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## **THE SPREAD OPTION** **RUN-AND-SHOOT OFFENSE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Many coaches are interested in adopting the Spread Option attack first popularized by Coach Erskine "Erk" Russell at Georgia Southern University. The fact that one variation of Coach Russell's formation is identical with the Run-and-Shoot Spread formation first developed by Coach Glenn "Tiger" Ellison has led some pioneers to combine the two attacks. The potential benefits are great. Defending the Triple Option requires disciplined "assignment football" by the defense, while stopping the Run-and-Shoot's quick passing game puts a very different set of demands on defenders -- the offense has the ability to control the ball with the pass, yet one slip and the defense gives up six points.

Coach Al Black's excellent book, Coaching Run-And-Shoot Football (Harding Press, 1991), details how he joined the powerful Run-and-Shoot offense of Coach Darrel "Mouse" Davis with a Triple Option attack. Coach Black's most important contribution was the addition of several play-action passes which combine Run-and-Shoot principles with the incredibly strong play-fake of the quarterback-fullback mesh. I have included two of them here.

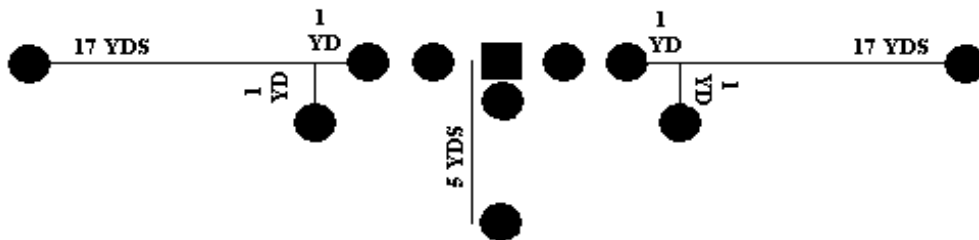
This playbook contains the bare bones of a Spread Option Run-and-Shoot attack. Complementary plays are not included, although coaches should be able to see from the base plays how others might be added -- a midline option, counter option, shovel pass, screen pass, and others.

A word of caution, however: it is far more important to develop the timing of the Triple than to use up precious practice minutes installing a misdirection play. Running the Triple to perfection is much more important than running three or four plays fairly well. Similarly, the fact that the Run-and-Shoot presented here "only" consists of three passes and three runs (plus Coach Black's two play-action passes) should not fool anyone. Another reason the Run-and-Shoot fits in well with the Option concept is that the quarterback need only read the defense, which is forced by the formation to spread across the width of the field and by motion to declare its intentions, in order to deliver the ball to an open man.

In other words, spend your practice reps on the core plays of the Run-and-Shoot as you do with the Triple. These nine plays will give you all the tools you need to defeat your opponents.

## FIGURE 1: THE FORMATION

Our formation appears below. We don't believe in the use of multiple formations with this attack -- we think it wastes practice time and places some of our personnel in less-than-optimal positions. The ends are split 17 yards from the tackles, but never closer than 6 yards to the sidelines; the halfbacks are one yard from the LOS and one yard outside the tackles; and the fullback's feet are five yards from the LOS. Line splits are generally two feet, although we may adjust these to suit our game plan. (The only real conflict between the optimal Triple Option and Run-and-Shoot formations occurs with the line splits. We believe option football is enhanced by three-foot splits, but quick passing Run-and-Shoot style works best with one-foot splits. Rather than tipping our intentions by changing back and forth from one to three feet, we compromise at two feet.)



