

BLOOD BOWL

HIT EM HARD, AND HIT EM OFTEN

A GUIDE TO BLOCKING IN BLOOD BOWL

By Ian 'Double Skulls' Williams

Blocking is one of the fundamental elements of Blood Bowl, and, for many of the 'bashing' teams it is absolutely crucial to having a successful team. For many of the 'flair' teams it can be just as important to understand how your opponent may exploit your weaknesses. Get your blocks wrong and you won't win many games; get them right and victory will be yours. This guide is intended to help coaches get the most out of their blocking.

The first thing you need to do is to understand the strengths and weaknesses of your team and your opponent's. Try to block like Dwarfs when you are playing Halflings, and you'll probably lose, but going around blocking everything in sight, can lead to disaster too. As with everything in Blood Bowl, it's all down to balance.

SKILLS

The most important skill for blocking is Block. Block has 3 effects:

- It massively reduces the chances of you falling over when blocking. A 2 dice block without Block is 4 times more likely to fail than one with Block. Players who do the hitting need Block, otherwise they will burn team re-rolls and cause turnovers.
- It increases your chances of putting opponents on their backside. One extra pip on the dice doesn't sound much, but when rolling 2 dice it improves the chances of putting your opponent on the ground by 36%. That means more opponents off the pitch and more SPPs.
- Block stops you being put down by opponents that do have Block; this is why so many receivers take Block. It can also play havoc with an opponent's blitz, because he can't guarantee either knocking you down or pushing you back.



There are other skills that are important for blocking. Dodge and Tackle are important because they affect the amount of knock downs. At a later stage of development Pro can also help out.

The table on the right really shows how dangerous it can be to make 2 dice blocks if you don't have Block. One turnover in nine doesn't sound like much, but what happens if it's the 1st block of your turn and you haven't even thought about the ball? What if you don't have any re-rolls?

Attacker's Skills	Defender's Skills			
	None	Block	Dodge	Block/Dodge
None	56%	56%	31%	31%
Block	75%	56%	56%	31%
Pro	68%	68%	41%	41%
Block/Pro	84%	68%	68%	41%

Tackle isn't included because it negates Dodge - so just look at the appropriate defender column without Dodge.

Attacker Skills	3 dice	2 dice	1 dice	2 dice	3 dice
	Defender's Choice	Defender's Choice		Attacker's Choice	Attacker's Choice
None	70.4%	55.6%	33.3%	11.1%	3.7%
Block	42.1%	30.6%	16.7%	2.8%	0.5%
Pro	52.9%	39.5%	22.2%	4.9%	1.1%
Block/Pro	26.4%	18.5%	9.7%	0.9%	0.1%

STRENGTH

High Strength is important, but normally a skilled Strength 3 player is better at blocking than an unskilled Strength 4 player. An unskilled player making a 3 dice block has less chance of putting an unskilled opponent down than a 2 dice block with Block. On top of which the player with Block has a considerably lower chance of causing a turnover. Also a 1 dice block with Block on a player with Dodge has a better chance of knocking them down than a 2 dice block without Block.

ARMOUR

The difference between AV7 and AV8 doesn't sound like much but it equates to a 50% higher chance of having your armour broken. Similarly AV8 has 66% more armour breaks than AV9. High Armour really is vital if you are going to get hit. The combination of armour and skills actually mean that an AV7 player with Block or Dodge is still more likely to get hurt than an AV8 player without either.

ASSISTS

Make sure you understand who can give assists and who can't. Ending up making a 1 dice, or 2 dice opponent's choice block can be disastrous.

