THE ULTIMATE WARHAMMER MAGAZINE

WHITE DWARF

PRESENTS

BLOOD BOWL



IN ASSOCIATION WITH
SPIKE! MAGAZINE

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...and so does White Dwarf, with top tips from James Hewitt, Matt Keefe and others for on-the-pitch success.

RUNNING A SUCCESSFULL LEAGUE

James Hewitt is back with top tips for budding League Commissioners everywhere.

THE WHITE DWARF & THE BLACK GOBBO

Grombrindal, the White Dwarf himself, is known to take to the Blood Bowl field from time to time. Read his rules.

RULES, RULES RULES!

And we've got even more rules – from Special Balls to Halfling and Goblin referees.







WHITE DWARF

THE BEST OF BLOOD BOWL 16/17

WELCOME, SPORTS FANS!

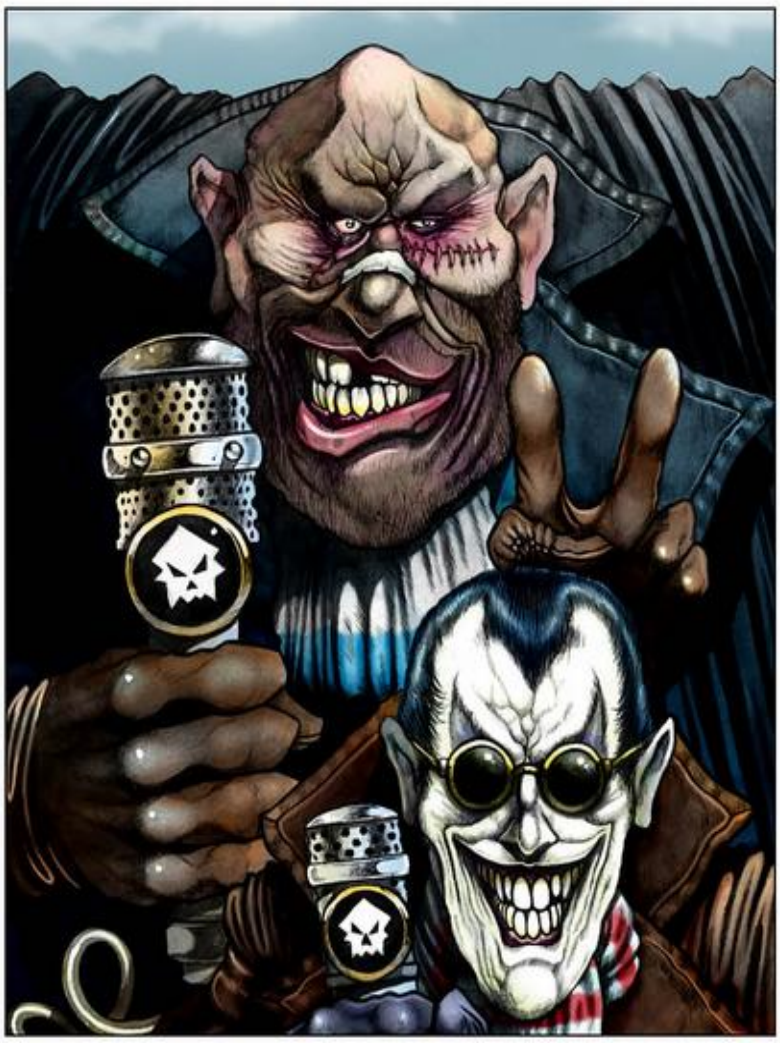
Good evening, sports fans, and welcome to this special compilation from White Dwarf (in association with Spike! Magazine). What's it all about? Well, to celebrate the forthcoming 2496 Blood Bowl Championship game between the Elfheim Eagles and the Doom Lords, we bring you the best of Blood Bowl as seen in White Dwarf.

We've got an introduction to the game alongside an interview with the game's designer, Jervis Johnson himself. We've got a match report to take you right into the action, and we've got a Parade Ground to inspire your own choice of team colours. We've got rules for Grombrindal and the Black Gobbo, Special Balls, and Halfling and Goblin Referees. And we've got a slew of the best Blood Bowl journalism from Spike! Magazine, the Blood Bowl world's leading sports magazine.

Whether you're a veteran coach or a rookie new to Blood Bowl, we're sure you'll enjoy this compilation of the best of Blood Bowl. And don't forget you can find more like it regularly in the pages of White Dwarf, the Ultimate Warhammer Magazine.

Enjoy!

Jim and Bob



WHAT IS WHITE DWARF?

White Dwarf is the ultimate Warhammer magazine. For more than 40 years, it has been the essential guide to everything going on with Citadel Miniatures and the Games Workshop hobby, bringing you an in-depth look at the latest games and miniatures, battle reports, painting guides, modelling tips and more. White Dwarf is 148 pages of the very best the hobby has to offer, each and every month.

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SPIKE! MAGAZINE

ALL THE LATEST NEWS FROM THE BLOOD BOWL WORLD



SPIKE! MAGAZINE'S...

GUIDE TO BLOOD BOWL

GOOD AFTERNOON, SPORTS FANS! JIM JOHNSON HERE, WELCOMING YOU TO A BRAND NEW SEASON OF BLOOD BOWL. HERE'S BOB BIFFORD, TO TALK YOU THROUGH WHAT'S IN STORE. TAKE IT AWAY, BOB...



Blood Bowl is a game so simple even Goblins have managed to get the hang of it, but for all you rookies, here's our essential introduction.

THE OBJECT OF THE GAME

As laid down in the ancient tomes of Nuffle, the idea of the game is to haul the ball the length of the field and into the opposing team's End Zone, scoring a touchdown. The team that scores the most touchdowns wins the game.

THE BALL SHALL BE THE BALL

The original scriptures of Nuffle called for the inflated bladder of a pig to serve as the ball (much to the consternation of the pig). These days balls can be made from anything from finest pigskin to warpstone chunks or even specially-bred ball squigs.

THE FIELD OF PLAY

Whilst few teams these days own their own stadium, there are fields the length and breadth of the world (and, it's whispered, beyond). Each must be 100 paces long and 60 paces wide, with the End Zones an additional five paces, in honour of the sacred Gridiron. The thing with paces is that a Goblin's pace is different to, say, an Elf's pace, so pitches have a tendency to reflect the nation and race it belongs to. As they're broadly the same size, and make up the majority of Blood Bowl players, most Human and Orc pitches are about the same size. Though there is the infamous Green Acres stadium, owned by Halflings – a bit of a squeeze for Troll and Ogre players...

DID YOU KNOW...

The highest score in a Championship game in 2493 was the Marauders 7-0 defeat of the Bugman's Best Dwarf team in the Blood Bowl play-offs. Many blame the defeat on the fact that the Dwarf players had been sampling the brew after which their team is named (the renowned Dwarf beer known as Bugman's XXXXXX) before the match started. Consequently most of the Dwarf players could barely stand up, let alone play Blood Bowl!



IN ASSOCIATION WITH BUGMAN'S XXXXXX – A BREW AS FROTHING AS THE PLAYERS!



DID YOU KNOW...

According to the rules of the original game, a match started with the ball being tossed up between the teams by a hapless referee. The upshot of this was usually a dead referee, of course, so the practice was stopped and a kick-off used instead. Now, at least, the referee can stay out of the way and not get flattened!

ALSO...

That bribery is now so prevalent amongst referees th one can accept a bribe. It's got so bad that the referees' guild is considering appointing a second bunch of referees to govern the conduct of the first lot.

A GAME OF TWO HALVES

The game of Blood Bowl goes on for a set length, divided into two halves. This stops games going on forever (unless absentminded coaches and referees lose track of time). The only time the length of a match can be (legally) changed is if scores are even at the end of the second half. Overtime is optional and must be agreed by both teams, but few coaches will want to be responsible for something as dull as a draw, lest fans' anger lead to an all-too-literal bout of 'sudden death'.

THE DRIVE

At the start of each half, each team's players line up at the centre of the field, and have the role of kicker and receiver bestowed upon them by the fate of Nuffle via the referee flipping a coin (weighted coins and two-headed coins are available, although most teams settle for bribes or just breaking the ref's jaw). A drive continues until a team scores a touchdown or the half ends, at which point, the players (those left standing) are recalled to the line of scrimmage and it starts all again. Players hauled off on a stretcher may return to the game at these kick-offs, if they can manage it.

IT'S ALL KICKING OFF

Blood Bowl's popularity stems from the fact that unlike most sports it actively encourages the players to beat seven bells out of each other! Each player is clad in armour, but forbidden weapons. Many players skirt the edges of this prohibition with knuckle dusters, spikes or blades on their armour and a few openly flaunt it by carrying shivs or knives, not to mention the peculiar Goblin predilection for chainsaws. Anyone caught with a weapon is sent off for the rest of the match, though that's not a huge amount of comfort to any players they've sliced in half! Special mention must go to the Dwarf Death Roller, which is less of a secret weapon and more of a weapon with a secret rider atop it.

THE TEAMS

Nuffle's sacred number is 11, and it is thus decreed that only 11 players from each team can be upon the field of play at any one time. Blood Bowl being Blood Bowl, casualties are inevitable, so teams are permitted up to five reserves for when players are killed, maimed or just knocked out. That's not to say some teams don't try to skirt the rules, but it's a brave or stupid coach who tries to defy the will of Nuffle – which is why it's inevitably Goblin teams that try to sneak a few extra bodies onto the field.

THE PLAYERS

It'd be quicker to list the races of the world that don't play Blood Bowl! The original teams were Mungk's Orcs and Sacred Commissioner Roze-El's Dwarfs, but these days Humans, Ogres, Elves of all nations and even the dread legions of Chaos are known to play Blood Bowl. There are even rumours of ethereal leagues of Daemons, but usually such claims are made only after a few pints of Bugman's Trollbrew. Some even claim to have seen Fishmen teams, because people will believe anything these days.





SPIKE! TOP 3 ALL-TIME WORST PLAYERS



Skurfrik Stone Sucker, Spike! Magazine's All-time Worst Player No. 3, was renowned for being the stupidest Hobgoblin player ever – and that's saying something! Skurfrik often turned up to matches several days early – because it took him that long to figure out how to tie up his boot laces.



No. 2 position goes to Halfling thrower Rondo Magoo of the Bluebay Crammers, by far and away the worst thrower of all time. Rondo was reputedly so shortsighted that he had to get someone else to pick his nose for him. His record of 0 completions, 1271 attempts has stood for thirty-two years and is unlikely ever to be beaten!



Spike! Magazine's No. 1 All-time Worst Player Award goes to 'Speccy' McGroan of the Evil Gits – one of those truly incompetent cretins that Blood Bowl need if it is to retain its prime-time status. He played for only one season (2488-89) but over the year he managed to fumble the ball over 30 times, averaging more than two fumbles per match. Speccy's finest hour, however, was in his final match when he managed to fumble the ball a record nine times before he was pulled off (and then pulled apart!) by the Gits head coach.

HALL OF FAME

THE REIKLAND REAVERS 2485 SQUAD

The Reikland Reavers are one of the pre-eminent Blood teams in the league, founded over a century ago in 2389 as the Altdorf Acolytes, changing their name a few years later. The change seemed to do them the power of good, as they immediately found success, securing their first cup win in 2396. They haven't looked back since, winning the Blood Bowl no less than five times.

Owned by a dynasty of savvy businessmen who back up their vast fortune with astute financial planning, the Reavers hire only the best human players, with the likes of the Mighty Zug and the legend-in-his-own-lifetime Griff Oberwald having donned the blue-and-white in recent years. Not only are the Reavers regarded by many as the best Human Blood Bowl team to take to the field, many commentators and fans argue they're the finest all-round team in the world.