## **FIGURE 2: TRIPLE OPTION**

### Assignments:

Backside Tackle: On, playside gap, LB

Backside Guard: On, playside gap, LB

Center: Odd: on; Even - playside gap, LB

Frontside Guard: Odd: backside gap; Even: on

Frontside Tackle: Odd: backside gap; Even: LB, backside gap

Backside End: Deep 1/3

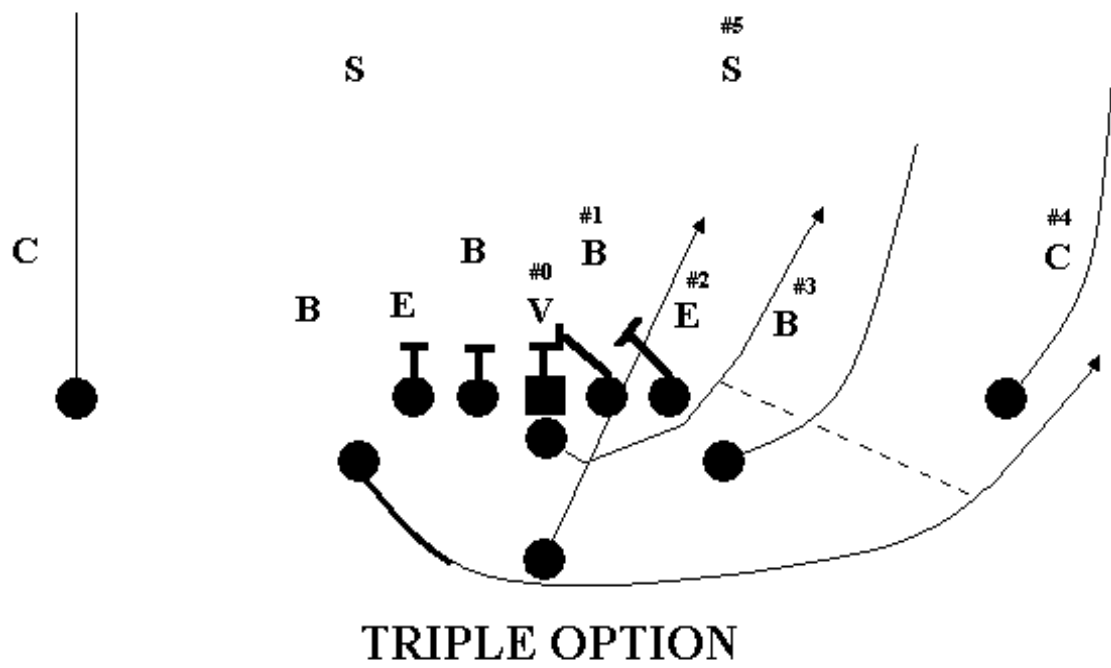
Backside Halfback: Tail (3-step) motion, run parallel to LOS, look for pitch

Fullback: Drive for outside hip of FG; mesh with QB; ball or slap-fake

Frontside Halfback: Arc release and stalk #5

Frontside End: Arc release and stalk #4

Quarterback: Read #2, option #3



**Triple Option** (Figure 2): (Coaches should refer to a good wishbone/Triple Option text for a more detailed discussion of the mechanics of the quarterback/fullback mesh and option pitch.) The QB open-steps parallel to the LOS and extends the football at waist level. His eyes remain on the read (defensive #2 frontside) at all times.

The fullback forms a pocket with his near arm above his numbers, palm down, and his far arm across his waist, palm up. He keeps his eyes on the ball, centering the ball on his belt buckle and running under control right through the ball.

If the read does anything other than attack the football (turning his shoulders and coming flat down the LOS), the QB slides his inside arm out of the FB's gut and seats the ball in the FB's pocket with his outside hand. Feeling the ball, the FB clamps his upper arm down over the ball and runs to daylight outside the frontside guard's block. The QB continues down the line, but his job is finished -- we don't ask him to fake the option pitch or keep. He should protect himself from a hard-charging #3.

If the read attacks the ball, the QB pulls the ball back in to his stomach with both hands. Feeling the QB withdraw his hands, the FB slaps his top arm down hard on the bottom arm, creating a powerful fake for the defense, and charges ahead into the read. The QB steps around the FB/read collision looking for #3, and makes his next decision based on #3's reaction. If #3 attacks the ball, the QB will pitch. Otherwise, he will turn downfield and run to daylight. (Note: This decision can be modified to face a particular defense -- the QB can be given a different decision algorithm for keeping versus pitching, but the description above is the best way to teach the Triple to beginners.)

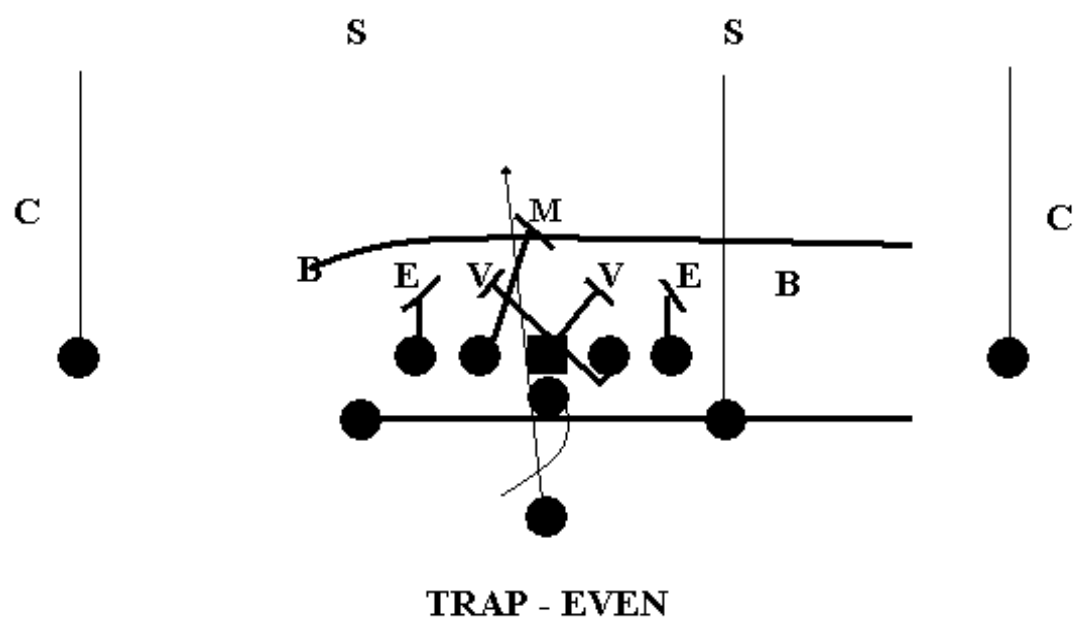
The other mechanics are straightforward. The line blocks strong to the inside, isolating #2 and #3 for the read and the option. The backside end runs his man deep, both to eliminate pursuit and to set up play-action. The frontside halfback and end arc release and stalk their men (#5 and #4), delaying contact as long as possible. The backside halfback goes in "Tail" motion which places him in a normal T-halfback position when the ball is snapped. He gains width as the play develops, looking for gaps in the widely-stretched defense if he receives the pitch. If the QB turns downfield with the ball, the BH follows, maintaining his distance in relation to the QB in order to receive a late pitch downfield if necessary.

