

Gameplan

Playbook



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1 FORMATIONS

1.1 INTRODUCTION The table below shows the formation codes and names for each formation available, the number of each player type on the field in that formation, and the general effectiveness of the formation for different play calls.

| Code & Name | QB | OL | RB | WB | TE | WR | Effectiveness & Comments |
|-------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|-------------------------------------|
| A Pro Set (Near) | 1 | 5 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 2 | balanced, good strongside |
| B Shotgun Ace | 1 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | shotgun, two backs, one up |
| C Shotgun Slot | 1 | 5 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 3 | shotgun,oneback,three receivers |
| D Shotgun Spread | 1 | 5 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 4 | shotgun, four receivers |
| E Ace (One Back) | 1 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | weak inside run, balanced |
| F Field Goal | 1 | 5 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 0 | special teams, not including kicker |
| G Goal Line | 1 | 6 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | run power, no wide receivers |
| H Slot (One Back) | 1 | 5 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 3 | third wide receiver, one back |
| I I Formation | 1 | 5 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 2 | balanced, fullback leading |
| J Jumbo | 1 | 5 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 1 | run power, one wide receiver |
| K Pro Set (Far) | 1 | 5 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 2 | balanced, good weakside |
| L Split | 1 | 5 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 2 | both backs up, weak running |
| O Open Set | 1 | 5 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 2 | balanced, weak inside (no fullback) |
| P Punt | 0 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 0 | special teams, not including punter |
| S Stretch | 1 | 5 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 4 | run and shoot, four wide receivers |
| T Two TE Balance | 1 | 5 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 2 | balanced, no weakside, one back |
| U Two TE Strong | 1 | 5 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 2 | unbalanced, both TE strongside |
| W Wishbone | 1 | 5 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 1 | misdirection running, weak passing |
| Z Wing Three | 1 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 3 | third receiver, one back up, no TE |

| | |
|----|--|
| QB | Quarterback |
| OL | Offensive Line (including auxiliary tackles) |
| RB | Running back (full back, half back, tail back) |
| WB | Wing Back (up back, wing, h-back etc) |
| TE | Tight End (positioned to block or release) |
| WR | Wide Receivers |

1.2 WING BACKS Running backs lined up in wing back positions are more effective as receivers than in their usual positions, but much less effective running or blocking (though they can block, and at a pinch run the ball if they go in motion). A wing back is likely to be a better receiver and a bigger threat after the catch than a tight end, although there are several defences in Gameplan that effectively key on the running backs, and fewer that specifically take out the tight end. Wings are less effective as blockers (than either tight ends or full backs), being largely restricted to outside running plays.

1.3 BASIC FORMATIONS The basic offensive formation in pro football is the one we call the pro set. This lines up with five offensive linemen, the quarterback, one tight-end, two wide-receivers and two running backs (the full back and the half back). The running backs are both set in the backfield, one directly behind the quarterback and one slightly offset to the strongside.

1.4 STRONG SIDE The side where the tight end lines up is known as the strong side (since the offence has the extra blocker on that side). The other side is known as the weak side. We assume the tight end is normally set at the right end on the line of scrimmage, from where he can block as a lineman or release to catch like a receiver. The strong side is the open side for the quarterback (in Gameplan quarterbacks are always considered as being right-handed).

1.5 WIDE RECEIVERS The wide receivers are normally split one each side of the line of scrimmage. The weakside receiver starts on the line and is sometimes known as the split end (he's the other end from the tight end). The strongside receiver starts a yard behind the line of scrimmage and is sometimes known as the flanker. It is the flanker who is most usually seen "in motion" and this extra freedom makes him more difficult to jam on the line of scrimmage. Usually a team has their most dangerous receiver as the flanker.

1.6 BASIC VARIATIONS The Pro Set Near (A) offers great variety to the offence. With the tight end to block and two running backs in the backfield, they can use lead runs (where the fullback leads the halfback through the hole), or misdirection plays (where one back fakes the run in one direction and the other carries the ball in another). The alignment of the running backs allows good running straight ahead or strongside, particularly lead running to the strongside. Weakside running is less effective. Passing is fairly good, with two wide receivers plus the tight end, and the two running backs in the backfield able to release or block.

The Pro Set Far (K) formation is similar, but instead of one running back offsetting to the strongside he is offset to the weakside. Straight ahead running is unaffected, but weakside running is improved at the expense of the strongside.

The Open Set (O) formation is the third combination, where both backs are offset, one weakside and one strongside. Lead-running and running up the middle are poor, but running is otherwise good to both strong and weak sides.

In the I formation (I) both running backs are set directly behind the quarterback, with the fullback in front and the halfback 2-3 yards deeper than in a pro set. The running game is strong, especially up the middle, at the expense of the passing game (the running backs take longer to release into the flat or upfield and cannot pass-block as easily, being directly behind the quarterback at the snap).

1.7 TWO TIGHT ENDS Another common set is the Two Tight End Balanced (T) formation, where one running back is removed and a second tight end sets up on the weakside of the line of scrimmage. This effectively removes the strongside/weakside differentiation. The blocking is now equally strong to either side, at the expense of the ability to use plays which require two running backs (misdirection or lead runs).

A variation is the Two Tight End Unbalanced (U) formation, where the second tight end lines up on the strongside. Here there are two extra blockers to the strongside, but rushing to the weakside will probably be very poor (unless the defence over commits to the strongside).

An alternative for extra blocking power is the Jumbo (J) formation, in which the second tight end is brought in at the expense of a wide receiver. With two tight ends it has all the benefits of a balanced line of scrimmage but there are still two running backs available for misdirection and lead running. However there is only one wide receiver, so the passing game, particularly deep, is fairly weak.

The ultimate running formation is the Goal Line (G) formation, in which an extra offensive lineman replaces the only wide receiver from the Jumbo formation. This adds yet another blocker at the further expense of the passing game.

1.8 THREE RECEIVERS A formation with an extra receiver can be achieved by removing a running back and bringing in a wide receiver, to produce the Slot (H) formation. Passing to the wide receivers is significantly improved, but passing to the running back will be poor. The role of the tight end is unchanged, but the running game is restricted as there is only one running back in the backfield.

An alternative is the Ace (E) formation, where a running back (sometimes referred to as an H-back) sets up close to the line of scrimmage outside the tight-end as a wing back. This permits him faster release into the flat or over the middle, but he is much less effective as a runner or blocker.

1.9 FOUR RECEIVERS To produce a formation with four wide receivers it is necessary either to play without a tight end, or without any running backs in the backfield.

In the Stretch (S) formation the tight end is removed and there are four wide receivers. There is now no strongside to the offensive line, and the running game will be poor. There is no run blocking other than the offensive line, and successful running is dependent upon the passing game keeping the defence out of specialist run defences. The passing game is particularly good, but with no tight-end and only one running-back is almost entirely restricted to the wide receivers.

The Wing-Three (Z) formation is an alternative with only three wide receivers, but with the second running back moved to become a wing back (the same as in the Ace). The running game is almost as weak as with the Stretch, but with a running back and a wing back available the passing game is available to both running backs and wide receivers.

The Split (L) formation is a variation of the Ace formation, with both running backs lining up as wings (near the line of scrimmage). The variation in the passing game is optimised, with two wing backs, two wide receivers and the tight end, but with no-one in the backfield the running game is non-existent.

