

Adding Another Dimension to the Down Play
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The down play is a great staple in the wing-t. I had made a living off of it at my old school, but I moved to a new school with a head coach that has a spread mentality. Making the wing-t look like the spread is not so hard. With all the multiple formations you can use, and the innovations of coaches like Lew Johnston and Greg Wallace adding shot-gun to the package, we can hide the wing-t within the spread.

Since I had to run the offense out of a spread set, I began to examine Red formation (Figure 1). Red formation has many advantages, including: 1) adding an extra gap for defenses to defend; 2) adding an extra player in close proximity to the line to provide a fourth deep threat; 3) because of the proximity of the backs, it provides a heavy running set. Because of the paradox

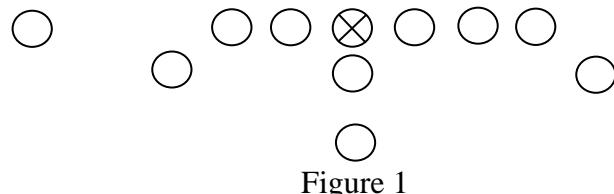


Figure 1

of the formation, between it being a four receiver threat and a heavy running formation, this provided a basis for which to start running our version of the spread wing. We spread the slot back into more of a twins receiver alignment and put the QB in the shotgun. The base of our attack was going to come out of this modified Red formation (Figure 2), which we called Raven.

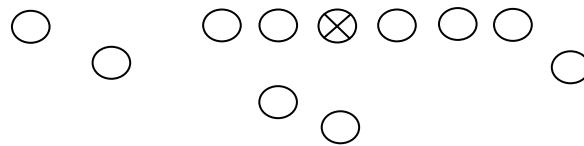


Figure 2

Because the right side of the formation is identical to Red formation or traditional wing right formation, the blocking scheme will remain unchanged. The down series varies only slightly among the down (Figure 3), down option (Figure 4), and down sweep (Figure 5). In fact, because a defense often does not react the way you expect them every time, one blocking

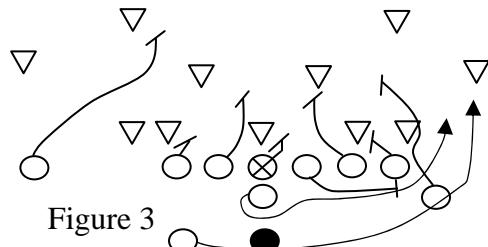


Figure 3

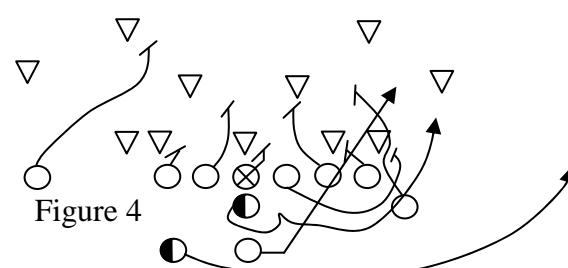


Figure 4

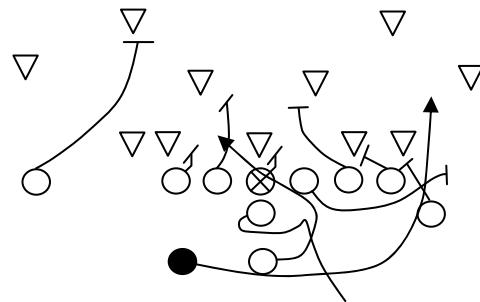


Figure 5

scheme will carry over in the other plays in the series. For example, the PSG in down is asked to pull and kick out. In down option, the PSG is asked to pull and log. But when our PSG wants to make that kick out block on down and the DE squeezes hard and is right there in the TE's hip pocket, that kick out ends up becoming a log (Figure 6). The FB, being the athlete that he is, reads the block and breaks it outside. Nine times out of ten, when the FB takes the down play outside, this is how it happens.

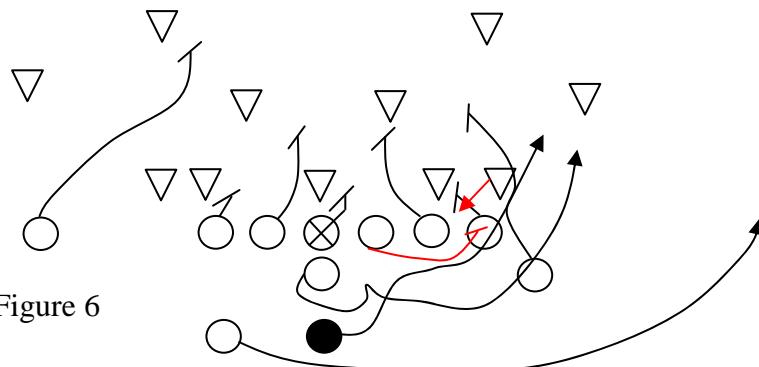


Figure 6

There are several things about Raven formation that we were going to modify in order to run down. First, with the LHB aligned anywhere from 5-8 yards from the LT, motion was going to take too long. Bringing him to formation would also defeat the purpose of spreading out the defense. The QB was going to assume the LHB's role. Also, reverse pivoting and handing off was also going to make the play long developing. We chose the shovel pass to be our method of delivering the ball to the FB (Figure 7).

