Ultimate frisbee: strategy and tactics: O1

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This document is about playing primary 'middle' or left wing on offence. These are referred to as position O₁ here¹.

YOUR TEAM IS STARTING THE POINT on offence. There are three key pieces of information you'll need from your team before the point starts: 1) What everyone's role is? (You are O1, which makes you a cutter².; 2) What offensive structure/plan is your team planning on using?³ 3) What defensive structure/plan to use if there is a turnover?

What actually happens, however, is likely to depend more on what the opposing team (D1-D7) does. After the pull as you run downfield⁴ it will help if you can figure out what defensive structure the D team use. It might be: person-match defence; a zone defence; or something else (often called "junk"). What you should do in the event of each is the subject of this document.

Person-match defence, vertical stack

So, if you identify the defensive structure as person-match the next thing to try and figure out is what direction the opposition are forcing. FOREHAND FORCE for right handers is the most common, so this is discussed first.

Three throws for O6 to get the disc to you are:

- 1. a break-side huck to A⁵;
- 2. an open-side huck to B⁶; and
- 3. an open-side throw to an upfield cut to C7.

The space that you have to cut in is between the dashed red and dashed yellow lines. This is because if you go further downfield than the dashed red line before O6 throws the discs⁸, D8 will be able get to A or B well before the disc does, and so be able to intercept or prevent any throws to you or others to A or B. Similarly, if you go upfield of the dashed yellow line then D8 will be able to get involved in preventing dump throws from O6 to O5 or O7. Hence, as O1 if you have made it to C but have not had the disc thrown to you perhaps it is time to go back to the vertical stack and make space for someone else to cut

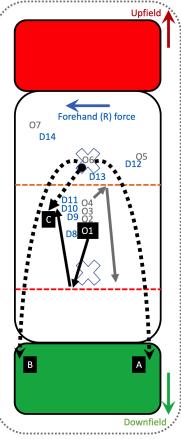


Figure 1: Vertical stack formation

- ¹ This document is part of a series, the rest of which is available here (LINK TO BE PROVIDED
- 2 O2, O3 and O4 are also cutters, and O5, O6 and O7 are handlers.
- ³ Vertical, horizontal, or something else
- ⁴ In the meantime, the handlers on your team will be busy catching the pull Figures 1 and 3 show O6 starting play at the brick mark, as might occur if the pull is out.
- ⁵ This throw is probably very difficult for O6 to make. However, you as O1 realistically will not have to do much other than stand still at the starting position then run and catch it after O6 has thrown it. Figure 1 indicates how D8 will be on the wrong side of you (as O1) and so probably won't have much of a play on the disc.
- ⁶ This throw is especially viable if: D8 is standing further upfield than indicated; you (as O1) are faster than D8; or D8 does not react to an initial cut downfield (black arrow)
- ⁷ The solid black arrows indicate a cut you might do as O1: initially going deep but then making a back under, upfield cut on the open side for Throw C
- ⁸ A, B and the dashed red line effectively move further upfield or downfield if O6 has a shorter or longer huck.

If you receive the disc at A or B hopefully it is a goal. But if not, the principles that apply to receiving the disc at C (or elsewhere) likely apply. Figure 2 shows the situation if the disc has been thrown to you on the back-under cut towards C.

In Figure 2 your options include:

- 1. throwing to A'^9 (to O_4 or maybe O_2);
- 2. throwing to O2 going to B' or C', using the same cutting approach you did earlier;
- 3. off-load to O6 moving downfield and right as shown by the grey arrow¹⁰;
- 4. break the force to throw to O₃ or O₅; or
- 5. if none of that works throw a dump to O7

Next, get back to the stack or make another cut.

Other possibilities might include: a BACKHAND FORCE (do everything the same, except the mirror image); a STRAIGHT-UP FORCE (it may be harder for O6 to throw to A or B, and it might help if you cut closer to the sideline if going upfield to C); or FORCE MIDDLE (where the force switches from forehand to backhand).

