Jim Tressel

THE INSIDE POWER RUNNING GAME

Ohio State University

The last 12½ months have been quite a whirlwind for me. I had 15 wonderful years at Youngstown State. In fact all the places I've coached, I would have no problem sending my children to those schools. They were wonderful places. I could have stayed at Youngstown State for the rest of my life if they would have wanted me. It is a wonderful place. But you never know what God has in store for you. The last 12½ months have further etched that in my mind. I had the great fortune to get the opportunity to become the head football coach at Ohio State. It is a tremendous place within a great community. There are great people there. The tradition at Ohio State is second to none. We have great players at Ohio State and a wonderful student body.

The changes that have occurred in my life were only minor as compared to the changes that we went through as a result of September 11. The world as we knew it changed overnight. As I looked into the eyes of my players, I knew it was a fearful time for all of them. They had never experienced anything like they had on September 11. As our team came into the Woody Hayes athletic facility that day, they had a concerned look on their faces and a lot of questions to be answered in their minds and hearts. I'm sure the exact thing was true in your particular team situations. We all have to deal with that situation.

This calendar year has been a wild one, both personally and professionally for me. What September 11 reinforced to me was how important we are. Today coaches and teachers are so important. This is such a fast-paced world. We have to make sure we stop and evaluate things as we go through our lives. I think it is important to stop and reflect spiritually.

The morals, beliefs, and values are the center core of who we are. As we reflect on what we are doing in here this morning, it is much like spiritual growth. Sometimes we don't spend enough time growing spiritually. When we sit in here and exchange ideas about football, it leads to professional growth. We get so busy doing so many different things, that we do not do the central core things.

It is nice to get away from the rat race of recruiting. It is nice to sit down and talk football. We have been flying around the country trying to attract good young people to the Ohio State football family. It is refreshing to me to sit down and talk about coaching.

The next two or three minutes I want to share a thumbnail sketch about coaching. After that I will talk about our inside power running game.

We constantly remind ourselves at Ohio State that the most important thing we do doesn't have anything to do with X's and O's. I heard this quote from an engineering professor at Ohio State. I was sitting in an engineering lecture with my son. He was on a recruiting visit at Ohio State when he was trying to choose a college to attend.

The professor told his students this story before he got into the subject of how this form of engineering was going to change society. Throughout the talk, there was one thought that came up. We keep this thought in mind in our department at Ohio State.

"Concern for man and his faith must always form the chief interest of all technical endeavors. Never forget this in the midst of your diagrams and equations."

That was an engineering professor who could have been a football coach. He was quoting Albert Einstein. The same thing has to be true in football. Before we draw up one X or O, we better understand that concern for our players is the most important thought. That is the chief interest. Once we understand that concern, we can talk about our schemes and packages.

Coach John Majors was up here when we started. He has invested his whole life in our game. He has invested his whole life in his players. His father did the same thing. The things that his players carried with them as they left Tennessee, Pittsburgh, and Iowa State, were the things that had to do with the core values. We have to make sure we do the same thing as we make our way in this world.

My topic today is the inside running game. When you become a head football coach, it is important for you to find a philosophy that you totally believe in. There are a couple of plays that every coach believes in and can count on in any situation. I don't want to sit here and try to tell you this is the only play we run. But this play *is* the basis of our offensive philosophy.

I have to trace my college career to find out how I decided on this type of offensive game. When I played for my father, he was a run-and-shoot coach. Later, I went to work at Miami of Ohio with Tom Reed. We ran the veer offense. Then I went to the University of Syracuse as an assistant coach. Coach Dick MacPherson was just coming out of the pro game at that time. He liked to run the power-off tackle, but it was from a weak backfield set instead of the I-formation. It wasn't a pound-it-at-you type of offensive play.

When I went to Ohio State the first time as an assistant, I worked for Coach Earle Bruce. That is when I met "Dave." Dave was the name for our off-tackle play at Ohio State. I was an assistant coach at Ohio State for three years before I got the opportunity to be a head coach at Youngstown State. When I got to Youngstown State, I had to decide what type of offense we were going to run. Earle Bruce was running the I-formation when I was at Ohio State. At the time, that was the freshest offense in my mind, and so that is what I chose to run.