### **FIGURE 3: FULLBACK TRAP**

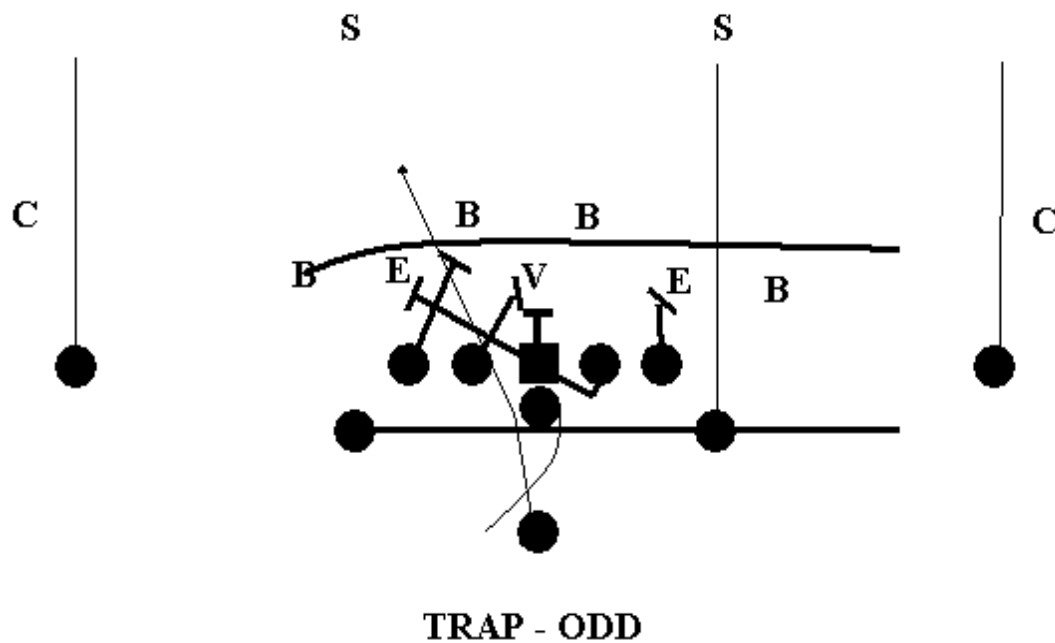
#### Assignments:

BT: On, frontside gap, LB  
BG: Pull & trap 1st past C  
C: On, backside gap  
FG: Backside gap  
FT: Odd: LB; Even: on, LB  
BE: Deep 1/3  
BH: Deep 1/3  
FB: Straight ahead, take handoff, follow BG  
FH: Motion to halfway between BH & BE  
FE: Deep 1/3  
QB: Reverse pivot, give FB





**Fullback Trap** (Figure 3): The "best play in football" according to Paul Brown, because it hits straight ahead. We run the Trap when the defense adjusts to "Travel" motion (where we send a halfback across the formation) by sending frontside #3 (OLB) across the formation with our motion man, leaving #2 (DE/DT) with contain responsibilities. The ends and backside half run deep and block ahead of the FB.



## **FIGURE 4: SPEED OPTION**

Assignments:

Line: On

BE: Deep 1/3

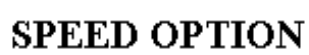
BH: Deep 1/3

FB: Run parallel to LOS, look for pitch

FH: Motion to halfway between BH & BE

FE: Arc release and stalk #4

QB: Option #3



**Speed Option** (Figure 4): When the defense adjusts to "Travel" motion by sending a safety across the formation or rotating him to deep middle, we run the Speed Option to the side that their safety has just vacated, leaving no one to cover our pitch man.

