

VOLUME 24

Triple Option Defense

**Understanding the Offensive Theory and Defending the
Flex with Multiple Fronts and Coverages**

BIOGRAPHICAL HISTORY



- **My father, Richard “Yogi” Hickman, was a Hall of Fame High School coach in Southeastern NC. He implemented Option principles from a Base I-Formation. This scheme was largely founded on principles learned from studying Nebraska under Tom Osborne.**
- **Jimmy Fletcher, my high school coach, implemented the Air Force Flexbone after serving as an assistant at East Tennessee State. Playing QB my senior year, we advanced to the State Quarterfinals using this offense.**
- **As a career college assistant in the South, I have been on staffs tasked with defending the Flex 22 times! Two entire seasons.....**
 - **2006 vs Navy**
 - **2009-2012 vs Lenoir-Rhyne (4x), Carson-Newman (2x), Brevard (2x)**
 - **2013-2017 vs Wofford (3x), The Citadel (2x)**
 - **2018-2021 vs North Brunswick (4x)**
 - **2023-Present vs Carson Newman (2x), Tusculum (2x)**

SCHEME BACKGROUND



- **In 2009, we used a “Dial-a-Defense” weekly approach, and it did not work.**
- **The next spring, we spent multiple days clinicing with Mark Tucker (former Citadel Assistant) and watching Iowa defend Georgia Tech in the 2010 Orange Bowl.**
- **Out of that came a base 4-down plan we still use today.**
- **While we defended it great at NGU, I still felt it was too much of a deviation from our Base defense.**
- **I began studying Service Academy games against one another. ALL 3 BASED in an ODD. That was telling.**
- **At AU, we have been 24% reduction 3-Down, 32% DBL reduction 3-Down, and 37% true 4-Down in our four games vs the Flexbone.**

UNDERSTANDING OPTION FOOTBALL



- In Volume 3, we took you through our # counting system to check our scheme's soundness.

- This principle is straight out of an option coach's playbook

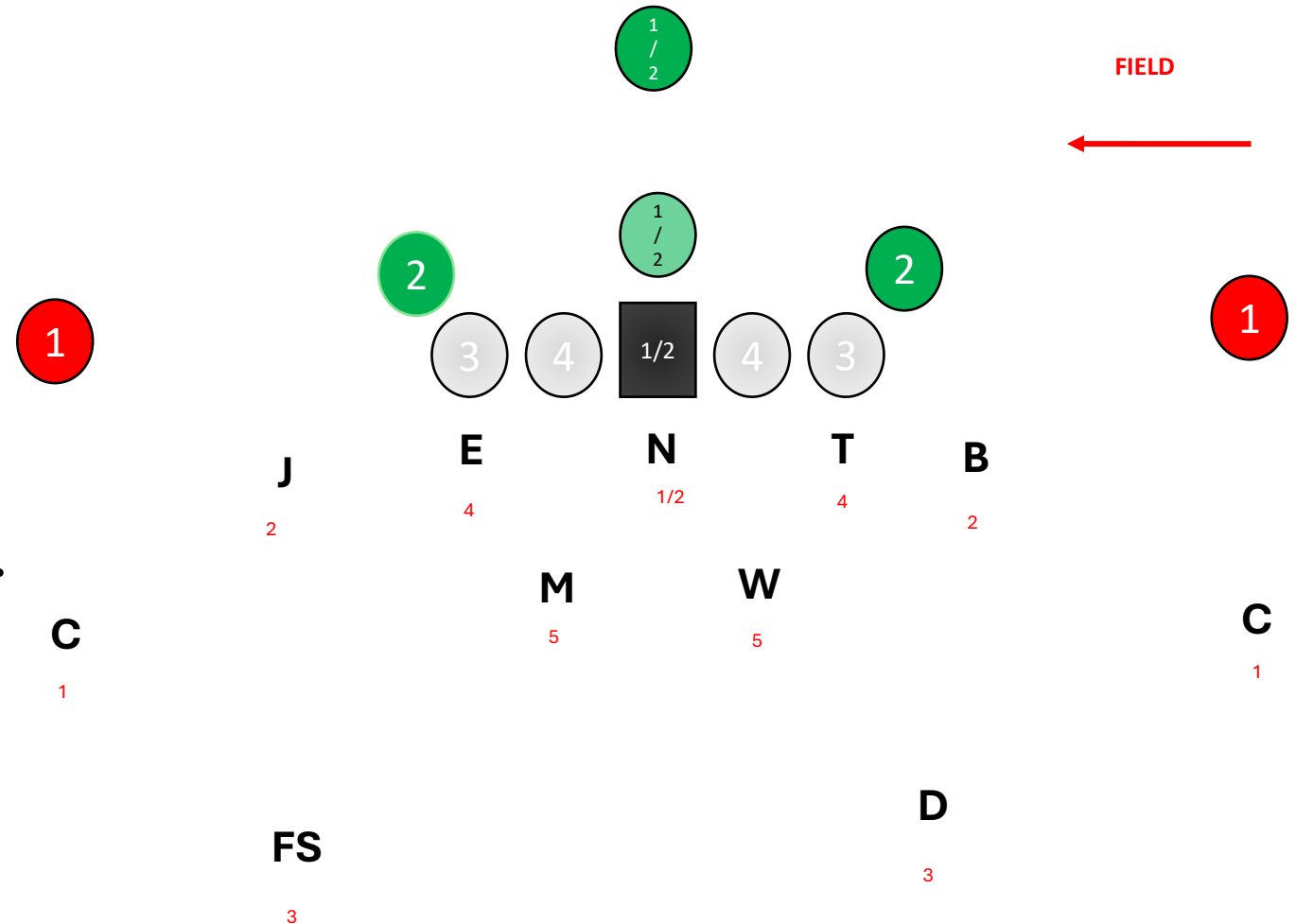
- It is **CRITICAL** in every scheme to even the math. We can accomplish this two ways...

