

BLOOD BOWL

The Ogre Playbook

or, Ugly Stupid and Totally Brutal

By James Stewart

In this article veteran Blood Bowl coach James Stewart lays down methods for leading your Ogre team to victory on the pitch, including team design, tactics, flying Goblins, and... philosophy?

DEEP, HUNGRY THOUGHTS

The newly official Ogre team is the most philosophical of all Blood Bowl line ups.

Yes, really. Here's why:

Beyond its revered status as a game of dirty tricks, cunning strategies and wanton slaughter, Blood Bowl teaches its participants an important lesson about life: Fate is capricious; plans fall apart; prepare for contingencies.

Blood Bowl isn't a game of controlling chaos; chaos refuses all attempts at control. Rather, it's an exercise in hedging your bets. The most brilliant plays, the most talented players and the largest pool of re-rolls mean nothing against an unlucky dice roll. An ill-timed fumble, a botched attempt to "go for it", or a bad kick-off table result can snatch defeat from the clutches of victory.

Or, as that greatest of all Ogre philosophers Morg 'N' Thorg once put it: Sumtimes yuh touchdown don't go no good. Dats when I shows 'em what dis pointy thing on my glove is for!

Mastering chaos can be difficult with any team, but for the Ogres, it's downright impossible. In addition to the usual uncertainties, Ogres have the Bone Head trait. For every six actions they attempt, one will result in a player standing still, thinking deep (or maybe just hungry) thoughts while exerting no tackle zones. And that's just if the dice are fair—which, as any Blood Bowl coach knows too well, they aren't!

But if the Ogres are unreliable—frustrating, even—they more than make up for that in terms of novel plays and sheer bruising potential (play your team long enough, and you'll

have 11 or more Ogres with ST 5 and Mighty Blow—now that's scary!). And because every player on the team can be involved in a Throw Team-Mate action, they can quickly turn the unpredictable nature of Blood Bowl to their advantage, creating some surprise reversals of their own.

Before we begin, consider this question: Do you have what it takes to embrace the Ogre philosophy?

SHOULD I FIELD AN OGRE TEAM?

Make no mistake—Ogres aren't for novice coaches. A first-time player has enough to worry about without factoring in the vagaries of the Bone Head trait. But for the jaded coach already familiar with the old favourites, the Ogres require a style of play that can't be had anywhere else—a new challenge and a new way of thinking.

And if you're entering an existing league, even one that's been around for several seasons, a new Ogre team promises a nasty shake-up to the status quo and a chance to make your mark immediately. The revised Handicap Table seems to favour Ogres—for example, the Illegal Drugs result might give an Ogre a three-dice block with one assist, or turn an Ogre into a serviceable ball carrier with ST 5, AG 3! That Boy's Got Talent can provide you with an additional (expensive) Ogre.

Regardless, you can revel in the fearful look in your opponent's eyes. He's no doubt thinking, "I'll win, but how many of my best players must die in the process?"

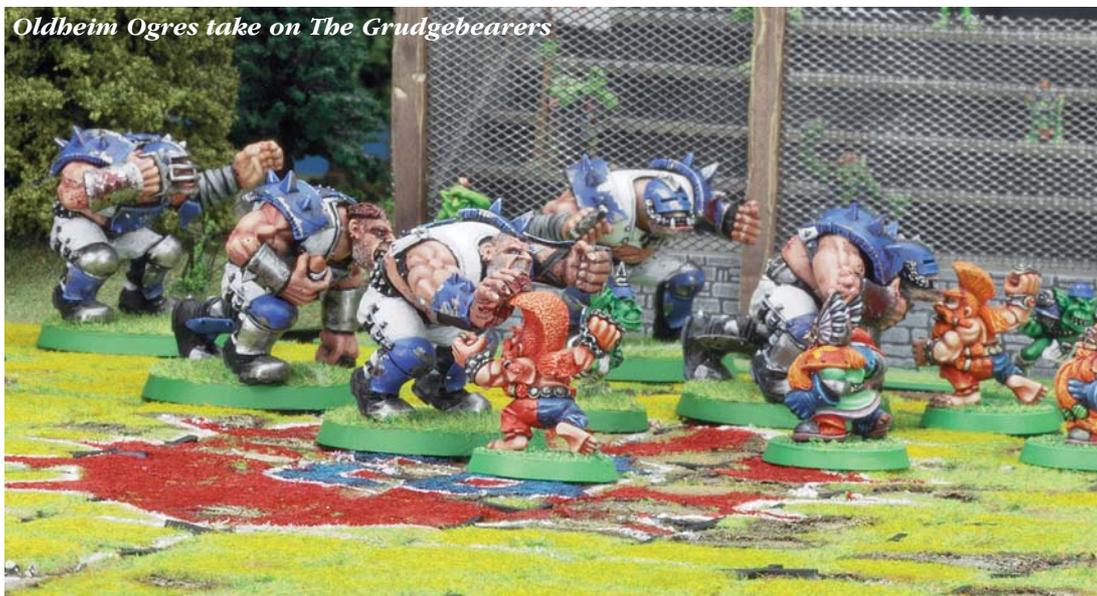
Notice that "total sadist" is not included among the potential Ogre coaches above. But with ST 5 and Mighty Blow, the Ogres are sure to rack up injuries, right? Not so fast, psycho—unless you roll doubles, Ogres can't get General skills. That