1.10 SHOTGUN FORMATIONS The various shotgun formations are variations on the other passing formations, in which the quarterback lines up four to seven yards deep in the backfield instead of immediately behind the centre ("under centre" in football parlance). Rather than handing the ball directly to the quarterback on the snap, the centre must pitch it and the quarterback must catch it. This longer snap increases the chance of a fumbled exchange, but the quarterback gains extra time to read the defence, dodge the pass rush and find an open receiver.

In the Shotgun Ace (B) formation there are two wide receivers, one tight end, one wing back and one running back (who stands alongside the quarterback in the backfield). The passing game is balanced, but not particularly strong deep, and the running game will be relatively poor (the running back is likely to be stationary when he takes any handoff) even though the tight end is available as an blocker.

The most common shotgun formation is the Shotgun Ace (C) formation, where the wing-back is replaced by a third wide receiver. This offers the greatest threat from the passing game whilst still retaining some semblance of a running game.

The most extreme shotgun formation is the Shotgun Spread (D) formation in which the tight end is replaced by a fourth wide receiver and the lone running back moves up to the line of scrimmage as a wing back. The running game is non-existent, and it is usually only used in desperation.

1.11 WISHBONE The Wishbone (W) formation is rarely used in pro football, but is still the staple of many college teams. There is only one receiver and only one tight end, but there are three running backs set in the backfield, one directly behind the quarterback and one offset slightly to each side. It is particularly strong for misdirection and option running, but is very weak in the passing game. Wishbone teams normally run most of the time and throw only a few passes per game. The success of the wishbone is primarily due to the lower quality of collegiate football and the willingness of collegiate coaches to allow their quarterbacks to run with the ball. In the pros the extra speed of defensive players prevents teams consistently running misdirection plays.

2 RUNNING PLAYS

2.1 INTRODUCTION The table below shows the play call codes and names, the ball carrier and general effectiveness for each running play available.

| Code & Name | Who | Effectiveness & Comments |
|------------------------|------------|---|
| RC Rush Through Centre | FB | power/dive straight ahead, short yardage |
| RT Rush Off Tackle | FB | power behind strongside tackle |
| LT Left Tackle | FB | power behind weakside tackle |
| FW Fullback Sweep | FB | outside, HB misdirection |
| DE Delay | FB | run off fake pass (all showing pass) |
| RI Lead Dive Inside | HB | dive, FB lead dive, short yardage |
| RL Lead Run | HB | off tackle strongside, FB lead |
| RO Option Veer | HB | option in/out option off tackle |
| RN Run Counter | HB | weakside, FB misdirection |
| PW Power Sweep | HB | outside behind pulling linemen |
| RW Run Weakside | HB | run weakside, FB lead |
| TW Toss Sweep | HB | pitchout strongside |
| SW Sweep | HB | sweep strongside, FB lead |
| CW Counter Gap | HB | inside cutback behind pulling linemen |
| TR Trap | HB | run behind trap block of aggressive DL |
| DR Draw | HB | inside run off OL showing pass |
| DT Draw-Trap | HB | inside run off OL showing pass, trap blocking |
| DW Draw-Sweep | HB | outside run off OL showing pass |
| EV End Around | WR | direct handoff, run weakside (QB to WR) |
| RV Reverse | WR | reverse on sweep, run weakside (QB to HB to WR) |
| DV Double Reverse | WR | end around reverse, run strongside (QB to WR to WR) |
| OR Option Run | QB | run, HB pitchout option |
| OT Triple Option | QB | run, HB pitchout, FB handoff option |
| QR QB Scramble | QB | rollout to strongside |
| QK QB Keeper (Bootleg) | QB | weakside keep, misdirection |
| QS QB Sneak | QB | dive behind centre |
| QD QB Draw | QB | run off pass fake |

2.2 FULL BACK & HALF BACK Teams normally have two starting running backs, the full back and the half back. The full back is usually the bigger and stronger, while the half back is smaller and faster. The fullback tends to take most responsibility for blocking, and bears the brunt of the inside power running plays. The halfback tends to run most of the outside running plays, where speed is at a premium, and is the back who has a better chance of breaking for a very long gain.

2.3 ONE BACK OFFENCES In one back formations the single back may be either the full back or half back according to the play call (it is the play you call that determines who is in the formation, not the formation itself). If a play description calls for a lead blocker or misdirection from a running back then don't call the play from a one back formation (they'll run the play assuming there's a lead blocker even though he isn't there).

2.4 LEAD RUNNING These plays involve one back leading the other (who is the ball carrier) through the hole, usually with the fullback leading and the halfback carrying. These plays are slower to develop than those without a lead blocker, so the defence has a better chance of breaking up the play, but the extra blocker means there is also a higher chance of the ball carrier escaping for a long gain.

2.5 MISDIRECTION Misdirection plays are those where the offence tries to mislead the defence by "showing" one point of attack and then hitting a different one. Typically it involves the quarterback faking a handoff to one back going in one direction and then handing off to the other back in a different direction. The principal intention of misdirection is to draw the linebackers out of position. Results are likely to be unpredictable. If the defence buys the fake then the ball carrier may well attack a weakly defended area of the defence. If the defence does not fall for the misdirection then the offence has simply removed one or more blockers from the point of attack.

2.6 TRAPS AND DRAWS These are "strategy" plays designed to lure defensive players out of position, usually by encouraging them to cross the line of scrimmage into the backfield. On a draw the offence behaves as if it were a passing play, encouraging the defence to rush the quarterback. As the defenders charge into the backfield the offensive linemen guide them away from the point of attack and the quarterback gives a delayed handoff to a running back. On a trap the defensive lineman nearest to the hole through which the play is to go is left unblocked. As he advances into the gap created he is hit by an offensive lineman pulling from the other side of the formation.

2.7 FULLBACK PLAYS Rush Through Centre (RC) is primarily a short yardage play, with the offensive line looking to overpower the defence and the fullback powering through the line of scrimmage. It is the play most likely to gain a couple of yards, but not likely to get much more.

Rush Off Tackle (RT) is the basic running play for many teams, with the fullback powering behind the strongside tackle. With the extra blocking of the tight end the play is likely to get yardage consistently.

Left Tackle (LT) is also an off tackle run, but it is run to the weakside without the extra blocking of the tight end. Yardage is not likely to be as good as the strongside run, but may exploit a defence which is over-compensating to the strongside.

The Fullback Sweep (FW) is the only outside fullback run, with the halfback and strongside of the line faking a run, while the quarterback hands off to the fullback running around the weakside.

The Delay (DE) is a form of draw play run by the fullback, with the whole of the offence showing pass. The offensive linemen drop into pass protection, the wide receivers step into their routes, and the quarterback drops back to pass before handing the ball off to the fullback to charge up the middle.

2.8 HALFBACK RUNNING INSIDE The Lead Dive (RI) is a variation of the Rush Through Centre play, with the halfback carrying the ball behind the lead block of the fullback. Yardage is likely to be better than for fullback dive, but there is more chance of the play breaking down.

The Lead Run (RL) is an off-tackle play, with the fullback leading the halfback. The extra blocker increases the chance of breaking a big gain, but also increases the chance of the play breaking down.

