

Pass Tags off of Zone Read

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On behalf of the Minnesota State University, Mankato Football program, I would like to thank the Minnesota Football Coaches Association for the opportunity to share our concepts.

Inside zone is a standard scheme in many football programs, including ours at MSU. As we install each scheme in our offense we want to first and foremost make sure that our athletes understand the philosophy of what we are doing and why we are doing it.

At MSU we believe inside zone puts our players in a great position to be successful. It allows our kids to play aggressive, fast and physical. When running inside zone we emphasize "splitting" the defense in half, by putting two defenders in the same gap, thus not allowing the defense to gap us out.

This can be done many different ways. One approach is using an H-Back to swipe across and kick out the end man on the line of scrimmage; while another method is reading the end man as we do in our zone read. Our thought process for this approach to inside zone is two-part. First, on the front side of the play we want to reach to run the defensive line. If our offensive lineman can reach the defensive lineman, we want to press him vertical. If our offensive lineman cannot reach him, then we will have him run him as wide as possible. Linemen make the decision to reach or wash using a three-step rule.

The third step rule is defined as when the player puts their third step in the ground they must make a decision to reach or run. Secondly on the backside of the play we are working to reach then cut off. We want to reach the defensive lineman and cut him off from the point of attack. The way that we accomplish this is by having an uncovered lineman post backside.

As defenses have become more familiar with defending zone read, offenses have had to become more dynamic with how they are running it or by reverting to more traditional ways of running the football. Running the zone read and giving the QB the option to pull it and throw it is today's version of the triple option. Therefore, when we just hand the ball to the running back we are only playing with 9 men on offense, because as

running back is the ball carrier, he cannot block anyone. This means we must rely on the QB to sell his fake to hold another defender.

Conversely, when we start utilizing the QB as the primary ball carrier we are playing with 10 by adding the RB has a viable blocker. The advantage to this approach is that we maximize the number of blockers. However, the negative is that this approach puts our QB in danger of injury.

By adding an outlet for the QB to pass the ball after pulling it on zone read, we are able to maximize the number of blockers that we can use but we also minimize the contact our QB will subject himself to as the primary ball carrier. Furthermore, we can stretch the field horizontally and vertically, which makes it difficult for the defense to defend against both the run and the pass. Thus, when we design dual reads for our QB, we try to keep the defenders he is reading in the same sight line to allow him to make quick efficient decisions.

We would be more than willing to sit down with and share ideas with staffs in the future.

Best of luck this season. ■