

WING-T AIR ATTACK?

PASSING CONCEPTS OUT OF THE SPREAD WING-T OFFENSE

I know some major coaches of the famous Wing-T who are deceased would be rolling in their graves when they hear of a Wing-T football team that passes over an average of 150 plus yards a football game. The Wing-T offense is predicated on the run game and occasional pass to keep defenses honest from loading the box with defenders. The game of football has morphed throughout the years from a power football offensive systems into a more wide-open spread attack. The traditional system of “three yards and a cloud of dust” offense has almost turned into a dinosaur and becoming extinct in professional, college, and even trickling down into the high school football ranks. Some coaches have been experimenting with incorporating different spread packages for passing situations within their power running offensive systems. Many coaches have struggled learning or implementing these concepts and thus either end up trashing the idea or not giving enough attention to the scheme that the kids struggle to perform up to their potential.

I grew up in a high school football powerhouse in the State of Illinois at J.D Darnall High School located in Geneseo, IL that is a traditional Wing-T program. The College and High School Hall of Fame football coach, Bob Reade, brought the Wing-T system to our football program in the 60’s. After winning multiple state championships, incurring a 52 game win streak in the process, and developing a major football tradition at Geneseo, Coach Reade took his knowledge and leadership to Augustana College, located in Rock Island, IL. There he led the Vikings to multiple Division III National Championships. Our football program at Geneseo continued the tradition that Coach Reade began and has made numerous state championship victories and appearances, playoff appearances, conference championships, and a running 50 year tradition of consecutive winning seasons. However, if there was one if any “Achilles Heel” to our offensive Wing-T juggernaut it would be the ability to pass in key situations. When I graduated from college I went out looking for a coaching job in which I could learn the spread offense because I felt I had a good understanding of the Wing-T offense and I wanted to diversify my offensive philosophy as a coach. I had the great honor to learn the Spread Offense under the tutelage of Coach Brad Bradley, an offensive spread guru, who learned the spread playing under Coach Rich Rodriguez when he was the head football coach at Glenville State College. As I sat in his offensive meetings, I soaked in his offensive system like a sponge learning the in’s and out’s of the intricate offense. I then looked at how I could one day combine his theories on the Spread Offense and the teachings of my background in the Wing-T offense. I knew I wanted to one day be a high school head football coach and wanted to implement both into my offensive scheme. After three years as an assistant coach under Coach Bradley at William Campbell H.S, I was able to put the plan into action when I became one of the youngest head football coaches in the State of Virginia’s history at 25 years old!

The Spread Wing-T Offense that I implemented incorporates both unique offensive systems and allows for a fluid transfer between these two different but high-octane offensive systems by simplifying the system. In this article, I am going to look at the base passing concepts that we incorporate in the Spread Wing-T Offense. There are five core passing concepts that we use and they are the following:

1. Quick Game
2. High/Low Game

3. Vertical/ Stretch Game

4. Play-Action Game

5. Bunch/Traffic/Flood Game

The first concept that we run is our quick passing game, which we use heavily on teams that are bringing a lot of pressure and we need to get the ball out of our QB's hands as soon as possible. One of the core principles of the spread offense is to spread out the defense and look for one-on-one mismatches. One the most common routes that we run in the quick game is your basic hitches route where all four of our eligible WR's run 5 yard hitches across the board. Our QB's are trained that his read is to find the closest throw with the farthest defender, which makes for a higher rate of completion. Sometimes if the QB's may notice man-on-man pass coverage, you may want your QB to find the weakest defender during his pre-snap read and exploit that mismatch. A crucial key to making this play successful is the spacing between the eligible WR's thus spreading out your defenders. Since a majority of the passes in the quick game need to be released as soon as possible our OL will execute cut blocks to get the defenders hand down. (see diagram 1)

