensively that provided problems for the offense in our games, as well as point out things that I think the opposing coaches should have focused more practice time on. I hope that these insights will be useful to the coach trying this system for the first time.

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<sup>2</sup> Hugh Wyatt. 1996. *Dynamics of the Double Wing*. (Video)

- 1) Pressure – Our opponent had a decent run-blocking offensive line, but when pass blocking they tended to stand up too high in their stances. Our defensive line was comprised of three of the five fastest athletes on our defensive unit, and they tended to beat the offensive line off the ball on most plays. In runs, this was less of a problem, since the offensive line was usually zone blocking, so the first blocker to enter the zone usually engaged our defender, but when pass blocking we put enormous pressure on the quarterback.

Corollary: When coaching this offense, make sure that your offensive line schemes and techniques are capable of protecting the quarterback for three to five seconds. Teach the passers to release the ball within 2.5 seconds of the snap on each play, with the exception of rollout passes. Throw to areas, rather than reading specific defenders or checking off receivers. Use the screens and draw to keep the defense off balance.

In both of our games, the biggest passing threat was the Bubble screen. We did an excellent job of stopping the Tunnel screen when they tried it, but the Bubble nearly broke our backs. It was responsible for 4 of nine completions in the first game, both touchdowns, and more than 140 passing yards. (It should also be noted that the Bubble screen also *lost* the game for our opponents in the championship; with the score tied and :43 left to play, they attempted a Bubble screen from their own thirty-two yard line that was intercepted and returned for the winning score.)

- 2) Discipline – Our opponents had not placed proper emphasis on the misdirection of the offense, which allowed us as a defense to ignore fakes and to play more soundly. They did not use a halfback screen or a draw, and the result was that our defensive line, already an advantage for our team, was able to pin their ears back and attack the offensive backfield on every play. They did not counter, limiting their misdirection to quarterback fakes after the handoff. They also did not use any trap or counter blocking schemes, which further limited their ability to attack our defense.

Corollary: Although the limited lines of force cause some difficulty in adequately constructing a misdirection attack, what's there absolutely *must* be used in order to place the defense into conflicts of execution. We discovered in the final game of the season that our overly aggressive defensive line was at prime risk for traps—had they used a trap blocking scheme in their Pistol offense our previous opponents might have represented our league in the Super Bowl rather than us.

- 3) Focus – Our opponents made one very simple mistake that completely removed an entire section of playbook from their options. In the Roar

Trap series they attempted to run, the motion was incorrectly timed. The slot receiver would motion to a location directly behind the playside guard and then chop his feet in place. When the ball was snapped, instead of trapping the defensive tackle while under a full head of steam, he would attempt to lead block for the running back.

After three repetitions of this mistake, we noted that motion of this nature *always* meant the lead was coming. We pointed this out to our defense at halftime of the first game, and the plays never gained a yard after that, in either game.

Corollary: When coaching this offense, pay attention to small details. Trim the playbook to a number of plays that allows you to focus on seemingly insignificant fine points. Properly timed, using the slot receiver as a motioning trap blocker should open a hole like a freeway in the middle of a compressed defense. Instead, it caused a catastrophic lack of production.

Additionally, be wary of running the same play with the same motion too often. Even the most inept defensive coordinator will brighten up eventually and notice the similarities. Motion should be used to keep the defense more worried about their alignments than their assignments, to get key blockers into advantageous positions, to make it more difficult to cover receivers, and most of all: to distract the defense away from the point of attack.

4) Skill and Precision – Our defense was constructed with an eye towards simplicity of execution. By keeping the responsibilities minimal and providing a high number of repetitions, our defense was able to learn their jobs quickly. This meant a greater amount of time could be spent in practice teaching skills to make those jobs *easier*, such as escape techniques for getting away from blockers and coverage techniques for recovering ground after the receiver makes a cut.

Additionally, the long snap had not been given an adequate focus. Five snaps were off-target in the first game and three in the second. Those eight plays were significant to our season—but much *more* so to our opponents.

It became obvious when watching the game film that our opponent had not focused on footwork as described in this document. Several exchanges between the quarterback and the running back were forced because the running back's path was too far outside to receive the handoff. (This was exacerbated by inaccurate long snapping.)

Corollary: Like any offense, the Pistol relies on precision for execution. The playlist must be kept small enough to ensure that each play, and each responsibility within the play, receives an adequate number of reps in practice. Each pass route should receive at least fifty reps before the patterns are put together. Each pattern should be run at least seventy-five times before it is called on game day. Each running play should be properly run against a live defense at least fifty times before it is used in a game. Each misdirection point should be repped properly at least fifty times. Each regular motion must be repped at least twenty times. Each timed motion (such as the Roar Traps and Fly Sweeps) must be repped at least seventy-five times. These must all occur *before* the first game, and repetitions of significant number must be maintained throughout the season as well.

The snapper *must* be properly trained to provide accurate snaps under a myriad of conditions, including inclement weather.

Because much of the blocking requires that the defense be taking a particular angle to the ball carrier, proper footwork is essential, both to set up these blocks, and to allow the running back to receive the ball in stride and maintain his acceleration into the hole. The faster he gets to top speed, the harder it is to bring him down with an arm tackle, and the more likely he will be able to get into the defensive secondary.

I am no better coach than the gentlemen who put this offense on the field against my defense. I believe our teams were roughly equal in talent, but our defense had less to think and worry about than their offensive players, and the confusion that resulted allowed us to achieve a 34-12 victory in the first game, and a 14-8 win in the Championship. Focus on the details is crucial for any offensive system.

## THE SYSTEM

### Terminology

Holes are numbered in a standard method, even on the right, odd on the left. (A simple mnemonic I use to help the players remember is to tell them, "It's *odd* to be left-handed.") The point of attack is always the outside shoulder of the man numbered, with the center having "two" outside shoulders, therefore two numbers ("1" and "2"). Members of the offensive backfield are numbered in traditional manner as well, "30", "20", and "40." (Left slot, Running back, and right slot.) The quarterback is "10." The ends are labeled "X" and "Z" for left and right, respectively.

Plays are called in the following manner: [Formation] (Ball carrier) <Point of Attack>. Play action pass plays generally have the call of the simulated play followed by a descriptor of the pass pattern and the designator "Pass" to remind the offensive line to pass block. A designated receiver may also be called by appending the receiver's call to the end of the play: "24 Gut Pass, Whip Right 40"

### Basic Run Blocking

Running schemes are kept as simple as possible. There are eight (sixteen when reversed) running plays, including the draw, with one to three schemes per play. Some schemes reverse or "combo" onto one another, leaving the ability to run the entire offense with very few adjustments to the front line blocking.

### Scheme Calling

One offensive lineman must be designated to call the blocking scheme at the line of scrimmage, based on the point of attack. Generally, this is a factor of the defensive alignment.

All plays have a "Bravo" or "base" blocking scheme that is the default. Other schemes such as "Tony" (trap) and "Charlie" (cross) are used against specific defensive fronts. The only exception to this rule is called counter plays, as the misdirection requires a counter blocking scheme to be used. In most cases this will be a "Charlie" or "Tony" blocking scheme by default.

### Pass Blocking

Pass blocking is kept basic as well. The shotgun set places the quarterback deep enough to avoid most pass rushes long enough to get the ball off, and the emphasis is placed on quick passes thrown to an area, along with quick play action to place defenders in conflict. Pass blockers should be trained to fire out and then give ground grudgingly. This blocking method takes some practice time in order to perfect, and offensive linemen must be conditioned to take only *one step* and then begin kick sliding backwards.

The ball should always be thrown within two seconds of the snap, even when play action is used. All pass patterns feature quick cuts and timed patterns rather than slow-developing routes. Remember that most youth-level offensive linemen are not accomplished at pass blocking, and you cannot expect them to protect the quarterback much longer than 1-4 seconds.

Generally, the two most important defenders to block in passing situations are the defensive ends, particularly the blind-side end. It is advisable to use the running back as an additional blocker wherever feasible, and in the event of extreme pressure a "Rip" or "Liz" call will put a slot back in position to help protect the quarterback as well. The tag "Protect" can also be used to designate a receiver to stay home and pass block for the play. "Rip Protect, Streaks Right Z."

## Ball Carrier Duties

The lone set back behind the quarterback is the primary ball carrier, but creative use of motion can allow for intercepted snap misdirection similar to the 1940's Single Wing. The motion can also place slot receivers into position to lead or pass block as well.

## Motion

Three members of the offensive backfield are charged with motion responsibilities, and the motion is coded for easy memory.

30	20	40
Rip: Motion to HB depth.	Fred: Motion forward and right.	Liz: Motion to HB depth.
Rodger: Motion towards sideline.	Floyd: Motion forward and left.	Larry: Motion towards sideline.
Roar: Motion flat across formation.		Load: Motion flat across formation.

Additionally, the tag "return" can be added to tell a player to go in motion for a short distance, then return to his starting point. The tag would appear like this: "Pistol Rip Return 22 Dive."

