



Tags for Inside Zone

According to PFF (Pro Football Focus), in 2017, NFL teams ran inside zone on 28.4% of all run attempts. Since then, I am confident that inside zone has continued to be one of the most prevalent run play utilized across all levels of football. A zone concept has several specific pros that make it one of the most adaptable run schemes in football.

The first pro of inside zone is its simplicity for offensive linemen. Of course there are many variations of verbiage when it comes to rules by different teams, but if an offensive linemen knows the direction of the zone scheme, he can adapt a hard-set rule to be successful: protect playside, head up, then backside. The only way an offensive linemen does not step playside is if defensive linemen is head up or to his inside shade. A head up defensive lineman must be blocked and an inside shade will turn into a double team from the backside. Understanding this basic concept allows this scheme to be successful versus many fronts, blitzes, or stunts.

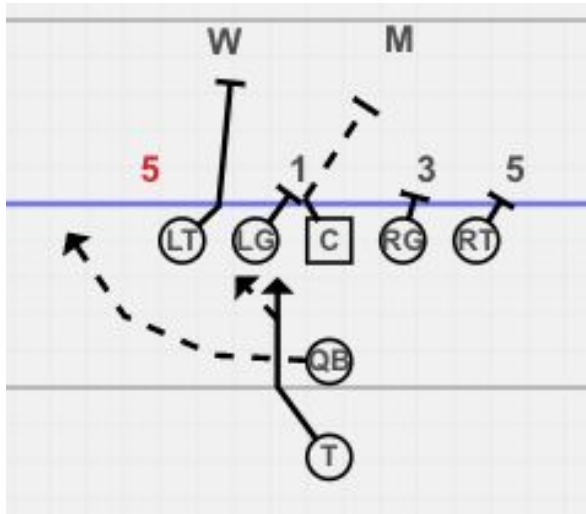
Another pro of incorporating inside zone is it is a versatile run scheme, that allows an offense to make use of it in many different types of plays. This concept can be utilized out of ALL personnel groupings and formations and can either be a “staple” of an offense or a complementary piece. This scheme has become more popular because it is a “cheap” way to get the quarterback-run-game going by placing defensive players in conflict. Specific tags can be utilized to create variations within the run and it can be utilized in RPOs and play action passes.

Throughout this article, we will look at several (not all) tags that can change the appearance of inside zone. These tags are not limited to the formations and personnel

groups described, however, show basic steps to create an inside zone scheme package.

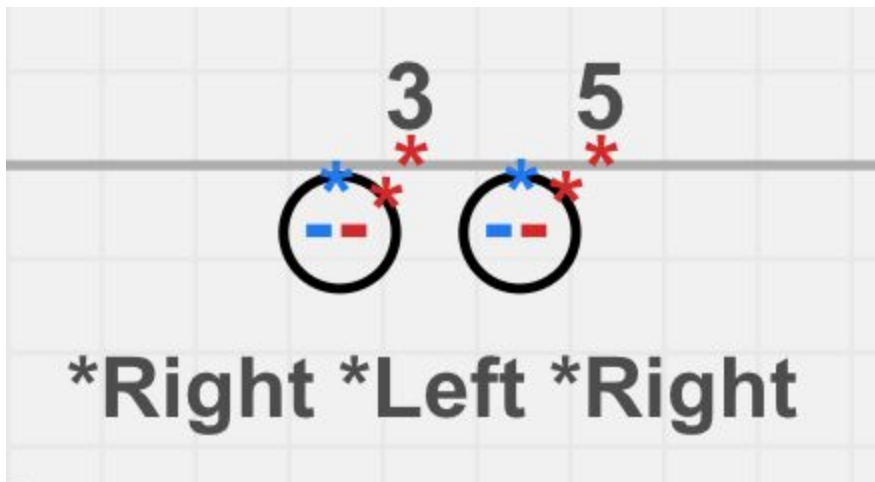
INSIDE ZONE BASICS <https://youtu.be/LDR2I0o53-U>

The picture below diagrams a basic depiction of inside (tight zone) vs. a “over”



front (3 to strength, shade to backside) and a 4-2 box. Obviously, the higher the level of competition, the more consistent of defensive alignment teams will face. For explanation purposes, we will look at this base front vs. this run scheme. Adhering to the rules mentioned, players block playside; if no playside then head up; and if not head up then double with backside OL. The RG and RT both, have outside techniques to