## **FIGURE 5: FULLBACK DRAW**

### Assignments:

Line: Area protection

BE: Vertical

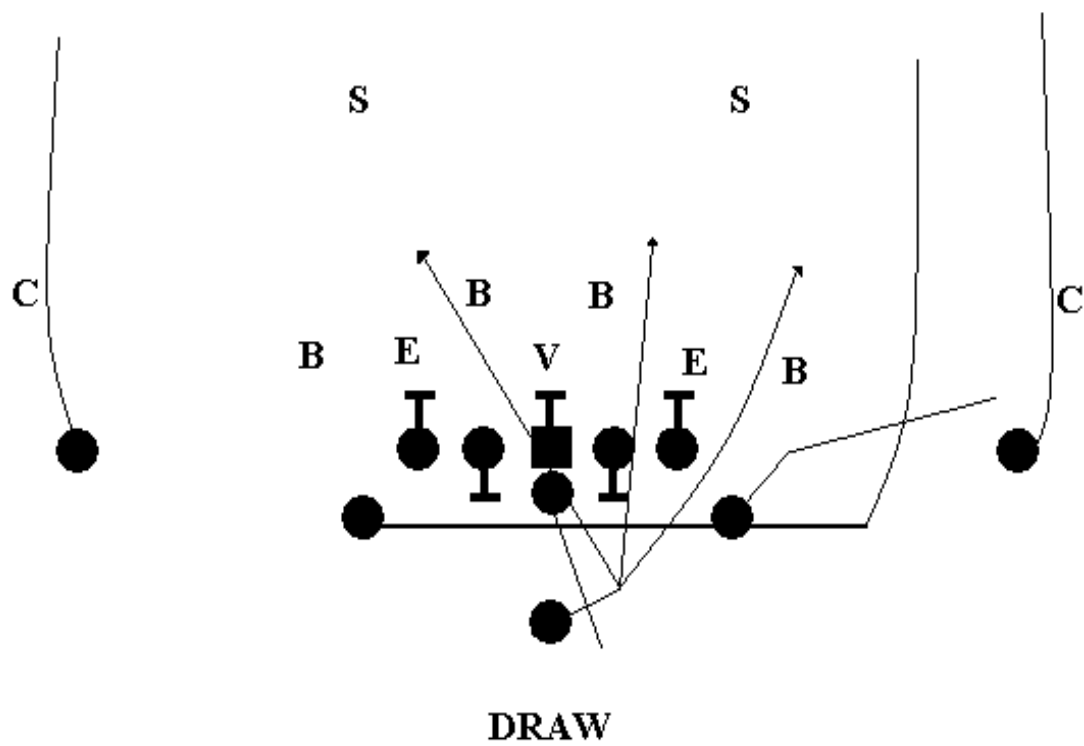
BH: Motion to halfway between FH and FE, vertical

FB: Set up for block frontside, take reverse handoff, run to daylight

FH: Outside release, shoot

FE: Vertical

QB: Five step drop, hand ball around behind FB, continue drop



**Fullback Draw** (Figure 5): The draw resembles our Go route package (page 13) until the QB crosses behind the FB and slides the ball into his stomach (reverse, backside or "slow" hand-off). The QB continues his drop, and the FB counts one second before he heads for daylight. Linemen take rushers in the direction they want to go -- this play can break from tackle to tackle, or even wider.



## **FIGURE 6: GO ROUTE**

Assignments:

Line: Area protection

BE: Vertical

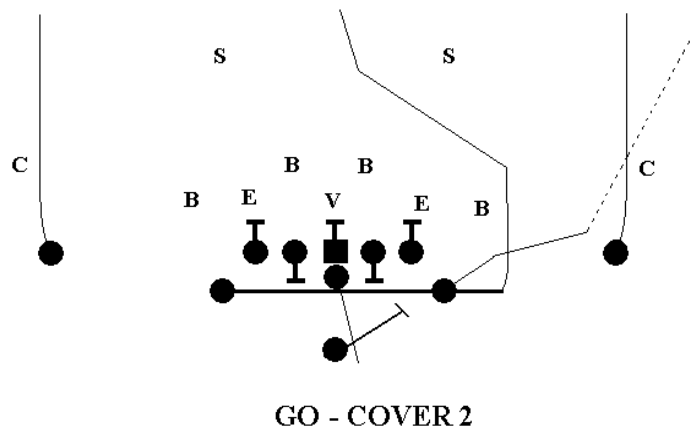
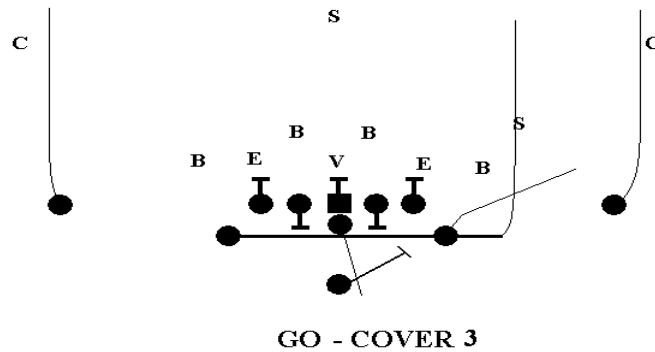
BH: Motion to: C3/vertical; C2/post; C1/shallow cross; C0/quick post

