

Playing Quarterback:

Part I - Pride, Preparation, Persistence

Matt LaFleur, Offensive Coordinator, Ashland University

I have been very fortunate for the opportunity to play quarterback at Saginaw Valley State University and then in the National Indoor Football League.

I have also had the opportunity to coach for several outstanding coaches at Central Michigan University, Saginaw Valley, Northern Michigan University and now at Ashland University.

During my experience as both a player and a coach there are several things I learned about coaching the quarterback position that are consistent to the position regardless of the offensive system you use.

I would like to share some key things that I have learned over the years that have helped me on and off the field as a player and as a coach.

In Part I of this three-part series we will discuss what we look for in a quarterback as we recruit and develop him within our system.

Part II will introduce what we expect from our quarterback as he becomes the leader of our offense.

In Part III we will cover the basic fundamentals that all quarterbacks need to be successful.

We have specific characteristics and attributes we are looking for in the quarterback to run our offense.

As we develop these aspects in a young quarterback he also learns the importance of academics, team goals and the learning progression needed to be a successful student-athlete.

I. Characteristics

The quarterback is the most important player on the field. Being a quarterback is very demanding, no other position requires as much mental acuity combined with physical ability.

Quarterbacks receive too much credit when their team wins and are many times the one who will shoulder the blame when their team loses. The quarterback is usually held responsible for the team's success. There are eight qualities that are quite common among successful quarterbacks.

1. **Leader:** You must be able to lead by example and be vocal when necessary. You must have a positive attitude - your attitude will affect the attitudes of others. Respect and care for your teammates and build relationships

2. **Intelligent:** You are the coach on the field. Know the offense, this allows you to make quick, decisive decisions. An indecisive quarterback is an ineffective quarterback.

3. **Determined:** You must have a burning desire to excel - outwork everyone around you. Love to compete. Be a student of the game - prepare for success.

4. **Confident:** Expect to win - you must have the mentality that nobody can stop you. If you don't believe in yourself, nobody else will believe in you. Being confident allows you to have fun.

5. **Accountable:** Take responsibility for your actions. Take pride in your actions. Your accountability is your dependability.



6. **Tough:** You must have toughness - show you cannot be broken mentally or physically. Have the ability to endure any challenge that you encounter.

7. **Consistent:** You must be consistent - on the field and off the field. Consistency is what separates the good quarterbacks from the great quarterbacks. Have the ability to control your emotions - always keep your composure.

8. **Winner:** Do the RIGHT thing both on and off the field. You must be disciplined. Find a way to get the job done.

II. Physical Attributes

We have identified seven physical attributes that a quarterback must have, and continuously work to improve upon, in order to be successful:

1. **Footwork:** Quarterback play starts with your feet. They will tell you when to throw, and when you should progress to the next receiver. They will put you in the correct position to deliver the football.

2. **Accuracy:** Football is a game of inches. Ball placement is the difference turning a completion into an incompletion and first down into a touchdown. Throw away from defenders.

3. **Balance:** You need to keep a good base while you're in the pocket. This allows for proper weight distribution, which plays an integral part in your accuracy. Finish balanced whenever possible.

4. **Flexibility:** You must be flexible to prevent injury. This also allows for greater trunk rotation. It also allows you to shorten the amount of time that it takes to set-up.

5. **Touch:** Every ball doesn't need to be thrown on a line. You need to determine when you will need to take some "steam" off the ball based upon distance from a receiver or a defender's position.

6. **Pocket Presence:** You need to be able to feel the rush while keeping your eyes downfield. Movement within the pocket must be quick and deliberate in order to buy time.

7. **Release:** You need to keep the ball loaded and have tight throwing motion in order to have a quick release. There should be no wasted movements such as dropping the ball, patting the ball, etc.

III. Goals

We have five very simple goals for our quarterbacks:

1. Win: Lead us to the conference championship.

2. Become an Academic All-Conference player.

3. Be the most efficient passer in the conference.

4. Have a 65%

completion

percentage.

5. Perfect

exchanges.

This includes

quarterback-

center and

quarterback-

running back

exchanges.



IV. Academics

Quarterbacks

have high

expectations

placed upon them in regards to their academic success. It is my belief that there is a strong, positive correlation between a quarterback's performance in the classroom and his performance on the field. The more productive and efficient the quarterback is in the classroom, the better he will be on the field.

Every starting quarterback should aim to be recognized as an Academic All-Conference selection. Here is what we expect out of

student-athletes:

1. **Go To Class:** Arrive to class on time and ready to learn. Make sure to bring a notebook and pen. Respect and communicate with your professors. Turn all assignments in on time.
2. **Graduate:** It is imperative that you obtain your degree. Strive to maintain a 3.0 GPA.
3. **Academic Meetings:** We will have one every Friday of home games. Discussion topics will include assignments/tests, previous test scores, and other concerns or issues.

V. Meetings

The best place for a quarterback to learn is on the practice field, however, the learning process begins in the meeting room.

The primary objective of a quarterback meeting is to create a clear, decisive, and systematic thinking process for the quarterback.

