



**WHY WE USE HANDS
INSTEAD OF SHOULDERS
WHEN ZONE BLOCKING!**

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WHY WE BLOCK WITH HANDS RATHER THAN SHOULDERS!

JOE JACOBY:

“Use ARM PUMP & PUNCH! It's a violent game - the arm pump & punch puts everything in motion. Flipper creates "grabbing areas" for them to go around. You PUNCH them - they are taught to do the SAME thing (jabbing their hands at YOU). Football is a HAND FIGHT. Quoted

JOE BUGEL

"Where else can you go out and punch somebody in the mouth and not get locked up"? That's what O & D line play IS, & that's what you have to teach them! It's a VIOLENT game - so use EVERYTHING to your advantage. Hands are WEAPONS, USE THEM! The DL doesn't wear long pads like QB's, and their RIBS are exposed. "MASSAGE those ribs" (the PUNCH is to the short ribs at the base of the pads). USING YOUR HANDS - INSIDE THEIR HANDS - GIVES THEM LESS TO GRAB"!

#1. LESS LIKELY TO MISS THE TARGET: Blocking with a shoulder or flipper puts you on one side or the other of the defender. Using the HANDS makes it more likely to hit the target (aiming AT or closer to the middle). “Block with your eyes – not your shoulder”!

#2. LESS LIKELY TO FALL OFF BLOCK: Burying your shoulder into a defender puts you beyond your “center of gravity”, making it likely you will lose contact & fall forward to the ground. Makes it difficult to keep your feet UNDER you, & maintain your balance.

#3. MORE LIKELY TO LOSE SIGHT OF LBers: Burying your shoulder into a defender forces your head down, & you will lose SIGHT of LBers, etc., in zone blocking (that you may NEED to come off on).

#4. MORE LIKELY DEFENDER WILL GRAB YOU (if you use shoulder/flipper RATHER than hands) & keep you from coming off the block.

#5. IT IS SAFER. If you lead with your hands, you are less likely to have a head and neck injury. Leading with your shoulder leaves your head and neck more exposed.

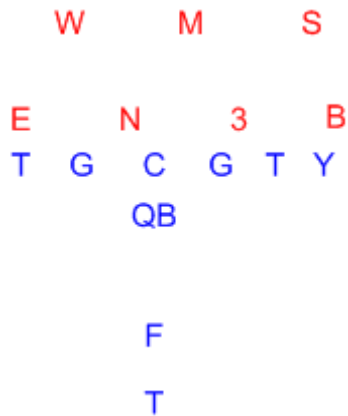
Is there anything more beautiful than seeing an offensive line move in concert, washing a defensive front to one side, and then out of the mass of confusion, seeing a running back cut back against the grain through a massive hole that seems to appear out of nowhere? Most football purists would agree with you. Well if you ask me, I'd have to say seeing a wily free safety fill that cutback lane with some serious authority is a much prettier sight, but I am a little biased.

The running game in football used to be pretty simple. The most complex things you would see for line play were some pulling guards to run sweeps or traps. But then several years ago you began to hear the word zone get thrown around more and more frequently until it's about all you hear anymore. Now, I don't know all the ins and outs of how a zone should be blocked, so I won't pretend to be an expert, but I will try to go through the basics to simplify things a bit. In the offense you and I grew up in, most of the time the running back had a specific point to try to run through, and the OL tried to create a seam right in that spot. With zone, you don't tell the running back exactly where to go. You direct his first couple of steps, and the point at which he gets the hand-off from the QB, but from there it's his responsibility to find a seam.

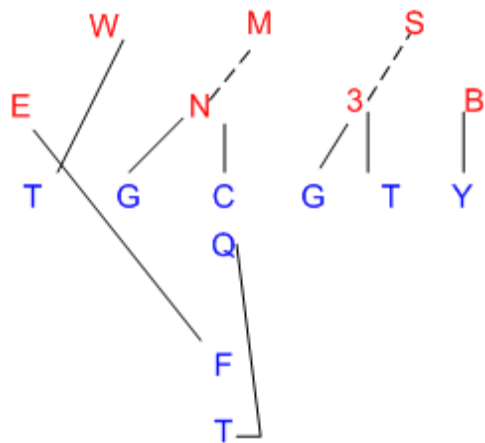
There are a couple different kinds of zone, two of the most common being the inside zone and the zone stretch. The inside zone is more of a downhill attack, and is more likely to produce the cutback lane. The zone stretch does just what it sounds like - runs more towards the edge, trying to get defensive flow horizontally so a vertical seam can be created for the back to dart through.