- 1) Pre-Snap Alignment
- 2) Post-Snap Movement

- A good option coach is going to explore every avenue before he abandons the run. They will "Hunt" and "Peck" all day to find numbers, angles, and leverage.

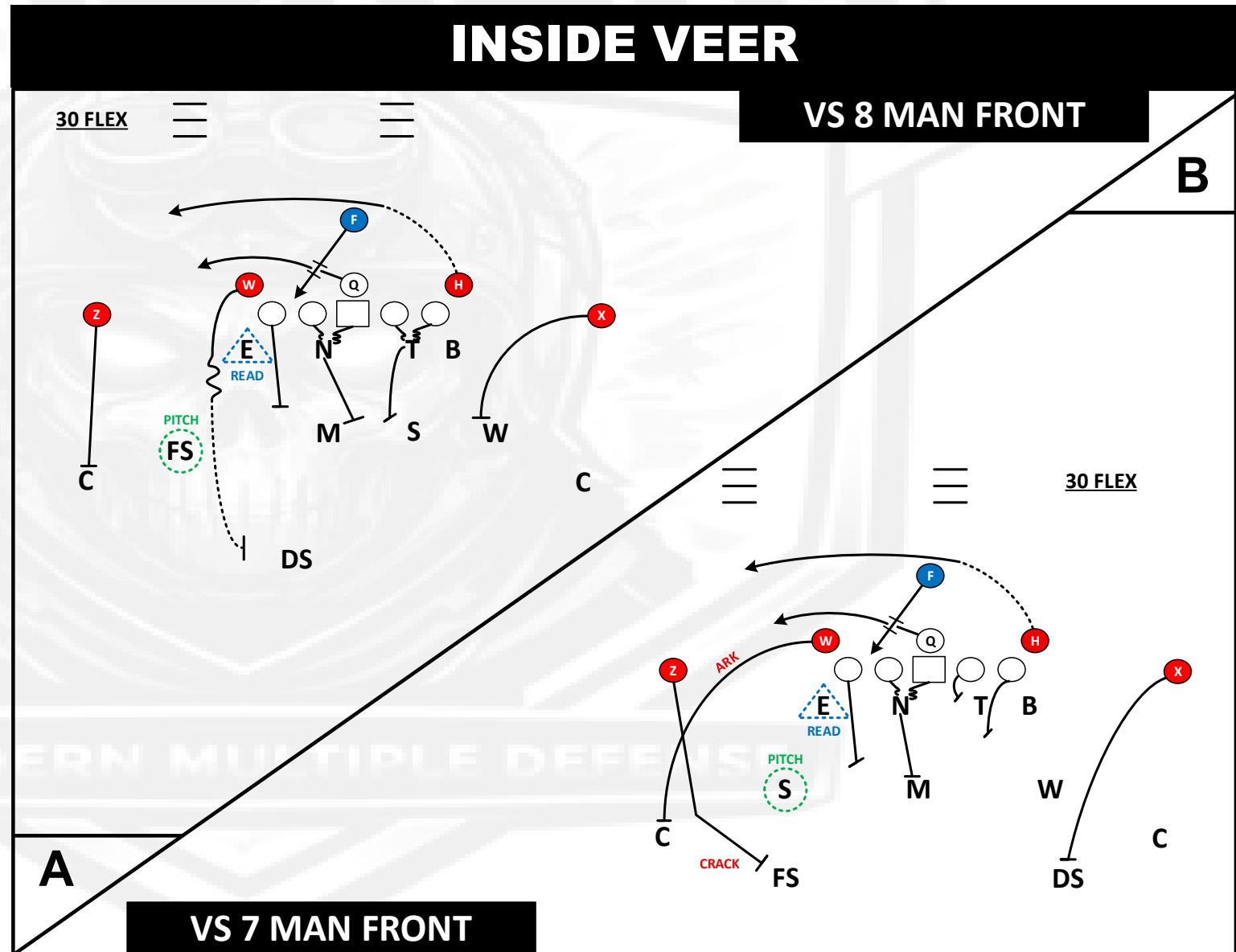
- Even if it hasn't been shown, every week you must prepare for **TOVER** and **UNBALANCED**... it is in their toolkit somewhere!

