

Preparing for your “Two – Minute” Exam

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Fifty-four seconds left, down two points, ball on your own twenty-eight yard. A situation you never like being in as a coach, let alone with your season on the line. We lived this last year in a section semi-final game. What was the result you ask?

Demonstrating great poise, confidence, and execution, our team, led by senior quarterback, Brandon Snoberger went 5-6 passing in thirty-five seconds. It was capped off by a fifteen yard touchdown pass in the corner of the end zone. How were we so poised with the season at stake? Where was the panic? This result was not due to chance, hope, or a prayer. It was due in large part because we had been in this situation before...in PRACTICE.

Even though as coaches we would rather be in “victory” formation this time of the game, we know this “two-minute” game situation inevitably will occur numerous times in our careers. With the game on the line, and in the above case, the season on the line, have you as a coach prepared your team enough for this season defining moment?

The question above I stated above must be discussed weekly among coaching staffs. In just my first three years as co-offensive coordinator of Sartell – St. Stephen High School, the execution of our “two-minute” offense has turned defeat into victory in some very key games. Why have we had success during these pressure filled moments? It comes down to what we always preach...preparation.

The biggest contributor to this success has been our two minute drill practice we run the day before our games. Our head coach, Scott Hentges, has been a big supporter of finding time to practice this situation weekly in practice. He knows this game situation is the difference between winning and losing a few times each year. We run this drill at the end of our “walk-through” on Thursdays and organize it specifically to help our team gain confidence running the two minute drill. It also helps

us as coaches to get organized in our thinking. We organize the drill as follows with situation, time, and time-outs always on our mind.

#1. Our offense goes on the field alone and runs the plays we call on air.

Again, our main purpose for this drill is for our team to gain confidence in this situation and be successful. We run this drill at the end of the practice so we can score a touchdown and celebrate as a team. If the defense was on the field, the drill would not go nearly as well, with the pace we want, and most importantly always end up a success. I want our players to have no doubt in their minds when they head out to that huddle when the game/season is truly “on the line.”

#2. Begin the drill by giving your QB two play calls out of the same formation to call in the huddle.

I have a hard time understanding why some coaches do not call two plays in two minute drill situations. You have an opportunity to call two plays for your offense before possibly needing your quarterback to call a play at the line. The amount of time you can save on clock management is immense. We run these first two plays always out of the same formation because we do not want our perimeter players needing to change sides for obvious time management reasons. Nothing bothers me more as a spectator when I see a positive play happen near the end of a half or game and then a team wastes precious time not knowing what play/formation to run next or has players running from side to side lining up when they should be snapping the ball. We sometimes call a run play and a pass play out of the similar formation or at times both of the calls are pass plays. If the first pass falls incomplete our players learn to re-huddle and two new play calls will be coming in from the sideline.

#3. Myself and Co-offensive coordinator Jerome Nemanich standing together on the sideline communicating on play calls.

The communication between us coordinators might be the most important part of the drill and really came together by chance. As we have practiced this situation more, the “back and forth” between coordinators during this drill in calling plays depending on the drill situation has really helped us when similar situations happen during a game. We have some instances where we may disagree with each other on a play call during the drill on Thursday, but we always then have an opportunity to talk about it after practice and be on the same page when Friday night comes around. During these two-minute, pressure filled situations, a calm, confident, singular vision is a must.

#4. Call plays based on evolving “drill” situation, but keep the successful finishing goal in mind.

Each time we run this drill in practice, we start the drill with a certain amount of time remaining in the game and a pre-determined number of time-outs. As the offense advances the ball down the field, we change the play calls according to the running clock our head coach is keeping track of on the field. If a few passes are completed early, we may call a few running plays

to work on the clock a little bit. If some passes go incomplete or the clock begins to run low, we will run a deeper play to give us a good chance of scoring on the drive. We know a “Go” route or post pass may be difficult to complete in a game situation, but we always want to make sure the drill ends with success and a touchdown at the end. If we want to practice a “trick play” we may have installed, a lot of times we run this play to begin the drill and have less time to begin on the clock.

#5 – Let the drill happen game speed, teach and communicate AFTER the drill with the players.

This is always difficult for coaches. We always want to “control” what is happening out on the field, but to truly be successful at the two minute drill, your players will need to be the ones in control. They need to learn in game speed to call plays at the line, line-up correctly, and adapt to certain game situations. This drill will be difficult for the players early in the season, but as you practice more, you will see them take ownership and “lead” the drill. You may not agree with what your QB may call at the LOS or your WR may run an incorrect route, but let the drill continue in game speed. After practice is the time to pull the QB or other players aside and communicate together what was observed during the drill and if some coaching points need to be addressed. We have done this drill

