

Free 5 on 5 Flag Football Playbook

17 plays (4 runs, 10 passes, 3 trick plays) with a diagram, the QB's reads, coaching points and common mistakes for each one. Free, no sign-up, made for volunteer coaches.

How to use this playbook

1. Pick 4 to 6 plays your team can learn this season. Fewer plays run well beat many plays run badly.
2. Keep the numbers: they match the wristband cards from the free playbook builder at flagcoachplays.com/playbook-builder/.
3. Walk each play at practice, then jog it, then run it against defenders.
4. Teach the QB the first read before anything else.

Before your first game

- These plays follow NFL FLAG style rules: no blocking, and the QB hands off or passes instead of running past the line.
- Leagues change rules, especially for rushing and for 6U and 8U. Check your league's rulebook.
- Inside a no-run zone a run play has to end in a forward pass, so have one pass play ready.

SYMBOLS

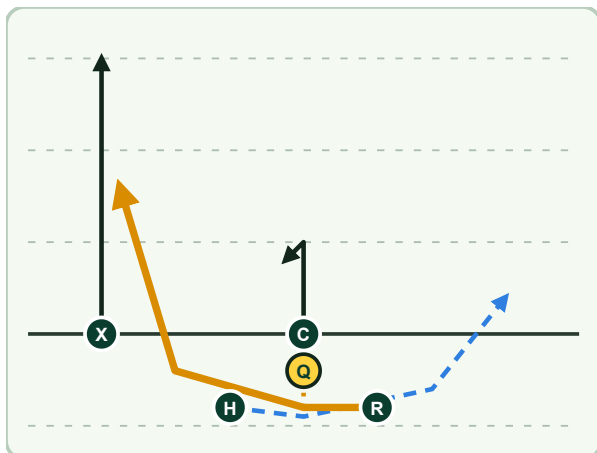
 Offense
  Defense
  Pass route
  Ball carrier
  Fake
  Handoff
  QB read order

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1 Crossbuck

Run · Split Backs · 6U, 8U, 10U



Two backs cross behind the quarterback. The QB fakes to the first back and hands to the second, who runs the opposite way. Young defenses chase the first body they see, so the real runner usually gets the edge.

CALL IT WHEN

Early in a game to find out which defenders chase the fake, and any time the defense is crashing hard toward the ball.

QB READS

1. R takes the handoff and bends to the left sideline.
2. H carries out the fake hard and finishes in the right flat, ready for a pass on the play-action version.
3. X runs straight downfield to pull a defender away from the run lane.

COACHING POINTS

- The fake only works if H sells it: arms folded as if holding the ball, head down, running full speed.
- The QB should turn their back to the defense for the fake so nobody can see which back gets the ball.
- R waits one beat before crossing so the two backs do not collide behind the QB.

COMMON MISTAKES

- The backs start at the same time and run into each other. Stagger them by one step.
- The QB watches the runner after the handoff. Keep the QB faking to H to hold a defender.

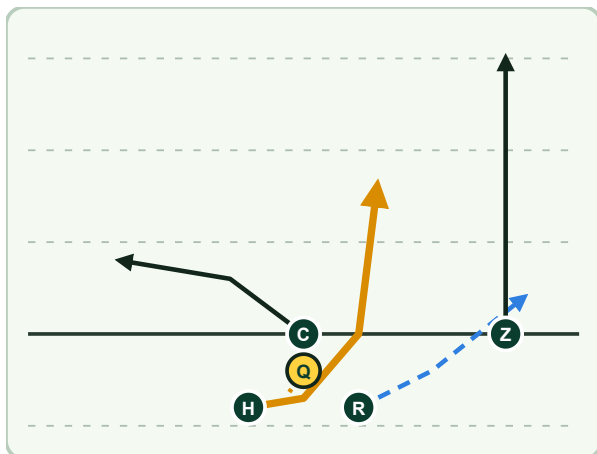
WHEN THEY ADJUST

If the defense stops chasing the fake, run it once as a play-action pass to H in the flat.

Full write-up: flagcoachplays.com/plays/crossbuck/

2 Double Back Dive

Run · Split Backs · 6U, 8U, 10U



A simple short-yardage run for young teams. The QB hands the ball to the left back, who crosses behind the QB and runs just to the right of the center. The right back runs to the flat as a decoy, and the receiver runs deep to clear space.

CALL IT WHEN

On short yardage outside the no-run zones, and as a first play for teams that are new to handoffs.

QB READS

1. H takes the handoff and runs just to the right of the center.
2. R sprints toward the right flat to pull a defender with them.
3. Z runs deep to take a defender away from the run.

COACHING POINTS

- The QB turns and hands off with both hands on the ball.
- C releases to the left flat right away, which pulls the middle defender away from the run lane.
- H keeps the ball tight and runs straight ahead once past the center. No dancing.

