

The Monstrous Madden Playbook
Offense Volume I

Matt Heinzen

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Visit my Madden NFL Playbook web sites at **monsterden.net/madden2003/** and **monsterden.net/madden2004/** and my forums at **monsterden.net/maddentalk/**.

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Chapter 1

Introducing the Monstrous Madden Playbook

This book contains many of my most effective offensive formations and plays. Readers familiar with my web site will recognize these formations as the ones from my Monstrous Madden 2003 Playbook online. Don't let this put you off, now that Madden NFL 2003 is old news and Madden NFL 2004 is the latest edition in the series (at the time of this book's release). Football is football, and in simulations as realistic as the latest releases of Madden any play that works in one version will probably be pretty good in other versions. Of course the gameplay mechanics *are* tweaked with each season's release, so there are differences. For this reason every play has been re-analyzed for Madden 2004, with changes made as necessary to get the best possible performance.

Offensive Philosophy

This offensive playbook features a radical, attacking style intended to create confusion and matchup problems for the opposing defense. Passing plays in particular feature multiple receivers instead of strong protection, seeking to overwhelm the defensive backfield.

It is not intended for bombing away with deep passes; try this and a savvy defensive coordinator will maul your quarterback with blitzes. Rather, most passing plays are designed with sequences of quick read progressions with the intent of hitting the first open receiver for quick 5–15 yard completions, with the possibility to break short catches into big plays. In a sense, this offense is the West Coast

passing game taken to the extreme.

Effective running plays are also included, though fewer in number, and only from a few formations. This may make running less effective against human opponents who may be able to predict and disrupt particular running plays better than the CPU, although the new Playmaker feature in Madden NFL 2004 gives players a lot of flexibility without the need for a large number of plays. The running plays that *are* included are mostly run from tighter formations (mainly [Diamond Wing](#), [Strong T](#) and [Crossbow](#)) than most of the passing plays. The running plays from the bigger formations feature a good mix of direct power and sophisticated trap blocking schemes, while runs from the lighter, more pass-oriented formations tend to use quicker handoffs straight up the middle to catch defenses by surprise.

Many of the formations are passing only (although quarterback sneaks, draws and scrambles are always possible from any formation), some because they do not have a running back in the backfield at all, but most because the Madden playbook editor does not allow running plays to be created with the quarterback in a shotgun position, regardless of the location of the running back(s).

Though upcoming editions of the Monstrous Madden Playbook feature greater balance, in this playbook speed is generally favored over power. Tight ends and fullbacks play fairly small roles, while three and four receiver sets, as well as two halfback sets are common. A blazing fast receiving core is always nice, but good hands may be more important because this offense is designed to move methodically down the field using short, reliable gains. You want a quarterback that is at least decent (of course, who doesn't?), but excellence is not required for success because the emphasis is on creating openings through sophisticated route combinations to allow for easy throws. Good accuracy, smart decision making and the ability to quickly scan and assess a defense trumps a cannon arm here. The most important position may be the halfback. Speed and good hands are essential here because the halfback is asked to catch as much as run. Blocking ability is not quite so important because I favor having an outlet pass to draw linebacker or slot cornerback coverage rather than have the back sit in the pocket and block in most plays.

Finally, this playbook requires *practice*. Against humans you can actually do a decent job just picking up the playbook and using it, as long as your opponent uses a traditional Nickel or Dime package to counter the multiple wide receiver sets. You'll get time to throw and receivers will always get open later if not sooner. However, once your opponent starts bringing heavy blitzes your offense may grind to a halt, resulting in sacks and interceptions, unless you know how to make safe reads and quick throws to counter the blitz. This requires practice, learning which

routes get open the most and what the proper progressions are. Most of these details are described for each play, but practice is the only way to prepare for game speed.

Creating New Formations

Before we get down to making plays we first have to create the formations the plays are run out of. Even if the only custom plays you put in your playbook are the ones from this book you will want to read this section carefully because there's a bit more to making effective formations than meets the eye.

Each formation has its own chapter with a diagram showing my preferred layout for the formation in the first couple of pages. Each offensive formation in Madden is placed on a grid 21 units wide by 6 units tall. The allowed formations are restricted by normal football rules, meaning seven players on the line of scrimmage at all times. In addition, the Madden playbook editor fixes all offensive line positions, both in grid location and in which players can be placed in which locations. It also requires that the quarterback be in a location in the same column as the center at any depth, though no other players are allowed between the center and quarterback.

The following symbols are used in the formation layout diagrams:

- LT:** Left Tackle
- LG:** Left Guard
- C:** Center
- RG:** Right Guard
- RT:** Right Tackle
- QB:** Quarterback
- RB or RB1:** Running Back (Halfback) #1
- RB2:** Running Back (Halfback) #2
- FB:** Fullback
- T1:** Tight End #1
- T2:** Tight End #2
- W1:** Wide Receiver #1
- W2:** Wide Receiver #2
- W3:** Wide Receiver #3
- W4:** Wide Receiver #4

One thing you may notice from the list is that I use RB for running back instead of HB for halfback. This is the only real difference between the way I describe things and the way they are in the Madden games, and is simply my style of speaking and writing. Just remember that when I'm talking about a specific position and I say running back I mean halfback rather than fullback. In addition I do not use a second fullback, third tight end or fifth wide receiver in any of the formations in this playbook, so symbols for these positions are not present.

A few other things to watch out for are the terms split end (abbreviated SE) and flanker. For those readers not acquainted with these terms a split end is a wide receiver on the line of scrimmage and a flanker is wide receiver off of the line of scrimmage. Only flankers can go into motion directly, though a split end may be sent into motion by stepping off of the line and having another player, such as a flanker, step up onto the line of scrimmage. Neither of these terms are part of the Madden Create-a-Playbook feature, but simple allow more expressiveness in describing formations and plays and are used frequently in this book.

The actual process of creating a good formation in Madden 2003 or 2004 is actually fairly involved. While it is possible to simply select the "Create Formation" menu item and modify the default Singleback-3WR set to your liking, this is not a good way to do it. The problem is that new formations by themselves do not contain information about how each player can go into motion. While I don't use motion very much in passing plays it is very important to a successful running attack, especially when the actual number of available running plays are limited. Motion information is actually embedded into each of the plays built in to Madden, and while we cannot manipulate the motion characteristics of our plays directly we *can* use these built-in motions to our advantage in creating new formations. The process I use and recommend for creating new offensive formations goes like this:

- 1. Find a typical play in any built-in formation that closely matches the one you want to create and add the play to your custom playbook.** This is done through the "Add Plays" menu option. For custom formations that will have a significant number of running plays it's best to choose a running play for the player who will carry the ball most often, i.e. the halfback.

- 2. Adjust the formation by moving players into the desired grid locations.** To do this go to the "Create Formation" menu option and select the existing formation of the added play. At this point don't worry about the actual position assignments. The motion characteristics of a play are bound to the player icon, not the position

assigned. For example, if WR1 is playing right split end and WR2 is playing left split end in the original formation, and you switch the assignments without moving the icons, the motion will look exactly the same when the play is run. Because you picked a formation that already resembles the one you want you don't want to move players around a lot (and especially across to the opposite side of the formation), possibly screwing up their motions.

3. Modify the player position assignments. Now that everyone is in the correct locations you can assign the actual positions you want. If you need to actually swap assignments (like in the above example of switching the #1 and #2 receivers) set the first player to an unused position such as WR5 or TE3, set the second player to the position just released by the first, and finally set the first player to the original position of the second player.

Even with this method I believe that if the original formation is not chosen well it may be possible to modify the formation so that unexpected motions are used. One possibility is if a tight end and flanker are on the right side in the original formation and the custom formation moves the flanker to the left. In the original formation if the tight end is put in motion he will step off of the line and the flanker will step up, keeping the formation legal. In the modified formation if the same tight end is motioned the flanker will still step up on the line of scrimmage, but after running to his original position on the far side of the formation to ensure that the tackles on both sides are "covered" with an eligible receiver. Chances are this is not what you want to happen.

Incidentally, these same rules for making flexible offensive formations apply almost identically to defensive formations. Although this particular book does not deal with defensive formations or plays, it's something I've been asked about often enough that I thought it would be worthwhile to mention briefly. Instead of motion abilities, defensive formations inherit the defensive line and linebacker shifts and the defensive backfield coverage audibles of their original formation. Defensive formations created from scratch do not have these capabilities, making them much more handicapped than offensive formations without motion. Fortunately, defensive audibles seem to only be specific to formations and not individual plays, and so picking a good base defensive formation for your own custom formation is much easier.

Creating New Plays

Once we have our formation we can get down to making plays. The method for making successful plays is in general much simpler than making custom formation. You simply set the position assignments to what you want and voila, you have a play. About the only special consideration necessary is in assigning the orange primary/Playmaker route for passing plays. The orange route is automatically given to the last receiving route assigned. If you enter a play's routes in the wrong order simply switch the desired orange route player to a block, then reset the correct route to give this receiver the orange route.

In editions of Madden NFL pre-2004 the orange route was simply the primary target to look for, and the target that CPU players would try to throw to most frequently. In Madden 2004 the orange route is usually also the Playmaker route. When you look at a play before the snap the Playmaker route is designated by the throbbing icon for the Playmaker compared to the regular icons for other receivers. Only wideouts and tight ends can have the Playmaker route, so if say a running back has the orange route the Playmaker will be assigned to one of the other receivers by the system. For this reason I always set the orange route to a wide receiver or tight end so that the choice is up to me. Just remember that this means that the orange route does not necessarily indicate the primary target in any passing play.

Specialty Plays

While standard pocket passing plays and direct pitch or handoff running plays are easy to make, more sophisticated plays like play action passes, end arounds and reverses, and halfback passes are a bit tricky and require a lot of planning ahead with your playbook because the Create-a-Playbook feature does not allow these sorts of actions to be put into plays manually. While all of the plays in this playbook are of the garden variety (in terms of setup, most of the plays themselves are not really ordinary at all) I've been asked several times how to create these specialty type plays, so I'll explain the process right here.

The key is the same as for adding player motions to a formation. Rather than creating completely new plays from a blank slate, existing plays of the desired specialty must be selected and added to you playbook ahead of time. Because existing plays cannot be added to original or modified formations you always have to create or use a new formation every time you add one or more specialty

plays. The only exception to this is if you previously added a built-in play from a particular formation, *did not ever modify or rename the formation in your custom playbook*, and then add another play from the same formation at a later time.

The fact that multiple specialty plays can be added from the same formation is the key to creating new formations with more than one specialty play. As long as you plan ahead you can add as many specialty plays from a formation as you want, and even if you don't have ideas for modifying them right away you can just keep them in your playbook for modifications at a later time. This is not trivial though, because the more unusual plays you want to have in a single formation the more limited your choice of built-in formations to start from becomes. Combine this with the task of selecting a built-in formation that closely matches the specifications for your intended formation and there may be some difficult choices to make. Not to mention the fact that you'll probably *never* find a single formation with two play action passes, a reverse, a draw play and a fullback pass, if you wanted to create such a set of plays in one formation for yourself.

Using This Book Effectively

I've had quite a few people who have visited my web site e-mail me requesting the rest of my playbook. I've always declined, in large part because until the writing of this book I've never had many more of the plays transcribed into any electronic format on my PC than what I had fully written up and presented on my wweb site Another reason why I've declined, and why I probably would have declined even if I had an entire playbook prepared in a compact format, is that I don't think players would be getting the most out of each play's potential if I simply handed over a stack of play diagrams. Although I do have some simple and straightforward plays in my playbooks, many of my plays are quite sophisticated and will only live up to their maximum potential through deep understanding of their strengths and weaknesses, as well as lots of reps on the practice field.

That's why my wweb site has the form that it does. It would be a lot less work for me to simply churn out play after play consisting simply of a diagram and set of player assignments, but how could my plays be told apart from plays created by any old schmoe? I'm sure that there are a lot of people who check my web site every few days and simply click the links to the latest plays posted, but I bet most readers take the time to actually read my descriptions, look over the strengths and weakness I point out for each play, and make a mental run through of the read progressions to envision how the play might fit their own style and the situations

they might want to deal with. Chances are that you're this type of player if your reading this section and haven't already skipped on to Chapter 2.

Nevertheless, I must admit that for non-PC Madden players my wweb site and this book (which you are most likely reading in electronic format on your PC) are probably not the most convenient types of media for getting plays into a game console. I know that in the writing of this book I spent a great deal of time running back and forth between my Nintendo Gamecube in my living room and my computer in my home office to type in notes, and that all of my plays were first transcribed with paper and pencil before a keyboard ever entered the mix. For this reason an appendix has been added near the back of this book containing a [quick reference chart](#) of the minimal amount of information needed to enter every formation and play into your game console of choice on just a few pages for easy and economical printing. Just remember that these play specifications are just the foundations of Madden success, the real power is in the deep knowledge of each play built atop these foundations.

Abbreviations

Just a few more quick items and you'll be all ready to start learning my formations and plays.

I use a lot of abbreviations to make my writing more concise. This book deals with the X's and O's part of football strategy, and I think that we humans are at our best processing this type of information in easily recognizable symbolic forms. On offense my most typical abbreviations (besides those listed above for official use in formation diagrams and player assignment lists) include O-line for offensive line, SE and SEs for split end and split ends, respectively, and of course HB for halfback (equivalent to RB and running back).

I also use abbreviations for defensive players. Most are pretty obvious but I'll list them all here just in case: D-line for defensive line, DE for defensive end, DT for defensive tackle, LB and MLB for linebacker and middle linebacker, respectively, DB for defensive back, CB for cornerback, SS for strong safety, and FS for free safety.

One last common abbreviation is YAC, for yards after catch. Plays or routes with good YAC potential allow the receiver to catch the ball in stride while running upfield.

Chapter 2

Diamond Wing Formation

Overview

Diamond Wing is the first formation I created primarily for running the football. I had been getting away with not having very many good passing plays in this formation because I primarily play against the CPU, which has yet to realize I used to run about 80% of the time when I was in this set. More recently I've developed some new passing plays ([Flurry](#)) and renewed my interest in older ones ([Lightnings](#)), providing a balanced attack against humans and CPU alike.

				W2				LT	LG	C	RG	RT				W1			
										QB									
									TE		FB								
										RB									

The formation is modeled after the old school style Full House T formation, still favored by many high schools and small colleges. To adapt it to pro football teams and enhance the formation's overall receiving ability the third running back is actually a tight end lined up in the backfield. Rather than place all three backs in a straight line, the primary blocking backs (the tight end on the left and fullback on the right) form the side corners of a diamond with the running back at the bottom and quarterback at the top. The split ends line up about five yards outside the tackles to widen the line as much as possible for stretch plays; on runs

to the outside these potential blocking vulnerabilities are compensated for by a combination of pulling linemen and lead blocks by the fullback and tight end.

Diamond Wing works decently for straight-ahead running, but that is not what most of my plays focus on. After all, any formation with a lead blocker for the halfback as well as at least one extra blocker on the line is good for straight-ahead run plays. The problem with this type of play is that it just comes down to raw power and execution (of the virtual players, as much as and maybe more than the human player). My playbook seeks to use innovative techniques to allow inferior physical ability to beat superior a good deal of the time, so with Diamond Wing I focus on sophisticated sweeps and trap blocking plays.

My wide receiver and blocking back assignments are somewhat arbitrary. Neither side is really favored for the receivers, so you may want to pick your favorite running plays and put the best blocking WR on that side. Likewise, the TE and FB positions in the backfield are really just the first ones I came up with, though the success of my current running plays likely depends at least somewhat on this arrangement and so switching sides is not recommended. I think the back on the right *needs* to be a fullback or running back for a few running plays because Madden NFL does not allow tight ends to receive handoffs, even when lined up in a backfield position. If the team you like to play with has two solid fullbacks you may want to put the second one in place of the TE, I haven't tried this but it should work just fine.

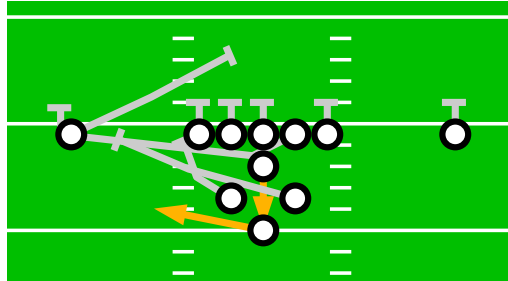
Diamond Wing is my favorite audible formation in this playbook. I like to keep my audibles balanced and complimentary to my usual formations and plays, allowing me to make changes without using oddball personnel packages, so my audible plays are also my favorite regular plays. To keep opponents from guessing my audibles I use three plays from one formation and two from another. Diamond Wing has three audible plays, two running ([Delay Sweep](#) to the left and [Counter Sweep](#) to the right) and one passing ([Flurry](#)).

Delay Sweep

This complex running play is one of the best I've developed. It looks just like a slow developing sweep off left tackle but can give stunning results. When executed well the blockers hit the defenders like dominoes in rapid succession. The sheer number of bodies make it look like a mess at first, but then a clear path opens up for the running back. The slow development of the blocking scheme is the key to the play's success, as each defensive lineman and linebacker gets "used up" by

the blockers before the RB reaches the line of scrimmage.

Delay Sweep works best in the open field. Because it is a bit slow developing it is not recommended for use near either goal line. The only really effective way to stop it is to stack the line or linebackers to the offense's left side, so it's important to mix this play up with runs to both sides.



Unfortunately, in Madden 2004 the Playmaker control is lousy for this play. The QB runs into the TE trying to block. It's possible that using a second fullback instead of a tight end might fix this issue, but I haven't tried it and wouldn't want to remove the TE in any case because he's too important in the Diamond Wing passing plays.

Player Assignments

Left Tackle: Run Block

Left Guard: Run Block

Center: Run Block

Right Guard: Pull Left

Right Tackle: Run Block

QB: Handoff to RB

Left SE: Lead Far Right

Right SE: Run Block

TE: Lead Off Left Tackle

FB: Lead Far Left

RB: Delay-Sweep Left

Blocking Assessment

The running back needs to have patience. Start out at normal speed after getting the ball and only step it up to turbo after the first couple steps to ensure that you don't get jammed up in the blocking. The TE is the first lead blocker, hitting tackle, go left behind him. The FB should be second, followed quickly by the pulling guard. If an opposing LB or cornerback does not come in quickly (i.e. the FB runs a ways before laying a block) you should be able to sweep behind the FB

all the way out to the left side. If the FB has to throw a block early, turn up a little earlier, to the right of the FB, following the pulling guard into the hole. This is actually the ideal situation, as long as the hole between the TE on your right and FB on your left is big enough to run through, because it means the defender the FB is blocking has overrun the play and cannot string it out laterally, letting the RB turn upfield more quickly.

If executed well the RB should sprint right by the D-line, leaving no more than a LB and a safety or two in pursuit. The near side safety at least will probably have a good angle unless he came up close to the line early; the key here is to outrun him to the sideline, putting him to the side of the RB where a good stiff arm can be applied. If this works then it's a race with the far side safety to the end zone. Juke or spin moves may work if the safety is too deep to apply a stiff arm. If you have to follow the FB a ways out, just look for blockers and wait for the best chance to turn upfield. Vision is key to the execution of this play.

The worst thing that can happen in Delay Sweep is that your lead blockers get jammed up early. If this happens, just look for the first cutback upfield and minimize your losses. If the defense overcommitted to your left side a cutback can get still gain good yardage. What you should *never* do is retreat backwards to get around a stopped fullback, even if you get around cleanly (which is difficult) there are probably no more blockers in front of you and you'll be lucky just to make up the ground you've given up.

Analysis

Pros:

- Works great against base defenses, and defenses overcommitted to the wrong side will pay dearly
- Has a chance for big yards every time
- If the defense stacks one side, just flip the play at the line of scrimmage (this works well against the CPU, probably not so well against decent human players)

Cons:

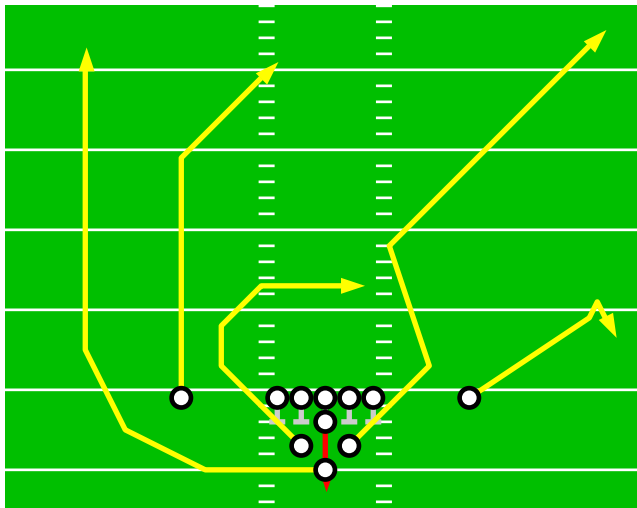
- Slow development means it's not ideal for goal line or third and short situations, where the defense is stacking the line

- Like any run play, stacking the line or blitzing right into the running lane will disrupt the play
- Poor pre-snap Playmaker control despite (nearly) symmetric formation

Flurry

An extremely well balanced passing play that compliments the primarily running attacks from the Diamond Wing formation. All five eligible receivers burst out into fairly quick developing routes with an easy, right-to-left scan across the field read progression. Quick tight end and fullback routes developing over the middle will take advantage of any linebackers who happen to be in a run blitz, while other routes deep and to the outside will spread the remaining defenders.

Flurry's great balance between pass patterns is one of the primary reasons it has often been included in my personal audible set (along with being a passing option to go with [Delay Sweep](#) and [Counter Sweep](#), two of my favorite running play audibles). There really are no primary targets, though I personally throw a little more often to the right split end curl, fullback and tight end than to the left SE or running back.



The curl route usually nets 5–10 yards, the FB post 10–15, and the TE about 8–12. The SE post is the best bet for big yardage, but can be a tough throw unless the FB and TE draw one or both safeties down close. The RB swing can be used as an emergency dumpoff, a way to get the RB the ball in open space to allow him to outmaneuver defenders (if you're good with those juke and spin moves), or as a late target running up the left sideline.

Setting the right SE as your orange Playmaker route is really a no brainer here. Pretty much isolated on the right side (as any route he runs will quickly outdistance the FB), this is a great position to make adjustments to to attack any weakness you spot in the defense. Wheels and quick in or out routes all can be used

effectively.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 3yd

Left SE: 15yd Post

TE: N2W2-N1-N1E1-E2 (open)

RB: W3-N1W2-N2W1-N7 (open)

FB: N2E2-N3W1-N5E5 (open)

Right SE: N2E3 (curl right)

Read Progression

1. Right SE corner curl
2. FB post in (right after first turn)
3. TE over middle
4. Left SE post
5. RB swing
6. FB corner out (after second turn)

The read progression as shown is very easy to pick up, you just scan the field from right to left. However, the FB and TE routes can get jammed due to how close they are to the O-line, so you may have to improvise a bit. Usually these jams are caused by LBs blitzing or just lined up close to the line of scrimmage to stop the run; if only one route is jammed this may open up the other. It may also be a line stunt to open up an inside blitz, in which case you need to look for the RB on the wide swing.

The fullback route is kind of an X-factor in this play. The primary read for him is right after he makes his turn to the inside (the ball should be released just before he starts to turn). However, if the play is able to develop longer, he can often get lost in the secondary since he's probably working against a linebacker rather than a DB. This can lead to a big play.

Analysis

Pros:

- Very effective passing play out of primarily running formation
- Features two relatively easy targets over the middle, as well as a safe dumpoff route on the RB swing
- Post and FB corner routes give big play potential

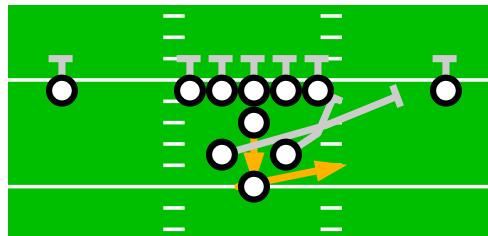
Cons:

- The FB and TE routes can get jammed up at the line of scrimmage, disrupting timing and read progression
- Many fullbacks have mediocre catching ability, and are prone to dropping easy catches right over the middle
- No extra blockers means that blitzes, especially inside blitzes that the line does not pick up, can cause serious problems

Counter Sweep

Counter Sweep is a misdirection running play that offers the potential for big yardage. It works best as a compliment to [Delay Sweep](#) because it starts out looking to go to the left before turning on the counter step to sweep to the right. Like most misdirection plays, Counter Sweep works best when the defense gets caught expecting something else, it cannot be relied upon to grind out a drive. Instead, it is best used as an explosive change of pace.

Like most Diamond Wing running plays, Counter Sweep works best in the open field due to its slower developing nature and outside blocking. It is not recommended for use near either goal line. It works best when not expected, so be sure to mix it up with other running and passing plays in the Diamond Wing formation.



Much like Delay Sweep, Counter Sweep has a very awkward Playmaker control in Madden 2004. The quarterback bumps heads with the fullback, delaying

the handoff and basically just making a mess of things.

Player Assignments

O-Line and Wide Receivers: Run Block

QB: Handoff to Running Back

TE: Lead Far Right

FB: Lead Off Right

RB: Counter-Sweep Right

Blocking Assessment

This is a counter play so it relies on misdirection. This means that the running back needs to get into high gear as soon as he gets the ball, before the defense has a good chance to react and adjust. The best case is when the defenders are stacking the inside or left side, allowing the right side blockers (in particular the split end) to get a seal and allow the RB to sweep all the way to the outside. If this is not possible try to take the first hole on the right side (usually inside of the SE but outside of the backfield lead blockers) and sprint for the corner, possibly turning straight upfield once you get by the linebackers. If the right side blocking collapses early you may have to head straight up the middle, this will not usually get many yards but is better than taking a big loss trying to get around a corner that isn't there.

Analysis

Pros:

- Great misdirection play against defenses committed to stopping Delay Sweep or stuffing the inside
- Has great potential for big yards
- If the defense stacks one side, just flip the play at the line of scrimmage (this works well against the CPU, probably not so well against decent human players)

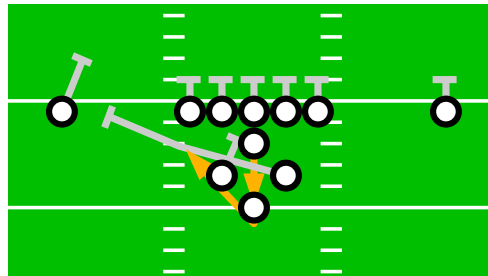
Cons:

- Slow development means it's not ideal for goal line or third and short situations, where the defense is stacking the line
- Stacking the right side or blitzing into the middle or right side will disrupt the play
- Lousy Playmaker control for switching the direction of the play

Inside Trap

Inside Trap is [Delay Sweep](#)'s quicker, more pugnacious little brother. The backfield blocking scheme is very similar, with the tight end just blocking down a bit more to the inside. The main differences are that instead of pulling with a guard the entire offensive line blocks straight ahead, and rather than a slow developing delayed run to the outside the running back starts with a quicker back step and takes the handoff directly up to the left side of the line.

In the ideal Inside Trap run the RB is able to take the burst and burst straight out at a 45 degree angle. Even though the run is technically a sprint, which is aimed off left guard, the block of the TE can sometimes catch the defensive tackles or inside blitzers, opening things up slightly to the outside. In any case the quick execution and power running style makes a nice, simple change of pace compared to the more complex running plays previously covered for Diamond Wing.



The Playmaker direction shift ability of Inside Trap is decent but not great. The problem lies with fact that the TE and fullback, despite being lined up in essentially equal positions in the backfield, do not swap their blocks as they would if they were both running backs of some type. This leads to the TE still blocking almost straight ahead while the FB blocks a bit too wide to the right side, though not so wide the runner can't make any use from it. Replacing the TE with the #2 fullback would likely solve this problem and give perfect Playmaker control.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Run Block

QB: Handoff to Running Back

Left SE: Lead Right

Right SE: Run Block

TE: Lead Left

FB: Lead Far Left

RB: Back Step-Sprint Left

Blocking Assessment

There are two basic possibilities when running Inside Trap. The best situation as discussed above is when the defense tries to jam the middle and the ball carrier has a clear path right off left tackle. Run straight towards this opening without wasting any time. The other situation is when the defense clogs the left side up. Make a quick cut inside the left tackle and run straight upfield. My experience has been that the most success is had when there is little hesitation and the RB doesn't try to make many moves. Juke moves to make cuts in most cases are overkill, instead just concentrate and making quick, small changes in direction as soon as you can assess the blocking picture.

Something definitely *not* to do is give up any ground trying to get around backed up blockers on the left side. Not every run gains yards, so just live with it if this occurs. Don't make a bad play worse by gambling against the odds trying to make a spectacular play.

Analysis

Pros:

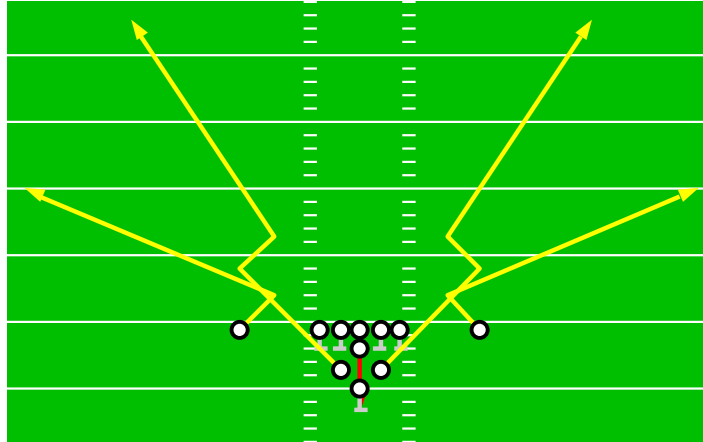
- Fairly quick developing running play that can work inside and outside
- Easy to learn and execute effectively

Cons:

- Playmaker is not as good as it should be for this type of running play
- Somewhat difficult to tell how well the play will work against the visible defensive alignment before the snap

Lightnings

Lightnings is one of my oldest passing plays in the Diamond Wing formation (making it one of my oldest overall). Against the CPU on the Pro or All Pro difficulty settings it was quite useful as a red zone play, with the fullback or tight end often getting open in the end zone, shield-



ing passes from defenders with good body position. Unfortunately, the CPU pass rush is simply too good at the All Madden level to use these routes effectively, as they take some time to develop, and this play fell into disuse. Recently I have started using it more in the open field, and have discovered that when the pass rush is more restrained and the receivers have some room to work with, it is effective at any level for gaining modest yardage.

The play's symmetry makes it easy to learn. The wide receivers start in to compress the defense before breaking sharply to the outside, where they can be hit relatively safely for 3–10 yard gains. The FB and TE run right up under where the wideouts break outwards before turning in for short post patterns which are good for 10–12 yards. If nothing is open, the FB and TE quickly break towards the corners. While lack of speed limits the effectiveness, the double move each backfield receiver makes can sometimes shake defenders, and running downfield gives more room for the WRs underneath to brake off their routes and scramble to get open.

The Playmaker route should be assigned to either wide receiver. Though you probably don't want to make too many adjustments to the routes as the split end routes are helpful in getting the underneath routes open, an occasional wheel or quick out can be used to mix things up a bit.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 3yd

Left SE: N1E1-N3W7 (open)

TE: N3W3-N1E1-N6W4 (open)

RB: Pass Block

FB: N3E3-N1W1-N6E4 (open)

Right SE: N1W1-N3E7 (open)

Read Progression

1. Right SE out
2. Left SE out
3. FB over middle (after first turn)
4. TE over middle (after first turn)
5. FB corner (after second turn)
6. TE corner (after second turn)

The split ends are your best targets for short yardage. Additionally, if they're not open early they can gain as many as 10 yards when hit late, close to the sidelines. The FB and TE should generally be hit over the middle on the post section of their routes, because with their lack of speed it's very difficult to get open on the corner route, which also requires the QB to hold the ball for a long time. In practice I have found that the FB tends to get open earlier and much more often than the TE, presumably because the defense keys more on the TE position and is more likely to jam him early.

Analysis

Pros:

- Effective passing play out of primarily running formation
- Good medium range targets over middle, safer and easier short yardage targets to the outside
- Spreads defense wide and forces man coverage to chase

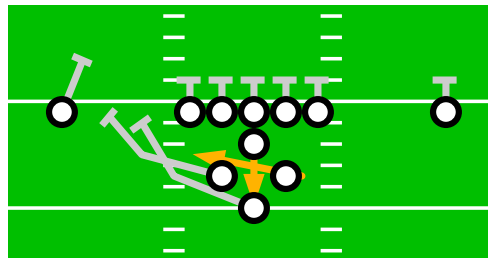
Cons:

- The FB and TE routes can get jammed up at the line of scrimmage, disrupting timing and read progression
- Many fullbacks have mediocre catching ability, and are prone to dropping easy catches right over the middle
- Hitting the FB or TE in the post segment of their routes takes precise timing, too early or too late and the receiver may be in a very awkward position to try to make the catch
- Pass blocking RB can get in QB's way, may want to use hot read audible to shift him to either side before the snap

Power Counter

Power Counter is a good play to use if you like to throw some unusual surprises at the opposing defense or are just looking for ways to get your fullback more involved in your offense. When most people think of a fullback running the ball, it's usually a simple power run right up the middle. A counter play is never to be expected, but that's exactly what Power Counter delivers.

Because it relies on surprise more than power blocking I only run Power Counter when there's not a lot at stake, usually on first down somewhere between the 30 yard lines. To be successful you need a good initial push by the offensive line to let the fullback get moving and



pick up some momentum. Big fullbacks are good at running over defenders once they get going, but aren't too great with the acceleration aspect and will not make much headway if hit in the backfield. Spreading out the defense with some Diamond Wing passing plays and outside runs might be the best way to set this play up.

The Playmaker direction flip for Power Counter is a bit unusual, but with this play that may not be such a bad thing. When flipped to the right the FB stays pretty still for the first second as the TE runs in front to block off right guard while the RB runs behind to block outside the right tackle. Both blocks take about the same angle, it's just that the positions they start in fit them neatly to either side. The FB

makes a short counter step before taking the handoff and running right. While it doesn't look like that powerful of a play, the normal version really isn't either and so the Playmaker version is workable if you can just catch the defense off guard.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Run Block

Left SE: Lead Right

Right SE: Run Block

QB: Handoff to Fullback

TE: Lead Far left

FB: Counter Step-Sweep Left

RB: Lead Outside Left

Blocking Assessment

There's not much to discuss with this play. The tight end and running back blocks tend to be more decoy than anything else because the best runs are usually up the middle, so it really depends on the offensive line. Hopefully they get a good initial push right up the middle, allowing the FB to take the handoff and either turn straight upfield, if there's a good opening, or glide behind the blockers just off left tackle. Don't let the sweep route type fool you, this play generally works best headed almost directly upfield after the counter step unless you happen to get great lead blocks.

In some cases the offensive linemen don't get good blocks and the FB will be stuffed for no gain. Like I said earlier, this will happen occasionally because it's a bit of a trick play. The best way to avoid this situation is to only use this play sparingly (at most twice, and probably no more than once per game) and to set it up with good plays ahead of time.

Analysis

Pros:

- Tricky play that can get 5–10 yards up the middle if the defense is thinking pass or run to the outside
- Gets the FB more directly involved in the offense

Cons:

- Lead blockers are mainly decoys
- Play will no be effective without proper setup and element of surprise

Chapter 3

Tsunami Formation

Overview

Tsunami was first conceived for use by my college 7-man flag football team a few years back. I named it after the Japanese word for the gigantic ocean waves generated by undersea earthquakes because I imagined various plays, especially utilizing the trips formation on the left, as overwhelming defenses, hitting them suddenly and unstoppably.

	W4					LT	LG	C	RG	RT							W2
			W3														
W1										R1							
								QB									

Unfortunately I could not convince my teammates (despite being team captain!) to use a formation featuring three wide receivers to the left, one on the right, a center, H-back and quarterback, with essentially zero effective line blockers. A center can certainly pass block but not very well by himself. My philosophy was that by spreading out the defense and using as many receivers as possible, quick, well executed plays would burn any teams that dared blitz. The left trips receivers would work together to create screens, block on short throws, and pull most of the defense to that side, opening up large areas on the right side. If the other team wanted to rush the quarterback at all they would almost certainly risk allowing

a short throw to turn into a big play. The center, being an eligible receiver and unable to block effectively without helpers would just run quick hooks and outs to the first available soft spot in the defense. The H-back would be available for emergency dumpoffs and could block by having the quarterback rollout to the right behind him. On broken plays the quarterback would have a lot of room to try and run with.

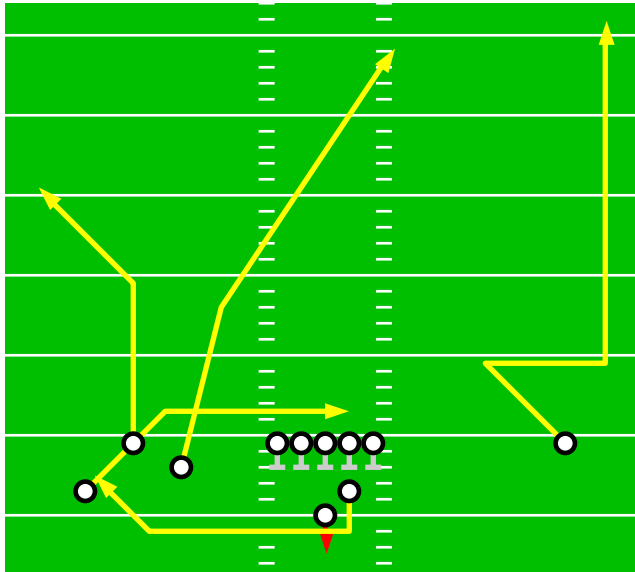
Because we never actually used this formation I never got to test my ideas. When Madden NFL 2003 came along, introducing the Create-a-Playbook feature for the first time, Tsunami was one of the first formations I tried. It isn't really the same as I first envisioned; adding four offensive linemen and an equal number of defenders means that things aren't as wide open in Madden as they would be in flag football. Defenses can put on a decent pass rush without gambling too much, it's harder to completely lose a defender (pro athletes don't get confused as easily as very amateur collegians), and you can't rely on single coverage for the right wideout. Still, I've made more plays for this formation than any other in my playbook because even in 11-on-11 it is still extremely versatile and effective.

