




ORC PLAYBOOK

Or “Duffing ’em up good an’ propa!”

By Carl Brown

No matter what team you use when playing Blood Bowl you quickly notice that each team has its own strengths and weaknesses. Elves are agile but lightly armoured, Dwarfs are slow but good at blocking and Orcs? ...well, they pack a punch in a fight, but that’s not all!

Back in 1993/94 I was involved in the playtesting and development of the third edition of Blood Bowl and during that period I played with a fairly successful Orc team getting to the semi and/or final stages of all of the major tournaments in the Studio league. I also wrote a tactics article that was featured in White Dwarf magazine and looked at general Orc tactics, including a few optional plays for Orc coaches to try out.

Since that time Blood Bowl has been played by thousands of coaches worldwide and the rules themselves have been developed further, following feedback from enthusiasts everywhere, culminating in the current living rulebook. With the rules changes and modifications that have been made it seemed appropriate to revisit my previous ruminations.

I hope the following article goes some way to helping budding new Orc coaches (and a few seasoned ones) take their ‘Green Dream Teams’ onto the hallowed turf and well-deserved victory. (Of course they deserve to win, “touched by Nuffle himself, they is; green as da turf itself!”).



GAME FORMATS

There are three distinct formats for playing Blood Bowl.

The first is one-off games 'out of the box' style; this sort of play generally uses whatever models are in the boxed game and is played by casual gamers every now and again. If this describes you then this article may well be useful, but to gain maximum benefit you should really play in a league, even if it's just you and a mate running two teams each (there's so much fun that you miss by not running a team over a series of games).

The second is league play which the majority of this article is about.

The third is tournament play. With the growing popularity of Blood Bowl more and more tournaments are springing up every year and the style of play during these events often differs slightly from those used in an ongoing league. I'll touch on this at the end of the article.

****Did you know...*

Merchandising and advertising has become a very large part of a Blood Bowl player's job. Varag Ghoul-Chewer of the Gouged Eye team, for example, plugs a mouthwash for getting rid of those really stubborn bloodstains and bad breath problems.

TEAM SELECTION & PLAY STYLE

If you're going to be playing in a league you should consider how you want your team to develop. The Orcs have one of the most versatile rosters in the game with access to hard-hitting Blockers and Blitzers, nimble Goblins and a huge selection of Star Players (for Freebooting purposes).

The options available on the Orc roster mean that you can take your team one of two ways: Da Fighty team or Da Cunnin' team.



DA FIGHTY TEAM

The most common Orc team is the grinding, running play, 'fifty' team. As I mentioned in the introduction, Orcs pack a punch in a fight and with four each of Black Orcs (ST4) and Blitzers (Block) available, combined with a high Armour Value (AV), you can quickly put together a formidable front line. Throw in a Troll and you're really going to be dealing out some pain to your opposition. In the early stages of a league, 'fifty' Orc teams can be hugely successful. Their high AV protects them through even the fiercest line of scrimmage battles and the Blitzers can quickly start to rack up Star Player Points (SPPs) through Touchdowns (TDs) and casualties.

If you like this kind of team then getting all of your Black Orcs on the roster as early as possible is a must, as they are going to have a slow progression with SPPs – gaining them mostly from casualties.

A good starting team selection for a 'fifty team' is: 3 Black Orcs, 3 Blitzers, 2 Throwers, 4 Linemen, 2 Re-rolls, 6 Fan Factor. This line-up gives you a good solid front line with which to batter your opposition, two good ball carriers (Throwers with Sure Hands skill) and a Fan Factor high enough to ensure you earn reasonable money to buy new players and Re-rolls with. Adding a Troll as early as possible helps to toughen up an already hard front line.