Quarterbacks must be taught the necessary thought process for each play in order to be successful.

Here are the quarterback responsibilities within the meeting room:

- Be early for all meetings - tardiness is unacceptable.
- Sit-up straight and pay attention - be wide eyed and ready to learn.
- Always bring your notebook and something to write with.
- Never answer a question that is not directed toward you.
- Respect everyone in the room.
- What is discussed in the meeting room, stays in the meeting room.

VI. Teaching Progression

The quarterback must understand upon arrival that it will take tremendous amounts of time, hard work, and patience to develop into the starter. An ideal situation would be to red-shirt the quarterback in his first year.

The development process for the quarterback will begin with the first quarterback meeting of his freshman year. It usually takes about two years to fully grasp the mental aspects of the game and become proficient with the physical tools necessary to become a GREAT quarterback.

It is impossible for a quarterback to efficiently develop if he is trying to learn too many aspects of the game simultaneously. The building block for becoming a successful quarterback is knowledge of the progression and his footwork.

The learning progression consists of three important aspects:

1. **Learn the offense:** This includes formations, plays and footwork
2. **Defensive recognition:** This includes coverages and fronts
3. **Protection schemes:** You must understand the strength/weakness of each protection scheme and any potential "Hots" with each scheme.

VI. Evaluation

We have 12 key points when evaluating potential and current quarterbacks: leadership, competitor, poise, arm strength, footwork, accuracy, release, coverage recognition, decision making, work habits, mechanics, and production.

We consider a player a potential All-American if he scores between 47-50. A score between 43-46 indicated a potential All-Conference player. A 39-42 indicates a potential starter.

A score between 35-38 indicates a backup. A 31-34 score indicates a developing quarterback, while anything 27 or below indicates a scout team player.

We understand that players can always improve - or even drop - but this a valuable evaluation tool and it gives our players an understanding of how they are being evaluated.

Here is a breakdown on each point:

Forms
<u>Quarterback Evaluation</u>

1. Leadership

- Steps forward and takes charge (5 points)
- Leads by example (4)
- Leads with his mouth (3)
- Goes with consensus (2)
- Follower (1)

2. Competitor

- Will not accept defeat (5)
- Refuses to give-up (4)
- Never gives a sucker an even break (3)
- Likes competition (2)
- Doesn't care either way - win or lose (1)

3. Poise

- Stays cool when it is HOT (3)
- Looks for support from coaches/players (2)
- Gives-up, Sulks, Pouts (1)

4. Arm Strength

- Excellent (3)
- Good (2)
- Average (1)

5. Footwork

- Quick, Light (1)
- Average (2)
- Slow, Heavy (3)

6. Accuracy

- Excellent (3)
- Above average (2)
- Inconsistent (1)

7. Release

- Quick (3)
- Deliberate (2)
- Slow, Winds-Up (1)

8. Coverage Recognition

- Understands schemes (5)
- Keys areas of the field (3)
- 50/50 chance (1)

9. Decision Making

- Excellent choices (5)
- Learns with reps (3)
- Erratic (1)

10. Work Habits

- Stays after practice (5)
- Only in practice (3)
- Has to be pushed (1)

11. Mechanics

- Sound, Fluid, Rhythmic (5)
- Developing (3)
- Robotic, Stiff, Lazy (1)

12. Production

- Finds a way to win (5)
- Grades out in the 70's (3)
- Satisfied with average (1)

In Part II of this series, we will discuss managing all aspects of the game including the huddle, pass progressions, protection, and special situations.

We will also discuss quarterbacks understanding their role in the offense, how to prepare for an opponent and how their performances will be evaluated.

Playing Quarterback: Part II - Playing the Game

Matt LaFleur, Offensive Coordinator, Ashland University

As a player develops a solid foundation to be successful in our system, the next step is demonstrating his understanding of the offense while managing all aspects of the game including the huddle, pass progressions, protection, and special situations.

A large part of this development is understanding their role in the offense, how to prepare for an opponent and how their performance is being evaluated.

I. The Huddle

The huddle is where the play starts. The quarterback needs to gain complete control of the huddle by grabbing the attention of the 10 other players.

In order to gain complete control and be effective in the huddle, the quarterback must:

1. Establish Eye Contact: Make sure everyone in the huddle has their eyes up and are focused on what you are saying.
2. Speak With The Appropriate Tone Of Voice: Be direct and firm. This will set the tone!
3. Accentuate Important Information: This will emphasize key elements of the specific play - motions, cadence, etc.
4. Be Positive: Convince your teammates that they can and will get the job done.
5. Exude Confidence: Don't let anyone doubt YOU or the play.

II. Play Progression Determination

A lot of quarterbacks are successful when leading a team on the chalkboard or in practice.

However, if a he can't lead a team in the heat of the game his value to the team is diminished.

An example of this is the ability to understand progression determination in the passing game.

In our offense, each pass play is designated a rule in order to determine the read.

The quarterback's knowledge of the read, rules to determine to correct read, and footwork are critical to the success of this system.

