



0 technique When he was a high school coach, Bum Phillips invented a clever way of numbering the alignment of defensive linemen. Bear Bryant is often given credit for this incorrectly. How do I know this? Bear Bryant told me on page 29 of his book *Building a Championship Football Team*. I must add that many football coaches garble his system by assigning slightly different numbering, probably unknowingly. I will also add that there was a lot more to Bum Phillips' system than just alignment numbering. He had the linebackers on each side call out numerical alignments for the defenders on their side before every play. Certain combinations were forbidden as unsound. Each change in the defensive line configuration required a complimentary change in the alignment of the linebackers behind them. The best explanation of the system is in Bryant's above-mentioned book. I think it is cumbersome terminology. The word "technique" suggests a way of battling with an offensive lineman. But it's just where the defender **aligns** in relation to the offensive linemen before the snap. Some coaches other than Phillips also add a zero to the number to indicate that it refers to the alignment of a **linebacker**. In most systems, a 0 technique would mean a nose tackle aligned nose-to-nose with a center. A 00 technique would mean a linebacker lined up nose-to-nose with the center, only several yards off the line of scrimmage. Because there are more than ten possible alignments, Phillips screwed up using **numbers** instead of **letters**. Had he used letters, every conceivable alignment could have been covered by a universal version of this way of identifying defensive line alignments. Since the letters A through D are already used for gap identification, I would identify the various shades starting with E and I suggest the following improved terminology:

Alpha = A gap
Bravo = B gap
Charlie = C gap
Delta = D gap (just outside shoulder of tight end)
Echo = nose of center
Echo strong = strong shoulder of center
Echo weak = weak shoulder of center
Foxtrot = inside shoulder of guard
Golf = nose of guard
Hotel = outside shoulder of guard
India = inside shoulder of tackle
Juliet = nose of tackle
Kilo = outside shoulder of tackle
Lima = inside shoulder of tight end
Mike = nose of tight end
November = outside shoulder of tight end

I am using the phonetic alphabet (alpha, bravo, charlie,...) instead of just the letters (a, b, c,...) for the same reason the military and others do: to prevent confusion between letters that sound similar like B and D.

I prefer the words "strong" and "weak" to "positive" and "negative" to designate strong or weak sides because of fewer syllables and because there is no need to invent additional words for strong and weak.

1 technique position where defensive lineman is located before the snap. In the original Bum Phillips' version (See definition of 0 technique above) of this terminology, a 1 technique was in the middle of the A gap. Some coaches make slight, but important-to-understand, changes while seemingly using the same terminology. For example, at Monte Vista High School in Danville, CA where I coached from 2003 to 2005, a 1 technique meant that the nose of the defensive lineman was on the inside shoulder of the offensive guard. Furthermore, the strong-side techniques were referred to as "positive" while the weak-side techniques were referred to as "negative." For example, a positive 1 technique meant a defensive lineman who was aligned with his nose on the inside shoulder of the strong-side offensive guard.

2 technique position where defensive lineman is located before the snap. In the original Bum Phillips' version (See definition of 0 technique above) of this terminology, a 2 technique was nose-to-nose with the offensive guard. Some coaches make slight, but important-to-understand, changes while seemingly using the same terminology. For example, some coaches refer to the strong-side techniques as "positive" while the weak-side techniques "negative." See the discussion under 1 technique above.

3 technique position where defensive lineman is located before the snap. In the original Bum Phillips' version (See definition of 0 technique above) of this terminology, a 3 technique was in the middle of the B gap. Some coaches make slight, but important-to-understand, changes while seemingly using the same terminology. For example, at Monte Vista High School in Danville, CA where I coached from 2003 to 2005, a 3 technique meant that the nose of the defensive lineman was on the outside shoulder of the offensive guard.

4 technique position where defensive lineman is located before the snap. In the original Bum Phillips' version (See definition of 0 technique above) of this terminology, a 4 technique was nose-to-nose with the offensive tackle. Some coaches make slight, but important-to-understand, changes while seemingly using the same terminology. For example, at Monte Vista High School in Danville, CA where I coached from 2003 to 2005, a 4 technique meant that the nose of the defensive lineman was on the inside shoulder of the offensive tackle.

4i technique position where defensive lineman is located before the snap. In the original Bum Phillips' version (See definition of 0 technique above) of this terminology, there was no 4i, however many coaches wanted to align there so they invented the 4i terminology. A 4i technique usually means that the nose of the defensive lineman is aligned on the **inside** shoulder of the offensive tackle.

5 technique position where defensive lineman is located before the snap. In the original Bum Phillips' version (See definition of 0 technique above) of this terminology, a 5 technique meant that the defensive lineman had his nose on the outside shoulder of the offensive tackle. Some coaches make slight, but important-to-understand, changes while seemingly using the same terminology. For example, at Monte Vista High School in Danville, CA where I coached from 2003 to 2005, a 5 technique meant that the defensive lineman was nose-to-nose with the offensive tackle.

6 technique position where defensive lineman is located before the snap. In the original Bum Phillips' version (See definition of 0 technique above) of this terminology, a 6 technique was nose-to-nose with the offensive tight end. Some coaches make slight, but important-to-understand, changes while seemingly using the same terminology. For example, at Monte Vista High School in Danville, CA where I coached from 2003 to 2005, a 6 technique meant that the nose of the defensive lineman was on the outside shoulder of the offensive tackle.

7 technique position where defensive lineman is located before the snap. In the original Bum Phillips' version (See definition of 0 technique above) of this terminology, a 6 technique meant the defensive lineman had his nose on the inside shoulder of the offensive tight end. Some coaches make slight, but important-to-understand, changes while seemingly using the same terminology. For example, at Monte Vista High School in Danville, CA where I coached from 2003 to 2005, a 7 technique meant that the nose of the defensive lineman was on the outside shoulder of the offensive tight end.

8 technique position where defensive lineman is located before the snap. In the original Bum Phillips' version (See definition of 0 technique above) of this terminology, a 8 technique meant that the defensive lineman was aligned on air outside the outside shoulder of the offensive tight end. Some coaches make slight, but important-to-understand, changes while seemingly using the same terminology.

9 route It varies from team to team. Generally, a 9 route would be a deep route because most teams number their routes from short to deep. But I cannot tell you whether the route would break inward or outward because some teams use odd numbers for **inward**-breaking and others use odd numbers for **outward**-breaking routes. The three most common deep routes would be a skinny post, a post-corner, and a go or streak. So it's probably one of those. You cannot use such terms except within the context of **one team** where they have a prescribed route tree that specifies what **their** 9 route is.

9 technique position where defensive lineman is located before the snap. In the original Bum Phillips' version (See definition of 0 technique above) of this terminology, a 9 technique meant that the defensive lineman has his nose on the outside shoulder of the offensive tight end.

10 technique same as 1 technique only at linebacker depth

20 technique same as 2 technique only at linebacker depth

30 technique same as 3 technique only at linebacker depth

40 technique same as 4 technique only at linebacker depth

46 defense defense designed by Buddy Ryan at the Chicago Bears and named after the jersey number of Doug Plank, generally it has more than the normal number of pass rushers and the pass defenders are in man pass coverage, there are a number of books available on how to run it, often mistakenly called a 4-6 defense

50 technique same as 5 technique only at linebacker depth

60 technique same as 6 technique only at linebacker depth

70 technique same as 7 technique only at linebacker depth

80 technique same as 8 technique only at linebacker depth

90 technique same as 9 technique only at linebacker depth

3-5-3 defense high school and college defense videos and books on which have been heavily promoted in the 2000s; associated with New Mexico Military Academy

4-3 defense typically used in college or pro play, the name is roughly descriptive, for details get one of a number of books on the defense; at the pro level, whether to use the 4-3 or the other common pro defense, the 3-4, appears to be a function of whether the team has more defensive linemen-type players or more linebacker-type players

4-6 defense mis-punctuation of the 46 defense also known as the Bear 46 defense; the defense was named after Chicago Bear Doug Plank's jersey number, not the number of linemen and linebackers it has; This mistake is so widespread that Coaches Choice publishes a book by Leo Hand called *101 Bear 4-6 Stunts*. There is no such thing as the Bear 4-6.

7-on-7 competitive passing drill involving no interior linemen other than the center; features offensive team consisting of C, QB, and receivers versus defensive team of defensive backs and linebackers

A

A 1. the gap between the center and offensive guard 2. the running back in a one-back offense.

Ace one-back, balanced, offensive formation with two tight ends, two flankers, and one running back who is aligned behind the quarterback and center

Adjustment change in the approach of a team or player during a game as a result of less than satisfactory success with the original approach; also changing defensive alignment in response to offensive shifts or motions; the ability to make during-

game adjustments is a must for all football coaches; many who do well in the first half but not the second are manifesting an inability to make appropriate adjustments definition

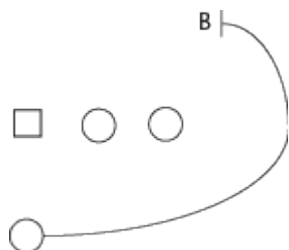
Against the grain superfluous description of the direction a ball carrier goes when he cuts back to the opposite side from the side he was originally running toward as in, “he cut back against the grain”

Agilities short for agility drills; drills commonly used by position coaches during the 10- to 20-minute position-coach period at the beginning of most football practices; the theory behind them is that agility is a desirable football skill and agility drills make players more agile; I do not believe the drills make players better at football to any significant degree; rather, they make the players better at doing the agility drill in question; I would appreciate hearing about any scientific study that proves any football agility drill pays a game-day dividend worth the practice time it takes; I suspect the real reasons for the widespread use of agility drills are they fill practice time and look footballish, that’s the way it’s always been done, the logic that agility drills increase agility seems correct, a number of companies make and/or sell products for agility drills and therefore have financial incentive to encourage belief in their efficacy, many coaches are afraid to deviate from football group norms because it increases the probability they will be blamed for losses; doing the same as every other coach enables coaches to subtly blame the players for losses, e.g. “someone needed to make a play but no one did;” I believe that agilities should never be used and that the practice time saved is far better spent on learning assignments, blocking techniques, practicing reading defenders and throwing passes, option reads, and so forth; carioca is an agility drill, as are running through tires (now ropes or a ladder), running around large hoops on the ground, etc.; may be the best you can do at the college level in the off-season when more productive activities are prohibited by rule

Air a vacant area of the football field. For example, if a cornerback remains aligned out wide from an offensive formation even though there is no offensive player there, he is said to be aligned “on air.” Except for a wide-side defensive contain man aligning on air to improve his chances of stopping the sweep play, aligning on air is generally incorrect and unsound; it is sometimes appropriate to **practice** only against air; e.g., Oregon found they could not practice their vaunted screen plays against their own scout defense because they got too good at reading the play early; my 1996 Granada High School team had the same experience with our inside-trap plays

Alley area between the cornerback and the box and safety definition

Arc block running-back inward block on a defensive contain man or linebacker; the word “arc” refers to the blocker taking a somewhat circuitous route to the blocking target, that is, he initially moves outward then comes back in to make the block; the running back’s path to the block is roughly a half circle; such a path often causes the defender being blocked to conclude prematurely that the running back does not plan to block him



Area blocking offensive blocking scheme in which blockers are assigned to block whomever comes into a particular area of the field; **not** synonymous with zone blocking which is a particular scheme defined below, although many coaches confusingly still use “area” and “zone” interchangeably; a blocking scheme in which blockers are assigned to protect an area of the field instead of being assigned to block a particular defender (man blocking); area blocking is common in wall kick returns and pass protection; I recommend an area-blocking scheme I call wall blocking for most youth football plays because most youth linemen are unathletic kids who will quit all sports by age 13 and area blocking with small splits is about all they can be expected to succeed at

Arrow outward pass route along a path about 30 degrees from the line of scrimmage

Audible verbal play called by a quarterback at the line of scrimmage before the snap; the call is made in order to take advantage of a weakness sighted in the defense or to get out of a previously-called play that is contraindicated by the pre-snap defensive alignment; most teams that use audibles also have their quarterback call dummy audibles that mean nothing in order to prevent the defense from being able to tell when an audible is being called; can take as long as seven seconds which has clock-management implications (see my book [Football Clock Management](#) for far more detail)

Awsonimity word invented by Leo Hand, author of *Attacking Football Defenses With Radar Blocking* to describe the period between the end of one play and the snap for the next; actually he defines it as the time between breaking the huddle and the snap but since there is not always a huddle but there is always awsonimity, I am modifying his definition; Hand feels this is an extremely important and difficult time for the defense if the offense takes advantage of it and gives the defense as little time as possible to see what formation they will be in; he also feels, and I agree, that offenses fail egregiously to take advantage of their control over this time period

B

B 1. the gap between the offensive guard and tackle 2. letter used to designate linebacker in a diagram of a defense

Backpedal running backward; correct technique requires keeping shoulders over the toes and pumping arms as when running forward; used by defensive backs and linebackers in initial steps of pass coverage at many teams; correct technique facilitates changing direction quickly; leaning backwards is faster but unsound because it only allows very slow changes of direction; stopwatch timing of backpedaling requires that coaches make sure that the backpedalers are **not** leaning backward in order to gain speed at the expense of acquiring the unacceptable bad habit of leaning backward

Back side the side of the center away from which the ball carrier is going; also called “off” side

Bail movement in which a pass defender aligns as if to bump a receiver then quickly drops back when the snap occurs

Balanced line an offensive line with a guard and tackle on each side of the center

Ball control play calling designed to get a first down rather than a bigger gain

Banjo pass-defense technique; definition fuzzy; seems to relate to two defenders covering two receivers according to a pre-arranged rule like, “I have whichever one who goes out, you get the one who goes in,” Tom Bass says it is when two defenders cover one receiver and divide the coverage between in and out or short and deep; may be used to deal with two receivers who come off the line close together then one breaks in and the other out crossing paths to hinder straight man coverage; having both such receivers break in or out tends to screw up the banjo plan

Base block offensive line block in which the blocker pushes the nearest defender away from the point of attack; normally used in bubble dive, bubble lead, and power plays where the C gap is not occupied by a defender

Base defense defensive alignment used most often by a team; may also have a personnel dimension to it; often used when the offense has 1st & 10; their “default” defense when they are not sure what to do; other defenses are typically defined by the coach in question as modifications of the base defense; an offense that operates at a hurry-up tempo typically hears the opposing coaches and linebackers yelling “Base! Base!” because they do not have time to call a different defense between plays

Bear defense see 46 defense

Belly **noun:** another football term that has come to mean different things namely an option play or an inside zone play; in Vince Lombardi’s Green Bay Packer offense, it was a fake fullback dive right, halfback dive left with the halfback taking a jab step to the right before running to the left A or B gap bubble depending upon the movement of the defensive tackle; the left guard was to use Lombardi’s whichever-way-he-wants-to-go blocking technique on the defensive tackle and the halfback ball carrier was to read that block and “run to daylight;” **verb:** to run a path that goes slightly backward and away from the line of scrimmage before coming back toward the line of scrimmage as in a swing pass route

Bend-don’t-break defense a defensive alignment and personnel group that is optimized to stop long plays and weaker against short runs and passes; the theory behind this is that while it is theoretically possible for an offense to four-yard a defense to death, few offenses can remain mistake-free during such a short-play drive and will be forced to punt as a result of their own penalties or occasional loss or inadequate-gain plays; in fact, offensive coaches can minimize penalties and loss or inadequate-gain plays by the way they design their plays (avoid deep plays like reverses), play calling (avoid passes), and simplification like always snapping on one, a tactic used by Auburn coach Terry Bowden in his undefeated season there; against such an offense, the bend-don’t-break defensive strategy is slow suicide

