

FALL SEASON HALFTIME REPORT

THE STATE OF YOUTH FOOTBALL PLAY CALLING

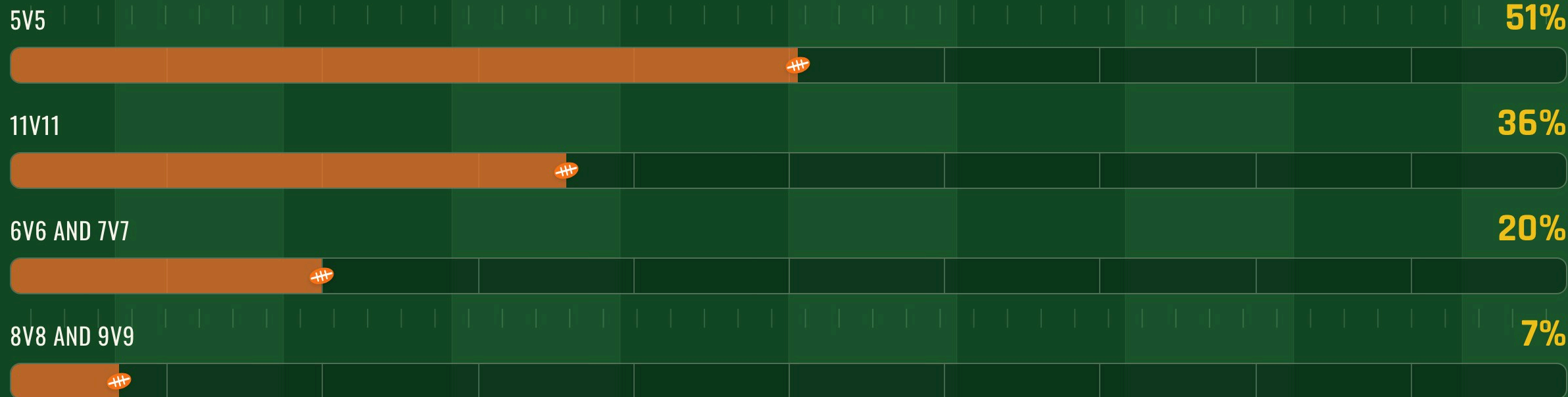
Halfway through the fall season, youth football coaches are drawing and leaning toward the following strategies: **Spread formation, Mesh play concepts and trick plays.**

BY COACH RAY CARROLL · PLAYS DRAWN AUG 1 TO OCT 9, 2026

THE STAT SHEET AT THE HALF

#1 FORMATION	Spread	The most-drawn formation in all four formats.
#1 PLAY	Mesh	13% of coaches drew it, more than any other play.
#1 ROUTE	Go	The most-drawn pass route at every level, flag to tackle.
PASS / RUN	69 / 31	The typical coach's split between pass plays and plays with a designed run.
ZONE DEFENSE	76%	Of the typical coach's defenses are zone, not man.
TRICK PLAYS	20%	Of coaches asked the AI for one. Only 8% asked how to beat a coverage.

THE BALL IS SPOTTED WHERE THE COACHES ARE

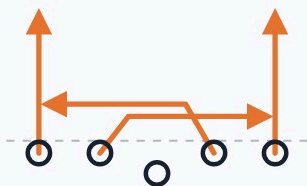


Share of coaches who drew in each format. Many coach more than one, so it adds up past 100.

