

CHAPTER 10

Play by Mail

The description of the game in preceding chapters has generally assumed that two persons are playing in person. The game can also be played by mail. This is somewhat more involved, since mailed material must substitute for a player's intentions indirectly. The rules in this chapter describe how this is done.

10.1 Play by Mail procedure

The following steps are taken in order to play the game by mail. The constraints and instructions on how this procedure is to be followed is given in section 10.2 and 10.3. A summary of parameters is given below:

	Away team	Home team	
Offensive sets	4	4	(Variations count as ½ set)
Plays	22*	18	*(some revealed only at 2 nd half)
Lines on play select	12	10	(For each half)
Defenses	10*	8	(Variations count as 1/2 defense)

10.1.1 Home team setup

The player with the home team (and who will actually play out the game) organizes his team into four or fewer offensive sets (with one designated as "starting") and selects his defensive starters by position to be played in the upcoming game. He also designates which players are on "practice squad". This information is then mailed to the "away" player. The home team player also rolls for weather and does coin toss. (Often this information will accompany game films from the home team's preceding game, and should include a current roster. Probably should identify who is on each of the special teams too.)

10.1.2 Away team game plan

The player with the away team, upon receiving the home team's information above, likewise selects his starters, designates practice squad players, and designs his offensive sets. He furthermore writes out a "game plan". He writes a number of plays (up to 22) and a down-and-distance table for the selection of offensive sets and plays for the first half. He will also make a second similar table for the second half which is sealed until that half starts, and may include the remainder of the 22 plays which the home team will not have seen in the first half. This play selection table may involve rolling a die (usual FOOL practice), or may be a list of plays to run, in sequence, for the given situation. For each line a particular offensive set is specified. Conditions for each "line" in the table can include things such as down and distance, score, whether a blitz is read, defensive personnel mix for example "if 4 or more DL", or even the presence of a particular player.) Except for reading thye blitz, all of the conditions must be things the offense can observe when calling a play, such as who is on the field. The complexity of this table is limited to 12 lines, or situations, although the criteria may be involved. (It helps to have one condition be a "normal" or default condition for situations in which none of the others apply.) The away player likewise designs several defenses, up to 10, with a similar selection table based on down and distance or other criteria, such as the

home team's offensive set being used. Again, some defenses (and a second table for selecting them) are sealed for the second half. The availability of the home team's offensive sets is crucial to intelligent assignment of man-to-man coverages. Tactics and player selections for special teams are also written. This information is sealed up, but with the offensive sets and defensive starters on the outside for the home team player to see while designing his own game plan. All of this material is then mailed to the home team player with any needed additional information such as an updated roster, and indications of which players are on practice squad (and special teams assignments?).

10.1.3 Home team game plan

The home team player constructs a game plan similar to that of the away player. There are some differences in the allowed number of plays and defenses, and all plays and defenses to be used must be written down before the game begins. Some limited modifications to the defensive starters is allowed, to reflect the needs of covering the away team's offensive sets. During this time, the home team player has access to the away team's offensive sets and defensive starters, but not the remainder of the away team's game plan.

10.1.4 Play of the game

The home team player unseals the away team's game plan, and using both game plans plays out the first half of play. Only rarely should he need to make a choice in any manner of play execution or selection. When a choice occurs which is not covered in the game plan, it is his responsibility to make a rational and reasonable choice that the away player might have made had he been there. Such cases occur in decisions on whether to accept a penalty, go for a first down on fourth and short or late in the game, whether to blitz kicks, punt tactics, and substitutions in case of injury. After playing the first half, the home player may make up a new set of play and defense selection tables (or modify the old ones). In the second half, some plays may be dropped from use entirely, and others used more. He may not design new plays or defenses at this point. He also may not change special teams tactics (unless the away team's second half game plan also includes special teams changes). The second half is then played using the modified game plans of both teams, the away second half plan being sealed until the half starts.

