

BLOOD BOWL



ELF PLAYBOOK

by "Harry" Harrington

Jarren sat up slowly, his vision blurry, the metallic taste of blood filling his mouth. Gradually his vision began to clear, revealing the silhouette of Kaleb Windtalker, the team Apothecary, hovering over him. "What happened?" said Jarren, his musical voice spoilt by the fat lip and missing teeth.

Kaleb's hands wove intricate patterns over Jarren's head and he whispered arcane words beneath his breath. Surprisingly quickly the bleeding stopped and Jarren's memory seeped back. "He cheated!" shouted the injured Elf, realisation flooding back. "That low-down sneaky Beardling deliberately cheated!" Indignant rage brought a rosy flush to Jarren's otherwise pale face. Arching his back he flipped athletically to his feet and strode back to the reserves' bench. "Well two can play at that game!"



As a long time fan of the Blood Bowl game I had eagerly awaited the arrival of the new Elf team and the models did not disappoint in the least. However, with the armour of Wood Elves and the speed of the High Elves I was a little disappointed with the stat lines – that was, until I started to play. With cheaper players than my traditional Wood Elves I found my starting team had something I had never expected in an Elf Team: reserves! That, coupled with quite a good Fan Factor and two re-rolls, meant I had something else that my previous Elf teams lacked: durability. Previously in tournaments and leagues the first few games were less about winning and more about surviving. The death of a single Lineman could spell disaster to a starting team and send you into the spiral of doom as each match started short-handed meant more casualties. Frequently it was preferable to simply disband the old squad and start from scratch. Now the Elves had a force to be reckoned with that could start swinging straight from the whistle and take their destined place at the top of the leader board.