Flex Formation
2x 2Offense = 5.5 Field/5.5 Bdry x2)



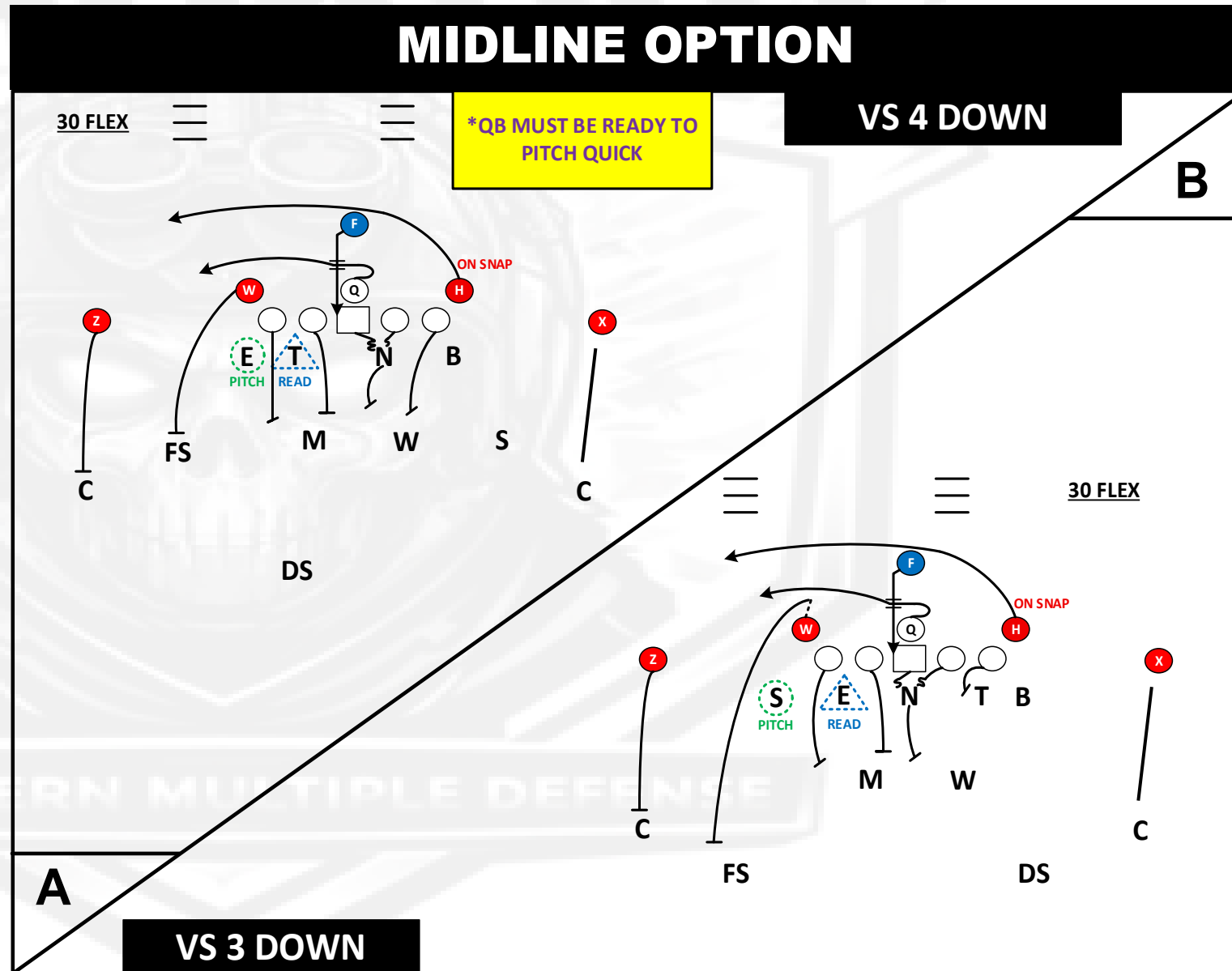
THE 7- OR 8-MAN FRONT-PERIMETER BASE RULES