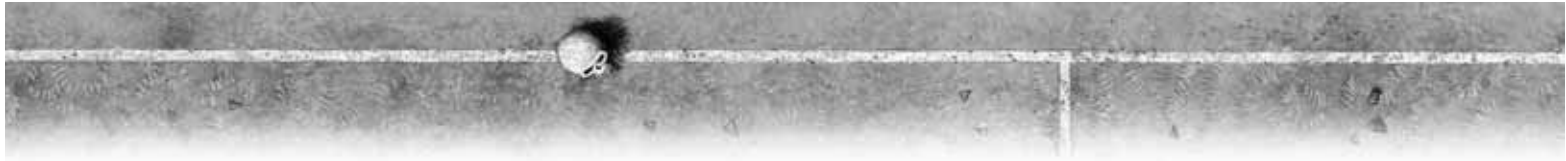
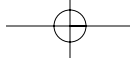
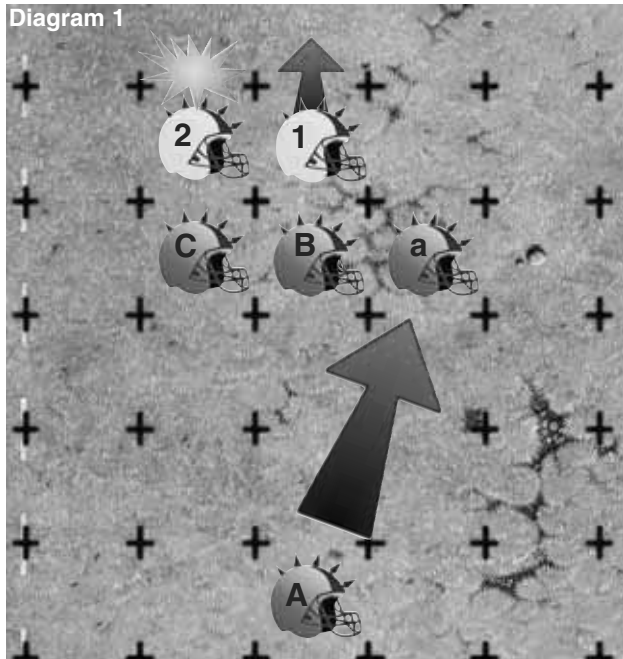


Diagram 1. In this example, neither B nor C can give an assist against No.1 or No.2. So unless you have higher Strength you can only make a 1 dice block. Player A moves forward, from A to a, to give an assist against No.1. Now B can block No.1 and then assist in C's block on No.2. If C were a Guard he could have given B an assist against either No.1 or No.2, and then B could return the favour. That would mean that A could be used elsewhere.



MAXIMISE THE NUMBER OF BLOCKS YOU MAKE

The easiest way to win the blocking war is to hit them more than they hit you. Want to knock that War Dancer into the back of beyond? Hit him as much as you can. The simple way to do this is to have as many players in contact with your opponent at the beginning of your turn. However, this isn't very useful if they are all outnumbered so make sure you have a reserve to commit.

Diagram 2. You can see below a simple example of how to maximise your blocks. If No.2 blocked No.16 and got a push back, then No.1 can't block him as he has to go backwards. However if No.1 makes the initial block, and only gets a push back, then he can follow and No.2 can make another block. So you've just doubled your chances of getting him down.

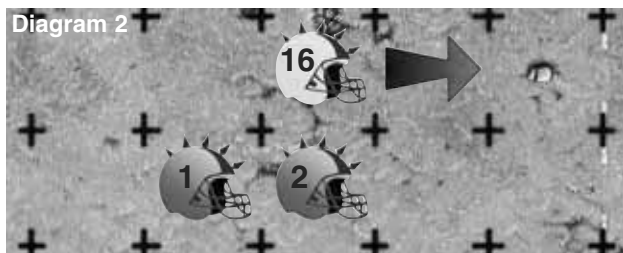


Diagram 3. In the next example No.3 isn't next to any opponent, so can't make a block, but if No.1 pushes No.16 sideways then No.3 can block him in addition to No.2 – this gives you 3 bites at the cherry, as well as potentially allowing you to make a block with a player who previously couldn't.

