

Maiming Isn't Everything...

A guide to coaching Chaos Dwarfs in Blood Bowl

Chaos Dwarfs play their own brand of Blood Bowl. They don't hit as hard as Chaos, they can't run methodical grinding plays with as much effectiveness as their Dwarf cousins, and they certainly won't be mistaken for Elves. What they can do is combine solid linemen, a pair of ungainly wrecking ball speedsters and a handful of expendable slave creatures to create a surprisingly effective team. With this guide, I hope to provide the tools with which the chosen of Hashut will crush their opponents into the pitch.

Team Selection

Before we start worrying about strategies and player advancement, we need to figure out what your squad will look like. As much as I hate to see cookie-cutter teams, I feel that this is the most effective starting lineup:

2 Bull Centaurs-260,000 Gold Pieces

4 Chaos Dwarf Blockers-280,000 GP

5 Hobgoblins-200,000 GP

Fan Factor-5-50,000 GP

Rerolls-3-210,000 GP



A popular variation involves dropping the Fan Factor to 2 and using that Gold to trade one of the Hobbos in for another CD Blocker. I understand the idea, as this slightly increases the durability and hitting power of the team. This really isn't worth the loss of Fan Factor, though, as winning the FAME rolls not only offers the occasional on-field boost, but also adds to your winnings. With a little luck you can have enough Gold to buy a fifth Blocker following your first game. Your Fan Factor, on the other hand, will take a minimum of three games to build up from 2 to 5.

No matter what you hear (from saboteurs, no doubt) DO NOT take a Minotaur in your starting lineup. He may be able to blow a hole through your opponent's line, but he is just as likely to lose concentration and let an enemy ball-carrier run right past him into the endzone. For as much as a Minotaur costs, you would have to trade all of your Blockers in for Hobbos or lose a Bull Centaur, and there's no way a Mino is worth that.

Another bad idea is starting with fewer than three rerolls. Your most agile players are still only average ball-handlers, and they don't start with any reroll skills (Pass, Catch, Sure Hands). This means you will almost certainly need three rerolls every half. It also takes forever to save up

for a reroll, as they cost double once the season starts. Having too many rerolls is simply not possible at this stage of your team's career. If you gamble on going without rerolls, you're guaranteed to spend whole matches fumbling the ball around your backfield, just waiting for some Wood Elf to hop in and steal it from you.

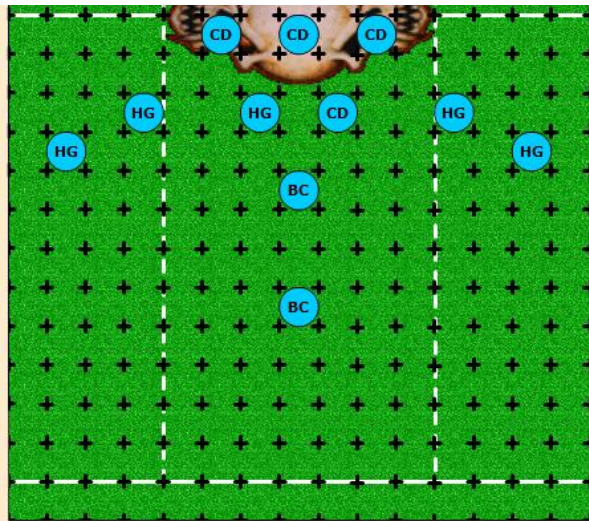
I've heard of some coaches starting without a single Bull Centaur. I have to assume this is some sort of joke, or perhaps a masochistic ritual. The Centaurs are what make this team interesting. You want to pick up both of them right away, as they don't gain Star Player Points as quickly as you might imagine.

Basic Strategies

With all of the variables involved in the different races you'll face and the skills you and your opponents will eventually acquire, it would be foolish to suggest that a certain play will always be successful. Therefore, I'm going to provide you with two extremely basic plays, one for offense and one for defense. As your team changes and your coaching experience grows, you should be able to tailor these plays to the situations and opponents that you face.