One downside to playing with a team solely devoted to battering the opposition to a bloody pulp is that your tactics can be a little one dimensional. On offence, you gather the

***Did you know...

Freebooter Blitzzer Joachim Goadmalice believed in training very hard. While with the Oldheim Ogres, he caused them more casualties in a training session than the Ogres had suffered in their ten previous games. In posthumous honour of his technique, the Ogres renamed their

training park Goadmalice Park because, in the words of team coach Rakan Gold, "That's where most of him his."



ball, put it in a protective pocket (or cage) of players and slowly pummel your way to a 7 or 8 down Touchdown. (See Stalling or Clock Management). On defence, you should try and work a Blitzzer or two into position to sack the opposite ball carrier. If your opponent is a throwing team then it's also wise to keep a Blitzzer in your backfield to use as 'cover' for taking out any receivers that break into your backfield.

Unfortunately for you as the league progresses the other teams will also gain skills and extra players. You can soon find yourself facing an Elf or Skaven team which quickly dodges from your players leaving you with a single Blitz action each turn to cause damage with – not an ideal situation for a 'fifty' team. A good way to counter this eventuality is to have an ample sprinkling of Tackle skill (more on skills later).

STALLING, OR CLOCK MANAGEMENT

A subject that often causes heated discussion in the Blood Bowl community is the slow grinding 7-8 down drive. The objective is to score a TD while leaving your opposition no time to respond before the end of the half. The part that can cause arguments is if a team gets to the End Zone early and stops or stalls with the ball, forms a defensive shield around the ball carrier and then proceeds to run the clock down, scoring on the final down.

Whether this is an issue for you or not depends on your gaming group. Personally I don't have a problem with it and the players that I play with all see it as an acceptable tactic.

Our view is that it's one of many tactics – deal with it! Even throwing play specialists do the same thing – just with a slight variation. Instead of carrying the ball to within one or two squares of the End Zone and stopping they simply hold the ball way back from trouble for several turns in the hands of their Thrower. He stands deep in his own half until a clean 'Touchdown pass' presents itself then moves up to release the ball and the team scores a TD, leaving slower teams little or no time to respond. The stalling tactic has both benefits and risks for whoever tries it.

The key thing for Orcs is that slow, grinding plays give ample opportunity to smash the opposite team up so that they can't put up much of a fight in the second half. The risk is that if you make a mistake during your slow advance and your opponent grabs the ball you may find yourself in the position where you can't respond quick enough – so you'd better learn to do it right!

But hey! This article is for Orc coaches so who cares what the opposition thinks? Use the slow drive if you really want to dish out some pain.

"Smash 'em up, and Zog 'em if dey don't like it!"

DA CUNNIN' TEAM

The second style of Orc team (and my personal favourite) is da cunnin' team.

The benefit of the Orc roster is the high number of 0-4 entries. Not only can you have loads of tough guys you can also have up to four Goblins. On the face of it the average Goblin isn't much to look at, but with the inclusion of a Troll they suddenly become a 'special play'. The second style of Orc team follows a slightly different path from the 'fighty' team. Sure, you need to utilise the power and strength of the Black Orcs and Blitzers but, by including Goblins with a Troll (just remember to put someone next to him before he does anything) you open up a whole new avenue of tactical options – 'Dat's cunnin' dat is!'

You can be very flexible with your tactics when playing with this type of team; it has muscle but isn't as tightly focussed as a 'fighty' team. In general it is quicker (the Goblins combined with the Blitzers) and much more difficult for your opponent to predict – you have more play options.

A good starting line-up would be: 2 Black Orcs, 2 Blitzers, 1 Troll, 4 Linemen, 1 Thrower, 3 Goblins, 2 Re-rolls, 7 Fan Factor. This gives you a good foundation on which to build a flexible team able to 'fight it out' or utilise the 'pass option' as the need arises.

You may find that this team is slow to get going and it's not always as effective in the early stages of a league as the 'fighty' team, but stick with it. Once you have a few skills scattered

throughout the team you'll have excellent play options to keep your team competitive through even the longest of seasons.

GENERAL GAME PLAY

Versus Low AV, High AG

So how do you actually use Orcs on the field of play then? Well, when facing the fast, low AV, high AG teams, such as Elves & Skaven, you've got to face facts – they're going to score.