COMMON MISTAKES

- H runs sideways looking for a hole. Pick the lane and go.
- The QB pulls the ball back at the last second. Commit to the handoff.

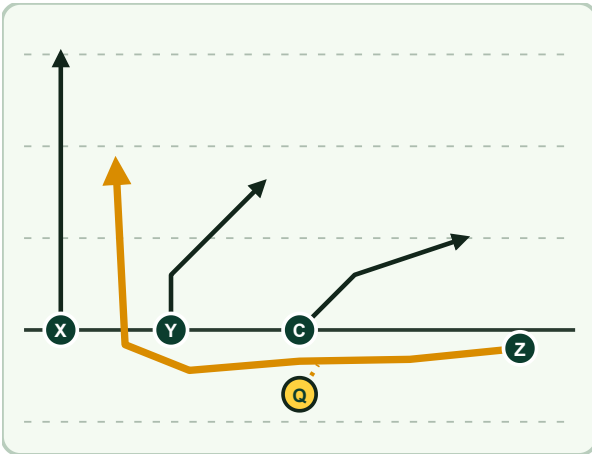
WHEN THEY ADJUST

Pair it with Crossbuck, which starts from the same look.

Full write-up: flagcoachplays.com/plays/double-back/

3 Jet Sweep

Run · Twins Left, Z in Motion · 8U, 10U, 12U



Z starts wide on the right and runs across the formation just behind the line before the snap. The ball is snapped as Z reaches the QB, the QB hands it off, and Z is already at full speed toward the left sideline while two receivers clear the edge.

CALL IT WHEN

When the defense crowds the middle, especially right after a pass play. Never inside a no-run zone: under NFL FLAG style rules, those plays must end in a pass.

QB READS

1. Z goes in motion toward the QB before the snap, running sideways behind the line.
2. Q calls for the snap when Z is one step away and hands off without slowing Z down.
3. Z stays behind the line until outside of Y, then turns up the left sideline.
4. X runs deep to take the cornerback away, and Y slants inside to pull the middle defender.

COACHING POINTS

- Timing is the whole play. Practice motion and snap together until Z reaches the QB on the same count every time, then vary the count.
- NFL FLAG style rules allow one player in motion before the snap, moving sideways or backward, never toward the line. Check your league.
- Q holds the ball out early, like a mailbox, and Z takes it on the run. Z should not slow down to look for the ball.

COMMON MISTAKES

- The snap comes too early and Z has to wait for the ball. Then the play is just a slow sweep. Snap when Z is one step away, not before.
- Z runs the motion too flat and bumps the center or the QB. Keep Z a step or two behind the line and in front of the QB.

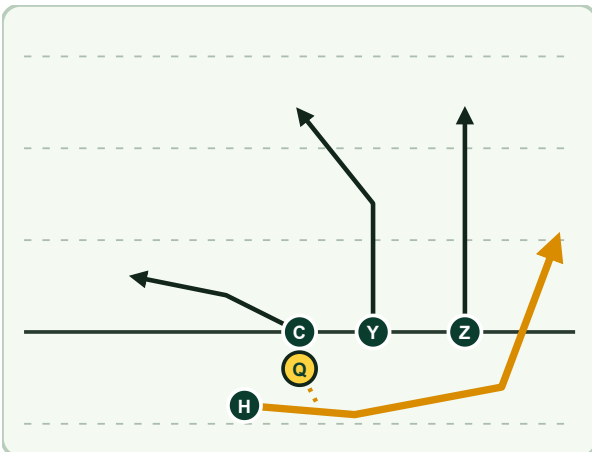
WHEN THEY ADJUST

When defenders start sprinting with the motion, keep the same look and call Fake Reverse, or run Mesh while the defense is watching Z.

Full write-up: flagcoachplays.com/plays/jet-sweep/

4 Sweep Right

Run · Slot Right, Back Left · 6U, 8U, 10U



The QB hands to a back running wide to the right sideline. The two receivers on the right run their defenders deep and to the middle to open the edge. Speed to the outside beats young defenses that pinch in.

CALL IT WHEN

When you have a fast runner and the defense lines up tight to the middle.

QB READS

1. H takes the handoff moving right and gets to the sideline before turning up.
2. Y runs a post to pull the inside defender toward the middle.
3. Z runs deep to take the cornerback away from the sideline.

COACHING POINTS

- H should take the handoff already moving at full speed.
- C runs a shallow drag to the left so the middle defender has to choose between the drag and chasing the sweep.
- Turn upfield only once past the last defender; running wide too long just loses yards.

COMMON MISTAKES

- H turns up too early into the defense.
- Y and Z stop running once the handoff happens. Keep running until the whistle so their defenders stay with them.

