

## INTRO TO SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT AT THE YOUTH LEVEL

Outside zone blocking is a scheme I have been interested in for a while but never really understood the mechanics behind it . As I picked the brains of many way smarter than me and watched a very good video about it I decided I would dive in head first and see what happens. If nothing else, I could bail in pre season with little harm done since I had no real certainty about what I was doing.

It was shaky at first but I saw the light and stayed the course. Like anything new I learned as I went along and dealt with the trouble spots as they arose systematically. I knew our team needed an edge running the football because we are small but very athletic.

I decided to run all off tackle plays as outside zone blocking, all sweeps and pitches as reach and run blocking since that is about all our team did last year. Then all inside running was 100% traps. This worked beyond my expatiations to the point we hardly ever ran outside. We were a powerhouse running the off tackle plays which opened up the play action passing game to no end. One of our receivers scored 15 TDs in 10 games. We became so good at the play action both of our tackles each scored twice thru the air. We scored 49TDs and more than half of those were off tackle runs. BTW, we never pulled a single linemen all season even on the traps.

We finished the regular season as the 9<sup>th</sup> ranked scoring offense out of 220 teams in 7 different age groups. We were number 1 for all 10 year olds and are considered rather small as a team. Our league is an independent unlimited weight league that is just over 60 years old so the competition is quite fierce. We punted once in 10 games.

Anyway, as I plugged along the games became more and more lopsided. We ran the outside zone out of 3 different formations so it is flexible. What stood out over all else was once taught it did not matter what the defense was showing therefore the teaching progression was much faster than I had anticipated. I was told that zone blocking covers everything by simple rules that do not change per the defense. I was told the defense is always wrong even if they stunt and blitz. This was all proving to be true. We played verses the gap 8, a really well run 44 stack, many very aggressive 62s and practiced every day verses the 46. Everything was indeed covered by the base rules and I never once stopped a practice to re-message a linemen's brain because of the defensive alignments except for the 44 stack. That did take a little extra coaching because of the chasing it creates in very young minds. Once they robotically went through their progressions as a unit we were very solid up front. It also helped improve our pass blocking 10 fold.

The following describes how I eventually taught this system successfully to 5<sup>th</sup> graders. There are many way smarter than me out there who may do things differently but this worked just great for us...beyond great. Feedback from those who have experience with outside zone blocking is appreciated. Next season we will inside zone...a whole new animal indeed. Coach Mike ( mahonz)

## THE RULES

- There is only one rule to outside zone blocking....determine whether you are covered or uncovered before the football is snapped.
- If uncovered then you will slide step play side and attempt to take over the block of the next man over play side attacking the far funnel of the defender and getting your butt to the football bumping the next man over play side off his block. The funnel is the area from the center of the chest plate up to the shoulder and down to the elbow. Hitting a perfect funnel is right into the armpit.
- If covered then you will t-step through the defenders play side number standing him up and turning him slightly so he is facing the football. Then attempting to block a scraping linebacker once the backside next man over bumps you off your block
- Uncovered means there is no defender aligned over you or fully in your gap to the play side. Ignore backside gap unless that man is also uncovered. Basically if no defender is shading your pads your are uncovered.
- Covered means there is a defender aligned right over you or fully in your play side gap. Must always pay attention to the backside gap. Basically if a defender is shading your pads anywhere you are covered.
- If uncovered and a linebacker walks up over you then you are now covered even if you don't think you are.If he is on the line and anywhere near you then you are covered. If you are now covered then it is possible you will get help from the next man over backside if he is uncovered.
- If covered and a linebacker walks up into either your backside gap or the play side gap you are still covered. It is up to the next man over either way to pick him up but you will no longer get any help and will not release to a linebacker.
- If uncovered and the d-lineman attacks hard to the backside gap then he is that uncovered mans immediate block without having to bump the next man over off play side as the covered man will now be immediately rotating to a scraping linebacker.
- If covered and the d-lineman attacks hard to the play side gap then the covered man is alone on the block and the uncovered man next to him backside immediately rotates to a scraping linebacker.
- Any late shift by the D-line could or will change the rules of being covered or uncovered.
- All linemen could be considered covered all at once but never all uncovered...that would be a stupid defense.
- If the d-line ever runs a twist then the vacating d-linemen is not your problem if he goes backside but the one about to show up is your problem. Same holds true with stacking and stunting linebackers. Who ever shows first is your man as you take the first zone step as determined by your pre snap rule. Never chase a stunt. Run your steps by rule and the stunt will get caught up somewhere in traffic. The rules hold true for all down blockers EMOL to EMOL.
- Fast feet, fast hands, fast eyes all come after a fast brain. Think first then do and before long you can do without thinking. If wrong then fix it the next play but never hang your head. Have a short memory and talk it over with your buddy on the way back to the huddle. Troubleshoot your tandem on the field per the defense. The coaches can only emulate so much for you during practice. Play football and figure out the tendencies of the defense. They can only do so much and eventually you will know what that is...exactly.

We go through this progression each day for 10 minutes, birddog to full speed.

## T STEP WHEN COVERED

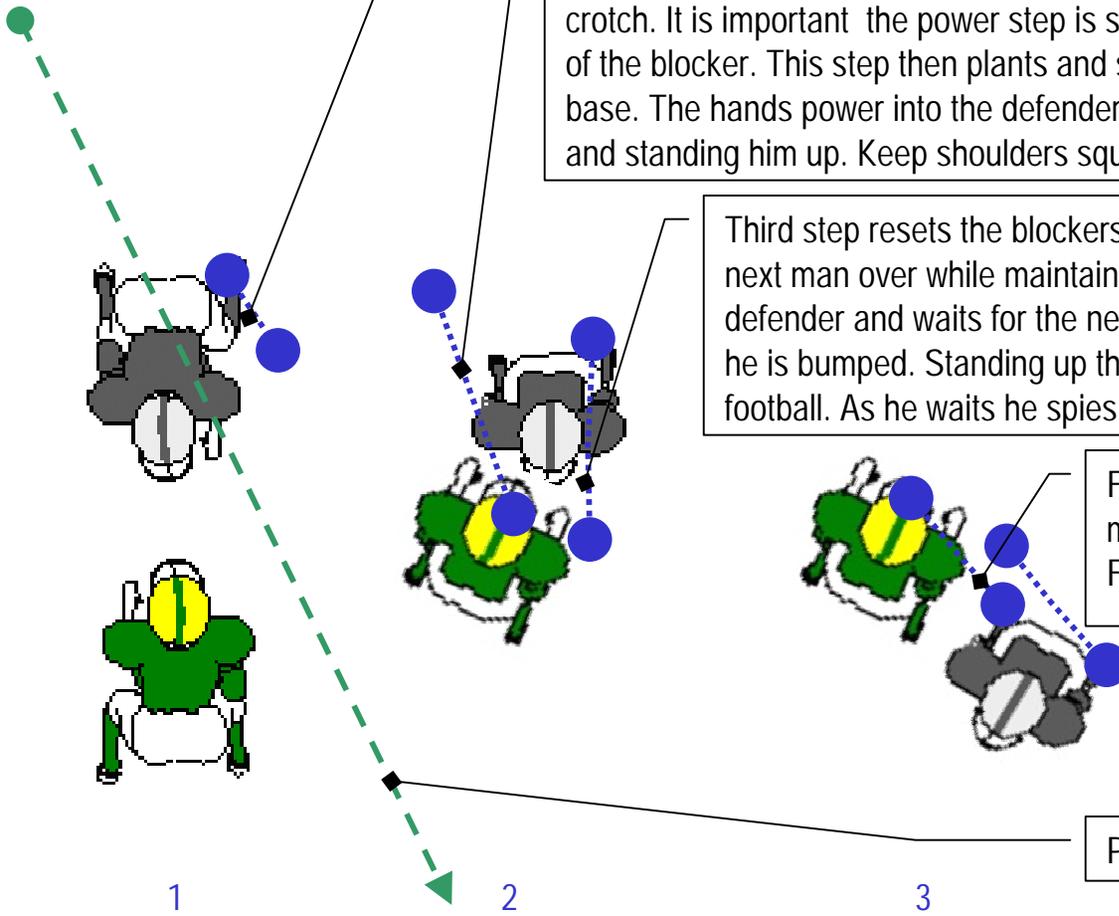
Play side foot is the first step and is equal both vertical and horizontal depending on your player. 6x6 or 8x8 or 10x10. This foot then plants and sets for the third step. Both hands cock and aim for the defenders far number. Thumbs up palms out. Stay low until hands engage. Then drop hips and lift hard during the power step.

