



## BASIC PASS BLOCKING TECHNIQUES AND SKILLS

When you think of football it would be safe to say you know there are 11 players on each side of ball. However, five of those players go unnoticed for most of the time. I know you see them because the QB has to get the ball from one of them—the Center. The two guys next to him, the ones who are usually in the way of the running back, are called Guards. The guys on the end, which just missed that block and got your fantasy QB knocked out, are called Tackles!

Now that the basics are stated, I am here to explain some basic “O-Line” survival techniques which will make life in the trenches a little easier. I will cover my favorite style of blocking which is Zone Blocking. No, this isn’t the kind of blocking you will see on Sundays in the NFL or during a prime time college football game, but for your high school and youth football levels it is a great basic blocking scheme that will be successful when practiced with precision and repetition.

To be a successful lineman starts with structuring their proper stances at a young age. The position on the line may change but one thing will always stay the same, they need balance. All offensive line blocking starts with a balanced stance. Here is how we begin:

1. Start with the feet which will be slightly wider than shoulder width apart
2. Their toes should be slightly pointed outward with the weight of the body concentrated on the in-step. I know this is different from what most people coach but this enables them to have better balance and a better ability change direction more easily with more of their cleat in on the turf/grass.

3. Knees are bent, the old saying, “Z in the knees” is really important for offensive linemen because that is where all their power comes from.
4. Back is flat with their heads cocked back for good vision.
5. It is important in zone blocking that your outside hand should be on the ground and you don’t want to apply too much weight on it. It should be light on the ground so that the offensive lineman doesn’t tip off the defensive lineman. How that happens is, when there is too much weight on the hand, the offensive lineman starts to lean and guess what, linebackers and defensive linemen will read that quickly.

Now that we have the balanced stance worked out, let’s talk about alignment and how we are going to line up on the football. Just like the foot positions in a stance, the line up positions will differ. For the purpose of this article I am going to discuss the “Stagger” technique. The stagger allows the lineman to execute blocks more easily, whether it’s a straight zone blocking play, a pulling play or pass blocking. The key to stagger is your foot positions. There are two foot positions “Post Foot and Kick Foot.” The Post Foot will be the inside foot of your stance. For the Centers it will be whatever foot is forward. For the lineman on the right side it will be their left foot. If they are on the left side it will be their right foot. For the Kick Foot, guess what? It’s the outside foot of the lineman stance. For Centers it will be whatever foot is back and for the right side of the line it will be your right foot. For the left side of the line it will be the left foot. Now here is where the stagger comes in. When you set at the line of scrimmage you stagger goes as follows:

1. Center and Guards have a toe-to-instep relationship with their feet
2. Tackles have a toe-to-heel relationship with their feet

Here is an example of a staggered line:



“Splits”  
This is a

term you will scream at your lineman until you lose your voice! For whatever reason, the linemen will stop paying attention to their splits. When this happens, some are closer while others are wider. All of the sudden your tackle is lined up in the back field and you are getting that “boomerang effect” which always seems to happen at the lower levels of football. One of the main mistakes coaches make is having the guard’s line up on the center’s heels, which isn’t all that bad, but the mistake comes when coaches begin to have the tackles line up on the Guard’s heels. This may work in the first quarter but as the game goes on, players get tired and the first thing to go is proper splits and line ups! I have mentioned some offensive lineman disclaimers during this article and here is another, depending on the offense you are running, as well as the down and distance, the splits will vary. For instance, if you are running a spread offense, you can get away with opening the splits up to maybe two feet or 3 feet. When you are in short yardage or even in goal line situation you will want to shorten those splits down to a foot or maybe even closer. As a coach you will want to predetermine these splits with your game plan. However, if you are having some issues keeping away from the boomerang effect here are some easy suggestions:

1. Base your splits off the centers post foot. Remember this is his foot that is forward on the line of scrimmage.
2. Guards will want to line up so their finger tips are at the centers heels, and about 1 ½ feet away.
3. Tackles and the Tight Ends will line up toe-toe with the guards post foot also at 1 ½ feet away.

