



Installing the No Huddle Offense

Nathan Watson
Head Football Coach
Urbana High School

"Score, score, and score some more. The fans go nuts."
- Chip Kelly

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Media coverage of our no huddle:

The News Gazette: Playoff notebook

Sat, 11/03/2012 - 6:00am | Fred Kroner

Right on the number

With record-setting quarterback Cameron Mammen at the controls of the Urbana offense, the Tigers are making the most of their time with the ball.

Coach Nathan Watson's no-huddle, speed-up philosophy has resulted in the team averaging 60.9 plays per game entering today's 4 p.m. Class 5A contest at Morris.

That totals to 1.27 plays per minute for the entire 48-minute game. For comparison purposes, last season's Rose Bowl champion Oregon team averaged 1.24 plays per minute over the course of its season.

Oregon averaged more total plays per game (74.1) than the Tigers, but collegiate quarters are three minutes longer per period.

"Give us the extra three minutes per quarter and I bet we get 74 plays a game," said Watson, whose 9-1 team is seeking the first 10-win season in school history.

Mammen's Twin City career passing record stands at 4,453 yards. His total offense career total (6,375) places him 14th on the all-time IHSA list.



Introduction & Coaching Background

- Eastern Illinois University (2001-2003)
Student Assistant - *Running Backs*
- Arcola High School (2004-2005)
Head Coach - *Offensive Coordinator*
- Champaign Central (2006-2008)
Defensive Coordinator - *Defensive Backs*
- Urbana High School (2009-Present)
Head Coach - *Offensive Coordinator*

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It's always important to remember where you came from and acknowledge the places, and more importantly the people, who helped you arrive at your current coaching assignment.

I played under two IHSFCA Hall of Fame coaches, Verlon Myers (1991) and Bill Monken (2012).

I also coached under EIU legend, Bob Spoo and IHSFCA trustee, Dave Jacobs.

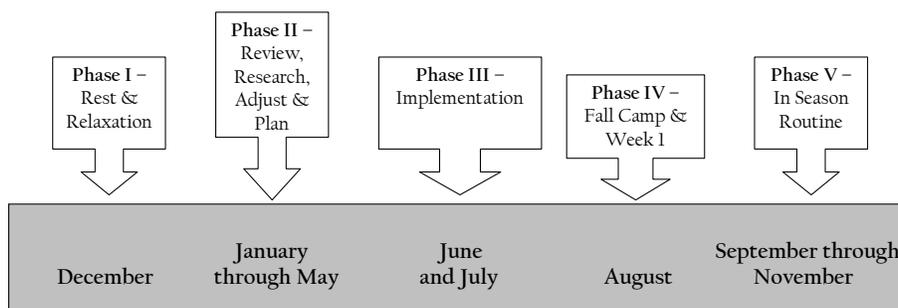
UHS Offensive Coaching Staff

- Chris Bazzell – Run Game Coordinator & Line Coach
- Curtis Blanden – Running Backs Coach
- Herb Howard – Wide Receivers Coach
- Sergio Medina – Pass Game Coordinator & Quarterbacks
- Nathan Watson – Offensive Coordinator

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In addition to acknowledging the past, it might be more important to acknowledge the present. The men listed above have been with me from the very beginning at Urbana – from 9 losses to 9 wins. Without the loyalty and hard work of these gentlemen, we would not have had our recent success at Urbana.

Urbana Football Season Timeline



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Before we begin talking about the no huddle, I believe it's important to recognize that I never wanted to be a no huddle coach. I believe there's something powerful about being in a huddle and looking into the eyes of your fellow players. And to be honest, I would still have our players doing that if it would give us the best chance to win. Nevertheless, part of our Urbana coaching routine each year involves an in-depth review of our previous season and it was that review process specifically that led us to the no huddle.

During our review, we project starts for the upcoming season, identify both the strengths and weakness of those players, and how that may play out in the upcoming season versus our conference opponents. With that information, we make the necessary adjustments to our scheme. We also identify players who we must develop and the position areas where we need to create depth during the summer contact days.

Why the no huddle?

