
HS Spread Offense Playbook

A Complete Installation Guide

Gridiron Encyclopedia

gridiron-encyclopedia.netlify.app

Table of Contents

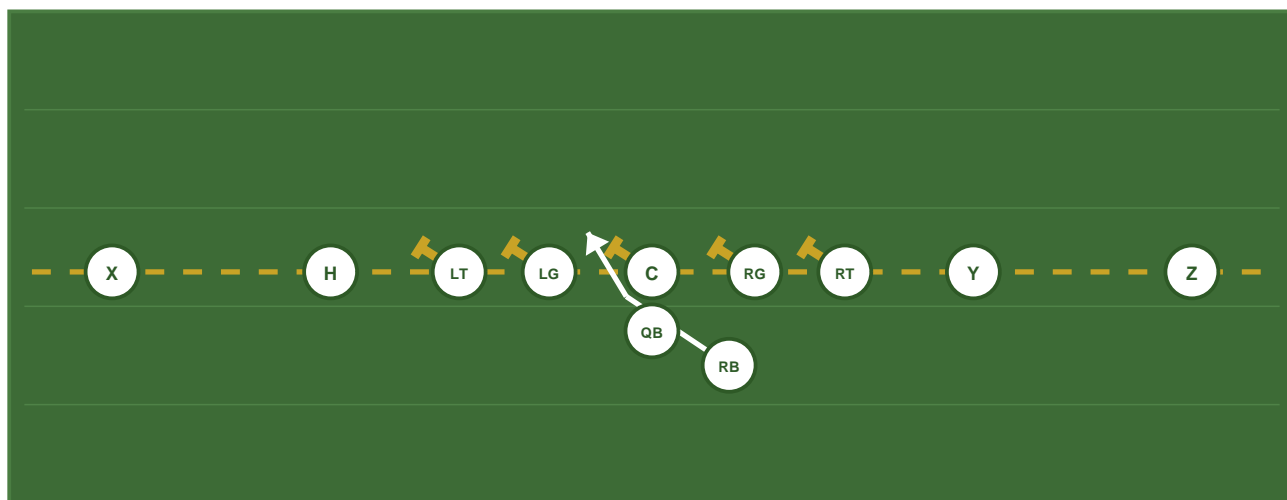
1. Philosophy & Overview
2. Inside Zone (Shotgun)
3. Outside Zone (Pistol)
4. Zone Read
5. Mesh Concept
6. Spacing Concept
7. Four Verticals
8. Smash Concept
9. Bubble RPO
10. Glance RPO
11. Tunnel Screen
12. Jailbreak Screen
13. Quick Slant-Flat
14. Quick Reference / Glossary

Philosophy & Overview

The spread offense is designed to spread the defense horizontally to create favorable matchups across the field. Operating primarily out of 10 and 11 personnel groupings in shotgun and pistol formations, the system relies on tempo-based execution and RPO (run-pass option) integration. By forcing the defense to account for every eligible receiver, the offense consistently isolates defenders in one-on-one situations, opening up run lanes and short-to-intermediate passing windows. This is a rules-based offense: every player reads the same key and reacts accordingly.

Inside Zone (Shotgun)

The foundation of the spread run game. The offensive line steps in unison toward the play-side, creating a horizontal push. The running back reads the first down lineman past the center and cuts to daylight. The QB executes a mesh-point ride to hold the backside end.

