

Skaven Playbook -Shooting the gap

By Tom Picard (Garion)

INTRODUCTION

Skaven are one of the fastest teams in the game, capable of moving the ball from one end zone to the other with ease. They are generally thought of as a finesse team because of their Gutter Runners' but their Blitzers' and Rat Ogre give the team a real punch as well. They are a very versatile team capable of switching their tactics at any point in the game to get the win, and while they will lose players most games they can still function very effectively on the pitch when reduced to a handful of players. Unlike bashy teams Skaven can fall back on plan B or C if plan A is not going to plan, so no matter how bad things seem to be getting a win is almost always within reach.

What makes Skaven so special is their Gutter Runners; 4 players with Ma 9, Dodge and Ag4 means any mistake or bad luck from your opponent can be exploited with a ruthless efficiency and their main strength and tactic is to just go for the ball and 'Shoot the Gap'.

SKAVEN'S PHILOSOPHY

"Shooting the gap is a term used in American football. To "shoot the gap", a defensive lineman will exploit the space between the offensive linemen. Shooting the gaps requires the defensive lineman to turn his shoulders and get past the offensive line into the backfield by any means possible, usually by diving through the gap. The play is often used during a blitz, as the defense will try to rush past the offensive line in order to get to the quarterback and cause a quarterback sack." (Quote taken from Wiki)

GENERAL TACTICS

Before I go into Skaven's general tactics I should point out that information relating to the use of the Rat Ogre is going to be sparse, I don't use them very often or like them for reasons you will read later. So this playbook will focus mainly on what I consider to be a purist's way of playing Skaven.

When playing with Skaven I always like to kick first. The reasons I do this are – I like a full strength team on the field when defending which you cannot guarantee you will have in the second half if you opt to receive first. I also like to know what I need to do in order to win the game when I receive in the second half. If I find that I am 1-0 down by half time then I can score a quick touch down in one or two turns then go for the win.

Although Skaven can score anytime with ease, managing the clock and stalling till turn 8 to score is a lot harder than a quick score, so trying to get the game won in the first half alleviates a lot of pressure from you in the second half. If you opt to kick first then successfully get the ball off your opponent and score to make the score 1-0 at half time with you receiving in the second half then you can just score your quick touch down to make it 2-0 and the game is over by the second turn in the second half. Then you just need to run down the clock while your opponent is trying to pull one back and you may be able to get a few more touchdowns as your opponent tries increasingly risky plays in order to tie the game.

So how do you achieve this game plan? Well it all really boils down to focussing on the ball and shooting the gap - exploiting any holes in your opponent's defence to pressurise the ball carrier. Get to your opponents ball carrier as quickly as possible and your opponent will be in trouble.

Typically I use an asymmetrical set up when defending (more on this later) and use Kick to kick the ball deep into the opponent's half. If successful you will immediately put your opponent on the back foot. This is especially useful against any slow teams like Dwarves, Chaos Dwarves, Nurgle etc... They will be forced into making a decision in their very first turn. 1 – Do they retreat with a large number of their players and make a cage deep in their own half to protect the ball carrier. 2 – Do they try a risky pass and catch to the centre of the pitch where they can then set up a cage further up the field to protect their ball carrier. 3 – Leave their ball carrier isolated at the back of the pitch with the ball but out of reach of the Gutter Runners. None of these are options that bashy teams really want to take. They want the ball in the middle of the field in a tight cage as quickly as possible, and attempting to achieve this in their first turn may lead to mistakes and the possibility of the ball carrier being left exposed or failing a pass or catch. These are the exact sort of situations that Skaven can exploit with ruthless efficiency. This tactic will not work as well against high agility teams for obvious reasons: Firstly they are perfectly happy to sit deep in their half with the ball until they want to score. They can also throw the ball back to the middle of the pitch and set up a cage with ease, because of this it can be a good idea in the first turn of the game to use Kick to kick the ball as near to half way line as possible preferably in one of the wide zones. This means it will be easier to pressurise their ball carrier early on in the game unless the elf team you are playing decides to throw the ball back to one of their players who then retreats deep into their own half. Either way this tactic will have little effect on high agility teams.

Against any teams with Ag3 or less the key to getting to the ball is spreading your opponent's players out and try and stop a cage from forming. Use your Linemen and Gutter Runners to draw all your opponent's players away from each other. If you are successful in doing this then your opponent will have a far tougher time protecting their ball carrier and your Lineman can happily sit man marking a player all half without having to make a block. This will force your opponent to either one dice block your lineman or choose to commit a second player to the block so that they can get a 2 dice block. Both are good for you because if they leave their players one on one with your linemen then they are one player down for protecting the ball carrier and your Linemen shouldn't get knocked prone too often. If they commit a second player to a block away from the ball carrier then it opens up more space for you to attack the ball. Again this tactic is best used against the slower low agility teams. Against high agility teams it will be less successful because they can dodge away from players tying them up and reform their offence however they like.

Another good tactic to use is jockeying your opponent's cage because with Av7 on most of the team you cannot charge straight in and start man marking everyone. Jockeying is a term used in football whereby a defender does not commit him self to a tackle but instead gives the opponent player a yard of space and cuts off his angles forcing him down the route the defender wants him to go - usually towards the side lines so the player runs out of space and needs to change their approach. To do this in Bloodbowl keep your players one square away from the cage at all times and shepherd the cage towards one of the side lines so that your opponent runs out of space, limiting your opponent to one Blitz a turn and no Blocks if possible. This is a perfect tactic to use if you do have a Rat Ogre in your team because when you find your self in this sort of position the Rat Ogre can usually both halt the cage in its tracks and also surf players with Frenzy if the opportunity arises. Again the main aim of this tactic is to force your opponent's ball carrier into breaking away from the cage in a desperate attempt to score leaving him self exposed which is where your Gutter Runners can really make the difference.