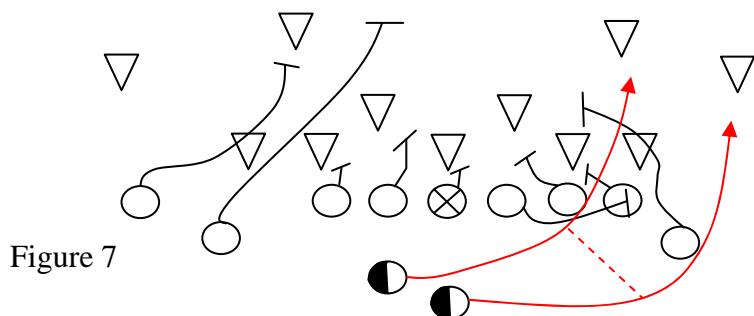


Figure 7

The QB's path is going to be different from the traditional path, partially because of the secondary role he is assuming. After receiving the snap, the QB will open pivot 90 degrees with his shoulders turning the same way. He will run laterally with his eyes on the DE. If the DE comes charging hard, he plants his outside foot and shovels the ball to the FB (Figure 8). Should the DE squeeze and not charge up field, the QB will keep the ball and now look the force defender (Figure 9). The QB will break it outside and get as many yards as he can get.

The FB's technique will also vary. After the snap the FB will open step with his play side foot, cross over with the backside foot, turn his shoulders 90 degrees and plant on the third step and aim off the PST's outside. He will turn his shoulders back another 45 degrees and look at the QB with thumbs out, pinkies together at his gut to give the QB a target.

The PSG assignment is pull and kick out the DE. However, like I mentioned before, if the DE is squeezing, then pull and log.

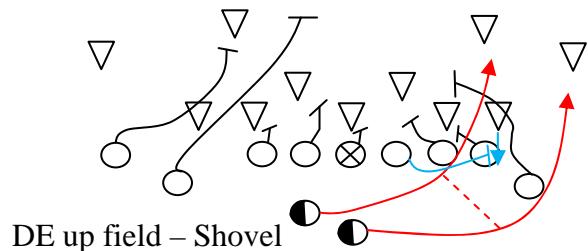


Figure 8

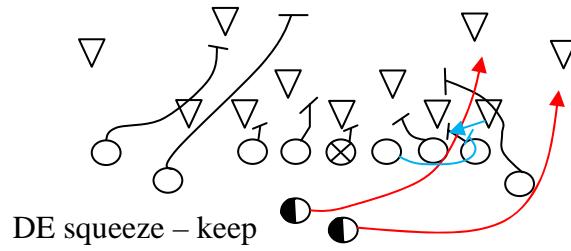


Figure 9

There were times we needed the FB to align in a strong position (Figure 10). We called this Strong Raven. We did not like shoveling out of this set, so we had the FB and QB switch assignments. We called this "down switch." In down switch, we felt the FB's action would help

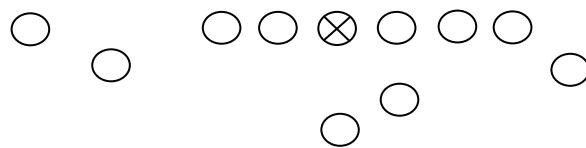


Figure 10

widen the off-tackle hole. We also felt it would break a tendency of the FB always running across the formation.

In down switch, we asked the FB to pull step and get some depth. Then, he would take an option path to the perimeter. The QB would take a lateral step with his play side foot, pointing it to the PST's outside leg. He would then read the DE. If the DE comes up field or chases the FB, the QB will tuck the ball away and run off tackle (Figure 11). If the DE squeezes the hole, the QB will plant his inside foot, pitch the ball to the FB and lean backward (Figure 12).

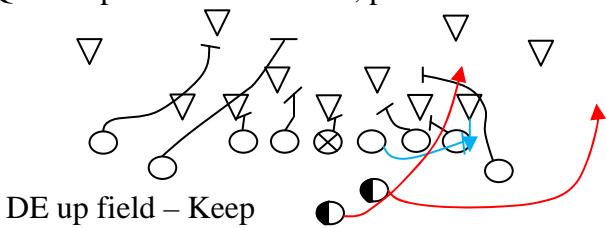


Figure 11

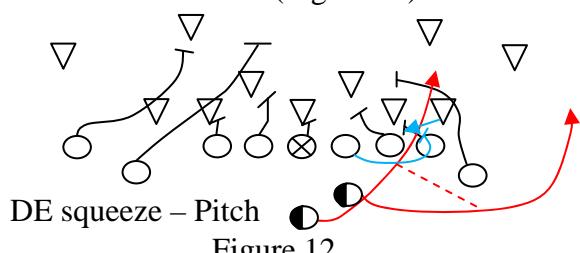
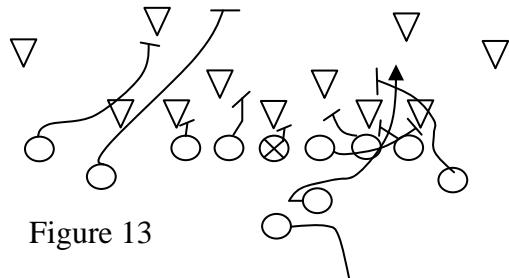


Figure 12

We also handed the ball off directly to the FB, if for whatever reason, we were not comfortable with a shovel pass or pitch (Figure 13). In this variation, the QB has to execute an excellent fake. We all know one good fake is worth two good blocks. If the QB didn't give us a good fake, it lost its effectiveness. The QB receives the snap, takes 90 degree flat step, puts the ball in the FB's gut, turns his back to the defense and fakes play action. The FB took a lateral step to the QB with his inside foot and received the handoff. As he is receiving the hand off, he lifted his outside foot, stepped at a 45 degree angle and headed for the PST's outside foot.



One of the things I liked most about this play was the misconception opponents would have on our offense. Whenever we shoveled the ball, those yards were passing yards. If our FB dropped the ball, it was an incomplete pass and not a fumble. The shovel pass is the best of both worlds. I can run my beloved down play, and yet, “pass” the ball out of our spread offense.

If you have any questions or comments, I welcome you to e-mail me at

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