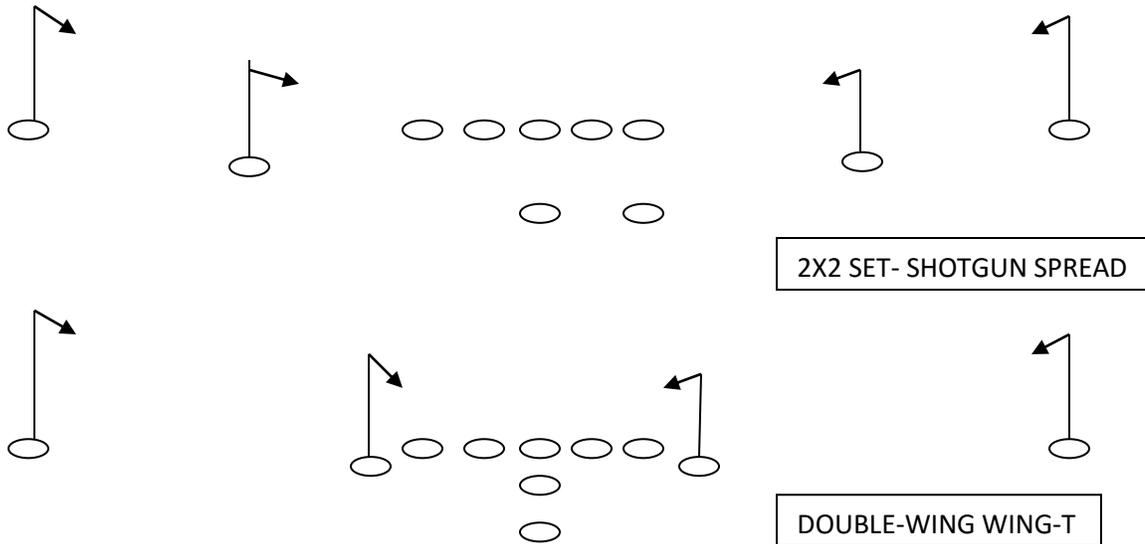


DIAGRAM 1- HITCHES

Other forms of route packages that are included in the quick game passing concept are pop passes, speed outs, and slants. All routes in which the WR's are running "now" routes in which the passes are going to be quick and they have to be ready for the passes immediately. One of our favorite spread route combo off of play-action and motion is our slant/fly combo route, which we read the #2 defender to trips side. If he goes with the fly route we throw the quick slant or if he sits the QB throws the quick pop fly in the seam. (see diagram 2)

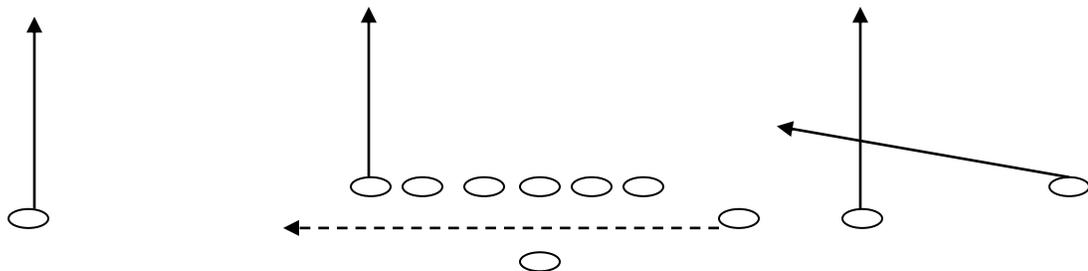


DIAGRAM 2- SLANT/FLY

3X2 SET w/TE- EMPTY-SPREAD

The second passing concept that we incorporate in our passing scheme is the use of high/low routes that put defenders in predicaments in their coverage. We want to exploit a specific defender and the QB will read his reaction and then deliver the ball to the WR according to his actions. With our high/low concept we try to put two WR's in an area where the defender needs to make a decision on which to cover and thus "we take what the defense gives us". With our route packages we can either exploit a LB or a DB and decide which is a better opportunity for our offense. The two basic high low routes involve the hitch/corner route and the dig/out route. The hitch/corner route is a high/low combo route that isolates the CB and the dig/out route is a high/low combo route that isolates the OLB. (see diagram 3) The hitch/corner combo route is a 5 yard hitch by the #1 WR and a corner/flag route by #2 WR. I try to simplify the QB read by choosing a side for him to read and then have the backside WR's run what is called "backside package" which is a dig route and post route to get into the view of the QB so he doesn't have to scan the entire field in case both routes are covered and he needs to check down. I don't know about you but our QB doesn't have enough time to read one side and then read the other side as well, so we do not mirror our routes. The Bow route is a 8-10 yard dig route by #1 WR and the #2 WR runs a 5 yard quick out.