Big-on-big matchup principle applied to offensive blocking schemes and defensive assignments; basic idea is that only bigger players should have to grapple with the opponent’s bigger players; e.g., offensive linemen block defensive linemen or linebackers cover tight ends; also abbreviated as BOB; usually used in conjunction with fast-on-fast or FOF

Blind side a) quarterback’s non-throwing-arm side; when set to pass, he faces the sideline on his passing-arm side and has his back to the other side preventing him from seeing a rusher coming from that direction; in the NFL, the offensive tackle who plays on a quarterback’s blind side is considered extra important during pass plays; b) any hit that comes from an area not being looked at by the player being hit

Blitz now means rushing across the line of scrimmage immediately after the snap by a defender other than the defensive line; originally “blitz” and “red dog” or “dog” had similar but different meanings; blitz referred to a rush by a defensive back and dog to a rush by a linebacker; author-coach Gaylord Bellamy said a blitz was a seven-man rush while a dog was a six-man rush (a seven-man rush is unsound because there are not enough defenders left to cover all the zones or all the eligible receivers—unless the man to be covered by the defender in question remains in the offensive backfield blocking in which case the defender might as well join him, but he’d better not forget he still has to cover that receiver if he goes out for a pass) George Allen used the two terms interchangeably; Tom Flores defines dog or red dog as a rush by a linebacker, but he defines a blitz as a rush by **either** a defensive back or a linebacker; too many coaches see their propensity to blitz as proof of manhood; in fact, it is a tactic that is necessary when your base defense linemen cannot get adequate pressure on the quarterback; if your defensive line **can** get adequate pressure in the quarterback, blitzing is an unnecessary, limiting, and unwise complication for your defenders

Bomb deep pass

Boot short for bootleg; also short for counter boot, a play in which the offense fakes a counter play followed by the quarterback rolling out away from the play fake and throwing a pass; typically, the pass pattern includes a tight end or fullback who blocks the boot side contain defender for one or two counts before running a flat pass route (delayed release)

Bootleg roll out by a quarterback who is pretending he does not have the football; so called because some coaches taught their quarterbacks to hold the ball with one hand on the back of their hip or thigh to conceal it from the defense

Bounce a) movement by a ball carrier who finds his original planned point of attack clogged and changes direction to attack a new point of attack b) now disfavored warm-up movement, although you would never know it when you see virtually every football team on earth do jumping jacks as part of their warm-up

Box **noun:** an area on the defensive side of the ball that is generally bounded horizontally by the interior offensive line and vertically to a depth of about five yards from the line of scrimmage; archaic use meant the back four players in the old seven-box defense. In that defense, there were seven defensive linemen and four guys behind them arrayed in the shape of a box, that is, two guys shallow and two deep; **verb:** a technique in which a defensive contain man proceeds straight to the depth of the ball carrier in the offensive backfield then turns inward to face that ball carrier and/or his lead blockers; if the defender in question does not make the mistake of giving ground or being blocked out of the box position, it is all but impossible to run a sweep successfully against this technique. Use of the box technique prevents the contain man from helping with the off-tackle play so another player must defend that play. Generally, a coach would only use the box technique on the wide or field side of the offensive formation.

Brush block block in which the blocker just brushes against the defender as he passes by him; sufficient when the ball carrier is moving at a high rate of speed just behind and off to the other side of the blocker; I had the fullback use a brush block against the linebacker in 26 power because I found that was all we needed, plus a harder block by the fullback tended to make the fullback shoot his foot backwards to brace himself and that he often tripped the tailback in the process

Bubble portion of the defensive line where there is no defensive lineman; typically the gap in question is the responsibility of a linebacker who is two or more yards behind that location; best point of attack for dive, lead, or power plays

Bubble screen screen-pass play in which an offensive player initially aligned in the offensive backfield, including a wing or a tight end, immediately runs outward while a screen of blockers is formed by wider receivers

Buck old-time word for a running back running straight into the line; now called a dive play

Bucket step first step of an offensive lineman or back in which he steps at about 4 o'clock or 7 o'clock; purpose is to begin moving toward the sideline; backward angle is to clear away from an adjacent player in the case of a lineman or for timing purposes in the case of a back, same as kick step

Bull to put the bottom of the back of the helmet against or near the back of the neck opening of the shoulder pads as in "bull the neck;" extremely important positioning to prevent serious neck injury during a collision

Bump pass coverage technique in which the defender aligns on the inside shoulder of the receiver and immediately strikes him when he first moves; designed to prevent or delay the release of the receiver on a pass route; all called press, tight coverage, or bump and run

Bump and run same as bump

Bunch tightly-aligned group of two or three offensive quick receivers, typically used to run a screen to the backmost of the group of receivers or to run a rub pattern or illegal pick play; receivers coming out of the bunch generally cross paths to make it harder for the defenders to maintain man coverage

C

C 1. the gap between the offensive tackle and tight end 2. letter used to designate a cornerback in a diagram of a defense 3. letter used to designate a coach in a diagram of a practice segment 4. abbreviation for center

Cadence the words and numbers spoken by the quarterback after the offense is set and the rhythm in which those words and numbers are said

Call outs pre-game activity in which the coach calls out the offense, defense, and each special team to make sure each player assigned to that team knows he is on it. If the coach has other personnel groups like third-and-short offense or nickel defense, he also calls out those teams.

Capital I formation I formation with all four backs aligned one behind the other behind the center; made famous by the University of Maryland; very powerful inside running formation; also called the "full-house I"

Carioca a variety of South American dance that originated in Rio De Janeiro; in football, refers to a sideways movement in which the player holds his arms out sideways away from his body like a referee's unsportsmanlike-conduct signal; in the movement, the player steps first with, say, his right leg **in front of** his left, then the next time he steps with his right foot he steps **behind** his left foot; this is one of the favorite, most widely used agility drills in all of football, which is quite odd when you consider that any football player who ever crosses his legs in this fashion in a practice or game would immediately be severely reprimanded by his coach; if there were a Hall of Fame of Dumb Football Drills, the statute out front would be of a player doing carioca; often mispronounced as karaoke since that fad became popular

Check route a running-back pass route that is run only after checking to make sure the back's pass-blocking responsibility is not blitzing

Check with me offensive play call made by a quarterback in a huddle; either means the play will be called at the line of scrimmage or the quarterback gives **two** plays in the huddle then announces which one he wants to run at the line of scrimmage once he sees the defensive alignment and personnel; e.g., "26 power and 25 power" is said in the huddle, then the quarterback says "odd" or "even" at the line of scrimmage once he sees which one is likely to work best; odd signifies 25 power in this case; even, 26 power

Chip similar to brush block only with more force and slightly more duration

Choice route pass route in which the receiver decides whether to break north, south, east, or west depending upon the initial movement of the defender closest to him; as a result of much practice, the quarterback sees the same defender movement and anticipates correctly which way the receiver will break and throws to him; also called sight adjustment

Chop block illegal double-team block in which one offensive player blocks the defender high and the other, low; see rule books for details

Chuck momentary hit designed to temporarily delay a player from going where he wants to go

Clear to run a pass route through an area in order to empty that area of defenders

Clearing route a pass route that is designed to clear an area of the defense

Clip zone poorly-chosen phrase for free blocking zone

Cloud zone pass coverage in which cornerbacks cover passes to the flat; both cornerback and cloud start with the letter C; opposite of “sky” coverage, also called “invert”

Combo block Same as tandem block

Coffin-corner kick a punt aimed at the sideline inside the opponent’s ten-yard line; formerly standard practice; lately largely replaced by the pooch kick

Comeback pass route in which the receiver breaks back toward the line of scrimmage, usually to the outside

Contain each side of all defenses has a player assigned contain responsibilities; that means he is not to allow a blocker or ball carrier from the inside to get outside of him; generally done by a lineman in a two-point stance at the youth or high school level; by a linebacker or defensive back at higher levels

Contain rush outside-in pass rush by a contain man to prevent the quarterback from scrambling or dashing out to his side; that is, contain pass rusher must take a slightly circuitous route to the passer so he comes in from the **side**, **not** from the passer’s **front**; all sound defenses have a player on each side who is assigned this responsibility

Corner pass route in which the receiver runs an eight- to twelve-yard stem, then cuts outward at a 45-degree angle toward the back corner of the end zone; previously called a “flag” route

Cornerback defensive back who covers pass zones on the outer edges of the field or who covers quick receivers who align at the outer edge of the offensive formation, in some defenses, a corner from one side will go over to the other side and cover a slot back

Corner over a defensive-alignment rule which has a cornerback go to the other side of the field to cover a slot receiver when there is no wide receiver on his side of the field.

Cover 0 pass defense in which **all** pass defenders are in **man** coverage; required when six defenders are rushing

Cover 1 pass defense in which **all** pass defenders **but one** are in **man** coverage; the one not in man coverage is usually a **free safety** who plays a zone defense in which his zone is the entire field; required when five defenders are rushing; also called “man free” or “man under”

Cover 2 **zone** pass defense with two deep safeties who are responsible for the two deep halves of the field

Cover 3 **zone** pass defense where the field is divided into three deep zones which are covered by the free safety (middle) and two corners (sides)

Cover 4 **zone** pass defense where the field is divided into four deep zones which are covered by the two safeties (middle) and two corners (sides); more often called “quarters” or occasionally, by idiots, “quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter.”

Cover 5 same as nickel defense

Coverage either the defensive backs and linebackers or the scheme in which they are utilized

Coverage recognition offensive drill in which the receivers and quarterbacks practice recognizing the pass coverages (i.e., man, zone, or combination) of the defense and adjusting appropriately to them

Counter offensive misdirection play involving several steps by the ball carrier and possibly other backs away from the actual point of attack, before he changes direction to go toward the actual point of attack, often involves a pulling lineman who executes a trap block; usually attacks the C gap; the counter trey is one of the most famous plays of this type; it is most closely associated with Redskins coach Joe Gibbs

Crab blocking technique in which the blocker gets down on all fours and shoves the defender sideways with his ribs by shuffling all four limbs in that direction; only legal in the free-blocking zone

Crackback block inward block by an offensive player who initially aligned out wide on a defender who initially lined up in the box, illegal if below the waist; the blocker must take care to avoid blocking the defender in the back; sometimes, the blocker can get the defender to face him by yelling “Hey!” just before he arrives

Crash incorrect path by a defensive contain man who charges into the offensive backfield at a 45-degree angle; generally means the defender assumes the play is a pass and wants to get a sack; unsound because the contain man is generally required to **contain** rush on a pass play to prevent a successful scramble or dash pass and he is required to maintain

an outside position in the case of a sweep or a tight-to-the-C-Gap-at-the-LOS position in the case of an off-tackle play; when the defender knows better, this is selfish, undisciplined play; offenses should look for this mistake and exploit it

Cross pass route at about eight yards depth and parallel to the line of scrimmage

Cross block two-person block in which the outer offensive lineman blocks inward on the first defensive lineman to his inside while the inner offensive lineman next to him allows the outer offensive lineman to pass, then blocks outward on the first defensive lineman to his outside; the outer offensive lineman always goes first because he is blocking the innermost and therefore most-dangerous-to-the-early-phase-of-the-play defensive lineman; typically used to block at the point of attack in a strong-side power play or a weak-side B gap lead play

Crossover step a lateral step in which the player steps with the foot away from the direction he is going; sometimes used by offensive backs for maximum distance and speed on their first step or to begin a sequence of steps which requires them to cut a particular direction on a particular step, e.g., in the single-wing off-tackle play, the ball carrier might open step, crossover step, then open step again so that he can cut upfield on the third step to the off-tackle hole; opposite of open step; **not** recommended for players who are near opposing players or for linebackers reacting to flow

Curl deeper version of a hook

Cushion vertical distance between the receiver and the defender who is covering him; a tight cushion indicates that a fade route or other deep route has an increased probability of success; a large cushion suggests a hitch, comeback, or slant would work

Cutback change of direction by ball carrier when he goes to one side of the center then changes direction heading toward the other side of the center; in some plays that get linebackers moving fast toward initial flow of the offensive backfield like the double wing super power off-tackle play and the inside zone play, a cutback is probable; wide-pursuit assignments must include at least one defender who is responsible for stopping a cutback; the word is often accompanied by the superfluous phrase “against the grain”

Cut block shoulder or cross body block aimed at the knees or lower part of the defender’s body; allowed only by interior linemen against defensive linemen under high-school rules; such a block in the free blocking zone must occur only at the outset of a play; in college and pro rules, backs may also throw head-on cut blocks against defenders coming into the offensive backfield; see the rule books of each level for details; often used by blockers who are significantly smaller than the guy they are trying to block; also used by blockers who have no other hope of making the block because of their position at some distance from the defender to be blocked; many in football self-righteously denounce the cut block as unethical; they need to send a letter to the various committees that set the rules and to the various coaches associations to get the rule that allows cut blocks changed and to add prohibition against cut blocks into the various association codes of ethics; until they do, it is a legal, ethical block that is the best block for the situations listed above

Cut off inward block on a defender farther away from the blocker than a normal blocking target; blocker seeks only to prevent penetration of the line of scrimmage by the defender

D

D the gap outside the tight end; also short for “defense” as in “D line” or “D coordinator”

Dash pass play in which the quarterback drops straight back as if to pass, then suddenly sprints out to one side; looks like an impromptu scramble but it is premeditated

Daylight an opening in the defense through which a ball carrier can run

Decoy player who carries out a fake running play or who runs a pass route knowing that no pass will be thrown to him on the play

Defense recognition set of blocking rules that say, for example, “you block the off-tackle play this way against a 4-4 defense and this was against a 5-3 defense;” useless if the defense aligns in an unanticipated defense

Defensive back defender whose primary responsibility is defending against passes to deep or wide zones or passes to quick receivers, typically safeties and cornerbacks

Delayed release departure of a pass receiver on a pass route after blocking, typically for a one-or two-count; purpose is to get the defender responsible for covering the receiver or zone in question to conclude the receiver is not going to run a pass route on this play and abandon covering him or the zone in which the route will take place; counterintuitive; receivers generally need to be admonished and/or punished repeatedly to get them to wait the required amount of time before releasing; generally important part of a counter boot play

Dig shallow or intermediate depth cross route

Dime back defensive back substituted into a game in a passing situation to replace a linebacker thereby resulting in a defense with six rather than the five defensive backs of a nickel package; mostly a college or pro term

Dime package the whole defense when a dime back has been substituted for a linebacker thereby bringing the total number of defensive backs on the field to six

Direct snap offensive formation in which the center or long snapper snaps the ball directly to a running back rather than to a quarterback who subsequently gives it to a running back; common direct-snap formations include punt, field goal, single wing, short punt; the shotgun can be a direct snap formation if the center snaps the ball to a non-quarterback

Disguise effort by defense to prevent the offense from recognizing which type of pass coverage they are using

Dive quick-hitting offensive play in which a running back ball carrier goes straight through an A or B gap with no lead blocker; a great many teams use dive right as their first play of the game apparently on the theory that it is the simplest play and will allow the team to settle down before running more complex plays; should be aimed at a bubble in the defense

Double coverage pass coverage in which two pass defenders cover one receiver

Double slot one-back, balanced, offensive formation with no tight ends, two split ends, two slot backs, and a single running back aligned behind the quarterback and center; can screw up modern defenses that are used to and designed for a pro set

Double team block or pass coverage of one guy by two guys; the double-team block requires a particular technique, not just the addition of a second guy

Double wing balanced offensive formation with two wingbacks and one running back behind the quarterback and center; there are both direct- and indirect-snap versions of this offense; plays are usually preceded by one of the wing backs going in motion backward and inward; line splits are usually zero; the fullback is generally as close as possible to the quarterback; made famous by coach Don Markham in California and Oregon, coach-writer Hugh Wyatt, and coach-writer Jerry Vallotton; tends to screw up modern defenses that are used to and designed for a pro set

