

The New Blaine

By Shannon Gerrety

After 24 years of running the same offense, change was not an easy thing to do. The Wing-T Offense had been our offensive trademark for a long time and making the switch to a completely new system wasn't an easy decision to make. After the 2007 football season, we thought it was time for a change. The Wing-T offense had been very good to us over the years, but with some of the struggles we were having with our offensive production, we were looking for something new. We are not suggesting you cannot be successful running the Wing-T, but we were having a difficult time putting points on the board and sustaining drives. Time for a change.

In the early part of the 2008 preseason meetings I proposed a question. What was our most productive offensive play? I thought we would be able to say the sweep, trap or waggle. None of those three plays were as productive as I thought they needed to be. In our opinion, in order to run the Wing-T offense efficiently, you need to establish the sweep. Over the past few seasons, I felt we were not doing that well enough. Why? We had to address that precise question. Why couldn't we establish the sweep? We knew the blocking rules, we knew the footwork, we knew the scheme, we had ran it for years, but we still were having a difficult time establishing the sweep. After much deliberation, I blamed it on a philosophical reason.

With other teams in our league spreading out the field and stressing our defense, we had to change the type of kid we had on defense. We needed to take some speed and size from our offense and put them on defense. The type of athlete we were taking from the offense was the same athletes we used to use as halfbacks in the Wing-T. The 190+ pound kid, who could run well, was no longer in the halfback position. We had

been taking them from the offensive side of the ball to play linebacker on defensive side. It's our philosophy at Blaine to 2-platoon our kids. With that being said, the talented halfbacks we used to produce were now on the other side of the ball. Over the course of a few seasons, our prototypical halfbacks had changed. They were still good athletes, but the size of the player had changed. They, consequently, had become a smaller, more nimble kid. Athletic, yes; but as big and strong, no.

In our league, with the likes of schools as Champlin Park, Anoka, and Maple Grove, the size of their defensive line requires a much bigger back to block the edge and run the sweep. We don't have those kids playing offense anymore, thus the time for change was inevitable.

When thinking about what type of new offense to install a lot of questions come to mind. First thing we had to consider was what type of athletes we have walking the hallways of Blaine. The next thing to ask is how can we get some of those non football players out for the team. With our old offense, we typically had one receiver on the field at a time. Most of the athletes, who we were targeting as potential contributors to the success of our program, were the lean, tall, athletic basketball player type of kid that could run. If you know anything about kids you can agree with the fact that kids want to catch footballs in the end-zone. They want to score touchdowns and get their name in the paper. If we wanted to attract those kids to football, we had to put a product on the field that they wanted to be part of.

We also had some skill returning in our program that we wanted to feature.



Our quarterback was returning and we knew he was a playmaking competitor. Surround him with some skill kids, many returning starters on defense, the spread offense was an easy decision. With commitment to the no huddle spread, a sound defense is a nice "ace up your sleeve" to have. A good quarterback that could help you with the transition is also a nice thing to have.

With all of those variables to consider, plus a staff that was eager and willing to put in the hours necessary to be prepared for a season, the decision was an easy one to make. Blaine was changing to the no huddle spread offense.

At a late spring team meeting, we announced the change to our kids. Prior to the meeting we posted sign all over the school announcing a big change to Blaine football. We tried to pique the interest of current players and intrigue news ones as to what was going on. Coaches were asked not to leak the change, but every once in a while they could let something slip out to some of the team leaders about a big change for the next year. Excitement was in the air and the school was buzzing. Kids were anxious as we gathered for the meeting. After some administrative topics were discussed in our meeting, we showed a highlight video of other schools that

were running the spread and told our kids about the "New Blaine." A loud cheer came from the kids. They were excited and ready for the 2008 season. Our next challenge was to keep them excited and have some fun with the install.

I can honestly say the outcome was better than we ever expected. The kids took to the new offense and our season was very successful. We were Co-Champions of the Northwest Suburban Conference, Section 7AAAAA Champions, and we played in Prep bowl XXVII. Our quarterback, James Peterson, was the AP and St. Paul Pioneer Press Prep Football Player of the Year, and we had several other great accomplishments along the way. It was a fun transition for our coaches, players, and fans.



Blaine QB James Peterson executes the option from the shotgun formation.



Blaine center Max Chapman and the Bengal offense get signals from the sidelines.



Blaine WR Nick Rusin makes his way through the Eden Prairies defense.



Blaine QB, James Peterson finds an opening in the Champlin Park defense to connect with receiver Nick Rusin, #5.