

Mankato West's Spread Offensive Philosophy

By Head Football Coach Mark Esch

In 2003, I was introduced to the spread offense by Tim Hermann, head football coach at Austin High School. We were about 50 to 60 percent spread in Austin, but the thing I liked most while serving as Offensive Line Coach under Tim was that he was open to new ideas. This sparked an offensive creativity that I tried to carry over here at Mankato West when I started as head coach three seasons ago. With the history of Mankato West, I knew we would get good athletes that could run and catch the football. The spread offense took off right away and we have never looked back. In this article, I want to paint a picture of some of the key elements of the spread.

Many people think that to run the spread offense you must have a great running Quarterback who can throw the ball extremely well. This is not entirely true. Obviously, if you have a kid who can do both it creates a headache for the defense. However, in my experience, you don't need a kid who is great at both. I was extremely fortunate my first year at West to have a QB that excelled at both. In my time at Austin and at Mankato West we've proven that what is necessary from a spread QB is that they are excellent at either one or the other, throwing or running. Our first year in Austin, we went 6-2 in the Big 9 and lost to Farmington 16-7 in the section championship. Our Quarterback was a very average passer, but was a phenomenal runner. In our 2008 state championship season at West, our QB was a great passer and a just above average runner. There are a wide variety of Quarterbacks that fit into the spread offense. The key is finding the right guy at a young age. In our youth football program we now are identifying potential quarterbacks as young as fifth grade. These kids are running a shotgun offense by the time they are in sixth and

seventh grade.

When identifying the spread offense quarterback there are certain things I like to see him do well. From a passing standpoint, the first thing I look for is the slant route. If a quarterback can catch the ball in the gun, step and throw a strike on a slant route I believe he can be taught to throw about any route or pass combination in our system.

Another key route we look at is the bubble route. It sounds simple, but many quarterbacks struggle throwing the bubble. With the zone/read/bubble being a huge part of our offense, it is imperative that our kid can throw the bubble every time it is open. Many times you will see a kid with a great arm struggle throwing a simple pass like the bubble pass. If this is the case, it is usually a simple footwork problem that can be easily remedied.

A third important aspect of any spread quarterback is the ability to read the defense. I understand that this is the case in most offenses, but the spread they must understand both the coverage and the front to be effective. Many times we call our play at the line of scrimmage and any of our play calls could be paired with another play. Our QB must be able to know which play is best, or which decision must be made with paired plays.

Another aspect I like about the spread is you can pinpoint strengths and build upon them. As I mentioned in 2008 we had a great passing Quarterback with excellent wide receivers. We identified early on that our QB threw the 3 step, sprintout, and screen game very well but did not excel at the 5 step game. This outside threat of our passing game forced a lot of teams to play a 5 man box, and as a result, we were extremely



successful running the football. There have also been years where our spread team has excelled at running the football, which creates many one-on-one matchups outside allowing an average passing team to throw the ball effectively. As a result of being able to both throw and run effectively, it gives us the ability to spread a the field not just horizontally, but vertically. The goal of our spread philosophy is to make the defense cover every yard of the football field. We stretch the field vertically with our speed. Our three-step or quick pass game can also stretch the field vertically, but is imperative to our horizontal stretch. The final aspect is our run game which stretches the field horizontally (but hopefully vertically too)!

One of my favorite aspects of the spread is that the offense can create problems for any defense by formation. It is usually only a matter of time before a spread offense, if ran correctly, will find a

"THE KEEPERS OF THE GAME"

weak spot in the defense. This may be the case with any offense, but the spread—by its nature spreading the field—can create some explosive plays when the weaknesses in the defense are found. We thoroughly look at every formation and try to identify how it is going to be defended each week. We will identify how teams play trips, where they play their alley players, how we can get an advantage on run blocking angles, and several other items that will dictate what we think will be successful. We have coaches assigned to drawing up the defense against each formation on game night so we can also make game plan adjustments between possessions and at half.

Our no-huddle adds a key element to

this game planning package. We can get in a formation, knowing we want to run 3-4 simple plays out of that formation. We can take a look at how the defense has lined up and make the appropriate call. We can also adjust after a play is called if needed. This can take some of the stress off of the Quarterback by allowing the Offensive Coordinator to make key decisions.

Our no huddle system also puts a great deal of stress on the defense. Other types of offense may wear down a defense by pounding the football. The spread offense wears the opposing defense down by making them cover the entire field. This forces all defensive players to run sideline to sideline on almost every play. We have had a great deal of success wearing teams

down with our finesse as opposed to our power.

In summary, there are many benefits to the spread offense and I believe most teams are capable of running the offense. It does require a total commitment and a willingness to learn. The benefits of the spread are numerous and I believe most teams in the state have the ability to achieve success in implementing this offense.

The Next Generation in Football Awards...

Personalized Photo Footballs



Logo / Mascot Balls

Team Balls



Achievement Balls

Player Balls



- **Any Photo (Digital or Hard Copy)**
- **On-Line Ordering Capabilities**
- **You Can Design or We Can do for You**
- **Sublimation (Hi Quality) Printing (No Stickers or Decals)**
- **Team Quotes Available**

- **Coaches / Seniors Gifts**
- **Banquet Awards**
- **All Conference / All State Awards**
- **Championship Trophies**
- **Achievement Awards**
- **Game Balls / Players of the Game**

Other Sports Available



Champlin, MN • (763) 227-9309 • www.safsportsenterprises.com