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Football Revolution

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Football Revolution

The Rise of the Spread Offense and How It Transformed College Football

BART WRIGHT

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA PRESS LINCOLN & LONDON

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Set in Sabon by Laura Wellington.

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Preface

> You're going to find stories of origins of the spread coming from all different directions, because now it's become a marketing word. They market "The Spread" to fans, to the media and to the prospects. The size, speed and strength of defensive players has increased dramatically, so the width of the field has become much more important to us on offense; that's the heart of the spread. If you look long enough, like most things in this country, you'll probably find it started on the West Coast.
>
> —DAVID CUTCLIFFE, Duke University football coach, 2009

Somebody once said the problem we have in understanding history is that our perception is unbalanced by our prior knowledge of the outcome. In twenty-first century college football, no single aspect of the game has more thoroughly undone everything once believed to be true than the development of the spread offense. More a way of thinking than a specific package of plays, the spread changed the way attaining success in the game is perceived.

It started in 1970, when college football's sphere of influence was much smaller and more limited conceptually. It was widely believed that all variations of moving the ball down the field had been explored and the best ones had been settled on. There was little difference from coast to coast, but

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in the West teams generally threw the ball more often, in the Midwest they ran it more, and in the South they wanted to do a little of each—beat you up with the run and then bury you with the pass.

The game has changed so much it's barely comparable to college football of the 1960s, 1970s, and for most of the nation's teams, on into the 1980s. The players recruited today to play linebacker are mostly lighter, taller, and more agile than those in the same positions thirty years ago. Safeties are bigger and more proficient pass defenders and they have a nasty streak; there's a new position on defense that is part outside linebacker, part safety, and part pass rusher. Defense is the part of the game that had to adjust to the spread—it forced defenses into a drastic remodel. For the offense, the spread brought all kinds of new players to the game—former basketball players, track athletes—generally speaking, it lured the best players to the game like a spider to a fly.

My interest in retracing this story wasn't in understanding why coaches started using the spread. That was obvious: it opened the field and made defenses play one on one. My curiosity was about why it took so long for college coaches who had seen the offense in action for five, six, eight years to make the switch. College coaches had been recruiting offensive players from suburban Los Angeles high schools for years, but those coaches weren't willing to try spreading out.

Eventually the spread was adopted by college football, becoming the base offense for teams at San Jose State, Stanford, and Washington State. Then later Kansas State, Kentucky, West Virginia, and others began surprising favored teams using the spread, sometimes in major upsets, and then it worked its way into the power center of college football. Championships were won, two spread teams—Miami and Washington—split a national title, and the spread was ev-

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erywhere from the peewee leagues to the National Football League. These days every NFL team has some packages of spread plays.

Who were these first few experimenters? What mental makeup differentiated them from the hundreds or thousands of other coaches who had seen this high school offense on film and looked the other way? It turns out they were stitched together by a common bond of reasoning—common to them, that is.

They were outliers, about as radical as football coaches get to be, and they gave birth to an offense that changed the game and inspired others to take it and run—or pass, if they preferred—with it.

This is how it all happened.

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Acknowledgments

This book took much longer than it ever should have and without the help of many people over the years, it probably would still be unfinished.

Mouse Davis, then the football coach at Portland State, first got me interested in writing more extensively about his offense, the run-and-shoot, when I was the sports columnist at the *Oregonian* back in 1979. He told captivating stories, filled with explosive statistical accomplishments, that were hard to believe until the following year when I watched his quarterback, Neil Lomax, throw seven touchdown passes in the first quarter of a 105–0 win over Delaware State.

Later I started researching what Mouse had done, when I was at the *Tacoma News Tribune* and my editor, Ted Pearson, assigned me to do a story on Dennis Erickson, the new coach at the time at the University of Idaho. Pearson, who grew up in Everett, Washington, was friends with Pinky Erickson, Dennis's father, and had been hearing a lot about a new offense that was going to make a mark in college football.

I couldn't have been more skeptical because the stories I was hearing from Pearson sounded like the ones I used to hear from Mouse Davis, and his offense wasn't exactly spreading like a wildfire.

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Erickson, though, had a different presentation. He had played quarterback, had been considered a rising offensive coordinator among the veer offense supporters, but now he was an exponent of this empty backfield, spread offense that seemed to have an answer for everything.

When he won big at Washington State and then won more national championships and had a better winning percentage than any of the other coaches at Miami, I started thinking about some kind of book.

