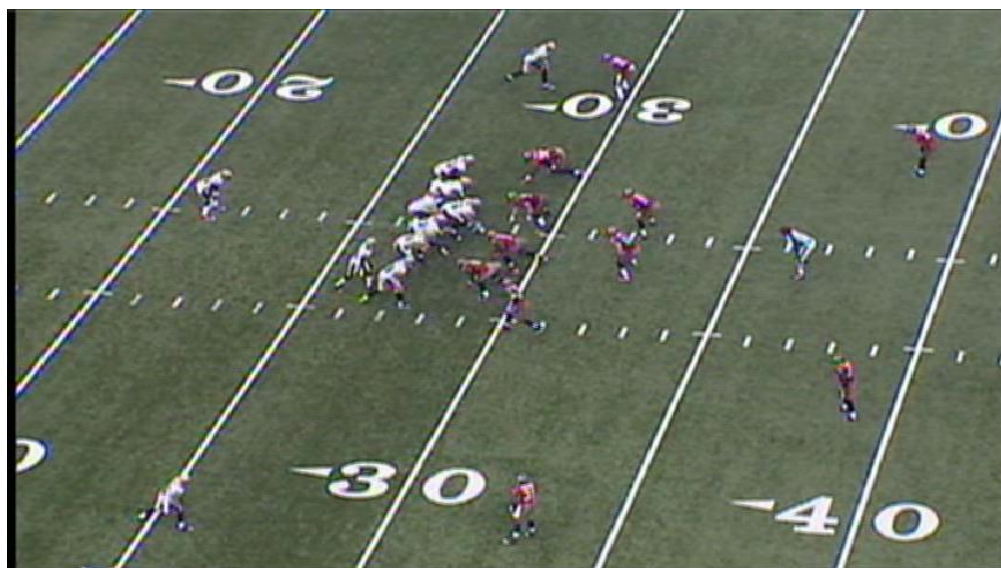


Quarterback Progression Process

We're going to focus on how quarterbacks can learn to use timing in their progressions to help them get the football out more quickly with better accuracy and velocity. We'll use pictures pulled off of NFL coach's tape from games that show quarterbacks using this same technique but it's nothing new; quarterbacks have been doing it this way for years but there is little or no information anywhere about these 'tricks of the trade' so we've decided to present a series of articles so quarterbacks and receivers can learn how players at the highest level do things. The picture below is taken just before the snap of the ball; do you know what defense this is and what they are going to do with the coverage?



Defenses in the NFL have morphed into concepts that change depending on what the offense does which makes it all but impossible to “read a single defender.” In fact, if a defensive coordinator suspects or knows that a quarterback is trying to read a certain defender, he can

easily make that QB throw interceptions by given him false reads, which is why most offenses now use progressions. They still use pre-snap keys, but they go through a progression from one receiver to the next depending on coverage. In the time it takes the high school quarterback to decide his primary receiver isn't open, the NFL quarterback has already gone through his entire progression, moved in the pocket to avoid being hit and has thrown the football to his outlet receiver; it all happens that fast!

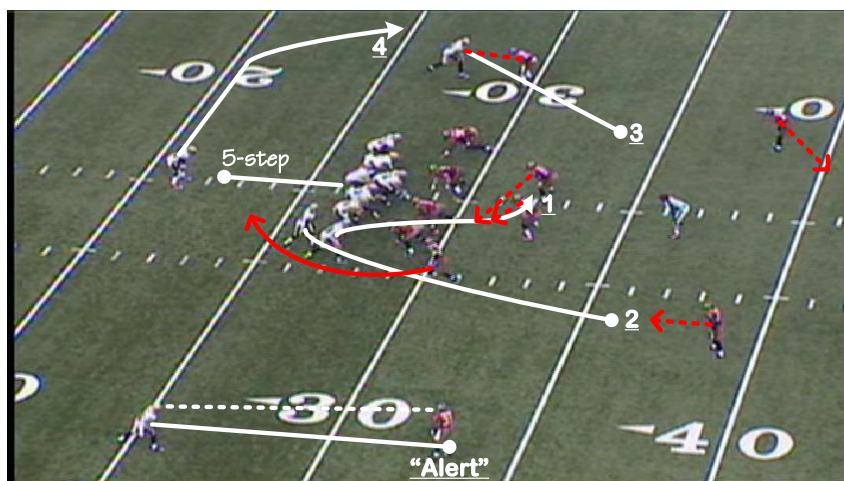
Generally speaking, once the quarterback receives the snap from center he shouldn't even be looking at his receivers because he should know where they will be when it's time to throw the football. The quarterback's main concern is "***where are the defenders and where are they going?***" His eyes are downfield watching their drops and coverage areas. It's important to note that he is not thinking "its cover three", or "its quarters"; he is reacting to what he sees in front of him in relation to the progression of the passing concept.