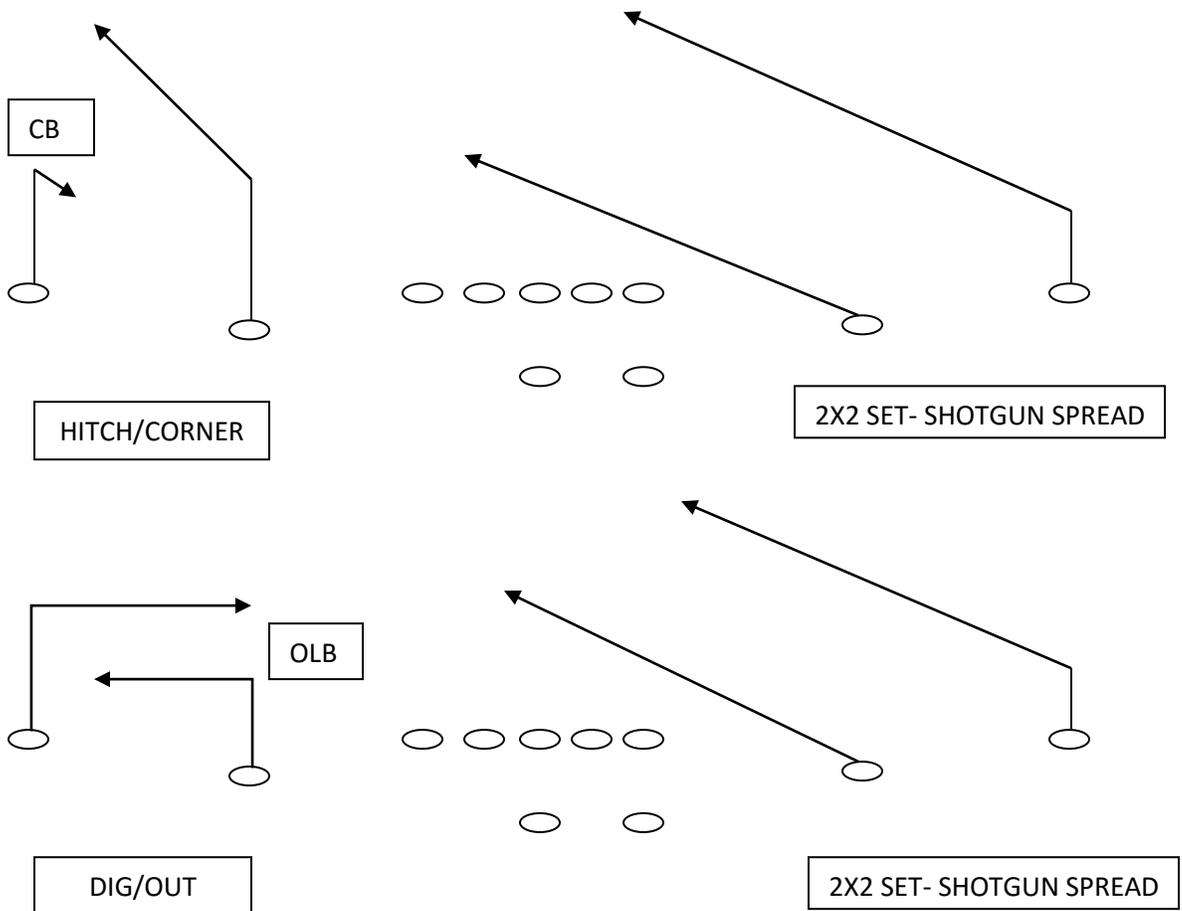


DIAGRAM 3- HITCH/CORNER AND DIG/OUT

There a ton of high/low route combinations that we can run out of various formations. We run our comeback/corner route, fly/out route, fly/stop/curl route, fly/pigtail/arrow route, pigtail/corner/fly route etc where we select a specific defender that we want to exploit and use multiple looks to high/low the same individual. (see diagram 4)

