

THE FORWARD PASS IN FOOTBALL

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THE FORWARD PASS IN FOOTBALL

CHAPTER I.

THE COMING OF THE FORWARD PASS.

INTRODUCTION.

The history of football has been a story of limiting the power of the offense. The defense has never been restricted, never curtailed, never hampered, always free to line up as it chose, to go when it pleased (barring offside), where it pleased and do practically as it pleased. Always the offense has been too strong, too powerful, and there has been the necessity of legal restrictions directed toward equalizing the attack and defense. This was true in general up to the “revolution” when ten yards and the forward pass came and the “new” game was created.

With the forward pass a great, new, unknown offensive weapon was provided. The history of the game since the granting of this new method of attack has again been chiefly a story of limiting the power and effectiveness of this new offense. To be sure minor changes in the rules have had other motives and objectives, but taking it by and large the statement is true to fact.

A brief review of the conditions of the “old” game will recall to players and spectators of that period the situation, and perhaps help all of us to better appreciate and understand the changes that brought the “new” game.

Mass plays predominated. Possession of the ball was vastly important. Five yards were to be made in three downs. If a man six feet tall could fall forward his full length three times he would make six yards and first down. Consequently “fall forward,” “get your distance,” were slogans of the old game. End runs, though they might occasionally succeed brilliantly, were apt to lose precious distance that could not be regained. If a team won the toss and took the ball there was practically nothing but a fumble between them and a touchdown, and games between evenly matched teams were

often really decided by the luck of the toss at the beginning of the game. For with even weight and particularly with a slight advantage of weight in the line, a safe, conservative game, straight ahead, slow but sure, tackle to tackle, hammer the weak spot, was sure to bring the ultimate touchdown. All sorts of ingenious formations were devised for massing power on the weak spot. The famous “guards back” of Pennsylvania, the “flying wedge” of Deland of Harvard, the “turtle back” wedge of others, the rolling mass on tackle and others of this type will bring a smile of reminiscence to “old-timers.” Men were pushed, dragged and hauled along by their team mates. Often special straps were attached to the uniform to facilitate this work, and even to make possible throwing a man bodily, feet first, over the prostrate lines.

Doubtless many men were severely injured by the splendid co-operative efforts of their own team mates in such activity. Such a game meant pounding—pure, unadulterated, gruelling pounding—until the selected spot, groggy and exhausted, gave way and the opponents swept through to victory or a substitute leaped in to fill the breach. Men came out of such games in those days bruised and exhausted, no definite injury but “dead,” “all in.” They were worse the next day and still worse the next, dragging back ready for another gruelling pummelling by the following Saturday. Internal injuries often developed and an unwarranted large number of deaths occurred. The game was too rough; dangerously rough; unnecessarily rough.

Closely linked with this aspect of the “old” game was the moral problem. Everything was hidden in the mass play. Spectators could see little of the real game, nothing of the “dirty work.” Much of it could not be seen even by the officials. Publicity is a great deferrent to unfairness. No man wants the spectators in the stands to see him “pull” any “raw stuff.” Close lines, petty irritations and difficulty of detection tempted many a man to foul play. We would like to think that the cleanness and high standard of sportsmanship of the new game is an indication of rising character and realization of ethical values of sport. Doubtless it is, but at the same time no small part of it is due to the openness of the new game; the fact that not only officials but spectators can see most of what happens. The brutality of the old game, the deaths and injuries from it, its moral effect, and finally even its lack of interest to spectators, led to a general outcry against

football. There was a wide demand that it be abolished as an intercollegiate sport. In 1906 a conference was called in New York for this purpose. Representatives from approximately seventy colleges attended.

Fortunately for American youth there were in the conference men of vision who saw the real need of the hour. These men urged that the difficulty was not with football but with the *way* in which it was allowed to be played; that the college faculties were themselves responsible for the condition in that they had given no adequate supervision to athletics; that the game should not be abolished but revised. They contended that a new game should and could be produced that would be more open, less dangerous and more interesting than the old game. Their counsels ultimately prevailed and the conference that had met to *abolish* football formed what has become the National Collegiate Athletic Association, an organization that has done a wonderful work in raising the standards of sport in our American colleges. The conference appointed a football rules committee, which, amalgamating if possible with the old football rules committee, was to adopt rules that would revise the game of football—that would make it a *new game*.

What should be done to produce a more open, less dangerous, more interesting game of football? Remember that the old mass game had resulted from five yards in three downs. The first fundamental suggestion was the requirement of *ten* yards to gain. This could never be made by mass attack. Consequently the forward pass was given to the offense—practically the one great occasion of legislation favoring the offense. In 1912 a fourth down was added. With ten yards in four downs and the forward pass as the fundamentals the modern game of football has been developed. Other changes, often important and far-reaching in influence, followed, but they followed naturally, logically, almost unavoidably, once the fundamentals, ten yards and the forward pass, had been accepted.

CHAPTER II.

LEGAL RESTRICTIONS RELATING TO THE FORWARD PASS.

The first suggestion of a recognition by the football rules committee of any need of a more open game came in 1903. Between the twenty-five yard lines seven players of the offense were required on the line of scrimmage and the first man receiving the ball from the snapper-back might run with it provided he crossed the scrimmage line five yards out from center (Football Guide for 1903, pp. 127 and 142). Between the twenty-five-yard line and the goal, however, only five men were required on the line of scrimmage. In that case, however, restrictions were adopted requiring the men to be back five yards or outside the end men. In 1904 came the “checker board” field.

With 1906 came the great revolution and the adoption of the new game; two lines of scrimmage, six men regularly on the line of scrimmage, center trio back five yards if not on the line of scrimmage, ten yards in three downs and the Forward Pass. It is with the last that we are concerned. (Football Guide for 1906, pp. 95 and 121.)

