

BLOOD BOWL

Skaven Playbook

Or, Offensive Behaviour. Part 2

By Paul Gegg

DEFENCE – AND USING YOUR SKILLS WISELY

Okay, most coaches can get a well-drilled Skaven Offence working nicely, but Defence is a bit more troublesome. So much, that many coaches feel that you should just concentrate on keeping your team complete and wait for a catastrophic error, or failing that, your next drive. Well not all coaches are going to give you either should they be masters at a seven/eight-turn cage or passing kings.

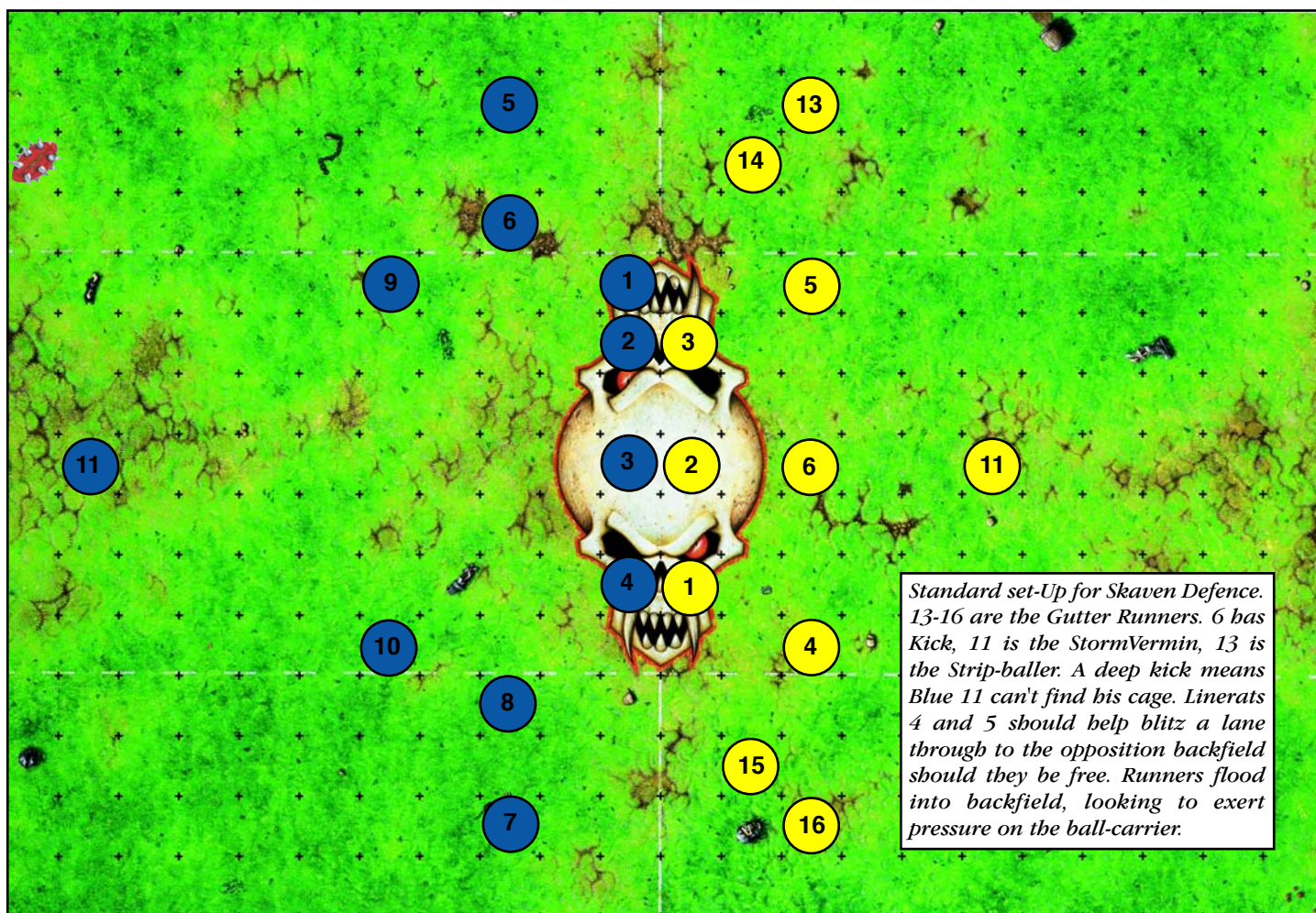
I find that the most 'offensive' displays come when the Rats play good defence. With a well-drilled offence, and fast and agile ball-carriers, you may only need to knock the ball loose once for a probable win (and you should have at least two drives on defence) because there is no better team during a melee for the ball than the Skavs.