The quarterback will sometimes have a difficult time choosing the correct read because of disguise. In times of indecision, the quarterback will pick the read to the best of his knowledge and let his footwork take him through the read.

Sometimes throwing the ball away or scrambling can be the best decision. Ultimately, if the quarterback understands the progression determination, he will not throw interceptions when he is confused.



We have two primary progression determinations: progression reading and key reading.

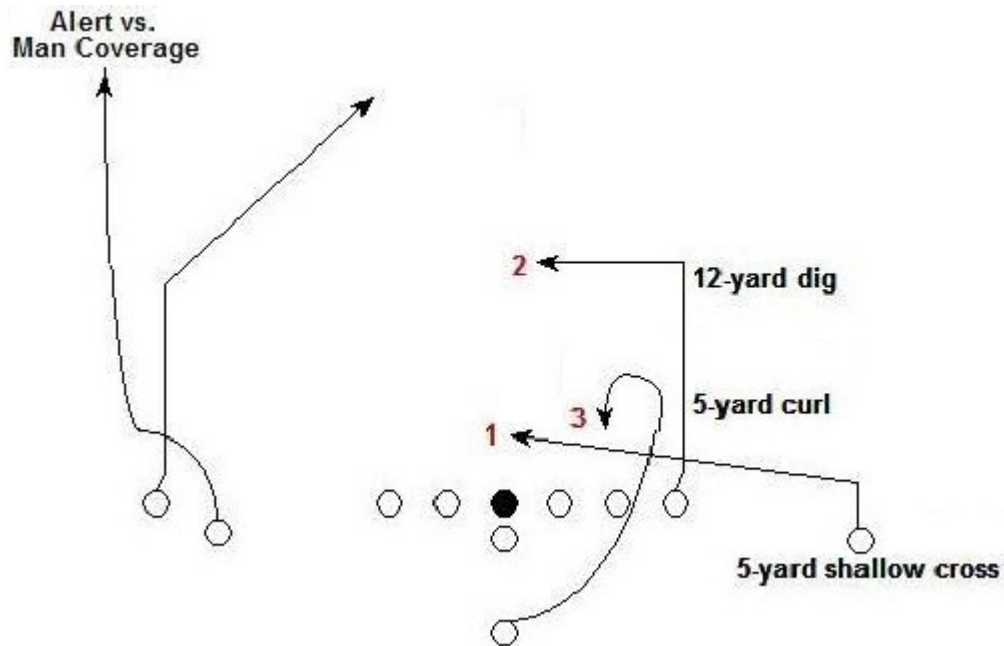
III. Progression Reading

Progression reading is a process in which the quarterback goes from his first receiver, to his second receiver, to his third receiver; and throws the ball to the first open receiver that he comes to without by-passing an open receiver.

We use progression reading because of the complexity of defensive coverages. Defensive disguises can make it hard for a quarterback to dissect a defense.

However, defensive players make mistakes - they can blow a coverage and this allows us to take advantage of that. It also reduces the amount of thinking for the quarterback, which in turn reduces indecisiveness.

PROGRESSION READING



Here are the progression reading keys for success:

1. Footwork

- You must take the proper drop.
- The drop correlates with the receivers' routes.
- The drop creates the rhythm for the play.
- Footwork will determine the timing of the throw.
- It is the mental clock for your progression. It lets you know when to move to the next receiver.
- Eliminate a receiver from the progression if your footwork rhythm is broken.
- Think of the footwork as learning how to dance.
- You must understand the rhythm of the drop and the rhythm of the play.

2. Eyes

- Your eyes allow you to see the receiver and the surrounding area.
- Ball placement - throw away from the defender.

3. Decisiveness

- The receiver is either open or not open.
- Be an aggressive thinker.
- An indecisive quarterback will not be successful.
- Aggressive thinking will allow you to execute efficiently.

4. Critical Rules

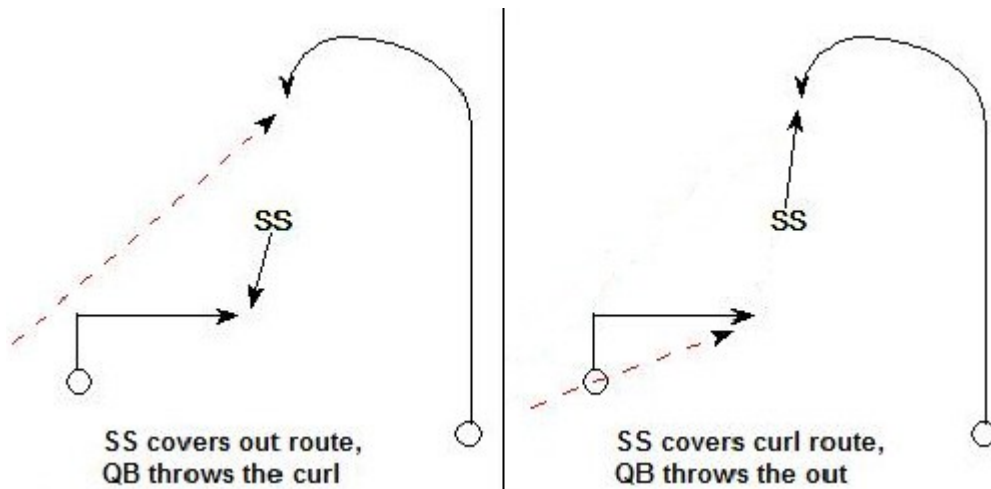
- Once you eliminate a receiver as being covered, you never go back to him.
- Do not wait for a receiver to get open.
- Never pass up an open receiver.

