

CHAPTER 3

Sequence of Play

This chapter describes the general sequence of play for executing run or pass plays. Special teams play execution is described in Chapter 9. Exceptions to the sequence given below are detailed in Chapters 4 and 5, which describe the execution of the run and pass plays respectively in detail.

3.1 General sequence of play:

The general sequence is given below. Each of these steps, particularly 1 through 5, should be taken with a minimum of delay, or a timeout should be called to ponder the play at greater length.

1) Offensive player selection:

The offensive coach selects eleven players to be on the field for the play.

2) Defensive player selection:

The defensive coach selects eleven players to be on the field for the play.

3) Offensive lineup:

The offensive players are positioned on the game board according to the desires of the offensive coach, within the constraints of player abilities and positions.

4) Offensive play selection:

The offensive coach writes down the play that will be executed. The manner in which this is done will be detailed in section 3.3.

5) Defensive lineup:

The defensive players are positioned on the game board according to the desires of the defensive coach. The constraints will be described later. Coverage markers are placed on particular defenders to indicate man-to-man coverage. The defensive pass rush status is announced, with no announcement meaning that there is no initial pass rush: that defensive linemen are playing in a “normal” manner, with priority on defending the run.

(In in-person games, the offensive player may choose to call a timeout as he sees how the defensive players are being positioned, as long as this is done prior to the announcement of the pass rush option. The pass rush announcement must therefore be the last act of this phase of the play. It is not quite sporting to announce the pass rush at the same time that a player (perhaps one who is blitzing) is being positioned, since this does not provide any opportunity for the offensive QB to call a timeout.)

6) Play execution:

The play is executed according to the way the play was written down by the offensive coach. Ultimately the gain on the play, in number of yards, is determined. There may be side effects such as injuries or a change of possession. Chapters 4 (for running plays) and 5 (for pass plays) detail this phase of the game in detail.

7) Administrative:

The yardage gain is recorded, along with the time and any other special events. Both players are made aware of the ball position and game time. The offensive player has the game record; it is his responsibility to announce these facts, or to set the scoreboard display if one is used. Any injury consequences are determined.

3.2 Offensive lineup:

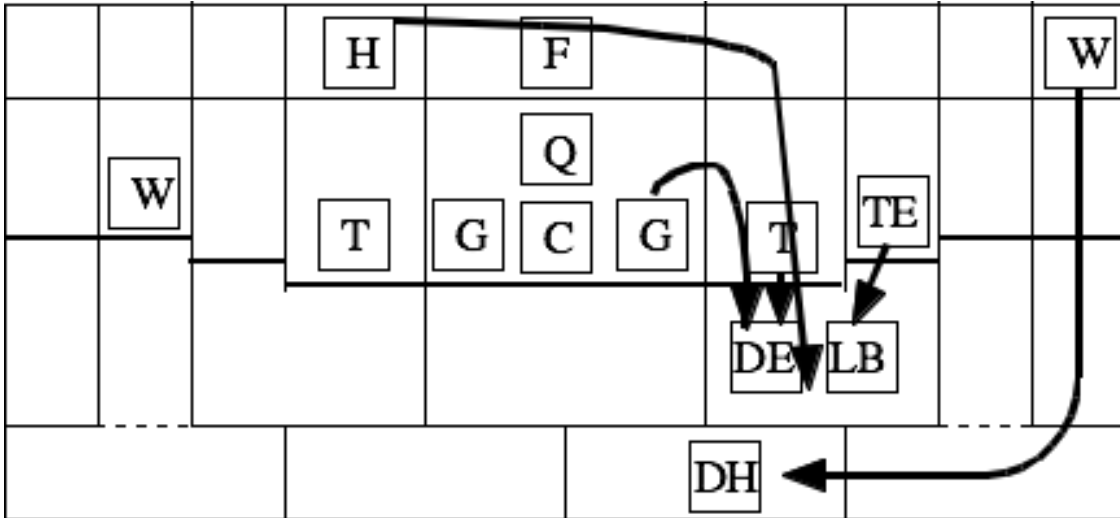
The offensive positions on the gameboard of Q, C, G, and T must be covered by appropriate players, generally of the same position, or (under advanced rules) a utility player able to play that position. A running back such as a B, H, or F can play the Q position, but will have a zero pass value. A total of seven players or more (other than the QB) must start in zones adjacent to the line of scrimmage. Normally this means that a tight end (E or TE) or wide receiver (W, E, or B) will be at either end in the tight end or wide receiver zone respectively. A player set up in the offensive zone outside of and adjacent to the tackle must be a TE or E. A Tight End (TE) may not line up elsewhere. (However, see unbalanced line rules for an exception.) A Wide Receiver (W) must line up in one of two wide zones, or opposite the "Wide Wide" (Can also be referred to as "Very Wide") defensive zones, either on the line of scrimmage or in the zone one removed from the line of scrimmage, on either side. A Fullback (F) lines up in the zone directly behind the quarterback. A Halfback (H) or even two H's can start in that zone even if there is no F. (This is a change from an earlier rule) A H must line up off of the line of scrimmage between the tight end positions, inclusive. (A H may line up in the TB position, but unless he is a specialized tailback he gets no special benefit from doing so.) A general purpose back (B) may line up as a H, F, or W. A general purpose end (E) may line up as a TE or W. A lineup such that a tackle is an eligible receiver is considered illegal, although a T could play "out of position" as a TE with a zero pass value.