THE PLAYS COACHES CALL MOST

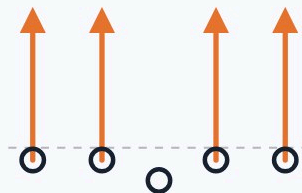
1 MESH

13%



2 FOUR VERTICALS

10%



3 FLOOD

6%



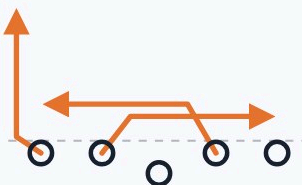
4 INSIDE ZONE

4%



5 MESH WHEEL

3%



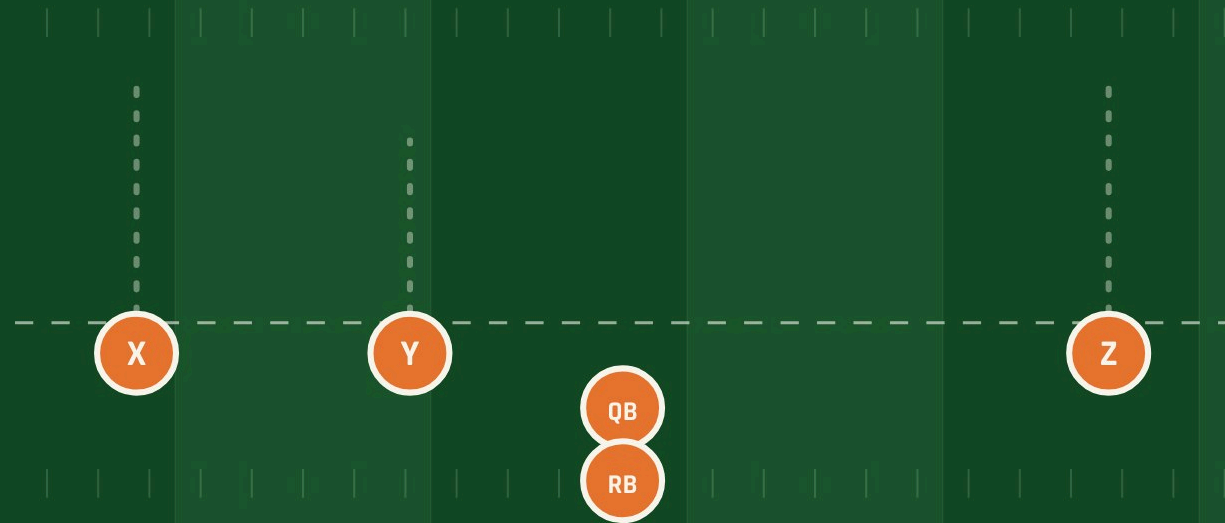
6 QUICK GAME

3%



Share of coaches who drew an offensive play naming the concept. Diagrams are our own illustrations of each concept.

EVERYBODY LINES UP IN SPREAD



5v5 Spread: two wide, a slot, quarterback and back. Spread is the most-drawn formation in all four formats, and Trips is second wherever enough coaches drew one to rank.

