

The Shotgun

by

Lou Thom Howard

The Shotgun
and
The Modern Short Punt
(Third Edition)

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Dedication

This book is affectionately dedicated to Roberta Paul. Although she never played a minute of football, this book would have been impossible to produce without her willingness to tackle the project and the day to day quarterbacking from her wheelchair.

Each and every day, another seemingly insurmountable problem would arise, and she always had the ability to turn that stumbling block into a steppingstone toward our final goal.....the successful completion of this book.

My eternal thanks to this lovely, ever smiling lady, who has turned a pessimistic football coach.....back into an optimistic author.

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This book, why now?

Why reprint my book “The Modern Short Punt a Winning Formation” which was published by Prentice Hall in 1959, and why the segment on Shotgun? Hopefully in then next page or two, I will be able to answer those questions for you.

In July of 2001, I was in Myrtle Beach SC keynoting the opening of the annual National Single Wing Football Coaches Associations Annual Symposium, and yes, there is a NSWCA and yes, I believe that probably because of the Shotgun’s recent popularity that there has been resurgence in the use of the direct snap offense.

During the first day, as I circulated around convention hall a few coaches approached me with copies of my book and asked if I would sign them. Suffice it to say that I was highly amazed. I wrote the book over 40 years ago and I was unaware that it was still possible to obtain copies of the book. In fact, I have only one copy in my possession.

“Where did you folks ever get these books?”, I asked. I was told that they were gotten online and that there were numerous places where one might purchase out of print and used books.

One evening, during the clinic, at the usual late night “cracker barrel session”, I related to a few of the “computer types” that I had always wanted to reprint my book to include a part of my offense which I had only referred to in the original book.

Specifically they were my Spread Formation or Exploded Short Punt. I had not included them originally because I didn't want my book to be a complete scouting report for my opponents.

It was at that point that I was told that it was evident that the "computer age" had passed me by.....that was a fact that I already knew. One does not have to print that large a number, I was told, with the new state-of-the-art methods, now one scans the book or material on to a disk and then one may print as many or as few as he would like. As far as selling them, that can also be done online. What a revelation that was to me. Before I left S.C., I had decided to embark upon the venture. I would reprint my book.

As I began my preparations, I thought a great deal as to how I would approach the Shotgun segment of the proposed book.

Based on the fact that I travel around the country doing motivational speaking at various universities and colleges, why not, I thought, contact as many coaches and players with whom I have had associations over the past years. I could then, request from them one of their favorite plays from the Shotgun, either a pass or run. I decided I would dedicate one whole segment of the book to their contributions. From my years and years of coaching clinics and seminars. I knew that every coach would be looking for that "one special play".

So, here is your chance to read and learn a great deal about the Shotgun. I believe that the material herein can be found at no other source. I am placing the Shotgun segment first because I know as a coach you will not want to read through the whole

Short Punt Book to get to that point where you will be able to find out what these winning coaches have diagrammed and explained for you.

Go look, read and learn.... hope you enjoy it.

Lou Thom Howard

Introduction

Many years ago, in his first job and also first year as Head Coach at Amityville High School, using an ancient direct snap offense known as the Short Punt Formation, Coach Lou Howard captured his first of nine consecutive conference championships. At that time there were no other teams in his conference or in New York that were using anything other than some version of the T formation. The next year Coach Howard followed his first successful year with a second straight conference championship which was followed by a third and fourth, fifth and finally a sixth in the tough Long Island class A Conference League Championship.



It was during his sixth year that the young mentor received what he considered to be the most important highlight of his career up to that point. Each year the famous *Spalding Sporting Goods Company* sponsored a national football clinic in which one high school coach in America was asked to speak. Two other levels of coaching accomplishments were also recognized. One was the winning coach in that year's Super Bowl, in this case it was the Green Bay Packer's coach *Vince Lombardi*. The other coach so honored was Ohio State's *Woody Hayes* who had just won in the Rose Bowl. (In the preceding picture, Lou Howard is in the center. He was the only High School football coach nationally honored that year).

One of the main reasons for this book will be found, if the reader examines the play which appears on page 83 in the Short Punt Section.