At first one forward pass could be made by any player anywhere behind his line of scrimmage to any player on the end of the line or one yard back of it provided the pass crossed the line five yards out from center. It was completed if *touched* by any eligible player before it touched the ground. Any illegal pass went to the opponents at the spot from which the pass was made. A forward pass over the goal line became a touch back.

Naturally a period of intensive experimentation followed. In 1907 the loss of the ball on first and second down was changed to a loss of fifteen yards. (Football Guide for 1907, pp. 137 and 168.) In 1908 the recovery of the touched ball was restricted to the eligible man who had first touched it on penalty of going to the opponents at the spot. Also the penalty for ineligible men touching the ball was increased to loss of the ball at spot where the pass was made (Football Guide for 1908, pp. 181 and 214).

Nineteen ten and twelve brought the legal changes that largely completed the new game. In 1910 the four periods were adopted, the longitudinal lines were omitted, and a pass and kick were both required to be made from five yards behind the line of scrimmage. A twenty-yard zone beyond which the pass could not go was instituted. This was dropped again in 1912, the end zone was added so that a team could score on a pass, the field shortened to three hundred yards and the fourth down added. By many this was regarded as a direct blow to the forward pass as it was supposed that it would mean an attempt at and a possibility of making the distance by the old line bucking methods. This was regarded as in line with the restrictive action of 1911, by which a pass touching the ground either before or after being legally touched was ruled as incompleting. Whatever the intention of the originators may have been the fourth down has worked quite as advantageously to the new game as the old, in that it has given quarterbacks an additional down with which to experiment and to take chances.

The changes relating to the forward pass since 1912 have been mostly of minor significance. The restriction requiring the kicker to be back five yards was removed in 1913, the forward passer was protected from being roughed up in 1914 and a ten-yard penalty for intentional grounding of a forward pass was imposed. The forward pass out of bounds was ruled incompleting in 1915. Relatively little change occurred during the war period and there has been a feeling since that experimentation has gone far enough; that the game is very good as it is, and that coaches, players and the public generally should have a chance to thoroughly acquaint themselves with the present possibilities. The open game has come to stay, and attempts to further restrict it have met with strong opposition.

CHAPTER III.

THE SPIRAL PASS FROM CENTER.

Possibly many would not recognize the necessity for a discussion of the spiral pass from the snapper-back in a presentation of the forward pass. Without this spiral pass, however, a successful forward passing game is greatly handicapped if not rendered absolutely ineffective. The reasons for this will be presented in a later chapter. Suffice it here to say that the writer regards a good fast, accurate, true spiral pass from the snapper-back, that can be shot back speedily and accurately to a distance of at least fifteen yards, as absolutely indispensable to a successful forward passing game. Ability to get such a pass is not possessed by every center, nor by every team even among the better colleges. This failure is due first to a lack of appreciation of its importance, and second to an inability to teach centers how to acquire this art.

The following method of teaching this pass has been found effective:

First: Have the candidate make an ordinary underhand spiral pass forward. This is so simple and common that almost every player does it automatically. Have him notice what he does. Notice how the ball is held as it swings forward past the hip. The hand is bent inward almost at right angles to the forearm. Now as the ball is shot forward from the hand a peculiar *pulling, lifting* motion is made. This motion imparts the rotation to the ball and produces the spiral. This is the fundamental part of the action. Essentially the same action must now be secured with a backward pass.

Second: Have the candidate make an ordinary underhand spiral pass *backward*. To many players this will at first seem awkward and they may be unable to control either the direction or the rotation of the pass. It is not necessary to continue with this until it is mastered, but some practice on it is helpful. Proceed soon to the third step.

Third: Take position as a center, right leg back for a right hander, swing the ball freely between the legs with the right hand, and make a backward spiral

pass between the legs. Work on this until a regular spiral is secured.

Fourth: Still swing the ball freely from the ground but place the left hand against the ball, pressing it more firmly against the forearm and guiding the direction of the ball. The right hand may now be a little farther forward on the ball.

Fifth: When the above has been mastered take position as in the fourth step, then bending a little more in the hips and knees place the ball, without changing position of the hands, so that it touches the ground well out in front. When ready pull the ball powerfully with the right hand, guiding with the left, and shoot it back at the chest of the catcher, at first about seven yards back. Follow through with the right hand and as the ball leaves the hand give the pulling, lifting snap described above in number one which produces the real spiral. Great care must be taken to see that the right hand is kept far enough *under* and *around* the ball. As soon as the player begins to lay it on the ground he almost invariably forgets to pass the hand far enough around it. Consequently he loses his rotation and the pass becomes “wobbly” and inaccurate.

Taught in this way many men acquired the idea of the spiral pass from center with great ease. Extended and constant practice, however, is necessary to insure a consistent and accurate performance that can be depended upon under fire—the accomplishment fundamental to the forward pass.

Some men master a very successful backward spiral pass from center with one hand. The principle of this pass is essentially the same as that of the closed grip overhand pass described later in the chapter on technique of passing. It requires a large hand and perhaps a certain amount of natural “knack.” It is dangerous and less effective with a wet ball, but with a dry ball ability to pass in this way with one hand often adds greatly to the offensive strength of the center.

CHAPTER IV.

TECHNIQUE OF THE FORWARD PASS.

The execution of a good spiral forward pass is a thing of real beauty and art. It holds the eye of spectators and players alike. It is to football what the home run is to baseball. The soaring flight of a sixty-yard spiral is like the rushing swoop of the daring aviator in its charm and interest. To produce it the player must have a good arm, master the knack of it and give long and earnest practice.