First thing is make sure you have someone worrying the ball-carrier. That will slow the Offence down and cause them to dilute their resources for fear of turning over. Runners can get everywhere and a TZ on the ball-carrier requires the marker to be blitzed off (preventing the blitz being used for forward progression of the team) or forces the ball-carrier to dodge out or block. Both can seriously affect forward motion and can result



in Re-roll burning, or better yet, a turnover. This Runner also doubles up as a potential scorer too should the rats recover.

In order to maximise my Runners' chances of tracking down the ball-carrier, they tend to line up in the widezones ready to race into opposing territory without having to go through the Line of Scrimmage (although being mindful that Runners in widezones can be easily targeted by oppo's tacklers/frenzied maniacs). Getting them in behind the Line of Scrimmage can also mean that they are covering passing lanes.



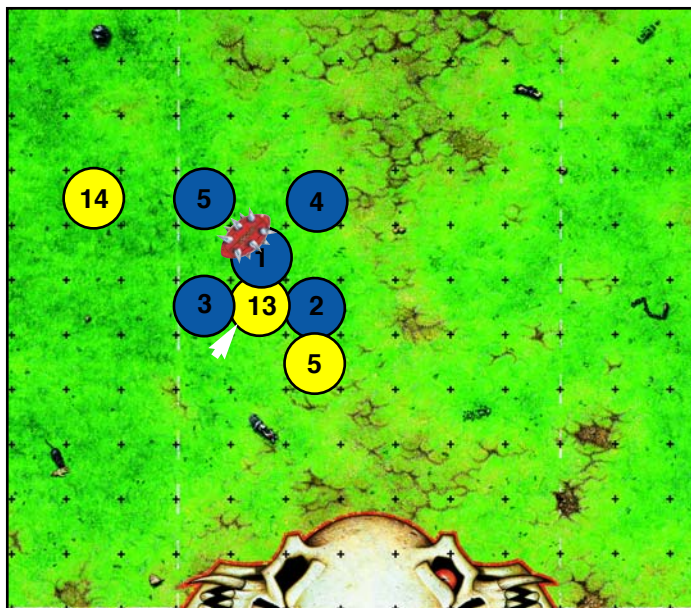
Strength teams will be aiming for the grind and therefore their priority is to form a cage. Best defence against that? Don't let one form. That's easier said than done, of course - planning to swamp the backfield with your Runners isn't going to be enough if the ball lands more or less in the middle of pitch as the cage will be formed before you get a defensive move. That's why you need the Kick skill.

Kick should be the first skill for the first Linerat that gets a skill upgrade and first skill at a tournament too. It allows the ball to be placed deep in the corners cutting off the Orc Thrower, Throw-ra or Ghoul from the safety of his cage, and giving you a vital turn to swamp him with your Runners.

Alternatively, kick shallow knowing that there's a small chance of the coach not picking up. This means that slow teams have to focus on ball-recovery rather than a first-turn massacre and may be forced to set their cage up in a widezone. This is a bit risky though, as often they will recover, form a cage AND give you a slap too, so be careful.