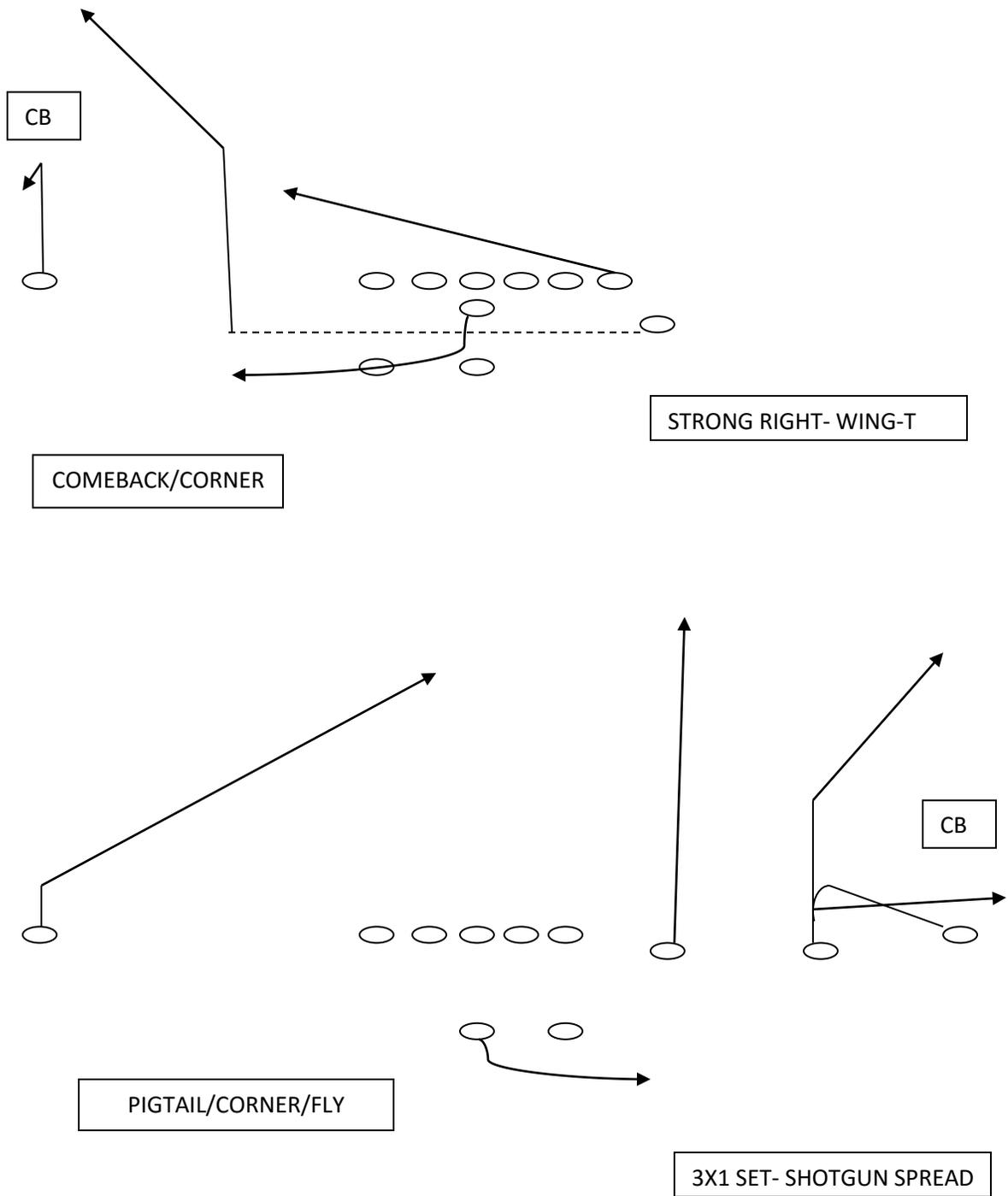


DIAGRAM 4- COMEBACK/CONRNER AND PIGTAIL/CORNER/FLY

The third concept of the Spread Wing-T passing game that we will be discussing is the vertical/stretch game. This concept stretches the defense vertically and forces the safety or safeties to play multiple WR's vertically. The universal goal of the QB every down but especially on pass downs is determining the number of safeties the defense has in the secondary. If we get a "one high safety" look we will run 4-verticals and force the safety to cover both slot WR's that are going vertical up the seams. The outside WR's will cancel out their corners and forces the safety to make a decision on which slot WR to cover. We coach our QB to use eye manipulation or pump fakes to sway the safety toward one slot and then throw to the other slot down the seam. This has always been a "ace up the sleeve" for our offense and have had huge gains and touchdowns.....many times forcing our opponents into 2 safety looks exclusively. (see Diagram 5)