Defense

This is the basic *Smashsnout* formation, which will serve you well in most situations:



Your three Blockers on the line will likely end up on the ground, but they should survive injury, and their Block skill will increase the odds of your opponent knocking himself over and giving you an early turnover. The secondary line of defenders will keep the enemy from dodging through, and even a well placed blitz will only knock a small hole through your defenses. The Centaurs are there to act as safeties, blitzing any potential scorers that make it into your half of the pitch. They're also close enough to pounce on any ball that is turned over around midfield.

On subsequent turns, stand your Blockers up and place them next to opposing players if at all possible. The idea is to force your opponent to hit players with Block or dodge away from players with Tackle, and the Blockers fit the bill for both of those requirements. Keep your Hobgoblins handy to lend assists or snatch up a dropped ball. The Centaurs can be used to augment the Blockers' press, but be careful with their placement. High strength means nothing if you're all alone among a pack of enemies. It's best to keep at least one Centaur out of the scrum and ready to handle any breakaways. However, you must remember that Centaurs don't start with Block or Tackle, so it's better to use a Blocker to blitz the ball-carrier. No defense is impregnable. The idea is to set up opportunities for your opponent to fail. If the other team avoids all of these, it's not the end of the world. It just means it's your turn to set up and hit him back.

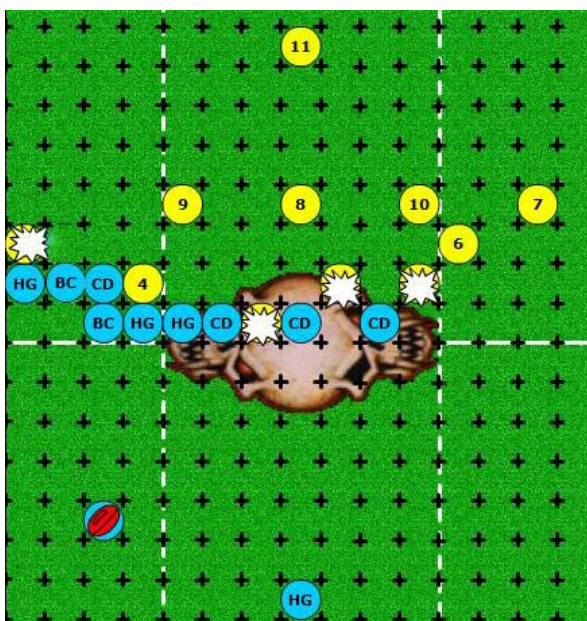
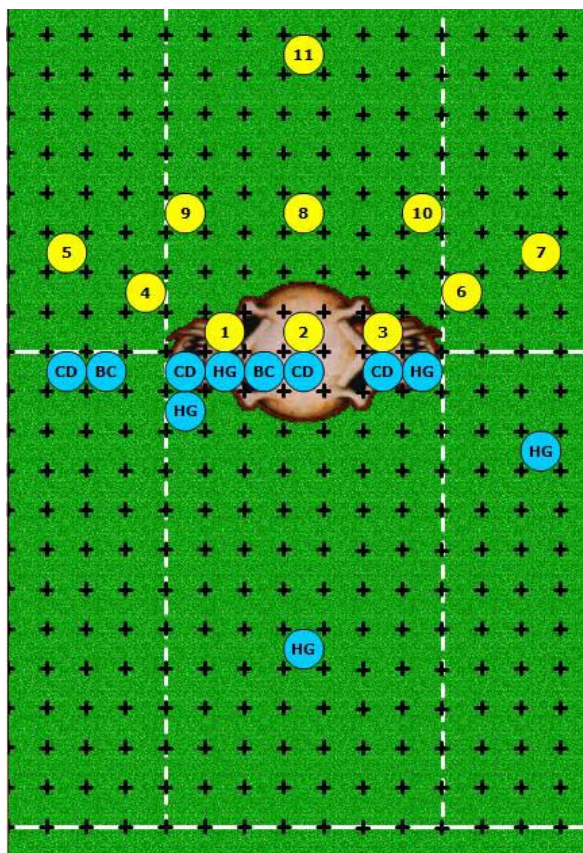
Offense