IV. Key Reading

Key reading is a process in which the quarterback focuses on an individual defender and works opposite the defender.

We use key reading because it gives the quarterback the option to work against the defense's strengths. It also gives the quarterback two options with one read. Finally, it is great for quick game.

KEY READING



Here are the key reading keys for success:

1. Coverage Recognition

- You must know the coverage. It might dictate the defender who the quarterback will key.
- Safeties and corner's alignment should tip the coverage. If you are unsure, have eyes on the free safety until the snap of the ball.

2. Footwork

- You must take the proper drop in order to throw on time.
- The drop correlates with the receivers' routes.
- The drop creates the rhythm for the play.

3. Critical Rules

- Know the coverage.
- Beat the defense with timing.

V. Determining The Read

There are several factors that we can take advantage of when determining the kind of read we will use.

Those factors can include coverage rotation, personnel, or even the number of weak-side defenders.

Here are examples of how to determine the read:

1. Straight Progression

- Follow a progression regardless of the defense.
- Take the proper drop and let your footwork take you from receiver to receiver.
- This is the least common used method.

2. Coverage Rotation

- Particular play calls will dictate the read based upon the coverage rotation.
- Throw opposite the rotation.
- The quarterback must be able to identify the following:
 - Zone Coverage: Strong or weak rotation
 - Man Coverage: Corner's D.E.L. (Depth, Eyes, and Leverage). Alignments of the safeties/linebackers



3. Best-Look Side

- Determine the read by using a combination of coverage rotation and pre-snap defender alignments.
- Throw opposite the coverage rotation. There are times this may not be possible because of defender's alignment.
- Key factors: coverage rotation, defender alignments, personnel, easiest throw

4. Personnel

- Used when the coverage is balanced.
- Determines the read according to particular match-ups.

5. Number Of Weak Defenders

- Particular plays will base the read on how many weak defenders.
- It is to our advantage when we have 1-on-1, or 2-on-2 situations.
- It is to our disadvantage when we have 1-on-2 or 2-on-3 situations.

VI. Protection

The thought process of a quarterback should be one that wants a defense to blitz. This will give the quarterback the ability to exploit one-on-one match-ups.

In order for the quarterback to be able to take advantage of these match-ups, he must have a good understanding of the protection schemes.

Identifying and anticipating when the defense is going to blitz is a very important trait that successful quarterbacks must learn.

The quarterback needs to be able to recognize if a defense is going to blitz in his pre-snap read. He needs to distinguish who are the potential blitzers and whether the protection can successfully pick-up the blitz.

If the protection will not work, the quarterback must know to check the protection.



By learning all of the protections, the quarterback can potentially put himself in a position where he would never have to throw "Hot."

Here are the key points to blitz identification:

1. Pre-Snap Alignments

- What is the front and the coverage?
- Is there a capped defender (a secondary player over an alley player)?
- Can the protection hold-up?

2. Is The Front Connected With The Coverage?

- If there is a 1 and 5 technique with a spin safety, then think Fire Zone.

3. Post-Snap

- Eyes must be focused on the secondary.
- Do not look at the rush - feel the rush.
- The quarterback doesn't always see the blitz.
- It is impossible to look at the linebackers, safeties, and corners at the same time and be an effective quarterback. The quarterback must feel the blitz and react.

4. Protection Scheme

- How many can be blocked?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the protection?
- Which defender makes me throw hot?

VII. Game Management

The most successful quarterback understands how to manage the game the game clock and special situations.

This includes the game clock, two-point plays, the two-minute offense and the four-minute offense.

Here are important game management points:

1. The 25-Second Clock

- Always know where the 25-second clock is placed on the field. Identify this on Friday.
- The goal is to NEVER take a delay of game penalty.



2. Two-Point Play

- This must be memorized by the quarterback.
- You need to tell the official where to spot the ball - left hash, right hash, or middle.

3. Two-Minute Offense (Conserving Time)

- Know what situations make the clock stop and in what situations the clock will continue to run.
- Know what to do after each play. Should you take a timeout, clock the ball, or call the play at the line (look to the sideline if unsure).
- Have a sense of urgency. Get everyone lined up quickly.
- Know how many timeouts we have left.
- Never take a sack. It is your responsibility to get rid of the football.
- If we get sacked and a timeout is available, use the timeout.
- Know how many points are needed. If a field goal is needed, know where we need to get the ball in order to attempt the field goal.
- Know whether an incompleting is better than a completion based upon the time remaining.
- Communicate with your teammates.
- Don't be surprised if the defense decides to blitz.
- Maintain poise and confidence.

