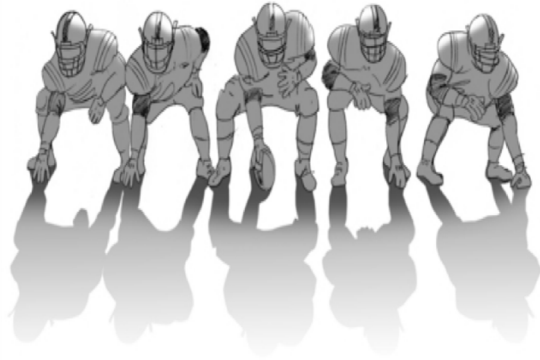

CHAPTER 5



Shoulder Skills

We believe in using the shoulder as our main blocking surface on all of our down & pull blocks and would like to take a few minutes to explain why we believe that this is the best technique.

Since the primary scheme involves angle blocking, trapping, and double teams, we believe that using the shoulder for initial contact gives our players the best chance for success. This also makes it easier to keep our "flat backs" giving our linemen the advantage of leverage. This is in addition to the advantage we gain by blocking the defender at an angle versus head on.

These advantages in leverage also allows smaller linemen to be successful. This flexibility is very important when the number of 250lb plus linemen are very few on a typical high school roster. We had a 12-1 section finalist team that had a 220lb left tackle, a 220lb center, and two 180lb guards. Yet we rushed for section best 4,355 yards in a division that was for schools with 1500-2500 enrollment. This was not small school football by any means!!!

Using the shoulder maximizes power on the Hit & Run blocks, which almost always starts with Angle Blocking in the Wing T. While angle blocking gives a smaller lineman leverage, the shoulder block also maximizes his power in a Run & Hit situation such as: Pulling to trap or kick out; Crack blocking; Gutting(folding) around for Lbers.

The primary reason I believe in teaching the use of the shoulder as the main surface area is **SAFETY**. Using the shoulder instead of the facemask almost does not even need further explanation as to why it would be safer. Asking a young lineman to place the facemask in the opponents chest, or "strike with eyebrows" can cause serious injury if not executed properly. And teaching to "sit on a stool" with the spine in the same position as when back squatting places the head in a position that is vulnerable to whiplash.

The other areas that I would like to address are that using the shoulder as the main surface area makes it easier to have **PROPER FOOTWORK, HELMET PLACEMENT** to the **HOLE**; and best way to **FINISH** the block.

Shoulder blocking is really misnamed because in reality it is really a chest surface technique with the head turned and positioned up to see the face of the defensive player the offensive lineman is blocking



FOOTWORK

As the previous 10-20 pages just explained, our kids understanding of which foot to step with first is connected to which shoulder to use. It is the “OPPOSITE FOOT, OPPOSITE SHOULDER” rule, which means: If I am blocking with my RIGHT shoulder, then my first step is with my LEFT foot. This rule is nearly universally true and makes having proper footwork become automatic.

HOLE LOCATION

Another universal rule of line play is to have your “HELMET TO THE HOLE”. Using the shoulder also makes this automatic. Using the shoulder on a down block versus a penetrator will put the helmet in front of the hard charging defensive lineman. Another example would be 33 belly, which is ran in the B-gap between the LG and LT. If the LG performs a Right Shoulder ON BLOCK on a 2 or a 1-tech, it automatically puts his helmet between the D-Lineman and the hole. Same thing for the LT performing a Left Shoulder ON BLOCK on a 4 or 5-tech.

This connection between shoulder, helmet, and correct footwork drastically reduces the teaching time for the line coach. It also makes it easy to learn and helps an average player to quickly get in the way of a defender.

DIRECTION OF THE BLOCK

By using the shoulder, the offensive lineman will easily understand the direction in which his block is to be completed. We teach another simple rule: “**BLOCK RIGHT, TURN RIGHT**”. This simply means that if using your right shoulder, then turn the defender to your right. This will naturally turn the tailpad towards the hole, we jokingly call this the **BUTT HOLE RULE**. By using the correct shoulder contact and footwork, the offensive lineman will turn his man away from the ball carrier without having to consciously think about it.

FINISHING THE BLOCK

Pushing an object with the shoulder-chest surface area allows a player to generate more power than trying to push with arm extension. This is obvious because the chest and shoulder muscles are so much stronger than the forearm and tricep muscles. Using the shoulder also allows the blocker to “lean” and maintain a flat back rather than being in an erect, sitting position. Just think about how you push a stalled car or a refrigerator across the kitchen. Same principles apply.