Now before you throw this article down in disgust and start yelling "this guy obviously doesn't do defence" (expletives removed) let me run the last bit of that sentence by you again with a few extra details.

"...you've got to face facts – they're going to score... once... maybe."

When you're playing with an Orc team and you come up against a team which is quicker, more agile and, well, basically better at playing with the ball than you, you have to be prepared for them to score.

With that in mind you can prepare a game plan that won't fall apart (have you stressing out) if the opposition grab a quick TD in the early stages of the game. When you're on offence, Wood Elf coaches will have Wardancers leaping over your lines and heading for the ball either before you've picked it up or just as you get it. Skaven players will have a pack of Gutter Runners swarming after the ball through any tiny gap

KEY PLAYER FOCUS: GOBLINS?

Despite their diminutive stature Goblins really are great little players when included in an Orc team.

Goblins can be 'groomed' (though you'll need to wear gloves) to become your catchers. Seeing as they already start with Dodge and Stunty you've got a nimble little critter that just needs Catch to make your opponent pay more attention to him sneaking down the sidelines.

On defence if you have several Goblins on your team you can send them through the opponent's lines to 'team up' and hunt down the ball carrier. Alternatively you can use their useful Dodge skill to get them into position to add that all important assist or nip in and deliver a nasty foul action on opponent's key players after the Black Orcs have knocked them down.

A particularly sneaky ploy when facing an opposing cage (usually against Dwarfs, Chaos or Undead) is to throw the Goblin into the cage. Target an empty square next to the ball carrier, your Troll will most likely miss the throw so the Goblin will scatter into a different square, potentially hitting an opposing player. This has a good chance of opening up the cage for your Blitzers to exploit and sack the ball carrier. The Goblin may well get injured in this play, but hey! Who cares? There are plenty more where he came from.

Goblins can also be used as a great diversion to pull opposition players away from defending against your running play – threatening the Pass action as they dodge their way into range of the End Zone.

And obviously there's the straight 1 down TD, Throw Team-mate play – you know what that is so I'll not go into it in detail (okay it's risky, but it can work sometimes).

that's appeared in your front line. More importantly, most coaches will probably have a player with Kick so will be putting the ball deep in your backfield, usually in the corner. Which means you're going to have to move it a long way to score – and that means protecting the ball carrier for a long time.

When you're on offence the first few turns of the first half are critical against agile teams (Wood Elves & Skaven in particular). Your main aim is to take out their key players (Wardancers/Gutter Runners) as quickly as possible. Oh... and stop them from getting the ball off you – yep there's a ball... must remember that.