The shotgun position of the quarterback and running back means Tsunami is a passing only formation. Unlike most of my other formations, including the all-passing ones, Tsunami does not emphasize the running back who actually spends most of his time blocking. Instead it relies on creative combinations of routes by the trips receivers balanced by an isolated receiver to the other side. The isolated receiver usually works against single coverage, though there may be safety or linebacker help depending on where the route is run and whether the defense plays zone coverage instead of man. Most Tsunami plays are really designed around the trips receivers. I put the #1 receiver as the left flanker because he benefits the most from decoys and screens run by the other two trips receivers. The #2 receiver is isolated on the right. The #3 receiver is the inside left flanker, and the left split end in the middle of the bunch is #4, who is a viable target but is best at drawing coverage from the underneath routes.

Backslide

Backslide is one of my most aggressive passing plays, intended to stun defenses by hitting hard and fast. While not the most consistent play to execute, its quick opening, big play potential and very good depth of reads make it an excellent choice when you want to attack for medium to long gains in one shot.

My favorite route is the triple progression route by the isolated split end. His quick slant can be hit sharply immediately after the snap for a good 10 yard gain, with potential to run long distances if the safeties are blitzing or out of position. If the slant is not open the SE will then break sharply to the outside where he can be hit close to the sideline. He then pauses for one second, which is helpful to a quarterback scrambling to the right, giving an easy target. After this delay the SE breaks upfield on a final streak. This portion of the route is rarely used but gets the most you can ask for out of a single receiver.



While the SE does his thing on the right side, the trips receivers are busy making things happen on the left. The inside flanker runs a type of slant post route right over the middle of the field. This route gives the best big yardage potential in the play. The left split end runs a corner route, forcing the left safety to pick one receiver and allow the other probable single coverage. The outside flanker undercuts these routes with a shallow drag. To top things off, the running back cuts behind and to the left of the QB to sneak out into the left flats for a safe dumpoff and possible good run after.

The sheer number of possible throws makes Backslide a bit tricky to learn. However, its aggressive, attacking style are enough to make it a favorite of mine and make opposing defenses think twice about sending blitzes.

The isolated right split end is an obvious choice for the orange Playmaker route. Wheel and quick out routes have plenty of room to work with, as does a quick in thrown early before the drag route comes across the formation.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 1yd

Left Outside Flanker: N2E2-E4 (open)

Left SE: 10yd Corner

Left Inside Flanker: N4E1-N6E4 (open)

Right SE: N2W2-E3 (delay 1 sec)-N8 (open)

RB: S1-W5-N1W1 (open)

Alternative Assignment: *Because the RB back cut is a somewhat difficult throw and unlikely to gain significant yardage, a better choice may simply be to have the RB pass block.*

Read Progression

1. Right SE slant
2. Right SE out
3. Left inside flanker slant post
4. Left outside flanker drag
5. Left SE corner
6. RB backside swing
7. Right SE streak

On the SE slant the most important read is the LB to that side before the plays starts and his initial motion after the snap. The throw is open if he doesn't move out into a zone with the snap. The out pattern afterward is usually dependent on whether the LB follows the SE. If so just move onto the next read.

As usual, things change if a blitz comes. Against most blitzes the slant is still you're best option, but if its not there or the SE is jammed at the line, look for the slant post route early, or just jam a hard throw to the drag route early if you really need to get rid of the ball. It probably won't be caught because there will be a lot of traffic while the trips receivers are still bunched together, but a hard throw over a very short distance is at least hard to pick off.

Analysis

Pros:

- Iso slant route works great against base man defenses and blitzes

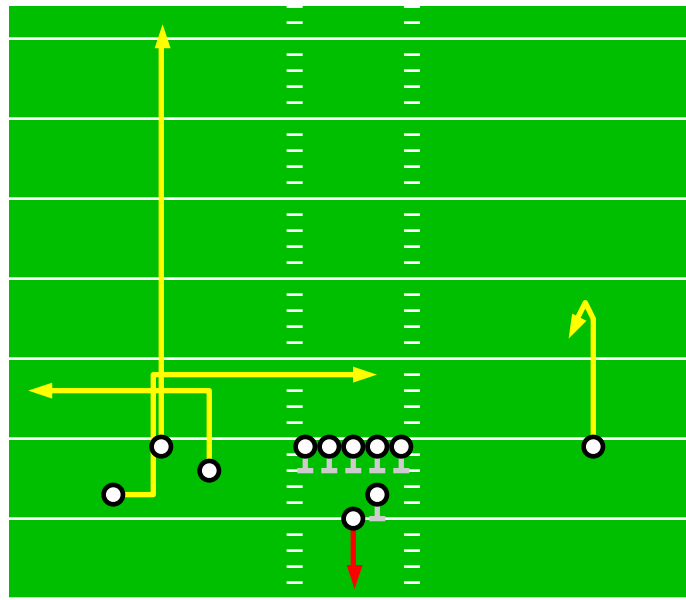
- Quick development and right to left primary read progression make play fairly straightforward to execute, despite its sophistication
- Great balance between long, medium and short yardage routes

Cons:

- Right SE slant/out timing needs to be precise, a late slant throw will go where the slant is aimed at, but the SE will have already turned for the out portion of his route and the pass will miss completely
- Inside flanker slant post route can be a dangerous throw because the target area is to the right of man coverage, over a linebacker and right towards the right safety
- Drag route is a little slow developing, and if thrown early has a chance to be tipped by the D-line

Intersection

Intersection is one of my oldest Tsunami plays implemented for Madden 2003 which was both successful and not inspired by my flag football play-book. It almost didn't make this book, but after a few modifications to shorten up the routes to counter the fast pass rush in Madden 2004 new life was breathed into it. The play is focused on the convoluted routes run by the trips receivers, cutting inside, outside and across each other in what looks like a traffic jam before suddenly breaking each receiver free in different directions.



suddenly breaking each receiver free in different directions.

Although the trips route combination really looks like a mess, things aren't quite as confusing as they seem (for the offense at least, the opposing defense might say otherwise). The split end runs a straight streak route and so gets out of the traffic quickly. The inside flanker runs an out pattern which slips under the SE and over the outside flanker. It's the outside flanker who runs the only really sophisticated route, taking a step to the inside before turning upfield underneath the inside flanker, then breaking once again to the inside.

While three receivers will always offer a good number of throws, the route mix of Intersection offers an even greater number of possibilities. Each flanker position has at least two distinct throws that can be made to him, one early while moving upfield and another after the break to the inside or outside. It can take a fair bit of practice to master the intricacies of all of the possible throws in this area, but the results are well worth it.

The isolated right split end goes with a simple curl route by default. This works well in many situations, but also makes an ideal position for the orange Playmaker route position. The best time for a change may be if the defense shows zone, meaning that the curl will likely be double covered (although depending on the type of zone, sometimes a curl can be very successful against a double team. Also, zone means that you're more likely to attack the other, undermanned side of the defense with two cornerbacks on three wideouts).

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 3yd

Left Outside Flanker: E1-N3-E5 (open)

Left SE: 25yd Streak

Left Inside Flanker: 5yd Out

Right SE: 8yd Curl

RB: Pass Block

Read Progression

1. Left inside flanker quick seam
2. Left outside flanker underneath
3. Left inside flanker out
4. Right SE curl

5. Left outside flanker in
6. Left SE streak

We start things off with a couple of quick reads. First look for the quick throw to the inside flanker just as he releases upfield. This is a good read against deep zones but not a lot else. The next quick read is the outside flanker underneath, which is pretty good against just about any type of coverage due to the protection from the other receivers. Throw any time from the step to the inside up to the end of the seam segment.

Next move on to the more standard throws. The inside flanker out route is decent against anything except for outside press coverage, although it can be a tight fit at times. Then look over to the right side for the curl route. Man coverage is best here because the QB only needs to read one defender. The outside flanker in route works pretty well against bumps on the outside (largely thanks to the step inwards to get away from the cornerback cleanly) as well as zones, just watch the linebacker sitting in the middle of the defense. Finally, look for the left SE on the deep streak. This can be another good throw against an outside press, usually drawing just single coverage from the free safety deep.

Analysis

Pros:

- Sophisticated crossing routes can tie man coverage up in knots
- Trips can overload zone defenses, with the outside and deeper receiver(s) shielding the inside receiver(s)
- Horizontal crossing routes plus isolated curl make for relatively easy throws

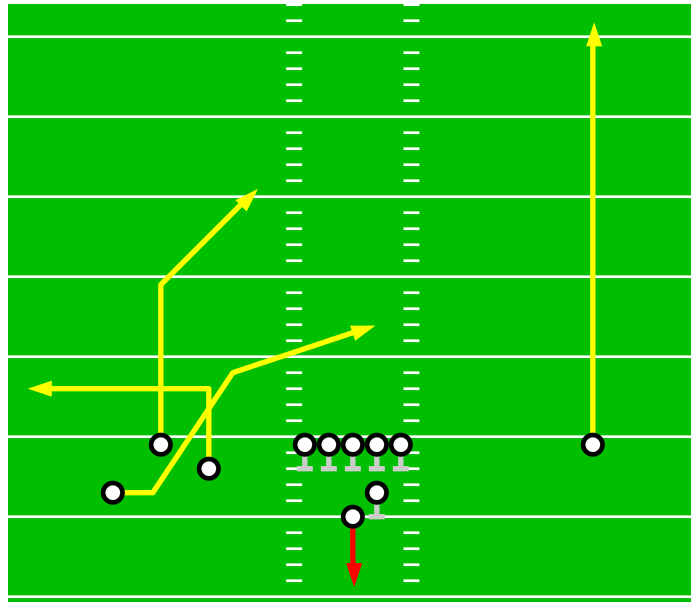
Cons:

- Physical bump coverage on trips receivers can disrupt careful timing and cause a lot of traffic, especially for outside throws
- No ideal throws to counter blitzes (unless you see it coming and hit the Playmaker first)

Deep Drag

Deep Drag features multiple crossing routes designed to free up the left flankers underneath the coverage, hopefully losing their defenders in the confusion. This works best against man coverage because the defensive backs end up chasing the receivers sideways across the field. Even against zone, the deep routes should draw enough coverage to open up the drag route across the middle. Because of the ease in reading and making this throw, this is one of my favorite plays for must have first down conversions.

This deep drag route is the primary target. Coming all the way across from the left side the flanker is almost sure to get good separation from a corner in man coverage. This makes for an easy throw for a good 6–10 yard gain. The key is timing the throw to hit between any linebackers in coverage, either just after the second turn or just after the right hash marks. The out pattern run by the



other flanker is a nice second option, though the sideline can make it a little tight, especially if the play starts on the left hash marks. In this case you need good timing, with a hard throw soon after the receiver breaks.

One potential drawback to this play is that a human could probably learn to defend the drag pretty well after being stung by it a few times, especially if your opponent likes to take manual control of a linebacker. The counter to this is that I have a wide selection of Tsunami plays, all of which are confusing and are hard for defenses to assess quickly. The key is mixing things up so that defenses can't predict and attack specific plays.

As usual with Tsunami plays, I'd go with the right SE as the Playmaker position. Working in isolation any audible route might be useful against the different defensive looks you might see.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 3yd

Left Outside Flanker: E1-N3E2-N1E3 (open)

Left SE: 10yd Post

Left Inside Flanker: 5yd Out

Right SE: 25yd Streak

RB: Pass Block

Read Progression

1. Right SE streak
2. Left outside flanker deep drag
3. Left inside flanker out
4. Left SE post

The reads are pretty straightforward. First look to the isolated SE on the right. You may not want to necessarily throw the streak right away, but if you have single coverage it's not a bad idea to throw a deep ball with some air under it. Next look for the primary route, the deep drag. If the linebackers are playing off you want to squeeze this throw in early during the vertical middle segment. Otherwise the receiver should be able to run away from man coverage and you can throw as the route crosses directly over the middle. The other good bet in this play is the square out. Running under the other two trips receiver's routes this player can get wide open, making for an easy throw and decent chance to run with the ball. The post route is best used to run off coverage for the underneath route but can provide the occasional big play deep downfield.

Analysis

Pros:

- Flanker drag pattern gets open easily and is an easy throw, just need to find a window between any linebackers in coverage
- Out pattern gives play two solid routes for possible 10 yard gains

- Streak and post pattern, though mainly to draw coverage, give big play potential if needed

Cons:

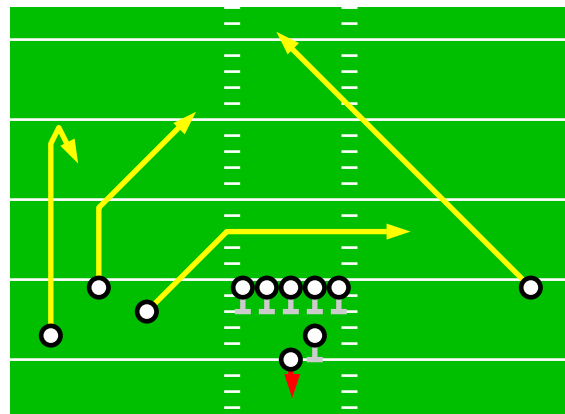
- A little slow developing, the RB stays in to block but the QB may have to buy a little time with his feet
- Hard to hit the out pattern in bounds if the play starts on the left hash marks
- No easy dumpoff route if pressured quickly

Modified From 2003 Web Version: *When originally designed for Madden NFL 2003 I had the drag route go a bit deeper (1N in the middle segment to be exact), as well as pushing the out route 5 yards further downfield. These were shortened due to the amount of time it took for the drag route to fully develop being a bit too much for the improved pass rush in Madden 2004.*

Quick Ins

Quick Ins is a play that I've never used much, probably due to its rather "vanilla" appearance compared to many of my more sophisticated Tsunami plays. However, after my recent testing and evaluation for this book I may have to use this play it bit more often. I originally designed it as a relatively simple and direct pass play to go with its more complex Tsunami brethren. While I got the simple part down pretty well, I never expected to be so effective as well. Quick Ins is one of the best marriages of simplicity (in a four route passing play, anyway) and pure productivity in my entire playbook.

The three inward routes executed by the left split end and inside flanker and the isolated right split end form the core of Quick Ins. The fact that all three of these routes are run in inwards makes the quarterback's job about as easy as you could hope for, allowing him to take in almost the entire play as it unfolds in a glance, without out a lot of looking back and forth between



the sidelines. The other QB-friendly aspect of the play is that none of these receivers makes a cut sharper than 45 degrees, meaning that if it looks like the receiver is running towards an open spot then he probably *will* be open when the ball is delivered. These two features make Quick Ins a play you can just pick up and use successfully with very little or no time spent on the practice field, not very common for passing plays I develop.

Besides the three primary routes, the outside flanker on the far left side runs a simple curl route. I didn't find this route to be particularly useful in my recent testing, but there's no way to test against every defense and the length of the route seems appropriate for the play, so it's certain to get open once in a while against different coverages. If you want, a quick out route or streak might also make good choices, this is one of the rare situations where its actually one of the bunched receivers who is the most isolated in terms of the effect of their route on their fellow wideouts.

I set the isolated right SE as the Playmaker in Quick Ins (as usual), but it's certainly not the only option. Because the outside flanker does not play a key role in the play while the right SE runs maybe the most important route, this flanker position is also a very solid Playmaker choice. None of the Playmaker hot routes (including the quick in) is likely to cause any interference with the existing routes, so you can tinker to your heart's content with this position if you so desire.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 1yd

Left Outside Flanker: 12yd Curl

Left SE: 5yd Post

Left Inside Flanker: N2E2-E4 (open)

Right SE: N6W6 (open)

RB: Pass Block

Read Progression

1. Right SE slant
2. Left SE post
3. Left inside flanker drag
4. Left outside flanker curl

The reads for Quick Ins are simple and direct. As they usually do the slant comes first. About the only type of base coverage this won't work against is outside press, along with some zones. Next look to the post. If the defense is not playing Dime or Quarters this receiver is often uncovered and should be hit with a quick throw ASAP. This route seems to eat up zones with the distractions caused by the receivers to the immediate left and right, and is great against DB blitzes as well. The third look is the drag route right over the middle. A great route against LB blitzes, this route can also be effective against most other coverages as long as the LB is handled carefully. Last is the curl route. While not used often, this can be a benefit as you won't be likely to pass up good opportunities for short to medium gains early with the hopes that a deeper route will be open later.

Analysis

Pros:

- Great combination of easy use and high productivity
- About equally effective against Nickel, Dime and Quarters defenses
- Three primary routes provide an answer to just about any coverage or blitz scheme
- Good YAC potential for primary routes

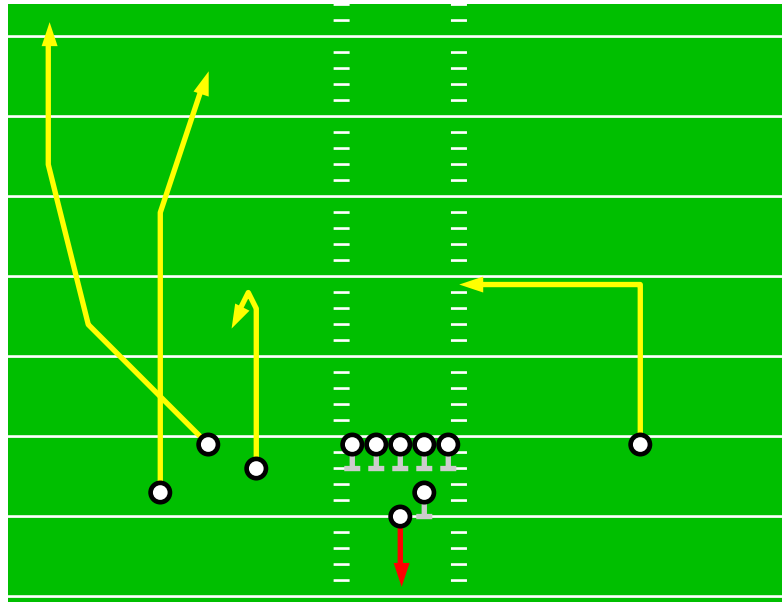
Cons:

- No real deep threat

Strong Left

With a lot of my Tsunami plays I take the bunched receivers on the left and run them to the inside or spread them across the field. By switching up which receivers run where the plays can get good receiver distribution while keeping the defenders guessing as to where their man will be heading next. For Strong Left I take a little bit different approach, running routes more to the left in hopes of overwhelming that side of the defense, even against man coverages already slanted to that side.

The big route in the play is the deep swing fade run by the left split end. As is often the case in Tsunami the left outside flanker's route goes underneath the split end's, but in this case the flanker starts straight up-field and the SE slants to the outside to cross over



the top. This cross is effective at tying up man coverage and lets the SE run to the soft spot in the corner of a Cover 2 zone. Meanwhile the outside flanker also runs deep on a skinny post. Though these long passes can give a defender time to recover from a difficult coverage assignment, running two deep routes down the left side can put a lot of pressure on the free safety.

Strong Left also features a couple of shorter (though not much shorter) routes, also aimed towards overloading the left side. The left inside flanker runs a 10 yard curl to the left, taking advantage of the area cleared out by the other two trips receivers. The right split end runs a 10 yard square in. The running back is in his usual Tsunami role as a pass protector. Though I use Tsunami primarily for pocket passing, a mobile QB may be able to take advantage of a right side left fairly open if the defense plays man coverage.

For the orange Playmaker route I like the right split end. A quick in or out route is basically a necessity for this play if the defense shows blitz because every route goes at least 10 yards deep by default. On the other hand, a deep wheel route will really test the deep coverage and prevent the strong safety from sliding over to help out on the two deep routes on the other side of the field.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 3yd
Left Outside Flanker: N7-N3E1 (open)
Left SE: N3W3-N4W1-N3 (open)
Left Inside Flanker: N4 (curl left)
Right SE: 10yd In
RB: Pass Block

Read Progression

1. Left inside flanker curl
2. Right SE in
3. Left SE deep fade
4. Left outside flanker skinny post

Strong Left is a little bit unusual for one of my passing plays because there really aren't any quick reads to make. While this makes it difficult to answer a hard blitz that applies immediate pressure, in other situations it means that the QB has an extra half second or so to just scan the field and get a feel for the defense before making his reads.

The first read is the curl. This route has the same depth as the second read, the SE in route, and because Madden makes it difficult to throw curl routes as early as you may want it's okay to flip the order of these reads. Next look for the deep fade. This is an excellent route if your opponent likes to press the outside receivers at the snap because he will run right over the top of the press and away from the safeties lined up to the inside. The final read is the skinny post. I don't throw this one too often, but between this route and the deep fade there's a decent chance get one receiver open deep.

Analysis

Pros:

- The swing fade route is effective against man coverage and a great route to attack outside bump coverage
- Three of the routes are fairly effective against at least one major type of coverage, giving the play good balance
- Every completion should gain 10 yards or more

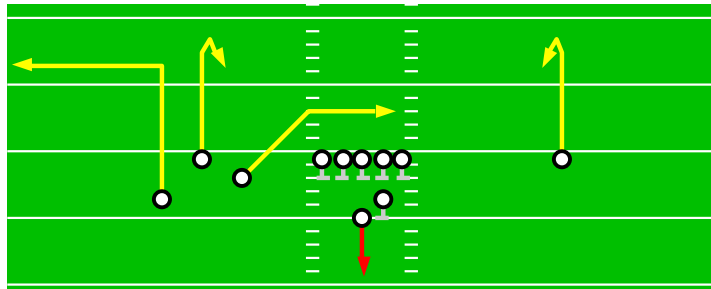
Cons:

- No quick throws other than early ones up the seams to the curl or in receivers makes it difficult to counter blitzes
- The route with the biggest potential is also the most dangerous to throw
- Cross-up between the left two receivers will not have much effect on zone defenses

Spread Attack

Spread Attack is a passing play designed almost solely for short and medium gains, good for converting third and medium or just as a solid first or second down play. Rather than run a lot of complicated routes that cross in, over, and under each other, Spread Attack simply spreads the receivers out, giving the quarterback easy reads and throws. Coupled with the mainly standard passing routes, this play makes a good selection for rookie Madden players.

To get the bunched receivers well distributed across the field (or at least the left half of it), each runs routes in different directions away from the starting bunch.



The outside flanker runs an out, the inside flanker runs a drag over the middle, and the split end in the middle runs a curl. The isolated split end over on the right side also runs a curl, ensuring that the drag route has plenty of room to work with.

With nothing too fancy going on in this play it can serve as a little breather if you find yourself being pressured heavily, hesitating in the pocket or making bad passing decisions. With four standard routes all run with fairly similar depths you don't even need to follow a true read progression if you don't feel up to it, just scan across the field and throw to the first open player you see. Spread Attack is actually quite effective against most coverages despite its simplicity. The drag route in particular serves as a great security blanket, able to bail the play out when the outside receivers are jammed or just smothered.

Set your right split end as the Playmaker. Isolated position, wheel routes and quick outs work well, yadda yadda, 'nuff said.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 3yd

Left Outside Flanker: 10yd Out

Left SE: 8yd Curl

Left Inside Flanker: N2E2-E2 (open)

Right SE: 8yd Curl

RB: Pass Block

Read Progression

1. Left inside flanker drag
2. Right SE curl
3. Left SE curl
4. Left outside flanker out

The read progression is simple, starting from the middle of the field and working its way outward towards the sidelines. We begin with the drag route, the most important part of the play. Running right across the middle this route offers an easy read and throw for the QB, and is great against LB blitzes and outside press coverage. Next look to the curl route on the right. This is a great option against man coverage because the isolation means only single coverage with no support nearby. We finish on the left side, looking quickly to the SE who should get open at about the same time as the right SE, then lastly to the out route. The out route is mmakableagainst man but requires a good throw and good timing to prevent the pass from being caught out of bounds. Likewise, against some zones the rereceiverill be running right at a defender, appearing completely covered, only to break to the outside with no pursuit. The receiver in this situation is wide open but a quick release is required to get the ball to him in the short time between completing the break and reaching the sideline.

Analysis

Pros:

- Simple, spread receiving routes make for easy reads

- Spread receivers work exceptionally well against Nickel defenses, which will not be able to cover every WR with a CB
- Able to succeed against all major coverages

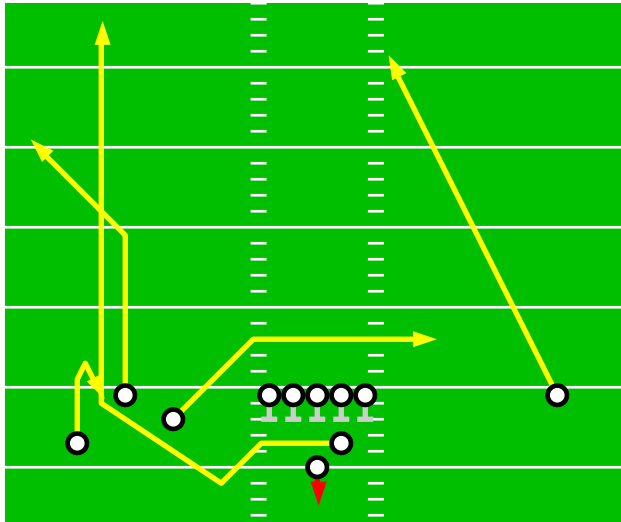
Cons:

- No deep threat available (without a hot read audible, anyways)
- With little variation in route depth, teams crowding the short zone can cause problems for most of the routes

Quick Look

Quick Look is a fairly straightforward play designed primarily to slow down blitzes and pick up easy yards against loose coverage. Quick developing slant, curl, and drag routes give quick options across the line, ideal if your opponent likes to bring blitzes from lots of different locations. Even the corner route, while intended as a deep option, can double as a quick seam route. If defenses are taking advantage of the relatively weak pass protection inherent in the Tsunami formation, Quick Look may be just the play to temper their aggressiveness.

I love quick slants, especially in the Tsunami formation where the right split end typically will draw only single coverage. Quick Look features such a quick slant, though aimed slightly upfield. This gives the route the dual option of a quick throw right off the line or a deep throw over the middle. This works in part because the inside flanker drag route tends to keep linebackers down close while the left SE corner route occupies the left side safety. The outside flanker's hook and the running back's backdoor swing also help pull the defense over the left flats and open up the middle of the field.



The quick slant and short drag routes are the primary targets. The slant should pick up 8–10 yards and the drag about 4–8. The hook route is best used to suck in defenders because the amount of traffic over on the left side can make it a difficult throw to get through, although the risk of an interception is low when thrown quickly. Likewise, the RB backdoor swing makes for a decent safety valve, although the RB seems to have an unusually hard time catching the ball on the third (Northwest) segment. The best time to actually pick up yardage with this route is on the streak portion, where typically two defenders on the left side will have to manage the three corner, hook and swing routes. A late throw should go to whoever's open between the flanker hook and the swing.

You shouldn't need to call many hot reads when running Quick Look because almost every route is designed to get open quickly. We have to assign the Playmaker to someone though, and it never hurts to have backup plans because it seems like you always need one the first time you don't bring one. I'd go with the isolated right SE as usual. Although his slant gets open often and quickly, a linebacker in zone can take this throw away, as can bump-and-run coverage by the cornerback. Either quick route, especially to the outside, can work through these issues.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 1yd

Left Outside Flanker: 4yd Curl

Left SE: 10yd Corner

Left Inside Flanker: N2E2-E4 (open)

Right SE: N8W4 (open)

RB: W2-S1W1-N2W3-N9 (open)

Alternative Assignment: *Unlike most of the other routes in this play, the RB backdoor swing route is not particularly quick developing. With no one staying in to help block it's unlikely this throw will be made often. To give the QB more time to work with the more productive routes the RB can stay in and pass block rather than running the swing.*

Read Progression

1. Right SE quick slant
2. Left outside flanker curl
3. Left inside flanker drag
4. Left SE corner
5. RB backdoor swing
6. Right SE over middle

With the first three reads all designed to get open quickly, it is more important to make a good assessment of the defense before the snap and pick out the best targets ahead of time than to go through a nice, orderly progression after the snap. Checking down every read in sequence can just take too long for such quick routes and a good opening early may be missed. I really like the slant and drag routes best. The curl route is good if it's wide open, but be sure to wait long enough to throw the ball because in Madden early curl throws tend to be dropped even if the receiver appears to be in good position to make the catch.

After the initial phase in which you look for the quick throws you can then go through a more orderly progression for the deeper routes. The corner route is the first good deep threat and can make for a decent throwaway pass if the defensive pressure comes quickly. The RB backdoor swing is not typically a big gainer (although it can be if you can wait to throw this pass late down the left sideline) but can also provide a good safety valve. Finally look straight down the deep middle for the second read for the iso SE. This pass really depends on at least the free safety being pulled over by the corner route, which still leaves the strong safety to help out. If the strong safety is otherwise occupied or the defense is simply in a very soft zone you might be able to jam a fastball right down the middle for a big gain.

Analysis

Pros:

- Three quick routes makes play excellent against any blitz
- Corner and right SE deep over middle give two legitimate deep threats

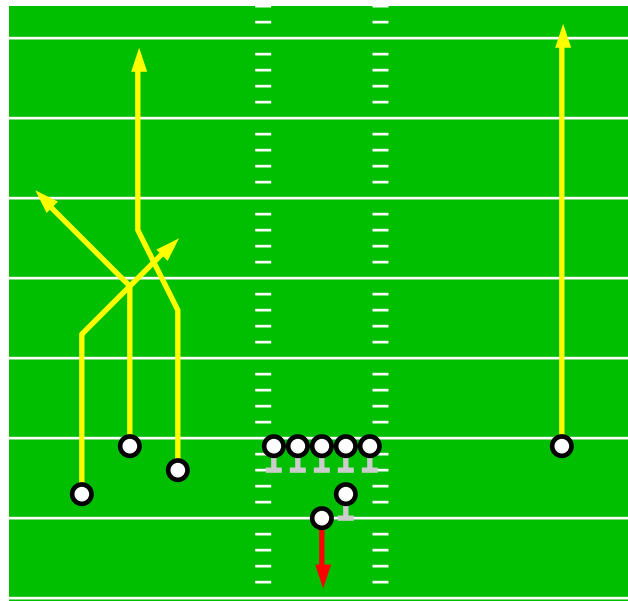
Cons:

- Curl route can be difficult to hit due to LBs stepping in front of pass, and unlikely to get many yards if complete due to defenders usually overloading left side
- RB tends to drop a lot of passes before streak segment of route
- No extra blockers means bad shotgun snap + blitz = sack most of the time

Laser

Laser was one of the original plays I envisioned for the Tsunami formation to be run by my flag football team, and the only one to make it into the book. Though not quite the defense devastator I had envisioned, after a few minor modifications it became one of my best Tsunami plays for attacking deep. If you're a little tired of my mainly short passing attack, give Laser a whirl.

The idea behind laser is kind of like a deep, full speed screen pass. All three trips receivers start out running straight downfield. At 10 yards the outside flanker cuts in on a post route while the inside receivers break towards the left corner. The outside flanker's natural position slightly behind the other trips receiverseans that as long as none of the routes are disrupted he will be shielded from the defensive backs by undercutting the other routes. If timed and ex-



ecuted well not only will the post be wide open, but the receiverseans front will be in position to lay immediate blocks for the run after the catch. Though these secondary routes can be effective against various other coverages, this primary post route was designed mainly to cut off and beat man-to-man defense.

Because it's an all deep route play I wouldn't recommend running Laser until you have a good feel for your opponent's defensive tendencies. Unless our

blockers can pick it up effectively a blitz could really mess up this play. Try out a few other Tsunami plays and see what your opponent tries, and if you draw frequent man coverage to deal with the trips receivers then bring out Laser and go for the big play.

Usual story with the Playmaker route. I set it to the isolated right SE. Another possibility might be the left inside flanker if you like quick ins over the middle. This may reduce the effectiveness of the outside flanker post route, but if pressure comes early you won't be able to wait for this route anyway.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 3yd

Left Outside Flanker: 10yd Post

Left SE: 10yd Corner

Left Inside Flanker: N4-N2W1-N4 (open)

Right SE: 25yd Streak

RB: Pass Block

Read Progression

1. Left inside flanker stagger streak up seam
2. Left outside flanker post
3. Left SE corner
4. Right SE streak
5. Left inside flanker stagger streak deep

The read progression for Laser is a bit tricky to pin down. How you run it really depends more on whether you tend to look for the quick throws for more reliable gains or like to really let the deep routes develop and make the big throws downfield. The above progression matches my offensive personality, which is to take the first good opening and not rely on chancy deep throws very often. I first look to the inside flanker running up the seam. The next three routes can really be looked at a lot of ways. I put the post first because it's the primary route, but it makes it's break at the same time as the corner route so you can go either way here. The iso streak is last because this is best used as a deep, high arcing pass against single coverage. I make my last look back to the stagger streak, which

occasionally is a good shot deep, though there is likely plenty of safety help in the area.

Analysis

Pros:

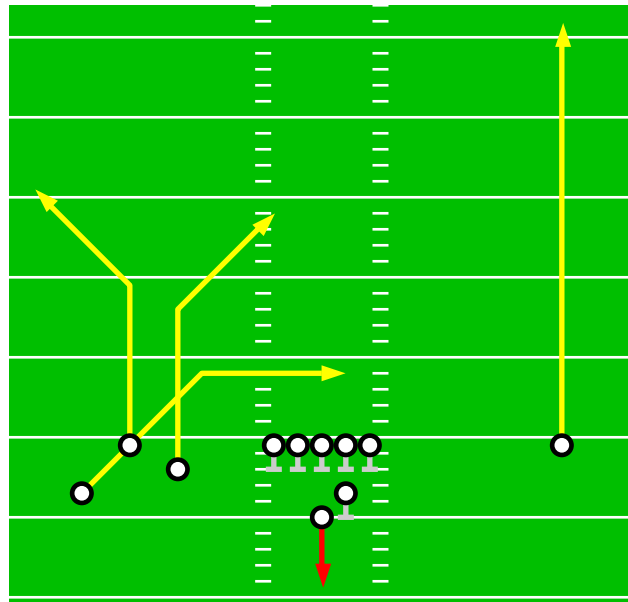
- Four vertical routes give high big play potential
- Post route is one of my best deep throws against man coverage, as well as working against deep zones between the safeties

Cons:

- No short checkdown routes to counter blitzes or early pressure
- Non-man coverages can take away the only primary deep threat, forcing the QB to make quicker throws up the seams or more dangerous, less reliable deep passes to other receivers

Splitter

Splitter is a fairly simple play that simply brings many of my favorite yet simple Tsunami techniques together. All of the routes are simple, with only the drag route not taken from the standard set. Each receiver runs to different areas of the field making the reads simple for the quarterback. Splitter isn't the kind of play you will dominate games with, but if you really like working with the Tsunami formation it might be the kind of play to pull out when things



aren't going so well and you need something simple to just slow the game down. My favorite Tsunami technique is to let the left split end and inside flanker run off coverage while the #1 receiver in the outside flanker position runs a route underneath. Splitter continues this theme by having the outside flanker run a simple drag route about 5 yards deep. The coverage is pushed downfield and then spread apart by the SE and inside flanker running 10 yard corner and post routes, respectively. The routes are complemented by my second favorite Tsunami technique, which is simply to run the isolated right SE on a streak in hopes of drawing single coverage down the sideline.

The biggest problems for Splitter will usually come from tight man coverages because the routes simply are not very dynamic. It works pretty well for attacking zones though, and if the defense likes to blitz the simple routes and easy reads can prevent costly mistakes from being made due to rushing the throws.

Of course in any play where I bring out all of my standard Tsunami techniques I have to use the standard Tsunami Playmaker position, the right split end. Unless you've skipped the entire rest of this chapter you know the reasons why, so I won't bother repeating them (and if you don't know the reasons just look at almost any other Tsunami play).

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 3yd

Left Outside Flanker: N3E3-E3 (open)

Left SE: 10yd Corner

Left Inside Flanker: 10yd Post

Right SE: 25yd Streak

RB: Pass Block

Read Progression

1. Left outside flanker drag
2. Left inside flanker post
3. Left SE corner
4. Right SE streak

The list of reads is as simple as it gets with Tsunami. The first read is my

favorite, the drag underneath the deeper routes. Outside press coverage might slow this route down a bit, but with the receiver two steps off of the line of scrimmage he usually breaks away quickly if touched at all and gets wide open. The post route comes next, though I like to throw this early up the seam as often as throwing after the break, especially against zones where there simply are not enough defenders in the area to stop the quick pass. The corner route comes third and is decent against bump coverage. Last comes the streak route, as usual this throw should not be made *too* often unless you like to live dangerously, but may be one of your better shots against man coverage.

Analysis

Pros:

- Use of simple routes run to different areas of the field makes play easy to execute without a lot of preparation
- Great play to beat bump coverage or soft zones
- Three fairly deep routes allow for strong vertical attack

Cons:

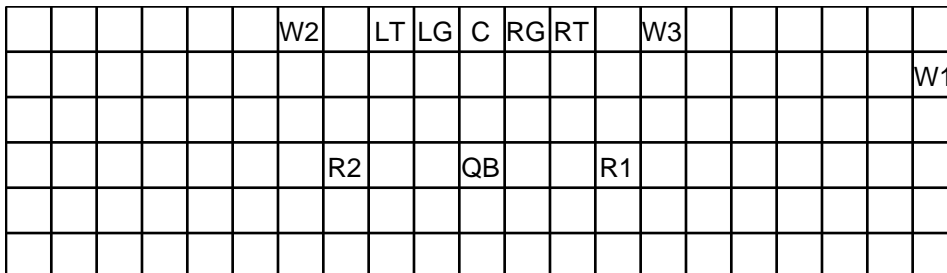
- Not very sophisticated, nothing that will fool defenses
- Difficult to attack good man coverages with (unless the defense only plays Nickel)
- Deep routes don't do anything special to get themselves open, and may be better used as decoys

Chapter 4

3 Gun Formation

Overview

3 Gun is the first formation I ever designed. It first seemed like a bit of a bust for anything but short yardage situations, but then I replaced the offset tight ends on the line of scrimmage with the #2 and #3 receivers and the formation's potential unfolded. While in the original incarnation the tight ends were too slow to challenge cornerbacks and safeties effectively on deep routes, not to mention split just a bit too wide to make effective blockers, three receivers made the formation much more dynamic. The backs are placed too wide to allow for any running plays, but are effective at creating matchup problems for the defense. This is especially true in the red zone, where the 3 Gun has proved to have unexpected success.