THE REAVERS HALL OF FAME: BLOOD BOWL XXV

Just which of the Reikland Reavers' squads was their best ever is a perennial discussion among Blood Bowl fans, with some finding it more difficult to decide than even their favourite variety of Bugman's! The Reavers of 2485, though, are certainly amongst the very best.

The side the Reavers fielded against the Darkside Cowboys in 2485's Blood Bowl XXV is remembered by all (even those who consider it overrated), as it was the team to features in the match in which (as every true fan knows) the Mighty Zug established his still-unbeaten record for Most Opponents Bitten in One Match, Wolfram von Beck was killed in the first ninety seconds (to be swiftly replaced by Orlak Sturmdrang) and a fresh-faced Griff Oberwald scored the winning touchdown, catapulting him to sporting glory.

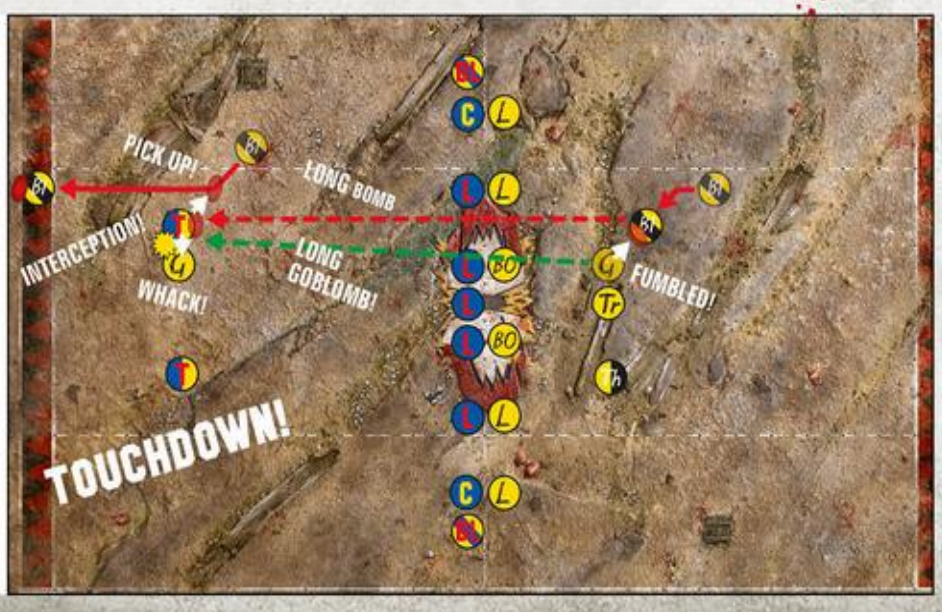
	NAME	POSITION	MA	ST	AG	AV	SKILLS
1	Wolfram von Beck	Blitzer	7	3	3	8	Block, Leader
2	Mighty Zug	Blitzer	4	5	2	9	Block, Loner, Mighty Blow
3	Kurt Helsturm	Thrower	7	3	3	9	Block, Fend, Pass, Sure Hands
4	Ludwig von Kleister	Thrower	6	3	3	8	Accurate, Pass, Sure Hands
5	Markus Schuster	Catcher	9	3	4	7	Catch, Dodge, Strip Ball, Wrestle
6	Johann lange	Catcher	8	2	3	7	Catch, Diving Catch, Dodge, Sprint, Sure Feet
7	Lothar Ostvald	Lineman	7	4	3	8	Block, Tackle
8	Johann Berger	Lineman	7	3	3	8	Dodge, Kick
9	Ernst Daavos	Lineman	6	3	3	8	Guard
10	Griff Oberwald	Lineman	7	3	3	8	
11	Solomon Schuster	Lineman	7	3	3	8	Block
12	Orlakk Sturmdrang	Lineman	6	4	3	9	Block, Leader

The Reikland Reavers	2	Assistant Coaches	5	Re-rolls
Human Team	8	Cheerleaders	7	Fan Factor
Head Coach Helmut Zwimmer	2	Apothecaries	Total cost of team 2,220,000 gp	

DID YOU KNOW...

The limit of 16 players per team was only introduced in the 2482 season. Previously, a team could swap players as often as it wished. The rule was finally introduced after the deaths of 743 Halflings from the Greenfield Grasshuggers at the hands of the Asgard Ravens Norse berserker team.

A new season is about to kick-off, but the Blood Bowl action is already underway and our Spike! Magazine Play of the Month is this incredible 'long goblomb' by the Orcland Raiders, from their first pre-season exhibition game against the Bright Crusaders. Special mention goes to Troll star player Krusha Gongroz who, at a command from team captain Urdukk Oomie-Kicker, reached for teammate 'Lanky' Two-Snots, intending to throw him downfield for an easy touchdown. The stupid creature failed miserably, dropping Lanky to the ground where the unfortunate Goblin dropped the ball. Furious, Urdukk picked up the ball and hurled it downfield himself – only to see it intercepted by the Crusaders' star thrower, Ernst Buonaviccio. Seemingly inspired, Gongroz chose that moment to scoop Lanky up once again and hurl him all the way down the field... straight into Buonaviccio! The Crusader was knocked down, knocked out, and the ball sent bouncing into the end zone where the Raiders pounced for a touchdown. What a play!



SPIKE! TOP 3

ALL-TIME MOST VIOLENT PLAYERS



Spike! Magazine No. 3 All-time Most Violent Player Award is currently held by Max 'Kneecap' Mittleman. Although a referee rather than a player, Max was always a big hit with the fans for his refusal to follow the NAF referees' guidelines. Instead Kneecap dispensed summary justice with the aid of a pair of pliers, a branding iron and a chainsaw. His record for the Most Players Dismembered by a Referee stands to this day.



The great Minotaur player Mad Bull Chainspleen was the most famous and violent player of his day. Not content with just smashing an opponent into the turf and jumping up and down on the body, Mad Bull had a nasty habit of devouring the battered opponent afterwards! An average of two players a match went down (both gravitationally and culinarilly), earning Mad Bull a fearsome reputation on the field and making him a sure-fire hit with all right-thinking Blood Bowl fans!



The late Engel 'The Exterminator' van Evilstein was probably the most violent player ever. Just before he was killed during an explosive attempt to wipe out the entire Underworld Creepers team at one go, he was reckoned to have killed or seriously injured an unbelievable 824 players!



"I'M THE MIGHTY ZUG, AND I DRINK BUGMAN'S TROLLBREW AND YOU SHOULD TOO. THAT'S RIGHT, ISN'T IT? I CAN GET PAID NOW, RIGHT?"



DID YOU KNOW...

A sizable proportion of fans look upon a Blood Bowl match as an opportunity to cause as much mayhem and destruction in the stands as possible. Indeed, many fans feel that something should be done about the small minority of peaceful fans that turn up for games just to watch, and spoil the fun for everyone else.

OPENING FIXTURES 2495

The Reikland Reavers	VS	The Bright Crusaders
The Rostov Renegades	VS	The Evil Gits
The Vynheim Valkyries	VS	The Gouged Eye
The Chaos All-Stars	VS	The Orcland Raiders
The Warhammerers	VS	The Darkside Cowboys
The Dwarf Giants	VS	The Marauders
The Heroes of Law	VS	Da Deff Skwadd
Warpfire Wanderers	VS	The Plaguebearers
The Celestial Comets	VS	The Caledor Dragons
The Bil Bali Archers	VS	Underworld Creepers

STAR PLAYER INTERVIEW



MORG 'N' THORG

"I MEAN, IT'S GIVEN ME A REAL CHANCE TO BREAK A LOT OF PEOPLE'S FACES, AND THAT'S NOT TO BE OVERLOOKED, BUT THE MONEY HELPS - MY CONTRACT'S ALWAYS BEEN VERY GENEROUS."

We've got a treat for you this month, sports fans. No less a figure than the Ballista himself, Morg 'N' Thorg of the Chaos All-Stars has agreed to be interviewed by our rookie reporter during a pre-season training session.

What's the most rewarding thing about playing Blood Bowl, Thorg?
Don't call me that. As to your question, I dunno, really. I mean, it's given me a real chance to break a lot of people's faces, and that's not to be overlooked, but the money helps – my contract's always been very generous.

Thorg, you've more awards than most of our readers have had hot dinners. What's the one you prize the most?
Look, don't call me that. Oh, that's not easy. I've got a few Services to Organ Transplants Medals, and that's certainly helped encourage a few of the kids to be organ donors – even if they did end up nicking other people's! But it has to be my NFC Player of the Year for 2485.

Some Goblin players blame you for encouraging the practice of lobbing them down the pitch – what do you say to them?
Well, it can't be helped, can it? They're only tiny. I've been doing it for years and I've had no complaints from my teammates – that's even when they haven't broken their jaws on the landing. And at the end of the day, it's just a game, ain't it?

Thorg, you've been a living legend since you signed up with the Chaos All-Stars. What were you doing before, Thorg ?
I told you, don't call me that! (*Check back next month for the second half of our interview with* Morg 'N' *Thorg. We're hoping it's with the other half of our reporter!* – Ed)



GOOD EVENING, SPORTS FANS

Blood Bowl is back. One of the most loved and sought-after games Games Workshop has ever produced, it's been out of print for a decade. Now it's back, and a whole new season is about to begin. Veteran or rookie, join us as we take a look at the game of fantasy football.

You heard it, Blood Bowl's back! If you're a veteran reader, the premise will likely be comfortingly familiar. If you're a rookie who doesn't know their long bomb from their end zone, it's very simple: Blood Bowl is the game of fantasy football. Two teams – the box provides Human and Orc teams, while the Skaven are also released this month, with Dwarf, Elf and other teams to follow – compete to get hold of the ball, move it down the field to the opposing team's end zone and score a touchdown. The game is played over two halves of eight turns each. At the end of the second half, the team with the most touchdowns wins the game. There is, however, likely to be an awful of lot of mishap and mayhem along the way.

Blood Bowl has been around since the late 1980s, and has existed in more or less its present form since 1994. Anyone who has played the game in the last 22 years will find this brand-new edition very familiar, as Jervis Johnson, who designed the original game and all of the major new editions up to the present, told us.

"It's 20-odd years since we first produced this more-or-less definitive version of Blood Bowl," he says. "There's been some work done on it over the years – in particular, making sure that the wording of the rules is tighter and that the balance of the teams is more even, that the cost of the players is right, but actually the core game mechanics and the principles of it are much the same. If you got in a time machine back to 1993 and played the third edition, this version wouldn't feel terribly different. It's basically the same game it always has been."

THE BEAUTIFUL GAME

Blood Bowl has more than a few great pieces of art, from the classic profile pieces from the late, great Wayne England to Karl Kopinski's cracking designs that grace the video games by Cyanide Studio.

The crown jewel is the cover art (above) by Filipe Pagliuso. Depicting a game in progress, it evokes Blood Bowl as a brutal, savage sport, but still a sport. The addition of the Goblins, alternately hurled around and trying to put the boot into prone Human players, nod to the comedy at the heart of the game.

A long-time favourite of many gamers, Blood Bowl has been largely out-of-print for the past decade (although it did make the leap from the tabletop to the desktop as a very popular series of computer games from Cyanide Studio during the interim). This latest edition of the classic tabletop version has been polished and updated – perhaps most noticeably with the great new miniatures and a flashy, double-sided board providing the field of play – but beneath the fancy range rulers and bespoke dice, it's the same Blood Bowl that players know and love.