I owe my wife, Debbie, a trailer truckload of gratitude for her willingness to let me go work on this for extended periods of time. The book itself changed focus completely three different times, and each time I felt it necessary to take a week off from work to get it completed. I would pronounce I was starting over again, she was unfailingly supportive, and she needs to know how much that meant.

My son Brad offered constant support and encouragement to me, even when I was reporting another new start-up. He always told me I could do it, and eventually he got to tell me, "I knew you could."

The Erickson family, Pinky before his passing, his mother, Mary, and his sisters, Christy, Julie, and Nancy, all went out of their way to help dig into the depths of their past.

Robert Taylor, my editor at the University of Nebraska Press, was exceedingly patient as I stumbled through an unfamiliar editing format and was easy to work with throughout the editing process.

I deeply appreciated the time and effort Jack Neumeier granted me on several occasions to talk about the offense he created and the specific identification of the night he came up with the idea while watching a high school basketball game.

Bob Davie was immensely helpful time and again as an observer who saw the offense come into the game, and he had illustrative examples of how it changed things.

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Kevin Steele provided the insight of a coach involved in the game when Washington State sent shock waves around the college football nation with a 52–24 victory that was felt by coaches from coast to coast.

Thanks to Patrick Smyth, head of the Denver Broncos' public relations staff, for helping arrange interviews with John Elway that led me to the funny story that until he played against the spread at Stanford when his father took it to San Jose State, it hadn't occurred to Elway that it was anything other than his old high school offense.

San Jose State publicist Lawrence Fan was a great help in assisting me with background information, including complete play-by-play packets from games. Others in college sports information who made this possible included Jeff Bechtold (Washington), Rod Commons (Washington State), Bill Stevens (Washington State), Dave Guffey (Montana), Steve McClain (Florida), Art Chase (Duke), Bill Lamberty (Montana State), Rick Korch (Miami), Tim Bourret (Clemson), and Mark Brand (Arizona State).

More coaches than I can recall were of great assistance to me, giving me time for the subject matter, sometimes in the middle of a season when the last thing they wanted was to get introspective and reflective, often at length, with someone they didn't know. But they helped, lots of them, including Gregg Smith (many times, many schools), Rob Spence (Rutgers), Dan Cozzetto (Washington), Homer Smith (Alabama), Mike Leach (Washington State), Tony Franklin (Louisiana Tech), Chad Morris (Clemson), Mike Breske (Washington State), Jon Lovett (Texas Tech), Jerry Moore (Appalachian State), David Cutcliffe (Duke), Tommy Tuberville (Texas Tech), Urban Meyer (Florida, at the time), Don James (Washington), Scott Satterfield (Appalachian State), Billy Napier (Colorado State), Gus Malzahn (Arkansas State), Shawn Elliott (South Carolina), Burton Burns (Alabama),

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Danny Ford (Clemson), Eric Wolford (Youngstown State), Bob Stoops (Oklahoma), Howard Schnellenberger (Florida Atlantic), Keith Gilbertson (Washington), Jonathan Smith (Idaho), Bobby Bowden (Florida State), Steve Spurrier (South Carolina), Tommy Bowden (Clemson), Vic Koenning (North Carolina), Brad Scott (Clemson), Bill Snyder (Kansas State), and others.

Thanks to friends and associates who either helped point me in the right direction or warned me not to go in the wrong direction, including Pete Wevurski, Tony Barnhart, Bill Plaschke, the late Mike Kahn, John Clayton, Edwin Pope, and Dan Raley.

Also, not included here but of immense help in writing about Miami was the interviewing time granted me by Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, the former Hurricanes football player, pro wrestler, and actor. Johnson talked of how Erickson challenged him in the classroom and made him present a signed form from teachers affirming he was in class that day before he would be allowed into the training room. Johnson's stories were moving and brought authenticity to the atmosphere at Miami when Erickson coached there.

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1

Home of the Chokers (Late 1940s)

Following his military service Jack Swarthout could not have landed in a place more in need of what he had to offer than the community around the public high school in Hoquiam on the east end of Grays Harbor, Washington.

He was book smart and military tough, a believer in rules, punctuality, all in a place that had a historic dearth of intellectual pursuits and more than it needed of booze, broads, and quick money, usually in that approximate order. This wasn't postwar middle America from a Chamber of Commerce campaign. It was part timber boom town after everything went quiet and part poor man's Reno, all of it still living off blue-collar jobs in the mills or at the docks. Nobody would have confused Hoquiam with Mayberry. Here the deputies needed more than one bullet and had better know how to use a gun.

