



ZONE RUNS PLAYBOOK

10

**SIMPLE AND EFFECTIVE
FOOTBALL PLAYS**

 PDF

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Zone Runs 101

While some teams use a combination of classic blocking and zone blocking principles, there are some steadfast believers in an all zone blocking approach, in both the run and pass games. Instead of blockers being assigned specific matchups that they are required to block, the blockers move altogether, as a unit, with each blocker taking on any defenders that come into his area, and blocking them in whatever direction gives them the most leverage, rather than away from a certain hole or side of the field.

This creates much more malleable running lanes, and as such, you will need a running back with good vision, able to wait patiently behind his blocks until a hole presents himself, at which point he will burst through into the second level.

You will also need mobile, smart linemen, who can get going quickly and make the correct reads on who they should and shouldn't block. The most important thing to remember when running a zone blocking scheme is that it is necessary for the entire unit to work as one.

The beauty of the zone running scheme is that it is extremely difficult for the defense to pick up on play action, as every single player, from the quarterback down to the last offensive lineman, will be moving the exact same way from the snap of the ball to the handoff, whether it's a running play or play action. And this leaves the defense open to the best part of the zone running scheme – the play action pass. With a litany of runs and the play action plays to complement it, you'll be running roughshod over opponent defenses in no time.

Zone Run Plays

Singleback Big – Inside Zone

Setup

This play is run from a Singleback Big formation, with two receivers, two tight ends, and one halfback on the field.

Play Objective

The inside zone is a staple of any zone running team. It's not a flashy play – it's a play that you drill over and over and execute so well, that the defense has no choice but to commit completely to the run, opening them up to some severe vulnerability to the playaction pass.

Positional Assignments

Offensive Line – The offensive line – zone blocking here – will not have any man assignment. Instead, they will take their initial step to whichever side the play is being run to, blocking the first defender to come into their gap/zone.

Tight Ends – Both tight ends will also be zone blocking here, with the playside tight end helping on the edge before moving up to the next level of the defense. The back side tight end will step to the back side, blocking the defender in charge of covering the cutback lane.

Wide Receivers – Both receivers will block, pushing the corners outside before getting downfield to help block the next level.

Running Backs – The halfback will take the handoff, patiently flowing downhill. The key in a zone blocking scheme is patience and vision for the running back. While he'll be initially aiming at the outside hip of the right guard, he needs to watch how the play develops, ready to run to daylight, where that's right behind the right guard, or taking the cutback lane to the backside.

Quarterback – The quarterback will reverse pivot, opening up to the play side, handing the ball of the running back, and then selling the bootleg out to the backside.

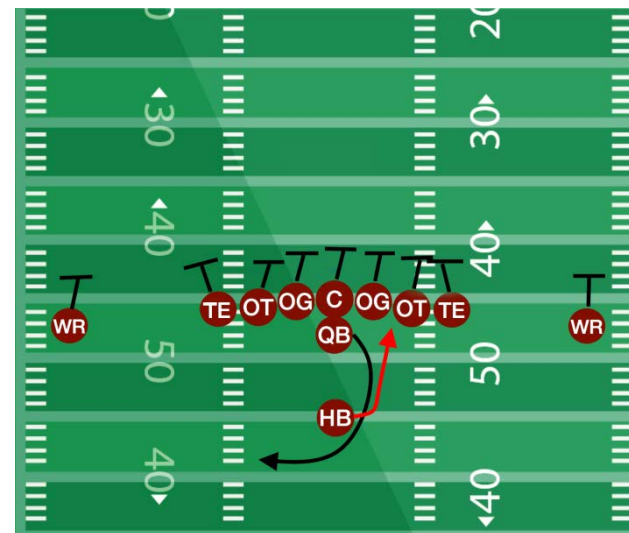


Figure 1: Inside Zone

Singleback Big – Outside Zone

Setup

This play is run from a Singleback Big formation, with two receivers, two tight ends, and one halfback on the field.

Play Objective

The outside zone, combined with the inside zone, is the basis for any zone blocking scheme. It isn't variety and trickery you're relying on here, but rather execution from your offensive line and vision from your running back. This is a solid playcall in any situation aside from third and long.

Positional Assignments

Offensive Line – The offensive line – zone blocking here – will not have any man assignment. Instead, they will take their initial step to whichever side the play is being run to, blocking the first defender to come into their gap/zone.

