



Making and Faking the Handoff

Once the quarterback and center begin working together smoothly, the running back is introduced to the drills.

Both the quarterback and the running back must execute precise footwork for any handoff to be successful, but it is the quarterback's job and responsibility to make certain that the ball is placed firmly against the runner's midsection.

When the quarterback approaches the handoff spot, he should be holding the ball securely in both hands. As he extends his arms and hands away from his stomach toward the ball carrier, the hand closest to the runner should come off the ball and the ball should be placed into the runner's midsection with the hand farthest away. Many coaches tell the quarterback to place the ball on the far hip of the runner. These coaches obviously do not expect that to happen, but they are trying to make certain that the quarterback understands the importance of getting the ball into the runner's stomach area rather than merely placing the ball on the near hip of the running back, where it likely will be fumbled.

Drill: Dive Handoff

A coach should be positioned where he can observe both players and the execution of the handoff. The drills should be repeated for each type of run that will be used by the offense.

It often is advisable to give the quarterback and the running back some time to work together before reintroducing the center to the drills. The ball carrier can align himself in the proper position and the quarterback starts the drill with the ball already in his grasp. On the snap count, both players then should execute their respective footwork for the play that was called, and the handoff is made.

Drill: Deep Handoff

If there is a problem with any one segment of the play when all three players are working together, the coach should stop the drill, separate the players once again, isolate the problem skill, and work on it individually until it is corrected. Allowing players to practice bad habits or to execute incorrect physical techniques only enforces that action by the player. The sooner a bad technique is pointed out to a player - especially to the quarterback - the quicker it can be changed and practiced correctly.

All quarterbacks spend hours practicing passing the ball, but only the great ones realize the importance of a well-executed running game and how much it ultimately contributes to the success of an offense. They understand and use the running game to make the passing attack even more dynamic. Rather than hastily going over ball handling, quarterbacks should spend the time needed to make the running game an integral part of the offensive attack he directs.

Faking the Handoff

When a quarterback forces the defense to try to stop a strong running game, he has set up one of the best plays in football - the play-action pass. This play looks like a run as it starts, but in reality is a passing play.

In order to insure the success of this type of play, the quarterback and the running back must convince the defense that the handoff has taken place. The quarterback must look like he is placing the ball into the running back's stomach and the running back must run as if he has the ball.

Two techniques are used by a quarterback when executing this type of fake. The first is putting the ball on his hip away from the line of scrimmage and then faking giving the ball to the running back with the other (empty) hand. If it is done quickly enough, this may momentarily fool the defense. But with this type of fake, the ball is not really secured in both hands by the quarterback; should he be hit from the rear there is an excellent chance for a fumble.

The second method of faking play-action is for the quarterback to extend the ball into the running back's stomach must make the defense think that he has the ball by running as hard as he would on an actual running play. The two-handed fake is preferred because the defensive players really see the ball being extended to the running back. By having both hands on the ball at all times, the quarterback has greater control over the ball, hence there is less chance of losing it. Also, after extending the ball and then taking it away from the ball carrier, the quarterback has the ball in both hands and is in an ideal position to set up and pass to a receiver down-field.

The important thing for the quarterback to remember is that all his hard work in learning the proper footwork for the running game, and the hours of practicing with the running back on the handoff, will pay off doubly - in a strong running attack, and subsequently, in a devastating play-action pass attack. As New York Giants general manager George Young once said, "You win with the pass - but if you can't run, you can't pass."