The Option Veer (RO) is also an off tackle run, with the halfback having the option of cutting inside or outside the tackle. The halfback reads the play as he approaches the line of scrimmage, and tries to pick the best hole available. This play gives the halfback a good chance of finding a hole and getting decent yardage if the defence is expecting the run, but isn't likely to get much extra yardage if the defence is playing pass as the linebackers get time to readjust.

Run Counter (RN) is a misdirection play with the strongside of the line and the fullback faking an off-tackle run while the halfback carries the ball to the weakside. Blocking at the point of attack is light, but if the defence buys the fake the half back can find himself in open field.

2.9 HALFBACK RUNNING OUTSIDE The Power Sweep (PW) is the basic outside running play. At the snap of the ball both guards pull to the right and lead the halfback around the strongside of the offensive line. The halfback cannot afford to overrun his blockers, so must wait for the offensive linemen to seal off the defence to the inside before turning upfield. If the offensive linemen fail then the halfback will simply end up running laterally until he runs out of field. If the halfback does turn the corner then a long run is very likely with only the secondary left to beat.

Run Weakside (RW) is a sweep to the weakside with the fullback leading the halfback around the left corner. Without the extra blocking of the tight end the play will not go far against a solid run defence, but the halfback may otherwise be sprung for a long gain.

The Toss Sweep (TW) is the fastest developing sweep play, with the quarterback pitching the ball out to the halfback. The halfback does not have to wait for any blockers to get in front of him and simply uses his speed to try and get outside as quickly as possible.

The Sweep (SW) is a variation with the fullback leading the halfback around the corner. The extra blocker slows down the development of the play and increases the scope for confusion, but provides an extra chance of breaking the halfback open for a long gain.

The Counter Gap (CW) looks and starts like a sweep, with offensive linemen pulling from the weakside of the formation. The intention is to get the defence to overpursue the play, while the halfback cuts back inside. The pulling linemen also turn inside to trap any defensive players who are at the point of the cutback. The play can only work when the defence buys the threat to the outside, or the offensive blocking is powerful enough to move the defence at will.

2.10 HALFBACK DRAWS AND TRAPS The Trap (TR) play is designed to take advantage of an aggressive defensive line, with the offensive line encouraging a defender into an apparent hole, then trap blocking the isolated player as the halfback carries through the hole. If the defence does not pursue across the line of scrimmage then the halfback will find himself with nowhere to go.

On a Draw (DR) play the offensive line set up to pass block and guide their immediate opponents away to the outside while the ball is handed off to the half back up the middle.

The Draw-Trap (DT) play is a draw play with a trap block. There is no lead blocker. It is less vulnerable to blitzes, stunts, stacks and the flex than the draw play because the first defensive player penetrating the line of scrimmage should be trap blocked but has even less impact on "passive" run defences.

The Draw-Sweep (DW) play is a draw to the outside, reliant mainly on the half-back's speed in getting to the corner. If the defence bites on the draw and the halfback gets outside he should get decent yardage - if they don't, or he doesn't, he won't go far.

2.11 GADGET RUNNING Gadget runs are designed to take the defence by surprise, using misdirection and an unexpected ball carrier.

On an End Around (EV) the quarterback fakes a handoff to a running back running strongside and hands off direct to a wide receiver crossing the field to the weakside.

On a Reverse (RV) play the quarterback hands the ball off to a back running strongside who then hands the ball off to a wide receiver looping to the weakside. The misdirection, faking a strongside run and sending the ball to the weakside makes the reverse more likely to fool the defence but is more risky because of the extra handoff.

A third option is the Double Reverse (DV), which is the reverse play with a second handoff, the wide receiver running to the weakside handing the ball off to a second wide receiver running to the strongside. This is the riskiest play of all, but if the defence is caught pursuing the play to the weakside the extra blockers to the strongside (from the initial misdirection) may lead to a large gain.

Reverses tend to produce high yardage, but are also likely to produce a lot of fumbles, some on the exchanges and some when wide receivers get tackled by linemen or linebackers. They are most effective against run defences, ineffective against pass defences (when most of the players you are trying to confuse are dropping back into coverage with time to watch and recover), and very risky against blitzes (when there are linebackers and safeties in the backfield to add to the general mayhem).

2.12 QUARTERBACK RUNNING There are a variety of running plays available to quarterbacks, although quarterback running is usually limited, except when forced to run under pressure. Teams usually try not to risk their quarterback on running plays, partly because of his importance as a passer and also because of his lighter padding.

The Option Run (OR) is primarily a short yardage play, with the quarterback carrying the ball off tackle with the option to pitch out to the half back or keep it himself. The pitchout is the usual result, as the objective is to force the outside defender to give up the running back and cover the quarterback.

The Triple Option (OT) is primarily a college running play, and not recommended against pro defences (who are quicker). The QB has the option to pitch out to the half back (OR) against an aggressive defence, hand off to the fullback up the middle (OT) against normal run defences and keep the ball (QR) if the defence is soft.

The Quarterback Scramble (QR) is not normally used as a designed play, usually occurring as the quarterback tries to avoid a sack. The quarterback rolls to the strongside, looking to get as much yardage (and perhaps out of bounds) before the defence closes in on him.

The Quarterback Keeper (QK) is a misdirection play, with the quarterback faking a handoff to a running back on a strongside run, and rolling out to the weakside.

The Quarterback Sneak (QS) is also a short yardage play, in which at the snap of the ball the quarterback simply follows behind the offensive line surge. The play is likely to get a yard, maybe two, but no more.

The Quarterback Draw (QD) is a delay/draw run by the quarterback. The added advantage over the other draw plays is that the quarterback drops behind his running backs (an important key for many defensive players), making the pass fake more convincing. Yardage is likely to be variable, and it is not a play that should be repeated regularly (unless you want your quarterback carried home in a box).

3 PASSING PLAYS

3.1 INTRODUCTION The table below shows the play call codes and names, the designated receiver, pattern and the typical distance for each passing play available.

| Code & Name | Who | Effectiveness & Comments |
|------------------------|------------|--|
| QI Quick In | WR | quick inside pattern, 0-5 yards |
| QO Quick Out | WR | quick outside pattern, 0-5 yards |
| QL Sideline Pass | WR | sideline timing pattern, streak |
| SI Short In | WR | short inside pattern, 5-10 yards |
| SO Short Out | WR | short outside pattern 5-10 yards |
| SL Slant | WR | short inside, 10 yards going deep |
| SM Seam Pass | WR | short inside pattern, 5-10 yards in seam of zone |
| DI Down & In | WR | deep pattern, inside, 10-20 yards (hook, comeback) |
| DO Down & Out | WR | deep outside pattern, 10-20 yards (square to sideline) |
| DL Down & Long | WR | deep corner or post, 20 yards going deep (bomb) |
| DS Stop & Go | WR | deep pattern in or out, breaking long |
| OP Option Pass | WR | QB rollout, run/pass option |
| LI Look In | TE | short inside pattern, 5-10 yards |
| LO Look Out | TE | short outside pattern, 5-10 yards |
| LL Look Long | TE | short inside, 10 yards going deep |
| FI Flare In | RB | short inside pattern, 5-10 yards (crossing pattern) |
| FO Flare Out | RB | short outside in the flat, 0-5 yards (old flare pass) |
| FL Flare Long | RB | short inside, 0-5 yards going deep (swing pass) |
| SC Screen Pass | RB | dumpoff on fake deep, screen |
| OS Option Screen | WR | deep option to WR or screen to RB |
| DC Dumpoff Screen | RB | dumpoff pass to running back on option screen |
| PL Play Action Long | WR | run fake, deep corner or post, streak (bomb) |
| PI Play Action In | WR | run fake, inside short crossing pattern |
| PO Play Action Out | WR | run fake, outside quick pass |
| PS Play Action Slant | WR | run fake, inside streak, slant |
| PA Play Action Option | WR | run fake, QB rollout with run/pass option |
| DP Dumpoff Deep | WR | dumpoff to secondary receiver, deep |
| FP Dumpoff Back | RB | dumpoff pass to running back, in the flat |
| LP Dumpoff Tight End | TE | dumpoff pass to tight end, short |
| SP Dumpoff Short | WR | dumpoff to outlet receiver, short |