Back side foot is the second step and is the power step long and hard into the defenders crotch. It is important the power step is straight away and stays underneath the shoulders of the blocker. This step then plants and sets for the fourth step while maintaining a good base. The hands power into the defenders far number as hard as possible turning him and standing him up. Keep shoulders square.

Third step resets the blockers base as he waits for the take over move by the next man over while maintaining a good base. Blocker collapses into the the defender and waits for the next man to bump him off. He must not leave until he is bumped. Standing up the defender is critical as you roll the butt to the football. As he waits he spies the second level.

Fourth and fifth steps slides off the block while maintaining a good base. Up field foot is first. Find and get on linebacker.

Path of the football



# SLIDE STEP WHEN UNCOVERED

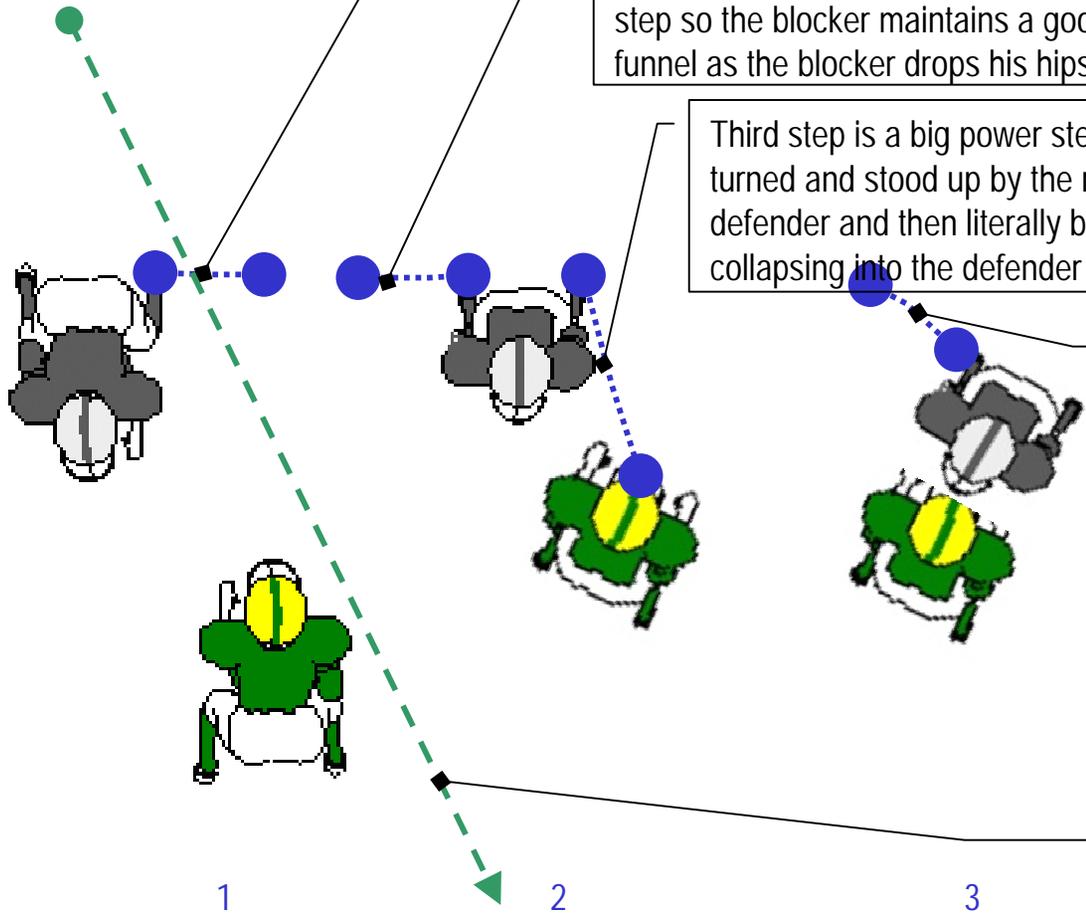
We go through this progression each day for 10 minutes, birddog to full speed.

Play side foot is the first step horizontal with the distance once again depending on your player but should not stretch the player unnecessarily. This foot then plants and sets for the third step. Both hands cock and aim for the defenders far funnel. Thumbs up palms out. Stay low until hands engage. Then drop hips and lift hard during the power step.

Back side foot is the second step and must be horizontal and equal in distance to the first step so the blocker maintains a good base. Both hands power into the the defenders far funnel as the blocker drops his hips and lifts. Keep shoulder square.

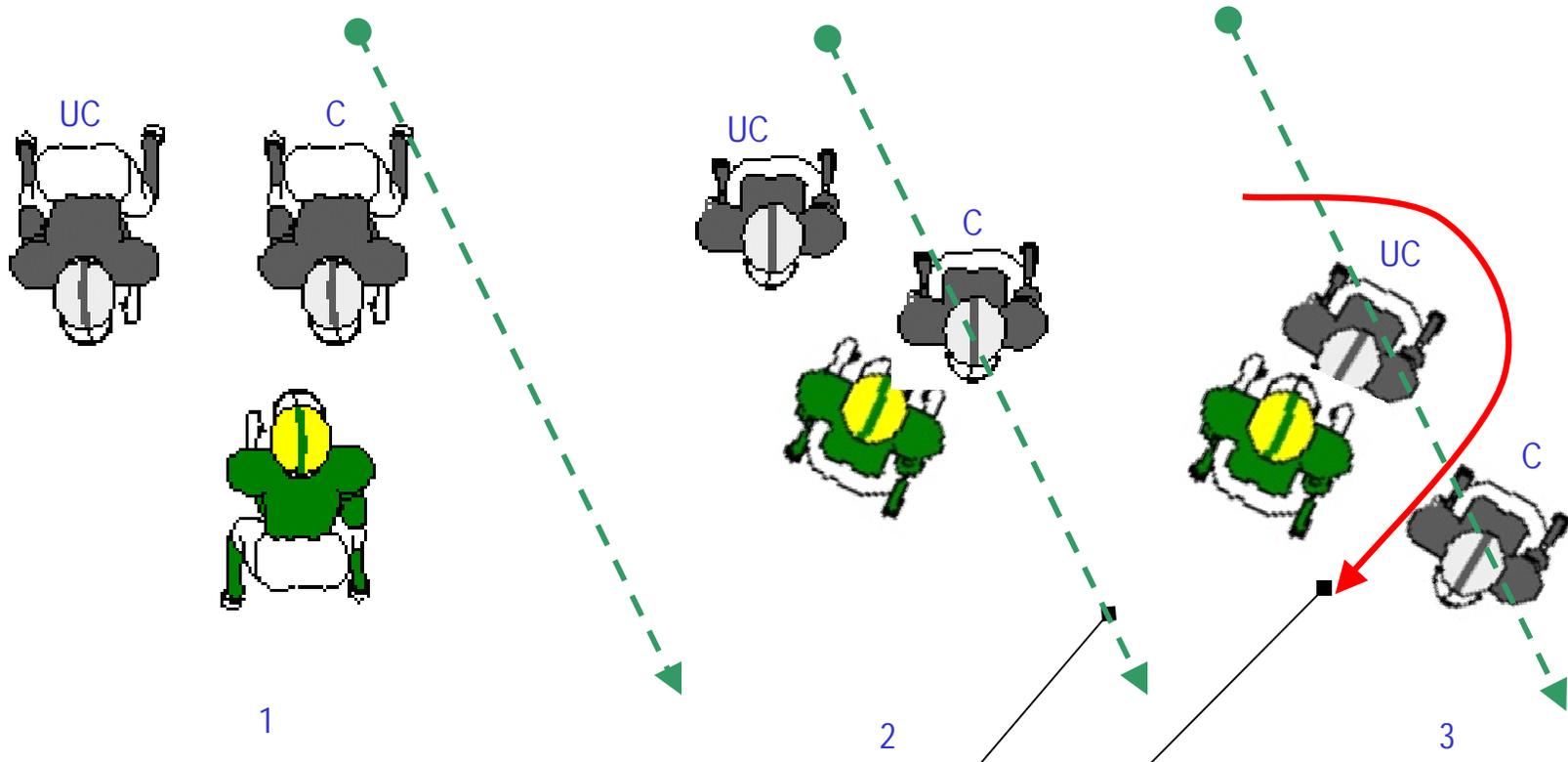
Third step is a big power step that attacks into he defenders crotch as he is slightly turned and stood up by the next man over. Blocker then collapses into the the defender and then literally bumps the next man over off with his play side hip while collapsing into the defender with head up field.