- A triple option scheme requires clear perimeter communication and execution.
- On all perimeter plays (or plays that have an edge component), the slot's rules are often dictated by the entire front.
- If the defense is in a 7-Man Front (2 safeties in split-field presnap), we should expect an Arc or Crack-Arc Game.
- If the defense is in an 8-Man Front, the game largely becomes a seal game.
- This is not a 100% rule as offenses have been more willing to arc tackles (Heat Schemes) and pitch off of interior players more. But it does make them a little more predictable than would have before.
- Both a 7-Man Front and 8-Man Fronts have positives and negatives. We play primarily out of a Quarter Shell (7-Man Front) for the purposes of being able to have full support to both sides of the formation.



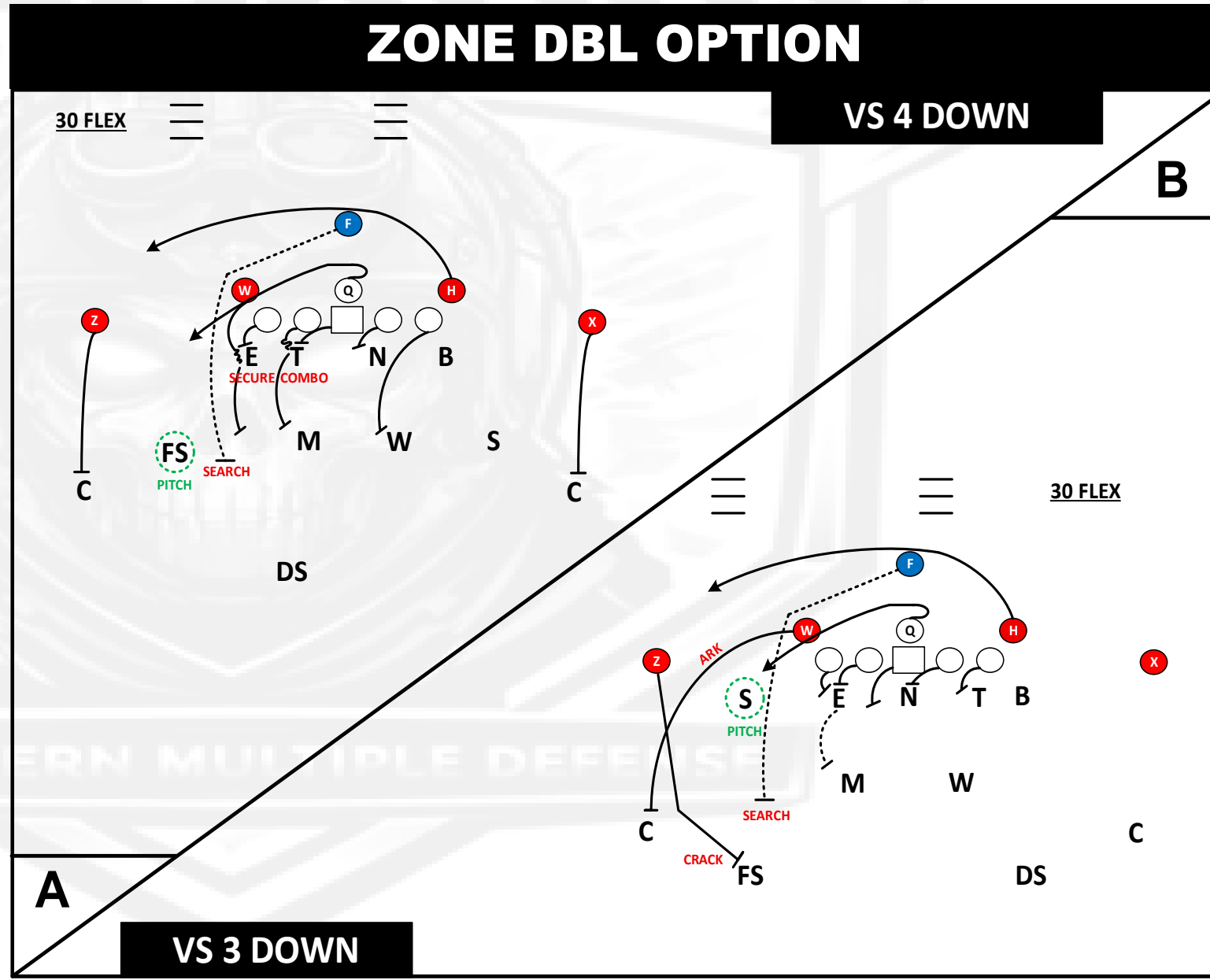
CORE SCHEME #2 – MIDLINE TRIPLE

- A true Triple-Option with a dive, keep, and pitch component
- Read key is defined as “First Man head up or outside the guard”
- Pitch key is defined as “+1 on the read key” or “next outside”
- The track of the back is a tell. The B Back will work up the midline (the QB’s crack)



CORE SCHEME #4 – ZONE DOUBLE OPTION

- A DBL-option with no dive component
- Great answer for the offense to interior pressure. Be ready for it in short-yardage or goal-line situations.
- Can be ran as a zone-to or zone-away (Loaded) scheme for offense
- Pitch key is defined by the widest threat to the first level...EMOL or TIT
- The track of the B Back is often a “Levels” movement where he is searching inside of the pitchman for leakage. Can also be used as a “Load” player to block the guy who is normally the “Read Key” in a Triple.



WHAT ARE THE “NON-THINKING” PLAYS?



- **Zone Dive**
- **Hard Dive**
- **Rocket Toss**
 - **Belly G**
 - **Q Follow**
 - **Sally Iso**
 - **Ctr Sally**
- **Rocket Boot**
- **Play-Action Passes**