While the author detailed in an honest fashion all of the many offensive plays and sets which he used during his career, plays out of the formation which he called his Exploded Short Punt Formation are the basis for his writing this segment devoted to Shotgun.

The plays used in the Shotgun segment were used during his nine year winning streak; they were not however detailed in his original book. The diagram found on page 83 wherein he talks about spread and trap is only one of the many sets in which he placed his receivers so that they might get opened immediately.

Lou believed firmly, that if you covered his spread formation, it would be impossible to shut down his running game....His record proved him to be correct.

The Editors

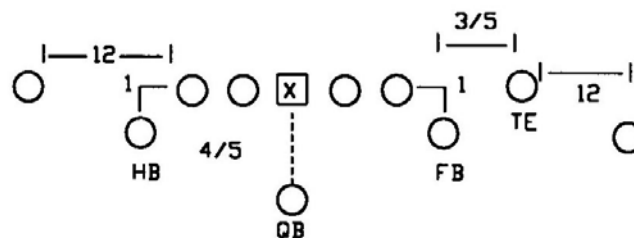
**A little Shotgun background,
before we go to work.**

Segment One

In his book, I Pass, Y.A. Tittle discusses the first time on November 22, 1960 when he and his fellow San Francisco 49ers squad members heard about Coach "Red" Hickey's intention to move away from their standard T-formation and use a direct snap offense against the World Champion Baltimore Colts and Johnny Unitas.

Y.A. goes on to tell the reason that Hickey called the team together on the practice field at Georgetown University that day. Hickey extracted a few sheets of paper from his jacket and announced, "gentlemen, we have worked out a *"new offensive"* pattern. We are going to beat the Colts with it".

The offense he discussed at that time is illustrated here.



Coach Red Hickey's Shotgun Formation

As it turns out in the foregoing two statements, one was absolutely true and the other was absolutely false.

On November 26, 1960, the San Francisco team did beat the world champion Colts by a score of 30 to 22 in one of the biggest upsets of the 1960 season.

The 49ers went on unbelievably, to win three of the last four games.

The false part of the statement was that the offense was anything but new. Again back to Y.A. Tittle's book, *I Pass*, Yalburton has this to say and I quote, "by the time we got to California to play the Rams, the so called Shotgun Formation was the talk of the football world. The newspapers took over. They ran diagrams of Hickey's offense. They called it a revolutionary form of attack. *Of course, it was not new.* Many teams had put the quarterback in a Short Punt Formation before, but Hickey's version apparently caught everyone's fancy. It was an overnight sensation.**

Of course it was a joy for me to read the foregoing paragraph because it gave rise to a point I would like to expand upon later in this segment. Tittle agrees that the Short Punt, which by the way goes back to World War I... was involved in Hickey's and his staff's thinking.

As a further substantiation of quarterback Tittle's observation anything but new, I would like to call your attention to a "blurb" that appeared in the *Pro Football Hall Of Fame News Release*

NFL Greatest Moments of the 1960s

"Although it is used today by nearly every team in the National Football League, the popular Shotgun formation is nothing new. The San Francisco 49ers head coach Red Hickey unveiled a version of the now popular formation in 1960. However Coach

Hickey's Shotgun was really just a new version of an old formation. Coaches likened it to Pop

Warner's double wing that was introduced at Stanford some 30 years earlier or the Short Punt formation, that had been used by numerous teams through the '20s and '30 and in some cases dating as far back as World War I times".

"Now Here's the Rest of the Story"

I believe we have all heard Paul Harvey, the famous radio and TV commentator make that comment. I hope he will permit me to repeat it once again. Here is why I make that observation.

After I had written about Y.A. Tittle's recollections of Red Hickey's comments to the team before the Baltimore game in November of 1960. At about 9:00 P.M. on a Sunday evening I had completed the finishing touches on quarterback Tittle's account. (see p.6) I received a telephone call from Ed Racely who was summering on Cape Cod.
**

I often referred to Ed in my writings because he is an old friend and considered the nation's leading historian on the single wing and the direct pass offense.