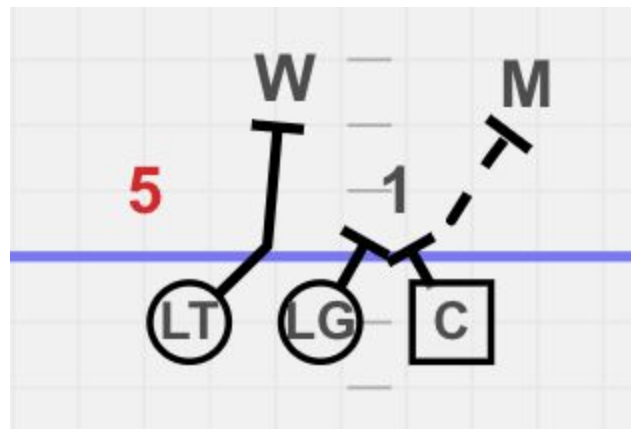
their playside, meaning they will block them. Every OL coach is different and will teach different ways to handle these techniques. The ultimate goal of these two blocks is to keep these techniques playside and NOT allow these techniques to block the guard and tackles face. Below is a visual representation of the steps needed (red is right foot, blue is left).



In this tight zone scheme, we want to keep these techniques to the playside and not allow them backside. The first step by the guard and tackle is a small step, that is almost “pick up, put

down” to guard against any inside move. Coach the first step to be in-line with the defender’s inside shoulder, closing the gap between. (Some coaches talk about 6” steps in this situation, however, each player and play is different making it difficult to give a concrete rule such as this). The next step with the left foot is gaining ground while making sure the OL’s shoulders are as square as possible, guarding against another inside move. The third step should again, gain ground, and split the defender in half while engaging. A thought for the OL is that the defender can play head up or outside but must NOT go inside. On the other hand, do not coach these players to “open the gate” and allow penetration on the outside of the play.

The next portion of the play is perhaps the most important. Since the center has no one in his immediate, playside gap or head up, he makes a call with the LG to double team the shade. This double team needs to get vertical movement away from the line of scrimmage. The center will take a hard

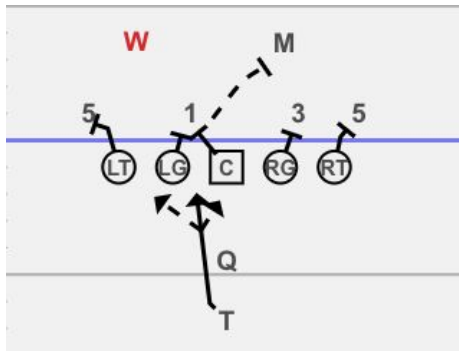


step with his left foot, punching immediately with his left hand with his eyes up. The LG will take a playside step with his right foot and look to deposit the shade across the center. The center’s mindset is to get vertical movement on the shade until a linebacker shows. It is very important for his eyes to remain up on the playside, inside LB (shown as Mike) in case he shows in the playside A gap. Again, coaches discuss leverage and displacement different, depending on their theory of inside zone. Nothing is right or wrong. The last piece is the LT working to the B gap linebacker (shown as Will). He will take a playside step, protecting B gap in case the shade spikes to that gap or the Will triggers immediately. This does not have to be a knockout block, however, if the LT comes to balance and engages the Will, it will provide a great cutback for the running back.

The running back's path is slightly different depending on the front and blocks that will take place. As a rule, he is to read the block by the center. Vs the 4-2 Over front, shown at the beginning of the article, this run will hit either frontside A gap or backside B gap. The double team on the shade with dictate this run. Vs an under front, the OL will be able to have two double teams (creating the play commonly known as "Duo") pushing the read spot to the frontside A gap.