3.2 PASS PATTERNS There are essentially only three basic types of passing patterns. On an "in" pattern the receiver stops and turns on his inside shoulder, facing towards the quarterback to wait for the ball. On an "out" pattern the receiver stops and turns toward the sideline. On "streak" patterns the receiver doesn't stop and turn, but runs downfield and catches the ball whilst running.

Inside patterns tend to produce the highest number of completions, but the receiver is catching the ball in front of the strength of the defence, so his chances of running after the catch are poor and of getting hit after the catch are high. If the pass is misthrown then there is a good chance of an interception.

Out patterns tend to be the safest patterns, as the receiver is usually between the defender and the ball. Completions are more difficult, particularly if the defence is expecting the pass, but against one-on-one coverage then there is a good chance of getting out of bounds or adding yardage after the catch.

Streaks are the most difficult patterns to complete, but are likely to produce significantly more yardage, especially after the catch. If the defence is expecting the run then streaks are fairly safe, but if there are safeties lurking in the deep and looking for the ball, then the chance of an interception is high.

3.3 PASS RECEIVERS There are three groups of pass receivers on a football team. Wide receivers are the specialists, whose primary responsibility is the passing game. Tight ends are receiver/linemen hybrids, expected to be able to catch like receivers and block like offensive linemen. The third group is the running backs, whose primary responsibility is running the ball, but who are also expected to participate in the passing game.

Avoid calling passing plays in formations where the player concerned is not present. If you call a pass to a wide receiver or tight end when there are none on the field then the QB has no chance of completing the pass. He may still manage to dump the ball off to someone else, but most likely he'll get buried by the defence while wondering where his receiver is.

3.4 WIDE RECEIVERS Wide receivers are the fastest players on the offence and are the main deep threat, although they will also catch short passes. They tend to line up near the sidelines, away from the congestion of the line of scrimmage. There are three groups of wide receiver patterns, quick patterns (timing patterns thrown off a three-step quarterback drop) within five yards of the line of scrimmage, short patterns (five to ten yards deep, thrown off a five-step drop) and deep patterns (ten to thirty yards deep, thrown off a seven-step drop).

3.5 QUICK PATTERNS Quick In (QI) is a quick timing pattern, in which the receiver takes a few steps to the inside, catches a quick pass from the quarterback, and tries to make his yardage after the catch. It is a pattern in which the receiver takes advantage of the "cushion" offered by his defender.

Quick Out (QO) is a similar timing pattern to the Quick In, with the receiver turning outside and trying to run after the catch.

For the Sideline Pass (QL) the ball is thrown over the shoulder of the receiver on a timing pattern. If the receiver is in man coverage, then the chance of completion is good, but against zone coverage the defender will be facing the quarterback and watching the ball, so the chance of completing the pass is poor and the chance of an interception high.

3.6 SHORT PATTERNS Short In (SI) is a short pattern to a receiver running a cross or hitch pattern five to ten yards deep across the middle of the field. The chances of completion are good, even against pass defences, but there is little prospect of the receiver making yardage after the catch and the receiver has a good chance of taking a big hit for his troubles.

Short Out (SO) is also five to ten yards deep, but the receiver turns towards the sideline. Yardage is likely to be good against run defences or blitzes when the receiver will be in single coverage, but against pass defences the completion chance will be poor.

The Slant (SL) pattern is also a short pattern, with the receiver slanting across the field and taking the reception on the run. If the centre of the field is vacant then there is a good prospect of a long run after the catch. If there are defensive backs lurking in the middle of the field then the chances of the pass being broken up, intercepted, or the receiver being nailed after the catch are high.

The Seam Pass (SM) is similar to a short in pattern, but looks to expose zone defences. The wide receiver "sits" in the seams of a zone defence and completion percentage against zones ought to be good. Poor against bump and run and linebacker drops, where the receiver is likely to be flattened.

3.7 DEEP PATTERNS The deep patterns are the speciality of the wide receivers, ten to thirty yards downfield away from the linebackers and congestion of the line of scrimmage.

Down & In (DI) is a hook or comeback pattern run ten to twenty yards deep, with the receiver turning back towards the quarterback. The yardage is the least of any deep pattern, but the chance of completion is higher, particularly against pass defences.

Down & Out (DO) is slightly deeper and likely to gain more yardage against run defences or blitzes. Against pass defences the chance of completion is very poor.

Down & Long (DL) is the long bomb. The receiver streaks down field and looks to catch the ball on the run. The chance of completion is poor, especially if the defence is playing for the pass, but if the pass is caught, yardage is likely to be very high.

The Stop & Go (DS) is also a deep pattern, where the receiver breaks in or out before turning upfield again, hoping that the defender has bought the first move. If completed, the yardage is likely to be good, but if the play is used too frequently the defender will take it away. The most likely result of a Stop & Go is that your quarterback gets knocked over while he's waiting for the receiver to get open.

3.8 OPTION PASSES For the Option Pass (OP) the quarterback rolls out to the strongside with the option to keep the ball or pass to a receiver downfield, according to how he reads the defence. Against man-to-man pass defence the quarterback is likely to keep the ball and his mobility and pass protection are likely to be critical to his success in getting yardage. Against a run defence or blitz the pass is likely and the chance of completion is good. If the defence doesn't commit or drops back into zone coverage then the quarterback is likely to struggle, with no receivers open and no rushing lanes available.

3.9 TIGHT ENDS The tight end lines up on the line of scrimmage and has to cope with pass catching in traffic. He tends to bear the brunt of short passing in the middle of the field, where the receiver is likely to take a savage hit after catching the ball.

The Look In (LI) pattern is the basic pattern for a tight end, short over the middle "underneath" the pass coverage. The chance of completion is good and this is the safest pattern over the middle. The yardage after the catch is likely to be relatively poor.

Look Out (LO) is a pattern to the tight end turning towards the sideline. Five to ten yards deep, the chance of completion is high, but again the chance of yardage after the catch is relatively small.

Look Long (LL) is a streak pattern to the tight end running downfield. This pattern is the most likely for a tight end to make significant yardage as he catches the ball whilst moving, but is more risky if the defence is expecting the pass.