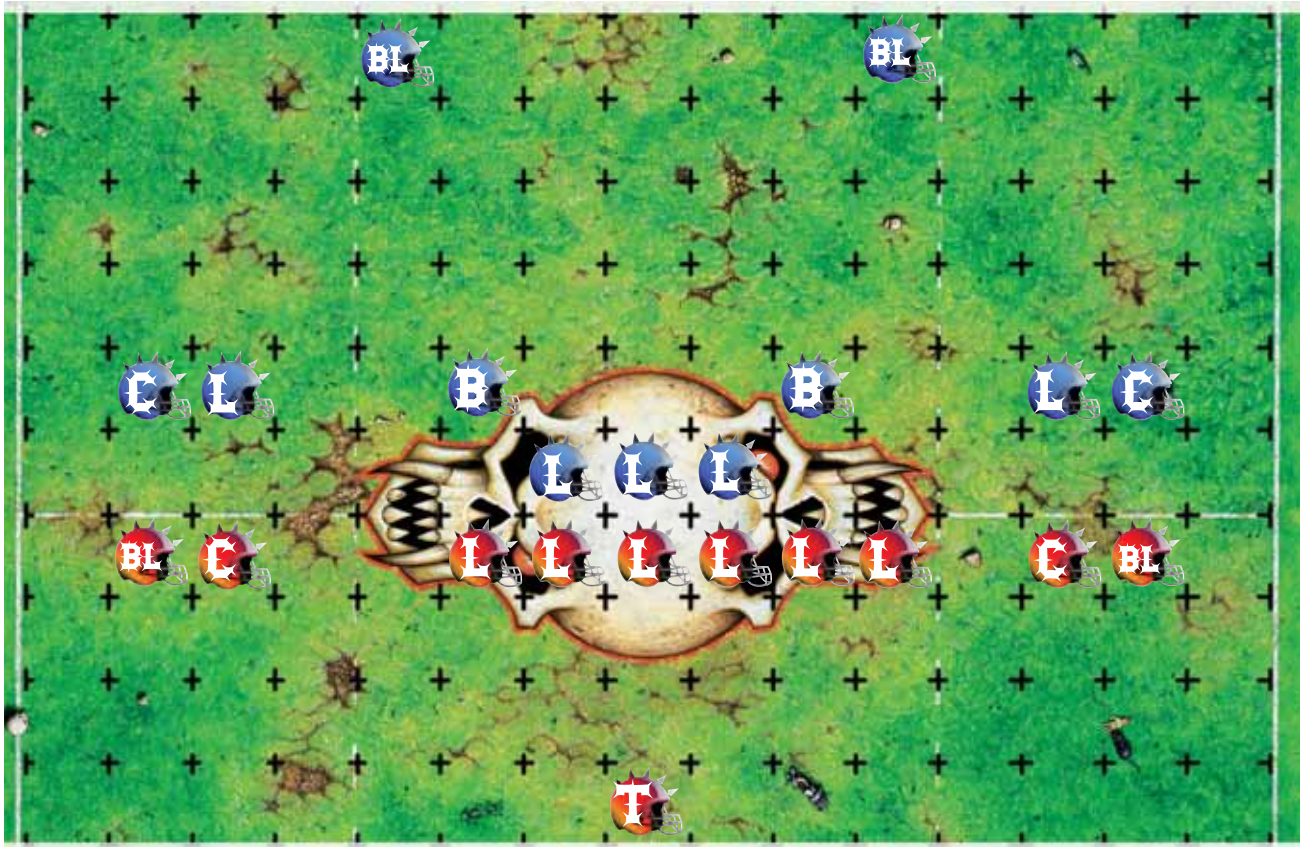


However, success is never guaranteed, so I've put together the following few tricks and tips to hopefully help any budding Elf coaches out there. The playbook maximises all the best points of the Elf team and also includes a few little dirty tricks to even the playing field against some of more robust teams in the league.

1: RECEIVING THE BALL

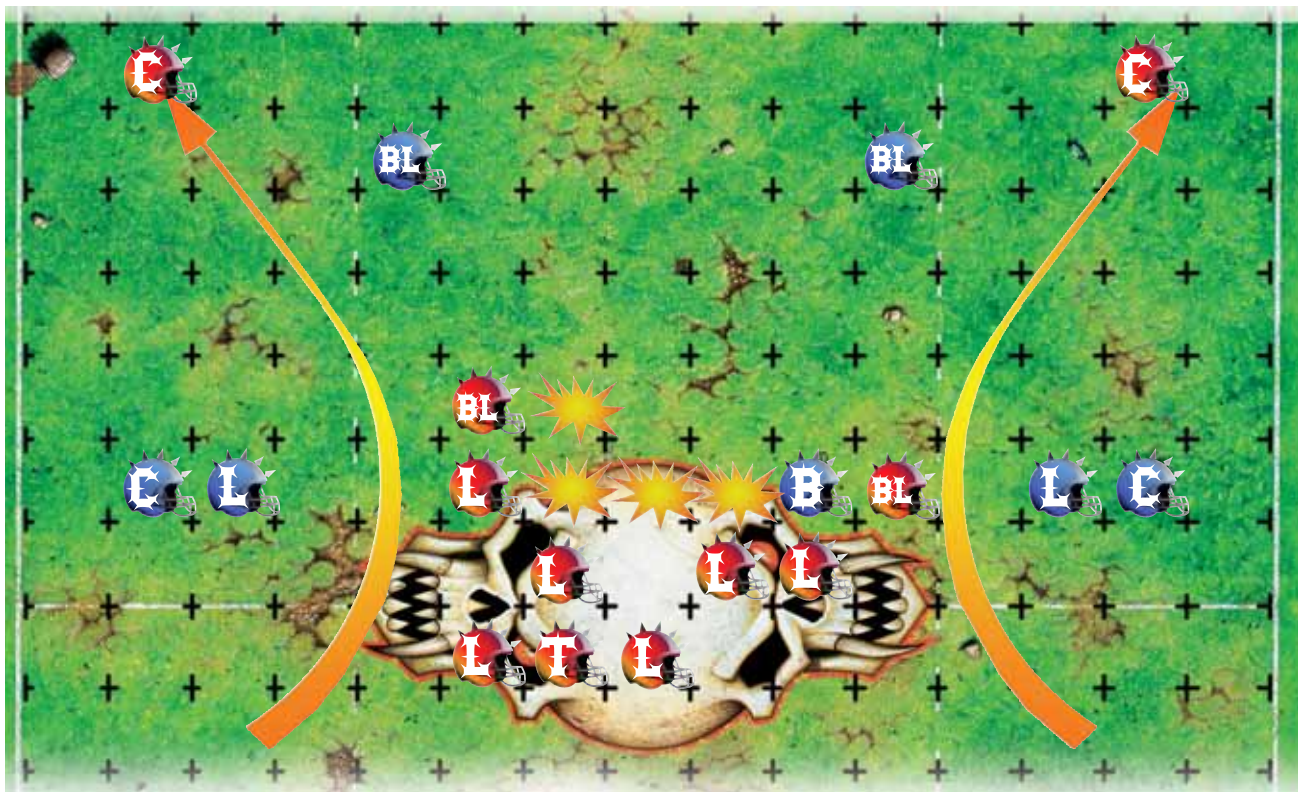
As with most teams it is a lot better to receive the ball at the kick off rather than kick to your opponent. Receiving lets you take the initiative and, hopefully, the lead.