Fig 5-1: Hands vs Shoulder Surface Area



FLIPPER VS HANDS

The technique of tucking the fist tightly into the chest (Fig 5-2) and blocking the defense with your forearm, shoulder, and chest was developed during a time when the rules did not allow extension of the arms. Rule changes have been made that give the offensive lineman a tremendous advantage on blocking. Now it is legal to cock the arms back and drive the heels of the hands into the defenders chest, grabbing the jersey under his armpits for a “legal” hold.

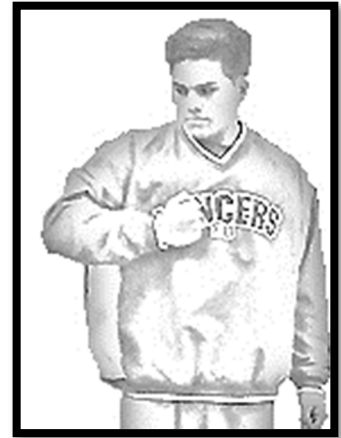


Fig 5-2: Flipper Surface Area

This hands punching technique is the best way to pass protect but is still open to interpretation as to how it best fits into the physical nature of run blocking. Unfortunately many Wing-T coaches fail to objectively analyze which technique is best and just hold on to the “old fashion” shoulder+flipper blocking technique.

"Hard to Teach Old Dogs New Tricks"

With more zone blocking concepts being integrated into the Wing-T package many people have abandoned the shoulder blocking concept altogether. We teach our receivers to use their hands when stalk blocking and the use of hands is the best way to pass protect. So why not teach offensive linemen to use hands? Even the University of Delaware toyed with the idea of using the hands technique on their zone and scoop blocking schemes.

Greg Perry was the original University of Delaware line coach and has stated that he would teach the use of hands instead of flipper if he were still coaching today. However, he also says that he would still teach shoulder and forearm flipper while ON or DOWN blocking in short yardage and goal line situations. His reasons for switching to hands are:

- Coordination of using the forearm flipper and the shoulder takes longer to perfect.
- It is hard to keep the D-Lineman from “sliding” off the forearm surface.
- Harder to rise up out of a good “fit” position and extend the hands when the forearm is pinned against the man your blocking.

In Coach Perry’s argument for the use of hands, he says he would teach the O-Line to aim the hands for the bottom corner edges of the shoulder pad breast plate. Do not extend the arms and create separation until the blocker’s leg action has caused the defensive player to move backwards. The OL should rise up and extend at the same time that the hips are rotating thru and the D-Lineman is on his heels. The extension of the body creates a longer more efficient lever and physics is working in your favor.

I found it interesting that Coach Perry says that he would start all of his teaching using the shoulder because it is safer and an easier starting point. It is important to understand that he was coaching Division 1 football and we are coaching 15-17 year olds, so if using the shoulder is easier and safer, maybe the high school coach should not abandon the use of the shoulder, just the use of the forearm flipper. And since he would continue to use shoulders on short yardage and goal line, he must feel that using the shoulder is the most aggressive way to block.



I agree that using the hands is more natural and that extending the arms as you rise up makes it easier to pancake the D-Lineman. I also believe that using extended hands technique is much easier on the reach and pass blocking. However, I do not think that the high school coach has enough time to teach two separate techniques.



Fig 5-3: Forearm Flipper

What I am proposing and what I teach is the best of both worlds. We took the forearm flipper (Fig 5-3) and simply asked our players to “pin” their elbow tight against the rib cage so that they could get the hand under the D-Lineman’s armpit. We call this the T-Rex Flipper because the arm is not extended very far from the body, similar to the Tyrannosaurus Rex’s little arms. (Fig 5-4).

As I read the arguments it is really an argument of using the hands instead of the forearm because everyone agrees that the shoulder/chest muscles are stronger than the very small tricep muscles. When you push an object away from your body, it is the tricep muscle applying the force and the arm extension leads to the head and shoulders rising up. The “pushing away” action also helps the D-Lineman gain better vision. Defensive coaches call it “gaining separation”. The rising up action goes against the tried and true adage: “LOW MAN WINS”.