means no Tackle, Block or Dirty Player. Sure, Ogres pack a punch, but if you want to play a team that racks up injuries and ignores touchdowns, Chaos or the Orcs are both safer bets.

ASSEMBLING THE MOB

Okay, so you see yourself in one of the above descriptions, or you're a bloodthirsty maniac who won't listen to reason. Either way, you have the makings of a great Ogre coach. Let's look at how to put together your crew of dim-witted thugs:

Oldheim Ogres take on The Grudgebearers



A roster full of Ogres is the eventual goal, and a coach who can field 11 at the start of the match inspires terror in even the most experienced opponent. But since Ogres cost 120,000 apiece, this is simply impossible for the starting coach. A more practical team design might look something like this:

- 5 Ogres
- 6 Goblins
- 1 re-roll
- 9 fan factor

While other Blood Bowl teams each have several viable starting lineups, an Ogre coach's options are a bit limited. The team can have only six Goblins, and must begin with 11 players. Given these constraints, and the whopping price tag on Ogres, this leaves a mere 160,000 to play around with.

Resist the temptation to purchase another Ogre. A re-roll is absolutely essential to pull off team-mate throws and counteract Bone Head, and a high fan factor will allow you to purchase those expensive Ogres—and, more importantly, those re-rolls that will cost 140,000 apiece in league play.

A coach with fantasies of an all-Ogre starting lineup might object: "But if I have six Goblins, that leaves only 10 slots for Ogres!"

Don't worry. Given that Goblins have AV 7—and the Stunty trait—those slots have a nasty habit of becoming suddenly available.



STUPIDITY VS. CHAOS: A PRACTICAL GUIDE

You've got your band of bullies, and hopefully picked out a suitably intimidating team name, fight song and so forth. Now it's time to play a match.

Remember all that nonsense about Blood Bowl being a game of managing chaos? Because of the Bone Head trait that afflicts your strongest players, you'll have to work twice as hard as other coaches to avoid tragedy. Though it's a tough job, experienced coaches already know how to play the odds. When coaching an Ogre team, however, three specific tactics prove especially useful:

Controlling the Clock

Control the ball. Control the clock.

Keep the ball in your possession as much as possible. Even when the dice create an unexpected shift in the game's momentum—as they inevitably must—the team in possession of the ball is in a better position to capitalize on such moments.

This tactic begins during the first turn of the match. If you're receiving, use all eight turns to score, crippling the opposition along the way. You'll have fewer players opposing you in the second half. If you find yourself on defence, force

"But They All Look Like Bone Heads to Me!"

Ogres who fail a Bone Head roll lose their tackle zones until they can succeed on a subsequent roll, so it's important to distinguish them from their team-mates who still have their heads in the game.

Some coaches turn around players who have taken an action. Instead of facing up or down the pitch, an Ogre suffering from his own boneheadishness can be turned left or right to face the sidelines—"Stands full of fans... Tasty, crunchy fans! Should I be doing something? Mmmm, fans..."

Though this system works in a pinch, the true hobbyist might prefer a more customized solution. Why not fashion a dunce cap from a rolled cone of white paper? If you want to get really fancy, write "Bone Head" (or an even less flattering appellation) on the front before taping your cap together.

the opposing coach to score quickly. Even if you don't have enough turns left to score, you'll be able to tie things up in the second half, forcing the game into overtime. Overtime almost always favours the team that inflicts the most injuries and has the most resilient players. In other words, overtime almost always favours the Ogres!

Though controlling the clock in this fashion is a common tactic among veteran coaches, the Ogres have a distinct advantage in this regard: the constant threat of the Throw Team-Mate touchdown. Even if your opponent takes seven turns to score, a bad scatter on the kick-off gives you a shot at a one-turn TD to even things up. It doesn't always work, but unlike teams that have only one Big Guy, the threat is always there.