This is a play I call *Left Hoof Black*; it's just a very simple wedge. If your opponent runs an asymmetrical defense, there's no reason not to switch the play to the right (you just won't feel as sinister). You should start set up as so:

The three middle Blockers throw blocks, with the inside man waiting for an assist and going last. The weak side Hobgoblin runs back to cover the ball, the remaining Blocker moves diagonally to cover opponent #4, and then the leftmost Bull Centaur blitzes #5 and then drops back one square so that a short line can form around him. Everyone shifts left, except for your Hobgoblin in the backfield, who attempts to pick up the ball. If he manages to do so, he should then run as far to the front and left as possible without coming in range of potential blitzers from the open side.

If all goes according to plan, the end of the turn should look something like this:

From here, your opponent will have to work hard to knock down more than one of your men (even that won't be a sure thing), and you'll be set to continue the push up the left, or shift to the middle, depending on how the defensive players have been placed. You can leave the ball with the original carrier, or hand it off to another Hobgoblin. Have a Centaur cover each of his flanks, with some Blockers filling out the rest of the cage. You should be able to score in three turns, providing you don't see many Skulls or dropped balls.



Building Your Team

As the wins start rolling in, so will the money. There are three main ways to spend it: players, staff, and rerolls. You may be in a hurry to protect your players through the purchase of an Apothecary, but that can probably wait until you start getting doubles on skill rolls or are up to a full complement of Blockers, whichever comes first. Once you have all six Blockers and an Apothecary (this should take you 3-5 matches), you should consider what your team has been missing. Are your Hobgoblins getting knocked out early? Buy an extra one. Are Orcs and Chaos out bashing you? Pick up the Minotaur. Do you find yourself blaming your dice for every loss? Time for another reroll. It's really that simple.

Once you have fourteen players and half a dozen rerolls, you should just start banking your winnings. You want to leave empty slots on the roster to take Star Players and Mercenaries as inducements when facing larger teams and you'll eventually need some of that gold to replace dead or crippled players.

Player Advancements

As well as adding players, your team will also be growing in experience. Being more dexterous than the rest of the team, you will find that the Hobgoblins have a much easier time gaining SPPs. This is fine, as they are the most important players to give skills to in the early game. As time goes on, however, you should concentrate on earning SPPs for your other players. If you hold a comfortable lead or are about to score a winning touchdown, why not hand it off to a Dwarf or Centaur and let him run it in? The chance to gain 3 SPPs for one of those players is too good to pass up in a "safe" situation like that. Another good opportunity arises when your opponent makes the mistake of sending the ball out of bounds with his kickoff. You should absolutely give the resulting touchback to a Centaur and let him rumble all the way in for a score.

Here are some ideas as to which skills suit each position:

Hobgoblins

When your first Hobgoblin receives his first skill, Sure Hands is the best option. If you can't pick up the ball in the backfield, nothing else really matters. Your next two players to skill up should take Kick and Dirty Player. Kick will allow you to pin your opponent deep in his half, and Dirty Player will give you a means of dealing with teams that want to dodge away from you every turn. With DP, you'll at least be able to Blitz one of the cowards and then stomp on his throat once he's down. Hobgoblins are not at all resilient, so it's a good idea to have backups for your important role players. Therefore, you'll eventually want to add another player with Sure Hands, as well as a second Dirty Player. You can develop one or two into blitzers by giving them Block and Strip Ball, and eventually Wrestle.