With Strength 3, Speed 8, Catch and Nerves of Steel your Catchers are without doubt the best in the game. Smash a hole (or holes) in the opposing line and send your Catchers through the gaps, striking deep into the backfield. This will force your opponent to split up his forces and send guys to stop them. In most cases it will take two defenders to neutralise one Catcher and this will either leave a free Catcher behind the enemy lines or you will outnumber the enemy at the line of scrimmage. If you have a free Catcher then take the quick TD. If you have the numbers on the front line then punish them by beating up his Linemen.



In this case the Human team have set up to defend against my attack by leaving three Linemen at the line of scrimmage and trying to cover the flanks to prevent my speedy Catchers breaking through into the backfield. By smacking the front line back and down, and sweeping my speedy Catchers into the backfield, I leave my opponent with a difficult decision. If he doesn't neutralise my Catchers quickly I will score next turn, but by moving men away from the line of scrimmage to stop the Catchers he will leave himself dangerously outnumbered and will pay the price when I systematically gang up on his front line.





By placing two Catchers in a scoring position and only allowing the opportunity for one of them to be blitzed, the defenders must choose between stopping the TD or protecting their Lineman. Either way is great as you have a good chance to inflict serious damage to his team or rack up the scoreboard.



2: KICKING THE BALL

Although you are automatically at a disadvantage if your opponent receives, you should realise one thing: if you're playing against a big hard team that pootles up the park in a blob, just don't get in the way. Dodge your line of scrimmage away from the enemy as quickly as possible, then go hunting. Assume that your opponent will take most of the half to work his way up the pitch, this gives you time and opportunity to catch the stragglers on their own and beat them to a pulp by surrounding two or three stragglers with your entire team. You will leave your opponent with three choices.

A: Score quickly.

