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Q: Do you consider the Wild Bunch an "order of football?"

A: No. The Wing-T is an order of football.

The Wild Bunch is more of a side order.

I am a big fan of the Mouse Davis Run-and-Shoot offense, and have been ever since I was an undergrad at Berkeley around 1980. Like many others, I had heard of the unbelievable scores Davis' offense had posted at Portland State since 1975. Davis was brought in for a one-year stint at Cal as Offensive Coordinator under Head Coach Roger Theder while I was a student there. I still remember sitting in the stands at Memorial Stadium during open practices that summer, when Davis would run the offense through his revolutionary package, and I would furiously scribble notes and diagrams. A running back I shared a class with explained to me the Davis theory of reactive offense: classifying defensive secondaries as Three-Deep, Two-Deep, Man or Blitz, then adjusting routes based on defensive reactions. Those reactions were highlighted by the use of long motion across the formation on almost every play.

My love affair with the Run-and-Shoot culminated in a head coaching job in Melbourne, Australia from 1988-90, where I installed the R&S and took a last-place team into the semi-finals. The second year, two teams ran the R&S, and the other one won the championship (the Division III studs they imported from Ohio didn't hurt, either).

All during the 80's, though, I was torn between the demonstrated power and simplicity of the R&S, on the one hand, and the fascinating experiments that Joe Gibbs, Bill Walsh and others were performing with compressed formations, on the other. I tried time and again to apply the bunched receiver principle to the R&S, but without success. Finally, while working in the U.S. in the summer of 1995, I had the opportunity to coach an entry in a high school 7-man passing league. The head coach and offensive coordinator (both die-hard Power-I types) weren't around that summer, so I interpreted the HC's instructions in May to "have some fun" fairly broadly: I installed the original version of the Wild Bunch (I think I called it something really lame like the "Cluster Bomb").

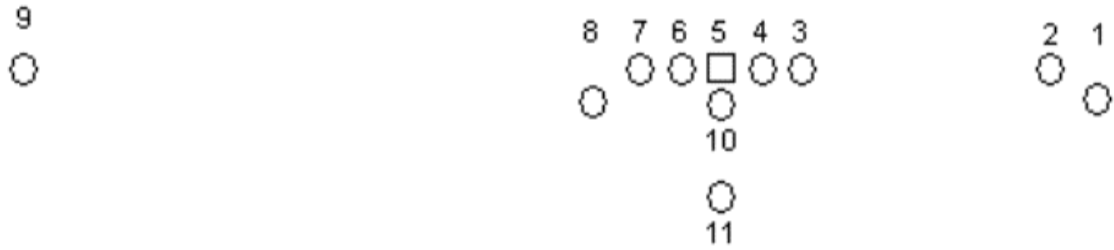
Key to Page 4 Illustrations

1: Z back **4:** Bunch Guard **7:** Spread Tackle **10:** Quarterback
2: Y end **5:** Center **8:** H back **11:** Fullback
3: Bunch Tackle **6:** Spread Guard **9:** X end

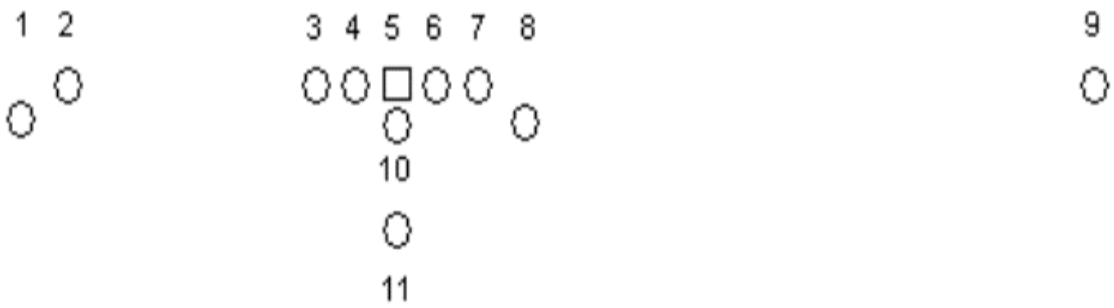
(Note: Numbers 1-9 in Right and Left below are also our hole numbers for runs.)

WILD BUNCH: FORMATION AND ADJUSTMENTS

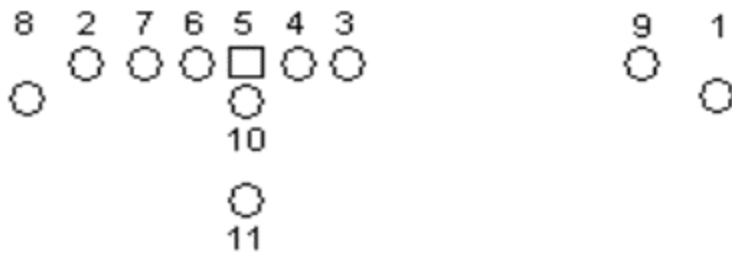
RIGHT:



LEFT:



SWAP RIGHT:



SWAP LEFT:



The X end (17 yards from his tackle, but no closer than 6 to the sideline) and H back (1 yard from the same tackle, 1 yard back) made up the Spread side, while the Y end (6 yards from the other tackle) and Z back (1 yard further out, 1 yard back) formed the Bunch side. The FB's feet were 5 yards from the LOS, directly behind the QB. The (theoretical) line used one-foot splits. We sent H in motion across the formation to form the Bunch, or Z in the other direction to form R&S Trips. To the R&S Seam, Go, Slide and Smash patterns, I added a bunched Slant and Fade. Using those six patterns and a Draw off of Go action, we tore a hole through the competition. Like Lucy Ricardo, though, I had "a lotta 'splainin' to do" when the coaches got their team back that August...