The action all takes place in the Blood Bowl world, one superficially similar to Warhammer's Old World, but also rather markedly different: Orcs, Humans, Dwarfs and the servants of Chaos don't just war amongst themselves in constant battle – they also play each other at Blood Bowl! Essential, therefore, to the fun of game is its own peculiar brand of humour, a mixture of parody and comedy violence. "Blood Bowl came out of an interest in fantasy, science fiction and American football," says Jervis. "But I also I wanted to make sure it couldn't be serious.

"I always saw Blood Bowl as being satirical. It's a parody on professional sports. It takes a lot of the way that sport is reported and makes fun of it. With all the merchandising and the stats and the way people talk about sports – which is all very hyperbolic – and incorporates that into the background in a humorous way. And at the same time it's a warm-hearted satire on fantasy tropes and on some of the things we have in the Warhammer world – so the Blood Bowl world joshes fondly with some of the things we take very seriously the rest of the time."

It's the combination of this mayhem and mishap with a real tactical challenge that makes the game so much fun. "The game tells a story while at the same time providing a challenge," says Jervis. "You can laugh at the outrageous things that happen in the game but at the same time it makes you think just hard enough about what you're going to do next so that you feel that you won because of the skill you brought to the game rather than it just being dice rolling."



JERVIS JOHNSON

One of the grand old Games Designers of Games Workshop, Jervis's hand can be found in any number of our games, stretching back to the time before time known as the 1980s.

Of all Jervis's work as a Games Designer, though, Blood Bowl remains perhaps his most beloved, even after more than twenty years.



PLAYER CARDS

Each player on the Blood Bowl pitch has a quartet of stats, dictating how far they can move in a turn (MA), how good they are at breaking faces (ST), how good they are at dodging out of trouble (AG) and how good they are at taking a punch (AV). Some players also have a few skills – in the case of the thrower, they can salvage a failed pass or reverse a fumble, which can change the course of a game.

THE BLOOD BOWL PLAYBOOK: HUMAN TEAMS



The guys in the trenches, linemen are capable but unspectacular all-rounders, providing blocks and assists for their more skilled teammates. Linemen dream of their moment of glory; coaches should be wary about trying to give it to them.

With the all-important Pass skill, throwers can re-roll any unsuccessful passes – absolutely vital if you're to have a chance of succeeding with those tricky long bombs. Protect your throwers, but get the ball to them quickly.

Quick and agile, catchers are the ideal targets for passes but do lack strength and wear less armour, making them a little fragile. Keep them in the open spaces where they can protect themselves with their speed and agility.

Fast and skilled at blocking, blitzers are ideally suited to carrying the ball down the field or running ahead of their teammates and knocking defenders out of the way. Their speed and blocking skill provide much of a Human team's versatility.

VITAL STATISTICS

There are four stats in the game – Movement Allowance (MA), Agility (AG), Strength (ST) and Armour Value (AV) – and describe the varying qualities of the players. Human catchers, for example, have a very speedy MA of 8, but a rather measly ST of 2 and lack for protection with an AV of a mere 7. Black Orc blockers, by contrast, are likely to be outsprinted by many opponents (their MA is a whopping, erm, 4) but with a ST of 4 and an AV of 9, if they catch a player, they'll tear them apart while able to take a beating themselves. Different stats are important in different aspects of the game – Agility is used for throwing and catching the ball and dodging around opponents, amongst other things, while Strength is used when making blocks, and Armour Value when rolling to see if players are injured after being knocked down – so just these four stats provide a huge variety of different strengths and weaknesses, and players suited to dramatically different roles in a team.

What further separates each player role, and in turn each team, are the skills each player starts with, and the skills they can gain. What makes a thrower different from a lineman is his Pass and Sure Hands skills. Death Zone – Season One adds the ability to develop players, giving them access to a selection of new skills that can shape a team into something more suited to your style of play – making a blitzer into an all-out thug, or giving a catcher some surprise blocking ability.

THE WILD, WILD WORLD OF BLOOD BOWL

The fantasy element of Blood Bowl helps add an amusing and sophisticated wrinkle to the variation between players and teams. The many races which play Blood Bowl are quite different, and their teams reflect that, not just in looks and what players they can hire, but how they play. Even at a glance, you can see the contrast between Human and Orc teams, for instance.

"The Human team are essentially the benchmark for the 'middle' team," says Jervis. "They're all-rounders where, in general, the other races' teams are more focused on particular styles of play. This provides players (that's us, the real-life coaches) a variety of different options. I love playing Dark Elves,

BLOCK AND TACKLE

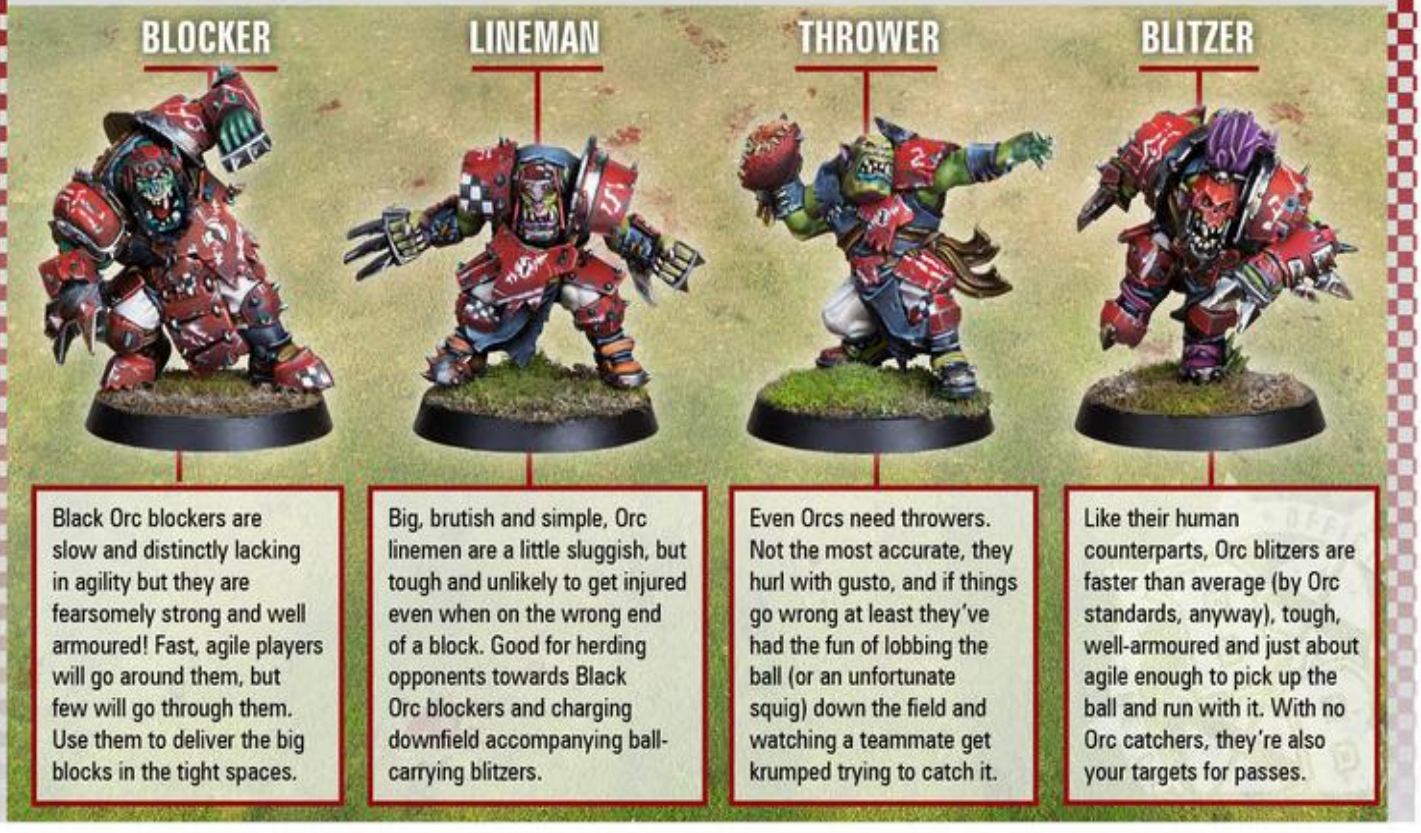
Each player that hasn't fallen flat on their face has what is called a tackle zone – essentially the player's reach. If an enemy player tries to move out of a square that's part of your tackle zone, they must make a dodge roll or risk being knocked down, and potentially ending up knocked out, injured or even killed.

Whilst it means agile players like Elves and Skaven can run rings around sluggish Orcs, one bad roll can spell the violent end for a particularly cocky player!

THE OFFICIAL BLOOD BOWL STAMP

Blood Bowl has always been a phenomenally popular sport, and naturally, many suspicious customers have tried to cash in on its world-spanning popularity with dodgy knock-off merchandise sold off the back of carts. If it's Official Blood Bowl Merchandise, it'll bear this mark – accept no imitations!

THE BLOOD BOWL PLAYBOOK: ORC TEAMS



Black Orc blockers are slow and distinctly lacking in agility but they are fearsomely strong and well armoured! Fast, agile players will go around them, but few will go through them. Use them to deliver the big blocks in the tight spaces.

Big, brutish and simple, Orc linemen are a little sluggish, but tough and unlikely to get injured even when on the wrong end of a block. Good for herding opponents towards Black Orc blockers and charging downfield accompanying ball-carrying blitzers.

Even Orcs need throwers. Not the most accurate, they hurl with gusto, and if things go wrong at least they've had the fun of lobbing the ball (or an unfortunate squig) down the field and watching a teammate get krumped trying to catch it.

Like their human counterparts, Orc blitzers are faster than average (by Orc standards, anyway), tough, well-armoured and just about agile enough to pick up the ball and run with it. With no Orc catchers, they're also your targets for passes.

and that's because I like the idea of that kind of fast team making long passes down the field, but they're fragile. So that gives you the kind of thing you get in sports, but really emphasises it and ties it to a particular style of team, rather than having to make any one team (such as Humans, say) capable of all these different ways of playing.

"Orcs are hittier, although they're very close to the Humans. That's very deliberate. It's always been that way right from the beginning – Orcs versus Humans, it's just such a classic fantasy match-up, and it's always been such a good place to start. There are differences between them – the Orcs are a bit better at hitting and the Humans are a bit better at passing – but they're very similar at heart.

> **"It's always been that way right from the beginning - Orcs versus Humans, it's just such a classic fantasy match-up, and it's always been such a good place to start."**

"Skaven are where things get really interesting. What they are is fast – not necessarily very good at throwing, but if you can get the ball to the right player, they can potentially score a touchdown in a turn or two. They are incredibly quick, but the downside is they're rather brittle – only their blitzers can take a punch. And to an extent they're sneaky – they've got players in there who can spoil somebody's day by stabbing them in the back (or the front, if the ref isn't looking) – but they're a fast-running team, generally."

There are also the Dwarfs, who are similar to the Orcs but have one notable limitation. "They are very slow," says Jervis, "but they are very tough, and they're very good at hitting people. They're the classic cage team, basically. What you'll tend to find with the Dwarf team is that if they've got the ball they'll form up around the ball carrier and just grind down the field. Maybe they won't score a lot of touchdowns in the process, but it's very tough to get the ball back off them once they've got it. What they can't do is get that quick score, so if the game starts to go against them, they can struggle to get back into it.