Fourth step is a t -step to maintain a good base as the next man over leaves then getting his butt to the football head up field then drives to the whistle maintaining a good base with fast feet.



Path of the football

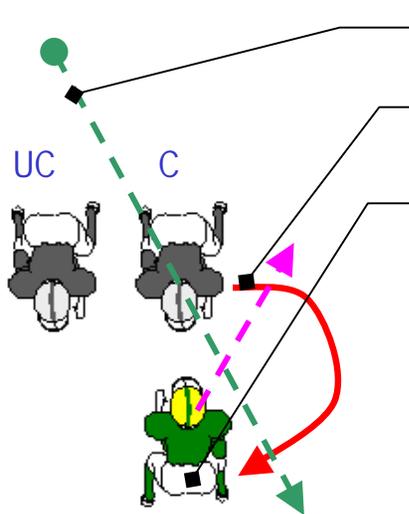
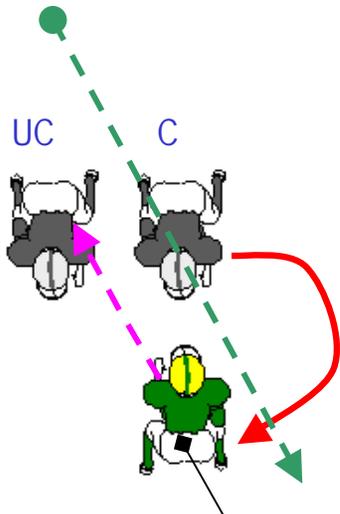
# HOW IT LOOKS



Path of the football

Direction the entire zone is rotating.

# WHAT IF FOR THE D-LINE



Path of the football

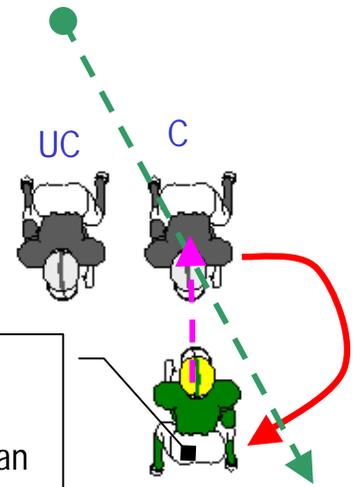
Direction the entire zone is rotating.

The defender goes hard into the covered mans play side gap. Then the covered man gets both hands on the backside numbers and takes the block on alone riding the defender hard on his natural path. The uncovered man then gets immediately to the linebackers. Steps do not change.

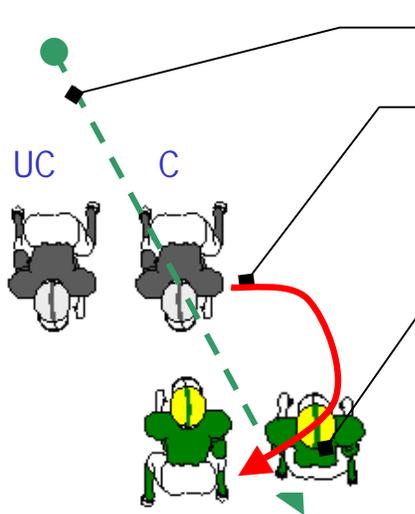
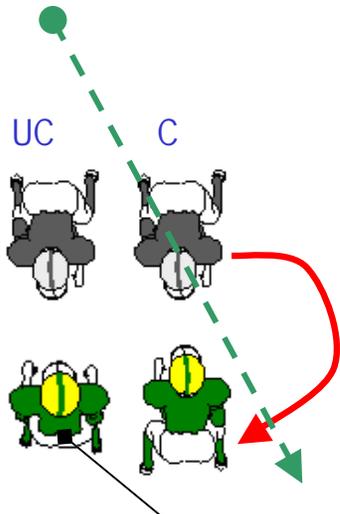
The defender goes hard into the uncovered man. Then the covered man gets both hands on the defenders play side hip and pushes off to the linebacker immediately. This actually helps the uncovered man take over. Steps do not change

We teach the linemen to key the defenders helmet if in a 3 or 4 point stance, the belt buckle if in a 2 point stance. This tells the linemen immediately where the defender is going. Eyes are not down field until engaged with the first level defender. If a defender bear crawls then which ever linemen meets him first fall on him so his buddy can continue to the linebacker. The footwork and the hands must be fast...fast ...fast and stay as square to the LOS as possible until you begin to rotate in tandem.

The defender goes hard into the covered man. Then all rules apply and they run the defender until the uncovered man bumps the covered man off. Then the covered man rolls to the linebackers. Steps do not change.



# WHAT IF FOR THE LINEBACKERS



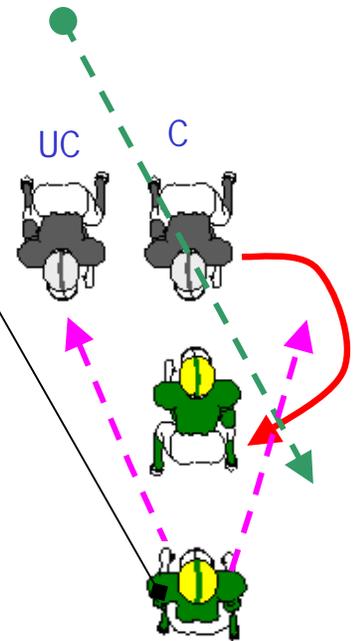
Path of the football

Direction the entire zone is rotating.

The linebacker walks up and fills the covered mans play side gap. Then both blockers slide step into their defenders. Neither lineman will release to the second level and both blocks become big on big getting their butts to the football. A big power step is critical when not getting any help.

The linebacker walks up and covers the uncovered man. Then both blockers t-step into both defenders. Neither lineman will release to the second level and both blocks become big on big getting their butts to the football. A big power step is critical when not getting any help.