In the case of doubles, your choice of skills will depend on what the player has already gotten (if anything). If a player has Sure Hands, add Accurate to make him into a reliable passer. Your Dirty Players will want to add Sneaky Git, to lessen their chance of being ejected from the game. Dodge always helps to keep Hobgoblins alive. Consider giving one of them Leader (I know, I know, a Hobgoblin leading Chaos Dwarfs is blasphemy), this will allow you to buy one less reroll and keep your Team Value low.



Any stat increase is welcome for Hobgoblins, but in the case of double 5s, I would take a skill over increased MA or AV.

Chaos Dwarf Blockers

I divide my Blockers into two categories, “Holders” and “Hitters.” Four Holders manage the line of scrimmage while two Hitters grind through the opposing team. Holders will take Guard as their first skill, followed by Stand Firm. Four of these guys will serve as the foundation for a very strong cage or a menacing defensive line. The Hitters want to take Mighty Blow right away. Following this, they can take Frenzy or Pro if you want to increase the chance of knocking someone down, or Piling On if you’re feeling adventurous and bloodthirsty (and why wouldn’t you be?). Mighty Blow/Claw/Piling On is a particularly nasty combo, but your precious mutant (see below) won’t last long if he’s spending much time on the ground.

Blockers can choose mutations if they roll doubles, and that option will be enticing. Your Hitters should absolutely take Claw on doubles, and Tentacles or a Prehensile Tail are decent choices for Holders. Agility skills can be at least as useful, though, so don’t feel like you have to take a mutation at every opportunity. Diving Tackle is excellent for either type of Blocker, and Dodge is useful for any player that gets hit (meaning: “every player in the game”). One skill that is often overlooked is Jump Up. As slow as Blockers are, a skill that allows them to stand up and still take their complete movement can be incredibly useful.

*Many experts will tell you to always pass on an increase in MA or AG, opting to take a skill instead. There are some interesting possibilities in developing semi-agile or not-so-slow Dwarfs, however. Blockers start their careers as fairly well-developed players, so the loss of one skill slot isn’t the end of the world, and an extra square of movement or the ability to pick up the ball in a clutch situation can come in handy on occasion. It may not be the most sensible decision to accept these stat increases, but doing so might lead to some surprisingly effective players.



Bull Centaurs

The most important skills for Bull Centaurs are Block and Break Tackle. Block allows them to actually use their high ST to its full potential, and Break Tackle keeps your opponent from tying them up and keeping them away from where they need to be. The order in which you take these skills doesn't matter that much (I would start with one of each), but they are absolutely the base skills for your Centaurs. Once those are out of the way, I begin to specialize, making one Centaur into an offense-oriented Fullback, and the other into a defensive Safety. Both are going to be on the field for offense and defense alike, of course, but each will be built to excel in one aspect of the game. The Fullback's next skills should be based around getting the ball in his hands, and Sure Hands and Kick-Off Return both fit the bill. The Safety has more options, as Tackle, Strip Ball, Frenzy, and Juggernaut are all excellent skills for him.

*If a Bull Centaur rolls doubles early in his career (within the first three rolls on the advancement chart), he has essentially become your Fullback by default. Catch, Dodge, Jump-Up and Side Step are all excellent skills for an offensive-minded player. For the Safety, Jump-Up, Dodge and Diving Tackle can also be useful, though the skills mentioned in the preceding paragraph may be preferable. Centaurs cannot get mutations, unfortunately.

Any sort of characteristic increase is a huge boon to a Bull Centaur, and all praises be to Hashut if you manage to roll one. A Centaur with a MA increase is very fast, a Centaur with a ST increase is very strong, and a Centaur with an AG increase can actually pick up the ball more than half of the time.



Minis by Arashi

I hope that some of the ideas in this article will prove useful for coaches planning to take stewardship of a Chaos Dwarf team. I have recently entered a new league, and am thus running a squad of them myself. Join me next issue, and I'll let you know if my concepts translated into success.

The playbook graphics above were generated using Mikkell Pahlke Fausing's Blood Bowl Play Creator found at: <http://www.blood-bowl.net/Resources/PlayCreator/PlayCreator.html>)