FB: Block frontside

FH: Shoot

FE: Vertical

QB: Three-step drop, pan deep frontside to backside



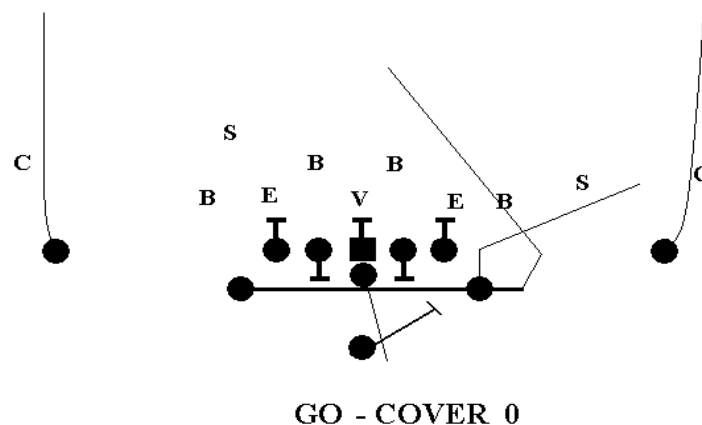
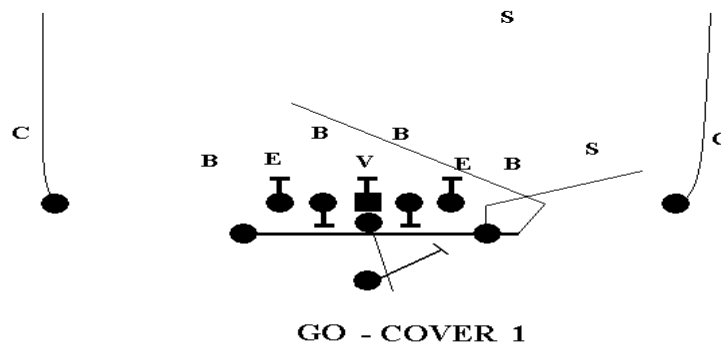
**Go Route** (Figure 6): If frontside #4 (SS in C3, CB in C2) drops straight back, QB hits FH on the Shoot; if #4 does anything else, QB hits BH's Vertical. If nothing is open at three steps, QB pump-fakes, alerting receivers to work toward the second phase of their routes. QB then scans the deep third area from front to backside, looking to throw on the 6th or 7th step.

C3: FE/BE are vertical for all coverages. FH releases outside two steps, then cuts for the sideline at +7 yards. BH is five yards outside FH at the snap, runs vertical.

C2: FH runs Shoot same as C3, but breaks up and outside numbers if QB pump-fakes. BH is three yards outside FH at snap, starts vertical, cuts to post at +7, splitting safeties.

C1: FH runs straight upfield two steps, then Shoots. BH is one step outside FH at snap, slants outside two steps, "selling" the deep cut, then runs Shallow Cross underneath safety.

C0 (Blitz): Same as C1, but BH has no deep middle defender, runs quick post.



## **FIGURE 7: SWITCH ROUTE**

Assignments:

Line: Area protection

BE: Backside hash, then: C3/read FS, C2/hook at 17, C1/C0/cross at 7

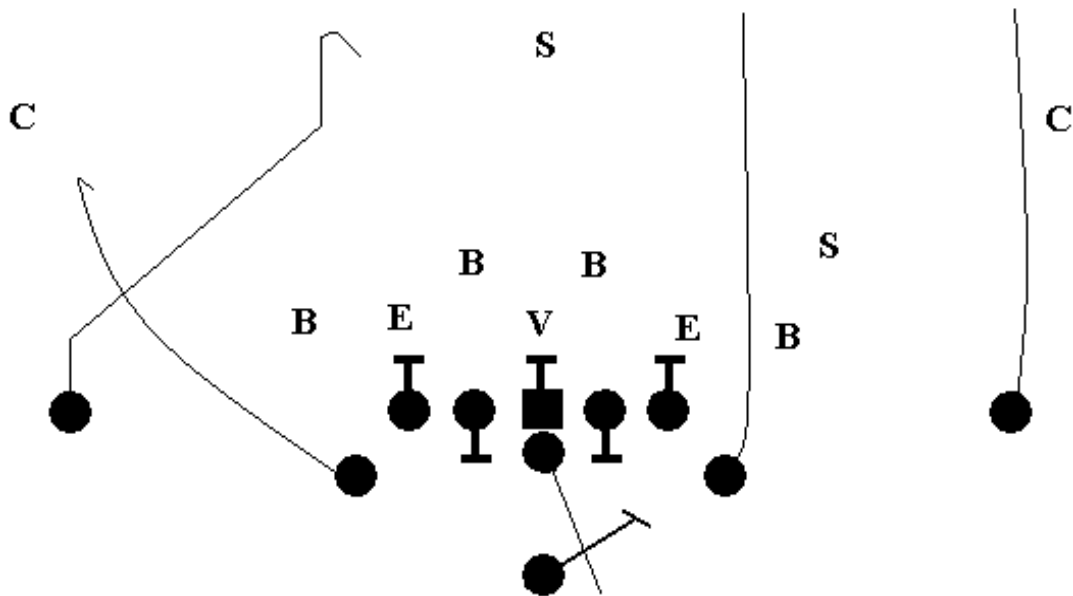
BH: C2/C1/C0: Backside numbers; C3: hook at 7-10