Despite the formation's speed with three wideouts and two halfbacks it is still primarily geared towards short to medium yardage and red zone situations. Patterns run tightly together create matchup problems, allowing receivers to break free suddenly. The backs, which are strongly featured in this formation, are in perfect positions to catch easy swing passes for safe yardage. In more sophisticated

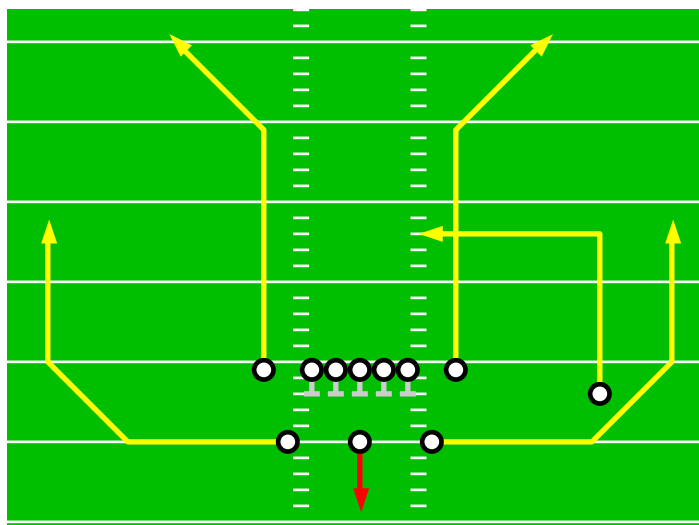
plays routes by the backs can follow in the trails of the three wideouts, creating even more matchup problems and often springing wide open (though possibly for only brief moments) in the confusion.

Wide receiver assignments favor the flanker with the top position and are balanced by placing the top split end on the other side. The starting running back is on the right though in my experience the left back gets a few more catches and generally has a bit more room to work with on the less crowded left side of the field, so it may be worth trying to switch these up.

Twin Flares

Twin Flares is kind of a special play for me, as it was the first custom play I ever developed. Though not flashy, it's effective at doing the things I originally envisioned when I created the 3 Gun formation. Split ends stretch the defense vertically and horizontally, the backs flare out into wide swing patterns, and the flanker runs the solid route right over the middle to gain the tough yards through the heart of the defense.

If you want to run this play frequently you had better pick a team with a good #2 running back, because he may be the best target on as many as 50% of the throws your quarterback will make. With the top receiver and running back both to the right side of the formation defenses may shade slightly in that direction,



opening up the left flats for the left back, probably the least threatening pass receiver on the field in the 3 Gun formation. I like to take advantage of this to get a relatively easy pass out to the back and let him make moves in the open field. This tends to work best against man coverage though, so if your opponent likes to run zone then going with the standard passing routes will be most effective, with quick throws up the seams to the split ends and over the middle on the in route.

One thing that you have to watch out for with this play is making accurate throws on the swing routes. In Madden 2004 it's very easy to have this kind of pass lead the receiver too far. Having the quarterback's feet firmly planted helps much of the time but isn't always the answer. I've gotten in the habit of stepping back as I throw, which would normally put a pass behind the receiver but in this case can make the pass catchable. A lot of reps in practice are necessary to prevent missing what should be easy hookups in real games.

I set the flanker as the Playmaker receiver. If the defense shows blitz you can switch to a quick in/out route. Want to push the ball deep, go for the wheel route which clears out the safety for the right corner route. The split ends also make decent Playmakers.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 3yd

Left SE: 15yd Corner

Right SE: 15yd Corner

Right Flanker: 10yd In

Left RB: W4-N2W2-N3 (open)

Right RB: E4-N2E2-N3 (open)

Read Progression

1. Right SE up seam
2. Left SE up seam
3. Right RB swing
4. Left RB swing
5. Flanker in
6. Right SE corner
7. Left SE corner

You'd expect for my earliest play the progression would be simple. it actually is fairly simple, though adding the quick looks to the split ends up the seams fills it out a bit. Overall though the symmetry in the SE and RB routes and the higher than normal usage of standard routes compared to my other plays makes it easy to learn and execute.

The first looks (as well as great hot reads against a blitz) are the split ends running straight up the seams. These reads are pretty easy and are also very effective against softer zones where the eventual corner sections of the routes may draw double coverage. After these quick reads look for the swing routes, starting on the right. The #1 back is running into a bit more of a crowd with the flanker on the same side, so the left RB is usually a better throw and is my favorite target in the play. You can expect a modest but fairly reliable 5 yards here. Next look for the square in. This route goes right over the middle and so is an easy read and throw. Finally look for the corner routes. I start on the right side but the order isn't critical here.

Analysis

Pros:

- Has effective routes against almost any type of coverage
- Near symmetry and use of standard routes makes for easy learning, read progression and execution
- Good mix of two short routes, one medium route and two deep routes
- Effective against press coverage because the flanker is usually the only receiver bumped, and this can provide a screen block for the right RB swing

Cons:

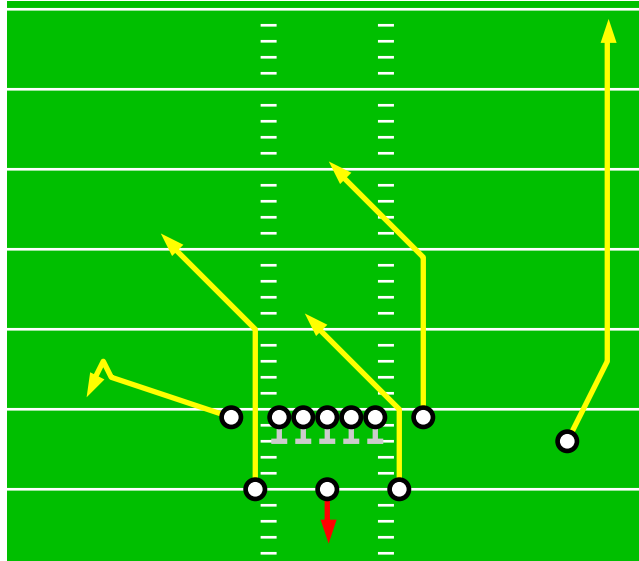
- Swing routes are hard to throw accurately
- No help in pass protection can lead to sacks, especially with bad shotgun snaps
- No deep middle route means that the safeties can spread to double cover the corner routes

Flood Left SE Iso

This misnamed play (it's the flanker and not the split end who is isolated, the flanker just *looks* a bit like a split end because of where he lines up) is one of the most devastating goal line plays I've devised to date. This is interesting, both because it is one of my oldest plays and because it wasn't designed with the red

zone in mind. It was only after some serious reevaluation that I discovered that the running backs, especially the left back, seem to break free in the end zone almost at will, and against any difficulty setting.

The primary targets are usually the backs and the right SE. Away from the end zone the flanker has the best big play ability, especially if he gets around tight bump-and-run coverage. If the corner plays off be careful with this route, in this case the move to the outside, designed to force the corner to look away from the pass and chase the WR, may actually allow a better angle for an interception. The left SE works best



to draw coverage away from the backs but can also provide a relatively safe target when you need to get rid of the ball, especially against a blitz.

The right flanker is the obvious choice for the Playmaker route. I change this route at least 50% of the time due to heavy use of this play close to the end zone, where a streak is inappropriate. Usually I call a hot read audible to a square out or curl, but a quick out or stop route may work just as well.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 2yd

Left SE: N1W3 (curl left)

Right SE: 10yd Post

Right Flanker: N2E1-N8 (open)

Left RB: 10yd Corner

Right RB: 5yd Post

Read Progression

1. Left SE out curl
2. Right RB before cut
3. Left RB before cut
4. Right SE before cut
5. Flanker after turning upfield

This progression may be slightly different in goal line situations. When passing at the goal line reading the defense *before* the snap of the ball is more important than ever. You may want to call a hot read for isolated WR, such as a quick out if the corner is playing off or cheating inside to break up a quick slant. In these cases you may want to read this route first. Also, you can usually ignore the left SE curl when close to the goal line, it does a good job drawing coverage but if the defense is stacked close to the line it becomes a dangerous throw, and it's hard to get more than a couple of yards out of it unless the coverage is blown.

Analysis

Pros:

- Left RB breaks wide open in the end zone in goal line situations at least half of the time
- Flanker's isolation makes for great hot reads
- 3 or 4 "primary" targets makes play easy to learn

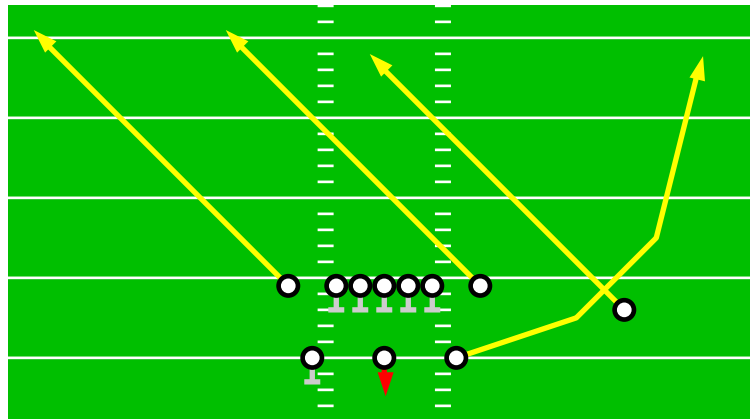
Cons:

- No blocking backs means that high snap + blitz around end = sack
- RBs can get jammed if the defense crowds the line, leading to a possible sack or throw away
- Right SE post pattern is hard to hit in bounds when the ball is snapped within a few yards of the goal line

Pitchfork

Pitchfork is a great play for novice Madden players. All three wide receivers run the same slant routes to the left, no breaks in their motion, no trickery or complex timing issues, just three easy reads and throws that get open quickly and help keep pressure off of the quarterback. While it's this simplicity that will appeal to rookies, the effectiveness, especially against a heavy blitzing team, will delight veterans as well.

The three slant routes are obviously the primary focus of Pitchfork. Quick slants right off the line of scrimmage are especially effective against man coverages because it's like a footrace in which the receiver



has a head start. If the defense is playing man there's a good chance any or all of these routes will be open. Likewise, softer zone coverages, while better at reacting to receivers running sideways across the field, simply cannot react in time to stop a quarterback with a quick release from completing these passes (though watch out for the linebackers). You will have to watch out for bump-and-run coverage though. Although only the flanker on the outside is actually pressed, the defensive backs playing up tight can get in the passing lanes. The slant over the middle or the backup route, the running back deep swing, are your best options here.

I like the left split end as my Playmaker. A quick in route might make things crowded but should slip under the other slant routes, while a wheel streak could stretch the defense and help open up the middle slant underneath.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 1yd

Left SE: N6W6 (open)

Right SE: N6W6 (open)

Right Flanker: N6W6 (open)

Left RB: Pass Block

Right RB: N1E3-N2E2-N4E1 (open)

Read Progression

1. Left SE slant
2. Right SE slant
3. Flanker slant
4. Right RB swing

It doesn't get much easier than this. Simply scan the field left to right. The left slant has a good chance of getting a big jump off of the line, and combined with possible closeness to the left sideline you want to make this throw quickly to give the receiver a chance to catch the ball with room to maneuver. The next two slants require a bit more care because linebackers can get in the passing lanes. Last look for the RB swing. Most of the time you can complete this fairly early, but against press coverage the best shot is deeper down the right sideline if you can hold onto the ball long enough.

Analysis

Pros:

- Heavy use of simple slant routes make play very easy to learn and execute
- Slants and swings are two of the best routes for beating man coverage and blitzes
- Excellent matchup against Nickel defenses
- Quick route development and backside blocking make QB difficult to pressure or sack

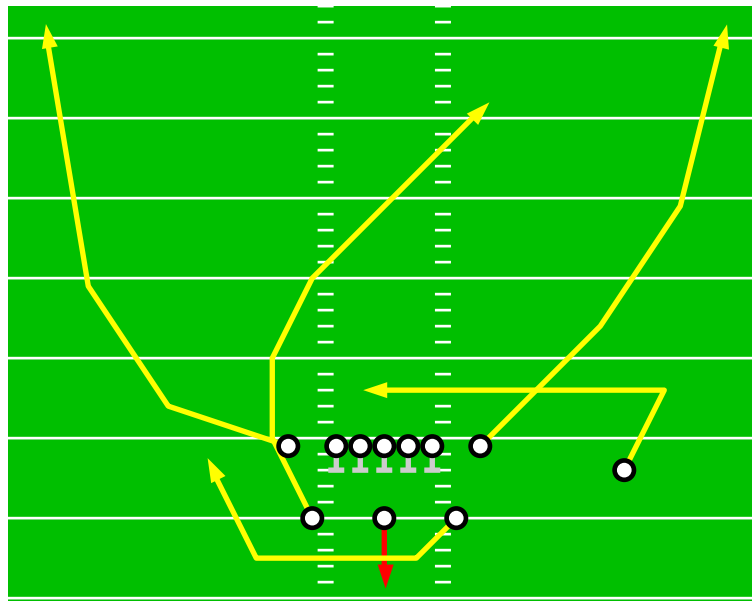
Cons:

- Cover 2 press coverage crowds the passing lanes and disrupts the play's timing
- Not as effective against Dime defenses

Cyclone

Cyclone, another [Undercuts \(Slingshot\)](#) offshoot, is one of my best plays for throwing down the deep middle. The split ends glide out and up towards the corners, pulling the defense away from the middle. This opens up the medium to deep middle for the broad, circle post route run by the left running back. You'll be sure to want to have a fast, sure handed #2 back for this play. The flanker in and right RB back cut round out the play, giving it solid options for short yardage and a nice safety valve.

The primary targets are the left RB and the flanker. The flanker is best for reliable gains, but I really like going downfield to the RB. I have few plays that can gain as much yardage right over the middle as consistently as this. The SE routes can also pick up some good gains, but because of how the receivers



curve out and up the QB may have to throw the ball over the top of a DB, so it is very important to be sure you know what the defense is doing. If you aren't sure a throw is open, take the safe route and dump to the RB cutting around the backside. One problem with this play that may hurt novices is that the three deep routes are very tempting, especially the RB circle post because of how open it can get, but the passing windows are tight and a mistimed throw can go right to a defender. As usual, practice, practice, practice.

Two spot I would assign the Playmaker route to would be the left split end. This receiver works well because a wheel or quick out route works well in isolation without disturbing any other routes.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 3yd

Left SE: N1W3-N3W2-N6W1 (open)

Right SE: N3E3-N3E2-N4E1 (open)

Right Flanker: N2E1-W7 (open)

Left RB: N2W1-N2-N2E1-N4E4 (open)

Right RB: S1W1-W4-N2W1 (open)

Alternative Assignment: *Because the right RB back cut is slow developing and unlikely to gain significant yardage, a better assignment may be a simple pass block.*

Read Progression

1. Left SE out
2. Left RB seam
3. Flanker in
4. Right RB back cut
5. Left RB post
6. Right SE fade corner
7. Left SE fade corner

Special attention must be paid when reading the left RB, as there are two places in the route that make good throws. The first time is when he turns straight upfield on the second route segment. This works best if the LB to that side blitzes or just moves close to the line. The second position is on the post segment, directly over the middle. This requires a very careful read. Often the split ends will cause the defense to vacate the middle of the field, opening a nice area for the RB to catch the ball. However, it is important that the QB throw the ball *before* the RB is in the clear. If you wait until the RB is open the throw will head right towards the far safety. The best time to throw is right when the RB has curled around the left side LB. Wait just until you see that the LB will either stay in a short zone or the RB has him beat deep before making the throw.

The SE routes also require some care. The left SE can be hit early as he heads out into the flat or late towards the corner. The right SE takes a straighter heading

downfield so it is best to skip reading him early. Once in a while a quick seam pass is available, but probably not enough to add this risky throw into the standard progression.

Analysis

Pros:

- Left RB has one of my best routes for getting big yardage
- Flanker compliments RB post with reliable short yardage route
- SEs give additional big play capability close to the sidelines, good for a hurry up offense

Cons:

- No blocking backs means that high snap + blitz around end = sack
- Left RB seam/post route takes good perception and precise timing, an early throw will face LB coverage, a late throw may be aimed right at the strong safety
- SE corner routes require good touch and placement to the outside to be effective
- Read progression jumps around a lot, often requiring players to just concentrate on a few preselected routes

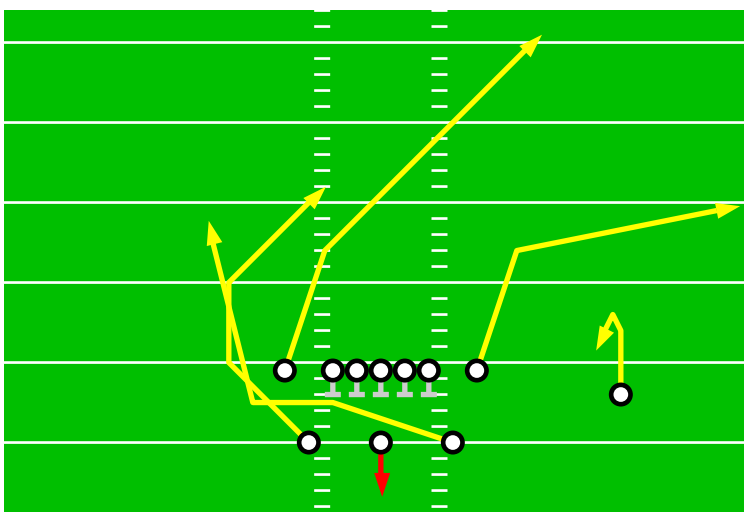
Circle Left

Circle left is another 3 Gun play originally designed primarily for the open field that was somewhat abandoned until I discovered its great goal line utility. It's also an excellent compliment for [Flood Left SE Iso](#) because it primarily targets the right side rather than the left (despite what its name might lead you to believe).

Near the goal line (it works best in the 3–10 yard range) the primary target is the right split end to the inside of the flanker. The flanker runs a quick hook that should draw the attention of the outside defensive back. If you are right on the goal line (inside the 3 yard line), this hook may actually be your best shot. Meanwhile, the right SE runs a slanted out route that should cross behind the flanker right after he makes his turn. The likely defender for the SE is a safety or

linebacker which the SE should be able to easily run away from, making this the primary read and the best chance to score in most situations. The keys are getting the corner to commit underneath and putting the right touch on the pass to lob it over the flanker and corner and away from the inside defenders.

If the right side is blanketed there's probably an opening on the left side. The left running back runs a circle route to open up right over the middle, while the right RB follows him around the left side to work up the left seam. These circle routes will cause matchup problems



for man coverage because the defenders have to run a long way to get to where their men are going. Finally, the left SE runs a slanted post route directly over the middle. This is not a great target close to the goal line because it's easy to catch the ball out the back of the end zone, but in the open field this route has the best big play potential. Additionally, it works off of the slant out pattern the same way the slant out works off of the hook, trailing behind defenders that are already committed.

The position you probably want to assign the orange Playmaker route to is the left SE. We don't want to mess with the primary routes on the right side, but switching this slant post route to a quick in/out route in either direction could make for a nasty little surprise for the defense, especially if you use this play more than once in a game. You might do just that, because it's just that effective at scoring touchdowns.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 2yd

Left SE: N3E1-N5E5 (open)

Right SE: N3E1-N1E5 (open)

Right Flanker: 4yd Curl

Left RB: N2W2-N2-N2E2 (open)

Right RB: N1W3-W2-N4W1 (open)

Read Progression

1. Right flanker hook
2. Right SE out
3. Left SE slant post
4. Left RB circle
5. Right RB flats/seam

This progression is very straightforward, you just read the receivers in a counter-clockwise circle around the center. However, things happen quickly close to the end zone, so it's usually best to just key on a few routes. The hook route can usually be ignored as a decoy in goal line situations unless you're within the 3 yard line, instead focus on the out route. If you're under quick pressure it may be safer to immediately dump it to one of the backs rather than trying to lob it over the middle.

Analysis

Pros:

- Right SE can usually run away from coverage for a fairly easy TD
- RBs are often uncovered very close to the goal line, when the defense blitzes heavily
- SE slant post can make big plays in the open field

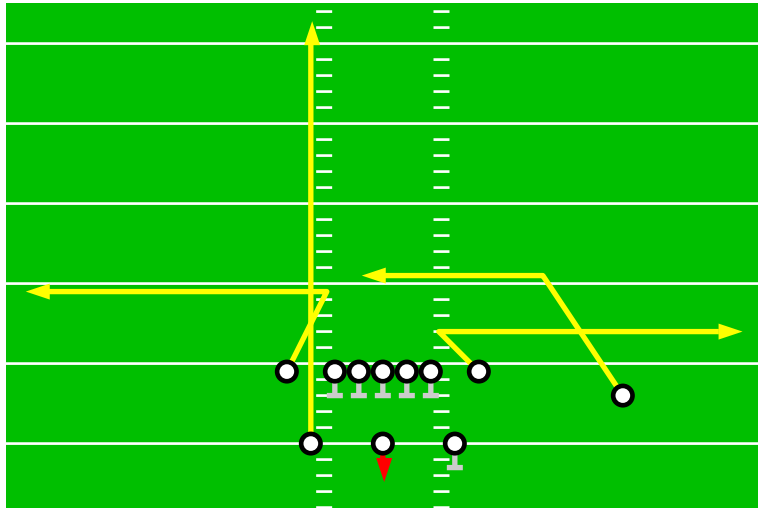
Cons:

- No blocking backs means that high snap + blitz around end = sack
- Jamming the SE will completely disrupt the primary read
- Out pattern requires a lot of practice to get the timing and accuracy down

Fissure

Fissure is a nice play to call when you need a pass that can reliably gain short yardage in the face of several possible defensive looks. A set of three quick cutting in and out routes, each with two possible reads, are an excellent counter to the blitzes and press coverage a lot of defenses may want to throw at you on third and about 5 yards to go.

The play is built around the sharp in-and-out routes run by the split ends. Either of these can be thrown immediately as a very quick slant to the inside, excellent against blitzes, or later as more traditional out patterns. On the right side the shorter out pattern combines with



a flanker slanted in route to cross up defenders, especially when playing man coverage. This in route also doubles as a quick slant pass, making six reads in total for the three primary routes. It takes a lot of skill and practice to take full advantage of all of these reads in such quick succession, but if you can you'll really tear up defenses with Fissure.

To round out the play the left running back runs a streak while the right RB pass blocks. This streak rarely makes a good deep throw, though once in while you can take a nice deep shot if your #2 back has good speed. It does a decent job stretching the defense to open up the left out route, though, and like the other routes *also* doubles as a nice quick read right up the seam, really the better look for this pattern.

The flanker makes a decent choice for the Playmaker. Switching this top receiver to a wheel makes Fissure into a legitimate deep threat as well as providing a different means to open up the right out route.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 1yd

Left SE: N2E1-W7 (open)

Right SE: N1W1-E7 (open)

Right Flanker: N3W2-W4 (open)

Left RB: 25yd Streak

Right RB: Pass Block

Read Progression

1. Right SE quick slant in
2. Left SE quick slant in
3. Flanker quick slant in
4. Left RB up seam
5. Right SE out
6. Left SE out
7. Flanker over middle
8. Left RB deep

Fissure has a lot of reads for a fairly simple looking play. The first four are the quick reads in the early parts of each route. Look for the slant ins from the inside out: right SE, left SE, flanker. Take a quick glance at the RB up the seam. Next move on to the main sections of each route, conveniently in the same order. The right and left SE out patterns, followed by the flanker right over the middle, and finally the RB deep. If nothing looks open you can roll to your left to give the flanker time to get open late or simply throw wide of either out pattern to get rid of the ball.

Analysis

Pros:

- Good at beating press coverage and blitzes
- Lots of reads makes Fissure very flexible in the hands of experienced players
- At least one of the in or out routes will beat man coverage almost every time

Cons:

- Not as good against base defenses (4-3 or 3-4) because more physical play close to the line of scrimmage can disrupt the timing of the quick in and out routes
- Novice players may not be able to take advantage of all of the quick reads which are necessary to have success against aggressive defenses
- Quick cutting and crossing routes lose some effectiveness against zone defenses (though shorter passes can still be completed underneath most zones)

Chapter 5

Singleback 3WR Formation

Overview

Singleback 3WR is one of my only formations that looks like it came straight out of a typical NFL playbook. This means that it lends itself better to balance than many of the formations in this book, effective for running as well as passing. However, with no lead blocker most running plays are simple, and may be best used as a change of pace rather than a grind it out attack.

				W1				LT	LG	C	RG	RT	T1						
W3										QB									W2
										R1									

Though single back formations are used in many offensive schemes, it lends itself quite well to West Coast offenses. My plays build off of these principles, relying heavily on slants and quick throws over the middle. The quarterback needs to be accurate and have good timing, the receivers should have good hands, run sharp routes, be able to take punishment over the middle and block effectively on running plays. Good vision and the ability to quickly assess a defense is critical. One difference from the timing scheme of west coast style is that I prefer to adjust the timing of many of the slant route passes depending on how the defense reacts. Throwing quickly after the snap is good against most defenses, but the ability to

adjust timing to select holes in the defense can be a big plus.

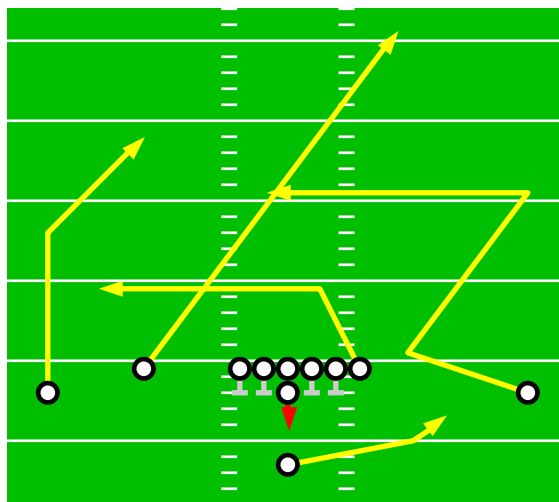
Because of the quick development of most of the passing plays the running back tends to run routes more often than block. Running plays tend to rely on quick execution rather than power or sophisticated blocking, which may be a nice change for players who do not like the slightly slower blocking schemes typical of [Diamond Wing](#) or the brutish power of [Strong T](#).

The given wide receiver assignments emphasize the slot receiver for quick throws over the middle, balanced by receiver #2 on the other side. Because quick routes are run from all positions the read progressions in Singleback 3WR can be more complicated than with other formations, though anyone who likes to throw quick slants can probably pick up many plays just by feel. This formation also gets the tight end involved in a more natural role, with lots of short routes run in the passing game and blocking in the running game.

Maverick

Maverick is a quick hitting play that focuses on slants run by the left split end (in the slot) and right flanker, as well as a drag route across the middle by the tight end. These three routes can all be thrown very quickly, making the play very effective against most blitzes.

The right flanker runs the most important route. The TE draws the short middle coverage which should open up the very shallow slant route the flanker starts with. If the initial reads are covered, rather than simply trying to move to an open area the flanker breaks sharply back to the outside corner, and if *still* nothing is open he turns again and runs across the deep middle. The last portion of this route is rarely used because the QB would have to hold onto the ball longer than is usually possible, but adds predictability if the play breaks down.



The left split end lines up in the slot and runs a deeper quick slant than the right flanker. This pattern can either be hit very early or later over the middle. Timing

is critical on an early throw because the TE undercuts this route and can step in front of the throw. It is also important to look out for any linebacker coverage the TE brings with him. A left flanker post and running back swing round out the play. The WR slant routes can expect 5–10 yards when hit early and more if hit later. The TE may only get 3–5 yards unless he can turn upfield and run after the catch.

There are a couple of potentially good Playmaker positions in this play, but I really like the left split end. A quick out cuts under the post pattern, a quick in should slide just under the tight end running in the opposite direction, great for crossing up defenders.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 1yd

Left Flanker: 10yd Post

Left SE: N8E6 (open)

TE: N2W1-W5 (open)

Right Flanker: N1W3-N4E3-W6 (open)

RB: Swing Right

Read Progression

1. Right flanker slant
2. Left SE slant
3. TE drag
4. RB swing
5. Left flanker post
6. Right flanker corner
7. Right flanker in

In any play with quick reads it is important to read the defense well *before* the snap. This may allow you to adjust the read progression if you spot a weakness in the defense that may disappear once the defenders have a chance to react to the play. In addition, take time to learn the inside WR routes well. The left slant route must be hit at difference places depending on the defensive alignment, and the

right flanker zig-zag pattern can really get a defense out of position when allowed to develop.

The first look is a very quick read to the right flanker slant. You must be ready to throw this as soon as the ball is snapped. The more traditional slant on the other side comes next. The exact timing on this throw may vary depending on the defensive coverage, so it may be a good idea to hold onto the ball an extra half second and stick with this read rather than moving on in the progression if you spot a weakness over the middle. You have to watch the TE, who happens to be the next read, as well as the LB in coverage when throwing the slant because he moves right through the throwing lane. After the TE look for the swing in the right flats, hopefully cleared out by the right flanker. Next up is the left flanker post route. I usually prefer to get rid of the ball by this point but if you still have it this route gives the best deep potential in the play. Finally, look for the last two sections of the right flanker route. These will probably come into play only if things breaks down and the QB is scrambling out of the pocket.

Analysis

Pros:

- Nearly impossible for human player to react in time to disrupt right flanker slant
- Three quick reads plus RB safety valve can nullify almost any blitz
- Inside receivers can both be thrown to early for safe, short yardage or later for bigger yardage

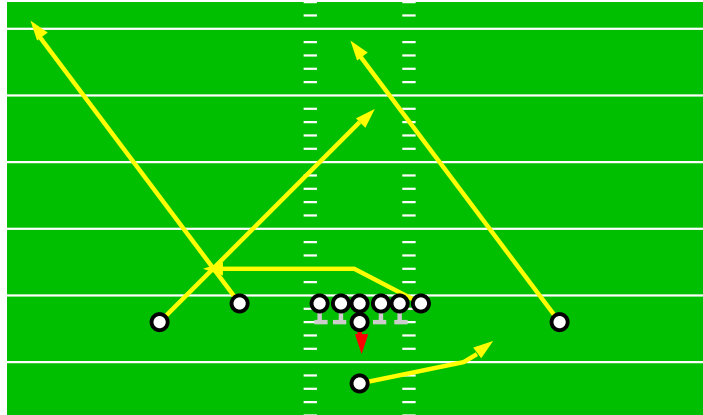
Cons:

- Requires a lot of practice to get the timing down and to read the defenders on the slant routes
- Jams at the line can disrupt the timing of the play (through having three quick reads helps make up for this)
- The bullet passes right through the offensive line can be tipped by defenders more easily than deeper passing plays
- QB cannot hold onto the ball for long

Stinger

Stinger is a fast and aggressive play that really lets you go after a defense. All three wide receivers run straight slant routes to maximize the speed of the play and allow for quick throws to be made before the defense knows what hit them. These quick reads and throws can get you in a little trouble if you play Stinger carelessly, but with quick, crisp execution defenses will be at your mercy.

Slants are almost always good at attacking man coverages, and Stinger is no exception here. The problem is that when run from the outside receiver positions bump-and-run coverage can break up the precise timing required. Stinger provides



a nice counter to this technique if you're the daring type, in the form of the left split end slant out. Aimed right over the top of the left cornerback, a *very* quick, *very* hard throw *immediately* after seeing the bump will have the SE running at full speed right behind the corner and away from most of the defensive help to the inside. I must stress that while this works nicely for at least 5 yards with a decent chance to run after if executed correctly, throw a hair late or to the inside and you're looking at a pick by the slot cornerback. It also may not work if the opposing player takes manual control of that CB. if you're not quite so adventurous just wait for the TE to get open over the left side for a short gain.

Just in case the defense is playing a short zone or tight coverage on a blitz, the tight end and running back run additional routes that are just the things to provide relief. The TE runs a very shallow drag right over the middle. This gets open quickly, but because it's so close to the line be sure to pick a good passing lane to avoid getting your pass tipped by a defensive lineman. The running back runs a standard swing route, one of my favorites against the blitz.

I like the right flanker for my orange Playmaker route. His relative isolation makes him the ideal position to switch to a quick in, out or stop route, or to a wheel. Whatever looks like a vulnerability in the defense.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 1yd

Left Flanker: N6E6 (open)

Left SE: N8W6 (open)

TE: N1W2-W4 (open)

Right Flanker: N8W6 (open)

RB: Swing Right

Read Progression

1. Right flanker slant
2. RB swing
3. Left flanker slant
4. Left SE corner
5. TE drag

The progression listed above applies in most situations. However, if you want to try and exploit the Cover 2 bump-and-run with the quit slant out, you *must* look for this first, throwing immediately after the snap. Otherwise you're just giving the slot corner a chance to plan his end zone celebration after taking an interception the other way for six.

Excepting the anti-press coverage hot read above, the Stinger progression starts out with the right flanker slant. This is my favorite throw to make because the right flanker generally has a bit more room to work with than the left two receivers. Next is the RB swing underneath this slant. The left flanker slant is next, coming after the swing because it's best to be sure that the left flanker has not gotten caught up in any traffic around the left SE, who is the next read. This throw requires extra care because a free safety who gets a good jump will have a perfect line to step into the throw and intercept it. This is why I usually only throw the slant corner when the left flanker is jammed at the line and I can throw the ball a bit to the outside, away from the safety. Last, look for the TE right over the middle, being sure to pick a good passing lane to fit the ball through.

Analysis

Pros:

- Fast and aggressive passing play that should cool down attacking defenses
- Swing pass is devastating against blitzes

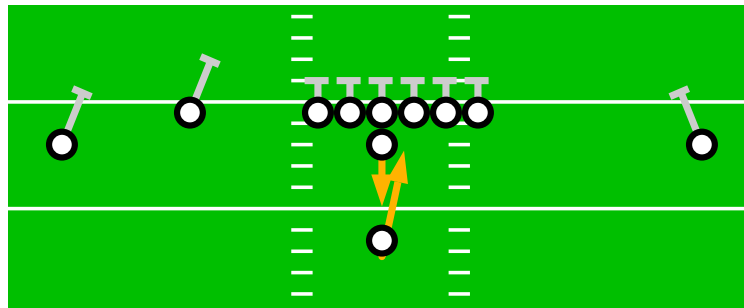
Cons:

- Blitzes and tight zone coverages can take away the deeper streak routes
- Careless throws, especially in the area of the crossing slants, are prone to interception
- TE can get caught up in traffic from the trenches

HB Plunge

This simple, straight ahead running play works best when the defense is expecting pass. With no lead blockers a simple handoff to the running back straight up the middle is used to try to catch the defense by surprise and pick up a few yards before they can react.

Against defenses of equal or lesser ability HB Plunge can likely be used in more standard situations. However, it is simply too simple to be effective against



great defenses, especially on the All Madden difficulty setting, if they are prepared to stop the run. No lead blocker means it's up to the offensive line to get a good push and sustain their blocks, so the running back can't waste his time heading upfield. The play is most effective against outside blitzes which will run right past the running back, or when the defensive line is spread out wide to stop runs to the outside.

Naturally, the Playmaker feature works perfectly. The normal right side is probably slightly better with all other things being equal because of the TE block-

ing support, but otherwise it's pretty much the same deal to either side.

Player Assignments

O-Line and TE: Run Block

QB: Handoff to Running Back

Left Flanker and SE: Lead Right

Right Flanker: Lead Left

RB: Back Step-Dive Right

Blocking Assessment

Because this run is quick and up the middle the blocking assessment is simple. The standard holes to look for are between the center and right guard, and between the right guards and tackle. It is also possible to bounce outside between the tackle and TE, or even outside the TE, but this should only be done if the defense stuffs the middle and open space is clearly visible. The success of the play relies on the RB hitting the line by the time the defense has realized it's a run, so it's not a good idea to dance around in the backfield.

If the defense looks stacked on the right side of the line, the Playmaker control lets you easily switch the play to the left. With the play's simple, straight-ahead blocking technique running to either side works equally well.

Analysis

Pros:

- Simple and easy to learn running play that will be familiar to regular football fans
- Will run past most outside blitzes
- Easy and effective use of Playmaker control
- Should never lose many yards due to quick execution and up the middle direction

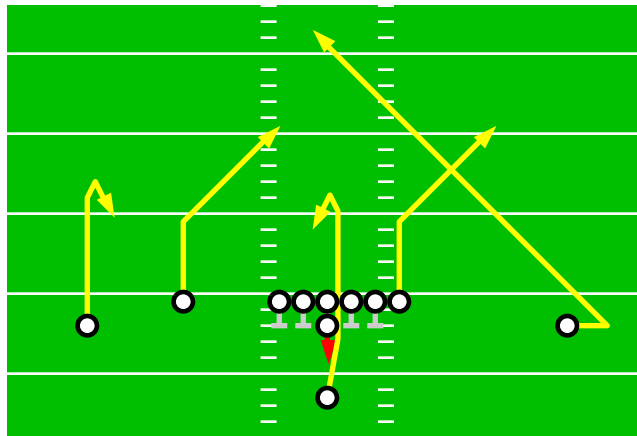
Cons:

- No lead blocker and lack of sophistication minimize effectiveness against superior defenses or anyone geared to stop the run
- Difficult to break for very long gains

WR Zigs

Above I told you how Stinger has a route you can use to beat press coverage if you're brave enough to risk it. Well WR Zigs has a maneuver that's more effective and less likely to have you holding your controller in a white-knuckle grip. This maneuver is an innovative slant pattern that starts by taking a step to the outside before cutting back at a 45 degree angle to the inside. This little first step makes it nearly impossible to bump successfully at the line of scrimmage (from a flanker position at least, haven't tried it with a split end who actually starts right on the line of scrimmage). Some players may also like the fact that they get an extra second to get the timing of the pass down, rather than rushing to throw the slant right after the ball is snapped.