Boneheaded Contingencies

In Blood Bowl, the coach who expects random tragedy, who realizes that the dice are out to get him, who concocts backup plans for backup plans for backup plans, will ultimately prevail. The best take a perverse pleasure in sudden reversals, in failed plays that would have worked in a more predictable world. Some truly hopeless cases—those whose cavorting with pandemonium would sicken even the Chaos Dwarves of Zharr Naggrund—eventually become Ogre coaches.

Strange as it sounds, coaching an Ogre team requires caution and restraint. Conservative play must be the rule. Before undertaking any action with an Ogre, ask yourself, "What will happen if this player is stuck in this square, exerting no tackle zones?" If the answer is something serious, along the lines of "my entire defensive line will fall apart" or "I'll have no chance of blitzing the ball carrier next turn," you should probably reconsider. Sometimes it's better that your Ogre do nothing than, um, just stand there doing nothing.



In addition, be extremely reluctant to spend a re-roll to reverse the effects of Bone Head. Re-rolls, after all, are your best method of dealing with chaos. Until you've bought a re-roll for every turn (which would require an outlay of 980,000 assuming you began the season with one re-roll), don't use them unless it would almost certainly change the entire course of the match.

This doesn't mean that you should never attempt a desperate play. We'll get to those in a minute.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EDGE

A scared coach makes mistakes. Scare the other coach.

Though completely irrational, and far overblown in most cases, most coaches would rather not face an Ogre team. Against bruiser teams like Chaos or the Orcs, you minimize one of their biggest advantages—those Chaos Warriors just don't seem that intimidating in the shadow of your Ogre frontline. And coaches of those agile but fragile teams (Wood Elves, Skaven) are no doubt contemplating the worst-case scenario in which you win because their entire team is in the Dugout, shattered and useless.

So at the start of the match, be sure to mention all those casualties you caused in your last game (with or without exaggeration, as you prefer). Make every casualty you inflict seem more serious than it is. If you score a serious injury in the first few turns, mutter something offhand to the effect of, "It's starting early this time." If your opponent debates whether or not he should use his Apothecary, be sure to sow the seeds of doubt: "He's far from the most valuable player you've got" or "Are you really going to use your Apothecary this early in the game? Well, okay, if that's what you want to do..."

You get the idea. Be a good sport, but talk some good-natured trash. You're thinking like an Ogre now!



UGLY PLAYS, AND REALLY UGLY PLAYS

With those general strategies in mind, here are five ideas for plays and formations at which the Ogres excel. Mix them into both your offensive and defensive playbooks, and you'll have the tools to score touchdowns and win games:

GOBBOS IN FLIGHT

Without a doubt, the Ogres were built for exploiting the Throw Team-Mate skill. Every player on the team is either a launcher (Ogres) or the launched (Goblins). Other teams may have players who can throw or be thrown, but they have to be in the right place at the right time—less of a problem where the Ogres are concerned.

When your Ogres control the ball, there's always the threat of a one- or two-turn touchdown effected through the Throw Team-Mate skill, and it isn't nearly as risky as most coaches assume. Even if the throw is inaccurate (and it almost always will be), the AG 3 Goblin needs only a four or better to land on his feet—a 75% chance of success if you've got a re-roll handy. The real danger lies setting up the throw—Bone Head could complicate things, as could a hand-off if you need to move the ball within range.

Don't be scared to make a Long Pass, if that's what you need to score the touchdown. Assume the pass will always be inaccurate; worry instead about the landing.

One caveat – remember that it's possible to scatter backward. The author of this article once lost a game in the last turn of the second half when his Goblin nailed the landing but scattered out of sprinting range of the end zone!

Unless the Goblin being thrown is holding the ball, an unsuccessful throw doesn't result in a turnover, so thrown team-mates can be useful in other capacities as well. Toss a Goblin over the frontline to worry that ball carrier, to lend quick support to a troubled player elsewhere on the field, or even to break the cage...



RATTLE THE CAGES

Most Blood Bowl players are familiar with the cage—surrounding the ball carrier with four or more players to protect him from blitzes as the formation moves downfield. Properly utilized, it is a slow but reliable way to score touchdowns.

Not against the Ogres, though. Not even close. Ogres were built to shred cages with a combination of the three techniques below:

Strength: Ogres, big brutes that they are, get two-dice blocks against those position players such as Chaos Warriors and Black Orcs that are integral to solid cages. At worst, you should be able to peel one player off the cage per turn with a blitz (barring a few Bone-Headed foul-ups).