"The other thing they're pretty good at is just being attritional. One of the things that Blood Bowl has that isn't true to nearly the same extent, thankfully, in real-life sports is that you can just wear the other team out by injuring their players. The Dwarfs can definitely play that game if they want to and will rarely succumb to it if the opponent tries it on them."

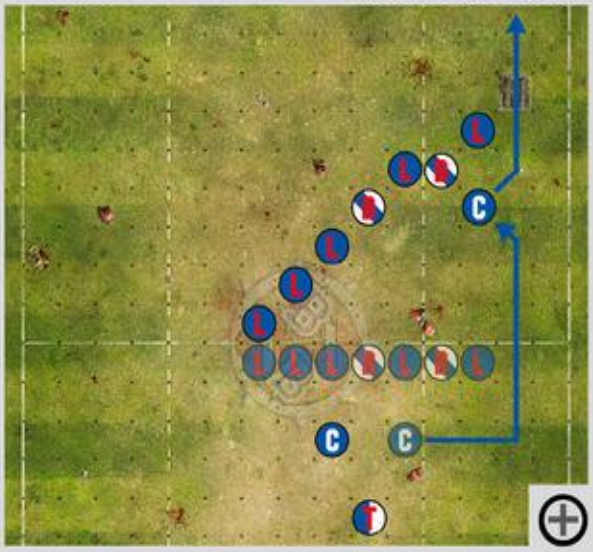
STRATEGY! TACTICS! PUNCHING PEOPLE IN THE FACE!

These differences between the teams require different approaches, and Blood Bowl presents an interesting mix of tactical options. Not only are there elements of strategy of the kind familiar from other tabletop games, but the tactics available to Blood Bowl coaches also parallel those found in its real world counterparts.

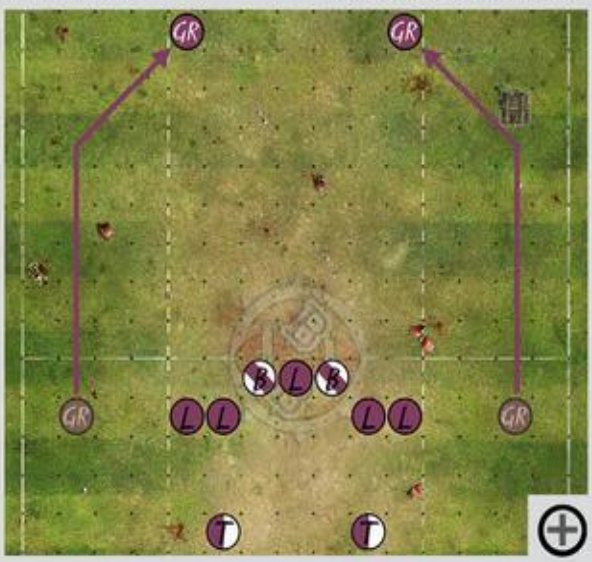
"Fantasy and science fiction, at their heart what they do is take something from the real world and look at it through a slightly different lens," says Jervis. "You can see

THE BLOOD BOWL PLAYBOOK: STARTING FORMATIONS

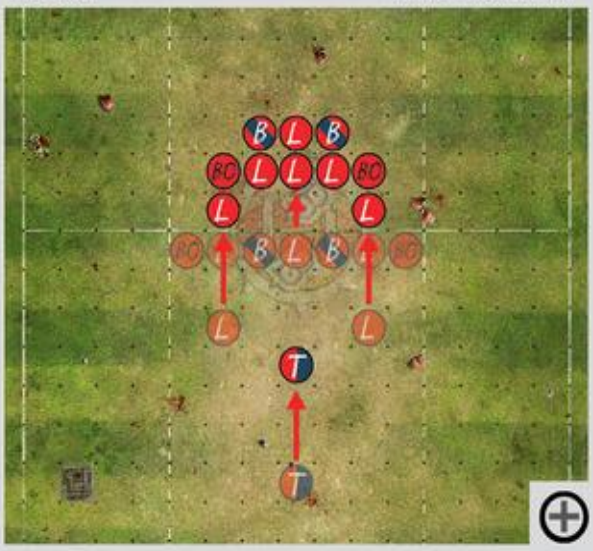
THE SCREEN — **PROTECT THE CATCHER**



STRETCH PLAY — **MOVE FAST, THROW LONG**



THE CAGE — **GRIND THEM DOWN**



elements of American football being refracted through the lens of this rather weird setting. Right from the start I wanted you to be able to throw the ball, pass it down the field, and for that idea of formations and how you set up to be an important element.". (

"The other thing with Blood Bowl – which I think is quite different to quite a lot of our games – is that you recruit players for your team with gold, and they might develop over the course of the season, but that starting team is relatively balanced. What we accepted – and embraced, in fact – is that certain teams are harder to play. And we tell people that. Essentially, what we say to players is that if you're starting out with the game, you're probably best off beginning with Humans or Orcs, and as you get a bit better and get a feel for the game, you might use one of the other teams." (Death Zone – Season One, also available this month, covers seven more teams.)

"So the teams aren't all perfectly balanced against each other. There are teams that are hard to use well – Halflings being a classic example – but they're balanced enough that if

THE TURNOVER

The turnover is one of the most dreaded moments in Blood Bowl, as you mess up a vital dice roll, your turn ends and control passes to your opponent.

Do you undertake risky manoeuvres first? Or will you make safe moves early on, knowing one bad roll can ruin your plans? All too often, a coach can snatch defeat from the jaws of victory with one unlucky roll.

THE NEW KIT

At the start of the Blood Bowl project, Mark Bedford was, in his own words, "locked in a room and told to draw Blood Bowl players".

"What we wanted to get across with the new designs was that they're not just Warhammer warriors without weapons," says Mark. "They're wearing sports gear, made by the likes of Orcidas. To be honest, part of it was a nod to what came before in the early editions of Blood Bowl, but updated with 21st century know-how."



THE BLOOD BOWL PLAYBOOK: SKAVEN TEAMS



THROWER

Skaven throwers are quicker than their human counterparts, but less durable, ideally suited to recovering kick-offs, scampering quickly upfield into good throwing positions and getting the ball into the hands of the super-speedy Gutter Runners.

BLITZER

The toughest players on a Skaven team, blitzers are well armoured but still quick. Ideal lead blockers, they can open up gaps for swift Gutter Runners to sneak through, or as ball carriers themselves, with a few nippy linerats in support.

GUTTER RUNNER

Amongst the fastest players in the game, Gutter Runners are even more fragile than their Skaven teammates. Less able-handed than Human catchers, get the ball to them with short, accurate passes then unleash their speed and agility.

LINEMAN

Lightly armoured and relatively fragile, Skaven linemen can, however, still hold their own against most other teams' linemen, and are somewhat swifter too. Best used in ganging up on opponents or providing assists to hardier blitzers.

you're a good coach, you can win with them, but you're giving yourself a challenge if you try it. So there's an element there about the challenge you give yourself when you're playing the game, too, which I think is cool. All of the teams offer different options. They're all fun to play in their own way. You can win with any of them. It's just that some of them are a bit harder to win with than others."

A LEAGUE OF YOUR OWN

"The other thing that the game has that's always been very important to it is league play. You can play the game as a series of one-off matches, but actually what most people end up doing once they really get their teeth into the game is setting up a league and playing a series of games…taking a team, building it up – you're the coach, and you develop your team over the course of several games to become a championship-winning team (you hope). People enjoy that, they can see the real-life parallels, and they can see that their game isn't an isolated thing but it's another match… but what happens if your star player is injured? What happens if they're killed?" Every coach's worst nightmare!

"I think it also gives Blood Bowl players the opportunity to try different things out," says Jervis. "You can start out playing one style of team but then it's always interesting to try out

THIS SEASON'S HOT NEW DOUBLE ACT

Whilst Blood Bowl is, at its heart, the same game Jervis unleashed on the world 20 years ago, Andy Hoare and James Hewitt have not been idle. There are several small-scale fixes and finesses to the game, with things like Illegal Procedures firmly relegated to the realm of 'optional' rules. Special Play cards have been restored to their place at the heart of the game, where recent editions had required a deck of playing cards on hand to make use of them. That aside, this is very much Blood Bowl as we've always known it. Andy and James were reluctant to change much about the core of Blood Bowl – after all, it's a beloved game that's stood the test of time for a reason!

Instead, they've simply added plenty of new ways to play, rather than cropping any out. Exhibition Play, which is covered in Death Zone – Season One, has always existed in a fashion, but is now given its own dedicated rules. And whilst there's a brand-new set of league rules in the supplement, there's nothing to stop you and your friends using the classic rules for ongoing play if you prefer it. In short, Blood Bowl is now, more than ever, about how you want to play it – it's a game, after all!





ANDY HOARE & JAMES HEWITT

The leg work on this latest edition of Blood Bowl fell to Andy Hoare and James Hewitt, the first project from Forge World's Specialist Games team. Andy has previously worked in the Studio and for the last several years on the Horus Heresy. James was previously one of the Studio's rules writers and worked on Warhammer Quest Silver Tower, amongst other projects.

THE BLOOD BOWL PLAYBOOK: DWARF TEAMS

BLOCKER



Dwarf blockers are tougher than old boots, making them the perfect players for cages and attrition play. The biggest drawback is that blockers are even slower than an elf with two broken legs.

RUNNER



Runners are some of the fastest players you have, but their real value is in their sure hands. Give them the ball and stick them in a cage of blockers, as despite being the fastest player you have, they're still Dwarfs!

BLITZER



The blocker's swifter cousin and the runner's tougher brother. Use them to put down any enemy players you don't like the look of, like their ball carrier, catcher or any player your opponent is particularly attached to.

TROLL SLAYER



Troll Slayers are perfect for putting enemy big guys in the injury box, even if they have a tendency to get a bit carried away. Be careful not to let them get isolated from the rest of the team – they're fragile, for a Dwarf.

a different team and learn how to use them effectively." With each team being around a dozen models, it becomes easier to try out a new team as opposed to a new army.

THE NEW SEASON

So, Blood Bowl is back, and in style. Whilst it's perfectly fine to play the game straight out of the box with just what's inside, if you fancy trying out different teams, or alternative Special Play decks, or even whole new ways of playing the game like exhibition matches, you're going to be spoilt for choice. This month alone sees the release of another team (the Skavenblight Scramblers), a supplement that covers many new ways to play (including a brand-new league system), a host of new teams, and even a new playing field (with accompanying weather table). Just imagine what else might be on the horizon…

And if all those wonderful new miniatures, supplements and add-ons aren't enough to satisfy your appetite for Blood Bowl, keep one eye firmly on the official Blood Bowl Facebook page and website – **www.bloodbowl.com** – which has all the locker-room banter, trash talk from rival coaches across the globe and the bleeding edge of news in the ever-changing Blood Bowl landscape. White Dwarf is proud to be hosting a few pages from the premier Blood Bowl periodical Spike! Magazine each month (, so you can see the month's dirtiest plays, find out the most recent fixtures to see when your favourite team will be playing next, and maybe get a little more of an insight into the lives of star players.

That's right, sports fans – after a decade in the wilderness, Blood Bowl is back, and there's never been a better time to be a fan!

HOME AND AWAY

Having had a good old-fashioned ogle at the brand-new Blood Bowl pitch, you'd be forgiven for believing it was the work of some supremely talented artist in a digital art suite. In fact, the Specialist Games team made the pitch the old-fashioned way, building a physical pitch from scratch before photographing it from on high. The only thing added with the black art of digital photo manipulation was the square grid.