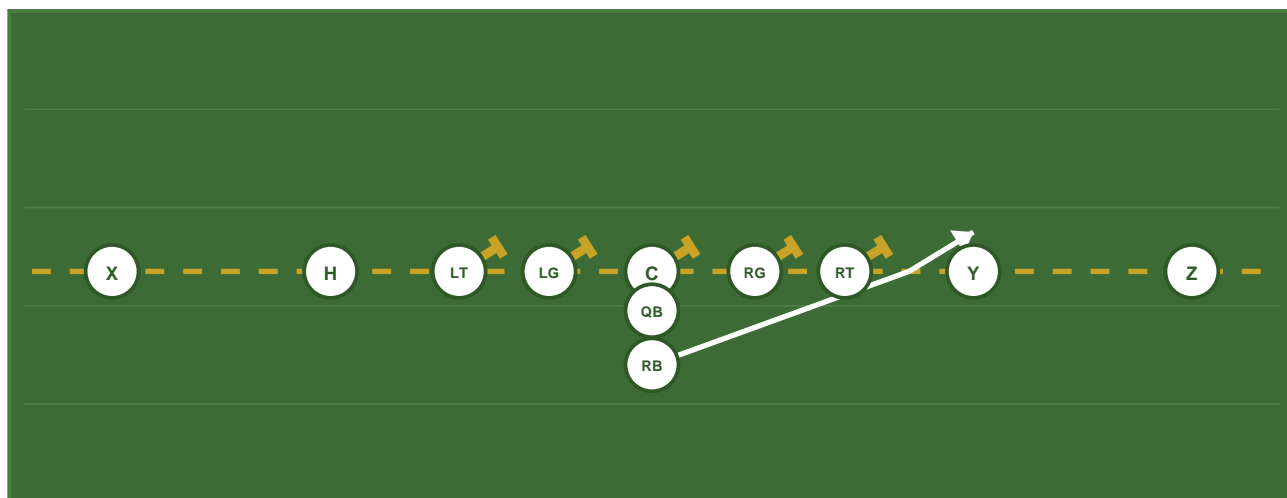


Inside Zone (Shotgun)

- OL: Zone step play-side, combo to LB level.
- RB: Aiming point is play-side A-gap; read the first DL past center.
- QB: Ride the mesh, pull on "give" read, hand off on "keep" read.
- Backside WR: Stalk block or run bubble route as RPO tag.

Outside Zone (Pistol)

A stretch concept that forces the defense to run sideline to sideline. The RB aims for the outside leg of the offensive tackle and reads the first defender to show outside leverage. If the defense over-pursues, the RB cuts back into the vacated lane.

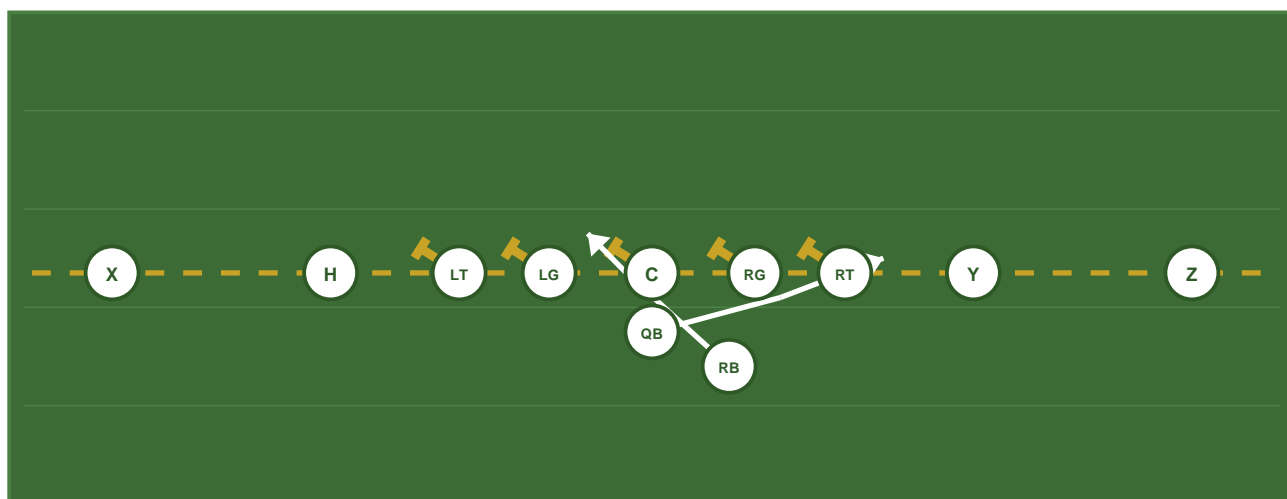


Outside Zone (Pistol)

- OL: Reach step, sustain blocks to the sideline.
- RB: Aiming point is OT outside leg; press the edge then cut back.
- QB: Reverse pivot, hand off deep. Can pull on zone-read tag.
- Cutback lane is the money — patience is key.