5V5

43%

of coaches drew Spread

#2 Trips · 23%

6V6 AND 7V7

75%

of coaches drew Spread

#2 Trips · 31%

8V8 AND 9V9

55%

of coaches drew Spread

11V11

27%

of coaches drew Spread

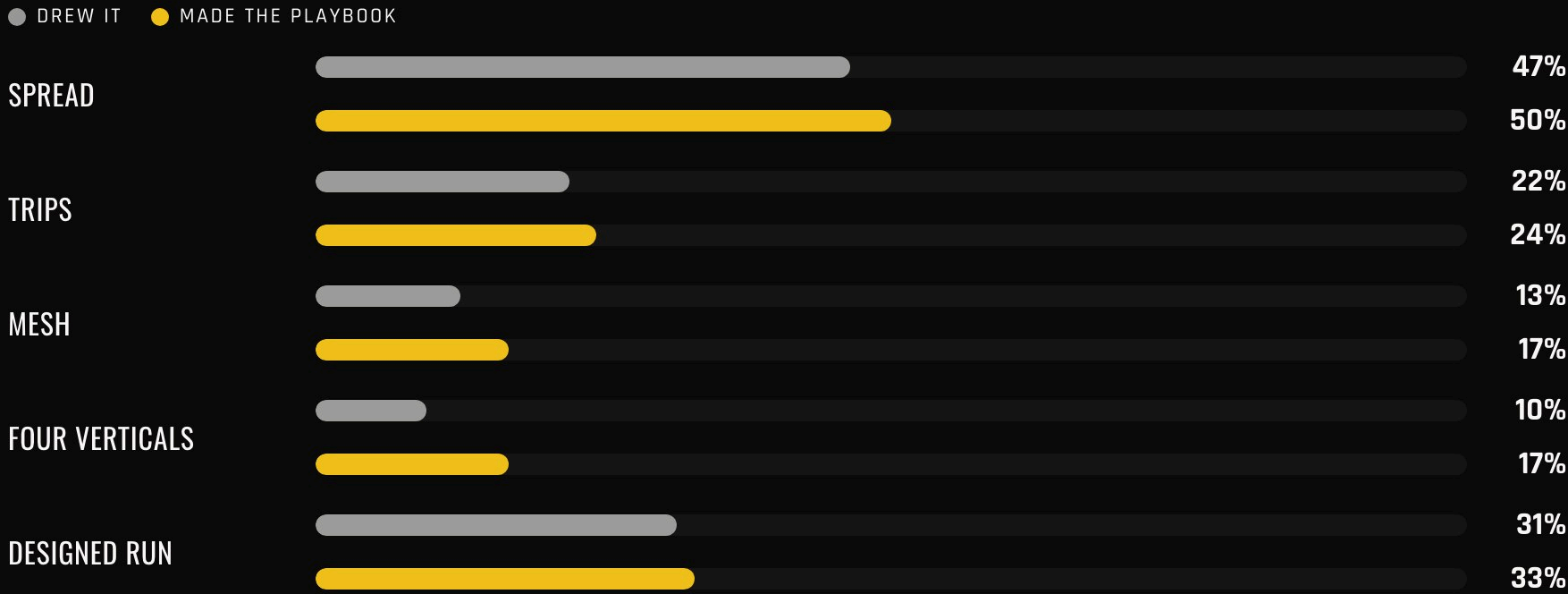
#2 Trips · 10%

WHAT MAKES THE PLAYBOOK

BUILT A TEAM PLAYBOOK

29%

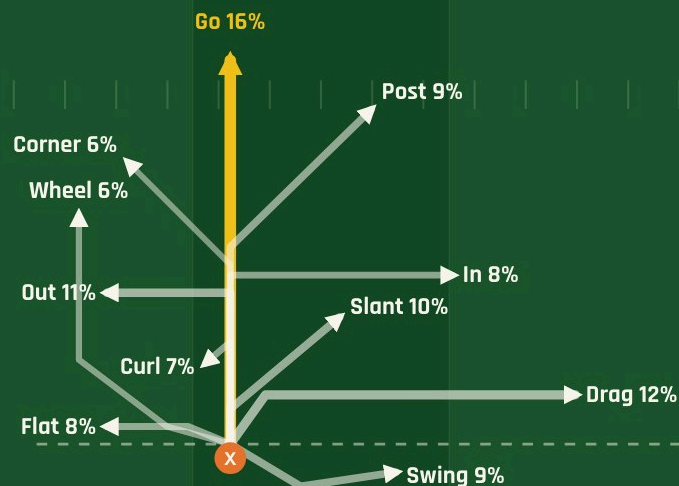
Coaches who moved plays they drew into a team playbook, our closest signal to a play that gets called on game day.



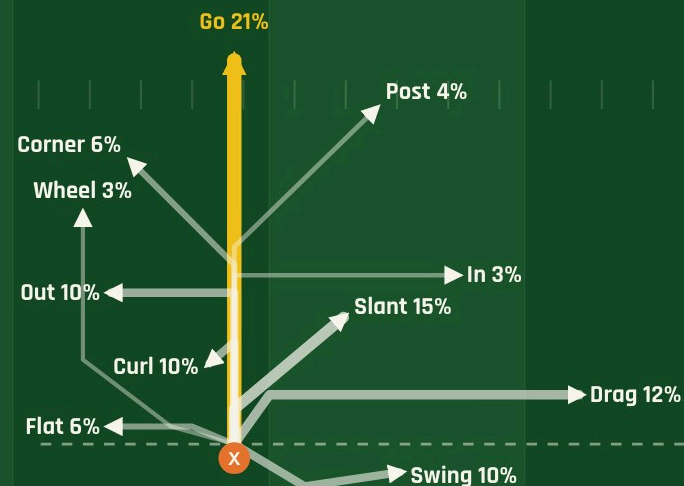
Formations and plays: share of coaches. Designed run: share of plays. Four Verticals makes the cut most.