3.10 RUNNING BACKS Running backs tend to have similar pass catching responsibilities to the tight end, although their position at the snap, behind the line of scrimmage, means that it takes more time for them to get open for a reception. Running backs often set up close to the line of scrimmage (on the wing of the formation, hence the name "wing back") to make them more effective as pass receivers. Running backs are also used as blockers in the backfield, so teams should be aware that sending running backs into pass patterns reduces the number of potential pass blockers.

The Flare In (FI) is similar to the Look In, with the running back going short over the middle, hooking back towards the quarterback. The chance of completion is good, particularly if the defence is playing for the pass and not keying on the running backs.

Flare Out (FO) is a short pattern to a running back outside into the flat. Not unlike a running play, the pass is most effective if the defence has dropped off into pass coverage. If the defence is playing for the run, then the likelihood is that the running back will be covered and unlikely to make much yardage.

Flare Long (FL) is a swing pass, to a running back slanting inside around five yards deep, streaking down the field. If completed yardage is likely to be good, but if the linebackers have dropped off deep, then the play is likely to be broken up.

3.11 SCREEN PASSES The Screen (SC) is thrown from a fake pass, with the quarterback and linemen setting up as if for a deep pass, but allowing the pass rushers to penetrate before the ball is dumped off to a running back who has slipped into the flat. The blockers regroup and roll out to block for the running back. Very poor against run defences, when the defence doesn't penetrate, the play is most effective against a blitz when the defence may be caught on the wrong side of the ball, or against zones where the blockers may overpower isolated defenders.

The Option Screen (OS) is a more complicated option play where the QB has the choice of throwing deep to a receiver downfield (the OS play) or dumping off to a back in the flat with a screen of blockers (the DC play). No other dumpoffs are available, as there's no time to look for secondary receivers.

The Dumpoff Screen (DC) may be used as a play in its own right, when it's an ordinary screen pass with a downfield fake. There are fewer blockers than for a regular screen pass and success will depend more on the threat of the wide receivers than the ability of your running backs.

3.12 PLAY ACTION Play action passes are actually variations on regular patterns, with the offensive line and backfield faking as if on a running play and the quarterback faking a handoff before throwing to a wide receiver. These patterns are most effective if the defence is expecting a rushing play, when the secondary are likely to buy the run fake and there will be no pass rush. Against a zone defence the secondary are unlikely to buy the fake, and against a blitz the run fake is superfluous.

Play Action Long (PL) is the longest play action pattern, thrown to a receiver streaking downfield. The chances of completion are poor, but if the pass is caught yardage will be very high.

Play Action In (PI) is a play action pattern to a receiver running a short crossing pattern. Not particularly explosive against run defences, the play is most useful when the defence is expecting the run but a completion is more important than yardage.

Play Action Out (PO) is a quick play action pass, faking a handoff to a running back on a quick hitting play up the middle, setting up a quick out pass to a wide receiver.

Play Action Slant (PS) is a short play action pattern, to a receiver running an inside slant pattern.

Play Action Option (PA) is the option pass run off a play action fake. Against a run defence results will be good, against a pass defence or blitz the play is likely to be disrupted.

3.13 DUMPOFF PATTERNS Dumpoff patterns are those to secondary receivers, thrown when the primary receiver is covered and the quarterback has time to find an alternative. You should **not** call dumpoff patterns as primary passes. Calling a dumpoff pass is like telling your quarterback to drop back, look for a receiver downfield and then even if he's open ignore him and look for someone else.

Dumpoff Deep (DP) is a dumpoff to a wide receiver, fifteen to twenty yards deep over the middle.

Dumpoff Short (SP) is a dumpoff to a wide receiver short near to sideline.

Dumpoff Tight End (LP) is the most common dumpoff pattern, to a tight end "sitting" underneath the coverage in the middle of the field.

Dumpoff Back (FP) is a dumpoff pattern to a running back in the flat.

4 DEFENCE

4.1 INTRODUCTION In Gameplan the defensive play calls are a combination of formation (the players on the field and the positions in which they set up) and action (what they do at the snap of the ball). The exact combinations of defensive personnel, their alignments and assignments are never actually specified (this isn't possible because of the scale of the mismatches that can occur in the game). The defence may sometimes be assumed to be doing something different from what you ordered, if it is obvious that it should do so.

For example, if you call a goal line defence against a deep pass from shotgun, then your defenders do not simply stand around on the line of scrimmage waiting for the run. They read the pass and adjust to the call. If, on the other hand, you were to call a goal line defence against a play action pass from a run formation they wouldn't adjust at all and you'll be lucky if you don't give up a touchdown.

The table below shows the play call codes, names and general description of each of the defences available, along with the number of men initially committed to the pass rush.

| Code & Name | Description & Pass Rush |
|------------------------|---|
| GL Goal Line Defence | stacks up and pursues the play, no initial rush |
| MD Mixed Defence | front seven read and react, don't commit |
| PD Pass Defence | man to man coverage, soft, four man rush |
| RD Run Defence | front seven plug the gaps and pursue the play, no initial rush |
| FD Flex Defence | linemen attack to break up the play, linebackers read and react |
| IX Inside Charge | stacks up the play inside, six man rush |
| OV Shift/Slant Over | aggressive run defence, attacking the strong side |
| OX Box Defence | outside charge, boxes the play inside, six man rush |
| TS Tackle Stunt | aggressive run defence, stunting to spring a man inside |
| UN Shift/Slant Under | aggressive run defence, attacking the weak side |
| ES End Stunt | aggressive pass defence, stunting to spring a man outside |
| DD Double Man | man to man, with extra man deep or double team, three man rush |
| LD Linebacker Drop | lineman or linebacker drops in short pass zone, three man rush |
| LJ Linebacker Jam | linebacker jams tight end on line of scrimmage, four man rush |
| ND Bump and Run | man to man coverage, bump and run, four man rush |
| WC Wide Coverage | soft four deep, four short zone, three man rush |
| ZD Zone Defence | three deep, four short zone, four man rush |
| ZS Short Zone | two deep, five short zone, four man rush |
| JB Linebacker Blitz | strongside linebacker, looping to the outside, five man rush |
| KB Linebacker Blitz | weakside linebacker, looping to the outside, five man rush |
| LB Linebacker Blitz | inside linebacker, plugging the middle, five man rush |
| FS Safety Blitz | free safety inside, disguised or delayed blitz, five man rush |
| SB Safety Blitz | strong safety inside, no disguise, five man rush |
| SS Safety Blitz | strongside safety or corner from the outside, five man rush |
| WS Safety Blitz | weakside safety or corner from the outside, five man rush |
| BZ Allout Blitz | blindside linebacker and inside safety, six man rush |

4.2 BASE FORMATIONS There are currently two defensive "base" formations, the 3-4 and the 4-3. The choice between which of these to use as your base defence is considered part of the rosters rules (see Rosters guide).

The difference between the two is mainly that moving from the 3-4 to the 4-3 one of the linebackers is replaced by a defensive tackle. This improves the straight ahead run defence and the initial pass rush (because of the extra lineman) at the expense of the outside run coverage and short pass defence (one less coverage defender). The 4-3 is usually less flexible, as there is a greater degree of specialisation. Both formations hinge on a single key player who must dominate the middle of the formation (the nose tackle in the 3-4, and the middle linebacker in the 4-3).