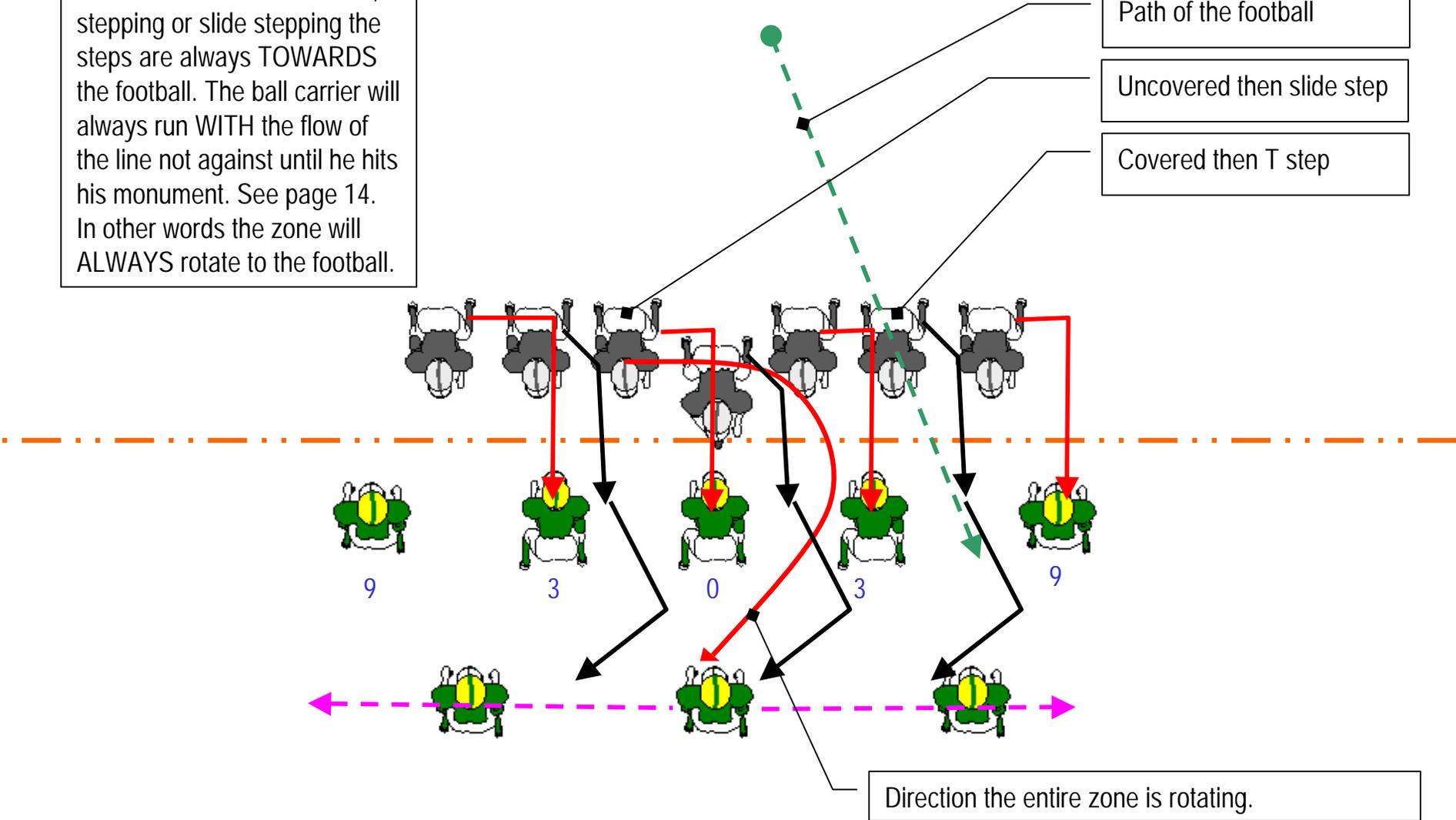
The linebacker zone blitzes backside or play side. This actually helps the scheme since the d-linemen will attempt to shoot a gap and pull the double team. The rules don't change as the blockers are attempting to block the linebacker anyway. If the blitz comes backside then the covered man takes the d-line by rule because the d-lineman goes hard to the play side gap and the uncovered man picks up the blitz. If the blitz comes play side then then the covered man picks up the blitz because the d-lineman goes hard backside and the uncovered man takes the d-line. If the blitz is a jailbreak up on the line then all blockers t-step into the jailbreak. If the jailbreak is all zone then the blockers play by rule depending on the immediate action of the d-line. That is why we do teach eyes on the d-line first....then down field.



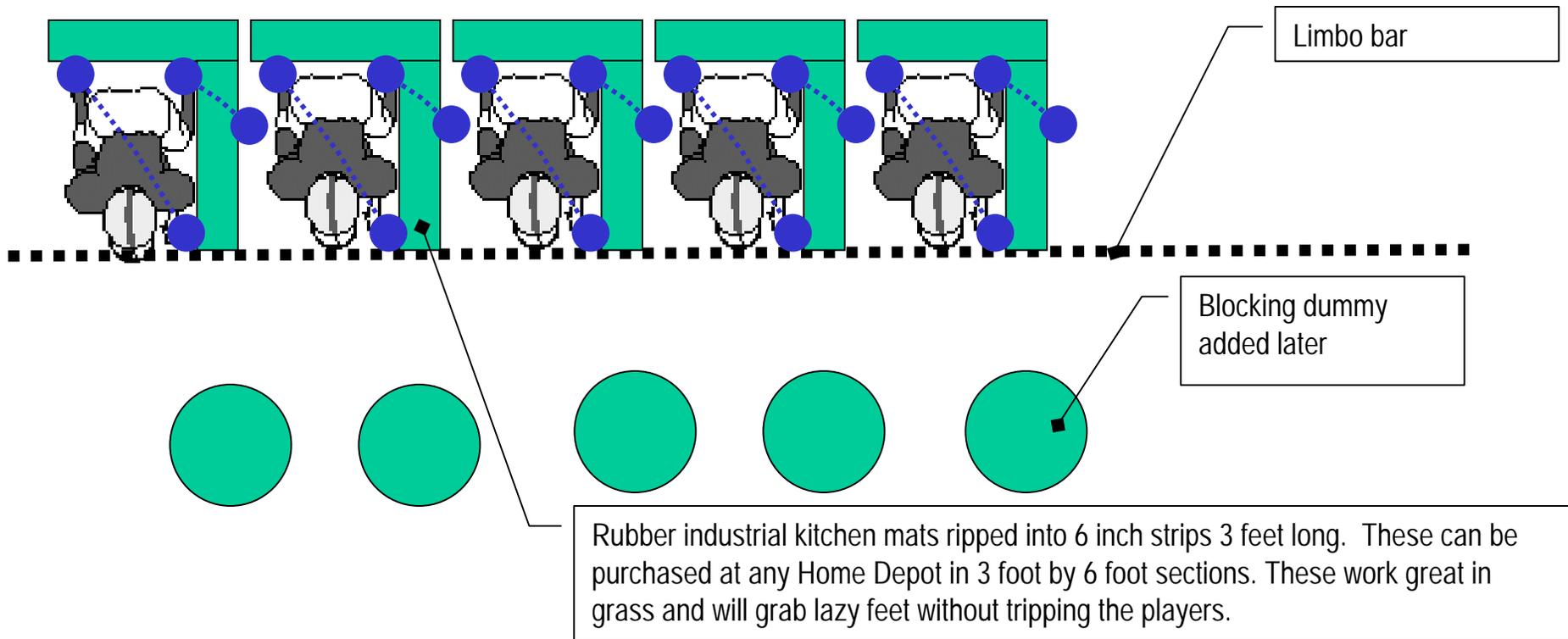
# THE LINE RULES vrs. BASE 5-3

Whether cover or uncovered, t stepping or slide stepping the steps are always TOWARDS the football. The ball carrier will always run WITH the flow of the line not against until he hits his monument. See page 14. In other words the zone will ALWAYS rotate to the football.

