

HUMAN PLAYBOOK

by David Candlish

With the release of the new Human team David Candlish thought it would be prudent to write up a team Playbook. Read his words of wisdom.



Blood Bowl is played across the entire Old World with hundreds of teams from all races fighting for glory, but by far the most common race playing Blood Bowl today are the ubiquitous Humans. There is something about Blood Bowl that stirs the soul of the average man or woman and they apply in droves to join teams across the length and breadth of the Empire. Whereas many Elves sneer down their noses at the thought of wrestling in the mud, and most Orcs are too busy fighting in one of their countless inter-clan feuds, to the average peasant or commoner Blood Bowl represents a break from the tedium that is their day-to-day life. Although the vast majority soon realise that they are not cut out for the fast-paced and gruelling life of a modern Blood Bowl superstar this still doesn't stop them from creating teams and leagues across the land.

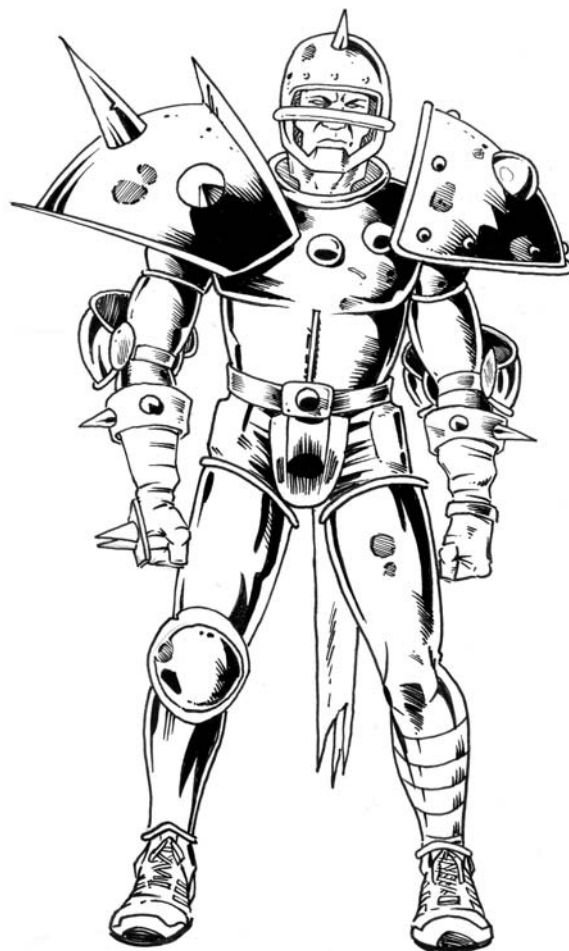
By and large, most Human players are decidedly average at the sport when compared to the players of other races. Every so often though, a Human star player comes along and makes people sit up and take notice – household names like the 'Mighty' Zug and of course Griff Oberwald spring to mind, with more recent on-pitch sensations such as Zara the Slayer and the superb young catcher Diego 'The Hand of Sigmar' de Mardona (currently playing for last year's Blood Bowl winners the Flatlined Annihilators). With Human teams, such as the Reikland Reavers and the Marauders, having won numerous major trophies over the years it is hard to deny that Human teams have a natural affinity for the game and as long as the burning enthusiasm for the game is in their heart, Human teams and their coaches will continue to enjoy success at Blood Bowl.