Person-match defence: horizontal stack

Figure 3 shows O1 on the left wing¹¹, again assuming a FOREHAND FORCE FOR RIGHT HANDERS. In a horizontal stack the strategy is to cut upfield and downfield (black arrows) within your quarter of the field¹². O6 can potentially throw a deep huck to you downfield (A) or a break-force throw to you (D)¹³. If you do get the disc around D, it is probably best to look to move the disc back to the middle of the field via a dump to O₅ or O₆, as it is hard to make progress from the sidelines when playing horizontal. In the event that O2, O3 or O4 get the disc you will be best running downfield, to offer a deep or back-under cut (probably while staying within your quarter of the field14).

Other possibilities might include: a BACKHAND FORCE (do everything the same, except the mirror image); a STRAIGHT-UP FORCE (it may be harder for O6 to throw to A or B, and it might help if you cut closer to the sideline if going upfield to C); or FORCE MIDDLE (where the force switches from forehand to backhand).

Some key take aways about vertical and horizontal stack offence are: 1) you are O1, a cutter, so leave upfield of the dashed yellow lines to the handlers, and don't go downfield of the dashed red lines

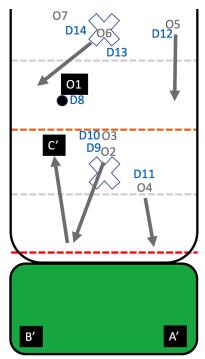


Figure 2: Vertical stack progression 9 Note that A', B', C', and the yellow and red dashed lines are all now further downfield reflecting the new position of the disc. The stack (O2, O3) has also moved downfield.

¹⁰ A pass to O6 should be relatively easy, as D13 is on the wrong side having been forcing O6 forehand earlier. This pass would put O6 in 'power poistion' where they can easily thrown anywhere on the field as D13 will likely be behind them. In contrast, D8 will be downfield of you making it difficult to break the force

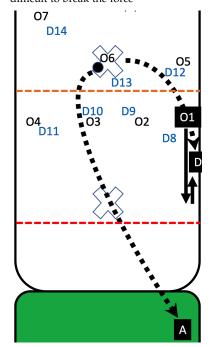


Figure 3: Horizontal stack formation 11 Typical terminology is as per 'stage left', being on the left as you look downfield (the enemy's gate is down!)

12 Switches to another quarter of the

until the disc has been thrown¹⁵; 2) standing still and letting the handler (O6) throw it to A¹⁶ may be a reasonable option, especially if the handler is a good thrower, your defender (D8) is not covering you deep, or you are faster than your defender, 3) upfield or downfield cuts are easier to throw to than cuts that move horizontally across the field.

Zone defence

Oh no, the defence decided to play zone¹⁷! What to do? There are many different zones¹⁸ Regardless of what zone it is, three ways to beat it are: 1) over; 2) round; or 3) through.

As O1 (left wing), you are mostly relevant to beating a zone through (1) OVER. This is done by exploiting the gaps between D8¹⁹ and D9²⁰. Figure 4 shows with dashed black arrows two potential throws from O6 to you:

- 1. O6 might throw directly to you (O1) where you are shown standing in Figure 4. Such a throw might be a hammer or a blade, because O6 will be trying to get the disc to you as quickly as possible, before either D8 or D9 can intercept it. Hence, it will help if you are looking directly at O6 and standing still, so that they can land said throw on your head!
- 2. Alternatively, O6 might throw to A, expecting that you and the disc can get there before D8 does.

The grey dashed arrows in Figure 4 show various ways that the disc might go 1) over, 2) around or 3) through to O5, O2 or O3. From them you might receive the next pass or the one after that as you, collectively, take advantage of the 4 (O1, O2, O3 and O5) versus 2 (D9 and D10) mismatch until the upfield end of the zone (D12, D13, D14) catch up to the disc. Once they do so, it becomes 4 versus 5, so, as a team, you will likely be better off giving it back to one of the handlers (O₅-7) so as to play 7 vs 7 again. There are plenty of other variations, for example, maybe it goes (2) AROUND to O7 and then deep, taking advantage of the temporary 2 (O1, O4) vs 1 (D8), who might have to choose between covering A or B. Regardless, the objective for you as O₁ is to set up or 2 (O₁, O₄) vs 1 (D8) or even 3 (O1, O4, O7) vs 2 (D8, D11). This enables your offence to split a defender, but requires that all of you be in positions that can be thrown to, one way or another. Even getting a 2 (O1, O4) vs 2 (D8 and D9 or D11) downfield can be helpful, as then the game becomes 5 vs 5, which is easier for the offence.