- **By consistently changing fronts by call and inserting a stem, we feel it is hard for the offense to get into an effective read game.**
- **As a result, we see an uptick in these non-thinking plays.**
- **We also feel by being a naturally balanced defense (3-4) we see more non-conventional Flexbone formations (condensed, unbalanced, tover, 3xl, etc.)**
- **This still presents unique challenges due to congestion problems (creation of more gaps).**
- **These are “Go-To” plays for an offense in short yardage or Goal-To-Go situations. Negate risks of a negative.**

PHILOSOPHIES OF DEFENDING THE BONE



- **Math the Math – Make sure we are alignment and assignments sound.**
- **The biggest misnomer of Option Defense – Presnap Assignments. We fit the scheme, just like every other play. “Dive, QB, Pitch” is all great, but what if they block the QB player? What if they block the pitch player? You have to have triggers and cues based on what the key tells you to do.**
- **Stop the Dive. The entire defense except for two defenders has dive responsibilities depending on the blocking structure.**
- **Two hats to the alley – In addition to having a “force” player, the alley player is a +1 player on the QB if the original QB player is blocked. If not, he gets the free run to the pitch man. This creates TFLs.**
- **String the ball out! An enormous mistake is to constantly charge the mesh. It’s like a baseball hitter... if the QB is consistently seeing the same speed, he can locate and hammer your fastball. Have a base way to play it and then charge occasionally for the element of the surprise.**
- **Deny the dagger! When these guys throw the ball , they want big plays. Demarcation angles and consistent commitment to playing a key (E.E.T.T.) .**
- **Disciplined and assignment football is key. But we must not forget the core tenant of defense.....CHASE THE BALL once it's diagnosed. (E.E.T.T.)**