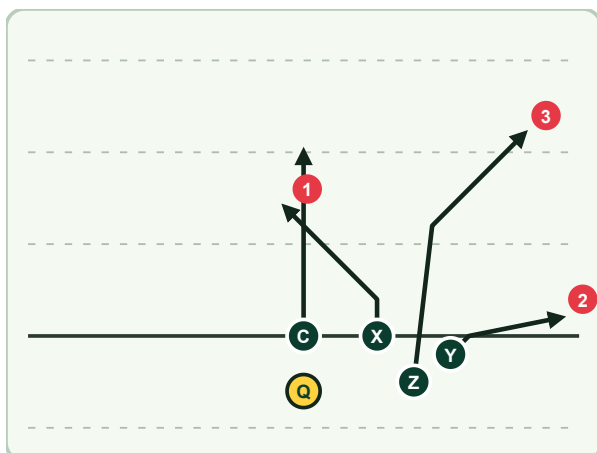
WHEN THEY ADJUST

Run the Reverse off the same look once the defense races to the right sideline.

Full write-up: flagcoachplays.com/plays/sweep/

5 Bunch Slant-Flat-Corner

Pass · Bunch Right · 8U, 10U, 12U



Three receivers line up in a tight triangle, then burst out in three directions: a slant inside, a flat to the sideline and a corner over the top. Defenders lined up close together have to sort out who covers whom, and the confusion leaves someone open.

CALL IT WHEN

Against man-to-man, or any defense that lines up tight on your receivers.

QB READS

1. X on the slant: a quick throw right after the snap.
2. Y in the flat if the slant is jumped.
3. Z on the corner if the defense squeezes both short routes.

COACHING POINTS

- Line the bunch up about 5 yards from the center so the flat has room to the sideline.
- Every receiver takes one hard step before breaking. That first step is what freezes the defenders.
- C runs straight up the middle to hold the middle defender in place.

COMMON MISTAKES

- The bunch lines up too wide apart, which removes the traffic that makes the play work.
- The QB waits too long on the slant. It is a one-step, throw-now route.

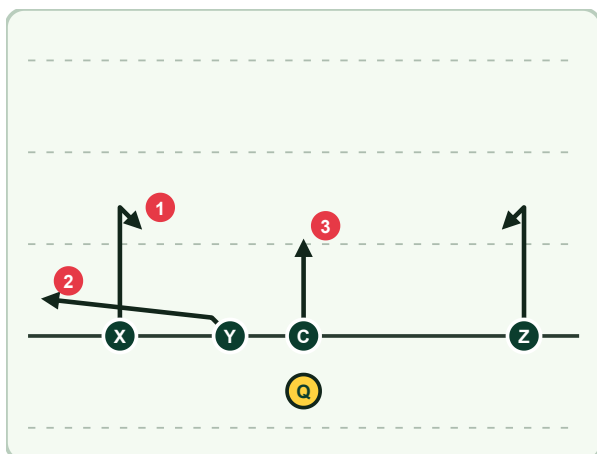
WHEN THEY ADJUST

Flip the routes: X runs the flat and Y runs the slant, so defenders who learned the first version guess wrong.

Full write-up: flagcoachplays.com/plays/bunch-slant-flat/

6 Curl-Flat

Pass · Twins Left · 6U, 8U, 10U, 12U



The outside receiver runs 6 yards and turns back to the QB. The inside receiver runs to the flat underneath. One defender is responsible for both areas, and whichever one they choose, the QB throws to the other.

CALL IT WHEN

Any down. It is the most dependable pass in youth flag, and a good first pass for any team.

QB READS

1. Watch the flat defender. If they drop toward the curl, throw the flat to Y.
2. If they jump the flat, throw the curl to X.
3. C at 5 yards over the middle if both are covered.

COACHING POINTS

- X turns back toward the QB, not toward the sideline, and comes back a step toward the ball.
- Y should get to the flat fast and turn around looking for the ball.
- Z runs the same curl on the other side, so the play works in both directions.

COMMON MISTAKES

- X drifts deeper instead of stopping. The curl works because it stops.
- Y runs too deep. The flat is 1 to 2 yards past the line.

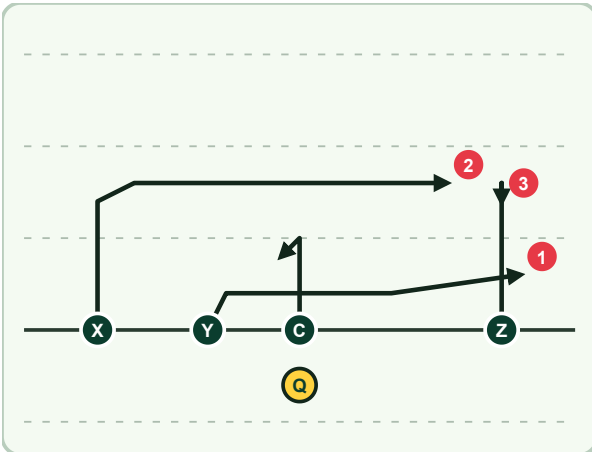
WHEN THEY ADJUST

When the defense sits on the curl, call Stack Go-Out or have X fake the curl and go deep.