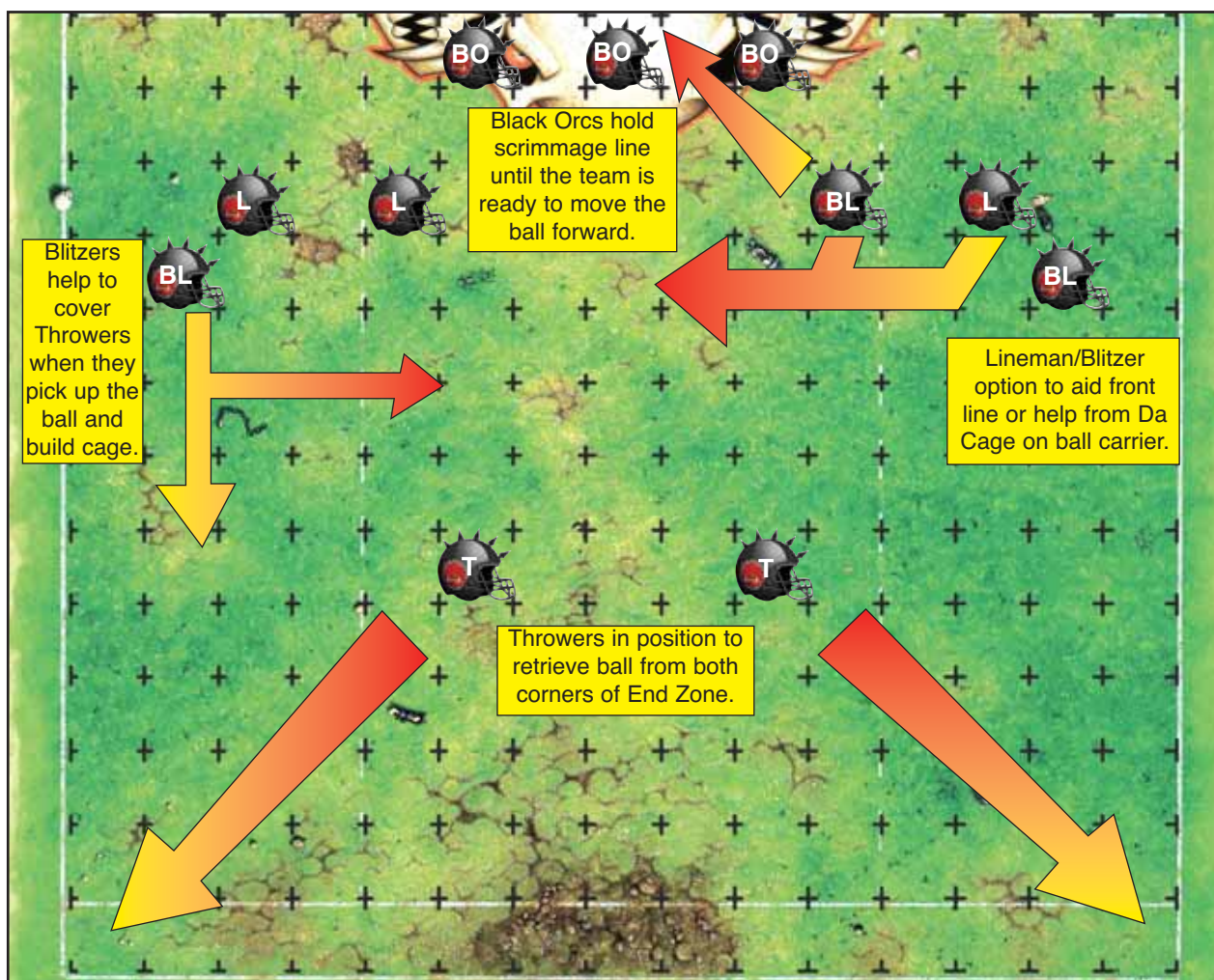
The initial couple of turns after the kick-off when you first grab the ball is when the agile teams have their best chance to score against you. Now you may think that by playing deep with as many players as possible you reduce the chances of having the opposition steal the ball. It doesn't quite work that way as the more players you pull back the weaker your front line and the harder it will be to push forward once you have the ball.

Take a look at the sample formation: 'Da Grappla':

This line-up gives you two players in position to reach both corners of the field to collect the ball if necessary. Whichever direction the ball ends up going in you can use the player not going for the ball to protect the player that does. The rest of the team is set up to be able to react to a fast strike on your ball carrier while maintaining a formation that can quickly form a protective pocket (cage) around the ball and drive downfield in a running play.

If you're really struggling by Turn 2 and the agile players are all over your ball carrier I'd suggest taking a deep breath and then giving them a good kicking. Don't worry too much about clearing the ball out of the Danger Zone – they're quick and agile remember! They'll bring the ball right back in no time if you throw it upfield and fail a catch. Worse still, if you fumble and have the ball at your feet they'll stand a good chance of picking it up even in tackle zones. So, bearing in mind that they may score on down 2 or 3, try to take out the danger men that are causing you so much trouble now – they might score but it'll cost them 2-3 players to do it.

Worse case scenario. For the sake of argument let's say they turned you over and scored on down 3. Give a sarcastic "Boo Hoo... what do I do now?", and then smile menacingly – it's



all going to plan (you did take out those Wardancers/Gutter Runners/'danger men' right?).