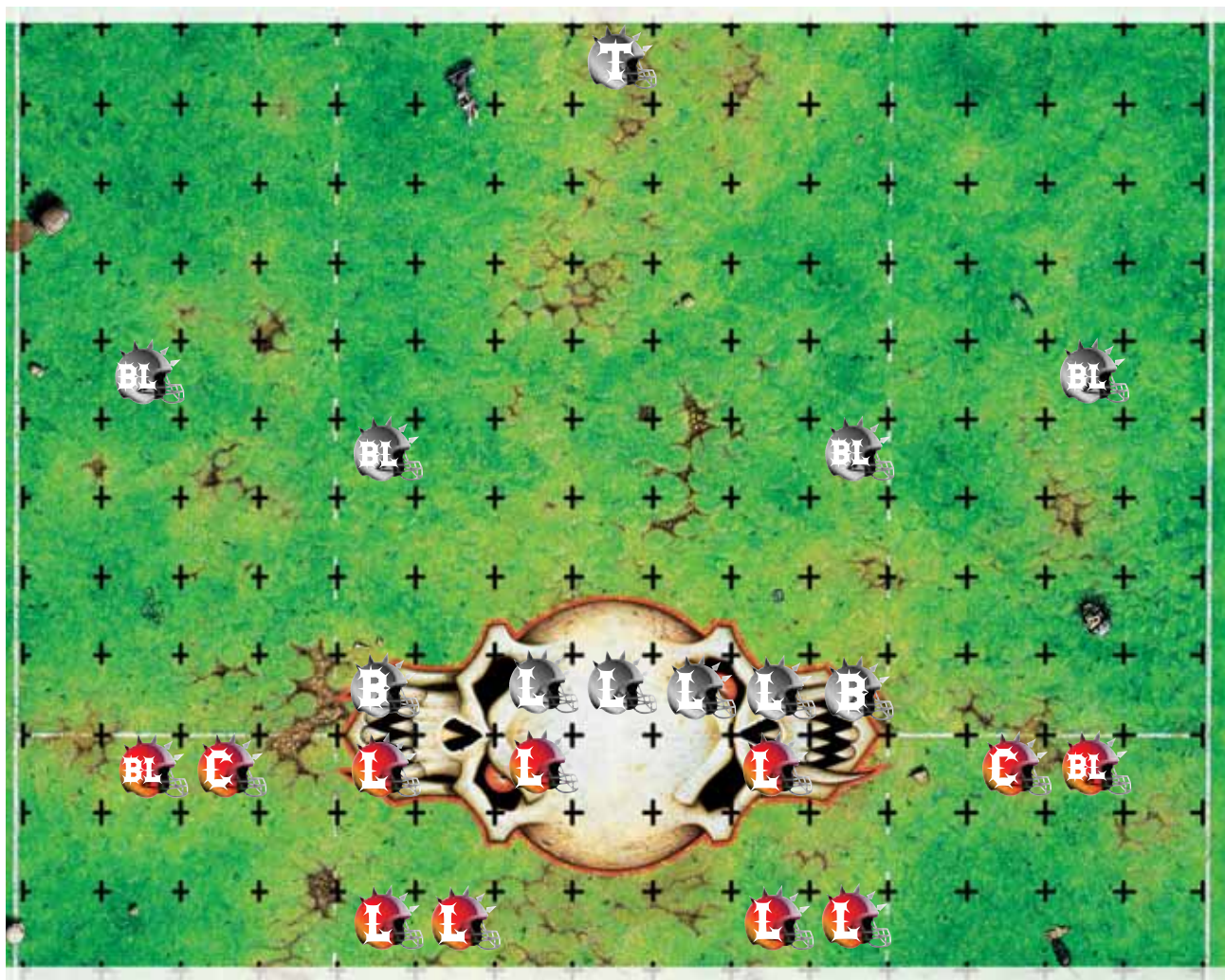
This means he can't protect the ball carrier with his harder, slower players, giving you the opportunity to blitz the ball carrier and swipe the ball.

B: Send men back to help the guys you're bullying.