- Lack of depth
- No wasted energy
- Smaller players
- More opportunities to score
- Limits the defense
- More reactive on offense
- It's our philosophy

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During our review of the 2011 season, we identified several reasons why we should go no huddle:

- 1) We realized that we had a lot of talent returning, but very little depth. In fact, after the review, we realized that we would have up to 8 two-way players for the upcoming season.
- 2) Once we realized depth was an issue, we reviewed our 2011 game film to determine the ways in which we could have preserved our players' energy. Some of the ideas generated included: better conditioning, more underclassmen on special teams, not having the wide receivers switch sides, and fewer substitutions. Nonetheless, the thing that really stuck out in my mind was the offensive huddle. Our huddle was seven yards behind the ball and we wanted the players sprinting to get there quickly. After reviewing film, I estimated that we ran approximately 800 yards in sprints per game simply getting into and out of the huddle.
- 3) In 2012, we knew that we were going to have the biggest line that we had ever had. We were very excited about that because we typically do not have large players at Urbana. Unfortunately, during our review, we also realized that the term "large" is relative and that every team in the conference would have physically larger linemen than us. We felt that a faster tempo would be an equalizer.
- 4) In 2011, we lost some close games. After those games, I remember thinking that if we had just had a few more opportunities to score, we would have won. Obviously, after our review, we felt that the no huddle could give us those additional opportunities.
- 5) The no huddle limits the defense in regards to scheme, personnel, and fatigue substitutions. There was at least one game in 2011 where this would have been beneficial. Unfortunately, we missed the playoffs by one game in 2011.
- 6) Many people believe that the no huddle limits your play calling ability and that's simply not true. There were several instances in 2011 where I was unable to change a call when I wanted to because, in our 2011 system, that was the quarterback's responsibility. After our review, we felt that the no huddle might be able to help in these instances.
- 7) The no huddle has actually always been our philosophy – see the next slide.

Urbana Offensive Philosophy Statements

- Identity – Pro-style attack built upon a drop-back pass system combined with a read run game.
- Utilize personnel strengths and create opportunities for our best play-making threats.
- Dictate defensive alignments and prevent easy recognition of our intentions. Force comprehensive preparation by our opponents for our attack.
- Our system will be multi-dimensional, built on run/pass concepts that can be applied to our varied personnel groupings and multiple alignments.
- Be proactive in our specific plan of attack, striving for balance, with the components complementary in nature. Our versatility will allow us to be reactionary when necessary.
- **We will attempt to create as many opportunities as possible by playing at an up-tempo.** Emphasis will be placed on developing sound fundamentals and precise execution.

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During our 2011 season review, we were reminded about what we believe in as an offensive staff. In one of our discussions deciding about whether or not we were going to pursue the no huddle, one of our young assistants simply stated the obvious “If you look at our philosophy, we should be a no huddle team already”. He was correct!

As an offensive staff, we have always had a philosophy statement and always believed in its value. In fact, this philosophy statement has only undergone one minor change in my 12 years of coaching. Yet, sometimes, in the middle of the season, we may have a tendency to wander away from it if things aren't going well. It is important to define who you are as an offensive unit and let that guide your decision making. In this case, it made it very obvious to me that we needed to evolve into a no huddle team.

No Huddle Research

- Medina & Watson went to Eastern Illinois (two different staffs) and they had resources from Louisiana Monroe, Nevada & Ohio
- Bazzell went to Oregon & Northwestern
- All of us went to Illinois spring practices
- We also asked Stan Weinke to help us out

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Once you decide to go no huddle, only a small part of the work is complete. The next step is to research as much as possible. Make sure you go to the best and learn as much as possible from them. As you can see from the slide above, we did that by gathering information from some of the best no huddle college football teams in the country.

After we had conducted extensive research, I was still uncomfortable with the no huddle. I felt like we knew how to run the no huddle but had no idea about how to install it. So once again we went to the best - Stan Wienke.

Stan, who was actually a former conference rival when I was at Arcola, drove to Urbana and spent hours with us talking scheme, watching film, and most importantly teaching us how to install the no huddle. We didn't have everything planned at that point but we definitely felt good about moving forward.

Things to consider

- Personnel
- Formation
- Motion
- Shift
- Play
- Pre-Snap Read
- Cadence
- Audible

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I can't give you everything you need to know about the no huddle in 50 minutes and I am definitely not giving you our signals, but I can tell you what I believe must be included with it.

The following are issues I believe you should consider when installing the no huddle:

Personnel – We communicate this with hand signals however we became so efficient at it that once the players saw new personnel coming in, they knew what to do and where to go. I believe the way in which you accomplish this really depends on how many personnel groups you have, how often you practice it, and how efficient your booth is.