Introduction & Basic Principles

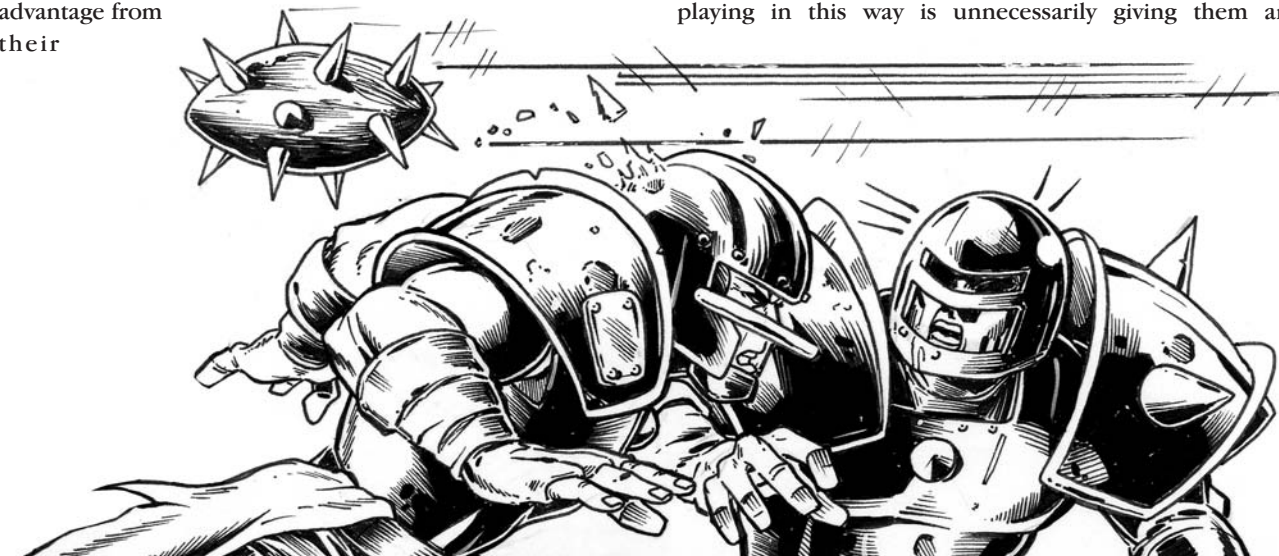
It's been a long time since a Human playbook article has been published and the tactics for this race have changed somewhat from Robin Dews' article way back in White Dwarf 177! As well as rules changes, the calibre of Blood Bowl coaches in general has improved meaning that common Human tactics are now outdated. What the Human coaches out there need is an up-to-date guide with advice appropriate to the current Living Rulebook that applies to both League and Tournament play.

Whether you're a Human coach looking for a few new tricks or you simply want to make sure you're ahead of the game for the next time you face a Human team, this article should hopefully have something for everyone.

It has said many times before, but Humans really are the most adaptable team in Blood Bowl. Many people think this versatility is only really useful to teach beginners the basic tenets of the game and that Humans should be dropped for one of the more specialised races as soon as possible, but this isn't true. Humans are an underestimated force. Although other teams such as Dark or High Elves appear to have a similar aptitude, their natural agility automatically makes them better at the



finesse game and most Elven teams develop down this route. Also, the high cost of Elven players dictates a style of play that requires caution and prudence when deciding how best to use your costly Witch Elf or Dragon Warrior. The Human coach has less to worry about in this regard which leaves them free to concentrate on the game in hand rather than worry about the safety of their players. All teams have their 'bogey' teams that they find hard to beat (Amazons vs. Dwarfs being the most obvious example), but generally speaking most races have some trouble facing Humans as often they are simply undecided as to how to best approach them. A good Human coach is one that can take real advantage from their



opponent's inherent weaknesses and the adaptable nature of the Human team is crucial to this. When faced with a bashing team, such as Chaos or Dwarfs, let them chase the ball and try to pull them out of position. Against Finesse teams, grind your way up the pitch and kill as many players as possible. Simple, logical advice, but it is hard to implement properly and it takes a skilled coach indeed to know how to play (and how NOT to play) against every different race in the game. Most other races will use the exact same strategy against everyone they face so the challenge and enjoyment of using a Human team comes when you learn how to face and defeat that tactic. It's hard, but rewarding.

As at ease with the bashing game as they may be, their lack of Strength or optimised blocking skills means they will only win a protracted fight against Agile teams. When faced with teams that relish the prospect of all-out war on the line of scrimmage it's best to tie them up with a few players you are less worried about losing (such as those who have picked up niggling injuries) and then proceed to outmanoeuvre them elsewhere. You will need to use your superior speed to avoid damage and disrupt their attacking plan. Using a similar philosophy, it is foolish to attempt to outrun Fast teams, so concentrate your strength and make them play on your terms. While this may seem like it is stating the obvious, many people assume that because Humans can do a little of everything they can excel at everything.