If your opponent does not let their cage open up at any time during the drive then you will need to switch tactics. As always blitzing away the corners of the cage and applying a tackle zone to the ball carrier is a good tactic. This is one of the few times where you might leave one of your Gutter

Runners in an opponent players tackle zone at the end of a turn, but only do this with your Blodge SS Gutter Runner. Moving him along side your Blitzzer into the heart of the cage to add extra pressure on the ball carrier can cause big problems for your opponent and can completely stop their cage in its tracks. Once you get yourself in this sort of position then it can be a good idea to apply tackle zones to the other corners of the cage with your linemen and tie up any killer players (MB, PO, Tackle) with your worthless linemen as well so that your Gutter Runners' remain protected. Once you are in this position you should be able to either grind your opponents cage to a stand still for the remainder of the half or force them to make blocks with all members of the cage in an attempt to free the ball carrier. You may well take some casualties here but that is fine as long as the end result is that your opponent moves his ball carrier away from the cage and away from all the congestion that has built up. When done properly this will mean your opponent has left his more secure cage and tried to set up another cage elsewhere. It will often be the case that they have weakened their defences significantly and once that occurs - it is time to strike.

The final course of action once all else fails is to use your Wrestle, Strip Ball Gutter Runner to dodge into a cage on a 5+ and negative 2 dice block your opponent's ball carrier. This is pretty much a last gasp attempt but the odds are still surprisingly good. There is a 55% chance of successfully dodging into the cage because of the free Re-roll Dodge gives you and a 90% chance that a negative 2 dice block will successfully free the ball up if you have a Re-roll. This is of course providing your opponent is not carrying the ball with a player with Sure Hands. The chances of pulling this off are further increased if you get your Gutter Runner Leap as well. I usually try and attempt this once quite early in the half to see if I get lucky and when it is still early enough that it doesn't matter if I fail and also as a last gasp attempt to stop the score.

Other general tactics you should think about while playing:

- When your linemen are prone and in tackle zones it is often best just to leave them on the floor. If standing them will gain you no benefit tactically then leave them down. This way they will live longer.
- Use your killer Blitzers (MB, PO, Tackle, Claw) to try and get a numerical advantage, target your opponents players with tackle and take them out first. If you can remove all your opponent's tacklers from the field then half the battle is won.
- Do not use Pilling On if it is going to leave your Blitzzer isolated and on the floor, he will get fouled and if you lose your Blitzzer's you will be in trouble. So when using Pilling On make sure that you have enough linemen free that can move around him when he is lying prone so he can avoid being fouled.
- Try and use your Blitz action to free up your Linemen, that way you will not need to make as many 3+ dodges each turn.
- When dodging with linemen save this action till the end of the turn and weigh up the need to dodge - generally speaking if your linemen is being marked by a player with MB and PO you should try and dodge because failing the dodge has less chance of injuring you statically. If you are in just one tackle zone then just leave the player alone but do not 1 dice block with him, you are better off just leaving him standing and tying up and opponent players.
- If you play with 3 Gutter Runners when defending leave one further back in your half to pick up any players that try and break through your defences for the touch down. Use the other 2 to pressurise the ball carrier
- If you play with 4 Gutter Runners when defending leave one further back for defending as described above. Also leave one Gutter Runner away from the action within range of scoring so if the ball pops free you can pounce on it pass the ball to the free Gutter Runner and score.
- When playing against versatile teams like Humans, Norse etc who have fast hard hitting players. Try and tie those players up and draw them away from your Gutter Runners and the ball carrier.
- Spread out bashy teams players and stop a cage from forming.

STARTING ROSTERS TV 1000k

2	Blitzers	180k
4	Gutter Runners	320k
1	Thrower	70k
4	Linemen	200k
3	Re-rolls	180k
1	Apothecary	50k
Total		1,000k

Starting with all 4 Gutter Runners and both Blitzers is a must they are what makes the team tick and starting with less than 4 Gutter Runners will just slow your team's development down. 3 Re-rolls is more than enough for a starting team with such a good balance of starter skills and an apothecary is needed in case anything should happen to one of your key players. This is the only starting roster I would ever consider using, you have all the players you will ever need from the first game apart from a couple more Linemen for back up when your players start dropping. After your roster has reached 13 players then get a 4th Re-roll and then you can just save up your money for the day when you lose a number of key players, this way you will be able to replace them comfortably. Once you have a surplus supply of money then you can replace your injured linemen as you see fit. Always make sure you have enough money left over to replace a Gutter Runner though in case something should happen to them.

A slight variation on the above roster is to drop another Re-roll and buy an extra Lineman instead but in my opinion that leave you a little short on Re-rolls and Linemen are easy to replace but saving for another Re-roll can be more difficult with such a fragile team.

Another slight variation on this build is to drop the Thrower in place of a lineman and the drop the Apothecary as well which means you can afford an extra Re-roll. Personally I don't like playing without a thrower as he adds another dimension to the Skaven game plan. Also 3 Re-rolls is enough for a starter team 4 is really not required especially when your team already has so many useful starter skills.