Zone Read

The QB reads the backside defensive end after the snap. If the DE crashes down on the RB, the QB keeps and runs off the edge. If the DE stays home or widens, the QB gives to the RB on inside zone. This removes one defender from the box without blocking him.

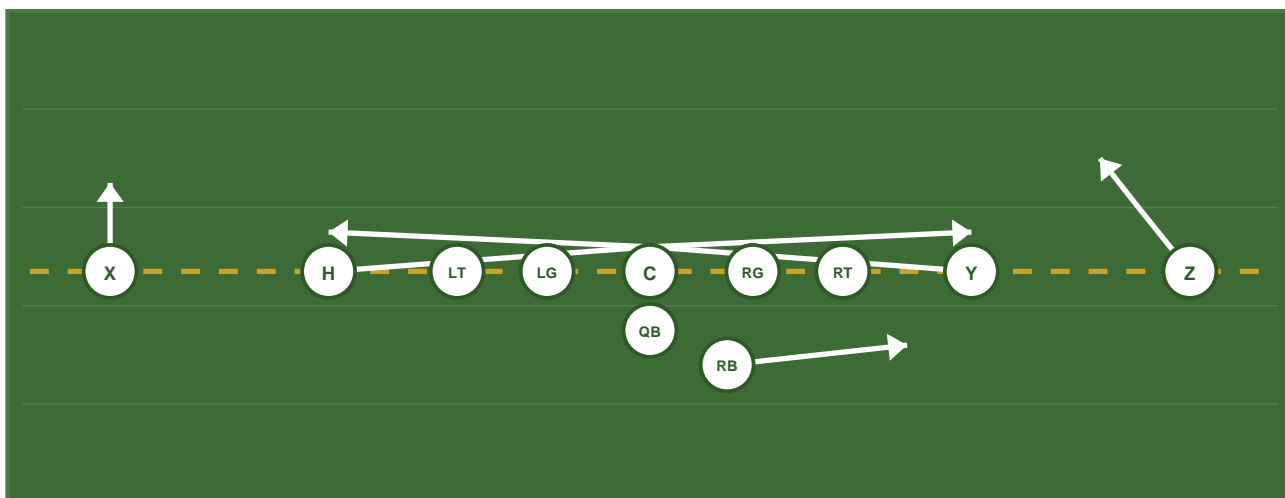


Zone Read

- QB: Eyes on the backside DE through the mesh.
- RB: Run inside zone track regardless of give/keep.
- Backside OT: Skip the DE — he is the read key.
- If DE squeezes: QB keeps. If DE sits or widens: QB gives.

Mesh Concept

Two receivers run shallow crossing routes from opposite sides, creating a natural pick. A third receiver runs a choice or sit route over the top. The QB reads high-to-low: choice route first, then the two crossers underneath. Effective against both man and zone coverage.