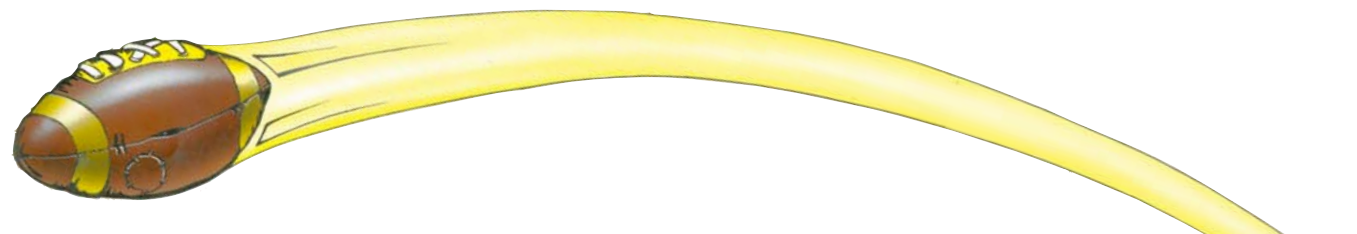
While you are focusing on the weaknesses of your opponent it is vital you don't allow them to dictate the match by maximising their own strengths. For example, I've known numerous coaches who are happy to let a Skaven team score quickly so they can then attempt their own two-turn touchdown after the kick-off. This is a mistake as a Skaven team is much more likely to consistently score in two turns than a Human team, so playing in this way is unnecessarily giving them an

advantage. Although it is unavoidable that you will be put in situations that favour the other team's style of play, by using your combination of speed, strength and agility you can put as much pressure on the ball carrier as possible in an effort to disrupt their plan. Once a coach is forced to think outside their habitual game plan they're more likely to make mistakes.

Ultimately, the trick to winning with Humans is recognising that whereas other 'balance' teams like Dark Elves or High Elves can rely on any of their players to pull off desperate long bombs or vital

dodges, Human coaches need to make sure they have the right player in the right place at the right time or they run the risk of burning re-rolls needlessly. It takes time and practice to realise how best to use and position your players to get the most out of them, but once it 'clicks' you'll find your game improves by a huge amount.

With these basic ideas in mind, and after a little practice, you can approach a game with some confidence knowing that you can both anticipate the strategy adopted by any given team and know how best to neutralise it. Good luck!

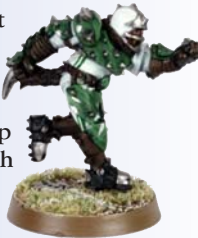


BLITZERS				90,000 gc
MA	ST	AG	AV	
7	3	3	8	

Starting Skills: Block.

Although the most expensive Human player, weighing in at 90,000gc, Blitzers are an essential part of any Human Blood Bowl roster and no team should be without a solid block of four Blitzers at its heart. With a movement of 7 and the Block skill they are useful defenders, good for plugging gaps and blitzing ball carriers, but as well as this they are also fearsome attacking players, especially when used in pairs to cover each other. Their natural scoring and blocking abilities often see them develop quickly, although this can sometimes be at the expense of other players, particularly Linemen. With access to General and Strength skills they can be fine-tuned into ferocious blockers or with the occasional double roll they can be given skills that develop them into highly prolific scorers.

Suggested Skills: Tackle, Strip Ball, (Stand Firm), (Dodge), Guard, Mighty Blow.
Pros: Fast, start with Block, up to four allowed on roster.
Cons: Cost can make them tricky to replace.




THROWERS				70,000 gc
MA	ST	AG	AV	
6	3	3	8	

Starting Skills: Pass, Sure Hands

Rounding off the list of Human specialist players is the Thrower. Although his stat line is identical to that of the Lineman, his skills more than outweigh his higher price and every team should start with at least one. His Sure Hands skill is simply essential to any Human offensive play as without them far too many re-rolls would be burned in simply picking up the ball. His Pass skill makes him a threat even when he is fairly deep within his own half, especially when the opposition has to deal with Catchers waiting for the ball. While it seems natural to always give him Accurate as his first skill, I've found that by giving him Block he becomes a much more versatile player for two different reasons. First of all, with Block he can act in unison with a defensive Blitzer to turnover the opposing ball carrier then recover the ball using Sure Hands to move it back up field. Second, with Block and Sure Hands he is effectively immune to 'Strip Ballers' (especially annoying Wardancers that have the habit of bouncing around your backfield). This means that not only does your opponent have to worry about marking your Catchers but he also has to be wary of a Blitzer-guarded Thrower running up the field.

Suggested Skills: Block, Accurate, (Leader), (Frenzy), Hail Mary Pass.
Pros: Useful skills, superb player after only a few upgrades.
Cons: Often a target, can be tricky to gain SPPs with passing alone.