2	Gutter Runners	160k
2	Blitzers	180k
1	Thrower	70k
5	Linemen	250k
1	Rat Ogre	160k
2	Rerolls	120k
1	Apothecary	50k

This starting roster means that you start with 2 less Gutter Runners so you can start with a Rat Ogre. You also have to lose a Re-roll and have an extra Lineman to make room for the Big Guy. Personally I don't like this roster 2 Re-rolls leaves little room for error and losing 2 Gutter Runners means you have give up two of your most reliable and important players in place for a very unreliable Big Guy. Starting with the Rat Ogre does have some benefits; it increases your teams hitting power significantly, especially at a low TV and gives your team a greater ability for tying players up which leaves more room for the rest of your team to exploit.

PLAYERS

Blitzers

Skaven Blitzers provide the much needed muscle and support to the Skaven team; with access to strength skills they can and should be built to as support players and also as high impact players -

developed to cause as much damage as possible to the opponent's team as quickly as possible. With Av 8 they have the highest Av in the team and can absorb some punishment that other players on the team cannot. Because of this opponents tend to focus their blocks and blitzes on the Linemen and Gutter Runners because of their low Av and the threat that Gutter Runners pose. As a result your Blitzers tend to stay on the field for a relatively long time despite posing a big threat to your opponent.

Blitzers are key players in your team and you should waste no opportunity to get them SPP as early in your team's development as possible, try and get them to score touchdowns every chance an opportunity arises if it is safe to do so and use their access to St skills to cause as many casualties as possible. A Skaven team with two highly developed Blitzers can make Skaven a truly hard hitting team despite being a finesse team at heart.



Single rolls

Mighty Blow, Tackle, Pilling On, Guard, Grab, Fend

Or

Guard, Tackle, Mighty Blow, Pilling On, Fend, Grab

Double rolls

Claw, Horns, Jump Up, Dodge,

Stat increase

+St, +Ag,

I only really develop Blitzers in the two ways shown above. Initially making one the killer and one the support player. But they both essentially end up with the same skill set. Claw is always the first double I would take as it adds an extra punch to the team and helps level the playing field when playing against heavy hitting teams like Dwarves and Orcs who were traditionally always tricky for Skaven to deal with at a high TV. Horns, Jump Up and Dodge are all good choices for doubles as well, but generally speaking I feel that their normal skills are more important so often ignore any other doubles. The final two skills I would give my Blitzer are Fend and Grab, Fend prevents your opponents from being able to use Pilling On against you therefore increasing your Blitzers chances of survival significantly and Grab helps you create space for your team mates, sets up crowd surfs, negates Side Step and most importantly makes scoring one turn touchdowns with your Gutter Runners a lot easier. It might be a very cheap tactic but it works so well it is very hard to ignore it. Grab also negates the use of Fend when you want to use Pilling On, so even though you cannot follow up the block you can still use Grab to place the blocked opponent player in an adjacent square to you then Pile On.



Throwers



Skaven throwers are in a minority of throwers that are actually very useful. First of all they have the highest starting Ma of any throwers in the game along with Wood Elf throwers also they start with two very useful skills in Pass and Sure Hands. Their high Ma enables them to sit deep in your half with the ball out of reach from your opponent's Blitzers until you want to make a pass or hand off. That said I still do not see the need for taking two. One thrower is all you need in a Skaven team another one will just increase your TV unnecessarily albeit a small amount but it all adds up. Also having two throwers on the field at the same time isn't advantageous in any way because one of them will ultimately just end up functioning as a lineman anyway. Some coaches like taking two Throwers and using one for each drive, a specialist thrower with skills like Accurate, Safe Throw, Strong Arm and Nerves of Steel and then another thrower that is used for defending with skills like Block, Extra Arms, Big Hand, Two Heads for picking up loose balls and making a quick pass for a quick break away. Although I

understand the reasoning behind using these two builds and the added options they bring to the team, it is not something I like doing for a few reasons. First of all the second build (the ball retriever) relies on a number of double rolls to make him truly effective in this roll. Also Gutter Runners are perfectly proficient at this roll even at a rookie level. But most of all I do not see the benefit in increasing your teams TV by developing a player that you only intend on using for half the game. It is an unnecessary TV bloat and keeping your TV down so your more important players (Blitzers and Gutter Runners) can max out on skills is an important part of Skaven team management. Furthermore I also feel that using a more basic build of thrower that can play both halves in different roles (thrower/ball carrier when receiving and lineman when kicking) benefits the team in a greater way.

Many Skaven coaches feel that you do not really need a thrower at all because of the Gutter Runners high Ag and Ma means they can do the job of a thrower just as well if not better anyway. But the Thrower does come with some added perks. First of all they have access to Passing skills so they can take Leader early on in place of an extra Re-roll which will help you keep your teams TV down. They can also have Accurate which means they are able to make quick passes on a 2+ with a free Re-roll and on a double they can take Extra Arms to make their ability to pick the ball up 2+ and also helps them to functions as a back up catcher (catching on a 2+). Another good double to take on them is Dodge; this means after two skills you could have a Blodge, Sure Hands ball carrier which can be invaluable when playing against opponents like Slann or Wood Elves who are likely to have players with Leap and Strip Ball. I always recommend taking Leader as one of the first two skills no matter which development route you go down with your Thrower because an extra Re-roll for a small TV increase of 20k is very useful, also Throwers tend not to get too involved in the action anyway if it can be helped.

