



PROTECTING THE QUARTERBACK

BY COACH TOM BASS

Protecting the quarterback when he attempts to throw is one of the major challenges for any offensive coach at any level. To have any type of successful passing game, you need to focus on a combination of factors that are essential for the timing of your passing game.

First is your quarterback. He must be accurate, have excellent footwork in dropping and setting up and understand that he is going to have limited time to select a target and release the ball. If your quarterback is low setting up and hesitates in releasing the ball, your protection will usually breakdown.

You can be of tremendous help in this area in designing short passes where the QB knows prior to the snap where the ball is going and he can take a three-step drop, set, step and let the ball fly.

In a short passing game (WR run 4-yard routes - Hitch - Quick Out - Slant - TE Look In or 4-yard Short), your offensive linemen and even your backs can be more aggressive and set and attack the defensive player they are assigned to block. For your OL this is the first step between full run blocking and full pass protection and it is a good way to help your OL gain confidence in pass protection.

For even a short passing game, the receivers must understand the importance of running their designated pass routes at the proper depth and come off the line at full speed. When the receiver is slow off the line, varies where he makes his break and is not prepared to make the catch when he comes out of his break, the QB will be forced to wait and hold the ball until he is certain where the receiver is going. This added time will result in your pass protection breaking down and the QB being sacked.

The next issue is with the offensive blockers, the five offensive linemen and possibly the TE and one or two offensive backs. The first concern is that each of these players knows exactly which defensive player he is responsible to block prior to the snap of the ball.

This can be done with your pass protection scheme. You can begin with the five OL blocking the four down defensive linemen and the middle backer if he comes. With this type of blocking, you need some form of communication on the offense that clearly defines who the OL will block on the pass attempt.

Versus a blitzing team your TE, HB and FB can be assigned to block any additional rushers the defense may use.

Once you have made certain that the offense knows who to block, you can begin to work on technique. To help the OL learn to pass block, set up a drill with a cone or marker to show where the QB will be setting up. Line up the entire OL and have each player turn and get a mental picture of where the QB will be so that they can try to always stay between the defender and QB for the entire play.

Without anyone on defense, teach the players the difference between blocking an inside rusher and an outside rusher. Then have them go one at a time with you indicating where the defender is going. Have each player shuffle off the line keeping his feet moving for three counts, stop, turn back and see where they are in relation to the target area.

It is essential that during any pass protection block, the blocker bend at the knees and not at the waist, keep his back straight and have his head and eyes up.

For an inside rusher (usually a player head up or on the inside shoulder of the blocker), it is important that the blocker step inside with his inside foot on the snap of the ball. As he takes this step, both hands should come up to the center of his chest in position to fire out and stop the charge of the defensive player. He should then shuffle across the formation.

For an outside rusher (usually a player lined up on the outside shoulder or wide outside the blocker), the first step should be a kick step back with his outside foot and a slight turn of his body to the outside of the formation. Once again, as he takes this step, both hands should come up to the center of his chest in position to fire out and stop the charge of the defensive player. He should then shuffle back off the line of scrimmage. Next with the same drill set up, it is time to bring on a player who will act as the defensive rusher. Initially, you want the defender to rush straight ahead and to just put his hands on the shoulder pads of the blocker. He can then move to his right or left and the blocker should move with him using shuffling steps never crossing his feet.

The next step is to emphasize to the blocker that pass protection is an aggressive block, that he wants to punch out with the palms of both hands into the chest of the rusher, momentarily stop his charge, then back off, bringing his arms and hands back to his chest and re-set ready to punch out again. He should continue this action until you blow the whistle to stop the drill.

Up until now, everything should have been run at half speed with the focus on teaching pass protection technique. Now you can begin to allow more speed to the rush of the defender, even though it is still an offensive drill, and he can exert more pressure to reach the QB spot.

Try to avoid full team rush drills when teaching your pass protection, go one-on-one and avoid the chance of collision and injury. Add full speed competition only as a final phase of your teaching once you feel that you OL have an idea of the correct way to pass protect.

There are two other suggestions you might want to consider on definite passing situations. The first is to line your two tackles and guards up in a two-point stance with their back foot slightly back prior to the snap. Your tackles can have more of a stagger. This should help them to get off the line quicker and to get in a position to take on the defensive charge.

The second suggestion would be to use a shotgun formation, where you have the QB back off the line 4 yards, giving him a little more time to set up and throw.

I hope you can take a few ideas that will help in your teaching of pass protection blocking to your team, but keep in mind it takes all 11 offensive players doing exactly what they are supposed to do in order to execute a successful passing play.

Coach Tom Bass