

## **MAKING COMPLEX SIMPLE: Adapting RPO's for All Levels**

### **Case One – Split Zone**

by Paul Hefty  
9<sup>th</sup> Grade Assistant Coach  
State College High School, PA  
Instructor in Kinesiology @ Penn State University

#### **INTRODUCTION:**

One of the challenges for coaches is to take today's new-exciting, but complex RPO concepts and find ways to simplify teaching, learning and processing for high school level players (and Coaches).

The dilemma is to take a major D1 offense or complex system and make it simple enough to use at not only the high school varsity level – but, with the 9<sup>th</sup> grade program – while still reaping the benefits of explosive plays and being turnover free.

***First**, research a system that is sophisticated, but simple in design. We were fortunate to study and learn from **Joe Moorhead, Penn State's Offensive Coordinator and current Head Coach at Mississippi State.** "**Evolved Simplicity**" = use only 1 blocking scheme for OLine (Zone-Veer) – Run or Pass*

***Second**, design a system to be flexible in that it can adjust and fit to the strength's (talents) of personnel from year to year, week to week and game to game. We are fortunate to work and learn under State College High Schools HFC-OC, Matt Lintal. State High spread RPO system is flexible by design and consistently exploits opposing defenses personnel with a variety of mismatches.*

***Third**, use a scaffolding or chunking teaching progression. Scaffolding or chunking of teaching is a process of introducing information in a way where each future concept builds upon or simply expands the previous concept.*

#### **Step 1 – Simple**

1. Teach using 2x2 alignments
2. Learn details of a quality RPO system without making changes to the core, so as to not lose the integrity of system as it evolves
3. OLine uses a minimum number of blocking schemes

#### **Step 2 – Flexible**

1. Use simple personnel terminology while each position has a natural twin
2. Split-Zone RPO attacks all fronts and coverages (1 scheme for multiple plays)
3. Split-Zone RPO has ability to make QB a runner, thrower or dual threat (play to strengths)

#### **Step 3 – Scaffolding**

1. OLine uses only Split-Zone (Veer) blocking rule for every type of play
2. Pre and Post-snap defensive recognition process that is used with all no huddle plays. This TRI-O process is used with both the OC (coaches) and QB (players) = all on the same page
3. Limited communication to simplify processing for players (think and play FAST)

# WHAT – WHY - HOW

## STEP 1 - SIMPLE:

We start by installing and teaching everything from a balanced 2x2 Hback set. This helps with learning our offensive principle **#1 = NUMBERS**. Both the OC (from the sideline) and QB can easily see if the defense is balanced or overloaded by using a three step, defensive recognition process of pointing @ 1 or 2 high safeties + hanging backers (MrO's) and last the mike backer.

The other key point is that you can adjust the Hbacks alignment pre-snap (using similar formation calls that again, only the Hback adjusts to). This is done with an offensive concept (blocking scheme) in mind, which allows the Hback to have the best leverage for each play. Applying offensive principle **#2 = BLOCKING ANGLES**. Both the OC and the QB want to call plays to put the OLine and Hback in the best possible blocking scheme based on blocking angles.

To keep communication with the no huddle – high tempo offense simple, 95% of the time we have the Slot align to the field (formation directional call) and the Hback into the boundary. This achieves a maximum horizontal stretch of the defense while helping the OC and QB to identify defenders easily. Applying offensive principle **#3 = SPEED IN SPACE or FIELD**. The players can anticipate this tendency, helping to simplify and create consistency for everyone.

*\*Diagram 1: notice 2x2 alignment with Z & A receivers aligned to directional call or field*



When and if you want to be a heavy 3x1 team when the football is on the hashes, you simply move 1 player (Hback) to the field while all other players align same as they would in 2x2 set. By minimizing the number of players who have to change – you have limited new learning. The key to keeping your system simple is to have the ability to use the same rules for both 2x2 and 3x1 sets. Only the nature of the defense should change. The goal for changing alignments should be to manipulate the defense, not changing things up just to do something different (method to the madness). Remember, less variables for the players means less to process (*Less is More concept = SIMPLE*).