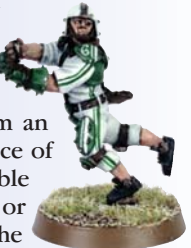


CATCHERS				70,000 gc
MA	ST	AG	AV	
8	2	3	7	

Starting Skills: Catch, Dodge.

Despite the unavoidable fact that as a Human coach many people will point and chuckle at the low ST and AV of your Catchers, they soon stop laughing when you have two of them deep in their half of the pitch waiting for a touchdown pass. Granted, their poor Strength and Armour makes them prime and easy targets, but the Dodge skill increases their survivability no end and once they gain the Block skill they become a real force to be reckoned with. Their relatively low cost makes them an essential purchase and easily replaceable, and although I would not advise buying your full allowance of four Catchers from the outset, having at least two of these versatile players is a must for any respectable Human coach. Many people tend to use them as an extra assist to get a 2-dice block in critical areas or for those desperate backfield defensive efforts. Both these tactics are viable but are not really using the Catchers to their full ability. The trick to getting the most out of these players is to laugh in the face of the vulnerability and throw them deep into enemy territory. Most coaches will then task at least two players to defend each Catcher, drawing strength away from other areas of the pitch. Although one or both of your Catchers may take a beating, more often than not they stay on the pitch, having distracted the defence long enough for your Blitzers to have smashed some heads and be launching an attack of their own. The worst mistake you can make with these guys is to be scared of using them!

Suggested Skills/Traits: Block, Side Step, Sure Feet, (Jump Up), Sure Hands, (Nerves of Steel).
Pros: Very fast, agile & skilled.
Cons: Prime target, low ST & AV.

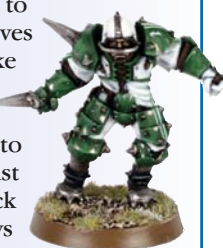


LINEMEN				50,000 gc
MA	ST	AG	AV	
6	3	3	8	

Starting Skills: None.

Average in every respect, your Linemen are the cheap cannon-fodder you inevitably use to stand up to those Black Orcs and Ogres while your Catchers and Blitzers are making a nuisance of themselves elsewhere. While it's all too easy to treat them as throwaway players, in the long term this is a mistake as the ultimate success of your team relies on having skills and strength across the board, rather than clustered on a handful of players. If you work on the principle that while the positional players keep your team going in the early stages of a league, you can invest in advancing your Linemen to guarantee success in the future. However, if there is a dirty job to be done (like a 1/2 dice block against a Troll or a 3 player foul) then that unskilled Lineman is your man! Although generally speaking Block is the best skill to give a rookie Lineman, if you roll a double then Leader, Kick or Guard are always useful provided you then take care of your investment!

Suggested Skills (Traits): Block, (Leader), Kick, (Guard), Dirty Player.
Pros: Cheap.
Cons: Limited skill choices, easy to overlook in favour of Blitzers & Catchers.




OGRE				120,000 gc
MA	ST	AG	AV	
5	5	2	9	

Starting Skills: Mighty Blow, Thick Skull, Bonehead, Big Guy.

This Big Guy should always be considered a luxury rather than a necessity. While the idea of Strength 5 and Mighty Blow is tempting, their sheer cost and the eternally frustrating Bonehead mean Ogres should be bought if the circumstances allow rather than depending on them as a core player. That said, once an Ogre has Block, and better still Block and Frenzy, they soon become a nightmare for the opposition to deal with and will rapidly pay for themselves time and again. Look to buy one after your fifth or sixth league match, but don't even think about them in a tournament unless it's a TR110 occasion.

Suggested Skills: Block, (Frenzy), (Leader), Guard, (Stand Firm).
Pros: Strong, intimidating.
Cons: Expensive, Bonehead.





League Play & Long Term Development

There are many different ways of playing a Human team so ultimately your choice of roster will depend on your favoured playing style. However, I advise the roster below as it maximises skills in the short term while still having scope for future development.

