SPORTVIEW
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The Houston Veer-T

FOOTBALL COACHES SPEND half their lives diagramming Xs and Os on blackboards and table cloths. From the juggling of all those Xs and Os in coachy think-tanks come offensive and defensive plays and maneuvers. Yet some of football’s best plays and offenses came about by pure chance.

Years and years ago, when the single-wing formation was the standard offense, a coach was scrumming his first team against his second team. Some say that coach was Wallace Wade and the squad Alabama’s. Be that as it may, the first team was on offense and the play called in the huddle was a reverse from the fullback to the wingback. The wingback, however, missed the handoff and the fullback was left holding the ball as he half spun to hand the ball to the wingback.

Not knowing what to do, the fullback completed his spin and lo, and behold, there was a big hole in the line. The fullback took off and ran for some 10 or 15 yards.

Well now, reasoned the coach, if the full spinner, with the fullback retaining the ball, fooled a defense in scrimmaging, didn’t it follow that it would work in a game. Thus was born the fullback spinner, a potent weapon in the single-wing offense.

The fullback “draw” play, dramatically popularized by Paul Brown’s Cleveland Browns with Otto Graham “slipping” the ball to Marion Motley, was “born” during a long-ago Green Bay Packers-Chicago Bears game. The Packers had a big guard by the name of “Buckets” Goldenberg who, on passing situations, put on a one-man rush. Every time Sid Luckman, the Bears quarterback, went back to pass, Goldenberg would come shooting through a hole opened by his fellow linemen and “sack” Luckman.

In desperation, Luckman told his fullback, before a third-down-and-long-yardage play, that he’d had all of Goldenberg he wanted; that he would hand the ball to the fullback who would run up the middle through the hole left by the charging Goldenberg. The play worked for a first down. Voila! The “draw” play was created.

Missed Handoff, New Offense

HOUSTON UNIVERSITY’S COUGARS were scrimmaging one afternoon in 1964. The quarterback missed a handoff to a running back. Stuck with the ball, the quarterback “slid” down the line. The defensive tackle “froze” and the quarterback went between him and the end for a sizable gain.

Houston coach Bill Yeoman “saw” something in that maneuver, “Hey, let’s run that again,” he yelled.

From that missed handoff, Yeoman constructed his Veer-T offense that has become so popular with coaches. With the Veer-T, Yeoman’s Houston teams became the most offensive of college teams. Over the past five years Houston has averaged 33.9 points a game and 469.7 yards in total offense.

The Veer-T is described by Houston’s sports information director Ted Nance as “a cross of the old split-T, sliding quarterback offense and the belly series.” It is a triple-option offense, as is the line, or keeping and running the ball himself, or pitching out to a trailing back.

The Veer-T is run with two set backs and a flanker; the Wishbone has three running backs behind the quarterback, with the fullback a step closer to the qb than the other two running backs. The Wishbone, which Texas’ Darrell Royal first sprung on Houston in the Longhorns’ first game of the 1968 season requires three good running backs all of whom must be good blockers. In the Veer-T the quarterback “options” the defensive tackle and end without either of those defensive players being blocked.

Running a ‘Con’ Game

NO BLOCKING ON tackle or end? No way the Veer-T could work. But it does. It’s a “con” game worked on the defense, and there’re suckers a-plenty playing defensive football. Sure, the Veer-T requires good faking and speed. Houston always has both.

“Coach Yeoman always recruits speed,” says Nance. “Overall this year we’re just as fast as last year.”

The Cougars went 9-2 last year, losing only to Arizona State by one point and to Alabama by 14 points, before losing to No. 3 ranked Colorado, 29-17, in the Bluebonnet Bowl. Virginia Tech fell to the Cougars’ speed, 56-29.

The Houston squad Yeoman brings to Blackburg for tomorrow’s game against Virginia Tech is a young group. Twelve sophomores are starters.

“Inexperience hurt us in the first two games,” Nance said. The Cougars lost their opening game to Rice by one point (14-13) and their second game to Arizona State (33-28). Two weeks ago the Cougars, who had an open date last Saturday, defeated Tulsa, 21-0. That victory was a solid one, in view of Tulsa’s one-point loss to Arkansas last week.

“We’ve come along just about as coach Yeoman expected,” Nance said. “He expected some early-season trouble.”

Yeoman, taking advantage of Houston’s open date last Saturday, scouted the Gobblers in their 13-10 victory over Southern Methodist. As a result of that scouting trip to Blackburg, Yeoman has stressed defense this week. “Our defense must play well if we’re to win over Virginia Tech,” the Houston coach says.

Tech coach Charlie Coffey all but echoes Yeoman’s words. If Tech is to defeat Houston, Coffey says, “We have to play like hell and have the same kind of defense we had against SMU.”

Sounds like a coaches’ game tomorrow, for Yeoman has often said, “You play defense for the coaches and offense for the fans.”