Full write-up: flagcoachplays.com/plays/curl-flat/

7 Drive

Pass · Twins Left · 8U, 10U, 12U, 14U



The inside slot runs a shallow cross at 2 yards, and the outside receiver runs a dig at 8 yards right behind it. Both routes attack the same middle defender, so if they step up to cover the shallow cross, the QB throws over the top to the dig, and if they sit deep, the ball goes low.

CALL IT WHEN

Second down and medium, or any time the defense is playing man coverage and the middle of the field is open.

QB READS

1. Y on the shallow cross first: if the middle defender stays deep or rushes, throw low to Y.
2. X on the dig over the top: if the middle defender steps up to take away Y, throw the dig to X.
3. Z on the curl as the third option if the middle is jammed.

COACHING POINTS

- Y crosses at 2 yards, not 4. Staying shallow keeps the dig open above it.
- X gets to 8 yards before breaking across, then runs slightly downhill toward the far sideline.
- The two crossers should stay about 5 yards apart vertically so one defender cannot cover both.

COMMON MISTAKES

- Y drifts deeper while crossing and crowds the dig. Stay at 2 yards.
- X breaks inside too early at 4 or 5 yards, right into the underneath coverage. Push to 8 before the break.

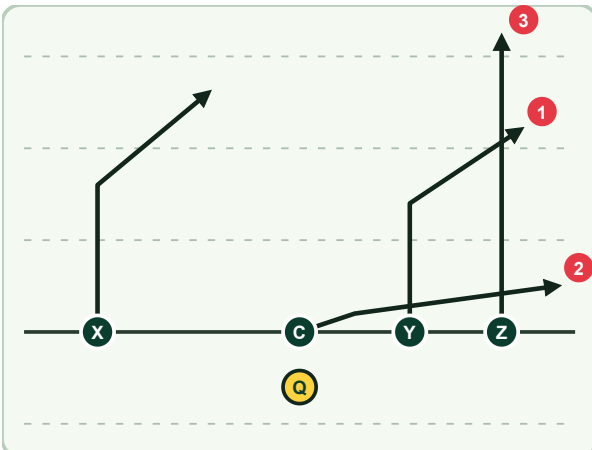
WHEN THEY ADJUST

When the defense drops two players into the middle, throw the curl to Z or call Stack Go-Out to attack the sideline.

Full write-up: flagcoachplays.com/plays/drive/

8 Flood

Pass · Trips Right · 8U, 10U, 12U, 14U



Three receivers attack one side of the field at three depths: deep, middle and short. Zone defenders on that side cannot cover all three levels, so the QB reads high to low and throws to whoever is left open.

CALL IT WHEN

Against zone defenses, especially when the defense keeps one deep safety in the middle.

QB READS

1. Y on the corner route at 7 yards breaking to the sideline.
2. C in the flat underneath if the corner is covered.
3. Z deep if the safety bites on the corner.

COACHING POINTS

- Z must run full speed straight down the sideline to push the deep defender back.
- Y breaks at 7 steps, not 5. Too shallow and Y runs into C's area.
- The whole play is on one side, so the QB can look right from the snap without giving much away.

COMMON MISTAKES

- The QB locks onto Y and ignores C. Practice the progression out loud: corner, flat, go.
- C releases too slowly. C has to get to the flat before the defender sinks.

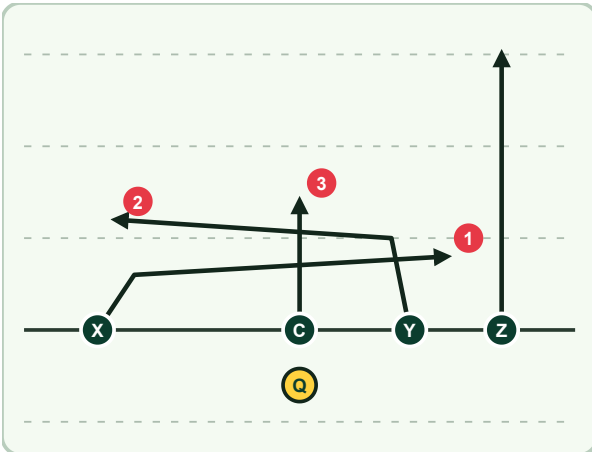
WHEN THEY ADJUST

Run the same look but have X run a deep post back across the field when the defense overloads the right side.