When you go to a clinic, you should always think through what you are going to do before you do it. If you are going to make a change, think through that decision before you do it. Don't just change to be trendy. Find something that you believe in and stick with it.

The reason we chose the power-off tackle as our base play at Youngstown State was because we felt that was the way we needed to start our program. We wanted our offense to be physical, tough, and simple. Another factor was the fact that we were starting from scratch. We needed a play to hang our hat on. We felt we knew how to teach that type of play. It is so important that you know how to teach in coaching, and especially the plays you are going to make your bread-and-butter plays.

We found out if we could run the ball for 200 yards a game, we had a good chance to win the game. If we could score 24 or more points a game, we could win most of our games. If we could win the turnover margin, we could win most of our games. As these facts became clear to us, they became our philosophy.

We did a study when we got to Ohio State. We wanted to see if the same things were true at Ohio State as they were at Youngstown State. I gave one of our graduate assistants the task of finding out the answers by researching the past 10 years of Ohio State football. At Youngstown State, we had a coaching tool we called a production index. We added the number of first downs we made to the number of points we scored in each game. From that total, we subtracted three times the number of turnovers we made. If the answer came up to be greater than or equal to 40, we won most of those games. If the answer was less than 40, we did not win those games.

The findings in all of those games were very conclusive. In the past 10 years, Ohio State's record was 56-2 when they rushed for more than 200 yards in a game. When their production index was greater than or equal to 40, the record was 67-2. When the production index was less than 40, they were 24-27-2. That meant they won 24 games playing good defense, but lost 27 games because of offensive failures. When Ohio State scored 24 or more points, the record was 76-4.

This is a measuring stick for our program. We can tell our players if they do these things, they will win the game. Our players want to know what we expect of them and what we want them to do. Once you find out what you need to accomplish, the next thing is to find out how to do it.

At Youngstown State, when we ran the same off-tackle play 250 times or more in a year, we were National Champions. That meant if we were good enough to run the same play off-tackle 250 times, we probably had a good football team. We probably played good defense as well.

The most important statistic about any given play is the percentage of consistency of the play. The yards-per-carry statistic is often skewed by long runs. The consistency of the play is what is important. That means the play got the yardage it was supposed to get, and at a very high percentage of the time.

We had a consistency formula. On first down, we needed four yards. On second and long yardage, we needed to gain half the yardage. On third down, we needed the play to get a first down. That was how we measured a play for its consistency. The off-tackle power play got what we needed 56 percent of the time in 1999.

I don't want to mislead you. We do more than line up in the I-formation and run off-tackle. College football today is throwing the football. We are no different than other teams today. But we are never going to lose sight of running the football inside.

The most important concept of college football is utilizing the talents that you have on your football team. If I could point to one thing over the course of the last 16 years as a head coach, that is one area in which our offensive staff has done well with that concept. We have done a good job of utilizing the strengths of our players.

The worst thing you can do with a young man is to ask him to do something he doesn't have the ability to do. We want to make sure we do not ask our players to do more than they can handle mentally. The greatest threat to successful offense or defense in my mind is outsmarting our players. We can get very competitive in trying to outsmart the opposing coaches. In this age of video wonderment, with so many things available to us, it is a challenge to keep things simple for our players. We have to make sure we do no more than our players can handle.

At Youngstown we went four straight years where we played 15 games. We went to four straight National Championship games from 1990-1994. We played 60 games in a four-year span. We had some guys who played in 58 and 59 straight games. We lost 26 seniors after that fourth year. In 1-AA, that is a lot of guys to lose when you only have 63 scholarships.

In 1995 I made the biggest mistake I've ever made as a head coach. After the graduation of so many seniors, I didn't go back to basics with the young group we played with the next year. We simply kept on doing the things we had done, without the experience we had enjoyed for four years. We didn't do a good job and the coaches got ahead of our players in the mental approach to the game. It cost us because in 1995, we didn't have a good year. Fortunately, we knew what we had done wrong, and we took the blame. It was our fault, not the players'.

We want to be able to run base running plays that can be run from different formations. Teams that scout your team know what you are doing. We need to know as much about our team as they do. We need to scout ourselves during the season to see what the opponent is seeing.

