



Game Management Guide

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Version 1.0

Overview

We have overseen literally thousands of games over the past seven years, and have answers to the most common questions from coaches. We know what it takes to make sure you (and your kids) have a great game day. Our game management guide takes the headache out of game day, and provides you with tried and tested techniques used to manage substitutions, call plays, and organize pre-game practices.

The guide will be expanded soon to include information about with what to do when things go wrong -- such as dealing with difficult parents, opposing coaches, or referees.

Managing Substitutions

The way you manage your team's substitutions should be determined in large part by two factors: how many kids are on your roster, and how much help you have from assistant coaches and parents.

League guidelines mandate that all players should play at least 50% of the time.

Unit Rotation

The easiest system we've found to ensure fairly equal playing time for teams of 8 or more players is to take your team and split them into two separate units of equal size. Assign different names to each unit -- we'll call our units Red and Blue.

Let's assume our team wins the coin toss and elects to start out on offense. We'll have the Red unit start the game on offense. After the offensive series concludes (your team either scores a touchdown or turns the ball over on downs, via interception, or safety), The Blue unit comes in to play defense.

Once the defensive series is complete (your team stops the other team, or the other team scores a touchdown), *the Blue unit stays in to play an offensive series*. After the offensive series is complete, the Red unit comes back in, plays a defensive series, and stays in for an offensive series. Units continue on a two-series rotation for the remainder of the game.

This system ensures that players get equal opportunity on both sides of the ball. If you have fewer than 10 players, players from the Red unit will participate in the Blue unit's series, and vice versa. If you do have less than ten, try to rotate the players that are selected to play with the other unit so that more than one player receives the additional opportunity.

A variation of this system is having units rotate EVERY series, so that during the first half, the Red unit would play every offensive series while the Blue unit would play every defensive series. In the second half, you'd switch it so that the Blue unit would play every offensive series and the Red unit would play every defensive series. This variation has players sitting out a shorter amount of time between rotations.

Individual Player Rotation

I would only recommend this if you have another coach who is solely responsible for managing substitution. The premise is simple, every few plays, rotate one of your players in and one of your players out. You should have a set rotation. For instance, if you have eight players, give each player a number, 1 through 8. Players 1 through 5 would start the game. Player 6 would come in for player 1. Player 7 would come in for player 2. Player 8 would come in for player 3. Player 1 would return for player 4. And so on.

If you are substituting frequently, it can become difficult to manage. If you have a coach who is dedicated to managing the rotation, this can be a great system for you.

What NOT To Do

In the past, we've had coaches who have rotated multiple players through one or two spots in their lineup. Basically, they'd have three or four kids who played the entire game, with the rest of the kids rotating through one or two spots.

This is not in line with our guidelines, which stipulate that players should play at least 50% of the time.

Teams employing blatantly lopsided substitution schemes will be disciplined by the league, and may forfeit games.

The *most* important thing is that you have some kind of plan in place

Spreading the Ball Around

Almost as important as having a good substitution plan and pattern, it is imperative that you give all kids an opportunity to handle the ball. Ideally, each child would receive at least one pass or hand-off each game.

This is not always possible, and will not always happen.

It's ok to have a few kids share the duties at Quarterback -- most teams will only have a couple of kids who are really capable of playing the position.

If there's a player who hasn't gotten the ball for a while, call a run play or design a pass play specifically for that player at an opportune moment in the game, or at the beginning of the next game.

