

PHILOSOPHY OF OFFENSIVE FOOTBALL

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In my introduction they left out the fact that my record my first year was 0-7. Some of these people only see my record the last few years and they think I have had instant success. Very few things come instantly, and very few things in life come easy. I am very lucky and I am blessed to have the job that I have. It is a lot more luck than it is deserving on my part. I was lucky to be in position to get a job like the Auburn job. I was only 26 years old when I got my first Head Coaching job. That was at Salem College in West Virginia. I went out and lost all seven games. The only thing I am thankful for is the fact that I was coaching but no one was watching or paying attention to what we were doing. They did not know how bad I was. Fortunately, I learned to coach without a lot of people watching. In the SEC you do not get a lot of time to learn on the job.

I was a student of the game of football when I first started and I am a student of the game now. I was always a better student of the game than I was a player. I loved to play football. Not only is my job football, my hobby is football. It is important that coaches remain students of the game. I know it is important to continue to learn about the game each year.

I was fortunate to go on the Nike Tour this year. It was the first time that I had a chance to go. Nike takes the coaches on a tour to Mexico, and other places. You talk about the kid in the candy store; I was sitting around with Joe Paterno, LaVell Edwards, my dad, Steve Spurrier, and other great coaches. I did a lot of listening. The point I am trying to make is that we can always learn football. We need to learn more football or we become stale. Nothing remains the same. If you are not going forward, you are going backwards.

You are very seldom standing still.

I do not know if I am a better clinician now that I am the Head Coach at Auburn. The first ten years as a Head Coach I coached at small colleges. I was at Salem College for three years and we had 1000 students. I coached almost the entire offense; ever single position. At Samford we were in Division III for one year, and Division I for five years. I have coached the line, the Quarterbacks, wide receivers, running backs, and everything else. Then I was a much better X's and O's person. Now, when I talk at a clinic I do not give out a lot of details. My brother Tommy, is the offensive coordinator and he can do a better job of that. Coach Fisher would do a better job with the defense. I do try to tell you some of the things I am doing. As a young coach I always try to analyze what I am doing, and what I might do better, and what I can find to be important for the reasons for our success. I have a good base or foundation to which to speak from. I have been running the same things and have had the same offensive philosophy since I have been coaching at all levels. At times as young coaches we may think the coaches at the next level know a lot more than we do and that they run a lot more than we do. Well, we are running the same offense that we ran at Samford and Salem College. We ran the same offense and went undefeated in the SEC. I feel the same situation is true in high school. There are certain principles that are true at all levels. As a Head Coach or as a Coordinator, we need to remember these facts.

I would be remised if I did not say thanks to the high school coaches of Florida. They were very instrumental in my coaching career. When I left for Salem College in 1983 I had been a coach at Florida

State University for four years. We built our program at Salem College on Florida athletes. I would come to Florida on Spring break to recruit players. I would come down in my own car and spend the night with many of the high school coaches. We did not have much to offer at Salem, but the high school coaches of Florida treated me super and enhanced my career. At Samford it was the same thing. We had great success with the high school athletes from Florida. Of course the change we have made at Auburn has been a greater emphasis of supplementing our State athletes with those athletes from Florida. I commend the coaches from Florida for the job that you do with football. The state has the population and a lot of things going for **high** school football. You are doing a super job. Much of our success we have had has come from the fact that we have some good athletes from the State of Florida. They have been good ambassadors of the state.

I have always felt the most innovative coaches in America are high school coaches. We are too uptight in college. We get in games and think our job is on the line and we do not do anything innovative. We look at a lot of films of high school games and see a lot of good things in those films.

I am going to talk about a few things on offense that I believe in. I will talk about what I believe in philosophically. Let me say this to begin with. I have been taught this and you should never forget this. I have been taught to be a positive football coach. The greatest thing you can do as a coach is to have a positive attitude and to accentuate the positive, as opposed to being a coach that is negative. I know at times we get caught up in poor mouthing our team and that we are no good. When you do that all you are doing is degrading your athletes. We can recruit. After we recruit that is all that we have. You must make the players that you have, believe they can win. Very seldom are you going to have athletes that are better than someone else has.