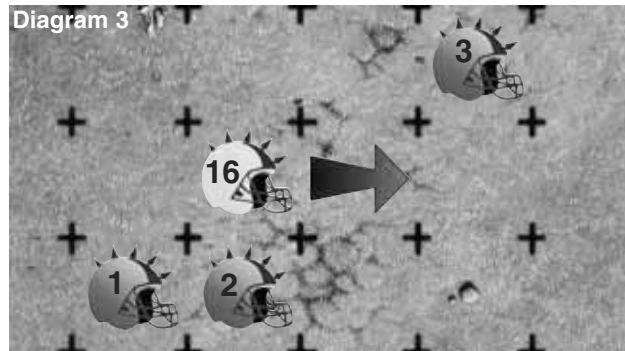
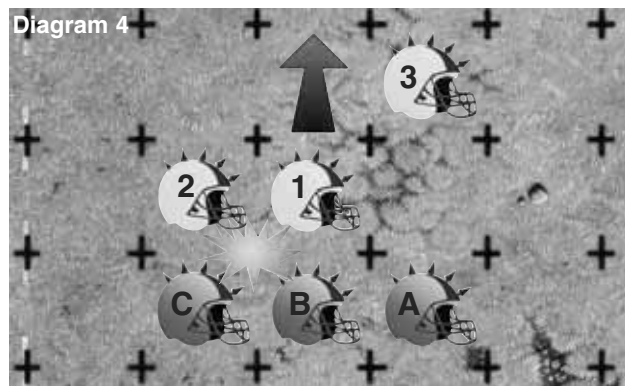


Diagram 4. Below, if B blocks No.1 then he can't follow up as he will no longer be able to assist as he will be adjacent to No.3. So, by not following up, you are still ensuring that C can block, without having to bring an extra player in to give an assist.



Always watch out for the bigger opponents...

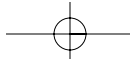


Diagram 5. Use secondary push backs to get extra blocks. A is prone, having been knocked over last turn. B now blocks No.1. As all 3 squares behind No.1 are occupied you can choose which one to push No.1 into. Make the secondary push back into A. A now stands up and D gets to block No.1 with an assist. If he only gets a push then C gets another chance to hit No.1 too. Secondary push backs can be very useful if you are in a crowd, both for freeing your own players and for putting opponents into a vulnerable square.

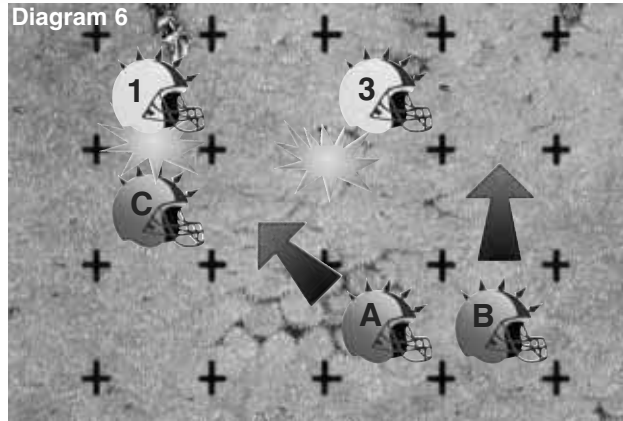
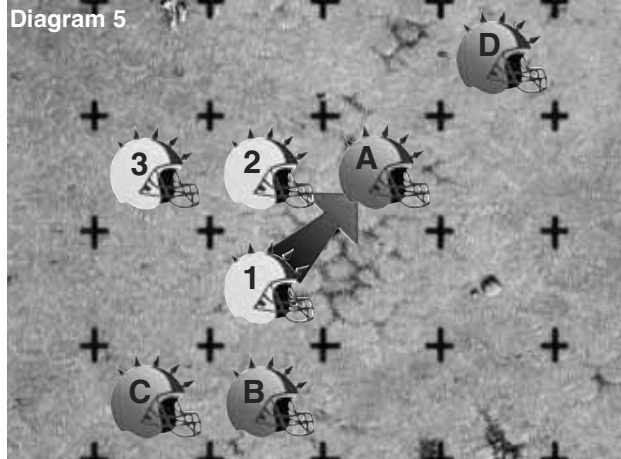