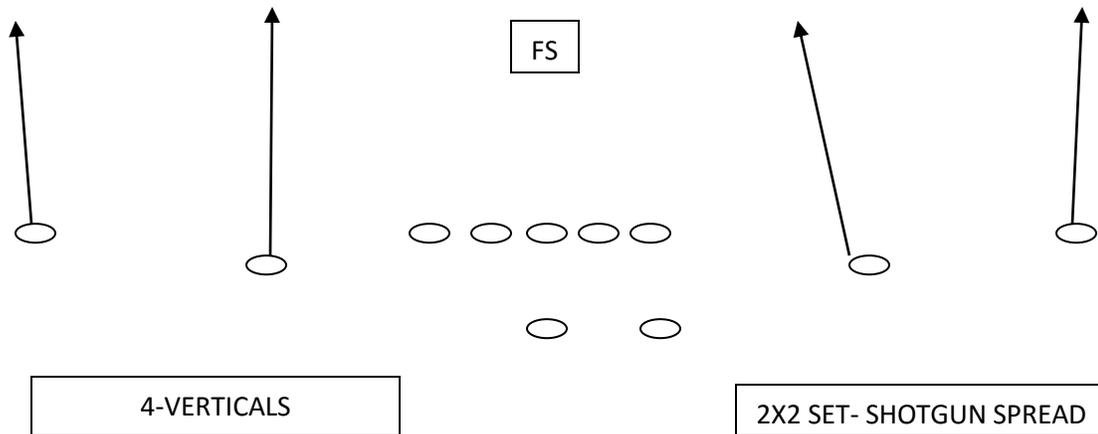


DIAGRAM 5- VERTICALS

If we want to still go to the 4 vertical look against a two-high safety look we tell the QB where the 1-on-1 mismatch on the outside between our WR and their cornerback is located. Our QB will eye manipulate or pump fake to get the safety to bite on the slot WR toward his side on the seam route and then throw the outside fly route on a 1-on-1 mismatch that we want to exploit. If teams start to bail high on the 4-verticals with either a cover 4 shell zone look or a man under w/ safeties over the top look we will then sneak our RB out in the flat or in hook/curl zone underneath forcing the defense to play in space with a great open-field runner.

The fourth concept of the Spread Wing-T passing attack is the play-action scheme. The waggle and bootleg play-action attack off of the run-heavy offense has been a staple since the development of the Wing-T offense. The plays come off the effective buck sweep/trap/power series and catch over pursuing defenses. Many coaches in the Wing-T system have different blocking schemes in which either two guards, one guard, or possibly no lineman will pull and lead the QB on the play-action pass protection. Most of the routes flood the zones of the defense on all three levels. Usually you have the #1 play-side WR run a post/corner route to stretch the defense vertically. Depending on your WR skill level and/or your QB arm strength sometimes teams will have the WR run a post/comeback route. The FB will release into the flat running an arrow route and be a dump off pass and sometimes your main WR. If the #1 WR and FB are covered then the QB will continue his read progression to the drag route from the #2 WR from the backside of the offensive formation. I prefer to pull both guards but tell my play side guard to check for a blitz before he pulls to lead out the QB. (see diagram 6)