In 1997, Andrew Coverdale and Dan Robinson's outstanding The Bunch Attack: Using Compressed Formations in the Passing Game (Coaches Choice Books: Champaign, IL, 1997) codified and greatly added to the bits and pieces of Bunch offense I had picked up along the way. The Wild Bunch emerged in a recognizable form that year: the passing game consisted of Seam, Cross, Smash, Go, Mesh, Triangle, Switch, Slide and Over route packages. The running game was a combination of R&S (Trap and Draw) and modern one-back (Inside Zone and Counter Gap). I have since added the Fly Sweep series (Sweep, Dive and Bootleg) to provide a sequenced run-pass threat, and to get H or Z out wide with the ball while using the same motion that creates the Bunch or R&S Trips.

Where the tendencies of R&S and Bunch have conflicted, I have gone with simplicity. There is only one formation, for example, not including the Swap adjustment to blitz situations (Page 4, lower diagrams -- see discussion of zone blitz on Page 27). This saves an unbelievable amount of practice time, and allows the offensive to get more practice reps of the 16-18 core plays we normally carry. Since we flip-flop the offense, players get used to running plays, both right and left, from the same position relative to their teammates. (With the defense spread across the field, and motion across the formation used on almost every down, the Davis R&S has utilized "only" one formation, yet has managed to avoid stereotyping for the last quarter century -- so I'm not too worried about its stepchild, the Wild Bunch.)

If you're looking for a way to "air it out", look no further. The Wild Bunch offers the best of two highly-evolved passing attacks -- the R&S provides an unparalleled method for stretching the defense and reading its adjustments to long motion, while the Bunch Attack offers some of the most cunning route packages ever designed. In fact, with both arsenals and the Fly Sweep sequence to choose from, offensive football becomes downright fun, especially in the Red Zone. There is no way for the defense to overload against one receiver or one route package without instantly and obviously exposing a weakness elsewhere. As for the running game, I leave the last word to Mouse Davis: "The only way to stop us running is to let us pass."

Wild Bunch Pass

PASS PROTECTION

We prefer zone or area protection. Guards and Tackles set up as far off the LOS as the rules permit (helmets even with the Center's belt is a good rule of thumb). On the snap each lineman takes a short step to get square with the rusher in his area. If uncovered, he checks the near LB, then kicks back at a 45 degree angle for backside rushers. (Note: FG/BG etc. refer to Frontside/Backside Guard.)

100 (DROPBACK) PROTECTION:

BT: First rusher (line or LB) from frontside gap to head-up. Otherwise, check backside.

BG: Same.

C: Same.

FG: Block #1; if no one comes, drop deep to frontside and check for pursuit.

FT: Block #2 on line from inside gap, to on, to outside gap; if not, check LB.

200 (HALF-ROLL) PROTECTION:

BT: Hinge

BG: Hinge

C: Even: Hinge; Odd: Reach

FG: Reach

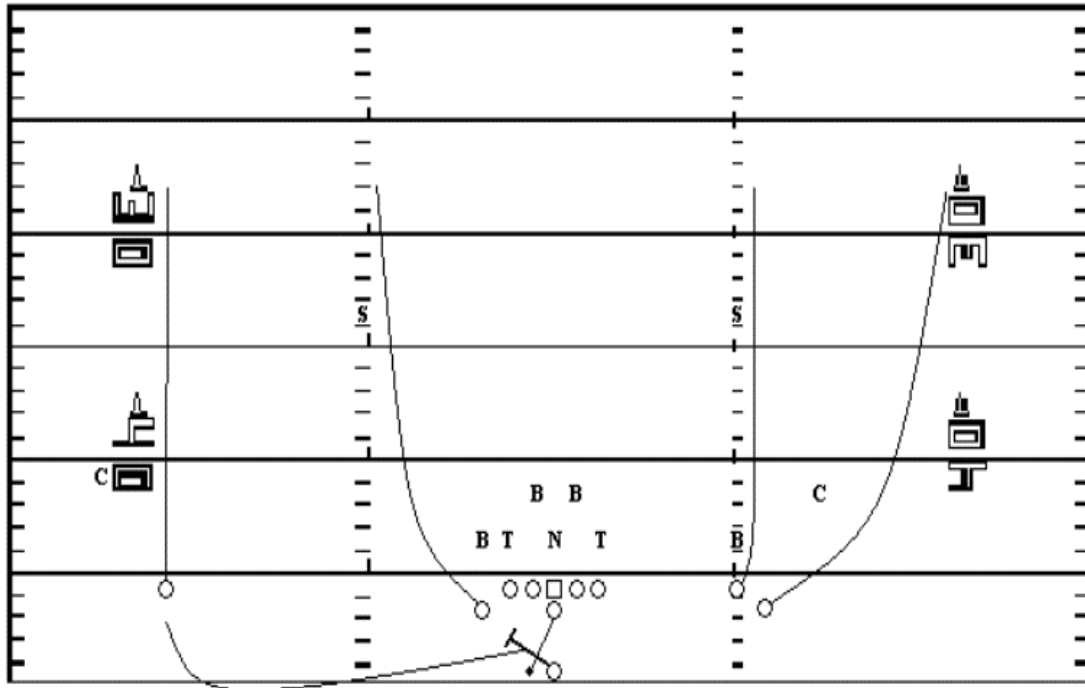
FT: Reach

In 100 or 200, FB takes two steps toward the frontside sideline while reading the outside rush. If #3 takes an inside charge, FB seals him inside and rides him past the QB. If he runs deep to contain, FB locks out and takes him deep. If #3 attacks FB hard and head on, FB chops the outside hip with his inside shoulder. If no one rushes, FB checks middle and backside, then releases.

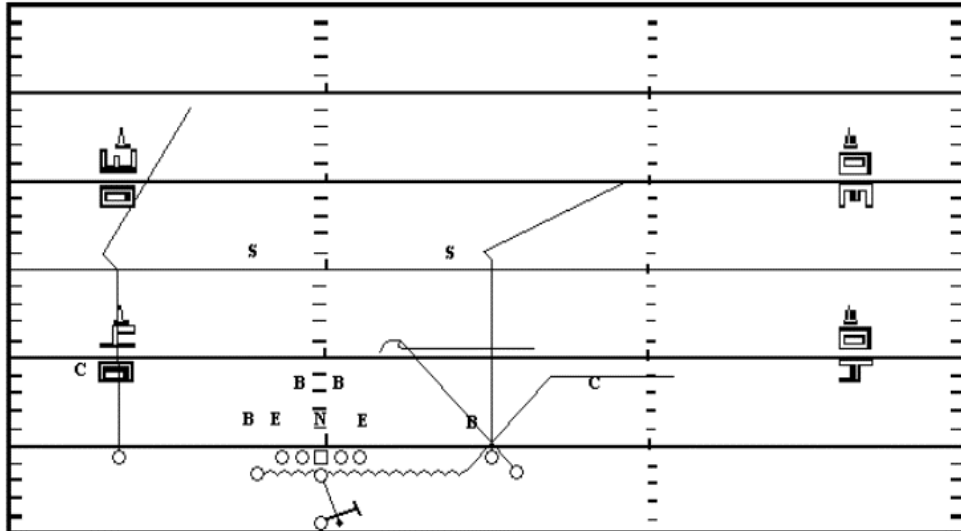
When zoning a stunt, linemen must communicate. The diagram below shows the man over FT rushing inside. FT goes with him, keeping him on the LOS. FG sees his man disappear behind FT and calls out "Loop". FG shuffles toward FT, bumping hips with him and contacting the inside rusher with his near hand. Both FG and FT call "Switch". FG now has the inside rusher, while FT squares up to meet the outside loop charge.



100 SEAM



This "four verticals" play makes concrete the implicit threat of the Wild Bunch -- cover our four immediate receivers, or pay the price. X and Z run the numbers, while H and Y zip down the hashes, looking for the ball quickly. While H is the most likely recipient of a quick dump pass, any of the four receivers running their landmarks or the Fullback running his Check Flare can get the ball right now. Against Cover 1 or 0, Y breaks opposite his man (usually to the outside), flattens out at +6, and becomes the primary receiver.



124 MESH

H motions to a yard inside Y at the snap. Y runs a Smash, H a Flat route underneath him, while Z runs a Whip Read. H and Z literally rub shoulders at the Mesh point.