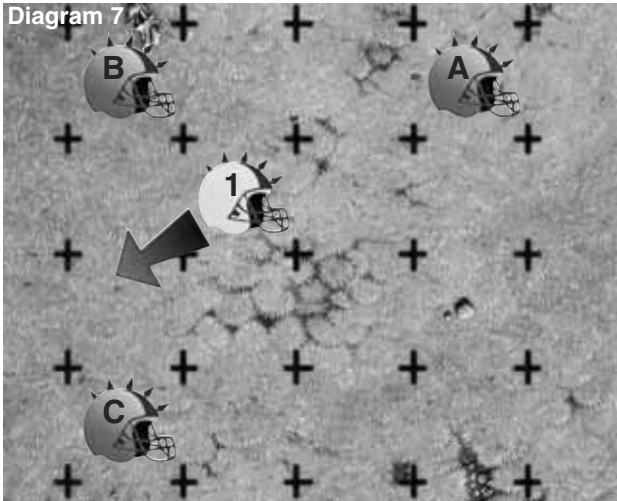
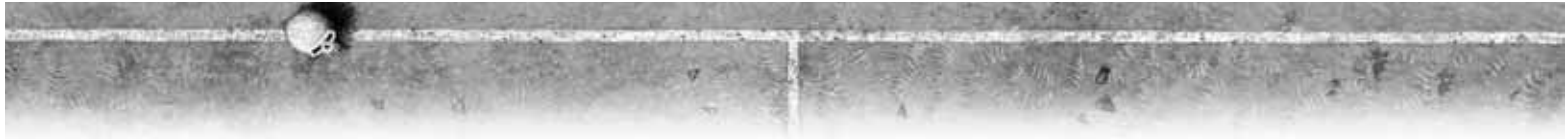
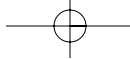
Diagram 6. Use your blitzes to get extra assists. In this example C can only get a 1 dice block on No.1. So B moves up to No.3, who A then blitzes, but A finishes his blitz move next to No.1, allowing C to make a 2 dice block.

Diagram 7. Sometimes you can blitz, and then ensure that another player will have a chance of blocking the opponent if you only managed a push back. In the diagram on the next page B starts prone. He stands up, A comes in for the blitz and pushes No.1 next to C, so that C can now get a second block against No.1.



*****Did you know...**

The worst tackle on record happened in 2488 when six players from *Khain's Killers* tried to bring down Elfheim Eagle Star Thrower, Valen Swift, once and for all. As Khain's men piled on the seemingly helpless captain, a stunned Elfheim crowd held its breath. Long moments passed as the refs pulled apart the bodies, but when the dust cleared, the Elf was still standing. Swift protest to this day that rumours that it was only a projection of him are untrue!



HIT THEM BEFORE THEY HIT YOU

What you want to do is ensure that those players you want to be blocking with are next to an opponent at the beginning of your turn. Now moving all your players to man mark the opposing team is normally a good way to ensure that you get knocked into the back of beyond. Sometimes it can be a brilliant idea against teams that are outnumbered or hopeless at blocking.

Some teams (eg. Dwarfs) can risk putting a lot of their players next to opponents at the end of their turn. High Armour, Block on most players and probably some useful skills, like Guard and Stand Firm, can cause opponents all sorts of problems in their own turn. Most teams are not as tough as Dwarfs, but still need to make their blocks count. Norse are the perfect example of this. Having every player start with Block makes them very effective when blocking, but AV7 means getting hit hurts.

Some teams, notably tree-hugging Wood Elves, are so fragile that they need to avoid any contact at all. Very often they will try to stand off, so that you can't hit them. So, how do you drag your opponent into your blocks and avoid getting hit back?



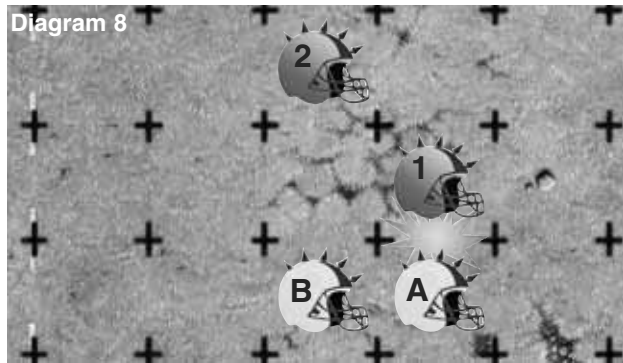
Even stronger players will not be able to open the way if you manage to cage 'em.