4. Four-Minute Offense (Wasting Time)

- Alert the offense of a four-minute situation. We will huddle.
- Snap the ball with two seconds remaining on the 25-second clock.
- The cadence will remain the same throughout this situation.
- Perfect ball handling is critical.
- No faking after handoffs. Follow the ball carrier as the defense will be trying to strip the ball.
- A scramble or a sack is better than throwing the ball away.
- Remind everyone to stay in bounds.
- Remind everyone about ball security.
- Be very slow when getting off of the pile.

VIII. Film Study

The quarterback position is the most demanding position in all of sports. It requires mental acuity, physical skills, and emotional stability.

A quarterback can compensate for any physical limitations by being mentally sharp. His mental capacity needs to be greater than any of his physical characteristics.

The quarterback needs to have the ability to analyze a situation without overcomplicating his response to the situation, which is known as functional intelligence.

Film study is a chance for the quarterback to help eliminate indecisiveness on the field. There are three ways of watching film: watching self scout cut-ups, watching opponent film, and playing the game while watching film.

Watching Self Scout Cut-ups

Pass Play

- **What is the down and distance?**
- **What is the offensive personnel?**
 - **What is the play?**
 - **Is the formation correct?**
 - **What is the protection?**
- **How many does it take to be hot?**
 - **What is the defensive front?**
 - **Pre Snap Coverage**
 - **Zone or Man?**
 - **Is it a blitz look?**
 - **Where can they come from?**
- **What is the progression/who is my key?**
 - **Can my read change post snap?**
 - **What is my footwork?**
 - **Post Snap Coverage**
- **What is my progression/who is my key?**

- What is my footwork?
- Who should get the ball based upon the read?
 - Positives and Negatives of quarterback.
 - What should have been done differently?

Run Play

- What is the down and distance?
- What is the offensive personnel?
 - What is the play?
- Is it a call it or can it be checked?
 - What is the defensive front?
 - Do we need to check?
 - If so, what is the proper check?
- What is my footwork and landmark?
- What type of ball handling will be used?
- What type of fake do I use? Watching Opponent Film
 - What is the down and distance?
- What is the offensive personnel vs. the defense?
 - What is the formation?
 - What is the front?
 - Is the formation correct?
 - Pre Snap Coverage
 - Zone or Man?
 - Is it a blitz look?
 - Where can they come from?
- What is the post-snap coverage?

Playing The Game While Watching Film

Pass Play

- Read a play from the call list.
- Look at the defensive alignment.
 - What is the protection?
 - Are there potential problems?
- If yes, what should I check it to?
 - What is the progression?
 - Can it change post-snap?
 - What is my footwork?
- Did the progression and footwork change post-snap?

Run Play

- Read a play from the call list.
 - What is the front?
- Are there potential problems?
- If yes, what should I check it to?
- What is my footwork and landmark?
- What type of ball handling will I use?

IX. Grading

Forms

[Quarterback Grading Sheet](#)

It is extremely difficult to use a grading system in which the quarterback receives a plus or a minus for each play.

In order to do a thorough job of critiquing the quarterback, the coach must evaluate a multiple areas of criteria for each play. This type of grading allows the quarterback to receive specific feedback, thus enhancing his learning process.

Specific feedback allows the quarterback to see the areas in which he is excelling, as well as areas that need improvement.

This will also let the quarterback know the expectations for each play and give him a better understanding of the play.

Play Call	Decision	Mechanics	Execution	B.P.	Result	YAC	Comments
	(+/-)	(+/-)	(+/-)	(+/-)	C/I/P		

Here are the areas of grading I use to evaluate our quarterbacks:

1. DECISION (+/-)

- Did the quarterback throw to the right receiver?
- Did the quarterback make the right check?

2. MECHANICS (+/-)

- Did the quarterback use the proper footwork?

3. EXECUTION (+/-)

- Did the quarterback get his job done?

4. BALL PLACEMENT (+/-)

- Did the quarterback put the ball in the correct location?

5. RESULT

- Completion, Incompletion, Touchdown, Interception, Sack, Throw Away, Drop, Etc.

6. YAC

- The number of yards the receiver was able to gain after the catch.

7. COMMENTS

- Rationale for the grades.

In Part III of this series we will discuss the basic fundamentals a quarterback needs to be successful in our offense.

Playing Quarterback: Part III - Fundamentals

Matt LaFleur, Offensive Coordinator, Ashland University

The importance of a fundamentally sound quarterback can not be overstated.

If a player understands the offense, but isn't proficient in the basics of the center exchange, the running and passing game, and throwing the ball, it puts your team at a great disadvantage.

The following is an overview of the basic fundamentals a quarterback needs to be successful in our offense.

I. STANCE

Although the stance may seem elementary, it is a critical fundamental of quarterback play.

The quarterback must know that his stance is the basis for every play.

He needs to think of his stance as if it were the "key that starts the ignition."