I would say this, it is so

important to accentuate the positive. Develop a positive attitude to your players so that they can be successful. I have never had a better example of this than this year when we came to Gainesville to play the University of Florida. We were very fortunate to beat Florida in Gainesville. However, if our players had read the newspaper, we would not have had a chance. We were a 17 point underdog. We were playing the Number One team in the nation. Coach Spurrier had not lost a game to an SEC team in Gainesville. We had won 17 straight games and another win would break our record for an Auburn team. The game was on National TV. We would have to win a scoring contest.

The biggest thing I had to do that week was to get to the newspapers to tell our players that I felt we could win that game. I went over all of the positive aspects that we had going for us. I had to get our players to believe we could win the game. If your players do not believe they can win, it will be tough to win. They will rise to your level of expectations. Coaching did not win that game; the players won that game because they believed they could win. You must always give your players the feeling that they can win.

I can go from Samford to Auburn and be successful. If I had listened to all the Auburn Alumni, or believed all that I read in the newspaper, there was no way I could have been successful at Auburn. They were all convinced you could not go from a small school to an SEC school and be successful. You have to be a positive coach. I do not like negative coaches. You could not coach for me if you were not a positive coach. All I want to hear is how we are going to win. I want the assistant coaches to tell the players how they are going to make them winners.

I usually give a talk on Attitude from a Leadership standpoint. As a football coach, you must believe in yourself and that you have as much knowledge and ability as anyone else has. Then you have to get the players to believe in themselves. That is where it all starts.

Before I talk about our Offen-

sive Philosophy and what I think is important to win, I want to tell you I am a **Bowden**. As a **Bowden** we talk offensive football all of the time. I run the style of program that my dad runs. As the Head Coach I call the offense. I am the offensive coordinator, and Head Coach, and I call the plays. I hire a defensive coordinator and he calls the defense. That has always been my philosophy and that is the way my father does it. I can't be in both offensive and defensive meetings so I hire the defensive coordinator. He is going to be given the credit or he is going to take the blame. It gets you a good coordinator this way. That is the way it works for me, but not all coaches do it that way.

As much as I am going to talk on offense I want you to know that offense does not win Championships. Offense is not your answer to winning football games. Defense is going to win for you. That is the key to big games, and the Championships. Offense is a key, and it is a big part of a program, but defense wins it all. We will have two or three big games a year. Florida State will have two or three big games a year. Florida will have two or three big games a year and those games will be won with defense. The big games are generally low scoring games.

Look at the last four National Champs in college. Three of the four Champs have led the Nation in Scoring Defense. In 1991 Miami won it all and led the Nation with 9 points per game Scoring Defense. In 1992 Alabama won it and only gave up 9 points per game. In 1993 Florida State won the Championship giving up 9 points per game. This year Nebraska won the Championship and they were second in Scoring Defense. Miami won the Scoring Defense giving up 9 points per game. Nebraska was second with 10 points per game. Alabama averaged 26 points per game on offense when they won it in 1992. Florida State averaged 43 points per game in 1993. Nebraska was around 30 points this year on offense. The essential is defense. I am not going to talk about defense, but if you are going to take over a program and you want

to give yourself a chance to win, make sure the defense dilemma is solved first.

As an offensive coach I tell my defensive staff I want to be in the top 5 in Scoring Defense. I think I can average 32 points per game in a bad year. I think we know enough on offense to do that. I tell our defense we are not going to win the big games unless we are in the top 5 in Scoring Defense. To do that I tell our defense two things. They have to have a great rush defense. That comes out to less than 3 yards per rush in college. The other aspect of the defense is giving up the big play. Great rush defenses do not give up the big play. You will never get beat if you do not give up the big play.

Florida played great defense this year, statistically. They had a great rush defense. They were in the top five. They did not give up the big play, even though they gave up a lot of in between yardage. Alabama has been the most difficult defense to play against year in and year out. Bill Oliver, the Defensive Coordinator at Alabama is a great challenge to me as a coach. He has never had a 300 yard passing game against him in the last 60 games and they are always in the top 5 in Scoring Defense.