FOLLOW UPS

First of all you can follow up when you knock opponents down. Against average or low AG opponents this is quite an effective way of tying them down. Against high AG players they may well just dodge away, but at least you are forcing them to roll dice.



Diagram 8. In the example below A knocks over No.1. Should he follow? If No.2 is also prone, yes. That way both those players are tied up and neither can make a Block action. If No.2 is not prone then the question becomes more difficult as you are giving your opponent the opportunity to block you back. If A has higher Strength then often it will be a good idea to follow up, as not only will No.1 have to stand up but at least one other player will have to be thrown in to get a 2 dice block against you. Saying that, if No.2 has Block and you don't it is more debatable.



If you have the same Strength then you ought to expect to have a 2 dice block against you. Normally that means you either have some other reason for tying those players up, or are well protected against getting hurt (Block, Dodge and/or high Armour). Also you need to consider what happens if A does follow, and gets blocked. Will your opponent follow up and give B a chance of blocking him next turn? This can be a good way to bring the battle to you – sacrifice a few linemen to get the opponent where you want him.

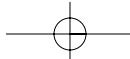
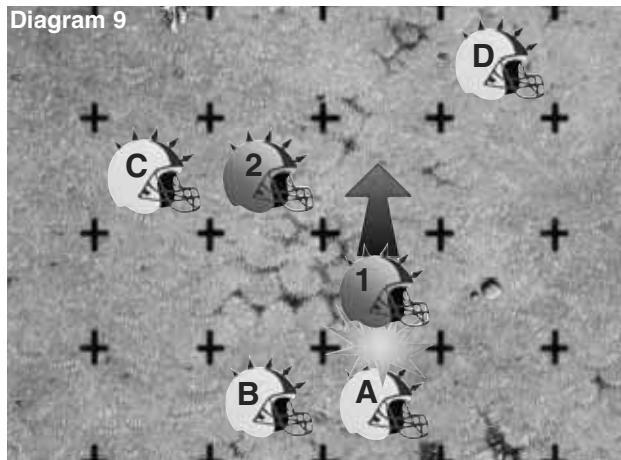


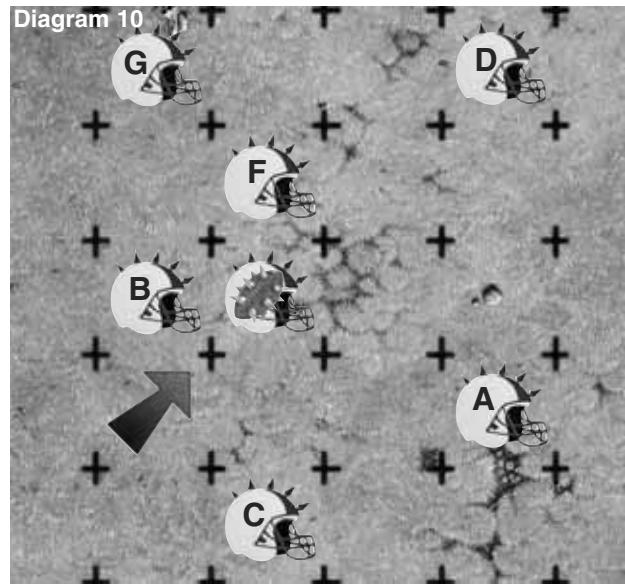
Diagram 9. In this example, because you have No.1 and No.2 surrounded there is little risk associated with following up – and next turn you ought to be able to block both of them. You could choose to follow up with A, safe in the knowledge that No.1 is now pinned by D and doesn't have any easy dodges out. Normally this sort of situation will only occur if you've already managed to remove a few opponents from the pitch.