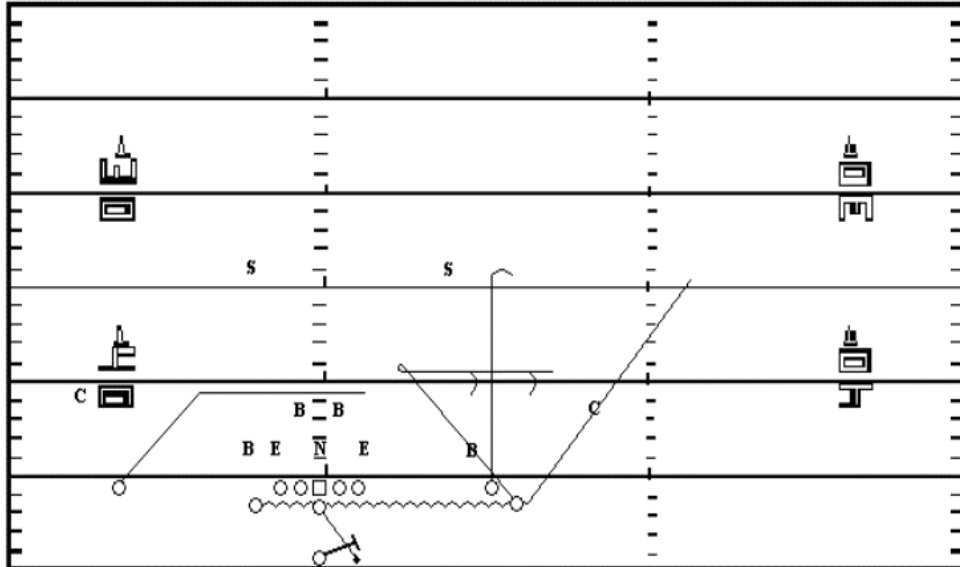
C3: QB looks to H right now -- if flat defender jumps him, QB shuffles a few steps and hit Z's Whip as he snaps his head around into the hole left by the flat defender. QB throws the ball right in the hole, stopping Z in his tracks. If a hyper CB is prowling the Flat, we may pre-determine a pump-fake to H and deep shot to Y.

C2: If PCB drops, hit H now. If PCB squats or moves laterally, hit Y's Smash. NEVER TRY TO THROW OVER A RETREATING CB. Z sits in the zone window as your outlet.

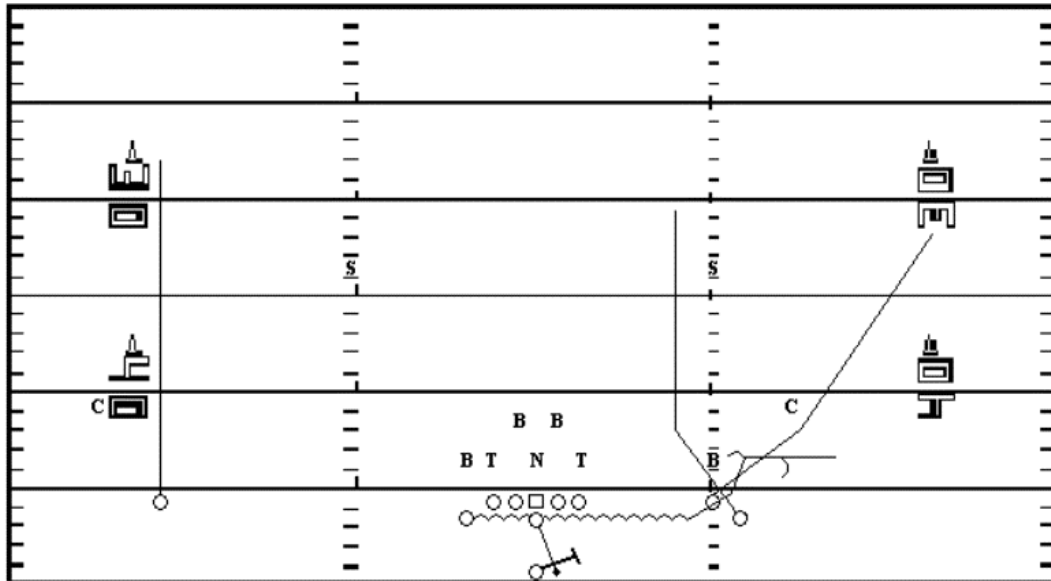
C1: Look to Y to beat the safety. If the safety crowds the Bunch, come back to X on the Post. H is "Q" receiver against blitz, Z is outlet.

C0: Consider Swap adjustment at LOS (Page 4, lower diagrams). If QB has time, Y's (or X's in Swap) Smash can be a big play; otherwise, think H in the Flat, then Z's Whip Read.