FB: Block frontside

FH: Frontside hash

FE: Frontside numbers

QB: Three-step drop, key FS; throw FH, BE or BH



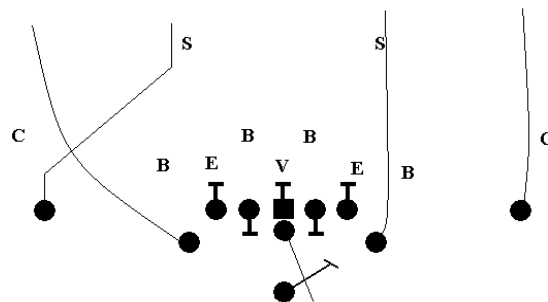
**SWITCH - COVER 3**

**Switch Route** (Figure 7): At snap, QB looks to FH and keys FS response. If FS does not work to intercept FH at +18, QB hits FH by QB's third step. If FS works frontside, QB sets up behind FT at fifth step and looks first to BE in window at backside hash, then to BH running up far numbers. Against blitz QB looks for BE cutting across field at about +7.

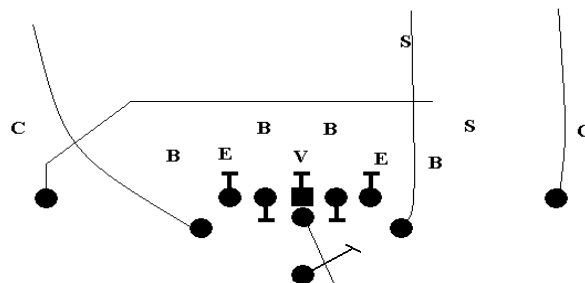
C3: FE/FH are vertical for all coverages. BH cuts behind BE to far numbers, continues downfield halfway between numbers and sideline. If there is a deep-third defender in front of him, he hooks at +7-10. BE reduces his split slightly to get to backside hash quickly. He slants to hash and pushes downfield, reading FS. If FS gains depth but stays in front of BE, he breaks back for zone window. If FS vacates centerfield, BE continues down hash, looking for ball over inside shoulder.

C2: QB looks immediately to backside. BH sprints for deep outside third, looking for ball deep. BE pushes up backside hash -- if C2 safety gains depth on hash, BE hooks at 17 and finds window. FB should check frontside, then release and replace weak ILB.

C1/C0: BH runs same route as C2, taking his man outside and deep. BE cuts across field at +7, accelerating away from his man.



SWITCH - COVER 2



SWITCH - COVER 1/0

## **FIGURE 8: SMASH ROUTE**

### Assignments:

Line: Area protection

BE: C3: Quick post; C2: Backside numbers; C1/C0: deep post

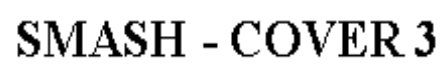
BH: C3: Cross and replace strong ILB; C2: Cross at +8; C1/C0: post

FB: Block shortside

FH: Smash

FE: C3/2: Outside release, hook at +6; C1/0: Square in at +6

QB: Sprint shortside, read: #4, then #5 playside

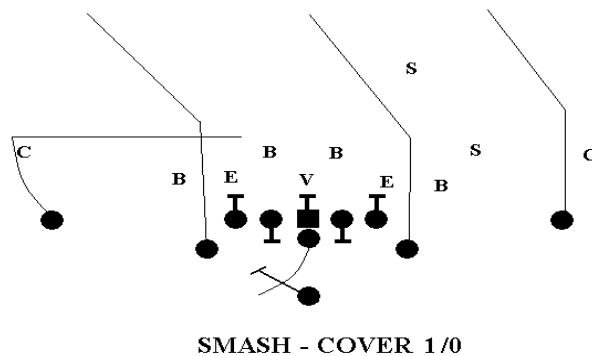
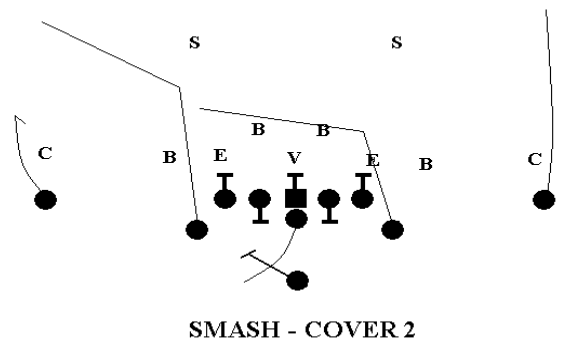