Single rolls

Block, Leader, Accurate,

Or

Accurate, Leader, Block

Other Skills

Nerves of Steel, Safe Throw

Double rolls

Dodge, Strong arm, Extra Arms

Stat increase

+Ag, +Ma

Gutter Runners



Gutter Runners are among the elite of the game, they are right up there with the very best players in Bloodbowl. They are the fastest players in the game and start with Ma 9, Ag4 and Dodge. Despite having huge targets on their head opponents will have a surprisingly tough time hurting them, they are very hard to pin down because of how high their Ma is and Ag 4 plus Dodge means that tying them up is very difficult. They are surprisingly resilient because they are one skill away from obtaining Blodge or Wrestle Dodge coverage and even though your opponents will focus a lot of energy every turn trying to pin them down, Blitz them and Foul them at every opportunity this will just leave you more room for your Linemen, Thrower and Blitzers to exploit. Gutter Runners are remarkably cheap and they are the heart and sole of any good Skaven team and getting them skilled up is incredibly easy.

As discussed earlier in this playbook you need to be careful not let your Gutter Runners absorb all the SPP which is easy to do, you also need to focus on getting your Thrower skilled up and most importantly get your Blitzers scoring as well. So make sure you spread the SPP out especially to your Blitzers.

To make full use of your Gutter Runners you will need to develop them in all in slightly different ways; some of them to harass the ball carrier, another to specialise in sacking the opponent ball carrier, another to specialise in capitalising on loose balls, one of them needs to be your primary ball handler and you can also develop one to specialise in one turn touchdowns. If you get to a stage when all 4 of them are well developed with a wide variety of skills at their disposal then they are an absolute menace to any opponent and will win you most of your games singlehandedly.

Surprisingly Gutter Runners biggest strength is in defending. Despite it being easy to score in two turns or even one, it is their ability to harass opponent's ball carriers in to dropping the ball and then running away with it that makes them truly exceptional players.

Below are some of the most common types of build for Gutter Runners as you will notice each of them have a few skills that cross over with the other builds, this is so if you lose a Gutter Runner you will have another player that can perform the same role in your team so you will not be totally reliant on one Gutter Runner for each type of role

Ball Sacker

Single rolls

Wrestle, Strip Ball, Dauntless, Tackle, Leap, Side Step, Diving Tackle,

Stat increase

+St, +Ag, +Ma

Double rolls

Horns, Two Heads, Guard

The job of this type of Gutter Runner is to sack your opponent's ball carrier. With Wrestle and Strip ball you have a 98% chance of successfully forcing the opponent to drop the ball on a 2 dice block providing that player does not have Sure Hands, however it is always



going to be very hard to achieve a 2 dice block with a Gutter Runner or even a 1 dice block before you get Dauntless or Horns. But even if it is a negative 2 dice block with a Re-roll against a player with no Sure Hands then you still have a 90% chance of successfully forcing him to drop the ball. Horns is a very good early skill to take on a double because it means you will increase your St by one when blitzing but if you have already taken Dauntless then do not bother with Horns and Instead give your ball sacker Two Heads or Guard. Guard is a good choice because you can never have too much Guard and it is also useful to have a player with Guard that can keep up with your other Gutter Runners and offer them a little protection. Two Heads is also useful, as it increase your chances of dodging into a cage and getting to the ball carrier. Gutter Runners can Dodge into a typical cage on a 5+ (into 3 tackle zone), as Gutter Runners already start with Dodge that means there is a 55% chance of successfully pulling off this action. It is not something I would recommend doing every turn. But if you are out of any other options then it is something nice to fall back on in desperate times. It is also particularly useful if your opponent sets up a Side Line half cage and leaves their ball carrier next to the sideline, in that circumstance I will often man mark the cage players and try and dodge into the cage to surf the ball carrier.

Later skills include Tackle for when you will be facing more players with Sure Hands and Blodge at a higher TV, Diving Tackle for exerting extra pressure on the ball carrier when man marking him and Leap which makes breaking in to a cage even easier.



Man Marker

Single rolls

Block, Side Step, Diving Tackle, Shadowing, Tackle, Pass Block,

Double rolls

Guard, Prehensile Tail

Stat increase

+St, +Ag, +Ma

The primary function of this Gutter Runner is to harass your opponent, get in his face, and force him to making an error. SS and Shadowing means he will be very hard to shake off and when your opponent gets lucky and you fail your Shadowing Roll you have Diving Tackle to fall back on which means they will have a -2 modifier when trying to dodge away from you. Block is preferred over Wrestle on this build as it allows you to stay on your feet on a both down roll if an opponent tries to block you away from the player you are marking. Pass Block also adds another Dimension to this player type; with good positioning it enables you to try and man mark the intended target of the pass, even if you fail the interception then the opponent player will have a -1 modifier to catch the ball because of the Gutter Runner's tackle zone and they will also have a player with Diving Tackle and Shadowing to overcome.

On double rolls Guard is a good choice because this player should hopefully be next to or near to the opponent ball carrier a lot and Prehensile Tail is another good choice as it adds another modifier on to a dodge roll your opponent tries to make, combined with Diving Tackle this means a player dodging away from this Gutter Runner would have a -3 modifier to their dice roll.

Ball Retrieve/Carrier

Single rolls

Block, Sure Hands, Side Step, Fend, Diving Tackle, Strip Ball

Double rolls

Big Hand, Two Heads,

Stat increase

+St, +Ag, +Ma

A ball retriever Gutter Runner is a very important role in the team and all Gutter Runners are capable of performing this roll no matter which skill selection path they have gone down and even at rookie level they are very good at this job.