In fact, this should be the strategy if the defence continues to play zone once the disc gets close to the endzone, as shown in Figure 5. If

¹⁶ Also, maybe the handlers might move the disc around a bit first, so as to get an opportunity (power position / no force) to take a shot towards A

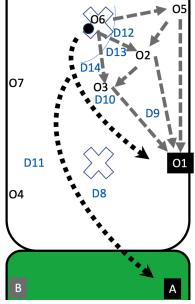


Figure 4: 331 zone formation

- ¹⁷ Figure 4 shows a 3-3-1 zone. There are many other zones, but for the purposes of playing as O1 the principles are generally simlar.
- ¹⁸ Even 3-3-1 might be force forehand, backhand, middle, return, sideline, and probably more. Then there are a whole range of other formations including: puppy-fence (1-3-2-1), four person cup (4-2-1) two person cup (2,3,2) and cup-o-saurus (6-1)!
- 19 who is trying to cover throws to you or O₄
- ²⁰ who is trying to cover you and O₂ and (maybe) O5.

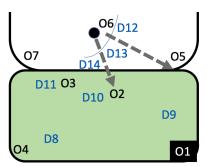


Figure 5: 331 zone formation near the endzone

you (O1) and the other wing (O4) go and stand on the back corners of the endzone, then two defenders will have to cover you, otherwise a throw over will score²¹.

An advantage of you and O₄ being at the downfield corners of the endzone is illustrated through comparison to Figure 6. Here O1 and O4 are further upfield and away from the sidelines. This allows D8, D9, and D10 to move upfield and help defend the front of the endzone. It is still possible for O6 to throw OVER into the space downfield of O1 or O4, however, this is a much harder throw. In Figure 5 the throw to O1 or O4 can be flat, quick²² and as hard as O6 wants. In contrast, the throw needed in Figure 6 to pass to O1 or O4 has to go over their (your!) head, but be floaty enough that it can be caught within the endzone. This appears much harder to throw AND catch!

Junk defence

In between zone and person match are a range of defensive strategies that are a bit of both. The simplest is perhaps 'last person back'²³. The most complex, perhaps, is 'clam'^{24,25}.

Regardless, a similar approach to that used against zone would seem most relevant to what you might do as O1. 1) Try to spread out so that one defender cannot cover more than one offensive player (so play left wing and stand deep and wide); 2) Work with others on your team to try and find situations where one defender has to choose which of 2+ offensive players they are going to cover because you are arranged such that they can't cover you all at once!

That's enough for this basic document though. Good luck O1! Hopefully, I'll write more in depth about zone, clam etc. in some future document.

²¹ In Figure 5 D8 is shown covering O4 (but also trying to help in the centre of the endzone) while D9 is trying to cover O1 and O5, and help D10 with O2.

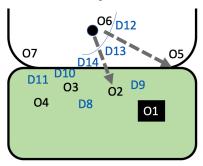


Figure 6: Compressed 331 zone formation near the endzone

- ²² Likely, the quicker the disc gets to O1 or O4 the better, as less time in the air equals less time for D8 or D9 to get close enough to make an intercept.
- ²³ In which the person who is deepest (furthest downfield) switches to cover the offensive cutter who is furthest downfield (or the largest threat to receive a huck). The formation shown in Figure 1 might involve D8 being the 'last person back' and so initially covering O1. However, once O1 turns upfield D9 would switch to O1, with D8 subsequently covering O2.
- ²⁴ Often called in a similar manner to 3-3-1 zone, yet with defenders effectively playing 'person-match-with-all-theswitches'.
- ²⁵ Although there's probably many more complex defensive strategies that I've never heard of!