

THE RUNNING BACK IN THE PASSING GAME

PRESENTED BY : ERWIN KLEMPNER
Running Back Coach
University Of Regina Rams

FOOTBALL CANADA
NCCP LEVEL 4
MONTREAL, QUEBEC
JANUARY 30 – FEBRUARY 2, 2003

b. Ideal Pass Block Position – The running back must align himself so that he is in the ideal position where he is able to deliver a one or two hand punch. The running back should line up his nose on the inside ear of the blitzer. (See Figure 2) The running back should be in a good balanced position ready to deliver a blow by having the shoulders over the knees and the knees over the toes. The feet are the most critical point of the ideal pass blocking position. They should be slightly staggered inside foot up, the toe of outside foot in line with the instep of the inside foot. They must point straight ahead and be flat on the ground with all the weight being on the inside of the foot, heel to toe. He must feel pressure down through his hips to his knees to the inside part of his feet. Hands must be up in a ready to punch position or to use them to help him move. (See Figure 3) **I like to describe the ideal pass blocking position using the term “Press Down”** because this reminds the player he must feel the pressure in his feet to maintain this ideal football position. He cannot have the press down feeling when he is leaning forward on his toes or back on his heels.



Figure 2



Figure 3

2. Pass Blocking Skill

Once the running back understands and feels comfortable with the “Press Down” position, we will work on four possible techniques that the blitzer will use on the running back.

a. **Outside Rush** – Blitzers will come off the edge and attempt to go around the running back. The running back must adjust to the movement of the blitzer and try to keep his hips square to the blitzer's for as long as he can. This forces the blitzer to go around the running back. (See Figure 4) If the hips are turned this creates a “soft shoulder” for the blitzer to attack, which gives the blitzer a shorter distance to the Quarterback. (See Figure 5) First movement is to step back with the outside foot and to slide the inside foot back keeping it ahead of the outside foot in order to keep the shoulders square to the rusher. Picking up the inside foot transfers all the weight to the outside foot and therefore does not keep the “Press Down” position, therefore foot movement is step and slide.

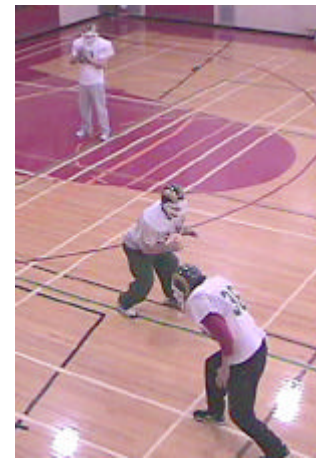


Figure 4

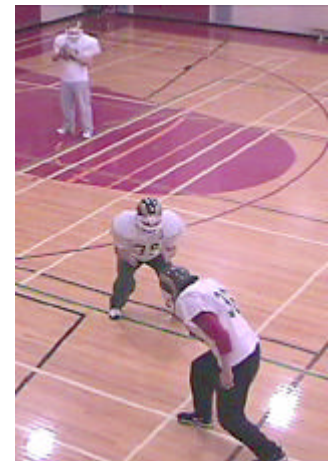


Figure 5

The punch is a 3 to 6 in inch blow and the running back should think to “Press Down” while punching, this will help teach balance. We do not want to use the inside hand until the last possible second as this will force the running back to turn his hips and give a soft shoulder. The punch allows the back to keep position on the blitzer and wait for a swim or a rip move. If the running back gets a good punch and a good fit try to keep it, avoid hit and recoil. When pass blocking you want to frustrate the blitzer and be an obstruction, a lunge is a one shot deal and many times the quarterback pays the price.



Figure 6

Once the outside move is made the rushers inside hip is exposed and the inside hand of the back then punches the hip (See Figure 6), which prevents the blitzer from stopping

and cutting back underneath. The running back must continue to “Press Down” and shuffle his feet to accommodate the blitzers’ path past the quarterbacks drop back position. If the running back does not maintain the “Press Down” technique throughout the pass block and becomes too aggressive and leans (gets on his toes) it will allow the rusher to stop push the RB upfield and cut underneath the block to the QB.

b. Inside move - The inside move is when the rusher takes a step upfield and then rips underneath the blocker. All inside moves must be honored as this is the shortest distance to the quarterback. The running back must move to ideal position and engage the blitzers and deliver a blow with both hands to the sternum, on the punch the running back should be in perfect balance **and use the “press down” technique.** (See Figure 7) Once in the ideal position the running back is able to react to the blitzers’ counter move. The running back must be prepared to give up ground grudgingly as he must allow the QB to step up and throw the ball.