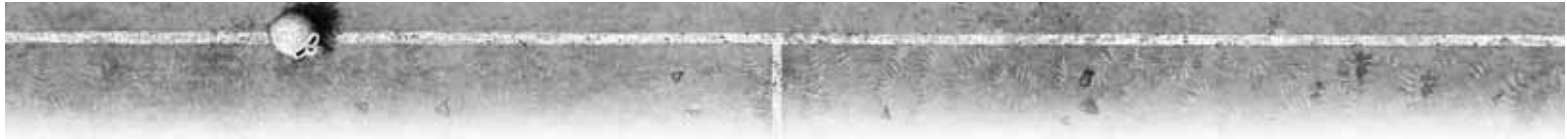
SUCKING THE OPPONENT IN

If you are up against some pansy Elf, or other cowardly opponent who doesn't want to get stuck in, then sometimes you have to lure them on to you. On offence this normally means giving them a chance of blitzing the ball carrier. Make no mistake that this is a risky play, some lucky blocks, and a bad scatter, can result in you getting turned over and having the ignominy of being scored against.

Diagram 10. In the next example the ball carrier is vulnerable to being hit from the direction of the arrow. To get a 1 dice block your opponent will have to mark B and C. If the ball carrier does get hit then he can only be pushed into the empty squares to the right – so even if the ball pops loose it's very likely to remain in at least one of your player's tackle zone – and probably inside the cage. With your opponent's blitz used he may try to swamp the players around the ball with additional tackle zones to make your next turn harder – so hopefully you've managed to suck in a sizeable proportion of his team. I would not recommend this sort of play if you haven't got any team re-rolls left.



The Ogre's 'sucker in' the Elves, as explained on diagram 10.



PUSHING OPPONENTS OUT OF BOUNDS

One extremely effective method of establishing numerical superiority is to push opponents out of bounds. Not only do you leave your opponent with one less player for this drive, but you've got a good chance of keeping the player off on future drives too. However, most coaches are aware of this and will avoid placing players on the side lines, for obvious reasons.

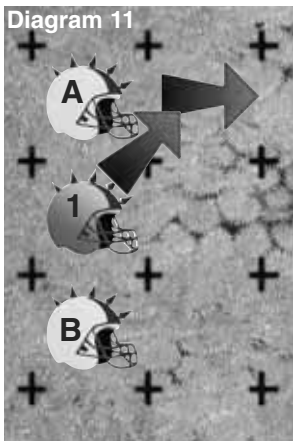
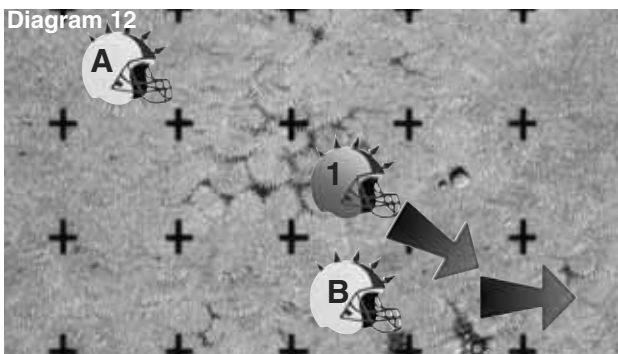


Diagram 11. To the left you can see how an opponent a square away from the sidelines can still be pushed out of bounds, without having to use a blitz.

Diagram 12. Here you can see how a blitz can be used to move an opponent out of bounds by using your blitz. A blitzes No.1 so that he is to the right of B, who then blocks in turn. Obviously you

can combine these two examples to get opponents out of bounds that are at first glance safe. You should also consider how secondary push backs can be used to push opponents out of bounds, or a least put them in a position where they are vulnerable.

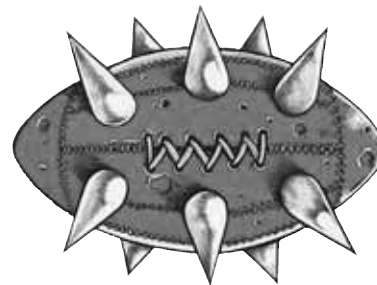


"Oi! Get back on this pitch!"