Tight Ends – Both tight ends will also be zone blocking here, with the playside

tight end helping on the edge before moving up to the next level of the defense. The back side tight end will be executing a hinge block to keep the defensive end from getting into the backfield and chasing the running back down from behind.

Wide Receivers – The playside wide out must get a good block on his man, pushing him downfield and keeping him engaged long enough for the running back to get by. The backside receiver will also block his man, pushing him out to the sideline away from the play.

Running Backs – The running back will take the handoff from the quarterback and begin to run, aiming initially at the outside hip of the playside tackle. patiently flowing downhill. It is essential the running back however keep his eyes up, as he must be able to adapt and run to daylight wherever the hole appears, whether that means bouncing it outside or cutting right back down the middle.

Quarterback – The quarterback will hike the ball and hand it off to the running back, then roll out hard to the backside.

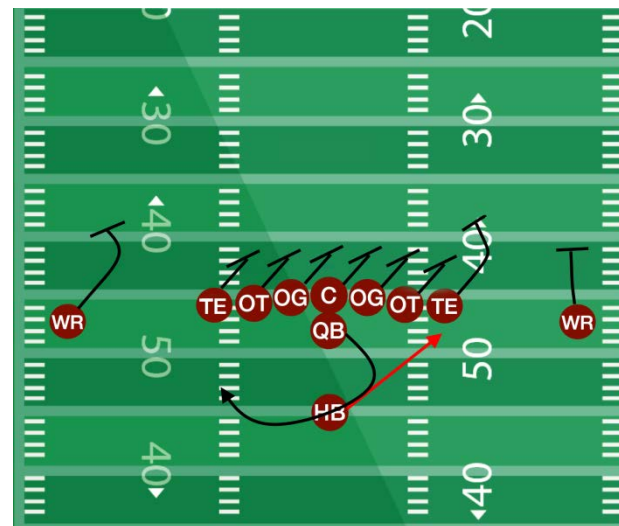


Figure 2: Outside Zone

Singleback Big – Split Zone

Setup

The offense will come out in a Singleback big formation with two tight ends. The right side tight end will line up as an H back, the flanker will line up on the weak side, and the split end will align on the strong side.

Play Objective

When using zone runs, the offense is always going to have to figure out what they're going to do about the cutback defender on the back side. A lot of the time the offense will just ignore him, but this can make it much tougher for the ball carrier to cut back to the weak side if the defense over pursues to the play side. By sending the tight end across the formation to kick out on the cutback defender, we open up a huge lane up the backside of the tight end on the weak side for the running back.

Positional Assignments

Offensive Line – The entire offensive line will flow to the playside, all taking a step to the right and then blocking any defender in their area, moving up to the second level if there is none at the first.

Tight End – The tight end will also step to the playside, blocking in concert with the rest of the offensive line.

Wide Receivers – The receivers will both try to block their men to the sideline and downfield, keeping them out of the play.

Running Backs – The halfback will receive the handoff, aiming initially for the inside hip of the right tackle, but keeping an eye on the cutback lane behind the left tight end. He will watch the blocks develop, looking for daylight and exploding forward as soon as he sees it.

Quarterback – The quarterback will receive the football from center, handing it off to the halfback.

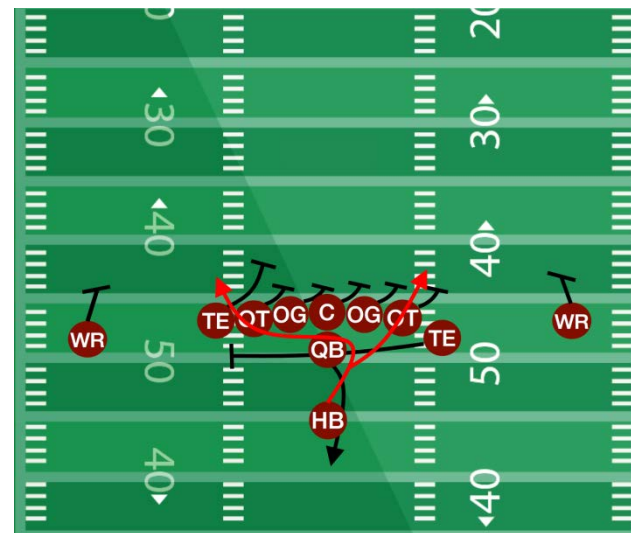


Figure 3: Split Zone

I Form – Inside Zone

Setup

This play is run from a classic I formation, with a receiver on either side of the line, a tight end on the play side, and a full back and halfback in the backfield.

