



THE "LOCO PUNT FORMATION"

ARTICLE BY: JARED VAN ACKER, HEAD FOOTBALL COACH, GALAX, VA

I want to first off give thanks to American Football Monthly and the extensive knowledge on the game of football that is published within its pages every month. I look forward to the day when the new issue reaches my doorsteps to see the new and innovative minds/trends in the greatest game in the world. I have been the Head Football coach at Galax High School for the last two years and like all coaches I stress the importance of all three phases of the game of football: offense, defense, and special teams. I believe that one of the most important phases is special teams and unfortunately many coaches don't emphasize its importance until it bites them in the backside. A couple of years ago while I was a young assistant coach, I put some of my own thoughts into a punt scheme that I used while I played at Quincy University, now an NAIA school in Quincy, IL. Like all coaches across America we are "thieves" when it comes to our ideas and schemes and I devised a fun and effective punt formation that I call the "Loco Punt". This punt formation has been a very effective tool in the punt game for our football team and blends a solid spread punt scheme with an arsenal of fakes to keep the pressure off the punter and to allow for a successful punt and coverage. With this scheme we have been able to change the landscape of many football games! In the two years that we have used the "Loco Punt" we have had only one punt blocked and numerous first-down conversions from the array of fakes that we use. Some teams have quit rushing the punt and some teams have even quit putting a returner back in fear of our fakes!

First of all, I am going to go through the basic concept of the "Loco Punt Formation" and its base formation. The main philosophy of the "Loco Punt formation" is to spread out the return team and to allow for a blazing coverage team to trap the return team into 1/3 of the football field- thus minimizing the return. In all reality the "Loco Punt Formation" can be considered an offensive formation designed to, find mismatches, and to incorporate motion to overload a return teams base defense. Many of the same concepts are incorporated into many modern-day spread offenses. Then we throw in a couple of fakes to keep the defensive rush honest and to provide an attack that makes

opponents spend extra time scouting our punt team rather than other phases of the game. The basic set for the punt formation is a spread formation with two "MISSILES"(WR) split wide and a spread five man front with two-foot splits between the guard and tackles on both sides and a three-foot split between the long snapper and guards. There are two up-backs a.k.a. "HEADHUNTERS" positioned 3 yds deep in between the guards on each side of the long snapper. The "LOCO" is a wingback located off-tackle a yard deep thus making him an eligible WR. Now the location of the "LOCO" is based on the location of the football. If the ball is located on the right hash the "LOCO" is located on the left-side of the formation. If the ball is located on the left hash the "LOCO" will align himself to the right of the formation. If the ball is located in the middle of the field he will align himself on the side away from our bench. The punter will be located behind the long snapper at 13-15 yards.(See Diagram 1)