225 TRIANGLE

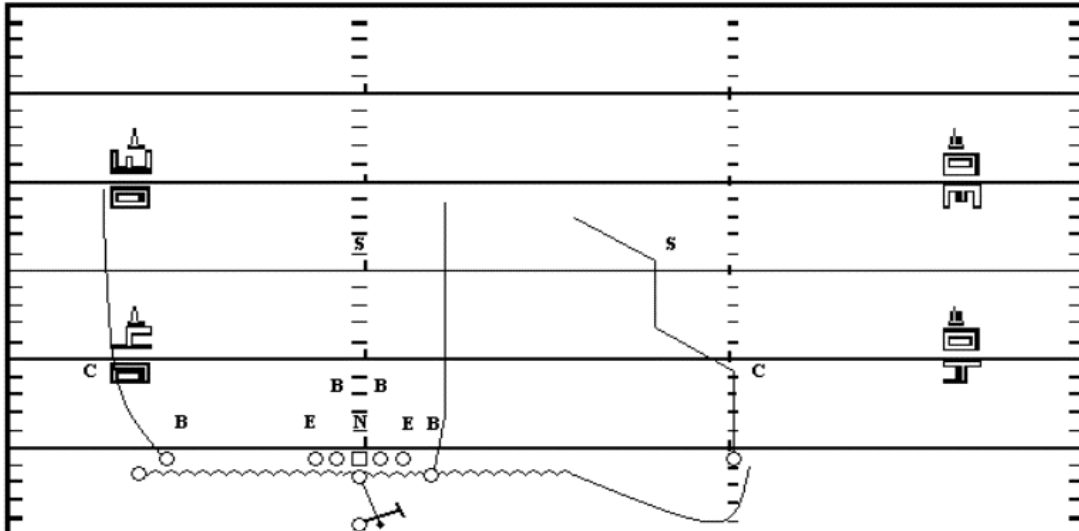


Excellent Red Zone call. X runs a Shallow Cross at +4, looking for a zone window or accelerating away from his man. We can also tag X with a Post, or at the goalline with a Fence -- he runs hard to the end line, then pivots to face the QB and slides laterally. H motions just behind Z at the snap and runs a hard Fade, looking for the ball over his inside shoulder at +10-12. Y runs an Option cut, getting behind and between LB's at +12. Y shows his numbers to QB and stays open. Z runs a Whip Read, popping open at +5-6. From a half-roll to Bunch, QB looks to H's Fade first, then Z's Whip Read. Y's Option makes him the perfect outlet. At the goalline, we may tag H with a Marker adjustment. Two yards deep in the end zone, he looks back briefly for the ball. When his man looks back, too, H plants his inside foot at +5 in the end zone and cuts back hard for the cone at the front corner of the end zone. QB throws low and hard to the spot when H looks back for the ball.



SWITCH

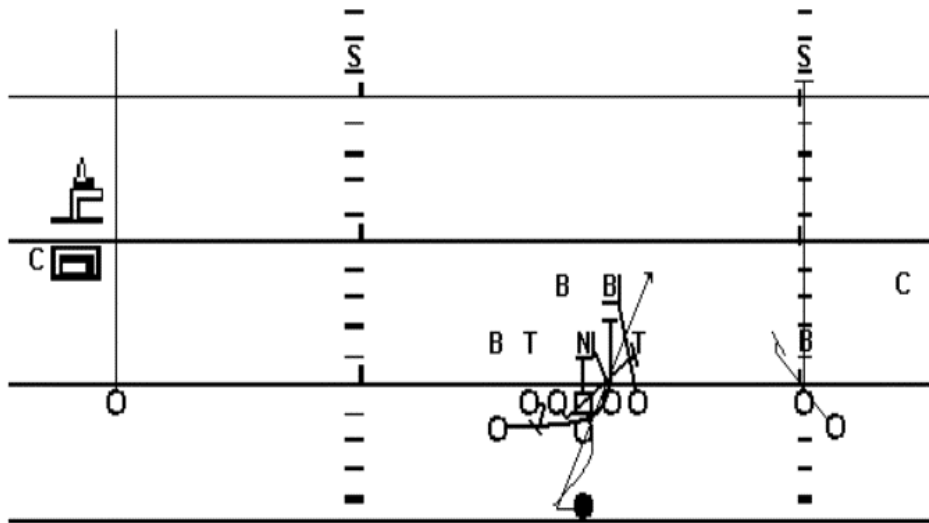
Z reads the nearest safety on the run -- if he stays deep middle, Z runs the hash alley, looking for the ball at about +20. If the safety widens or against C0, Z breaks hard down the deep middle. If the safety floats over the top of Z's hashmark alley, Z hooks up at +14-15. Y essentially runs a Fade through the near shoulder of Z's defender. H's rule is simple -- get open. If in doubt, head for the sideline, stopping in a zone hole if one opens. X runs deep, trying to take two backside defenders with him. Don't neglect a deep shot to X if he's coming open. QB reads reaction to H's motion. Versus man, we will predetermine a deep shot to either Y or Z right off the rub. If the deep route isn't open, hit H breaking away from his man. Against zone, QB looks off deep, then throws to the area where H is breaking. This is a timed throw while short defenders are still dropping. If H's Choice route is jumped from inside, look for Z running his hash.



117 SLIDE

Some seasons, when we feel we have a superior receiver at X, we will include Slide in our repertoire as well as Go.