Play Objective

The inside zone is a great running play that relies on solid blocks and vision from the running back for effectiveness. The zone blocking allows it to be flexible against different fronts, and when combined with the playaction pass, can be very tough for defenses to deal with.

Positional Assignments

Offensive Line – The offensive line has zone blocking responsibilities, with them all taking a step to the play side and blocking the first defender to enter into their zone. The only exception is the backside tackle, who will block the edge defender out away from the plays in case the running back cuts back.

Tight End – The tight end will also be zone blocking, double teaming the edge defender with the playside tackle before moving up to the next level and looking to block a linebacker.

Wide Receivers – The receivers will push the corners to the sidelines and look to make a block at the next level if the running back breaks one.

Running Backs – The halfback will take the handoff and head for the inside hip of the right tackle, taking his time and reading the defense before finding daylight and hitting the hole hard.

Quarterback – The quarterback will reverse pivot, opening up to the play side, handing the ball of the running back, and then sell the bootleg out to the backside.

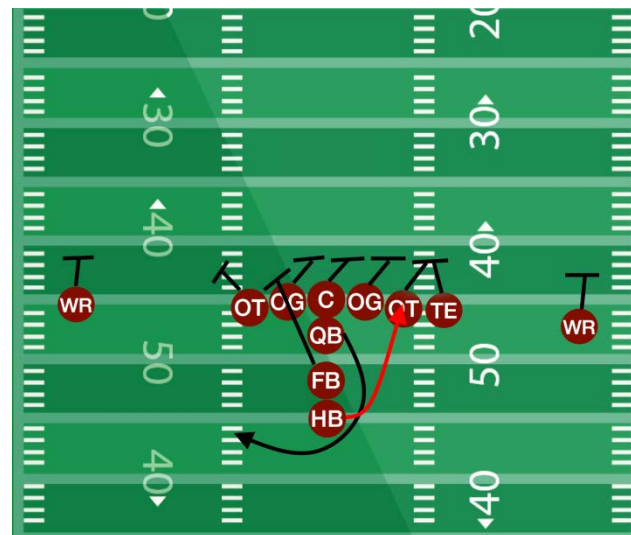


Figure 4: Inside Zone

I Form – Outside Zone Ghost

Setup

The offense will come out in a classic I formation, with a receiver on either side of the formation, a tight end on the strong side, and a fullback and halfback in the backfield.

Play Objective

While we often leave the cutback defender unblocked on zone running plays, this can eliminate potential cutback lanes, or might allow a very aggressive defender a bee line at the ball carrier if he isn't forced to maintain his edge responsibilities. By sending the receiver on a ghost motion, we hold that backside cutback defender from attacking playside without using a valuable offensive lineman to block him.

Positional Assignments

Offensive Line – The offensive line – zone blocking here – will not have any man assignment. Instead, they will take their initial step to whichever side the play is being run to, blocking the first defender to come into their gap/zone.

Tight End –The tight end will also step to the playside, blocking in concert with the rest of the offensive line.

Wide Receivers – The weak side receiver will block his man downfield and towards the sideline. The playside receiver will motion into the backfield just before the snap, coming back into the formation as if about to receive a handoff for a reverse.

Running Backs – The halfback will take the handoff and look to follow his fullback around the edge, while reading the offensive line and keeping his eyes up for any cut back opportunities.

Quarterback – The quarterback will take the snap and open up to the playside, handing the ball off to the halfback. He will then continue to drop, faking a handoff to the wide receiver as he comes by on the fake reverse.