Every other route is of the traditional variety, though setup for fairly quick execution. The wide receivers on the left run curl and short post routes, while the tight end runs a short corner pattern that can help make room for the delayed slant underneath. The running back runs a hook route right up through the middle of the line, a rarity



in my playbook. I'm usually not big on these running back routes that often get jammed up in traffic, but if your opponent has figured out that my playbook uses a lot of swing passes then this little change-up might take them by surprise.

One thing I should mention about the post route. I've noticed that against man coverage this receiver is constantly bumped all the way through the route, making him very difficult to complete the pass to even if he appears to have inside position the entire way, occasionally resulting in an interception. Most of my

experience with this has been through several repetitions in Practice mode, but from my normal game time experience I believe that this contact will be penalized rarely, if ever. Hopefully the level of contact in this type of coverage is reduced in future editions of Madden, but for now it's just something to deal with.

The right flanker gets my vote for Playmaker, mainly due to his isolated position, but for this play any of the wide receivers will actually work out okay. Both guys on the left start their routes straight upfield so either could open up an in/out route for the other, and the flanker could make good use of the outside wheel route.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 1yd

Left Flanker: 8yd Curl

Left SE: 5yd Post

TE: 5yd Corner

Right Flanker: E1-N7W7 (open)

RB: 8yd Hook

Read Progression

1. Left SE post
2. Right flanker slant
3. TE corner
4. Left SE curl
5. RB hook

For once the slant route is not the first read in a play, due to the out step added to the beginning of it. In WR Zigs we start by looking to the post, which is the best route against most zone coverages. If not covered closely go ahead and throw before the break, just watch out for too-tight man coverage. Now we go for the slant. Don't rush this throw, try to hit it in the middle between the cornerback and safety, watching for the linebacker who may slide over to take away the passing lane. Next look for the TE corner just downfield, then left to the flanker curl. This route is good against many coverages but requires fairly good pass protection and good ball placement. Last is the RB hook. This may or may not be an option

depending on the pass protection and how quickly the back gets through the line, so try not to rely on this route too heavily.

Analysis

Pros:

- Unique slant pattern is almost impossible to stop using press coverage
- Play is fairly easy to learn due to single read per receiver progression and use of mainly standard routes
- Post pattern is often uncovered against 4-3 defenses

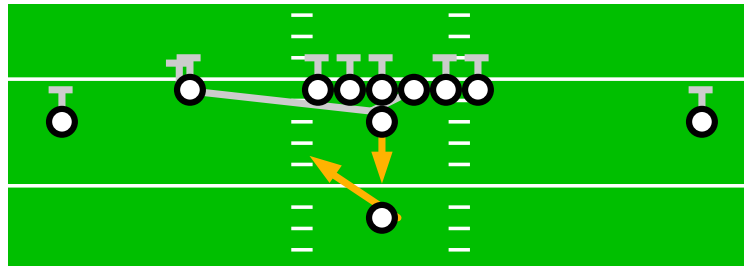
Cons:

- Post pattern often gets roughed up unmercifully against man coverage without drawing a flag
- RB has a hard time fighting through traffic on middle hook route

Counter Trap

It took me a while to develop a good misdirection play in a singleback, one tight end set, but I think I came through pretty well with Counter Trap. It's pretty simple actually, just a standard counter run with one pulling guard and otherwise straight-ahead blocking across the line. Though fairly effective with its standard aim towards the left side, this play has the distinction of being probably my only play that works best when run in the opposite direction using the Playmaker control.

Counter Trap is one of those plays that probably never would have made it into the book if it wasn't for the inclusion of the Play-



maker control in Madden 2004. Despite the cases where it just doesn't work out, the Playmaker control is truly one of the greatest gifts a running game could ask

for. With simple North-South runs its useful enough just allowing the play to be directed to the left or right side, whichever looks most vulnerable. For more sophisticated runs though, involving directional blocks and pulling linemen, when it works for these plays it's like getting two plays for the price of one.

The way Counter Trap is drawn up it goes to the left side following a counter step intended to get the defense moving in the direction of the strong right side of the formation. The pulling guard creates an opening for the defense to enter, trapping them away from the real direction of the play off left tackle. The problem is that with no lead blocker any rush around left tackle will get to the running back in the backfield untouched. This was causing me serious problems in testing until I discovered that the Playmaker flip was working on a consistent basis. Running behind the tight end takes some of the surprise out of the play, but hey, you just have to go with works.

Player Assignments

Left Tackle: Run Block

Left Guard: Run Block

Center: Run Block

Right Guard: Pull Left

Right Tackle: Run Block

TE: Run Block

QB: Handoff to Running Back

WRs: Run Block

RB: Counter Step-Off Tackle Left

Blocking Assessment

Like I said above, the play works best most of the time going to the right. More specifically, you should *never* run this play in the default left direction if either the right defensive end or right outside linebacker is lined up wide and can get a clean rush around the left tackle. Remember that the left tackle is run blocking here so he won't slide out to stop the same rusher he might if he were pass blocking. A few practice reps will show you what the limits are more easily than any description I give, so just try it out a few times. If you can run off left tackle you usually want to cut it up before the inside receiver (the split end) unless he does a really good job sustaining his block. If you *can* run to the outside, once in a great while you

may even be able to get outside the second receiver (the flanker), but in general don't count on it.

Things are a little bit different running to the right side, which you'll probably do most of the times you run Counter Trap. Even if the defensive line or linebackers spread out to cover both edges you usually want to go to the right because the TE can handle this edge rush. Rather than getting around all of the offensive line blockers in this case, you probably want to cut up a little sooner, probably between the TE and right tackle. This is another thing that makes running right with this play easier, the decision to cut or not to cut is not as critical because it's not as East-West oriented as when going to the left.

Analysis

Pros:

- Great Playmaker flip, usually even better than the original play
- Can often exploit out of position defenses for 7 or 8 yard gains

Cons:

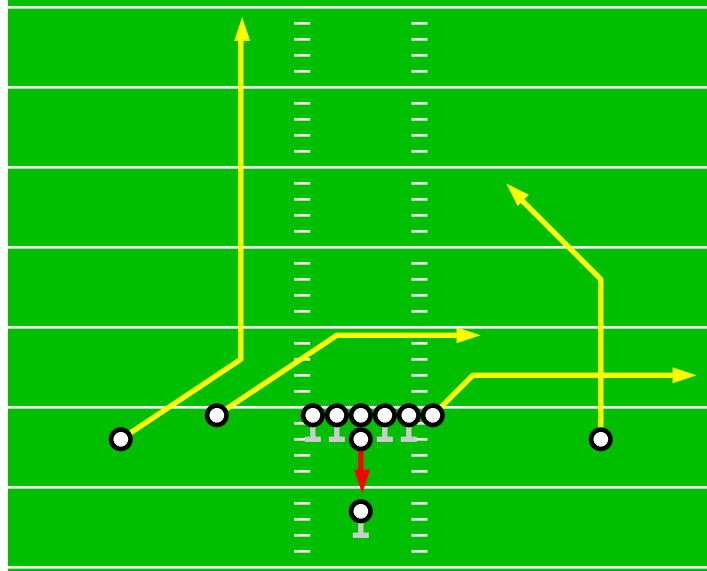
- Standard left direction for play is almost certain to lose yards if a LB or DE is spread out wide to the left side
- Slow development compared to more common dive or sprint runs from singleback formation can result in losses against strong defensive rushes

Leveler

I like slant routes because they're a quick, easy and reliable way of getting wide receivers open right off the line of scrimmage. Defenses can take away one slant if they play really tight man coverage or keep some linebackers in short zones, but it's hard to shut down two or three. Still, if you're using my playbook it won't be too long before your opponent looks for a way to shut these slants down, whatever it takes. One solution would be mix up different routes and get away from the quick slants a bit until the defense loosens up. Well, you should already be using other routes as long as don't keep running the same plays over and over again, and

giving up on a strength is generally not a way to win games, so for this play we'll do something else: we'll take a couple of slants and make them even sharper.

There's a tradeoff you have to consider every time you build a quick slant route into a play. You have to weigh the ease with which the receiver gets open quickly against the number of yards he's likely to pick up when he makes a catch. The more vertical the route is, the harder it is to get open but the more yards he'll have on a quick



throw (of course even vertical routes can get open eventually, otherwise we wouldn't have streak routes, but we're more concerned with quick throws here). A 45 degree angle is usually a good tradeoff, and I use it often. In Leveler though I start both left side receivers in at about 30 degree angles. You won't get many yards throwing these quick passes but there's not much man coverage can do to stop it either. To add a little flare to the play, after about 8 yards the outside flanker breaks downfield into a streak while the inside split end cuts slightly to his right in a drag route over the middle.

The tight end also joins the party taking one quick step up and out before turning all the way to the outside. The only route that attacks directly downfield is the right flanker, who runs a post. With most of the passes going to receivers running sideways you don't want to use Leveler if you need to gain a lot of yards, but it can be a nice call for short yardage conversions.

With the receivers mainly moving from left to right I like the left flanker for my Playmaker. Whatever he does will be in relative isolation because the SE who is his nearest neighbor runs a route almost directly away from him. Feel free to throw in a wheel route here to add some vertical punch to the play.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 2yd

Left Flanker: N2E3-N8 (open)

Left SE: N2E3-E3 (open)

TE: N1E1-E5 (open)

Right Flanker: 10yd Post

RB: Pass Block

Read Progression

1. Left flanker shallow slant
2. Left SE shallow slant
3. TE out
4. Left SE drag
5. Right SE post
6. Left flanker slot streak

As usual we start with the slant routes on the left. Look first to the flanker on the outside and then to the SE inside. I prefer the flanker here because you won't have to worry about a linebacker like you might with the SE slant. Keep looking right to the TE quick out, which is your best weapon against bump coverage on the corners. Back over the middle is the left SE drag route. Again the key here is to watch the linebackers. It's best against a LB blitz but can often slip under zones coverages. The post route is next. I like this route against zones, hitting it in the soft spot between the cornerback and safety. Finally we have the left flanker streak. You probably won't use this much, and it takes too long to develop to make a really good deep throw, so concentrate on hitting it right up the seam, soon after the break.

Analysis

Pros:

- Three horizontal slant and out routes very tough to cover one-on-one
- Pretty decent against all major coverage schemes

Cons:

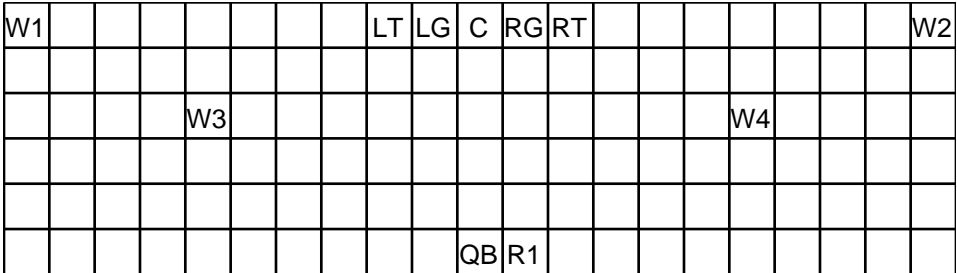
- Not much of a deep threat
- Crowding the short zone will make the primary reads difficult

Chapter 6

Slingshot Formation

Overview

The Slingshot formation lines up four wide receivers as far as possible across the line of scrimmage with the inside receivers off of the line, giving the appearance of a pulled slingshot, hence the name. The super-spread design is intended to force opposing defensive backs to cover from sideline to sideline. Most plays run routes as different depths to stretch defenses vertically as well as horizontally. By using the entire field receivers can easily find openings in zone defenses, while man defenses leave multiple receivers in single coverage, ripe for picking by a skilled quarterback. Because of the extra-deep shotgun position of the quarterback and running back, Slingshot is a passing only formation.



The quarterback’s deep shotgun position allows an extra half second or so for routes to develop and the quarterback to react to blitzes. This frees up the single running back to usually run a fifth pass pattern to pull a linebacker into coverage and give the quarterback an easy checkdown.

Most Slingshot plays work in three sections. Each pair of receivers to either

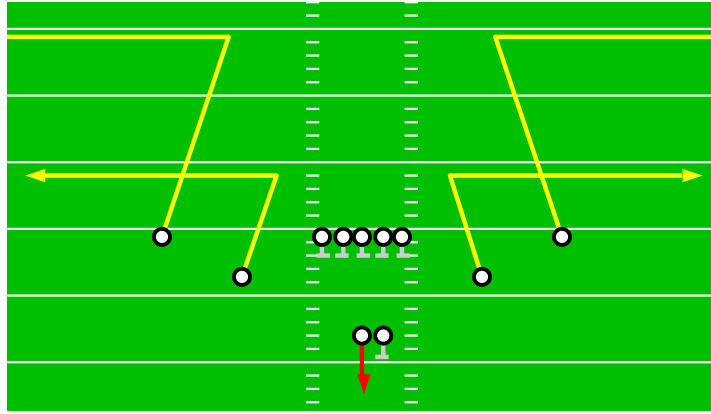
side run routes complimentary to each other, with one wideout attempting to draw coverage. This is not to say the routes are decoys, the route that draws coverage is usually the early, short yardage read, while the second route is the later, longer yardage read. A quarterback needs to learn to read each receiver pair in a single glance to really master such plays. Though progressions vary between the different plays, a good rule of thumb is to read one side of the formation first, then the other side. The running back usually comes last because he takes a moment just to get back to the line of scrimmage from his deep position. The upside for the back is nearly always a favorable matchup against a linebacker who steps into coverage late. In Madden NFL 2003 the Rams were probably the ultimate Slingshot team (and worked well for most other formations, as well), in large part due to great depth at wide receiver but also because of the speed and catching ability of Marshall Faulk out of the backfield. In Madden 2004 teams tend to be a bit more balanced throughout the league but I would say the Chiefs with another do-everything back like Priest Holmes is a great fit.

My wide receiver assignments are somewhat arbitrary because each play really focuses on different wideout positions. **Undercuts** (maybe my favorite play in this entire book) favors the left two WRs for possession, with speed needed by the right SE. **Deep Outs** is aimed at the flankers, while the split ends mainly draw coverage deep. Flicker has the split ends as first reads. Though I have not experimented much with different assignments, I suspect the displayed formation is close to optimal. It balances skill equally between split end and flanker, and slightly favors the left side over the right due to those routes in Undercuts and the running back being on the right side, and therefore adding ability to that side. Additionally, the left flanker seems to get the most catches and yards in my experience with my favorite plays.

Deep Outs

A modification of the traditional deep outs plays. The first modification runs two outs on each side, at different depths. The deeper split ends draw the safeties, freeing up the flankers underneath. The second modification is to start each pattern slanted in rather than running straight upfield. This causes the defense, already spread wide across the field to protect against the Slingshot formation, to pull back a bit into the middle of the field, opening the sidelines to the sharp cuts to the outside.

The flankers running the underneath routes are the primary targets in this play, with the split ends mainly drawing coverage. The SEs can usually get open late, but require tricky throws over the coverage of the flanker and away from the out-



side cornerback and safety. This requires precision timing, very good pass protection, and just the right touch on the throw.

The orange primary route should be set to one of the SE deep outs. Often times you will want to audible the split end to the near side of the field to a wheel route (although an ordinary straight streak route may be even better) because there may not be enough room to run the standard deep out route effectively. The Playmaker control makes this easy, and also gives you the option of switching a longer developing route to a quick in or out route if you expect quick pressure from the defense.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 3yd

Left SE: N6E2-W8 (open)

Left Flanker: N3E1-W7 (open)

Right Flanker: N3W1-E7 (open)

Right SE: N6W2-E8 (open)

RB: Pass Block

Read Progression

1. Flanker out (short side of field)
2. Flanker out (wide side of field)
3. SE out (short side of field)
4. SE out (wide side of field)

Because the deep out routes may run out of room on the sidelines, the QB needs to take extra care with his throws when the play starts close to either set of hash marks. You'll want to look at the receivers to the short side of the field first, before they run out of bounds, but plan ahead on trying for the easier throw to the wide side of the field. If the play starts more towards the middle of the field either side makes a good option, but the timing of the throw becomes more of an issue here. It's a good idea to practice this play with the ball positioned at different points between the hashes to get a good feel for when the ball has to be released in different situations.

Something else to look for is the quick throw to the flankers on the slant portion of their routes. If the defense is not playing Dime or brings a DB blitz one of the flankers may be uncovered right off the snap. An immediate throw here can net an easy 5–10 yards.

Analysis

Pros:

- One of the flankers almost always gets open
- If pressure is brought with a blitz the flanker on the blitz side may get open early on the slant (before he breaks to the outside)
- Longer developing play mostly nullifies effects of bad shotgun snaps
- Even if receivers are covered, leading the pass far enough works as a safe throw away, putting the ball out of bounds

Cons:

- No easy dumpoff route
- SE outs can be tricky and dangerous, the long distance makes timing very important, and there is usually safety help (the flankers will only get LB help)
- The RB in the formation doesn't always step up to block like you might expect, limiting their effectiveness and sometimes getting in the QB's way when scrambling (less of an issue in Madden 2004 than in Madden 2003)

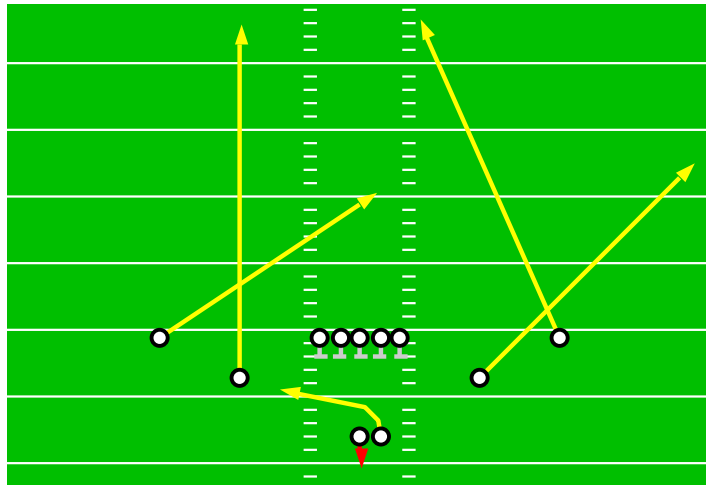
Modified From 2003 Web Version: *Due to the faster pass rush in Madden 2004 compared with Madden 2003 this play has been modified from its original version.*

The vertical first segment of all four out routes has been shortened by 1N to speed up execution.

Vectors

Vectors is a good play to run if you find the sheer number of reads and cuts made in some of my other high-powered passing plays daunting. Other than the running back, who runs a fairly simple pattern himself, it consists entirely of straight slants and streaks. Additionally each route only has one read associated with it, making Vectors one of the easier plays to learn and run in the Slingshot formation.

Because the routes get moving quickly, this is a great play against any opponent who thinks he can stop your passing game with a Nickel defense. It also does a great job vs. man coverage with the heavy emphasis on slants patterns that cross under other receivers. Blitzes are solved with a toss to



the running back. The only thing to really watch out for is press coverage on the outside receivers. As you've probably noticed by this point in the book this probably causes me more frustration than just about anything else a defense does. Still, as with most of my plays there are ways to attack it if you know what you're doing. With Vectors a quick, hard throw to the inside streak by the left flanker will usually do the trick.

Vectors has one more pretty nice feature going for it: it's pretty good against deep zones. A lot of plays are good at attacking man using nifty moves and crossing routes, or attacking zones by spreading out the defensive backfield and hitting quick throws down the seams. Vectors does a pretty good job of both.

Normally I like giving the Playmaker route to one of the best receivers in the field, but with Vectors I'm choosing the #3 man at left flanker. A quick in or out route either way can exploit a spread out defense, and adjusting the streak to a wheel route could give almost the same play but maybe allow the flanker to run

outside of the left slant rather than inside, throwing a nice little wrinkle at the defense.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 1yd

Left SE: N4E6 (open)

Left Flanker: 25yd Streak

Right Flanker: N6E6 (open)

Right SE: N9W4 (open)

RB: Flats Left

Read Progression

1. Right flanker slant out
2. Right SE slant in
3. RB flats
4. Left SE slant in
5. Left flanker streak

Besides being composed of simple routes, the progression of Vectors is also fairly simple. On each side of the field the QB looks first to the left receiver running a slant to the right, then to the right receiver running a streak or deep slant over the top of the other route. These pairs of reads are sandwiched around a look to the RB in the left flats. Looking at it another way, because the receivers running slants to the right end up on the right side of their partners, you can really make the reads simply by scanning left to right.

Analysis

Pros:

- No breaks or multiple reads for any single WR route make this a relatively easy five route play to learn
- Well balanced against man and zone coverages
- Slants and RB flats routes will neutralize any blitz

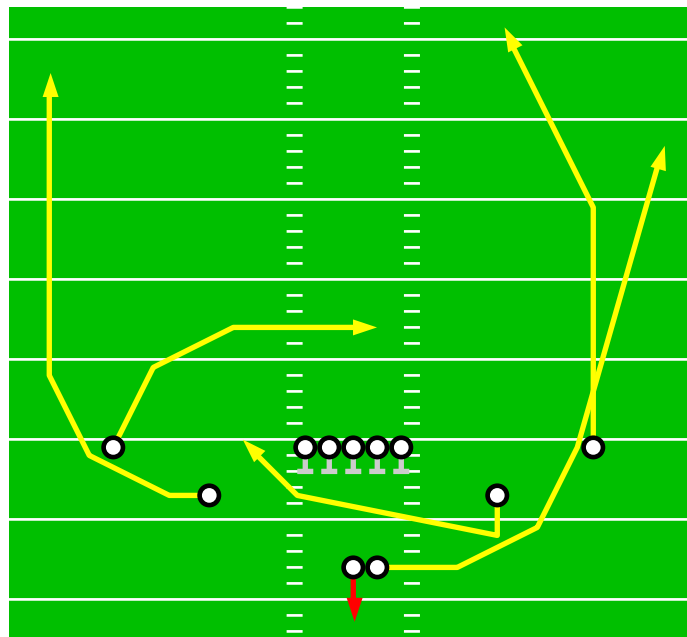
Cons:

- Bump coverage can limit QB to quick inside streak and flats route
- Slant out can be a dangerous throw, especially against zone defenses
- Deep slant on right side is tempting down the middle but can be dangerous if a LB gets a good, deep drop

Undercuts

A radically designed passing play that features all five eligible receivers running patterns undercutting each other. These routes compliment each other to pull defenders out of position, forcing them to chase across the field. Against man coverage the defense can be torn apart as receivers run away from their man, using the other patterns as screens. If the defense is in a zone, the deeper routes will draw the primary coverage, leaving the underneath routes open for a quick strike.

The primary targets are the left split end and flanker, and the running back. The paired left receiver routes are particularly difficult for defenses to stop. Zone coverages may prevent defenders from getting crossed up but will allow the drag route to get open over the middle. Press coverage can cut the inside defender off from the flanker running to the outside. Hitting either of these receivers quickly



should net an easy 6–10 yards, while late passes to the flanker down the left sidelines can go for 15 or more yards. The right SE's skinny post has the best big play capability but is a dangerous pass due to the large distance from the QB's deep position. The right flanker coming around behind the O-line can make for a nasty surprise if you have the time to let him work into the open, but it's usually

better to take an earlier read when possible.

The real key to the play though may be the running back swing. It's an easy completion close to the line of scrimmage that allows him to make moves in the open field, and doubles as a deep threat down the right sideline in the wake of the skinny post.

You have a couple of choices in assigning the primary Playmaker route. The right SE running the skinny post is in the best position to take advantage of a quick in/out route if you only need to gain a few yards. However, the right flanker route is seldom used in actual game conditions, so this might be a better option. You have to be careful about audibles here though, as a hot route might interfere with the other routes run. A streak will run close to the skinny post, a quick out might draw coverage towards the RB swing, and a quick in will be aimed right at the SE drag.

Because of the great number of possible throws Undercuts features that are both reliable and effective it makes a great choice for an audible play as part of a hurry up offense. I don't know if any play has served me better when needing to move the ball quickly and consistently down the field and score. Though the right coverage schemes can certainly slow it down, its combination of quick routes that get open easily, deep strikes, and the multi-purpose RB swing make it near impossible to stop completely, even when a defense knows it's coming.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 2yd

Left SE: N2E1-N1E2-E3 (open)

Left Flanker: W1-N1W1-N2W1-N7 (open)

Right Flanker: S1-N1W5-N1W1 (open)

Right SE: N6-N4W2 (open)

RB: E2-N1E2-N2E1-N7E2 (open)

Read Progression

1. Left SE short drag
2. Left flanker under SE
3. RB in flats
4. Right SE skinny post

5. Left flanker down sideline
6. RB down right sideline
7. Right flanker around left side of O-line

The first place you want to look is at the left two receivers. These routes work best against man coverage where the SE runs the outside defender to the inside, out of the flanker's way. It's a little more dicey against outside press coverage; here you can hold onto the ball and wait for the SE break free to the inside, or you can throw a high arcing pass over the bump to the flanker running down the sideline. The next look is to the RB out in the right flats. The right SE skinny post should draw the CB deep but a LB may slide over to cover this route. Press coverage will also jam things up. After these primary routes have been exhausted look downfield to the skinny post. Make sure your long throw can beat the safety who will probably come over to help. Finally, the left flanker and RB down their respective sidelines and the right flanker making his way around the offensive line round things out. With a speedy RB the pass to him late down the sideline may be the best bet for fairly reliable big yardage in Undercuts. It's bailed me out more than a few times on critical third and 10 yards or more conversions.

Analysis

Pros:

- Left SE, flanker combo almost impossible to defend completely without sacrificing other areas
- RB is hard to defend due to wide swing pattern, if he is covered early then the left SE over the middle will probably break free, and the RB can often outrun the LB coverage down the sideline
- Skinny post gives big play opportunities if the defense plays close to line, makes play excellent for hurry up offense when time is short
- Well balanced, effective against aggressive blitzes as well as safe coverages

Cons:

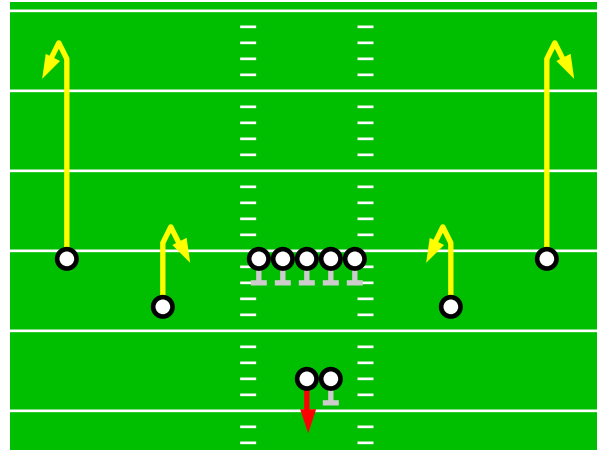
- Skinny post can be a dangerous throw due to the deep drop of the QB; a receiver may look like he has the corner beat but the pass may hang in the air long enough for the safety to step in front of the WR for an interception

- Right flanker route takes a while to develop, catch can be difficult because the pass is aimed at the receiver's back
- Semi-vulnerable to bad shotgun snaps, mainly by screwing up quick throws to the receivers on the left side

Comebacks

Good utilization of curl routes is a nice tactic to employ when you've been pushing a defense downfield with vertical routes and want to switch things up as they try to compensate. Comebacks features four curl routes in total, short ones by the flankers inside and longer ones by the split ends outside. The nice and easy reads and throws these curls offer can make a good compliment to more risky and aggressive passing plays that attack the defense deep.

I've found that at least 75% of the time I like to go with the inside curls. These routes may not get you much more than 5 yards but are very effective against all of the standard coverage schemes that you'll see on the majority of downs, unless your opponent is really into exotic schemes. Even in these cases at least one of these routes will get open most of the time, and unless the defense



brings a very fierce pass rush they won't be able to get to the quarterback fast enough to interrupt his throw. This is a difficult task, even with a blitz, because the running back stays at home to pick up any rushers the offensive line cannot account for.

Though I don't use them nearly as often, the longer outside curls can gain very good yardage, usually in the 12–15 yard range, and work pretty well against straight up man-to-man coverage. To get every extra bit of space possible for the throw each split end turns to the outside, which is usually where you want to make sure the ball is placed. This does slightly increase the distance of a throw that is already pretty long to begin with, so make sure the receiver is well open and has good body position on his defender before making this pass.

The Playmaker assignment is a tough choice with Comebacks, but I have to go with one of the split ends. While the flankers can make good use of quick in and especially out routes, their curl routes are simply too important. There's a much greater chance that the defense can cover only one of the short curls than there is that they can cover both, so you don't want to take these routes away and possibly leave your QB out to dry. Better to go with a SE where a wheel route may give you a good downfield shot if he draws single coverage.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 2yd

Left SE: N5 (curl left)

Left Flanker: 4yd Curl

Right Flanker: 4yd Curl

Right SE: N5 (curl right)

RB: Pass Block

Read Progression

1. Left flanker curl
2. Right flanker curl
3. Right SE curl
4. Left SE curl

The reads here are very simple. After the snap look at the center of the of the field and take in the flankers and the linebackers all at once, then throw to whichever flanker gets more open. Like I said earlier, you will probably want to make one of these throws the great majority of the time, especially against zones or outside press coverage so it's best to be prepared. I look left first because that's the #3 receiver as opposed to the #4 receivereivere right, but with a throw this simple you generally just want to go with the best opening.

If the flankers *are* both covered, or if the defense plays man and you just want to take a shot for more yards, look to the split ends next. Remember to make a good, hard throw and be careful about the ball placement and the body position of the receiver.

Analysis

Pros:

- Only one type of route, making for easy learning, reading and execution
- At least one of the short flanker curls can get open against almost any defense
- Great change-up after you've been pushing the defense with deep routes

Cons:

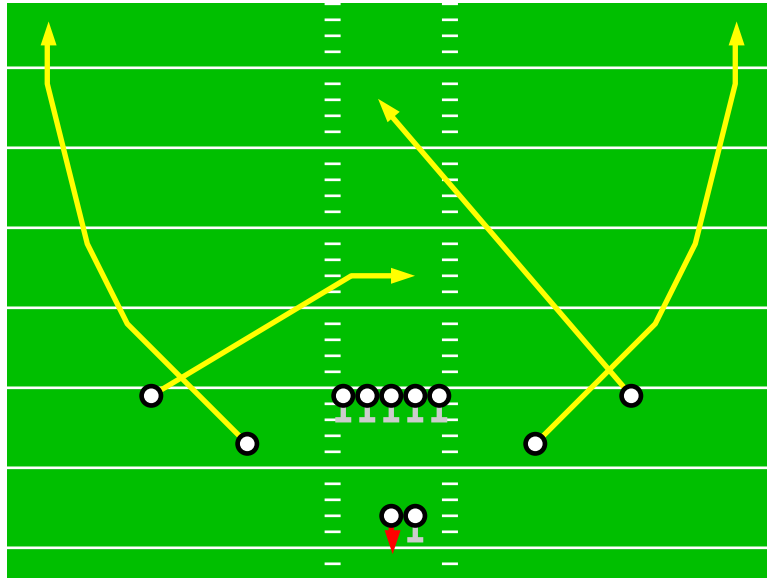
- Difficult to get good YAC unless the defense plays very soft on the inside curls
- Outside curls are difficult throws against most coverages

Crossing Slants

I originally envisioned Crossing Slants as being exactly what its name implies: four slant patterns, two on each side, with the split ends slanting in over the flankers slanting out. This worked out pretty well for the split ends but the flankers tended to run out of real estate, especially on the short side of the field. A little bit of modification and I had what appears today. Rather than slanting directly out, the flankers start on slants, but curve upfield after crossing under the outside receivers. These broad wheel routes allow the flankers to stay in bounds and attack deep downfield to boot.

I also tinkered around a bit with the inward slants before finding the current solution. I liked the idea of a completely symmetrical play, but it does no good to have slant routes run right into each other. by varying the angles I was able to keep the flavor while giving the quarterback a couple of complimentary options. On the left the slant is shallow, getting open with ease. On the right the slant is deeper, making for more big play potential. Together these routes form a great duo.

One thing to watch out for on the right slant is physical coverage. This route seems to get bumped quite a bit against man coverage and with blitzes. I would recommend not throwing this pass until you are sure that the receiver has gotten clean separation.



make the throw with the rough coverage you risk missing completely. While this doesn't seem to seem in too many interceptions, it's still not a risk worth taking.

I like the right split end on the deeper slant in to be my Playmaker. Because this route isn't as much of a sure thing as the slant on the other side it can make the best use of a little extra flexibility. The flankers are okay for switches to quick out routes but not much else, which is why I can't recommend them for the assignment.

Player Assignments

- O-Line:** Pass Block
- QB:** Dropback 1yd
- Left SE:** N3E5-E1 (open)
- Left Flanker:** N3W3-N2W1-N4W1-N1 (open)
- Right Flanker:** N3E3-N2E1-N4E1-N1 (open)
- Right SE:** N7W6 (open)
- RB:** Pass Block

Read Progression

1. Left SE slant
2. Right SE slant

3. Right flanker wheel
4. Left flanker wheel

Everything here is pretty straightforward. We start with the inside slants, beginning on the left. Because it's run shallower it gets open the easiest, though usually for a few less yards than the slightly deep slant on the right, which is the second read. The slant out/wheel routes make the third and fourth reads. Look at the right side first between the two to minimize the number of times you need to look back and forth. These generally work best against man coverage. Make the throw hard and to the outside. Strangely, they don't seem to work as well as the inside slants against blitzes, even DB blitzes.

A very important word of caution about the wheel routes. If the defense runs something like Cover 2 Pinch with press coverage on the outside corners you may be tempted to try to go for a big play with either wheel route over the top of the bump. *Do not try this*, at least not during an actual game. If your curiosity gets the best of you try it out on the practice field. During my analysis of Crossing Slant I completed this pass the first time I tried it and thought I was onto a good exploit for this coverage. Nearly every other attempt I made was intercepted or probably should have been, regardless of exactly where or when I threw the ball, dashing those initial hopes. If the inside slants get jammed up the only option you really have is to hope the pass protection holds up long enough for the receivers to beat the bumps. This really isn't too bad as the slants, especially the shallow slant on the left, tend to break press coverage faster than most other routes and are wide open for a fast, hard throw immediately afterwards. The QB may have to buy a second with his feet, but with good poise can outlast the coverage.

Analysis

Pros:

- Inside slants work well against man and zone coverages as well as blitzes
- Only four fairly simple reads
- Can beat bump coverage with time

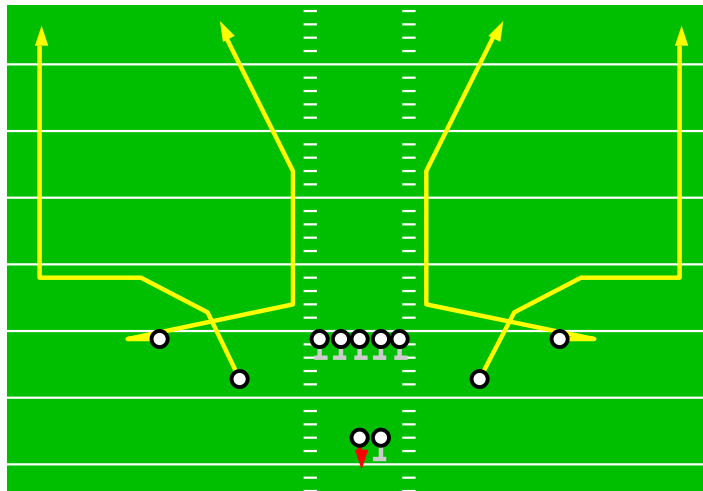
Cons:

- Broad wheel patterns are dangerous, especially with outside press
- Right SE slant can get roughed up quite a bit, really disrupting timing

Flicker

One of the more sophisticated plays I've ever created, Flicker seeks to use every bit of the field and give the quarterback multiple reads for nearly every receiver. Flicker was heavily influenced by both the undercutting routes of [Undercuts](#) and the snapback routes of [Reflex \(Crossbow\)](#). The wide receivers start out running sideways across the field, then turn upfield in well defined routes rather than simply scrambling to find an open area. These multiple level routes give Flicker more depth than almost any other play.

Although Flicker has great depth, the main emphasis is on quick, sharp execution. The primary targets are the split ends, who can expect to gain anywhere from 3–10 yards, depending on how tight the coverage is and how early the throw comes, with a chance to turn upfield and run a lot farther if the safeties and linebackers are cleared out by the flanker out routes.



The throws to the SEs require some zip as well as a good passing lane as they run right behind the defensive line. The flanker out patterns are the next best targets. These routes can expect slightly better yardage (about 5–10 on average), but with less chance for run after the catch and possible problems catching the ball in bounds. These throws require a lot of touch, both a nice arc on the ball to get it over the cornerback covering the SE and placement to the outside, away from flanker's defender. Practice is crucial for all of these routes.

So far we've covered the primary reads, but Flicker still has more to offer. Each route discussed so far primarily works sideways, stretching the defense laterally. Most of the time this works well enough to get a quick throw off for short to medium yardage. On the rare situations that the defense both crowds the short zone and does not bring much pressure, each receiver breaks into a completely new pattern down field. The SEs run side by side right up the seams before flaring slightly towards the corners, while the flankers turn and run up the sidelines. A

Dime or Quarters defense may stop a relatively short passing attack only to be faced with a now greater downfield threat. These secondary routes are fairly simple and against aggressive defenses will probably never be used, but can force the defense to run and cover farther than just about any other play.

I'd recommend either SE for the orange route in this play. Instead of the quick SE out-and-in route cutting under the flanker fade out route, the fade out can cut under either a wheel streak or over a quick in. The in route keeps the quick inside-out flavor of Flicker with just a slight variation, while the wheel has the potential to really burn an opponent who you've already attacked with Flicker and is playing tight coverages to smother the lateral routes.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 1yd

Left SE: W1-N1E5-N4-N4W2 (open)

Left Flanker: N2W1-N1W2-W3-N7 (open)

Right Flanker: N2E1-N1E2-E3-N7 (open)

Right SE: E1-N1W5-N4-N4E2 (open)

RB: Pass Block

Read Progression

1. Right SE in
2. Left SE in
3. Left flanker out
4. Right flanker out
5. Right SE seam/corner
6. Left SE seam/corner
7. Left flanker sideline streak
8. Right flanker sideline streak

As this is one of the most complex read progressions in my entire playbook it deserves some in-depth explanation. The routes in this play are symmetric. The progression described is intended to allow the QB to scan back and forth so that the same side reads that happen with close timing (such as the right flanker out followed by right SE seam) are in sequential order.