10.1.5 Cleanup

The home player is responsible for compiling statistics on the game in accordance with the policies of the league commissioner. He should, as a courtesy, point out exceptionally important plays, heroes, goats, and injuries, also commenting on the game in general. A detailed play-by-play account is not necessary, since this information is in the game record. Copies of both game plans, the statistics, game record, and other information as appropriate is then mailed back to the away player (and other league owners), perhaps with a setup or game plan for a following game.

10.2 Constraints

10.2.1 Offensive setup

An offensive set is a map, or diagram, showing the offensive side of the playing board, with the players' locations and values. It is what the defense sees prior to play

execution. (The orientation of the diagram should be consistent with what the other player will use for his defense, so that the game may be played more easily. The league commissioner may set the standard in this and similar matters. Within the UFL and FOOL leagues, it is customary for the offensive set to be oriented as seen by the defense, that is, with the line of scrimmage at the bottom, as is seen in the examples in this document. The "LW" position location is still as seen by the offense, on the left side of the formation, but on the right side as oriented on the paper.)

Each set shows a particular set of players in a corresponding set of starting positions. It is a different set if one of the players is moved or a substitution made (other than due to injury or tiredness). A set may be a "variation" on another set, defined as having the same positions but (partially or entirely) different personnel, or having the exact same personnel, but with one (and only one) in a different starting position. Note that these definitions cover planned variations, such as for down and distance situations, and have nothing to do with substitutions made during the game due to injuries or tiredness.

Each team is allowed only a certain number of sets, normally 4. A variation, however, only counts as 1/2 set against this limit. Generally the second and third sets, and variations, are used to provide a different mix of players and positions for special situations, such as goal line offense, third and long plays, or in case of injury to a star which would have a significant effect on tactics. Sets are normally designated by number, with a letter (a,b, etc.) appended for a variation.

10.2.2 Plays

The home team is allowed 18 plays, each designated by a letter. The away team is allowed 22, any number of which may be reserved for use in the second half, and sealed in the second half part of the game plan. (Such a reserve of plays keeps the home team player from having complete knowledge of what plays he may have to face in the second half. To compensate for the unavailability of these plays in the first half, the away player is given more plays. The home player has no similar disadvantage, since the away team's tactics for the second half had to be selected before the first half of the game was seen.) Each play is written in the same form as for plays written into the game record when games are played in person.

It is possible to write plays applicable to multiple sets, with the position to which the play applies sufficiently flexible to permit it to be used for different positions. For example, "LE/SL" might apply to a WL in one set, and a LTE in another. Players designated by number may be in different positions in different sets. The play "#33/RT (RG,RE) would apply to player #33 whether he is a fullback, halfback, or wingback in the current set. (If #33 is not in the game, the play would apply to his substitute, the player in the same position that #33 was in the "starting" set, or if #33 was not a starter, in the lowest numbered set.) The plays should be written to avoid ambiguity, or methods provided for avoiding ambiguity. The following default guidelines may be used to resolve ambiguity:

- If LE is written and there is a LTE and LW, use the LTE.
- If LW is written and there is none, use the LTE.
- If LTE is written and there is none, use the LW.

In any of the above, if the listed substitute was given as a secondary or primary receiver, use a halfback who starts outermost on the same side.

If LH is written and there is none, use the RH or F in that order.

If F is given and there is none, use the player who starts as FB in the lowest numbered other set.

If F is written, and no player qualifies above, use the TB, Str H, Wk H in that order, where Str and Wk are on the strong and weak sides.

If no side is given, as W/SX (Wide receiver to short on same side), use the wide receiver on the strong side if there are two. All similar defaults are to the strong side. If no side is obviously "strong", use the side toward the quarterback's handedness.

When blockers are specified, and the alternate line has a player who would normally not block in the same position, or who cannot reach the zone and gain position in order to block, the blocker is left out and treated as if he was not included in the play. In particular, if the starter (for whom the play would normally be written) has a non-zero blocking value and is not a W or H, and the substitute has a zero blocking value, is a W or a H, then the substitute does not block. (If the starter was a H but substitute, also a H, has a modified blocking value of zero, he does not block. Same for W. But if starter had a zero blocking value, the substitute blocks as specified.)