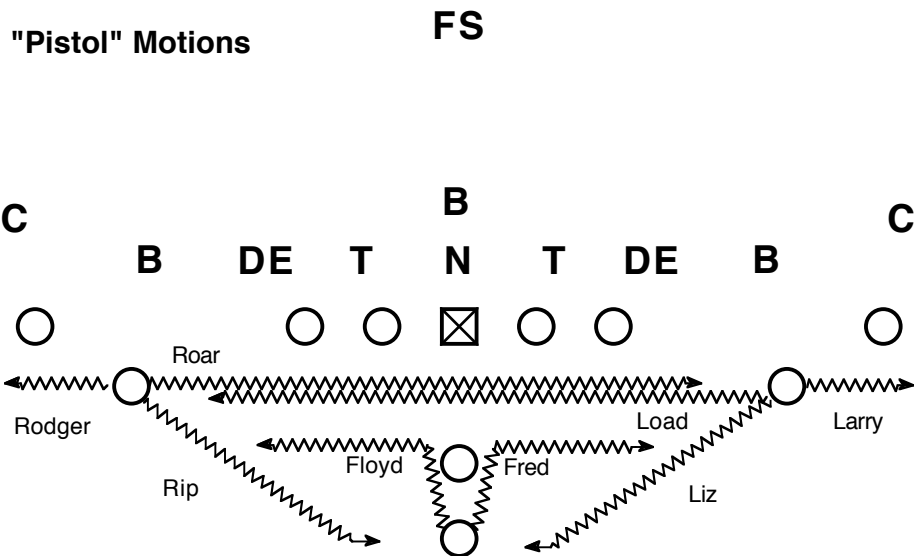
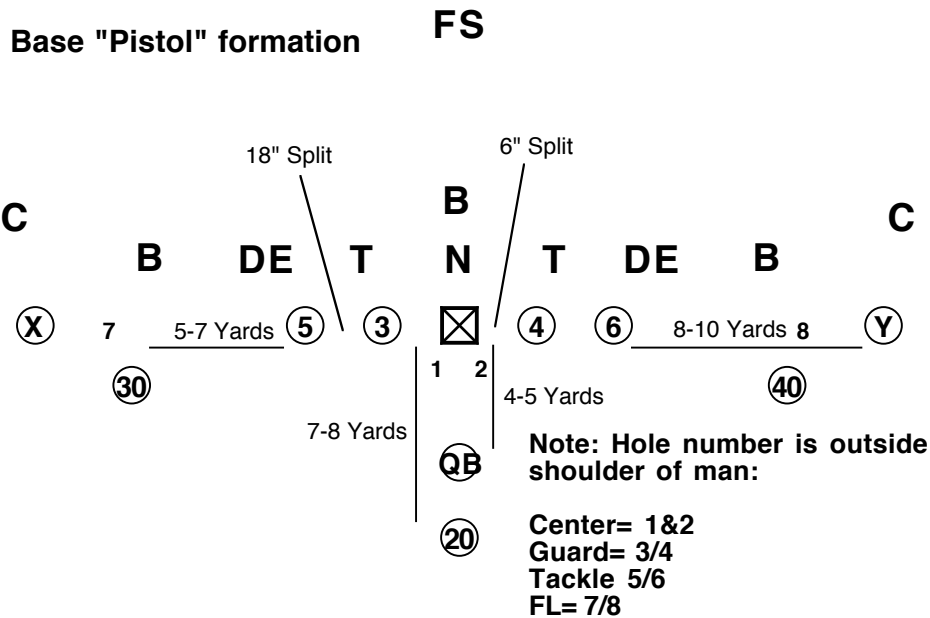
Motions can also be strung together to change ball carriers. For example, "Pistol Rip Fred 32 Dive." The ball carrier number should change as well, but the line blocking does not. Second motion starts when the first motion ends, and all players come to a complete stop *before* the second motion begins. (Note: Pay attention to the play clock when calling multiple-motion plays to confuse the defense.)



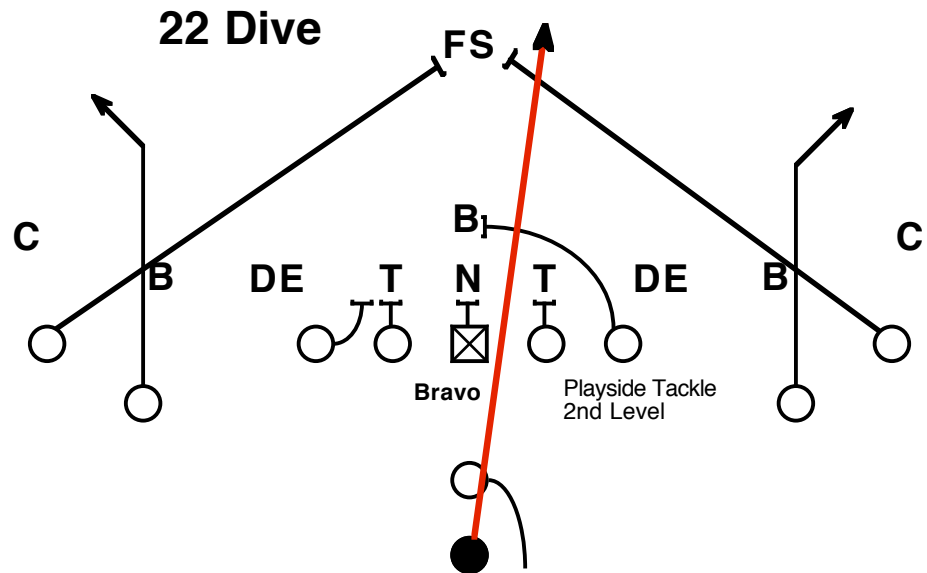
The Pistol uses only one base formation and relies solely on motion calls to alter the offensive alignment. At higher levels, other formations may be used.

## Running Pass Routes

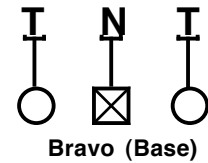
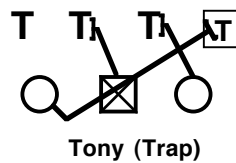
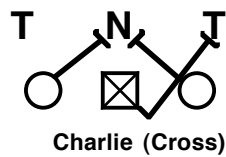
In the event of a pass call with motion, routes are swapped each time a receiver crosses the path of another. An example of this is the bubble screen. Called with "Larry" motion, the split end would run the bubble path while the slot receiver (#40) would act as the lead blocker.



**RUNNING PLAYS**



**Blocking Schemes**



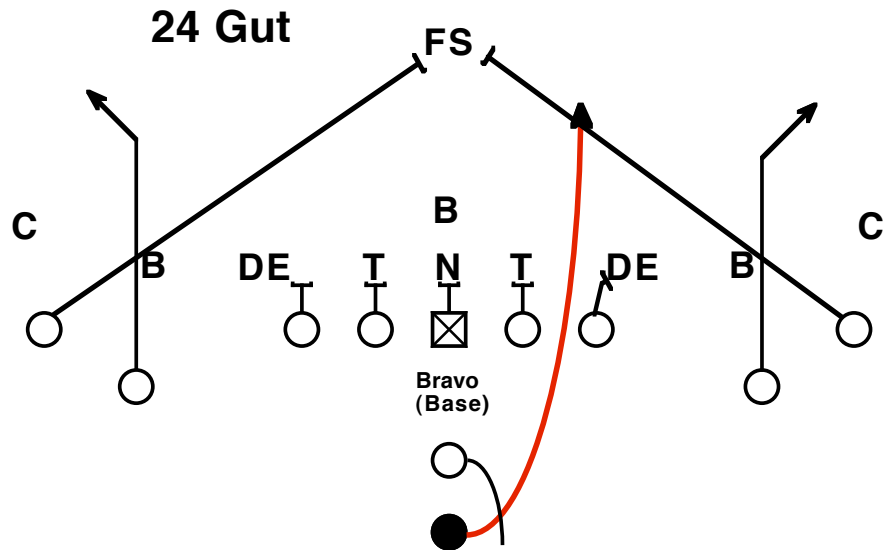
22 Dive is a straight-up-the-pipe play to the lone back. It can be run with or without motion. ("12 Dive" can be used in the event of Fred or Floyd motion, or use a Rip or Liz motion to move a flanker into position as a ball carrier.) It is the most important play in the offense, and should be used liberally.

The quarterback secures the snap and pivots immediately by snapping his hips to the playside and then sliding his playside foot back until his hips are parallel to the sideline. The running back takes a step with the near foot towards the center's playside shoulder, and receives the handoff on his second step.

