

Go Score!

Efficiency in the Scoring Zone

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From the time we watched our first game, we all understood the fundamental role of the offense in the game of football. The purpose of the offense is not to control the clock, nor is it to create field position or give the defense a rest. Although these are all important by-products of an effective offense, they are not the primary focus. The role of the offense is to score points, period. It is with that basic premise in mind that we communicate and develop our philosophy for the area between the opponents' 25-yard line and their 5-yard line, the area we refer to as the "Scoring Zone". We use this reference in an effort to communicate to our team what we intend to do when the ball reaches this point.

Goals

When developing a scoring zone philosophy or plan, we must first set parameters or goals of what we are trying to accomplish. This allows players and coaches to understand the importance of efficiency in this area. It also gives us a tool to measure ourselves. When setting efficiency goals for the scoring zone, we want to first be realistic. We want to set standards that are attainable but not underachieving. Meeting a goal serves no purpose if it does not help us win. Secondly, we must set a standard that not only challenges our unit, but also communicates the level of performance that we expect from our offense. Lastly, we must take into account the effectiveness of our kicking game and kicker. Can we expect at least a field goal when we reach the 25-yard line? Going into each season we will adjust our scoring zone performance expectations slightly. For the 2000 season, we entered each game with the following objective.

1. 80% in the Scoring Zone (TD or FG)
2. 67% TD's

Through the MAC championship game, we were able to score 41 of 48 times in the scoring zone for 85%. We were able to score TD's 71% of the time, or 34 of the 48 times in the scoring zone. In this respect, we were efficient and successful in this area. For the 2001 season, these performance expectations may be slightly altered in the effort to raise the bar.

Philosophy

When developing a scoring zone philosophy, we first look at the personality of our offense. We do not want to drastically alter from our attacking style of offense. Our offensive philosophy is

based on a two-pronged attack. We want to be balanced and unpredictable, blending the run with the pass from a variety of looks using different combinations of personnel, formations, shifting, and motion.

With this in mind, we set forth to develop our scoring zone package in an effort to keep pressure on opposing defenses. We want to stay consistent in our approach with our unit while remaining unpredictable to our opponents. We try to keep the following considerations in mind when developing our scoring zone plan.

- A. What is the opponents' defensive philosophy in this area? Through film study we can determine if the defense is zone oriented or based on increased pressure.
- B. While trying to attack the defense, do not make calls that jeopardize the field position. That is, avoid negative plays.
- C. Try to avoid 3rd and long situations. Our advantage is the run/pass threat. 3rd and long reduces the threat, and defenses will have special coverages or blitzes for these situations.
- D. Utilize a wider variety of motion, shifting, personnel grouping and formations to create indecision on the part of the defense.
- E. Coach this aspect of the game to convey a great sense of urgency to your offense. This can be done in the classroom and, more importantly, by committing practice time to this important facet of the game. The more you are able to put players in this situation in practice, the more poise and production they will display on the field.

Pre-Scoring Zone

As coaches, we all realize that efficiency in the scoring zone is vitally important to winning any game. However, one area that many game plans over-look is the part of the field leading up to the scoring zone. Spending time to plan for this area will increase your opportunities in the scoring zone. At Western Michigan, the priority for us once we cross the 50-yard line is to use a combination of plays that will increase our chances of crossing the 25-yard line. When choosing plays for this area, we try to keep 2 basic ideas in mind:

1. Utilize plays that have the highest degree of success in the 10- 15 yard range.
2. Do not become conservative on your approach, but avoid plays that might put your team into a position of having to convert a 3rd and long (i.e.the use of deceptive such as reverses etc.), and avoid protections that have the quarterback sit deep in the pocket making multiple reads. This is a great place to use the quick passing game and protections that move the pocket.

This is also an area you must determine how far out to extend your 4th down territory. Oftentimes this is influenced by your kicking ability and weather/field conditions. We plan for this during the week and take time to explain our intentions to our offense to not surprise them on game day. We want 4th down attempts interpreted as further "attack," and not as "panic" on the part of the coaching staff.

The Plan

We break down the scoring zone into 3 separate areas.

A. +24-+15

B. +14-+10

C. +9-IN

In each category, we will have 3-4 specific passes and 2-3 specific runs. The passing package for the 3 combined areas will include:

A. Drop Back

B. Play-Action

C. Sprint-Out

D. Screens

We will attack the defense with vertical routes such as corners, streaks and post routes (especially on early downs). As mentioned previously, we will increase the use of shifting and use personnel and formation change-ups to ensure one on one situations, create personnel mismatches and forces the defense into pre-snap adjustments they may not be accustomed to.

The run package for the three combined areas will include:

1. Inside quick-rhythm runs that can be run on quick a cadence
2. A way to quickly pressure the perimeter of the defense safely.
3. A misdirection play vs. fast flowing or overpursuing defenses.

In this area, it is imperative that you control the point of attack and allow the ball carrier to do his job. We must also not allow penetration across the front in an effort to avoid negative yardage plays. Extra tight-end sets, wing sets and unbalanced formation can be used to your advantage in this area to create the match-ups desire. The ability to run the ball must be stressed to your unit. This is an area that requires tough, physical blocking and running. The ability to establish the run in the scoring zone significantly increases your chances for success.

Key Coaching Points

1. Don't use route combinations or blocking schemes not otherwise practiced. Create the deception and change through motion, shifts, and formations.

2. Find ways to get the ball to playmakers. Take advantage of your special players. Don't ask someone to do something he is not capable of.

3. Strive for simplicity to enhance confidence and your ability to help your team from the sideline. QB reads, blocking assignments and route adjustments can be received more readily if they are simple to begin with. Remember simplicity to your unit may be achieved while creating a drastic change for the defense. (i.e. a base play from a different personnel grouping with a shift)

4. Commit practice time and meeting time to this as often as possible. At Western Michigan, we practice scoring zone one-on-one (WR vs. DB's) ever other practice. We have a scoring period of 7- on-7 on both Wednesday and Thursday. We have a team scoring zone period on both Wednesday and Thursday and a-team walk-through on both Thursday and Friday. The more we emphasize the importance of an efficient scoring zone plan, the more our players will work to ensure success.

At Western Michigan, we strive to be creative and unpredictable in all areas of offensive football. Some of our greatest challenges have come in this area of the field. Hopefully, some of the ideas I have presented you will find worthwhile. Success in the scoring zone does not happen by chance. When you have a plan, teach your plan, believe in your plan and practice your plan, it will pay the dividends you seek.