

## Basic Philosophies of the Pro Spread Offense



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On behalf of our staff at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville, we would like to thank the AFCA for the opportunity to contribute to the 2000 *Summer Manual*. The University of Wisconsin-Platteville has received attention during our first year here. This attention is the result of a change, from a traditional Wing-T set, to the four and five wide receivers sets that we now use. At UW-P, we are strong believers in throwing the football. However, in our first year here as a staff, our program is founded on the idea that teams win championships. Although our offense may receive attention, we do not believe any one phase of the game to be more important than another.

### The Platteville Offensive Philosophy

At UW-P, we are a one-back and no-back, pro-spread offense. Due to the fact that some people label our style offense as finesse football, we make it a point to instill an aggressive attitude in our offensive players. We expect our players to be the aggressors in all situations. Throwing the football is our starting point. Our offense requires four or five great receivers, five or six adequate linemen and one great quarterback. At the Division III level, we can not attract players with athletic scholarship money. Thus, we feel that we can promote exciting, high-energy football, through the pass game. We believe that such offense will allow us to attract fast, athletic players that have played receiver, quarterback, or running back in high school. These types of players are the ones, which we feel, produce high-powered offenses.

### Spreading the Field Through Formations and Motion

Our philosophy is to spread the field by formations and/or motion. By spreading the field, we make it is easier for the quarterback to read the coverage alignment and harder for the defense to disguise their coverage. In our offense, we also use motion by the back or a receiver to recognize coverage. When we start seeing man coverage, motion forces teams to tip who has man to man responsibility and who may be blitzing. Spreading the field with our wide alignments makes it very hard for defenses to blitz from the secondary without showing their intent to do so. Also, by stretching the field horizontally and vertically, we will aid our running game. We use the pass, or

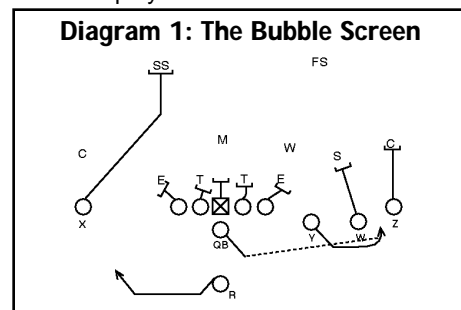
threat of pass, to set up our running game. Because of our receiver's wide splits, we create positive run and pass lanes in the defense. The fear of our vertical passing game creates soft perimeter defenders. It is very hard to give a player responsibility in deep pass coverage and still tell him to be effective in stopping the run.

### Throwing to Uncovered Receivers

Another key advantage to the spread is that we force defenders to cover all of our receivers where they line up on the field. We believe that a defense must commit one defender for every receiver that we have in formation. More often than not, this means that a linebacker must leave the box and cover a wide receiver or slot player. On some occasions, teams choose not to account for each one of our receivers with a defender. If this situation occurs, we work to throw to any uncovered receiver. In our philosophy, a receiver that can gain at least four yards after a catch because of the way the defense is lined up to his alignment in the formation is uncovered. However, by the nature of our formations, even when teams cover all of our receivers, we feel we can create mismatches in our favor.

### Taking Advantage of Uncovered Receivers with the Bubble Screen

One of our favorite ways to take advantage of uncovered receivers is by using a package that we call the bubble screen. The bubble screen is a fast and effective way to get the ball to your best athletes in open space. In Diagram 1, you can see that the defense has only used one defender to cover up the Y and W receivers in the formation. This type of defense gives the offense a numbers advantage in that area. Therefore, we will throw the bubble screen to the Y receiver. This play allows us to get the ball to one of our best athletes and have both perimeter defenders blocked on the outside of the formation. We teach specific techniques to each position in this offensive play.



**Offensive Line:** Block head up aggressively.

**Front Side Tackle:** Cut the defensive end to get his hands down.

**Z:** Block first perimeter defender from the sideline.

**W:** Block second perimeter defender from the sideline.

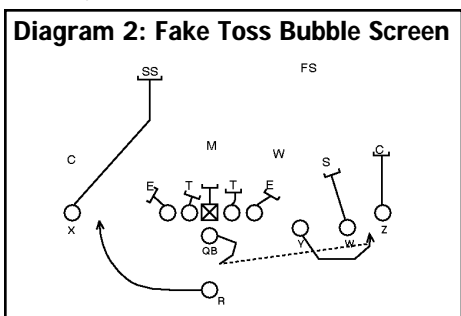
**Y:** Three-step route. First step (with right foot) to gain depth at 45 degrees, second step to gain width and third step downfield toward numbers looking for the football. When the ball is caught, run to the numbers before making a cut.

**R:** Flare opposite the call.

**Quarterback:** Step out from center with right foot, step toward target with left foot and throw to Y. Fade back after the throw to prevent an incompleteness from looking like a lateral.

**The Play Action  
Bubble Screen Concept**

If you have success with the bubble screen, teams will start to cheat a defender out to cover up both the Y and W receivers. Thus, the linebackers must be influenced in order to create space between him and the wide receiver. One way that we do this is by using play action. By showing a run fake, most linebackers will be frozen and allow the receiver for which they are responsible to create space between himself and the frozen linebacker. In Diagram 2, we show a fake toss bubble screen that we use. The assignments for this play are as follows:



**Offensive Line:** Block head up aggressively.

**Front Side Tackle:** Cut the defensive end to get his hands down.

**Z:** Block first perimeter defender from the sideline.

**W:** Block second perimeter defender from the sideline.

**Y:** Take one hard step up field with you left foot. Then take the second step (with right foot) to gain depth at 45 degrees, third step to gain width, and fourth step down-

field toward numbers looking for the football. When the ball is caught, run to the numbers before making a cut.