We felt at the beginning of the season we had to change plays at the line of scrimmage. We didn't want to play a guessing game from the sideline. We think the only way to keep that from happening is to have a simple enough scheme to automatic at the line of scrimmage. We had to have the ability to check out of bad plays.

We have to work to get efficient play-action passes off our base runs. If we get good at our base runs, people will commit more defenders to the run. You have to take advantage of that by being effective in play-action passing. We want to strike the area where the extra run-support players come from. We must do a great job with play-action passing because it will complement everything you are doing in the running game.

We want the threat of the run-pass balance from all of our different formations. The players coming into college football these days are really smart football players. You are not going to outsmart too many college players today.

We have to utilize different personnel groupings. If you watch our defensive coaches during the course of the game, they always want to know what personnel group is in the game. We want to utilize our personnel groups to get the most out of their ability. We may bring in our jumbo group and throw the ball. We want to force the defense to play an honest defense regardless of whom we have in the game.

One time I heard a coach say foo tball was a game of pressure. Does the defense have the pressure on the offense? Or does the offense have the pressure on the defense? I believe the offense can put pressure on the defense if we give them less time to think. If you line up and the defense knows what is coming, they have a better chance to stop it. If we vary what we do and force the defense to think about their adjustments, we stand a better chance of a successful play. We have to keep the pressure on the defense.

We must have the threat of attacking the entire field. You can't get so caught up with being such an inside-run team that you forget to attack the rest of the field. If you do that, you allow the defense to play only the field you are using.

If the inside-run game is going to work, you better have some other plays to get outside with. Our inside power run worked this year because we could get outside with a stretch play or a toss-sweep play.

The offense must have the ability to change the launch point of the thrown ball. Defenses today have outstanding pass rushers. If they know exactly where you are going to throw the ball from each time, they will sack you. We can't give them that advantage. We have to throw the ball from a variety of different places.

We have to utilize the three-step-drop passing game. Today, defensive teams love to blitz. We are in the age of defenses that like to blitz and pressure the quarterback from a variety of different areas. It is the age of the attacking defense. They try to pressure the offense into making mistakes by attacking them.

We must make sure we have a passing game that can take advantage of the defense when they bring more defenders than we can block. We want to be efficient in the passing game. You can't run the football effectively until you are efficient in the passing game.

All of these things I have been talking about played a big part in being able to have a power inside running game. Without being able to do the things I have been talking about, we can't run the ball. Keep all those points in mind as I show you the power off-tackle running play. We want to use it as our base play. This is our big play. It may not be the one you would choose. Jim Dennison, who coached at Akron University, has made a living running the isolation play. That is his play. He knows how to teach it. He believes in it. His players believe in it. That is the play he hangs his hat on.

We picked the power inside run, because we think we can run it against all fronts. It is better against some fronts than others, but our guys know how to block it against anything the defense can put up. It is the one play where we can call it and run it. We don't have to worry about calling an automatic to get out of the play.

In the heat of the game, when you ask your players what they want to run, you better have one of these plays. It is a play they have confidence in. Everyone needs a play they can run against any defense. You have to run this play from multiple looks. You have to be willing to run the play anytime or anyplace on the field. We can run this play in our sleep and in any situation.

I'm not saying this is the best play to run. I'm saying this is the best play for us to run for what we want to accomplish. It has simple execution, and our players believe in it.

Our basic power inside run can be run to the tight-end side or the split-end side. The tight end has to block the C-gap. The onside tackle blocks the B-gap. The onside guard blocks the A-gap. The center blocks the backside A-gap. The backside tackle has to block both the B- and C-gaps on the backside because the backside guard is pulling. He has to get his big bootie in the B-gap and turn back on the C-gap. It sounds simple, but it isn't.

You get too many different looks from the defense. They give you varying techniques that make it tough to run this play and be effective. We tag the play now to remind the linemen to block their gap. We call it "21-gap," to remind the linemen that this was an area blocking play.

The fullback blocks the onside D-gap. The backside guard pulls and finds the onside linebacker. He has to stay square and get his eyes on the linebacker. The fullback traps the D-gap. The aiming point for the fullback is the hip of the tight end.