Swarthout was something of an odd bird, a mix of an egg-headed, voracious reader and a by-the-rules-boys war-hardened veteran and eccentric fitness freak. He was a reader of science fiction and history as a kid, firing his imagination with dreamy possibilities through books and periodicals that lifted his thoughts beyond the difficult realities of daily rural life in 1930s America. He was told, and believed with every fiber of his being, that he could be whatever he want-

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ed to be and that a good education was the passport to get him there.

What they had in common, Swarthout the individual and Hoquiam the community, was a lack of pretense. In towns like Hoquiam and nearby Aberdeen, your smarts, sweat, and reliability took you a long way. It was a little more involved than that for Swarthout, who was enough to let his imposing presence work for him while his mental agility kept him a few steps ahead of the football players he coached and his staff. Swarthout may have asked for a little more than the community in which he got his start as an unconventional high school coach with an ability to motivate his players, but he was never a bully. It never got personal with him.

As a coach Swarthout used a compelling mix of the tangible techniques of precision blocking and tackling, packaged with concepts that were abstract for his time. He was one of the early postwar pioneers who wanted to exploit defenses with a surgical passing game instead of relying on a few simply executed pass plays designed to make an overly aggressive defense pay for stacking up to stop the run. Swarthout wanted more than a generic passing game. How much of a difference can you make when you try to do everything better than your opponent?

His military background and football experience taught him to give vigorous attention to physical discipline while his vivid imagination filled his head with abstract concepts. To Swarthout, anything was possible if you worked hard enough. The real question was, what exactly is it that you want to do?

All coaches need a key player at the right time to make their ideas relevant, and the relationship Swarthout had with his high school quarterback in Hoquiam turned out to be determinative in the development of the spread offense years

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later. Swarthout had no way of knowing how the passing game concepts he installed at his first coaching job would eventually evolve, but his spirit of adventure and sound technique were the seeds from which it all sprouted.

Swarthout had attended the University of Montana on athletic scholarship and played football for the Grizzlies until graduation in 1942, when the Reserve Officer Training Corps sent him off to Officer Training School and deployment around the world. By then football played a starring role in the character development and morale of the American military, which was, effectively, the greenhouse for generations of football coaching ideology.

Having emerged from elite schools in the Northeast, football spread quickly across the United States in the twentieth century and was considered to be compatible on several levels with the goals and aspirations of the armed services. Football's focus on physical fitness, attention to detail, knowing your role as part of the team—all of it reinforced and enhanced military life. Navy preflight schools established at the universities of North Carolina, Iowa, and Georgia and at Saint Mary's College in Northern California assembled football teams to compete against the top college squads in the country. The navy teams more than held their own.

How much has the world changed? In the twenty-first century troops come home from overseas in anonymity, looking for jobs, struggling to keep their families afloat. During World War II they came home to local acclaim and took positions of respect and authority, often in football.

The list of preflight football coaching veterans includes Alabama legend Paul "Bear" Bryant, Missouri's Don Faurot, and Maryland's Jim Tatum, all football coaches before, during, and after their service. Bud Wilkinson came out of

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an assistant coaching position at Iowa preflight and later led Oklahoma to a still-standing record of forty-seven consecutive victories.

The Army team at West Point was a national power during the war years, with talent backed up by more talent, all of it led by running backs Doc Blanchard and Glenn Davis. They dominated Heisman Trophy voting for three years, winning the prize in 1945 and '46, respectively.

Football sold the military and the military sold football to Americans, each invigorating feelings of patriotism, effort, and honor. When victorious men came back from World War II and the Korean War and got involved in college football, they married two institutions that still worked toward mutual benefit.

Many of the returning vets were former players—like Swarthout—who became coaches at small colleges or high schools after their tours of duty. They weren't just looking for jobs; many of these war veterans believed football was an instrument, maybe the best one at the time, to move young men, and the country, in a new direction. It offered the kind of pull-together teamwork talk that still occurs today, but the rewards seemed so much closer after World War II to that particular group of coaches.

Seldom have post-military opportunities had as much influence as they did at the time those enlisted men returned to classrooms and football fields after the war. They left Desolation Row and returned to the Avenue of the Americas, believing they could do anything and football was the carriage that would take them where they wanted to go.