"We built the board from scratch and photographed it," says Mark Bedford. "It also meant we could do lots of really cool things later on in post-production, like the snowy winter pitches." The more cynical amongst you may be forgiven for thinking that you'll only ever see the classic Human and Orc pitches as boards you can buy, but the Specialist Games team have already got plans to make sure every team feels at home when they play Blood Bowl.



THE STUFF OF LEGENDS

The earlier editions of Blood Bowl had more than a fair few teams to choose from over the years. If you're a grizzled coach with many seasons of Blood Bowl experience and have a Norse, Chaos Pact or Vampire team (to name but three of the classic rosters on offer) you want to dust off for the new season, Specialist Games have you covered.

If you want to take these teams of legend to fortune and glory, check out the Blood Bowl Facebook page for more information.



REIKLAND REAVERS VS THE GOUGED EYE

Don your team colours, tap a cask of Bugman's XXXXXX and tune in to Cabalvision, because it's time for our Blood Bowl Match Report. How will Games Designer Jervis Johnson fare against our Editor, Matt, when the Reikland Reavers play the Gouged Eye?

DRIVE BY DRIVE

A Blood Bowl game lasts for two halves of eight turns each, but the real shape of a game comes from the 'drives' that unfold as players attempt to move the ball downfield and score. A drive is, essentiall, the period of play between touchdowns and kick-offs. The ball might change hands a few times, but often a drive really comes to fruition when a team manages a sustained spell of possession. So, you'll see we've presented the game as a series of drives (mostly scoring ones, too!) with diagrams, photos and, of course, commentary from Jim and Bob bringing you all the key moments.

Blood Bowl, like most of our games, involves two players. Unlike most of our games, however, it involves a ball that has to be kicked, thrown and otherwise manhandled over a blood-splattered line to score a touchdown. The side that scores the most touchdowns is the winner, Simple, really. Except that while some players are concentrating on picking up the ball, the rest are pummelling the living daylights out of each other. Sounds like a great premise for a special Battle Report, eh?

This month, Matt "Blood Bowl Fanatic" Keefe is holding the banner high for the White Dwarf team. Over the last few weeks he's been polishing up on the rules of the game and he was even spotted in the car park throwing a ball around.

And no wonder he's been practicing, because he'll be playing against none other than the father of Blood Bowl, Jervis Johnson. For those of you new to Blood Bowl, Jervis created the game back in 1986, so he's had plenty of time to develop his tactics. Matt, it's fair to say, looked a little concerned that he'd embarrass himself.

To make the game a fair (pah!), even match, Matt and Jervis fielded the two quick-start teams as described on page 5 of the Blood Bowl manual in the new boxed game. Essentially, each player would begin the match with 12 players, of which one would begin the game as a substitute. No doubt they would be needed later in the match when the punches started flying.

We're also pleased to announce that for this Match Report we'll be joined be infamous Blood Bowl commentators Jim Johnson and Bob Bifford. Look forward to some enlightening commentary from them throughout the match, plus useful(ish) facts and no small amount of ridicule when a player does something foolish. Let's play ball!

THE REIKLAND REAVERS

11	Ivan Kellhoofer, Lineman
2	Hans von Broken, Lineman
4	Matthias Meier, Lineman
7	Ritter von Baum, Lineman
14	Nobby van Pocklespike, Lineman
3	Tristan Batten, Lineman
6	Heinrich Bolado, Blitzer
5	Jan Piquo, Thrower
1	Jurgen Schlingder, Thrower
9	Arno von Runckel, Catcher
10	Johannes 'the Duke' Duchel, Catcher
12	Biff Underfeld, Blitzer





JERVIS JOHNSON

Jervis Johnson is the creator of Blood Bowl and chose to take coaching duties with the Reikland Reavers for our match report."I prefer to use more agile, throwing teams," says Jervis. "Traditionally I play Dark Elves. I love throwing the ball down the field, even if it doesn't usually work out terribly well, so the Humans were the team for me."

THE GOUGED EYE

1	Urfrik Skullhack, Black Orc Blocker
2	Oaf Kneebreaker, Thrower
3	Krug Painspear, Blitzer
9	Gort Skullhack, Blitzer
12	Trok Elfsplitter, Lineman
5	Izzi the Frog, Lineman
7	Grobba da Lobba, Thrower
11	Gurg the Whack, Lineman
4	Skrappa Snotbeater, Lineman
6	Durf Smacktalka, Lineman
8	Grimjaw Gitslash, Black Orc Blocker
10	Hack Grimtoof, Lineman





MATT KEEFE

White Dwarf Editor Matt is a long-time Blood Bowl player with previous stints at the helm of Human, Dwarf and Skaven teams. His only prior experience coaching the Orcs, though, was short-lived. "The Orcs are a good, solid team. They're durable, but lack for speed, so I hope my tactics hold up," says Matt optimistically.

THE FIRST DRIVE: DA CAGE

The Gouged Eye win the coin toss and elect to receive, meaning the Reikland Reavers will kick off the first half! The ball is booted down the field, but the Gouged Eye get a quick snap and the game begins!

KICK-OFF TABLE

The element of chance provides some of Blood Bowl's tactical challenge and much of the game's unique humour. Most notably, there's the kick-off table, a chart of random events that can occur at a kick-off – everything from high kicks to pitch invasions! Successful coaches need to be ready to capitalise on whatever happens.

With Matt electing to receive the kick-off, Jervis opted to go long, placing the ball deep in the Gouged Eye's half – from where it immediately scattered straight out of the end zone, gifting the Gouged Eye a touchback (meaning Matt could give the ball to a player of his choice). But there was worse to come for the Reavers. A result of Quick Snap! on the kick-off table allowed Matt to move each of his players a square, giving him a head start and allowing him to set his players up ready to block. With the Gouged Eye taking the first turn, there couldn't have been a better start.

Matt immediately attempted to set up a cage formation – a classic Orc tactic wherein a protective 'cage' of players form up around the ball carrier and rumble downfield in a brawling mass. Having set up with the cage tactic in mind, Matt had his Black Orc blockers anchoring the ends of his line, allowing him to start with some hefty blocks before offering assists to teammates on the inside. The Reavers' line was quickly pushed back and, with so many players knocked down, Jervis struggled to mount return blocks to disrupt the cage. Orcs are not fast, but they are hard to stop, and a plan was coming together…







"Now that, Bob, is how to roll up a defensive line. The Reikland Reavers are in serious trouble, with six of their players lying on the turf and the Orcs forming a cage around Trok Elfsplitter, their No. 12. I think he's got the ball, but it's pretty tough to tell from this angle. I'm surprised, and a little disappointed, at the lack of violence, though. The Black Orcs led the offensive, rolling the line up from the wings, but didn't capitalise on their attack – there's not been a single casualty so far!"

Ball | Human Move | Orc Move | Push Back | Knocked Down



"The Reikland Reavers will need to pull something special out of the bag if they're to stop this offensive, Jim. Personally, I'd recommend an Ogre…

"But wait, Johannes 'the Duke' Duchel is making a run for it. That's a brave move from No. 10, but I can't see him stopping that big green wall. Unless he gets help from lineman Tristan Batten, that is. No, scratch that, Tristan's down. Tristan's down! Trok's making a break for it. Looks like a touchdown's incoming!"











"This is an impressive and, I think, unprecedented display of tactics from the Gouged Eye here, Bob. Oaf Kneebreaker and Krug Painspear are holding back the Linemen and, no, wait... Heinrich Bolado is making a move, he's past Krug and he's going in for the tackle on Oaf. Jan Piquo's closing in, aiming to head off Trok. It's a bit desperate, Bob – a Catcher and a thrower against three Orc linemen. Duchel's gone in for the tackle... he's taken a knee to the crotch. Trok's over the line. Touchdown!"

BLOCKING

Blocking is an essential part of Blood Bowl, for teams both with and without the ball. For the attacking team, blocking clears the way for teammates to head towards the end zone. For the defence, it's a way of slowing the other team down, getting to the ball carrier and sending the ball bouncing away. Players cannot block if they move or get up, though (with the exception of a special 'blitz' action by one player per turn), so the Gouged Eye's successful blocks in the first few turns made it increasingly hard for the Reavers to block in return.

Matt sent Trok Elfsplitter, the Orc lineman gifted the ball by the touchback, 'dashing' (by Orc standards) up into the back of the cage, where his teammates quickly formed up to protect him. Some valiant defence from the Reavers slowed the cage (tackle zones – the squares around opposing players – can't be moved through without making a risky dodge roll first, so even without throwing blocks, teams can slow down the opposition) but with so many players knocked down each turn, the Reavers were soon struggling to hold off the Gouged Eye. By the fifth turn, the cage had made its way deep into the Reavers' half, and Matt decided to bust out with a 'big green arrow' of players making for the end zone. Jervis attempted some desperate last-minute cover defence, sending a plucky catcher back to block Trok's route. In the end, he proved little more than a speed bump, alas, as the Orc lineman rumbled in for the touchdown!

FROM THE DUGOUT...

Matt: As we discussed in our feature on page 36, starting formations are a really important part of Blood Bowl strategies. Playing with the Orcs, and winning the coin toss, I set up with the aim of employing the cage formation straight away. Putting the Black Orc Blockers on the ends of my line allowed me to start off with a lot of favourable blocks (the stronger the blocking player relative to their target, the more dice you get to roll) and the fortunate Quick Snap! result on the kick-off table allowed me to immediately gain the upper hand in match-ups along the line of scrimmage. Needless to say, I was rather pleased with how my starting formation set me up to score (with the help of a handy dose of good fortune, of course). Things would turn out to be rather different on the subsequent kick-off, however...



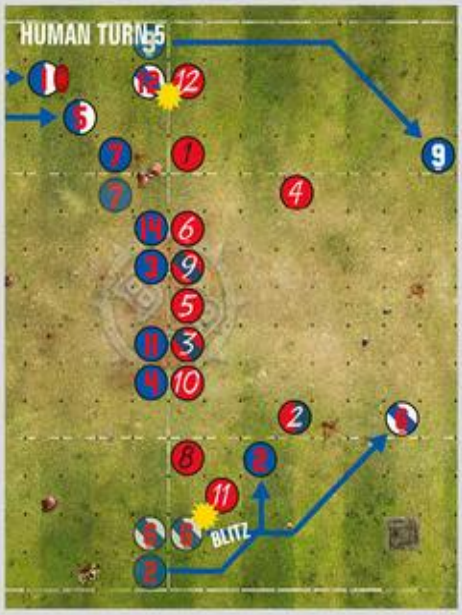
THE SECOND DRIVE: STRETCH PLAY

With the game at 1-0 to the Gouged Eye, the Reikland Reavers prepare to receive the kick-off. What can one of the most feted teams in the league do with their own first spell of possession?

A result of High Kick on the kick-off table allowed Jervis to reposition any one of his players in the square where the ball was about to land – choosing a sure-handed thrower, a clean catch immediately followed, and the Reavers were off. Jervis opted for the high-speed, long-range 'stretch' play – sending a fleet-footed catcher downfield as quickly as possible. Matt's poor choice of set-up was immediately exposed as the much slower Orcs were caught too high up the field to turn around and chase back. Still, the stretch play brings its own risks as, with potential receivers so far down the field, a long-ranged pass will be needed to hit them. Jervis had Jan Piquo (thrower, No. 5) bring the ball up from the back, cleverly handing it off to fellow thrower Jurgen Schlingder (No. 1) while catcher Arno von Runkel (No. 9) dashed into the end zone without so much as a single opponent anywhere near him. Hand-offs, like passes, require a dice roll, so Jervis had introduced an element of risk with this high-speed stretch play, but the reward was immediate as Schlingder dashed up towards halfway and heaved the ball downfield to the waiting von Runkel. Touchdown to the Reavers!