- Path of the football
- Uncovered then slide step
- Covered then T step

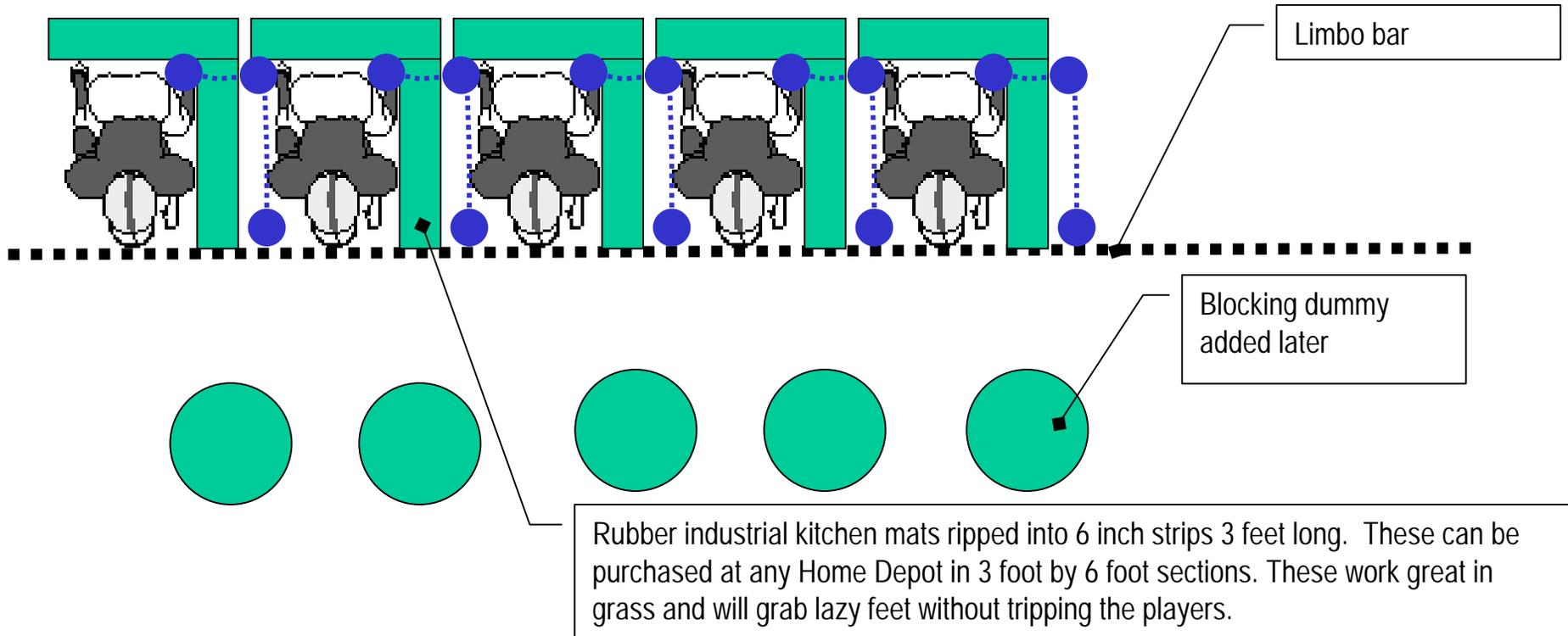


## T-STEP MAT DRILLS w/ LIMBO BAR



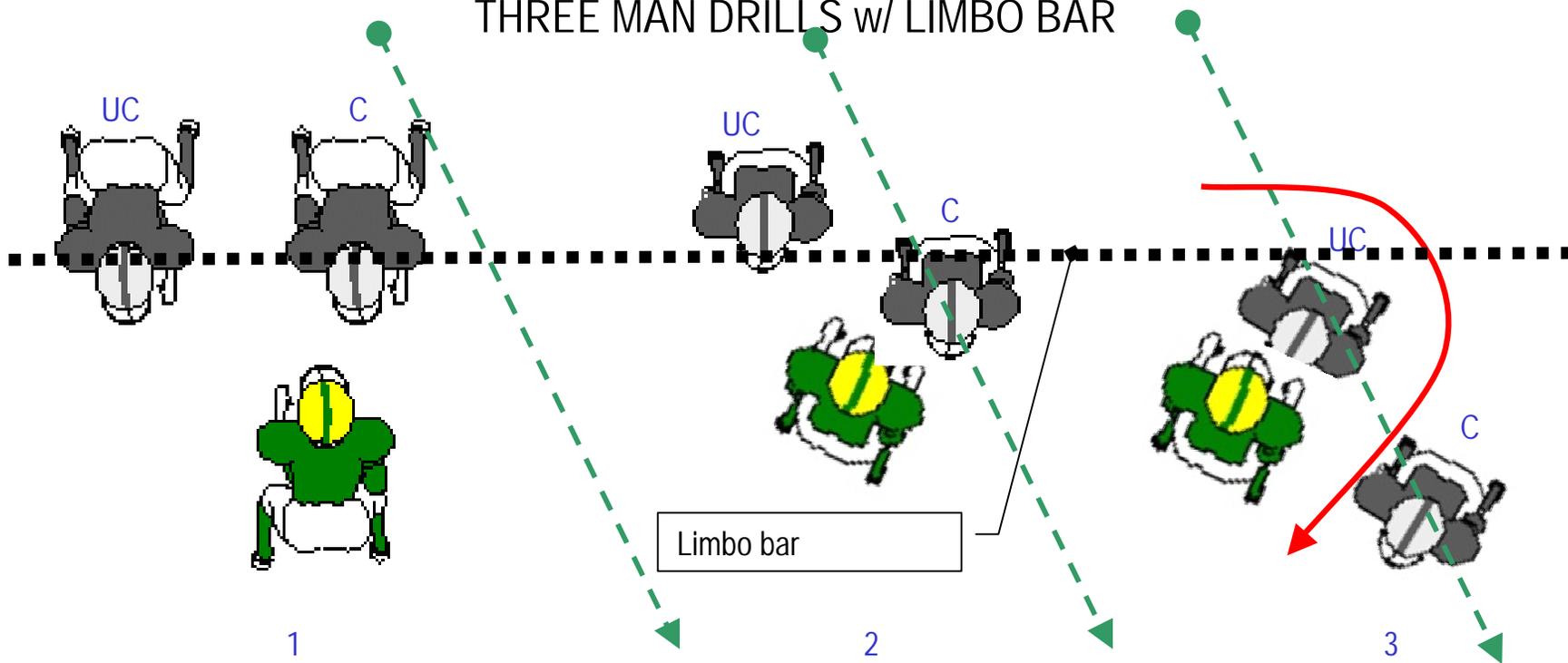
We use a limbo bar that is set 12 inches over the linemen's facemask. They cannot touch the limbo bar as they come out of their stance. Both heels must touch the horizontal mat with the play side foot touching the vertical mat. On the coaches whistle they t-step under the bar. It is very difficult to keep the second step which is the power step underneath their bodies at first. Stress that they do. Shown is practicing a t-step to the left. Move the vertical mats to the right to practice going right. The first step is across and to the far side of the vertical mat and forward equal distance. The second step is to the same side of the vertical mat and long to the end of the mat. As they get comfortable with their steps under the bar add a bag to hit into with a piece of tape marking the aiming point (near number). They need to power up the hands on the first step and get the palms out thumbs up. Stress quick feet and good hands and power into the tape collapsing hard into the bag while he lifts keeping his hands on the tape. Zone blocking is susceptible to holding calls. Stress hands inside, aim, collapse and lift. We do this drill for 5 minutes each direction and eventually use the bags full time.

## SLIDE STEP MAT DRILLS w/ LIMBO BAR



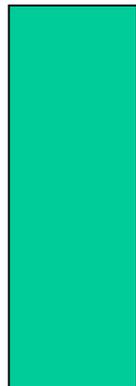
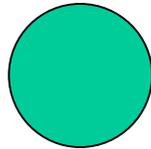
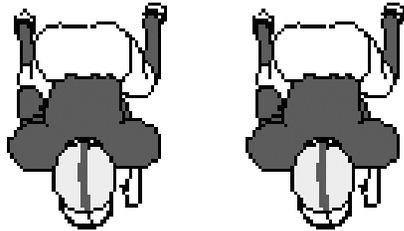
We use a limbo bar that is set 12 inches over the linemen's facemask. They cannot touch the limbo bar as they come out of their stance. Both heels must touch the horizontal mat with the play side foot touching the vertical mat. On the coaches whistle they slide step parallel to the bar. Shown is practicing a slide step to the left. Move the vertical mats to the right to practice going right. The first step is across and to the far side of the vertical mat parallel with the bar. The second step is to the same side of the vertical mat and parallel to the bar and is the same distance as the first step to maintain a good base. The third step is the power step along the far side of the mat and to the end of the mat. As they get comfortable with their steps under the bar add a bag to hit into with a piece of tape marking the aiming point (far funnel). They need to power up the hands on the first step and get the palms out thumbs up. Stress quick feet and good hands and power into the tape collapsing hard into the bag while he lifts keeping his hands on the tape. Zone blocking is susceptible to holding calls. Stress hands inside, aim, collapse and lift. We do this drill for 5 minutes each direction and eventually use the bags full time. This drill will also dictate your horizontal splits. If the first step steps on the next mans eventual second step foot then the splits are too close or you may want to use the bucket step instead of the slide step if using tight splits.