People around the bay of Grays Harbor, Washington, ringed by the workingman's town of Hoquiam and just to the east the more "upscale" Aberdeen, were more than ready for

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what Swarthout had to sell. The two towns relied on a burgeoning timber industry that had frantically deconstructed the surrounding forests for profit and turned the region, in less than a century, from a pristine emerald dreamland into a smoldering pile of careless economics and witless personal vices. It was as though the region had gone on a long drunk and was finally realizing it needed to sober up and make something of itself.

If it were possible to view a time-lapse motion picture of Grays Harbor from the 1790s through the arrival of the first white settlers in the mid-1800s, the appearance of the railroad in 1895, and Swarthout's arrival roughly fifty years later, it would be a chilling piece of film to behold. The area had been inhabited by the Chehalis, Quinault, Wynoochee, and Humptulips tribes for hundreds of years prior to May 7, 1792, when Boston fur trader Robert Gray, the first white man to explore the area, crossed the bar into the dewy quiet of the pristine bay that would eventually bear his name. The Chehalis tribe named the area Ho'kweeum. Loosely translated, Hoquiam, as it was later spelled, meant "hungry for wood."

Five rivers empty into that shallow, wide bay in what became southwestern Washington State. Before long, "hungry for wood" was converted from a description of the land to a depiction of what happened when white men came in with their screaming, gas-powered saws, ripped through the tall firs, dragged them to market, and forever changed the face of the region. The railroad came right into the harbor to facilitate the retailing of the forest, and a population of hard-working, hard-drinking loggers transformed the area into something the natives never could have imagined.

In the timber business, workers could get a cash payout for each day of work in the forest and then squander it away by night in the area's bars and crowded houses of prostitu-

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tion. Location was central to and almost codified the rampant debauchery. Grays Harbor became a gray area for politicians and lobbyists to the powerful. Just an hour's drive west of the state's center of political power in Olympia, it was close enough for politicians to sneak away for an afternoon or evening, yet it was far enough removed from the big-city newspapers in Seattle and Tacoma, a couple of hours' drive to the northeast, to escape their attention.

They clear-cut the land by day and partied by night, each endeavor leaving societal scars. Grays Harbor's skyline featured more than three dozen pulp, saw, shingle, and timber mills. After the community college opened in 1930, they nicknamed teams "Chokers" after the choke-setter—commonly referred to as "choker"—who was responsible for securing a cable around felled trees to be dragged out of the forest.

Smokestacks firing clouds of hot ash into the sky framed the profile of the port of Grays Harbor, so littered with years' accumulation of junk logs and unwanted wood chips that it appeared possible to walk from one end of the bay to the other across the timber debris. From mid-October through May, when morning fog, overcast skies, and drizzle were the norm rather than the exception, the place projected a foreboding panorama that provided literal heft to the color that embodied the harbor's name.

It was in this environment that someone like Jack Swarthout was both ready and welcome to any challenges.

Swarthout learned what the world looked like from a bleak adolescence on a farm in southern Washington State during the Great Depression and then came home from World War II to a culture of burgeoning prosperity and possibility. Never before and never since has a generation of Americans grown up like Swarthout's did, seeing first-

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hand as teenagers the economic desperations of life, then coming back from war to experience their country growing into unparalleled prosperity. All things seemed possible, especially on the football field, just like Swarthout had always believed.

Swarthout saw football's lessons as valuable to the individual player, his school, the community, and as he said many times, "to the U.S. itself." The thing that made him stand out was how he thought about winning.

Swarthout must have had an abundance of tactical genes. He was fascinated by uncommon approaches that could catch an opponent off guard and force him to scramble to make changes in the heat of the game. He became an unofficial and often unrecognized father figure of sorts to an innovative collection of northwestern football coaches who presented their own rebuttal to the coaching orthodoxy of the times. From his navy experience, Swarthout knew all about toughness, sacrifice, and determination, but he also understood that everyone else knew all about that, too. He was interested in more, namely, the great benefit of tactical thinking.

Swarthout didn't just want to beat the opposing team in a physical contest with stamina and fitness, he wanted all the advantages on his side, starting with tactics. He knew it all gets set in motion with a thought and if your concept can flummox the other guy, it was that much easier to win.

