



Bulldog Offensive Line Technique: Our Key To Victory

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The University of Minnesota Duluth football program has a proud history in this state for over 70 years. This fall we enter into a new phase as we begin play in the highly competitive North Central Conference. This will be a challenge unparalleled in the past. I look forward to that challenge. I am grateful to head coach Kyle Schweigert, and former head coach Bob Nielson, for the opportunity to serve as a representative of the University of Minnesota Duluth. I am also appreciative of the coaches that have tutored and helped me, in particular my position coach at Brigham Young University, Roger French, who is arguably one of the best pass protection technique teachers in football, and Mitch Browning from the University of Minnesota who influenced me as we developed a strong zone running game here at UMD.

As a coach I have had the opportunity now to work in several different offensive philosophies. Some were pass oriented, others more run dominant. Many times our tendency to “hang our hat” on the run or pass (or both) was determined by the talent we had offensively. The one thing that remains constant through changes in philosophy and scheme is technique. We as offensive coaches are only as good as the players on the field. The better our players’ technique the better opportunity they have to properly execute our schemes. I would like to share the techniques and basic drills we use to teach our offensive linemen at the University of Minnesota Duluth. The techniques we teach at UMD are fairly universal; hopefully there will be something that will be of benefit for everyone.

Stance

Our stance is balanced and will give us the ability to move in any direction to run block and pass protect with efficiency.

- Feet slightly wider than shoulder width apart.
- Knees in line with the hips (Inside the feet).

Inside foot flat to the ground. Outside foot stagger to instep or heel of inside foot.

- Reach out with down hand and place five fingers on the ground (to bend knees and lower shoulders) with left hand down on left side and vice versa.

- Pull back on hips to place body weight over the feet.

Coaching Point: Pick up down hand, should not shift weight to do so.

Run blocking technique

The success of a run play or our ability to make a successful block is determined in large degree by our initial “angle of departure” (AOD) from the line of scrimmage. This becomes the overriding principle for our offensive linemen in determining how to block their respective assignments. In order to be successful it is critical that the linemen have some basic understanding of the point of attack or “big picture” on any given play. The AOD will vary due to “point of attack” (inside vs. outside plays) or by defensive alignment (wide or tight). In either case the basic principles outlined below are followed.

First step

- Short and quick to gain position on the defender (lateral or drop).



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- Arms cocked with elbows close to ribcage, hands open and thumbs up.
- Chest to the knee with shoulders forward.
- Weight distributed inside of thighs, inside the knees, on insteps of feet.
- Hips must be forward of feet to gain leverage on the defender.

Second step

• Goal is to cover the defender. As a general rule on inside plays look to cover the inside foot, on outside plays look to drive second step to middle of defender.

• Quick as possible...1,2! Second step must be down as contact is made with the defender. Coaching Point: If OL is late with second step quickness may be the problem or could be aligned too close to the LOS.

• Hands fire forward striking the breadbasket with thumbs up, elbows in. Hand placement determined by point of attack... numbers (inside run or solo block) or breastplate (outside run or combination block).

• Crown of helmet drives through the chinstrap of defender.

Third step & beyond

• Gain width and distance from the line of scrimmage. Reset hands as defender works to gain inside leverage.

• Drive defender with a base, weight distributed on insteps of feet.

• Extend and shove at the whistle to finish block.

Run blocking drills

There are many drills we will use to teach the run blocking progression. The general idea is to break the techniques into drills that will easily transition into live situations. The most basic and essential drills are covered here.

Cock/Punch – First two steps. We will break this drill down to two parts progressing from air to a hand shield. Will do from 2 point and 3 point stance. Can be used as a rapid fire drill. We like to use this drill as a warm-up or pre-practice drill to

teach aiming point and quickness. We will line up boards to help the linemen work with a base.

Duck Walk – Continuous run block following Cock/Punch drill. Allows lineman to put the technique together into a rhythm. Done versus air, with board to keep a base. Have the linemen swing arms with elbows locked at a 90-degree angle rotating at the shoulder. Work through chute as a progression. Easily transitions to Fit & Finish.

Fit & Finish – Drive block versus a bag/defender to work drive block from start to finish. Use with boards and chutes if possible. Angle the boards as needed to work both inside and outside blocking paths.

Base – Done on board with a defender putting progression together in a live situation.

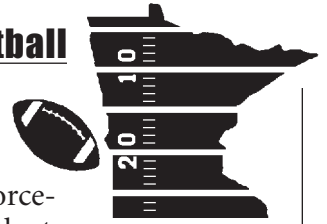
From these drills we can transition to many others to help us in our blocking progression and to teach the minute details of each block within our schemes.