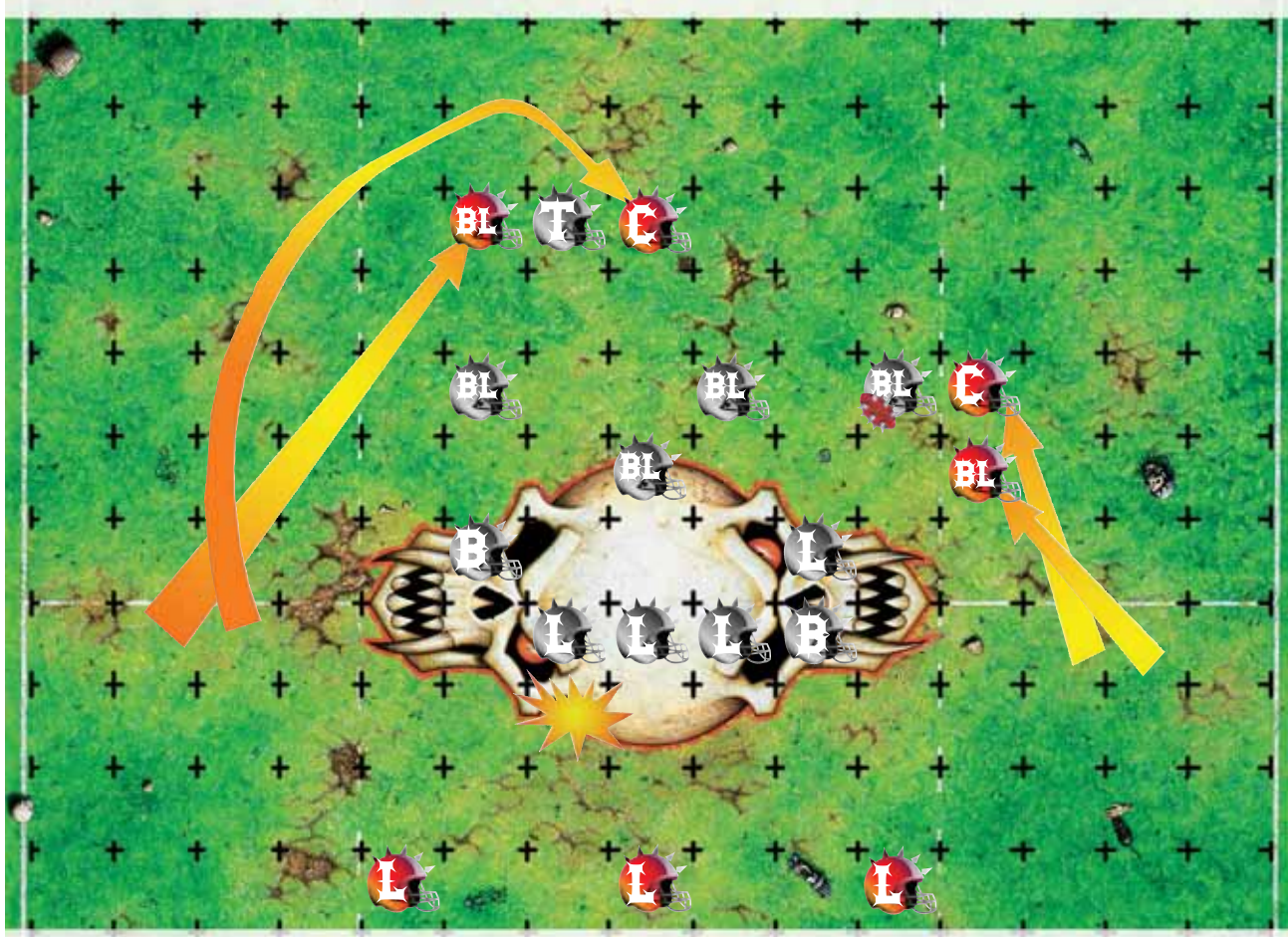
This means you're still probably going to outnumber them in the fist fight and it also weakens the cage around the ball carrier so you might sneak in a blitz.

C: Leave them to die.

In which case he scores and next time you set up to receive he has players lying in the dead and dying box and you have him outnumbered across the board.



The Orcs are receiving the ball and are preparing to form a cage and march down the middle of the board. After knocking the three Linemen off the line of scrimmage the Thrower picks up the ball and chucks it to the nearest Blitzer who moves into the safety of the cage. Slowly but surely the cage moves down the pitch squishing everyone in its way. Instead of playing a meat grinder where the opponent has all the advantages, why not ignore the ball and pick on the guys around the edges, just keeping a skirmish line in front of the big block of enemy players?



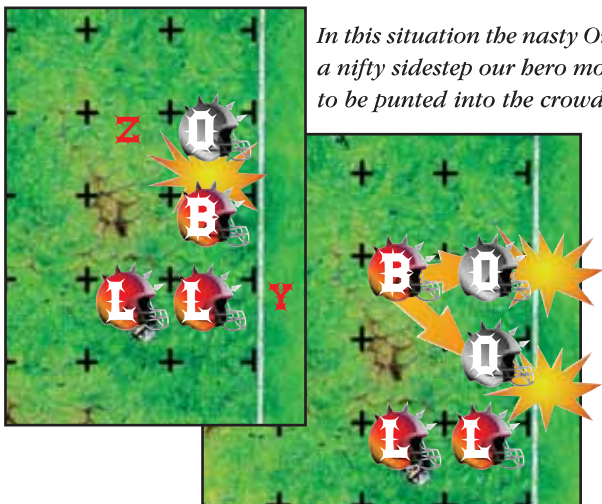
By ignoring the ball and targeting a couple of the opposition key players you leave your opponent with a difficult decision. While he's deciding what to do, add more Linemen to swarm the targeted players to guarantee that any foul goes through the armour.



3: SNEAKY STUFF

Side Step is one of the most underrated skills in the game. By standing next to your enemy's defensive cage you can actually be bounced around and end up in a position to block the ball carrier on your turn. Or, even better, lure enemy players towards the edge of the board and side step around them. Then you can give them a discreet shove into the crowd on your following turn.