Full write-up: flagcoachplays.com/plays/flood/

9 Mesh

Pass · Spread Slot Right · 8U, 10U, 12U



Two receivers run shallow crossing routes toward each other at 4 to 5 yards and pass within an arm's length. Man-to-man defenders get tangled in the traffic, so one of the crossers is almost always open.

CALL IT WHEN

Against man-to-man coverage, and on third down when you need 5 yards.

QB READS

1. X on the shallow cross: throw it as X clears the middle.
2. Y on the deeper cross going the other way.
3. C sitting at 7 yards in the middle, the safety valve.

COACHING POINTS

- X goes underneath, Y goes over the top. Decide this in practice so they never collide.
- Tell the crossers to keep running after the catch. The ball arrives while they are moving, so yards after catch are free.
- Z's vertical route matters: it pulls a defender out of the middle.

COMMON MISTAKES

- The crossers drift too deep. Keep X at about 4 yards and Y at about 6.
- The QB throws behind the receiver. Aim at the front shoulder.

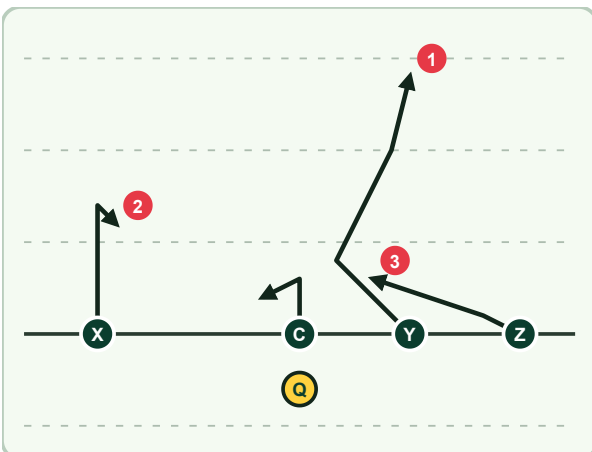
WHEN THEY ADJUST

Once the defense jumps the crossers, have Y stop and sit in the middle of the field instead of continuing across.

Full write-up: flagcoachplays.com/plays/mesh/

10 Slant and Go

Pass · 2x1 Right · 10U, 12U, 14U



Y sells a hard slant for three steps, then plants and runs upfield and back to the right sideline. The safety or corner who jumps the slant is left behind, and the QB throws the deep ball over the top. Works best once the defense has already seen and bitten on a real slant.

CALL IT WHEN

Second or third time you run a slant concept. Call it when a defender is stepping in front of the slant route.

QB READS

1. Y on the double move. If the defender steps inside on the slant fake, throw it deep and let Y run under it.
2. X on the 7-yard curl if the deep coverage stays back.
3. Z on the shallow cross as the safe third option, drifting across the middle at 2-3 yards.

COACHING POINTS

- Y must sell the slant: three hard steps inside at a 45-degree angle, head looking at the QB, then a sharp plant and sprint upfield and back to the right sideline.
- The ball should be thrown before Y finishes the break. Throw to a spot about 12 yards downfield, not to where Y currently is.
- Z's shallow cross across the middle at 2-3 yards gives the QB an easy bail-out underneath if the deep ball is not there.

COMMON MISTAKES

- Y rounds off the slant fake so it looks like a slow drift. The first three steps must be full speed inside.
- The QB stares down Y and waits too long, taking a sack against the 7-second clock. Set, look, throw or check down to Z.

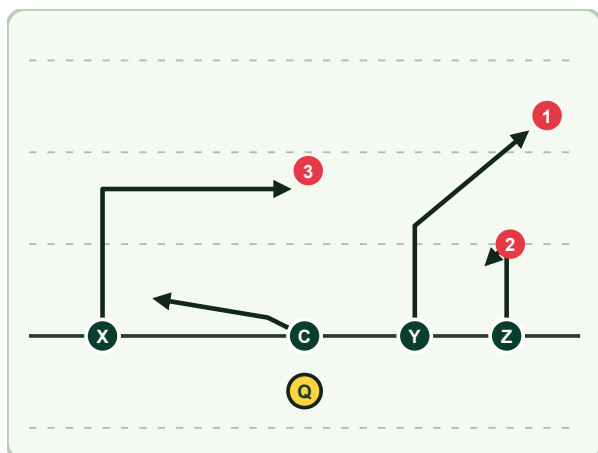
WHEN THEY ADJUST

If the safety stops biting and stays deep, come back to the real slant to Y or run Mesh to attack the middle.

Full write-up: flagcoachplays.com/plays/slant-and-go/

11 Smash

Pass · Twins Right · 10U, 12U, 14U



The outside receiver runs a 5-yard hitch while the inside receiver runs a corner route over the top. The cornerback can either sit on the hitch or run with the corner, not both.

CALL IT WHEN

Against zone defenses with a cornerback who plays short, and in the red zone.