ATTACKING SEQUENTIAL PLAYCALLING



- **Stemming and Restemming the front are easy ways to change pictures for the QB, OL, and perimeter players.**
- **Often, option plays are better to certain looks. For instance, the midline follow play is typically built in to Read a B Gap defender. Inside veer is better to a true B Gap Bubble. Giving the offense various even and odd fronts and multiple coverages can often force them into non-thinking plays.**
- **Taking chances is a change up. Pressure natural bubbles to try and create a higher stuff rate. The defense will need to create some negative to no-yardage plays to stay out of 4th and short... They are going for it.**

COVERAGE FOR OPTION DEFENSE



- **Everyone must cross-key! Key the opposite wing back. If no wing opposite, take key near back.**
- **Before declaring the force, the wing back MUST pass the fullback. The force player should see near wing through peripheral.**
- **Once he crosses:**
 - **Backside safety snap eyes to far #1!**
 - **Nearside 1/3s player snap eyes to near #1**
 - **Could be corner or safety... be ready for crack replace**
 - **Still should be able to fall off onto wheel IF you get a post**



FLOW COVERAGE

- **Sky Support**
- **Not good against condensed sets (Ck Disco)**
- **Safeties cross key Wings. If man clears the FB, trigger to become Force Player (Pitch). No Wheel responsibilities.**
- **It is Cover 4 until it isn't! If no motion occurs or no one crosses the FB, you become MOD on #2.**
- **Corners must remain deep, but trigger to crack replace. Crack replace = Force (Pitch)**



DISCO COVERAGE

- **Cloud Support**
- **Not good against wide splits sets (Ck Flow).**
- **Corners cross key Wings. If man clears the FB, trigger to become Force Player (Pitch). No Wheel responsibilities.**
- **It is Cover 4 until it isn't! If no motion occurs or no one crosses the FB, you become MOD on #1.**
- **Safeties must remain deep, but trigger to crack replace. Crack replace = Force (Pitch)**