The tight end, tackle, and guard are blocking their gaps. Most likely there will be a double-team block with two of these three blockers. On most defenses, one or two of the offensive linemen will be uncovered. When the blocker is uncovered, the gap they are responsible for is not threatened immediately. The uncovered lineman must watch the linebacker for a blitz. The uncovered lineman can come off slow and help the covered lineman with his block. Any of the three blockers can call the outside lineman down anytime they need to. The center and backside tackle have to secure the backside A-, B-, and C-gaps.

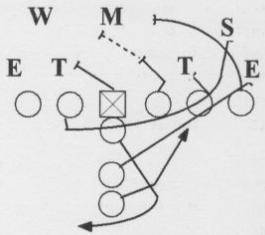
The term "Dave" was Earle Bruce's name for this play. For all I know, it could have come from Woody Hayes. But to Earle Bruce, "Dave" meant down blocking for the line. The guard, tackle, or tight end in this scheme has to block the backside linebacker. The backside linebacker in the 4-3 defense is the Mike linebacker.

On defenses today, no one lines up in pure vanilla. They line up in one defense and angle out of it into something else. They try to guess what you are running and stunt to where they think the offense is going. The thing the offense has going for it is that they know where they are going from the outset of the play. The rules for this play are good. The key to the success of any play is what the offensive line does after they block their rules.

Later as we watch the film, you will see what I am talking about. When there is no one to threaten his gap, a lineman can give help to one of his teammates.

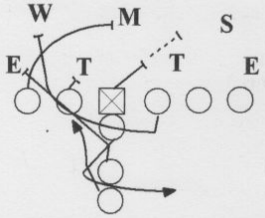
If we run the play to the split-end side, it is the same play, and it has the same rules. Everyone blocks down. The backside guard pulls, and the fullback kicks out. It is that simple.

DAVE



The only difference for the fullback is this. He is trapping the C-gap instead of the D-gap. His aiming point is tighter at the tackle's hips. The play is tough to run this way, but it can be done. It is harder to get to the backside linebacker.

DAVE OPEN SIDE



If the tight end doesn't have anyone in his gap he blocks the backside linebacker. In this case, he bypasses the Sam linebacker and blocks the middle linebacker. The Sam linebacker is blocked by the pulling guard.

Jim Bollman is our offensive line coach at Ohio State. He has a coaching point that applies to a player blocking the backside linebacker. When our players have to block a backside linebacker, we want them to attack the linebacker's backside number. They attack the linebacker's backside number and make him bubble over the top of the block to disengage from the block. We can attack his frontside number and push him back on the chalkboard. But in reality, we can't get him going backward by attacking him on the frontside number. That is an important coaching point. Attacking the backside number allows the lineman to get square on the linebacker.

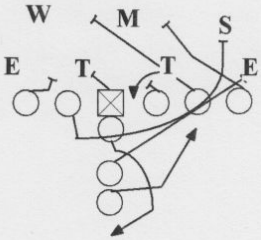
The fullback tracks the hip of the tight end. He kicks out the defensive player in the D-gap. The tackle comes down on the 3-technique. The guard has no one inside of him in the A-gap. He comes off the line slow and helps the tackle on the 3-technique, keeping his eye on his gap for a possible run-through by the Mike linebacker. He doesn't block his gap until it is threatened by someone.

All we are trying to do is get the tailback to the line of scrimmage. If we can do that, the tailback will make yardage. As the season went by this year, our tailbacks got better and better. We want the tailback to hit the line of scrimmage with his shoulders square. If he hits the line of scrimmage with his shoulders square, he has a chance to be creative.

We don't want to coach the tailback too much. We want to slow him down. We want him to get his shoulders square, and let him do what we recruited him to do. We don't want to get too scientific. He is the one on the field, and he has to make the decision where to run. Let him be a tailback and run the ball.

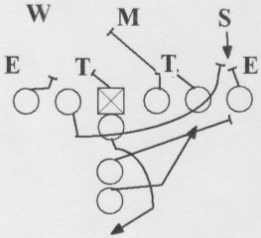
If the 3-technique slants inside, the guard takes him and the tackle goes all the way to the Will linebacker. He works for the backside number on the Will linebacker. What this technique allows the blocker to do is to get square on the linebacker as he tries to pursue. When the linebacker tries to bubble over the block, our blocker can get square on him. We don't want the linebacker to get square and run downhill at the line of scrimmage.