**R:** Fake a toss away from the play.

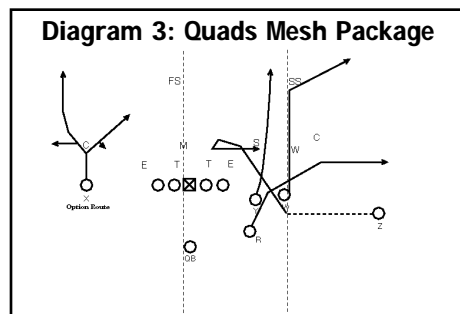
**Quarterback:** Reverse pivot out with your right foot, with two hand, fake the toss and bring the ball to your ear. Step out with your left foot toward the target and throw the ball to Y.

**Mismatches Created by Formations**

Because we use four and five receivers, often times one of our receivers is matched up versus a defender that we feel is inferior or athletically. We feel that our receivers should be able to beat a linebacker or strong safety. In order for defenses to match up better against our receivers, they will put in one or two extra defensive backs. By forcing teams to put defensive backs in the game, due to our base formations, we feel that we can run the ball successfully against nickel and dime packages. Our greatest match-up advantage is when we can create confusion among defenders, or when we can get one of our receivers in a one on one match-up in open space.

**The Quads Mesh Package**

In Diagram 3, you can see that in one of our base packages is to put four wide receivers to one side of the formation. We have those receivers align in what we call a cluster formation. This formation gives us two advantages. First, it will in many cases put the wide receiver, on the backside of the formation, in a one on one situation with the corner. Secondly, the quads side of the formation allows us to run meshing routes that will be confusing to defenders, whether they be in man to man or zone coverages. The assignments for this package are as follows:



**Offensive Line:** Man-zone-man.  
**Z:** Run a whip route at six yards, aiming to replace the defender that is covering the Y receiver.  
**W:** Get vertical immediately on the snap and run a corner route at 18-22 yards.

**Y:** Run a vertical route through the face of any deep defender over the top of you.

**R:** Delay until everyone clears and run a shoot route off of the route of Z.

**X:** Has options to run a slant, fade, hitch, speed out, etc., depending on how the corner is playing him and whether or not there is a flat defender.

**Quarterback:** Five step drop.

**Vs. Man:** Look at mesh route on front side or match-up on backside.

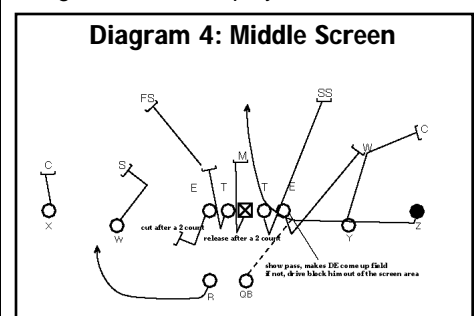
**Vs. Zone:** Look at high low combination on front side or how they are playing the backside single receiver.

**Create Big Plays Versus the Blitz**

Another way that teams try to defend our passing offense is by blitzing. Our philosophy is to recognize the blitz, protect the blitz, and attack the blitz. We want our players to get excited when teams blitz us. We express to our players, that when teams blitz, there is going to be a big play by either the offense or the defense. We want our players to expect to make big plays when teams blitz us.

**The Middle Screen**

Our favorite play to control the blitz is the middle screen. When we are successful running this concept, we are able complete a high percentage pass that usually is very rewarding in terms of positive yards gained. We also deter teams from blitzing us because if we do catch a team in a blitz, many times we are just one or two blocks away from a very big play. Diagram 4 will explain the play more specifically. The assignments for the play are as follows:



**Right Tackle:** Pass set the defensive end and club him by and block the defender over Y.

**Right Guard:** Pass set for two counts and go block the front side safety.

**Center:** Pass set for a two count and block the middle linebacker.

**Left Guard:** Pass set for a two count and block the backside safety.

**Left Tackle:** Pass set the backside defensive end and cut him.

**R:** Flare away from the screen call.

**X and W:** Run off the defender covering you.

**Y:** Push up at the defender over you to give the right tackle a chance to get out to him. If corner chases Z, then peel back and block. If corner doesn't chase, double the defender over you with the right tackle.

**Z:** Pause for one count on the snap, come down the line of scrimmage, catch the ball in the tackle box and run up the hash.

**Quarterback:** Look off the middle line-backer as you drop, come back and throw the ball to Z with a very high release.

### Conclusion

Obviously this article is not a comprehensive look at our offensive package. However, we hope this article contains some thoughts or ideas that can help your program. If there is anything that we can provide for you or your staff that will improve your team, please make us aware of your needs. We will gladly make any-



**Wisconsin-Platteville averaged 265 yards passing per game to lead the WIAC in that category in 1999.**

thing from our program available to you. | (608) 342-1801 or (608) 342-1884. Good  
Feel free to contact our football office at | luck this season!

## “Smash Mouth” Football, Similar Terms, Should Not Be in a Coach’s Vocabulary

Hard-nosed, maybe, but “smash-mouth” football is not how competent football coaches refer to their game. Football is a contact game, but terms that reflect brutality and violence do not belong in a coach’s vocabulary.

Image is one reason to clean up slang terms like smash-mouth that have become popular in the media, but a more compelling reason comes from a legal standpoint. In a courtroom, descriptive terms are used against coaches and the game.

Don’t hesitate to ask your fellow coaches, student-athletes and especially the media who cover your team to cooperate and refrain from using overly-descriptive terms that reflect poorly on the game and your profession.