4.3 PASS RUSH Regardless of the defensive formation used, most pass defences have a basic four man pass rush. For the 4-3 formation these four rushers are simply the four defensive linemen. For the 3-4 defence the three defensive linemen are usually joined by a linebacker, often a player actually referred to as "designated pass rusher". This is usually the (blindside) right outside linebacker, who on passing downs often lines up on the line of scrimmage outside the defensive end. This blurs the distinction between the 3-4 and 4-3, as the remaining three linebackers responsibilities are the same as they would be in a normal 4-3 set. In Gameplan any single dogging linebacker in 3-4 counts as a pass rusher in all defences, and he is not considered to be a blitzer.

4.4 RUN AND PASS DEFENCE In any formation the defensive players either play for the run, by trying to prevent the offensive line from opening holes through the line of scrimmage for the running backs, or play for the pass, with pass rushers trying to break through the offensive line and pressure the quarterback before the receivers can get open.

Pass defences are characterised by defensive players trying to penetrate into the backfield whilst the linebackers and defensive backs cover potential pass receivers. Normally the secondary are responsible for covering the primary receivers, with the two cornerbacks covering the two wide receivers, the strong safety covering the tight end, and the free safety patrolling deep in centrefield as a last line of defence, with the linebackers having responsibility for any running backs. No defender can keep a top class wide receiver covered for ever, and any passing down is a race between the receivers getting open and the pass rushers reaching the quarterback.

Run defences are characterised by the defence not trying to penetrate the line of scrimmage, but trying to ensure that their strength remains focused around the ball. The secondary will still provide coverage against the pass, but with a weakened pass rush their chances of keeping all receivers covered for long enough are very much reduced.

4.5 BASIC DEFENCES The more you specialise, the greater the chance of getting a serious mismatch. Some defences are very extreme (very good when they're good, and very bad when they're bad). You can gamble against virtually any offensive play call, but you're not obliged to gamble (unless your defence can't do the job any other way).

Run Defence (RD) is a conservative run defence, with the linemen and linebackers looking to plug the gaps and not allow the offence more than a two or three yard gain. There is no initial pass rush, but the defence is not very strongly committed to the run and is unlikely to give up a big gain to a passing play.

Pass Defence (PD) is a four man pass rush with man to man coverage on the various receivers. The outside linebackers hold responsibility for the running backs, the cornerbacks cover the wide receivers, and the strong safety is responsible for the tight end. The corners usually line up fairly deep, giving them time to react to the receivers' moves, and the overall passing threat should be reduced. The defence is not particularly weak against the run, as the defenders are individually keyed on the various offensive personnel (for example, if the tight end blocks rather than releasing, the strong safety should read this and move up for the run).

Mixed Defence (MD) is a standard defence, with the front seven reading and reacting to the offence. The defence is unlikely to make a big play, as they're conceding the initiative, but they're unlikely to give up a big play either. In many combinations mixed defence is also treated as a specialist defence. If the offence is messing about with something clever, then mixed defence will help your defence to wait, read and react correctly.

Goal Line (GL) defence defends the line of scrimmage, stacking up and pursuing the play along the line. It is good against most running plays, effectively keying out the running backs, although liable to be penetrated by dive plays (where the defence is not concentrated enough to hold the line) and misdirection plays (where the aggressive pursuit can be drawn to the wrong point of attack). Against the run it is not likely to give up big gains. Against the pass it is poor, with the front seven committed elsewhere and no pass-rush, making the chances of a completion and good yardage high, although each individual receiver should still be checked off in man to man coverage.

4.6 RUN DEFENCE There are a number of other run defences, some of which are variations of the basic run defences, while others are more specialised. Many teams will adopt one or more of these defences as a basic defence, and you will often find it necessary to adapt your defence to use one or more specialist run defences when facing a powerful run offence.

In the Overshift (OV) defence the defensive line overloads the strongside of the line of scrimmage by slanting their blocking assignments to that side. Against the pass there is no difference from a basic run defence, but against strongside runs, particularly off-tackle plays, the extra concentration of the defensive line is effective in increasing the number of busted plays (stuffs). Against weakside runs, the defence is less effective, with the defence slanting away from the point of attack.

The Undershift (UN) defence is the mirror of the overshift, with the defensive line slanting the weakside of the line of scrimmage. This isn't an especially good idea unless the offensive is running to that side. Look out for offences with balanced strong and weak sides, who are especially likely to hit the weak side of the line.

The Flex Defence (FD) is a more aggressive run defence with the defensive linemen attacking across the line of scrimmage to break up the play, while the linebackers read and react as in the basic run defence. The linemen's charge increases the chance of stuffing a play at source, and the play is strong against inside runs, which are likely to be disrupted by the rush or plugged by the linebackers. With the defensive line committed to the backfield there is a risk if the ball is run to the outside, but the play is flexible if the play turns out to be a pass. The hunt for the ball in the backfield will soon turn to search for the quarterback if he drops back to pass.

The Tackle Stunt (TS) is also an aggressive run defence with the line stunting to spring a man inside. In a stunt one lineman leaves his position and loops around another lineman into what might be a vacant hole. This increases the chance of a lineman being sprung unblocked into the backfield, but also increases the chance of a breakout, if the position vacated is the hole to which the offence is running. The play is most effective against the slower developing runs, particularly lead plays.

4.7 PASS DEFENCES All pass defences are a balance between keeping receivers covered and reducing the time they need to be covered. Given time any receiver will get open eventually. There are two forms of pass coverage, man to man and zone. In man to man coverage each defensive player has responsibility for covering a specific opponent, but in a zone defence the defensive players cover specific areas of the field (known as zones). Instead of running with the pass receivers, the players remain in their zones until the ball is thrown and they are free to converge upon the target. Zone defences and defences with spare men in pass defence are much more likely to gain interceptions and don't have the same risk of long gains as aggressive defences. They will also generally give up less primary completions and more dumpoffs, and will be more vulnerable to draw plays.

The Bump and Run (ND) defence is a variation of the basic pass defence. The cornerbacks line up on the line of scrimmage and try to "bump" the receivers, preventing them from getting away into open field (defenders are only allowed this sort of contact with receivers close to the line of scrimmage). This defence is also effective against quick patterns as the receiver cannot catch a pass "underneath" the coverage if the defence is tight to him at the line of scrimmage. However, the aggressive play of the cornerbacks increases the chance of a "blown play" and a big gain if a pass is completed.

The End Stunt (ES) is another variation of the basic pass defence. Instead of a straight ahead four man rush, one pass rusher stunts (loops around another defensive lineman) to the outside. The disruption to the offensive blocking scheme increase the chance of springing him free with a clear path to the quarterback. Against a long pass (slower pattern) the chance of disrupting the play should be higher, against a quicker pattern the stunt may simply take a pass rusher out of the play.

The Double Man Defence (DD) is a more extreme pass defence, dropping a man from the pass rush to reinforce the coverage. This provides either double coverage on a key receiver or an extra man deep. With only a three man pass rush, the chance of quickly closing down the play is poor, but the extra defender decreases the chance of giving up a big completion and increases the chance of making an interception.