DAVE VS. STUNTING 3-TECHNIQUE



We can run this play with our fullback aligned in the wing position to the open side. We can bring the fullback in motion and get into the same position as he was in the I-formation. If the frontside linebacker blitzes the C-gap, the tight end walls him off to the inside. The pulling guard turns up in the hole and blocks the next player to show. We don't want him to slow down and look around for someone to block. He fires up into the hole and finds someone to block.

DAVE VS. STUNTING SAM



If there is more than one player coming to the D-gap, we block the first one that comes. We feel the second defender cannot get flat enough to get in on the play.

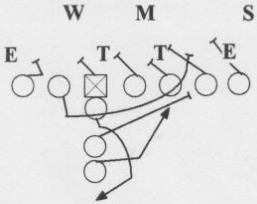
On the goal line we generally get into a two-tight-end set. In this set we have our fullback in a halfback set. We like the Dave play because the angles are good for us. The defense is bringing everyone who is eligible to play. We area-block the gaps. The fullback has to take a step up to get on the proper track to kick out. Everything else is the same.

We want the safeties to have to make the tackle on our tailback. The tailback has to remember we want at least four yards out of the play. He can't get fancy with his footwork. He must get square and then hit up in the hole. He has to be a football player. He has to make defenders miss him, and he has to split people, run over defenders, and still be an aggressive football player.

We can put an extra lineman in the game and get into an unbalanced line. We have a four-man side and a three-man side. Nothing changes for the play. We block it the same way and we can run it either way. The advantage of this play is you can run it with any formation you line up in, and you can run it against any defense they can put up.

We have to give our tailbacks freedom to run where they want to. We do not want to overcoach the tailback.

DAVE FROM THE UNBALANCED

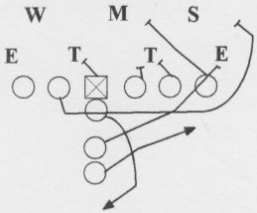


Any lineman can call the outside lineman down for help if he feels he needs it. When we talk about the backside linebacker, it is the Mike linebacker in a 4-3 defense. The Will linebacker is the third linebacker.

On this play, we cannot block the safeties. They are always going to be unaccounted for if they come into the box. That is why the tailback must be a football player. If they make the play, we feel it is going to be down the field. If they are making plays at the line of scrimmage, they should be set up for the play-action pass.

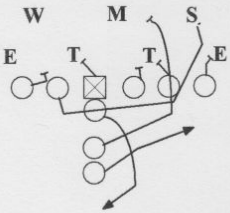
Defensive coaches teach their defensive ends to wrong arm on kick-out blocks. When that happens, the pulling guard has to be alert. If he sees the wrong technique by the defensive end, the fullback will log in the defensive end. The guard goes around the log block and turns upfield for the linebacker. The tailback has to take his time and not rush the play. He must read the log block and the guard pulling around the block, and then he takes the ball outside.

DAVE VS. LOG KICK OUT



Our tailback is lined up six-and-a-half to seven yards deep depending on the tailback. We have an adjustment we make if we are getting a lot of heavy wrong technique for the defensive end. We call it "Dave stick." This is to help the fullback from having to root out the defensive end. The tight end sticks the defensive end over him. Everyone else blocks the same. The fullback comes through the hole and takes the end's blocking assignment. He is working for the backside linebacker.

DAVE STICK



When we run this play to the open side, the kick-out block gets on the fullback real quick. The C-gap is one gap closer and the defender gets on him in a hurry. The fullback has to get low and get really tough. As I said before, the tailback has to break a tackle if he wants to score. What he doesn't have to do is break that tackle behind the line of scrimmage. We are always going to make sure the tailback gets to the line of scrimmage before he is hit. If you can read the back's number in the film, that means he is square to the line of scrimmage. That is the way he has to run the ball.

Well, that is the end of the film. Thank you so much. Our doors are always open. We have a great staff of coaches. Many of them have coached in the high school ranks and they care about young people. You are always welcome at Ohio State. Thank you.