Plays may be written with "relative" locations specified, to give more flexibility without requiring additional plays. The following abbreviations can be used:

- S "Strong" side: the side with the TE.
Example: IS, WS =IR, WR if the TE is on the right side.
- W "Weak" side: the side without the TE
- N "Near" side, the side nearest the player in question
- F "Far" side, the side farthest from the player concerned

10.2.3 Play selection

The table for play selection may have up to 10(home) or 12 (away) rows for different situations of down, distance, time, field position, score criteria, the defensive personnel mix (for example 4+ DL's), or even the presence or absence of particular defensive players. The line on the chart must designate which offensive set to use. (If a QB change occurs during a set change in the middle of a series, not due to injury or during a time out, the substitute is 50% chance of being -P for his first play. This discourages making QB substitutions on down and distance situation, which is seldom done in practice.) One line may be used to give plays to be selected if the quarterback recognizes a blitz. [The play selection chart could include more than 10/12 lines if one line is identical to another, say, as applied to a different set. This is a matter of convenience in making the tables cleaner.]

On each line of the table, a play is listed for every possible roll of the dice. Usually 6 columns are listed for the possible rolls of a six sided die. Some entries are of the form X/Y indicating a second roll is made, with a high roll selecting play Y and a low roll selecting X. An entry of X/Y/Z would similarly provide a 1/18 chance for each of 3 plays. An alternative scheme is to number the columns 2 to 12 and use two dice. It is also legitimate to simply list plays, which are used in turn and checked off the list. If the end of the list is reached, it is started again. Finally, an entry may designate that a selection is to be made from some other line of the table, perhaps labeled "*".

Unless all set selection is based on play selection table entries, an auxiliary list is needed to indicate which set plays when. This is most often a rotation. For example, "1,1,2,1,1,2..." would indicate that set 2 starts every third series of downs. Some sets may be selected for series starting near one's own goal line, for the last two minutes of the half, or if ahead or behind in the 4th quarter, for example.

The set and play selection tables should be such that the starters will be expected to play about 2/3 or more of the time, and at least half of all plays. This is in the interest of fairness. Since the starters are known when developing the game plans, the plans reflect the assumption that these players will be in more often than not. In an in-person game, the other team would be free to adjust if the player personnel were used differently, but this is not true for by-mail play. Also, experience credit is based on who the starters are, and abuse of the "starter" identification would undermine that system. A lopsided halftime score may alter the situation and halftime set and play selections so that certain substitutes play more, but the first half should definitely show the starters meeting the stated criteria. Generally, the number 1 set should include all offensive starters, and should be the most often used set on first down situations, and a large proportion of other situations. The starters should each appear in at least one other set, unless the first set is used in well over 50%, and preferably 2/3 of the situations. Some flexibility is reasonable on this issue as long as the intent is satisfied.

10.2.4 Defenses

Defenses are set up along the same general lines as the offensive sets. Each different rush (or defensive line play or blitz) option counts as 1/2 of a defense. The home team is allowed eight defenses, the away team is allowed ten, some of which may be sealed for the second half. (The rationale for allowing the away team more defenses is the same as for allowing them more plays.) Defensive set selection is the same as for offensive plays. (In playing the game, defensive set selection precedes offensive play selection and follows offensive set selection. This is because the offensive play selection criteria may depend on the mix of defensive personnel, though it cannot depend on where they set up. This is a different order than for in-person games, but without loss of realism.) At least 2 defenses should be all starters, and all starters should be on at least 3 defenses, and starters should be on defenses that will have them in the game over half of the time. Reasonable flexibility can be used while meeting this intent. The matrix of play selection can have more than 10 (12 for away) lines to the extent that some are identical to others. Again, this is a matter of simplifying or clarifying the information.