Down block inward block by an offensive lineman or wing

Downfield away from the line of scrimmage on the defense side; means the same as “upfield;” there is no comparable word for different depths on the offense’s side of the line of scrimmage; one reader said it is the offensive coach word for going across the line of scrimmage deeper into the defense

Downfield blocking blocking more than about four yards beyond the line of scrimmage; can be done by any position, but is most often associated with receivers; **long runs** are typically the result of effective downfield blocking; since many players are selfish, the amount of downfield blocking a team does reflects its head coach’s ability to spot the lack of it and his ability to motivate and discipline his players to do it consistently; one observer of Knute Rockne’s legendary Notre Dame teams said that excellent downfield blocking was what distinguished them; Princeton alum and later coach Charlie Caldwell said he and his teammates felt like they had had Saturday off after playing Notre Dame when their backfield was the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse because Notre Dame players were excellent at **getting in your way** such that you could not make the tackle, but that there was **little or no contact** in such “blocks;” generally, only downfield blocks are susceptible to such precise timing, the no-longer-used phrase “running interference” refers to such non-contact, but highly effective, tackle prevention positioning and timing

Downhill another of those maddeningly vague and devoid-of-logic football coach terms that seems to have some sort of meaning along the lines of “good,” like “leverage;” may mean the same as “north-south,” that is, perpendicular to the yard lines, when used by some coaches

Drag shallow pass route in front of and across the middle of the offensive formation; often combined with a delayed release by the receiver

Draw running play in which a quarterback drops back as if to pass then suddenly gives the ball to a running back standing next to him or runs with it himself; path of the run is up the middle; if a fake run followed by a pass is a “play-action pass” then the draw could be called a “pass-action play”

Drive offensive possession

Drive block one offensive player trying to push one defensive player away from the offensive point of attack; done with the shoulder in the old days and with the hands since the rules were changed to allow that

Drop quarterback’s initial steps on a drop-back pass play; always an odd number; common drops are 1-step and 3-step at all levels and 5- at the high school and higher levels and 7- and 9 at the college and pro levels

Dummy audible Fake audible play call that has no meaning because the offensive players have been told to disregard certain audibles because the lack of a “hot” color word or other indication that the audible is to be ignored

E

E letter used to designate a defensive end in a diagram of a defense

East-west parallel to the yard lines; toward the sidelines; ball carriers should generally avoid running east-west unless they are much faster than anyone on the defense which is rarely the case above the high school level; east-west running by ball carriers is generally considered to be cowardly and/or poor judgment in that such a direction rarely results in gaining yards and often results in a loss of yards from the point at which the ball carrier began to run toward the sideline

Edge just outside the EMLOS, also called the “perimeter”

Eight-man front a defensive formation that has eight defenders **in the box**; typically a 4-4 or 5-3; the word “front” does **not** mean the line; it means both the line and the linebackers

Eligible receiver offensive player who is either the end man on the line of scrimmage or a back, that is, not on the line of scrimmage; eligible receiver position names include split end, tight end, tailback, quarterback, fullback, flanker, halfback, slot back; must wear a jersey number below 50 or above 79 by rule

EMLOS abbreviation for “end man on the line of scrimmage;” can refer to either offense or defense

Empty an offensive backfield with no running backs other than the quarterback behind the offensive interior line, also called “no back”

Encroachment illegal advance by a defender into the neutral zone after the ready-to-play signal but before the snap; under high school rules, retreating out of the neutral zone before the snap does not negate the infraction; in college and pro rules, it does; see rules at each level for details; parents and fans at high school games often protest, “He got back” at officials who throw encroachment flags; it doesn’t matter at that level

End around a somewhat old but still viable offensive play in which a wide receiver runs through the offensive backfield and gets a handoff; a famous but now rarely-seen version of this was the Statue of Liberty play in which the quarterback would drop and set up to pass, but the wide receiver would take the ball out of the quarterback’s hands as he went by; can be done out of a drop-back pass fake or a fake running play; the Statue of Liberty play is now disfavored because the wide receiver taking the ball from the quarterback’s poised-to-pass stance is more easily seen by the defense than a lower handoff

End line the line that is the border of the back of the end zone

Even a) defense in which there is no nose which, in turn, means the number of defensive linemen will be an even number b) defensive front in which the number of defenders who would not cover a receiver in a man pass defense and who are in the box is the same on both sides of the center

Exchange ball moving from the quarterback to a running back or from one running back to another ball carrier; handoff or pitch

F

F 1. fullback on an offense diagram 2. free safety in a defense diagram

Fade pass route in which the receiver runs straight up field then fades or drifts out near the sideline while continuing to run full speed upfield; often used as an automatic play change when a defender aligns in tight bump-and-run or press man-to-man pass coverage position against a wide receiver

Fake field goal a running or passing play that is run out of a field-goal formation in a field-goal situation

Fake punt a running or passing play that is run out of a punt formation in a punt situation

False step step that gains no ground or which goes in the opposite direction from where the player is going; unbelievably common mistake; I once had a star tailback who hopped straight up in the air off both feet every time the ball was snapped; this was so time consuming that he was unable to lead block for a fullback ball carrier who was coming from his inside on a B gap lead play; I was totally unable to get him to stop; offensive linemen, wide receivers, and running backs often false step backwards or in place as their initial movement on the snap

Fan pass protection scheme in which offensive linemen block defensive linemen and offensive backs block linebackers

Far typically an offensive player who is aligned on the other side of the center from the play side or from a particular defensive player; e.g., a linebacker typically keys on the near offensive back but directs his vision to the far back to check for a counter play if the near back flows to the other side of the center at the beginning of the play; can also be the **name of a formation** in which an offensive back is offset to the side away from the tight end

Fast-on-fast matchup principle applied to offensive blocking schemes and defensive assignments; basic idea is that only faster players should have to deal with the opponent’s faster players; e.g., wide receivers or backs block linebackers or corners and corners cover wide receivers; also abbreviated as FOF; usually used in conjunction with big-on-big or BOB

Field position location of the ball in terms of distance to the goal line the team is trying to cross

Fill a) replacement of a pulling offensive lineman by a back so there is no hole in the offensive line b) movement by a linebacker or safety to fill a gap that opens in the defensive line during a play in the vicinity of the C or D gaps

Finish the run correct ball-carrier technique in which a ball carrier who no longer has any daylight to which to run lowers his shoulder and explodes into defenders to gain a few more yards before he is tackled

Fire **noun:** code word that tells scrimmage-kick (punt or field goal) team players that there has been a bad snap or muffed snap; designated players then run pass routes so the ball carrier can pass to them; **verb:** defensive play call word for blitz as in “Mike fire” means to blitz the Mike linebacker

First sound a snap count in which the offense is told to begin the play on the first sound made by the quarterback, whatever that sound is; often used in short-yardage situations; often tipped off by the quarterback delaying the start of his cadence until he has his hands under the center and everyone is set where the quarterback in question has not been doing that previously in the game

Flag route pass route now called a corner route, the original name stems from the fact that the corners of the end zone were marked by springs that had a flag on them; these have been replaced by day-glo pylons for safety reasons; the name of the route could have been changed to “pylon route”

Flanked inside of, as in, “you got flanked by the slot back;” a mistake for certain defenders who are not allowed to let offensive blockers get to their outside

Flanker a wide receiver who aligns one yard off the line of scrimmage on the strong side of the offensive formation, because he is off the line; he is permitted to go in pre-snap motion; can be facing any direction at the snap

Flat passing zone outside the weak tackle or tight end stretching to the sideline and about eight yards deep from the line of scrimmage into the defense's territory; a flat pass route is also called a bench route

Flea flicker ambiguous phrase for a trick play in which there is a pre-planned lateral; sometimes used to describe a lateral from a running back faking an inside run back to the quarterback and sometimes used to describe the hook-and-lateral play; the 2/6/06 *San Francisco Chronicle* incorrectly used the phrase "flea flicker" to describe Pittsburgh's reverse pass for a touchdown in the previous day's Super Bowl

Flipper using the bicep like a pinball flipper to hit a defender; forearm, which is bent less than 90 degrees, and shoulder may also be involved

Flood pass pattern; anti-zone-pass-defense tactic; puts more pass receivers into a defense zone than there are defenders in that zone

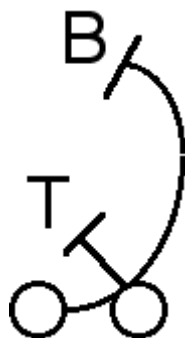
Flow initial direction of offensive backs; play-side defenders must react immediately to flow but back-side defenders must "stay home" and check for misdirection plays before they fly to the apparent direction of the ball

Fly **verb**: run full speed usually to the ball after a play has been diagnosed by the defense; **noun**: a) pass route that goes straight up the field; also called a streak or go route b) offense that has a flanker in pre-snap motion toward the quarterback who calls for the snap simultaneously with the arrival of the flanker then gives or fakes the ball to the flanker

Flying wedge old-time play in which blockers linked arms as they ran forward; now illegal because it literally killed defenders; see "wedge"

Fly to the ball run full speed to the ball whether it is being carried by a ball carrier or flying through the air

Fold block two-person blocking scheme in which one offensive lineman blocks a defensive lineman near his neighboring teammate while that teammate loops around the offensive lineman blocking the defensive lineman and blocks a linebacker; used when it gives both blockers better angles than if the folding offensive lineman just blocked the defensive lineman nearest him; a fold block can be outside as shown in the attached diagram or inside which would be a mirror image of the outside fold block.



Football position stance in which the player is slightly crouched with his ankles, knees, and waist bent and arms bent at the elbow and held in front of his trunk; also called athletic position or Z in the knee; this is a ready position that is adopted usually once the ball has been snapped; linebackers and bump pass defenders are also in this position or a similar one just before the snap

Force Seems to refer to a cornerback or safety abandoning his pass-coverage responsibilities to tackle a ball carrier who is taking a wide path. One coach-author said it was that plus the guy who is responsible for the pitchback when defending an option play. I notice that the word appears in many book indexes but never in anyone's glossary in the books that have glossaries.

Formation way in which the eleven players on a team are aligned at the beginning of a play

Forward pass a pass thrown from behind the line of scrimmage toward or beyond the line of scrimmage; if it goes beyond, rules regarding ineligible receivers downfield, pass interference, and illegal downfield blocking while the ball is in the air are triggered; if the forward pass does not go beyond the line of scrimmage, those rules are not applicable

Four-down situation game situation in which the offense would not punt; generally that would be when a successful punt would not improve the situation much or when there was not enough time to get the ball back after a successful punt to score the game-tying or game-winning touchdown and a field goal would not be enough to tie or win

Four-down territory misnomer for four-down **situation**; there is no location on the football field where a normal high school or higher level team would routinely "go for it" on fourth down rather than kick; within field-goal range, the offense will almost always attempt a field goal on fourth down if the time and score permit; outside of field-goal range, they will always punt if time and score permit; so it is always the **situation**, not the "territory," that causes offenses to go for it on fourth down

Four-minute drill poorly-chosen phrase to describe a slow-down offense; intended to contrast with the name “two-minute drill” which is another, albeit less, poorly-chosen name for a hurry-up

Free short for free safety

Free-blocking zone rectangle in the general vicinity of the offensive interior line’s pre-snap positions; the high-school Rule 2-17-1 defines it as four yards to each side of the ball before it’s snapped and three yards deep into each team’s side of the line of scrimmage; in the zone, offensive linemen may block defensive linemen below the waist, clip, and block in the back as long as the ball remains in the zone; see the rules for each level for details; some in football self-righteously denounce this rule; the rules are typically set by committees of the most eminent coaches in the world with the advice of the most prominent football-specialist orthopedic surgeons so it is unlikely that the critics know what they are talking about

Free kick kicking play in which the kicking team may line up any way they want behind the ball and the receiving team must be at least ten yards away from the yard line of the ball before the kick, see also rule book definition; free kicks are better known as kickoffs or kickoffs after a safety; they occur at the beginning of each half, after each field goal or touchdown-P.A.T. attempt, and after a safety

Free safety sole “center fielder” deep coverage man in a cover-3 pass defense; weak-side deep coverage man in a cover-2 pass defense

Freeze option offensive option play in which the dive is a fake right through the center’s original position; so-called because it is supposed to freeze the linebackers in place as they react to the dive fake while the quarterback and pitch back run toward the edge of the offensive formation; same as midline option

Freeze play A) quarterback sneak in which the entire team except for the center and quarterback remain motionless after the snap; looks like some sort of false start to the defense so they may not attempt to tackle the ball carrier; my son’s 8-10-year old team only won one game all season; it was by a score of 6-0 on this play which went 60 yards for a touchdown; B) a “play” in which the quarterback calls cadence trying to draw the defense off side but the offense never moves no matter what; in other words, the offense is pretending they are about to run a play when they are not; in this case, the phrase “freeze play” means there is no play so remain frozen until the defense jumps off sides

Front a) number of defenders in the box; many **mistakenly** think it refers only to the front **line** of the defense; in fact, it refers to both the front line and the linebackers b) when used as an adjective modifying the word “side” it means the same as play side

Full house an offensive backfield with three running backs other than the quarterback behind the offensive interior line, e.g., T-formation, wishbone, power I

Full-house I formation I formation with all four backs aligned one behind the other behind the center; made famous by the University of Maryland; very powerful inside running formation; also called the “capital I”

Fundamentals coaching’s equivalent of God, mother, and apple pie; that is, a subject which no coach may ever be criticized for “focusing on;” except by me; although there are no doubt a number of fundamentals that must be taught ASAP to young players, like correct tackling technique, rules, and safety, a team that spent all its time on fundamentals would only be able to compete in fundamentals contests where, say, each team got into three-point stances to be judged like posing body builders; the actual main focus at all football teams must be **plays and assignments**; you teach what fundamentals you must and can as time permits after they learn what they are supposed to do on each play; the propensity of a coach to claim he “focuses on fundamentals” is usually inversely proportional to his knowledge of fundamentals

G

G a) abbreviation for guard b) when used after the word “power” refers to a play in which the offensive line blockers all block to the inside except for the playside guard who pulls and traps out on the defensive EMLOS

Game clock clock that keeps track of the time remaining in the quarter; starts at 15:00 for each quarter at the college and pro levels; 12:00 at the high school varsity level; 10:00 at the lower high school levels; and usually 8:00 or 10:00 at the youth levels (see my book [Football Clock Management](#) for far more detail)

Game plan changes to the offensive, defensive, and/or special teams play book for a particular opponent; a pre-game theory of what plays or defenses are most likely to work against a particular opponent; game plans are expected to be superceded during the actual game by data from the game itself which is superior to pre-game guesses as to how the game will unfold and which plays and defenses will work best against that opponent; game plans are based on analysis of film in which your opponent played teams **other** than yours and is therefore greatly inferior to what you can learn by observing your game when **you** actually play them; “sticking to your game plan,” which is typically seen as a virtuous behavior pattern, only makes sense when you do not yet have sufficient data to formulate a more up-to-date game plan; sticking to your game plan after the unfolding of the game in question has revealed it to be incorrect is mindless stubbornness or a lack of ability to make necessary during-game adjustments

Gang tackling effort to get as many defenders legally in on each tackle as possible

Gap 8 old defensive formation in which every gap had a defender in it; not viable now because defense cannot rely on offense to be in a full-house backfield formation with two tight ends like in the old days; also, in this era of passing to all

five eligible receivers, it is unsound to rush more than five men without switching to man pass coverage; the five man pass coverage defenders must align on their men or in the defensive backfield and not in a gap.