QB READS

1. Watch the right cornerback. If the corner stays deep, throw the hitch to Z.
2. If the corner jumps the hitch, throw the corner route to Y.
3. X on the dig across the middle if both are covered.

COACHING POINTS

- Z's hitch is a quick 5 yards and turn, then shuffle a step inside to open up.
- Y aims for the back corner of the end zone in the red zone.
- The QB takes the hitch in doubt. It is the safer throw.

COMMON MISTAKES

- Y breaks to the corner too early and runs into the cornerback.
- The QB throws the corner route flat. Put air under it so Y can run under it.

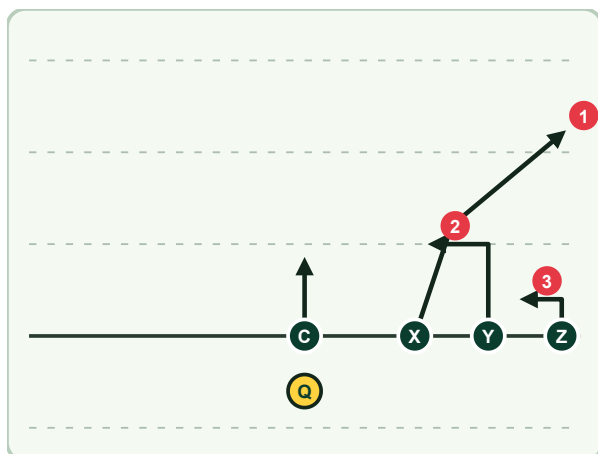
WHEN THEY ADJUST

Once the corner starts jumping hitches, run the same look but have Z run hitch-and-go.

Full write-up: flagcoachplays.com/plays/smash/

12 Snag

Pass · Trips Right · 8U, 10U, 12U, 14U



Three receivers to the same side run three levels: a corner route breaking deep, a snag route that stops at 5 yards and turns toward the QB, and a short check-down underneath. The three routes form a triangle against two defenders, so the QB reads the extra defender and throws to whichever level they leave open.

CALL IT WHEN

Second and third down when you need 5 to 8 yards, especially against man or a two-deep zone on that side.

QB READS

1. Watch the defender over Y. If they stay flat or shallow, throw the corner to X.
2. If that defender chases X over the top, throw the snag to Y, who sits at 5 yards facing the QB.
3. If a defender sinks under Y, throw the short check-down to Z.

COACHING POINTS

- Y is the heart of the play: run 5 yards, stop, turn and face the QB with hands ready. Do not drift.
- X angles upfield and toward the right sideline, then at 6 yards breaks hard toward the corner pylon. Sell the upfield path so the defender opens their hips.
- Z is the safety valve: drift 2 yards upfield, stop, and turn back toward the QB ready for a quick catch.

COMMON MISTAKES

- Y keeps moving and never sits. The play only works because Y stops and creates a window.
- Z runs too deep instead of staying shallow at 2 yards. Z is a check-down, not a deep threat; keep it short and quick.

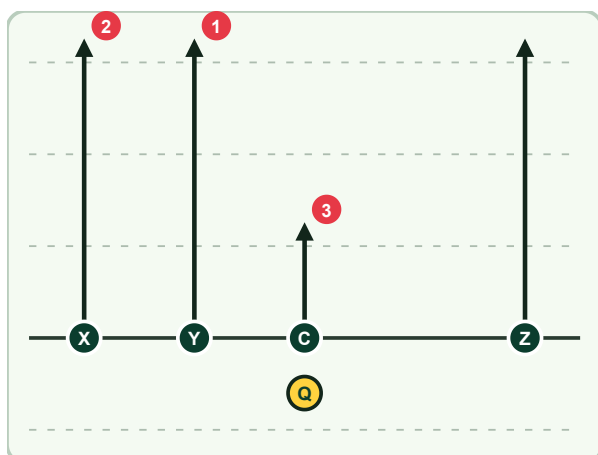
WHEN THEY ADJUST

If a defender drops right into the Y window, call Smash or send Y up the seam off the fake sit.

Full write-up: flagcoachplays.com/plays/snag/

13 Spread Verticals

Pass · Spread · 10U, 12U, 14U



Three receivers run straight downfield while the center settles in the middle. With only one or two deep defenders, the defense cannot cover three deep routes, so the QB throws to whichever receiver the safety leaves.

CALL IT WHEN

When the defense crowds the line of scrimmage, or you need a big gain late in a half.

QB READS

1. Watch the deep safety. If the safety goes toward X, throw to Y on the seam.
2. If the safety stays in the middle, throw to X or Z down the sideline.
3. C sits at 6 yards as the check-down if everyone is covered.

COACHING POINTS

- Receivers must run at full speed from the first step. A half-speed vertical is easy to cover.
- Keep at least 5 yards between receivers so one defender cannot cover two.
- The QB should throw the ball out in front so the receiver runs under it.