Fig 5-4: T-Rex Flipper

Greg Perry’s 30+ years experience says having leverage is way more important than whether you use hands or forearm. Every wrestler, gymnast, and football player knows that the man with the lower center of gravity will win. Perry argues that asking a linemen to fit on the defender’s hip requires great flexibility and balance. He says that he would abandon attacking the hip and instead aim the helmet below the D-Lineman’s chin. As long as your center of gravity is lower then you will win. Regardless of forearm or hands, a successful block needs hip extension for power, a wide base for balance, and foot drive for finish.

SHOULDER & HAND PLACEMENT

We teach the use of the shoulder-chest surface area, combined with the use of the palms of both hands:

- Shoulder-upper chest makes contact above belt line and below the chest;
- One hand is always below bottom edge of shoulder pad breast plate;
- Other hand is on the hip on the side of the helmet, except penetrator block;
- Other hand on penetrator block is in the armpit.
- Face up, flat back;



Fig 5-5: Hand instead of Forearm



To summarize the entire sequence: Blocker takes a 6-inch first step with the foot opposite the shoulder that will make contact (**B**LASTOFF). As the second foot lands, the shoulder and both hands make contact in strategic places (**E**XECUTION). The arms extend out and up as the hips explode forward (**E**LEVATION). As the third and fourth steps drive forward, the blocker is standing the defender straight up using a motion similar to a military or incline pressing motion (**F**INISH).



Two gladiators in the trenches takeoff from the line of scrimmage with the eyes focused on the one he is about to collide with. The offensive lineman fires out, face up, shoulders targeted for the hips, hunkered down lower than the defensive lineman. His hands explode with cobra-like quickness, sledge hammers exploding into the bottom corners of the shoulder pad apron like rocket propelled grenades slamming through tank metal. The simultaneous extension of the hips multiplies the power at the same time that the two RPG fists detonate. The feet are pumping like pistons in an engine, staying wide like powerful Clydesdales pulling the wagon full of kegs. You extend your arms, military pressing the defensive player into rull backward acceleration. And then the Grand Finale, the defensive player tumbles like a giant redwood tree, the wind in his lungs forcibly exits past his mouthpiece as his body slams into the turf. The victorious offensive lineman adds insult to injury by avalanching on top chest, and comes to rest face mask to face mask staring into the now dominated mind of the defensive tackle that he just completely defeated.

Smash mouth football at its best. It is two warriors squaring off, trying to move each other during a 5-second battle that is a true measure of the heart, soul, and spirit of the human being behind the technique. The magic of this one on one confrontation is what draws us all to the great sport of football. This demonstration of intelligence, understanding of proper technique, strength, will, spirit, soul, hardness, enthusiasm, flexibility, quickness, and whatever else went into the success of this one rep. This one rep has planted the seed of doubt in the mind of the opponent, and will make it easier to do the same thing on the next play.



BAG WORK

Bag Work perfects our shoulder skills on all our Individual Blocks. This is performed after the footwork drills and is done every day during spring, summer, and the beginning of August. We will spend 15 minutes on shoulder skills at first but cut it back to 5 minutes a day from 2nd week of August up to our first game. It then becomes a 5-minute review one day per week until Game 6 week, at which point all individual periods are eliminated.

The heavy, noncollapsible cylindrical blocking dummies (weighing 50-70 pounds) will be used, as well as the sled. The shoulder skills progression is broken into four teaching groups:

1. **Surface:** *We start with a slow FIT drill, then explosive STRIKE-&-FREEZE, and then RAPID FIRE.*
2. **Step and hit:** *FIT & DRIVE followed by three levels of SAME FOOT-SAME SHOULDER.*

I. SURFACE - FIT

This is nothing more than a fit drill. You do the surface drill from a six-point stance, which means your hands, knees, and feet are touching the ground. An important coaching point is the toes should be flat and not curled underneath the feet. You do not want to curl the toes underneath the feet because, if you do that, as the blocker strikes, his knees will lift up off the ground and you will not be emphasizing rolling the hips



Fig 5-6: Six Point Surface Drill

In the picture you see the players are on their toes and in the zoomed in picture you can see that my offensive linemen's hips are not rolled forward. When this drill is done correctly, their thighs are often on the ground. Also, I do not like their off hand on the ground. It should be touching the bag slightly under the chin.



At first we will have the players *START* by fitting up against the bag. They “mold” their face, cheek, shoulder, and hands around the bag. Make sure that their surface is correct, that the shoulder is making contact, and the head is “squeezing” the bag. We want them to understand the blocking surface:

- ✓ The side of the neck, squeezing hard against the defender with the earhole;
- ✓ The front of the shoulder and top of the chest;
- ✓ The shoulder side fist against the bag, elbow tight against the rib cage;
- ✓ The fist opposite the shoulder is pinned against the side of the bag;
- ✓ Make sure eyes are up and that their faces are not facing down towards the ground.