4 Blitzers	360,000
2 Catchers	140,000
1 Thrower	70,000
4 Linemen	200,000
3 Re-Rolls	150,000
8 Fan Factor	80,000

Unless you permanently lose a player early on, your first purchase absolutely must be an Apothecary. Common sense it may be, but far too many people go for an extra Lineman or save for an Ogre only to realise the error of their ways once they lose a Catcher or Blitzler. After this, another Lineman or Thrower should be top of your shopping list, with an Ogre to follow that if your winnings permit. As is always the case for a league, you should try to start with as high a Fan Factor as possible to give you the winnings needed to enhance your squad. Although tempting to start with an extra Lineman and only 3 Fan Factor, this short-sighted approach is lacking and you will pay the price after a couple of matches. Don't bother going for extra re-rolls until you have at least thirteen fit and able players on your squad, and once you have four Team re-rolls and a Leader re-roll you should probably switch focus back onto buying players or Wizards if your league allows them. Finally, Cheerleaders and Assistant Coaches are usually so far down your list of priorities they should not even be considered until you've played about a dozen matches. Although the idea of buying a couple of each to win rolls on the Kick-Off table seems logical, the reality is that they are used so infrequently as to be essentially useless, especially when compared to a Lineman that can be used in every turn of every match.

During a match you should always be aware that your long term success depends on your Linemen gaining skills and because of this you should always take the chance to enable them to score or inflict a casualty should the situation present itself. This shouldn't be at the expense of winning the match, naturally, but your Blitzers and Catchers will gain SPPs at a faster rate without having to try too hard. At first this is a daunting proposition, but when a few Linemen have picked up MVPs or the odd CAS here and there it does get easier. When choosing your skills you should try to keep the innate flexibility of the Human team in mind and resist the urge to specialise too much. By this I mean avoid giving all your Linemen Block, your Throwers all Accurate, etc, and try to aim for a situation where many of your players can perform as many roles as possible. If you wanted a team that excelled in blocking then you should have picked a different race, and the same holds true for passing or running based teams. Humans only work if your team can exploit the weaknesses of your opponent and by specialising too much in one area you will inevitably suffer in another. That said, keep things in context – don't go giving your Catchers Mighty Blow on a double on the basis it would make them better blockers!

Humans & Tournament Play

The majority of tournaments are either TR100 or TR110 events, but whereas other teams simply use the extra cash to buy a twelfth player, the Human roster does have a couple of difference approaches for each type that are worth addressing. For skill progression and development I will focus on the overwhelmingly common "one skill after each match" format used by the vast majority of tournaments as well as the absence of long-term injuries between matches.

TR100 Tournaments

The optimum roster for Team Rating 100 tournaments is very similar to that of a league but is tweaked slightly to

take advantage of the fact that immediate team strength is more important than the long-term prospects of the squad.

4 Blitzers	360,000
2 Catchers	140,000
1 Thrower	70,000
5 Linemen	250,000
3 Re-Rolls	150,000
3 Fan Factor	30,000

By switching Fan Factor for an extra Lineman you have that little extra strength in depth that is so vital in tournaments. Although some people swear by using a high Fan Factor to be sure of winning every Kick Off roll, this seems like a foolish tactic if it results in a weakened force on the pitch – although Kick Off rolls do sometimes win the match for you, these occasions occur infrequently and basing your entire tournament strategy around them seems foolish in the extreme. You may argue then that you could upgrade a Lineman to a Thrower and stick with Fan Factor 1, but in my experience most other tournament rosters usually end up with about 3 Fan Factor naturally, so keeping a Fan Factor of 3 avoids gifting your opponent with cheap re-rolls and is vastly different from having a game plan that revolves entirely around winning Kick Off rolls.

Another common alternative is to drop a Lineman and take an Apothecary, or even trade in a re-roll. Considering the latter option first, unless you get a kick out of flying by the seat of your pants when the re-rolls have run out I advise sticking with at least three re-rolls. Whether or not you swap your Lineman is down to personal preference although I find the sight of a definite substitute more reassuring, even if the alternative could mean saving a 90,000gc player.

When choosing skills for my players I find that even if the order I allocate them varies, the underlying skills chosen do not alter much from tournament to tournament. Given below are the choices that I've found to be most efficient to date, although I do try to tweak them in each tournament I take part in.

Blitzer 1	Strip Ball
Blitzer 2	Strip Ball
Thrower	Block
Blitzer 3	Tackle
Blitzer 4	Tackle

Although this leaves the Catchers without Block, it significantly boosts the defensive strength of the team. Since Humans are naturally capable on the offence, increasing the rate of opposing turnovers is a major priority. With Strip Ball/Tackle on one player, your opponent is obliged to tweak their attack plan slightly, but it can be reasonably easy to pin these players and move down the opposite wing. With more than one player with these skills it then becomes a veritable nightmare – even if they break free down one wing they're faced with the

prospect of losing the ball to your defensive Strip Ball/Tackle Blitzers.