Gap, on, over offensive blocking rule, most likely for a guard; the words mean that the lineman blocks a defensive lineman in his inside gap if there is such a defender, a defensive lineman whose nose is on his nose or outside shoulder if there is such a defender, and the nearest linebacker if no linemen are in the gap or on him; oversimplification for modern football; see the discussion below of the similar OIL blocking rule

Get off duration between snap count and offensive player moving; there is an excellent, very thorough discussion of sprinter reaction time, which is the same thing, at <http://condellpark.com/kd/reactiontime.htm>; International Association of Athletic Federations says that if an athlete moves sooner than .1 second after the start signal, he false started on the grounds that a human cannot react that fast to a signal; the world record reaction time was .101 seconds which may have been achieved by anticipating rather than reacting; it takes .006 seconds for the sound of the hut to travel from the quarterback's mouth to the tackle's ear; it takes .026 seconds for the brain to send the signal to the feet to move; in football, there is no electronic disqualification time but coaches who emphasize get off risk false start penalties which can quickly offset the value of extraordinary get off; in addition, the defensive line is going on visual ball movement which takes no time at all to go from the ball to the eyes of the defender; the above-mentioned article says reaction times are mostly .13 to .15 seconds and these are world championship sprint races; according to the book *Football Physics* by Timothy Gay Ph.D., the reaction time of a football player is .2 seconds, that is, it takes .2 seconds from when the brain receives the command to go until when the body starts to go; a rhythmic cadence enables the offensive linemen's brains to issue the command to their muscles to go .2 second **in advance** of the actual "hut;" the defense cannot issue a go command from their brains until they see the offense begin to move so they are .2 seconds **late** getting going; in high-level swimming and track competition, the go signal is a **light** and any racer who starts moving before humanly possible, that is, before the fastest reaction time of superb athletes, is disqualified on the grounds that he or she must have issued their brain command to go **before** the light; in football, it is legal to give the brain command to the muscles .2 seconds **early**, but it can only be accomplished with a rhythmic cadence; see also rhythmic cadence

Go See streak

Goal-line area from the goal line to the ten-yard line on the defending team's side of midfield

Goose and go offensive play in which the quarterback uses hand pressure to tell the center that he wants the snap immediately instead on the previously-called snap count and that the center is to block for a quarterback-sneak play; good for a couple of touchdowns and first downs each season on my high school freshman teams

Green zone area of the field from the goal line you are defending to your own 20-yard line; also called backed up when inside your own ten-yard line

Guard usually the first interior offensive lineman next to the center, sometimes a defensive position called nose guard which is a defensive lineman aligned on the offensive center

Gunner wide receivers on NFL punt team; assigned to immediately go to the punt returner on the snap to the punter; under NFL rules, only two players may go downfield before the ball is punted; receiving teams generally assign one or two defenders to prevent each gunner from leaving as soon as he wants; in high school rules, there is no limit of the number of punt-team members who can go downfield when the ball is snapped to the punter

H

H fullback in a two-back offense or inside receiver, that is a slot back or wing back, in a one-back offense; the non-fullback meaning is associated with Redskins coach Joe Gibbs

Halfback smaller, faster running back who aligned behind guard or tackle in T-formation era; also used in that play-both-ways era to describe defensive backs who are now called cornerbacks

Halfback pass same as tailback pass

Halves pass coverage scheme in which each safety has to cover half of the field

Handoff you know what it means; I just put it here to show you that it has no hyphen (source: *Sports Illustrated*)

Hands team kickoff receive team whose front two rows consist of players who normally catch passes; typically sent in when an onside kick is expected; arguably should **always** be in on the grounds that the kickoff team can kick onside at any time

Hard count cadence used by a quarterback to try to get a member of the defense to jump offside; typically used on third or fourth down when the line to gain for a first down is five or fewer yards away; accomplished by an unexpected increase in the loudness of a "hut," rapid sequences, and other means; using hard counts successfully is a subtle art form that even those most skilled at it may not be able to explain fully; bobbing the head, which often accompanies a hard count, is illegal

Hash field markings between which the ball must be placed for all free kicks and scrimmage plays; when a scrimmage or pass play ends outside the hash, the officials move the ball to the nearest hash before giving the ready-to-play signal; in the NFL, they are coincident with the uprights of the goal post; in college, they are 60 feet from the sideline; in high school and youth, they are 53 feet 4 inches from the sidelines and divide the field into equal thirds; approximately 85% of all scrimmage plays originate from the hash marks

Hash position location of the ball with regard to the hashes; e.g., left, right, or middle

Help a teammate who is both positioned and mentally available so that he can help you defend against a play; by mentally available, I mean that he does not have another responsibility, like being in man pass coverage, that would prevent him from helping you stop a play; when you have help, you can be more aggressive on the side of the offensive player away from the help if your help is to your inside, you can be more aggressive at taking away a play to the outside; if your help is to your outside, you can be more aggressive to your inside; and if your help is deep you can be more aggressive at stepping between the receiver and the quarterback; defenders who have no help are often described as being “on an island;” coaches sometimes describe the sideline as your only help; that means you have no teammate help, but you can still lean a little toward defending the inside on the grounds that the receiver is limited to the outside by the sideline; on the other hand, a ball carrier only needs about a six-inch wide alley of fair territory to run through so the sideline is not much help

Highest point altitude at which a receiver or pass defender ought to catch a pass when an opposing player is in the vicinity; this situation is analogous to a rebound in basketball; no basketball player would ever wait for the ball to come down to chest level in such a situation, but receivers and pass defenders often do because they often are alone when the ball comes down; the phrase is used by coaches to teach players that when they are not alone, it is a “jump ball” situation, they must make sure they out jump the opposing player

Hit and quit mistake by a blocker, namely, blocking his assigned defender briefly then stopping before the whistle, typically so he can turn around and watch the ball carrier; a form of football loafing

Hitch pass route in which the receiver runs straight upfield at full speed as if going deep then stops and comes back toward the quarterback to catch a pass that was thrown before he stopped; a typical hitch pass would have the receiver take five steps then come back while the quarterback was doing a three-step drop and throwing on time on the third step; indicated when the defense is giving the receiver a large cushion

Hole predesignated point of attack for an offensive play; typically numbered 2, 4, 6, and 8 on the right and 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9 on the left; No one can explain why five numbers are used on the left but only four on the right; probably caused by an aversion to using the number 0 or because 0 is already used for plays that go directly over the center like a midline option; a common play-naming system would number the running backs from 1 to 5 and attach the hole number to complete the play, e.g., 26 would be the 2 back (tailback) going through the 6 hole (right side off tackle)

Hook pass route in which the receiver goes straight downfield around five steps then abruptly comes back toward the passer

Hook and ladder short for hook and lateral

Hook and lateral offensive trick play in which a receiver runs a hook pattern and after catching the ball, laterals it to a teammate who is running around him to the outside; sometimes called a flea flicker

Horizontal stretch an offensive player who forces a defender to defend the part of the field near a sideline by aligning there before the snap or running a pass route or decoy route to that area

Hot pass a very quick pass to an offensive pass receiver who is running a replacement route to a spot vacated by a defensive pass rusher

Hot receiver offensive pass receiver assigned to run a hot route in case a particular defender rushes the passer

Hot route a pass route run by a receiver as a result of a designated defender rushing the passer; because no offensive player is assigned to block that rusher, the quarterback must throw “hot,” that is, very quickly to a receiver who runs a replacement route to the spot the rusher vacated thereby replacing the defender there

Huddle tight grouping of eleven players on the field for the purpose of communicating the subsequent offensive play or defensive call; also used prior to kicking plays; unsound to huddle when trailing and the game clock is running; may have been invented by Gallaudet University, a school for deaf people, to prevent defenses from seeing the hand signals used to call play; which begs the question of why hearing teams use huddles; I never use them

Hurry-up game tempo in which the offense tries to call timeout as soon as possible after the previous play or tries to snap the ball as soon as possible after the ready-to-play signal; generally accompanied by efforts to stop the clock like getting out of bounds or preferring an incomplete pass to being sacked; See my book [*Football Clock Management*](#) for detailed discussion of the hurry-up offense



I offensive formation in which two or three backs are aligned behind the quarterback and center

In a) pass route that goes straight upfield then inward parallel to the yard lines b) direction toward the center and away from the sideline

Indirect snap football snap in which the center snaps the ball to a quarterback who has his hands under the center, used by all variations of the T and I formations as well as in the indirect snap version of the double wing; this is the most common type of snap in football since the mid-Twentieth Century; prior to that time, the **direct** snap was most common

Ineligible receiver interior offensive linemen; offensive centers, guards, and tackles; offensive linemen who are not the end man on the line of scrimmage and therefore not permitted to catch a forward pass; must wear jersey numbers between 50 and 79

Influence block a reverse-psychology block in which you pretend to block the defender as if the play was a pass when it is a run or vice versa or you pretend to block him in one direction when you really want to block him in the other direction; a well-coached, disciplined defender will react quickly to and fight through your block, but his reaction will be incorrect since your block is “incorrect,” albeit deliberately so; an influence block should be a disastrously bad idea against a poorly coached or poorly disciplined defender; he will neither notice nor react to it; it should work best against a well-coached, disciplined team; I always thought it would be a good way to attack our legendary local high school, De La Salle of Concord, CA.

Inside-out pursuit one or two defenders must be assigned to stop cutbacks by ball carriers; to do that, they lag a yard or so inside a ball carrier who is running wide; usually done by linebackers

Inside trap misdirection offensive play like a counter only the misdirection usually involves only one or two steps and the point of attack is usually the A or B gap; outside of hole is blocked with a trap block; especially effective against an overly hard charging defensive lineman

Inside zone play see zone play

Interference (the old-time blocking kind) interfere is an old-time term that means to prevent a defender from tackling your ball carrier in open space. When I was a kid in the 1950s, we played sandlot tackle football all the time. We literally did not know that touch football existed, let alone flag. Running interference meant running along with a ball carrier so that your position—usually a little ahead of and a little inside the ball carrier—got in the way of the defender trying to block him. If the defender tried to go around the interferer, the ball carrier would read that and cut around the interferer’s other side. We did it all the time in the 1950s—and sandlot football had no adult coaches. Every kid back then knew what running interference meant. Every kid knew how to do it. It worked great and involved little or no contact. It was just positioning. Yet if you ever see it in a ball game nowadays, it just seems to be a momentary accident. Coach’s play diagrams never diagram interference, only blocks, even though interference lasts for several seconds. Coaches constantly ask players to sustain blocks, but they forgot about running interference, which is a classic sustained “block” that players can actually do as opposed to the mythical sustained block which is very difficult to pull off in reality.

Interior line offensive centers, guards, and tackles

Invert assigning cornerbacks to shallow pass responsibilities; also called “cloud coverage” when referring to pass defense; normally, cornerbacks cover **deep** passes; when inverted, they cover **shallow** passes to the flat

Iso short for isolation play, same as lead play

Isolation same as lead play

J

Jab step a quick open step away from the direction the offensive back ultimately intends to go, used to misdirect one or more defenders or necessitated by the timing of the play to prevent the offensive back from arriving somewhere too soon

Jersey numbers by rule, must be 50-79 for interior offensive linemen; 1-49 and 80-99 for eligible receivers, not required in high school scrimmage-kick (punt and field goal) formations; by convention, certain number groups are usually reserved for certain positions; in his book *Watching Football*, Moose Johnston says 1-19 are for quarterbacks, place kickers, and punters and some receivers, 20-49 for running backs and defensive backs, 50-59 for centers and linebackers, 60-79 for guards, tackles, and defensive linemen; 80-89 for tight ends and wide receivers; and 90-99 for defensive linemen; I would say 20-29 are generally for tailbacks and 30-49 are usually for fullbacks

K

Key **noun:** opposing player whose movement is observed in order to make a decision about how to play against his team; generally, all defenders key on designated offensive players related to their defensive responsibilities; also two defenders are the dive key and pitch key for the quarterback when he runs a triple-option play; **verb:** use of an opposing player’s movement to make a decision

Key breaker offensive play designed to cause a defender to lose confidence in a particular key or to take advantage of a defender who is keying on a certain action by an offensive player; in the single wing offense, key breakers are called “wrong-way plays;” for example, a jab step by a tailback often indicates a counter **boot** play **toward** the jab-step side or a **counter** play **away** from the jab-step side; the contain man on the jab-step side should key on the jab step and when he sees it, assume counter boot and blast off toward the quarterback; this suggests a key breaker of a jab step by the tailback followed by an off-tackle play to the jab-step side; the defensive contain man who charges deep into the offensive backfield to stop the boot when he sees the jab step would take himself out of the off-tackle play

Kick-out block fullback off-tackle block that blocks the defensive EMLOS outward; correct response by defender is to attack the fullback’s outside jersey number with his inside shoulder

Kick step same as bucket step

Kneel down offensive play in which the quarterback drops to a knee after taking the snap; appropriate when the time, downs, and opponent timeouts remaining are such that the leading offensive team need gain no more first downs to win; also sometimes used at the end of the first half when the offense needs no more first downs to run out the remaining time in the half and they conclude that their field position is such that trying to score before half would be overly risky

L

Lane a) area of responsibility of a member of a punt or kickoff team; width of the lane is the width of the field divided by the number of kick team members assigned to lanes; b) area of responsibility of a member of the defensive line or linebacker during an apparent drop-back pass play to prevent a draw play

Large-split rule if your defense aligns in shades or nose-up on the offensive linemen, they must have a large-split rule; a large split rule says that if the split between the offensive lineman and his teammate to the inside is greater than a certain distance, we no longer align nose-up or in a shade; rather, we move into the middle of the gap; a varsity coach I coached under once drew the conclusion that his opponent did **not** have a large-split rule; he told his offensive linemen to widen their splits by one foot on every play; sure enough, the opposing defense remained in their nose-up or shade alignments leaving huge gaps in their defensive line; when the splits got to eight feet, my varsity coach stopped the widening out of pity

Lead offensive play in which a fullback goes through a bubble to block a linebacker followed by a ball carrier; also called an isolation, iso, or blast play; the phrase “lead option” is also used to describe a type of option play in which an offensive back goes around the end ahead of the ball carrier to block for him

Lead option speed-option play in which the pitchback has a lead blocker

Leverage like “eagle,” this is another football word the meaning of which exists only in the minds of the coaches who use it, if there; best I can tell, it means to either be in the right location or the right body position when blocking or defending; since that goes without saying, it is a meaningless admonition; I have heard it used to admonish a player who was **not low enough** in relation to the man he was trying to block or tackle; I have also heard it used to criticize a contain man who **let himself be flanked** by a blocker.