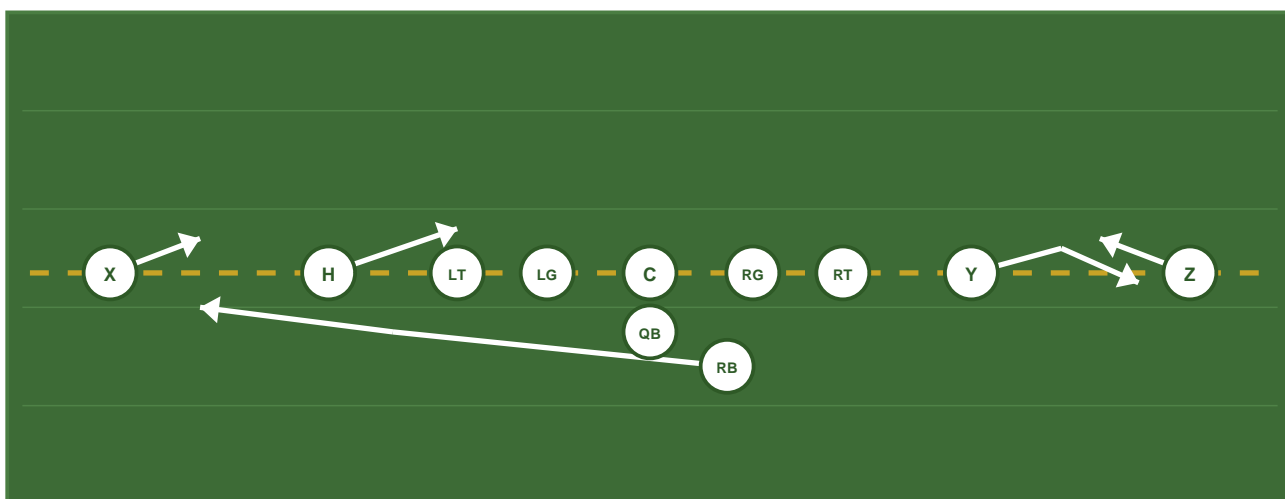


Mesh Concept

- Slot WRs: Cross at 5-6 yards, run full speed through traffic.
- Outside WR: Sit or choice route at 10-12 yards.
- QB: High-low read. If choice is covered, find the crosser in the window.
- Hot route if blitz: throw to the crosser coming toward pressure.

Spacing Concept

Five receivers distribute across three levels of the field in the short-to-intermediate range. The spacing stretches zone defenders by placing receivers in every window. The QB works a simple left-to-right or triangle read.

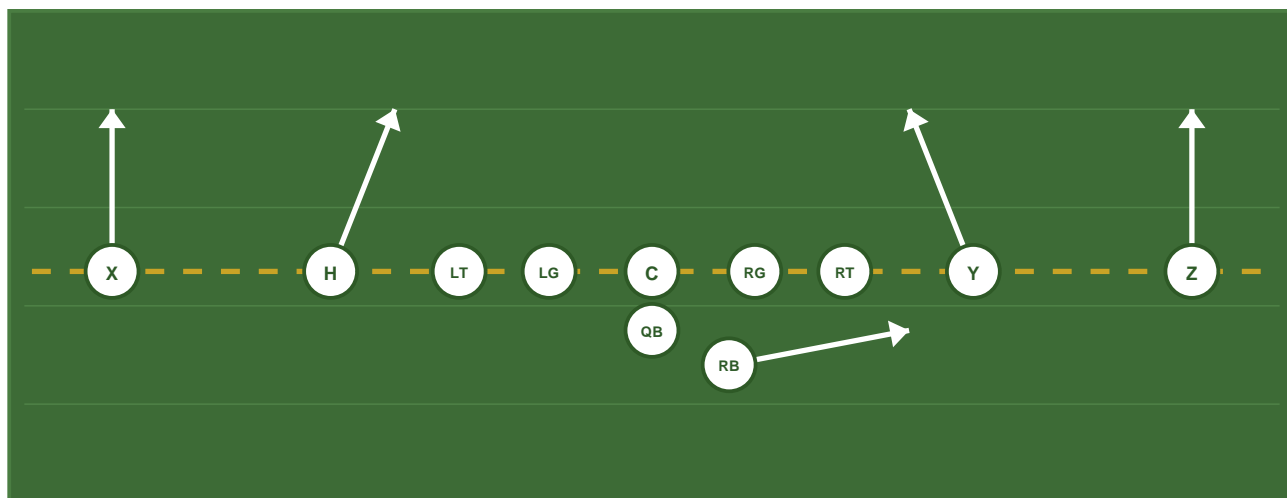


Spacing Concept

- Receivers settle in the open windows of zone coverage.
- QB: Identify the triangle — work high-to-low, inside-to-outside.
- Against man coverage, receivers create natural separation with spacing.
- Great answer to heavy blitz packages.

Four Verticals

All four wide receivers push vertical, stretching the secondary deep. The running back check-releases into the flat as a safety valve. Designed to attack Cover 2 by splitting the safeties and Cover 3 by overloading the deep thirds.