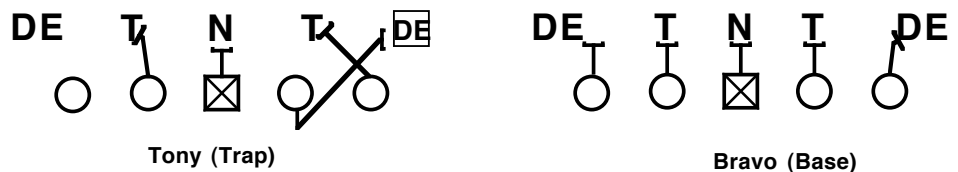
Three blocking schemes are used for this play. Generally, a call of "Base" works only against odd defensive fronts that are not stunting or blitzing. A call of "Charlie" or "Tony" will result in a trapping action against the first defensive player on the line of scrimmage outside the midline of the playside guard. (This sounds much more complex than it really is. If the

playside guard blocks down and the tackle goes to second level, the first unblocked defender outside the guard will be trapped if the trapper runs the correct path.) Outside men always go first when Tony or Charlie blocking.

The companion play to 22 Dive is 21 Dive.



**Blocking Schemes**



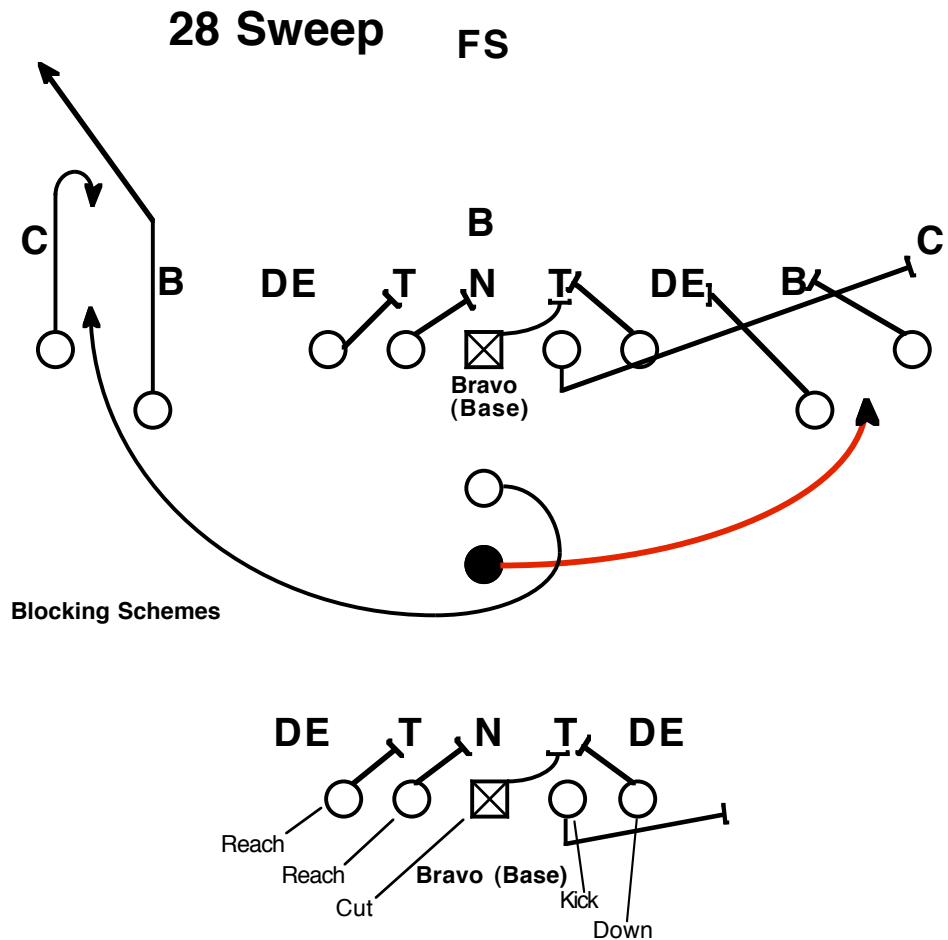
24 Gut is an off-tackle play to the lone back. It can be run with or without motion. Unlike 22 Dive, the running back's path is slightly curved to the play side. The most effective footwork for quarterback on this play is for him to secure the snap and pivot immediately to the point of attack on the heel of the playside foot and the ball of the backside foot. He should take one natural step and hand off the ball before dropping back to fake a pass while reading the playside corner and safety.

The running back takes a crossover step with the backside foot, and then runs directly at the playside guard's hips. He should receive the handoff on his third step, and with his fourth step cut directly into the hole with his

shoulders parallel to the line of scrimmage. (Note: Some players may be tempted to take this play too wide. Train them to make one cut and then gain vertical depth.)

It is possible to add different base pass route combinations to this play in order to read the defensive coverages. To avoid confusion when doing this, the phrase "No pass" should be used: "24 Gut NO PASS, Smash Right.")

The reverse of 24 Gut is 25 Gut.

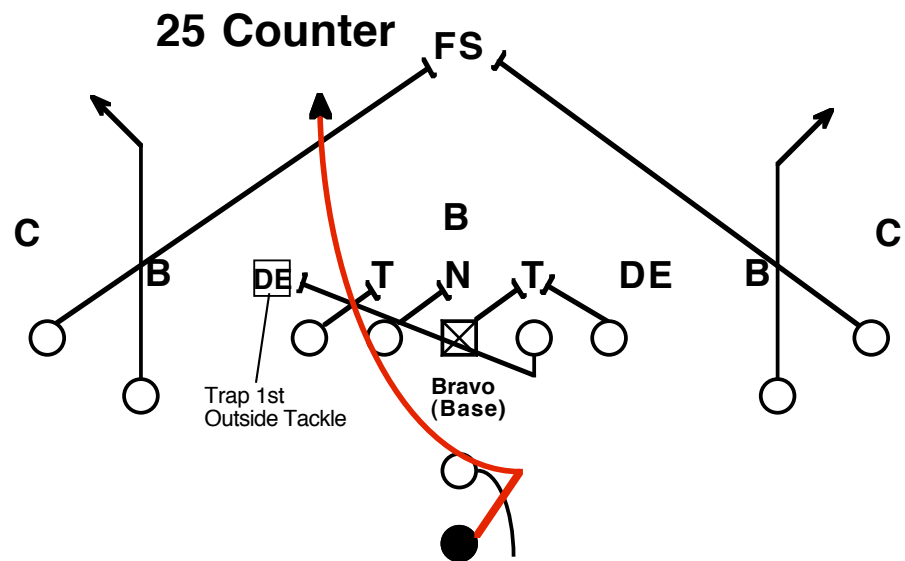


28 Sweep is the perimeter play in the offense. It can be run with traditional "Buck sweep" blocking (down blocks on the playside, both guards pulling) as well as with motion. The playside guard, however, is generally

charged with kicking out the first defender to show, while the playside end and slot crack block on the first defender inside them. (Generally this results in the scheme shown above.)

The quarterback's footwork is identical to 24 Gut. The running back's footwork is similar, except for a sharper initial angle to the sideline. Specific angles are impossible to determine without seeing the play on grass, since talent and speed may alter the steps. This play requires a large number of repetitions, especially to time the crack blocks and handoff, and to teach the quarterback to read the defensive coverages on the backside.

The reverse of 28 Sweep is 29 Sweep.



### Blocking Schemes



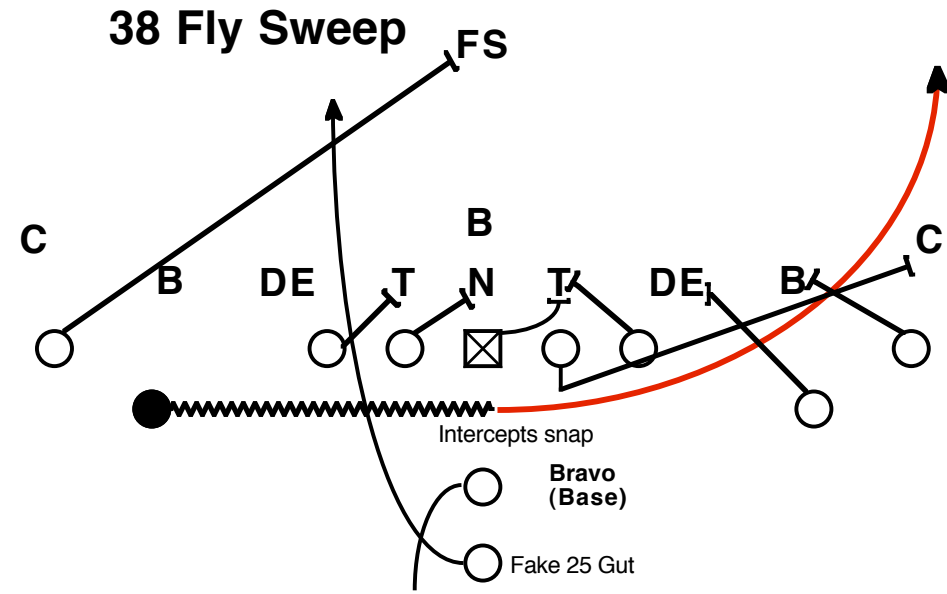
As the name implies, 25 Counter is a misdirection play. The lack of intersecting lines of force in this offense requires the faking to be more subtle, but the misdirection can still succeed when properly coached. The play can be run with motion, but care must be taken to avoid giving the defensive unit keys that the counter is coming instead of the core play.

Make sure that you use similar motion whenever possible. (Roar motion makes this especially effective, as it turns the play into a counter look from the Roar Trap series.)