**\*Diagram 2:** notice 3x1 alignment with only the Hback moving from previous 2x2 set

## Hback Deep & Over (3x1)

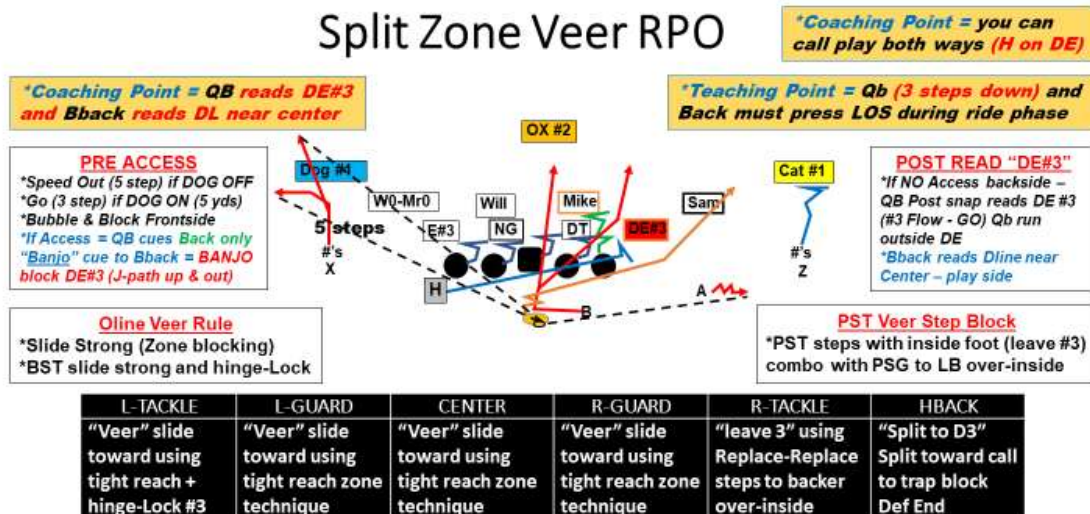
**"Trio Right"** (H & A & Z Recs to directional call)

\*Signal = coaches left hand in "OK" sign with 3 fingers up



Last, and most important – everything you do in your offensive design must focus on keeping OLine rules, techniques and adjustments @ a minimum! For this reason, we always start with our zone concept which is great for summer and fall camp install. Safe and sound because everyone is heading the same direction along with everyone involved (balance + fun football right from the start).

**\*Diagram 3:** notice split zone RPO – attacking all areas of the defense (opportunity for all)



**ADAPTION:** We learned through years of trial and error that 9<sup>th</sup> graders have a hard time grasping the inside zone concept (both OLine blocking and Backfield running and reading). So, we simply reversed traditional zone concept thinking and rules while still using split zone backfield action.

The OLine simply uses old inside veer rule blocking. Everyone zones toward, but now the play side OT leaves the play side defensive end and combination blocks with the play side guard to the first backer head up or inside. We use an A-Gap point of attack and apply a “Bang-Bend-Bounce” back read and react process to the frontside. To help 9<sup>th</sup> graders, we simply had the Hback still split the formation and block the defensive end (just like regular split zone), but had the OLine zone-veer block in the same direction as the defensive end we are reading (traditional split zone reads the backside defensive end). What this did is make the play side the frontside for everyone, which took away confusion and questions in the learning process. We were able to keep the integrity of the split zone concept while adapting to the needs of a 9<sup>th</sup> grader football mindset.

Here is an example of how we applied split zone techniques and rules – except the OLine blocking toward defensive end and reading frontside, versus backside defensive end.