If you can develop a great rush defense and prevent the big play you will have a great Scoring Defense. A great rush defense should also give you a good pass rush. The best rush teams are playing 8 or 9 people close to the line of scrimmage. This is what we are seeing on offense. We played against two real tough teams last year. One was against was Ole Miss and Joe Lee Dunn, who is now at Georgia. If you look at their defense you will see 9 people close to the line of scrimmage. He will play Man Coverage a lot of the time. He likes to blitz. If you will watch when they run the blitz, you will see they play a soft Man or Zone Coverage behind the blitz. He has taken average football teams and done great things with them defensively. He knows he can play the run tough with 9 men up close to the line, and that will force them into passing situations. But he

does not play the secondary tight; he plays loose. That scares you. One year against Auburn, before I got there, he played with only two down linemen.

Alabama plays a little more Three Deep in the Secondary. I think things are getting back to more Three Deep. Everything is Four Level, with four backs deep. It use to be Quarter, Quarter, Half. Now it is Quarter, Quarter, Quarter, Quarter in the secondary. However, I am seeing more of the Three Deep Concept now. The thing I am trying to tell you is this. Be great on the defensive side of the ball and the offense will be fun.

My dad and my brothers have continual discussions on what is the most important offense to be successful. As coaches we need to decided some definite things about offense. Just as I said Scoring Defense is an essential thing in winning a Championship, I do not think Scoring Offense is always the most important thing in winning. I have always used Florida State as an example to explain what I mean. Also, I have used Florida to explain this because they score so many points per game. Florida State will line up as 20 point favorites for 8 games per year; probably. They will be 18 to 20 point favorites in most of their games. I do not care what offense Florida State lines up in, they are going to win by a whole bunch. The whole premise, or the big question is this; What offense should they run for those other three games. Don't put your offense in for Podunk University. Put your offense in to beat Miami. If you are a "Throw it every down Coach," and you average 50 points per game, and then all of a sudden you play against a great team that has equal athletes. The last thing you want to be doing is to be throwing the ball on your 5 yard line. What do you end up doing in that situation? You end up in the running game. That may not be your best offense. In the big games you end up NOT doing the things you do best. I am not saying this is the total answer, but this is what has taught me to debate this subject. Is it best to go out and use an offense where I can score the

most points against a team I am going to beat anyway. Or, is it best to develop a balanced offense that gives you enough time to practice both phases of the game? Can you run both the passing game and running game in the big games? In big games turnovers will probably be the deciding factor.

In looking at the best teams in terms of winning the best teams are teams that run a balanced offensive attack. The teams that are run oriented are usually not in the hunt **for the National Championship**. An example would be the Air Force Academy and Vanderbilt. They ran the ball well, but did not have a strong passing game. Passing only teams are the same. An example would be Las Vegas, and New Mexico. Take the top ten teams in the country and you will see them in the top of Total Offense. Florida and Nebraska were exceptions this year. Florida had more passing and Nebraska had more running, but they both had outstanding defenses.

If you have an outstanding defense you can have some tendencies, and it will not make that much difference. The point I am trying to get to is this. If I want to have the best offense for winning a championship, and not the best offense for Terry **Bowden** to be the Coach Of The Year, or to winning the Scoring Title, but for **Terry Bowden** the Head Coach. The best offense for me is a balanced offense. We do not have to score 40 points a game. At my level it looks as if 31 to 32 points per game is what we need to achieve. If you are looking at your offense and you are going to make some adjustments, balance is the key. If you want to get to the championship level, with people with similar talent, this is where balance will help you. If you are a lot better than your opponent you can run it or pass it every down. In high school I imagine the it should be a little more run than passing. However, in the big games you must have the ability to do both.

In talking about a balanced offense I was taught by my father to "Keep It **Simple**." It is the old KISS Principle. KEEP IT SIMPLE STUPID. I recommend to you to keep

it simple. Don't try to do too much. If balance is what you want, the key is combining EXECUTION with UNPREDICTABILITY. You must be able to combine the two. You must be able to execute and not make mistakes, but you also want to be unpredictable. If you only ran one play you probably would execute that one play perfect, but you would be very predictable. If you ran 100 plays you may not be very predictable, but you probably could not execute very well. Our whole dilemma in getting the right offense is to find a way that we will be unpredictable, but one that we can also execute. My theory has always been to keep it simple. Again, when I say my theory, it is what my father taught me over the years. My father does go back five decades in coaching. He was a Head Coach in 1955, and a lot of football has been learned and forgotten since that time.