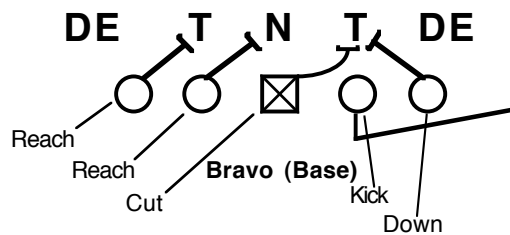
25 Counter is designed to emulate 24 Gut at the snap and for the first two steps, which are identical for the offensive backfield. The running back's initial path is the same, except that where he cuts up into the line on his fourth step, in the counter he uses his fourth step (which should be his outside foot hitting the ground) to cut back against the grain and get as close to the pulling guard's rear as he can. The puller should look to kick out the first defensive player outside the tackle.

It is crucial that all backfield movements look identical to 24 Gut for as long as possible. The play works best when the running back attacks the 4 hole as if that were the point of attack, drawing the defense to that point before cutting back sharply behind the puller.

The reverse of 25 Counter is 24 Counter.



Blocking Schemes



Same as 28 Sweep

The fly sweeps offer another method for getting outside the perimeter of the defense. The crossing action of the diving running back and the fast motion across the offensive backfield should place the defense in an immediate conflict. Used in conjunction with "Roar 25 Gut" this play becomes part of a Buck Action series that Wing-T, Single Wing, and Double Wing coaches will be intimately familiar with.

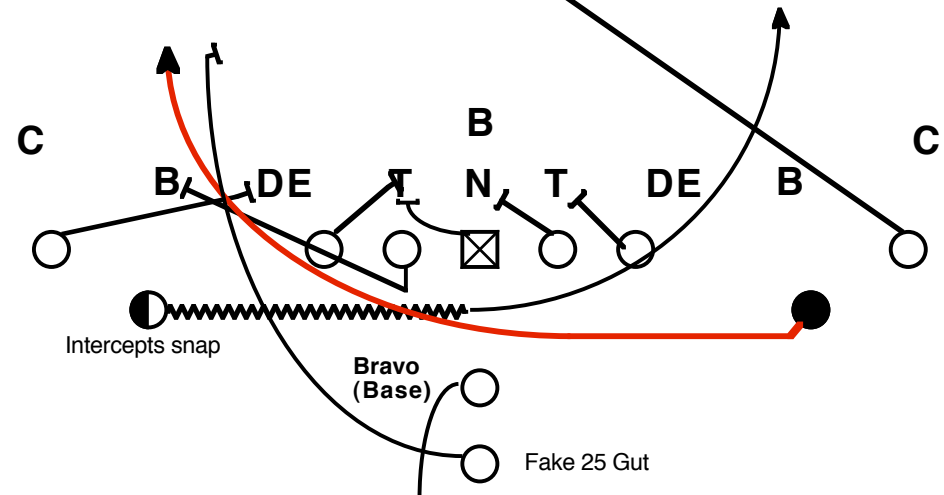
As the name of the series implies, the Fly sweep is taken in part from the Fly offense.

Offensive line blocking is identical to the running back sweeps, however it will take some careful timing of the cadence for the snap to occur at the right time for the slot back to intercept it. The quarterback must be given ample repetitions with each potential slot receiver.

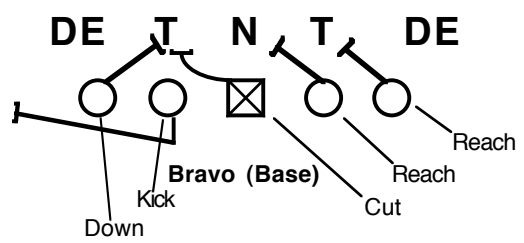
Quarterback and running back footwork is identical to 25 Gut, however the quarterback should wheel around and carefully watch to see if the outside linebacker is capable of covering the slot receiver on Roar 38 Dragon Pass.

The companion play to 38 Fly Sweep is 49 Fly Sweep. (Note: These plays can also be called with motion tags: "Roar 38 Fly Sweep.")

**49 Fly Reverse FS**



**Blocking Schemes**



Same as 29 Sweep

Every offense should have some form of reverse in it, and the 49 Fly Reverse complements the 38 Fly Sweep. The addition of the diving running back provides an extra lead blocker, as well as further misdirection that will confuse undisciplined defenses.

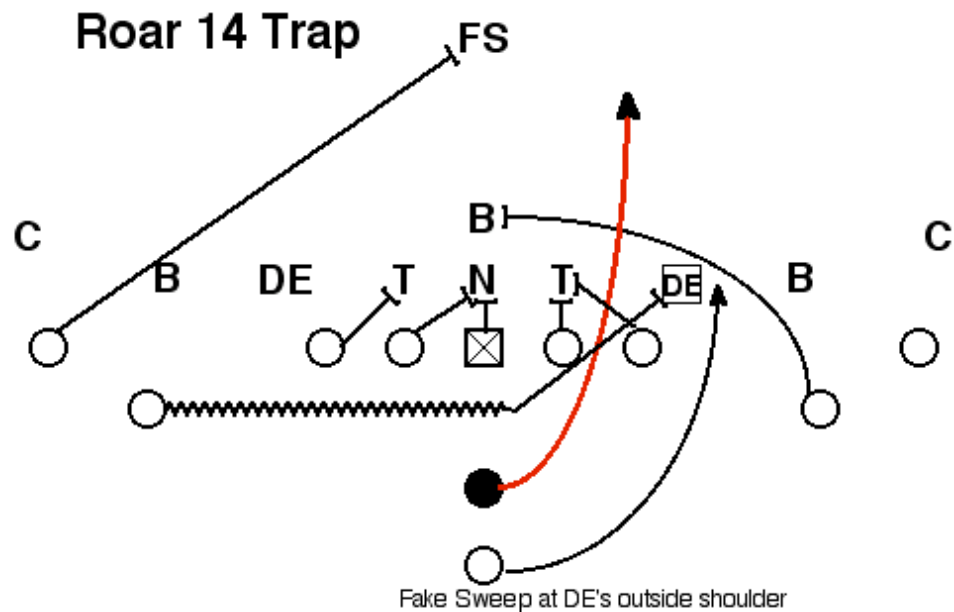
The offensive line blocking is identical to the Fly Sweep. It is generally assumed that the outside linebacker at the point of attack will penetrate, so the split end on the play side must be conditioned to aim past him, for the



defensive end. The playside guard is responsible for pulling and engaging that linebacker and taking him whichever direction he wants to go, and the carrying slot back must read this block; if he sees both numbers on the guard's jersey then it is a kickout, and he should cut up into the hole. If he sees one, then the guard is logging the linebacker, and he should take the play wide. The handoff is an outside handoff, with the receiving player farther upfield from the line of scrimmage.

Footwork and action behind the play is identical to 38 Fly Sweep (i.e.: 25 Gut). The quarterback and running back must provide proper fakes, and the quarterback should also watch to see if the defense covers 38 Fly Sweep Dragon Pass. (The left slot back should be wide open in the flat.)

The companion play to 49 Fly Reverse is 38 Fly Reverse, however, it should be noted that teams are generally better able to run the reverse in one direction, and it may be a good idea to reduce the playbook by practicing this trick play in only one direction.



One of the nice things about the Roar and Load motions is the way they can set up interior defensive linemen for trap blocks. While almost every running play can be altered to allow the quarterback to carry the ball simply by changing the number to "10," plays using the Roar/Load Trap blocking scheme are particularly effective, and allow for a double team scheme similar to the Double Wing. (Like the Double Wing, the secondary blocking scheme is a simple track block from the offensive line, with the motion slot providing the kickout leverage.)

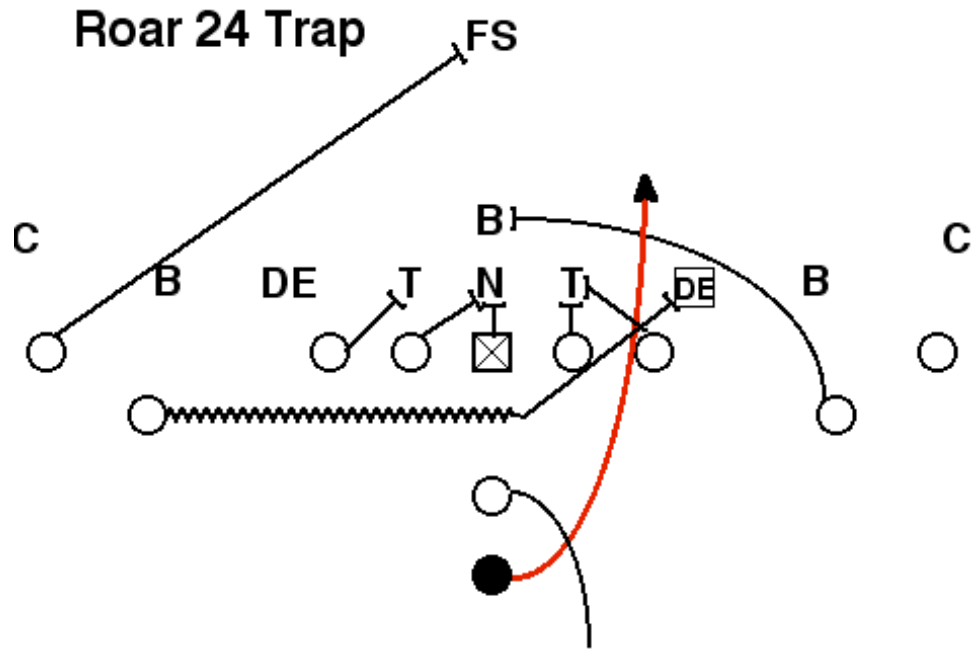
It is extremely important to time this play properly. The ball should be snapped to allow the quarterback enough time to catch it and track in behind the motioning slot, *without* the slot stopping in place. It will require some practice for the quarterback to time the snap properly. With some slots it may be necessary to snap the ball before he crosses the center, and with some it might be necessary to snap the ball afterwards. Only practice on grass will be able to tell for sure.