In practice most of these reads will never be made as they simply take too long to develop. The first four reads are primary and all happen quite quickly, so it is most important to make a good evaluation of the defense before the snap and adjust the progression of these initial reads accordingly. The key areas are just a few yards past the line of scrimmage just outside of the tackles, where the SEs will make their catches. If the defense shows blitz, it may *seem* like the area where the blitzer comes for would be a good place to throw to. However, I have found in practice that often a LB will float out into zone coverage in this area, and the best target is actually the side which looks *best* covered before the snap.

Another thing to evaluate is whether the defense is playing man or zone on the outside. The flanker out routes seem to work best against man defenses, where the DB will have to turn his back to the QB to chase the receiver. The SE ins work fairly well against man defense but can slice across zones with ease. Just watch out for lurking LBs.

Analysis

Pros:

- Greater depth of reads than almost any other play
- Four quick routes designed to pick up easy short yardage with great opportunities to run after the catch
- Spreads the defense across as much of the field as possible

Cons:

- Very complicated play that requires precise timing and decisive execution, meaning lots of practice to be effective
- Primary SE in routes have a tendency to get tipped by defensive linemen if the QB does not pick a good passing lane
- Semi-vulnerable to bad shotgun snaps, mainly by screwing up quick throws to the SE in routes
- Flanker routes run all the way out to the sidelines, may have trouble staying in bounds on short side of field

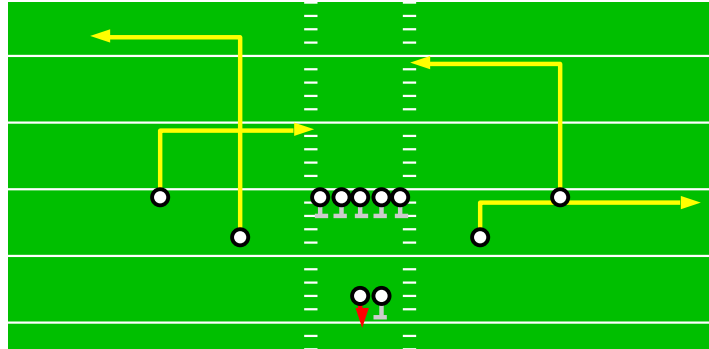
Modified From 2003 Web Version: *Because Flicker is primarily a quick executing play and because the quick pass rush in Madden 2004 effectively takes away*

some longer developing routes, the running back route which originally appeared in the 2003 web version of this play has been replaced with a pass block. The route was a lengthy swing/post route (E4-N1E1-N1-N8W4), rarely used during actual gameplay.

Squares

Square ins and outs are not really two of my favorite routes in Madden, mainly because it seems like the defenders seem to make better breaks on the in/out cut than the receivers do, especially when playing man coverage. Still, it's important to mix things up a bit so I've developed this play, simply named Squares, that does a pretty decent job although it definitely works best against zones.

The basic idea is pretty simple. The flankers each run out routes while the split ends both run in routes. On the left side the flanker runs a deep out over the top of the SE in, on the right the flanker



runs a very short out route. Both in routes have more intermediate depths. In total we have four routes in a play that might appeal most to novice Madden gamers due to the familiar and easy back-and-forth scans of the field. Expert gamers don't despair, I've also worked in a quick blitz read at the beginning that will help to exploit immediate vulnerabilities in the defensive set.

The biggest drawback to this play is probably that even though the right in and left out routes have decent depth you probably won't find yourself throwing these passes very often. Neither gets open on a consistent basis, even against Nickel coverage it tends to be the underneath routes, especially the right flanker, who is turned loose. The deep out often takes longer to develop than the quarterback can afford to hold the ball for, even with the running back staying in to pass protect. Squares can still be a useful part of your passing attack, just don't expect it to strike fear into the defensive secondary.

I set the left flanker as the orange Playmaker route receiver. His long 15 yard out pattern takes a while to develop, time the QB may not have if the defense looks prepared to bring pressure. Although the quick seam pass is a good blitz

read, it may be more convenient to switch to a quick in or out route, effectively moving this route to the beginning of the read progressions and speeding up the entire play.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 3yd

Left SE: 5yd In

Left Flanker: 15yd Out

Right Flanker: N1 (cut 90 right)-E6 (open)

Right SE: 10yd In

RB: Pass Block

Read Progression

1. Left flanker up seam
2. Right flanker out
3. Left SE in
4. Right SE in
5. Left flanker out

To take full advantage of what Squares offers you want to be able to make the left flanker running straight up the seam your first look. This works well against zone coverages where the slot cornerback is playing off and is essential to beating outside press coverage consistently.

After the quick seam look we enter main progression with one look per receiver. Start on the right with the quick out. This works well against man coverage but may only get a couple of yards unless the pass is caught perfectly in stride with enough separation to turn upfield after the catch. Because it's so short it also may slide right under outside bump coverage and can be thrown late to the outside, though it may be a tight fit close to the sideline. Next look left to the SE square in. This works best against zones but can get by man coverage as well. The slightly deeper square in on the right side is a bit tougher. I don't throw this pass too much, though it should get open against some zone coverages. The deep square out is also tough, the QB needs good protection and should only throw this against single coverage.

Analysis

Pros:

- Does a good job attacking zones with short throws underneath and deep crosses just outside the hash marks
- Easy routes to learn with simple read progression makes play fairly well suited for novices

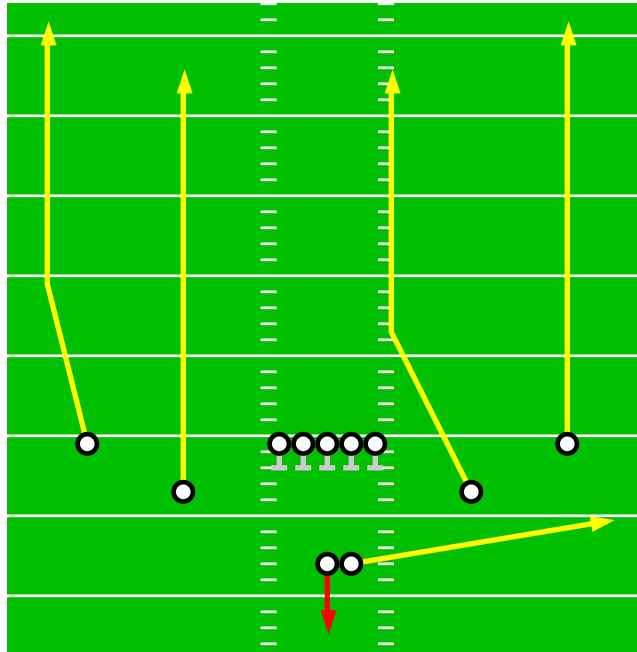
Cons:

- Press coverage will limit play to short passes
- One of my worse plays against man coverage
- Two deepest routes are rarely used

Streaks

Who hasn't played some kind of football video game and loved to run an all-streaks pass play once in a while? While the realism of modern editions of Madden have made it difficult to win just bombing away downfield every team has an occasional need to simply air it out, whether it's for a desperation touchdown with only seconds left on the clock or just to test the defense and take a shot at making a surprise big play. The Slingshot version of Streaks is a little different than you may be used to, with two of the routes starting angled a bit to the left to create an optimal receiver spread downfield and allow the running back a little extra maneuvering room in the flats in case the quarterback decides to throw a nice safe checkdown instead of trying the home run ball.

Though the routes have been tweaked the basic premise of Streaks is just what you would expect: throw the ball as far as you can to whoever looks most open. This is definitely your best shot if you want 30+ yards in one play, but Streaks offers a few more options that add flexibility without any serious impact on deep threat capabilities. The first is the slight slant in by the right flanker. While it was mentioned above that two of the receivers (the other is the left



split end) slant slightly to the left to improve mutual receiver spacing, this also makes the flanker into a nice target about 10 yards deep, right at the right hash marks. Unless you *really* need an immediate score, this is an easy way to take advantage of any defense playing the deep pass exclusively.

The other option is the running back. He runs a straight route over and just slightly up to the right. It can be a little tight along the sideline, but if the corners are playing off this can be an easy completion for 5–10 yards and a run out of bounds. In a hurry up offense you can run four or five pass plays that get out of bounds in about the same amount of game time as one 20 yard play over the middle of the field, so this is not an insignificant route.

I like the left flanker straight streak as my Playmaker route in Streaks. Flanker routes tend to be easier to work short passes to in a spread formation, with the top cornerbacks usually manned-up on the split ends. A quick in/out route may not get you deep downfield, but is better than a sack and in non-critical or no-deep-completion-necessary situations it may be all you need.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 3yd

Left SE: N4W1-N6 (open)

Left Flanker: 25yd Streak

Right Flanker: N4W2-N6 (open)

Right SE: 25yd Streak

RB: N1E6 (open)

Read Progression

1. Right flanker seam
2. Left flanker seam
3. RB in flats
4. Right SE streak
5. Left SE streak

The progression listed above is more intended for normal passing situations where you do not necessarily need to throw the bomb. The only looks for the flankers are earlier to exploit the medium deep middle, while the bombs are down the sidelines to the split ends. If all you really want to do is throw deep then you can pretty much ignore the progression, just look downfield and try to pick out the dead spots in the defense rather than reading the receiver specifically.

Analysis

Pros:

- Four deep routes for when you really need a big play
- RB in flats is excellent for gaining short yardage and getting out of bounds quickly
- Staggered right flanker streak doubles as a quick throw underneath deep zones or to counter blitzes

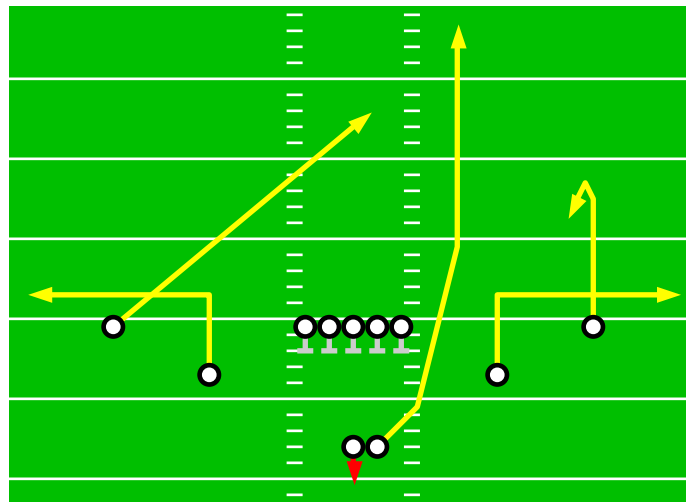
Cons:

- No blocking support to help give time for streaks to get deep
- Cannot be relied upon for consistent completions

Daggers

While a play like [Streaks](#) on the previous pages is great if you need a lot of yards in a hurry, sometimes it's more prudent to make the defense think the long ball is imminent by coming out in a spread formation and then running a series of short routes to achieve modest but more dependable gains. This is what Daggers is all about.

Daggers is most effective if you can get the defense playing back on its heels, worried enough about giving up a big play that they don't press too hard in the short zone. The two flanker out patterns will take advantage of such coverages, in addition to working well against man. The left split end runs a slant over



the top of one of these outs, a little more shallow than most of my slants to give the receiver a chance of getting open quickly even if it means giving up a few yards. A curl route is run over the top of the out route on the other side, giving the quarterback an easy target to throw to, while the running back runs a tight wheel route just outside the tackle. This wheel is best used as a decoy to pull linebacker help away from a possible double team on the SE curl, but if the QB has time also makes for a nice shot downfield, assuming your RB has good speed.

All in all, Daggers is designed for a nice, direct progression of reads with reliable and familiar routes. These features should minimize mistakes and make it easy to run without the number of practice reps some of my other Slingshot Slingshotquire. A good play for spreading out the defense and making a quick throw to convert third and 5.

Either split end makes a good choice for Playmaker, though I personally go with the left SE. Quick in routes can cross right over the flanker out routes, while wheel routes can push the play deep, making it more than just a short yardage converter.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block
QB: Dropback 1yd
Left SE: N5E6 (open)
Left Flanker: 5yd Out
Right Flanker: 5yd Out
Right SE: 8yd Curl
RB: N1E1-N4E1-N5 (open)

Read Progression

1. Left SE slant
2. Left flanker out
3. Right flanker out
4. RB wheel
5. Right SE curl

Daggers uses a fairly direct read progression that should help prevent hesitation and poor decisions by the QB. Start off with the shallow SE slant. I usually like slants against man coverage but this one is a little tricky the close proximity with the out route early on, and works out better against zones or blitzes. Next comes the out routes, start on the left to avoid needing to look back and forth. Fourth is the RB swing, wait to throw this until the back has cleared the defensive rush around the outside to avoid a tipped pass. The curl route is last. Make sure this is thrown hard, probably a bit to the inside (assuming the RB has distracted the nearest LB sufficiently).

Analysis

Pros:

- Familiar and easy to throw routes plus easy read progression
- Quick development should prevent most sacks and throws made under pressure

Cons:

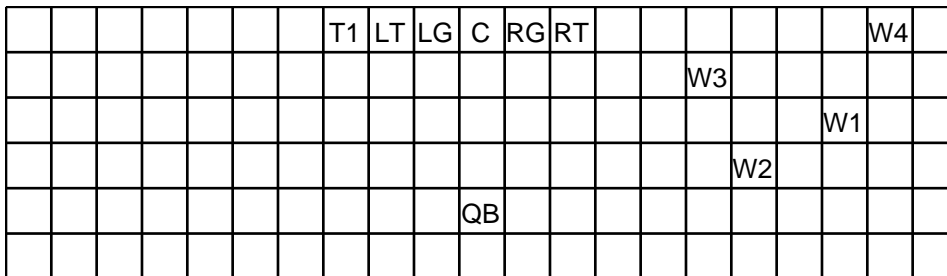
- Bump-and-run coverage on outside can take away the SE routes as well as making the underneath out routes much more difficult to throw
- Won't complete many deep throws or get much YAC with short outs and a curl route

Chapter 7

Bomber Formation

Overview

Bomber is designed to be a slightly more vertically oriented counterpart to formations like [4 Left](#). Rather than spread the defense out along the line, Bomber clusters the receivers close together, placing a greater emphasis on screens and complimentary routes. The clustered receivers also make man defense much more difficult to manage effectively because there's no telling where each receiver will end up. The lopsidedness can be just as effective in overwhelming zone coverages for shorter throws underneath. Bomber also uses the opposite side of the field as [4 Left](#), which may benefit right handed quarterbacks on rollouts.



Where [4 Left](#) spreads out the receivers and uses a lot of routes that move inwards, like drag routes right over the middle, the closeness of Bomber allows greater balance between routes that work the inside and outside parts of the field. One of my favorite techniques is to use routes that work in pairs, starting together, then breaking apart late when the defense is already stretched thin. Because Bomber was originally designed to attack strongly downfield the quarterback has

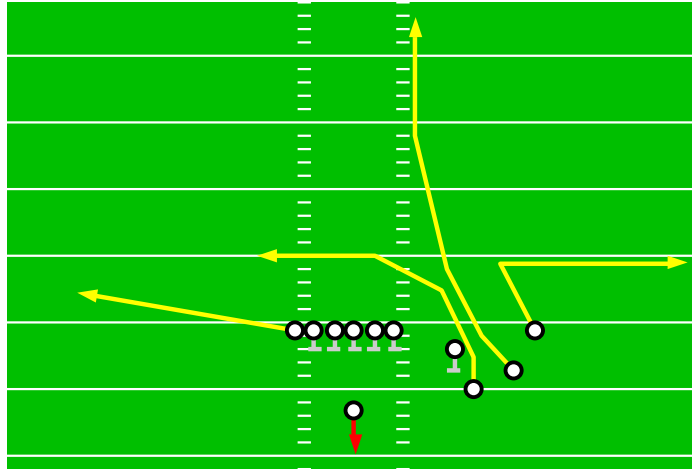
a slightly deeper shotgun than with 4 Left or [Tsunami](#). While the enhanced pass rush abilities in Madden 2004 have somewhat dampened this vertical theme, the deeper gun allows the QB more opportunity to step up in the pocket and have some control over the flow of the rush. This helps a little against blitzes but is hardly a panacea. Excellent awareness of the defense is required and mobile quarterbacks will have a definite advantage in this set. Like with many wideout heavy formations, throwing the deep ball may be the plan but pressure may dictate that the quarterback checks down to the tight end or an underneath route.

With no running back Bomber is a passing only formation. All plays are designed around the four wide receivers working together. The receiver assignments are actually recent modifications to my original assignments. I started with the top two receivers in the forward positions because I had a mostly vertical attack style in mind. Although there are still significant vertical elements in most Bomber plays the most import routes tend to be underneath routes, so I moved the best receivers to the back where it is easier to run away from man coverage. These changes were made by analysis of three of my favorite Bomber plays using a scoring system for the importance of each route (the most scientific method used to determine receiver assignments for any of my formations) and ended up working well for me. In some cases the type of receiver (speed, possession) is more important than overall ability, so your preferences may differ depending on the plays you like best and the teams you play with.

Jetstream

One issue with the Bomber formation is that many of the deeper passing routes simply do not have time to develop. The tight end stays in to block once in a while but provides no relief on the right side or to strong defensive rushes up the middle as a running back might be able to do. In addition, though the natural direction for the quarterback to rollout to is the right, where most of the receivers are, this is also the area most likely to have defenders waiting. Jetstream provides at least a partial solution to these issues by keeping the flanker closest to the inside in to block. He actually does a surprisingly good job cutting defensive ends, opening passing lanes and giving the QB time to throw to the longer developing rear flanker routes.

These rear flanker routes are the focus of Jetstream. The receivers start running slightly towards each other but gradually curve apart, leaving the inside flanker to glide inwards over the middle and the outside flanker to fade up and into a go route up the seam. The round in



works well against man coverages while the round go route strikes deeply into zones. Both of these routes can also be quite effective if your opponent likes to play bump-and-run, but a lot of precision is required to squeeze the passes through the tight traffic.

Jetstream is supplemented by the tight end's direct out route and the split end's almost traditional out pattern. Neither is flashy but both provide solid targets for short to medium yardage as well as the ability to bail out a QB under duress.

The tight end makes the best choice for the orange Playmaker route. If you see an upcoming blitz around the left corner that might make the out pass too dangerous a nice quick *in* route may be the answer. Pushing downfield with a wheel streak is also a good way to attack defenses ignoring the TE to concentrate the wide receivers.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 2yd

TE: N1W6 (open)

Front Inside Flanker: Pass Block

Rear Inside Flanker: N1-N2W1-N1W2-W3 (open)

Rear Outside Flanker: N1W1-N2W1-N4W1-N3 (open)

SE: N2W1-E5 (open)

Read Progression

1. TE out
2. SE out
3. Rear inside flanker drag over middle
4. Rear outside flanker inside fade streak deep

The TE runs almost straight sideways and so can often get open very quickly. The thing to watch out for here is a defender playing tight man or flats zone coverage because with the sharp angle of the pass a defender does not have to move a long distance to get in the passing lane. The SE out all the way on the right side comes next. I don't actually use this throw too much because of the amount of traffic in the area, the long distance the ball must travel across the field, and the potential disruption caused by press coverage. The round in route which comes next is the best route in the play. It's very effective against man coverage and with good ball placement will pick holes around linebackers in zones, and is also pretty useful against bump-and-run outside. This should get close to 10 yards with a good chance to run into the open left side after the catch.

The round go route is last. This is best utilized against deep zone defenses where you can place the ball between and underneath the safeties. The ball should be thrown right after the rub with the round in route. Against Cover 2 in the Dime formation this pass is also makable, but risky. A hard, very accurate throw just over the MLB and between the safeties is required. Do not try this in a game without practice, and do not throw this pass unless the QB's feet are firmly planted and the ball can be released cleanly and from near the center of the pocket. The margins of error are just too small.

Analysis

Pros:

- Round in, TE direct out and SE out provide three solid, high percentage passes
- Round go is one of my better moderately deep routes against deep zone coverages
- Flanker chip block provides more time than most Bomber plays with the ability for the QB to roll out of the pocket on occasion

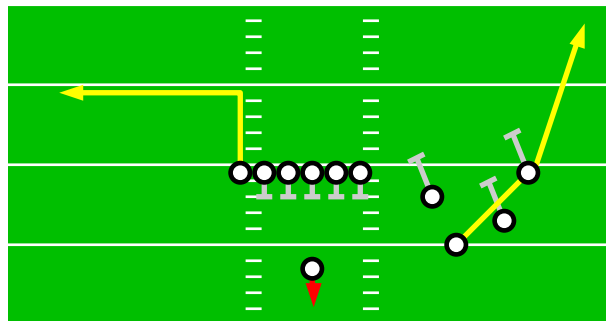
Cons:

- While solid vs. Dime, not nearly as good against Nickel (more physical defense) or Quarters (better pass coverage in general)
- Has problems with DB blitzes from bunched receiver side
- Throws against middle of press coverage defense must be almost perfect to avoid batted ball or interceptions

Bubble Screen

I originally created Bubble Screen because standard running back screen plays were notoriously hard to execute in Madden 2003. Defensive players tend to not be fooled very easily and so the running back tended to not get very far after making the catch. I decided that if a slower developing traditional screen could not be made to work (and I have tried, with very limited success in Madden 2003 but better luck more recently in Madden 2004) maybe a quicker wide receiver screen would fare better. Bubble screen makes use of Bomber's four bunched wide receivers as a perfect formation for executing a screen pass right at the snap. The rear inside flanker catches the pass while the other three wideouts in front of him block in a bubble shape. The ball carrier picks between the two holes between the blocking receivers or swings wide around the outside, depending on the reaction of the nearest defenders.

Because screen plays are a bit unpredictable I tend to run Bubble Screen mostly on first down. It averages about 3–5 yards for me, so its not a great call on third and long, and on short yardage downs there are usually too many defenders close to the line of scrimmage



to block effectively. Another good reason to use it on first down is that your opponent may be more likely to choose a base or Nickel defense. Bubble Screen works well against base defenses and many Nickel plays but poorly against most Dime plays because there are too many DBs to block immediately. This is also a good reason to use it against zones, which keep DBs on the other side of the field, rather than man coverages. On any down if a linebacker blitzes around the right

end it spells trouble for the receiver, who probably will not be able to react fast enough after making the catch to evade the tackle, in which case you're looking at a 5 yard loss. Still, if the defense guesses wrong Bubble Screen can be taken to the outside for big gains. 10 yards is not uncommon, and I've taken it the distance at a few times.

Besides the primary receiver, the tight end on the left side also runs a quick 5 yard out. It's mainly to keep the defense honest, but like with all Bomber plays there's a chance he will be forgotten. Check whether there are any defensive backs on the outer left side before the snap, and if not quickly look for the TE first before passing to the flanker. Finally, just in case nothing is open right away the flanker who receives the screen pass will after a delay of one second break into a kind of swing pattern. This works fairly well because most of the defenders have been drawn down and in at this point. In some cases you may want to use this motion as part of your normal approach. If the receiver catches the pass flat footed he often turns a full circle trying to run to the outside. Timing your throw to hit him just as he starts moving gives him a jump upfield.

The tight end is really the only choice for the Playmaker route. With the flanker screen route being the only other pass option the TE pretty much gets it by default. The out route is only there as a backup in case the screen is smothered anyway, this way we can ensure that this backup route is the *right* one for what the defense is showing us.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 1yd

TE: 5yd Out

Front Inside Flanker: Block Lead Left

Rear Inside Flanker: (delay 1 sec)-N2E2-N3E1 (open)

Rear Outside Flanker: Block Lead Left

SE: Block Lead Left

Read Progression

1. Flanker screen
2. TE out
3. Flanker swing

The play is primarily intended to go to the flanker on the screen. However, there are two other options. The TE is a good choice if he breaks wide open immediately. Also, if the screen pass looks covered the TE may be a safer throw even if it doesn't look like he will gain many yards. If nothing is open right away, look for the flanker to run a backup swing pattern after attempting the screen.

Analysis

Pros:

- Pass completion to screen receiver is almost automatic
- TE out pattern can punish defenses that only cover the bunched receivers
- Works almost like a running play without requiring a good run blocking O-line

Cons:

- An outside LB blitz on the right side may be able to tackle the receiver unblocked
- The Madden receivers will always turn all the way towards the QB rather than just turning enough to catch the pass, meaning this play does not execute as quickly as it might in real life
- A bad shotgun snap will pretty much ruin any chance of success for the screen because the ball must be thrown before the defense can react

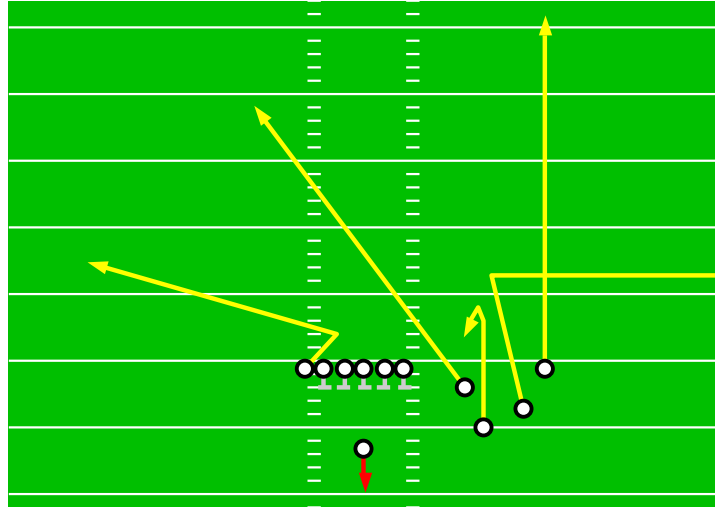
Cutter

While Bomber is intended to provide vertical attack for an offense, a defense brave enough to blitz may effectively shut down all but one or two short routes. Cutter combines a few of the traditional Bomber deep looks with the quick release ability needed when using a four wide receiver set with no running back to chip block.

Rather than working with convoluted crossing routes to get receivers open (a strategy that is effective but takes time to develop and can be disrupted by heavy traffic), Cutter runs each route more or less independently, relying on individual abilities and the sheer number of routes to get at least a few receivers open. The routes compliment each other, but without running into each other or otherwise

getting in each other's way. The dynamic tight end sharp in-and-out cut can draw the linebacker, opening up the slant. The slant and out route push the coverage downfield, opening the curl route underneath. About the only place where a collision might occur is between the out and streak routes in situations where the split end is bumped off of the line.

One thing to watch out for with all these quick throws is batted passes. The quicker the ball is released the less time natural passing lanes are given to form, which seems to be the cause of more tips at the line of scrimmage than most other plays I run. This shouldn't happen so much that it discourages you from



using Cutter, but it is something to keep in mind, especially before running it on third down. Practicing moving in the pocket and picking out gaps between linemen on both sides would be a useful way to prepare.

I think we have to give the Playmaker position to the tight end. Regardless that Bomber plays are designed around the wide receivers, so often it is the TE in his relatively isolated position across the way that really makes the plays click. By giving him the option to switch to quick in/out or wheel routes to take advantage of this isolation Cutter just becomes more versatile.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 2yd

TE: N1E1-N2W7 (open)

Front Inside Flanker: N8W6 (open)

Rear Inside Flanker: 8yd Curl

Rear Outside Flanker: N4W1-E7 (open)

SE: 25yd Streak

Read Progression

1. TE out
2. Front inside flanker slant
3. Rear inside flanker curl
4. Rear outside flanker out
5. SE streak

We start things out with the TE sharp angle out route. Although it starts angled in and I often like to use such routes as dual reads with a quick slant look early I can't advise it in this case because the slant segment is so short. Even so, it's a good idea to look for this throw right after the break if you only need a few yards. Next is the slant. Another anomaly with Cutter is that while slants are usually a great weapon against man coverage, a linebacker usually sticks to a short zone right over the middle which takes this slant away by giving the man defender a chance to recover position lost at the beginning of the route. The slant is more effective against outside press coverage, particularly if the LB moves at all away from exact middle of the formation, and is easy pickings against a LB blitz.

Now look for the curl. This is also best against zone and outside press coverages. It's also workable against man coverage if you can hold onto the ball long enough. Cutter finishes with the flanker deep out and SE streak. Most times you'll want to get rid of the ball by this time, the deep out is a bit risky (though is perfect against a DB blitz) and the streak is low percentage unless you can manage single coverage. Nice and easy reads overall, simply scan left to right and you're good to go.

Analysis

Pros:

- Easy left to right read progression
- TE out and flanker slant and deep out patterns provide answers to blitzes from any direction
- One of the most effective TE routes in the Bomber formation, both for getting open and picking up decent yardage

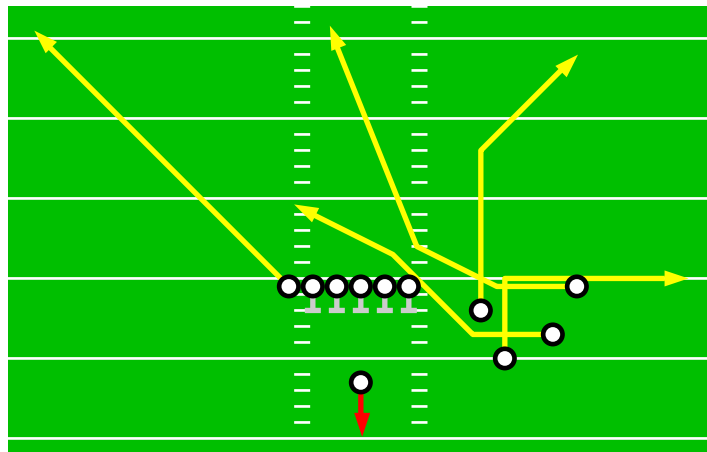
Cons:

- Defenders seem to bat a lot of passes at the line of scrimmage
- No blocking help means the O-line must be solid
- Pressure may tend to cause slightly early throws to the curl route which look perfectly catchable but can be problematic in Madden

Double Rub

Double Rub makes use of dual paired crossing routes, that is the two receivers farthest on the outside right run routes which start out horizontally and parallel to each other and cross through parallel vertical routes run by the inside receivers. The spacing is just right so that the split end runs right between the staggered inside receivers even though he is running perpendicular to them. This makes it very difficult for defensive backs in man coverage to stick with their men, as well as just making the play look really cool. After the pairs of receivers cross each pair splits apart to stretch the defense.

Double Rub works best as a short to medium range passing play but has viable routes at about every possible depth. The best overall target might be the shallow drag route run by the rear outside flanker. He slips basically under the heart of the defense while get-



ting enough depth at the end to gain a good 7–10 yards with an easy read and throw. The out pattern might be an easier target to hit though, getting open slightly faster and with more frequency. Though only a five yard route, if this receiver gets lost in a broken coverage assignment he has very good YAC potential. The corner and drag post routes offer nice, complimentary deep threats. Meanwhile, the tight end simply runs out a quick corner to the open left side to force the defense to cover the whole field or pay the consequences.

While not the easiest play to use with maximum effectiveness, Double Rub's primary shallow drag offers a fairly safe and easy throw in a formation that should cause confusion and doubt in the opposing defense. Two serious deep threats, good route balance, and a quick tight end read should be enough to slow down most blitzes as well, making this play more suitable than many wide receiver heavy plays for gradual learning.

Once again, I have to go with the tight end for the orange Playmaker route. I hate to sound like a broken record here, but with all of the complicated, interweaved routes over on the right side there just isn't room to make good adjustments on short notice. The TE is the perfect choice to take advantage of relative isolation.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 2yd

TE: N6W6 (open)

Front Inside Flanker: 10yd Corner

Rear Inside Flanker: 5yd Out

Rear Outside Flanker: W2-N2W2-N1W2 (open)

SE: W2-N1W2-N5W2 (open)

Read Progression

1. TE quick corner
2. Rear inside flanker out
3. Rear outside flanker drag
4. SE drag post
5. Front inside flanker corner

In many situations you will not have time to throw the drag post or corner routes, so you're best off spending most of your time practicing the first three reads. I've found the simple out pattern gets open the most often and should be your primary target, followed closely by the drag pattern. You should try to assess the defense as to whether you can throw the TE quick corner route before the snapping the ball if possible, the best situation is man coverage in a Nickel

package meaning the TE will not have man coverage or will be covered by a LB rather than a DB.

Analysis

Pros:

- The underneath drag route gets open often and fairly quickly
- Out pattern gives play two solid routes for decent gains
- Drag post and corner routes round out play with big yardage potential
- Once in while the TE will be forgotten by the defense and get an easy catch and run

Cons:

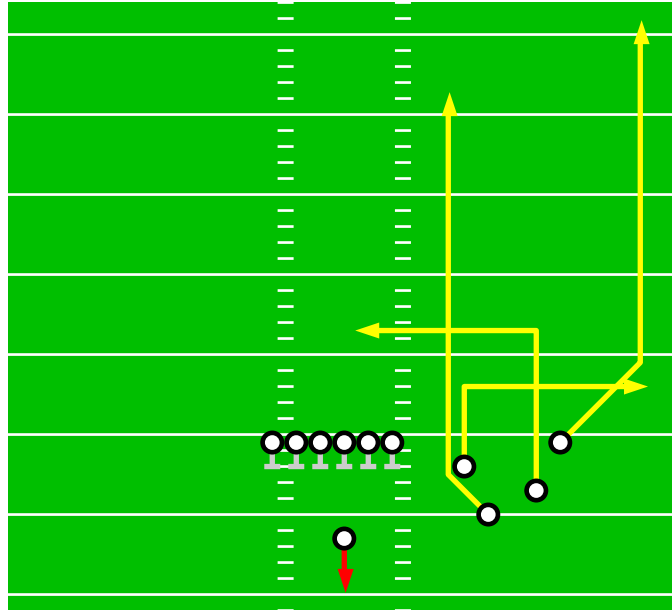
- A blitz may force a quick throw to the TE or out route
- The drag post route can be a dangerous throw, as the receiver may be running right towards the free safety
- The drag route is usually the best target but can get tipped by the D-line

Modified From 2003 Web Version: *This play was originally designed to be a more downfield threat for Madden 2003. The out and corner routes were both 5 yards longer, and the shallow drag route came before the out route in the progression. The routes were shortened because of the quicker pass rush in Madden 2004. Madden 2003 players may want to extend these routes to take advantage of longer throws.*

Crossroads

Crossroads is one of my best plays for delivering on the deep threat promise of the Bomber formation. Two streak routes work off of early moves to spread out and work around traffic. The tight end stays in to provide additional pass protection, letting the quarterback stay in the pocket long enough to actually deliver the long ball downfield.

Of course not all of the routes are aimed deep. The front and rear outside flankers run crossing in and out routes underneath and between the streaks. These routes, especially the out route, work well crossing up defensive backs in man coverage. They also make good fallback options if the defensive backfield is playing back against the deep ball. Even deep zones cannot completely take away the streak routes though,



thanks to the initial slant segments run right at the snap. The slot streak on the inside can often be thrown right up the seam, with the receiver's body shielding the ball from the strong safety. On the outside the fade streak can be launched deep against probable single coverage (thanks to the inside streak drawing the most attention) or early on the slant out against most man defenses.

Because Crossroads is intended to work deep you'll have to accept that sometimes the play just won't work out. Press coverage in particular can cause problems, taking away the outside fade streak unless the split end can break past the bump quickly. Throwing the fade streak deep is also a gamble, even with single coverage because it just depends on the receiver outplaying the DB.

For once the tight end will *not* get the Playmaker route because he is blocking in this play. Instead the honor goes to the rear inside flanker on the slot streak route. There isn't really much that can be done with this, though a quick out route might relieve the pressure of defenders crowding the short middle zone.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 2yd

TE: Pass Block

Front Inside Flanker: 5yd Out

Rear Inside Flanker: N1W1-N9 (open)

Rear Outside Flanker: 10yd In

SE: N2E2-N8 (open)

Read Progression

1. Rear inside flanker slant in
2. SE slant out
3. Front inside flanker out
4. Rear outside flanker in
5. Rear inside flanker streak
6. SE streak

Just in case the deep routes won't get open the progression starts with the slant portions of the eventual streak routes. You don't have to check these reads if you really want to go deep, but my philosophy is to take what the defense will give me and be willing to move down the field in 10–15 yard chunks even when time is running out. Look first to the inside slant, which is effective against blitzes and Cover 2, then to the outside, which gets open most against man.

Now move on to the intermediate routes. The shorter and quicker out pattern is the most useful, taking full advantage of the other three routes to lose man coverage. The in pattern only works if the QB gets fairly good protection. This also work well against man and outside bump coverage. For the streak routes once again look to the inside first. Your best bet is to hit the slot streak underneath the safeties. The fade streak is the big money throw, but is also the most chancy. Your best bet may be if the SE is bumped but quickly beats it and runs downfield a step ahead of the outside cornerback.

Analysis

Pros:

- Best deep ball potential of any Bomber play
- Streak routes double as quick slants to minimize the impact of blitzes and tight coverage
- Very effective against most man coverage schemes

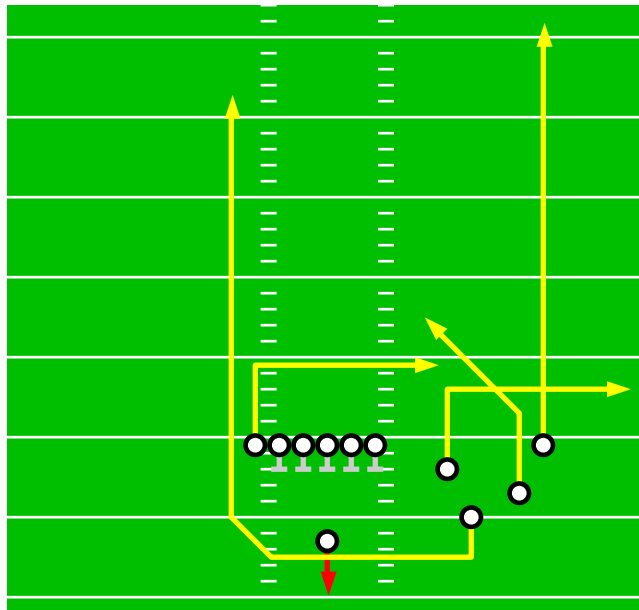
Cons:

- Not very good against Cover 2 press coverage
- In route takes a bit long to develop to use as a reliable safety valve
- Even with the TE blocking a blitz can force the QB to throw the deep streak routes too early to be really effective

Downtown

Downtown is another of my Bomber plays originally designed for Madden 2003 with aspirations of a strong downfield attack, but unfortunately had to be scaled back due to the improved pass rush in Madden 2004. Even so, it makes an effective play for completing short and medium length passes with an occasional deep shot thrown into the mix. It features an unusual back cutting route by one of the flankers which may be too slow developing to look for most times Downtown is run, but can distract defenses and occasionally get open for a decent gain with breakdowns in the pass coverage.