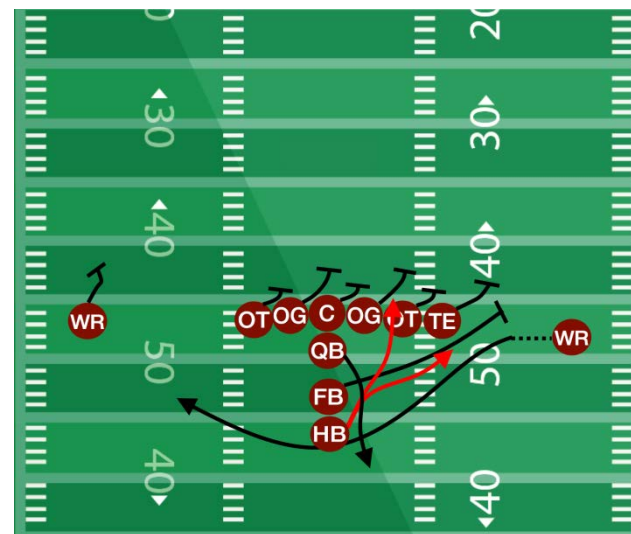


Figure 5: Outside Zone Ghost

Shotgun Trips TE – Inside Zone

Setup

The offense will align in a Shotgun Trips TE formation, with the three receivers bunched off to the left and the tight end on the right. The halfback will also be on the right side, just in the backfield next to the quarterback.

Play Objective

The key to a successful zone running scheme is execution. It's not about exotic design that's going to shock the defense – just sound plays and complementary playcalling that will keep the defense on it's heels. Here's an example of another zone run you can for solid yardage on any down and distance.

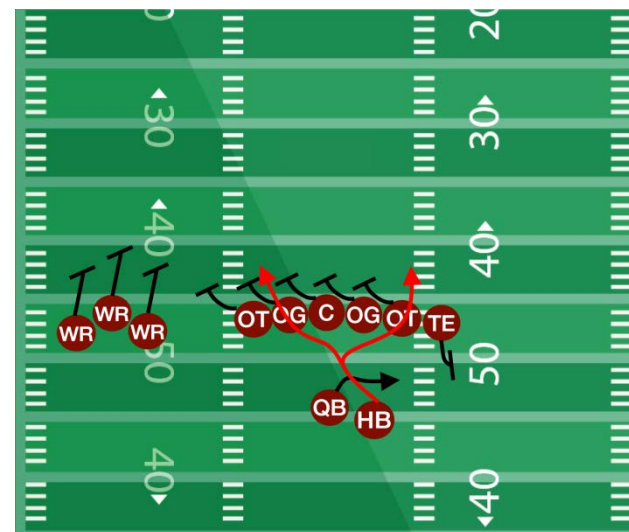


Figure 6: Inside Zone

Positional Assignments

Offensive Line – The offensive line will flow to the left, all taking that initial step to the playside before blocking their area and any man in it downfield.

Tight End – The tight end will execute a hinge block, working the edge defender upfield and out of the play to keep the cutback lane open.

Wide Receivers – The receivers will all block their men downfield and to the sideline, keeping the corners from having an impact on the play.

Running Backs – The running back will take the handoff, running initially for the outside hip of the left guard. He will keep his eyes open, watching the developing blocks, ready to run to the open hole, whether that's right behind the left guard or by cutting back across to the weak side.

Quarterback – After receiving the snap, the quarterback will hand the ball off to the halfback.

Shotgun Trips TE – Read Option

Setup

The offense will bring three receivers on the field here, having them bunch up on the weak side, with the tight end lined up on the strong side along with the halfback. The quarterback will stand in the backfield next to the halfback, putting the offense in a Shotgun Trips TE formation.

Play Objective

The read option is a great way to use a quarterback's running ability to give yourself an advantage at the point of attack. This play is versatile, and can go for big yardage, making it useful in most situations – but it's still a running play, so best avoided on 3rd/4th and long.

Positional Assignments

Offensive Line – The offensive line will be executing a zone blocking scheme here. They'll take their first step playside, blocking the first man to come into their zone, heading into the second level or double teaming someone on the first level if that's the player in their zone. The playside tackle however will ignore the first man in their zone – the playside defensive end. The offensive line will leave him unblocked, moving up to block a linebacker at the next level.

Tight End – The tight end will head to the second level, leaving the defensive end unblocked and blocking the nearest linebacker downfield.

Wide Receivers – The wide receivers will all block and engage their men, then looking to get downfield to make a block at the second level if they can as well.

Running Backs – The halfback will come up to the mesh point, taking the ball if the quarterback gives it to him or pretending he has it if the quarterback takes it. Either way, he needs to hit the inside of the line hard, and look for holes so he can run to daylight if he does have the ball.

Quarterback – The quarterback will take the snap and immediately key on the strong side defensive end. As the running back comes up to the mesh point, the quarterback will extend the ball out into his stomach and continue watching that defensive end. If the end crashes inside, the quarterback keeps the ball, and sprints outside looking to pick up yardage downfield. If the defensive end stays home on the quarterback, the quarterback will give the ball to the running back, who will continue as if running a regular inside zone run.