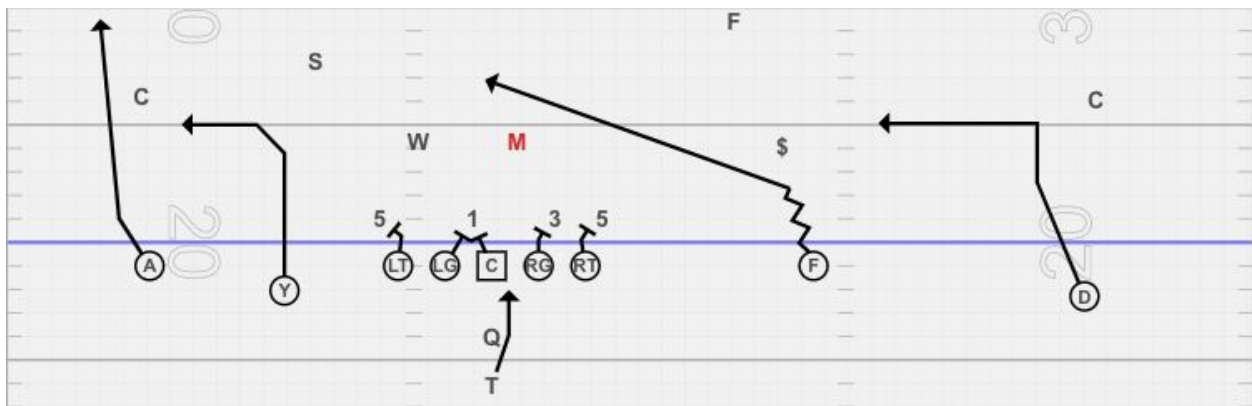
ZONE LOCK https://youtu.be/Ds_aG6G4DPU

One way to utilize inside zone in the RPO game is to "lock" the backside tackle on the defensive end. This protects the quarterback for a throw and allows him to read the movement of the Will or backside linebacker. Teams can also utilize this tag a run scheme if they are getting a scrap-exchange action from the backside end and Will.

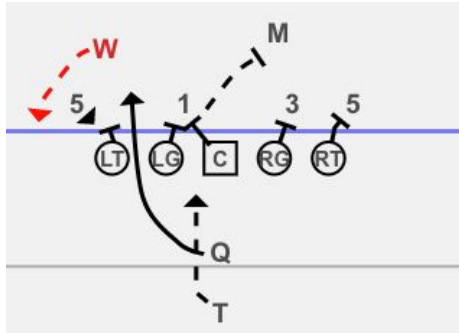


Versus this run scheme, backside linebackers (the Will), will see a double team in his face and will look to fill B gap. To combat this aggression, adding the "lock" tag gives him a clear read and allows you to throw quick game behind him. Many teams across all levels of football utilize the "pop" route or double slants off of this run scheme. If a defense knows they

have to combat inside zone and quick game they will slow down. Here, the quarterback will read the backside linebacker (Mike) and if he triggers, the quarterback will throw the pop route by the F. If the linebacker drops in coverage or stays flat-footed, the quarterback will give the football.



As mentioned above, this tag is also a good way to combat any scrape exchange that defenses employ to confuse the quarterback in the zone read game. As a standalone call, zone lock gives the quarterback the freedom to read the backside

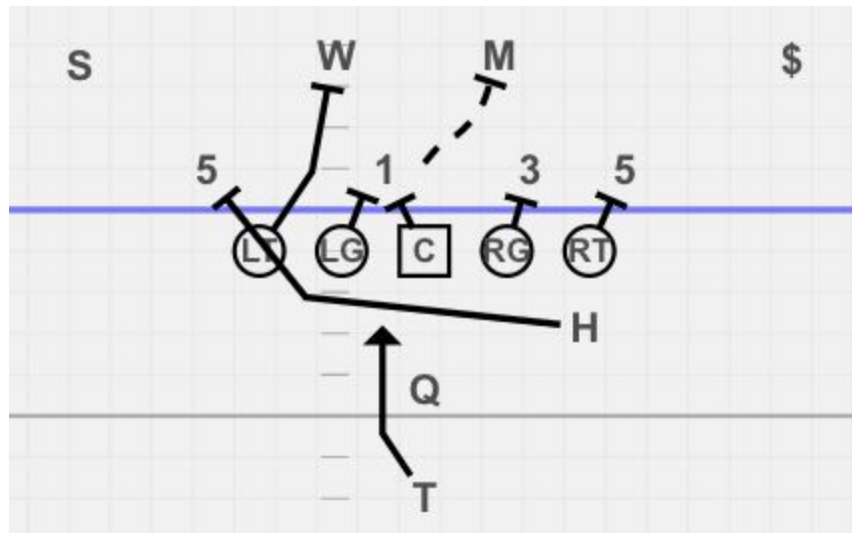


linebacker. If the Will fills B gap it is a give or throw, if he scrape exchanges to C gap, the quarterback can now pull the ball and attack B gap (shown left).

Again, this tag is primarily used to throws off of, however, can be utilized when teams try to bait a pull read for the quarterback.