However devoting one to retrieving the ball is no bad thing.

Choosing Block over Wrestle makes him a more reliable ball carrier. Sure Hands gives a free Re-roll when trying to pick the ball up which can be very useful - especially when picking it up when the ball is in multiple tackle zones. It is certainly not a skill that everyone would give to a Gutter Runner but it a skill I like to have on one of them in case I am playing against teams with Strip Ball players or Elf and Slann teams with Leap Strip Ball players. The other normal skills are fairly typical and just enable the Gutter Runner to perform other actions in the team as well like marking the ball carrier.

On doubles Big Hand is preferred so that you can pick the ball up on a 2+ anywhere, and Two Heads so you can dodge into tackle zones to retrieve a ball. Other useful skills worth considering are Leap so you can pick the ball up then escape from a tight spot then get the ball to safety, and Jump Up also has its uses in case you get sacked while carrying the ball.



One Turn Touchdown Specialist

Single rolls

Block or Wrestle, Side Step, Sure Feet, Sprint,

Double rolls

Two Heads, Nerves of Steel

Stat increase

+Ag, +Ma

Going out of my way to make a one turn touchdown specialist is not something I have ever really done with any race. So I would still always take Block or Wrestle as the first skill with this Gutter Runner so he is useful throughout the game and not just for a one off set play. Sidestep Sure Feet and Sprint all making pulling off the one turn touchdown more likely. On doubles Two Heads means most of your dodges will be reduced to 2+ rolls when trying to score a one turn touchdown and Nerves of Steel makes catching the ball when in tackle zones on the LoS a lot easier.

Linemen



Skaven linemen are pretty useless, cheap and expendable like all good linemen should be. They are very fast which has its uses but with Ag 3 they can't escape tackle zones with any reliability and they can't get Agility skills unless they roll doubles so Dodge isn't on the cards either. I generally like to keep my Linemen down to 2 skills at most so they do not inflate my teams TV, which isn't too hard as they die very quickly anyway. I find it is generally best to keep a few in reserves at all times so that when you drop in numbers you have back up. Skaven Linemen really are pretty hopeless but they do have their uses mainly getting in the way and tying opponent players up while your Gutter Runners and Blitzers do all the work.

Their main use above all else is the ability to use Kick. Kicking deep into your opponents half for their drive means that your opponent will start on the back foot which is especially useful against slow teams. It will force slow teams to either retreat deep into their half to form a cage (what a good coach will do) or try and pick the ball up and throw it down field to another one of their players (what a poor coach will do) or just leave their player isolated with the ball deep in their half.



Apart from choosing Kick the only other builds I bother with are giving Block or Wrestle to a lineman and then Fend.

There is also the option of giving dirty player to a couple of your line rats but I generally find that I am too low on numbers pretty fast to start fouling on a whim anyway.

On double rolls I would always go for Guard on my linemen and then Dodge if they are lucky enough to live till they get a second double. On Stat increases I would ignore all of them with the exception of +Ag because that extra agility makes them reliable for escaping tackle zones and regrouping, and it makes protecting your Gutter Runners easier and will mean he lives longer too and may even turn into quite a good player one day.



Rat Ogre



The Rat Ogre is quite a heavily debated player, many coaches me included do not like to take one at all at any point in the teams development, others swear by them insisting they are required for cage breaking etc, and other coaches sit in-between and would rather not start with one but will hire one once their team has already achieved a high TV.

The positives of using a Rat Ogre are, he adds extra St to your team, some extra hitting power and can tie up opponents quite well. He is also useful for breaking open cages and sticking a tackle zone on the ball carrier because with St5 and Prehensile Tail he can cause a few head aches for the opposition. He is especially useful against low Av teams like Amazons, Norse, Vampires, Skaven, and Elves to a lesser extent. Prehensile Tail means he can exert a little pressure on players that want to dodge away from him, but once elf teams

reach a high TV this will not worry them much; also if the Rat Ogre doesn't yet have Stand Firm then players with block can comfortably negative 2 dice block him away from them.

The negatives are – he is extremely expensive and increases your teams TV a lot which could be better used making your Blitzers, Gutter Runners and Throwers even better players, or for milking the inducements. He is not very reliable at all, Wild Animal means unless you are Blitzing/Blocking with him every turn he will spend large portions of the game doing nothing and Loner means you cannot reliably re-roll any failed rolls he makes. Av 8 is also very low for a Big Guy and against bashy teams they will quickly have him on the floor or off the field. Another negative I have found when playing with him is you do tend to over rely on him for cage breaking and when he fails every action he does (which will happen to everyone at some point) then you are left with very few options left. If you do not take him then your Gutter Runners and Blitzers should be built for dealing with cages and getting to the ball carrier. In my opinion they are much more reliable at this role despite only being St2 and St3 players and as a Skaven purist I feel that the Rat Ogre can actually detract from what Skaven do best which is 'Shooting the Gap'.

The skills choice is really down to personal preference with a Rat Ogre there is no right or wrong way to develop him using the limited skills at his disposal. Below is the order that I would develop him.