Let me give you a simple explanation of being able to execute and still be unpredictable. If I could only have five plays in my offense and we had two runs and three passes, it would mean you could execute any of those five plays on 1st Down and 10, and any of the five plays on 4th Down and inches to go, you would be pretty unpredictable. In a nutshell that is the theory of my offense and that is the theory of my fathers offense. I think Brad Scott has the same theory.

I was with my father during the Nike trip. He was telling me he did not need more plays. He said, "All we have to do is run the plays faster." He was talking about the No Huddle attack. Could you imagine running these five plays I referred to earlier from the No Huddle? Now the defense can not get ready for all of these plays. This takes the coaching out of the game. I keep thinking of ways I can get Coach Bill Oliver out of the game. I do not know if I can line up and beat him all of the time. He is that good. But, if I can get in the No Huddle and run those five plays; I could run them fast or I could run them slow. That would take the coach out of the game. Now, the offense is more unpredictable to the players.

As coaches we want to add more and more on offense. We here something nice about a coach and we want to add one of his plays. We watch games on TV and see good plays and want to add them to our offense. My dad wants to run the same plays but to run them faster. I like this No Huddle concept. We will probably get to it someday. It does give you the ability to keep it simple, but it also makes it more unpredictable for the defense. I think there is some merit to this concept. It takes a commitment by a coach. That is a good example of not trying to do more; just do better.

Again the theory is to keep it simple on offense, and make sure you can execute what **you** run. The **worse** thing you can **have** happen in a critical situation is not being able to execute the play. **The** defense does not stop you; you stop yourself because of a lack of execution. We all have been through that situation.

Let me give you some examples of keeping your offense simple. Our offense at Auburn is no more complicated than it was at Samford. It is a little more complicated than what we ran at Salem College. We are getting better at it, and we are adding a little each year. It stays fairly simple. We do not use many formations offensively. I am not saying this is the only way to winning. It fits with what we believe in at Auburn. As a coach that has to teach and assistants that have to teach, it gives you a lot more time than an offense that has a lot of formations and a lot of plays. At least you can sleep at night knowing the players will know where to line up. Some teams can't tell until halftime if the players will line up in the right splits on offense.

We have three basic formations at Auburn. We use no motion. I always qualify that by letting Georgia and Florida know that I may change that theory someday. Basically we run three formations. We run the I Formation, Split Backs with the Gun; we move the quarterback back and split the backs but do not move anyone else, and we use a One Back Set with four wideouts. We substitute personnel when we go

to the One Back Set. We take the fullback out and put a **wideout** in, and we take the tight end out and put another **wideout** in. We run the same Shotgun Split. Those are our basic formations. If we ran Motion we would have to work on the snap count for ever. That is a pain. You have to work on it and work on it. Then that guy gets hurt and you do not have a man that can run the motion the same as the first man. We try to stay with formations that are very basic.

The year we went undefeated we only had two formations. We ran the I and the Split Backs. We did not have the Four Wide Out Set. We added one formation and we won 9, lost 1, and tied 1 this year. The point I am trying to make is to keep it simple. Who do you think has the most uncomplicated offense in the SEC? FLORIDA! They just threaten you with simple things on offense every play. They have athletes that can execute on every play. It scares you to death because they are good at it. They are not afraid to try anything on any down. If you look at what they do you will see it is not complicated at all. We study them. It is not complicated. Other teams do a lot more complicated things on offense.

I worked the SEC Championship between Alabama and Florida on TV. I thought I caught this in the paper the next day about one of the **TD's** Florida scored. They had a 1st Down on the 1 yardline. The QB threw the Slant Pass and they scored. The next **day** the QB said, "We had a Quarterback Sneak called and I saw the defense was in a Pinch, so I checked off to the Slant Pass." I could not do that if I were the Coach. I could not give my Quarterback the audible on the 1 yardline. I would have run the sneak and taken the No Gain play and run the Toss Sweep on 2nd Down. That is part of our philosophy.