Figure 7

- c. Bull Rush** – In many ways the bull rush is similar to the inside move, but the blitzers are attacking the running back head up, usually this occurs as the blitzers have a 5 yd run at him. The running back should use the same technique described for the inside move. It is very difficult for the running back to take on a bull rush and give ground grudgingly.
- d. Chop Block** - An effective way to keep the blitzers’ bull rush “honest” or to slow him down is to use a chop block. The chop block is set up by the running back getting into the same position as he is about to punch the blitzers. He must “sell” the move by looking into the blitzers’ eyes like he is about to engage him with the punch. The running back must roll his hips through the man keeping his head up and make contact at the blitzers’ thighs, thus taking his legs out. The running back should land on his stomach flat out. If done properly and occasionally, the blitzers will be kept guessing. This will slow the blitzers’ rush and allow the running back to use regular pass blocking technique.

PASS BLOCKING DRILLS:

1. Step and Slide Drill against air 5yds straight back
 - practice foot movement in ideal position
 - punch as you shuffle, to get the “Press Down” feeling with punch

PARTNER DRILLS – introduction drills used at half speed to teach technique speed can be increased as skill is mastered

1. Step and Slide Drill outside rush
 - partner moves up field and uses swim and rip move
 - inside hand punches hip when it is exposed
 - **variation-** partner moves up field then tries to come back inside
2. One step up and crash inside move
 - aggressive punch and partner tries a second move
 - Work on getting hands on sternum and “Pressing Down”
3. Bull Rush
 - partner attacks hard from 2 steps away
 - Work on getting hands on sternum and “Pressing Down”

¾ speed drills to reinforce technique and body position on blitzer

4. Pop Drill
 - Coach chooses blitzer
 - Blitzer attacks on coaches command.
5. Mirror and Engage Drill
 - expand alley as skill improves

LIVE DRILLS

6. Live pass rush drill
 - Linebackers practice pass rush

7. Live Two way go blitz
 - Linebackers blitz outside or inside gap

PASS RECEIVING:

There will be two parts to the receiving section 1) catching the ball, 2) routes that utilize the running back in the passing game specifically drop back passes.

1. CATCHING THE BALL

- a. Ball above the chest (Figure 8)

- thumbs and fingers together to form triangle
- arms out but slightly bent
- as point of ball goes into triangle
 1. fingers give towards body
 2. arms collapse towards body at the elbows
 3. tuck ball under arm, fingers over the point of ball



Figure 8

- b. Ball below the waist (Figure 9)

- put little fingers together
- fingers point to the ball
- elbows come together
- catch ball with fingers and bring ball into body

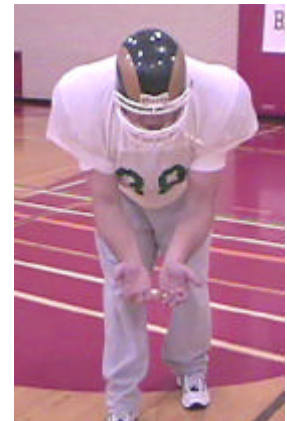


Figure 9

- c. Over the shoulder catch (Figure 10)

- little fingers together
- elbows come together
- finger tips bend toward the ball
- catch ball with fingers and bring into body

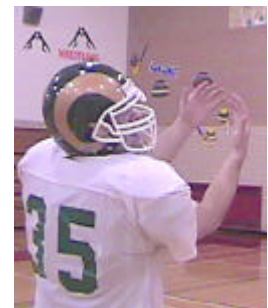


Figure 10

d. catching the ball on an out pattern (Figure 11)

- reach out with arms in front you use body as shield
- thumbs together reach for the ball
- catch ball with fingers and tuck under arm away from defender



Figure 11

2. PASSING DRILLS :

The passing drills used are a progression where fundamentals are emphasized, (especially using hands) from a warm up time to full speed timing drills.