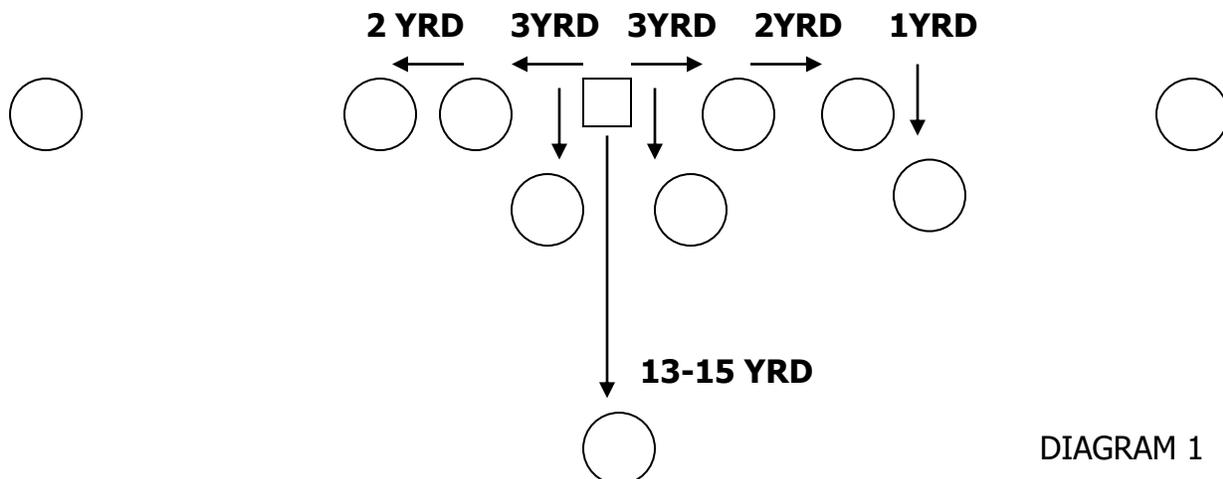


DIAGRAM 1

The first aspect of our opponent we look at is how they plan to cover our "Loco Punt Formation" and how many return men they put back for the return. Like all offenses, when we use the "Loco Punt Formation", we want to play the numbers game and see how they will cover all of our eligible WR's and still put on a rush and return. We run a fast-paced no-huddle scheme on all three phases of the game which allows our team to line-up quickly and makes our opponent "reveal its cards" and thus gives our coaching staff in the box the decision to either punt or run our fake system.

If we need to punt, the punter will relay the punt audible which we call "PANTHERS" to the O-line. Then the punter will "shift" the "LOCO" and outside "MISSILE" by having the "LOCO" shift up to the line of scrimmage and the "MISSILE" shift back off the LOS then

motion him across the formation and protect any threat off the edge. If there is no edge rusher, he will run directly to the returner with no responsibility except to make the tackle on any return. The play side "MISSILE" will fly down the football field directly to the returner with no responsibility except to make the tackle on any return. We utilize a zone/gap pass protection scheme up-front in which the two "HEADHUNTERS" step up and fill the A-gap, the guards a.k.a "GRENADES" zone/gap block the B-gap, the tackles a.k.a "TANKS" zone/gap block the C-gap, the "LOCO" will block the backside edge rusher and become the wide-side of field safety. The long snapper snaps the ball and runs down field directly to the returner with no responsibility except to make the tackle on any return. The punter tries to directionally kick into the 1/3 of the field to the short-side and become the safety to the short-side of the field. If the punt goes out of bounds it is still a great punt in my opinion because there is no return. However, if the punt stays in the field of play the return is trapped within the 1/3 of the field in which our coverage bottles up. The "GRENADES", "HEADHUNTERS", and the "TANKS" fan out on the kick of the football and fill the running lanes on coverage. The "TANKS" are the contain players on the coverage allowing no returns outside of them and funneling all returns inside to the coverage. (See Diagram 2)