The quarterback needs to feel comfortable with his stance in order to function properly.

We have a simple formula for increasing our opportunities to complete a pass:

**Proper Stance = Proper 1st Step = Proper Drop =
Proper Body Position = Proper Balance = Properly Thrown Ball**



It is important that the stance becomes second-nature. His stance should not alter or impair his thought process whether he is in the gun or under center.

A. Stance Under Center

The quarterback's stance is built for speed. Here are the key coaching points:

- Feet under the armpits.
- The left foot is staggered (heel/toe relationship) in order to obtain immediate depth from the line of scrimmage.
- Feet are slightly pigeon toed to reduce the chances of taking a false step.
- Knees and ankles are naturally bent and in an athletic position.
- Proud Chest - back erect and shoulders square to the line of scrimmage.
- Arms are extended with a slight elbow bend so he can "ride the center."
- The top hand is placed firmly against the center's butt, wrist deep, and parallel to the ground. The fingers should be comfortably spread with the middle finger down the crack of the center's butt.
- The bottom hand rests under and beside the top hand. The tip of the TOP HAND THUMB fits the natural crease at the first joint of the bottom hand thumb. This hand also serve as a backstop.



B. Stance In The Gun

Here are the key coaching points for the stance in the shotgun:

- Balanced or slightly staggered with his feet about shoulder width apart.
- Athletic stance - a little bend in the knees.
- Show hands early to get the defense to "tip their hand."

C. Key Stance Reminders Whether Under Center Or In The Gun

Here are some important aspect that remain the same regardless of the quarterback's location on the snap:

- Mental Weight. According to the direction of the play, the quarterback must know which foot his weight should be on.
- Head up and eyes down field.
- "Active Eyes" are critical. Scan the defense.
- Look at your defensive keys.
- See the cornerback's D.E.L. (Depth, Eyes, and Leverage).
- See the safeties. See the alignment of weak safety, validated by strong safety. Look for different levels.



II. QUARTERBACK/CENTER EXCHANGE

A. Under Center

The quarterback/center exchange is obviously very important, yet it is often taken for granted.

With enough practice, the exchange can be easily mastered to ensure that there are no fumbled snaps.

The quarterback is responsible for every snap that is taken under center.

The center is instructed to snap the football using a quarter turn. This ensures that the quarterback receives the laces.

The quarterback and center must be able to execute the snap unconsciously.

Before every practice, the quarterback and center should properly perform the technique in order to achieve a clean exchange.

The quarterback needs to master the following concepts when receiving a snap:

- "Ride the Center." Follow the center with the bottom hand and keep pressure with the top hand until you receive the ball.
- Immediately seat the ball into your stomach. The quarterback will bring the ball to the back pectoral on pass plays.
- It is the quarterback's responsibility to get the ball regardless of how good or bad the center executes the snap.
- Communicate with the center. Let him know how he is doing.

B. In The Gun

We want the center to snap the ball firmly, around chest level, and slightly to the right side of the quarterback's chest (assuming we have a right handed quarterback).

The most important thing about the gun snap is that it must be firm and consistent.

The center must work very hard on snapping the ball while taking protection steps. It helps if the center is flexible and he must be able to "sit on the ball" to be effective.

A high snap is usually the result of the center raising out of his stance too early.

The quarterback should remember the following principles when in the gun:

- Align with your heels at 5 yards.
- Feet should be parallel to the line of scrimmage.
- Extend both arms and show hands early.
- Give assertive leg lifts to try and get the defense to "undress" itself.
- If we are using a silent cadence, make sure to give the center the indicator with at least 5 seconds left on the play clock.

C. The First Step From Center

The quarterback's first step is very important because it enables him to get on the correct course, whether it is dropping back to pass or handing the ball off.

In order to take the proper first step, the quarterback must master his stance.

The first step on a dropback pass should consider the following points:

1. Mental Weight: For a right handed quarterback, the weight should be on the left foot. No false steps.
2. Push: The left foot should be slightly pigeon toed. Push off of the left foot. Simultaneously bring the ball up toward the back pectoral.
3. Gain as much depth as possible. Maintain your balance. A slight stagger will add six inches to your first step.
4. The right foot should be parallel with the left foot at the end of your first step.
5. Maintain pad level. Keep your shoulders level throughout the entire first step.



III. RUN GAME

Fundamentals in the run game include the departure (from center), handoffs, option pitches, and shotgun runs.

1. Departures

There are two basic departures from center in the run game: front out and reverse out.

Front Out: Open with the foot in the direction of the play. This will require your mental weight to be on the foot that is opposite the direction in which you intend to move.



Anytime we front out, we will use a "cheat reach" step to help deliver the ball to the running back with as much depth as possible.

A cheat reach is a step taken a split second prior to receiving the snap.

Reverse Out: Open with the foot opposite the direction of the play. This requires your mental weight to be on the foot that is in the direction of the play, and you must pivot off this foot in order to properly execute the technique.