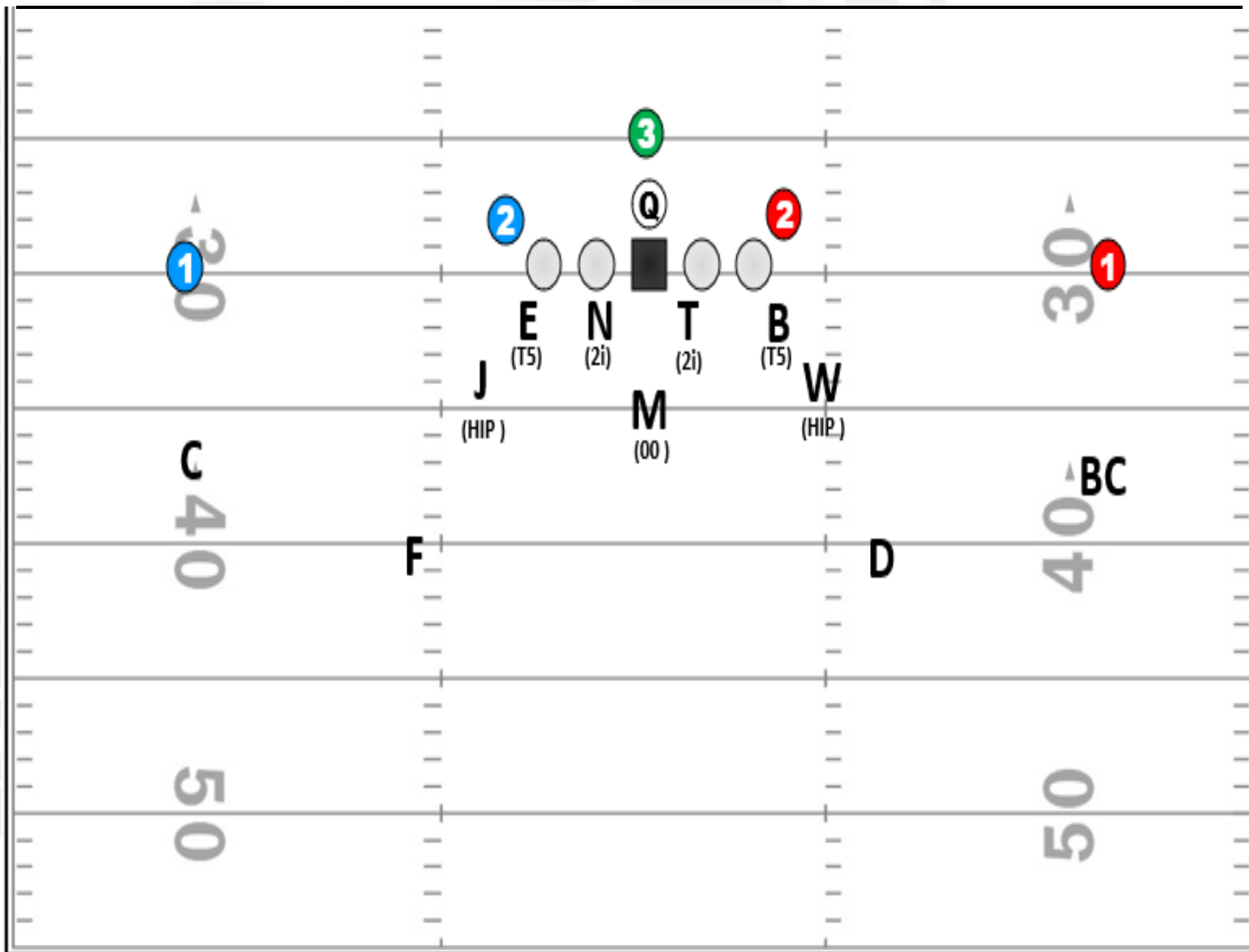


BASE CALLS (OKIE)

- **We still like all our Base “Okie” calls vs Triple Option sets. All of these were discussed in-depth in Volume 9.**
- **Bash, Jam, Max, and Wax were called on about 25% of our snaps vs Triple Option the last two years. Corresponding slants like Tear and Rip were still called.**
- **Called primarily with 3-Deep coverages.**
 - **Base option rules in 3 Deep > Curl-Flat Player = Force... Pitch**
 - **Hook to Okie Side (Shade 5) > Squeeze Scrape ... B Gap Dive... C Gap QB**
 - **Hook to Reduction Side (3/5) > Primary A Gap (Dive)... But expect same color to cross face! Free to the Alley (QB to Pitch)**
 - **Post-Safety plays with cheat steps. He is 75% pass, but converts to playside alley in perimeter run game**
- **Will also play with Flow and Disco**