Formation, motion, shift, and play – All of this information is written on our wristbands. Each position has a different wristband with different information on it – quarterbacks, offensive linemen, tight ends, running backs, and wide receivers. In addition, the information on the wristbands changes weekly. We use hand signals or poster board to tell the players which play they are running from the wristband and sometimes there are reminders about what to do.

Pre-Snap Read – We use hand signals, tag words, and poster board to communicate this information.

Cadence – We have the ability for the quarterback to control the cadence with tag words or it can be written on our wristband.

Audible – To change the play, we can use hand signals or poster board. In addition, the quarterback can use tag words.

Communication

- Hand Signals
- Triple Play Wristbands
- Poster Board with Images
- Tag Words
- Numbers

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I have chosen not talk about communication in great detail for two reasons:

- 1) We don't want to give away how we communicate because we believe it's unique from what we have researched.
- 2) I feel that it has to be personalized in order to fit your scheme. Coach Weinke gave us great suggestions on how to signal in plays but it just didn't fit with what we were trying to do. I suggest you sit down with your staff (maybe even your players) and figure out what makes sense for your program.

Above, I have listed the five different ways we choose to communicate. They all have their positives and negatives. For example, creating a poster board with images takes both time and money but is easy for the players to remember. In contrast, creating hand signals takes little time and is free, but hand signals may not be as easy for the players to remember.

My only suggestions before you start are:

- a) to keep it simple
- b) to do your best to interrelate all of the types of signals you use
- c) and to always have a dummy or decoy call

Tempo

- 2 minute
- No huddle
- Huddle
- 4 minute

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Offensive tempo is another issue you need to consider when installing the no huddle offense. Specifically, these are the 4 tempos you need to consider:

2 minute (fastest) – We used to have a series of plays we practiced every Saturday morning. This scripted series of plays was our plan of attack for time sensitive situations. We no longer use this technique because we have become so efficient at the no huddle. Still, it is crucial to practice the no huddle for time sensitive situations.

No huddle (faster) – Basically, we go as fast as we can but we make sure we are in the right play call.

Huddle (fast) – Now, we only huddle after a time out, a penalty on us, end of the quarter, and before a two point conversion

4 minute (slow) – We still don't huddle for this tempo but we don't allow our quarterback to snap the ball until there are three or fewer seconds on the play clock. My coaches hate this tempo because they want to play fast all of the time but it is necessary for effective time management. It is essential that you practice this as well.

Installation

- Weight Room
- Summer Contact Days
- Fall Camp

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Our installation of the no huddle began in the weight room. We strength and condition four days per week in the off season, so at the beginning of every workout, we would use our hand signals to give our players the sets, repetitions, and percentage of their max that they would use at the workout that particular day. As a result, the vast majority of our players knew the hand signals before summer contact days had begun.

When the summer had finally arrived, we agreed as a staff that we were going to use the no huddle all summer no matter what. And that is exactly what we did. We used the no huddle for every contact day. Even on a defensive day, we would run at least one offensive drive using the no huddle even if it was on air. In addition, we used the no huddle for every 7-on-7 competition we were involved in. I'm not going to lie, the night before the summer started, I could barely sleep because I was so worried that the no huddle installation would slow our progress. In fact, I even seriously considered scrapping it all that night. I am very happy I did not make that decision.

In regards to the fall camp, nothing really changed. The only issue was the guys that had poor summer attendance. Despite their talent level or reason for missing, we did not let it slow us down and they were forced to catch up if they wanted to play. Be prepared for that scenario because it's likely to happen for any team.

Negative

- Score too fast?
- Lack of effectiveness at a slower pace

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I'm not sure that you can ever score too fast on offense but there were some occasions when we were running the no huddle this past season where I at least questioned that philosophy. For example, if the offense scored extremely fast and the defense was struggling, you didn't really get the time to coach the exclusively defensive players regarding adjustments. Furthermore, if your defense is made up of players that only play that side of the ball, they can become fatigued if the offensive drives only take up a short amount of time. Nonetheless, I believe there are ways to prepare for both of those scenarios and I will never truly complain about scoring too fast.

There is one area regarding the no huddle that can become problematic if you don't address it. Specifically, there were times this past season when I wanted the offense to slow down the pace in order to run time off of the clock. A couple of times when we attempted this tempo, we started getting penalties and blown assignments that were uncharacteristic for us. My only explanation for this is that we had created players with short attention spans and when we attempted to slow the tempo, our players lost focus. Fortunately, we addressed it by explaining to them why it was important to be able to operate at a slow tempo. We also practiced it more. Most importantly, we had senior leaders that helped us maintain our discipline during these situations. Unfortunately, we don't have those seniors next year so only time will tell if this becomes an issue again.