While the quarterback is attacking the motion slot's hips, the running back should run a tight sweep path as if he were attempting to hit just outside the defensive end. Properly run, and with a correct fake, the defensive end should attack upfield to the running back, allowing the motion slot to kick him out. This path should also draw the outside linebacker to the running back, and keep him out of the interior play.

Of utmost importance is the playside slot's crack block on the middle linebacker. This is another aspect of the play that requires some timing. It can be more effective for the kickout if the slot fakes a crack at the defensive end, gaining his attention for a moment before the motion slot hits him. However, this can also pull the blocker out of position and make it impossible to get to his block on the middle linebacker. Coaches' judgment should be used.

This play is also the start of a preliminary speed or trap option series that is beyond the scope of this playbook.

The companion play to Roar 14 Trap is Load 15 Trap.



Without changing a single aspect of our blocking, we can change the ball carrier to "20" and allow the running back to do what he does best. Backfield footwork for this play is identical to 24 Gut, but as noted above, the motion requires careful timing to get correct, as does the playside slot's crack block on the middle linebacker.

## THE PASSING GAME

The Pistol is a much more pass-intensive offense than is usually recommended for the youth level. Part of this comes from the increased ability to protect the quarterback that is offered by the deep snap, and part comes from the placement of receivers in space where they can force the defense into matchups in favor of the offense.

Two things must be remembered, however. First, this offense, because it relies on the passing game as much as it does, will either score quickly and explosively, or turn over the football (whether on downs or by interception). Second, even the best youth quarterback is not capable of making five reads on every snap. Wherever possible, give your quarterback only one to three reads and teach him to check through those reads swiftly before throwing the ball away. The ball *must* leave his hands within 2.5 seconds of the snap on every play, even if he is throwing it away.

Additionally, most focus is on slot receivers and the running back, so these must be the most sure-handed receivers on the team. Above all, do not throw to a receiver that can't catch, and wherever possible avoid routes over the middle of the field. (A ball thrown over the middle that is not caught generally ends up in the hands of a defender.)

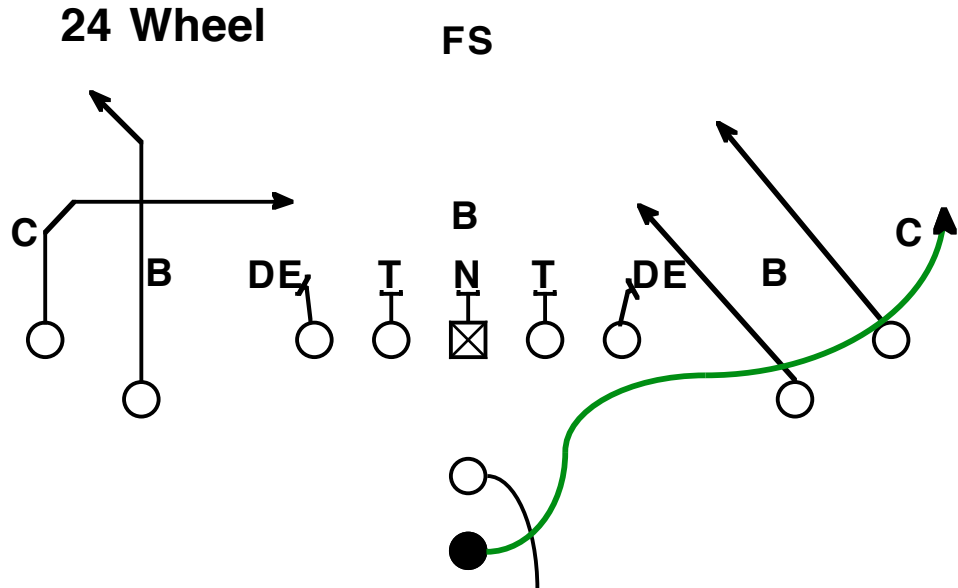
Playcalling is generally devoted to sides: "24 Gut Whip Right, Streaks Left Pass." A "look" call can be used to focus a quarterback on a specific side of the field: "24 Gut Whip Right, Streaks Left Pass, Look Right." This terminology is cumbersome, but leaves less to chance.

This section is organized first into play action passes complementary to specific running plays, and then basic patterns for expansion after that. In most cases, "Gut" and "Dive" actions can be used for almost all of the play action passes, although "Gut" is the only one shown. It is recommended that play action passes be the first passing plays installed and repped, with additional plays being added individually as the season progresses. The ability to coach patterns rather than plays allows for play installation later in the season to be relatively smooth.

The "default pattern" on the backside is a Dig from the outermost man, and a Nod-Corner from the inside man. The purpose of this default pattern is to freeze both the free safety (who should jump the corner route when the receiver makes eye contact and nods to him) and the middle linebacker (who should be pinned in the middle of the field by the Dig's crossing route.) This prevents two of the best athletes on the defense from engaging

in downfield pass coverage. While this side of the pattern *can* be thrown to, it is intended primarily to be a decoy.

In the below diagrams, the primary receiver is designated with a green path, while the secondary receiver is designated blue. Single-receiver patterns like screens will have the ball carrier designated with a black circle as well.



24 Wheel is the most basic pass pattern in the offense, and probably the one with the highest likely completion rate. Initial footwork is identical to 24 Gut, with the running back adding an additional cut on the second step after he cuts into the hole. This second cut should face him perpendicular to the line of scrimmage. He should take two more steps directly at the sideline before “wheeling” upfield and running a streak.

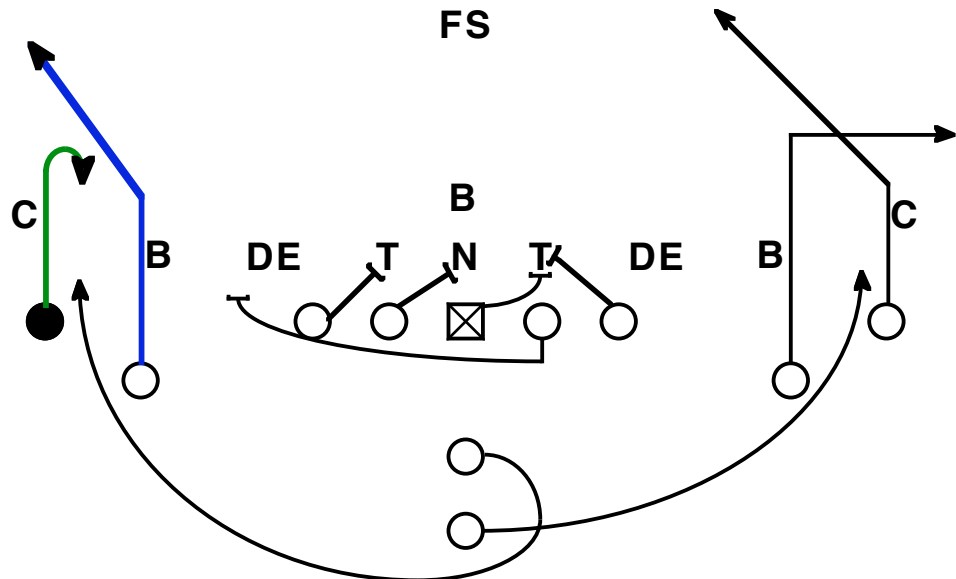
The quarterback’s steps are identical to 24 Gut, but after faking the handoff and dropping back with the ball hidden, he should snap his shoulder hard to the left as if he were looking at the Nod-Corner on the back side, before throwing a high, arcing ball to the running back’s outside shoulder about fifteen to twenty yards downfield.

Because the play is a relatively quick-hitting pass to the offense’s best athlete off of a play action series that the defense should be aggressively

defending, this pass has a very high expected completion percentage with a relatively low risk of turnovers.

The companion play to 24 Wheel is 25 Wheel. The play can also be called "24 Gut Wheel Pass."