The Zone Defence (ZD) is a committed pass defence. The front four rush the passer, and the coverage is divided into seven zones, with four short zones up to 15 yards from the line of scrimmage, and three deep zones further downfield. With the secondary concentrating on the quarterback, they cannot react quickly to running plays or screens. Zones can also be vulnerable to quick patterns, when a receiver may be isolated against a linebacker, and to secondary receivers slipping into the "seams" while the defenders are picking up primary receivers tracking through their zones.

The Short Zone (ZS) defence emphasises the short zone coverage, with five short zones and only two deep (hence this is also called the "two deep zone"). The two outside short zones are both manned by cornerbacks, so it is particularly strong against short patterns run near the sideline. The two deep zones are manned by the two safeties, who may be vulnerable to any deep pattern, but particularly to a fast tight end breaking up the middle into the seam between the two safeties.

Wide Coverage (WC) is primarily a zone defence concentrating on avoiding giving up the big play. There are four short zones (manned by linebackers, except that a defence would normally replace some linebackers with defensive backs in situations where wide coverage might be used) and four deep zones (all manned by defensive backs), and only a three man pass rush. Entirely useless against a running play, as the defence concentrates on pass coverage. Close to the goal line, where the deep zones are unnecessary, the defence adjusts by keeping pass defenders in man to man coverage to ensure that on any chosen play wide coverage always has the least chance of giving up a catch in the endzone.

The Linebacker Drop (LD) is a mixture of man-to-man and zone defence. One pass rusher drops off the line of scrimmage at the snap of the ball into a short zone over the middle, from where he can read the quarterback and/or pick up running backs and tight ends coming over the middle. If the offence is passing deep or out to the wide receivers then the pass rush is reduced without reinforcing the secondary, but a key feature is the opportunity for the offence to lose track of the dropping linebacker or lineman and throw a free ball into his zone.

The Linebacker Jam (LJ) is a variation on the basic pass defence. The strongside linebacker attempts to jam the tight end on the line of scrimmage, preventing him releasing into his pattern before passing coverage over to the strong safety. Effective against passes to the tight end (who is effectively being double covered) but not good if the play calls for the tight end to block the linebacker anyway, and also removes the linebacker from pass coverage in the flat.

4.8 BLITZES Blitzing shifts the balance of the defence by taking players out of the run or pass coverage, risking longer gains, but gaining the chance of nailing the play at source. A blitz can stuff a run just as effectively as a pass, but probably not unless you direct the blitzer the same way as the ball carrier. A "blitz" actually means sending an extra player from the defensive secondary, while an extra pass rushing linebacker would be "dogging", but "blitzing" is often used to refer to either. Taking a man out of the coverage is always a gamble, and deciding which man to send is an equally difficult choice. Weakside blitzes generally have more chance of reaching the quarterback (being on his blindside).

The Strongside Linebacker Blitz (JB) sends the strongside (left) outside linebacker looping to the outside. His chances of disrupting a sweep are good, as he may get into the backfield and nail the running back, and the five man pass rush also provides a strong rush against the pass.

The Weakside Linebacker Blitz (KB) is a similar play, but sends the weakside outside linebacker looping to the outside (in a 3-4 defence it is the weak inside linebacker who blitzes, having assumed the responsibilities of the outside linebacker who is already the fourth pass-rusher). The effects are similar to the strongside, except that weakside runs may be stuffed.

The Inside Linebacker Blitz (LB) is the least effective blitz against the pass, sending a linebacker through the middle of the offensive line. Against a pass the linebacker is unlikely to get through unblocked, but against the run he increases the chance of stuffing a play up the middle.

The Free Safety Blitz (FS) is a disguised or delayed blitz up the middle by the free safety. The relatively light but quick free safety is unlikely to be very effective at plugging a gap on a running play, but against the pass he's the least likely to be picked up. He was also the last line of defence, until you sent him after the quarterback.

The Strong Safety Blitz (SB) is similar to the Inside Linebacker Blitz, sending the strong safety up the middle. The strong safety will be less effective against the run than a linebacker, but more effective than the free safety, and is more likely than a linebacker to be left unblocked on a passing play.

The Strongside Corner Blitz (SS) is actually a blitz by either the strongside cornerback or the strong safety from the outside. Less effective against the runs than linebacker blitzes, the element of surprise against the pass will be higher, as the blitzer is leaving his coverage on a primary receiver.

The Weakside Corner Blitz (WS) is similar to the strongside blitz, but with the weak (free) safety or weak side cornerback attacking from the outside.

4.9 DEATH OR GLORY DEFENCE Sometimes, when the defence knows for sure what the offence is going to do, and playing the percentages isn't good enough, then there comes a time to gamble hard. All three defences offer a high chance of breaking up any play in the backfield (particularly those they're supposed to stop). The problem comes when they don't get there, everyone has been committed and you should expect to give up big yardage if you don't kill the play at source.

The All Out Blitz (BZ) combines the weak side linebacker blitz and the strong safety blitz, with both men rushing the quarterback to make up a six man pass rush. The chance of nailing the quarterback is very high, but if the ball escapes the remnants of the defence will likely be outmatched.

The Inside Charge (IX) is the most extreme inside run defence, with the front six stacking up the play inside. Any inside run will be overwhelmed, but against an outside run or any pass the only chance is to stuff the play at source. Normally only used on goalline or short yardage situations.

The Box Defence (OX) is an equally aggressive defence, that commits defenders to the outside to box running plays to the inside. Outside runs will be stuffed, but if a running play breaks inside the yardage will be significant. Against a pass the only hope is the pass rush.

5 SPECIAL TEAMS

5.1 INTRODUCTION Twelve special teams play calls are included, and you can call most of them (some are automatically called for you), train and key on them. The special teams formations are called by the computer as and when necessary. In the advanced game they may be used on fourth down plays to set up fake field goals and punts, and to identify possible fake situations on defence (see advanced guide).

Code & Name

FG Field Goal Attempt (automatically called).

FB Field Goal Block (automatically called)

KO Normal Kickoff (kicked high for distance and hang time, no gimmicks)

KS Squib Kickoff (low kick bouncing along the ground, reducing returns)

ON Onside Kickoff (short kickoff, attempting to regain possession. Automatically called)

PN Normal Punt (punt high for distance and hang time)

PC Punt Corner (aim out of bounds when in opponents half)

PR Normal Punt Return (standard return, no gimmicks)

PV Long Punt Return (gadgets and gambling on return)

PB Punt Block (all out attempt at blocking punt)

KR Normal Kick Return (standard return, no gimmicks)

KV Long Kick Returns (gadgets and gambling on returns).

5.2 FIELD GOALS The two field goal plays (FG and FB) are automatically called for you when you or your opponent attempt a field goal. Note that training on the field goal block (FB) play counts both for blocking field goal attempts and preventing your opponent from blocking your kicks.

5.3 KICKOFFS On kickoffs you have the option of calling normal kickoffs (KO) and squib kickoffs (KS). Squib kickoffs are much shorter, and returns are rare. There is also a chance for the kicking team to recover the ball on squib kickoffs. Training on kickoffs (KO) will improve your kickoff coverage (reducing the returns for your opponents). You cannot call Onside Kickoffs (ON), but the computer will automatically call them for you in desperation situations.

5.4 PUNTS Corner Punts (PC) are the same as normal punts (PN) when kicking within your own half. However, in opposition territory your punter aims to kick out of bounds within the 20 yard line. These are generally shorter than a normal punt, but no return is allowed.