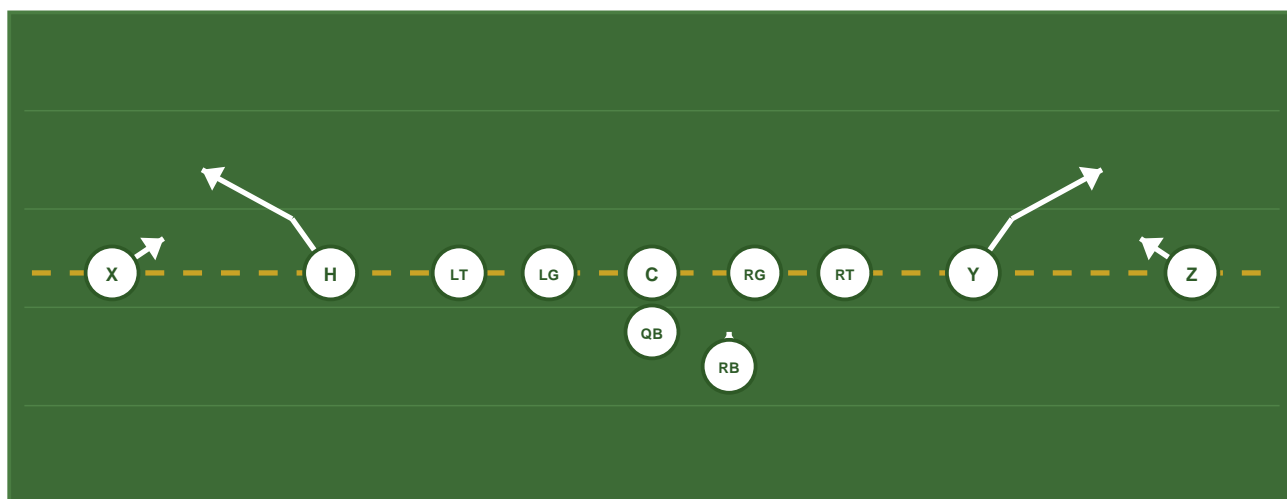


Four Verticals

- Outside WRs: Win vertical on the outside, threaten the deep third.
- Slot WRs: Push the seam, read safeties — sit if Cover 2, run by if Cover 3.
- QB: Read the safeties post-snap. Two-high: throw the seam. One-high: throw the post.
- RB: Block first, release to flat if clean.

Smash Concept

A hitch-corner combination that attacks Cover 2 by putting the flat defender in conflict. The outside receiver runs a 5-yard hitch while the slot runs a 12-yard corner route behind the dropping CB. The QB reads the flat defender.

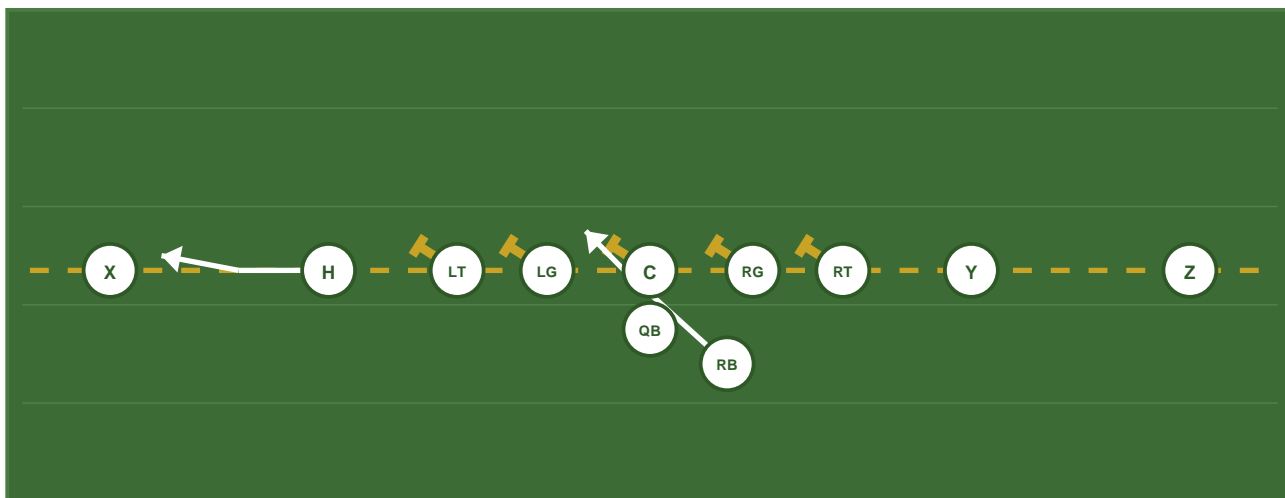


Smash Concept

- Outside WR: Hitch at 5 yards, show your numbers to the QB.
- Slot WR: Stem inside, break on the corner route at 12 yards.
- QB: Read the flat defender. If he squats on the hitch, throw the corner.
- Deadly against Cover 2 shells.