Practically all passes of more than five yards are executed as spirals. These are of three types, the underhand, the overhand with closed grip and the overhand with open grip.

THE UNDERHAND SPIRAL.

This is valuable for short distances where a quick pass is desired. Its execution is so easy and common that no further comment is needed beyond what has already been said in connection with the first part of teaching the spiral pass from center, (page 6).

THE OVERHAND CLOSED GRIP SPIRAL.

This pass is theoretically the correct and logical manner of executing a distance (over ten yards) pass. The ball is laid over into the palm of the right hand (for a right-hander) with the fingers along and somewhat behind the lacing of the ball, the thumb on the opposite side. The position of the hand depends largely on its size. The smaller the hand the nearer the end of the ball it must go and the more difficult it is to retain the ball in the grasp. This type of pass is therefore difficult for men with small hands and with a wet

and muddy ball. In making the throw the arm should be drawn backward *over* the shoulder, not down around as in a baseball throw. The nose, *i.e.*, the forward point of the ball, should be well elevated and the ball is then shot forward past the ear at its objective. The motion is somewhat like that of a pitcher, when pitching from the shoulder without the “wind-up,” with a runner on first. As the ball leaves the hand the rotation is given by a sharp pull *downward* and *inward*. The most common fault and cause of failure with this pass is that the nose of the ball is not kept up during the forward motion of the arm. To do this the elbow must be kept fairly close to the body and the little finger side of the hand kept *up*. This gives a rather constricted position for throwing and most men at first feel unable to get the desired distance. This comes, however, as one acquires the knack of the snap and the follow through with the body. When developed and mastered this pass gives wonderful accuracy, great speed and can be shot directly to the receiver without much elevation. It is therefore less likely to be intercepted and is an ideal pass particularly for shorter distances up to thirty yards and for dry days.

THE OVERHAND OPEN SPIRAL.

This pass is made in general in the same way as the closed grip spiral, but the thumb lies alongside or near the fingers and the hand is open, the ball lying in the palm of the hand. It is held in position as the throw is made by the centrifugal force of the swing. In making this pass a bigger swing may be used, more comparable to a “wind-up” delivery, and consequently greater distance and greater height may be secured. The ball can be literally “heaved” out and passes of fifty to sixty yards are easily possible. The greatest difficulty in the execution of this as in the closed grip pass is to keep the nose of the ball up. This can be accomplished, however, without bringing the hand in so closely as in the other, thus allowing opportunity for more individual peculiarities. Players therefore usually learn this pass easier than the other, and because of its greater usefulness with a wet and slippery ball is the pass now most commonly used. Its chief disadvantage is the greater height which it usually requires. This tends to increase the danger of interception.

RECEIVING THE FORWARD PASS.

Although a great deal of practice is usually given to receiving forward passes, often very little actual coaching is given on the correct form.

Every receiver should be notified by some method just *before* a pass is made to him. At this signal the receiver should turn toward the point to which the pass is supposed to be made. This should be known on all forward pass plays. The receiver and ball should then meet at this point, the receiver on the dead run and somewhat sideward to the ball. It will occasionally happen, but should rarely be necessary, for the receiver to take a pass from directly behind or even very much over one shoulder. He should, however, be able to do it when necessary.

The actual catching of the pass is not essentially different from catching a punt or any ordinary pass. One hand should be used to guide the ball into the body, one hand should be kept well under the ball, the elbows should be kept close and the ball always be brought in *against the body* and held securely against any possible attack.

CHAPTER V.

FUNDAMENTALS OF A SUCCESSFUL FORWARD PASSING GAME.

The forward pass has now been a part of offensive football for fifteen years. In spite of that fact few teams have developed anything like a consistently successful ground gaining forward pass attack. Apparently many regard the forward pass simply as a valuable threat, something for occasional use, something to take a chance with, something the possibility of which makes the *real* game still workable. To a large degree this has been the attitude of the larger colleges. In general they have frowned on the forward pass; opposed it, sneered at it, called it basketball and done what they could to retard its adoption. It has taken away from them the advantage of numbers, weight and power, made the game one of brains, speed and strategy—even if you please like baseball, luck,—rendered the outcome of their *practice* games with smaller colleges uncertain. Why should they have hastened its development? Rather it has been the smaller colleges that have found in the forward pass their opportunity, which have developed its possibilities until now the larger ones as well are turning to it as the final means of winning their big game.

It is doubtless fair to say that the early development of the forward pass was largely due to two teams, Springfield College of the Y. M. C. A. and the Carlisle Indians. Their game in 1912 at Springfield is said by competent experts to have been probably the greatest exhibition of open football ever staged. It is doubtful if two such finished exponents of the open game have ever met before or since. To Coach J. H. McCurdy of the Springfield team goes the honor, in the writer's judgment, of the early recognition and development of the strategy of the forward pass, for in this respect at least, Springfield excelled even the wonderful Indian teams produced by Glen Warner. No one team can longer claim a leadership in this or any other department of the game, but it is fair to say that the Springfield team has

continuously demonstrated an unusual aptitude for the forward pass and a high degree of leadership at least among the Eastern teams.

It is not strange, in view of the fact that the great leaders of football have not taken more kindly to the forward pass, that its underlying principles have not been more thoroughly worked out and organized. It is the chief purpose of this work to state if possible some of these principles and fundamentals to the end that the open game of football, always in the past and still to some extent opposed by certain groups, may be better understood, more successfully coached and more firmly and thoroughly established.

REGULAR GROUND GAINING PLAY.