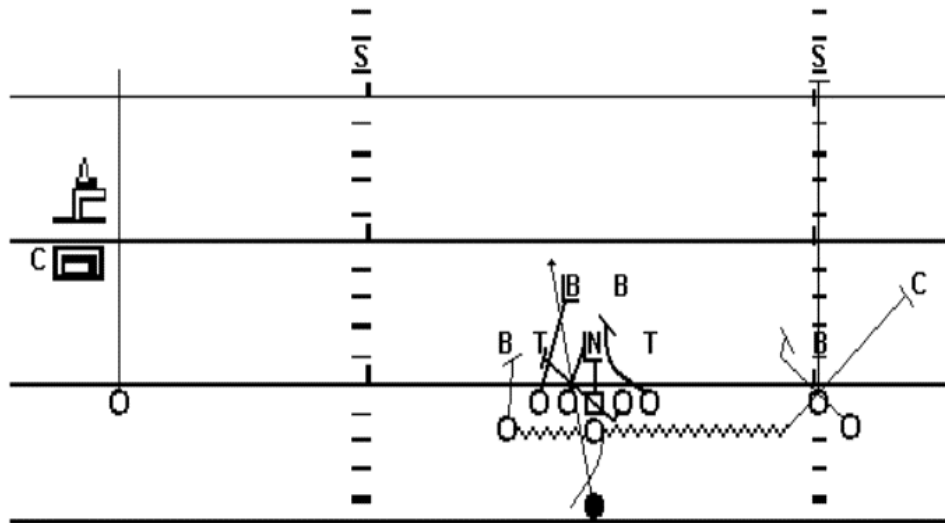
Against zone coverage, Y runs an outside vertical pattern up the backside numbers, while H releases slightly outside then streaks downfield, trying to tie up a linebacker and a safety. Z goes in motion halfway between X and H, then fishhooks five yards into the backfield before turning downfield at the point where X lined up. X runs a quick Slant, lingering in the zone window before heading downfield another four steps and slanting in again. Against man coverage, X cuts the slant portion of his pattern short, breaking hard downfield and taking coverage deep with him. H turns his pattern into an In or Out (away from the man covering him) at +10, while Z runs a Wheel off X's backside, trying to rub his man off as he heads down the playside hashmarks.



34 COUNTER

FB's lateral step resembles 36 Zone, but he cuts back and follows Spread Guard and H through the hole. Bunch side of the line seals to the inside, SG kicks out defensive #2, ST hinge blocks (like backside sprint-out pass protection) to pick up a crashing or slanting defender, while H pulls through the hole and walls off pursuit.

From the Swap adjustment (page 4, bottom diagrams), we can motion H to form the Bunch, then still run Counter by having Y pull and wall off in H's place.



35 TRAP

Can be run with or without motion. If the OLB over H pursues motion across formation, leaving DT with contain, we will trap inside him all day long. With motion, also functions as a "Bunch draw."

Center: Block backside - If no backside LOS defender, block straight ahead.

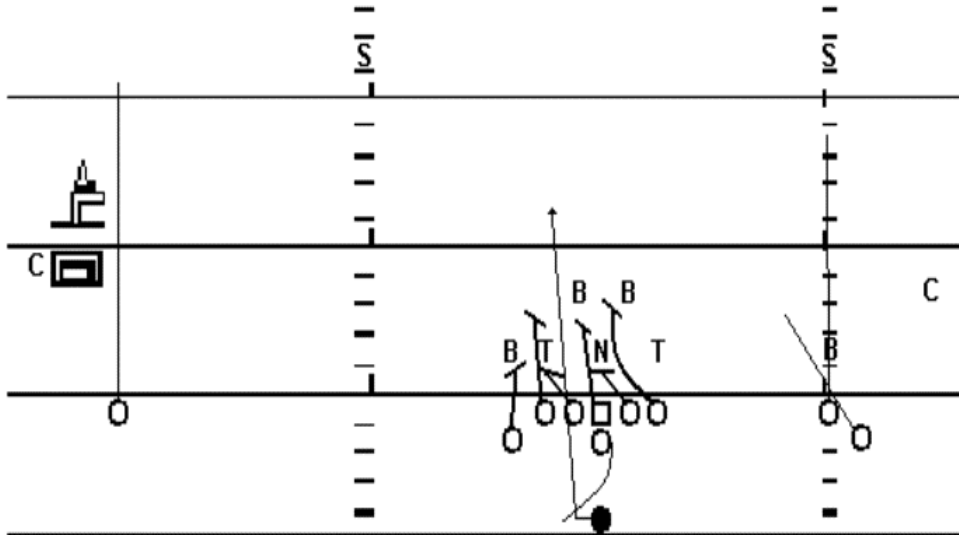
Spread Guard: Continue through A gap until you hit somebody (Usually man in front of center). If center blocks your man (NG) too, combo to backside LB.

Bunch Guard: Pull playside and kick out first defender past A gap.

Spread Tackle: Nearest LB.