5.5 PUNT RETURNS Long Punt Returns (PV) involve gadgets and more adventurous return plays (usually with two returners deep rather than one). There is a greater chance of long returns, but also more risk of fumbles or no return at all. The Punt Block (PB) play makes increased effort on blocking the punt rather than setting up the return (usually removing the blockers who hold up the “gunners” who chase down the returner), so returns will be poor.

5.6 KICKOFF RETURNS Long Kickoff Returns (KV) involve gadgets, such as reverses, pitch outs and so on, with a greater chance of long returns but more chance of being stuffed after a short return or no return at all.

6 HINTS & TIPS

6.1 PLAY BY PLAY REPORTING In the descriptions of the results the idea is to report key characteristics on each play. A "breakout" means that someone missed a tackle, allowing the runner to make extra yardage. The characteristic which caused the breakout is reported (e.g.: lead block, run breakout). "Stuffed" means that one of the defensive players penetrated into the backfield and made the play before the running back reached the line of scrimmage. "Run broken up" means the play would have been stuffed, but the running back evaded the stuffer and made something on the play anyway.

"QB hurried" means that the quarterback was pressured by the pass-rush before being ready to throw to the intended receiver. "No open receiver" means that the QB had time to pass the ball, but the intended receiver was not open. Both reports mean that the QB had to look for a second option. He may "scramble" to gain yardage himself, try to look for a secondary receiver to whom the pass can be "dumped off" or "checked off". Alternatively he may fail and get sacked.

"Blitz picked up" means that a running back picked up and blocked a blitz and prevented a hurry or sack, giving the team the chance to complete the original pass. The more backs a team has in the formation the better the chance of picking up the blitz. If you call a pass to a running back, he can't hang around to pick up blitzes (so a one back offence lacks the ability to do both at once).

On interceptions "picked off" means that a defensive back made the play and took the ball away, whereas other messages mean the quarterback or someone else made a mistake (a giveaway).

On pass receptions "popped", "nailed" or "decked" means that a defensive player hit the receiver immediately after the catch. Pops are most likely on inside patterns. All pass receivers can be popped, but wide receivers often lack the nerve and durability of running backs and tight ends. Receivers who can catch the ball while scanning the field for approaching safeties are rare.

6.2 PLAY & FORMATIONS You cannot complete a pass to a player who is not on the field. This does not mean you cannot complete a pass when you call a play to a player who is not on the field, because you can dump it off to someone else but your chances of making a play if you do so are greatly reduced. Running plays are different: at present your rating is reduced for screwing up the formation, and the chances of all the bad things increase (fumbles, penalties, stuffs).

6.3 PENALTIES Penalty calls are mostly connected to particular events and are quite likely to be meaningful. Silly combinations of plays and formations (lead runs with only one running back, tight end passes when none are on the field, etc), poor team ratings on the plays called, lack of training on the plays called and playing hard all affect the number and type of penalties called against you.

Most interference and holding penalties occur when your guys need to interfere or hold (your guys are telling you they can't cope and need some help from the coach). The false start and incidental face mask penalties are applied in the same circumstances. The delay of game, illegal motion, illegal shift and illegal procedure penalties ("confusion penalties") indicate bad combinations of plays and formations.

6.4 KEYS Your accumulated keys are quite distinct from your keys for the game itself. Don't rely on accumulated keys to stop a play, and don't make the mistake of treating your keys the same way as your training. Keys are far more significant than accumulated keys.

6.5 PLAY ACTION The effectiveness of a play action pass depends very much on both the defence called and on the credibility of the fake. If you have established that you can run then the defence is more likely to buy the fake (quite apart from being more likely to call a run defence in the first place). If there are still defensive backs lurking in the deep then all you're doing is taking a potential blocking back out of the play, reducing the ability of your quarterback to read the defence and maybe faking the linebackers a step or two out of position.

6.6 RUN & SHOOT If you want to try playing a run and shoot style offence then you should be aware that this version lacks one of the essential play calls (an option pass or audible draw play). A true "run and shoot" is therefore not yet possible, and won't be possible until a system of quarterback audibles can be introduced (it's a difficult concept, having quarterbacks calling audibles under the orders of the coach). Remember that the key to the Run & Shoot is the run, and the ability of the offence to establish a credible running game with only one back and no tight end. It doesn't have to be a superb running game, but it does need to be sufficient to keep the defence off balance.

6.7 PASS OFFENCE It is essential to understand that the most important component is your pass protection, and that it is important to have some sort of running game to keep the defence off balance. Scattering receivers to the four winds will do you no good whatever if your quarterback is carried away in a bucket. Don't neglect the secondary receivers. Tight ends and running backs can be harder to defend, because they offer alternative threats. To build a good passing game you need to mix it up, passing long (which forces the cornerbacks to back off) and short, using all your receivers. If the defence doesn't have to cover them all, then they'll get the coverage right too often.

6.8 GAME BALANCE Game balance varies from league to league. In some leagues everyone builds monster offensive lines, and then we're told it's too easy to run. In other leagues they don't, and then complain that they can't run at all. The balance in the NFL does shift around as well, but it's less obvious because there are no other NFL's to compare with.

Don't expect things that work well in one league to necessarily work well in another league, because all of the rosters and coaches are different. The effect of coaching on the play balance is very significant.

6.9 COMMON FAULTS Gameplan coaches often spend too much time trying to find dominating strategies and not actually trying to stop their opponents. A common reaction to a league full of big offensive lines is to go and get one yourself, but the smart solution would be to draft run stoppers and get ahead of the game.

6.10 DEFENSIVE ADJUSTMENTS The defences make a number of adjustments during the game. In this version the defences adjust more quickly than before to the offence repeatedly calling the same play. Teams need to vary their play-calling, but should still try to stick to their strengths. Against "regular" plays (runs off tackle, etc) the defence reacts slowly, but against trick plays (reverses, etc) the defence learns very quickly. Some of the plays which are most appropriate for regular use can be achieved with more than one variation of the same play call (e.g. sweep with SW, PW or TW, draw with DR, DE or QD, and run off tackle with RT, LT and RO).

6.11 DEFENSIVE BALANCE In addition to these play adjustments the defence will also adjust to the run/pass balance and to the short/long pass balance. If the offence is running far more than passing, then the defensive line adjusts to the run at the expense of the pass. If the offence is throwing too many short passes, then the defensive backs tighten their coverage, closing down on short passes, and making themselves vulnerable to the long pass. There are two ways to coach a high scoring offence. One is to smash the defence flat by doing one thing so well that they cannot stop it. The other is to keep the defence off balance, by mixing up your plays and making the defence adjust to whatever you did last (just in time for you to do something different).

6.12 DUMPOFFS Don't call the dumpoff patterns in your gameplan. The dumpoffs are what your quarterback will try and throw if his primary receiver isn't open, assuming the defence hasn't yet buried him. It's quite common for the primary receiver to be covered, so the quarterback will then look for a secondary receiver or even to scramble. The dumpoff patterns are worth training on, because this improves the chances of completing them when they're thrown, but you shouldn't call them yourself within your gameplan, as this is the same as telling your quarterback to ignore his primary receiver, regardless of whether he gets open or not.