The first fundamental of a successful forward passing game is that the forward pass should be used as a *regular ground gaining* play and not simply, as so many teams seem still to do, as a sort of last desperate chance. With many teams the attack may be summarized practically in this manner: first and second down, runs; third down, forward pass; fourth down, kick. And then they wonder that the forward pass doesn't succeed and stigmatize it as a dangerous, treacherous and unsuccessful play! Rather a team must have the confidence to use it often on first and second downs, and even on special, occasions on a fourth down. Not only that, but it must be used frequently, persistently and continuously. Nothing more disturbs the morale of defense than a series of forward passes, some of which succeed even though a considerable proportion of them are incompletes. There is always the danger that one may succeed and get away! What proportion of the running plays are successful in the modern game? No statistics exist. If the forward pass were tried anything like as persistently as the running game, unquestionably its percentage of success would greatly increase.

On this basis the pass should be used for short as well as long gains. A running play that gains two and a half to three yards is regarded as successful. Why should not the pass be used in the same way? Passes that give little or no gain in themselves, but put the receiver in position for open field running, and at least a few yards gain, disorganize the defense,

eventually make the long passes successful, spread the defense so bucking becomes possible, and contribute generally to making the forward pass a regular ground gaining play—a part of the regular attack.

PASSER WELL BACK.

The early successes of the forward pass were secured almost solely upon the principle of putting the passer a distance of fifteen yards back, then letting the opposing line come charging through absolutely without resistance. Practically the whole offensive team was sent down to receive (apparently) the pass, thus confusing the defense as to who was eligible and furnishing interference as soon as the pass was completed. By actual experiment it was found that a distance of thirteen to fifteen yards was necessary. Although lines are more wary and experienced today than formerly, this single piece of strategy is still very valuable. Many teams are failing with their passes simply because their passer is not more than seven to ten yards back. The greater distance gives a short but *vital* length of time for receivers to get free and for the passer to pick out the open man. It also gives a longer time for running sideward and forward, helping to confuse the defense as to whether a run or pass is really intended. Add to this the fact that with the greater distance back little or no protection need be given the passer, it becomes clear that though many plays can and will be built with the passer up close and running back only the necessary legal distance, a big distance back is an important fundamental.

This at once brings out the importance of the spiral pass back from center, and the ability to make, when desired, a long forward pass of from fifty to sixty yards. Unless the snapper-back can make a consistent, accurate, speedy pass to a distance of fifteen or more yards and can accurately *lead* his passer, no advantage is gained by this distance back. Many teams have failed to put their passer the necessary distance back because, though they did not recognize the real difficulty, their center was not adequately getting the ball back to him. Consequently the passer was instinctively creeping up closer and closer, being hurried in his passes and often failing. The spiral pass back from center is an absolutely fundamental requisite for a successful forward passing game.

The ability also to make long passes is fundamental. With the secondary defense playing ten yards back and possibly covering twenty yards more, with the passer fifteen yards behind his own offensive line, the pass going outward at an angle must often travel fifty-five yards to clear the secondary defense. Although such long passes need not often be used, the knowledge that the offense possesses the ability to make them is necessary to keep the secondary defense back so that short, sharp passes may succeed for the disconcerting gains of the regular ground gaining attack.

KICK, RUN OR PASS POSSIBLE.

The ideal forward pass formation is one from which a kick, pass or run is possible. As the play starts it should be difficult to diagnose whether a run or pass is intended. In fact, as a team becomes finished in its performance it may often switch in its intention, running out a play on the call of the passer that was intended for a pass, because the defense laid back and waited; and conversely, though not so often, a pass may be made to an open man on the call of the passer, though the signal called for a run. This represents high art in team work but it can be developed. Much depends upon the alertness and head work of the passer in this connection. Such changing of plan should not be allowed in the early season, but it may be encouraged later as the team becomes unified and comes to know itself. Such a combination, operating with basketball intuition, becomes exceedingly difficult to stop.

If in addition to this a kick is occasionally worked on something besides the fourth down, the game becomes a real test of wits.

Naturally not every forward pass will be “pulled” from an ideal formation. Many splendid forward pass plays can be built up from ordinary close running, bucking formations.

ALL ELIGIBLE MEN OPEN—“CHOICE” VS. “MECHANICAL” METHOD.

An occasional forward pass play is developed where only a single eligible man is open to receive the pass. Such a play depends for success upon its speed of execution, its unexpectedness and its similarity to other regularly used running plays. A few such plays should of course be included in the team's attack, but they are the exception and when successful are so because of that fact. They the more strongly emphasize the fact that as a general principle a regular forward pass play should aim to get as many eligible men as possible open to receive the pass. These men should be so spread that they cannot all be covered by the defense. The passer then selects an open man or the *best* open man to whom to pass.

This method puts great responsibility upon the passer. It fits in with the idea of putting him well back and giving him as much time as possible to make his choice. It requires a passer of special mental type, and one of considerable basketball ability who can dodge and get his pass off accurately even when apparently covered. The ease of choice can be much facilitated by having an order for each play in which the passer is to look for possibilities. The first choice should always be the signal called. That play should always be made if it is at all possible; in early season and during practice it should be executed whether possible or not. But as the passer develops ability he should be allowed when the pass signalled is covered to select second, third and even fourth choices, and the order of looking for the choices should be so arranged that a quick sweep of the field in front of him will give the passer his open men.

Not all coaches agree to the principle outlined above. Many have had difficulty in finding passers who could make the choice required. They have felt, therefore, that plays had to be designed to special men, calling these men to special zones, one time one place, next time another place, and then the play made as quickly as possible to this special man. If the defense was confused and the man got loose, the play succeeded (barring mechanical failure); if he did not it failed. This represents a purely mechanical method. It harks back to the "old" game where everything was as mechanical as possible and there was little need of brain power and little occasion to make quick decisions. The quarter made the decisions; the player did *what he was told to do*. The new open game is not played that way; it opens up a world of choice and possibility to the player. Therein lies its greatly increased mental value.