Linebacker defender who generally aligns “in the box” several yards from the line of scrimmage but aligns outside the box when he is assigned to cover a quick receiver other than the tight end

Line call verbal blocking instruction given by one offensive lineman or by the quarterback to other offensive linemen while they are aligned at the line of scrimmage just before the snap; used to adjust to unexpected defensive alignments or to adjust to a defense that uses multiple alignments during a game; roughly the offensive line equivalent of a quarterback audible or check-with-me play call; has adverse clock-management ramifications when the offense is in a hurry-up tempo

Line of scrimmage line parallel to the yard lines that stretches all the way across the field and passes through the forward (from the offense’s perspective) tip of the football before it is snapped; abbreviated as LOS

Line splits distance between feet of neighboring offensive linemen; some offenses like the single wing (See my book [Single-Wing Offense for Youth Football](#)) and double wing commonly use zero line splits, that is, the feet of adjacent linemen touch each other before the snap; other offenses, most notably the triple option and the spread, use wide splits on the theory that it enables their offensive linemen to simply maintain a hole that existed before the snap which is easier than trying to **make** a hole, especially when your team is overmatched by the defense; some modern pass-oriented offenses, most notably Texas Tech’s in the 2000s, have huge offensive line splits

Liz left, typically used for line calls or check with me to designate an overloading (by the defense) side of the line or which of two plays that can go left or right is to be used

Loaf not going full-speed or expending 100% of potential effort; typically done by selfish or poorly conditioned players who are not the focal point of the play in question; may occur in a well-conditioned, non-selfish player who is being overused

Loaf and leave pass pattern in which the receiver releases slowly off the line of scrimmage at the snap as if he is not involved in this play, then accelerates to full speed on a streak route

Log type of block; a log block is plan B of a trap block; if the blocker cannot block the target **outward**, he blocks him **inward** instead; this occurs when the defender in question does a good job of squeezing the hole and thereby prevents the trapblocker from getting an inside position on him

Lonesome polecat offense invented by Glenn Ellison and explained in his book *Run and Shoot Football*; formation is same as swinging gate

Long snap snap in which the ball travels at least four yards and as many as 18 yards on a line-drive trajectory; the long snapper’s head is down looking through his legs at the snap target; a special recent high school rule prevents defenders from hitting the long snapper until he has recovered from his head-between-the-legs position; used for scrimmage kicks, namely punts and field goals, and for single-wing or direct-snap double wing plays; often confused with the **shotgun** but different in that the long snapper looks through his legs as he snaps because of the need for pinpoint accuracy and speed

Long snapper specialist who only snaps for field goals and punts; now so valued that colleges recruit and pro teams hire players solely for their long-snapping abilities, the Giants lost a 1/5/03 NFC playoff game to the Niners because of two terrible long snaps by a reserve long snapper; the Niners had been down by 24 but won the game 39-38; University of Houston lost the hot-chicken-soup-for-Montana-at-halftime 1979 Cotton Bowl 35-34 to Notre Dame because their long snappers were all injured and the replacement made two bad long snaps that Notre Dame turned into touchdowns

Long trap trap where the trap blocker is on the back side of the play and his blocking target is the defensive EMLOS

Look-in a slant pass route with no stem; receiver runs inside at a 45-degree angle starting on his first step after the snap

Look in and tuck receiver drill in which receiver is to keep his eyes on the ball until he has secured it into the ball-carrying position

Looking concerned a technique used by offensive players who either do not know whom to block or who do not wish to block anyone; when the ball is snapped, they get into a good athletic position and hop around looking concerned although never making contact with any member of the opposing team; the purpose of this technique is to avoid collisions while appearing to casual observers to be playing hard; typically detected while watching film or during a game when an observer focuses on a particular player throughout a play; in view of the fact that such observations almost invariably inspire the coach in question to utter an expletive, coaches should not watch film or focus on a particular player when children or others who should not be exposed to such language are present

Loop defensive stunt in which a linebacker blitzes through a gap that is one or two gaps away from where he was aligned before the snap

LOS abbreviation of line of scrimmage

M

M a) letter used to designate a middle linebacker in a diagram of a defense b) abbreviation for mike or monster

Man type of blocking or pass coverage; in man blocking, the offensive player is assigned to block a particular defender by position and he must block that defender no matter what path the defender takes; in man pass coverage, the defender is assigned to cover a particular receiver and must cover him no matter where he goes as long as the play might still be a pass play to that receiver; also called man-to-man

Man free see “cover 1”

Man-to-Man same as man

Man under see “cover 1;” as with many football terms, the word “under” is superfluous; there is no such thing as “man over”

Max protect short for maximum protection

Maximum protection having backs and/or tight ends pass block instead of running pass routes; one possible solution when the number of possible pass rushers exceeds the number of blockers available; alternative for dealing with an extra pass rusher is hot protection

Middle screen what it sounds like; a screen pass to a receiver who is around where the quarterback was before he received the snap

Midline option same as freeze option

Mike nickname of defensive linebacker position than starts with M like middle linebacker or monster

Misdirection play a type of offensive play that seems to head in one direction, then goes in another; reverses, traps, and counters are misdirection plays; may involve faking to one back going one way and giving to another back going another way or may involve change of direction by a back

Monster word used by some coaches as the position name for the strong safety or an inside linebacker; in particular, used in the book *Slanting Monster Defense in Football* by Dale Foster

Motion movement by no more than one player at the time of the snap; all players must be motionless for at least one second before the motion man begins his motion; at the time of the snap, he must be going sideways or away from the line of scrimmage, not toward it; purposes include facilitating receiver release against tight press pass coverage, outnumbering at the point of attack a team that aligns correctly **prior** to motion but fails to **adjust** properly to motion, finding out whether the defense is in **man or zone pass defense**, achieving a favorable receiver-defender matchup against a team that is using zone pass defense, forcing opponents who scout you to spend more practice time teaching their defenders how to adjust to your motions; the fly offense uses motion to the quarterback on every play; the double-wing offense generally motions into a tight wing-T formation at the time of the snap

Move the pile a ball carrier hitting more than one defender so hard and/or in a prolonged way such that the defenders move backward

Move the pocket an offensive play design in which the protection for the passer is located other than the usual area straight behind the center

Muff touching the ball by a receive-team member during a failed attempt to catch a kick; may be recovered, but not advanced, by the kicking team

N

Naked a play in which a quarterback carrying the ball runs outside in a belly path and is not accompanied by a blocker

Nasty split a line split that tries to **almost** trigger the defense's large-split rule; that is, it has the offensive lineman widen as much as possible without triggering the defender's large-split rule; most often done by tight ends and wings because defensive contain men are the most afraid of any offensive player getting to their immediate outside; if the contain man does **not** move into the gap, the off-tackle play is greatly aided by a nasty split; if he **does** move into the gap, the sweep is greatly aided by a nasty split

Near typically an offensive player who is aligned on the same side of the center as the play side or as a particular defensive player; e.g., a linebacker typically keys on the near offensive back but directs his vision to the far back to check for a counter play if the near back flows to the other side of the center at the beginning of the play; can also be the name of a formation in which an offensive back is offset to the side of the tight end

Neutral zone an area delineated vertically by the length of the football stretching horizontally from side line to side line; no one is allowed to have any part of his body in the neutral zone, except the center, between the ready-to-play signal and the snap; in college and pros, a defender who penetrates the neutral zone before the snap has not violated the rules if he gets back before the snap; in high school, getting back before the snap does not negate the infraction

Next level a) next deeper set of defenders in the sequence of defensive line, linebackers, and defensive backs b) next higher football team in the sequence youth, high school, college, and pro

Nickel back defensive back substituted into a game in a passing situation to replace a linebacker thereby resulting in a defense with five rather than the normal four defensive backs; mostly a college or pro term

Nickel package the whole defense when a nickel back has been substituted for a linebacker

North-south perpendicular to the yard lines; toward the goal line; football fields are generally located so that their long axis runs north-south; ball carriers should generally follow a north-south path as much as possible even to the extent of charging through defenders when necessary; opposite of east-west; a ball carrier who runs north-south is sometimes called a "salmon" after the habit of salmon to swim upstream

Number blocking man-to-man blocking rules in which defenders are numbered, typically from the outside in, and each offensive blocker is assigned to block a particular defender by number; typical of option offenses; contraindicated when the defensive alignment cannot be predicted in advance or if they stem just before the snap; it can generally be predicted by teams that use the option because that offense more or less forces the defense to stay in just a few alignments and to refrain from blitzing



O a) symbol used to designate offensive players in a diagram; the Os in the phrases "Xs and Os" (Xs are no longer used in football diagrams) Exception: centers are often designated by a square or circle or square with an X in it b) when used after the word "power" refers to a play in which all playside offensive linemen block to the inside and the backside guard pulls and traps out on the playside defensive EMLOS

Odd defensive front in which there is a nose and therefore an odd number of defensive linemen

Offset I two-back formation in which the tailback is behind the quarterback but the fullback is offset to one side or the other behind the guard or tackle; sometimes called near or far or strong or weak indicating the offset fullback is nearer to or farther from the tight end side

Offside laymen's terminology for what officials call "encroachment"

OIL blocking acronym for a mythological blocking rule; the letters stand for "on, inside, linebacker" and supposedly tell an offensive lineman to block the man on him and if there is no man on him to block the first defensive lineman to his inside and if there is no defensive lineman to his inside to block the first linebacker to his inside; obviously, the words "on" and "inside" must be defined more precisely; likely definitions would be that "on" means a defensive lineman whose nose is aligned from your nose to your inside shoulder and "inside" means a defensive lineman whose nose is in the gap to your inside or on the outside shoulder of the teammate to your inside; this rule is widely used by **youth coaches** who have never thought it through; it allows for no pulling and trapping; it permits no double-team blocking; it allows no cross or fold blocks; it allows no base blocking to the outside for dive or lead plays that attack a bubble; it is useless for the **center** who, by definition, has no "inside;" it does not work if more than one defender align in an area that is one offensive player's "on" or "inside" area; it has all offensive linemen blocking in an **inside** direction which makes you wonder who's blocking defenders who align **outside** the nose of the EMLOS; it is too predictable; it is susceptible to slanting by defensive linemen through the wake of the offensive linemen who are themselves all slanting inside; it probably only makes sense for playside guards and tackles in a power off-tackle play featuring a kick-out block by a fullback or a counter play featuring a pulling guard from the backside; this rule could generally only be used by playside guards and tackles and then only for some plays going to a B or C gap and only against some defenses; it is absurd to do, as many youth coaching staffs do, and use OIL as their sole blocking scheme for all positions on all plays against all defenses

Okie short for Oklahoma defense

Oklahoma name of a defensive drill; which drill? I do not know. It sometimes seems as if half the competitive drills in football are called, "The Oklahoma Drill;" I have heard it applied to two-against-two, three-against-three, and four-against-four competitive drills held inside a five- or ten-yard square; in those drills, a ball carrier and one or more blockers tries to get to the other side of the square against an equal number of defensive players; I have also heard it used to describe a

drill in which a single ball carrier runs along a line of blocking dummies lying on the ground then chooses an alley between two of them and cuts upfield to run through it while a single defender moves sideways until the ball carrier cuts then tries to tackle the ball carrier in the alley; in Doug Mallory's *Football Drill Book*, he defines it as an offensive lineman, quarterback, and running back against a single defender; the running back receives a handoff from the quarterback then tries to run between two stand-up dummies three yards apart with the help of a base block by the offensive lineman on the single defender; the books *101 Defensive Back Drills*, *AFCA's Offensive Football Drills*, and Donald Fuoss' *Complete Handbook of Winning Football Drills* make no mention of any Oklahoma drill

Oklahoma defense a 5-4-2 zone pass defense invented by Oklahoma coach Bud Wilkinson to stop his own split-T triple-option offense which was increasingly being copied by his opponents; Wilkinson's split-T teams set the still-standing NCAA Division I-A consecutive wins record of 47; similar to the defenses currently used by coaches Pete Carroll, Monte Kiffin and Lyle Setenich

One back an offensive backfield with one running back other than the quarterback behind the offensive interior line

Open status of a receiver who has no defenders near him

Open pivot initial quarterback 90-degree spin right after he receives the snap and begins to move to a handoff, option read, or pass drop; in the open pivot, the quarterback immediately faces the direction where he will be going or handing the ball off; commonly used for the dive, lead, and power plays as well as option plays other than counter and counter option; opposite of reverse pivot

Open step a lateral step by a player with the foot on the side to which he is turning; e.g., a player taking a first open step while turning to his right would step with his right foot; opposite of crossover step; used by most players in most situations and by offensive backs when maximum distance and speed on their first step are not necessary or to begin a sequence of steps which requires them to cut a particular direction on a particular step, e.g., the first step of an inside-trap play by a fullback is usually an open step because he needs to cut the other direction off that step and does not want to get too far away from the quarterback because he is getting the ball during the second step

Option play in which an offensive ball carrier has the choice of keeping the ball or passing, handing, or tossing it to a teammate; typically a triple option, speed option, or run-pass option play; a defender who serves as an option key need not be blocked; rather, he will be eliminated from the play by making him attack a player who no longer has the ball when he arrives at that player; option running plays, in effect, give the offense an extra player in comparison to other indirect-snap offenses in which the quarterback hands the ball off or tosses it to another offensive player so early that the defenders can generally ignore the quarterback thereafter; also the run-pas option play where the ball carrier has the option to either run or pass depending upon which looks best at the moment

Out a) pass route that goes straight upfield then outward toward the sideline; sometimes the outward route comes slightly back toward the line of scrimmage b) direction away from the center toward the sideline

Outside handoff exchange in which the ball is handed off in an away-from-the-line-of-scrimmage direction

Outside zone play see zone play

Over alignment of a player on the other side of the center from where he normally aligns; usually refers to a cornerback who aligns on the other side of the center because there is no wide receiver on his side and there is more than one wide receiver on the other side or an interior lineman who aligns on the other side of the center thereby creating an unbalanced line

P

P abbreviation for punter

Passing tree a diagram of all of a team's pass routes along with their names; typically, it is necessary to put the wide receiver routes on one page, the tight end routes on another, and the running back routes on a third; called a "tree" because most routes have a "stem" above which the routes branch out in different directions at different depths; there are slight variations between the passing trees of different teams, but there are more similarities than differences

Pattern group of individual pass routes used in combination during a particular play; a single receiver can run a pass route but only two or more receivers can run a pass pattern

Peelback block block by a receiver who is downfield against a defender who is closer to the line of scrimmage; typically, the play involves a completed pass to a receiver who is less deep than the blocker or a wide running play; the effectiveness of the block is enhanced by the fact that the defender is focused on the ball carrier and does not expect a blocker to come from deeper downfield; illegal if below the waist; the blocker must take care to avoid blocking the defender in the back; sometimes, the blocker can get the defender to face him by yelling, "Hey!" just before he arrives

Penetration movement by a defender past the offensive line into the offensive backfield; devastating to some plays like the option, traps and counters

Perimeter just outside the EMLOS, also called the "edge"

Pick a) illegal offensive pass pattern in which one receiver blocks the defender covering another pass receiver in order to enable that receiver to get open b) slang for interception

Pitch a) generally means the same as toss although some teams use both terms to describe slightly different plays b) act of pitching the ball on a lob trajectory to a pitchback in the triple-option or speed-option play or called pitch play

Pitchback in an option offensive play, the offensive back who gets into and maintains a pitch relationship with the quarterback so that he can receive a pitch if the quarterback decides to make one

Pitch relationship relationship between a quarterback and a pitchback on an option play; typically, the pitchback is around four yards outside and four yards behind the quarterback; many coaches prescribe different distances for his pitch relationship. In some cases, the pitchback gets ahead of the quarterback in which case the pitch is a forward pass.

PK abbreviation for place kicker

Place-kick punt this is my own invention; the 2/05 *Scholastic Coach* magazine contained an article I wrote about it; very simply, teams should place kick out of bounds on fourth down when they are out of field-goal range instead of punting; the only exception would be a **quick kick**; although missed field goals from outside the defense's 20-yard line cause the receiving team to get the ball at the opponent's prior line of scrimmage at the **college and pro** levels, place kicks that go out of bounds are **not** missed field goals; in the absence of a missed field goal, the rule for college and pro is the same as high school: the receiving team **gets the ball where it went out of bounds**; place kicks go about 15 yards farther than punts, bounce the right direction, are more accurate, get off in 1.4 seconds rather than 2.0, and are never backed up; my 2004 high school freshman did it with the expected success; no one ever should have punted in the past and no one should ever punt in the future other than for quick kicks; it's not my opinion, it's arithmetic; see my article at www.johntreed.com/placekickpunt.html.