Now when you receive the next kick the agile player may try the same trick again, but with several key players missing it should be easy for you to brush them aside and grind downfield to equalise at the end of the half.

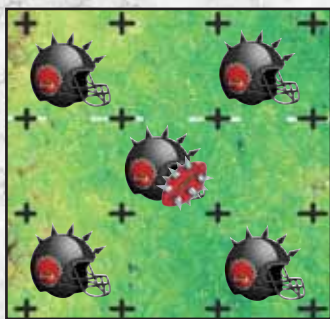
If by some chance your agile opponent doesn't play the 'sack the ball carrier quick tactic', all the better. Gather the ball into a protective cage and slowly batter your way through his team. Even if he rolls back from your line (only giving you a blitz each turn) make each blitz hurt, target his specialist players. The low AV of agile teams means that with a concentrated effort in the first half you can leave your opponent with not much more than linemen in the second half.

On defence against agile teams use either a Blitzzer or some Goblins to put pressure on their thrower deep in his own backfield, but concentrate the majority of your effort on clearing out the potential receivers he will try to rush through your lines. If this is the second half then he should struggle to work his players through – you've already battered his best players (see above). If it's the first half then apply the tactics I've already mentioned and target the 'danger men'. Don't worry too much about conceding an early TD.

PLAYBOOK HIGHLIGHT – DA CAGE

There are many ways to protect a ball carrier in a pocket or cage but I've found the most versatile and some would say most effective way is:

This maximises the level of potential assists you can give the ball carrier should your opponent get into a position to block him (also if they knock him over he'll fall into a square covered by the tackle zones of two of your players so the ball might still be 'safe'). More importantly, it only uses four players to do so, leaving the rest of your team to fight a route downfield to the opposite End Zone, create a screen or 'outer ring' around 'da cage', or generally get on with duffing up the other team.



Versus High AV, Low AG

Games against the High AV, low AG teams are going to be tough. It's going to be a toe-to-toe slugfest, make no mistake, so how can you come out the winner?

Once again the basic rule of targeting their key players applies. Most hard-hitting teams have a proportion of players with AG2 (or less) this makes the AG3 players critical for moving the ball (Dwarf teams only have a maximum of four players that have AG3 available!). So the number one priority is to take out the opposite team's potential ball carriers.

Obviously they're going to be thinking the same about your team so protect your Thrower(s), his Sure Hands skill could make the difference in grabbing the ball out of a midfield meatgrinder when your team starts to 'dook it out' with theirs.