As the quarterback nears the top of his drop his eyes go to the target area and when his back foot hits the ground, he has already started his throw-motion and then allows himself to react to what he sees. That means the football is coming out unless there is a reason not to make the throw. This is very different from the way quarterbacks used to be trained when it came to reading defenses. In the old days, the quarterback was told to confirm the receiver was open before he threw the football, but if you do that today you'll only get to the 1st receiver in the progression and by time the ball gets to him, the DB will most likely be right there to make the tackle, knock the ball down or worse yet, intercept the pass.

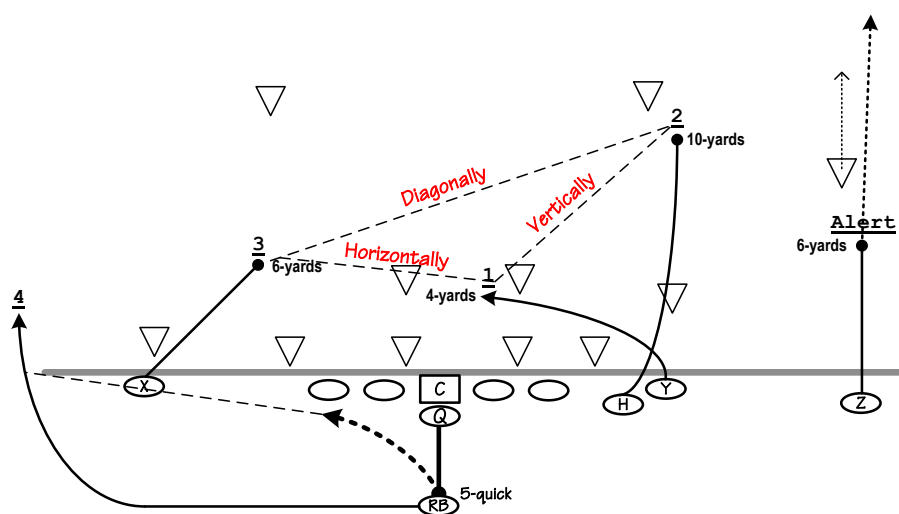
Today's quarterback drops back intending to make a certain throw and even starts his throw-motion not knowing for sure his target will be open, and it turns out this works much better. The

football comes out faster and it's far easier for a quarterback to start his throw-motion in rhythm and stop it (if needed), than it is to wait on the receiver and then try to get the football there before the defense closes in on the receiver. NFL quarterbacks are doing this routinely in games and practices but it happens so fast and they make it look so easy that we don't notice it at all unless it's pointed out to us.

We are going to dissect one play from an NFL game where the quarterback uses this technique and you'll see that the quarterback looks like he is throwing right into double-coverage, but in reality he is just going through his 1st and 2nd options in the passing concept before he finally goes to the #4 receiver in the progression. All five receivers released into the pattern and the quarterback was left with a five-man protection scheme which didn't account for an outside blitz that was showing. The quarterback was able to get to the final receiver in the progression even with an unblocked linebacker coming at him because of the way he was able to react during the play. The picture you see below has the receiver's routes drawn as well as the arrows showing where the linebackers and defensive backs went once the play started. The quarterback's drop and his probable progression are also included.

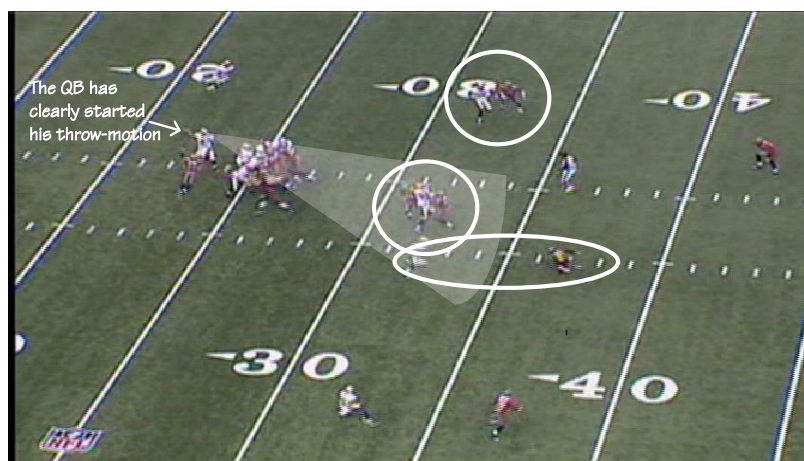


This is a low to high progression for two reasons; first the drag route is going to open up first if it doesn't get walled off by a linebacker jumping the route. Secondly, if the curl was #1 in the progression, the drag route would bleed into the "X" receiver's route by the time the quarterback came off the curl route, which means it's not a viable 2nd option if the curl route is covered. You want to stretch the defense horizontally, diagonally and vertically as much as possible and you never want two or more receivers near each other when it's time for the football to come out.