## THREE MAN DRILLS w/ LIMBO BAR

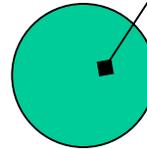
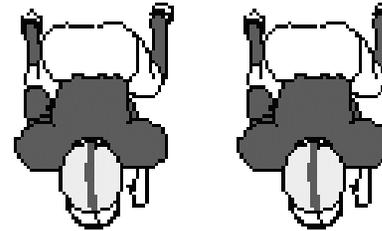


We use a limbo bar that is set 12 inches over the linemen's helmet. They cannot touch the limbo bar as they come out of their stance. This forces them to stay low until they lift the defender on their power steps. The lift is critical to the block so that it takes the power away from the defender as the blockers rotate. We allow the blockers complete success at first. Whether you use a live defender or a coach with a shield the blockers must be allowed success as they get used to rotating and lifting. We basically tell the defender he will allow the blockers to kick his butt then as the blockers get comfortable they add resistance. We birdog this through all 4 major steps then go live. Coach checks, steps hands and eyes. The defender is eventually allowed to attack any gap after the blockers get their bearings. At figure 1 all 3 players should be in their stance and by figure 3 nearly upright. This is not a stay low and drive block. It is stay low then lift block. Very important difference is vision to the second level. The blockers want to emphasize the hard punch with hands and the lift while they collapse into the defender. The lift and drive has to be powerful enough that if they did it on air they would face plant into the turf. We do this drill every day for 10 minutes with 2 blockers on one defender. As the blockers get comfortable we will add a scraping linebacker to the drill for the next 10 minutes but we progress the same every day. At first for the footwork we spray paint white dots in the grass for them to follow.

### 3 SECOND COMPETITION DRILL



We set up two teams for this drill and crown winners. The two blockers must execute the perfect zone technique per the coaches set rotation( left or right) and then the proper blocker must release and then drive the bag on its side with his hands only for 3 full seconds. Whoever drives the gag the furthest in 3 second wins. If the wrong blocker releases that team is disqualified. What this does is trains the blockers not to release early but to at least release and who is supposed to release. The coach holding the bag will dictate who releases by how he attacks the tandem with his bag and who he covers. This also trains both blocker to maintain their blocks no matter what for 5 full seconds without paying any attention to their buddy after they release. During this drill you want to really train the eyes. It is difficult to read to the second level while engaged in a block so we use this drill to stress the eyes on the bag since it is stationary. We found that stressing the eyes only confused them as they learned the steps and the punch. Once they release they will hit something so this drill also helps out with that aspect.



Blocking dummy held by coach



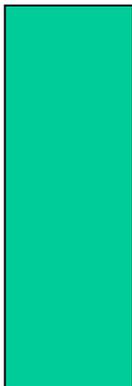
Blocking dummy on end 3 yards away.

We do this drill twice a week for 10 minutes.

## 5 SECOND COMPETITION DRILL



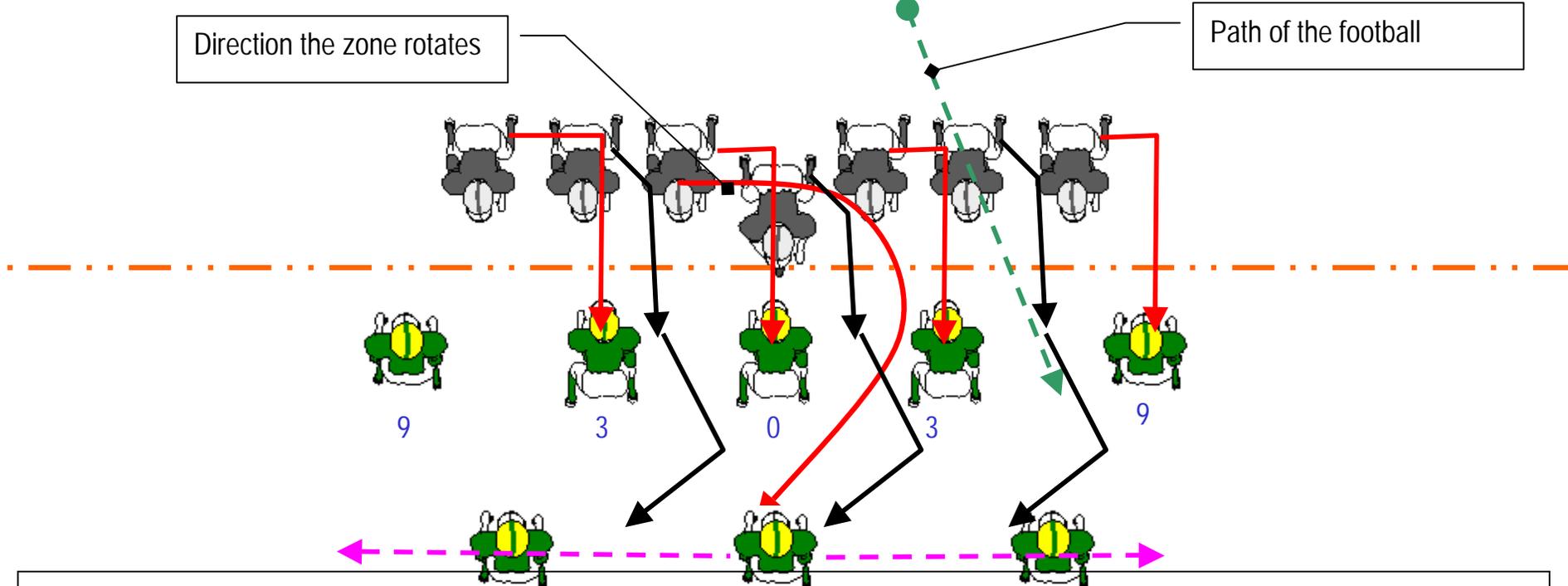
We set up two teams for this drill and crown winners. The blockers must execute the perfect zone technique per the coaches set rotation( left or right) and instruction ( covered or uncovered) Then they both execute their pre determined rule and immediately release to drive the bag with their hands only for 5 full seconds. Whoever drives the bag the furthest in 5 second wins. What this does is trains the blockers to execute their steps and get downfield as fast as possible in the case they have no one to block. This also trains both blocker to maintain their blocks no matter what for 5 full seconds without turning around to see where the ball is in the case they have no one to block. We stress there is always another victim downfield and every play in football will last about 6 seconds. This drill is very good at getting blockers downfield. We all know what typically happens if a young man does not have someone to block. You can add the limbo bar to this drill if you want to stress staying low but we stress if you fire off and land on air get vertical immediately and hit something...anything.



Blocking dummy on end 3 yards away.