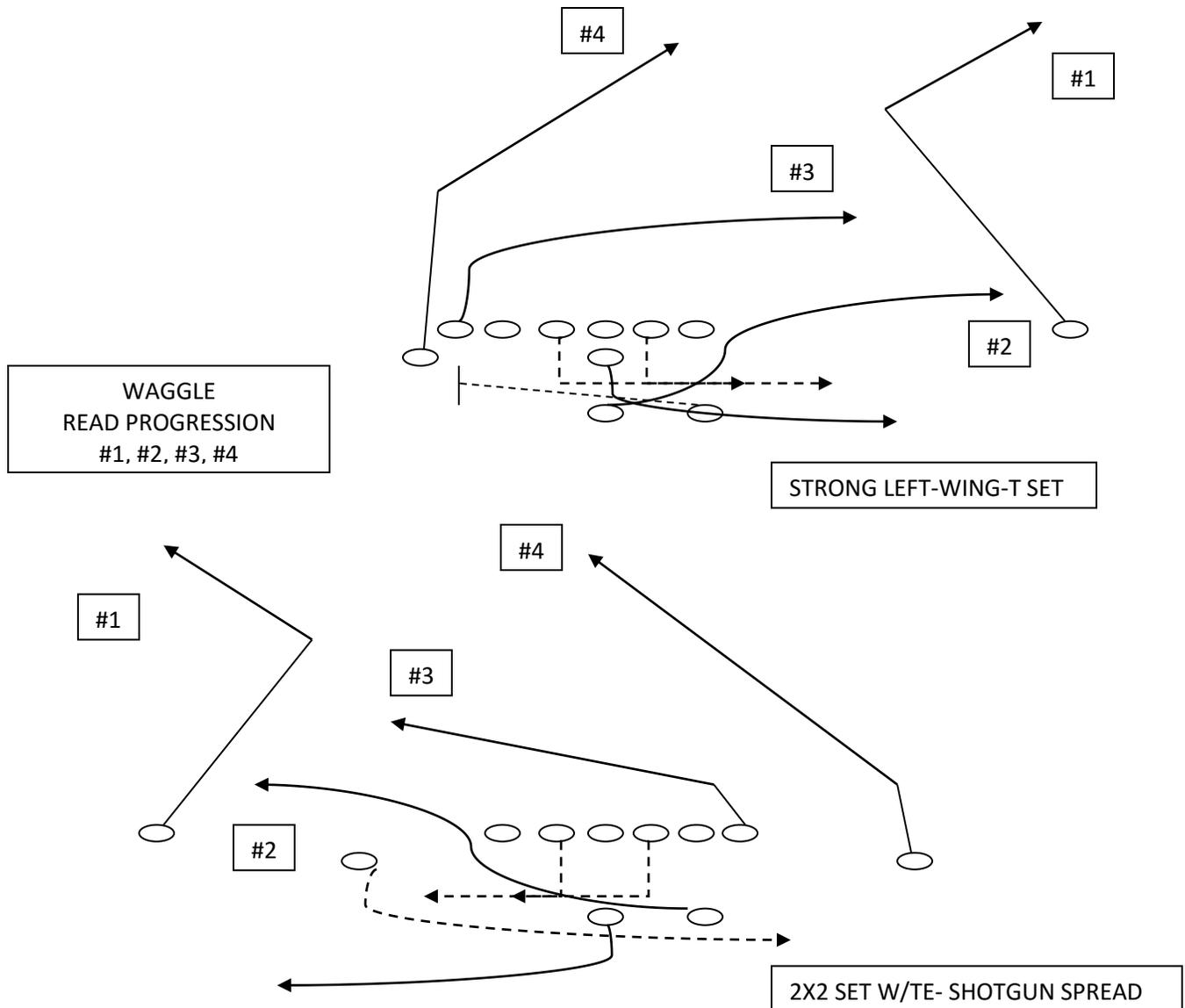
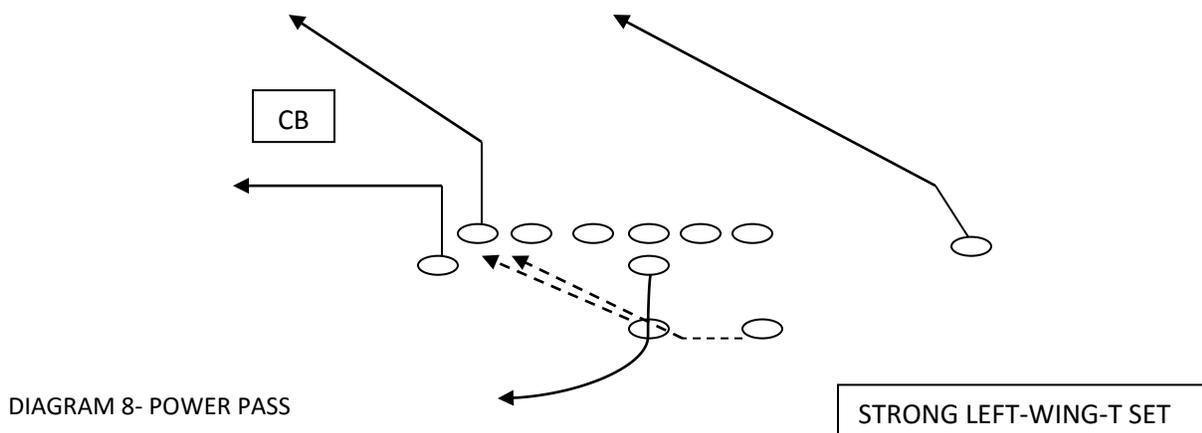