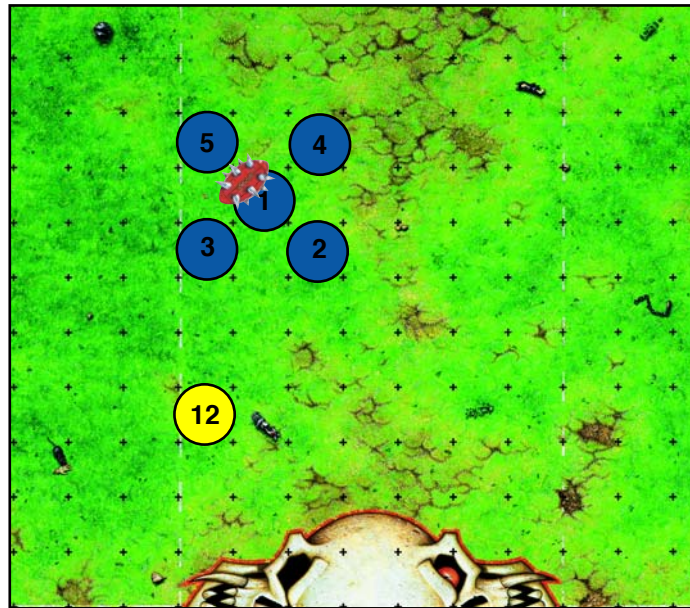
Assuming the ball has not arrived in the cage, you can now use the Runners. It's great to get a Runner blitzing an open ball-carrier with another Runner as an assist for one-dice, but it's not very common at a decent level. You have to work at it by marking the deep players and hoping for a failed dodge. Alternatively screen the carrier from the cage (particularly effective against Khemri) and hopefully you should be able to fashion a blitz on the ball-carrier in subsequent turns. Once you can get blocks on the ball-carrier, having a Runner with Block or better yet, Strip Ball is going to improve your chances of knocking the ball loose. Once it is loose, and you put TZs on the ball (and the opposing ball-handlers) your oppo may start tearing through his Re-rolls and then, my friends, the battle is half won.

Good oppos will still often make it to a cage, but one play I've used many times is the "Kamikaze Blitz". A Runner can dodge into even the most robust cage (three tackle zones) on a 5 (55% chance of success with the Dodge skill) and then a half-die Strip-Ball block (assuming at least one defensive assist is cancelled) will still force the ball out 70% of the time (with Re-roll) and a massive 91% if you are prepared to accept both down (again with Re-roll). Great for what your opponent thinks as an impregnable cage. And it's not even that jammy! Assuming you haven't turned over, use your unactivated Runner(s) to put TZs on the ball or potential recoverers. You can try the same tactic with a Block Runner but although the chance of turnover is lower, so is the chance of seeing the ball loose.

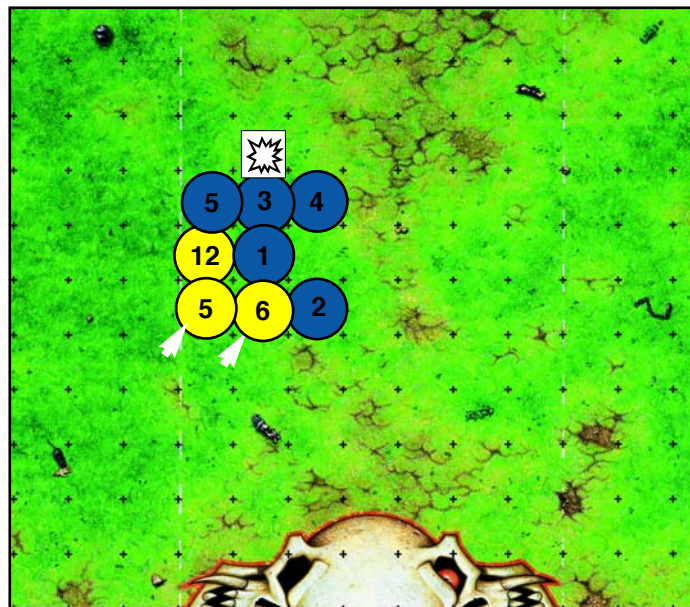


Runner 13 dodges from position shown on 5s into a half-die blitz on the ST3 ball-carrier. The ball may well be knocked lose from the square between Blue 4 and 5 and may be recoverable by Runner 14.

A smattering of opposing Guard, Tackle, Block and Sure Hands make this play pretty much impossible, so then you've got to fall back on other cage-breaking tactics. That's where you need the Rat-Ogre to get in there and use his second block to put a tackle-zone on the ball-carrier and leave a corner of the cage free for a Linerat (or better yet, a sidestepping Gutter Runner to get a second tackle-zone on the Thrower).