COMMON MISTAKES

- The QB decides before the snap. The read is the safety, and the safety only shows after the snap.
- Receivers look back too early and slow down.

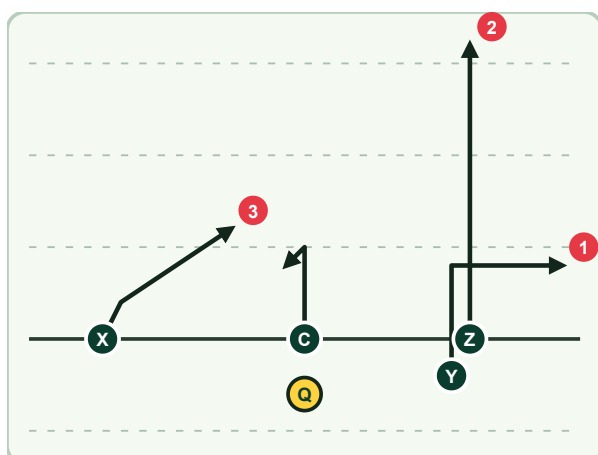
WHEN THEY ADJUST

When defenders start bailing deep at the snap, call Curl-Flat and throw underneath them.

Full write-up: flagcoachplays.com/plays/spread-verticals/

14 Stack Go-Out

Pass · Stack Right · 8U, 10U, 12U, 14U



Two receivers line up one behind the other. The front receiver runs deep, and the back receiver breaks to the sideline at 4 yards underneath. Defenders playing the stack cannot tell who goes where until the ball is almost out.

CALL IT WHEN

Against man-to-man, and when you need a sure 4 yards near the sideline.

QB READS

1. Y on the out route at 4 yards. This is the throw most of the time.
2. Z deep if the defender sits on the out.
3. X on the backside slant.

COACHING POINTS

- The back receiver lines up directly behind the front one, about 2 yards back.
- Z's first three steps look like every other route. Don't give the go away early.
- Y should plant on the outside foot and snap the head around toward the QB.

COMMON MISTAKES

- The QB throws the out late and it floats to the sideline. It has to leave the hand as Y breaks.
- Y rounds off the break. A rounded out is easy to intercept.

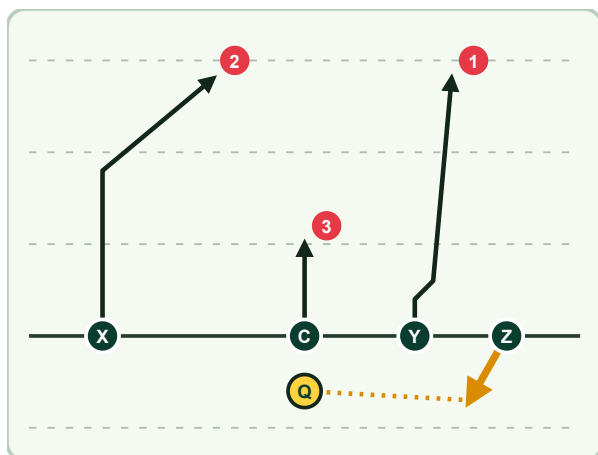
WHEN THEY ADJUST

Run Stack Go-Out, then next series have Y fake the out and turn upfield (out-and-up).

Full write-up: flagcoachplays.com/plays/stack-go-out/

15 Double Pass

Trick play · Twins Right · 10U, 12U, 14U



The QB throws a quick pass sideways and slightly backward to Z, who has stepped back behind the line. The defense sees a short throw and runs up to pull Z's flag. Z sets both feet behind the line and throws the second pass deep to Y, who jogged at the snap and then sprinted up the field.

CALL IT WHEN

After the defense has seen a few quick throws to the right side and is jumping up fast to stop them. It works best on first down, when defenses are not expecting a deep shot.

QB READS

1. Q throws right away to Z, who has stepped back behind the QB. The ball must travel sideways or backward, never forward.
2. Z catches it, sets both feet behind the line and throws deep to Y, who started slowly and then sprinted up the right side.
3. If Y is covered, Z throws to X on the deep post, or to C sitting in the middle as the safe throw.

COACHING POINTS

- Pick a Z who can really throw. Test every receiver in practice; the best arm on the team is sometimes not the QB.
- NFL FLAG rules allow unlimited backward passes behind the line, and after one, every defender may rush and the 7-second clock no longer applies (nflflag.com). Z has to throw quickly, so teach catch, set, throw.
- Q aims the first throw at Z's chest and a little behind. A throw that drifts forward counts as the one forward pass, and then Z is not allowed to throw again.

COMMON MISTAKES

- Z catches the first pass standing on the line, or in front of it. Z steps back first, so the catch is clearly behind the QB.
- Z throws on the run and the deep ball floats. Stop, set both feet, then throw.