Pass protection technique

At UMD we run a few different pass protection schemes, some are zone or gap protections, some are man protections, and a few are a combination of man and zone. Although they vary slightly from one to another, successful execution depends upon some hard and fast rules: Always protect the inside first, never cross feet, never duck head, and never lunge at a defender. These basic rules all pertain to leveraging the defender and forcing him on the widest possible path to the quarterback. Because pass protection is more difficult to teach than run blocking our drills and techniques are a little more extensive, but cover three major areas; Setup, Punch, and Movement.

Power set

The power set gives us the ability to set up quickly and aggressively on an inside defender. This setup allows our linemen to shut off an inside rush lane and force the defender to restart his rush to the outside. Generally the first step is about six inches but must be adjusted as the lineman works to gain inside leverage. The head must be up and back, hands up, thumbs together forming a “W” with elbows close to ribs. Arch the back (big chest), drop the center of gravity with butt



back and low, weight resting on insteps of feet and inside thigh. This position allows us to punch the target quickly and aggressively. As in the stance the inside foot should remain forward of the outside foot to maintain power in closing the inside lane.

Kick step

The kick step is utilized when by alignment we have inside leverage on an outside defender. We are now in a position to slow the defender's upfield rush while protecting our inside. A couple of landmarks we use in the initial setup are to line up our outside foot to the crotch of the defender or our helmet to the defender's inside shoulder. Our eyes should never focus on the defender's helmet, but on the "V" of his jersey. On our first step we must look to cut down half the distance to the defender's rush lane by gaining width and depth. Following our first kick step we must look to get depth rather than width always working to maintain inside leverage. To do this we have a goal to take at least three kick steps before we open our shoulders. By staying "square" to the line of scrimmage longer we can more easily protect the inside while having the ability to get depth on an upfield rush. The principles of balance remain the same as in the power set, with the outside foot slightly pointed out to keep weight on the instep.

JAB STEP

The jab step is an aggressive inside step to shut off the inside counter move (rip, swim, or spin) made by an outside rush. The jab step can only be effective if the lineman is square to the line of scrimmage. If the lineman has already opened his shoulders to the sideline power and quickness are lost. This step is short, quick, powerful, and forward toward the inside. Our hips remain low and the lineman works to "gain ground" with the inside foot while driving off the outside foot. The jab step is almost always accompanied with a punch to shut off the inside rush and force the defender to restart to the outside. If the defender is able to gain inside leverage the lineman must do everything possible to ride him past the center.

PUNCH

A good punch can be effective in forcing the de-

fender to restart his rush and buy time for the lineman to continue to gain inside leverage. Execute the punch by forcefully extending the hands to the target the defender gives (chest, shoulder, back). The punch must entirely come from the upper body. Strike the defender in the six-inch window...not before, not after. Snap head up to avoid ducking or leaning. Work to maintain extension on the defender by locking out our arms and controlling the frame. If the defender gains inside position work to reset hands...club down and punch the frame. If defender controls wrists rotate thumbs down to release and work to reset hands.

MOVEMENT & BALANCE – General Notes

- Weight should always be equally distributed between the feet, with the balance from front to back resting on the insteps.
- Trail foot should slide across the turf, never coming off the ground. We want two feet on the ground as much as possible.
- Change in direction should always lead with the directional foot..."Gain Ground."
- Hips should stay at the same level throughout the pass play to maintain balance and movement efficiency.

PASS PROTECTION DRILLS

The drills below represent some of the regular drills we will incorporate into practice early on and will repeat often. They relate to the basics of footwork, hand placement, and leverage control.

Power Set/Punch – Used to rep the power set technique. To check for proper body position have the linemen freeze in the power set position as you check for balance, low body position, etc... Use with 25 lb. plate to work quick set/punch and increase shoulder/arm strength and speed of punch.

Kick Step/Jab Step – Vertical movement drill working individual kick steps, change of direction (COD), and jab steps. We will break this drill into two sections early and transition into the Mirror drill.

Mirror – Lateral or Vertical movement drill with offensive lineman mirroring the defender in an area.



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Lateral Punch (Sled) – One at a time using 5/7 man sled. Setup to first pad and punch, lateral step to second pad and punch, etc... Focus on getting set in front of pad before executing punch. Feet must be in powerful position and cover the defender. Can be used with COD as well.

Head Sets – Power set and punch drill with defender standing and lining up at an angle reaching to slap the back of helmet on movement. Lineman must work to kick off the ball, get set, and punch the target while popping his helmet back to maintain good body position. We will usually work half a dozen reps at a time.

Push/Pull – Offensive lineman locks into the

frame with defender pulling/pushing get the lineman to break his center of gravity. Lineman must work to sink hips and gain ground as the defender pulls, and push back with defender push. Good balance and leverage drill.

If you have any questions about any of the techniques or drills please feel free to give me a call at (218) 726-8296 or email me at <ngibbs@d.umn.edu>. I would like to thank the Minnesota High School Football Coaches Association for all you do to promote football in our state. Best wishes on a great season this fall!

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