Giving the Thrower Block is the one concession to attacking play, vastly increasing his immunity to those players who seek to turnover the ball deep in your own half. As discussed earlier, this gives you the option to perform a grinding play up the field – a tactic that is particularly effective against low AV teams. If you'd rather adopt the "we'll score one more than you" approach then you could substitute Block on both Catchers for one each of the Strip Ball/Tackle Blitzers, but in all honesty if you like to play that way you should be using a Skaven or Wood Elf team. Besides, as any experienced coach will tell you... games are won and lost by a team's defence.

TR110 Tournaments

A TR110 tournament is simply a tournament that allows 1,100,000gc with which to create your team as opposed to the regular 1,000,000 TR100 alternative. There have been a number of discussions at www.TalkBloodBowl.com and

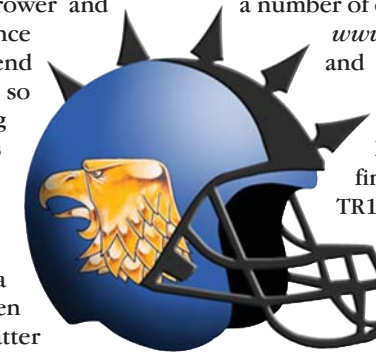
www.BloodBowl.net about the relative merits and drawbacks of each different format but, in summary, TR110 tends to naturally favour high cost teams such as Wood Elves, High Elves, Dark Elves and Skaven. These teams find it hard to have more than 11 players at TR100, but at TR110 they can usually field 12 and occasionally squeeze in an extra re-roll. By comparison, most of the teams that do well at TR100 usually add a Big Guy or a re-roll to their roster at TR110. Both types of team benefit from the extra cash, but the Finesse teams feel a bigger relative bonus.

Since the Human roster at TR100 is fairly solid with a combination of skilled positional players and a little in reserve, playing at TR110 can be an excuse to go to town! Shown below is my sample TR110 Human roster.

1 Ogre	120,000
4 Blitzers	360,000
2 Catchers	140,000
2 Throwers	140,000
3 Linemen	150,000
3 Re-Rolls	150,000
4 Fan Factor	40,000

Who cares if those pansy AV 7 teams now have more players? With that Ogre you can just kill more of them! Also, having an extra Thrower gives greater flexibility and the chance to have more players with more skills on the pitch at any one time – a good thing, generally speaking. At first glance you may think that losing a Lineman at the expense of another Thrower will mean putting a more expensive player directly in harm's way, but in reality the Ogre attracts so much more attention that the Throwers remain fairly unmolested.

With such a different roster it is inevitable that the skill choices need to change and unsurprisingly the first skill should always be Block on your Ogre. Without it the Ogre will cause innumerable turnovers when he rolls double "Both Down" results and his Big Guy status prevents use



of a Team re-roll. The other skill choices could remain fairly similar as illustrated below:

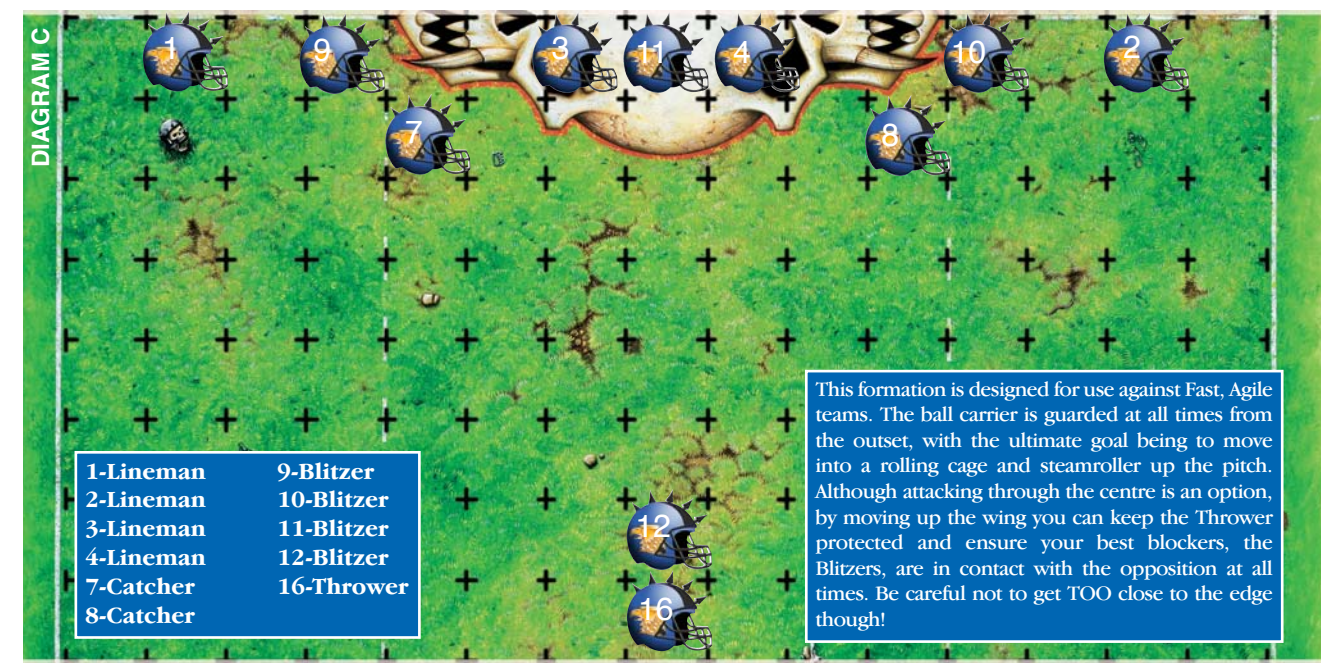
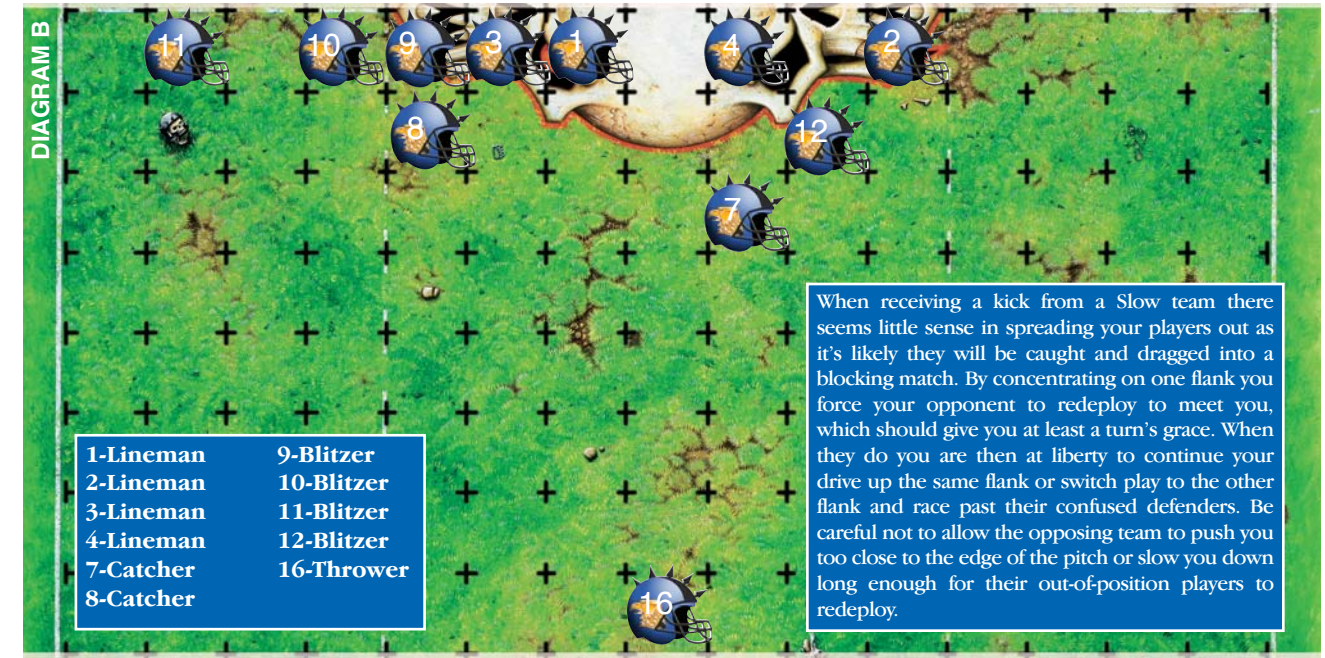
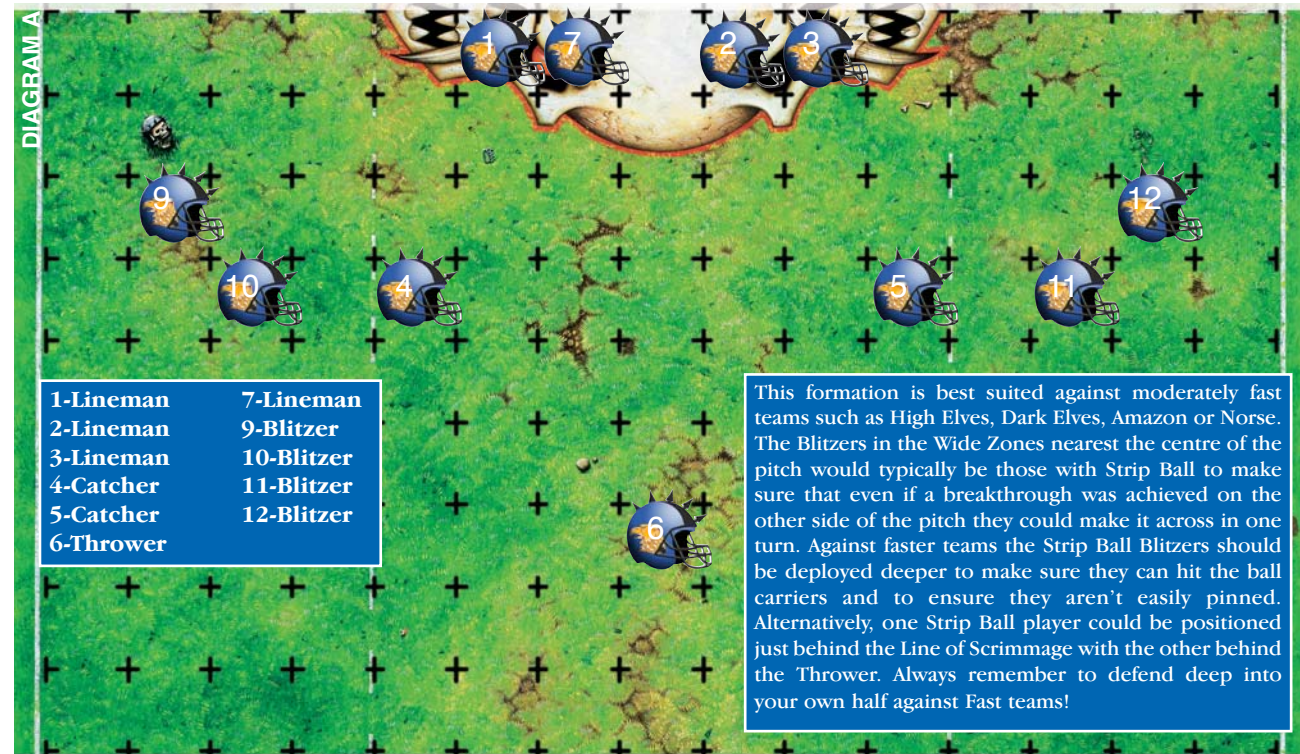
Ogre	Block
Thrower 1	Block
Blitzer 1	Strip Ball
Blitzer 2	Tackle
Blitzer 3	Strip Ball
Thrower 2	Block

Once again, this choice of skills is tailored towards defensive play by giving the back field players abilities that are most suited to forcing the ball from the opponent. When both Throwers have Block it means you have no

less than seven players with the skill and at least three of those – the Strip Ball Blitzers and one of the Throwers – can be dedicated defensive players. This should give you a fighting chance of stopping even the most aggressive offence. A word of warning though: avoid the temptation to always perform the first block of the turn with the Ogre just because he's big and has Mighty Blow. Double Skulls without a re-roll really messes up a game plan when it's your first action.

Sample Human Kick-Off Formations

Shown below are a number of generic, balanced starting formations for Human teams when kicking and receiving.



In Conclusion

Hopefully this tactics article will give you some ideas about how to approach your next game and give you some faith that Humans can compete with the more specialised races. Although some experienced tournament players insist that the Humans do not have what it takes to win a major tournament, claiming the roster has key flaws that will ultimately hold it back, it will only take one skilled Human coach to prove them wrong. For all their versatility, getting the most out of the Human team requires long-term practice and dedication, but stick with it and soon you will be running rings around those Orcs and pounding the Elves into the turf with reckless abandon!