## 28 Run and Gun



The 28 Sweep sets up the possibility for an aggressive, athletic quarterback to make the defense pay for overpursuit. The initial footwork is exactly the same as 28 Sweep, but after faking the handoff the quarterback wheels sharply downfield and gains a little depth, which should put him too deep for an aggressive backside defensive end trying to chase down the sweep.

The quarterback should roll out hard and fast, looking to creep towards the line of scrimmage as much as possible, which not only allows for the possibility of a keep, but also forces the defense into a conflict of assignment.

The curl route shown by the split end should not be the end of the route. If the ball is not in the air when the end curls, he should keep his shoulders parallel to the line of scrimmage and his hands up while "sliding" towards

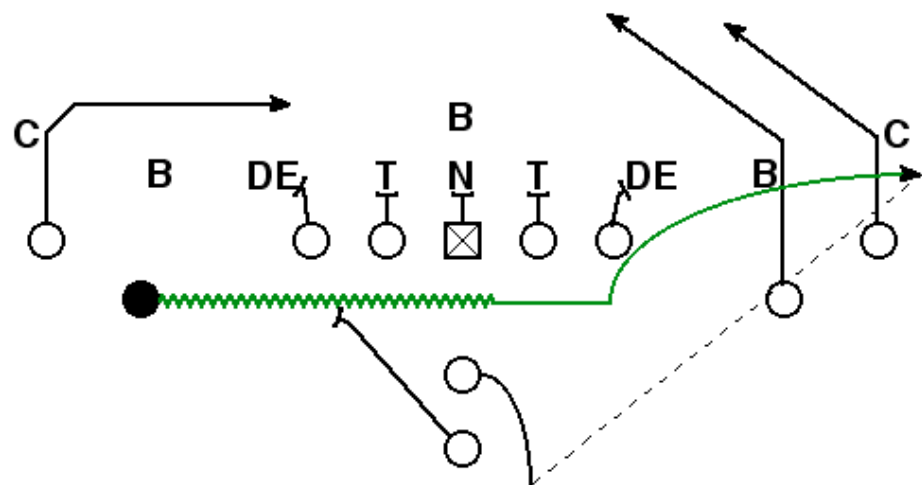
the sideline, giving his quarterback a safety valve in the event that the defensive end chases him down.

While most passes should be thrown within 2.5 seconds of the snap, the fake and roll out action of necessity delay this throw. It should, however, be thrown within five steps of the quarterback's rollout.

The backside guard is responsible for pulling and providing escort to the quarterback, but he should refrain from going downfield without hearing a signal to prevent ineligible receiver penalties.

The companion play to 28 Run and Gun is 29 Run and Gun.

## Roar 38 Dragon Pass<sub>FS</sub>



Note: This is a single-read pass.  
If the slot is not open, throw the ball away immediately!

Complementing the Fly Sweep series is the Dragon Pass. This is a single-receiver pattern designed to take advantage of the defense that does not or cannot cover the motioning slot. His full-speed sprint motion makes it difficult for him to break off his route and go deeper, but it also provides a great angle for the ball to be thrown.

The snap should take place just after the motion slot passes behind the center, and for at least two steps he should cover his stomach and "rock the baby" as if he had the ball before breaking into his pattern.

The quarterback should secure the ball and look directly at the free safety before turning his shoulders, setting his feet, and throwing the ball. If the motion slot is covered, the ball should be thrown over his head and out of bounds.

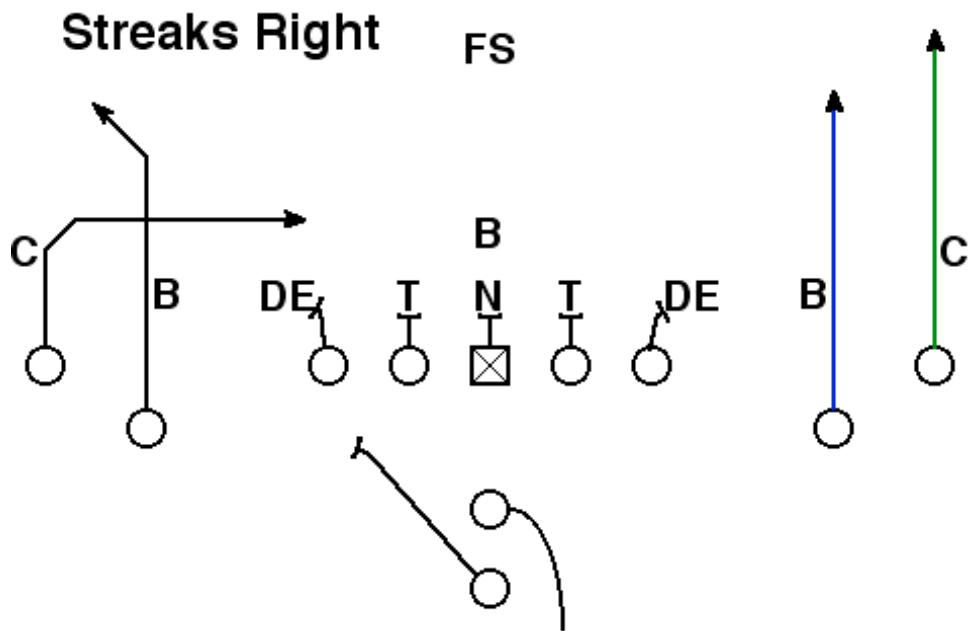
The Dragon Pass can also be used as a complementary play to the Gut series with the call "Roar 24 Gut Dragon Pass."

## Additional Pass Patterns

The following patterns are not specifically designed for play action, although with a certain amount of creativity they could be used as such. They are primarily two-receiver patterns designed to be used in sections to provide versatility to the offense and confusion to the defense.

Remember that motion will affect the location of the receivers, and could cause offensive players to get in each others' way during the patterns. Motion may also change the pass route responsibilities as the receivers cross one another prior to the snap. They will need many, many repetitions in practice to get used to such changes.

Patterns can be used together, such as "Streaks Left, Smash Right."

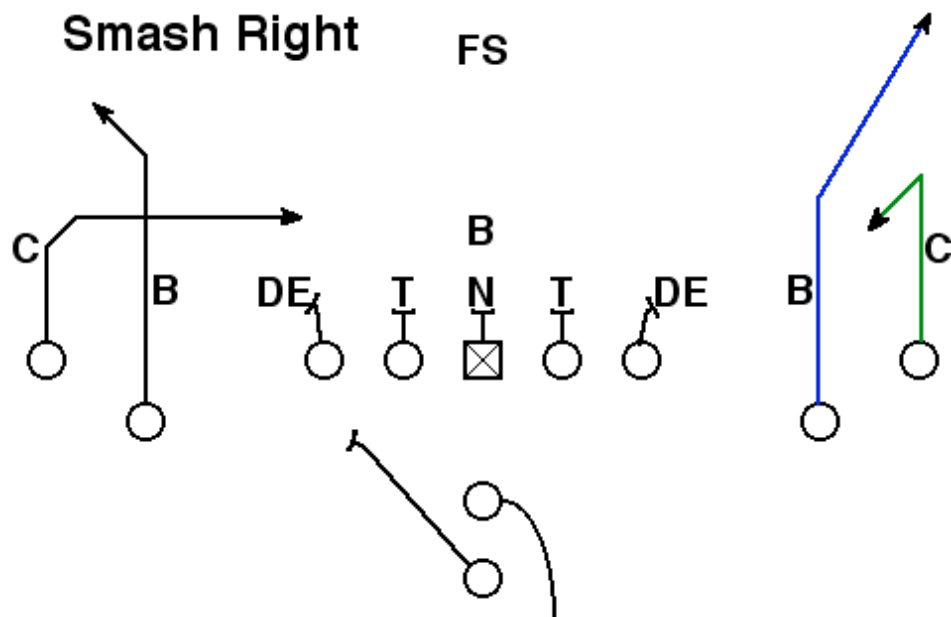


In every offense, some form of vertical stretch play should be used to keep the defense from overplaying the run. Streaks is a pattern designed to take the defensive players deep in one-on-one coverage. Talent mismatches or



