

Rufio's playbook: The Inside Zone Run

One of the staple plays of the 2010 **Cleveland Browns'** offense was the Inside Zone run. I love this play for our team, and I love our tweaks to it because they could become a very dangerous series of plays going forward.

Unlike other teams, we did not consistently set up the Inside Zone by running the Outside Zone with a lot of success (though we were pretty good at the Outside Zone during our winning streak). This seems to make sense because our line is built more for the in-line power blocking of the Inside Zone and less for the Outside Zone play.

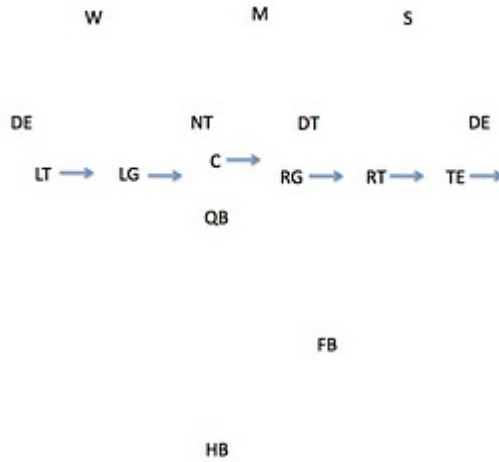
In the same way it was surprising to find success in the running game without a passing offense, it was a little surprising that we had success with the Inside Zone run without the compliment of the Outside Zone runs.

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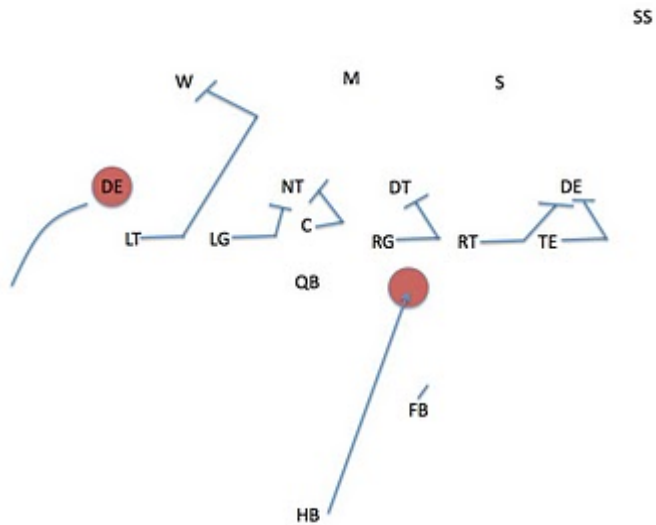
Inside Zone

Once teams establish the **Outside Zone** runs as successful plays, defenders usually overreact to the offensive linemen's first steps. The defense sees the offensive line trying to "reach" the defenders, the defenders usually fly toward the sideline. That's the perfect time to dial up the Inside Zone.

The idea with the Inside Zone is mimic the first few steps of the stretch play almost exactly, but then to cut the run back up the middle or to the weakside when the defense reacts to the sideline to stop the stretch play. To begin the play, the offensive line and TE still take their bucket step:



A major difference between the outside zone and the inside zone is the aiming point of the RB. It is now somewhere around the playside hip of the OG, as illustrated below. You'll notice that OL and TE's assignments are *exactly* the same as the Outside Zone:

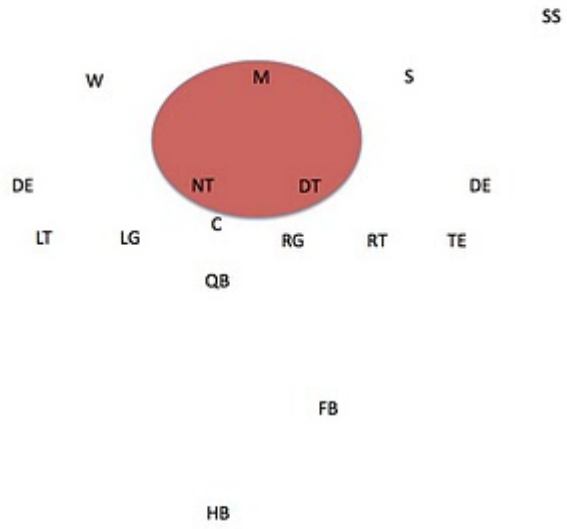


While which defenders the OL and TE block remains the same, their technique is a little different. With the Inside Zone run, blockers are trying to get a bit more of a drive block to push the defenders vertically up the field. They will also attempt to kick defenders out more often as opposed to sealing them inside like in the Outside Zone play.