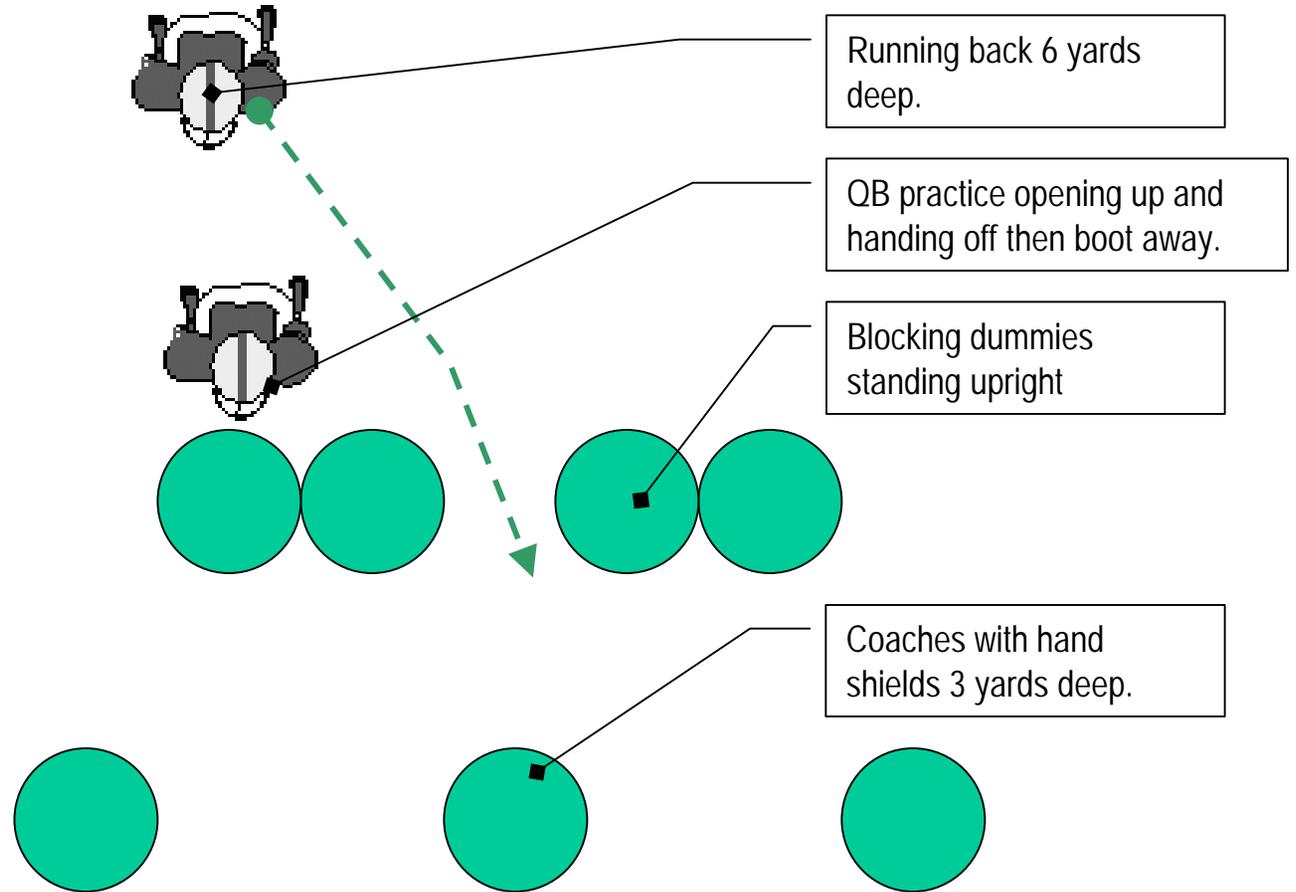
We do this drill twice a week for 10 minutes.

## TEACHING THE RUNNING BACKS



We teach the backs to fill the tackles pre snap shoes no matter what. If running right RT, left LT and this is not negotiable with them. Once they fill those shoes then they have 3 options. 1- Continue the path 2- cut outside once 3- cut inside once. No dancing bouncing or delay of any kind. You are a missile to the tackle then one cut and go. In the above diagram all 3 possibilities are there. IF the DT attacks the B gap then the LT at the point of attack can easily get on the play side OLB at a good angle and the running back can go straight away or cut outside. IF the DT attacks the C gap then the LG will not get on the play side OLB at a good angle therefore the back must cut back inside. If the POA is clogged the back still finds whatever seam he can and takes it. If he comes in like a missile he will gain a little something through the seam or get caught up into the flow of the zone and and pop out the other end. No matter where the back starts in formation he must fill the tackles shoes first. The back must start rather deep if it is a straight handoff or delay if it is a cross buck or wrap around from the backside. Either way the line must have some time to engage and begin to run and rotate the defense before the back arrives. The more times you run this play in a row during the games the better it gets. There are only a few things the defense can do defending the off tackle and they are all covered by rule so its just a matter of allowing your players to get comfortable and execute. There is not a designed hole but rather a monument. The play side tackles feet pre snap is the monument. From there the play now has options and can take on a life its own and those options are dependent on the defense.

## DRILLING THE RUNNING BACKS



We tried a few things but this was the best. The running back would run in-between 4 upright blocking dummies split 2 by 2 and touching one another. This would take his downfield vision away. Then 3 coaches or players holding shields would wait on the other side 3 yards deep and spread 3 yards apart. As the runner came through the hole one of the three shields would attack him so he would have to quickly think and make his cut or stay the path. This really helped as the season progressed and we ran this drill for 20 minutes at a time using 5 backs and 2 QB's. The shields could not attack until the runner was completely in the hole since most of our players were shorter than the bags so they came out blind. It was very apparent this drill worked when we went team. The cuts were crisp and very quick or when he would stay on path and would beat the scrape. Back aligns 6 yards deep and behind the center. The QB would practice handing off and booting away while he RB took a proper handoff. The drill easily flipped to go to the right and left.

## TROUBLE SPOTS AND THOUGHTS ... DON'T FORGET I AM A ROOKIE WITH THIS STUFF

- Do not lead a back through the zone. They just get in the way. You can use the FB or WB to mesh to kick out or to log at the perimeter but to isolate a backer with a back gets messy.

- Slow lumpy linemen do not work. The linemen have to be athletic and use quick excellent technique. Fast feet and fast hands are a must.

-- The stance we use is a bit unique. Heels even with one another, butt low, head up, back straight, 80% of the weight on the balls of the feet 20% on the down hand. This allowed for good vision and quick lateral movement. The feet are under each armpit so the stance is rather skinny with the knees slightly out. Like a frog leaping out of his stance.

-- Vertical splits are maximum, horizontal splits depends on your scheme or if you use slide in lieu of bucket steps. We use slide.

-- In order for the outside zone to work the defense must run with or flow with the play. At the youth level some will and some will not. If you run the outside zone enough the defense will begin to flow with you. You almost have to train them for what you want them to do sometimes. If they don't flow then the zone gets clogged and the back will want to bounce. Like a lot of things in youth football, if the defense does not play sound rules then that alone can blow up your plays. If that happens run traps all day or inside zone ( have not taught IZ yet so cant comment ). Traps are the perfect option for kids that sit and wait. OZ is the perfect option for defenses that flow and attack....like most will.

-- Linemen will have a hard time releasing off the double team...or both releasing and leaving the DL untouched. Be patient and keep drilling them. It takes time but when it starts to happen it's a beautiful thing.

- The linemen have to know one another and how each man thinks. Since each zone play is a 3 man tandem working as one unit they must trust one another.

- You can delete the hole numbering system. We created zones and that told the line how to block. Zones 3 and 4 was for all sweeps or the quick toss outside the TE. 1 and 2 were all OZ off tackle plays and 0 was for all traps. For pass blocking they would key the call. All calls ending in a digit was a run to that zone, all plays ending in a letter was a pass.