In my original version the three main routes on the right included a streak and 10 yard out and post patterns. All of these patterns are still there, but the post and out have each been shortened to 5 yards to ensure that the quarterback has someone to get the ball to before getting sacked. While this reduces the “downtown” aspect of the play somewhat, a streak route always provides long ball potential while the post is a great weapon against zones such as the Cover 2, with a chance to catch the ball in stride and make a run between the safeties.



The final wide receiver route is the backside swing by the rear inside flanker. This was moderately effective in 2003 but has mostly fallen into disuse in 2004.

I haven't tried it myself, but you might want to look at having this player pass block if you're having problems dealing with the pass rush. It should work okay, as evidenced in [Jetstream](#), as long as the right tackle gets at least a bit of a nudge on the outside pass rusher.

Once again the tight end is a critical part of making this play work. His simple 5 yard in is a crucial read for beating blitzes and can get wide open against just about any defense where the linebacker decides to freelance a bit and move away from the exact middle of the defense. Because of the importance in getting this route open quickly and reliably, I once again anoint the tight end *The Playmaker*.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 2yd

TE: 5yd In

Front Inside Flanker: 5yd Out

Rear Inside Flanker: S1-W5-N1W1-N10 (open)

Rear Outside Flanker: 5yd Post

SE: 25yd Streak

Alternative Assignment: *Though I won't make any guarantees about how it will work because I have not tried this myself, you can substitute a pass block for the rear inside flanker backdoor swing route if you find this route more of a distraction for your QB than for the opposing defense.*

Read Progression

1. TE in
2. Rear outside flanker post
3. Front inside flanker out
4. Rear inside flanker trailer
5. SE streak

As usual, look for the tight end first. The main thing to read here is the position of the linebacker, if he stays right in the middle the route is covered, otherwise you can squeeze the pass in early or wait to throw it a bit late depending on which way the LB shifts. Next look for the post route, which works well against most zone

coverages but seems to get bumped around a lot vs. man. Also, beware of timing disruptions against Cover 2 outside press coverage. Occasionally the extra traffic causes the out pattern to be nudged into the post pattern (or is it the other way around?), which in turn causes the QB's throw to be aimed short, possibly right at a defender. Just make sure the post receiver comes out of his break cleanly and you'll be fine. The out pattern read comes immediately afterwards, then look downfield to the streak.

Finally, the backside swing is the last option, though you probably won't get a chance to use this unless you can buy some time running around a bit. It also won't net many yards against a Dime or Quarters defense, but might break wider open vs. Nickel due to the lesser number of coverage defenders. Of course this means a better pass rush as well, so don't count too much on this.

With the lack of extra pass protection (unless you keep the rear inside flanker in to chip block) you definitely want to take the first available read with this play. You may not want to settle for a 5 yard in when you're really looking for 10-15 yards on the post catch and run, but it's certainly better than a sack.

Analysis

Pros:

- Good mix of short (out and in), medium (post), and long (streak) receiving routes
- Post offers a good route for attacking press coverages on the outside
- First three reads are all excellent blitz counters

Cons:

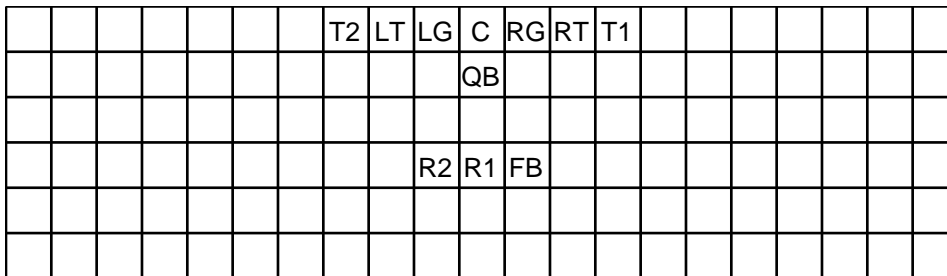
- While usually solid, surrounding traffic will once in a while cause the post route to brush up against the out route, disrupting timing and possibly leading to rare but disastrous interceptions
- Quarters defense can effectively shut down the deeper routes
- Trailer route can bump into QB dropback, and simply takes too long to get open in Madden 2004, only usable if the QB scrambles to buy time, the O-line does a great job picking up the defensive rush, or some other type of breakdown in the defense occurs

Chapter 8

Strong T Formation

Overview

Although this playbook leans towards the passing game, every playbook needs a power running game, especially for converting crucial short yardage situations. [Diamond Wing](#) fulfills part of this need but is more intended for sophisticated trapping plays instead of one yard and a cloud of dust type power runs. The real answer is this Strong T, a no-nonsense formation intended almost strictly for power running. It is a throwback to the older T-formations and is almost identical to the Straight Three-Back T formation except that I place the fullback on the right (or “strong” side, hence the name) instead of in the middle. This makes the formation favor lead plays to the right, similar to the common Pro formation (2 WRs, 1 TE, RB and FB split behind the QB). The outside halfback, or the “whip” as I call him, can still get into the action on sweeps or counter plays.



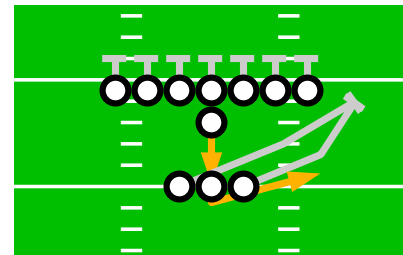
Unlike the T-formations now employed mainly by small colleges and high schools, Strong T has a more NFL flavor and does not involve complex option plays. This is partly because it is designed for power rather than finesse or misdi-

rection and partly because most NFL quarterbacks are not really built for running the ball, but mainly because Madden simply does not support such running plays. This means that most Strong T plays are quite simple, with the offensive line and tight ends often just run blocking, so the only real variables are the blocking and running maneuvers of the backs. Although these plays are simple I have found many of them to be effective even at the All Madden difficulty level. I use them primarily in short yardage, goal line and clock burning situations.

As indicated, the back assignments are designed around strong side and up the middle running plays. The #1 halfback in the middle is in an excellent position for dives or sprints to either side as well as lead plays to the right. The #1 tight end is on the right. This is somewhat arbitrary, but is intended to further strengthen the strong side running ability. For a lot of modern teams the primary tight end is a lot like a wide receiver in a tight end's body and not necessarily the best blocking tight end on the team, so flipping the ends may in some cases be desirable.

HB Off Tackle

This simple but effective running play is my favorite to use when you really need just a few yards. The tight end on the strong side extends the line to give a wide blocking base, while two lead blockers give enough power and flexibility to get a good drive forwards. By combining power with running to the outside HB Off Tackle gives an excellent combination of reliability and steady yardage.



HB Off Tackle is ideal when the defense is stacked strong up the middle, such as in short yardage situations when a dive play might be expected. Two lead blockers means that it can be taken to the outside safely, despite a strong defensive push. Several times I've used this play to score 1 or 2 yard touchdowns against the CPU without being touched.

If the right side looks stacked by the defense the Playmaker control can bail you out. The blocks by the whip back and FB spread out more than they do to the right side, and the whip back in particular can run past a defender you might want blocked, but overall the left side works pretty well.

Player Assignments

O-Line and TEs: Run Block

QB: Handoff to Center Running Back

Whip RB: Lead Far Right

Center RB: Back Step-Outside Right

FB: Lead Far Right

Blocking Assessment

The running back needs to take the first few steps to the outside quickly. Because both lead blockers sweep to the right and the running back takes a second before following this play is most hampered by a quick rush right up the middle. This is not a huge concern because none of the offensive linemen pull, but it should be considered.

Next the RB needs to make his decision about where to cut. If the fullback gets a good jump he may be able to seal off the corner and the RB can sweep all the way to the outside. Otherwise, look for the gap between the FB and the lead blocking whip RB. Because this play should not be expected to produce huge gains it's usually best to turn straight upfield at this point. If you're lucky though you may be able to race to the corner. Look for a juke early to bust to the outside, with a possible stiff arm late. Spin moves should be avoided because there are usually a bunch of defenders converging on the RB after he breaks past the line.

Analysis

Pros:

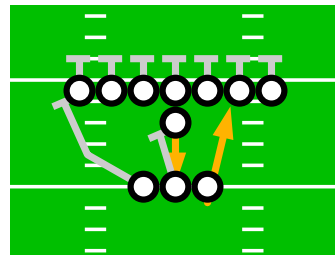
- Very solid power running play that will rarely lose yardage, great for converting short yardage and goal line situations
- Has a chance for big yardage due to sweep-like nature, especially against defenses shifted to the other side
- If the defense stacks one side, just flip the play at the line of scrimmage (this works well against the CPU, probably not so well against decent human players) or hit the Playmaker control

Cons:

- A little slower developing than most power running plays
- Lots of pressure up the middle may disrupt play before it can stretch to the outside

FB Plunge

With lead plays you rely on your blockers to punch a hole through the defensive line and usually your lead blocker specifically to take out the linebacker best in position to attack the runner. If the offensive line is doing its job up front but the opposing linebackers are swarming and making plays a quick hitter by the fullback may be what you need. Decoy blocks by the



primary and whip halfbacks can distract the linebackers while the fullback slams straight up into the line. He probably won't gain a lot of yardage, but might surprise the defense for a quick couple of yards before they have a chance to react. Although a fullback is typically a power runner the key to this play is not so much his power but a good initial push by the offensive line. The FB won't be dancing around or juking any defenders that penetrate into the backfield, and he won't be accelerating as quickly as a smaller halfback, so it's essential that he gets an uninterrupted start. Once he hits the line of scrimmage with a full head of steam, *then* his power and momentum can take over.

The one unfortunate aspect of FB Plunge is that the Playmaker feature is basically useless. Switching the direction of the play causes the backs to run into each other, delaying the run by about a second and ensuring a tackle for loss against most aggressive defenses.

Player Assignments

O-Line and TEs: Run Block

QB: Handoff to Fullback

Whip RB: Lead Outside Left

Center RB: Lead Left

FB: Back Step-Sprint Right

Blocking Assessment

Though both HBs throw blocks, the quick execution of the FB run demands that they stay out of his way and so the blocks both spring out to points left of the center, serving mainly as decoys. The FB himself only has straight-ahead run blocking from the offensive line and right tight end to work behind. The relatively short handoff and quick first step combined with the TE block means that edge rushers should not be a problem. The FB simply needs to keep his shoulders squared and his feet moving him constantly forward, while making at most one small cut to hit the best part of the hole. No juking necessary or desired here.

Analysis

Pros:

- Good counter to defenses swarming to slower developing lead runs
- Simple, no nonsense power running play up the gut that anyone can learn to execute effectively

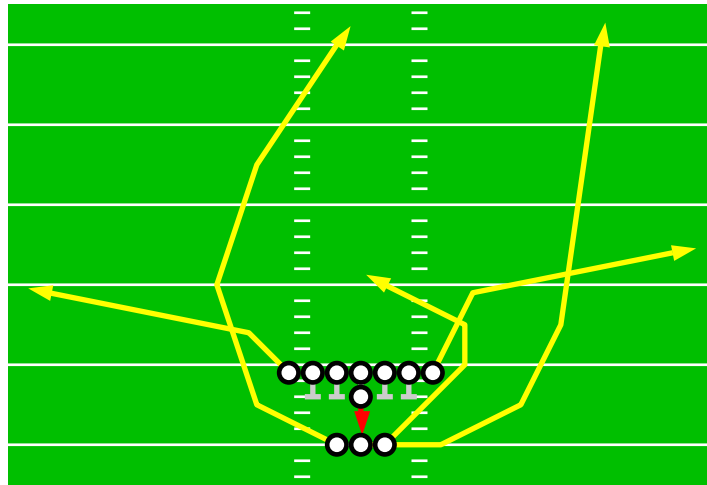
Cons:

- Can lose yardage if the offensive line does not get a good initial push
- Usually only good for a couple of yards

Blitzkrieg

Blitzkrieg is a German word meaning “Lightning War.” It was used to describe the core strategy used by Germany in World War II. Essentially, it is to strike as hard and fast as you can, always advancing upon your enemy and never letting him regroup or reestablish a fortified position. I decided it was an appropriate name for a play that runs out of a tank-like formation but hits a defense with the speed and suddenness of a V2 rocket. It is best used close to the goal line, when the defense is thinking power run.

Blitzkrieg is based upon two principles: surprise and quickness. The Strong T formation is normally best used for power running and is effective in short yardage and goal line situations. Blitzkrieg is also designed for these situations, taking advantage of the fact that most defenses will not be prepared to cover five receivers.



The lack of blocking help makes sacks a danger, but because the quarterback should always be looking for a quick throw the result is more often wide open, short range targets. This second principle, quickness, prevents defenses overcommitted to stuffing the run from recovering, as well as stopping most base defenses from reacting in time to cover everyone.

In goal line or short yardage situations every receiver except for the center running back on a wide swing should gain at least two yards where he catches the ball, enough to convert most downs or score a touchdown. Most routes do not work very far down field, move mostly sideways, and feature slow receivers like tight ends and the fullback, so yards after catch are not usually high. Still, this play does have potential in the open field as well. The fullback usually gains 8–10 yards if is able to turn back to the middle before catching the ball, and the whip RB circle post can gain 15–20 yards if open late.

Set either tight end for the Playmaker route. Either position will have situations where the end will have a chance to attack specific weakness in the defense with a hot route, so which player you choose may depend on which TE you like best as a short pass receiver.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 1yd

Left TE: N1W1-N1W5 (open)

Right TE: N2E1-N1E5 (open)

Whip RB: N1W2-N3W1-N3E1-N3E2 (open)

Center RB: E2-N1E2-N2E1-N7E1 (open)

FB: N2E2-N1-N1W2 (open)

Read Progression

1. Left TE out
2. Right TE out
3. FB circle
4. Center RB swing
5. Whip RB circle post

This listed progression is straightforward and designed for the open field. TE outs, FB over middle, RBs up the seams/on the flanks.

The progression is quite a bit different up by the goal line. The right TE is not a very good target here because he simply gets caught up in too much traffic. Also, the center RB swing, while not too hard to complete, is difficult to get any yards with when the defense is stacked up close. By the goal line I use a left-to-right progression: left TE, whip RB, FB, center RB, and right TE. The primary targets in this situation are the whip back (whose route becomes more compressed, like a broad circle route) and the FB circle over the middle. If the goal line defense plays back against a pass the FB is your best bet because he runs straight across over the middle, pulling away from man coverage or moving through gaps in a zone. On a blitz the whip back is good because the shallow corners are emptied, and the left TE can work as well. The center RB may work best if the defense stacks the middle, which is usually the best way to defend Blitzkrieg because the D-line can get to the QB quickly and will bat a lot of passes to the FB or right TE.

Analysis

Pros:

- Quick developing play with several good routes which can overwhelm goal line defenses
- Uses element of surprise by running a five receiver pass play out of a primarily running formation

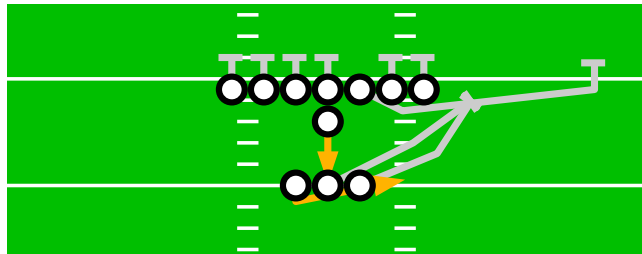
- Multiple routes, especially the whip RB circle post, can stretch defenses in the open field

Cons:

- Aggressive goal line or line stacking defenses can get to QB very quickly due to lack of blocking support, causing sacks, batted balls and knockdowns if the ball is not released quickly
- Best goal line route (FB circle) is a little slow developing and targets a position not known for great hands

Whip Sweep

Though Strong T is mainly intended for use in a straight-ahead, power rushing attack, the presence of the fullback on the right side rather than in the middle allows for power sweeps to be



easily run to the right side. With the compactness of the Strong T formation there is a good chance that a lot of defenders will be playing close to the ball. This can make Whip Sweep a bit of a hit or miss play; if a large number of defenders get a good push and penetrate into the backfield the play can go for a loss, but if the offensive line holds up these defenders might be trapped to the inside, creating up a wide open running lane around the right corner.

I don't use Whip Sweep terribly often, partially because I really like [HB Off Tackle](#) which is run to the same side, and also because it puts the ball in the hands of the whip back rather than the #1 halfback. Still, players using teams with quick, third-down style backs in the Whip position will be able to make good use of the player's speed in a power running play that doesn't require a lot of power from the ball carrier.

The Playmaker feature for Whip Sweep is pretty lousy. The center HB gets caught up on the whip back and the handoff is delayed because the QB gets hung up on the FB. If the offensive line blocking is solid the play might be salvageable, but this is one adjustment you will probably be leaving out of your game plan.

Player Assignments

Left TE: Run Block

Left Tackle: Run Block

Left Guard: Run Block

Center: Run Block

Right Guard: Pull Right

Right Tackle: Run Block

Right TE: Run Block

QB: Handoff to Whip Running Back

Whip RB: Back Step-Sweep Right

Center RB: Lead Far Right

FB: Lead Far Right

Blocking Assessment

This run can be trickier than most to execute due to the lengthy development and sheer number of bodies running to the right side on both teams. In some cases the defense may be overextended to the outside and you will be able to make a quick cut upfield right outside the right tackle. More often you'll have to have patience, keeping close behind your lead blockers and trying to turn the corner wide. Though I almost always recommend against it, this may be one of the *very* few plays in which you can have reasonably good success giving up some ground early in order to end up with greater gains. Not much ground though, after taking the handoff you should never go more than 5 yards behind the line of scrimmage. Just don't make a habit of this, passing up early cuts or trying it out with other plays and you should be all right.

Analysis

Pros:

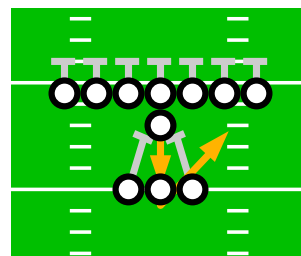
- Might have best chance of breaking for big gains of all Strong T running plays
- Makes good use of smaller, quicker, third-down type running backs that will often play the whip position

Cons:

- Can be difficult to execute due to being less predictable than most straight-ahead running plays
- Relies on having a good #2 halfback
- Pretty bad with Playmaker control

HB Plunge

Sometimes you want to use sophistication or misdirection to outplay a defense, but other times you just need to flat out come right at them and get in their faces. HB Plunge is for these times. Unlike most of my plays which are quite complicated and designed to outmaneuver even defenses with superior talent, HB Plunge is for times when you just need to gain a yard, or maybe even an inch, or simply want to smack the other team right in the mouth. Just about the simplest play in my playbook, all nine blockers push straight ahead while the center running back simply takes the handoff and runs right up through whatever hole he finds.



HB Plunge can work in any short yardage situation, however it works best if the defensive line is spread out. If you like to run sweeps and other runs to the outside HB Plunge can be a nice change of pace. It may not be flashy, but it can get the job done.

Due to the very simple straight-ahead blocking utilized the Playmaker control works very well for switching the direction of the play. Just remember that as HB Plunge is drawn up the ball carrier primarily follows the lead block of the FB, while if switched to the left the less powerful whip RB will have to provide the key block.

Player Assignments

O-Line and TEs: Run Block

QB: Handoff to Center Running Back

Whip RB: Lead Left

Center RB: Back Step-Sprint Right

FB: Lead Right

Blocking Assessment

The play is designed to go up the middle. The two lead blockers slant in slightly to hit the gaps on either side of the center while the ball carrier runs just far enough to the right to give the QB room to make the handoff between these blockers. I chose the back step because it gives the best timing (in my opinion) for such a play, though unfortunately it does not support the dive run from this position. Taken straight through you should run between the center and right guard. However, I have found that it is easy enough to cut back to the left side if a better hole is open there. No juke move should be necessary. In practice the right side is usually best anyway because the fullback is the lead blocker here.

After picking the hole there is not much else to think about. Just hit the sprint button and run straight ahead. In short yardage situations you may want to be ready to dive ahead quickly rather than sprinting to ensure you make critical conversions.

Analysis

Pros:

- Very solid power running play that will rarely lose yardage, great for converting short yardage and goal line situations
- Very simple, easy to learn and to use effectively
- If the defense shoots one gap the RB can usually run easily to the other one

Cons:

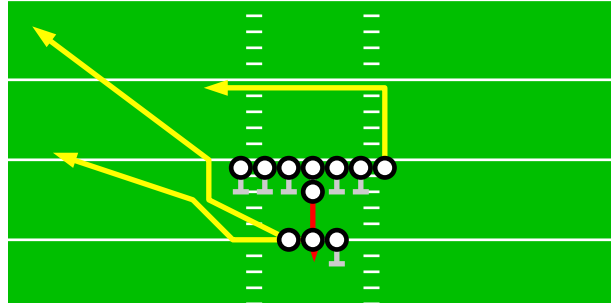
- Difficult to gain more than a few yards

Whiplash

[Blitzkrieg](#) is one of my favorite power formation passing plays within a few yards of the goal line, but any play can lose its effectiveness if used too often. That's why I developed Whiplash as a secondary passing option in the Strong T formation.

Though two options through the air may not seem like all that much, when a defense also has to worry about all of the ways your team might try to run the ball out of the Strong T it adds up to quite a handful.

Whiplash is also quite a bit more conservative than Blitzkrieg, more in line with traditional goal line pass plays. Blitzkrieg's five receiving routes put a lot of pressure on the quarterback, both in the physical sense of the defenders being



able to quickly and easily get into the backfield and in the mental sense of dealing with so many reads so quickly and in such confined areas. Blitzkrieg utilizes only three routes, leaving a tight end and the fullback in to pass protect. The other TE runs a simple in route offering the QB an easy read right over the middle, while both halfbacks run customized complimentary flats routes which seek to overwhelm defenses attempting to attack the run.

For the Playmaker route it might be nice to give it to the center running back because a quick adjustment would have him running into the right flats, giving the play the maximum three receiver spread with one route left, right and center. Unfortunately, even if the *orange route* is assigned to a back the actual *Playmaker* position is automatically reassigned to a wide receiver or tight end, in this case the right TE by default. That's okay, because as the primary target right in front of the QB he makes a great position for quick route changes.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 3yd

Left TE: Pass Block

Right TE: 5yd In

Whip RB: N1W2-N1-N3W4 (open)

Center RB: W2-N1W1-N1W3 (open)

FB: Pass Block

Read Progression

1. TE quick seam
2. Center RB in flats
3. TE in
4. Whip RB in flats

The reads for Whiplash are simple, designed for quick and easy execution when faced with little time to throw. It all starts with the TE, who is usually the best target when facing base goal line defenses. With a clean release make this throw immediately, no sense in waiting for the defense to react. Of course with a heavy defensive rush he may not get into his route immediately, and if the defense expects pass this will be the first target they will want to cover so be prepared to look to the backs. The center RB runs the underneath route, making it slightly easier to hit early, so we look to this back first. If the left side cornerback blitzes, such as in the Gaps Fire play, this route is golden. Next take a quick peek back to the TE. Even without an immediate opening the break to the left may offer just enough separation. If not make the final read to the whip RB in the wide flats. This read isn't quite as sure as the others because the throw is a bit longer and the slightly greater depth of this route compared to the center RB makes coverage more likely. It works pretty well against man coverages, although in this case an earlier throw may be better. As usual, be ready to make adjustments to your reads to exploit anything the defense appears to be offering.

Analysis

Pros:

- With only three receiving routes the play is easy to execute even in faster reacting goal line situations
- Tandem RB routes will overwhelm any defense attacking the run

Cons:

- Not enough routes to guarantee open receivers against defenses playing the pass
- RB routes have tight angles to the throws, sometimes hitting the players in their backs instead of their hands

Chapter 9

4 Wide Formation

Overview

As its name says, 4 Wide (which essentially is just the name I gave to my own version of Singleback-4WR) lines up four wide receivers across the line of scrimmage, with the flankers to the inside. Like with the [Slingshot](#) formation this is designed to stretch the defensive backfield. Unlike Slingshot, 4 Wide places the quarterback under center to get the ball in his hands as quickly as possible, facilitating quick throws. In addition, although 4 Wide is best used as a passing formation it also features a fast developing, straight-ahead running play to provide good balance.

W3								LT	LG	C	RG	RT							W4
			W2							QB								W1	
										R1									

Because of its speed based design the running back usually runs a fifth pattern on short passing plays with the intent of the QB releasing the ball before a blitz has time to get to him. On the less frequently used medium and long range plays the running back may stay in to provide additional protection. Plays develop very quickly, so the most important reads the quarterback makes happen before the ball is snapped. Unlike most passing plays, the receiver is not necessarily open

when he is in open space, but rather when he is moving towards a space that is open, or will be open in about a half second (actually, this is usually true against zone defenses, but in the case of 4 Wide it's also true against man which is more unusual). These plays may seem ineffective to novices because of the timing and precision needed, but with practice you'll be able to carve up defenses like a surgeon.

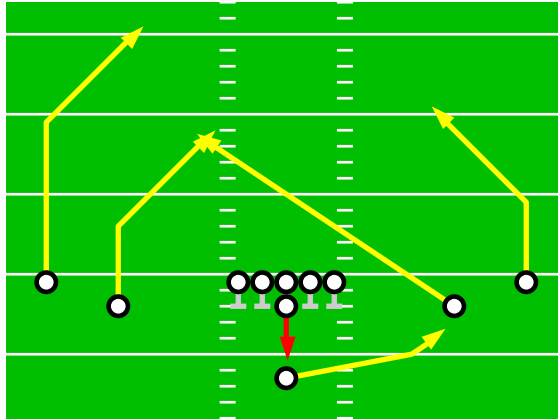
The fast development of passing plays has a big impact on read progressions. Many times reads will have to be combined to scan an area of the field in one glance, taking in both receivers to one side simultaneously, then the other side, and finally the running back (of course this ordering depends on the actual play). Often, matchup advantages can be spotted before the play starts, allowing the quarterback to lock in on a receiver for an immediate throw. Finally, it is hard to make reads on four to five routes in under two seconds, so it is often necessary to pick out just two or three that look good before snapping the ball and not worry about the others unless the play breaks down.

The given wide receiver assignments emphasize the flankers over the split ends due to the quick throws used, though different plays may favor each flanker differently. You need to determine which plays you like best and assign your top two receivers to the flanker positions accordingly. The split ends are assigned to best balance the receivers on each side of the formation, so if you decide to place your top wideout in the left flanker spot put your fourth wideout alongside at left split end, with the middling talents of the #2 and #3 wide receivers on the right, #2 at flanker.

Quick Slants

A fairly traditional slant play like those often featured by West Coast style offenses. It relies on sharp routes by the receivers and snap decisions by the quarterback. When executed well it is virtually unstoppable for 5–10 yard gains.

The flankers are the primary targets, specifically the right flanker who runs a slant directly off of the line. Unless he's jammed immediately by a defender he'll be running away from his man, slicing between linebackers. The QB just has to pick an opening between the linebackers and fire the pass quickly and accurately. The early reads are high percentage but typically yield the shortest gains, about 5–10 yards unless the safeties leave the middle open for a big run after the catch. The short throw distance and quick timing also make it very hard to throw an interception unless the pass is tipped by a defensive lineman. The outside posts are harder to throw and have greater chance of interception but should gain at least 15 yards.



If the middle gets jammed up with defenders in coverage and you don't need a big gain the swing pass is a safer alternative than the outside post routes. You probably aren't looking for big yards if you wanted to throw the inside routes anyway, and a good RB always has a chance to make moves and break tackles on swing passes.

The best positions for the Playmaker route are probably the split ends, the left SE in particular. He can run a quick route to the outside, complimenting the RB swing and forcing the defense to spread out wide, or to the inside cutting under the short left flanker post.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 2yd

Left SE: 10yd Post

Left Flanker: 5yd Post

Right Flanker: N4W6 (open)

Right SE: 5yd Post

RB: Swing Right

Read Progression

1. Right flanker slant
2. Right SE post
3. Left flanker post
4. Left SE post
5. RB swing

With Quick Slants, like many other 4 Wide plays, it is very important to read the defense before the snap. If you see what looks like a vulnerability read the route in that spot first, otherwise the speed of the play may cause the opening to be closed by the time you get to it in the normal progression.

I generally throw the first read about 70% of the time because it is by far the easiest, the DB covering the right flanker has no hope of staying with the receiver off of the line without cheating inside a bit (in which case a play like [Undertow](#) will *really* burn him). The other routes can take a lot more practice to get down but are necessary if the linebackers drop back to cover the slant, or if the right flanker is jammed at the line. Though it's last in the progression I generally look more for the swing route than the outside posts because it's an easier read, gets open more, and is much safer as a checkdown.

Analysis

Pros:

- Nearly impossible for human player to react in time to disrupt right flanker slant
- Quick reads and execution will nullify almost any blitz
- All wide receiver routes are aimed upfield, giving good YAC potential

Cons:

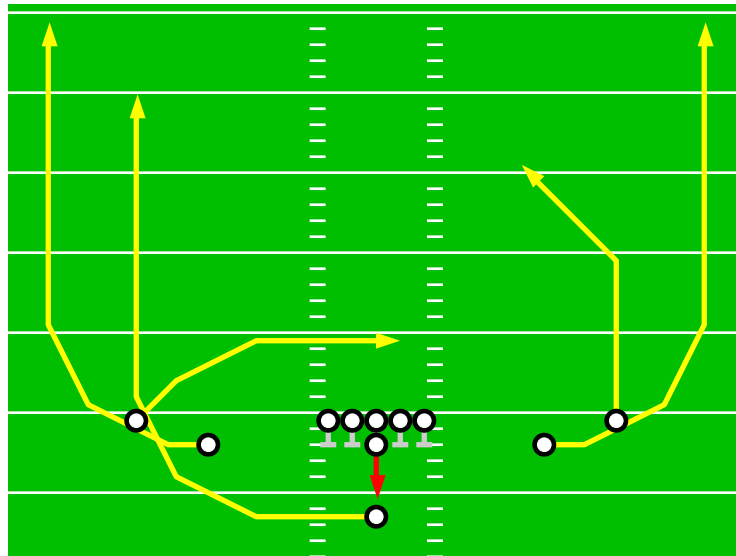
- Requires a lot of practice to get the timing down, especially for routes other than the inside slant
- Jams at the line can really disrupt the timing of the play
- The bullet passes right through the offensive line can be tipped by defenders more easily than deeper passing plays

- If the QB holds onto the ball for more than a couple of seconds he can easily get sacked
- The difficulty in making reads almost instantly makes it easy to throw into coverage (though difficult to intercept, due to short distance and hard throws)

Undertow

Undertow, as its name suggests was derived from [Undercuts \(Slingshot\)](#), which I consider to be my first truly great passing play and to this day maybe unsurpassed. I decided that although I like to keep my plays fresh, favoring experimentation with new techniques over rehashing old ones, the sterling qualities of Undercuts were just too good to not develop further. The [4 Wide](#) formation has much in common with Slingshot but places the quarterback and flankers closer to the line of scrimmage, allowing faster play development. Like Undercuts, Undertow combines reliable, short yardage routes with big play potential, but does so with a greater efficiency, getting more possibility out of the top two receiver's routes.

The flankers are the primary targets in most situations. These routes are symmetric so the read progression may be modified to look first at which ever receiver looks most likely to break open before the ball is snapped. These routes are also dual utility; they can be hit immediately after the snap while cutting



under the split end for a short but reliable gain, or they can catch the ball running up the sideline, hopefully after the receiver loses his man on the undercut. This throw requires very good touch and timing, as you have to drop the ball in after the receiver gets around the cornerback but before he gets in the vicinity of the

safety. This should only be attempted after several reps in practice.

The third target, the left SE, is also very useful. Because the flankers both run routes to the outside they usually draw the inside pass coverage, opening up the middle of the field. The SE's drag route gets open quite easily and if the flankers can grab the attention of the safeties a simple catch and turn upfield can get big yards. If a safety comes down to cover this short zone there is a good chance that the right SE will be open over the deep middle on a post pattern. To top things off the RB runs a pattern almost identical to the flanker patterns, to the left side but even wider. Like with the flankers this can be hit early for a safe dumpoff or late up the sideline for big yards. As you can see, Undertow has perhaps the best usage of the entire field of any of the plays I've devised. For the defense its a matter of picking your poison, they can select certain routes to cover but there's almost no way to cover them all.

Picking the Playmaker route for Undertow is a tough decision because there of the amount of synergy built into the routes. I'd have to say going with the left flanker route is probably the best choice. You can switch the flanker to a wheel route, both to open up the drag underneath and draw coverage away from the left sideline for the RB wide swing. A left quick out may even work to cross up man coverage on the left side, provided neither receiver is jammed.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 2yd

Left SE: N1E1-N1E2-E3 (open)

Left Flanker: W1-N1W2-N2W1-N7 (open)

Right Flanker: E1-N1E2-N2E1-N7 (open)

Right SE: 10yd Post

RB: W3-N1W2-N2W1-N7 (open)

Read Progression

1. Right flanker undercut/sideline streak
2. Left flanker undercut/sideline streak
3. Left SE drag
4. Right SE post
5. RB wide swing

I have combined the dual undercut/streak route segment into single reads because the play develops quite quickly and it is not really possible to make four distinct reads just among these receivers before the other reads. The best approach is to assess the defense *before* the ball is snapped and decide which part of each route looks best, taking the down and distance game situation and defensive formation into account. This is especially important for the flanker routes, as the only way to hit the undercut early enough is to make it your first read. In this situation you may flip the left/right read progression as appropriate.

Analysis

Pros:

- Top three wideouts run routes that can be hit for reliable gains, with additional big play potential by the flankers
- Excellent field utilization makes it almost impossible for the defensive backfield to cover everyone
- Great YAC potential due to flanker sideline routes losing man coverage and opening up the middle of the field for the SE routes
- Drag route and RB wide swing give play two good, safe checkdowns

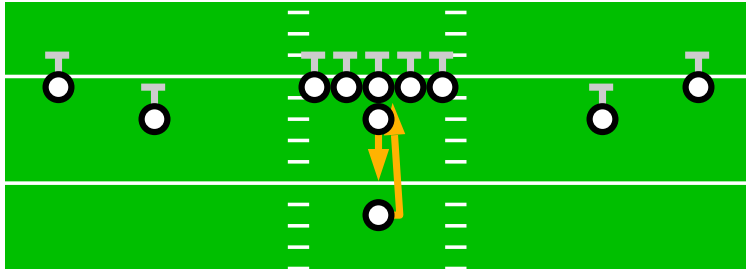
Cons:

- Flanker sideline throws are somewhat dangerous because they require great accuracy and timing on a moderately soft pass
- Jams on the split ends can create the double problem of putting the DB in position to break up the undercut routes
- Though usually quick developing, it is easy to give up a sack due to lack of extra pass blockers and short QB drop

HB Sprint

Every formation should have at least one running play if at all possible. 4 Wide is primarily a passing formation so this is what you get, a dead simple run right up the middle.

In a four wide receiver formation it's obvious we can't have any lead blockers to open up holes in the defense. We also have no tight



ends to sustain blocks on the outside. That really only leaves runs right up the middle, pure speed rushes to the outside, or some kind of misdirection. I've tried a few sweeps that utilized pulling guards, down blocks by the wide receivers, and a few other more gimmicky techniques, but nothing really worked out very well. Plays might do okay some of the time on easier settings but were never reliable and depended heavily on the defense making a mistake in blitzing or defensive line positioning. After trying all these different ideas I settled on this simple run, as simple as you can get. It won't work to well if the defense expects run, but the 4 Wide formation should hopefully spread the defense out so that each offensive lineman is matched up on a single defender, giving your back a shot at a decent gain.

Because of the play's simplicity and perfect symmetry (other than the runner) the Playmaker feature works perfectly. It won't make huge differences because the run is pretty much straight up the middle, but may help if the defensive line shifts to the offense's right side to attempt to enhance its pass rush.

Player Assignments

O-Line and Wide Receivers: Run Block

QB: Handoff to Running Back

RB: Shuffle Step-Dive Right

Blocking Assessment

If you call this play at a good time and get a Dime defense to attack you can expect one defender for each offensive lineman to block (four defensive linemen and the linebacker), assuming the defense does not bring a blitz. The blocking is all straight-ahead so it's impossible to predict where the holes will form. With no lead blockers there should be plenty of room to cut and juke, just try to keep your shoulders squared while constantly running upfield.

Analysis

Pros:

- As simple to execute as you can possibly ask for
- Works best against spread out Dime defenses, but does okay against Nickel as well
- Quick execution means the back should rarely lose yardage, and will run right by most blitzes around the outside

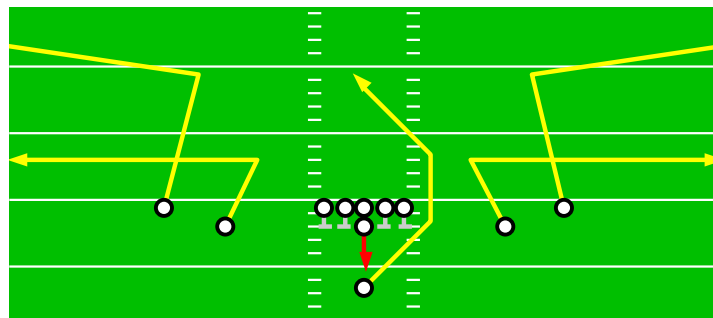
Cons:

- Not effective against base defensive formations
- generally will not work if your opponent anticipates run

Outs

I developed Outs as a shorter and more reliable offshoot of [Deep Outs \(Slingshot\)](#). Rather than taking a deep shotgun snap while the receivers run far downfield before breaking to the outside, Outs is intended to work off of a relatively quick five step drop. The quarterback needs to be prepared to make a quick read and throw, and to spice things up a bit the running back gets into the mix with a custom route out of the backfield.