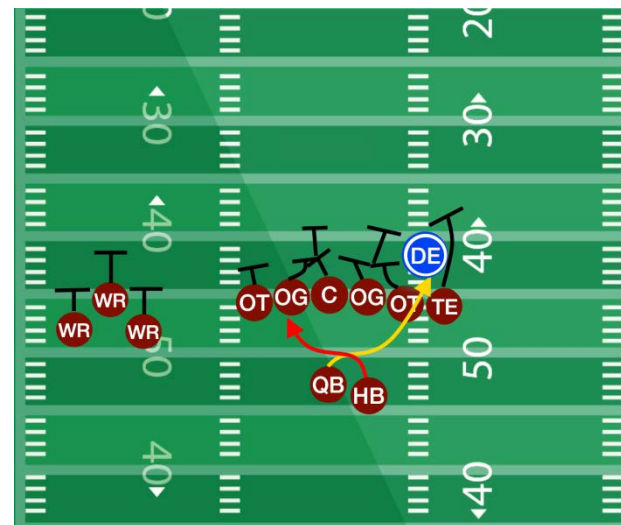


Figure 7: Read Option

Zone Run PlayAction Passes

Singleback Big – PlayAction Boot Left

Setup

This play is run from a Singleback Big formation, with two receivers, two tight ends, and one halfback on the field.

Play Objective

When the defense is starting to lean forward, anticipating the run, pull out this playaction call to catch them slipping for a nice pass completion. This would be best used in whatever situation you would be most likely to call a zone run, as the defense will be most likely to fall for the fake when they're being punished over and over by the run.

Positional Assignments

Offensive Line – The offensive line needs to jump up aggressively initially, selling the run fake, before dropping into pass protection.

Tight Ends – The weak side tight end will run a five yard out, ready for the ball as he's the number one option on the play. The number two is the strong side end, running a deep a over route across the field.

Wide Receivers – The number three option, the receiver on the strong side, will run a post route, with the other receiver running a fade on the weak side.

Running Backs – The halfback will sell the run fake, hitting the line hard before settling in as a blocker.

Quarterback – The quarterback will open up for the handoff as if running an inside zone, before pulling the ball back in and rolling out to the left side, looking first at the weak side tight end, then the strong side tight end, the strong side receiver, and finishing with the weak side receiver running the fade. The quarterback can also look to run, especially on a third down situation where there is no wide open receiver.

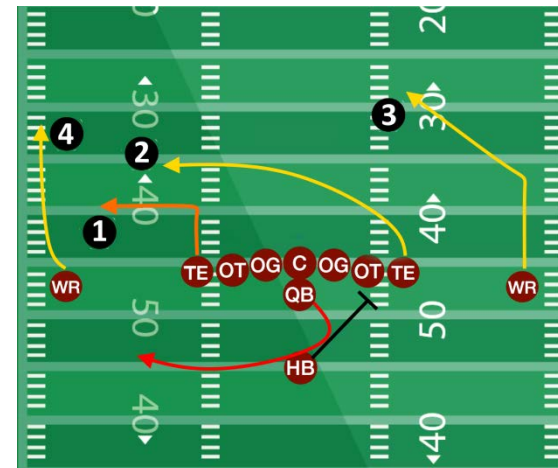


Figure 8: PlayAction Bootleg Left

I Form – PlayAction Weak Zone Boot

Setup

This play will be run from the class I Formation, with a receiver on either side of the line, the tight end on the play side, and a full back and halfback in the backfield.

Play Objective

When you've hit the defense over and over with your perfectly executed zone runs, the only response will be for them to bring a second safety up into the box and commit to the run. Once they've done that, you'll want to call this play and look to beat the defense over the top for the big completion on the playaction pass. This is a play best called on either 1st and 10 or 3rd and short, when the defense is going to be expecting another run up the middle.

Positional Assignments

Offensive Line – The offensive line will step up initially, as if about to block a zone run, before stepping back into pass protection.

Tight End – The tight end will run a wheel route, looking to make a deep catch along the sideline.

Wide Receivers – The flanker is the number one option, running a streak down the field. We want him to angle the streak slightly towards the middle of the field, giving the tight end a bigger window on the sideline if the defense is in zone coverage. The split end will run a dig route over the middle of the field.