The triangle in this pattern is "low to high" over the middle of the field, so the outlet receiver will open up to the outside late in the play. If the #1 to #2 progression takes place outside, the outlet receiver would open up late over the middle. This insures that the defense is stretched to the maximum when the pass is thrown. The defenders are going to react to a quarterback who is both stepping into the throw, and has taken his front hand off the football.

The picture below shows the quarterback at the top of his drop; he is clearly in the middle of his throw-motion and it appears as though the football is coming out even though no one would be open in this 1 to 2 progression; the drag is walled off by both linebackers and the safety at the bottom of the screen is jumping the curl. However the quarterback reacted to this “pulled down the throw” and moved on in the progression smoothly.



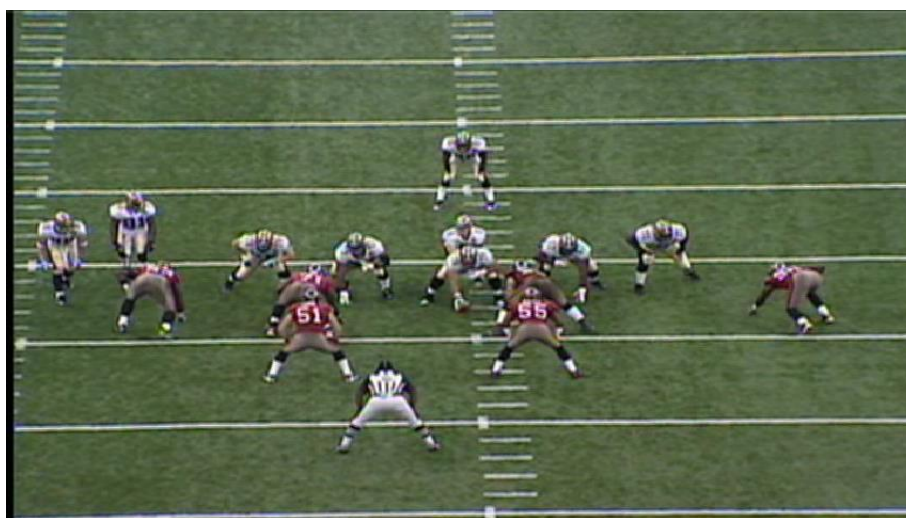
The quarterback then moves to his left and he can see the corner is all over the “X” receiver. We can also assume he knew the safety was deep and playing the middle of the field which means there is a lot of grass near the sideline so he makes a quick throw to his running back coming from the backfield for an easy 1st down plus additional yards.



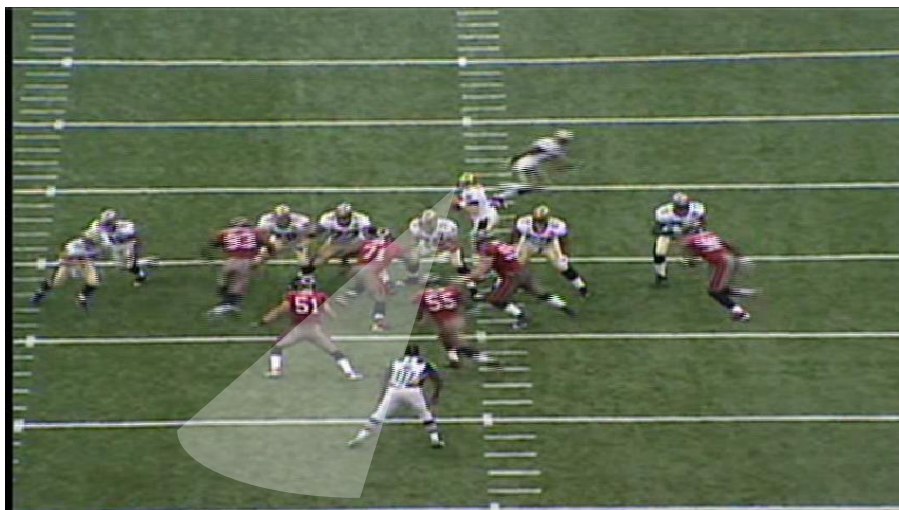
This all happens in a few seconds and the quarterback makes it look so easy, but that comes from years of experience and thousands of repetitions. He knew the linebacker at the bottom the screen was unblocked but his progression was going to take him away from pressure if he had to move to his outlet and he used it to his advantage. You can see the unblocked linebacker didn't even touch him before the ball was out of his hand.