SKILLS

Many skills allow players to re-roll the dice when attempting certain actions. The Pass and Catch skills are textbook examples and, while Jervis's chosen tactics did require several dice rolls for a risky long pass, the fact that both the throw and the catch would benefit from re-rolls gave it a good chance of success.







"A conservative kick-off from the Gouged Eye and a beautiful catch by Piquo, who passes it off to Schlingder. It looks like the Reavers are making a break for it down the left flank – a classic stretchy play. Blitzer No. 12, Underfeld, has gone in for a tackle on Trok, knocking his opposite number down and allowing Runckel to slip through the gap like a greased-up Snotling. Only Skrappa Snotbeater can catch him now. He's closing... he's tapped Runckel's ankles... the Catcher's down!



"This is some of the fastest play I've seen from the Reavers, Jim. The last time I saw a team move this fast was after that Squig Burger incident in 2488. Boy, did those Halflings suffer...

"Back to the play and it looks like Schlingder's making a break for it. Ruckel's back up, too, and he's staggered across the line into the end zone. I can see Schlingder lining up his throw. It's going to be a long one, Jim. The ball's in the air. Runckel's caught it. Touchdown, Reavers! Great play!"



FROM THE DUGOUT...

Jervis: I can't resist passing. Passes can be risky but a thrower passing to a catcher means both get re-rolls (owing to the Pass and Catch skills respectively), so it's a chance worth taking.

Matt: Dealing with kick-offs is important. Where I set up really well on the first drive, here I just didn't think enough about Jervis's likely tactics or how to defend against them.



THE THIRD DRIVE: THE SNEAK

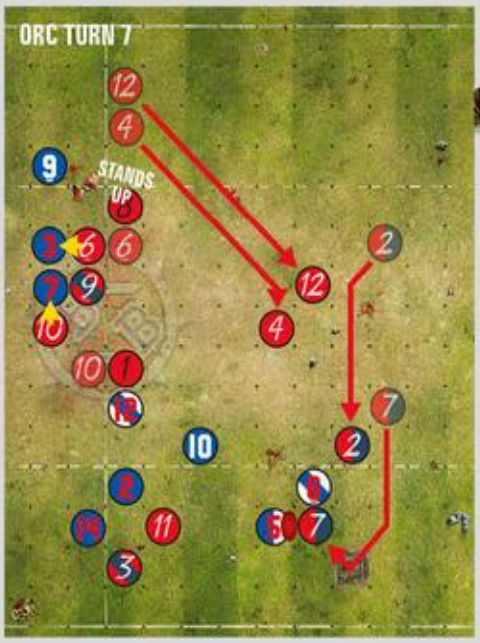
With that immediate strike back, the Reavers are back in the game. Everything looks poised for the teams to go in 1-1 at half-time, until a riot suddenly (if not unexpectedly) breaks out in the stands...

As the ball was lofted skywards once more, a moment of Blood Bowl mayhem broke out – a riot in the stands, causing the referee to stop the game and wind the clock back to before the sudden outbreak of fan involvement. Each player received a free turn. With the Gouged Eye all set up to krump some 'eads, the ball was allowed to bounce around behind their lines. Matt attempted what should have been a few safe blocks before attempting to recover the ball but then, disaster, a Black Orc Blocker failed miserably to live up to his name and rolled two results of Both Down while trying to thump a puny Human catcher! This sudden turnover allowed Jervis to send his players scooting around the Orc line, Jan Piquo (No. 5) scooping the ball up and heading down the field with escorting teammates close behind. The Orcs' lack of speed (and Matt's poor set-up) were again exposed, and another turn was all that was needed for Piquo to scoot into the end zone. Amazingly, a second riot ensued, making for one very long first half, and giving the Orcs enough time to finally pile a few casualties on the Humans. But it's touchdowns that count, and it was 2-1 Reavers at the half.

SAFETY FIRST

Some actions are riskier than others – a quick pass if safer than a long bomb, of course, and blocking with a couple of assists is safer than going it alone. You should generally carry out your safest actions first each turn to avoid the risk of turnovers. Of course, bad luck (and clumsy Black Orc blockers!) can't be helped.







"Interesting, the Reavers are standing back for this kick-off, expecting a charge by the Orcs. But wait, the ball's on the ground and the Orcs are completely ignoring it! Their coach has told them to go in for the kill, and Urfrik Skullhack has knocked out Matthias Meier. And now Ivan Kellhoofer is out, too! That's a shock, but it's not as shocking as the play on the right flank. Jan Piquo has found a gap, he's got Duchel and Bolado in support. Piquo's picked up the ball. The sneak's making a break for it!"



"Oh ho, now that's a turn up for the books, eh, Jim? The Orc Throwers – No. 2 and No. 7 – are the only Orcs able to stop the attack and it looks like neither of them are too keen to get stuck into the fight. Grobba gives Piquo a little shove, but that's all. Get stuck in, you worthless greenie! No, it's too late, Bolado has moved in to head off Oaf Kneebreaker, Duchel's covering the open ground and Piquo is making a break for it. We don't often see Throwers this far up the pitch, but he's over the line. Touchdown!"



FROM THE DUGOUT...

Matt: Oh no, it's happened again. With just a couple of turns left in the half, I planned to use that time krumpin' 'oomies. Something that didn't really feature in my strategy at this point was, erm, the ball. With another Riot result on the kick-off table, however, suddenly there was time for a lot of things to happen, and my lack of a plan for dealing with the ball proved rather costly.





No. 9, Arno von Runckel, dashes past the Orc defensive line and awaits a long pass from thrower Jurgen Schlingder.

THE FOURTH DRIVE: THE SCREEN

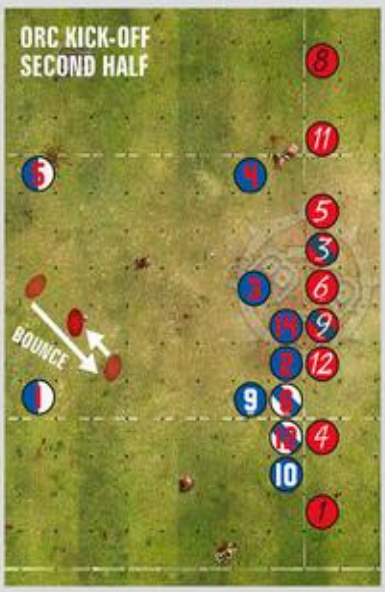
It's the Gouged Eye to kick off the second half. 2-1 down, it's a tricky position for an Orc team to be in. They really need to get that ball back. But the Reavers are up to something. They're lining up out wide...

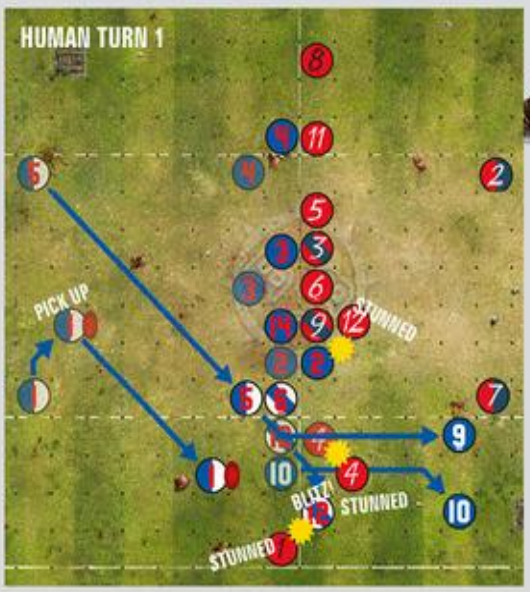
The Reavers were sitting pretty at the start of the second half but the Gouged Eye's Orcy tactics were taking their toll, and the Humans were forced to line up with just ten fit players. Jervis set up in a 'wing' formation, loading the right-hand side of the field with players. The Orcs, having already set up, could do little to compensate and, while Jervis sent thrower Jurgen Schlingder (No. 1) over to retrieve the ball, the Reavers' line launched a fearsome round of blocking against the Gouged Eye's flank. An Orc lineman and the Black Orc blocker Urfrik Skullhack both went down stunned, followed soon after by the Gouged Eye's only scorer so far, Trok Elfsplitter. As stunned players must spend a turn recovering before they can stand back up, the Gouged Eye's flank was suddenly horribly exposed. The Reavers' rampaging front line followed up, forming a blocking screen heading down the wing. Schlingder raced up from his own half, carrying the ball, and slipping in behind the screen.

Matt sent players thundering over, Krug Painspear (No. 3) blitzing in from the side, but with so many Orc players out of action on the turf, it wasn't enough to disrupt the Reaver's carefully constructed screen. Blitzer Heinrich

DISGUISE PLAY

In Jervis's earlier stretch play, he was able to send players down both flanks, making it hard for Matt to know where the ball was going to go. This isn't always possible, though, especially as injuries take their toll, and so for the second half Jervis adopted the opposite ploy of an obvious but all-out attack down one side.







"We return for the second half, but not all the Reikland Reavers have. I've heard from the dugout that Ritter von Baum is taking a dirt nap and he may be out for some time.

"And that's the kick off. Schlingder's caught the ball, but I'm more interested in what's happening on the line of scrimmage. Did you see that, Bob? Three Orcs down in as many seconds, and they ain't getting back up. The right flank is wide open and both catchers have made a break for the end zone."





"That move has infuriated the Orcs and they're hitting back hard. Gurg's in, Izzi the Frog's blocking, Durf Smacktalka's gone in for a block on No. 14, Pocklespike, and they're knocking them all down. But it is way too little, too late. Von Runckel and Duchel are already past the line of scrimmage and Schlingder is moving up screened by both blitzers. He's hopped over Snotbeater, he's handed the ball off to Duchel, and the nippy little catcher is running for the end zone. Great play, there!"





INJURIES

When players are knocked down in a block or fall after a failed dodge roll, they must make an armour roll. If this beats their AV, then a further 2D6 injury roll must be made. If lucky, players will just be stunned, but may be knocked out, or worse, and forced to leave the field. Injuries can be a real factor in the game. Over the first couple of turns of the second half, the number of Orc players stunned by the Reavers really made it hard for Matt to form a defensive line, while the casualties mounting up on the Reavers would also soon start to tell…

Bolado led the way, dodging past Gort Skullhack (both coaches had been fairly cautious up to this point, avoiding risky dodge rolls – a test against a player's Agility stat – but Jervis clearly felt the time was right, and Bolado passed easily) before blitzing Krug Painspear out of the way.

The pass was on but the Reavers didn't need it. Schlingder followed his teammates' blocking screen, handing off the ball at the end of his run to waiting catcher Johannes Duchel before Duchel's speed took him down the field and into the end zone for yet another quick-fire score. Touchdown to the Reavers! Once again, the execution of a play direct from a starting formation had been masterful and the Reavers were firmly in command at 3 touchdowns to 1. Big trouble for the Gouged Eye…

FROM THE DUGOUT…

Jervis: I got very lucky with my armour rolls (though less so with my injury rolls) during the first turn of this half, which took a lot of Matt's players out of action for a turn (effectively two turns, since they also have to stand up again). With only a single player allowed to blitz each turn, this really limited the Orcs and meant my numerical disadvantage wasn't really exploited. For the moment, at least…

Matt: I don't believe it. I am getting absolutely mugged. Another two-turn touchdown! (Who wrote this stupid game?) My set-up wasn't too bad but I was in trouble after some very good blocking in the first turn by Jervis. I knew that scoring two (or even three) touchdowns in the remaining time would be difficult, but the Orcs' greater toughness offered me some hope…

THE FIFTH DRIVE: DA BIG SCRAP

Ouch! The Gouged Eye are down 3-1. They're going to need to score and score fast - not their speciality! But the Reavers are in trouble with no reserves and two men in the casualty box. Can they hold out?