Fig 5-7: Hand Placement

Coaching Points

1. Player get in a 6-pt stance, so that hands, knees, & top of toes are all touching the ground.
Do not let them curl their toes into the ground. Their laces should be on the ground.
2. Align head up on the bag. Face mask is touching the middle of the bag.
3. Knees are hip width, directly below the hips, so that the hips can rotate into the block.
Direct angle up and down in their knees. Do not hunch back on the heels.
4. Start with no explosive movements. They move smoothly & under control.
5. Entire surface is on the bag, hips are on the ground, and laces are flat.
Keeping the laces flat forces the explosion from the hips rather than the traction of the cleats
6. Really teach the squeeze with the head, shoulder, & forearm. "Legal holding"

Drill Command & Buzz Words

1. "Right shoulder surface Fit on Ready"
2. Players reach back with right arm, ready to strike (Fig 5-6)
3. *coach counts to three* and then Coach says "**READY**" and the players will fit in with the right shoulder.
4. Players stay frozen against the bag until coach comes around & makes all corrections.
Knees cannot touch ground until coach has seen every player and made corrections.
Bag holders also help coach 'em up. Partner a returner with a new player.

Switching Partners & Switching Shoulders

On all of our drills, we have the starter and his backup partnered up with a bag. If we are ever short bags or have an odd number players, we NEVER let a starter be in a rotation of three players to a bag. Starters have to get the most reps. When the player has hit the bag with a particular shoulder, coach yells "**ROTATE**" and he switches with the bag holder as fast as humanly possible. Do not waste time switching and train your players to do everything fast.

SURFACE - STRIKE AND FREEZE

This drill is the same as the FIT drill, except players will now explosively "punch" the bag or sled on the Coach's "READY" command. They still start in the six-point stance. They stay frozen in their FIT position, knees off the ground, "squeezing" the bag until the coach tells them to return to their 6-point stance.

You want to really strike the bag and roll the hips through; you want to make contact hard enough so the bag is knocked off the white yard line. You want to have hardness here. This move is explosion.



Drill Command & Buzz Words

1. "Left Foot, Right shoulder Strike And Freeze on Ready"
2. Players cock their arm back as far as possible behind them, ready to strike (Fig 5-6)
3. *coach counts to three* and then says "**READY**" and the players explode into the bag with right shoulder.
4. Players stay frozen against the bag until coach comes around & makes all corrections.
Knees cannot touch ground until coach has seen every player and made corrections.
Bag holders also help coach 'em up. Partner a returner with a new player.

Once a player has hit & froze on a bag with the right shoulder 2-3 times, they rotate with their bag holding partner. The player that was holding the bag performs 2-3 right shoulder blocks and players switch again to then perfect the left shoulder Strike-A-Freeze blocks. Remember, rotating happens very, very fast.

SURFACE - RAPID FIRE

Players are still on all fours in their 6-point stances, this is a series of three blows delivered as quickly as possible.

Drill Command & Buzz Words

1. "Left Foot, Right shoulder Rapid Fire on Ready"
2. Players cock their arm back as far as possible behind them.
3. Coach silently counts to three and then shouts "**READY**".
4. After contact, Coach shouts "**BACK**" and players immediately recoil back into 6-point stance.
5. Three seconds after the "BACK" command, coach says "READY" and players quickly strike the bag again.
6. Coach shouts "BACK" and three seconds later says "READY".
7. Players quickly execute a 3rd shoulder blow, remaining in fit position until coach makes all corrections.

A player only performs one set of RAPID FIRE for the right shoulder and then switches with his bag holding partner. That player then does one set of RAPID FIRE right shoulder blocks and then they switch again.

VERY IMPORTANT: If there are 14 offensive blockers but only 5 bags for example, we would put our starting RT, RG, LG, and LT with a bag and their backup. The two centers would be partnered up with a hand shield. The remaining four players (all 3rd stringers) would all share the fifth and final bag. They will miss certain shoulder rotations.



After perfecting the Fit in spring ball, we start shoulder skills with RAPID FIRE for rest of season.

So our 6-point progression starts with the slow moving fit drill, then performing an explosive Strike & Freeze, and ending with Rapid Fire. We really focus on the fit in the spring and early summer. Rest of summer and early August is Strike & Freeze. From the 2nd week of August until approximately Game 5 week, we start our bag drills with "Rapid Fire".