Now we are going to look at that same play unfolds from the end zone camera so we can get a better look at what the quarterback is looking at as he goes through his progression.

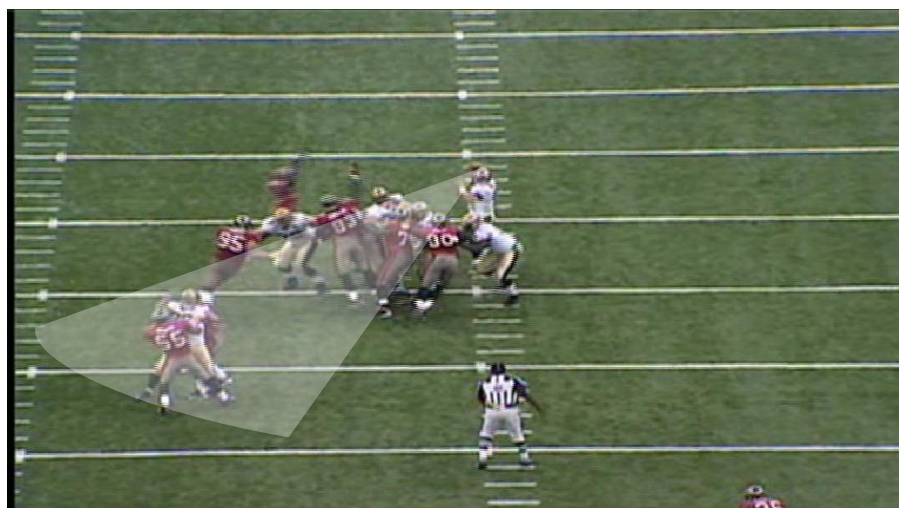
The quarterback comes to the line of scrimmage and checks the box for protection; then the safeties for coverage and finally looks at the corners to confirm what he believes he sees as far as the concept is concerned.



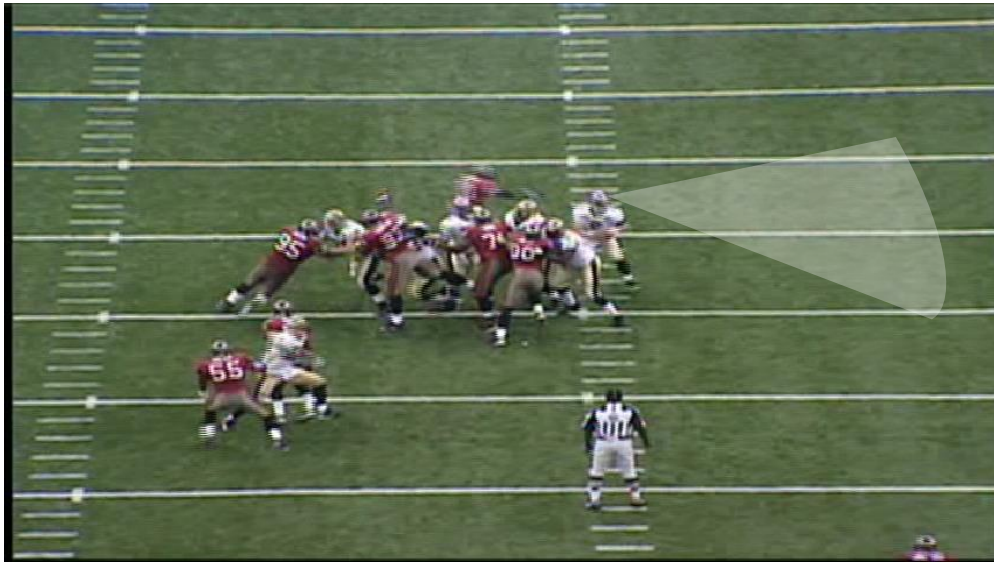
The quarterback is now in the middle of his drop and his eyes are on the area of the field he wants to throw to; he knows where his receivers will be so he is focused on what the defense is doing and trusting that his receivers will be at their landmarks when it's time to make the throw.



This picture clearly shows the quarterback is stepping into the throw. The football is up and back as he sees the drag-route getting walled off by the linebackers as well as the safety jumping the curl route; but he is still able to easily “pull down the throw” and react to what he sees without having to think about it.



The next picture is taken just after the quarterback has pulled down the throw as he steps up and slides towards his outlet receiver who he knows is to his left side. He has a lot of room in front of him but he knows it's better to throw to a wide open running back running the speed-swing.



The pass ended up in the uncovered running back's hands that had no one around him, in part because the quarterback originally stepped into the first progressions of the concept and drew the defense as well as the rush away from the outlet receiver.