The above provisions limiting players to certain positions may be waived by declaring that a player is playing out of position, at some penalty. Generally the player is credited one less in contact value, and sometimes one less in pass value (such as when a player is substituting at wide receiver). Chapter 7 has a fuller elaboration of these provisions, and should be considered authoritative in this matter. For some positions, such as center and running back, the use of a substitute player other than prescribed may add a chance of fumble. Usually such substitutions are necessary only due to injuries.

3.3 Offensive Play Selection:

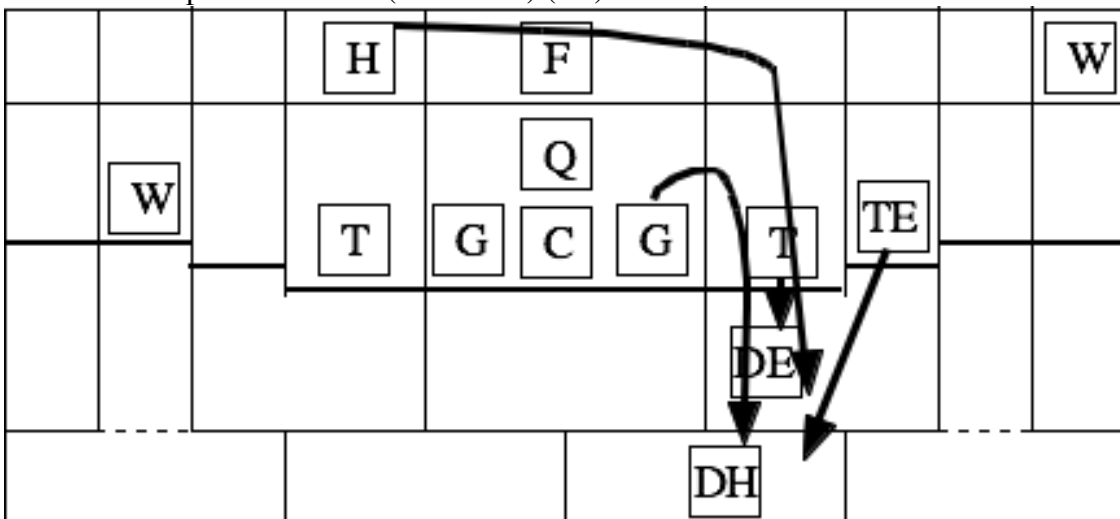
Play selection consists of indicating a ballcarrier, where he is to run, and who is to block and where. The general format is illustrated by example as follows for a run play:

H/LT #27 (LG,TE)(WL) [or H/LT (LG,TE)(WL) #27]



Here, the ballcarrier is the halfback. If there is more than one halfback who could execute this play, a more specific designation, such as RHB must be used, or possibly by number, #27 here. He is to run the play by moving to cross the line of scrimmage into the L zone at the LT position. The play as written is defective if he does not have sufficient movement points to do so. The blockers in zone L are the left guard, who pulls (requiring 3 movement points, as Chapter 4 will specify), the tight end TE (it is assumed that this is the left tight end if there are two), and (implicit) the left tackle. The tackle need not be mentioned since it is assumed that all linemen, unless mentioned, block straight ahead into the adjacent defensive zone. One zone straight downfield from the LT entry point, in the SL zone, the left wide receiver (WL) will block. In the game record, the player number of the ballcarrier should also be included as shown for statistical purposes.