ZONE DIVIDE <https://youtu.be/JgyQnhNKecA>

Zone “Divide” is one of the most popular tags across all levels of football. This is utilized in 11/20 personnel groupings (11-1 TE, 1 RB, 3 WR; 20-2 RB, 3 WR).



If you are fortunate enough to have a tight end/H back type player, this run can be very effective. This action can come from an H back formation or a 2-back set out of shotgun. Zone Divide is a great way to protect C gap to C gap and can be utilized as a traditional run, RPO, or play action.



Here is a pre snap look with an H back to the right and the running back slightly offset to the left. The play is Inside Zone Right Divide. All linemen will follow their zone rules to the right and it is up to the H back to take a great angle and attack the EMOL's (end man on the line of scrimmage) *upfield* shoulder. This is essentially a kick out block that creates a trap on the defensive end. The running back will press the center and guards double team, going opposite of the block. We tell the running back this run will cutback but to not assume his path. In this shot, the H does a great job attacking the upfield shoulder of the defensive end, who tries to wrong-arm the "kickout" block.



The left guard gets great movement on the nose and the running back presses the line of scrimmage, making linebacker reads difficult. Zone Divide creates a wall between the linemen all blocking to the right and the H back kicking out opposite. One of the most important pieces to this run is the backside tackle's ability to climb to the weakside linebacker and get on him immediately.



Above is a great still-shot of the run as the running back clears the line of scrimmage. In a perfect world all linemen would be able to stay square, however, the double team does a great job of displacing the shade.

Zone Divide is a great way to safely combat blitz on a “run down” out of 11 personnel.



Above is a pre snap picture of the Will linebacker walked up in C gap for a blitz. In the tight view, the defensive end has slid down to a head up 4 giving him the ability to play B gap. The H back’s rule on Divide is to kick out the end man of the line of scrimmage, in this situation he is the pressed linebacker. The left tackle’s rule comes into play here as well. He still does not have a playside threat, however, he now has a head up threat that he must account for.



As the linebacker blitzes off the edge, the H back does a great job of attacking his upfield shoulder, creating a huge cutback lane for the running back. After the running back has pressed the line of scrimmage, the backside double team and frontside base blocks are displacing defensive lineman horizontally, leaving a cutback for the running back.

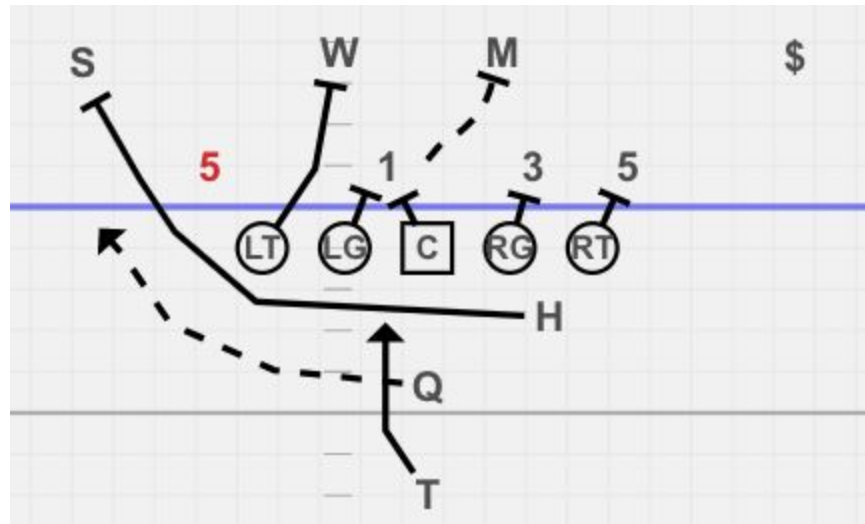
Here is a look at Duo Divide and how it gives the running back a two-way go depending on the double teams that take place up front (below). The run scheme is to the offense's left towards the shade, giving the offensive line 2 double teams (on the shade and the 3 technique to the backside). The running back will press the Center's double team and make a cut off of his disposition. This particular run shows a great job of vertically moving on the double team and muddying up the linebacker's read.