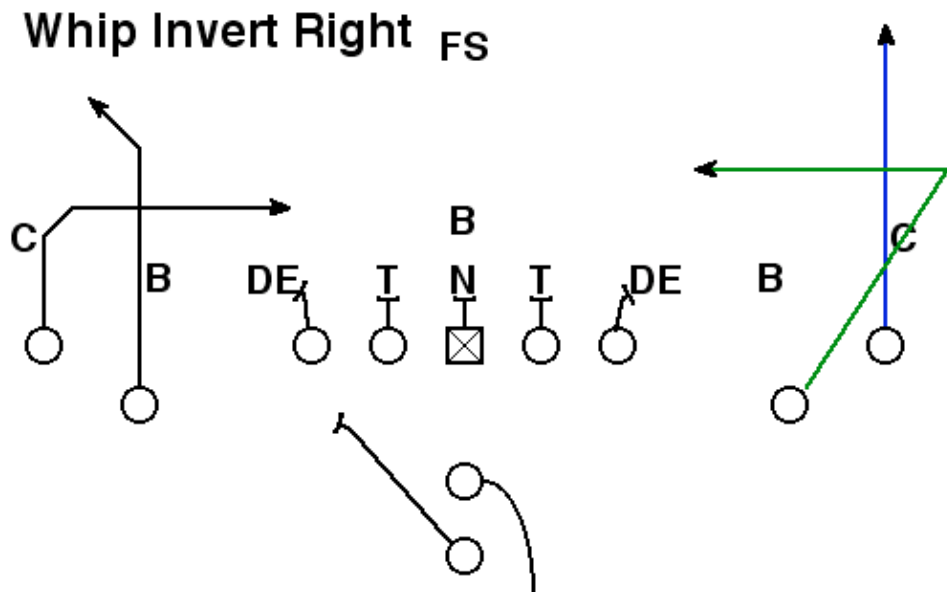
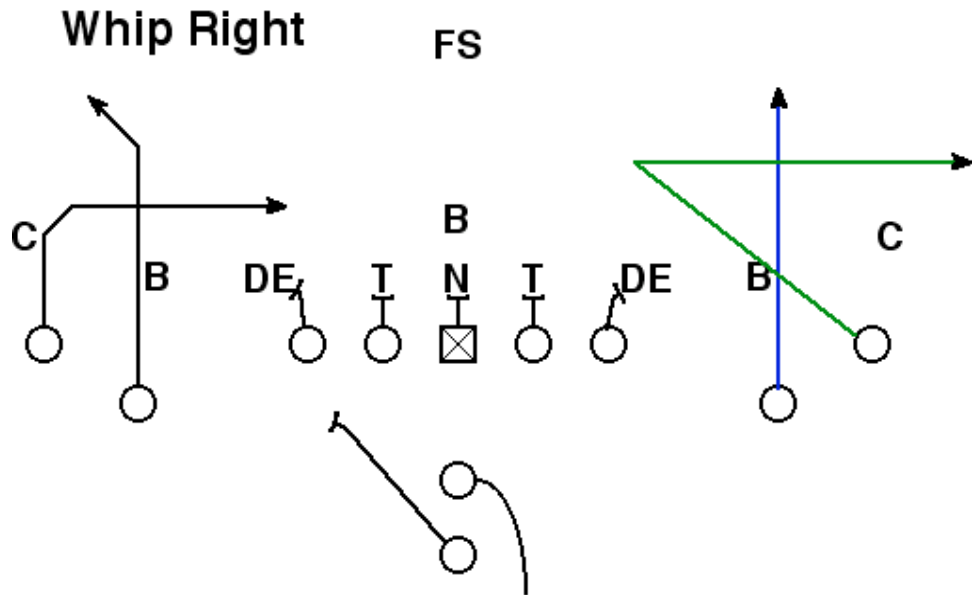
technique mistakes should be immediately apparent after one or two streak routes.

Both inside and outside receivers break deep at the snap. One adjustment that is easy to install is to have one or both receivers "throttle down and chop" after three to five steps before accelerating into the streak again. This provides the illusion that the receiver is about to make a cut, and the defender will invariably drop his weight and come up, allowing the receiver to get behind him.



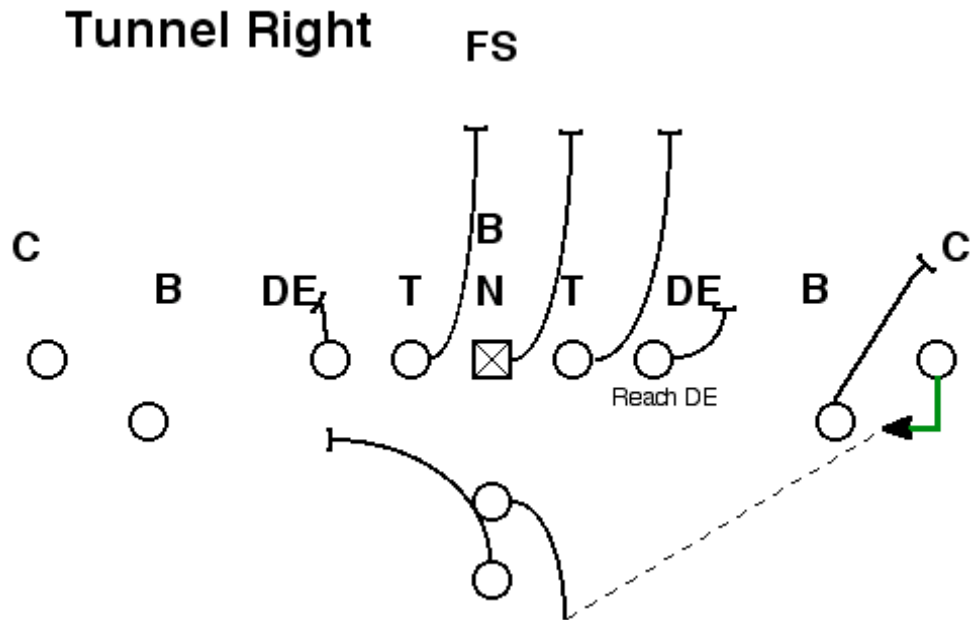
The Smash pattern is one of the most effective patterns in football, especially when facing zone defenses. The curl underneath forces the outside linebacker to come up and defend the short throw, while the deep fade or corner route draws the cornerback and safety downfield.

Generally the quarterback should first look for the short route, and take it if the outside linebacker is not in coverage. If the outside receiver is covered, the quarterback should immediately throw a high, arcing ball to the inside receiver's outermost shoulder on the fade route. The ball should come down about twenty to thirty yards downfield and within one yard of the sideline. This should *not* be a jump ball, but should be caught in stride.



The Whip and Whip Invert patterns are especially useful against man-to-man defenses and coverages that try to roll up on one side. In the Whip, the inside man runs a streak and provides vertical stretch, while the outside man runs a sharp, inward breaking route aiming for the outside shoulder of any man in coverage on the #2 receiver. After approximately five steps, (or the third time the receiver's inside foot touches down) he should break off his route, reverse direction, and cut flat to the line of scrimmage. In the Whip Invert, these responsibilities are reversed, and the





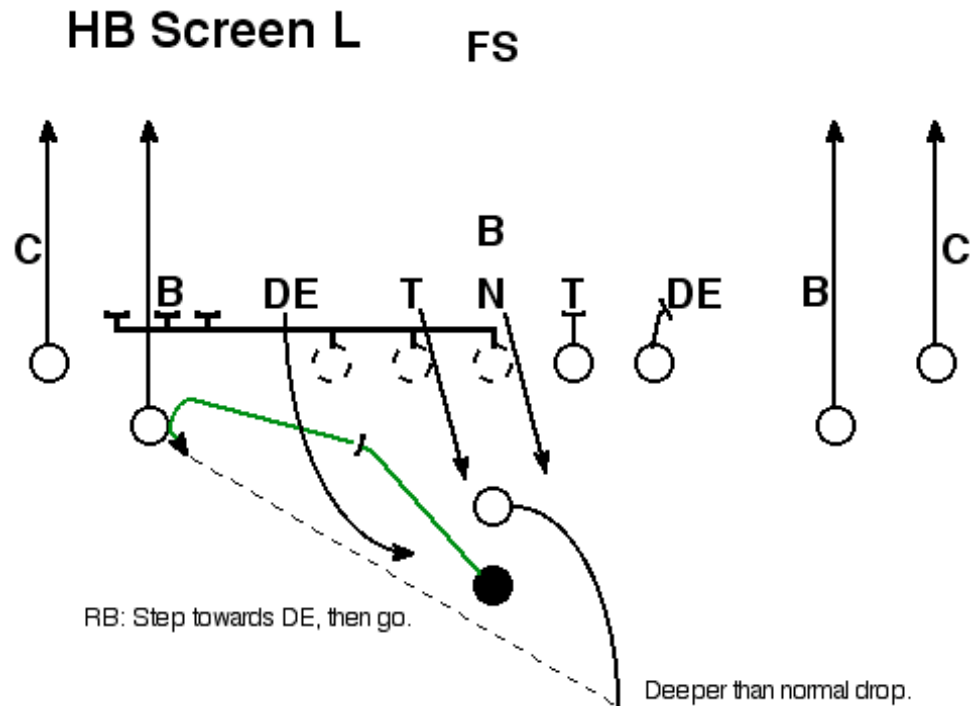
The Bubble and Tunnel screens are a set of complementary screen plays designed to attack defenses that give your receivers too much of a cushion.

In the Bubble screen, the inside receiver is the target, while the outside receiver cracks down on the #2 defender in coverage. The intended receiver should make one sharp step with his outside foot (“squash the bug”) and then pivot his hips back to the inside and be ready for the ball immediately.

Note that this pass is completed behind the line of scrimmage, which means that offensive linemen are not restricted from moving downfield immediately at the snap. Both guards and the center do *NOT* engage any defenders head up on them, but go immediately to second and third level, “climbing” across the playside shoulder of any defenders in their path (as drawn).