Though the name implies that most throws will go to the outside, one of my favorite features of Outs is that every wide receiver route starts slanted inwards, meaning that each (and especially



the inside flanker routes) makes a great blitz read, quick throw against soft zones, and weapon against bump-and-run coverage on the outside. By practicing the inside slant patterns as well as the out patterns and being able to quickly assess the defense as soon as the ball is snapped Outs can become a nearly unstoppable

weapon in your playbook. I've tested it against all of the typical types of coverage in the Nickel, Dime and Quarters formations and there's no play that I've found that will completely shut it down.

Besides the all-important, all-purpose slanted out routes the running back adds a nice touch to the play with a circle route right over the middle. If the linebacker in the middle slides out to blanket the short routes to either side then the middle of the field will be easy pickings with this simple read and toss. It won't always be there, especially if the linebacker(s) have good coverage skills, but it's the best way to get a good run after the catch and there's often room to work with as the out routes pull defenders away from the middle.

You can use either side, but I assign the Playmaker route to the #1 receiver in the right flanker position. A switch to a quick out route might get open easy under the deep out pattern if the middle looks like tight coverage, while still leaving the short slant-and-out on the opposite side.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 2yd

Left SE: N4E1-N1W7 (open)

Left Flanker: N2E1-W7 (open)

Right Flanker: N2E1-W7 (open)

Right SE: N4W1-N1E7 (open)

RB: N2E2-N2-N2W2 (open)

Read Progression

1. Left flanker quick slant
2. Right flanker quick slant
3. Right flanker out
4. Left flanker out
5. RB circle over middle
6. Left SE deep out
7. Right SE deep out

The basic progression is straightforward. Look for the flanker quick slants, then the flanker outs, followed by the RB circle and lastly the split end deep outs.

The more detailed progression given above gives a natural way to scan the field back and forth between reads. We start on the inside left slant and look quickly right, follow this player into the out pattern, then look left to the underneath out on the other side. Look to the middle for the circle route, follow the path of the circle route up and over to the left corner for the deep out route, and finally look all the way across to the right deep out route.

As usual change this up if you spot particular weaknesses in the defense to exploit, especially on the slant portions of the routes. In general you want to get rid of the ball before reading the deep out patterns. These are quite difficult to throw, require holding onto the ball for a relatively long time, and usually draw double coverage from the safeties. They're also hhardto hit in bounds from the center of the field or closer to the receiver's side. If the play starts away from the exact middle of the field I would ignore the short side deep out and only look for the wide side where you have more room to work with.

Analysis

Pros:

- Standard out parts of underneath routes work great against man
- Quick slant reads inside easily counter blitzes and outside press coverage
- One of my best plays for effectiveness against Nickel, Dime and Quarters defenses

Cons:

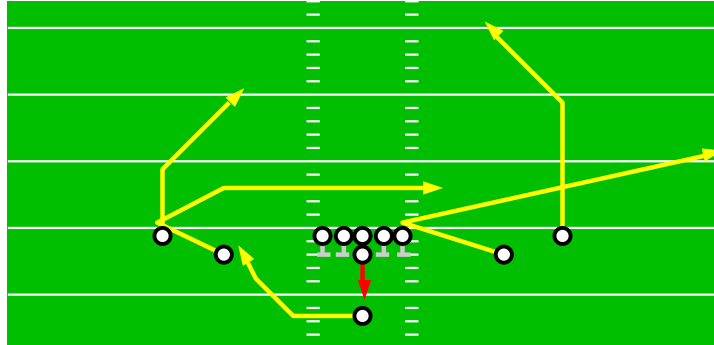
- Deep outs routes are difficult and potentially dangerous throws that generally shouldn't be used except as decoys for the underneath routes
- No blocking help means the QB must get rid of the ball quickly

Snapback

A short passing play inspired by [Reflex \(Crossbow\)](#) and [Flicker \(Slingshot\)](#). Two receivers start running one way laterally across the field before suddenly turning back in the other direction. Unlike Reflex and Flicker Snapback is asymmetric,

with the two pivoting receivers both starting left then turning right rather than running mirrored routes.

The right flanker is the primary target, working double duty as a blitz hot read by starting sharply in to the left, then pivoting back to the right to shake man coverage and move into the main section of his



route. The split ends both run post routes which stretch the defense down field and take advantage of the fact that safeties and linebackers will want to move up to engage the flankers and running back. The left flanker runs a route similar to the right flanker, but slower developing and through more traffic. If nothing is open early but the quarterback has time this route over the middle works well and is an easy throw. The running back runs a swing to the left. This makes a good safety valve but will not usually gain many yards unless thrown late down the sideline because the RB often gets caught up in the defensive traffic following the left flanker and SE.

I like the right SE for my orange route. A wheel route will run coverage away from the right snapback route as well as the post, and a quick out route may work even better, provided the ball is snapped near the left hash mark to give enough room on the wide side of the field.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 2yd

Left SE: 5yd Post

Left Flanker: N1W2-N1E2-E6 (open)

Right Flanker: N1W3-N2E9 (open)

Right SE: 10yd Post

RB: Swing Left

Read Progression

1. Right flanker quick slant in
2. Left SE post
3. Right flanker slant out
4. Right SE post
5. RB swing
6. Left flanker over middle

This progression jumps around a lot more than I usually like, so it is important to read the defense before the snap to pick out the most likely targets. I find it may be easier to approach the play from a novice's type of perspective: rather than checking through a list of routes, visualize the paths the receivers will take before the play and watch for open areas. For the right flanker look for a blitz first and throw immediately if the short middle is open, otherwise watch the right side linebacker. The flanker will likely get by man coverage but may be smothered in zone. For the post routes watch the safeties. If either safety moves down or to the outside the post route should get open over the middle. Just be sure to throw as the receiver breaks to prevent the defense from recovering. The left flanker route may take too long to develop to be used much of the time, but will get open over the middle if the LBs move to the outside to cover the RB or chase either flanker. Again, watch for a LB lurking in zone.

Analysis

Pros:

- Right flanker almost always gets away from man coverage
- Dual post routes give legitimate deep threats which are often opened up by the two flanker routes which can draw the safeties down and to the outside
- Right flanker doubles as an excellent hot read if the defense brings a blitz

Cons:

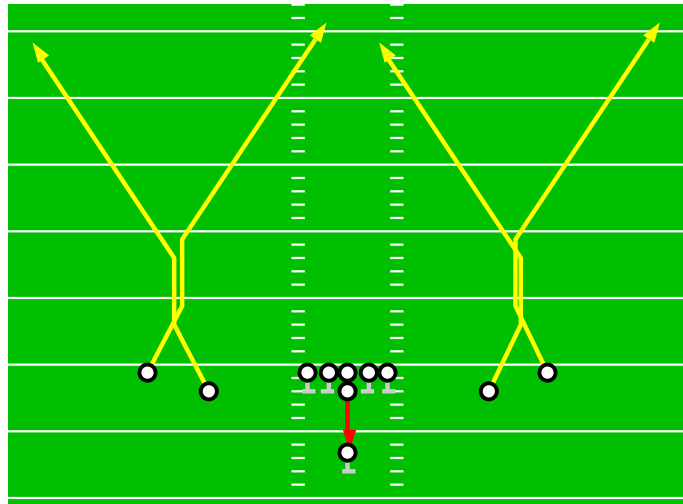
- Read progression is difficult to manage, especially in the limited amount of time available
- Jams at the line can really disrupt the timing of the play

- If the QB holds onto the ball for more than a couple of seconds he can easily be sacked due to lack of blocking support

Deep Twister

Most of my passing plays are designed for short to medium, high percentage throws that allow skilled players to be competitive even against superior teams or on high levels of difficulty. Adding variety, Deep Twister is a play for those of you who like the long ball. I considered for a long time whether I should even include this play in my book because some people might consider it to be cheese. Well I decided that those people just need to learn to defend the deep ball better. Deep Twister is certainly not unstoppable, but it is one of my best plays for those situations where you need to score a desperation 70 yard touchdown in a single play. Back in my Madden 2003 days, when I needed a quick touchdown or just wanted to take one last shot before the half after giving up a score I'd take the kickoff to the right side and then run this play on the first snap, aiming for the left flanker corner route. Even when I couldn't take it all the way there were a few times it worked as a nice 40 yard completion taken immediately out of bounds to set up a field goal or one more heave downfield.

Deep Twister seeks to cross up defenders by having each pair of receivers run crossing or fake crossing routes while running deep down field. With a bit of luck at least one of the wideouts will lose their man to get open for a deep bomb. On the left the receivers cross, with the split end eventually running a post and the flanker heading for the corner. On



the right side things are reversed. Bother players come together early but split back out in the direction that they came from, flanker to the inside and SE to the outside. Because the right and left flankers are the #1 and # 2 receivers in this

formation I prefer to run Deep Twister from the right hash marks if at all possible to give the left flanker deep corner route enough room to work without butting up against the sideline.

Naturally this type of play works best against man coverage but can be effective even against zones by either keeping the safeties split until late, opening the middle to the post patterns, or by throwing to single coverage on the outside. In any case your chances are pretty slim for actually hooking up on the home run ball, but that's pretty much true any time you need to go all the way in one shot, right?

This is probably a rare case where any receiver will do for the Playmaker route. You probably won't want to use this, unless you're in a not completely critical situation and want to switch someone to a safer and easier in/out/stop route as insurance because changing any one route will also reduce the effectiveness of the paired route on the same side. If I have to make a choice though I'd go with the right SE because his route is most likely to run out of room on the right sideline when I run the play from the preferred right hash marks.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 3yd

Left SE: N2E1-N2-N6E4

Left Flanker: N2W1-N2-N6W4

Right Flanker: N2E1-N2-N6W4

Right SE: N2W1-N2-N6E4

RB: Pass Block

Read Progression

1. Left SE post
2. Left flanker corner
3. Right SE corner
4. Right flanker post

From my book up to this point you know that I usually put a lot of emphasis on the read progressions of each passing play, that in most cases knowing how to make reads is as important as knowing exactly where, when and how each route

is going to be run. Well, Deep Twister has a such a progression but it might be the least useful progression in the entire playbook. All routes use the exact same distances in each segment and so potentially all open up at the same time. The above progression is based more on my own route preferences than on actual play development.

I like the left corner route best, so I look left first but starting with the post route because the SE starts a step in front of the flanker and so may get a hair deeper a split second earlier (hey, I have to pick an order *somehow*, right?). Then I look right, first to the SE on the corner route and then to the more favorable flanker post right towards the middle.

Analysis

Pros:

- Maybe my favorite play for a one-timer deep scoring shot
- Corner routes can get open fairly consistently against man coverages, even against Dime formation

Cons:

- Even as effective as it is, you probably won't complete any of the routes deep more than about one-third of the time against decent opposition
- RB chip block not capable of holding off a strong pass rush or blitz long enough to throw the good deep ball
- Quarters-Prevent or other deep zone defenses will probably be able to react to double cover every receiver late on the deep passes

Chapter 10

Crossbow Formation

Overview

Crossbow is one of my earlier formations, designed for simple but reliable running plays and compact passing plays. While not flashy or terribly exciting, most of the plays are relatively straightforward, especially compared to what is found in most of my all-passing formations. The simplicity of the Crossbow formation makes it nice for beginning players who find my other formations and plays too complex to start out with.

							T2	LT	LG	C	RG	RT	T1						
						W1				QB				W2					
										R1									

With no lead blocker the most effective running plays are often to the outside, where the tight ends and wide receivers can string out the defense at the line of scrimmage. Runs to the inside can be effective as well, but require the running back to possess good ability to cut and juke because the straight-ahead, straight across the line blocking means that the location where the best hole opens up can be quite unpredictable. Combine this with the short set of the running back and there's not a lot of margin of error to work with. Because the compactness of the Crossbow formation often draws a lot of defenders in close the best running opportunities will come against Nickel defenses with smaller defenders as opposed

to base 4-3 or 3-4 defensive sets. This means that a good strategy is to use mostly passing plays out of the Crossbow formation early to take the opposing defense out of their base set.

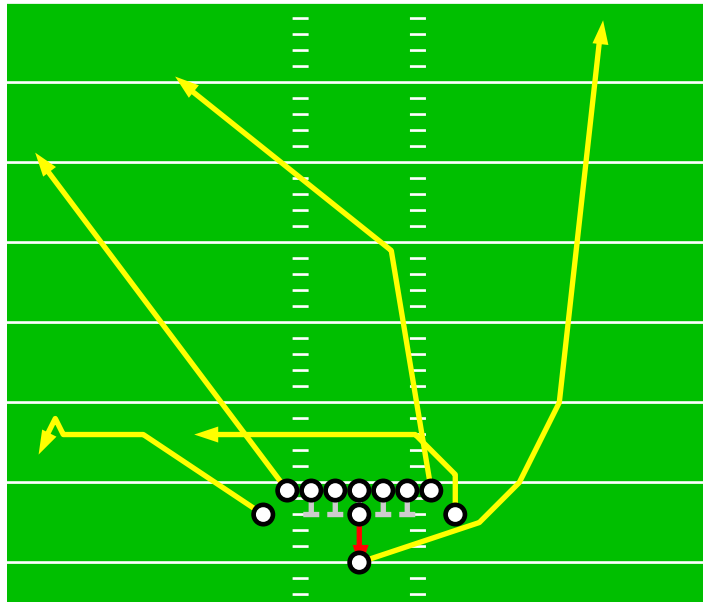
Passing plays can either use all of the receivers and tight ends to spread out the defense or keep some players in to block to allow longer routes to develop while providing solid protection for the quarterback. I try to use the compactness of the formation as an asset, hoping to draw coverage in close and let the passing routes explode outwards, forcing the defenders to turn their backs to the quarterback to give chase.

Wide receiver and tight end assignments are setup to balance out each side. I place my #1 receiver and #2 tight end on the left and #2 receiver and #1 tight end on the right. Switching everyone to the other side would be equally balanced. As usual go with whichever way best suits the teams you like and your own playing style.

Flood Left

Flood Left is a revamped version of one of my oldest plays. The premise is simple: all four forward receivers (two tight ends, two wide receivers) run drag, corner or post routes to the left side while the running back swings out to the right. The wideouts and tight ends can initially overwhelm the defenders on the left side by sheer numbers. If the defense pursues heavily the RB may find himself wide open on the opposite side. While most of these routes are designed to reliably gain short to medium yardage, Flood Left creates excellent opportunities for good runs after the catch.

This play does not really have primary targets. The wide receivers and RB are all fairly easy to hit for short gains. The tight ends are a bit more difficult targets, though teams with a modern, speedy TE may be able to take advantage of the slant post route for big yards over the middle. This route runs right towards the free safety, but that safety is usually already



occupied by the other tight end's quick corner route and the WRs underneath. This allows the right TE to run away from his man and the strong safety.

Choosing a good Playmaker route is tough. Switching up any player's assignment is more likely to hurt the chemistry of the play than to create new openings, so use discretion before making any adjustment. If you do make changes before the snap the safest bet is probably the right TE. A wheel route will have a similar effect in opening up the other routes, while a quick in may clear an opening for the flanker drag right behind (though the speedier WR will likely catch up to the TE in short order, so be quick with your throw).

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 2yd

Left Flanker: N2W3-W2 (curl left)

Left TE: N8W6 (open)

Right TE: N6W1-N4W5 (open)

Right Flanker: N1-N1W1-W5 (open)

RB: N1E3-N1E1-N2E1-N6E1 (open)

Read Progression

1. Left Flanker to outside (before curl)
2. Left TE quick corner
3. Right Flanker drag
4. RB swing
5. Left Flanker curl
6. Right TE post

This progression is pretty basic. At the beginning of the play look at how the defense is aligned against the left WR and TE. Often one defender will have to cover both receivers momentarily, which usually leads to an easy pass to the flanker underneath. You may also want to look for the right TE before he makes his break if the safeties are in man coverage and do not stay back deep. Also, although the left flanker ends his route with a curl, in practice this is rarely used (it's as much to keep him in bounds as anything), so you may end up skipping over his second read.

Analysis

Pros:

- Quick developing play with several good routes
- RB often has room to run in the flats
- One of my best passing plays for reliably converting short yardage

Cons:

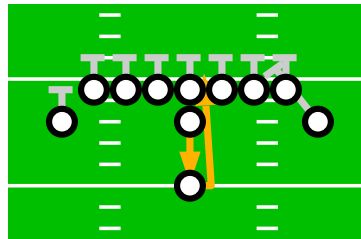
- Deep routes are slower developing and possibly dangerous throws
- No extra blockers so you may need to get rid of the ball quickly (further limiting use of deep routes)

Quick Sting

The quick and easy run up the middle no formation is complete without. Well, except for all those no-back pure passing formations, and the shotgun formations

Madden doesn't let you create your own running plays from, of course. This play isn't drawn up with kind of dominant blocking that can grind away at the defense, down after down, but makes for a nice occasional quick hitter that can pick up a few good yards with some quick footwork.

The running back takes a quick shuffle step to the right and then plunges straight ahead. That's one way to run it at least, and probably the best way when you only need to gain a yard. I have found it more effective, through, to be ready to juke quickly to either side to take advantage of the biggest opening I can find. That's the problem with no lead



blocker, running plays just aren't as predictable because there are no guarantees as to where the blocking will be most successful. The flip side of this is that it can be a benefit to smaller, quicker running backs who can move side to side, taking advantage of the wide blocking of the tight ends and flankers to juke and make cuts without losing speed.

The Playmaker direction shift work perfectly with this run, even down to the flanker lead block switching sides and direction correctly. It won't help a whole lot because the play is pretty much up the middle anyways, but is still a nice feature to have.

Player Assignments

O-Line and TEs: Run Block

QB: Handoff to Running Back

Left Flanker: Run Block

Right Flanker: Lead Wide Left

RB: Shuffle Step-Dive Right

Blocking Assessment

Nothing mysterious or sophisticated here. The back receives the handoff quickly and needs to be able to make very quick cuts to whatever hole opens up. No lead blockers makes it hard to predict what will happen in the trenches, so good vision and the ability to quickly assess the blocking are the critical skills to have. I like to keep my shoulders squared and use a juke move about half the time to get to the opening and accelerate though it as rapidly as possible.

Analysis

Pros:

- Quick execution makes it effective against soft defenses and many blitzes
- As easy to learn as it gets

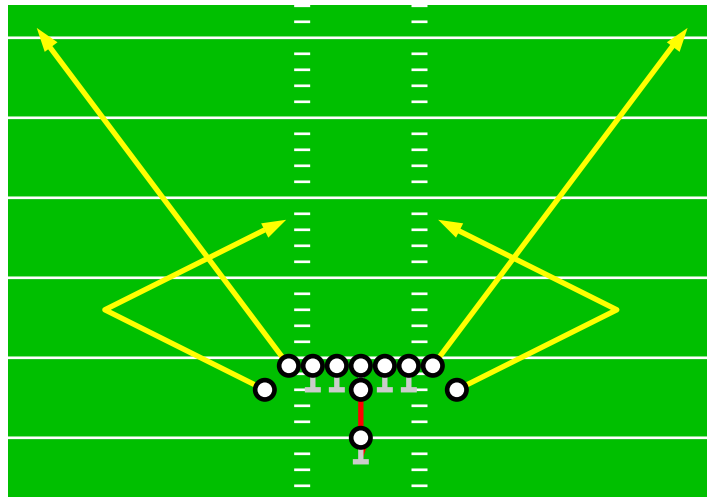
Cons:

- No lead blocker means that the RB has to very good at identifying the holes and cutting to them quickly for run to be effective
- Not great against base defenses with a lot of muscle up close on the inside

Reflex

Reflex is a relatively simple play designed to reliably get the wide receivers open for easy passes over the middle. It tends to get 8–10 yards when the routes are able to fully develop, making it a good choice for converting third and long. The tight ends and flankers start by running away from the center in a burst, spreading out the defense. Then the flankers break sharply back to the inside, usually leaving man coverage behind them. This leaves the quarterback with an easy read and throw, just needing to watch out for any linebackers lurking in zone coverage.

The primary targets are the flankers after they make their breaks to the inside. The tight ends are usually too slow to make effective targets, but do a good job drawing the safeties to the deep corners, away from the shallow middle where the flankers will end up. Once in a while you may be able to hit a TE on a blitz or just catch a defender out of position.



While this play was one of my long time favorites, it fell somewhat out of my favor when I made the step up to All Madden difficulty in Madden 2003, and went into further decline with the faster pass rush of Madden 2004. Adjustments were made (see below) to quicken the execution, as well as placing more emphasis on the out portions of the flanker routes. While no longer the sure thing is seemed to be when I first introduced it, the new Reflex is a solid choice at any level.

I set my right flanker as the Playmaker. A quick in route can help counter blitzes and take advantage of the defensive middle stretched thin by the routes to the outside.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 3yd

Left Flanker: N2W6-N2E6 (open)

Left TE: N8W6 (open)

Right TE: N8E6 (open)

Right Flanker: N2E6-N2W6 (open)

RB: Pass Block

Read Progression

1. Left Flanker to outside
2. Right Flanker to outside
3. Left TE quick corner
4. Right TE quick corner
5. Left Flanker after break
6. Right Flanker after break

Although the flankers are the primary targets to look for *after* they make their breaks, it's also important to look for them quickly after the snap in case the defense brings pressure and the routes do not have time to fully develop. In some cases you only need a few yards, and in these situations the 2–5 yards the flankers will get on their quick outs will be all you really want. These may also be the better options if the defenders are playing off or cheating to the inside to take away slant routes.

Analysis

Pros:

- Two primary symmetric patterns makes the play very easy to learn and read
- Sharp breaks made by flankers almost always lose their defender in man coverage
- 3 or 4 “primary” targets makes play easy to learn

Cons:

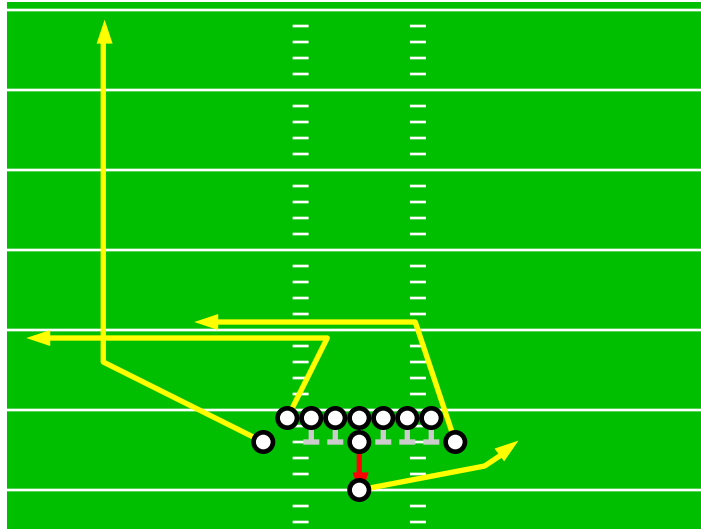
- Primary routes take a while to develop, meaning lots of pressure can disrupt the play
- RB does a lousy job pass blocking, getting the way of the QB as much as pass rushers (occasionally I’ve even had the RB block me *into* a defender!), sometimes it helps to call a blocking hot read to either side for the RB
- TE routes are not particularly useful or reliable except as decoys

Modified From 2003 Web Version: *Reflex was originally designed for Madden 2003 and became a staple play for me at the All-Pro level of difficulty. In the original version both reflex (out-and-in) routes extended 2 units farther horizontally for both the out and back sections of the route. At All Madden difficulty in 2003 and on most difficulty levels in 2004 the pass rush is simply too fast for such long developing routes to be effective. Even in the shortened versions used the QB may not have time to wait for the in cuts, but at least has a decent chance while also looking to make use of the out portions of the routes.*

Shear

Shear is a solid, quick hitting pass play that is especially effective against both blitzes and man coverages. I make good use of one of my favorite techniques, creating in and out routes with angled initial segments rather than the traditional straight starts that allow the routes to perform double duty as quick slants in the early reads.

Besides the quick slant route options I also feature an out and up route by the left flanker. This quick slant to the outside is tough to cover when thrown well, and if not open early turns into a sideline streak that can gain big yards thrown later in the play. The meat of the play though are really in the in and out routes, both run to



the left by the left tight end and right flanker. The TE takes advantage of the out-and-up route on the left to draw coverage deep, while the flanker in route follows in the TE's wake and makes an easy read right over the middle.

Shear is rounded out with a swing route by the running back. I really like to use swing routes which isolate the back from the other receivers, offering the possibility that no one on the defense has man coverage on the back. It's such an effective technique in [Flood Left](#) that I had to use it again, this time just with the stock route.

I like the right flanker for my Playmaker. If things look to crowded right over the middle a quick out route is a good fix. A wheel route is also a possibility if you want to push the play deep.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 2yd

Left Flanker: N2W4-N8 (open)

Left TE: N2E1-W7 (open)

Right TE: Pass Block

Right Flanker: N3W1-W5 (open)

RB: Swing Right

Read Progression

1. Left TE quick slant
2. Right flanker quick slant
3. Left flanker quick out
4. RB swing
5. Left TE out
6. Right flanker over middle
7. Left flanker streak

Shear is most effective when you can take full advantage of the three quick slant reads. None of these are likely to net more than 5 or 6 yards, but that's just fine if you're mainly concerned with moving the chains. Start with the shorter TE slant, then the right flanker, and last the left flanker slant to the outside. These all work very well against the blitz, are solid options against man coverage, and the flanker slant in is great at splitting deeper zones right down the middle for a good run after catching the pass in stride.

The RB swing that follows is the first complete route to look for and is a good throw in almost every situation except a cornerback playing the short zone to the right side. Next look to the TE out and the right flanker in, just over the middle. Finish up with the left flanker streaking down the left sideline. This throw is best between a cornerback and safety playing zone.

Analysis

Pros:

- Three quick slant sub-routes (two inside, one outside) coupled with the RB swing make Shear devastating against blitzes
- Swing route has a good chance of being left uncovered by aggressive man defenses
- Out-and-up pattern offers a nice look for fitting a deep throw over the CB and under the free safety

Cons:

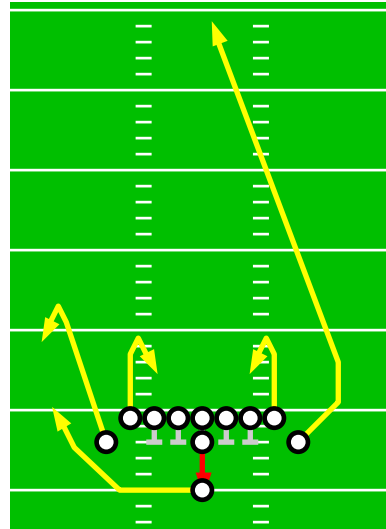
- Even with the right TE staying in to block the play is still vulnerable to strong defensive rushes up the middle or around the left tackle

- Throwing the quick slant passes over the middle increases the chances of tips by defensive linemen

Uncoiled

Uncoiled is good passing play when you want several sure, easy reads to be able to reliably gain 5 or 6 yards. The play is based around three curl routes at nearly even depths across the middle and near left parts of the field. Because reading these routes only requires determining if a receiver is open at a fixed position Uncoiled is a good option for players who haven't mastered the finer points of timing throws to hit targets moving between defenders.

The nice thing about curl routes is that while it's not too hard to stop one at a time, it's very difficult to stop as many as three. With only one curl a defensive back in man coverage can often get some help underneath from a nearby linebacker. With three curls there simply aren't enough linebackers in the short zone to cover everyone, so it would require two or three great individual efforts by man defenders to lock everyone down. Just in case this does happen, the running back runs a swing route underneath that will take advantage of the occupied defenders for at least an easy couple of yards. Because the running back responsibility *also* often falls to a linebacker, all of these short routes should keep this unit very busy.



Though the play is intended primarily for short gains, the right flanker adds a kind of circle post route that can split zones right down the middle. This throw requires a lot of practice though, as the timing must be precise to fit it over the linebackers and under and between the safeties.

I give the orange Playmaker route to the right flanker. When used as intended you probably don't want to mess with the three curl routes, and running backs in the backfield aren't eligible for the position.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 2yd

Left Flanker: N3W1 (curl left)

Left TE: 4yd Curl

Right TE: 4yd Curl

Right Flanker: N1E1-N1-N8W3 (open)

RB: Swing Left

Read Progression

1. Right TE curl
2. Left TE curl
3. RB swing
4. Left flanker curl
5. Right flanker post over deep middle

Uncoiled uses a straightforward five receiver, five read progression. We start with the TE curls. I put the right TE first because he's the #1 TE as I have Crossbow setup, but you basically want to make these reads simultaneously and pick whichever man is more open. Next look for the RB on the swing. Back to the other side is the left flanker curl which bends outwards to get a little extra separation from the left TE. Finish up with the right flanker post over the middle.

Analysis

Pros:

- At least one curl almost sure to get open against man coverage, with the TEs also working well against most zones
- Swing makes a good outlet if pressure come very quickly
- Circle post gives play one good deep threat to keep the defense honest

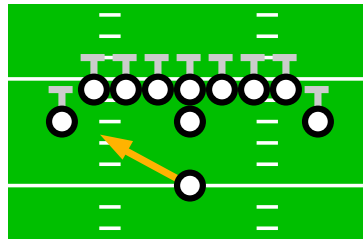
Cons:

- If curls are thrown early, before the receiver has completed his turn, passes which look catchable will often be dropped
- Short TE curl routes are tipped fairly easily by defensive linemen
- Circle post can be a dangerous throw that requires pinpoint accuracy and excellent timing to avoid swats or interceptions

Speed Pitch

Two tight ends and no lead blocking fullback indicates a formation built to run to the outside, and that's what Speed Pitch delivers. You won't be running wide sweeps with this play though, due to the short set of the running back, but rather delivering quick stings right off tackle.

As you may have guessed by now, Crossbow is not a dominant running formation. I originally intended it to be as good at moving the football on the ground as through the air, but my attempts at sweeps and counter plays didn't work out as well as I envisioned. The fact that the receivers start in close is certainly a part of this, making it easy to contain any runs wide to the outside. Nevertheless, Crossbow does have one great strength in the running game, and that is that it can attack almost any direction other than wide to the outside with equal effectiveness. Because it won't just run opponents over, Speed Pitch is most effective when you can get a defense a little off balance and then strike where they don't expect it. Mixing things up with passing plays and [Quick Sting](#) runs to the inside is the key.



The Playmaker feature works perfectly and turns what might otherwise be a mediocre running play into a very viable part of your rushing offense. Rather than facing the possibility of running straight into the heart of the defense, now you can run away from it every time. Even if the defense simply spreads out wide you can look for cutbacks against over-pursuit.

Player Assignments

O-Line, TEs and WRs: Run Block

QB: Pitch to Running Back

RB: Receive Pitch-Off Tackle Left

Blocking Assessment

Though this run is a pitch play, it's probably one of the shortest ones you'll ever use. This requires a bit of change in mentality, you want to execute this run almost like a normal handoff off tackle. You shouldn't expect dominant blocking from the wide receiver on the outside so look for the first cut upfield you can take, especially against blitzes which, as long as you can get by the initial rush, often leave nice avenues to move through.

Analysis

Pros:

- Works well against many blitzes, offering cutback lanes to the runner through over-pursuit
- With Playmaker control available defense can't afford to just stack one side against the run

Cons:

- Not so good against zone defenses because the angle of the run gives defenders a chance to react by the time the runner hits the line of scrimmage
- Not terribly effective against base defenses (4-3 or 3-4)

Chapter 11

4 Left Formation

Overview

4 Left was my idea to take a fairly common trips style formation to a new level. I moved the lone wideout who might normally be split to the opposite side in a 4 wide trips formation over with his buddies and replaced the standard single running back with a tight end to give just a bit of a threat to the weak side (as well as make the formation legal, of course). The goal of the formation is to force the defense either to bring almost all of its defensive backs to the left side, leaving huge openings for any player who slips over to the right side, or to defend the whole field in zone coverage but be overmatched on the left side. The four wide receivers work together, using screens, crossing routes and decoys to free up their teammates.

W2								LT	LG	C	RG	RT	T1						
		W4	W3	W1															
										QB									

Due to the almost total lack of blocking help (in some plays the tight end stays in to block, but that's it) this formation is best suited towards very mobile quarterbacks such as Michael Vick or Kordell Stewart. This type of QB can take advantage when the defense stacks the left side by scrambling to the right with little opposition. This is aided by the tight end, who in most plays runs straight

routes slightly up and towards the sideline. Against man defenses most defensive backs are on the other side of the field, allowing the TE to occupy the only defender in space on the right, opening up half of the field for scrambles and drag routes.

The plays in the 4 Left formation require some of the most practice of any of my plays. The four receivers and their defenders create a lot of traffic, so just throwing the ball up into the crowd can make for a lot of turnovers. The lack of blocking means you have to make near instant blitz reads. The lopsided shape of the formation means that the QB may have to scramble and be able to throw on the run.

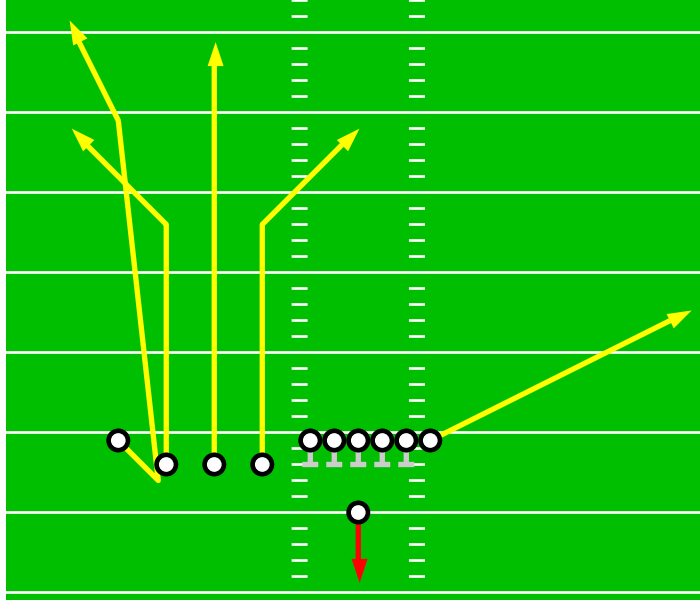
Unless you count possible QB scrambles, 4 Left is a passing only formation. Nearly complete emphasis is on the set of four wide receivers. The assignments I use are somewhat the opposite of the slightly similar [Tsunami](#) formation with its trips receivers, but are aimed at the same goals. I put the #1 receiver in the closest slot, the inside flanker position, which often drags across the line for short but reliable gains. This position does not need great speed but should have great hands. #2 is the split end on the outside, mainly for balance with the top receiver inside and to allow a bit of isolation. The #3 and #4 receivers are left in the middle. I put #3 in the middle flanker position (second WR from the right) because the outside flanker position (second in from the left) is maybe the toughest to get the ball to, due to the fact that it makes for relatively long throws and is in the middle of a lot of traffic. This position tends to run streak, post and corner routes.

Jailbreak Option

Jailbreak Option is a play specifically designed around the unique abilities of Michael Vick. I call it an option play because although it contains some standard passing routes there are two major options for the quarterback to take. The first is a throw to the split end who starts far to the left. The split end runs a few yard down and in and then pauses. This is designed to draw a defender down close. He then breaks upfield with the goal of running right past this defender. Meanwhile the quarterback rolls out to the left, keeping close to the line of scrimmage. If the rest of the receivers can draw enough defenders deep and across the field, the close defender has to make a choice stay with the receiver upfield and make the quarterback try to run, or rush the QB and force a throw. Defenders usually step up to pursue a scrambling QB who's right in front of them, so the SE is often able to break wide open 10 yards downfield. If not, just tuck the ball and run while

using the SE as a blocker.

The SE is the best target but certainly not the only one. The tight end on the right forces the defense to cover the whole field and will occasionally break wide open for an easy catch and run. The other three wide receivers all run deep routes that break apart late. These routes are a good fallback in case the defense crowds the short zone against the primary option play.



The post route runs away from most of the defense into the open field, and the corner route usually makes for a safe throwaway once it develops because of how close it is to the left sideline.

The hardest part about learning this play is managing the timing between the SE route and the QB rollout. The goal is for the QB to run up far enough to force the defenders to come after him while still being able to make a good throw. Additionally, the throw itself can be difficult because the SE will not always be wide open. Often a linebacker will be in coverage and you will have to lob the ball high enough to get it over him while not letting the ball hang *so* high that a defensive back downfield can react and either intercept it or blast the receiver as he tries to catch it.

For the Playmaker route I'd go with the TE or inside flanker. If the defense shows blitz either position can switch to a quick in/out route for a fast and easy throw to counter.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Receive Shotgun Snap

SE: S1E1 (delay 1 sec)-N9W1-N2W1 (open)

Outside Flanker: 15yd Corner

Middle Flanker: 25yd Streak

Inside Flanker: 15yd Post

TE: N3E6 (open)

Read Progression

1. TE slant out
2. SE after breaking upfield
3. Inside flanker post
4. Middle flanker streak
5. Outside flanker corner

This progression works well if the QB is not pressured quickly. The three deep flanker routes are primarily to draw coverage away from the SE and so should not be used as early reads. However, a blitz can be devastating to any 4 Left play because of the lack of backfield blockers. If a blitz comes through cleanly look for the TE first and the inside flanker (while running straight upfield) second. *Do not throw the streak or corner routes under quick and heavy pressure*, these routes are in heavy traffic until they break in different directions 15 yards upfield. The inside flanker is fairly safe because it's a short distance throw with maybe a linebacker to worry about, the other two routes likely require throwing over DBs. If you have to it's better to just take a sack and live to fight the next play.