Platooning having one set of players play offense and a completely different set play defense; platooning is standard with rare exceptions at the college and pro levels; platooning became standard when unlimited substitution rules were adopted during World War II and again after a brief return to restricted substitution after the war; platooning is the opposite of playing both ways; partial platooning with some players going both ways is standard at the high school and youth levels; strict platooning at the high school or youth levels is typically a mistaken attempt to imitate college or pro teams which have a vastly larger pool of talent from which to draw and are teams where a player who could make first-string at more than one position on two sides of the ball is extremely rare

Play action a pass play which starts with a fake running play; should be hyphenated when used as an adjective as in "play-action pass"

Play clock clock that keeps track of how many seconds have elapsed since the ready-to-play signal; at the NFL level, the play clock usually starts at the end of the previous play and runs for 40 seconds; at the other levels and after official's time outs in the NFL, it runs for 25 seconds; in college and high school games it always runs for 25 seconds but is not started until the referee's ready-to-play signal after the ball has been placed and the officials are lined up ready for the next play; failure to snap the ball before the end of the play clock results in a delay-of-game penalty against the offense; at the college and pro levels, there must be a visible play clock at each end zone; in high school rules, visible play clocks are not required and are often banned by league rule as an unfair home field advantage; in high school, one official uses a stopwatch or special timer as the play clock; see my book *Football Clock Management* for far more detail

Playside the side of the center to which the ball carrier is going; also called "on" side

Pocket protected cup-shaped or U-shaped area formed by offensive lineman and backs so quarterback has time to find an open receiver and throw a pass

Point of attack location among the defense where the offense plans to go with the ball either by running or passing

Pooch kick a punt that is designed to land around the five or ten yard line in spite of the fact that the punter could kick it much farther; replacement for the "coffin corner kick" although I have no idea why; coffin-corner kicks generally worked; pooch kicks rarely do; the objective is to give the opponent the worst possible starting position; that is done by downing the ball inside the ten-yard line—which is the goal of a pooch kick—or by causing the kick to go out of bounds inside the ten-yard line—which is the goal of the coffin-corner kick; if the kick goes into the end zone it is a touchback and the receiving team gets to put it into play at their own 20-yard line

Possession series of plays in which one team continues to possess the ball on offense; also called a drive

Possession receiver receiver who is used frequently to gain the third-down yardage needed to get a first down thereby enabling his team to retain possession of the ball for another series; most commonly tight end, wings, and slot backs; the name assumes that the yardage needed is relatively short; in 3rd-**&-long** situations, there is no special name for the players who are used to gain the needed yardage for a first down

Post pass route in which the receiver cuts inside at a 45-degree or smaller angle after a stem of typically eight yards; so-called because the change of direction puts the receiver on a path toward the goal post; common route for the middle of three deep receivers against cover two

Post-corner pass route in which the receiver fakes a post route momentarily before cutting outward at a 45-degree angle toward the corner of the end zone; previously called post-flag route because the corners of the end zones were marked with flags mounted on springs; nowadays pylons are used to mark the corners of the end zones, but no one has begun calling this a pylon route.

Power a) short for power play which is a strong-side off-tackle play that involves a fullback blocking for the ball-carrying tailback b) the simplest series of the single-wing offense; no fancy-ball-handling plays (See my book [Single-Wing Offense for Youth Football](#))

Power G off-tackle power play in which the key block on the outside of the point of attack is by a pulling guard and other play side offensive lineman block inward; requires somewhat athletic pulling guard

Power I full-house offensive formation with a fullback and tailback aligned behind the quarterback and center and a power back at the depth of the fullback and aligned behind a guard or tackle, usually used with two tight ends; typically used in short-yardage situations for power running between the tight ends

Power play offensive lead play that attacks the strong-side C gap; blocking schemes vary according to coach choice and/or alignment of the defense; also called off-tackle play

Power X off-tackle power play in which the key blocks on each side of the point of attack are a cross block; indicated when there is a defensive lineman in the C gap which is the point of attack

Press same as bump pass coverage

Pre-snap read visual evaluation of the alignment and personnel of the defense by the quarterback or other eligible receiver including running backs prior to the snap; the purpose is to make preliminary decisions about where to go or where to throw the football and/or for the quarterback to call an audible

Prevent defense defense which has an abnormally high number of defensive backs who often align deeper than normal and an abnormally low number of pass rushers; typically used late in a game by a leading team against an offense that is outside the red zone; often criticized glibly by broadcasters as “preventing” you from winning; they really ought to do a study of the use of prevent defense and the results before making that comment; one logical argument would be that the defense ought to do that which got them the lead in the prior portion of that game; however, it is equally logical to say that the offense that is down by a score or two late in a game and far from scoring position is likely to call only plays with big-play potential, which is different than they were doing earlier in the game; therefore it makes sense to get into a bend-don’t-break, defensive configuration that is optimized to stop big plays; if any criticism of the prevent defense is valid in general, it may be that it is not practiced enough and is therefore not ready for prime time; in that case, it would be **execution, not** the prevent defensive **alignment** *per se*, that is the problem

Here is an answer I sent to a reader who had the usual criticism about the prevent:

I have neither done a study on the subject nor heard of any such study. The idea is that you know the opponent will probably throw long passes so you should be in a defense that prevents completion of long passes. Arguably, a sack also does that, but to rush more than five guys, you have to go to man pass coverage and that often creates match-ups that favor the offense. By rushing fewer than six, the defense can do at least some zone pass coverage which eliminates unfavorable-to-the-defense, one-on-one match-ups. In a given game, coaches should probably think about what is likely to work best versus that opponent and do it rather than always go to prevent. But all things being equal, a zone pass defense biased against long passes makes some sense in prevent situations.

Pro set an offensive two-back formation with a tight end and flanker on one side of the center and a split end on the other

Protection blocking for a play that keeps the ball in the offensive backfield for an extended period of time compared to a normal running play, i.e., passes and scrimmage kicks

Pull movement by an interior offensive lineman in which he steps slightly backward on his first step while turning 90 degrees then runs along the line of scrimmage to block a distant defender

Pursuit movement by all defenders either to designated locations or to the ball after a pass has been thrown, a ball carrier has broken contain, or a tackle has been begun; correct pursuit includes each defender taking correct paths and angles as well as moving at maximum speed; good pursuit is a manifestation of a disciplined, well-coached team



Quads offensive no-back formation in which there are four receivers on one side; either a tight end and three flankers or a split end and three slots; the other side has a tight end

Quarterback-sweep-slide play same as sweep-slide play

Quarters cover 4 pass defense

Quick kick misnomer for a punt that is done from a non-punt formation; so named because in the early part of the Twentieth Century, teams would frequently kick on first, second, or third down according to field position; a better name would be “surprise punt” because it can be done on any down including fourth; the surprise would stem from doing it out of a **non-punt formation**; should be far more common than it is; for years I routinely had my teams execute “fourth-down quick kicks” in which we lined up as if to run or pass on fourth down, invariably inspiring the opposing coaches to yell, “They’re going for it!” then, after the opposing punt returner moved up to a safety position, we would punt it over his head; later, the opposing team would put a guy deep to receive the punt even when we were in a non-punt formation on fourth down and we would run a pass or run play; the quick kick is the mother of all vertical stretch tactics

Quick receiver a receiver who aligns on the line of scrimmage or no more than one yard off the line of scrimmage and outside of the offensive line; backs in the backfield are not quick receivers; all other receivers are quick receivers

Quick side weak side; the term is used by some coaches because “weak side” sounds wimpy to persons not familiar with football terminology, like girls in whom the weakside players are interested

Quints a quads formation with a split end away from the quads side

Q-in pass route in which the receiver initially goes outward at a 45-degree angle then spins 225 degrees ending up heading straight inward toward the middle of the field, if the receiver is on the left, the spin is counterclockwise; if on the right, clockwise

Q-out pass route in which the receiver initially goes inward at a 45-degree angle then spins 225 degrees ending up heading straight outward toward the sideline, if the receiver is on the right, the spin is counterclockwise; if on the left, clockwise, also called a “twirl”

R

R abbreviation for rover

Reach **noun:** a) type of block in which the offensive player tries to get his helmet to the outside hip of the defender in question; b) zone play in which the quarterback hurries to the running back who is running from the tailback position to the outside edge of the offensive line; the quarterback typically has to reach by extending his arms full length to get the ball to the ball carrier in time; this play typically uses reach or tandem blocks by the playside offensive linemen; **verb:** the act of a blocker getting his helmet to the outside hip of a defender

Read action in which a football player watches one or more opponents in order to make a decision on what he should do next; refers to quarterbacks reading defenders in order to tell whom to throw to or whether to throw at all, defenders reading behavior of offensive players in order to diagnose an offensive play, and the quarterback’s decisions on whether to give the ball to a dive back, keep it, or pitch it to a pitchback when running the option play

Reduced front defensive line alignment where the defensive end and defensive tackle move inward on the weak side compared to where they would line up on the strong side, the defensive end is on the outside shoulder of the weak side offensive tackle and the weak side defensive tackle is in or shaded into the weak side B gap

Red zone from the goal line to the 20 yard line on the defending team’s side of midfield, requires change in tactics by both offense and defense because of the inability to run deep pass routes or punt as far as the punter can kick and the elevated probability of an offensive score

Release a) departure of a pass receiver from his pre-snap position to his pass route; the word is generally not applied unless the defender is in tight, press or bump-and-run pass coverage which means he is trying to prevent or delay the receiver from releasing; accordingly, receivers practice release techniques for escaping such defender tactics; b) deciding where to throw and throwing of a pass by a quarterback as in, “Dan Marino had one of the quickest releases ever.”

Replacement route a pass route in which the receiver replaces a particular defender by running to the spot vacated by the defender when he departed to rush the passer

Reverse offensive misdirection play in which a ball carrier goes many steps in one direction then hands or pitches the ball to a quick receiver running the opposite direction; can use inside or outside handoff

Reverse pivot spinning move executed by a quarterback right after receiving the snap; 270-degree spin; for example, if a quarterback wanted to toss to a tailback sweeping to the right, he would spin counterclockwise and use the momentum of his spin to impart speed to the toss; generally used to toss the ball to a tailback on a toss sweep; also to fake the sweep and hand off to a fullback running an inside trap; also the start of the Houston veer counter and counter option plays; sometimes used to give a slight misdirection effect to a dive play; opposite of open pivot; one of the most famous plays in football history—the “Miracle at the Meadowlands”—was a dive with a reverse pivot; many believe that the reverse pivot, which is slightly trickier than an open pivot, contributed to the Giants’ fumble on the handoff and Eagles game-winning touchdown; that play also caused the invention of the “Victory Formation”

Rip a) right, typically used for line calls or check with me to designate an overloading (by the defense) side of the line or which of two plays that can go left or right is to be used b) move by a defensive lineman or a receiver trying to escape tight press coverage; involves ripping up with the arm closest to the blocker or bump pass defender to prevent him from holding or pushing you

Roger right, typically used for line calls or check with me to designate an overloading (by the defense) side of the line or which of two plays that can go left or right is to be used

Roll-out pass pass “drop” in which the quarterback runs medium speed backward and outward (bellies back) wide to one side and throws a pass on the run or after setting up; may involve a play-action run fake handoff

Roll-up corner cornerback alignment in which the cornerback has a small cushion vis a vis the receiver

Route pass path run by a single receiver; can be pronounced **either** to rhyme with “out” or like the word “root;” the sixties TV show *Route 66* had a theme song that became a hit record; in the song, they pronounce it like “root” in the line, “Get your kicks on Route 66.” I prefer that pronunciation because in the Army, my first job after college, “route” pronounced to rhyme with “out” was a derogatory term for a lousy unit as in, “route-step outfit;” a pass **route** is distinguished from a **pattern** which is the combination of the several routes run by all the receivers on a particular play; in other words, a pass pattern is a group of individual pass routes

Rover used by some coaches as the position name for a linebacker, often the weak-side inside linebacker

Rub pass route in which one receiver deliberately gets in the way of, but avoids touching, the defender covering a fellow pass receiver; legal version of the illegal pick play

Run and shoot offense that relies on choice or sight-adjustment passes; receiver breaks away from defender after reading defender's initial movement; quarterback sees the same movement by the defender and anticipates which way the receiver will break from practice experience; neither receiver nor quarterback know before the play starts which way the receiver will break; invented by Glenn Ellison and/or Mouse Davis; Ellison invented predecessor offense which he calls the "lonesome polecat" and which features a center-eligible formation more commonly known as the swinging gate; the phrase "run and shoot" seems to have been discredited as an offense, but sight adjustments and choice passes live on as parts of offenses known by other names

Run-pass option offensive play in which quarterback or other ball carrier rolls out to the side and has the option to run or pass the ball on the run

Run through lateral movement by a linebacker who changes direction and runs through a gap in the offensive line in an attempt to tackle a ball carrier in the backfield for a loss

Run to daylight advice to ball carriers to avoid defenders as they proceed toward the goal line; in youth and high school football it is often a technique employed by blockers who wish to avoid contact with opposing players while appearing to be trying hard

Rush end defensive end whose main job is to rush the passer; typically a pro or college approach to the position

S

S abbreviation for sam or safety or strong safety

Sack tackle of a quarterback before he can throw a pass; Marv Levy says he was present when then this use of the word was coined by Hall of Fame coach George Allen. Allen's team was playing a team whose quarterback was Craig Morton. Before the game, Allen told his players they were going to pressure Morton and toss him around like a "sack of Morton salt;" a coverage sack is such a tackle caused by the defensive backs doing a good job of covering the receivers on the play;

Safety defensive player aligned on or near the interior offensive line from about four yards to about 12 yards deep according to the scheme and game situation; also a play which results in two points for the defense when the offense is tackled in the end zone or throws or carries the ball out of the side or back of the end zone (see rule book for precise definition) (see the intentional safety chapter in my book *Football Clock Management* for far more detail)

Safety valve pass route typically for a running back in which he moves to a spot near the quarterback in case the quarterback cannot find a receiver in a more desirable location to throw to

Sally naked bootleg; named after legendary stripper Sally Rand

Sam nickname for positions starting with the letter S like strong-side inside or outside linebacker or strong safety

Scat pass protection in which a running back is assigned to block one possible rushing linebacker or safety and another potential rushing linebacker or safety is dealt with via a hot pass if he also rushes; also used in the phrase scat back to describe a small, quick running back

Scheme offense, defense, and special teams play books

Scoop block by an offensive lineman on a linebacker pursuing from the backside; because the linebacker is moving laterally upfield from the lineman, he must lead the defender, that is, go to a spot ahead of the linebacker as one would lead a skeet in skeet shooting

Scout report written analysis of video of upcoming opponent's recent games, reverse engineering of upcoming opponent's play books plus identification of tipoffs, strengths and weaknesses of opposing personnel, opponent tendencies; a team's weekly game plan is based on the scout report for the week

Scramble quarterback running with the ball after first trying to pass; usually impromptu but may be planned in the case of a quarterback who is a very good runner

Scramble block same as crab block

Scramble drill pass routes that receivers are assigned to run when the quarterback cannot throw on time and must scramble behind the line of scrimmage

Scrape lateral movement by a linebacker in pursuit of a running play; some coaches may use it to refer to what other coaches call a run-through

Screen pass pass that does not cross the line of scrimmage; word "screen" refers to a line of offensive line blockers who deliberately let defensive players through then form in front of receiver to lead him downfield; deceptively hard to throw; must be practiced against air because your own scout team will become too good at recognizing it

Scrimmage down down that begins with a snap and the defense permitted to be on the edge of the neutral zone