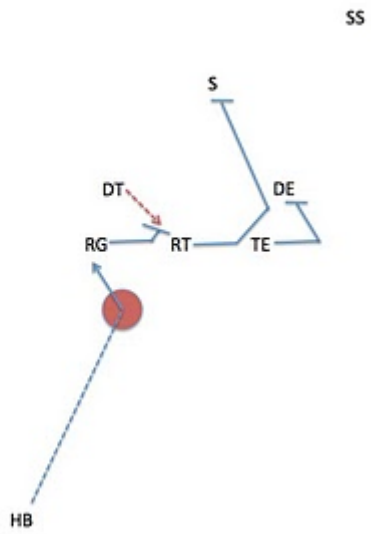
Most of the initial steps of the Inside Zone are exactly the same as the Outside Zone on purpose. The offense wants to feign like they will run outside, and then "whuuut!" cut it back up the middle.



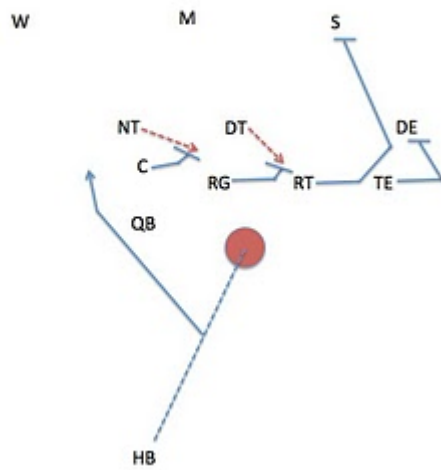
The RB's read varies by coach and possibly the particular game plan, but he is probably keeping an eye on the NT, DT, and Mike linebacker:



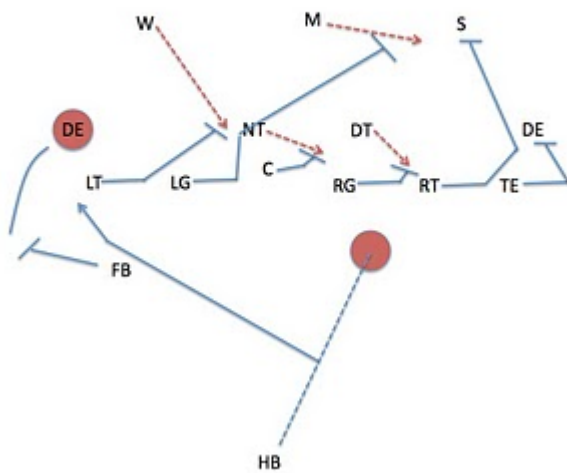
Just as in the outside zone, if a defender runs by the play, the RB is cutting back:



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Lastly, you'll notice that the weakside DE *is* blocked by the FB for the inside zone. Because the aiming point and potential cutback lanes are further to the weakside of the run (the left in this example) an unblocked DE could absolutely destroy this play. Blocking him with the FB allows the play to mimic the Outside Zone. The blocking pattern remains the same, with the LT releasing up to the second level immediately.

Here, we are running the play against the [San Diego Chargers](#):



Bucket step and initial reach blocks:



Blockers up to the second level, Vickers takes care of the weakside defender:



Jennings heads in with no clear hole, but a full head of steam...



...and lowers his shoulder to pick up 5 yards.



Browns Specific Advantages

There are a few reasons why I would really like to see us continue to run the Inside Zone (and the Stretch play if we can find an athletic RT) as a part of our system.

1. The first is easy. Just look at how many of these runs are zone blocked (skip to about 45 seconds in and look for the bucket step):

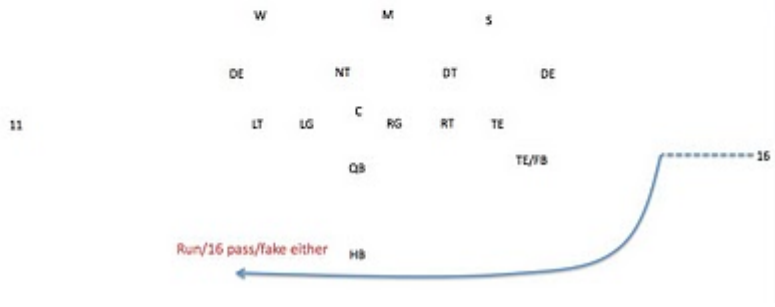
2. The second reason is that the Inside Zone play fits our team's personnel and (what I think is) the vision of the coaches very well. Mangini has brought in huge offensive linemen whose strengths are in-line power. We have some tough runners with good vision.