**Hudl (2017, October 25) State College High School 9<sup>th</sup> Grade Football vs Chambersburg, PA**  
**\*CLICK ON VIDEO TO PLAY**



**Clip 1:** notice how right OTackle leaves the defensive end for Hback to block (QB to read) and climbs to 2<sup>nd</sup> level blocking first backer head up to inside (Veer step with inside foot first and “replace-replace” technique to next level). Rest of OLine steps toward using “tight reach” technique or double team blocks toward (similar to inside zone)

#### **STEP 2 - FLEXIBLE:**

We start by first using our initial summer camps to identify each individual player’s best position for their 9<sup>th</sup> grade season, but most importantly for their future development. We use simple offensive personnel terminology, but have every position learn a twin. Meaning, by design each player has another position that is a natural twin where new learning is at a minimum. For example, by using an Hback the X and Z receiver position is essentially the same (both on LOS and widest receiver or #1 to each side), therefore if necessary players can easily learn a 2<sup>nd</sup> position in the system.



**ADAPTAION:** We learned the key position for this “twin” personnel learning process is the A (slot receiver) and B (back). Often, we don’t know if the player will be a future receiver or running back, this allows us to teach right from the beginning in a way where the player can learn both. Plus, quite often your best play makers are at these positions, allowing us to naturally have the system fit with the players unique skill sets.

Next, this system and concept fit both a running oriented QB and a passing oriented QB by using the split-zone veer concept right from the start we are able to use each QB’s strengths while developing them as a dual-threat or complete QB.

Most important, it puts your OLine personnel into a position to be successful. With No Huddle and shotgun on every play, we put our best all-around OLine at center first and then their twin would be either guard next to them. Next, you can have guards and tackles stay on one side to help them learn no huddle play cues easily so that they can focus on blocking rule and technique changes only. We found that split zone-veer allows us to put our bigger lineman at either guard or tackle and be successful.

Last, the split zone-veer concept allows you to attack the front and the coverage all at once and in multiple ways (pass-run-read). Here is an example of all the different pre and post-snap options on every split zone-veer play. The coach-OC can also communicate (signal) to the QB to “Alert” him pre-snap pass preference (bubble or OutGo), helping both the QB and coach to be on the same page.

**Hudl (2017, October 25) State College High School 9<sup>th</sup> Grade Football vs Chambersburg, PA**  
**\*CLICK ON VIDEO TO PLAY**



**Clip 2:** see Pre-snap quick pass options of bubble screen to slot receiver if leverage outside + speed out route option to #1 receiver on Hback side. OC-coach can “Alert” QB if the bubble or speed out is available and desired by coach