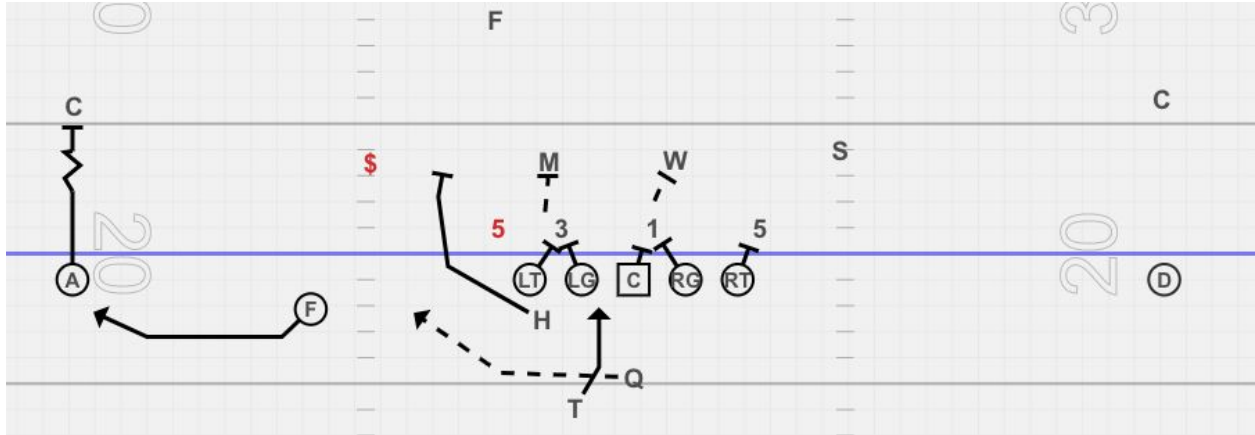


ZONE BLUFF

To compliment Zone Divide, “Bluff” gives the defense the same look as Divide except the H will avoid the end man away from the run and look to engage the D gap defender. This tag gives the quarterback the ability to read the end man and have a lead blocker if he is given a pull read. The D gap defender could be an outside linebacker in a 4-4 or 3-4 scheme or could be a roll down safety in a 4-2-5 scheme.

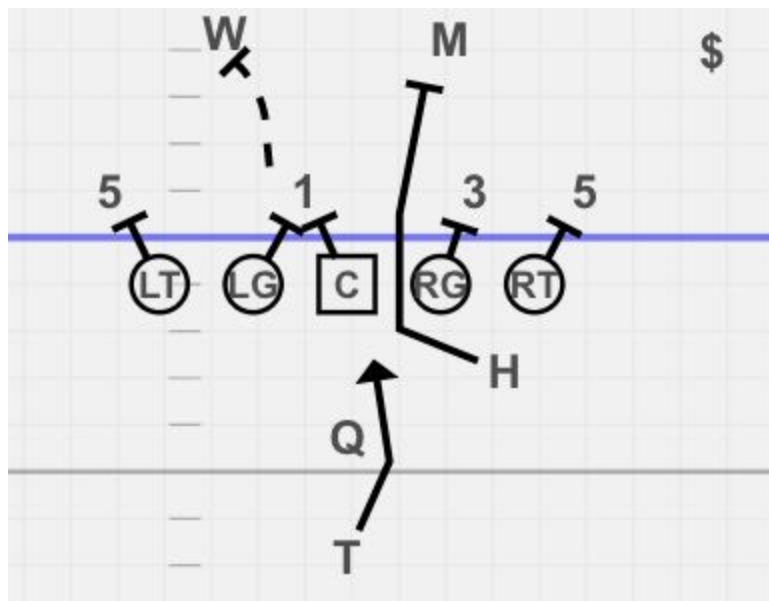


Bluff is a great compliment to Divide because the only new teaching is for the H back. He works across the formation and avoids the end man and turns up to the next level. As the H back avoids the end it may slow him down, leaving C gap wider and giving the quarterback a clearer read. This also gives the running back a larger cutback lane. In this scheme we feel that it is important to not overcoach the H back as he engages in