Scrimmage kick a place kick, punt, or drop kick during a scrimmage play, the other kind of kick is a free kick which is used for kickoffs, kicks after a fair catch in high school and the NFL but not college, and kicks after a safety

Scrimmage play play that begins with a snap and the defense permitted to be on the edge of the neutral zone; other type of play is a free kick

Seal generally refers to an offensive lineman getting in the way of a linebacker who wants to pursue a wide player laterally

Seam a) border between two pass defense zones b) pass route, usually for a tight end or back out of the backfield, in which the receiver runs upfield along the seam between a cover-3 free safety and cornerback

Secondary defensive backs, namely safeties and cornerbacks; also used to describe the general medium-to-deep area (in terms of distance from the line of scrimmage) where they normally align

Second level the second level of the defense starting with the defensive line (first level), the linebackers (second level), and the defensive backs (third level); so-called because of their respective distances from the line of scrimmage

Separation receiver getting away from a defender who is trying to cover him; same as open

Settle a receiver slowing down or stopping at the seam in a zone pass defense; also called throttle down

Seven-man front a defensive formation that has seven defenders in the box; typically a 4-3 or 3-4

Shade an alignment by a defensive player in which his nose is lined up with something other than the gap between offensive linemen or the noses of offensive linemen; in the Bum Phillips numbered techniques above, 4i, 5, 7, and 9 are shaded techniques; in my lettered alignment designations, the shades are E, F, H, I, K, L, N

Shift change in alignment by any offensive player or players who did not have at least one hand on the ground; all offensive players must be set for one second **after** the shift before the ball can be snapped

Short punt an offense in the single wing family; the most common formation looks like a punt formation with the punter not deep enough; very powerful running offense; the short-punt off-tackle play, which is its most successful play, has four double-team blocks at the point of attack

Short side the side of the offensive formation where the distance from the ball (before the snap) to the sideline is shortest, also known as the boundary

Short trap a trap play in which the pulling trap blocker passes only one of his teammate interior linemen enroute to his blocking target

Shotgun a) type of snap in which the center snaps the ball several yards back on a **lob** trajectory **without looking at the snap target** as he does so; his **head is up** as with a quarterback-under-center snap so he can see the defender he needs to block; associated most with Niners 1960 coach Red Hickey; b) formation that uses this type of snap; when I ran the single-wing offense for years, away-game announcers would erroneously call it the shotgun; there is little similarity between the shotgun offense and the single wing which uses a long snap (snapper's head is down looking through his legs and snap is a line drive)

Shovel pass very short forward pass usually to a receiver who is still in the offensive backfield and moving sideways

Shuffle moving laterally by sliding the foot on the side the player is going outward then bringing the other foot close to that foot without crossing the legs; used by linebackers and sometimes defensive backs to move laterally because it allows them to change direction quickly if necessary; also sometimes used by offensive backs in motion so they are facing upfield and do not have their legs crossed at the time of the snap

Sight adjustment change in pass route made by a receiver because of defender behavior that triggers the change, most hot routes are sight adjustments; a tactic that is most connected with the run-and-shoot offense originated by Glenn Ellison and Mouse Davis; although the run-and-shoot has generally fallen into disfavor, its main tenet, the sight adjustment, lives on in most high-level football programs

Skeleton competitive passing drill using no interior linemen and possibly fewer than five eligible receivers; most common skelly format is 7-on-7

Skinny post post pass route where the angle of the cut is significantly less than 45 degrees

Sky zone pass coverage in which safeties cover passes to the flat; both safety and sky start with the letter S; opposite of cloud coverage which has the corner cover the flat

Sky kick same as pooch kick

Slant a) pass route in which the receiver goes inward at a 45-degree angle, usually after a short stem, typically, three steps b) diagonal charge path taken by a defensive lineman or linebacker

Slappy lousy player; short for a longer phrase that I am not at liberty to reveal in a family dictionary

Slide pass protection in which the offensive linemen step in the same direction and the running back goes in the opposite direction and blocks at the other end of the line

Slip screen screen pass play in which a wide receiver immediately runs inward near the line of scrimmage; the screen of blockers is provided by other wide receivers, slots, a wing, or a tight end on that side of the formation

Slot area between the interior offensive line and the wide receiver

Slot back quick receiver aligned in the slot; popular for running a sweep play to that side below the varsity high school level

Smash compliance pass pattern sometimes erroneously called a route; I am not sure it has a set, widely accepted definition. In one book, a chapter on the smash route [sic] showed a series of shotgun formation diagrams that had one to three wide receivers on each side of the formation and showed patterns in which the widest receivers generally ran hitches, the second-widest receivers generally ran in a little, then straight upfield, then outward, and the number three receiver from the outside in, usually a back, ran shallow across the middle.

Snap quick movement of the ball by the center from the ground to the quarterback's hands

Sneak offensive play in which the quarterback immediately runs forward after taking the snap; often audibled to as a result of the defense failing to line a defensive lineman up in one A gap, frequently used in short-yardage situations even when both A gaps are occupied by a defensive lineman

Sniffer back running back who lines up in a three- or four-point stance immediately behind the quarterback; typical of the fullback in the wishbone and the indirect-snap double-wing offenses

Solid man pass protection with number of available blockers equaling number of possible pass rushers

Spearing using the top of the helmet as a battering ram when blocking or tackling; illegal and extremely dangerous to the player who does it; a Seattle team was ordered by a court to pay \$6 million to a player who broke his neck while spearing; the defendants lost because they did not do anti-spearing drills, read the rule against spearing to the players, and give the player or his parents written or video instruction against spearing; I have often seen spearing in games but I have never seen this penalty called, which suggests that the officials should be named as co-defendants the next time there is such a suit; video of all games officiated by the local association could be subpoenaed and studied looking for instances of spearing that were not called; then those clips—I would expect one or two per game—could be shown to the jury; if the officials would start calling it, the coaches would do more to prevent it

Special teams kicking-play teams

Speed cut 90-degree turn by a receiver using two 45-degree step; so called because the receiver can make the turn faster using two 45-degree steps than he can using one 90-degree step

Speed option double-option play in which there is no fake to a dive back or read of a dive key defender by the quarterback, rather, the first and only read is of the pitch key defender; in the typical speed option, the quarterback runs at the inside shoulder of the contain defender and one running back runs the same direction; the quarterback keeps the ball if the contain defender does not attempt to tackle him and pitches it to the pitch back if he does

Spike immediate forward pass thrown deliberately into the ground in order to stop the clock; should only be done when the offense has no more timeouts and the time remaining in the half is such that the down in being wasted could never have been used anyway; Note: it takes about six seconds to run each play if the clock stops at the end of the play, for more information, see the spike-the-ball chapter in my book [*Football Clock Management*](#)

Spinning fullback single-wing play series in which the ball is snapped to a fullback who then spins 180 or 360 degrees faking or giving to one to three other backs and sometimes faking to all of them and keeping the ball himself; arguably the most deceptive play series in the history of football; used by most single-wing coaches but most associated with Coach John Aldrich

Split short for line split; also distance between a wide receiver and the nearest interior lineman or tight end

Split backs offensive formation with two halfbacks aligned behind the guards or tackles at a depth of about four yards, characteristic of the veer triple-option offense; often a tipoff that a drop-back pass play is coming when employed by non-veer-option teams

Split end a quick receiver who aligns on the end of the line of scrimmage on the weak side of the offensive formation and away from the interior line

Split T balanced, full-house, offensive triple-option formation invented by Don Faurot and made famous by Bud Wilkinson; it is the same as the wishbone only the fullback is deeper than the half backs rather than shallower than them; the name stems from the fact that the offensive lines of triple-option teams typically have wider line splits than other offenses; the still-standing, Division I-A, consecutive-wins record of 47 was set by Wilkinson's Oklahoma split-T teams

Spread imprecise term that seems to refer to one-back or no-back offenses accompanied by the use of the shotgun snap and no tight end; Texas Tech under Mike Leach and Evangel Christian Academy are known for this type of offense

Spread-option spread with use of the option play added; most associated with Urban Meyer of Utah and Florida

Sprint draw trick play in which the quarterback sprints out to one side; a running back stands motionless with his dominant hand behind his back; as the quarterback passes the running back, he slips the ball into the back's hand; after remaining for a one count, the back takes off running away from the direction of the quarterback

Sprint-out pass pass "drop" in which the quarterback runs fast backward and outward (bellies back) wide to one side of the end and throws a pass on the run

Spy defender who is assigned to cover one offensive player, often a quarterback who is fond of running with the ball

Squeeze the hole correct resistive action by a defender to prevent the hole to his inside from becoming larger as a result of his widening out or being blocked outward

Stack a) wide receivers aligned one directly behind the other b) a linebacker aligned directly behind a defensive lineman

Stalk block open field, above-the-waist block usually made by wide receivers on defensive backs

Statue of Liberty play fake pass play in which the passer cocks his arm as if to throw the ball but another player runs past him from behind and snatches the ball. Boise State used a variation of this play to win their bowl game at the end of the 2006 season. They faked a pass to the right with an empty hand then handed the ball forward and low with the non-throwing hand to a player who was running past and in front of the quarterback. The play succeeded for the two-point conversion needed to win the game.

Stay home correct behavior by back-side defenders when they see offensive backfield flow going away from them; they must remain in place momentarily while they check to see if a trap, counter, or reverse play is coming at them before they fly to the ball

Stem a) Initial portion of a pass route in which the receiver runs straight upfield before cutting; during the stem, the receiver tries to make the defender think he is running a streak route b) rapid, last-second, lateral, pre-snap movement by a defensive lineman to a different alignment *vis a vis* the offensive linemen he is near; attempts to change and therefore confuse offensive blocking assignments when it is too late for the offensive blockers to refigure whom to block

Sticks same as chains; officials sometimes signal to each other with crossed forearms which means “double sticks” which, in turn, means that the offense is now snapping the ball from behind the point where they started the series so they must pass **both** sticks to gain a first down; in the absence of such a reminder, an official might inadvertently signal timeout after the offensive ball carrier passed the stick marking the original starting point of the series rather than the line to gain for a first down

Streak Pass route in which the receiver runs straight upfield from his pre-snap position; sometimes called a go route or fly route

Stretch **noun**; type of zone play; **verb**: offensive tactic used against defense by sending receivers deep (vertical stretch) and/or wide (horizontal stretch)

Strong some coaches use this word to describe an offensive backfield alignment in which the fullback aligns offset to the strong side typically behind the strong guard or strong tackle or B gap

Strong safety linebacker or defensive back aligned on the strong side of the offensive formation

Strong side usually the side with the tight end in a pro offensive set; some coaches define the strong side differently against other types of offensive formations, e.g., the side with the most quick receivers; if the offensive formation is **balanced** (5 1/2 players on each side of the ball) has two tight ends or no tight ends e.g., double slot or ace, coaches often refer to the field or wide side as the strong side; if the offensive formation is balanced and in the **middle hash position** so that there is no field side, most coaches designate the offense’s **right-hand side** as the strong side on the grounds that most people are right-handed and therefore prefer to execute football plays to their right

Stud a) very good football player who looks like a football player is supposed to b) used by some coaches as the name of the strong safety or strong side linebacker position

Student body right (or left) toss sweep with one or more lead blockers; associated most with USC

Stunt defensive rush that takes an unusual path or has unusual timing

Support run defense by defensive backs

Surprise punt usually incorrectly called a “quick kick;” any punt from a non-punt formation; could come on any down including fourth

Sweep offensive play that goes deep in the offensive backfield (in the case of the toss or pitch sweep) or shallow in the offensive backfield (in the case of a fake-dive handoff sweep) and around the end man on the offensive line of scrimmage; the most famous play to have that name was the Green Bay Sweep when Vince Lombardi was the Packers coach; however that play was really a sweep/off-tackle play depending upon what the defensive contain man did

Sweep-slide play an improved version of the kneel-down play, the kneel down wastes **maximum** time **between** plays but consumes the **minimum** number of seconds **during** the play; in the sweep-slide play, the quarterback takes the snap and deliberately runs backward and toward the far sideline; he slides, taking care to stay inbounds, just before a defender is about to tackle him, this play should take an additional 10 seconds per play, thereby enabling the offense in question to gain one less first down; should end with an intentional safety when the offense is leading by three or more points; since each sweep-slide play loses about 15-yards, the offense needs to be at midfield or in the opponent’s territory in order to do a full sequence of four sweep-slide plays

Swim move by a player trying to escape from an opponent who is trying to block or delay him; involves swinging the arm closest to the opponent downward to prevent the blocker from holding or pushing the player in question; called a swim because the arm movement resembles the movement of a swimmer’s arm

Swing running back pass route in which the running back loops out and away from the line of scrimmage before turning toward the line of scrimmage at which time the pass is thrown to him; often done as a check route, that is, the running back checks for a blitz by his assigned pass protection blocking target then runs a swing route if his man does not blitz

Swinging gate offensive formation in which the center is eligible and all the ineligible linemen are off to one side some distance from the center; ball is snapped backward around 12 yards; other backs are either out wide away from the ineligible linemen or behind them; called the “lonesome polecat” by Glen Ellison author of the book *Run and Shoot Football*

T

T tailback

Tackle a) offensive lineman between guard and tight end or outside of guard on weak side b) interior defensive lineman who usually aligns between tight ends c) act of stopping a ball carrier by ending his forward progress, taking part of his body other than his feet or hands to the ground or knocking him out of bounds

Tailback running back who usually aligns about 7 yards deep directly behind the quarterback; can align at other locations in the backfield when directed; deepest back in I formation; type of player is similar to halfback of earlier eras; generally associated with USC head coach John Robinson

Tailback pass offensive play in which a tailback receives a toss or pitch as if to sweep around an end; however, the tailback either sets up out wide and passes or passes on the run to a relatively deep receiver; this is technically a type of play-action pass; also anachronistically called a halfback pass; effective play at all levels; similar to the reverse pass used by Pittsburgh successfully for a touchdown in the 2006 Super Bowl against Seattle

Tampa 2 variation on cover 2 defense alignment and responsibilities, so-called because it was invented or made famous by the Tampa Bay Buccaneers; the Bucs dropped a middle linebacker back in the middle of the field to defend the pass, thereby creating a cover-3 variation while rushing four; the 2 or three deep guys are in zone pass coverage so blitzing is generally no longer possible; I presume the purpose of the Tampa 2 is to delay the offense recognizing that they are facing a cover-3 pass defense

Tandem combination of a defensive lineman and a linebacker stacked behind him

Tandem block block by two offensive linemen in which they initially double-team a defender toward the play side, then, depending upon the behavior of a linebacker behind the defender they are blocking, one of them leaves the double-team block and goes upfield to block the linebacker leaving the other member of the double-team block to block the defensive lineman alone

Tempo amount of game-clock time between a snap and the next snap for the subsequent play assuming no timeout or end of quarter occurs

Tendency a habit of running a certain play or defense more than 50% of the time in certain situations; for example, teams study opponents’ down-and-distance tendencies, formation tendencies, and so forth; when they find a correlation between a situation or formation or whatever and what the team does, they teach it to their players and coaches and respond accordingly in the game plan and in the game; the opposite of tendencies would be random selection of plays and defenses; always using the same offensive formation eliminates any formation tendencies

T-formation indirect-snap offensive formation in which the backs other than the quarterback around three to four yards behind the line of scrimmage and in which the fullback is directly behind the quarterback and two halfbacks are at the same depth but behind the offensive tackles, made famous by Stanford coach Clark Shaughnessy in 1940

Third level defensive backs area of the field

Three and out a series that results in a punt rather than a first down

Three-point stance classic football lineman stance in which the player has one hand on the ground, the other two points being his feet; the two other stances are two-point (standing up with no hands on the ground) and four-point (both hands and feet on the ground); the three-point stance is almost universal among tight ends, interior offensive linemen, interior defensive linemen, and fullbacks