Bubble RPO

An inside zone run paired with a bubble screen read. The QB reads the flat defender or overhang player pre-snap and post-snap. If the defender is in the box, throw the bubble. If he is wide, hand off inside zone.

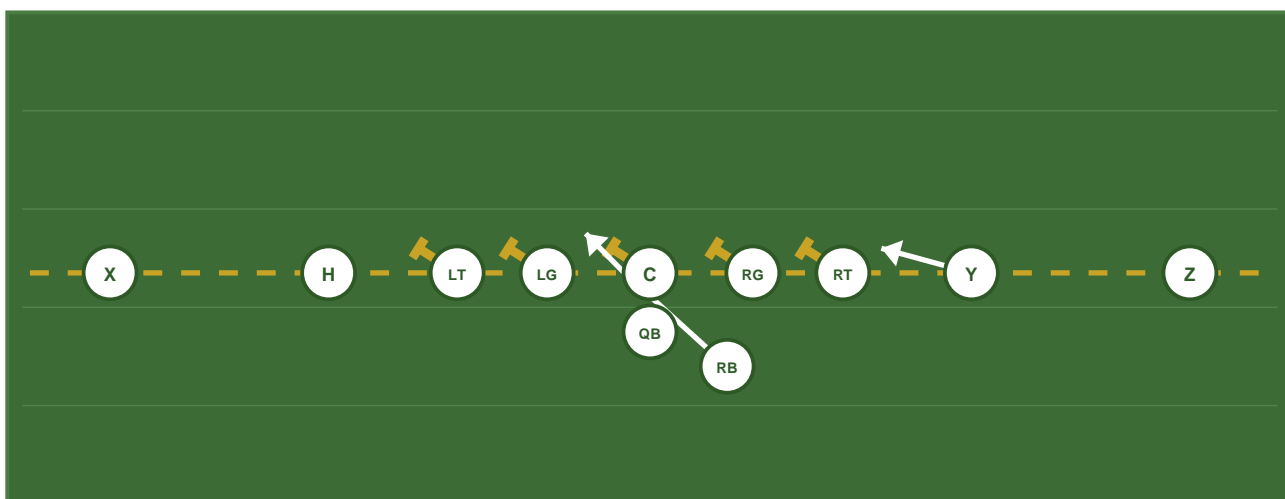


Bubble RPO

- QB: Pre-snap count box defenders vs. blockers.
- If box is loaded (6+ in box): throw the bubble.
- If overhang player is wide: hand off inside zone.
- Slot WR: Be ready for the quick bubble — catch and get upfield.

Glance RPO

An inside zone run combined with a glance route by the slot receiver. The QB reads the linebacker. If the LB steps up to play the run, the QB pulls and throws the glance to the vacated area. If the LB drops, the QB gives the handoff.