Of course, a couple of Ogres slowing things down in front of the cage forces your opponent to break around them—into yet more Ogres. Leave them no escape: You can close the noose around the cage and bash your way to the meaty centre. Eventually, the cage collapses into a free-for-all, with your Ogres adjacent to plenty of comparatively weak targets. In such a quagmire, the last man standing is likely to be an Ogre.

See Ian Williams' excellent guide to blocking (available at the official Blood Bowl website) for ideas on how to turn such muddles into true casualty factories.

Stunty Suicides: If the cage already has holes, it's time to send in the Goblins—those brave, brittle fools. Because of the Stunty trait, they can dodge through even the smallest crannies to assert tackle zones on the ball carrier. At worst, they're an annoyance to your opponent. At best, they buy you time to encircle the cage with a ring of Ogres. With lots of Ogres to assist, Goblins can tie up low-AG opponents who can't dodge their way to freedom.

Be careful here. Goblins are fragile and should generally avoid being pummelled. That said, in situations that might decide the game—your opponent's final rush, for instance—the little guys should say their prayers, sneak through the line, and take a beating for the team.

Goblin Bombs: Why not throw a Goblin into the centre of things? If your opponent is foolish enough to leave an open square inside the cage, you're guaranteed to knock down one player—possibly the one with the ball. If your opponent has a tight cage, however, you can still chuck a Gobbo against near a corner and have a decent chance of knocking someone out of position.

With a blitz and a thrown Goblin cage-breaker in action, you should be able to strip away two players from the cage each turn. It won't be long before your opponent's well-planned offence dissolves into a quagmire—just the game the Ogres want to play.

A SPARSE BUT VICIOUS FRONTLINE

It's possible to cover every square along the line of scrimmage with five players—two in the wide zones and three in the middle. With most teams, this would be an invitation to blitz their thrower or run half a dozen receivers through, but not with the Ogres. Because of their high ST, they can be spread thin and still require several assists to take down, leaving the Goblins free for deep coverage. Having even more Ogres around allows you to compensate for Bone Heads and other unhappy accidents.

Other teams put up the most solid line they can muster and let their opponents choose where they'll punch the hole. Against Ogres, however, things aren't so simple. The real secret of the Ogre frontline—for offence and defence both—is that you can dictate where your opponent must break through. Two Ogres standing shoulder to shoulder are all but unbreakable without three or four assists (especially if you've got Ogres with the Guard skill), so leave gaps exactly where you want your opponent to make his move.

THE NIGH UNBREAKABLE THREE

While Ogres can spread out and still maintain a strong line of defence, an Ogre with the Guard skill in the middle of a three-Ogre lineup at the centre of the pitch forces your opponent to break through the wide zones. In this case, the centre will hold.

Against an ST 3 opponent, it's impossible to hit the middle Ogre (the Guard) with an even-up block because his pals to the left and right provide assists. To break off one of the wings, an ST 3 opponent would need four assists for a two-dice block—impossible, because the squares immediately behind the defenders are covered by the Ogre with Guard. Even against Big Guys or stronger opponents such as Black Orcs, at least one Ogre with Guard can be a frontline lynchpin, forcing your opponent to devote players to assists, limiting their options and putting them right where you want them—adjacent to your Ogres' fists.

This strategy can also work in the wide zones. Two Ogres, one with Guard, can be tough to break through. With only two Ogres with Guard in your defensive lineup, you can all but dictate the path your opponent must take through your frontline.

THE QUAGMIRE

Every Blood Bowl coach has witnessed the horrible effects of the quagmire, even if they don't know it. A quagmire arises most often when two bruiser teams converge in the centre of the field and get tied up in a bramble of tackle zones and assists, and resolve the issue by beating each other senseless. Though the Dwarves, with their innate Tackle skills, are the masters of this style of play, the Ogres are a close second. With their ability to make two-dice blocks without assists, and the help of their Stunty confederates, Ogres can gum up the line of scrimmage in no time.

Early in the game, while you've got plenty of time to score, why not create a quagmire of your very own? Against a running team, encircle the cage with Ogres and start pounding away. Your opponent will attempt to reform the cage each turn, moving the ball as far as possible. Give them no direction to run, keep your Ogres close to their victims, and before you know it you'll have the classic quagmire.

Against a passing team, blitz a hole through the frontline and head straight for the thrower. Leave some Ogres behind for a sparse defensive line and use the rest for the charge. Either of the two possible outcomes will benefit the Ogres: your opponent will be forced to pass the ball for a quick touchdown, or they'll commit players to defending the thrower from your advance, quite possibly creating a quagmire with a ball at the centre (be sure to toss a Goblin into the mix in case it squirts out).