Blocking the zone is where it really helps to have linemen who can move horizontally. In fact, the OL must be able to move horizontally, all while keeping their shoulders square to the LOS (line of scrimmage) and while engaging the defense. If they open up their shoulders at all, it can create a seam for the defense to get penetration and disrupt the play before it starts. Their first step (the coaches I worked with called it a bucket step) is incredibly important. In most instances it's going to be a very short (6 inches), very quick step directly to the side in which the play is running (in a zone to the right it will be to the right with the right foot and vice versa). It should be almost directly horizontal. The reason the first step is so important is it allows them to keep a solid base, and ensures they stay squared to the line.

To start off we'll talk about the inside zone to the strong side against a basic 4-3 front out of an I set with one TE:



In a traditional iso play, everyone would block the man in front of them while the fullback picked up the Mike and the TB followed him through the hole. This works fine, but if the defense runs any twists or slants, it can really affect the results of the play. That's the primary reason for running a zone type scheme; instead of being responsible for an individual, you have to work with the guy next to you to block whoever shows. I'll draw it below, blown up a little more than usual to make it a little bit easier:

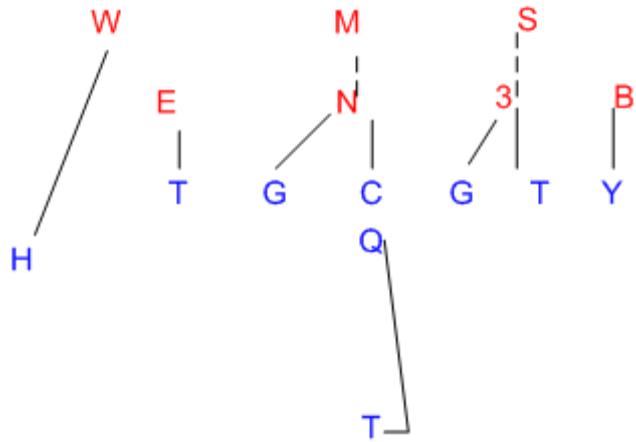


As you can see, I've drawn them blocking in pairs, with a bold line denoting the first responsibility and the dotted line denoting second level responsibility. There is only one dotted line for each second level player because the two blockers have to work together and pick him up depending on which side he shows. You can see why the first step would be very important for them. If the Center takes too big of a step, he'll leave a large

gap allowing the Nose to crash down on him, disrupting the entire play. If he takes too little of a step, he can't induce any flow (LBs read the OL's steps and will slide the same direction to maintain their position) from the Mike making it much more difficult for him and the guard to pick him up. Looking at this, is it clear why guys who are good in the 3 technique are so valuable to a defense? He's going to be facing an immediate double team on almost any running play, and if he can force his hand on those offensive linemen, his LBs are going to LOVE him as they will make a TFL (tackle for loss) after TFL. It's also very clear to see why and where that cutback lane is going to be (right off the left hip of the left guard). It's very important that the left guard and center don't lose any ground to the nose - if he gets any penetration whatsoever, the potential cutback lane disappears. You should also be able to visualize why you don't need to cutback all the time. There should be running space in both the A and B gaps on the strong side. In fact, we tried to work with our RBs to pound it on the strong side a couple of times to try and develop quicker defensive flow to the strong side, thusly making the cutback an even better option later.

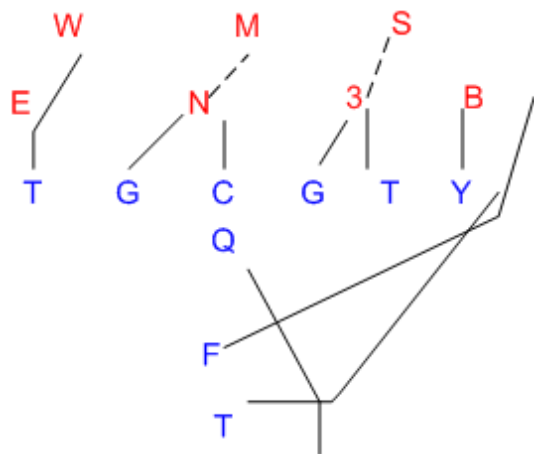
For the QB, it's very important that he gets the ball the running back as deep and as quickly as possible. Again, the quicker and deeper you get the tailback the ball, the better angle he has at the cutback lane. In my eyes, the best thing to do with the QB after a play like this where he didn't have to get too lateral to make the handoff is to boot back to the weak side (fake the handoff and then turn his back to the LOS and loop back to the opposite side). The boot does two things here that a straight drop won't do for you: A) helps hold the defensive end from crashing down, B) keeps the Will LB honest for the same reasons, and C) it gives you more options offensively for the play action.

