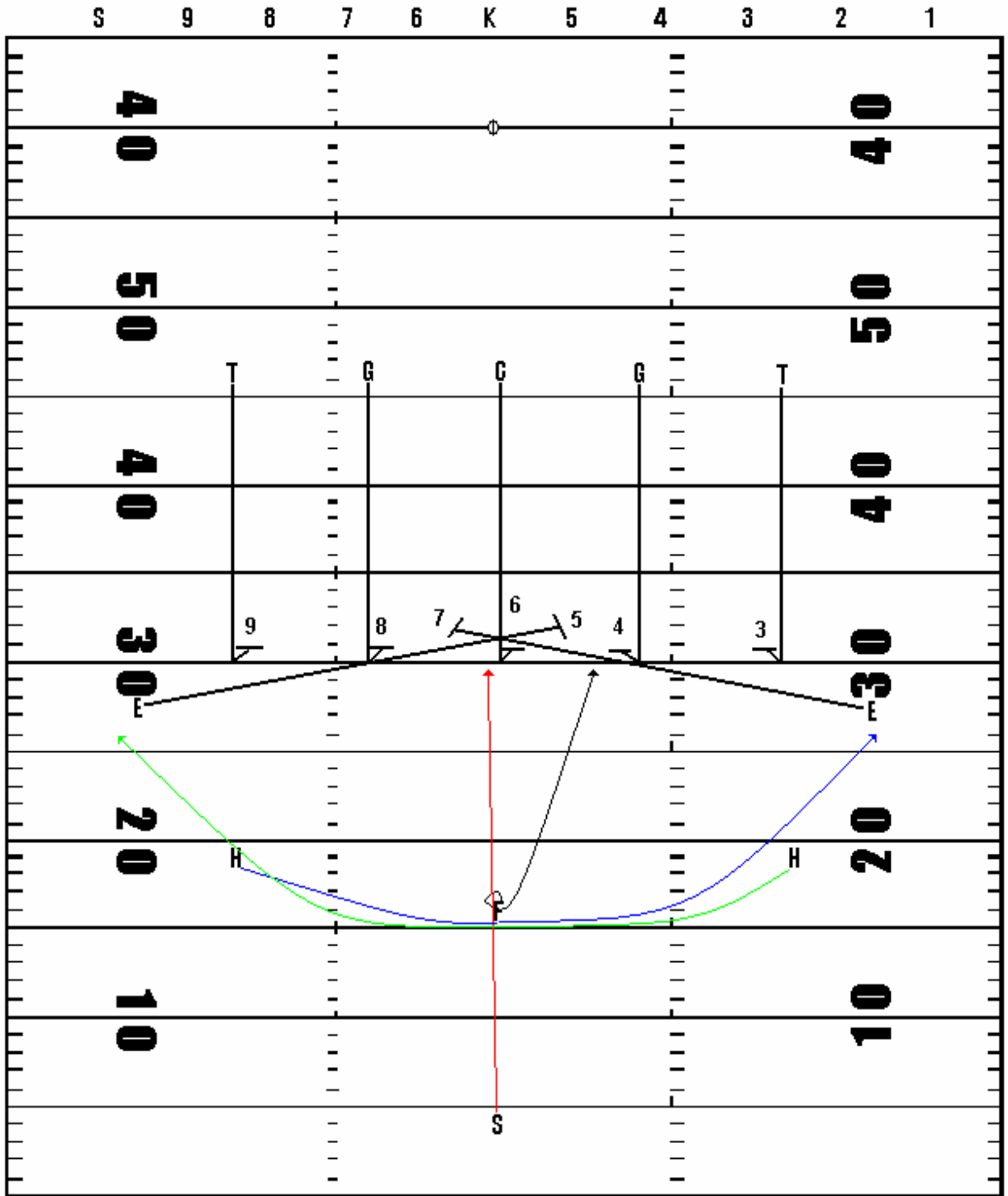


# BUCK LATERAL KICK RETURN



I have used the kick return diagrammed on the previous page exclusively since 1975. It requires more teaching time and repetitions than the standard wedge return, but I believe it pays big dividends. Opponents will not see anything like it all season, and so must spend extra time to prepare for it.

The basic premise is that seven blockers take care of the middle seven men on the kick-off team, while the four backs perform an intricate maneuver on almost every kickoff which resembles (and is based on) the old Single Wing buck lateral series. (Note for youth coaches: Adjust the distances in the diagram to suit your kick receiving situation -- move the backs closer to the ball if kicks don't carry that far, and cut down the distance your line drops by a proportionate amount.)