After listening to the information that Mr. Racely had for me....my mind raced back to the comment by Paul Harvey.Now here's the rest of the story. Racely read to me a portion of a newspaper article written by Dan Fitch, on November 1, 1998, in the sports section of the Santa Cruz County Sentinel. It was immediately evident to me that Red Hickey was still alive (which I didn't know) and living in Santa Cruz, California.

To ensure accuracy of Mr. Fitch's material, I am going to report the following information directly from this article.

“.....it is history in the San Francisco 49ers media guide. It is a paragraph synopsis for the 1990 season. *Howard W. (Red) Hickey saved a seemingly hopeless season when he installed his shotgun attack and the club captured four of its last 5 games including a 30-22 upset to Baltimore.*

Red Hickey remembers it well. It was in his second season as San Francisco 49ers head coach. The team was 4-4 coming off a win over Dallas. Looming ahead on the road was powerful Baltimore. Hickey was desperate. He had time to think on the train ride from Dallas to Baltimore. He sat with a fountain pen and a piece of paper and “diddled and fooled around” trying to come up with something to confuse the Colts.

Somewhere between Texas and Maryland, it came to him. Problem was he had to sell it to the other coaches and players.

“I got the coaches together and asked for a show of hands”, Hickey said. “I asked can we beat this team with the offense we have. And no hands went up”. He explained the formation he wanted to try. It spread the backs and receivers and most notably dropped the quarterback three yards behind the center. The rest of the coaching staff was underwhelmed.

"They started to laugh", Hickey said. "There was a lot of giggling when I put it on the board". Someone said " well that's unusual.

On the first-play from scrimmage in Baltimore, quarterback John Brodie, hit RC Owens for 20 yards. The 49ers scored 30 points on a championship defense using the spread offense. Two weeks later they beat the same club at Kezar Stadium 34-10, before 57,269 fans. The team scored 346 points in the course of the 14 game season, it's most since 1953. The end of Mr. Fitch's article.

I believe the reader will agree, that the offense reported by Y.A. Tittle and his observations were correct. He probably could not have known at that time the information that Fitch reported about, an incident that had happened some 30 years previous.

After winning three of the final four games in 1960, San Francisco continued in their winning ways in 1961 when they were able to obtain the services of the first team All-American, Billy Kilmer of UCLA, where he had starred in the single wing. Kilmer's passing and running ability were a perfect fit as he joined the other two pro quarterbacks, John Brodie and Bob Waters. Y.A. Tittle was gone, having been traded to the New York Giants.

The trio jumped off to a sprinting start with the Shotgun posting a 49-0 score against Detroit and 35-0 win over the Los Angeles Rams. The final curtain came down on the San Francisco's Shotgun the following week however, in Chicago. The Bears middle linebacker, Bill George on blitzes between the offensive guards seems to find the key to stopping the Shotgun. His technique was copied by all future opponents with a devastating effect of

San Francisco. That was the end of the Shotgun until it was resurrected in the mid-70s by Dallas".

And that is the Beginning of another Story.

How the "Shotgun" got its name.

Ed Racely, whom I have quoted before, told me an interesting fact about Red Hickey and how the unnamed offense which he re-anointed, received its name.

Evidently a reporter on *The San Francisco Chronicle* was trying to explain the handiwork of the three quarterback system which Red used. Like errand boy's he rotated them every other play, to carry out his instructions. The writer said something to the effect ".....the way those guys are firing the ball around the field it looks like it's being fired out of a shotgun.

Thus the name SHOTGUN!

Footnote: the following is a telephone call to me. I received a letter with the article and his comment".... The Shotgun article is the same as Red Hickey told me several years ago. I have a short tape of the 49ers 1961 season which I made from the highlight film. If you would ever want a copy of that, let me know. The Shotgun was really a very simple offense with variations making it complex to defend".

A Myth Is Debunked

Segment Two

I believe it is amazing how stories and myths evidently feed upon themselves..... I would like to tell you about one that I believe, in some way may have involved me.