We believe in keeping it simple so we do not have any audibles. It takes a lot of work to run audibles. We do have some Sight Adjustments. These things could be a Clinic Talk. You could talk all day about these ideas. Both wide receivers and the Quarterback will read the defense. If they see something

different they may change their assignment. They may change their pattern, but no one else needs to know what they are doing. The rest of the team goes ahead and does what they were supposed to do. On running plays we do not change much at all. The most we would do would be to call two plays in the huddle and pick one of them to run at the line of scrimmage. We give them Two Choice. We would call a 46 or 46 Sweep "AT THE LINE". We call it an "Either -Or" call. We do not do a lot mainly because we want to execute. We want our players very sure who to block and how to block. We can be successful doing this.

I am not just blowing smoke. You may not believe me if I was still at Salem College or Samford. But I am at Auburn and we have beaten some good teams with this philosophy. We have averaged 32.1 and 32.6 **points** per game **the** last two years. **We** need to get up to the 37 point range to be in the **top** five in the country. We have **accomplished** a lot **with** this philosophy. We only have one snap count. We do not have audibles and we do not have motion. We do not change the snap count because it messes us up more than the defense. Question: Do you run Check With Me plays? No! We do not do run "Check With Me" plays. Every now and then we run the "Either - Or" play. Again, we do a lot of sight adjustments.

A lot of coaches ask me how I can tell all of our opponents that we only have one snap count. We tell them we want them to know this and we want them to know What the snap count is. It is a simple DOWN - SET - HIKE. We do not change it. However, about every fourth play we call a FREEZE play. We come up to the line and do not have a play called. We go Down - Set - Hike; but we do not move. If the defense starts crowding us I will call the Freeze until we get them back off the ball. When they get a couple of penalties they back up and stop trying to beat us on the snap count. In high school all you have to do is to get them to break the line of scrimmage and it is a penalty. In college we snap the ball when they jump over the line of scrimmage. By doing this we do not jump offsides.

We do have some tricks we use with our snap count. About the third game of the year we may go one time on Down.

I found out there are certain things you do not want to have happen on National TV. You do not want a lot of illegal procedure calls, you do not want to have 12 men on the field, and you do not want to have a kick blocked. Those are coaching mistakes, and it makes you look bad. I am kidding just a little, but it seems that way. Perception is very important. A well tuned machine doesn't jump offsides. To mess up down inside the 5 **yardline** just kills me. If you are ever going to change the snap count it should be on first down. I do the tricky counts on first down.

We run a few plays and a few formations. We go on the same snap count. We do not have any audibles. We like to run the ball. We do not run it as well as we would like to. We averaged 199.6 yards per run in 1994. In 1993 we averaged 210 yards per carry. We run about eight running plays. We run six plays out of the I Formation and two plays from Split Backs. You have to run the Trap and the Draw. We call the Screen a running play. We think of the Screen as a counter to the passing game. It hurts teams that like to rush the passer. The Screen and Draw and Trap are all running plays to us. My dad always told me if I ever wanted to add a play to our offense, not to do it unless you take one play out of the offense. You can't extend practice time. So, if we are going to add a play we have to take one out. Most of the time we can't find one that we want to take out. You can't rep the plays the same amount of time if you keep adding plays. With only six plays we can change the blocking schemes around. We can block the Sweep a lot of fun ways. We can give the Sprint Draw a different look by changing our blocking scheme.

I am not so concerned on the Passing Game about the number of pass plays you have as I am the number of pass protections you have. My favorite position to coach is the offensive line. We all know

the more protections you have the more problems you have. Do you use a Man Protection, a Zone Protection, or a Hinge Protection? Do you do a Fan Out and a Double Read on both sides? Do you have a Bootleg or Waggle Protection? If you have all of those you have a lot of problems. You can do a lot of different pass routes off the same protection. That is not a real coaching problem. A receiver can run 6 different cuts, and you can run each of those 6 cuts off Play Action and Straight Drop Back action. It is not a lot of teaching to involve this. I want to be very simple in the protection. We have about two or three protections.

We have gone to the Shotgun Formation with the Split Backs. I was not big on the Shotgun Formation at one time. Now I am sold on the Shotgun in passing situations. You can miss a lot of things and the Quarterback can still get rid of the ball and not have to take a sack. We threw the ball 51 times against Florida and did not have a sack. We had less than one sack a game. If you don't pick them up the Quarterback has to heave it out of bounds. But, that is better at times, than taking a sack. We have found it is a big play.