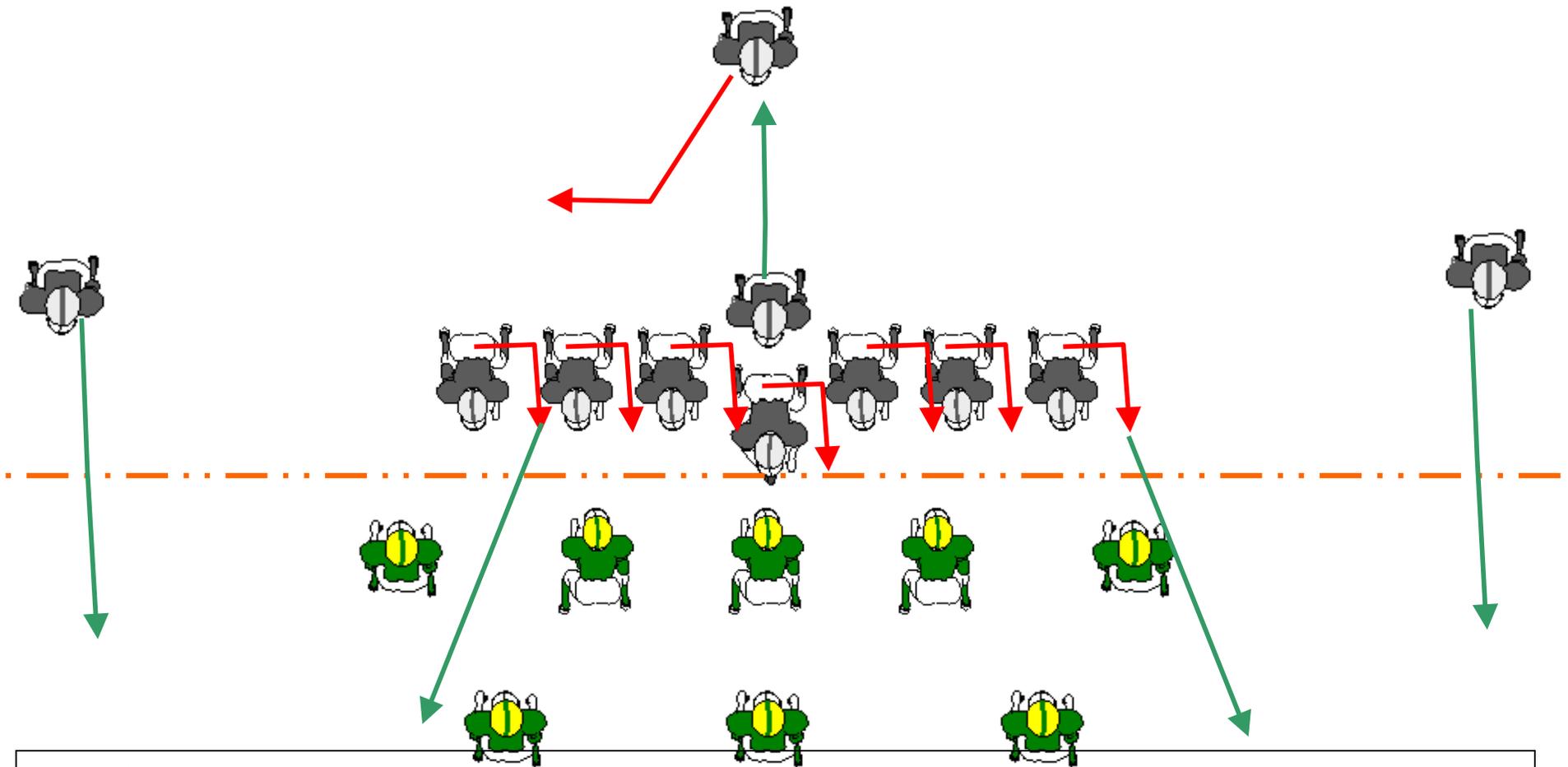
-- We ran OZ off tackle plays out of 3 formations. An ace back with the back at 6 yards, the wing t with the full back at 6 yards and the HB at 3 and the I with the FB at 4 and the TB at 6 yards. We ran an OZ to the wing t HB as he wrapped the QB after faking the FB dive, then he would turn immediately up field off tackle so you can do just about anything as long as the back does not arrive at his monument too early. The ace formation was the best with 2 TE's and 2 slots split wide. The QB action was easiest in ace. Anything else will take some extra reps. Keeping the QB on his midline in the wing t took some time.

-- The boots and waggles off the OZ is very nice. Especially once you get the defense running with you.

- You no longer have to rely on the sweep. Most youth defenses fortify the perimeter since the sweep is king with the little guys. If you can effectively run the c gaps all day regardless of the defense you are now running a contrarian offense for youths. We ran sweeps and pitches on rare occasion.

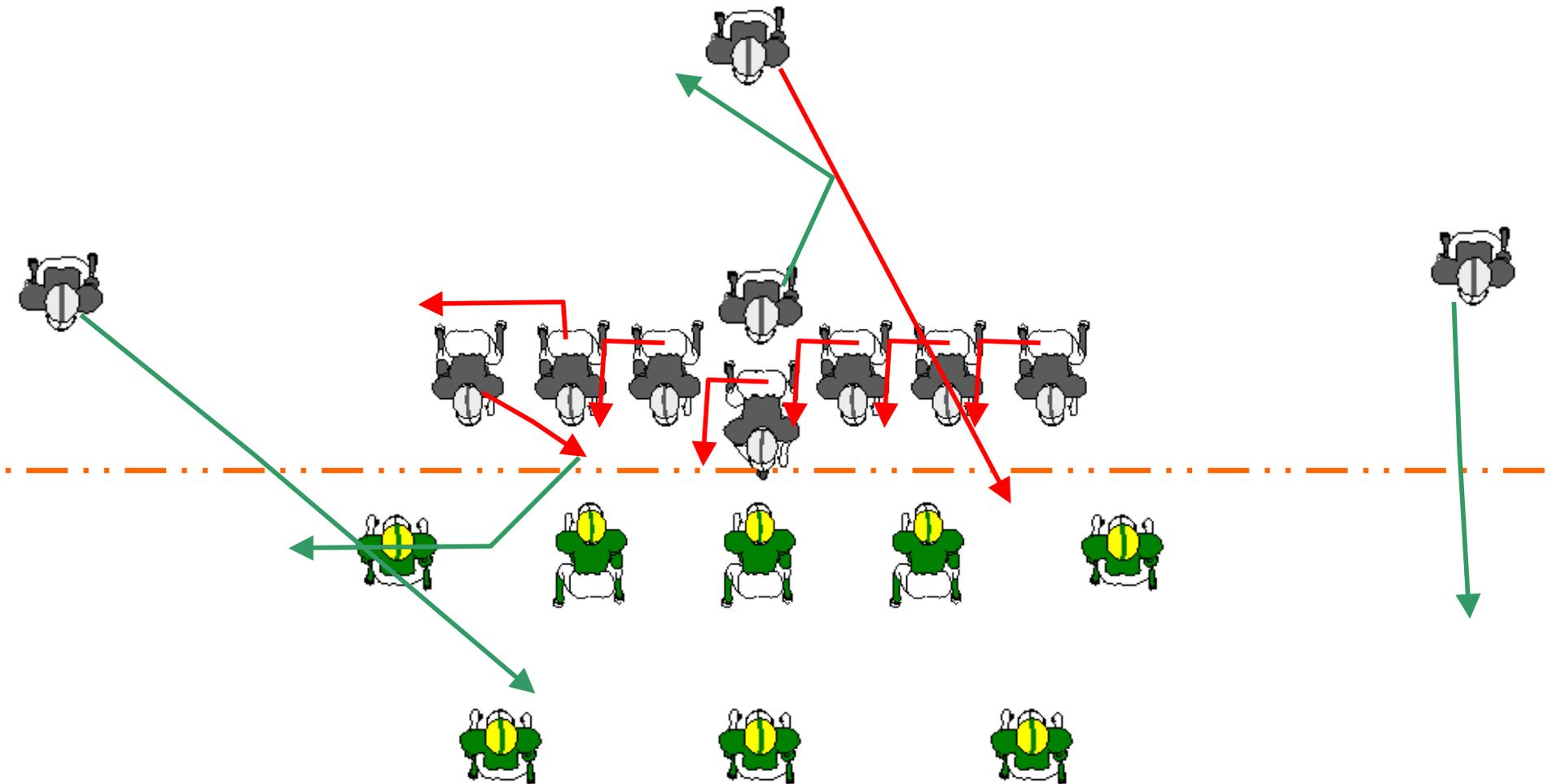
-- The kids think its cool because no one else does it. We told them they were running a big boys offense. That peaked interest. It is important the kids enjoy what they are learning.

## BONUS -SLIDE PROTECTION FOR THE DROP BACK PASS



Now that your line are the masters of the slide step simply slide protect your pass plays. You can go all left or all right. It is real tough for the defense to pick up TE's on the slide protect since they release late. The RB has to banana to the unblocked DE. Take two steps towards your run monument then stop and wait for the DE then at the last minute scoop him to the sidelines. No play action. Straight 3 or 5 step drop. Really tough to beat this simple scheme. It builds a great wall as the front side OT picks up the front side DE. Teams know we will pass and it still works great. Linemen implement their slide steps and then start running in place and punching at the ugly #s in front of them while always protecting from the football out. It is so similar to OZ you never telegraph pass. Works against all fronts. Slots go deep and the TE's shallow to medium. Slots can be minimum type player positions with purpose.

## BONUS -KICK PROTECTION FOR THE PLAY ACTION PASS



Simply do the same for the slide protection except keep the play action side TE in to block and have the backside TE and OT switch defenders. The TE cracks the DT for one second then literally pushes off him catapulting himself into into a quick arrow route. QB play actions to the RB and throws quick to a 100% wide open TE ahead of the OLB. Slot receiver runs a slant to clear the zone. Never had an incomplection all year running this play to either TE both left and right. Backside OT bucket steps and rides the DE out. Play action side DE is a non issue. Works against all fronts.