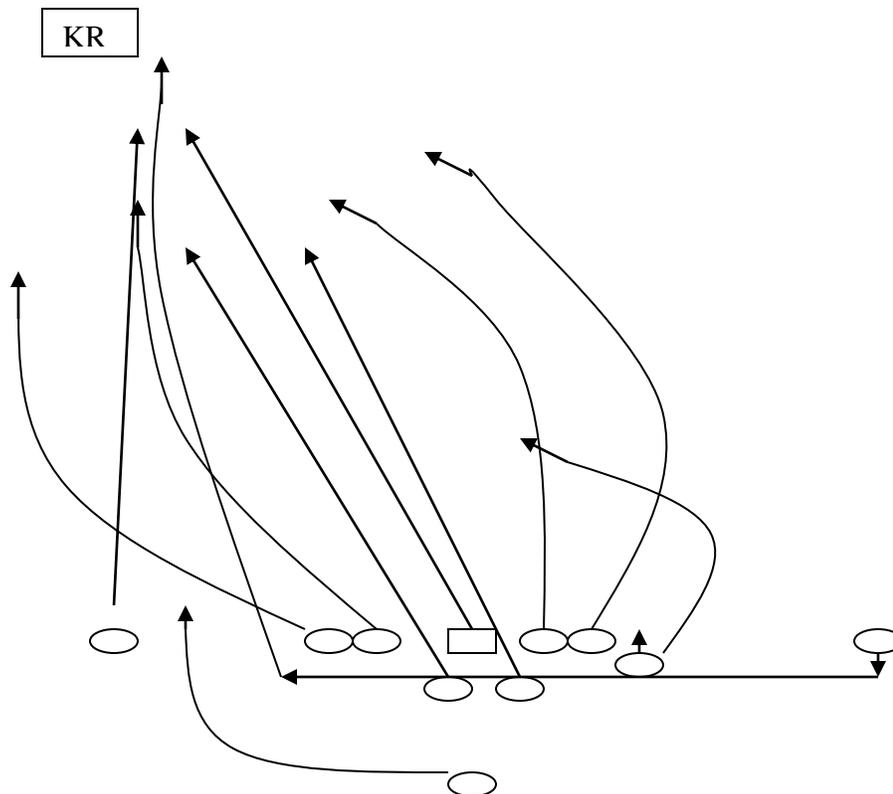


DIAGRAM 2

If our coaches determine that we need to run our fake system either because of punt return tendencies or because of field position our punter will relay the fake audible called "FALCONS" to the punt team. The punt fake sequence that we run through will be based on the defense and how it reacts to the motion of our "MISSILE". Though there are many different fakes in the system I will go over our main three fakes.

The first fake is designated "PATRIOTS" which we call if the opponent doesn't cover our "LOCO" man/man as an eligible pass receiver. The "MISSILE" will not go in motion and there will be no shift. The punter relays the regular cadence and when ball is snapped, he will roll out toward the "LOCO" which runs a 5 yard out route. The play side "MISSILE" will run a vertical go route. The punter will read the coverage on the "MISSILE", if the cover man goes with the "MISSILE" on the vertical go route, he will throw the 5 yard out to the "LOCO", If the cover man sits on the 5 yard out route, the punter will throw the vertical go route. (See Diagram 3)

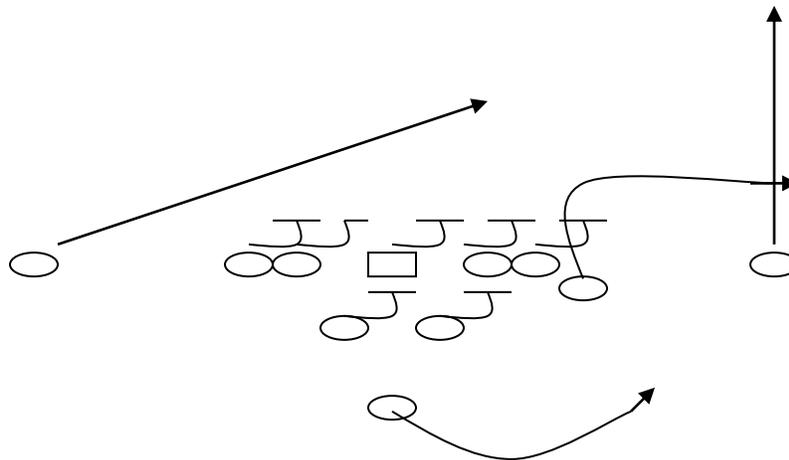


DIAGRAM 3

If our opponent covers the "LOCO" with man/man coverage we will shift the "LOCO" and the "MISSILE" like our regular punt shift. However, this time we will read the reaction to the cover man that is covering the "MISSILE" that is motioning across the punt formation. If the cover man goes with the "MISSILE" across the formation we will run our second fake called "SAINTS". This fake is a sweep with the punter to the vacated side of the defense. The line will scoop/zone

block to the nearest defender and the two "HEADHUNTERS" will pull out and log block any defenders flying to the football from the inside. The punter is coached to take the snap and sprint to the numbers and up the sideline for the 1st down or touchdown. (See diagram 4)