Analysis

Pros:

- The SE/QB rollout combo puts enormous pressure on man coverage defenses
- Poorly executed blitzes by the defense can be severely punished by the three deep routes
- Excellent play for mobile quarterbacks

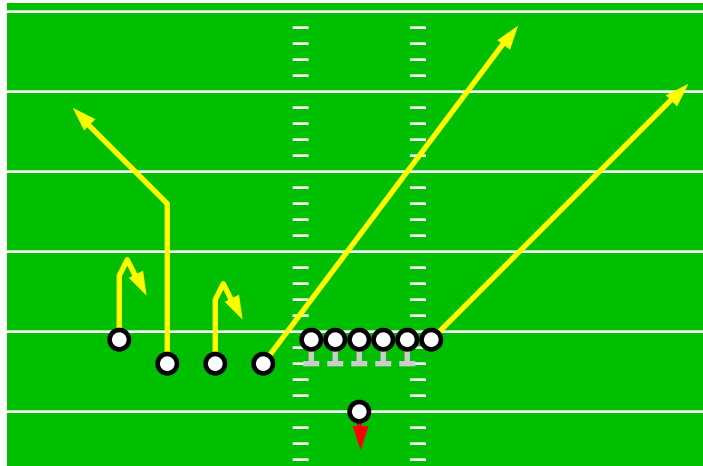
Cons:

- The primary route is slow developing and will probably not work well against zone defenses
- A blitz can devastate this play due to minimal blocking and few good quick reads
- Requires a good running QB to get the full potential out of this play

Blaze

With any four wide receiver formation pressure on the quarterback is something to be concerned about. In the 4 Left formation Blaze is one of the solutions to the issue of countering defensive blitzes. Four of the five routes can be thrown quickly, before a blitz gets to the QB, while three of the routes have the potential to strike deep if the blocking holds up long enough.

The strategy behind Blaze is based on two types of routes that are both pretty good at countering aggressive defenses: slants and curls. Quick slants off the line of scrimmage by the inside flanker and tight end are dual purpose routes, they can be really thrown at any point and so make good



hot reads *and* deep throws without any adjustments. Short curl routes aren't quite so versatile but make nice, easy targets for the QB to pick out and throw to. A blitzing defense usually has its defensive backs in coverage back off just enough to ensure that a quickly completed pass doesn't burn them completely, and this bit of separation can be all a curl route receiver needs.

The curl routes and slants are spread out about as much as possible to ensure that they don't interfere with each other by drawing coverage closer to other receivers. Additionally, the outside flanker runs a corner route that adds deep

potential to go with the more critical slant routes. More importantly though this corner route draws coverage from the curls underneath.

I like the inside flanker to take the orange Playmaker route. Though his slant route is maybe the best route in the play, there may be times when the defense decides to take the slants away with linebacker short zone coverage. This is especially true if you run my playbook a lot, which is sure to make opponents take an active interest in stopping the quick slant. A quick in route will drag right over the middle, while a wheel route may make a nice surprise for a defense expecting dink and dunk pass plays.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 1yd

SE: 4yd Curl

Outside Flanker: 10yd Corner

Middle Flanker: 4yd Curl

Inside Flanker: N8E6 (open)

TE: N6E6 (open)

Read Progression

1. TE slant out
2. Inside flanker slant
3. Middle flanker curl
4. SE curl
5. Outside flanker corner

Blaze is meant to be executed quickly so we only take one look at each receiver. For the most part we just look right to left, starting with the TE and inside flanker slants, then the middle flanker curl. Quickly skip all the way to the left for the split end curl which gets open at the same time, then look upfield to the corner route. As I said you should try to get rid of the ball quickly, but if you aren't pressured you may be able to take additional looks downfield to the slant routes, especially the inside flanker slant.

Analysis

Pros:

- Works well against blitz, especially the inside slant which is an easy read right over the middle
- Inside curl is wide open against deep zones
- Quick and simple progression with ending corner route that doubles as a safe throwaway pass

Cons:

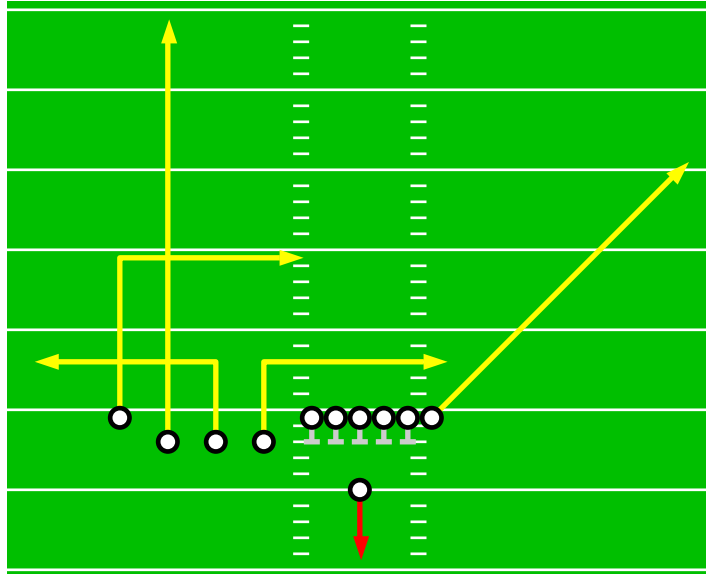
- Difficult to execute against press coverage with several reads close to line of scrimmage
- Reliable for short yardage but not especially explosive downfield

Cross Levels

Cross Levels is an easy to learn and read play that works well against deep coverage by throwing underneath, as well as using quick routes to counter blitzes. Three of the five routes are crossing routes, allowing the quarterback to easily pick a hole in zone defenses to throw to or allowing the receivers to work together to confuse and run away from man coverage. Although it utilizes all five receivers in pass patterns Cross Levels is effective against blitzes (unless you get a bad snap) because three receivers can be thrown to immediately.

The best targets are the inside and middle flankers running in and out routes in the opposite directions. A blitz will leave at least one of these receivers open, while the routes pass underneath deep coverages. If the defense plays tight man or a short zone to take away underneath routes, the streak pattern and the deeper in pattern that crosses beneath it are good options. The tight end's quick corner route ensures that the defense has to cover the whole field, so with five options someone can almost always get open. Just in case no one does the short out route can double as a fairly safe throwaway as long as you're not too far from the left sideline.

There are a lot of options for the orange Playmaker route. The inside receivers running quick in and out routes can better beat press coverage by switching to quick in/out routes, while the outside flanker could take a quick in route underneath both of these routes (though this would cause a lot of traffic). On the other hand, the TE working in relative isolation might be best able to take advantage of his matchup. With so many choices I'll leave the ultimate decision up to you.



Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Receive Shotgun Snap

SE: 10yd In

Outside Flanker: 25yd Streak

Middle Flanker: 5yd Out

Inside Flanker: 5yd In

TE: N6E6 (open)

Read Progression

1. TE slant corner
2. Inside flanker over middle
3. Middle flanker in left flats
4. Outside flanker streak
5. SE in over middle

Things are pretty direct here. Against man coverage look for the TE, otherwise

you can probably ignore him against a zone unless the defenders really back off deep. The in and out routes should be taken as a single read, look right at both player together and watch how the defenders move as they split apart in opposite directions. If a defensive back bites hard on the out route it may open a window for throwing the streak route, otherwise take the SE running across the middle 10 yards deep. With no blocking help you want to concentrate on the first three reads and try to get rid of the ball quickly.

Analysis

Pros:

- Three quick reads will neutralize blitzes
- Can gain easy big yardage against prevent defenses by throwing underneath and getting blocks from down field receivers, especially on the left side
- Very easy play to learn and read

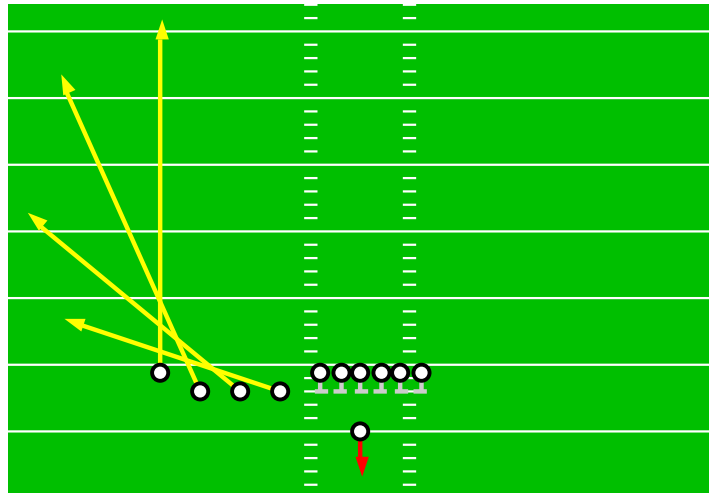
Cons:

- Typically gets short gains for a four WR formation
- Bad shotgun snaps will ruin timing for quick reads and lead to a likely sack against any blitz
- Deep in route can be a dangerous throw

Warp

Warp might be called a wide receiver screen play by accident. Not to imply it isn't effective, I wish half of my plays purposefully had the potential explosiveness as Warp does. I took the basic idea of running multiple routes that slide under each other and took it as far as I could, running four continuously undercutting routes towards the outside. I wasn't sure exactly what the results would be when I drew this play up, but the final product has definitely exceeded my expectations.

Though it can be effective against almost any coverage in different ways, Warp is simply a thing of beauty against straight-up man coverage in the typical Dime defense matched against it. A quick throw to the inside flanker underneath the other receivers and you have an easy completion with a virtual convoy of three blockers out in the open flats.



The first time I ran this play in an actual game situation it went for a 60 yard touchdown down the left sideline with no defender ever laying a finger on my receiver. Of course it won't work this well every time, but my results have been very good overall.

As with man defenses, Warp can be deadly against blitzes. Press coverage is a little tougher because the jam on the outside split end is right in the path of the inside flanker's route. The middle flanker early (to the inside of the bump) or the outside flanker late (behind the bump) are your best targets here. No convoy of blockers for awesome YAC potential but the catch is made deeper downfield to start with.

As much as I hate to do it I have to assign the Playmaker route to the inside flanker. You really don't want to change this route unless you're sure the defense is loading up to stop this play, but with the other three routes playing tight along the sideline a simple quick in just over the middle has a good chance of getting open easily. A deep wheel route would also make a fitting punishment for defenses who massively overload the left sideline with DBs to stop this play.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 2yd

SE: 25yd Streak

Outside Flanker: N9W4 (open)

Middle Flanker: N5W6 (open)

Inside Flanker: N2W6 (open)

TE: Pass Block

Read Progression

1. Inside flanker out
2. Middle flanker slant out
3. Outside flanker slant corner
4. SE streak

The best plays are not only extremely effective but easy to execute. This combination is a rare and beautiful thing, and Warp may just fit the description. Just make the reads in direct order, from right to left or shallow to deep, whichever way you like to think of it. The first read is the best against man or blitz, #2 is best against press, though #3 is also good if you put a lot of air under the ball. Read #4 should not be used frequently unless you're the type who likes to gamble deep downfield, I prefer to throw deep when I see single coverage and so this may be nice against a blitz if the O-line picks it up nicely.

Analysis

Pros:

- Maybe the best YAC potential of any play I've ever created
- Combines effectiveness with extremely simple read progression in a four receiver pass play
- TE blocking gives better protection than many 4 Left plays while giving opportunities for mobile QBs to scramble to wide open spaces on the right side
- Most coverages cannot completely stop Warp, but can only hope to contain it

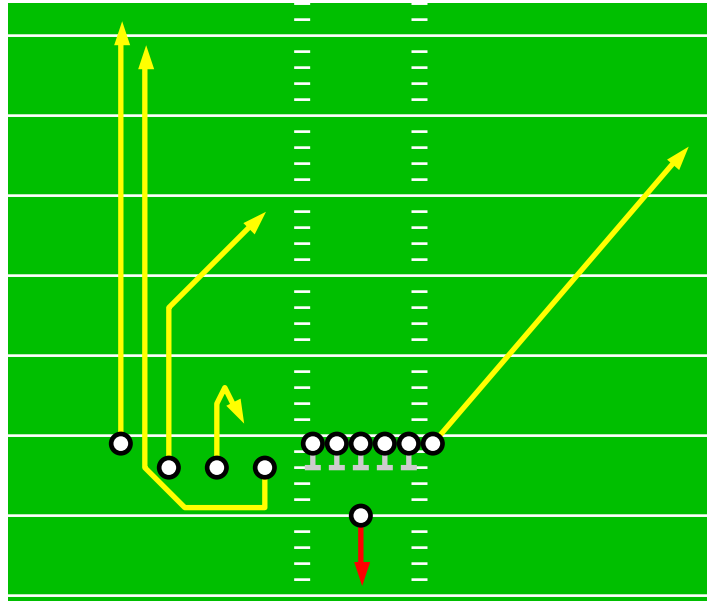
Cons:

- Press coverage, while not shutting the play down, will take away the chance to run with a blocking convoy
- Not as effective against Quarters defenses as it is against Dime

Outside Trailer

Outside Trailer is designed to get the inside flanker open in isolation by running him underneath the routes of the other three left side receivers. The flanker can usually make an easy catch in the flats after turning upfield and then has to rely on making moves in the open field to get by defenders and gain yardage. The other routes tend to be used mostly as decoys, but are still useful in situations where the primary outside route cannot get open.

On a typical execution you can expect from 5–15 yards from the outside trailer route. The other routes are either more difficult to throw consistently or difficult to gain many yards with. The tight end runs a straight outside slant route typical in the 4 Left formation which stretches the defense and punishes over-commitment to the left side. The middle flanker



runs a short hook route which is intended to keep defenders from moving into the left flats and also serves as a good target when pressured or when no one can get open downfield. Post and streak routes run on the outside are primarily to open up the left flats for the trailer route but are effective targets against defenses concentrating on the short zone.

For the orange Playmaker route I would think about the middle flanker or tight end. The middle flanker could switch to a wheel or quick in or out route without disrupting the focus of the play too much, while the TE has the best opportunity to work in possible isolation. Either choice has its good points so it's your call.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Receive Shotgun Snap

SE: 25yd Streak

Outside Flanker: 10yd Post

Middle Flanker: 4yd Curl

Inside Flanker: S1-W2-N1W1-N10 (open)

TE: N7E6 (open)

Read Progression

1. TE slant out
2. Middle flanker curl
3. Inside flanker after turning upfield
4. Outside flanker post
5. SE streak

The progression is simple, mostly just working right to left with the inside flanker adjusted because of the outside route. The toughest part of the read is the outside trailer route. In man coverage it's a fairly easy read, but if a linebacker or defensive back is lurking in zone you need to wait for the flanker to run past them and try to squeeze the pass in before he reaches the deeper safeties. If pressured the inside curl makes a nice safety valve.

Analysis

Pros:

- The outside trailer route will run away from almost any man coverage
- The curl route works well as both an easy, short yardage target and fairly safe checkdown late
- TE, left flanker and SE stretch the field horizontally and vertically

Cons:

- The primary route is a little slow developing and does not work very well with defenders in zone
- Missed throws on the outside trailer route are somewhat more common than would be expected, probably because the WR changes direction in his route

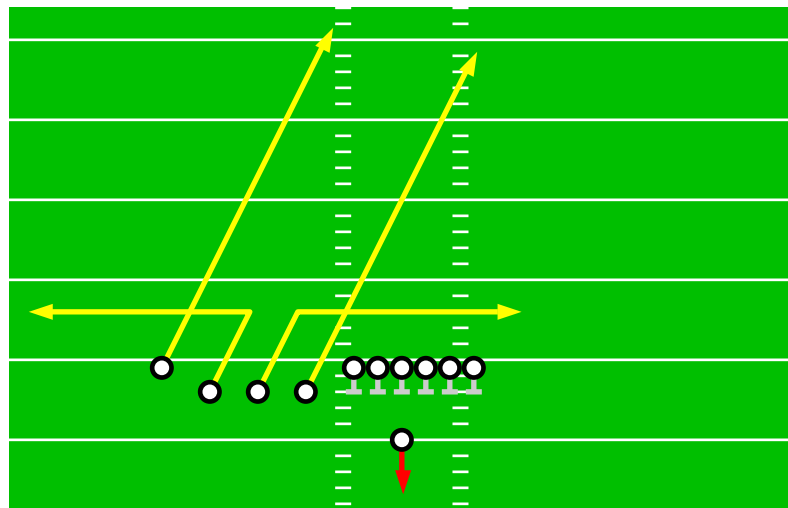
twice in a very short time span

- Downfield throws (post and streak) are somewhat dangerous because of the number of DBs usually in the area

Division

Division is another play in the [Cross Levels](#) vein, though skewed by about 30 degrees. All receivers start upfield on slants, then after a few steps the middle receivers split into in and out patterns underneath the continued slant routes to either side. While there's not a lot of fancy stuff going on in this play it makes solid use of crossing routes combined with effective slant routes and overall design which spreads the defense at the point of attack.

This play is really designed to attack man coverage. The keys to beating man coverage are making sharp cuts, especially early in the routes to create separation, and to use neighboring routes to cross up and cut off defenders. Every



route starts as a slant off of the line to get things started, while the two middle routes split apart in opposite directions. Besides making sharp cuts which can lose defenders, these routes each cut under the exterior slant routes, making it very difficult for defenders to stay tight. With good timing and accurate throws Division can eat up man defenses.

Go with the split end on the outside as you orange Playmaker route. With slants and quick in and out routes already at your disposal through the flankers towards the inside there isn't really any need for quick in/out routes, and flanker-wheels would just interfere with the outside slant. In addition, although it may get

in the way of the out route the SE is the receiver most likely to face the bump-and-run and so might make best use of a hot read.

Player Assignments

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 2yd

SE: N8E4 (open)

Outside Flanker: N2E1-W5 (open)

Middle Flanker: N2E1-E5 (open)

Inside Flanker: N8E4 (open)

TE: Pass Block

Read Progression

1. Inside flanker quick slant
2. Outside flanker out
3. Middle flanker in
4. SE deep
5. Inside flanker deep

When executing Division the routes to key on are the three to the inside. The slant to the outside is less important because in many cases it would require throwing right over or between the defenders on the underneath and inside routes, something you generally want to avoid. First look for the slant, which is the best read if there is press coverage on the outside or if a linebacker blitzes. The outside flanker out route is next and is your best bet against man coverage as it takes advantage of the outside slant route to lose the defender. The in route comes next and works well against blitzes and press coverage, as well as against zone if you can find a spot to throw to that avoids the LB. Next look for the outside slant. This is really only a good idea if you can find a soft spot in a deep zone, possibly splitting the safeties. Finally look back to the inside slant route deep.

One other thing to look for is although the in and out routes are pretty short, with a very quick release you can use the slant portions of the route before the receivers make their cuts. This is useful against blitzes and to hit zone coverages before they can react to the in and out cuts.

Analysis

Pros:

- Inside slant and in routes will defeat press coverage of Cover 2
- Multiple solid reads attacking positions spread across the field
- Blocking TE allows QB to roll to right, following shallow in route and waiting for it to outrun man coverage and get by LBs in zone

Cons:

- Though fairly effective against almost all coverages there are no primary routes to concentrate on and each defensive coverage will likely shut down two or three routes
- Not reliable for deep passes
- Quarters defenses can flood the short zone while sticking close to slant routes, making what would be easy short yardage throws against Nickel or Dime less certain

Quick Reference Chart

The following pages contain a compact quick reference for the layout of every formation and the player actions of every play. Because most readers of this book will have electronic copies only, these pages allow for convenient printouts of the essential information to be taken to a game console away from the computer.

Formation coordinates are designated as (X, Y) , with X in the range 1 to 21 from left to right and Y in the range 1 to 6 from top (at the line of scrimmage) to bottom. Player assignments use the same conventions as in the normal text, with primary receivers starred with an asterisk (*). Alternative assignments described in the main text are not included in this chart.

Diamond Wing

QB: 11, 2
FB: 12, 3
RB: 11, 4
TE: 10, 3
WR1: 17, 1
WR2: 5, 1

Delay Sweep

LT: Run Block
LG: Run Block
C: Run Block
RG: Pull Left
RT: Run Block
QB: Handoff to RB
Left SE: Lead Far Right
Right SE: Run Block
TE: Lead Off Left Tackle
FB: Lead Far Left
RB: Delay-Sweep Left

Flurry

O-Line: Pass Block
QB: Dropback 3yd
Left SE: 15yd Post
TE: N2W2-N1-N1E1-E2 (open)
RB: W3-N1W2-N2W1-N7 (open)
FB: N2E2-N3W1-N5E5 (open)
Right SE*: N2E3 (curl right)

Counter Sweep

O-Line and WRs: Run Block
QB: Handoff to Running Back
TE: Lead Far Right
FB: Lead Off Right
RB: Counter-Sweep Right

Inside Trap

O-Line: Run Block
QB: Handoff to Running Back
Left SE: Lead Right
Right SE: Run Block
TE: Lead Left
FB: Lead Far Left
RB: Back Step-Sprint Left

Lightnings

O-Line: Pass Block
QB: Dropback 3yd
Left SE*: N1E1-N3W7 (open)
TE: N3W3-N1E1-N6W4 (open)
RB: Pass Block
FB: N3E3-N1W1-N6E4 (open)
Right SE: N1W1-N3E7 (open)

Power Counter

O-Line: Run Block
Left SE: Lead Right
Right SE: Run Block
QB: Handoff to Fullback
TE: Lead Far left
FB: Counter Step-Sweep Left
RB: Lead Outside Left

Tsunami

QB: 11, 4
RB: 12, 3
WR1: 1, 3
WR2: 21, 1
WR3: 5, 2
WR4: 3, 1

Backslide

O-Line: Pass Block
QB: Dropback 1yd
Left Outside Flanker: N2E2-E4 (open)
Left SE: 10yd Corner
Left Inside Flanker: N4E1-N6E4 (open)
Right SE*: N2W2-E3 (delay 1 sec)-N8 (open)
RB: S1-W5-N1W1 (open)

Intersection

O-Line: Pass Block
QB: Dropback 3yd
Left Outside Flanker: E1-N3-E5 (open)
Left SE: 25yd Streak
Left Inside Flanker: 5yd Out
Right SE*: 8yd Curl
RB: Pass Block

Deep Drag

O-Line: Pass Block
QB: Dropback 3yd
Left Outside Flanker: E1-N3E2-N1E3 (open)
Left SE: 10yd Post
Left Inside Flanker: 5yd Out
Right SE*: 25yd Streak
RB: Pass Block

Quick Ins

O-Line: Pass Block
QB: Dropback 1yd
Left Outside Flanker: 12yd Curl

Left SE: 5yd Post
Left Inside Flanker: N2E2-E4 (open)
Right SE*: N6W6 (open)
RB: Pass Block

Strong Left

O-Line: Pass Block
QB: Dropback 3yd
Left Outside Flanker: N7-N3E1 (open)
Left SE: N3W3-N4W1-N3 (open)
Left Inside Flanker: N4 (curl left)
Right SE*: 10yd In
RB: Pass Block

Spread Attack

O-Line: Pass Block
QB: Dropback 3yd
Left Outside Flanker: 10yd Out
Left SE: 8yd Curl
Left Inside Flanker: N2E2-E2 (open)
Right SE*: 8yd Curl
RB: Pass Block

Quick Look

O-Line: Pass Block
QB: Dropback 1yd
Left Outside Flanker: 4yd Curl
Left SE: 10yd Corner
Left Inside Flanker: N2E2-E4 (open)
Right SE*: N8W4 (open)
RB: W2-S1W1-N2W3-N9 (open)

Laser

O-Line: Pass Block
QB: Dropback 3yd
Left Outside Flanker: 10yd Post
Left SE: 10yd Corner
Left Inside Flanker: N4-N2W1-N4 (open)
Right SE*: 25yd Streak
RB: Pass Block

Splitter

O-Line: Pass Block
QB: Dropback 3yd
Left Outside Flanker: N3E3-E3 (open)
Left SE: 10yd Corner
Left Inside Flanker: 10yd Post
Right SE*: 25yd Streak
RB: Pass Block

3 Gun

QB: 11, 4
RB1: 14, 4
RB2: 8, 4
WR1: 21, 2
WR2: 7, 1
WR3: 15, 1

Twin Flares

O-Line: Pass Block
QB: Dropback 3yd
Left SE: 15yd Corner
Right SE: 15yd Corner
Right Flanker*: 10yd In
Left RB: W4-N2W2-N3 (open)
Right RB: E4-N2E2-N3 (open)

Circle Left

O-Line: Pass Block
QB: Dropback 2yd
Left SE*: N3E1-N5E5 (open)
Right SE: N3E1-N1E5 (open)
Right Flanker: 4yd Curl
Left RB: N2W2-N2-N2E2 (open)
Right RB: N1W3-W2-N4W1 (open)

Pitchfork

O-Line: Pass Block
QB: Dropback 1yd
Left SE*: N6W6 (open)
Right SE: N6W6 (open)
Right Flanker: N6W6 (open)
Left RB: Pass Block
Right RB: N1E3-N2E2-N4E1 (open)

Cyclone

O-Line: Pass Block
QB: Dropback 3yd
Left SE*: N1W3-N3W2-N6W1 (open)
Right SE: N3E3-N3E2-N4E1 (open)
Right Flanker: N2E1-W7 (open)
Left RB: N2W1-N2-N2E1-N4E4 (open)
Right RB: S1W1-W4-N2W1 (open)

Flood Left SE Iso

O-Line: Pass Block
QB: Dropback 2yd
Left SE: N1W3 (curl left)
Right SE: 10yd Post
Right Flanker*: N2E1-N8 (open)
Left RB: 10yd Corner
Right RB: 5yd Post

Fissure

O-Line: Pass Block
QB: Dropback 1yd
Left SE: N2E1-W7 (open)
Right SE: N1W1-E7 (open)
Right Flanker*: N3W2-W4 (open)
Left RB: 25yd Streak
Right RB: Pass Block

Singleback 3WR

QB: 11, 2
RB: 11, 5
TE: 14, 1
WR1: 5, 1
WR2: 21, 2
WR3: 1, 2

Maverick

O-Line: Pass Block
QB: Dropback 1yd
Left Flanker: 10yd Post
Left SE*: N8E6 (open)
TE: N2W1-W5 (open)
Right Flanker: N1W3-N4E3-W6 (open)
RB: Swing Right

Stinger

O-Line: Pass Block
QB: Dropback 1yd
Left Flanker: N6E6 (open)
Left SE: N8W6 (open)
TE: N1W2-W4 (open)
Right Flanker*: N8W6 (open)
RB: Swing Right

HB Plunge

O-Line and TE: Run Block
QB: Handoff to Running Back
Left Flanker and SE: Lead Right
Right Flanker: Lead Left
RB: Back Step-Dive Right

WR Zigs

O-Line: Pass Block
QB: Dropback 1yd
Left Flanker: 8yd Curl
Left SE: 5yd Post
TE: 5yd Corner
Right Flanker*: E1-N7W7 (open)
RB: 8yd Hook

Counter Trap

LT: Run Block
LG: Run Block
C: Run Block
RG: Pull Left
RT: Run Block
TE: Run Block
QB: Handoff to Running Back
WRs: Run Block
RB: Counter Step-Off Tackle Left

Leveler

O-Line: Pass Block
QB: Dropback 2yd
Left Flanker*: N2E3-N8 (open)
Left SE: N2E3-E3 (open)
TE: N1E1-E5 (open)
Right Flanker: 10yd Post
RB: Pass Block

Slingshot

QB: 11, 6
RB: 12, 6
WR1: 1, 3
WR2: 21, 1
WR3: 5, 3
WR4: 17, 3

Deep Outs

O-Line: Pass Block
QB: Dropback 3yd
Left SE: N6E2-W8 (open)
Left Flanker: N3E1-W7 (open)
Right Flanker: N3W1-E7 (open)
Right SE*: N6W2-E8 (open)
RB: Pass Block

Vectors

O-Line: Pass Block
QB: Dropback 1yd
Left SE: N4E6 (open)
Left Flanker*: 25yd Streak
Right Flanker: N6E6 (open)
Right SE: N9W4 (open)
RB: Flats Left

Undercuts

O-Line: Pass Block
QB: Dropback 2yd
Left SE: N2E1-N1E2-E3 (open)
Left Flanker: W1-N1W1-N2W1-N7 (open)
Right Flanker: S1-N1W5-N1W1 (open)

Right SE*: N6-N4W2 (open)

RB: E2-N1E2-N2E1-N7E2
(open)

Comebacks

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 2yd

Left SE*: N5 (curl left)

Left Flanker: 4yd Curl

Right Flanker: 4yd Curl

Right SE: N5 (curl right)

RB: Pass Block

Crossing Slants

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 1yd

Left SE: N3E5-E1 (open)

Left Flanker: N3W3-N2W1-
N4W1-N1 (open)

Right Flanker: N3E3-N2E1-N4E1-
N1 (open)

Right SE*: N7W6 (open)

RB: Pass Block

Flicker

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 1yd

Left SE*: W1-N1E5-N4-N4W2
(open)

Left Flanker: N2W1-N1W2-W3-
N7 (open)

Right Flanker: N2E1-N1E2-E3-N7
(open)

Right SE: E1-N1W5-N4-N4E2
(open)

RB: Pass Block

Squares

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 3yd

Left SE: 5yd In

Left Flanker*: 15yd Out

Right Flanker: N1 (cut 90 right)-E6
(open)

Right SE: 10yd In

RB: Pass Block

Streaks

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 3yd

Left SE: N4W1-N6 (open)

Left Flanker*: 25yd Streak

Right Flanker: N4W2-N6 (open)

Right SE: 25yd Streak

RB: N1E6 (open)

Daggers

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 1yd

Left SE*: N5E6 (open)

Left Flanker: 5yd Out

Right Flanker: 5yd Out

Right SE: 8yd Curl

RB: N1E1-N4E1-N5 (open)

Bomber

QB: 11, 5

TE: 8, 1

WR1: 19, 3

WR2: 17, 4

WR3: 16, 2

WR4: 20, 1

Jetstream

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 2yd

TE*: N1W6 (open)

Front Inside Flanker: Pass Block

Rear Inside Flanker: N1-N2W1-
N1W2-W3 (open)

Rear Outside Flanker: N1W1-
N2W1-N4W1-N3 (open)

SE: N2W1-E5 (open)

Bubble Screen

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 1yd

TE*: 5yd Out

Front Inside Flanker: Block Lead
Left

Rear Inside Flanker: (delay 1 sec)-
N2E2-N3E1 (open)

Rear Outside Flanker: Block Lead
Left

SE: Block Lead Left

Cutter

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 2yd

TE*: N1E1-N2W7 (open)

Front Inside Flanker: N8W6
(open)

Rear Inside Flanker: 8yd Curl

Rear Outside Flanker: N4W1-E7
(open)

SE: 25yd Streak

Double Rub

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 2yd

TE*: N6W6 (open)

Front Inside Flanker: 10yd Corner

Rear Inside Flanker: 5yd Out

Rear Outside Flanker: W2-N2W2-
N1W2 (open)

SE: W2-N1W2-N5W2 (open)

Crossroads

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 2yd

TE: Pass Block

Front Inside Flanker: 5yd Out

Rear Inside Flanker*: N1W1-N9
(open)

Rear Outside Flanker: 10yd In

SE: N2E2-N8 (open)

Downtown

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 2yd

TE*: 5yd In

Front Inside Flanker: 5yd Out

Rear Inside Flanker: S1-W5-
N1W1-N10 (open)

Rear Outside Flanker: 5yd Post

SE: 25yd Streak

Strong T

QB: 11, 2

FB: 12, 4

RB1: 11, 4

RB2: 10, 4

TE1: 14, 1

TE2: 8, 1

HB Off Tackle

O-Line and TEs: Run Block

QB: Handoff to Center Running
Back

Whip RB: Lead Far Right

Center RB: Back Step-Outside
Right

FB: Lead Far Right

FB Plunge

O-Line and TEs: Run Block

QB: Handoff to Fullback

Whip RB: Lead Outside Left

Center RB: Lead Left

FB: Back Step-Sprint Right

Blitzkrieg

O-Line: Pass Block

QB: Dropback 1yd
Left TE: N1W1-N1W5 (open)
Right TE*: N2E1-N1E5 (open)
Whip RB: N1W2-N3W1-N3E1-N3E2 (open)
Center RB: E2-N1E2-N2E1-N7E1 (open)
FB: N2E2-N1-N1W2 (open)

Whip Sweep

Left TE: Run Block
LT: Run Block
LG: Run Block
C: Run Block
RG: Pull Right
RT: Run Block
Right TE: Run Block
QB: Handoff to Whip Running Back
Whip RB: Back Step-Sweep Right
Center RB: Lead Far Right
FB: Lead Far Right

HB Plunge

O-Line and TEs: Run Block
QB: Handoff to Center Running Back
Whip RB: Lead Left
Center RB: Back Step-Sprint Right
FB: Lead Right

Whiplash

O-Line: Pass Block
QB: Dropback 3yd
Left TE: Pass Block
Right TE*: 5yd In
Whip RB: N1W2-N1-N3W4 (open)
Center RB: W2-N1W1-N1W3 (open)
FB: Pass Block

4 Wide

QB: 11, 2
RB: 11, 5
WR1: 18, 2
WR2: 4, 2
WR3: 1, 1
WR4: 21, 1

Quick Slants

O-Line: Pass Block
QB: Dropback 2yd
Left SE*: 10yd Post

Left Flanker: 5yd Post
Right Flanker: N4W6 (open)
Right SE: 5yd Post
RB: Swing Right

Undertow

O-Line: Pass Block
QB: Dropback 2yd
Left SE: N1E1-N1E2-E3 (open)
Left Flanker*: W1-N1W2-N2W1-N7 (open)
Right Flanker: E1-N1E2-N2E1-N7 (open)
Right SE: 10yd Post
RB: W3-N1W2-N2W1-N7 (open)

HB Sprint

O-Line and WRs: Run Block
QB: Handoff to Running Back
RB: Shuffle Step-Dive Right

Outs

O-Line: Pass Block
QB: Dropback 2yd
Left SE: N4E1-N1W7 (open)
Left Flanker: N2E1-W7 (open)
Right Flanker*: N2E1-W7 (open)
Right SE: N4W1-N1E7 (open)
RB: N2E2-N2-N2W2 (open)

Snapback

O-Line: Pass Block
QB: Dropback 2yd
Left SE: 5yd Post
Left Flanker: N1W2-N1E2-E6 (open)
Right Flanker: N1W3-N2E9 (open)
Right SE*: 10yd Post
RB: Swing Left

Deep Twister

O-Line: Pass Block
QB: Dropback 3yd
Left SE: N2E1-N2-N6E4
Left Flanker: N2W1-N2-N6W4
Right Flanker: N2E1-N2-N6W4
Right SE*: N2W1-N2-N6E4
RB: Pass Block

Crossbow

QB: 11, 2
RB: 11, 4
TE1: 14, 1

TE2: 8, 1
WR1: 7, 2
WR2: 15, 2

Flood Left

O-Line: Pass Block
QB: Dropback 2yd
Left Flanker: N2W3-W2 (curl left)
Left TE: N8W6 (open)
Right TE*: N6W1-N4W5 (open)
Right Flanker: N1-N1W1-W5 (open)
RB: N1E3-N1E1-N2E1-N6E1 (open)

Quick Sting

O-Line and TEs: Run Block
QB: Handoff to Running Back
Left Flanker: Run Block
Right Flanker: Lead Wide Left
RB: Shuffle Step-Dive Right

Reflex

O-Line: Pass Block
QB: Dropback 3yd
Left Flanker: N2W6-N2E6 (open)
Left TE: N8W6 (open)
Right TE: N8E6 (open)
Right Flanker*: N2E6-N2W6 (open)
RB: Pass Block

Shear

O-Line: Pass Block
QB: Dropback 2yd
Left Flanker: N2W4-N8 (open)
Left TE: N2E1-W7 (open)
Right TE: Pass Block
Right Flanker*: N3W1-W5 (open)
RB: Swing Right

Uncoiled

O-Line: Pass Block
QB: Dropback 2yd
Left Flanker: N3W1 (curl left)
Left TE: 4yd Curl
Right TE: 4yd Curl
Right Flanker*: N1E1-N1-N8W3 (open)
RB: Swing Left

Speed Pitch

O-Line, TEs and WRs: Run Block
QB: Pitch to Running Back
RB: Receive Pitch-Off Tackle

Left

4 Left

QB: 11, 4
TE: 14, 1
WR1: 7, 2
WR2: 1, 1
WR3: 5, 2
WR4: 3, 2

Jailbreak Option

O-Line: Pass Block
QB: Receive Shotgun Snap
SE: S1E1 (delay 1 sec)-N9W1-N2W1 (open)

Outside Flanker: 15yd Corner
Middle Flanker: 25yd Streak
Inside Flanker: 15yd Post
TE*: N3E6 (open)

Blaze

O-Line: Pass Block
QB: Dropback 1yd
SE: 4yd Curl

Outside Flanker: 10yd Corner
Middle Flanker: 4yd Curl
Inside Flanker*: N8E6 (open)
TE: N6E6 (open)

Cross Levels

O-Line: Pass Block
QB: Receive Shotgun Snap
SE: 10yd In
Outside Flanker: 25yd Streak
Middle Flanker: 5yd Out
Inside Flanker: 5yd In
TE*: N6E6 (open)

Warp

O-Line: Pass Block
QB: Dropback 2yd
SE: 25yd Streak
Outside Flanker: N9W4 (open)

Middle Flanker: N5W6 (open)
Inside Flanker*: N2W6 (open)
TE: Pass Block

Outside Trailer

O-Line: Pass Block
QB: Receive Shotgun Snap
SE: 25yd Streak
Outside Flanker: 10yd Post
Middle Flanker*: 4yd Curl
Inside Flanker: S1-W2-N1W1-N10 (open)
TE: N7E6 (open)

Division

O-Line: Pass Block
QB: Dropback 2yd
SE*: N8E4 (open)
Outside Flanker: N2E1-W5 (open)
Middle Flanker: N2E1-E5 (open)
Inside Flanker: N8E4 (open)
TE: Pass Block

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