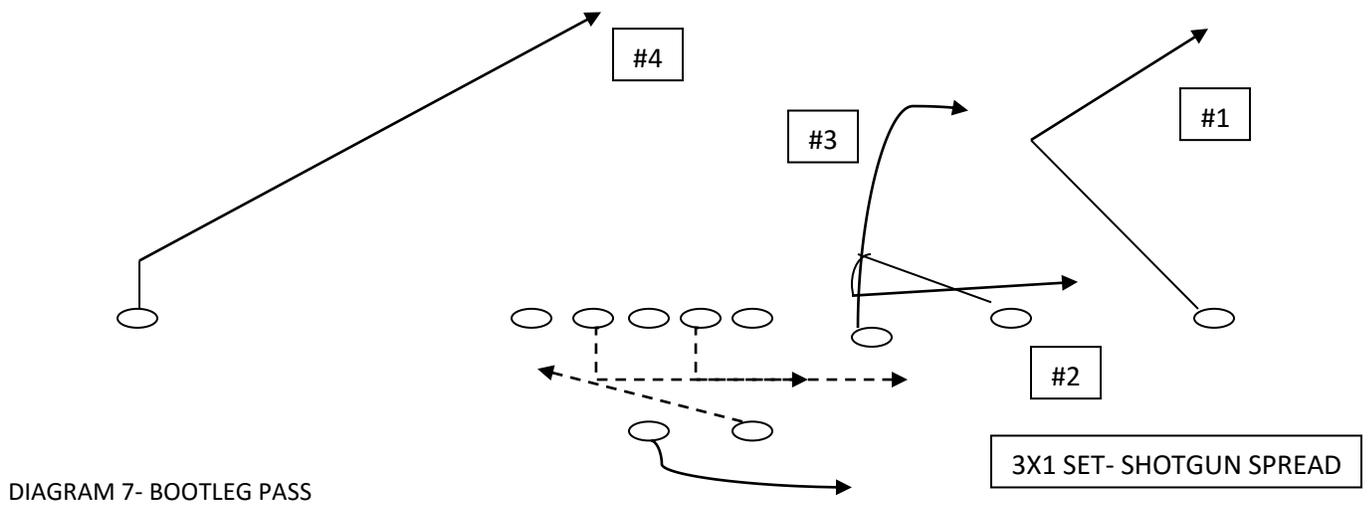
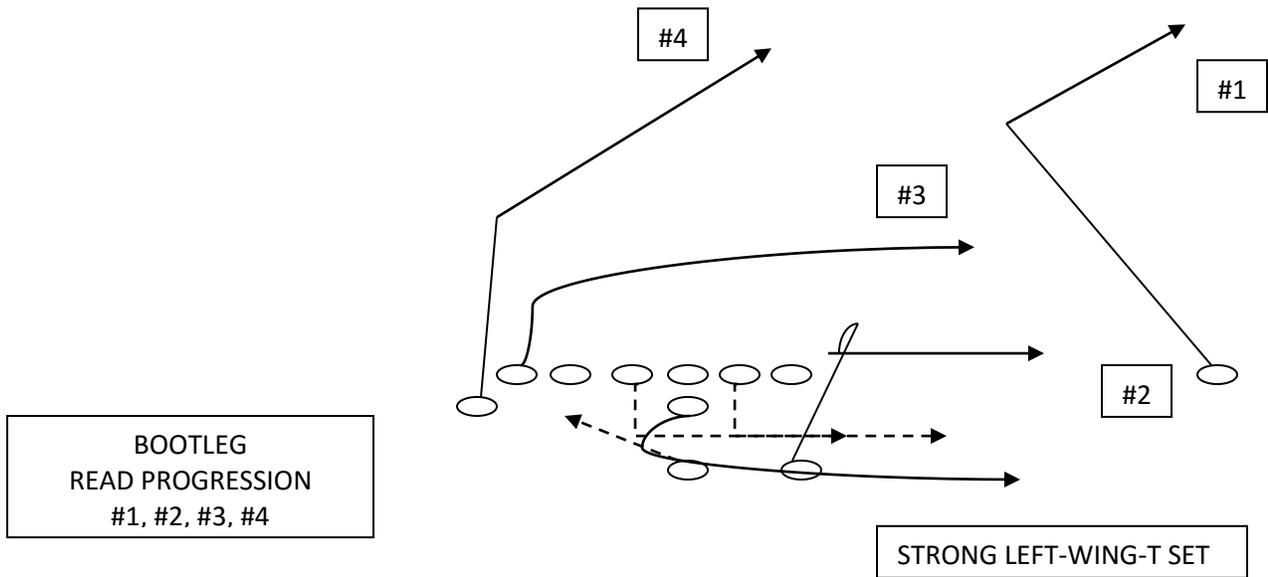