2. Hand-Offs

- Seat the football immediately following the quarterback/center exchange.
- Swiftly turn your head and shoulders to the target, with your eyes focused on the mesh point.
- The ball and off hand will always stay within the frame work of your body.
- Seat the ball firmly into the belly of the running back with your eyes.
- Pull both hands back into the belly after the exchange with the running back.
- Carry out the specified fake.



3. Option Pitches

- Look at your target before you pitch the ball.
- Step to the pitch.
- Pronate your wrist to ensure that your thumb finishes down and toward the ground.
- Pitch chest to chest. "My heart to his heart."
- Finish moving toward your target whenever possible.

4. Shotgun Runs

- The running back and quarterback must understand who is responsible for the mesh based upon the run play.
- When the running back is responsible for the mesh, make sure to keep your eyes on your Read Key or downfield based upon the play.

5. Reminders

- The first step is critical to ensure the quarterback gets on the proper course.
- The quarterback uses a hand on a clock as a landmark for the first step (5 o'clock, 7 o'clock, etc.).
- Know where your mental weight should be - no false steps.
- Understand the proper timing and the exact mesh point with the running back.
- Don't watch the running back after the handoff.
- Take pride in carrying out fakes.
- Faking is your blocking responsibility.
- We must become great at faking in order to be successful in our play-action and run-action pass.



IV. PLAY-ACTION/RUN ACTION

It is critical that the quarterback develops the ability to be deceptive. It is the deception between a run and a pass that keeps the defense off-balance and guessing.

As long the quarterback can remain consistent with his stance, ball handling, and action, he can make it difficult for the defense to decipher between a run and a pass.

We utilize three different types of fakes off of the run game:

1. Head And Hand Fake

- Hold the ball within the frame of your body.
- Place your off hand into the running back's belly - 1-hand fake.
- Look the fake in.
- Allow the front hand to follow the running back through the fake.
- Follow the fake with you head for a split second.

- After the fake, get your head around and eyes downfield in order to see how the defense reacted.
- Get the ball up and in a loaded position.

2. Ball Fake

- Hold the ball within the frame of your body.
- Extend the ball immediately (can be with one hand or two hands) toward the mesh point.
- Prior to reaching the mesh point, pull the ball back into your stomach and shrink your body.
- After the fake, get your head up and eyes downfield in order to see how the defense reacted.
- Get the ball up and in a loaded position.

3. Flash Fake

- Used primarily out of the gun.
- Show the ball for a very short period of time.
- Keep head up and eyes downfield the entire time.

4. Reminders

- All the reads off of play-action/run-action will be progression reads.
- We will either boot or set-up after each fake.
- Be aggressive with your fakes.

V. FOOTWORK

You can not over emphasize the importance of footwork for a quarterback. It impacts every aspects of a quarterback's performance.

Here are several key footwork points:

1. Footwork is the quarterback's most important physical characteristic.
 - A quarterback's footwork determines how well he plays.
 - Footwork is the foundation for progression reading.
 - The quarterback's footwork will correspond with the receiver's route.
2. It establishes the rhythm of the pass play.
 - Throw with your feet.
 - Proper footwork tells the quarterback when to throw and whom to throw to.
 - Trust your footwork.
3. It puts your body in position to throw the football. Body balance is critical.
4. It must become routine. There is no time in the game to think about it.
5. You master footwork through repetition. Footwork must be stressed everyday - in meetings, drills, and on game day.

VI. DROPBACK MECHANICS

We want all drops to be compact without any wasted movement. Here are the nine key points of the dropback:

1. "Sprint" to the top of your drop. It is necessary to get there as fast as possible while maintaining balance. Stay under control.
2. The first step is critical. It allows the quarterback to get on the proper course.
3. Keep the ball on the back pectoral (loaded position). Do not drop the ball.
4. Keep your elbows down. This helps maintain balance. Stay compact.
5. Maintain a quiet ball. Try to keep the ball loaded at all times. Do not rock the ball.
6. Always keep two hands on the ball. This increases ball security.
7. Keep your head down the middle of the field. Do not "eye lock" a potential receiver. Keep the defense guessing.



8. Sustain a wide base at the top of the drop. Feet should be shoulder width apart. This prevents over-striding and helps maintain proper balance.

9. Don't void your shoulders. We want the "eye" of the front shoulder to point up-field, not toward the sidelines.

VII. DIRECT SNAP DROPS

We use six types of drops, the 1-step, 3-step, 5-step, sprint out, play-action and run-action. Here is an overview of each:

1. 1-Step Drop

- Utilized to get the ball out of our hands fast - bubble screens, hot throws, uncovered receivers.
- Throwing to the right:
 - Step with the right foot at 4 o'clock.
 - Use a "cheat-reach."
- Throwing to the left:
 - Step straight back with your right foot.
 - Keep your shoulders square to the line of scrimmage.

2. 3-Step Drop

- Used for the quick game.
- 3 and Anchor.
- 1 big step and 2 gather steps.
- Rhythm - 1..., 2, 3, Throw.
- Probably won't "look off" when throwing quick game routes.