**Clip 2:** see Post-snap QB reads play side defensive ends depth and hips (On LOS and turns hips to ball)

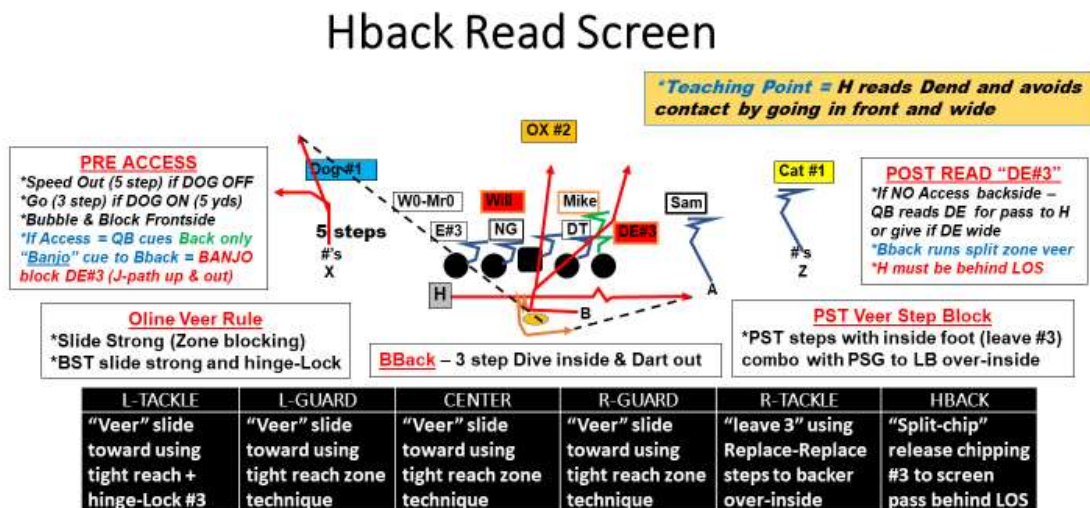
**STEP 3 - SCAFFOLDING:**

The key to making complex simple is to use some basic teaching methods that have proven to allow anyone at any level to learn and process complex information quickly and consistently. Scaffolding or chunking of learning is a process of introducing information in a way where each future concept builds upon the previous one. The image is of when building a house, the builders continue to build upward and onward by adding more scaffolding as they go (not new, but adding to what already exists or is learned).

Again, the challenge was to take 1 blocking scheme for the OLine and scaffold plays to attack across a broad front (Woody Hayes, HC @ Ohio State), while using every player (all get touches = balance).

**ADAPTION:** Here is an example of scaffolding technique using split zone veer with an Hback read screen. Great way to adapt to your QB's strengths of being a runner or passer (flexible design).

*\*Diagram 4: notice Hback avoids defensive end now and stays behind LOS so that receivers can be blocking downfield (legal screen)*



**Teaching and Drilling:**

The key to making RPO's work is to daily teach and drill tactical skill development (decision making combined with technical-fundamental reps). Routine is essential with young 9<sup>th</sup> graders, therefore we use a simple daily progression with our "Zone Drill" a key component daily to our success. Here is an example of our daily "Zone Drill" teaching process to develop quality decision making by all players.

*\*Diagram 5: notice X&Z receivers and A&B trade roles halfway through drill. Coaches provide defensive read keys for QB's and Back's. At the same time the OLine and Hback review veer blocking by having coach at QB and self-scouting (using next group of OLine on defense). This is a great way to introduce and review defensive fronts you will see each week along with key blitzes.*

# Phase 2 - Zone Drill

\*work after Position Fundos

PSU bubble & Veer Scheme Review (5 min period – everyday)

**PERSONNEL**  
 X-A-Z Recs (2 each)  
 Bbacks (3)  
 Qbs (3)  
 Coaches (2)

**PSU BUBBLE & VEER READ**  
 \*work all 3 phases of Zone-Veer RPO  
 Q1+B1-2+X work "Banjo" block and OutGo read route  
 \*X&Z Recs trade roles (twin) + A\*B trade roles (twin)  
 Q2+B3 work Veer Read  
 Q3+A+Z work Bubble and Block

**PERSONNEL**  
 OLine (2 each)  
 Hbacks (ALL)  
 Qbs (none)  
 Coaches (1)

**VEER SCHEME REVIEW**  
 \*work Veer Scheme versus Defensive fronts  
 Oline & Hback work split zone + straight zone + slice zone blocking



**GOALS** – ball never touches the ground and receivers-backs get 10 yds and past blockers. Blockers can stop once ball carrier is past them. Return to LOS using opposite hand (Ball Security) - NEVER throw ball back!  
**ROTATE** – Qbs take 4 reps and rotate clockwise. Bbacks rotate clockwise every rep. Xrecs rotate from Defense to Receiver. Arecs rotate from Defense to Receiver. Zrecs rotate from Defense to Receiver \*ALL trade after 2.5 mins  
**NOTES** – finish with 4 reps of "North Lightning-Rangers" (stutter bubble & go)

**GOALS** – take correct 1<sup>st</sup> steps toward and eyes on LB level for 2on2 Combo blocking progression  
 \*play side Tackle leaves DE#3 & uses Replace steps  
**ROTATE** – 3 reps each way and rotate Defense to Offense = 12 plays total in 5 min period  
**NOTES** – work versus fronts and blitzes you will see

## VARIATIONS:

We are able to scaffold other plays using the split zone-veer concept as the foundation. Here are some complimentary plays or variations that we use.