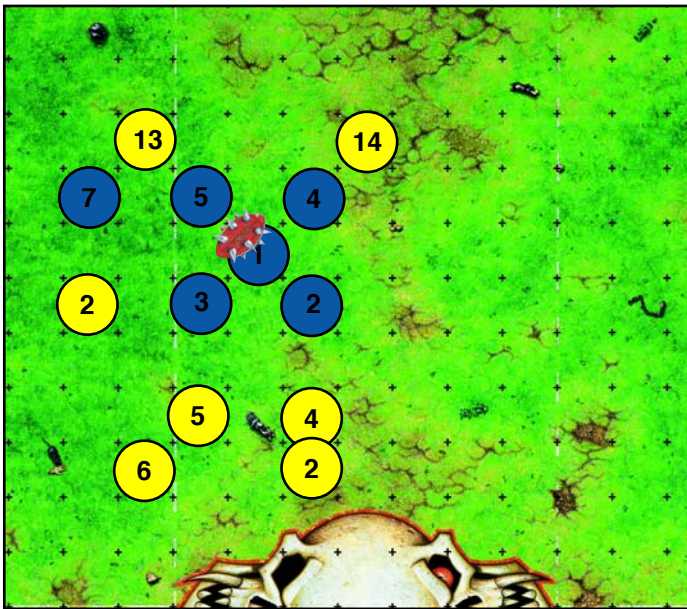


Rat-Ogre 12 blitzes Blue 3, pushing him back (even if he gets the POW), then hits him again into position between Blue 4 and 5, meaning that he stays in contact with Blue 1 ball-carrier. Then you can get players in to put extra TZs on Blue 1 forcing a dodge away from a Prebensible Tail.



Like so.

If you haven't got a strip-baller or a Rat-Ogre, it's best to step back and try and frustrate the cage by allowing it only one or two squares of forward movement per turn. With plenty of Movement and players with Dodge, you can re-deploy fairly easily. Frustrate the oppo by putting TZs on key cage- cornermen and dropping remaining players off slightly so that the enemy cannot set up another cage if they move forward. Maybe even try and force the cage down one side. They will have to try something eventually and then you can possibly pounce. In the meantime, remember that your rats are fragile so don't leave them in any unnecessary TZs and get used to playing short-handed. You never know when an opportunity will come or how many rats you'll need to take advantage of it.



Frustrating the cage. Without Strip Ball or Rat-Ogre.

Defending against Agility: Your opponent may well use the same tactic on you that you do against them (namely dropping deep and aiming for the two-turn score). There's not much you can do about that once the ball is out of range of your blitz, other than take out/mark the potential scorers and put some sort of pressure on the ball-carrier. Your StormVermin (ideally with Tackle) should be deep in your half to get in amongst the opposing potential scorers. You should also be looking out for the opposing team's Half-back.

Agile teams generally don't have Sure Hands so they will either target your Strip Baller or make sure their carrier is out of range. But with movement of possible 11, that's a long way. The shallow kick works wonders as they have to recover and can't necessarily get far enough away so may try extra re-roll-burning ball-handling rolls. Re-rolls are normally few and far between with agile teams so be patient if you are trading scores. They will be lucky not to run out.

Whether it's against strength or agile teams, the shallow kick can even prevent the need for a good defence altogether should you get a Kick-Off BLITZ! Even if the ball lands deep and you can't reach it, your Gutter Runners can put serious pressure on the oppo's backfield.

Whatever you decide on kicking, mix it up. Don't always kick to the same place. I don't. Least, that's what I tell everyone.

TOURNAMENT PLAY

Well a lot of this article is based on tournaments or low-TR teams. So you know that I advocate four Runners and an Apothecary. What about the rest of the team though?

At a One Million Tourney, I like 7 Linerats, 4 Runners, 1 Vermin, 3 Re-rolls, 1 Fan Factor and an Apo.

A more standard line with a bit more strength in depth might be 6 Linerats, 4 Runners, 2 Vermin, Apo, 2 Re-Rolls, 3 Fan Factor.

For the bashy amongst you (what are you doing playing Skaven?) 3 Runners, 2 Vermin, Rat-Ogre, Thrower, Apo, 2 Re-Rolls and 1 Fan Factor will get you a fair few TDs too.

At a Tournament with starting value of 1.1 Million value, you have little to spend it on other than a Rat-Ogre so I think the ideal roster is 6 Linerats, Rat-Ogre, 4 Runners, 1 Vermin, Apo, 3 Re-Rolls and 3 Fan Factor, though 6 Linerats, Rat-Ogre, 3 Runners, 2 Vermin, Apo, 3 Re-Rolls and 2 Fan Factor gives you a bit more Block to start with.

Skill choices: I normally go Kick (LR), Strip Ball (GR), Tackle (SV), Dirty Player (LR) and Block (GR). Guard for the Rat-Ogre may get squeezed in there too. Many coaches find that Block on all their Runners is too tempting but you need to think how you are

going to make defence work. Whatever you decide, just don't ignore Kick.