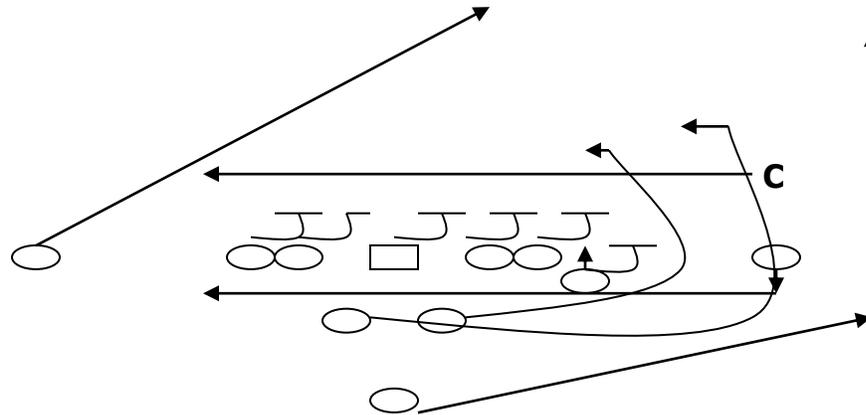


DIAGRAM 4

If the cover man doesn't go with the shift by the "LOCO" and "MISSILE" but either stays in the area or comes off the edge as a rusher/contain we'll run our third fake in the fake sequence called "STEELERS". This fake is a sweep with the punter, but to the overloaded side to the motion where we will have a numbers advantage. The motioning "MISSILE" will scoop/zone block to the nearest defender. The play side "MISSILE" will crack block on the nearest defender flying to the football from the inside. The two "HEADHUNTERS" will pull out and either log block or execute a kick out and log block scheme depending on the reaction to the defense. The punter is coached to take the snap and sprint to the numbers and up the sideline or cut up into hole developed by blocks for the 1st down or touchdown. (See diagram 5)

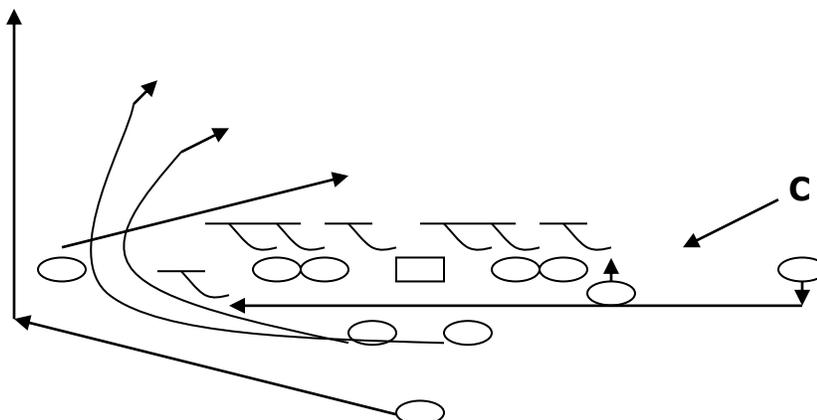


DIAGRAM 5

The "Loco Punt Formation" has been an instrumental part of our special teams attack. This dynamic scheme allows our special teams to be a force to deal with every Friday evening on the gridiron. Thank you!

About the Author

Jared Van Acker

Coach Jared Van Acker is entering his third year as head football coach at Galax High School in Virginia. Prior to Galax H.S, he served three years as an assistant coach at William Campbell High School in Virginia, where he helped coach the Generals to a state championship in 2005. He served one season as an assistant at Carthage High School in Illinois, where they finished as state runner-up. He played three years of college football at Quincy University, in Quincy, IL. He received his Bachelor's Degree from Western Illinois University and graduated from J.D Darnell High School in Geneseo, IL.

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