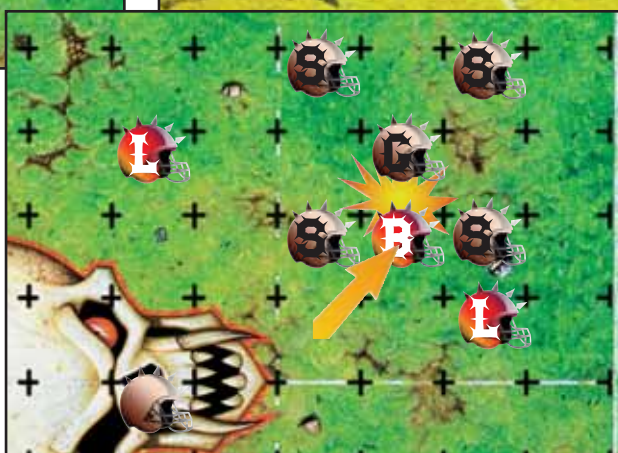
Nerves of Steel on a Strength 3 Catcher means you don't have to worry about dodging away from those nasty defensive tacklers. Just catch the ball then blitz the guy (don't follow up, just push them away and make a run for it). Even on a one-dice block you have a 66% change of either knocking him down or pushing him away.



In this situation the nasty Orc is attempting to slap our heroic Blitzzer out of the park. However, with a nifty sidestep our hero moves to square 'Z' rather than 'Y', leaving the Orc in the perfect position to be punted into the crowd himself in the next turn whether he follows up or not.



In the situation below the Skaven have surrounded their ball-carrying Gutter Runner with a defensive cage. The Skaven try to knock the Blitzzer out of the way so the Gutter Runner can make a break for the End Zone. But with a deft swivel of his hips, our heroic Blitzzer slips past the flailing Skaven and slides up alongside the Gutter Runner to give him a slap in the next turn.



4: FOUL!

Important note! No one expects Elves to fight dirty. The judicious use of fouling can be the difference between a close game and a massacre. Since you only have a 1 in 6 chance of being caught fouling for the first offence it makes sense to target the odd guy on the floor and improve your Morris dancing skills on their heads (also see the detailed analysis of fouling in last issue). Personally, I always foul at least once each half on the off chance that I can remove some pesky opponent. But don't waste this golden opportunity. If you're going to foul, do it with style and get as many guys as you can around the victim to help you get past that armour and cause some serious damage. Of course, if you're lucky enough to have "gotten the ref" as a kick off result, it is your duty and privilege to systematically stomp on anyone foolish enough to fall down. Remember Elves might be a "Good" race, but they hate losing and attempt to excel at all disciplines within the game. The awards for longest drop kick, most casualties and, of course, the highest vocal octave shift inflicted on an opponent, are all hotly contested.

ELVEN PLAYBOOK

The second part of this article revolves around team progression. With re-rolls and reserves normally lacking from a starting Elf roster there are many options crying out for each gold piece, but where should you spend them? A priority is, of course, the Apothecary: an absolute "must have" for every Elf team. Once the Apothecary has been signed up you can then add reserves. Do not buy any specialist positional players until the Lineman roster is complete. Only when you have enough reserves do you risk shelling out on that second Thrower.

When building a team you have to make a basic decision: do you make a team of all-rounders or do you go for a few uber-hard star players. My advice is to get a team of all-rounders so your opposition can't target a few players to change the course of the game. The way to do this is simple, place a random Lineman halfway into the enemy's half as soon as possible, then do all the razzle-dazzle with your Catchers and Blitzers. Once you've secured the ball simply run round and hand off to the Lineman for an easy score.

The other, more cheeky, way to get experience is to keep two players back ready to catch the ball from the kick off. Place your Catcher one square behind the ball then pick it up with a normal Lineman (on a 2+) and throw a quick pass to the Catcher (on another 2+) and then watch the Catcher catch it... (you guessed it, on a 2+) for an instant completion for the Lineman. Use MVPs on Linemen rather than Blitzers and Catchers (they get enough SPPs on their own) so every player in your team gets the skills he needs to survive. Remember that there is no such thing as redundancy in an Elf team; every player has the speed and agility to score if he needs to, whilst still having the strength to stand up and take a beating.