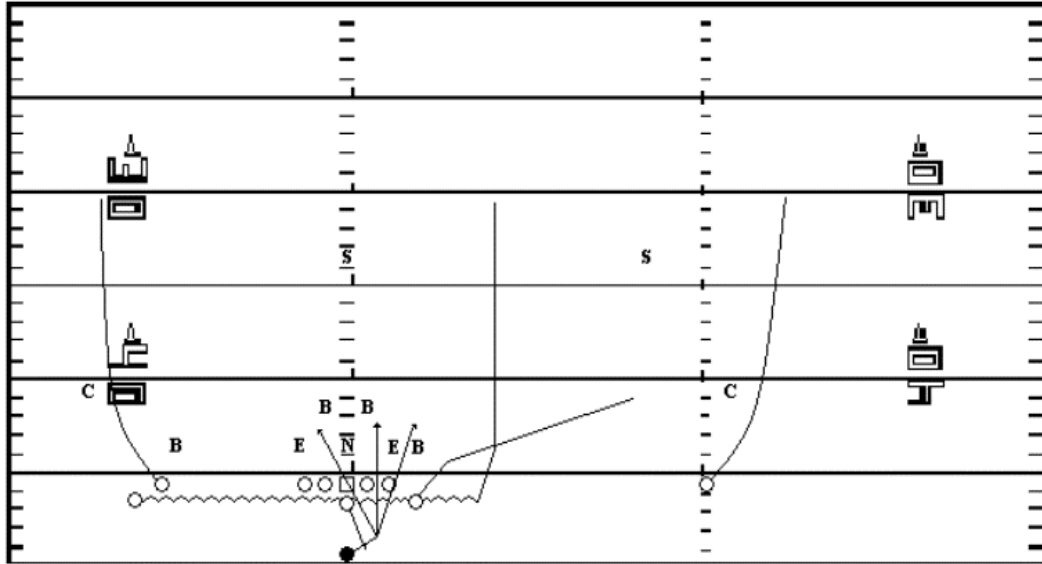
Bunch Tackle: Reach block toward center. ***(Rules courtesy of Dum Coach.)***

When we find defenses cheating toward Bunch and the field, we will run Trap from the hash without motion. Trap then becomes a great way to pop the FB into the secondary with a full head of steam.



36 ZONE

The foundation of our inside ground game. If an offensive lineman is covered, he blocks the man on. If uncovered, he will step playside and double with the covered lineman. At this point they will stay engaged with the double team until they reach the second level or the second level comes to them. In the event that the uncovered lineman has no one to double team, he will work to the second level with his shoulders parallel to the LOS. We work hard to distort the defense with the double team so that FB may have a cutback lane. FB takes a lateral step (setting up 34 Counter), then takes the handoff and looks for daylight. Can also be run from Swap (page 4, bottom diagrams) with Y taking H's place as a blocker.



38 DRAW

From 113 Go action, QB drops behind FB, then slides the ball in his pocket from behind (reverse, backside or "slow" handoff). FB waits one count after the handoff, then runs to daylight. Running the R&S version, after we burned the OLB once with Draw, no one went near H's Shoot pattern from Go for the rest of the game.

Although we generally only call Draw when defenses drop their EOL defender on the Spread side into coverage, we have run right by defenders who are so intent on rushing the passer that they miss the backside hand-off.

for our three Bunched receivers and X on the backside. Triangle is certainly a great Red Zone package, but is also a very versatile 3rd and medium-to-long route. Starting H's Fade from behind Z can give him that all-important extra step on a man defender at the snap, while both Y's Option and Z's Whip Read are excellent go-to routes against zone coverage. (When we run Trap with Bunch motion, we snap the ball when H passes behind Z, to convince the defense we're throwing Triangle.) If Mesh, Triangle and Switch get defenses creeping toward the Bunch side before the snap, we will come right back to attack the Spread side with Smash, Over, and especially Option Screen. For that matter, with our best and fastest receiver at X, we will test the backside defenders regularly from Mesh, Switch and Triangle, as well. "Spread them out and test them" is another way to state the Wild Bunch credo.

For anyone concerned that an offense with "only" 16-18 plays can't provide enough versatility to combat today's defenses, it should be obvious that, with a reactive passing offense, numbers can deceive. We adjust one or more routes in all of our route packages depending on coverage, giving three or four different "looks" from the same package. If you multiply coverage adjustments by route packages, then add running plays, you'll see that the Wild Bunch actually consists of about 45 plays -- respectable by any standard. This is why we run from one formation -- to give enough time in practice to perfect the adjustments called for in running "only" 16-18 plays.

The running game is no afterthought. We spread the defense as much to create holes for FB, H and Z as to open passing lanes for our QB. Glenn "Tiger" Ellison's original R&S offense consisted of four running series and only one passing series, since he calculated that running nine against six in the box - after forcing the defense to spread to cover his formation - was good odds by anyone's reckoning. The Fly Sweep series provides a mechanism for getting outside with speed while maintaining the same motion that we use to create the Bunch or R&S Trips, so the Sweep appears to be a pass play until the ball is snapped. The FB Dive creates a complementary inside threat, while the Bootleg reduces backside pursuit and brings the QB outside of containment, often with single coverage on the backside receiver. This is basically the same series Coach Manny Matsakis ran from his "Sting-and-Shoot" at Emporia State during the mid-90's with such devastating effect.

The rest of the ground game consists of FB plays between the tackles, and most can be run with or without motion - Bunch motion or Spread motion, in several cases, to prevent the defense from anticipating Go, Slide or Draw when we motion to Spread. Once defenses start reacting to our ball-control passes to the flats (notably Go, Mesh, and Switch) as well as the wide running threat of Sweep, we add a new dimension to our attack -- the more they spread out to cover the outside game, the more we pound it inside with Trap, Zone, Counter and Dive. Against Cover 0 and/or on 3rd and long, we can also execute much of our inside game (Zone, Trap and Counter) from Swap, with devastating results when we pick up the blitz.