10.2.5 Standard "Time Running Out" (TRO) Conditions:

For both offensive and defensive play one selection criterion is often the relative score as the end of the game approaches. Usually writing such a criterion is lengthy, so it is abbreviated "TRO lead" or "TRO trail/tie" or such. To simplify game plan preparation, the following "standard" set of TRO conditions are given. Players wishing to adopt a different set of criteria are free to do so.

"TRO" exists if:

trail by 1-3	outside opp 30	with < :30
trail by 1-3	outside opp 50	with < 1:30
trail by 1-3	inside own 30	with < 2:00
trail by 4-7	outside opp 20	with < 1:00
trail by 4-7	outside opp 40	with < 2:00
trail by 4-7	inside own 30	with < 3:00
trail by 7-10	outside opp. 20	with < 3:00
trail by 7-10	inside own 30	with < 5:00
trail by 11-14	outside opp. 10	with < 5:00
trail by 11-14	inside own 30	with < 8:00
trail by 15+	outside opp 10	with < 12:00

10.2.6 Special teams

Punt and kickoff returners (and kickers, if there are more than one) should be designated in the game plan, and a runback and coverage tactic selected for each special teams situation. A selection tactics table may be provided instead of a single choice, but for each extra tactic there must be 1/4 fewer defenses or offensive sets or one fewer plays. This reflects extra attention to special teams in practice at the expense of offense or defense. If there are two extra tactics, let's say KO reverse and punt blitz, both offense and defense should lose 1/4 set or its equivalent. The away team may seal a tactic for use in the second half. If this is done, it should be indicated on the outside of the sealed game plan. Unless the away team does this, the home team is not allowed to change special teams tactics at halftime. No change can be made unless the other tactic(s) were practiced at the expense of offense and defense as described.

Recommendation – adopt it?: Each team is allowed one special unusual variation each half, such as fake punt or FG, defense against onside kick, onside kick, sideline return (unless always used) or reverse. (A blitzed FG or punt, squib or sideline kick, pooch, corner kick are not “unusual” in this sense and can be used without restriction.) A home team must predesignate the special play and when it is to be used in the game plan prior to unsealing the away team's game plan.

Back to other alternative: Examples requiring the sacrifice of an extra offensive play include: reverse KO return (with the team's default tactic used for all except the one allowed reverse), sideline KO return if that is called for some situations and standard for others, return only on a punt return if that isn't used for all non-blitzed punts. Examples requiring fewer defense variations include sideline kick if that's to be used in some situations and a normal kick in others. Any sort of fake FG or fake punt would also be in this category. Different punts (pooch, coffin corner, standard) do NOT count extra. (What about blitz for FG/PAT or punt?)

Special postures such as defense against an onside kick, and the onside kick itself, count as extra tactics. If neither kicking or receiving team has prepared for an onside kick, then the onside kick may still be selected and resolved normally. If the kicking team has not prepared but the receiving team has, there is no chance that the kicking team will recover. If the kicking team has prepared but the defensive team has not, the chances of recovery are doubled. **(Roll the kick twice, as for a “o” play.) Rushing punts also is an extra tactic, unless all punts are rushed. [No, seems that this should be available**

without extra preparation. Same for blitzing FG's. A squib KO shouldn't require extra time / plays either. The intent is to reflect a practice cost for extraordinary special teams tricks.]

(Optional: Unless a new default tactic is practiced at the expense of offensive or defensive practice time, the same tactic as was used in the previous game must be used. This option is not currently used in FOOL play. Should it be?)

10.2.7 Whether to kick or go for it on 4th down:

The game plan may provide guidance on when to go for a first down on fourth and short yardage rather than kick a field goal, and when to punt rather than kick a field goal. If no guidance is given, the home player is to make a reasonable judgment. Even if guidance is given, special circumstances, in the opinion of the home player, may override the guidance.