The Orcs were in big trouble. Matt's only score so far had taken six turns to orchestrate, and now he needed two touchdowns just to send the game into overtime, with only six turns left. Matt set up ready to execute another cage formation. A touchback gifted the ball safely to the Orcs and it was entrusted to lineman No. 12, Trok Elfsplitter, the earlier touchdown scorer. A turn's worth of good blocking set the cage up nicely, and Trok took up his place in the centre of it, but the cage wasn't quite sealed off and a block from plucky lineman Hans von Broken (No. 2) coming in from the corner of the cage knocked Trok back and down, sending the ball spilling out of his grasp and bouncing into an empty square beside him. Unfortunately for the Reavers', this square was itself also right inside the Orcs' rather well-protected cage.

For the first time in the game, an offensive formation wasn't coming together quite as intended (Matt's earlier cage, as well as Jervis's stretch play and screen had all come off in textbook fashion) and now a brawl broke out in the middle of the field – much to the Orcs' liking.

GAME MANAGEMENT

It's important to 'manage' the game. How you do this depends on your team's strengths and weaknesses. Orcs take a long time to score so need to avoid falling behind. Other teams might be able to rack up scores quickly, then hope they can avoid injuries and see the game out to the end.







"I'm back, sports fans – call of nature and all that. Looks like I missed a nippy bit of play there from the Reavers, but now we're back on the line of scrimmage following a touchback. Trok's got the ball again and it looks like the Orcs are trying to set up another cage. Tried and tested, eh, Jim? But wait, what's von Broken up to? He's in the cage! He's knocked the ball out of Trok's hands. Now the Orcs are giving him a good kicking. Von Broken's down and the Orcs are stamping on him. Referee!"



"I think the ref might have turned a blind eye, Bob. He's got heavy pockets right now, if you know what I mean. Still the Orcs are at least trying to pick up the ball. I think they're squabbling about who's going to carry it. Oh, there he is – Grobba da Lobba's got the ball and he's leaving the melee in the middle of the pitch. The Reaver's haven't noticed yet. Grobba's making a run for it. No, he's going to pass to Izzi the Frog waiting on the wing. Textbook play – the Reavers are totally off guard."







"The Orcs are really going for it. Izzi is tearing up the turf like a boar during hunting season, but Duchel is making a sprint for it to intercept him. The man's feet must be on fire, the speed he's going! Von Runckel's looking to tackle Izzi, but he's got to get past the Blitzer Gort Skullhack. And, oh, that's got to hurt! Von Runckel's going to be spitting out teeth for weeks. Why they didn't send in No. 14, Pocklespike, I'll never know. Poor tactics from the Reavers and an easy Touchdown for the Frog."





FOULS

Even Blood Bowl has rules, and foul play – attacking an opponent on the ground – is not permitted. But it happens a lot anyway. Players can attempt to foul adjacent prone opponents. An armour roll is made for the fouled player, but if a double is rolled the offender will be sent off. As the second half progressed, Matt adopted a strategy of trying to injure as many Reavers players as possible, including by means of foul play, which paid off with yet another casualty in turn 4. The Reavers would be badly depleted in the final few turns…

Some hefty blocking left several Reavers stunned before Grobba da Lobba attempted to pick up the ball, fumbling it onto a nearby teammate, who fumbled it back towards the lucky thrower, Grobba grabbing it at the second attempt. The Reavers attempted to pick themselves back up but were now badly depleted, and another turn of Orc blocking sent two more casualties from the field. Now halfway through the second half, it was time for the Orcs to attempt their first (albeit short) pass. A success! They don't call Grobba da Lobba for nothing. On the other end of the pass, Izzi the Frog set off down the field. Jervis sent Johannes Duchel off in desperate pursuit, going for it twice (allowing a player to move an extra square as long as they don't roll a 1 on a D6). It wasn't enough, though, as Gort Skullhack blitzed him out of the way and Izzi pounded into the end zone. There would be time for one last chance for the Gouged Eye…

FROM THE DUGOUT…

Jervis: That was coming. I got very lucky on the previous drive, stunning several of Matt's players, but the injuries were really starting to mount up for me now. A big scrap in the middle of the field didn't really help but at least I managed to slow the Orcs up for a couple of turns, forcing them to go around the brawl in the middle and attempt a couple of passes and Go For It! rolls. So now it's just a case of holding on until the end of the game…

Matt: Well, I'd managed to pull one back, but I wasn't at all sure there was enough time left in the game to score again. With Jervis down to only eight fit players to take the field on the ensuing kick-off, my tactics were going to be very simple. Beat his team up to get the ball back as quickly as possible…







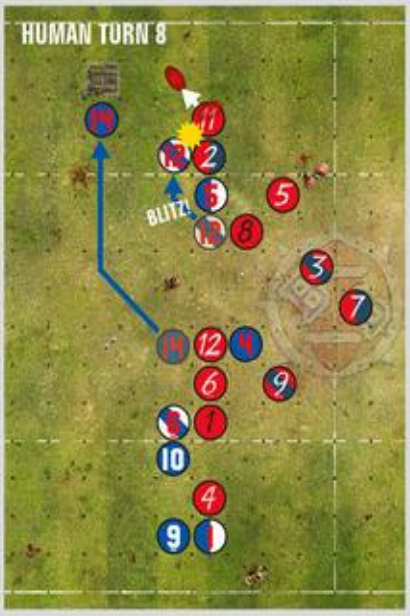
THE FINAL DRIVE: DESPERATION PLAY

This is it. We're into the final quarter with the Gouged Eye to kick off. They need to reclaim the ball and score pronto. The teams are lining up. The Reavers are down to eight. This is going to be close...

With three turns left to cement an unlikely comeback, Matt elected for a short kick-off, planting the ball just behind Jervis's line and hoping for the best. A couple of lucky bounces brought it back to within one square of the line of scrimmage. The Reavers pounced first, but fumbled, despite Jervis using a team re-roll, and the ball spilled forward once more, bringing the Reavers' turn to a sudden halt. The Gouged Eye charged forwards, pushing back the Reavers' depleted line. Behind them, Grobba da Lobba picked up the ball. Some cunnin' would be required, but the desperation play was on! Jervis dropped his Reavers back to cover the open spaces and force dodge rolls. Grobba launched a pass across the field to lineman Gurg, risking an interception from the nearby Reavers' blitzer. Even with the ball, Gurg wasn't going to make it to the line – certainly not when a blitz came in, knocking him down and sending the ball loose. But there was one last chance. Grobba picked up the ball, dashing forward to hand it off to Oaf Kneebreaker. A couple of dodge rolls and going for it would get him there! One good dodge came, then a fail, a re-roll, and another fail! It was all over. Victory to the Reavers!

ASK THE QUESTION

The mere presence of opposing players can be enough to upset even the best-laid plans. Tackle zones prompt risky dodge rolls and difficult decisions about how to use block, blitz and move actions. "Just try to make your opponent roll the dice as much as possible," says Jervis. "Ask the question."







"Amazingly, the Orcs have decided that now's the time to start passing the ball. Grobba has picked it up from the fumble. He's hoofed it to Gurg. Biff Underfeld, caught in the middle, is leaping up to intercept the pass. No, no, he's not, he's missed the intercept. Gurg's got the ball now, he's making a run for it. No, Underfeld's got his legs and the ball's on the ground again. Grobba's making to pick it up. He's flicked it up to Oaf Kneebreaker. Can Oaf get past Pocklespike? That would be a resounding no..."



"And that, Blood Bowl fans, is the final whistle, and the Reikland Reavers have beaten the Gouged Eye 3-2 in what I can only describe as a wonderfully violent opening match to the new season. Your thoughts, Bob?"

"A superb match, Jim, and one I think the Reikland Reavers' fans are going to remember for some time. The Reavers put on an excellent show, scoring two touchdowns in quick succession, using their superior agility to run rings around the slower Orcs. I do feel for the Reaver's, though. I had a quick peek in their dugout and Batten, von Broken, von Baum and Kellhoofer are all looking in a bad way. They said Kellhoofer was sleeping, but I'm pretty certain a human's neck doesn't bend that way. A high price for victory, Jim, a high price."

"And that's all from the Oldbowl stadium. I've been Jim Johnson, he's been Bob Bifford, and today has been another great day for Blood Bowl!"







THE POST-GAME INTERVIEW: THE REAVERS VICTORIOUS

Jervis: Well, I have to be pleased with my chosen tactics – I won! There were a couple of stages when I was just lucky – the dice gods were with me – and that gave me something of an edge. With the touchdown at the end of the first half, I didn't think I was going to score then, but I thought I'd give it a try because if I knew there was a chance and that if I did score it would put some pressure on the Orcs. And then getting that quick touchdown at the start of the second half put me in a strong position.

Which was just as well, really, because at that stage the war of attrition really started to go in Matt's favour. It was unlikely I was going to be able to score again, and I couldn't really do anything to slow the Orcs down, so without that cushion of two touchdowns I would have been in trouble. I had too few players to really stop the Orcs and I knew they were going to get around at some stage or another. I knew that what I had to try and put enough speed bumps in front of the Orcs to slow them up close to the halfway line. What I was trying to do was create very thin defensive lines, which were going to get overwhelmed, but then I'd have another one behind. It worked, as Matt had the ball out to one side of the field on the last drive of the game but had to send it out to the other side with a pass and a couple of risky hand-offs, costing precious time and movement. There were a few risky dodge rolls required from me, but I knew which ones I really had to make and I had a re-roll saved up, so I was able to pull it off. And it worked, with a plucky lineman being in position to trip up Matt's lineman on that last desperation play.

THE POST-GAME INTERVIEW: THE GOUGED EYE, GOUGED

Matt: I really enjoyed that. Blood Bowl has always been one of my favourite games and, despite the loss, the game was great fun. I was really pleased with how my chosen formation (the cage) worked from the initial kick-off, but after that things went rather awry, unfortunately. My defence – that is, my strategy for when the other team has the ball – was not very good. Orcs aren't quick enough or agile enough to catch up with opponents if they end up on the back foot, and it was very obvious from Jervis's quickfire score more or less directly from the next kick-off that I hadn't put nearly as much thought into my defensive set-up as I had my initial (attacking) set-up at the start of the game. I knew that Jervis likes to pass, and with Human catchers being so quick, leaving all that space behind my team was bound to lead to trouble. And it did. Twice.

The other effect of the Orcs' lack of speed is that it thus takes them quite a few turns to score. I left myself with a mountain to climb going 3-1 down. It might have been worth 'running the clock' a bit at the time of my first touchdown. With the ball in a well-protected cage, I was in a perfect position to park on the goal line for a turn or two before scoring the touchdown. It's unlikely that Jervis's puny Humans could have got to Trok Elfsplitter past all his teammates, and there wouldn't have been enough time left for Jervis to score before half-time. In the last turn, though, I could have tied the scores with a couple more lucky dice rolls, which made for a great end to the game. And the Orcs secured a 'moral' victory (well, maybe not moral) with four of Jervis's players casualties at the end of the game. The Reavers will not be in great shape for the rematch.

