

Inside the Huddle: Offense can be quarterback friendly for Pitt



Pat Bostick played quarterback for Pitt from 2007-10. Each week, he'll break down Pitt football and the changes that are being made in each area.

by Pat Bostick

With a running back to his right as he stands in the shotgun formation, the quarterback signals a slot receiver from his left to motion behind him, makes a quick stepping motion with his right leg, and the ball is snapped. He places the ball into the running back's stomach while keeping his eyes on the defensive end.

Thinking the running back has the football, the defensive end makes his move toward him and goes for the tackle. But the quarterback had quickly retracted the ball and is now sprinting toward the line of scrimmage. Milliseconds before he is struck by a fast-approaching linebacker, he pitches the ball to the receiver he brought in motion, who runs 80 yards for a touchdown.

This is what many college football fans think of when they hear about a no-huddle offense. The truth is, though, that the spread offense encompasses much more than crazy motions, read-options, and double reverses. Sure, the quarterback is usually in the shotgun and there are some unique formations and motions, but that doesn't mean each variation of this offense will look the same.

The Multiple Spread

There are many misconceptions about this style of offense – especially about what type of player can succeed in it. And while Pitt has run a pro-style offense in the past, the Panther

quarterbacks can see tremendous success in this new system.

It's important to remember that most offenses are tailored to the strengths of the quarterback. Though it is likely that the quarterback will be asked to run the football several times a game, there are various other ways for these offenses to generate yards and points without having a quarterback who fits the mold of a Pat White or Cam Newton. For an example, simply look at the success of the 2009 Cincinnati Bearcats and their quarterback, Tony Pike. Pike was tall, lanky and, while he did possess solid speed, he was more of a passer and did not resemble the running quarterback most people expect to direct a spread-style attack.

Currently, the Panther signal-callers are in the process of transitioning to Coach Graham's offense, and since they've been trained in the pro-style system, each of these quarterbacks must acclimate themselves to the nuances of the new system. However, the basics of playing the position (reading defenses and making decisions), coupled with the mastery of some new techniques and terminology should put the Pitt triggermen in a position to be greatly successful. In fact, this offense can be, and generally is, very quarterback-friendly.

The No Huddle

The most obvious and widely publicized transition each quarterback will make is the transition to the no-huddle offense. It will take some time to get

accustomed to the system of play entry (how each play is transmitted from the coach to the quarterback and then to the rest of the offensive unit). But once this process is mastered, the no-huddle attack can prove to be very dangerous. Not only does it create an exhaustingly fast-pace tempo, but it forces the defense to make adjustments on the fly. Instead of having the advantage of huddling before each play, wherein the defense can dial up certain blitz and coverage variations based on the offense's personnel, down, distance and field position, the defense will be more preoccupied with simply getting aligned and identifying the offensive formation. This can limit a defense's multiplicity, allowing both the offensive coaches and personnel to easily identify the defensive tendencies that can be exploited.

The New Look

This fall, the Pitt quarterbacks will also benefit from the rest of the offense and its significant makeover. The pro-style offense's foundation is the "I-Pro" formation, where there are two receivers (a flanker and a split end), one tight end, one fullback who lines up directly behind the quarterback under center, and a running back who stands behind the fullback. This formation has been around for a long time, but has given way to more three and four wide receiver sets, which are customary in college football's spread offense.

The Panther signal callers, up

until this point, have been trained to play under center. Although there was significant formation variation and moderate usage of the shotgun, the core of the offense these guys were trained in was the I-Pro set. I played in that system for four years here. As quarterbacks, we grew accustomed to reading defenses in a much more condensed environment, being that there are only two receivers on the field. Defenses didn't have to cover quite as much ground and were able to disguise blitz and coverage looks better because of the condensed nature of the formation. Now the quarterbacks are backing up into the shotgun routinely, where they can see more of the field. The three and four wide receiver sets are going to force defenses to "cover down," essentially showing the defense's hand before the ball is snapped. Defenses will be more spread out, opening up bigger running lanes and making it easier for the quarterback to identify what the defense is trying to do.

These factors have an impact on the defense, benefiting the quarterback before the ball is even snapped. Now add some zone-read running game, a diverse passing attack (short, intermediate, and "shot" passing) and some explosive trick plays, and you've got the recipe for a pretty potent offensive attack. I believe the Panthers have the personnel to succeed in this system, as it's simply going to be a matter of execution. And as for the triggermen, they'll have some weapons at their disposal in this quarterback-friendly offense.