II. STEP & HIT

The first three drills in the shoulder skills progression focused primarily on the contact surface and how to deliver an effective punch on the bag. This group of drills gradually incorporates the footwork that is coordinated with the contact by the shoulder & hands. The following fundamentals are reinforced:

- Keep the **"man between your legs."**
- Keep the **"chest on the thigh,"** or maintain a **"flat back"** body angle.
- Remember to keep the head up: **"Eyes to the Sky"**. Not only to see the defense but to avoid lunging.
- Run through the block. **"Accelerate the Feet"** on contact. **"Beat the Freeze"**.
- **"Toes Out"** like they do when they squat. **"Push off their insteps"**.

FIT & DRIVE DRILL



Before we start blocking out of a stance or combining our footwork with our surface, we teach and drill the players to **"beat the freeze"**, as well as understand how it feels to block a live body. **"BEAT THE FREEZE"** is our buzzword to remind players to NOT stop moving their feet once contact is made. The blocker will actually fit into the defender's chest, while setting his feet as shown above. The blocker's chest is on the defender's thigh as he pushed the defender for five yards. Maintain flat back, do not rise up, wide stance, and push off the inside of the feet.

SAME FOOT, SAME SHOULDER DRILL - FIT

Remember, we have spent a large amount of time teaching the first 2 steps (Chapter 4). The SAME FOOT-SAME SHOULDER drill teaches the lineman how to strike the opponent with the shoulder & both hands at the same time that the **Second** foot hits the ground. In other words, as the 2nd step is planted in the ground at the same time that the shoulder & hands are hitting the opponent.

The blocker begins in a two-point stance, one arm's length away from the bag. His elbows are on his knees and he maintains a flat back. Feet are in the same slight stagger or square toes as when they are in a 3-point stance.



Drill Command & Procedure

1. "BIRD DOG - BIRDDOG" Players get in 2-point stance
2. "Right foot, right shoulder Fit on Ready"
3. When the coach says "READY", player takes a 6-inch step with left foot & freezes with both arms cocked back "in the holster", ready to strike.
If first teaching this drill, pause so players can look down to see if **heel replaced toe**.
4. Coach then slowly says "S-L-O-W-L-Y" followed by abrupt "HIT".
5. Players take the 2nd step at half speed, slowly making simultaneous contact with the shoulder and both hands.
6. Players remain frozen while coach goes around making corrections.
The right heel should be even or slightly in front of the Left toe.
They should still have a flat back, left hand squeezing the side of the bag, shoulder and neck squeezing the bag, and the T-REX FLIPPER slightly off-center of the bag, elbow tight against the rib cage (Fig 46).
Head up and eyes forward.
7. Coach says "Left Foot is in concrete, do not move it. Bring Right heel back slowly even with Left Toe".
8. Players rewind in slow motion, bringing right foot back and placing both hands back in the holster.
9. Coach then says "READY", pause for 3 count, then shouts "HIT"
10. Players repeat the right foot step & right shoulder fit at half speed.
11. Repeat this Hit – Rewind – Hit – Rewind – Hit several times so players form muscle memory.

Make sure that players understand the reason they are moving on HIT and not on Ready. It is because this movement happens after the ball is snapped, which is why they are starting the drill with their Left Foot Blastoff step already in the 6-inch, Heel Replaces Toe position. This drill actually starts with the 2nd Execution step.

SAME FOOT, SAME SHOULDER DRILL – STRIKE & FREEZE

We do everything exactly as in the previous "Same Foot, Same Shoulder Fit" drill just described, except players do not come forward at half speed. When coach says "HIT" they explode into the bag making contact with the same shoulder as the foot that is stepping forward. They should strike the bag hard enough to knock the bag & its holder off the line. They still freeze so coach (or bag holder) can make corrections and they still rewind several times to repeat the action.

SAME FOOT, SAME SHOULDER DRILL – RAPID FIRE

Again, the drill starts the same as in the previous two. The difference is as soon as the players make explosive contact with the bag (knocking it off the line), they immediately bring the Same foot back (right foot, right shoulder) and put the hands in the holster, ready to strike again. The coaches commands are: "READY – HIT – BACK – READY – HIT – BACK – READY – HIT – FREEZE". The players hit the bag a total of 3 times, freezing in fit position on the last one.

If the blocker is really exploding, the foot that is in "concrete" may come forward and settle for balance.