Offensive football has always been polymorphic at the strategic level, the capacity to score points being an objective that can be achieved in numerous ways by those willing to explore. Innovators are found at the edges, stressing the perfection of fundamental techniques but doing so through differing architectural designs. Swarthout was emblematic of an almost tribal band of northwestern football coaches who leaned more heavily on the thinking part of the game

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than most. They wanted to outthink you from the very start so you had to question every decision you made and then they wanted to beat you with execution.

To Swarthout, football was a game that improved and sharpened competitive instincts. It stressed discipline and emphasized the importance of teamwork. He felt there was an edge to be gained in the attention span of his players when he introduced a different approach or a new wrinkle to what they were already doing. In the end, he believed a kid could hop into his football vessel and, through repetition and attention to detail, learn how to become a better teammate. What he really wanted, after all of that, was to show his players how to grow up and be responsible adults.

The job teaching history and coaching at Hoquiam was, in itself, something that evidenced a kind of synchronicity. Everything Swarthout knew and believed in was emboldened by the sense of cultural chaos that blanketed Grays Harbor like a morning fog that lifts in the afternoon and returns by dawn. The oddity was that Hoquiam's mascot was the Grizzlies, the same as Swarthout's alma mater, and the bitter rival down the street in Aberdeen was the Bobcats, just as his old in-state collegiate rival, Montana State, had also been the Bobcats.

No other high schools in the state had those two nicknames. Swarthout later admitted he was looking for a high school head coaching position, preferably matched with a classroom role as a history teacher, but the clincher was coaching the Grizzlies against the hated Bobcats. It was a little football kismet at work and it just felt right.

The two schools in Hoquiam and Aberdeen still maintain the longest continuing high school rivalry west of the Mississippi River. The longer it goes, the more attention it

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receives, but it was an even-bigger deal back in the 1940s. There wasn't an athletic event in Grays Harbor more important than the annual Thanksgiving Day game between Hoquiam and Aberdeen.

The Aberdeen-Hoquiam game always drew capacity crowds of ten thousand to Olympic Stadium, built with local timber as a Works Progress Administration project and completed in 1938. It had the feel of a big-time facility because, when filled for games, the covered grandstand produced a booming sound out of those wooden bleachers that would make you think you were in the Rose Bowl.

Swarthout looked the part of a postwar football coach straight out of central casting. A picture of him, hands on hips in a T-shirt, sweat pants, and high-top sneakers with a tightly cropped GI flattop haircut, big shoulders, and that steely, no-nonsense, tight grin that glared out of his rugged build would have made an excellent poster for the Greatest Generation.

His approach in the classroom was somewhat didactic, strictly by the book, but his coaching, while emphasizing sound fundamentals, was forward leaning for his time in terms of its design. Swarthout believed in the three Rs, which were repetition, repetition, and repetition, principles he used to implement his version of the T formation. One of his coaching mantras was, "We're going to do it over until we get it right and then we're going to keep doing it right until we get it perfect."

He was smart enough to understand that the over-the-top drill sergeant approach was best left in the military, where it belonged, and was not suitable for the environment in which a public school educator and coach went to work each day. He wasn't an in-your-face screamer, but he surely was insistent and aggressive. He believed that in all areas of life thinking prompts action—that belief was at the core of his

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fascination with football tactics—so when a young man's thinking is confused, his behavior will tend to be erratic.

What Swarthout hadn't taken into account when he accepted the offer at Hoquiam was that playing sheriff would take nearly as much time as coaching. The illicit nature of daily life served to embroider his determination to invigorate the attention of his players.

There were areas in Grays Harbor that Swarthout defined as off limits for his players, imposing penalties when he got reports that lines had been crossed. He was well versed in such procedures, but Swarthout had been eager to turn the page and be a history teacher and coach, not the bad cop at Hoquiam High School. Boundaries came with the territory for football players in Grays Harbor, where Myrtle Street was the north-south dividing line that separated the two high schools. During the week leading up to the annual Thanksgiving Day game, travel was customarily restricted and players were warned against crossing Myrtle Street in the interest of avoiding altercations.

They were banned on a year-round basis from entering a three-block area called Paradise Alley, where Florence Nettleson, the area's most famous madam, had opened an upscale brothel in 1940. The prevailing notion was that without prostitution, decent women and girls would be endangered in public by bands of drunken, sex-crazed loggers. Better to let them work off their inebriated fantasies with the hookers and leave the good folk alone, or so went the theory. It was an uneasy tolerance policy that resulted in Nettleson's arrest twenty-six times from 1940 to 1951, until the community would no longer tolerate the brothels, but prostitution was going full force when Swarthout arrived. He became the football sheriff out of need.