COACHES THROW IT DEEP

5V5 FLAG

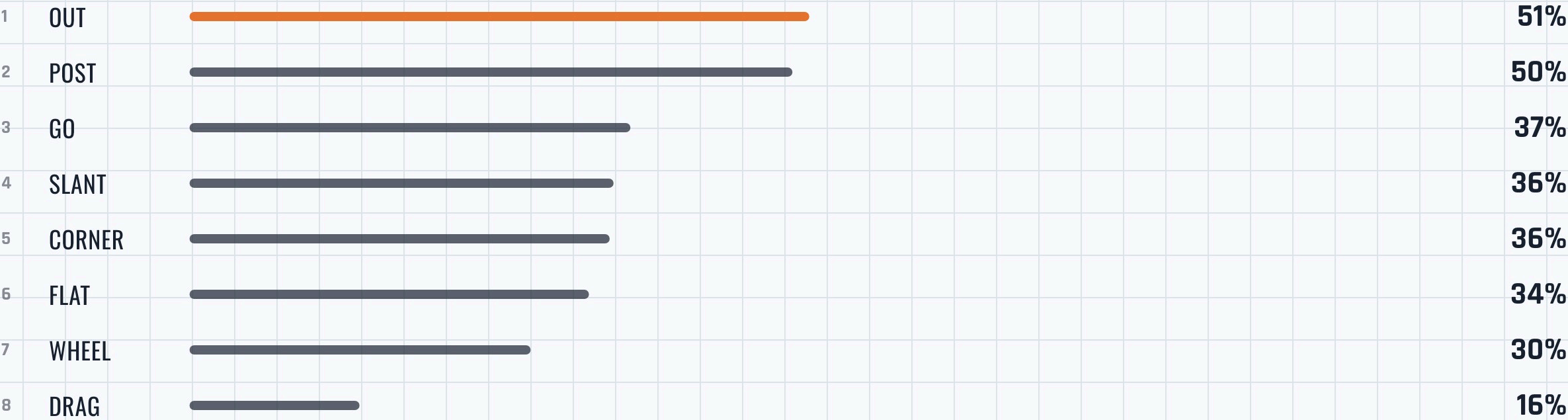


11V11 TACKLE



Each coach's pass routes by type, averaged across coaches. Thicker line, more often drawn. Gold is the most-drawn route.

THE ROUTES COACHES ASK THE AI FOR



Share of coaches whose requests named the route at least once. Outs and posts lead, ahead of the go route coaches draw most by hand.

FLAG VS TACKLE

	FLAG 5V5	7-ON-7 6V6 / 7V7	TACKLE 11V11
SPREAD FORMATION	43%	75%	27%
DESIGNED RUN	29%	20%	39%
PLAY-ACTION	10%	6%	7%
RPO	2%	1%	2%
#2 ROUTE	Drag	Drag	Slant

Share of the typical coach's plays. Gold marks each row's highest. Tackle runs the ball most; flag lives underneath.

76% OF DEFENSES ARE ZONE

DEEP ZONES
43%

15%
DEEP THIRD

13%
DEEP HALF

9%
DEEP MIDDLE

6%
DEEP QUARTER

UNDERNEATH
48%

22%
HOOK

10%
CURL-FLAT

9%
CURL

7%
FLAT

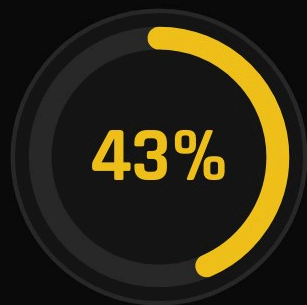
LINE OF SCRIMMAGE

43% DEEP + 48% UNDERNEATH + 9% OTHER = 100%

Where coaches put their zone defenders. Each box is that job's share of all the zone assignments coaches drew, so the field adds up to 100%. Wider box, more often assigned.

CALLING IT IN

HOW COACHES TALK TO THE AI



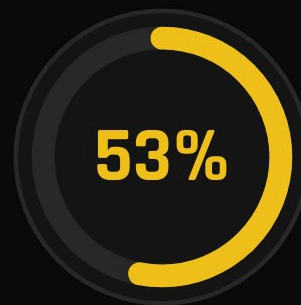
NAME A PLAYER

Requests that direct one player, like the slot on a wheel.



UNDER 40 CHARACTERS

A quick instruction, not a paragraph.



EDIT, DON'T CREATE

Change a play the coach already has.



ASKED FOR MOTION

Coaches who asked for motion or a jet.

AT THE HALF: TRICK PLAYS, NOT GAME PLANS

ASKED THE AI FOR A TRICK PLAY

20%

Reverses, fakes, laterals, something to confuse the defense.

ASKED TO BEAT A COVERAGE

8%

A play built for man, zone or a blitz.

ASKED FOR A SITUATION

6%

Red zone, goal line, third down.

Most coaches know the routes they like. Far fewer build a plan for the coverage they'll see Saturday. Start with beating man and beating zone.

THE FINE PRINT

COACHES, NOT PLAYS

Every figure is a share of coaches, so one prolific coach can't tilt a ranking.

10-COACH MINIMUM

Nothing is reported with fewer coaches behind it.

NO TEMPLATES

Staff accounts, our play library, copies of it and any diagram three or more coaches saved unchanged are excluded.

HAND-DRAWN ROUTES

Named by their shape: stem depth, break direction, climb or settle. Agrees with 87.5% of routes that carry a name.

PRIVATE BY DESIGN

Aggregated and de-identified. No coach is quoted and no coach's play is shown.

THE WINDOW

Plays drawn and AI requests made Aug 1 to Oct 9, 2026. "Made the playbook" means the coach added the play to a team playbook.

More detail on the [methodology page](#). Free to cite and reuse under [CC BY 4.0](#) with a link to this page. Data as [JSON](#).

DRAW A PLAYBOOK THAT DOESN'T LOOK LIKE EVERYONE ELSE'S

OPEN THE FREE PLAY DESIGNER

SEE IT LIVE: [RC-FOOTBALL.COM/RESEARCH](https://rc-football.com/research)



Cite as: RC Football, The State of Youth Football Play Calling: Fall Season Halftime Report, rc-football.com/research/youth-football-play-calling-halftime-report