Similar to the Whip Invert, the Tunnel Screen is a mirror of the routes run in the Bubble pattern. In the Tunnel Screen the inside receiver blocks outward on the defender covering the outermost receiver, creating a “tunnel” inside the block. All other responsibilities for the play are identical to the Bubble Screen.

It is important for the coach to understand that passes thrown to the flats have a generally high completion percentage, *but* they are also those routes that, when intercepted, have the greatest risk of a defensive return for touchdown. Reading the defensive coverage properly is key on these plays, as a defender who jumps the route can put you in a significant hole.



In cases where the defense is playing aggressively in the interior line, and the coverage on the perimeter is too tight to risk the Bubble or Tunnel Screens, the Halfback Screen is a great way to get the ball into the hands of your best athlete in open space.

At the snap, the quarterback immediately crosses over and drops as swiftly as he can to a depth of eight to twelve yards. This deeper than normal drop should protect him from the pass rush long enough to get the ball off, while also drawing the defensive linemen away from the running back.

The playside tackle, guard, and the center “slap and push” any defenders on them or outside them and move laterally, placing themselves with shoulders parallel to the line of scrimmage and approximately one yard across it. (Because the pass is completed behind the line of scrimmage, they can go downfield immediately.)

The running back steps up on the quarterback’s blind side and makes a movement towards the pass rushing defensive end without engaging him. Then he takes three to five sharp steps along the line of scrimmage and sets up approximately one to three yards behind it and directly upfield from the center’s position. He should turn and present the quarterback a

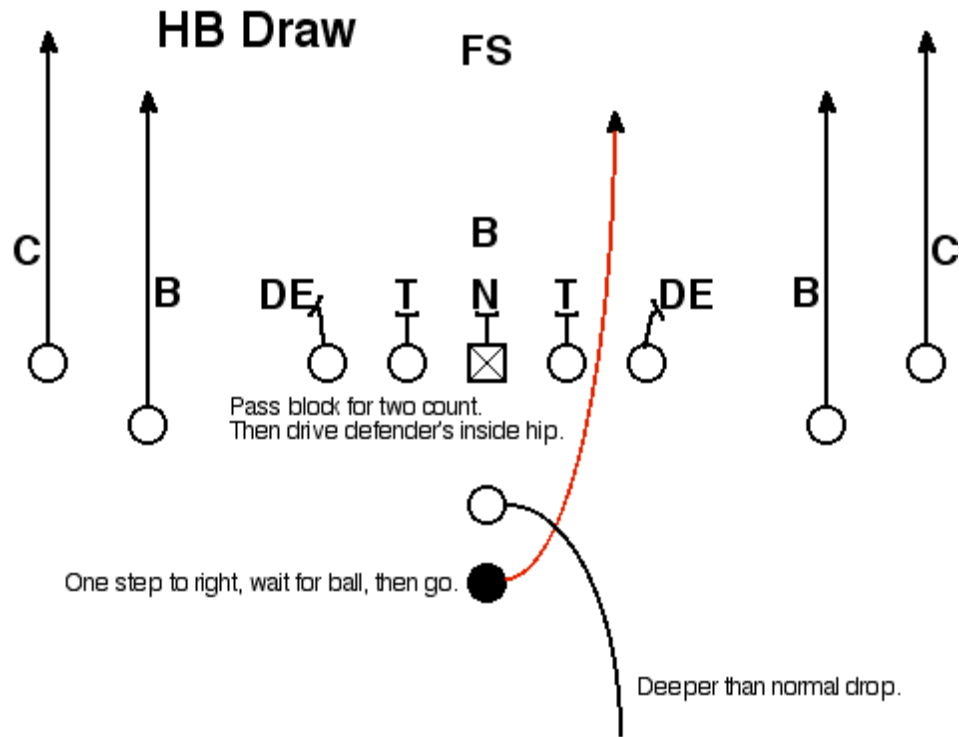
good target: weight on the balls of his feet, hands up, and in a good football position. Remember that the quarterback will be under pressure, and the running back must be able to respond to an errant throw. After he makes the catch, the running back must give a "Go!" signal to his blockers.

In many cases, especially at the youth level, offensive linemen are not certain who to block on screen plays. This problem can be solved in three simple ways:

- 1) Designate numbers (i.e.: The center takes the first man to threaten. The guard takes the second, and the tackle takes the third.)
- 2) Designate defenders (i.e.: The center is assigned to the defensive end. The guard takes the outside linebacker, and the tackle takes the corner.)
- 3) Wedge block (i.e.: The center and tackle converge on the guard and push him downfield with their shoulders in the small of his back. The running back settles into the wedge and moves downfield. Such blocking is legal provided the offensive linemen do not grasp or encircle one another, and only as long as no offensive player pushes the ball carrier.)

Any of these methods will work, but they must be coached and practiced repeatedly.

Additionally, train your receivers that passes thrown *behind* the line of scrimmage should not be caught with diving leaps—the ball is down upon contact with the ground and such an action could cost you several yards. Furthermore, passes thrown even close to parallel to the line of scrimmage may be ruled as fumbles if they are not caught, so treat the ball as if it were live!



The Draw is included here because it complements the passing game significantly and reduces pressure on the quarterback.

In the draw, the quarterback catches the snap and crossover steps back into his pass drop as normal. The running back takes a sharp jab step to the right and settles low on his hips, making a handoff pocket. As the quarterback drops past the running back, he slips the ball into the handoff pocket, and the running back accelerates upfield. The running back *must* wait for the ball to be delivered to him—this is not a dive or gut play. The running back must also be trained to attack the middle of the field, not to attempt the perimeter, which will slow him down and allow the defense time to adjust.

The offensive linemen should pass block as normal for a count of three and then place their heads on the defender's inside shoulder and drive him outside. (Note that the play is drawn with the running back going to the "4" hole. In execution, the running back has to use his vision and find his own seam between the defenders.

In practice, a "count of three" usually turns into "Onetwo**THREE!**," or a two-count. This is generally enough time to set the draw, but it may be necessary to try different lengths of time until you find one that works.

Receivers run streaks or outward breaking routes in order to pull the secondary deeper and away from the middle of the field where the ball carrier will be attacking.

The quarterback must be carefully coached. His eyes, hands, and footwork must look *identical* to a passing play. Some coaches teach the quarterback to step back and hold the ball high in the air so the defense can see it before handing off. Since this is *not* the action the quarterback makes on a real pass play, it's more of a tipoff to the defense than anything else.

If the running back makes the proper steps and the quarterback drops correctly, there should be no need for the quarterback to even look at the running back before or during the handoff. He should crossover step, take a normal drop step, and stick the ball out while taking his second crossover step and looking downfield. He should be coached to look at specific defenders as if he were trying to find an open man, and he should pick a different member of the secondary each time.

Draws are simple plays in concept, but are somewhat more difficult to execute. The function of a draw is to pull or "draw" the pass rush to the quarterback, sneaking the ball to the running back. When correctly run, the defensive linemen should be so intent on the quarterback that they either miss the handoff completely, or they are moving too quickly in the wrong direction and rush right past the running back.

The linebackers should also drop off into pass coverage, which means that the best tacklers of the defensive unit are out of position to defend this running play.

Draws work best against zone defenses and man-to-man defenses that play aggressively and blitz a great deal. Especially in situations where the defensive backs cover extremely well and the pressure comes mostly from rushing defensive linemen (especially defensive ends) the draw has the potential to become a big play in the offense.



## Final Thoughts

The Pistol offense has a great deal to offer the youth level of football. Its explosive passing attack and the ability to spread the field and force the defense to defend each portion can cause mismatches in alignment and in assignment, both. With a passing scheme of patterns designed to locate and exploit these mismatches, and with a running system that keeps the pressure up front, the offense can be very effective.

This playbook is not designed to cover every possible aspect of the system. A quick glance at the concepts integral to the Single Wing, Bunch passing game, Double Wing, and Wing-T, can provide numerous insights into new formations, plays, and series that can be added to the system. Trips and Quads looks, empty backfields, and other offensive formations that put receivers in space can also be added.

It is important to realize that, especially in youth football, less usually is more. A few plays, executed perfectly, will do far more than many plays executed in haphazard manner.

If I were to coach this offense, I would begin by breaking down the individual responsibilities on each play. After a core series of fundamentals work, where offensive linemen would work on run blocking, the quarterbacks and running backs would work on their basic footwork, and the receivers would work on the individual routes that comprise each pattern, I would install the plays piecemeal, approximately in the same order as they are listed in this playbook, working on one to three running plays and two to three passing plays per day. Remember that the individual skills: route running, run and pass blocking, motioning, etc, must be repped a considerable number of times before they can be put together into a coherent play.

Pay particular attention to motion. It may be useful to construct a play sheet listing the types of motion that can be used with each play. This will make certain that the coach doesn't motion the only potential ball carrier to the other side of the field accidentally!

If you decide to use this playbook as the foundation of your offense, I would be grateful if you would drop me a line at [Coach\\_Wade@Hotmail.com](mailto:Coach_Wade@Hotmail.com) and let me know how it works for you. Any insights you might offer into making it better would also be appreciated.

Thanks for coaching the greatest sport on earth!

~D.