By the time he left they might as well have named him football mayor of Grays Harbor for the influence he had over

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the game and the respect he had earned within the community and beyond.

Swarthout developed his forward-thinking offensive vision on the practice field behind the high school, just a few blocks removed from the livelier downtown streets. In the other direction, smokestack-pimpled hills descended into the bay, exhaling commerce into the rain and fog. Swarthout was appreciative of his small patch of turf, making it a combined refuge and training ground. There he would command the players' attention through protocol and drill them rigorously to develop the timing necessary to make the offense run as smoothly as it would have to in order to keep defenses guessing.

His observance to complete mastery of details was the systematic structure in which he built winning teams at Hoquiam. He used a T formation offense resurrected by Coach Clark Shaughnessy five years earlier at Stanford after it had been considered obsolete for decades. Swarthout developed a way to leverage a highly successful and rarely seen passing game into the offense.

Like Swarthout, Shaughnessy had an interest in history, especially military history, and he continually saw parallels between football and the movement of troops in war. A native Minnesotan, born in 1892, Shaughnessy didn't serve in the military but he studied it for most of his life and wrote many essays and magazine pieces about the strategic connections between football and war. His ideas, considered fanciful nonsense by some during his time at the University of Chicago, when the losses kept mounting up, were transformed into brilliant insights that articulated the basic structure for modern football in America when he coached the undefeated Stanford University "Wow Boys" team in 1940.

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In 1940 football was still circling back on itself for ideas, but Shaughnessy's concept of the T formation was such a departure from the way most football was being played it was as though he had created the offense himself. The T formation was a nineteenth-century creation that had been deemed useless after Coach Pop Warner, with All-American Jim Thorpe at the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania, popularized the single-wing formation.

The single wing and its close relative the double wing were essentially sledgehammer approaches to the game. Each relied on a tactical funneling to the point of attack of more blockers than the defense could defend against, creating a boxed canyon that linebackers had to enter but in which they could not survive the assault, outnumbered by offensive linemen and blocking backs. It was effective, it could be simply described, it worked, and it was copied in all parts of the country.

Football has always been a copycat sport, filled with coaches eager to replicate what the most successful teams are doing whether it fits their personnel or not. It's always easier for the football coach to keep his job when he explains to a school academician in charge of hiring that he is simply following the most successful formula of the day and to do this requires a certain amount of patience.

Swarthout was nothing like that, and neither was Shaughnessy, who had a revelation about the single-wing approach that led him to a reconsideration of the T formation. The act of snapping the ball 6 yards behind the line of scrimmage and then forming a blocking wall to move it 6 yards forward—as in the single wing—troubled him intellectually and tactically. It was, in effect, going backward to gather momentum toward the starting point before any actual gains of yardage could be accomplished. Better, he thought, to have the quarterback take the snap under center, turn, and hand it

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off to a hard-charging back who needed just a small crease in the defensive line to break through for a gain. When he imagined those holes being plugged, Shaughnessy foresaw fake handoffs or a man in motion in the backfield to draw a defender in one direction while a running play went the other way. Shaughnessy's T formation could muscle up and pound away for a short yardage gain and it could stretch a defense with deep passes.

Shaughnessy's concepts, more than anything else, catapulted football from the brutal war in the trenches it had been to what is known as modern football—a more balanced offense, with running, passing, and plenty of deception.

What Clark Shaughnessy did at Stanford in 1940 sent tremors through football orthodoxy. Sportswriters quickly took notice of how he transformed a team that had been 1-7-1 in 1939 into an undefeated champion the very next season.

He had the quarterback take the ball directly from the center's hands instead of standing a step back, as had been the practice in the original T formation. The center snap became a quicker exchange, and Shaughnessy built on that rapid start by drilling the quarterback in the proper footwork required to execute an immediate pivot and then hand the ball off to a hard-charging running back. Instead of the drive-blocking requirements of the single wing, Shaughnessy taught linemen how to "brush block," or hold their blocks just long enough to create a small opening in the line for a running lane. The idea was an aggressive snap, handoff, and just like that—bang-bang—the defense was pierced.