Positive

- Approximately 16 extra plays per game
- More repetitions in practice
- No conditioning
- Practice is more enjoyable
- Shorter practice time

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This was our first year in the no huddle and we averaged 16 additional plays per game than we did in the years prior to the switch. I see this as 16 extra opportunities to score.

One of the unexpected results was the effect it had on our practice. For each offensive practice, we typically have a 30 minute session set aside for “team” time. This is basically our first team offense versus our scout defense. Historically, we scripted 20 plays for this session. Since switching to the no huddle, we get at least 30 plays in during the same amount of time. That is 40 additional opportunities per week for improvement.

We found that with the no huddle, we had no reason to condition during the summer and during the first half of the regular season. This freed up another 5-10 minutes of practice time to work on something else. In addition, it boosted the morale of the players.

Another unexpected positive of the no huddle is how it livens up your practice. We used loud music during our team time to prevent our players from utilizing verbal communication. We chose to do this because we felt it would force the players to know what they are doing and to not rely on teammates and we believe it was successful in accomplishing that. This has also resulted in increased intensity during practice and, again, a morale boost that we didn't anticipate.

Another benefit of the no huddle is that practice is typically shorter – especially when things are going well. I personally believe in getting the work done and going home. This is a morale boost for all involved.

Results

2012 Urbana Tigers:

- 4600 total yards – 418.2 yards/game
- 386 total points – 35.1 points/game
- 2767 rushing yards – 251.5 yards/game – 6.2 per carry
- 1833 passing yards – 166.6 yards/game – 8.7 per attempt
- 60+ plays/game
- First playoff birth & Twin City Championship in 8 years
- First Conference Championship in 47 years
- First playoff win in school history

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These are some of the more obvious positive outcomes of using no huddle. If you look deeper, there's more to the story (see the next slide).

Results (continued)

Team	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	Final
Urbana	0	6	0	6	12
Community	0	14	7	0	21
Urbana	6	15	6	6	33
Central	0	7	0	7	14
Urbana	16	6	8	0	30
Bloomington	8	8	0	6	22
Urbana	32	27	8	7	74
Lanphier	7	12	0	7	26
Urbana	0	15	8	16	39
Centennial	0	0	12	0	12
Urbana	15	6	0	20	41
West	0	7	14	7	28
Urbana	16	0	14	12	42
Eisenhower	0	8	0	0	8
Urbana	0	7	14	12	33
Macarthur	7	0	0	13	20
Urbana	7	0	8	21	36
Danville	6	0	0	8	14
Urbana	0	14	16	6	36
East Peoria	7	7	0	8	22
Urbana	8	12	0	0	20
Morris	23	28	14	0	65
Urbana (total)	100	108	82	106	396
Opponent (total)	58	91	47	56	252
Differential	+42	+17	+35	+50	+144

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This table is of all of our box scores this past season. There's a lot there so let me tell you what I believe it says:

- Most of our offensive production was in the 2nd & 4th quarters of our games. I believe that is because our fast tempo resulted in fatigue of the opposing defense towards the end of the respective halves.
 - Our opponents had their least offensive production in the 3rd & 4th quarters. Once again, I believe our opponents were fatigued from our fast tempo and it affected their execution.
 - We outscored opponents by a 2:1 ratio in the 4th quarter. To me, I believe this is the strongest evidence that the no huddle can be very effective when it is used correctly.
 - In summary, the games that we won this year had a certain flow or rhythm to them. In the first quarter, our opponents seemed to struggle adjusting to our pace. In the second quarter, the opponent successfully adjusted to the pace. As a result, the 2nd quarter yielded the lowest point differential between us and our opponent. Nonetheless, our fast tempo eventually fatigued our opponent and statistics suggest that their performance slowly declined throughout the duration of the second half.
- * Some of the anomalies in the 4th quarter are the result of the JV players being in the game.

No Huddle Drive

- video

Urbana 7-on-7 Passing Tournament

- Saturday, July 6th at 9 am
- Round robin format/16 teams
- 2 IHSA officiating crews
- Certified athletic trainer
- \$150 entry fee guarantees 7 games
- 6 million dollar facility
- 2 synthetic turf fields



Questions?

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