Single rolls

Stand Firm, Guard, Juggernaut, Break Tackle, Pilling On

Double rolls

Block, Claw, Pro

Stat increase

+St

I like taking Stand Firm first because it works very well in tandem with Prehensile Tail; Guard is my second choice because it is the most effective skill when combined with Stand Firm for exerting pressure on cages. I also do not take Juggernaut until the third skill because it maximises my opportunities for getting Block first. However these are all good skills and no matter which order you take them in the end result will generally be the same.

STAR PLAYERS

Skaven have one of the best if not the best selection of star players out of any team in the game. All their star players have their uses and can bring something unique to the team's tactics and they have a nice varied price range too.

Fezglitch- 100k

Skaven do not get a chainsaw star player like most teams, instead their secret weapon player of choice is Fezglitch who wields a ball and chain. He is remarkably cheap considering the power of Ball and Chain but unfortunately like all players with Secret Weapon he will get sent off after a drive unless you have got a bribe and like goblin fanatics he can be very hit and miss.

He is armed with St7 and Foul Appearance which means blocking him will not really be an option for your opponent unless they are willing to tie up a large number of their own players which will leave space for you elsewhere to exploit. Disturbing Presence is also a very useful skill to have on a Skaven player because Gutter Runners thrive on the opponents inability to pick up loose balls and distribute them, so if you can manoeuvre Fezglitch in to an opponent's cage and force their ball carrier to drop the ball, then opponents players near him that manage to pick the ball up will not be comfortable distributing the ball. On a personal note I love Fezglitch for the madness he brings to the table, the fear in my opponents eyes when he starts moving and just the unadulterated fun of him, that said he can be a little useless sometimes if he continually misses everyone with his randomised movement.

I would recommend taking Fezglitch against the slower more bashy teams and avoid taking him against fast agile races because they can just score straight away and get him sent off. This can be useful because then you can take advantage of the quick score to try and score again that half and go for a winner the following half, however it is something of a waste of a star player and even if your opponent does not go for the quick score Fezglitch will have a tough time catching fast agile players anyway and disturbing Presence will have little use.



Skitter Stab-Stab - 160k

Skitter is essentially another Gutter Runner with a few nice perks. Firstly he has the ability to Stab which is a nice addition to the team and this in combination with Ma9, Shadowing and Prehensile Tail makes him an absolute pest for opponent ball carriers. Skitter is especially useful against faster more agile teams like the elf teams, Skaven, as well as the low Av teams like Vampire, Amazon, all of the Stunty teams and for picking off Lizardmen Skinks.

He does however have some fairly big weaknesses - first of all he is only St2 and Av7 which means he is very fragile. Dodge does help protect him a little but the lack of block or wrestle leaves him vulnerable especially to bashy team and any team that is at a mid - high TV. Also he does not have Side Step so as useful as Shadowing and Prehensile Tail is he is easily pushed away from the ball carrier and careful planning is required to make use of his skill set. Adding another player with only St2 to your roster means it is generally best to drop one of your regular Gutter Runners to the Bench if you are playing with a full roster otherwise you find your self too low on St to compete against a lot of races.



Hakflem Skuttlespike - 200k

Hakflem is another Gutter Runner star player with the added bonus of St3. He has Ag4 but with the added advantage of Extra Arms and Two Heads he essentially has Ag5 for the purposes of picking up loose balls and dodging. He also has Prehensile Tail which means he can be used to mark players and force opponents in to making modified dodge rolls however with no Side Step he can easily be pushed away and the lack of Block or Wrestle and Av7 does mean he is still quite fragile. He is one of Skaven's more versatile Star Players so can really be deployed against any of the races effectively, though he will usually live longer against the finesse teams.



Glart Smashrip Jr. - 210k



Glart is the Blitzer star player, with St4 he brings some much needed extra punch to the team and the combination of St4 and Claw makes him ideal for dealing with opponent Big Guys or oppositions strength 4 players (Chaos Warrior, Saurus, Black Orcs etc...). He is generally best employed against the bashy teams, reducing their Av to that of a lowly Skaven Lineman.

St4, Av8 and Block makes him useful for just getting in the way and tying up opponent players while your flair players run rings around the opponent. He also has Juggernaut which for a player with Block and no Frenzy means it does not get used very often. But it can still be useful from time to time as it does negate the use of Fend, Stand Firm and Wrestle when Blitzing and you can choose to ignore both down results and use a push back instead which is useful for freeing your players up as well as the occasional crowd surf.

Headsplitter - 340k

Boy is this guy expensive. He is essentially just a rookie Rat Ogre with +St, +Ag and the lack of Wild Animal. The loss of the negatrait Wild Animal is what makes him cost so much and while it is very nice knowing that your Rat Ogre will do what you tell him he still lacks Block coverage and that combined with the Loner skill means he can never be truly relied upon. As you can probably tell by now I am not a big fan of the Rat Ogre, Av8 on a big guy just leaves him too vulnerable for me especially with no Block and when any team can have Dauntless. Also there is the problem of choosing which type of team to play Headsplitter against, he isn't greatly effective against elf teams because by the time you can induce him they will probably be maxed out on Blodge and Side Step. He can help tie elf players up and make life tricky for them trying to dodge, but he does not have Stand Firm or Block so an opponent with Block can safely negative 2 dice block them self free every turn or dodge away. He also isn't greatly effective against bashy teams because they will usually have enough Guard, MB and PO by the time you can induce Headsplitter to make him seem quite feeble and they will quickly overpower him. However Headsplitter is best induced if you use a Rat Ogre in your regular roster. Two Frenzy Big Guys with Prehensile tail St5 and St6 will cause any team problems so if you like using Rat Ogres with Skaven then an additional one can be very effective. As said earlier I usually do not use a Rat Ogre and I would always rather induce Glart or one of the Gutter Runner star players and 2 Babes over Headsplitter, or Glart/Fezglitch and a Wizard if that option was available.