As related in the previous chapter, the so called Shotgun which we believe really evolved from the Short Punt, was first recognized and name in 1960. (See footnote on page 12)

As I started to extend my winning streak of six consecutive seasons, I was called upon by a number of magazines to write about our Short Punt Offense. In May of 1956 I wrote an article which appeared in Scholastic Coach Magazine in which I vaguely (so as not to render too much information to our league opponents) talked about our Exploded Short Punt. Only one offensive "set" was ever shown, although we did move our players to varying positions on the field. Later in my book which was published in 1959, I once again wrote about our Exploded Short Punt or spread formation.

The reader, I feel will readily see that we had been using the same basic offense that "Red" Hickey would eventually select. I had documented our use, I felt a full four years before it came in to existence in Baltimore on November 27th 1960 and was eventually dubbed "The Shotgun".

Some time ago, returning from my annual trek to the American football coaches' convention, at the airport I ran into Coach Brian Hughes, of C.W.Post. I consider Brian one of the up-and-coming young coaches in our profession and so it is always a great pleasure for me to have an opportunity to chat and

talk football with him.

As a T-formation aficionado, he playfully chided me on my use of the direct snap throughout my career. As one might expect, after the direct snap, naturally the conversation turned to the Shotgun. It was then that Brian made me aware of a story which I had never heard before. I had no idea how widespread it was. His tale involved one of my former players, John Niland.....before I continue; let me first tell you about John.

One of the greatest linemen that I ever coached was John Niland who played for me at Amityville High School. John later starred at the University of Iowa and finally in 1971 was the No. 1 draft pick of the Dallas Cowboys and a five times All-Pro guard for the Texas team.

During his playing years at Amityville, I used John occasionally in the fullback slot. His blinding speed which was later demonstrated as the lead blocker in the Dallas offense for Tony Dorsett was unequalled at the high school level. During those years, our short yardage plays against a defense which had to spread to honor our explosive passing game, gave Niland ample time to showcase his ability and speed to run plays both up the middle and off tackle.

John went to Dallas in 1971. A few years following John's arrival, the Dallas Cowboys under Coach Tom Landry began to use the Shotgun. Now, knowing all of the foregoing information, I imagine you have already guessed the rest of the story. But in case you haven't, it was that John Niland had taken Coach Howard's Exploded Short Punt (i.e.

Shotgun) and given it to Landry. Now the disclaimer.....to the best of my knowledge, it never happened.

I do believe however that Mike Ditka, was a coach at Dallas during that period, and was involved. Any well informed individual at that time was aware of the fact that coach "Red" Hickey did scout for Dallas for 16 seasons and.....if I'm not mistaken that he also receiver five Super Bowl Rings.

All About The Center

Segment Three

The role of the offensive center play and the direct snap pass once so important in the single wing and the Short Punt formations has been re-established with the current popularity of the Shotgun formation.

Although the author has briefly covered the center position in Chapter Two in *The Modern Shot Punt* portion of this book, this segment will go into much greater detail in the many aspects of center play and the snapping of the ball.

Over the past 40 or 50 years, because of the widely and almost exclusive use of variations of the T formation, direct snap centering has actually become a lost art.

Most of we coaches talk a good game as we discuss center play. Some say that they feel it is the most important individual technique to be learned on offense. We might even pontificate about how hard we work at improving this phase of the game, yet I submit to you that many times we do not “put our money where our mouth is...”

Recently, I had a reunion with one of my former football players, Bernie Wyatt, now chief recruiter for the University of Wisconsin and earlier for the University of Iowa. Bernie supported my thesis that because of the T formation, centering the long snap had indeed become a lost art and that a surefire way to remain on a professional football team’s roster was to prove oneself as a masterful long snapper.....”You know what, based on statistics? He was right”.

As coaches we always attempt to select the correct personnel and believe that every position is important, however, when we choose our center candidates, not only do we look for leadership potential, but we are also aware of the additional duties, which the center will be called upon to perform.

In all direct snap football, play begins with the action by the center. In the Shotgun the ball is usually passed to only one back, who is situated five to seven yards behind the center.

**The Stance and Basic Fundamentals
to be covered in center play.**

In that the author played "*The Pivot Men's Slot*" in both high school and college, much of what is written here below will be colored by the experiences gathered by the writer over many years of both playing and coaching.