Throwback pass pass to quarterback from running back or wide receiver who had previously received a handoff, pass, or pitch from the quarterback; frequently used in goal-line situations to take advantage of the fact that defenses favor man pass coverage in those situations and typically do not assign any defender to cover the quarterback; I recommend that the back-side defensive end cover him when the ball is passed out wide to the player who will throw it back to the quarterback and I recommend that the quarterback be covered by the defender whose man received the handoff or pitch when that exchange method is used, although these techniques should probably only be required on a game-plan basis against teams that are known to employ the throwback pass

Tight end a quick receiver who aligns on the end of the line of scrimmage on the strong side of the offensive formation and close to the interior line

Timeout you know what it means; I just put it here to show you how to spell it; This is the *Sports Illustrated* spelling; it’s not “time out” or “time-out”

Toss pitch by quarterback to a tailback running wide; usually preceded by a reverse pivot; also the short name of a sweep play utilizing that method of getting the ball to the tailback

Touchback ball that becomes dead in the end zone when it got there by force imparted to it by the team trying to score a touchdown or field goal in that end zone; results in the team defending that end zone getting possession on their 20-yard line; examples of touchbacks include kickoffs and scrimmage kicks that go into the end zone in high school and those that go into the end zone in college and pro football and are not returned out by the receiving team, interceptions in the end zone that are not run out of the end zone, recoveries of fumbles that bounce into the end zone and are not run out; even includes interceptions and fumble recoveries where the defender first got control of the ball outside the end zone but his momentum carried him into the end zone; if, however, a defender catches a ball in the end zone his team is defending after the ball went there from force imparted by the offensive team, then leaves the end zone of his own volition, then decides to retreat back into the end zone, the ball then becoming dead would be a **safety**, **not** a touchback, because now the force that put it there was imparted by the defender; fearful young players sometimes retreat into their own end zone after catching a kick erroneously thinking they will be taking a touchback only to learn that it is a safety; the word used by the NCAA rule book is “impetus;” if the **impetus** that put the ball in the end zone came **from the team trying to get into that end zone**, it is a **touchback**; if the **impetus** came from the **team defending that end zone**, it is a **safety**, see the rules book for your level for details

Touchdown you know what it means; I just put it here to show you there is no hyphen

Trail when a running play goes toward the D gap on one side of the offense, one defender on the back side of the play must trail it in case the play is a reverse; the job usually goes to the backside contain man; some coaches have the trail man follow the ball carrier while looking for another prospective ball carrier coming at the first ball carrier to receive a handoff or pitch; other coaches simply have the trail man “stay home,” that is, remain in place while looking for a reverse play coming back toward him; the trail man’s job is to **stop the reverse**

Trap block or play involving such a block on the outside of the point of attack in which the blocker is a lineman who pulls out of the line on the snap and blocks his target defensive lineman outward from the inside

Trey means three receivers on one side when used to describe a formation; typically, a team will use trey to refer to one type of three-receivers-on-one-side formation and trips to refer to a different such formation; the word is also used in the phrase counter trey in which case I have no idea what it means; the word “counter” and the phrase “counter trey” seem to mean the same things; so the word “trey” seems to add nothing to the word “counter” yet it is still used

Trick play unusual play; it generally appears wise to have one or two ready per game; generally rely on the element of **surprise** so must be used sparingly lest the upcoming opponent sees the play in their scout video and prepares for it, thereby eliminating the element of surprise; one benefit of using a trick play in a game is that it generally forces the **next** opponent to devote practice time to stopping it; if, as is recommended, you do not use it in the next game, that practice time is wasted; in some cases, you can also use a trick play in one game as a set up for another trick play that takes advantage of the defense’s overreaction to the prior trick play, e.g., a reverse in one game may be followed by a fake reverse or reverse pass in the next; trick plays are also wise in accordance with the branch of mathematics known as “game theory;” see the definition of “predictability” in this dictionary; generally, it is wise to sprinkle a few unexpected and/or unusual plays into a game to make opposing defensive coaches and defensive players more tentative about responding to their keys and to make opposing offensive coaches and players more tentative about their blocking assignments

Triple option an offensive play in which any of three ball carriers may end up with the ball: a dive back, quarterback, or pitchback; the quarterback decides who will carry the ball by reading a designated dive key and a designated pitch key; the dive and pitch keys are defenders who are optioned rather than blocked; invented by Missouri’s Don Faurot and made famous by Oklahoma’s Bud Wilkinson; the first triple-option offense was the split-T

Trips offensive pass formation in which there are three quick receivers on one side, usually a tight end, a slot back, and a flanker on the strong side

Twins offensive formation in which the weak side has a split end and a slot back

Twirl pass route in which the receiver initially goes inward at a 45-degree angle then spins 225 degrees ending up heading straight outward toward the sideline, if the receiver is on the right, the spin is counterclockwise; if on the left, clockwise, also called a “Q-in”

Twist defensive line stunt; roughly the defensive equivalent of the offensive cross block; used to confuse offensive lineman as to whom they are to block or to make it harder for them to block their assigned man

Two back an offensive backfield with two running backs other than the quarterback behind the offensive interior line

Two-minute drill hurry-up offense in which the offense tries to stop the clock at the end of as many plays as possible; so-called because it is often used at the end of a half; different from a hurry-up offense in that stopping the clock is a lower priority in a hurry-up (see the hurry-up chapter of my book [Football Clock Management](#) for far more detail)

Two-minute warning a warning given to the head coach of each team when there are two minutes left in the half; insignificant other than in the NFL where an official’s timeout is called for the purpose; at lower levels, it is just a quiet

U

U abbreviation for upback

Umbrella defense pass defense originated in 1950 by New York Giant Tom Landry; defensive ends had the option of dropping into pass zones

Unbalanced line an offensive line that has at least three interior linemen on one side of the center; common in the single wing but can be used in almost any offense; results in the offense outnumbering the defense on one side if the defense does not adjust

Uncatchable college and pro rule that says there can be no interference if the pass in question is uncatchable; there is **no such rule in high school** but that does not prevent parents, players and even coaches from yelling “Uncatchable!” at referees after interference calls

Upback offensive back who aligns just behind the A gap in a spread punt formation or offensive back who aligns just behind the interior offensive line in a single wing formation

Upfield away from the line of scrimmage on the defense side; means the same as “downfield;” there is no comparable word for locations on the offense’s side of the line of scrimmage; one reader said it is used by defensive coaches to refer to peetrating into the offense side of the line of scrimmage

V

Veer two-back, triple-option offense invented by University of Houston coach Bill Yeoman; the quick receivers are typically aligned in a pro set; the halfbacks are typically aligned behind the guards or tackles at about four yards depth; the lack of a third back in the backfield prevents this offense from running the wishbone-type lead triple-option play; however, unlike the wishbone, which has two quick receivers, the veer has three quick receivers; the word “veer” is also used to mean a split-back formation regardless of whether the team in question runs the option play

Vertical stretch offensive receiver or decoy who runs a deep pass route to force a defender to cover that area of the field

Victory formation offensive formation for taking a knee at the end of a half; it has two halfbacks immediately behind the quarterback and a linebacker or defensive back about seven yards behind them to make a tackle in case the ball somehow ends up in enemy hands; universally adopted to prevent a recurrence of the “Miracle at the Meadowlands” play

Vision ball carrier ability to see daylight and cut to it; as opposed to tunnel vision; ball carriers who **lack** vision run into piles of players when there was an open running lane on either or both sides of the pile; this is either because of tunnel vision or inability to cut sharply enough to go to the open lane; I have created what I call an “elusiveness test” to identify players with vision; in it, a ball carrier and a two-hand-touch “tackler” face off in a 20-yard long, 15-yard wide alley, the ball carrier is allowed just one juke or change of direction; ball carriers with vision can score a touchdown; those without cannot; about 5% of high school and youth players have vision

W

Waggle play-action pass in which the quarterback fakes a handoff to one side then rolls out deep to the other side and throws to one of two or more receivers who are running toward the same side; typically, the shallow receiver does a delayed release after blocking for a one- or two-count; some coaches use the term “waggle” when the quarterback fakes a handoff then rolls out to the same side as the handoff fake; very effective at all levels of football

Walkaway defensive alignment in which the defender is at a 45-degree angle inside a wide or slot receiver; used to prevent the receiver from running a quick slant or look-in pass route

Wall blocking my own term for the blocking scheme I advocate for youth coaches; their linemen typically will be quitting all sports by age 13 because they are not athletic so the best blocking scheme for them is to try to stay in place with zero or very tight line splits and block the area where they stand regardless of whether any defender tries to come there; sometimes, mainly on counter plays, the wall is swung like a gate into the linebacker area

Weak some coaches use this word to describe an offensive backfield alignment in which the fullback aligns offset to the weak side typically behind the weak guard or weak tackle or weak B gap

Weak side usually the side away from the tight end in a pro offensive set; some coaches define the weak side differently against other types of offensive formations, e.g., the side with the fewest quick receivers; if the offensive formation is **balanced** (5 1/2 players on each side of the ball) has two tight ends or no tight ends e.g., double slot or ace, coaches often refer to the boundary or short side as the weak side; if the offensive formation is balanced and in the **middle hash position** so that there is no boundary side, most coaches designate the offense’s **left-hand side** as the weak side on the grounds that most people are right-handed and therefore prefer to execute football plays to their right

Wedge a) offensive play in which three offensive linemen block the same defensive lineman and all other interior linemen, backs, and tight ends assist in a lower-to-the-ground version of the famous photo of the Marines raising the flag on Mount Suribachi on Iwo Jima in World War II; could be called “student body forward;” ball-carrying running back follows the wedge and hesitates somewhat to allow the wedge to get moving then looks for an opening to explode through; often run as a misdirection play by single-wing coaches who send the tailback on a fake sweep path as part of the play, often gains surprisingly long yardage; harder to coach than it sounds b) kick return play in which a number of blockers form a wall in front of the returner then simultaneously charge forward on command as he runs behind them; modern version of the now-illegal **flying wedge** in which the blockers interlocked their arms while charging forward; the flying wedge was outlawed because it literally killed defenders

West Coast offense offense with heightened willingness to throw short passes and to throw passes to running backs; most closely associated with coach Bill Walsh and his Niners Teams of the Eighties Decade; arguably includes an attitude of using the pass to set up the run or at least using the pass as much as the run as opposed to thinking that

“establishing the run” is primary; seems to me that the correct approach is to try to be able to attack as many areas of the field as possible and to use whatever’s working in a particular game; the thinner you stretch the defense, the greater the probability you will find a weak spot or weak defender to exploit; to the extent that the West Coast offense caused more areas of the field to be attacked using the pass and to make more of the eligible receivers likely to receive the ball, it is a wise and arguably overdue change in offensive strategy and tactics

Wide pursuit pursuit by all defenders of a ball carrier who has broken contain, that is, gotten outside the hash position of the tight end on the play side; the backside contain man is assigned to **trail** the ball carrier looking for a possible reverse; most defenders are assigned to get **outside** the ball carrier taking angles appropriate to their speed and position to do so; other defenders are assigned to pursue the ball carrier from the **inside** so as to prevent his cutting back “against the grain”

Wide receiver a quick receiver who aligns farther away from the interior line than any other receiver on his side of the ball

Wide side the side of the offensive formation where the distance from the ball (before the snap) to the sideline is greatest, also known as “the field”

Wing offensive back who is one yard off the line of scrimmage and one yard outside the nearest interior offensive lineman or tight end to his inside

Wing back same as wing

Wishbone full-house offensive formation with a fullback directly behind the quarterback at a depth of about two yards and two halfbacks behind each guard or tackle at a depth of about five yards; made famous by Darrell Royal’s Texas and Barry Switzer’s Oklahoma wishbone triple-option teams, invented by Texas high school and later Texas A&M coach Emory Ballard

Wrong shoulder block-shedding technique in which the blocking target hits the blocker with the shoulder on the side away from where the blocker is coming; this necessitates turning to face the blocker if he is a pulling lineman; many coaches do not allow this technique

X

X one of the quick receivers, most often used as the name of the **split end** but sometimes the tight end

Y

Y one of the quick receivers, most often used as the name of the **tight end**

Yards after catch yards gained by a receiver between where he caught a pass and where he was tackled, went out of bounds, or scored a touchdown

Yo yo motion motion in which a motion man reverses direction at least once during his motion; used to ascertain whether the defense is in man pass defense or if they will adjust incorrectly to motion

Z

Z one of the quick receivers, most often used as the name of the **flanker**

Z in the knee refers to the configuration of the foot, lower leg, and upper leg when the player is in a “good athletic position”

Zone blitz “blitz” in which a defensive lineman drops back into **zone** pass defense instead of rushing; in contrast to normal blitz which requires the defense to be in a **man** pass defense because there are not enough defenders who are not rushing to cover all the necessary zones; in a sense, a zone blitz is **not** a blitz because instead of increasing the number of rushers as is normal with a blitz, only the **position** of the rushers is changed, namely, one of the defensive linemen does not rush; he drops into a zone instead and a linebacker or defensive back rushes in his place, albeit from a different starting point; requires an extraordinary lineman who can also play pass defense

Zone blocking offensive line blocking scheme described below under zone play, not to be confused with area blocking, although many coaches do just that by using the phrase zone blocking to mean the same as area blocking, probably because zone blocking was an interchangeable phrase with area blocking prior to the invention of the zone play

Zone play Extremely common, relatively new, one-back offensive play type in the 1990s and 2000s at the college and pro levels; typically consists of two plays: **inside zone** (sometimes called belly) and **outside zone** (sometimes called reach or stretch); whole books have been written about it; for here, I will just define it roughly; all linemen take their first step to the play side trying to reach the defensive linemen; this typically results in two or more double-team blocks; during the block, one member of each double team is to abandon the double-team block and go block a linebacker; which member of the double-team does that is a function of the success each member of the double team is having with the defensive lineman; basically, the defensive lineman must be blocked first and that is to be done by whichever of the two offensive linemen double-teaming him can get the job done as determined by the position he has achieved in relation to the defensive lineman as the play unfolds; then the unneeded offensive lineman goes up to block whichever linebacker he can; in the outside zone play, the offensive lineman who blocks a linebacker blocks the next linebacker to his **inside** from the **outside in**; in the inside zone play, he blocks the first linebacker **on or outside him inside out**; this offensive-line blocking scheme is

very similar to the tandem or combo block except that in those blocks, it is preordained that the inside offensive lineman will end up blocking the defensive lineman and the outside offensive lineman will end up blocking a particular linebacker; the zone-play blocking is more fluid and who blocks whom is determined **during** the play according to who can get the defensive lineman in question and which linebacker the remaining offensive linemen have good blocking angles on; the ball carrier has a different, more inside landmark to run towards in the inside zone from the outside zone; the running back is to run "slow to the hole and fast through the hole;" that is because he is to read the blocks of the offensive linemen on the linemen and linebackers and cut to daylight wherever it is; in the inside zone play, a cutback to the other side is likely; there is no pre-designated point of attack *per se* to run to; the point of attack is chosen by the ball carrier based on what he sees as the play unfolds; requires a ball carrier with vision and linemen who can work together; the theory of the play is that the defense is generally aligned in a sound defense **before** the snap, but that if the entire offense starts running to one side or the other, the defensive alignment will break down, thereby opening up a running lane; the offensive linemen are to block whom they can the direction they can and the running back is to see the resulting lane and run through it; the attached diagrams show how to block it against a high school 4-4 defense because that is better for illustrating the blocking rules than the 4-3 would be.