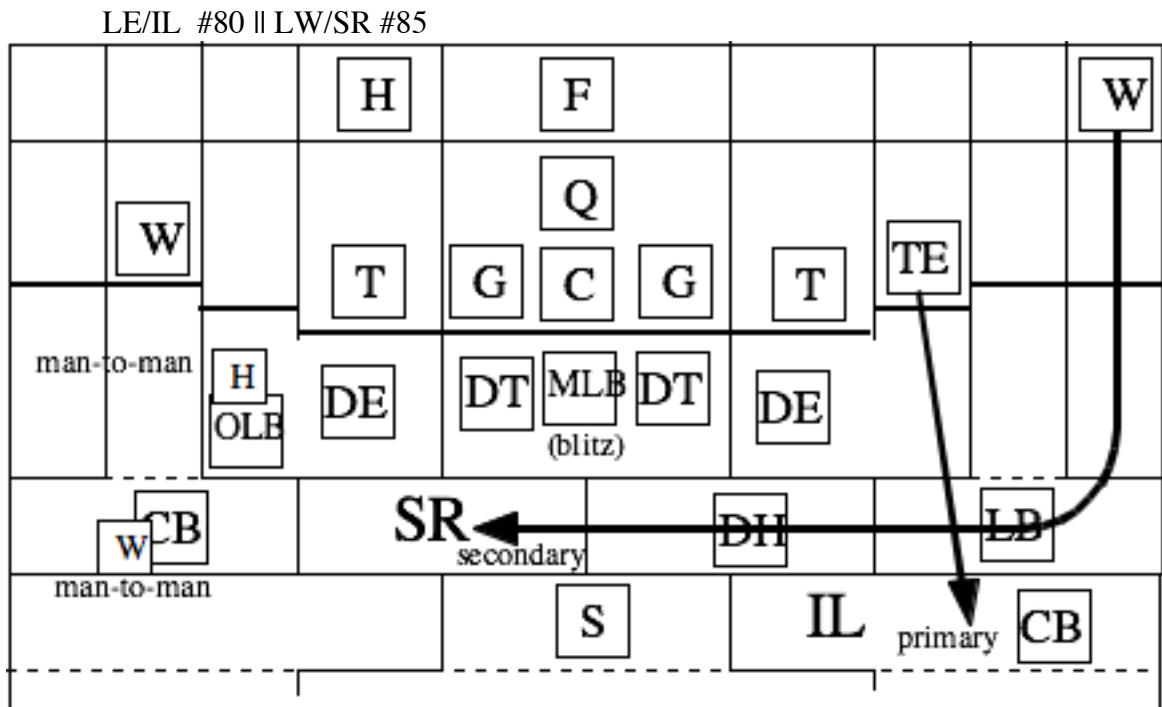
Another example: H/LT #27 (F LG lead) (TE) Here the G is a “lead blocker”.



The way the play is written has implications for offensive setup. If there is no left wide receiver, that blocking assignment is ignored, since there is no left wide receiver. If the left guard has only one or two movement points, that assignment is ignored since the left guard on the field cannot perform as specified. In case of ambiguity, use the player

closest to the assignment. If the SL blocker had been designated as "W", the left wide receiver would still be taken, but if no left wide receiver was present, the right wide receiver would be used. (Such defaults and assumptions are normally important only in by-mail play, where a given play may be used with different offensive sets, or with unanticipated substitutes.)

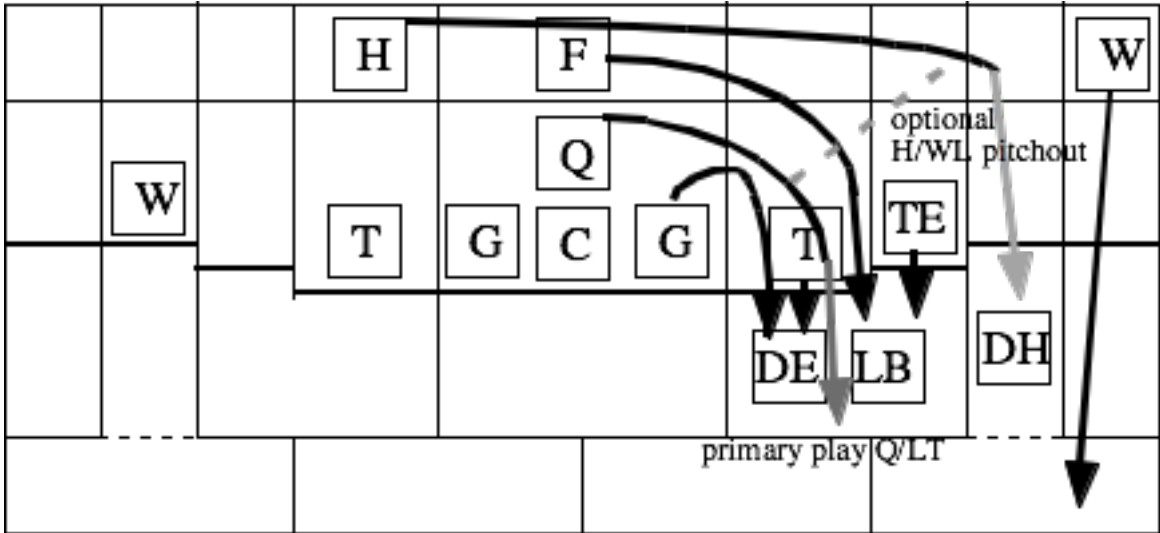
A pass is written similarly, but no blockers are indicated. (A screen pass is an exception, and is written similarly to the run.) For a pass, screen pass or draw, the entry point need not be specified, only the destination zone. A pass play may also designate a secondary receiver. An example is:



This play has as a primary receiver the left end in the Intermediate Left zone, and as the secondary receiver the Left Wide receiver in the Short Right zone. Note that the player number for both should be given. If the pass is actually thrown to the secondary receiver, the first part of the play as written should be marked out with a line through it to remove possible ambiguity for the statistician. It is possible for quarterbacks of exceptional ability to have a tertiary receiver.

The "||" symbol for an alternate play may also be used for options such as a QB option run. In the play written below, the option is to pitch out to the halfback going wide left, while the quarterback runs left tackle. Note "P" is used as a prefix to the destination to indicate a pitchout.

QB/LT #11 (F,TE)(LG) || H/PWL #27 (-)(WL)



In some plays, special options are used such as "qk", "+1", "loft", and such, which must also be included in the play as written.

3.4 Defensive setup

There must be a DE (or a utility player or one playing out of position as a DE) in both the L and R zones (areas). These players must be outside of all other defensive linemen. Linemen between them must be DT or DL types. A DT (or utility or out of position player playing the DT position) must also be in the C zone (area). A DE or DT playing outside of the R,C, and L zones is out of position, and is consequently -C and has a zero pass value. Any violation of the above conditions results in at least one penalty (of a contact point, usually) for players being out of position. If there is more than one DT, the other(s) may start in L, C, or R, but inside the DE's. If no DT is in C, a LB in that zone, or nearest it (as chosen by the offense) is reduced -C to compensate, and one is added to any contact die roll in that zone.

DH (or S or CB) players are allowed to start in the L, R, or C zones only if they are blitzing. If they are present but not blitzing, they are, in effect, playing out of position as a linebacker, and are penalized -C. LB type players (LB, OLB, MLB) may not start in the DC area. A MLB may start in C, L, R, SL, SC, or SR. He is otherwise -C. An OLB may start in areas IL, IR, or areas LS, RS, SL, SR, or L or R.

A CB must start in an area adjacent to the sideline (WWL, LS, IL, WWR, RS, or IR) if there is a wide receiver on that side. If there is no wide receiver on his side, he may also start in SL or SR. If there are two CB players on a given side but only one W, the second one may be positioned as if there was no W. A S cannot start in LS or RS unless he is blitzing, and may not start in WWL or WWR at all. (Of course, he could do so as a DH playing "out of position", and that applies to most other restrictions.)

There are speed minimums for all defensive areas. A player not meeting the speed minimums is -C, -P, and, if he is alone, 1 is added to any contact die roll. The minimums are:

C	1
L,R,SL,SR	2
LS,RS	3
SC,IL,IR,WWL,WWR	4
DC	5

Man to man coverage markers may be placed on any LB or DH type not blitzing (but not linemen). Only eligible ballcarriers and receivers can be so covered. There is no restriction on who can cover who, but rules on offensive movement and coverage make some choices more obvious than others.

Defenders in a line of scrimmage zone who are blitzing or rushing must be arrayed in one row (left to right) so that penetration can be properly assessed. In by-mail play, it may be convenient at times to place the defenders in two rows, but they are still treated as if in one row for resolving penetration. Note also that there is a limit on the number of defenders who can effectively pass rush from a particular zone (4 for C, 3 for L,R). There can be additional players in the zone but they cannot rush, for example a MLB covering the FB. These considerations need to be taken into account during defensive set-up.

3.5 Time limits

At the end of the defensive lineup phase, the defensive coach indicates that he has completed, and announces any blitz or other line play options. Play proceeds with offensive movement, as described in chapters 4 and 5. It is possible that one or the other player will deliberate excessively, slowing the game. A possible solution is a 30 second timer, to be started as soon as the previous play is completed and recorded. Alternatively, the other player may call a timeout for the slow player (or, if no timeouts are left, a delay of game penalty). This should be done only if the time taken is obviously too long. Players are free to deal with this issue in any reasonable way.

3.6 Time outs

In in-person play, the offensive coach may call a “time out” at any time prior to the defensive coach announcing the rush option. The defensive coach might be sneaky and move a player up to the line of scrimmage as he announces a blitz. In that case, if the time out is called simultaneously (or nearly so), the time out has the priority. Otherwise, if the time out is called at the same time roll a die to see if the time out was called prior to the snap. (high = called in time).