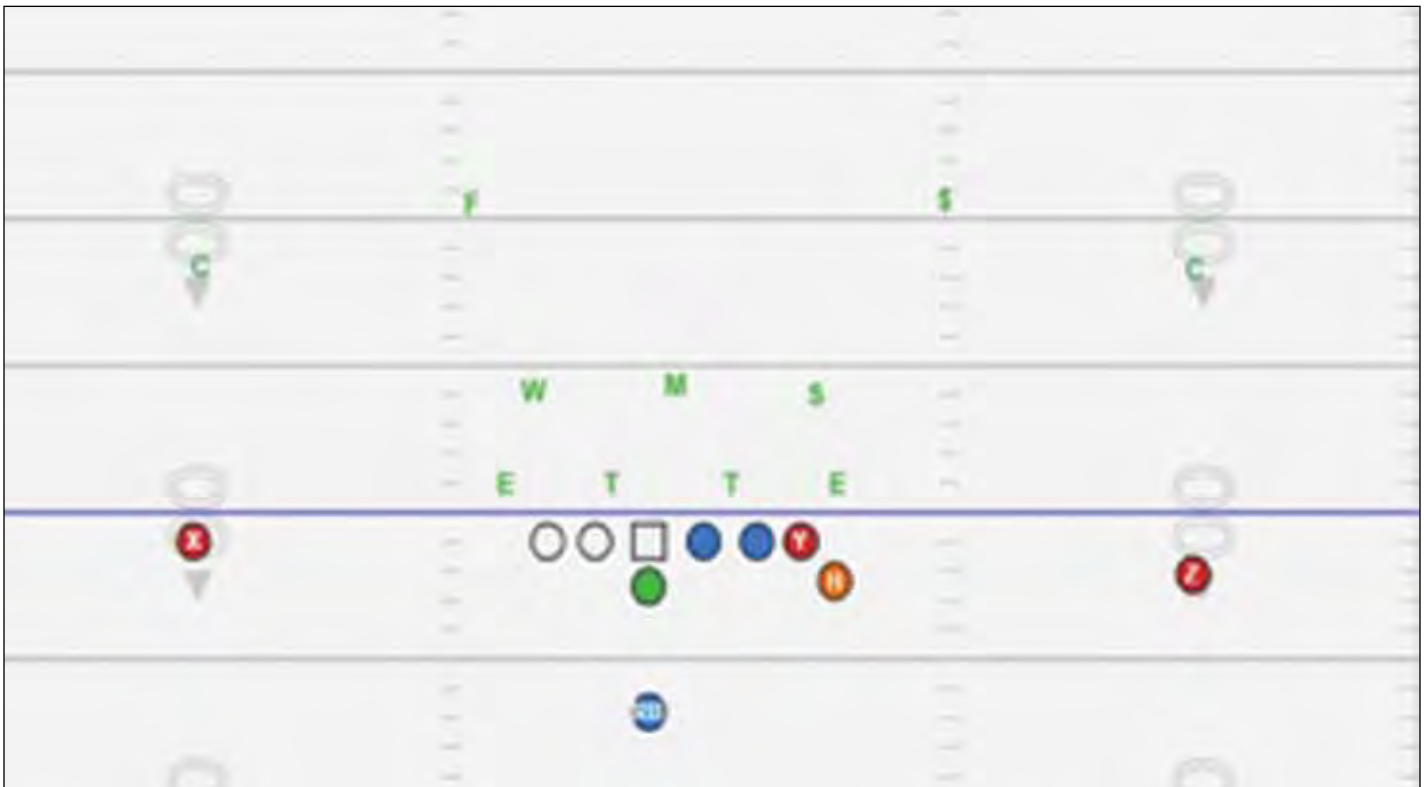


Figure 1 - Example of wing trips formation.

outside to 12 yards. This can be a really difficult route for CB with deep responsibilities.

TE, FB – Run Combo Route

TE – Get released off line of scrimmage, run post route to opposite hash

FB – Release out wide for 5 yards at a 45 degree angle, then cut in on a trail route. This is a difficult route for LB/SS coverage in zone or man coverage.

QB reads if he likes 4 routes pre-snap with alignment or technique, combo route main option is trail route.

Preparation like in most everything we try to teach in football is the key to improving your “two minute” drill offense. As your team gains confidence in this offense, other options for the drill are to add a defense to the drill later in the year or choose to have your quarterback call all the plays from the line to work on audibles, etc. What if you flipped the drill around? You could work on “two minute” defense with a nickel package, etc. There really are so many situations in which you could modify this drill to prepare for game situations.

Again, the most important take away from this article is I truly believe your team/program will benefit greatly from prioritizing these situations into your practice. As I wrote earlier, we have won at least four games over the past two years with last minute drives. These drives seem to occur in the most critical games like our section semi-final I stated above (needed to score quickly), and also our section final that followed. (4 minute TD drive to win with ten seconds left)

Would you rather be preparing for the State Tournament or your end of the year banquet? If you prepare your players and put them in end of the game like situations, they will play with confidence and execute like any other time of the game. I know we enjoyed celebrating these two program building victories last year and I hope by reading this article your team is now better prepared when your season may be on the line. ■

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