The FB is in control of the buck lateral maneuver. He will call "Right", "Left", "Short" or "Deep" depending on where the kick is heading. The FB's one rule is that he can never back up -- he can move laterally within the hashmarks, but never behind the 15 yard line. The two halfbacks can similarly move up and/or out to the sidelines, but never in further than the hashmarks or deeper than the 15. Finally, the safety man should never try to field a ball in front of the 15.

I will explain all possible variations of the return, starting with the FB's call for each.

**SHORT:** The FB will field a ball in between the hashmarks and in front of the 15 himself. The halfbacks should form a "mini-wedge" in front of the FB and block the first wrong-colored jersey that shows.

**LEFT:** The left HB will field a ball outside the left hash and in front of the 15. The FB will lead block for the LHB, while the S and RHB should pick up leakage from the right side.

**RIGHT:** Identical to LEFT, except the RHB fields the ball.

**DEEP:** The safety fields any ball behind the 15, no matter what the lateral position relative to the hashes. FB and both HB's should form a wedge five yards in front of the S, and block the first color that shows.

**NO CALL:** If the FB does not make one of the above calls, the buck lateral is on. The FB only makes the call if the kick will not allow the buck sequence to be properly set up -- if the ball is so far from either the S or FB that it would destroy the timing of the buck lateral return. If the FB can catch the ball without moving more than a step in any direction; or if the S can field the ball inside the hashmarks and in front of the goal line, the FB will allow the buck lateral to go

ahead. Once the ball is kicked and the backs don't hear a call, the FB will pivot 180 degrees on the spot where he lined up (with the ball, if he has caught a short one, or to face the S, who is fielding the ball behind him). The S starts forward toward the FB at full speed, while the HB's run full speed on a course that will take them right behind the FB. (HB RULE: If one of the HB's is to get the ball, he passes right behind the FB, while the other one passes deep enough to allow room between him and the FB for the HB who is getting the ball. If neither HB is getting the ball, the LHB always passes in front of the RHB.) We will pre-determine which buck lateral return we will use on the sideline before the kick return team lines up. These are the possibilities:

JACK (red in diagram): The Safety will field the ball, run just to the left of the FB, and continue straight downfield while the FB fakes to both HB's and completes his full spin by heading downfield as well. OR, the FB will field the short middle ball, pivot, hand the ball to the S, fake to both HB's, then finish his full spin and take off downfield as well.

QUEEN (blue): The LHB takes the ball from the FB and heads outside, while the RHB fakes to the left and both the S and FB continue their downfield fakes up the middle. This will happen whether the FB fields the ball and fakes to the S first, or whether the S fields the ball and hands to the FB before he gives to the LHB.

KING (green): The identical return as Queen, but to the left with the RHB carrying. This is the only time the RHB will pass closer to the FB than the LHB.

ACE (black): The FB will execute all fakes before continuing his full spin and heading downfield with the ball looking for daylight. (If the S fields the ball, of course, he will hand to the FB before FB fakes to both HB's and completes his spin.) He should keep both arms over the ball, just as he always keeps both arms crossed when faking on other returns. We have seen the FB run right by defenders who assume he's faking -- and if you succeed in running an ACE return back for good yardage, do the exact same thing the next time and watch the look on the other team's faces when they realize they've been had AGAIN.

I will not run this return until my team has repped it correctly 50 times. It is possible to use just the backs and a coach with a stop-watch, having the backs run their buck lateral pattern while calling out "KICK", "BALL" etc. to simulate the kick-off and catch. Start with the S holding the ball, then progress to the FB holding the ball, and then practice all four of the non-buck lateral possibilities from the previous page. We don't expect the line to know who has the football, and that actually makes the buck lateral more effective -- there is no way the line can tip the direction of the return. E-mail questions to [seayee@state.gov](mailto:seayee@state.gov).

## COACHING POINTS:

I teach everything whole-part-whole. Show them how it should look on the board first, walking them through each possible variation. Then take them onto the practice field and work the kick return team as two units -- the backs practicing their footwork and faking, and the other seven players working against light bags to time up their drops and targeting their blocks.

Next you bring the units together, but use a stopwatch and call out "KICK" and "BALL" based on the average time it takes to kick the ball to each of your four backs. (The front seven release with "KICK"; the back who is simulating catching the ball -- he starts with the ball in his hands -- can move when he hears "BALL". The other three backs need to work on their timing so that they arrive at the right spot on time.) Then you go through each variation of the return and focus on timing, footwork and faking.

Finally, you are ready to start repping the return against a live kicker (although I have the other kick team people either hold light shields, if I have enough, or just get two-hand touched by their blockers). Here is where you focus on perfect play execution. This means the FB makes the correct call, or no call if that is the correct situation; that all four backs run their paths perfectly and arrive on time to receive the ball or fake convincingly; and that the front seven are in position to make their blocks at the right time. Fifty perfect reps means I'm willing to use the return in a game.