SKILL PROGRESSION

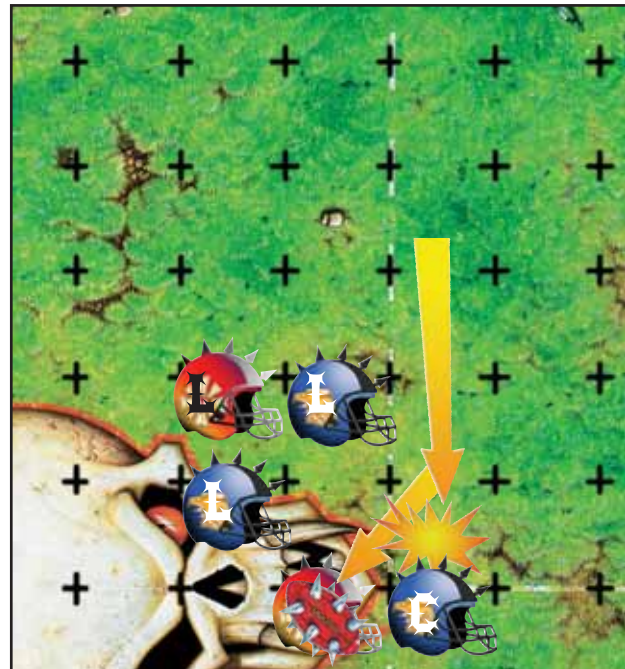
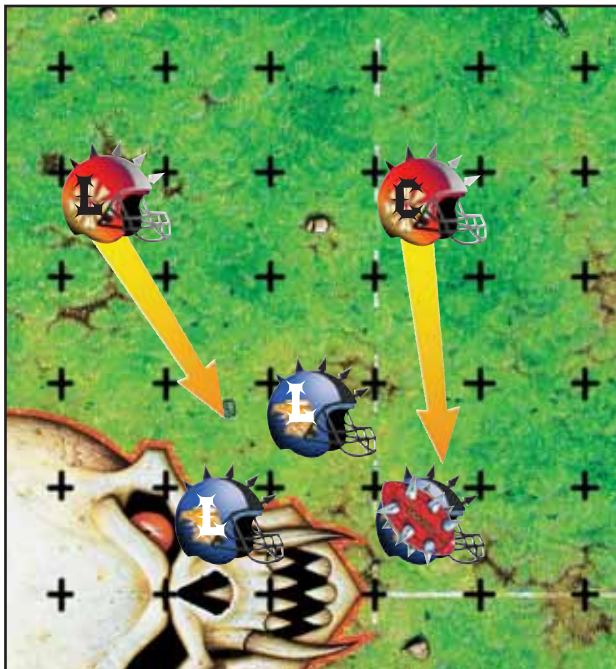
There is no choice when starting a team as fragile as an Elf team that the first two skills on the Elf coach's wish list should always be Block and Dodge. These are two of the very few skills that affect both offence and defence. Making your players deadly on the attack as well as impossible to knock down on defence is essential to the survivability of your team. The only exception to this rule is the doubles roll where you can start looking at some of the Strength skills like Guard or Mighty Blow.



“Individualise the players and give them specific roles”