### Slice zone-veer (Hback slices to backer = handles backer exchange)

\*Diagram 6: notice Hback reads defensive end to block outside backer (Mr0)

## Slice Zone Veer RPO

**\*Teaching Point = H reads Dend - if wide = inside, if slanting = out and around to SAM**

**PRE ACCESS**  
 \*Speed Out (5 step) if DOG OFF  
 \*Go (3 step) if DOG ON (5 yds)  
 \*Bubble & Block Frontside  
 \*If Access = QB cues Back only  
 \*Banjo cue to Bback = BANJO block DE#3 (J-path up & out)

OX #2  
 Dog #1, Will, Mike, Sam, E#3, NG, DT, DE#3, H, Cat #1, #s X, #s Z

**POST READ "DE#3"**  
 \*If NO Access backside – QB Post snap reads DE #3 (#3 Flow - GO) Qb run outside DE

**Oline Veer Rule**  
 \*Slide Strong (Zone blocking)  
 \*BST slide strong and hinge-Lock

**BBack** – 3 step Dive inside & Dart out

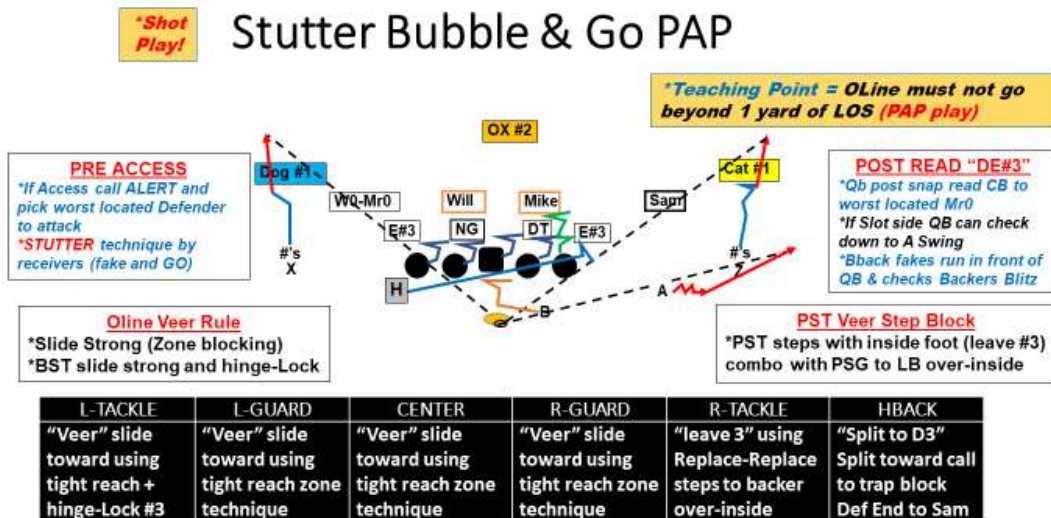
**PST Veer Step Block**  
 \*PST steps with inside foot (leave #3) combo with PSG to LB over-inside

L-TACKLE	L-GUARD	CENTER	R-GUARD	R-TACKLE	HBACK
"Veer" slide toward using tight reach + hinge-Lock #3	"Veer" slide toward using tight reach zone technique	"Veer" slide toward using tight reach zone technique	"Veer" slide toward using tight reach zone technique	"leave 3" using Replace-Replace steps to backer over-inside	"Slice to Sam" Slice toward call to block Mr0 (Sam backer)