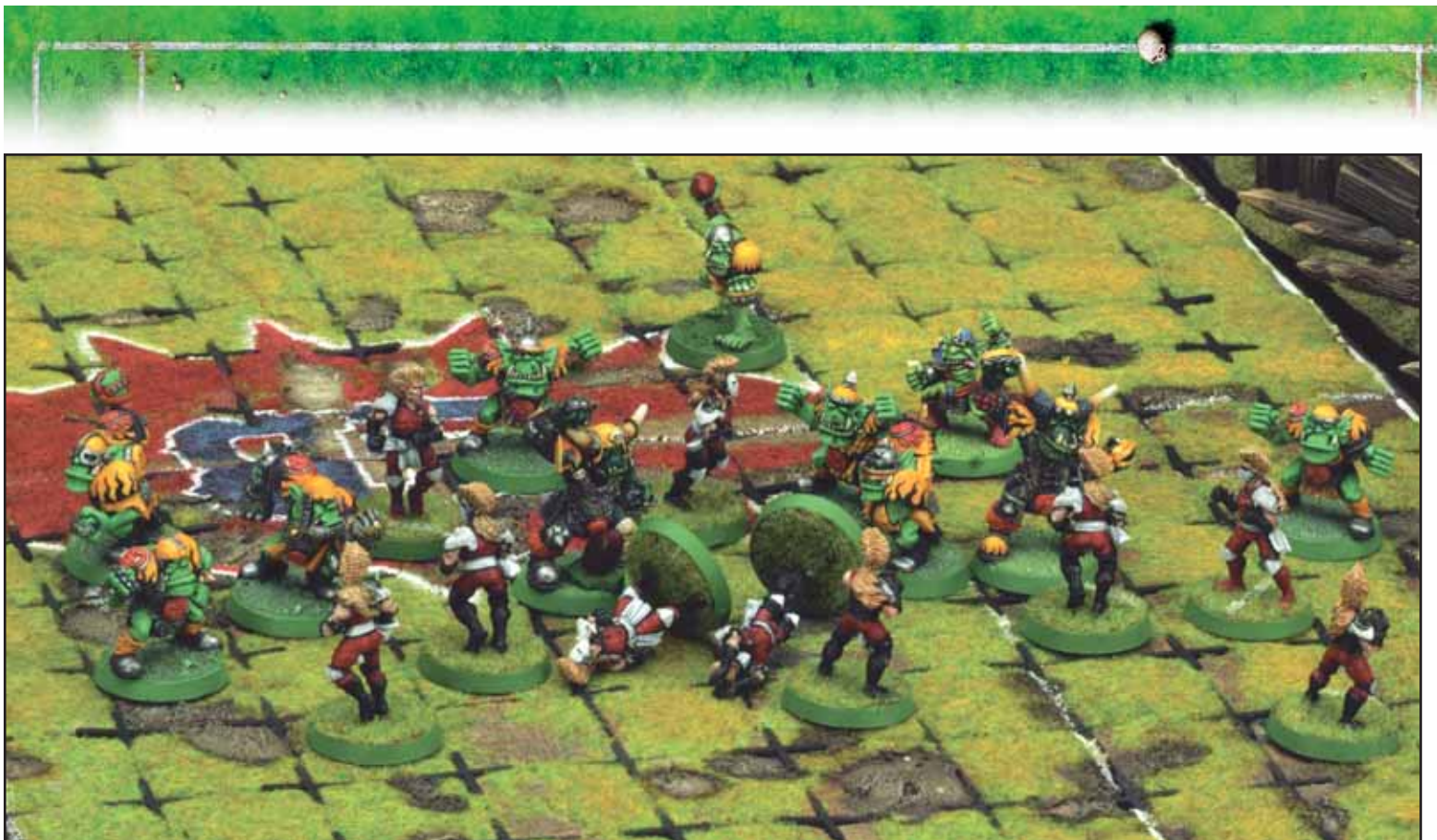


If you're playing with a 'fighty' team on offence, the motto is "do it to them before they do it to you". Slap 'em down with the Black Orcs (Mighty Blow and Piling On are useful skills for these games). Try to channel your running play towards the side of the field so that you can start to shove players into the crowd – it's easier to clear your opponent's lines (no need to roll to beat their Armour). If you're playing with a cunnin' team then these are the games in which to utilise your 'Passing play' option. Use your Goblins as receivers and work them deep into your opponent's half. While this is going on use the rest of your team to push for a running TD. This keeps the pressure on your opponent as he has to split his defence against two potential scoring tactics. If the chance arises for a short TD pass to a Goblin then take it!

On defence against running plays you need to try to reduce the amount of damage your opponent does to you while maximising the effectiveness of your own attacks. To do this, play a 'roll back' defence. This means you try to only give your opponent a Blitz action with which to block your players. You use your team to tie up the area in front of your opponent's team with tackle zones while working a Blitzzer or two into a position to pressure the ball carrier and hopefully make an attempt at sacking him. If you've got a Goblin, send him into a scoring position to annoyingly wait for a TD pass if you pop the ball loose. This can cause you opponent to get nervous and send a player to deal with him weakening his advancing line. Sure you've both got one player out of the main action, but your Goblin could be a game winner.