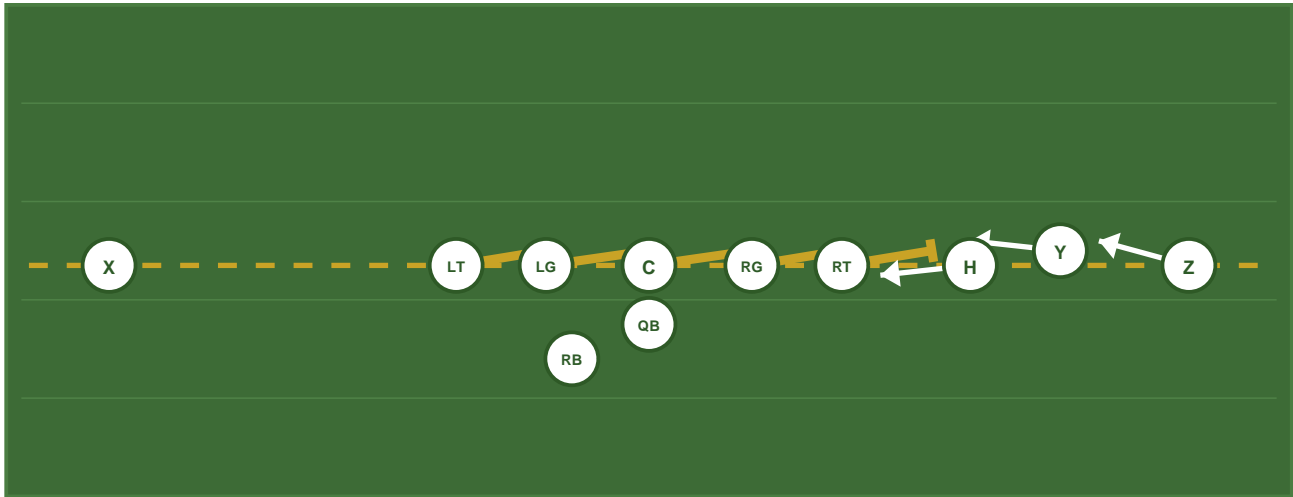


Glance RPO

- Slot WR: Run the glance (1-step slant) at the snap.
- QB: Mesh with RB; eyes on the LB. Pull and throw if LB fills.
- OL: Block inside zone — do not tip the RPO.
- Timing must be quick — this is a 1-step throw.

Tunnel Screen

A quick perimeter screen designed to get the ball in space. The slot receiver catches a short throw behind the LOS while the outside WR and the pulling lineman create a wall of blockers. Best called against aggressive pass rushes.

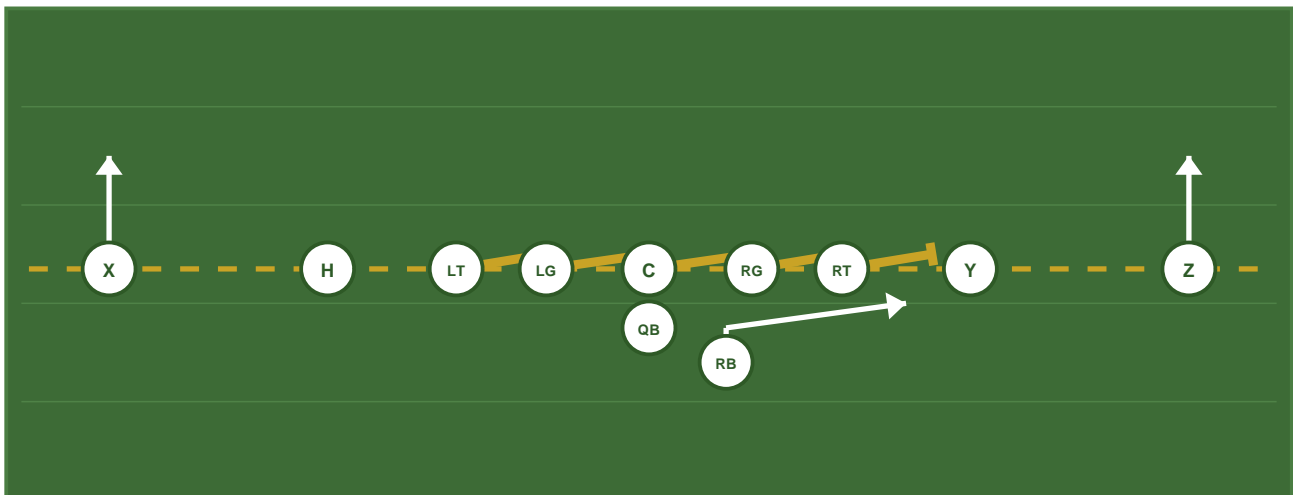


Tunnel Screen

- Slot WR: Settle behind the LOS, catch and follow the wall.
- Outside WR: Block the nearest DB aggressively.
- OL: Sell pass block for 1 count, then release to screen side.
- QB: Quick 1-step throw. Ball must come out fast.