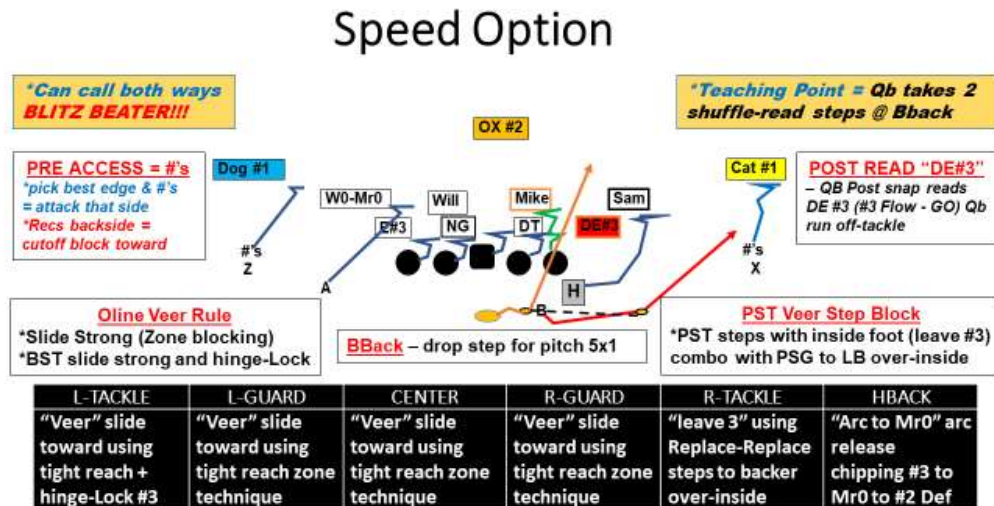
## Stutter bubble & go (double move PAP pass)

**\*Diagram 7:** notice OLine still uses split zone-veer blocking rules – but, must not go downfield more than 1 yard since it is a play-action-pass



## Speed Option (blitz beater)

**\*Diagram 8:** notice Hback avoids defensive end by "arc" releasing outside to block secondary force defenders





## CONCLUSION:

For us the key to making complex simple was to first study and really learn the details of a quality and proven system first and foremost. Second, we were able to keep the integrity of that system while making one small adaptation for the needs of our 9<sup>th</sup> graders. Next was the flexibility the system provided - we have been able to alternate 2 QB's each season along with using multiple backs and receivers to help the overall development for the players future in the varsity program.

Last and most important, this is fun football! It provides opportunities for every position player to not only be involved, but be successful doing it. All while the OLine learns and executes 1 blocking scheme.

A commitment to BALANCE creates opportunity. As my old college OC stated (*back when I was playing QB in the 80's @ Luther College in Iowa*) - **Mike Eayrs, Retired Head of Research and Development for the NFL's Green Bay Packers, over the last 30+ years in the NFL**, the distance of 12 or more yards on runs and 16 or more yards for passes are the *minimum distance needed* to trigger a dramatic increase in scoring probability. When these distances are achieved on a run or a pass they are labeled *Explosive Plays*. In that same timeframe, the NFL team with a positive turnover ratio and more explosive plays (You get more than you give up) win 91% of the time!

## KEY STATISTICS:

In the first two years of going completely no huddle-spread RPO's, our QB's threw 37 TD passes to 10 interceptions while averaging 20 yards per catch (Explosive plays). We also had 62 rushing TD's while averaging 6 yards per carry (9<sup>th</sup> grade HS level @ State College, PA)

***\*note – we averaged 39 points per game and went 19 and 1 during those two years = Fun Football!***

## MEET THE COACH:

**Paul Hefty – Currently an Instructor @ Penn State University** in the Kinesiology Department – teaching Coaching and Leadership courses and supervising coaching internships – while an assistant coach for 9th grade football @ State College High School. Previously an OC and HC @ the small college - D3 level in the Midwest for 20 years before retiring to raise a family and teach at Penn State University.

### **This is a series of RPO's being Adapted for Any Level:**

Case One = Split Zone RPO

Case Two = Power RPO

Case Three = Sweep RPO

If interested contact me from my website – love talking about coaching.

**Hefs Coach Talk Website:** <http://sites.psu.edu/hefcoach14/>