**Smash Route** (Figure 8): Takes advantage of defenses waiting to slide coverage to the wide side, anticipating motion. QB takes snap without motion, sprinting to the short side and reading #4. If he gives ground, QB will hit FE hooking at +6. If #4 hangs tough, QB looks for FH running Smash (corner) route and sets up to throw on 5th step. QB looks next for safeties' reaction to BH dragging across the formation, and finally to BE's post or vertical route down the far numbers.

C3: FE must be aware of shortside OLB's drop. FH should look for dump pass in first few steps; if it doesn't come, he breaks for the corner on a 45 degree angle at +10 and looks for the ball at +15-18. BH crosses to position vacated by playside ILB and sits in the window at +8. BE runs a short post between the backside corner and safety.

C2: FE breaks out and up, hooking outside of the numbers on his 5th step. FH breaks straight downfield, breaking for the corner at +10 and looking for the ball at +15-18. BH takes an inside release, crossing to a depth of +8 and sitting in the window where ILB vacated. BE runs the backside numbers to stretch the deep safeties vertically and horizontally.

C1/C0: FE takes the same release, but breaks in and across the formation at +6. FH runs a deep corner, clearing the safety and LB covering him. BH and BE run posts. QB scans from FE to FH, BH and BE.



## **FIGURE 9: VEER DUMP**

### Assignments:

Line: Covered: aggressive pop & set; Uncovered: step & set

BE: Post; on goalline, sit underneath goalposts as outlet

BH: Look for pitch; run or throw to FH/FE

FB: Dive, mesh, slap-fake & block or release

FH: Arc release on SS, break out at +12

FE: Frontside numbers; break for corner at +18

QB: Read #4; dump to FH or pitch to BH





**Veer Dump** (Figure 9): If you have a halfback who can throw the ball, this play can be a game-breaker. QB steps are identical to Triple. He reads frontside #4 - if he attacks pitch, QB dumps ball to FH. If #4 hangs, QB continues down line until pressured by #3. If FH doesn't come open, QB pitches. (Vs. man defense, QB ignores FH and runs option.) FE should look for ball early vs. C2, otherwise he breaks for the corner at +18 (BH may still pass to him). FH arc releases exactly like Triple and looks for a window if #4 attacks pitch. If #4 runs with him, FH gets vertical right now, then breaks out at +12. BH runs his Triple route, looking for pitch. If he gets the ball, he reads force -- if #4 attacks, BH can throw to FH or FE; if he hangs, BH runs to daylight. FB meshes and slap-fakes exactly like Triple, picks up ILB if he shoots or replaces him at +5, sliding with the window in front of QB. BE runs a post; if run at the goalline, he sits under goalposts as an outlet. The line uses play action protection: covered linemen pop their man aggressively and set to pass protect; uncovered men take a quick jab step forward then set.