DIAGRAM 6- WAGGLE PASS

The second form of play-action pass that is used heavily in the Spread Wing-T passing attack is the bootleg pass. The concept is very similar to the waggle with WR's flooding the zones of the defense at all three levels but the play-action comes off of the FB in this passing scheme. (see diagram 7) Like all play-action passes the really important factor is the play fake by those involved. The fakes made by the backfield in the power pass (see diagram 8) set up the pass and allows for the QB to read the reaction of the corner and deliver the ball. If you have a one-on-one mismatch on the single WR you may want to take a shot with him over the top on the post route.



The last passing concept of the Spread Wing-T Offense is what I call the bunch/pick/flood game. The basic idea of this concept is to put the defense in tough situations and flood zones with multiple WR's that puts defenders in predicaments. These routes are really good versus teams that like to run man-on-man defenses because the routes provide a natural "pick" of defenders in tight areas. You use their own defenders to "pick" their teammates which provides the separation needed for the WR's to get open and for the QB to deliver the ball to an open receiver. In our double slant with an arrow route our QB reads the play-side corner and adjusts his throw to his actions. If he goes with our #1 WR then our QB is instructed to throw the arrow or run the ball. If the corner sits on the arrow then your QB hits the #1 WR behind the OLB or run the football if covered. (see diagram 9) Another concept that we like to incorporate once again against teams that like to play man-to-man coverage is use the bunch formation to put defenders in predicaments. One of our favorite routes is our pigtail/post/corner combination (see diagram 10)

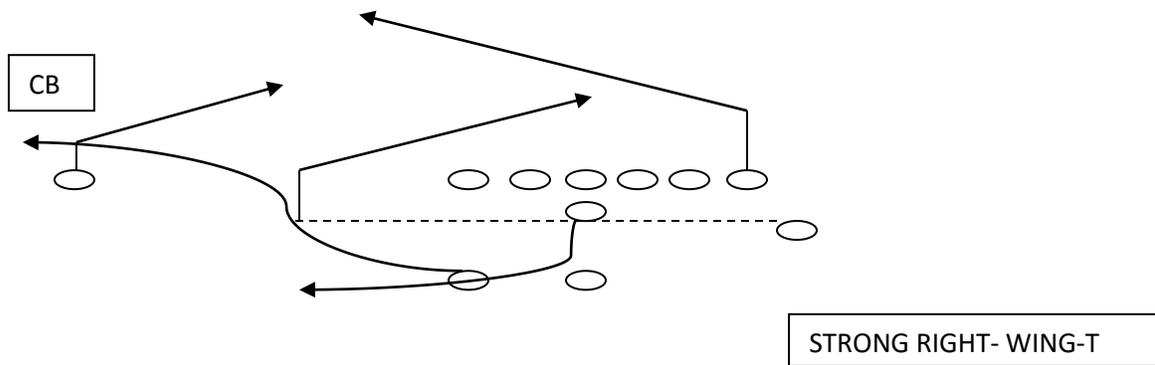


DIAGRAM 9- SLANT/SLANT/ARROW

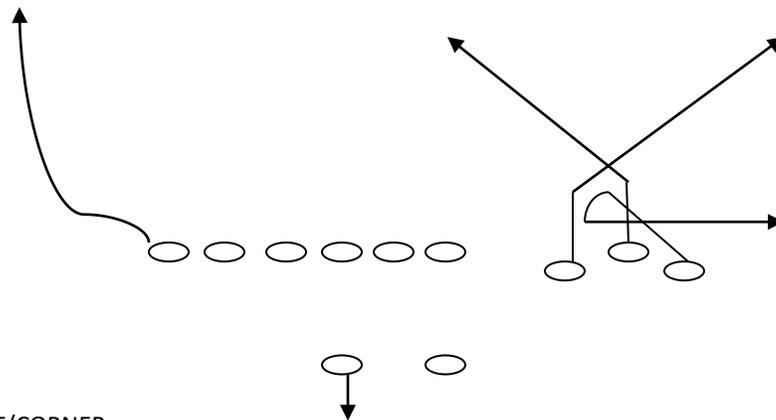


DIAGRAM 10- PIGTAIL/POST/CORNER

3X1 SET- SHOTGUN SPREAD

As you can see in the Spread Wing-T Offense you can incorporate your traditional concepts of the Wing-T offensive system and combine them with the new-age Spread Offense without a lot of difficulty. The Spread Wing-T Offensive system gives coaches many advantages for their offensive attack. This offensive system plays to the

strengths and knowledge of two of the most dynamic offenses in high school football. This offensive system forces our opponents to prepare for two different styles of offense and limit the amount of time to gameplan for our offense. The Spread Wing-T system allows for us to spread out the defense and limit the amount of defenders in the box to stop the run in fear of the aerial attack that we employ. The Spread Wing-T Offense has also been a huge recruiting tool for athletes who would love to play in a system that doesn't brand itself as a "three yards and a cloud of dust" offensive mentality but rather a wide-open attack that they see on television each and every Saturday and Sunday! I hope that you like these passing concepts and choose to incorporate them into your offensive scheme. Good luck and have a blessed day!

About the Author:

Jared Van Acker

Coach Jared Van Acker recently finished his 3rd year as the head football coach at Grafton High School, located in Yorktown, Virginia. He has led the Clippers to three consecutive Division 4 playoff appearances, winning the Region 1 championship in 2011. At the end of the 2010 season, he was named Coach of the Year for the Bay Rivers District. Jared completed his sixth year as a head football coach, with three prior years 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, located in Quincy, IL. He received his Bachelor's Degree from Western Illinois University and graduated from J.D Darnell High School in Geneseo, IL. He has been married to his wife Kim, for seven years and they have a 3-year old son, Caleb. They are also expecting their second child, a boy, in March!