The big reason that many coaches have failed with the “choice” method of passing is that their plays have not been so designed as to give their passer the necessary time for making a choice. They have allowed the defense to “hurry” the passer. Some of the methods of preventing this have already been indicated. Occasionally it may happen that a team possesses a passer of great ability who cannot work the “choice” method. For such a player “mechanical” plays must be built. But the probabilities are that many men would develop this ability if they were given practice and the opportunity.

CALL THE RECEIVER BEFORE PASSING.

It seems a very simple matter to say that the receiver should be called *before* the pass is made to him. It seems so simple that time is rarely spent in practicing it. It is assumed that it will be done, but in reality it is *not* done. The usual thing is for the passer to hurl the ball into the air and yell “ball.” Let any coach actually insist once on his passer calling his man *before* he passes to him and see what happens. And yet this is exactly the thing that will change the forward pass game from a happy-go-lucky chance into a mathematical probability. When the passer calls his man *before* he passes he knows what he is trying to do, the team knows, the receiver is given more time to get into position, he is then given a better chance to catch the pass and the rest of the team are given a chance to form interference. It is a small thing to count as heavily as it does, but it is one of the small things that make success.

KNOW WHERE THE RECEIVER IS TO GO.

Have it clearly worked out on every pass play where each eligible man is to go. This is equally true in fact for every man on the team, for *every man on the team has something to do on a forward pass*. It is just as important on a forward pass play that each eligible man know where, when and how he is to go as it is on running plays for the interference to know whom they are to take. This is where the mechanical part of the “choice” method of passing comes in. To a surprising degree this can be almost the same on all plays. It

will of course vary somewhat with the style of defense met, but again surprisingly little.

The eligible man should seldom go directly to the spot where he will receive the pass if it comes to him. At the proper instant, which should be pretty definitely timed for everybody on each play, and always at the call of the passer, the receiver should turn and race to the spot where he knows the ball will be thrown. This spot should have been previously worked out so that the passer “leads” the receiver, the latter being in better position to catch the ball and on the dead run. This should also be so worked out and the preliminary run of the eligible man such, that the receiver will get the ball with his body between the ball and his covering opponent. Receiver and opponent should never be crashing *together* when struggling for a ball. It is not only dangerous but poor strategy.

In working out the above possibilities some eligible men may often be used simply as decoys going perhaps almost straight toward the defensive halves and forcing them to cover them, making other eligible men more surely available for the pass. In case the defensive halves, however, refuse to cover these decoys, they should immediately be given the pass. Between combinations of this sort and the problem of determining whether a pass or run is in process, the position of defensive half in modern football is one compared with which the “dizzy corner” in baseball is a bed of roses. The fact is that a team with anything like a mechanical perfection in the passing game, and any ability to select its men as above indicated, simply cannot be stopped in mid-field. The greatest single fault and the one thing that stops most teams, outside of mechanical failure, is the failure of eligible men to spread widely enough. Too often two or three eligible men go to the same zone or area and a pass to any one of the three can be covered by a single defensive player. Instinctively every man on the offense tries to be where he expects the ball to go. It must be drilled into the players that their “business” may be decidedly elsewhere.

INTERFERENCE.

Finally, plan definitely for interference after the pass is completed. This is particularly true for the shorter passes. Insist that every man is in every pass play. There is great temptation for linemen to “take a day off” when a long pass is called in which they are not likely to figure. But they should either be protecting the passer, making it possible for him to better choose his open man, or down with the eligible men in the shorter zones ready for immediate interference in case that pass should be elected. This should be definitely mapped out with each formation and the receiver should know where to find interference behind which he can dodge the instant he has received the pass.

INTERCEPTION.

The danger of interception, though much over-rated by many, should be carefully guarded. The interception of a long pass often means nothing worse than punting to the other team would have meant. Possession of the ball does not count for as much as in the old game. It should never mean worse if the danger of interception is properly guarded. Too often, however, it means a touchdown for the defense.

In the first place when the receiver has been called every other man on the offense should instantly become alive as a possible interferer or possible protector in case of interception. It is a preparedness, mental and physical, that is desired that in itself would probably prevent half of the touchdowns now made by interception. A pass doesn't *finish* a play, it simply starts it—and it may *start it either way*.

In the second place all line men and eligible men in the shorter zones, who perhaps can be of no assistance on the longer pass, should the instant they find the long pass in process act as if they expected it to be intercepted.

Finally the passer himself and his immediate protectors should, the instant the pass is off, cover for possible interception. They are the last and possibly by far the most important “safety” in case of interception.

CHAPTER VI.

SUGGESTIVE FORWARD PASS FORMATIONS AND PLAYS.

The previous chapter attempted a general statement of the fundamental principles upon which a successful forward passing game may be built. It is the purpose here to illustrate these by definite formations and plays that have been successfully used. The kick formation has lent itself in many ways very admirably to forward passing. A slightly modified punt (Fig. 1) formation, in which the left end is one yard back, one half on the line, full fifteen yards back, halves about three yards back, has proven effective for line bucking, end running right or left, punting and forward passing. The greatest difficulty lies in getting the left half to go out straight to the side and be content with a short gain. When this happens a few times someone from the defense is bound to try to cover him. When that is attempted the way is open for runs or passes to left end or tackle. This sideward threat, almost a pure lateral pass, is an important part of the strategy of the successful forward pass attack. Note in the play the direction and turning of other eligible players, the position of line men for interference in case of a short pass over center or outward to the wide man and the general protection for possible interception.