The default guidance given below may be useful. It is still a matter of judgment, though, which must consider how well a team has done on short yardage plays earlier in the game.

If the ball is inside the 10, Go for a first down on 4th and 1.

If the ball is inside the 15, Go for a first down on 4th and 2 if the FG kicker has a 1/4 or greater chance of missing.

If the ball is beyond the FG kicker's average range, but inside the punter's average range, go for a first down on 4th and 1, punt out of bounds or pooch it otherwise.

If the ball is outside the punter's average range to the goal line, punt normally on fourth down.

If "TRO" conditions apply, go for a FG if trailing by 1-3 or 8-10 on fourth down within the FG kicker's range. Go for a first down on 4th and 2 or less, or on any yardage if within half of the applicable time given for the "TRO" criterion used.

If the team that is trailing is in TRO conditions and has prepared for making an onside kick, that tactic is used. If an onside kick is not prepared, whoever is playing the game may still decide that it is the only option that makes sense. (If he knows that the other team has prepared to defend an onside kick, a die roll should be involved in the decision.)

10.2.8 Tradoff of sets, plays, defenses, special teams (optional):

The following limits and tradeoffs can be made in game plans. There can be no tradeoffs between the "offensive" and "defensive" category.

offense: Normally 4 sets, 18 plays (home) / 22 plays (away), and 1 extra special team tactic per team (Overall 2 , one per half).

1 "set" = 4 plays (1 variation = 2 plays)

1 extra special teams option = 1 play

You can give up sets for extra plays (or special teams options), but not plays for extra sets.

defense: Normally 8 defenses (home) / 10 defenses (away) and 1 extra special team tactic per team (Overall 2 , one per half).

1 "defense" = 4 ru sh/line play variations

1 "defense" = 2 special teams options variations (e.g. both normal and blitzed punt rush)

10.3 Substitutions

When a substitution must be made due to injury, the substitute may not have the speed (or blocking/contact ability) appropriate to the play that might be selected. This is true in particular if the ballcarrier cannot reach the designated destination in the absence of bump effects or unexpected defensive alignments. Generally, substitutes should be selected, if possible, to have the same speed, and as close in contact, blocking, and pass ability as possible, to the player being replaced. This is especially true for backs and ends, but is also important for defenders covering man-to-man.

If a play is selected which cannot be run by the substitute due to a lack of speed, the selection is ignored and another selection made. A pitchout selection is likewise ignored if the substitution would bring the pitchout pass value below 10, assuming it was 10 or better originally. A pass play that would have to be run as +1 if it was not such a pass originally, or a qk play that would have to be run as a normal pass, are likewise ignored and re-selected. (A player may provide guidance that provides for alternative resolutions of such situations.) If the shortfall is due to tiredness, the play is run anyway, making the adjustments in the character of the play as needed. After one such problem, the tired player should be replaced unless there is good reason or guidance to the contrary. See rule 4.1.9 for how to so adjust a running play.

If a substitution for a starting player is one with a faster speed, the personnel selected for defense, specifically anyone covering him man-to-man, may be inappropriate. A defensive substitution corresponding to that made on offense should be made if possible. Some judgment on this is inevitably required.

10.4 Short field conditions (check to see if this conflicts with other guidance.)

In play-by-mail, due to the short field conditions, a play may be rolled on the play selection tables that cannot be run due to the short field. This will occur on pass plays. Unless the player makes other provision in his game plan (or a general policy statement), resolve these situations as follows: If the play cannot be run due to the primary receiver's route being too long, then select the other play under the number on the play selection chart, if any. (This applies to selections with 1/12 probability, such as under 6: Q/R, where after rolling a 6 a second low/high roll would be made to select either Q or R. If R was selected, but too long, Q would be chosen instead. If there is only one play in the column, or if both are too long, re-roll the play selection. If the primary receiver's route is OK but the secondary receiver's route is too long, shorten the secondary receiver's route until it fits: VDC to DC, DC to MC, MC to SC; DR to MR, MR to IR.