There are some skills that help enormously when pushing players out of bounds. Obviously Frenzy is very useful; that 2nd block means far more players are vulnerable to the blitz. Remember that Frenzy forces you to always follow up (even if the opponent is knocked down) so you have to be careful, or you'll find yourself pushed out in turn.

Stand Firm and Side Step effectively make players immune to being pushed out of bounds. Many coaches will try to ensure that vulnerable players have these skills. It also makes those skills extremely useful on players with Frenzy!

One tactic often adopted by 'strength' teams is to run their cage down one side of the pitch – this often opens up opportunities to push opposition players out of bounds.



MAKE YOUR BLOCKS COUNT

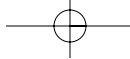
"Hit the player you are most likely to injure, with the highest value to your opponent."

Against most teams you'll find their players have different Armour, some will have Block, some Dodge, others Stunty. Ensure you hit the targets that are most likely to hurt your opponent, for example:

- If you have a choice between blocking a Zombie (AV8) or a Skeleton (AV7), always hit the Skeleton. They are of equal value, but the Skeleton is an easier target.
- Between an unskilled Human lineman and thrower, always hit the thrower. His loss will hurt your opponent more, and you are just as likely to flatten him.
- If there is a Ghoul with Dodge and one with Block & Dodge, always hit the one with just Dodge if you have Block, otherwise hit the higher value Block & Dodge one.

By reducing the numbers of the more vulnerable players you will be more able to gang up on the tougher ones.





“Make your skills work for you.”

If you have players with skills like Mighty Blow or Piling On try to ensure they have the maximum chance of putting their opponent down, otherwise they’ll never get a chance to break armour. Another tactic is to leave them behind another one of your players who is going to get hit in your opponent’s next turn. Then, if your opponent follows up, they will be able to make the block, instead of a player who doesn’t have the extra skill.

Beware of over committing your “tackler”. If your tacklers are outnumbered by opposing dodgers, be sure not to fall into the trap of sending him off after one dodger who (get him or not) leaves your tackler out of position to attack the other tacklers.

“Maximise your blocking dice.”

Strength 5 players need 2 assists against S3 to make a 3 dice block. Not only does this increase the chances of you putting the opponent down but it also cuts the chances of you going down yourself. Don’t forget that S4 players only need 1 assist to get 3 dice against S2 players, or 3 assists for 3 dice against S3 players; Guard can help a lot with getting those assists! But don’t go mad – overcommitting players to one block may leave your team out of position, or you may miss out on opportunities to get 2 dice blocks elsewhere. Don’t necessarily be tempted to 1 dice block with Block at the end of a turn, simply for something to do. Often you will end up in a worse position than you would had you never made the block. A late “skull” in a turn can turn a really tough-looking situation for your opponent into a very simple play. Don’t make your opponent’s job easier.

CONCLUSION

Games of Blood Bowl are won and lost by the number of touchdowns scored, not the number of casualties. If you emphasise the blood in Blood Bowl too much, you might win on casualties but you will lose the game. Never lose sight of the fact that you must out-score your opponent. If you’ve got no re-rolls and it’s the last turn of the half, there aren’t many occasions where you should block before scoring.

Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of your team is crucial to making effective blocks. Combine that with a good use of push backs and follow ups and you can pulverise your opponent. Effective blocking can open up the route for you to score more easily, and frustrate your opponent when you are defending. Don’t forget to thank Nuffle for the skulls!



Author	<i>Ian Williams is known as ‘Double Skulls’ online and is a prominent member of the online Blood Bowl community as well as being a veteran coach.</i>
Further Information	<i>The Blood Bowl boxed set is widely available from Games Workshop and GW Direct (See the How to Order pages). Ever thought about joining the NAF? The NAF is a independant and international organisation that supports Blood Bowl coaches.</i>
Website	<i>www.BloodBowl.com & (NAF website) www.BloodBowl.net</i>



‘Da Putrids player, Buurb’abal Plagueboots, leaves a trail of destruction in his wake.