3. The third reason I like this play for is that I think we can really expand on the success we've already had with it. A part of that was something very intelligent (seriously!) that OC Brian Daboll did last year. That thing was to use Josh Cribbs.

Most of the time, we ran the Inside Zone play from a formation that looked something like this:



Cribbs would usually come in motion and cut into the backfield on the snap for an end around/sweep fake.



This motion and fake are very smart. The thing that I think Daboll didn't do well enough was to actually get the ball to Cribbs on the end around, but if I go into why, this post will never end. I could only find tape of one time where we actually gave the ball to Josh, and it went for a big play.

Here is the play where we did hand the ball to Cribbs:





Anderson fakes to Harrison and gives to Cribbs. Look below and you can see the lack of a "contain" defender. **Joe Thomas** is blocking his man back in toward the middle of the field, as is **Alex Mack**.



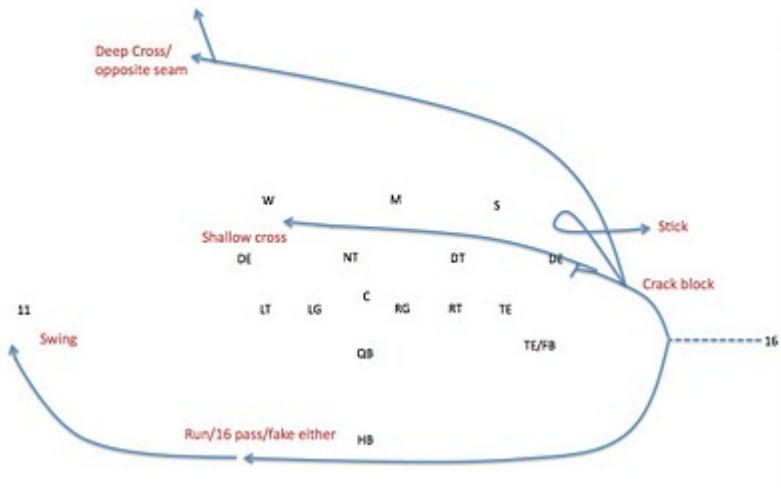
This is where we want Josh Cribbs; in the open field with the ball. He is one of few players on our team that defenses should locate and respect as a threat on every play. The more we give it to him, the more this fake can open things up for others.



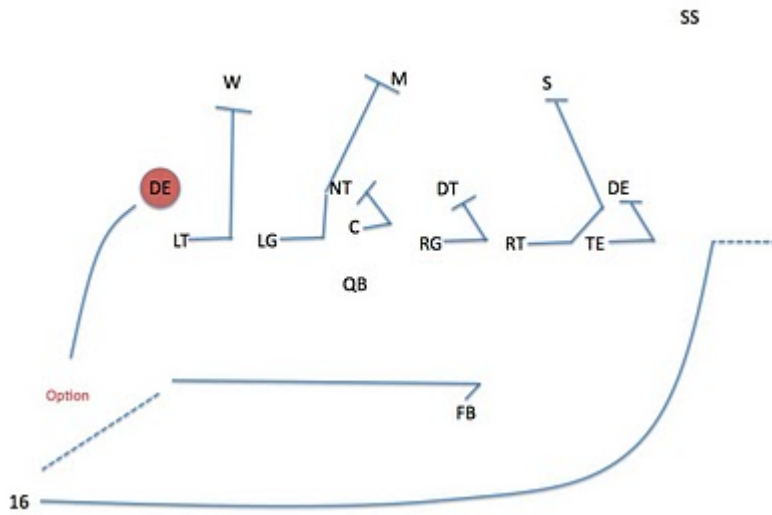


To truly make this play work to its fullest potential, it needs to become a part of a series of plays--both run and pass--where we get Cribbs going in that same motion. More to the point, we need to be able to run all of the series of plays effectively.

We could do any number of normal pass plays or play action plays off of this motion. Below, I have diagrammed a few of the routes Cribbs could run as a part of a pass play:



The possibilities are almost endless, as we could even hand the ball to Cribbs and then run the option off of the weakside DE. Instead of the FB coming over to block him, he could be the pitch man for Cribbs; if the DE stays wide to tackle Cribbs, he throws a little shovel pass inside to the FB, if he stays inside with the FB, Cribbs can keep:



And there you have it, the Inside Zone running play and the 2009 Cleveland Browns' tweaks to it.