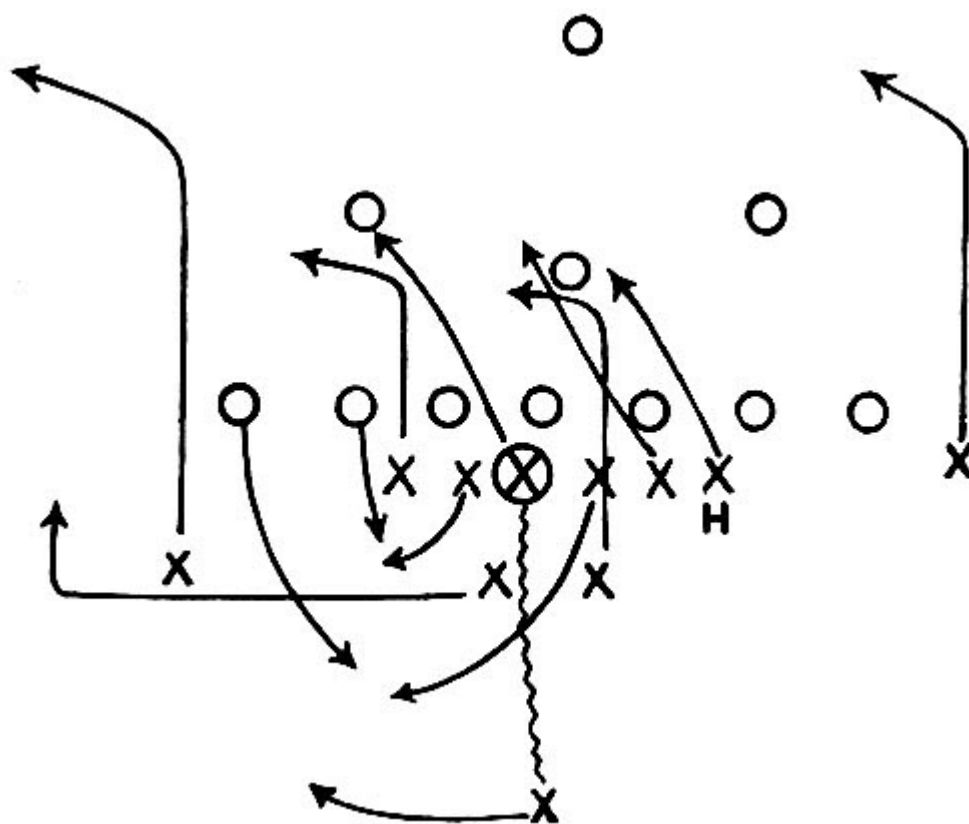


FIG 1.—Punt Formation Pass.

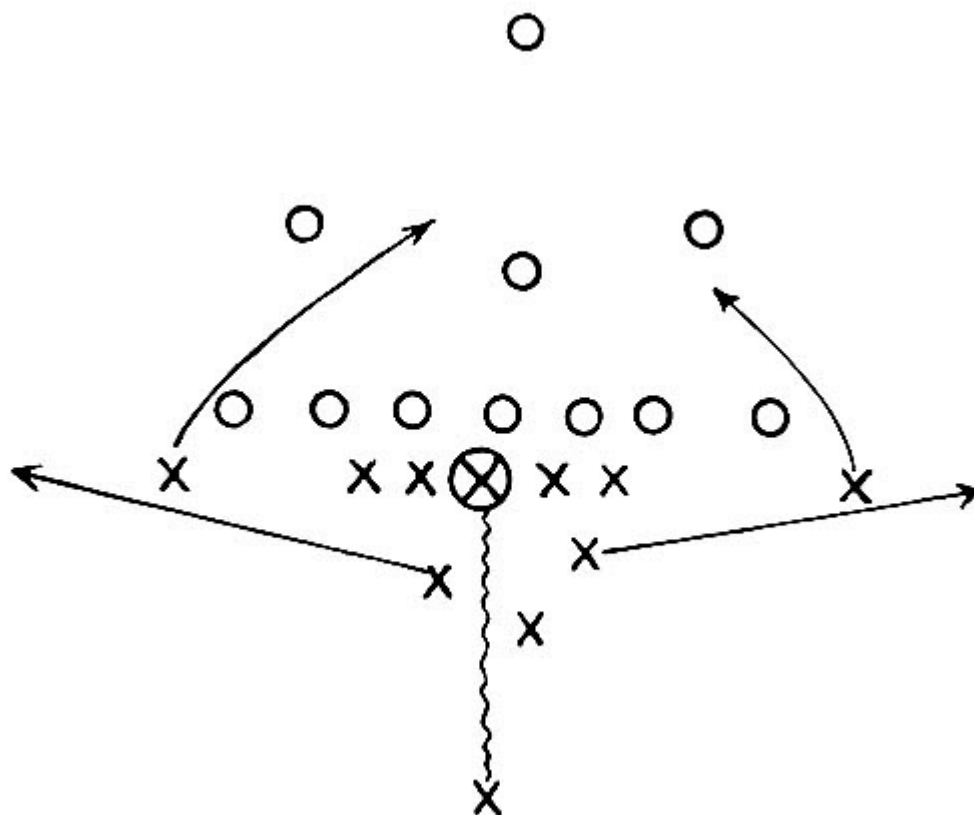


FIG. 2.—Undesirable Pass.

A quick shift of left end to the line and right half one yard back (or even played as it is) gives an equally good formation for run or pass to the right, the corresponding players going to the corresponding positions and everybody swinging and turning toward the right.