3. 5-Step Drop

- Used for the short, mid-range, and deep passing concepts.
- Three Types:
 - 5 and Anchor
 - 5 and Kick/Roll (a three-inch step with the plant foot into the direction - right/left - of the throw)
 - 5 and Hitch
- Know the rhythm for each drop.

4. Sprint Out

- When rolling right - open at 4 o'clock.
- When rolling left - open at 8 o'clock.
- Need to get your shoulders down hill.
- Finish moving toward your target.
- Get the ball up to the back shoulder.

5. Play-Action

- Path should be slightly tighter than inside zone.
- To the right: Ball fake and take a 5-step drop and Anchor.
- To the left: Ball fake, take a 6-step drop and Anchor then flip your hips.

6. Run-Action

- Path should resemble outside zone.
- To the right: 1-hand ball fake, 5-step drop and Hitch.
- To the left: 1-hand ball fake, 6-step drop and Hitch, and "follow the motion" (turn your back to the defense and get your head around quickly).



VIII. GUN DROPS

We use four types of gun drops, the 1-step, 3-step, sprint out, and play-action. Here is an overview of each:

1. 1-Step Drop

- Equivalent to a 3-step drop from under center.
- Used for the quick game.
- Catch, turn, throw.

- Keep footwork small.
- Maintain a wide base.
- Probably won't "look off" when throwing quick game routes.

2. 3-Step Drop

- Equivalent to a 5-step drop from under center.
- Used for the short, mid-range, and deep passing concepts.
- Three Types:
 - 3 and Anchor
 - 3 and Kick/Roll
 - 3 and Hitch
- Know the rhythm for each drop.

3. Sprint Out

- Stay flat, don't give too much ground - three yards max.
- When throwing to your left, you need to get your shoulders around.
- Finish moving toward your target.
- Get the ball up to the back shoulder. The ball should be loaded by the 3rd step.

4. Play-Action

- Keep your head up and eyes downfield on the coverage.
- Ride the running back through your opposite thigh.
- Do not give any ground on the fake.
- After the fake, utilize a drop that matches the route concept:
 - 1 and Anchor
 - 1 and Hitch
 - 3 and Anchor
 - 3 and Hitch
- Versus pressure abort the fake.

IX. MOVING WITHIN THE POCKET

Moving in the pocket includes stepping up into the pocket, lateral movement, escaping the rush and scrambling.

Here are our rules on each moving in the pocket variation:

1. In The Pocket

- Maintain a wide base.
- Keep pressure on the instep of the back foot.
- Your weight is down the midline.
- Feel the pressure.
- Sustain eye contact downfield.
- Keep the ball in a loaded position.
- Keep two hands on the ball at all times.
- Only move enough to create a throwing lane.

2. Hitching Up

- Keep your base.
- Push off the instep of the back foot.
- The front foot needs to lead as you push off the back foot.

3. Lateral Movement

- Always step with your back foot first.
- Keep your eyes downfield.
- Keep the ball in a loaded position.

4. Escaping

- Be decisive. When you decide to go, GO!
- Pull the ball tight to the body with both hands.
- Know where the pressure is coming from.
- When you feel pressure from the backside, try to reverse out.

5. Throwing On The Run



- 1 out of every 5 dropback passes will result in a scramble.
- Know when to throw the ball away.
- Think first downs. You don't always have to throw the "home run ball."
- Eyes should look from deep to short.
- Look toward the sideline for an outlet.
- Keep the ball loaded when possible.
- Before you throw, rotate your trunk in order to get your front shoulder perpendicular to the target.
- Throw off of your right foot.
- Finish the throw by moving toward the target - "shake the receiver's hand."
- NEVER throw back across your body.

X. THROWING MECHANICS

The basics of throwing mechanics begins with the grip and ends with the follow through.

Here are the seven key points to throwing the ball:

1. Grip

- The thumb and middle finger should be parallel to each other.
- There should be space between the ball and your palm.

2. Pre-Pass Position

- Maintain a wide base.
- Have a bend in your legs.
- Your chin is on the shoulder.
- Your shoulders are parallel to the ground.
- Keep your eyes downfield.
- Be in a "Loaded Position" with the ball on the back pectoral.

3. Six-Inch Step

- This is a small pivot step that should get your foot pointed slightly left of the target.
- It gets your belly-button and hips square to the target.
- Drive your weight off of your back foot.

4. Turn The Ball

- Push the tip of the ball away from your body for added velocity.

5. Don't Drop The Ball

- Keep a small, tight circle when throwing the ball.

6. High Elbow

- Your throwing elbow should be above the armpit on the release.

7. Follow Through

- Your throwing arm should finish down toward the opposite hip.
- Show your tricep.
- Your off arm should stay tight to your body and pull your trunk through.
- Your throwing leg should finish slightly in front of the opposite leg.
- Your feet should finish square to the target.
- Your eyes should remain on the target. Do not watch the ball.



This series on playing quarterback has been an overview of how I was taught - and how I teach - the quarterback position. I hope it is helpful to you and your players, and I wish you the best of luck this season.