His teams ran drills with military precision and accounts of the schemes were told in national newspapers and magazines as his innovative ideas grew into legend with the 1940 Stanford team. Swarthout was his own man after the war,

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with his own views, but his love of reading and history drew him to consume Shaughnessy's theories whenever he came across them. Coaches often published writings in national publications in the 1930s and '40s, and in its October 11, 1943, issue *Time* magazine was moved to include the following review of a lengthy dissertation by Shaughnessy:

> In the twelve years since Rockne's death, tall, gaunt-faced Clark Daniel Shaughnessy has indeed proved himself a top-flight coach. Last week he uncovered a second talent: military tactics. In Football in War & Peace (Jacobs Press; $1) he convincingly underscores the remarkable similarity of football strategy to tactics in warfare.
>
> Winning touchdown of his argument is an amazing parallel between Montgomery's victory at El Alamein and a "fullback counter" run from Shaughnessy's T formation. The tactics are almost identical:
>
> The British Eighth and Afrika Korps faced each other as on a line of scrimmage. Montgomery had the ball. His right halfback (44th Division) started the play by faking to the left and drawing off the defense. His left half (50th Division) took a fake from the quarterback, then plunged through center. Meanwhile, the fullback (United Kingdom's armored division) had started to the left. Quickly he doubled back, took the ball from the quarterback (51st Highlanders) and sliced through the right side of his line, between the defensive left end and tackle. His guard (9th Australians) blocked the defensive halfback and a historic advance had begun.
>
> Air Power. Football's Pantelleria, says Shaughnessy, was Notre Dame's 35-to-13 upset of Army in 1913. Described by a New York paper as "a team from South Bend, Ill.," Notre Dame uncorked the historic Dorais-to-Rockne passing combination for the first convincing demonstration that air power alone can overcome land strength. From the sidelines a lightweight halfback named Dwight Eisenhower watched 13

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Irish passes whistle by the hopelessly confused West Pointers. That game was the beginning of a new kind of football.

Swarthout was as caught up in the dissolution of conceptual boundaries between football and war as any of them. He spoke often about what the game taught young men, how it brought the best out of them. Even toward the end of his coaching career in 1973, when he was implicated in a scandal at the University of Montana (where he was the football coach and athletic director) that involved the misuse of government scholarship funds—*Sports Illustrated* referred to it as a "gnarled and nasty little morality play" in its April 23, 1973, issue—Swarthout was unwavering about his feelings toward the game and society.

"Athletics have so much value, not only to the university and the community but to the U.S. itself," Swarthout said in the *Sports Illustrated* article. "Football particularly. It hones the competitive instincts, it promotes discipline and cooperation. And here were these guys—G-men—treating me like I was some criminal. Still, I wanted to be honest with them; I've always been honest. Sure, we may have made some mistakes in our work-study accounting, but there was no intent to defraud Uncle Sam."

Swarthout was found not guilty of the charges that had him taking government scholarship money for players, banking it into their own account, and then "paying" them for work done, which could be a few hours a month or several hours a week.

At Hoquiam, Swarthout liked that he could pass or run with equal efficiency out of the T formation, but he was a hardcore traditionalist in that his first goal was to teach his line about blocking techniques that, properly delivered, would

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run an opponent into submission. His beliefs were challenged in his second year at Hoquiam when Jack Elway turned out for football and forced Swarthout to reconsider everything he thought about the game.

At the start of his junior year in high school, Elway stood six foot one, weighed 190 pounds, and could spin a football like a professional. His coach had seen taller quarterbacks, heavier ones, and faster ones, but he'd never seen one with such an advanced grasp of the game. Elway was well ahead of his time in his understanding of the importance of and his aptitude for the passing game. A knee injury in his junior year and two more by the time he got to college prematurely ended his playing career, but Jack Elway is still remembered in Grays Harbor for his high school exploits.

In 1947, after missing a few weeks with his knee injury, Elway returned for the Thanksgiving Day game and completed nine of thirteen passes for 162 yards in a 22–7 victory over Aberdeen. "You have to give Coach Swarthout and his gridders a lot of credit for their deceptive football and passing advantage with Elway," wrote Ed Stanley in the *Aberdeen World*.

In his senior season Elway completed six of ten for 139 yards in a 28–23 win over Hoquiam's archrivals and went off to Washington State College (now university) for what he hoped would be a long playing career. It wasn't. But before Jack Elway's career as a football coach was over, he would stand on the prow of a ship that changed football every bit as much as much as the arrival of Robert Gray changed forever the shallow harbor he sailed into at the end of the eighteenth century.

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