Against this type of play contrast the above (Fig. 2) which, though it has often proven surprisingly successful, seems to the writer to violate most of the principles above outlined. The ends coming in are at no advantage over the defense. The halves going outward have no interference and there is almost no defense for possible interception.

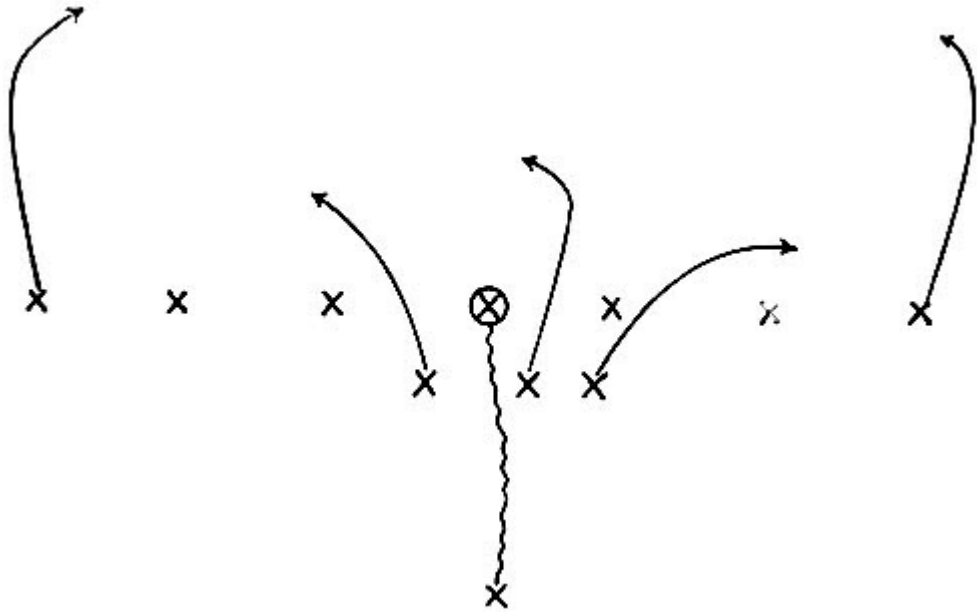


FIG. 3.—Springfield-Carlisle Indian Pass.

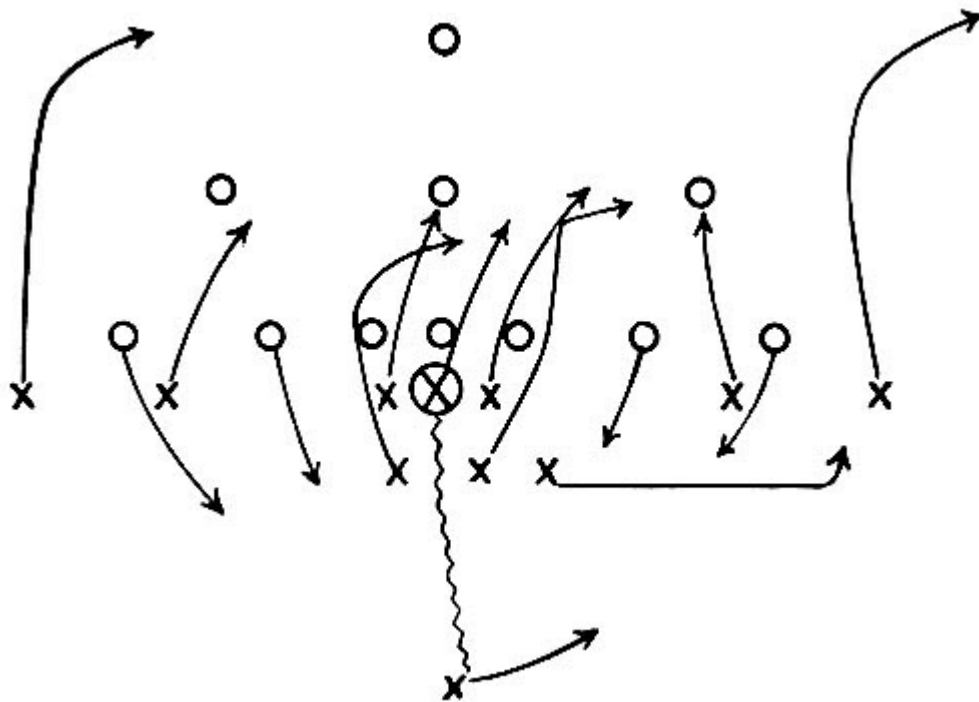


FIG. 4.—Spread Formation Pass.

One of the earliest successful forward pass formations was a widespread one devised and used by Dr. J. H. McCurdy of the Springfield team in the Springfield-Carlisle Indian game of 1912 (Fig. 3). In this the line was spread out practically across the whole field. It was used for kicking as well, and the whole line was sent down to stop the wonderful Thorpe. The play was good enough to produce twenty-four points against the wonderful Indian team of that year, although the game was won by the Indians 30-24.

The play is given here partly because of its historical value, but also because the principle is still good.

Spread formations somewhat modified from the above are still proving very successful, the following serving to again illustrate the principles of the preceding chapter (Fig. 4).

In this formation tackles are out seven to ten yards, halves about three yards back and full is back thirteen to fifteen yards. From this formation line bucks, end runs, double pass end runs, kicks and forward passes may be used. Quick variations may also be made to make tackles eligible if desired.

The formations outlined will doubtless sufficiently illustrate the principles discussed. There is no limit to the possibilities. The kick and spread formations here given alone possess sufficient possibilities for a team's entire season's repertoire of open plays. A common mistake is to attempt too large and varied an assortment of these plays.

CHAPTER VII.

DEFENSE FOR THE FORWARD PASS.