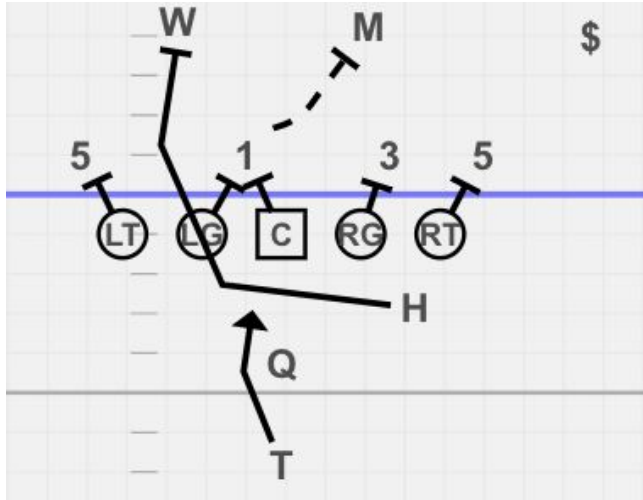
ZONE LEAD <https://youtu.be/7syKtro-2hg>

Zone “Lead” is a tag that utilizes an H back on an iso block. This is commonly known as zone “BOB” (big on big) or traditional “iso”. Below is Inside Zone Left Lead.



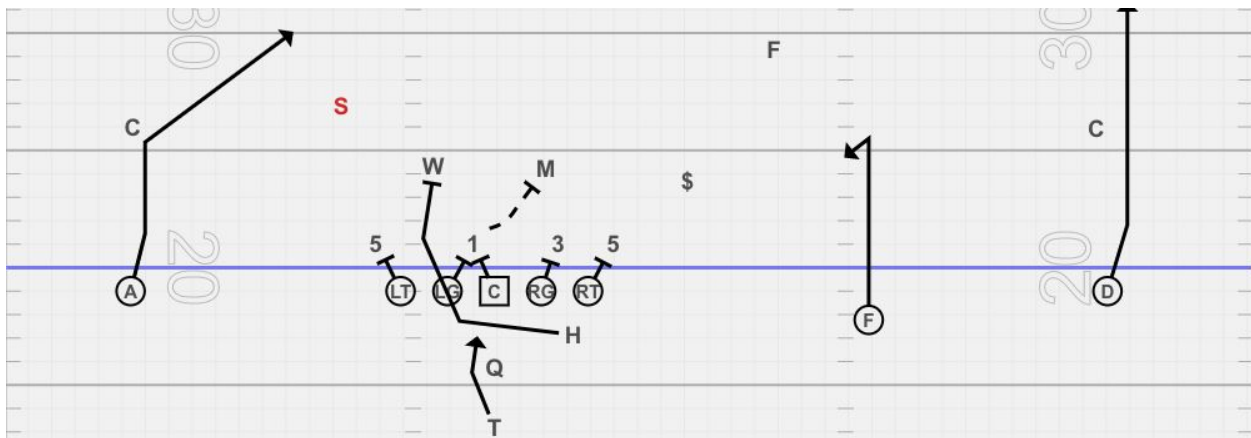
When Lead is called, it is an automatic “lock” call by the backside tackle. The H back is leading to the backside linebacker (shown as Will) and takes the best path to get there. Every week, the insertion of the H back can change depending on the front and looks the defense can give. This run can give inside zone several different looks, depending on where the H back aligns pre snap. By giving him a hard-set rule, the H back can get to his assignment from the frontside or backside of the formation. Another

way to get to Lead is running zone towards the H back, sending him almost across the formation to the weakside linebacker. This play can show linebackers flow to the



playside with the H back and running back cutting backside. Again, the most important aspect of this run is for the H back to get reps identifying the bubble in the defensive line to get the best entry to the iso block. Lead is very similar to Divide in that it protects the quarterback from frontside C gap to backside C gap, giving an offense the ability to throw quick game and screens off of this run action.

A popular RPO off of Zone Lead is a “glance” post by a single receiver. From the defense’s perspective, they are getting an 11/20 personnel set and have to make a decision defensively. If they decide to stay 2 high, the offense will have numbers in the box and probably look to run the football. However, when teams look to run some sort of sky coverage and roll down the boundary safety, they leave the boundary corner by himself in $\frac{1}{3}$ of the field in coverage.



In conclusion, Inside Zone provides an offense with flexibility in the run game, screen game, and RPO game. When in 11/20 personnel, there are many tags that can be implemented to catch defensive ends and linebackers off-guard throughout a game.

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ALL VIDEO CLIPS

IZ RPOs → https://youtu.be/Ds_aG6G4DPU

IZ QB Read → <https://youtu.be/LDR2I0o53-U>

IZ Lead → <https://youtu.be/7syKtro-2hg>

IZ Divide → <https://youtu.be/JgyQnhNKecA>

IZ Circle → <https://youtu.be/3tahSCSaSTQ>