DEVELOPING YOUR TEAM – SKILLS AND ADVANCEMENTS

Over the course of a league you'll need to fill out your roster (and replace the inevitable losses). Fighty teams should grab a Troll, an extra Black Orc and another Blitzzer as their next purchases. Cunnin' teams should go for Blitzzers before Black Orcs as they keep the overall MV of your team higher, enabling more flexible play options. A second Thrower would also be wise. Of course, the addition of an Apothecary is a **must** whichever type of team you've chosen.



With regards skills here are a few suggestions:

Black Orcs: *Mighty Blow, Block, Piling On, Guard.*

I favour Mighty Blow over Piling On because with an MV of 4 I prefer my Black Orcs on their feet. However, if I have a full roster I'll have both scattered throughout my team.

Blitzers: *Tackle, Strip Ball, Sure Hands, Mighty Blow.*

I tend to develop a couple of Blitzers into defensive players (Tackle/Mighty Blow) and a couple into offensive players (Tackle/Sure Hands). Strip Ball is useful in the early stages of a league when the number of players with Sure Hands is quite low, but tends to be less effective as a league progresses.

Throwers: *Block, Accurate, Safe Throw, Hail Mary Pass.*

Linemen: *Tackle, Block, Dirty Player, Kick, Leader, Pass Block.*

I concentrate on keeping the proportion of Tackle and Block in the team at a high level, but also use Linemen to incorporate the useful, unusual skills into my team.

Goblins: *Catch, Sidestep, Diving Catch, Sure Feet, Nerves of Steel.*

Troll: *Block, Pro, Piling On, Break Tackle.*

A quick word about rolling doubles – Stand Firm is a great Trait and if you can get it on a couple of Blitzers or Black Orcs then do it! These players can then be used to help 'refuse' the wide zones when you're on defence (see the box). Strong Arm for a Thrower can help cause all sorts of problems to an opponent who thinks the Orc throwing game is restricted to short passes. Jump Up is really useful for Goblins (especially if they've survived falling over after a Throw Team-mate play).

PLAYBOOK HIGHLIGHT : REFUSING WIDE ZONES

Refusing a wide zone is when you have a player or two that can halt your opponent's advance down one of your flanks.

Agile teams use players with the Side Step skill to put tackle zones into places you don't want them, and this can really mess with your attempts to punch a hole in their line. Strength teams, like Orcs, use Stand Firm to 'hold position'. If your opponent tries to push your players out of the way to create gaps for receivers to run through into your backfield, Stand Firm stops your guys from being moved. This helps to refuse the wide zone.

If you can do this on both flanks you can force your opponent to play down the middle of the field, which is just what your Orcs, particularly the Black Orcs, want to happen...



TOURNAMENT PLAY

A quick word about playing with Orcs in tournaments. Tournament rules vary from event to event, but one thing that seems to exist in the majority of them is some form of skill selection. This is often restricted to one skill per player so with this in mind I'd suggest the following: Blitzers – Tackle, (one with Strip Ball if Star Players are allowed), Black Orcs – Mighty Blow (keeps them on their feet while helping to cause more damage).

After that it depends on what line-up you prefer – Accurate and Catch for a Thrower/Goblin combo, Piling On or Block for a Troll – whatever suits your play style and the environment that you'll be playing in.

SUMMING UP

Some people say that Orcs are one of the easiest teams to play with, and at the beginning of a rookie league I'd agree. But to do well in the long run you need to develop a team that can keep up with the pace as agile teams become TD machines and Strength teams become casualty generators. Doing this with an Orc team is the mark of a good coach. How you go about this depends on the environment of your own league, but hopefully this article will have given you some useful tips to keep you in amongst 'em at the top, and help you have some fun along the way.

Author

Carl Brown was one of the original play testers for the third edition of Blood Bowl. He is also the first and only coach of (in)famous Orc team, Da Deff Squad.



Further Information

The Orc team is available from all good GW stockists. The entire Blood Bowl range is available from Games Workshop Direct (see the How to Order section for more details).

Website

www.BloodBowl.com