A quick note on the Apothecary in a tournament: You can use him to heal any injury you like. I'd use the Apo on the first injured Runner I get, but have also been known to use him to unstun a Runner in a key position.

LEAGUE PLAY

You probably can't (and shouldn't) go for 4 Runners from the start as then Re-Rolls or Fan Factor have to be ignored. You still need at least one Vermin for offensive blocking so I suggest 8 Linerats, 3 Runners, 1 Vermin, 3 Re-Rolls (you're going to need 3 so get them whilst they cheap!) and 9 Fan Factor. High FF will mean good gates and good winnings so you should be able to afford an Apothecary after your first game and then a string of players after that. Saving for the fourth Runner (or a replacement Runner) should be the first objective and then your second Vermin or a Thrower. The Rat-Ogre only comes in later in my opinion.

Gutter Runners hog the SPPs but they will improve quickly and help drag the team up the league table assuming you keep reasonable healthy. Try and spread the SPPs a little when you have games in the bag - your Vermin will appreciate it - and your team should then become well-rounded.

At higher levels of TR, Skaven tend to plateau as they will always break easily and Niggles and stat decreases will take their toll. Course by then, you should have won your first couple of trophies.

I'll mention the two star players quickly as Hakflem - the star Gutter Runner - and Headsplitter - the reliable Rat-Ogre - swing games easy enough, though you may as well try to build your own star players and save money for those certain-to-come fatalities. Best keep the Stars for the League Decider.