Morg 'n' Thorg - 430k

Morg n'Thorg is a beast and a player I love seeing on the field of play. However he is very expensive. St6 Block and Mighty Blow is a very nice skill combination to have and he can cause some real damage to your opponent's team. He is also an impassable object in a cage or screen and can tie up 3 or more players without trouble. However you will rarely have enough money to induce Morg 'n' Thorg and if you do then it might be more advantageous to induce a Wizard and another star player or two instead. If you have enough for Morg 'n' Thorg, a Wizard and more then go for it.



All pictures provided by Knut Rockie

SET UPS

Skaven are quite limited in how they can set up defensively, unfortunately they will always have to leave some of their key players open to a Blitz but minimising the opportunity to Blitz a Gutter Runner is the best you can hope for. Like all defensive set ups you should never put any players within two squares of the LoS in case the opponent gets quick snap on the kick off table which would allow the opponent to get extra blocks on you in their first turn. You also always want your Gutter Runners protected but close enough so that if Blitz is rolled on the kick off table then they can really take advantage of it. I always play with 4 Gutter Runners on the pitch on both offence and defence but dropping a Gutter Runner for another lineman when defending can be a good idea against some of the bashier teams like Orcs. Below are some set ups using both 3 and 4 Gutter Runners. All of the set ups below can be adapted to include a Rat Ogre by swapping a Thrower or a Lineman for the Rat Ogre. Never leave the Rat Ogre on the LoS when setting up defensively, this is a common rookie error and your opponent will immediately target this player for a block and a foul to try and get him off the field which will leave you a lot weaker for the rest of the game if they are successful.

Defensive Asymmetrical Setup



The asymmetrical set up is my preferred set up against all races with Skaven. The lineman in the centre of the field should have Kick so placing the ball deep in the opponents half can be done safely and can really start your opponent off on the back foot. Sometimes I swap the Kicker with the thrower if the thrower is still a rookie player, but once the thrower has got Leader then I prefer to keep that player further back and out of harms way until I have used the Leader Re-roll. I also sometimes leave the thrower with the Blitz in the wide zone depending on who the more developed player is. The benefits of this type of formation are it keeps your Gutter Runners safe and it encourages your opponent to try and exploit the huge gap you have left

for them at the bottom of the picture, this will not only make it easier to force your opponent into scoring an early touchdown but it also helps leave space in behind the opponents defence that can be exploited.

Note: Remember that kick is optional so if not using kick leaves the ball even deeper in the opponents half then opt not to use it.

Defensive setup vs fast teams

Fig1.

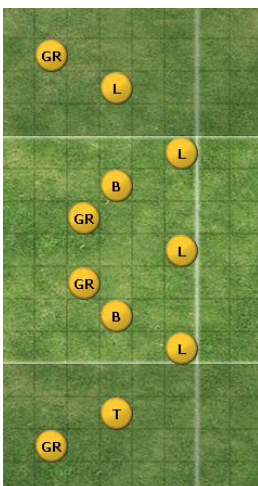
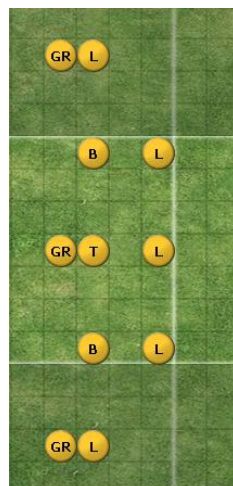
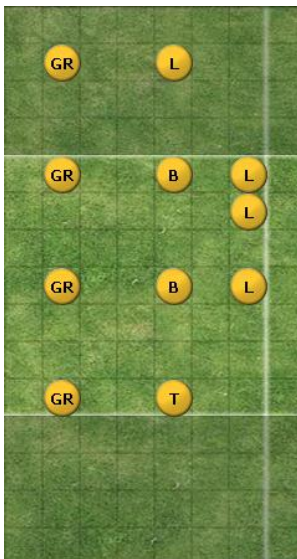


Fig2.



This type of set up is best deployed against fast teams to stop them getting their whole team behind your line of defence in one turn. It is also more useful than the Asymmetrical set if you are defending a 1 touchdown lead and there are only a few turns remaining. Fig1 set up leaves a number of your key players open to a Blitz in the first turn which I would always rather avoid if possible This type of set up is generally better to use if you only plan on using 3 Gutter Runners for defence and can be adapted as shown below in fig 2 which as you can see keeps your key players a lot safer

Anti – OTTD Set Up

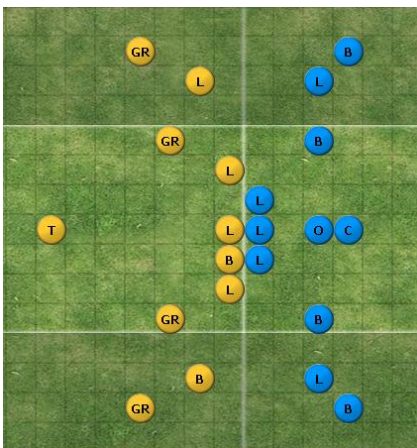


This is my preferred method of preventing opponents from scoring one turn touchdowns. Ideally your Gutter Runners will have Diving Tackle if you only have Diving Tackle on one or two put the first Diving Tackle player at the top and the second at the bottom. Also if your lineman has got Kick then switch the lineman with the Thrower so that you can kick the ball deep into the opponents half.