## **FIGURE 10: DIVE CHOICE**

### Assignments:

Line: Covered: aggressive pop & set; Uncovered: step & set

BE: Post

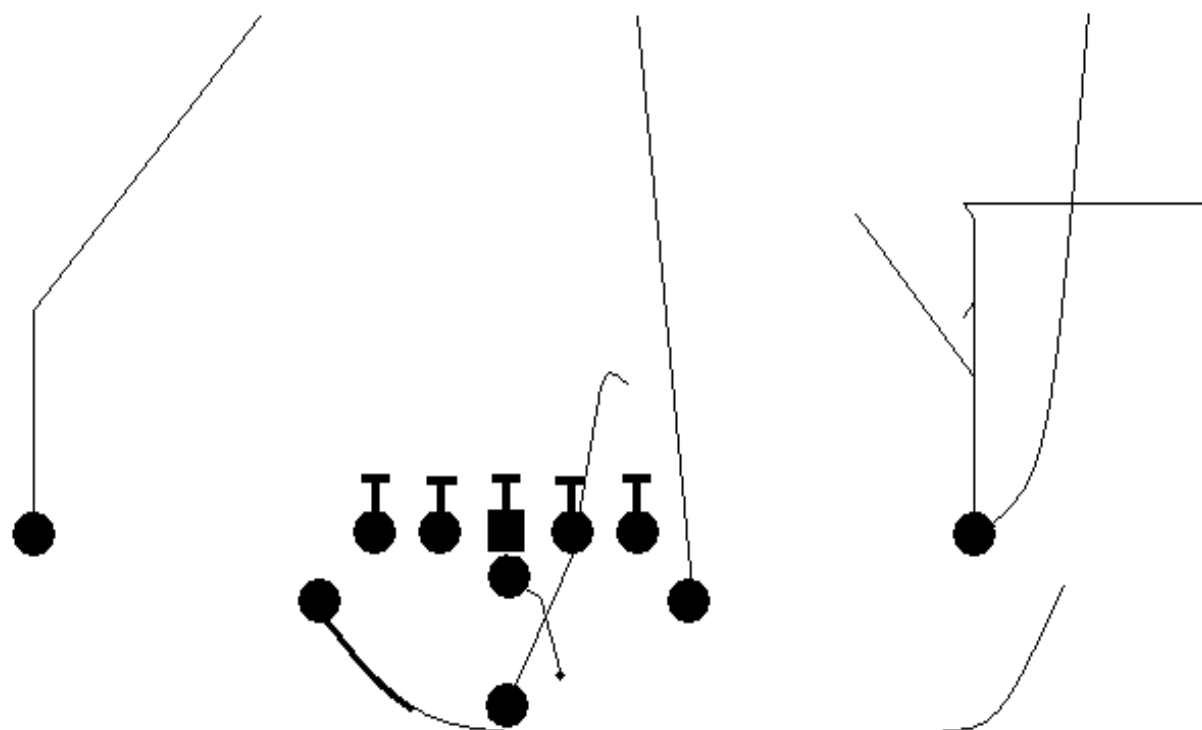
BH: Run pitch route; look for ball late if #4 drops under FE

FB: Dive, mesh, slap-fake & block or release

FH: Inside release, Vertical

FE: Choice of Quick Slant, Stop, Out or Vertical

QB: If #4 attacks pitch & #5 is loose, think Slant or Stop



DIVE CHOICE

**Dive Choice** (Figure 10): Excellent first-down call when defense is expecting the Triple. If frontside #4 (SS in Cover 3) is playing the pitch tough and #5 (CB in Cover 3) is hanging deep, the quick Slant on the FE's fourth step can break for big yards after the catch. A Stop on the fifth step should also be wide open and have good YAC potential. BE runs a Post and should come wide open in the second half. BH runs his Triple pitch course, looking for the ball late. FH releases inside and runs deep down the front hash, potentially taking the SS, FS and ILB with him. This isolates FE on the front CB, giving him plenty of room. An Out on FE's seventh step is a good Choice if your QB has the arm strength; otherwise, think Slant, then Stop. Against a tight Cover 2 corner, FE will run Vertical up the nearest landmark (frontside hash or numbers). FB fakes, then blocks or fills like Veer Dump; line blocks play action.

## PASS PROTECTION

We favor zone or area protection. Guards and Tackles set up as far off the LOS as the rules allow (with their hands lined up on the center's waist is a good rule of thumb). On the snap each lineman takes a short step to get square with the rusher in his area. If uncovered, he checks the LB, then kicks back at a 45 degree angle for backside rushers.

BT: First rusher (line or LB) from frontside gap to head-up. Otherwise, check backside.

BG: Same.

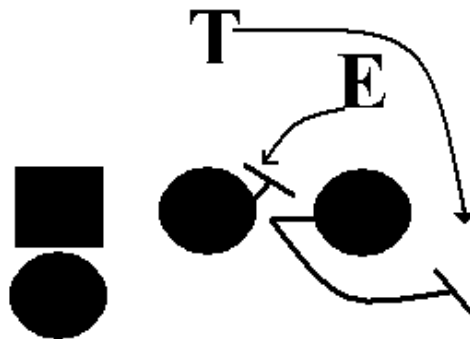
C: Same.

FG: Block #1; if no one comes, drop deep to frontside and check for pursuit.

FT: Block #2 on line from inside gap, to on, to outside gap; if not, check LB.

The FB will meet three kinds of charge: Slow play, straight and hard, or containing. FB takes two steps toward the sideline while reading the outside rush. If #3 takes an inside charge, FB seals him inside and rides him past the QB. If #3 runs deep to contain, FB should lock out and run him deep. If #3 attacks FB hard and head on, FB chops the outside knee with his inside shoulder. If no one rushes, FB checks middle and backside, then releases.

When zoning a stunt, linemen must communicate. Figure 11 shows FT's man rushing inside. FT goes with him, keeping him on the LOS. FG sees his man disappear behind FT and calls out "Loop". FG shuffles toward FT, bumping hips with him and contacting the inside rusher with his near hand. Both FG and FT call "Switch". FG now has the inside rusher, while FT squares up to meet the outside loop charge.



**FIGURE 11**