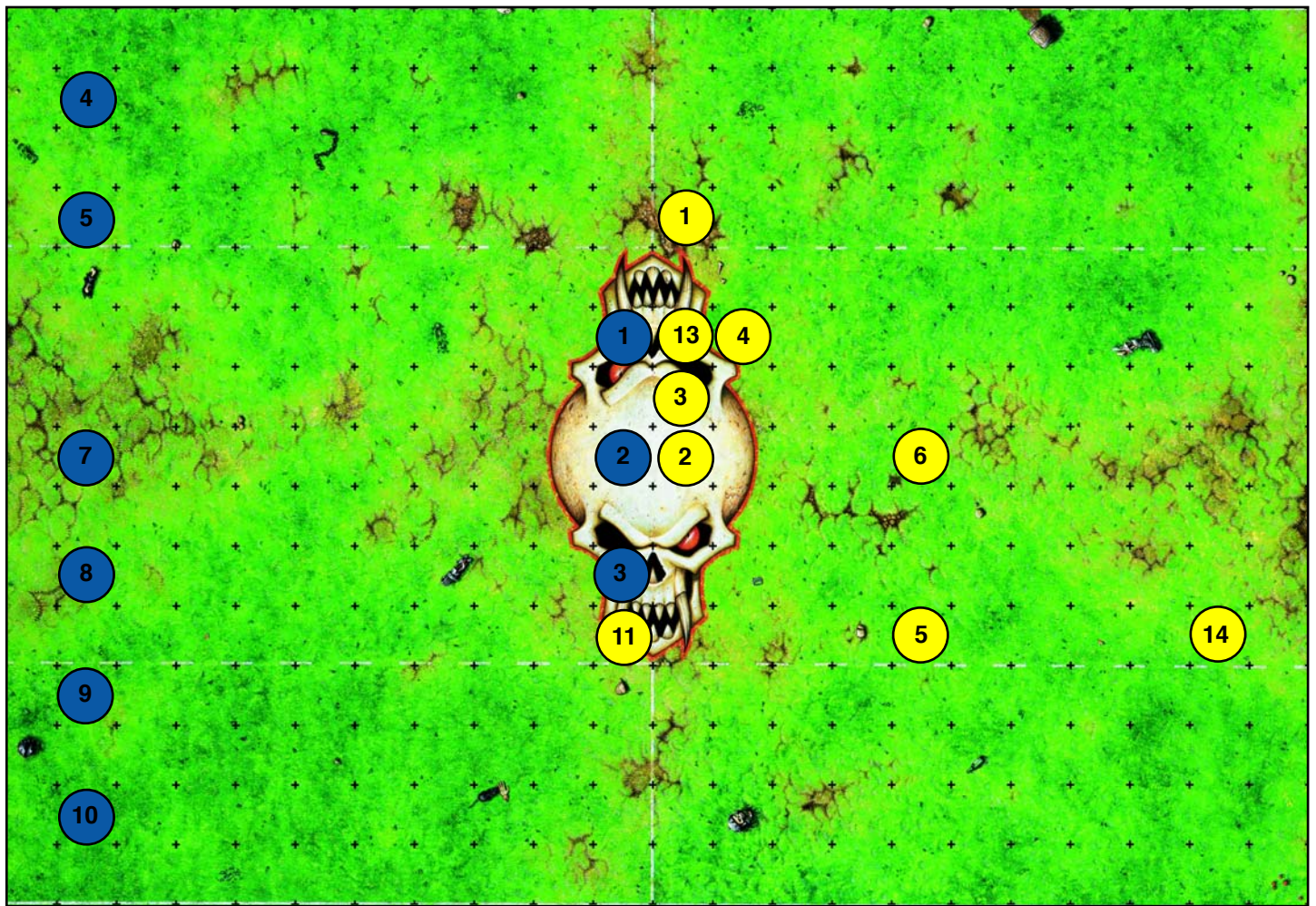
ONE-TURN SCORE

It's the last turn of the half and you've just been scored on. Your opponent has lined up three players on the Line of Scrimmage and rest of his players well out of range across the pitch. You chose Dauntless rather than Very Long Legs, or maybe it's a tournament, and you need to score. Well the good news is you still can.

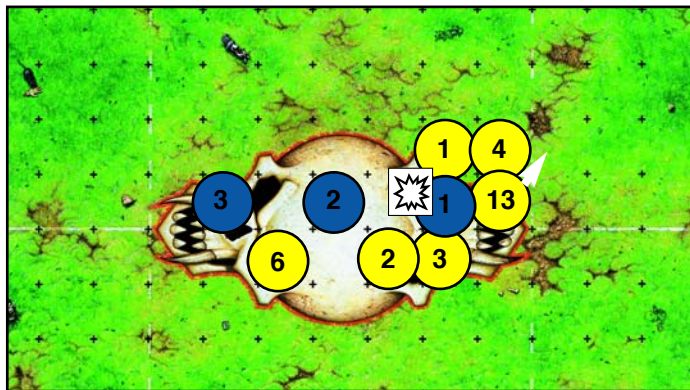
Basically you need get one of your Runners two squares into your opponent's half so then with 2 GFIs he can reach the Endzone. To that end, you need to turn one of your opponents into a pinball and push him into your half of the pitch. If you can do that, then with two further blocks and control of secondary pushbacks (blocked players pushing back players behind them as they have no available squares to fit into), you can push a Gutter Runner on the Line of Scrimmage into range of the score. Simple? Not quite.

First up, be mindful that a Quick Snap helps an amazing amount. So much so that you only need ONE successful block to potentially score.



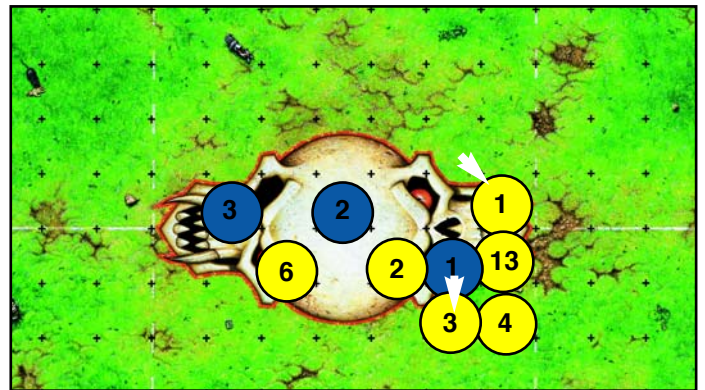


This Set-Up allows the One-Turn Score whether you get Quick Snap or not. 13, 14 and 15 are the Runners (let's assume you've lost one). Move 13 one forward on the Quick Snap and then Linerats 1 and 4 in behind Blue 1 on your turn so that Linerat 2 can hit Blue 1 (good idea to cancel Blue 2's assist so Linerat 6 has raced up to the LOS).