This set up will only work against those teams that are trying to achieve a OTTD via chain pushes. Against players like Gutter Runners with MA+, Sprint and Sure feet you are better off just lining your players up along the field so the player has to make 3 dodges.

If you have 3 Gutter Runners with Side Step then it could be best to line them up centrally on the LoS with a gap of one space between each of them. This should only be considered if the Gutter Runners are completely expendable, like the final turn of the final game in a tournament, if you want to keep you them alive then it is not advisable.

OFFENSIVE SETUP VS FAST TEAMS



This type of set up is preferable against fast teams; Elf teams, Humans, Skaven etc... It blocks all routes into your half off in case the opponent gets Blitz on the Kick-Off Table. You also leave the minimum number of players on the LoS in case your opponent gets Perfect Defence on the Kick-Off Table. If you over commit to leaving players on the LoS then you could find yourself in a lot of trouble if the opponent gets Perfect Defence on the Kick Off Table. They will then be able to re-organise their defence so they have all your players tied up in at least one tackle zone which can make life very difficult in your first turn.

OFFENSIVE SETUP VS SLOW TEAMS

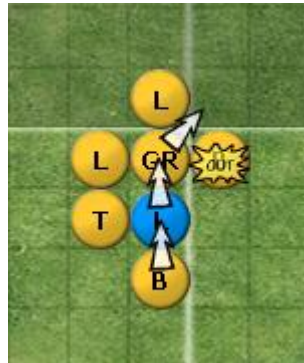
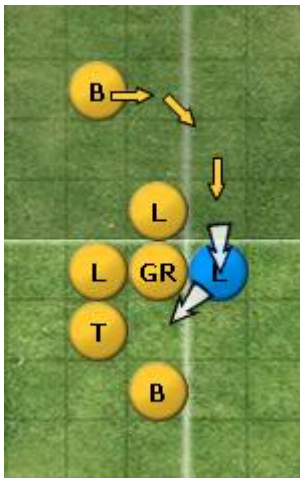


This formation is preferable against bashy slower teams. It is basically the same as the previous set up except the Gutter Runners have been moved infield so they cannot be blitzed in the event that blitz is rolled on the kick off table. There are extra gaps in the wide zones but bashy slower teams will generally not be able to exploit this like an elf team could. Again leaving as few players as possible on the LoS is preferable in case your opponent gets Perfect Defence on the Kick-Off Table.

ADVANCED PLAYS

OTTD - TYPICAL

1. Use the Blitzzer to Blitz the player on the LoS in to the gap then follow up.



2. Block with the Blitzzer - chain pushing the Gutter Runner into the opponents half.

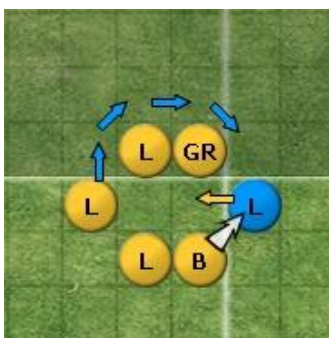


3. Block with another player chain pushing your Gutter Runner another square into the opponent's half. This will leave the Gutter Runner requiring 2 GFI's to score. You can use more players to continue this chain pushing tactic to move the Gutter Runner in range of scoring without having to make any GFI's.

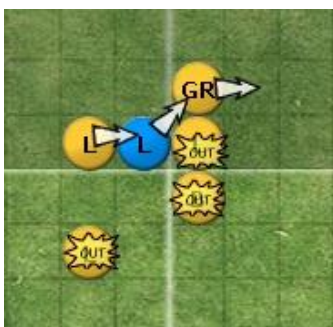
OTTD 5 PLAYERS NO BLITZ

To pull this off one of your Blitzzer's must have Grab. This OTTD technique will allow you to save your Blitz action so you can Blitz any player that may be blocking the path for your Gutter Runner to score.

1. Block with your Blitzzer. Use Grab to move the opponent's player in to the gap. Move a lineman in to the position shown



2. Block with your lineman and chain push the Gutter Runner into your opponent's half of the field.



3. Use your remaining lineman to block and chain push the Gutter Runner in to the opponent's half one more square. This will leave the Gutter Runner requiring 2 GFI's to score.

OTTD 4 PLAYERS

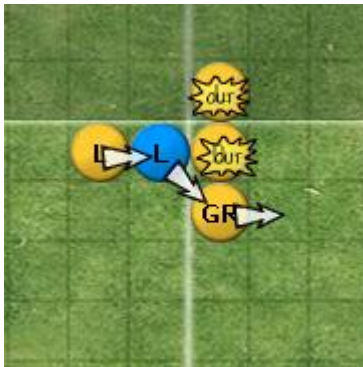
To pull this off one of your Blitzer's must have Grab.



1. Block with your Blitzer. Use Grab to move the opponent's player in to the gap.



2. Blitz with another player chain pushing your Gutter Runner into your opponent's half of the field. Do not follow up with the Blitz instead move your player into the space shown.



3. Block with your remaining player - chain pushing the Gutter Runner further into your opponent's half of the field. This will leave the Gutter Runner requiring 2 GFI's to score. Then laugh at your opponent for thinking he had done enough killing to stop your Skaven from scoring.