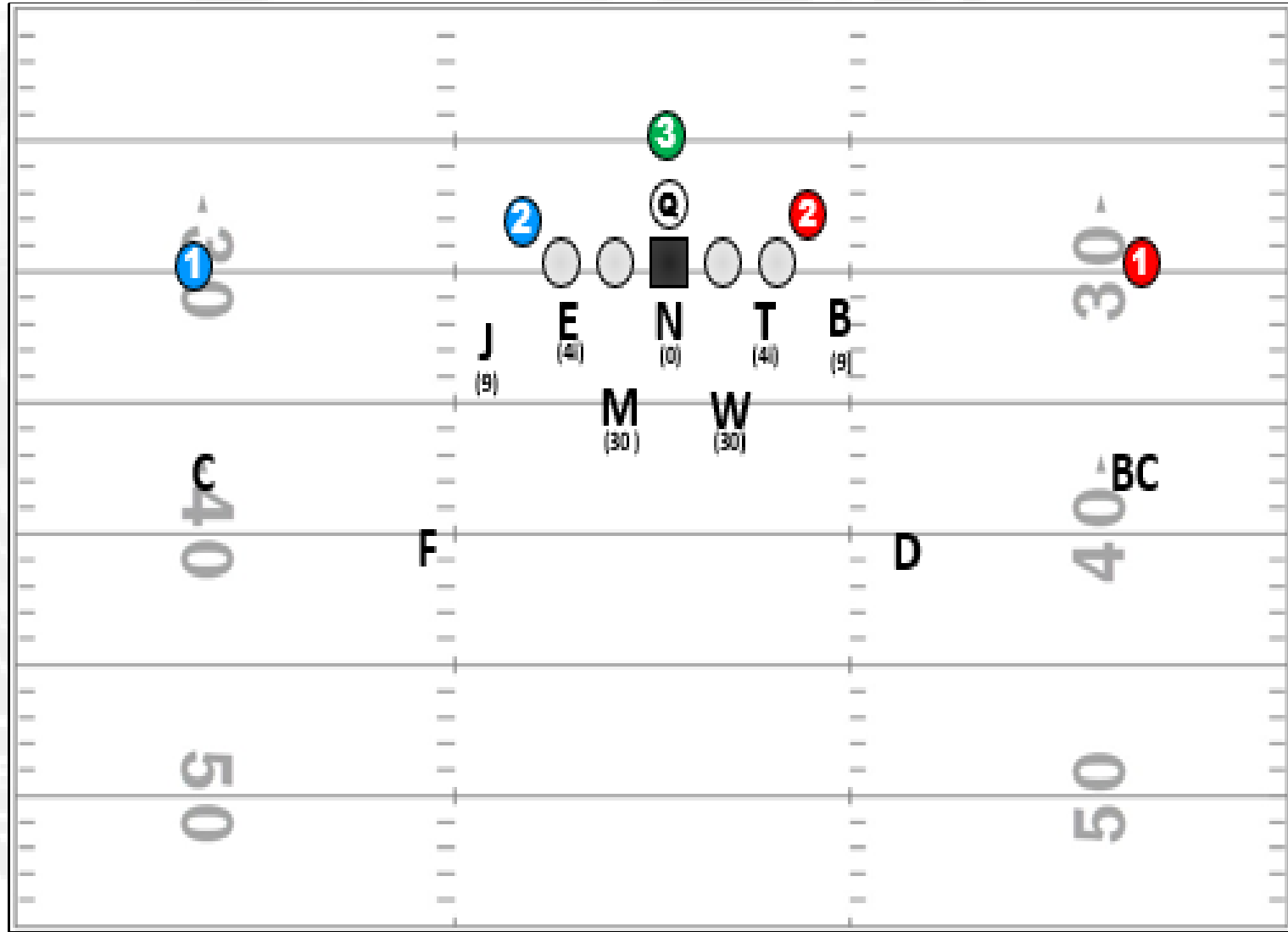
HAWKEYE (EVEN)

- **Developed after watching Iowa vs Georgia Tech in 2010 Orange Bowl**
- **“TRUE MIKE” Defense. In Hawkeye, the Mike Backer is a flow player, playing cloudy/clear to the ball side. If “B” gap is open, fit/deep and thick. If B gets congested by SQUEEZE, over the top tightly to take QB.**
- **Hip backers are in INDICATOR KEY. The near back (Wing) is my only key until he crosses the football away. At that time, I become a FB/B Gap Fitter.**
 - **He arcs, I arc! (Pitch)**
 - **He folds, I fold (B Gap)**
 - **He bases, I hammer (Tite D Gap)**
 - **Indicator on TE if 3 Man Surface (TIGHT 9)**
- **Can be played with Flow and Disco Coverage**



LIZARD (ODD)

- **A double reduction alignment and assignment. Sabre (Volume 13) for the interior 3 DL.**
- **OLBs are in “Tandem Read”. They primarily read Wing, but must secondarily see Tackle through peripheral (see page)**
 - **Double Down or Base = Fit Tight C**
 - **The Split= Short Feather Sit**
 - **Fold= Strike and late fall-in**
 - **Motion away= Tackle to B Back**
- **The goal of the tandem read is to “string-out” the play. OLBs become primary Alley players (QB to Pitch).**
- **Flow-side ILB, fits cloudy/clear, A to D. If the fit is interior, he takes dive. If it expands beyond B gap, he will play QB to Pitch (off the OLB)**



TANDEM READS EXPLAINED



<p>1.</p> <p>M DOWN/DOWN = COLLISION C GAP CONTROL</p>	<p>2.</p> <p>PASS = CONVERT</p>
<p>3.</p> <p>LOOP/ARC = 3 STEP FEATHER QB</p>	<p>4.</p> <p>REACH = SET EDGE ON WING</p>
<p>5.</p> <p>FLOW AWAY PASS = NEAR BACK MAN</p>	<p>6.</p> <p>TACKLE ARCS OUT, WING AWAY = 3 STEP FEATHER – QB PLAYER</p>
<p>7.</p> <p>TACKLE BASE BLOCKS, WING AWAY = CROSS FACE, WORK UNDER THE BASE</p>	