I have always been a real detail coach for doing self scouting analysis. When I was a grad student at Florida State I was in Law School. I spent a lot of time in the classroom. I was my dad's GA for Self Scouting. I would study all of our tendencies and all of the opponents tendencies. After two games we would have Two Game Tendencies. Then it would be a Three Game Tendencies. What do they do on 1st and 10, 2nd and 7, and so on. For four years I was the main Self Scout. By Tuesday I could give dad a Self Scout. This is what your tendencies are. Now, I get a Self Scout because I call the plays. If you call the plays you are going to have some tendencies.

I found out something about tendencies. They are not bad to have; they are good if you can win. Then you create tendencies. "Auburn may win, but they run the same play on 1st and 10." Then it is "they run the same play on 2nd and 3 every

time." By the seventh game you have created some unbelievable tendencies. Then in the next game you go out and make sure you do not run your tendencies. Then that is when we run our Split Backs. That is when we throw to the Tight End like we did against Florida. We had not thrown to the Tight End but three times all year. In that game we hit the Tight End for seven passes and 123 yards. Tendencies are not bad to have IF YOU KNOW THEM. If you do have tendencies it is because you are successful.

It is like saying, "We are going to run the Toss Sweep, and you know we are going to run the Toss Sweep. Now, lets see if you can stop it." That is basically been our theory. Then when we know we are over doing it, that is when I am going to hit you with a reverse, or the Fullback Belly Cutback, or the Halfback Pass. We could run our Quarterback Naked. In this philosophy you are going to have tendencies. Because of this you need to have Counter Plays that offset the other plays.

In our offense we run the Toss Sweep so we have to run the Fullback Belly. If we don't the linebackers will move laterally too fast. We have to run the Reverse or Naked as we call it. This is to keep the Safety from supporting too fast to one side. You have to run counters to your regular plays. If you run the Sprint Draw you run the Sprint Draw Passing Attack. If you run the Counter, you run the Bootleg off the Counter. Each play has a good counter play or a companion or complementary play off it. It allows you to stay simple but also to be unpredictable.

I am trying to give you some ideas offensively. I am sure most of you have faced the same problems that I have faced in my career. It is a matter of dealing with the time you can spend with a certain number of people in football and you are trying to get better at what you are doing. We want to be better coaches and we study and study. We work more and more. Someone asked me how it felt to be one of the youngest head coaches in the country. My dad told me it was not important to be the youngest coach in America; it is more important to

be the oldest head coach in **America**. I think he was right. I have a long way to go. The older I get the more I see that the game gets very simple. We like to say that you win with blocking and tackling. You win with fundamentals. This is true. Now, it might be the fundamentals of a Vertical Passing Game as opposed to the fundamentals of an Isolation Play in the 1960's. It is still the fundamentals. It is very simple.

We do not start Spring Practice until April 1st. We like to study our offense from last year. What do we need to improve? Are we developing tendencies? Is it a matter of personnel? This past year we lost about 30 yard per game out of our fullback. We lost two fullbacks the year before. This year we had two young fullbacks. We may not have to change things, just recognize that we may be less talented in that area. We are not going to jump the boat because of this fact. I try to recruit toward the scheme we run. I am reluctant to change my scheme. I can recruit and you can't. I do not like to coach things I do not know. Coach things you know and can teach.

Do we have any questions? I am not going to talk individual plays. Hopefully, I have covered some things that will help you become successful on offense. You win with defense. Don't give up the big play. Offensively, the teams that win the most are balanced offenses that run and pass the ball well. Those two things are essential.

In the summer we hold two camps at Auburn University. Both of them are outstanding. We have a family camp called the "**BOWDEN CAMP**." It is a Quarterback and Receiver Camp. We think it is one of the best in the country. My dad and my brothers run it. We work everyday. None of us leave. It is different than most camps. Our Auburn Football Camp would probably be different, but not any different than what most schools have. We think we have a great facility. The **Bowden Camp** is the third week of June, and the Auburn Camp is the second week of June. We would invite you to come and visit with us. I appreciate your attention.