Jailbreak Screen

A delayed screen to the running back. The OL initially pass sets, allowing defenders upfield, then releases into space as blockers. The RB fakes a block, then leaks to the flat for the catch. Creates a numbers advantage at the second level.

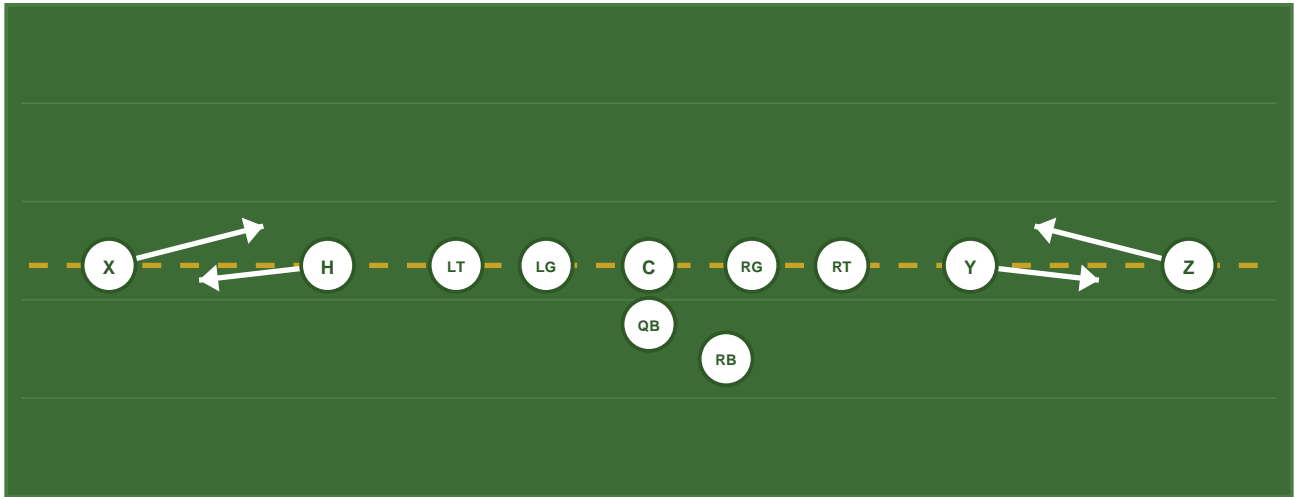


Jailbreak Screen

- OL: Pass set for 2 counts, let rush go, then get downfield.
- RB: Fake blitz pickup, slip to the flat. Expect the ball at the LOS.
- QB: Sell the deep look, then dump to RB.
- WRs: Run deep routes to pull DBs out of the screen area.

Quick Slant-Flat

A 2-man combination on either side. The outside WR runs a quick slant at 3-5 yards while the slot or RB runs to the flat. The QB reads the flat defender — if he drops, throw the flat; if he drives on the flat, throw the slant behind him.



Quick Slant-Flat

- Outside WR: Quick slant, 3 steps and break inside. Catch in stride.
- Slot/RB: Push to the flat immediately. Be a clear target.
- QB: Pre-snap identify the flat defender. React to his movement post-snap.
- Great answer to man and zone blitzes.

Quick Reference / Glossary

RPO

Run-Pass Option. A play where the QB can hand off or throw based on a post-snap read of a specific defender.

Mesh Point

The moment when the QB and RB come together for the handoff or keep decision on a zone read.

Overhang

A defender (usually OLB or SS) aligned between the box and the slot receiver, responsible for both run support and short pass coverage.

Tempo

The pace at which the offense operates. Fast tempo prevents defensive substitutions and adjustments.

Shotgun

QB alignment 5-6 yards behind center, receives the ball via a direct snap.

Pistol

QB alignment 3-4 yards behind center with the RB directly behind the QB.

Zone Step

Lateral first step by the OL toward the play-side, initiating zone blocking scheme.

10 Personnel

1 RB, 0 TEs, 4 WRs on the field.

11 Personnel

1 RB, 1 TE, 3 WRs on the field.

Stalk Block

A WR blocks a DB at the perimeter, maintaining inside leverage and mirroring the defender.