Consider the Wild Bunch from the defensive point of view. When we line up at the LOS, the defense must be prepared for:

- .. 100 Seam, 101 Cross, 202 Smash, or Trap, Zone or Counter, without motion.
- .. H starting in motion, followed by:
 - 21 Sweep, 33 Dive, or 333 Bootleg;
 - 124 Mesh, 225 Triangle, 126 Switch or 335 Over;
 - Trap (or, from Swap, Zone or Counter).
- .. Z starting in motion, followed by:
 - 49 Sweep or 37 Dive (we can easily install a 337 Bootleg);
 - 113 Go, 117 Slide, or 38 Draw;
 - Trap, Zone or Counter.

Neither when we come up to the LOS, nor after we send a receiver in motion, can the defense over-commit to stop a particular threat.

The Wild Bunch makes life particularly hard for certain defenders. Y's flexed split complicates defending the Sweep and Counter, and the OLB or Nickel back over him will be repeatedly humiliated if he can't simultaneously cover the flat. That defender is in no position to rush the passer, either. We will test his mettle early and often. If he doesn't follow our Y end out to his flexed position, we will throw dump passes to Y all day long, right over that defender's head.

Life is no better for the deep safety against the Wild Bunch. Run support is out of the question against this gonzo offense, where four deep receivers are waiting to embarrass him on every play. We have seen deep safeties line up further and further back on every down as they attempted to cover the deep routes, which only opens up the crossing and flat routes even more. Safeties assigned a line gap to fill against us soon find they have other priorities -- like not getting burned deep.

A quick word about Cover 4 ("quarters") coverage. We love to see it, especially on a fast field where we can make our cuts quick and hard. We'll run patterns that threaten deep and bring people in underneath, like Mesh and Switch; we'll throw Cross all day long against Cover 4 teams that leave one man to cover the short middle; and we'll come back with Go, where H cuts his Shoot up and inside the flat defender who is desperate to gain width against our Spread side.

The zone blitz has also proven vulnerable to the Wild Bunch. We can run a pure R&S solution, calling Go against teams that try to zone blitz us. We will pre-determine a Cover 0 read, with a quick throw in the cards to H or (less often) Z. If we have a Bunch route called, QB can call out "Swap! Swap!" and run the identical play, but with Y staying in to block backside. There is even a "Max" call available to keep 8 in blocking (H motions to behind BT, then blocks the end rusher) while we run 2-man Bunch patterns. We have rarely felt the need to use Max, though -- we have found spreading and throwing to be the best solution to blitz and pressure defenses. Nothing dampens enthusiasm for blitzing like lots of points on the board, we always say.

I believe the Wild Bunch shares with the Davis R&S the distinction as a great equalizer for teams with limited offensive ability. As June Jones has proved once again at Hawaii, (and Davis established at Portland State), this offense allows kids to play who could never hope to start in more conventional schemes. There is a place here for "Smurf"-type receivers, and big lanky pass-catching kids, and tight ends and halfbacks with hands, and fullbacks who live to block and run for the tough yards inside. The running quarterback, who might otherwise feature in a sprint-out or option attack, will appreciate the R&S route packages and the way the Bunch brings receivers closer to him for easier throws. The Elway-style mad bomber will enjoy throwing through rubs and the ease with which he can read and isolate defenders.

This is only the bare bones of the offense. I have a PowerPoint presentation that diagrams the plays against Cover 3/2/1/0 and gives more detail on blocking and play execution, which I'll be happy to e-mail to interested parties (blocking assignments and other information are on the Notes pages). Contact me at seayee@hotmail.com. I would also refer readers to two essential texts, the Coverdale and Robinson book mentioned on Page 5, and Al Black's Coaching Run-and-Shoot Football (Haworth, NJ: Harding Press, 1991), for the mechanics of the Bunch and R&S passing and running games. We are not particularly fussy about the technique of quarterback drop that we employ -- either Davis' system (3-5 steps on the throwing arm side, 4-6 steps on the other) or the more common practice of dividing passes into 3 steps, 5 quick steps, 5 big steps, 7 steps, etc. Our bias, though, is always toward simplicity, which brings us back to Mouse Davis' brilliantly original system whenever we find ourselves getting too complicated. Black's book does an excellent (and appropriately brief) job of describing the Davis method.

As a final note, I should point out that we like to carry about 18 plays at a time in our arsenal, but this is always subject to change without notice, especially in response to personnel changes. For example, we can run the Fly Sweep to either Spread or Bunch or both, depending on which part of our pass offense we're emphasizing. Some years we'll run Slide and Go patterns from our R&S repertoire, other years only Go -- and this will affect the direction in which we run the Fly series. The offense is hugely adaptable. The bottom line is that I believe the Wild Bunch will give you the tools you need to win.