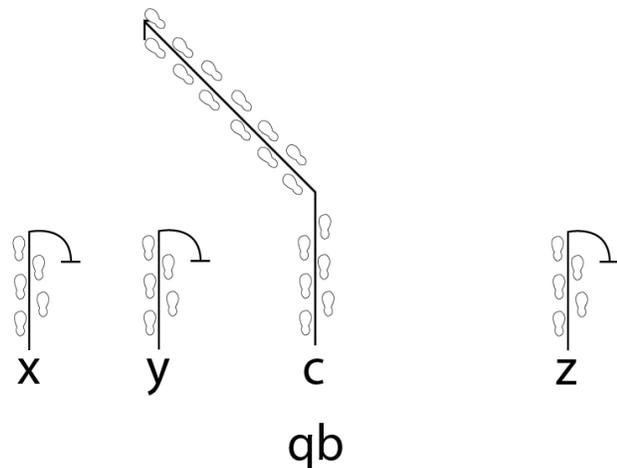
Calling Plays

Offense

On offense, especially at the beginning of the season, one of the most important things is that you keep it simple for your players. Successful plays are typically designed to do one of two things - overload a portion of the field, or isolate players in single coverage.

If you have 4-5 well designed offensive plays, you really don't need anything more.

Also, try and figure out what sort of defense your opponent is playing. If they are playing man to man defense, focus on taking advantage of match-ups, employing double move routes (out and up, slant and go, post corner, et cetera), using crossing patterns, or misdirection.



Teams playing a traditional zone with two corners playing wide and two safeties playing deep will give up the short middle. Teams playing a 3-1 zone with 3 players underneath and one player deep are susceptible to multiple deep routes or zone overloads.

The old maxim holds true - take whatever the defense give you.

Once you know what plays you're going to run, you need a quick and easy way to communicate the plays to your players.

The most efficient way to call your plays is to have some sort of playbook prepared before your game.

Try to use symbols or letters to represent players, so you can quickly communicate to each player and let them know what their route is.

Speak in terms that the kids understand. For younger kids, sometimes it is better to speak in “steps” than yards.

Some different ways to manage and quickly call your plays are:

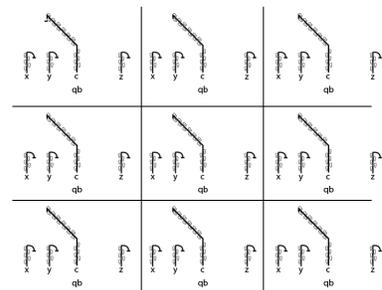
- Use a 3-ring notebook

Nothing fancy here. Each sheet in your notebook contains a separate offensive play. Huddle with your kids and refer to the play in the playbook.

You can keep empty sheets in your notebook and draw new plays on the fly.

- Laminated sheets

Take a single, 8 1/2 by 11 sheet of paper and separate it into nine sections by drawing two vertical and two horizontal lines. Each section of your sheet will contain a play.



For greater efficiency, create and laminate two copies. This way, you can assign each player a letter or symbol and call your plays from the sideline.

- Wrist coach

Similar to the laminated sheets, however this system requires that each player, or at least the quarterback, wear a wrist sleeve containing the offensive plays.

- Whiteboard

A simple whiteboard offers the greatest amount of flexibility, but will take the most time. Whiteboards are best used in combination with one of the other techniques listed.

Defense

If the goal of the offensive coach is to determine what the defense is doing and exploit the weakness, it follows that an important part of defense is varying your defensive plays.

You wouldn't necessarily call the same offensive play ten times in a row. In much the same way, you probably shouldn't stay in the same defense for an extended period of time. A good offensive coach will exploit a team that employs just one defensive scheme.

Man-to-man is the easiest defense for most kids to understand. Zone defenses are a little more complicated. The most common defenses are:

- 1-3-1 zone

One rusher, three shallow defensive players, and one safety. The safety covers all deep passes. This is an effective defense in the younger age groups.

- 3-2 zone

One rusher, two wide corners (left and right), and two safeties playing the inside of the field.

- 4 across zone

Used primarily in short yardage situations. Each defensive player is responsible for a quarter of the field. One player rushes.

- Man to man

The simplest of all defenses. One player rushes, each defensive player is responsible for guarding one offensive player.

Many variations of the above defenses exist. Just like you have an offensive playbook, you should also have a defensive playbook. A good defensive playbook illustrates the starting position of each defender, the area they are responsible for, and the direction of their first step.

Use the techniques referenced in the offensive play section to call your defensive plays.