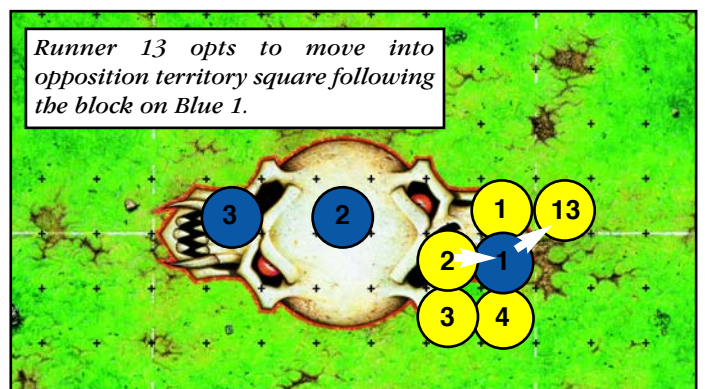


Blue 1 has nowhere to go other than in into one of the players behind him. I chose 13 and he gets pushed a square nearer the Endzone. 13 is now within range.

Quick Snaps aren't all that common. Assuming you don't get one, you need to blitz an opposing Line of Scrimmage player into your half and next to your intended scorer.

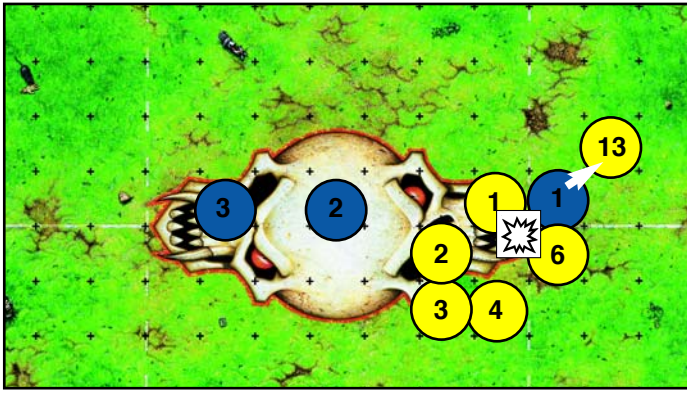


Linerat 1 blitzes from his starting position in the wide-zone and smacks Blue 1 pushing him back into Skaven Territory (and Linerat 3 back too). Re-roll knockdowns as he needs to be on his feet. Linerat 1 then takes up position next to 13 to help out later in the manoeuvre. Linerat 2 can now block Blue 1 pushing him into Runner 13.



Runner 13 opts to move into opposition territory square following the block on Blue 1.





Last block. Any spare player fills in the spare gap next to Blue 1 (here it's Linerat 6). Linerat 3 blocks Blue 1 pushing him into Runner 13 and hopefully down as well (so no TZ on 13's catch). Get the ball to your scorer (which is why you had your other Runners deep), dodge through the enemy lines and 2 GFIs to score. Lovely.

The Rat-Ogre can help with this manoeuvre as he gives a potential three-dice block and the follow-up Frenzy too (although with the amount of Skavs in a small portion of the pitch, you can get three-dice blocks anyway). However your one-turn scoring attempt dies with a failed Wild Animal check or if you don't get a push on the blitz (as you can't Re-roll it) so be warned.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Paul Gegg is the very successful coach of the Skaven team, the Darkthunder Cheatahs. The Cheatahs, along with Paul, have appeared at nearly every Blood Bowl tournament in Europe and must hold some record for the most travelled team. Paul will be sharing his experiences of playing with a Skaven team in an upcoming issue of Fanatic Online.

This is all hypothetical, as although I know how to do it, and have attempted it many times, it's never actually worked for me. In fact, I've lost more than a few Runners on the GFIs or the dodges. But it will work one day. It will!

SUMMARY

Gutter Runners are just terrific players. Look after them and they'll look after you. You should think nothing of dodging most turns, picking up in an enemy tackle-zone or making the odd long pass. And they'll be successful most of the time too. But you will get the odd snake-eyes, in fact if you don't get one a game, you aren't doing enough dodging! Sometimes those snake-eyes will be harmless but more often than not, they turn what appears certain victory into spectacular defeat. Just get used to dramatic failure - it goes with the territory. Try and remember the jammy plays too and you'll always have fun with them.

You should find that over the course of a few games, your Touchdown difference is quite large. The problem being that your casualty difference is often just as big the other way. It really is a fine line between being beaten up and losing heavily and being beaten up but still winning. Hopefully this article will have given you some ideas to turn the former into the latter. Good luck and may the Horned Rat look kindly on your Kamikaze Blitzes.