What about in a different set though? What if you don't have the FB? Well a lot of that depends on what formation are you in, and how the defense generally lines up against that formation. I'll show you one case below:



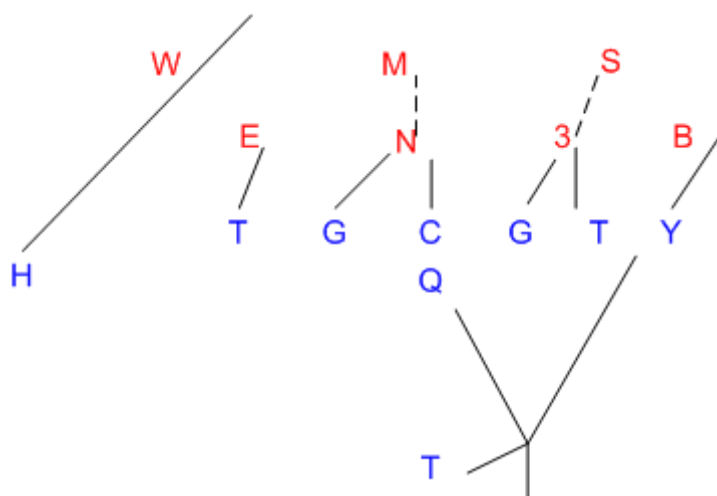
In this situation, Will should widen out a bit (as explained in a previous article) pre-snap for pass reasons. Because his position is a bit different, Mike and Sam have to adjust a bit as well. This does two things to the offense, it makes the block on Will much more difficult, thus making the cutback a bit of a riskier proposition (unless you've done your job as an OC and made him nervous about the boot and passes into the flat, thus making him a little slow on his run fills). And it also changes the route to the Mike, again making the cutback seem a little tougher to create. As a benefit though, it should make the defense much softer on the strong side of the ball. You can clearly see how some times a ball carrier will take the inside zone and, rather than cutting back, bounce the play outside to the strong side. These are the kind of things a RB should come to recognize through repetition in practice.

Now for the stretch zone:



The stretch is obviously much different, and has entirely different aims than the inside zone. Rather than trying to get flow that you can seal off and cut behind, you're trying to force the defensive front to flow and to stretch horizontally so you can create seams. There are options with what you want to do blocking as well. If you have a speedy tailback, you don't always even have to block the weak side end, letting the tackle go immediately to the second level. However, if that end is good, you may want to keep the tackle on him, hoping that congestion will make it tough for the Will to make a play (it usually does). Again, the bulk of the OL is going to be working as a team trying to get a body onto the defenders in the second level. This time, the fullback is working as a lead blocker, hopefully picking up the first body that shows, and chipping the outside shoulder of the bull end if he needs to help the Y seal that edge. The tailback is taking a much more aggressive outside path, forcing the QB to hustle to get him the ball. Again, you want the hand-off as deep as possible so the tailback has better angles on any potential lanes. Since the Bull is taught to keep his outside free, he will often press upfield as much as he can. In this instance, a lot of teams will teach the Y to let him go that way, but force him WELL outside. That way the FB and TB can cut underneath him and run right off the block of the RT on Sam. As the QB has to work so hard to get the TB the ball, it makes much more sense to have the QB plant his right foot after the hand-off and sink into a pocket behind the original strong B gap.

Here's how it looks in the other formation:



In this situation, a lot hinges on the ability of both the Bull and your Y. If the Bull is quick, the Y should try and get him to commit up field and then seal off a lane for the TB to run through. If he's strong, just try and keep him in the same place and let the TB bounce the play outside. The H/FB shouldn't worry too much about getting to Will. He should try, but if Will disappears quickly then he needs to work to the secondary and hope to get a body on the FS.

It's always very important for the TB to stay patient and let the zone develop, but it's also necessary that as soon as he sees a crease - accelerate through it. These types of plays take a lot of repetition in practice to run well, and the reps will help the TBs understand when and where to expect those creases to open up. The zone is a fantastic play, but can be greatly disrupted by one or two talented defensive linemen. Inside penetration kills the play, as does a failure to communicate among the offensive line.