There is no defense for the forward pass. In reality the pass cannot be prevented, particularly in the center of the field. Yet from the unwillingness of some of the great football leaders to adopt this style of game one would infer that it is a worthless game, difficult to succeed with and easy of defense. This is the point of view of a number of teams. Yet it is interesting to note that these are the very teams that have had no adequate forward pass defense.

Thus far most teams have trusted to luck against the forward passing game. The inefficiency and mechanical errors of its offense, aided by the restrictive legal measures adopted, have conspired to make this possible. Signs are not lacking, however, to indicate a greatly increased use of the passing game, an improved understanding and appreciation of its fundamental principles and a much greater degree of success for it. The defense for the forward pass will need to be studied with great care in the immediate future.

The writer does not pretend to have solved this problem. His interest has been rather on the other side. The following suggestions are offered simply as a beginning:

First, "hurry the pass." Some man or men, not the entire line, should go through and force the pass at the earliest possible moment, downing the passer, blocking the pass or forcing it to be made before the eligible men are ready or the passer has been able to locate them. This greatly increases the chance of mechanical failure. Generally this should be done by the ends. Some teams send the tackles in also. Some send tackles in and have the ends wait. This frequently helps against the pass but makes end running very easy.

Second, block eligible men. This of course can only be done before the pass is made. But there is often an appreciable time before the pass is made

when eligible men could be blocked on the line of scrimmage. This is the best work of the center trio rather than charging through.

Third, play a zone defense having each defensive back cover an area and play the ball coming into that area rather than attempt to follow individually eligible men.

Fourth, use the open defense (Fig. 5); that is, play the center out of the line and with the full back about three yards behind tackle. This defense is supposed to make center bucking easy, but it does not if the defensive line is properly coached. This first line of secondary defense is in position to intercept short passes or to help stop eligible men on the scrimmage line. They are also in the best possible position to assist on outside tackle and end runs while still in position to block center bucks. In the judgment of the writer this is the best all-round defense yet devised for the modern open game of football.

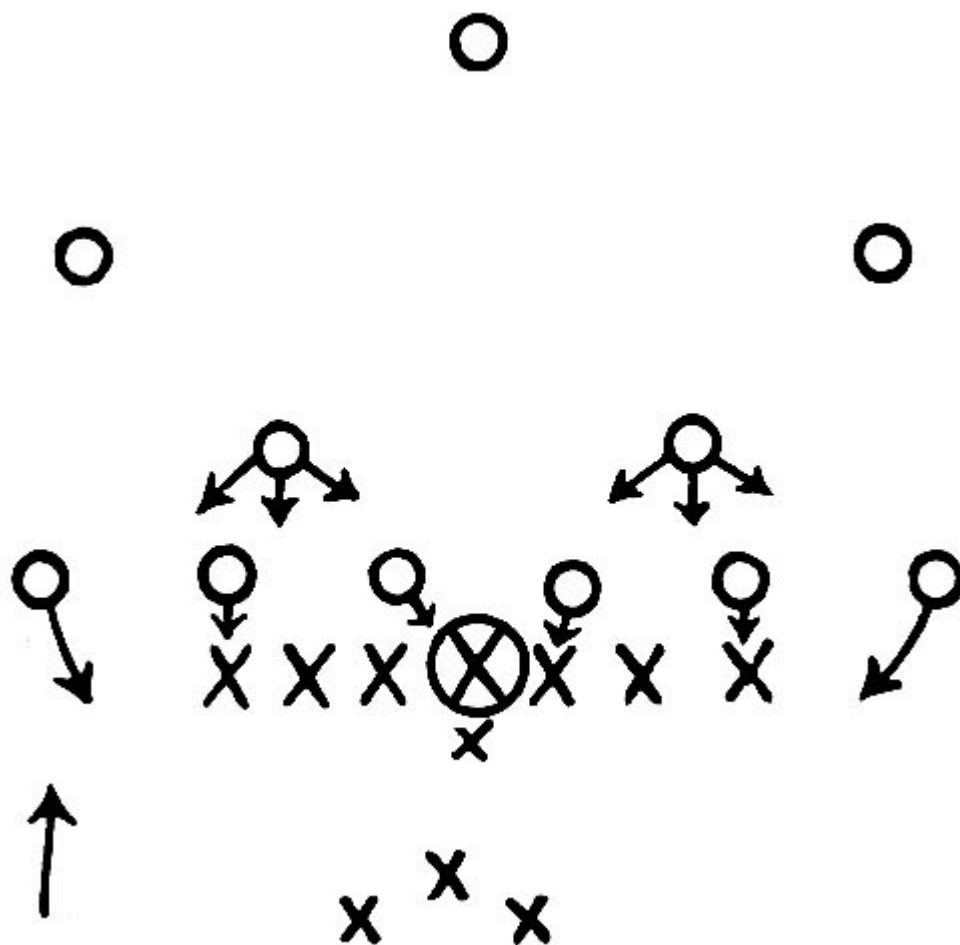


FIG. 5.—Open Defense.

The open defense should be played as follows: Guards play to the center, low, hard and stalling, not knifing through. Tackles fight their way into the play through opposing end. Ends play as close as possible, often not over two yards outside their own tackle and tear into every play smashing the interference and hurrying passes. Center and full play about three yards behind tackle, usually a trifle inside and wait until they diagnose the play, then meet it. These men must be the best tacklers on the team and fast, for if the tackles and ends accomplish their work these men have their opportunity. Backs play from seven to ten yards back and nearly straight behind end. Quarter or safety man should play as close as he dares to, considering the possibility of quick punts. This may be generally closer than most quarters play.

The defense with spread formations and for special plays is still too much a matter of individual opinion to be discussed here.