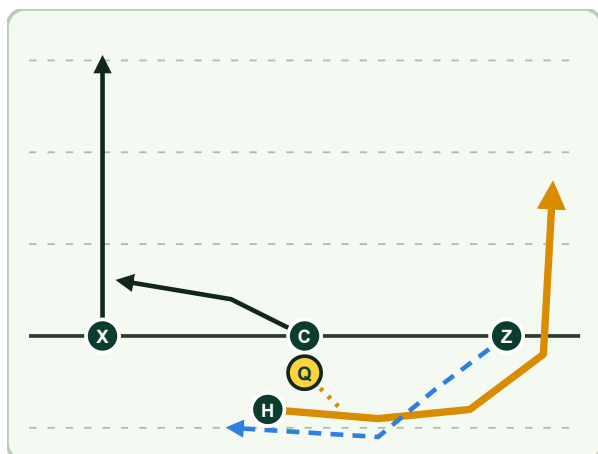
WHEN THEY ADJUST

If the defense stays deep and ignores the first throw, let Z tuck it and run up the right side behind Y. Next time, go back to Flood or Smash to that side.

Full write-up: flagcoachplays.com/plays/double-pass/

16 Fake Reverse

Trick play · Spread, Back Left · 8U, 10U, 12U



It starts exactly like the Reverse. The QB hands to H running right, and Z comes back behind the play for the second handoff. This time H pulls the ball away and keeps running right, into the side of the field the defense just left to chase the reverse.

CALL IT WHEN

Only after you have run the real Reverse and the defense has seen it. Call it when defenders start turning and running the other way as soon as Z comes back.

QB READS

1. Q hands to H running right, the same way as on the Reverse.
2. Z comes back behind the play and reaches for the ball. H shows it to Z, then pulls it back and keeps it.
3. H keeps running right to the sideline Z just left, and turns up the field.
4. Z keeps running left after the fake, as if carrying the ball. X runs deep and C drags left to pull defenders the same way.

COACHING POINTS

- The fake has to look like the real exchange. H holds the ball out with the hand farther from the defense, then tucks it at the last moment.
- Z sells it by running full speed to the left after the fake, hands in front like the ball is there. Tell Z that a great fake counts as much as a catch.
- Run it from the same alignment as Reverse, with the same count, so the defense cannot tell the two apart before the snap.

COMMON MISTAKES

- Calling it before the defense has ever seen the Reverse. Nobody chases a fake they have not been fooled by.
- H stops to make the fake and the right side defender catches up. Keep the feet moving.

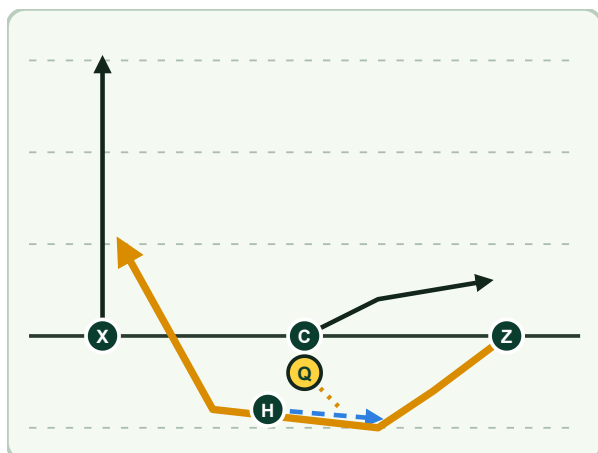
WHEN THEY ADJUST

If the defense stays home on the right side, go back to the real Reverse. If they start dropping deep, run Sweep Right.

Full write-up: flagcoachplays.com/plays/fake-reverse/

17 Reverse

Trick play · Slot Right · 6U, 8U, 10U



The QB hands off to a back running right. The receiver on the right comes back behind the play, takes a second handoff and runs the other way. The whole defense flows right, and the left side of the field is empty.

CALL IT WHEN

After the defense has seen a couple of runs to the right and starts flowing fast toward the ball.

QB READS

1. H takes the first handoff running right, then hands to Z at about the right hash.
2. Z takes the ball behind the line and sprints to the left sideline.
3. X clears the left side by running deep.

COACHING POINTS

- Z must not leave too early. Start the reverse on the count of two so H has the ball first.
- The second handoff is inside to outside: H holds the ball in the hand farther from the defense.
- Practice the exchange at walking speed before you ever run it live.

COMMON MISTAKES

- Z runs too close to the line and gets pulled before reaching the exchange. Aim 4 to 5 yards deep.
- Calling it too early in the game, before the defense has a reason to flow right.

WHEN THEY ADJUST

Next time, fake the reverse: H keeps the ball and keeps running right.

Full write-up: flagcoachplays.com/plays/reverse/