a. Square drill Cones set in a 10 yd Square

- used in warm ups to reinforce catching technique and skills
- have two lines of players standing diagonally from each other
 - i. player runs to the cone and breaks out at 90 °
 - players must turn head around to find ball and get hands up
 - catch ball tuck securely under arm and turn up field
 - ii. have players also run hooks
 - run past cone, plant outside foot, swing inside arm and head to get body facing QB.
 - move towards throwing catching ball, catch ball tuck securely under arm, turn up field.

b. Line drill

players line up 15 yds from coach in a single line on coaches command run at the coach, catch the ball with hands without stopping, tuck ball under arm and hand ball to coach. Use many variations of ball to catch; high-low, off to left and right, catch ball at highest point, wobbly ball, break at 90 and spinning. At the start of year the throws may be softer passes, as the running backs confidence builds increase the velocity.

c. Timing Drill (3 step drop)

Players take two or three strides from the LOS and are 10 -15 yds from the QB or coach. On command they will take two or three steps to complete the pass route. QB throws the ball on or before the break. The routes are outs, slant in, hooks, the running backs must make sharp cuts, get their head around to the ball, hands ready to catch the ball on the break.

d. One on ones - LB vs RB – Live to the ball being caught

Doing one on ones twice a week reinforces all the skills used in drills and develops timing with the quarterbacks.

e. Pass Skeleton

Pass Skeleton can use 7 on 7 and 12 on 12. 7 on 7 allows the running backs to learn to read the defense, release into the pattern and get into proper position to block blitzer. 12 on 12 allows the running backs to work on their reads and pick up the blitzers with the linemen.

3. RUNNING BACKS IN THE PASSING GAME

a. Man Coverage , 4-3 defense

Blocking Assignment – O-line responsible for D-Line and Middle LB

RB's responsible for outside linebackers

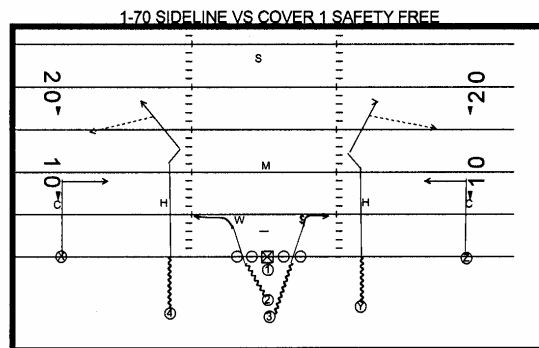
Cover 1 Man Safety Free

- Check position of safety – safety deep (10-12 yds)

Read Outside linebacker (W or S) to halfback (H)

Presnap movement OLB adjusts his position to running backs and engages RB at LOS , HB plays inside of slot. **On Snap of ball** if threat shown get into blocking alignment on OLB or HB always check LB to HB, if both come block most threatening player.

Neither defensive player blitzing, release into MAN pattern



b. Cover 3 Zone 4-3 defense

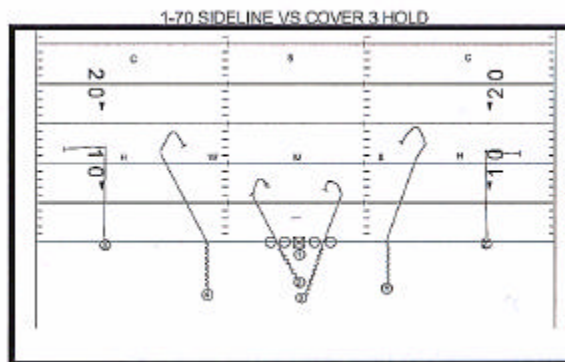
Blocking Assignment – O-line responsible for D-Line and Middle LB

RBs responsible for outside linebackers

Check position of safety – safety deep (10-12 yds)

Read Outside linebacker (W or S) to halfback (H)

Presnap movement OLB does not adjust to running backs, HB plays outside of slot back. **On snap of ball** LB moves away from RB, HB does not backpedal with slot or breaks out to flats.



Neither defensive player blitzing, release into ZONE Pattern

c. Play Action Pass

Blocking Assignment – Same patterns are run in man or zone.

Running backs used in play action pass plays can be very advantageous . A play action pass play should be run the same way the running play is. The blocking back will attack the man (defensive end) he usually blocks on the running play,

then just runs by him out into the pattern. Linebacker and halfback who have pass responsibility will come up to support run, therefore they will not be in an ideal position to defend the pass.