We have the basics down so now let's HIT!!! There is a general philosophy I like to follow when I have my offensive linemen get off the ball and block defenders.

1. No steps over six inches!
2. 1<sup>st</sup> step...Cock your hands back like you are reaching for guns in a holster.
3. 2<sup>nd</sup> step...Shoot your hands forward.
4. Finish...Short quick powerful steps like a "Duck Walk"
5. Hands...On the breast plates driving, the elbows in and thumbs together.

Here is an easy example:

>Hands cocked in the holster position. >Hands shooting through the defender >Hands on the numbers of the defender and drive



With these basic offensive line techniques you can now coach a few types of blocks. Most of your offensive linemen types aren't going to have the best footwork right away. Dance class was never on my mind growing up but success in the offensive line is all about foot work and rhyme. It will take time that is why offensive team individuals are so important to linemen. First, I will cover three types of run blocking foot work patterns. Then I will go over four pass blocking foot work patterns.

The first type of foot work I will cover is called a **"Drive Reach"** block. This is a block consisting of your first step being a six inch forty-five degree step up-field, then a crossover step and a lead step. Place the helmet on the defenders play side number and fight to keep square to the line of scrimmage. The hands will strike the defender on the second step with the target still on the breast plates. This step is used when a defender is shaded play side. The second type of foot work is called a **"Drop Step"** block. This is a block used where an offensive lineman's first step is a six inch forty-five degree step back gaining depth and width. The second step is a forty-five degree step up-field. Place the helmet on the defenders play side number, fight to keep square to the line of scrimmage and the hands will strike the target on the second step again focusing on the breast plate and keeping good base. This step is used when a defender is shaded far outside of if the offensive lineman is uncovered and blocking a LB on wheel or base. The third type of run blocking step I will talk about is called the **"Flat Step"** block. This is a block used when the defender is head up or tight shade or the first step taken needs be a scoop for a zone block.

Now keep on mind there is a bunch of different Zone and Man Terminology that will go along with all the different blocking calls. The Tight End is usually the one who controls most of the calls because he can determine the alignment of the outside LB better than the Center can. The other big key I didn't cover in this article is the pulling guard. That is an art form all its own. If you have a play such as a Power Trap, Power Sweep, QB roll-out pass, or any type of Sprint-Out Option, you need to pull your back side Guard for added protection and/or blocking. This aspect could be covered in an entire article. Perhaps that will be my next post.

My final topic is some pass blocking terminology and blocks. I will cover four types. Now depending on your QB drop, whether it's a 3, 5 or 7 step drop, the type of pass blocking will be different. The first type of pass blocking I will cover is called the "**Power Set.**" This is a six inch step with the inside or post foot. This block is used against a defender who is aligned head up or inside. On the first step, the head snaps back and hands up at eye level with the elbows in and thumbs together. When striking the defender keep a wide base with the short duck walk steps. The next pass blocking technique is called a "**Power Slide.**" This pass blocking step consists of a 10 inch power step with your post foot and mirrored by your kick foot. You will utilize the power slide when a defender is aligned with an inside shade or one man to the inside shoulder. The "**Sink Set**" block is a six inch step back with the kick foot or the outside foot. This is used when a defender is shaded outside. The offensive lineman wants to keep an inside number relationship on the defender. Finally, the last pass blocking technique I will cover is called a "**Kick Slide.**" This is a ten inch forty-five degree step back with the kick foot and sliding the post foot back on the same path. This block is used on a defender who is on an outside shade.

Always have the offensive linemen keep their shoulders parallel to the line of scrimmage and play to the whistle. The timer in a QB's head isn't synchronized with a lineman's. It never has been and never will be. When we coach proper stances and techniques with repetitions it will show during game time.