Running Backs – The fullback will run flat route, making himself available in the case of a blitz as the quarterback's hot read. The halfback will fake receiving the handoff, then running a wheel route of his own over to the weak side.

Quarterback – The quarterback will fake the handoff to the halfback, then run a bootleg over to the strong side. His first look is the flanker deep, with the tight end's wheel route on the same side of the field as his 2nd option. The 3rd option is the split end running the dig route, and his 4th option and hot read is the fullback running the flat to the play side. As a last resort, he can keep an eye on the halfback, who may be wide open if the defense becomes too preoccupied with covering the other four receivers.

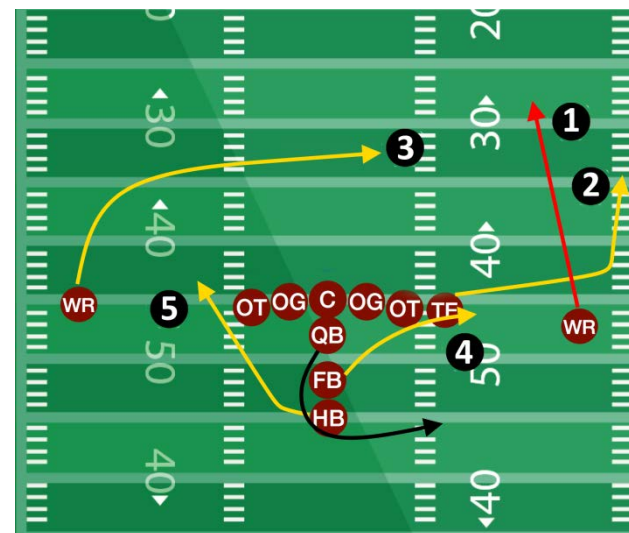


Figure 9: PlayAction Weak Zone Bootleg

Shotgun Trips TE – PlayAction Read

Setup

The offense will bring three receivers on the field here, having them bunch up on the weak side, with the tight end lined up on the strong side along with the halfback. The quarterback will stand in the backfield next to the halfback, putting the offense in a Shotgun Trips TE formation.

Play Objective

Any team that leans heavily on the run is going to need a steady dose of playaction in their playbook – to both clear up those running lanes as well as take advantage of the holes created in the secondary. This playaction pass is a great call in a situation in which the defense would be expecting a run, but you can afford to gamble for more yardage. The best example would be on 2nd and short.

Positional Assignments

Offensive Line – The offensive line must come off the ball aggressive, selling the run fake initially, then dropping back and moving into pass protection.

Tight End – The number one option on this play is the tight end, running a dig route over the middle of the field.

Wide Receivers – The second option is the split end, running a streak, looking to catch the safety flat footed and get behind the defense. The flanker will run a curl route, and the slot receiver will slide out into the flat.

Running Backs – The running back will fake as if taking the handoff, running hard into the line, before stepping back and helping out in pass protection.

Quarterback – After hiking the ball, the quarterback will fake the handoff to the halfback, then go through his reads, starting off with the tight end's dig route. He'll continue his progression from right to left, next looking at the deep streak route, the flanker running a curl, and the slot out in the flat.

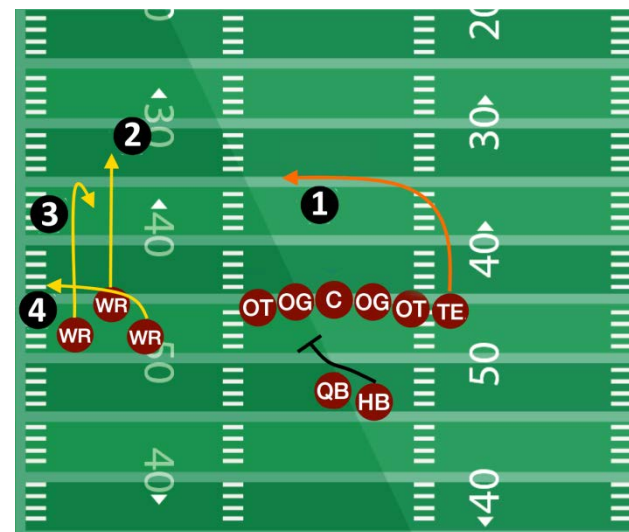


Figure 10: PlayAction Read

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