The quagmire can also be used on offence to tie up the strongest of your opponent's position players who would otherwise threaten your cage. A single Ogre can tie up two ST 3 attackers and retain his advantage on the blocking dice. With most of the opposition committed to the centre, a minimal cage of Ogres or even Goblins can run the ball for a touchdown.



THE CARE AND FEEDING OF OGRES

With these tactics, your team will be a legitimate menace on the pitch. What should you do with all that cash and Star Player Points you're sure to accumulate?

Star Player Development

Because they score few touchdowns and shouldn't even think of passing, Ogres rely on injuries for Star Player Points and tend to develop slowly. Though this protects them somewhat from the pernicious effects of the Ageing Table, extra care must be taken to select the best skills for your team—they won't have many chances to develop them.

And even when they do, their selection is the most limited of all the Blood Bowl teams because General skills aren't available unless you roll doubles. The skills that are the bread and butter of other teams—Block, Sure Hands and so forth—are beyond the reach of most Ogres. And Pro, the one trait that might really help them out, is forever denied them. Does this mean that Ogre teams are a lost cause? No way!

Goblins can develop Agility skills. Since they are best deployed with Throw Team-Mate, skills that will allow them to dash for the end zone will prove the most useful, i.e., Sprint and Sure Feet. If you're lucky enough to roll doubles, you might consider the Jump Up trait, allowing your Gobbo to cause mischief in the rear of your opponents' defences even after a crash landing, or receive a desperate last-minute pass (hey, it's only slightly more risky than a TD earned from being thrown!).

Then again, rolling doubles might be better exploited by choosing a General skill—since Goblins begin play with Dodge and Stunty, the addition of Block creates a potential

scorer who can weave through the opposition and possibly survive to the next match.

While Block is awfully tempting, consider Sure Hands as well. Unlike the Elves, Humans or other fragile lunchmeat races, Ogres lack a ball carrier. An Ogre with AG 2 has only a 50% chance of picking up an unguarded ball, and because of Bone Head, it's dangerous to give it to them at all (Turn 8, the Ogre's got an open run to the end zone and... rolls a 1! What a Bone Head!). A Goblin that can pick up the ball will save you many a re-roll.

Ogres choose from the Strength category. Consider a balanced approach with half the team getting Guard, half Break Tackle.

Break Tackle is an obvious choice for players with ST 5. Can you imagine a team of 11 Ogres dodging around the field like Wood Elves? A team with lots of players sporting Break Tackle can more than compensate for the occasional Bone Head in its ranks.

As we've already discussed, having many players with Guard gives you an all but unbreakable frontline, and is indispensable when quagmires arise.

While Break Tackle and Guard should be your first choices, a small dose of the other Strength skills can go a long way toward making your team a success. An Ogre with Pile On and/or Multiple Block is the closest thing you'll get to a Blitz. With Pile On, you'll have two shots at cracking open your opponent's armour with Mighty Blow. And with an assist on either side, an Ogre with Multiple Block can pave his way

through two opponents at once with a two-dice block against each. Now that's Blood Bowl!

If you roll doubles for an Ogre on the Star Player Table, don't get fancy. Take Block as soon as the opportunity presents itself.

Team Development

If you've used the starting lineup suggested above, your fan factor of 9 should give you plenty of money to play around with. Your fan factor isn't likely to drop—though you'll make fewer touchdowns with an Ogre team, two or more casualties is rarely a problem. You'll need every cent, of course, to hire those expensive Ogres and purchase even-more-expensive re-rolls.

And if you find yourself choosing between another Ogre and another re-roll, pick the re-roll. Re-rolls are dependable. Ogres aren't.

You can procrastinate a bit in hiring an Apothecary, though. Goblins are fragile, but cheap (and make fine assistant coaches, when it comes to that). Ogres, with Thick Skull and AV 9, are perhaps the most resilient players in Blood Bowl.

CONCUSSIVE CONCLUSIONS

Ogres aren't the easiest team to manage, it alone coach to play-off victories. But with patience and a healthy distrust of the dice, your team can run the clock and hook up desperate plays like no one else, and accumulate plenty of casualties along the way. Now get out there and toss some Gobbos around, ya Bone Head!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

As well as being an Ogre Coach, James Stewart is an accomplished writer and editor of roleplaying games. Chances are if you've ever played a game by White Wolf it could well have been edited by James.