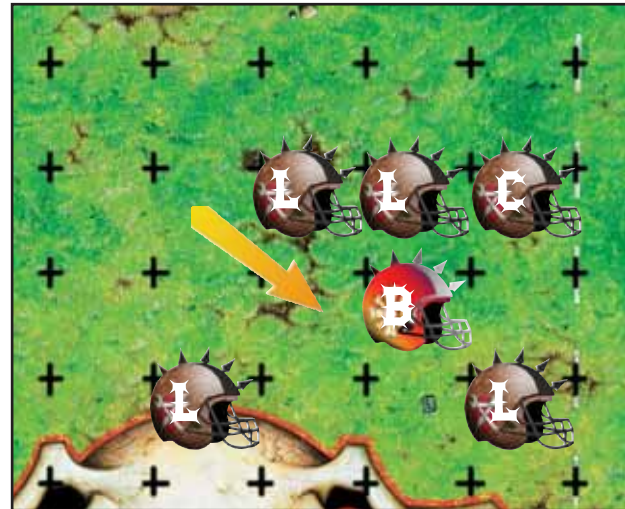
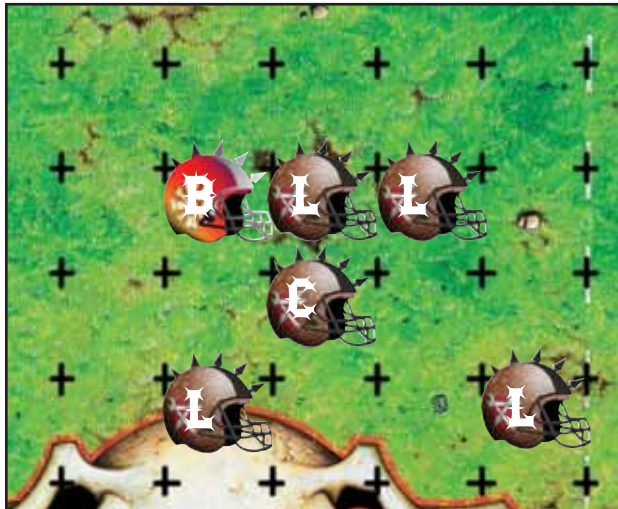
Defensive Tackle: This is a perfect position for a Catcher – just add Dodge and Strip Ball. Most speedy Catchers are Strength 2 with Dodge, and with this guy as a target you can

pretty much guarantee knocking the ball out of his hands. Your Catcher can then hop onto the ball, pick it up, and skip away towards the opponent’s End Zone.



The Enforcers: A Lineman with Dirty Player is a great way to even the balance against those heavily armoured brutes you will face week after week. Keep him away from the line of scrimmage, but close enough to punish anyone foolish enough to fall over. Don't waste this opportunity, target players that can affect the game then nobble them quickly using as many assists as possible to boost the chances of a kill.

The Spoiler: Giving one of your Blitzers Shadowing and Tackle means that simply placing him next to the opponent's ball carrier causes them some serious difficulties. Any attempt to avoid this player is hampered by the Shadowing skill which will keep him close to the ball carrier. Having a guy with Tackle and Shadowing really cramps the style of even the fastest Gutter Runner.





The Leader: A Leader re-roll is a godsend for an Elf team. Most skills work out at about 20K worth, but with a Leader in your team you get 100K worth of re-rolls for free (re-rolls costing double after the initial team design). Use him as a normal Lineman, but make sure to use his re-roll first as he may not be on the pitch that long.

The scream rose higher and higher, passing out of the Dwarf's audible range and into the higher bands that caused dogs throughout the city to wince. Inside the stadium a silence had spread through the crowd as all eyes turned to the Dwarf in the middle of the pitch. His eyes had rolled up in their sockets and the look of abject agony on his face made even the most depraved cultist gulp and cross his legs. Slowly, like some great oak in the forest, Gramli Dorfsson fell forward, his hands too busy cupping his groin to protect his face from the astrogranite. On the big screen, Cabalvision replays showed a stylish blur flying across the pitch followed by a well tailored boot executing a textbook, up and under, that the star kicker would have been jealous of. Swaggering back towards the bench surrounded by irate officials, Jarren soaked up the sudden applause from the crowd, heading towards an early bath, but with a broad grin on his face.

The Psycho: Every team should have one! A guy with Block and Dauntless who can take down even the hardest opponent. Give him Pile On if the opportunity arises and suddenly the Minotaur is hiding in the corner of the pitch because there's an Elf out there with a weird glint in his eye...



When designing your team you should really make room for some of these specialists. In a perfect world an Elf team should have 4 Catchers, 2 Blitzers, 1 Thrower, and the rest Linemen. Of these 9 Linemen you should aim to get at least one Enforcer, one Psycho and a Leader. This team then has the ability to take on all comers in both a high scoring TD fest or a down and dirty brawl.



***Did you know...

The Elf Great Hawks of the Elven Kingdoms League take so long to get made up for a game that they only manage to attend every other one!

Author

Mark 'Harry' Harrington has been very busy of late, not only has he written this ten page monster but he is one of the creators of the Necromunda Dust Falls campaign that has just started in this issue!



Further Information

Part 2 of this Elf tactics extravaganza continues next issue! To order a team of elves then check out the Fanatic Catalogue on page 93.

Website

www.BloodBowl.com