MOST VALUABLE PLAYER AWARD

Jervis: I'm tempted to say the fans – they rioted twice in the first half, gifting both teams extra turns but clearly the Reavers were the bigger beneficiaries. I'm also tempted to say the Orcs' No. 5 *(Jervis played a Special Play card on this hapless Orc lineman, which left him unable to assist in a block or take part in a foul. – Ed)* but I think it has to be my thrower, Jan Piquo, No. 5, who threw the Reavers' first touchdown. Plays like that don't come off for me very often, so credit is deserved when one of them actually does!

MOST VALUABLE PLAYER AWARD

Matt: Not my Black Orc blockers, that's for sure! I used them to anchor the ends of my line, but they became isolated and were knocked down, later putting in a succession of rather disappointing blocks further down the field. Snotling rations for them! I found that, overall, the Orcs lived up to their reputation – strong, tough, durable, but really not very specialised. My Most Valuable Player Award, therefore, will have to go to lineman Trok Elfsplitter, a safe pair of hands, steady runner, scorer of my first touchdown and all-round contributor.

WHITE DWARF JANUARY 2017

PARADE GROUND: BLOOD BOWL

It's a new season, sports fans, and the teams are all out in their new strips. They're so new, some of them don't even have blood on them yet! So join us in the dugouts as we take a look at what Blood Bowl fanatics from around our head office have been painting.

THE RATTENBERG NIBBLERS
BY DAN HARDEN

Until recently, Dan had only ever played two games of Blood Bowl, both of them against Nick 'touchdowns are for losers' Bayton. The release of the new edition of the game prompted him to paint a new team to join in the office fun, and he opted for Skaven, not least because he'd just finished painting a Skaven force for Armies on Parade (he's also got a thing for warpstone, but we don't mention that...).

What you see here is actually the away kit for the Rattenberg Nibblers. They were planning to wear orange this season (like Dan's Skaven army), but Matt Hutson stole all the Troll Slayer Orange to paint his Orc team, which you can see over the page. Instead, Dan chose to paint his team in a quartered black and white scheme with claw-scratched numbers.



Like most of the coaches in the White Dwarf team, Dan painted a test model for his team first to establish what colours he'd be painting where. Originally his colour scheme was going to be a lurid yellow and pink, which just made them look like "an explosion in a children's colouring book", so Dan settled for a more sombre black and white. He used Mournfang Brown spray as a basecoat, then washed all the models with Agrax Earthshade to shade them.

Dan painted the black using Abaddon Black, followed by Stormvermin Fur, then Karak Stone as highlights. The white was painted using Pallid Wych Flesh as the basecoat (which took a couple of layers because it's a pale colour) followed by a light wash of Administratum Grey into the recesses. Dan then highlighted the edges of the armour panels with White Scar. Apart from the skin, each area on Dan's models uses no more than three paints.



PLIMYFF WAAAGHGUILE
BY CHRIS WEBB

When it comes to the not-so-beautiful game of Blood Bowl, Chris Webb does love his greenskins. Back in the days when Chris was barely out of short trousers, he took his first Orc team, the Red Cap Rebels, to victory in his local shop league. In the recent league at Games Workshop HQ he took a team of Goblins to the occasional victory (putting him head and shoulders over most other Goblin teams!), and now he's put together a brand-new team of Orcs for the new Blood Bowl season.

Chris chose a green and white scheme as he feels that it's a suitably sporty colour scheme. As a contrast to his crisp, clean Space Marines he chose a much more weather-beaten, scruffy look, with a lot of strategic weathering around the sculpted dents and chips. Nevertheless, Chris really pushed the boat out, and even added lots of freehand numbers onto the players in haphazard, seemingly random places. Chris also added blood splatters using a slightly novel method. "I get a brush, load it with Blood for the Blood God, then blow hard through the bristles." Nice.







Chris was eager to make sure that each and every player on his team stood out, so after painting the first six players, he swapped the colours over for the next six – green and white cloth on one model became brown on its counterpart, and iron plate on one became green and white (with plenty of weathering) on the other. To further emphasise the difference between players, Chris made some cunning conversions across the team – a few new heads and plumes. Not only are they quick and simple, they help make the team unique, making it even easier to keep track of who's who on the pitch.

Plimyff Waaaghguile are already making something of a name for themselves across the Blood Bowl world, as not only did the (unfinished) team grace the pages of White Dwarf last month in In The Bunker, but you can see them inside Blood Bowl: Death Zone – Season 1 as an example of just one of the Orc team colour schemes. At the time of writing, they've yet to take to the Blood Bowl field in the White Dwarf office league, but we're confident that if Chris's performance is anything like it was in the recent company-wide league, he's certain to impress. Or at least lose in a suitably interesting and amusing fashion!



LOONTOWN LOOTERS
BY MATT HUTSON

Matt based the colour scheme for his Loontown Looters on that of his favourite football team – a pretty common approach to Blood Bowl colour schemes, we reckon. He made the colours the Orcs' own, though. "I wanted to make them look a little bit cartoony – quite colourful and fun," says Matt, "which was quite easy with orange as a starting point."

"Having said that, they are quite gritty, too – I've painted damage on the armour. I do need to put some blood on the bases, though – the bases are maybe a bit too clean."

Matt hasn't come up with a story for the Looters yet. "They're currently awaiting planning permission for their new stadium in the Badlands," he says, as well as some new signings. "I want to add a Star Player and I want to put some Goblins in the team."

And as for Matt's tactical approach, it's typically Orky. "I don't worry about scoring touchdowns. I think the fun of Blood Bowl is fouling and beating up your opponent. It's a big scrap, innit?"







Matt used slightly darker green skin for the Black Orcs than he did on the other players, to help differentiate them.

Matt aimed for a colourful effect on the team, but the blue (and the Orcs' green skin) is quite dark. "I added in white in as a third colour," says Matt, "a bright or at least neutral colour to make the model a bit brighter."

The numbers Matt painted on his Orcs were inspired by a font he found on the internet. "It's very Orcy – quite feral-looking – and it suits the armour, which is quite battered. It looks like it's been painted on by an idiot." Matt assures us this was deliberate.

Matt made use of not one but two sets of checks as well as dags on the Black Orcs' armour. "They're good fun to paint," he says. "They add another level of detail to the model. I learned to paint checks from painting my Eldar Harlequins. My advice is this: don't use the colour of the checks to paint in the lines. Use a mid-tone instead. I used Fenrisian Grey for the black and white checks. That way, the Fenrisian Grey works as a highlight on the edge of the black squares and a shade on the edge of the white ones. The principle's the same for the orange and black dags – I used Skrag Brown as the mid-tone for them."



HAAGENHEIM HOPLITES
BY NICK BAYTON

After six years of leading Orc teams to victory, Nick Bayton set out to try something different on the Blood Bowl pitch. Opting for the Humans, Nick was eager to try out a playstyle that wasn't entirely reliant on breaking the other team's faces – Nick is particularly looking forward to trying out techniques like passing, which isn't exactly a core part of the Orc playbook.

Nick's initial idea for the team was an incarnation of the Bad Bay Hackers from Matt Forbeck's Blood Bowl novels but found the team's logo a little too much hassle to paint onto every player. Keeping the colour scheme, Nick scoured transfer sheets for a suitable logo, and chanced upon the Solar Auxilia sheet from Forge World. He opted for the hoplite helmet design, and elected to rename the team the Haagenheim Hoplites.

Whilst Nick may have moved onto a team that doesn't involve quite so much punching to win its matches, he does think the team needs a little more muscle on the playing field – maybe something like an Ogre?







Nick chose quite a dark scheme – when he started painting the team, there were no other teams in his group that were yellow or green, so he painted the team both!

Starting with a Chaos Black undercoat, Nick sprayed the models Caliban Green, then washed the recesses with Abaddon Black. He then added Elysian Green highlights. For the mustard, he started with Balor Brown, washed those areas with Reikland Fleshshade, relayered it with Balor Brown and finished with a highlight of Ushabti Bone. For a final touch, Nick sponged on a variety of metals to represent chips.

Nick didn't go for a uniform scheme for his team, keeping similar colours across the entire team, but in different places. Part of this was to give the team the rag-tag feel you'd expect from Blood Bowl players on the road, but the other idea was to keep each player an individual. Nick took this one step further with a variety of skin tones, so he'd have one quite pale thrower and runner, and one each with a much darker skin tone.

As a finishing touch, Nick used transfers to number his team. Fittingly, he took them from the positively ancient Naggaroth Nightmares Blood Bowl transfer sheet!



PARADE GROUND

DA BLAK KRAG BROOZAZ
BY JAMES GALLAGHER

Army Painter James Gallagher was actually the first person to finish a Blood Bowl team outside of those painted by the Forge World studio. His fan factor has rocketed as a result.

"I've painted quite a few Blood Bowl teams over the years," says James. "I was originally going to paint Da Blak Krag Broozaz in red and blue, but I didn't want them to look too much like the Gouged Eye, so I painted them in their away colours of purple. If you think about it, though, purple is a mix of red and blue, so that still kind of works. It's also a very strong colour not often seen on Orcs and it complements their green skin. I went for white trousers and markings to finish off the colour scheme."

We can't imagine those trousers will stay white for long because Da Broozaz will almost certainly be on the pitch soon – James is an avid Blood Bowl player. "I've got a few tactics for my Orcs. Most of them involve hitting things really hard, but I reckon I might be able to sneak in a pass or two. Only short ones, though, I don't want to get too keen."







Being an Army Painter by trade, James knows how to strike up a good colour scheme quickly. He painted the armour first as it's the most predominant part of the model. "I used Xereus Purple for the basecoat," says James, "followed by a wash of Nuln Oil in the recesses to shade it. I then highlighted the edges of the armour with a solid layer of Genestealer Purple, then a final edge highlight of Dechala Lilac." James then carefully applied his team numbers to the armour panels. Perhaps too carefully, they look suspiciously neat considering they're on Orcs. We reckon they persuaded their Goblin mates to paint them on for them.

"Because the armour was really dark, I wanted the skin to be quite pale to contrast with it," explains James. "I followed the pale skin tutorial from the How to Paint: Ironjawz book, using Ogryn Camo as a basecoat – it's a really strong colour that's perfect for pale Orc skin. I then shaded it with Biel-Tan Green to add depth to the recesses in the skin, followed by highlights of Krieg Khaki. It adds a natural, slightly faded tone to the final highlights, rather than a vibrant one. The Black Orcs I painted with a darker skin tone, using Castellan Green as my basecoat and working up through Loren Green to Skarsnik Green."



THE GRIFFONS
BY MATT KEEFE

The Griffons are a touring team, who not only lack their own stadium but in fact don't even lay claim to a nominal home city. This may be a result of the troubled history of the team and its management – the team are serial bankrupts and just the latest in a long line of financially failed outfits, which invariably disappear owing a fortune. Previous incarnations of the team have included the Red Griffons (who played in blue after failing to pay for their specially commissioned new uniforms), the Black Griffons, the White Griffons (whose only known 'appearance' was, somewhat surprisingly, a scheduled fixture against the by-then-defunct Red Griffons in what many suspect was a ticketing scam) and, more recently, the Wandering Griffons. Now simply the Griffons, the team play in motley, quartered uniforms of blue, yellow, black and white. Rumours that the ragtag mix of colours displayed on the players' uniforms is the result of equipment cobbled together from failed, prior incarnations of the team are fiercely disputed by the team's frequently highly litigious management.







"I chose quartered colours as they're common to both sport and heraldry," says Matt, who painted the Griffons for the White Dwarf office league. "Blood Bowl teams sort of wear team uniforms and sort of wear armour, so it seemed a fitting similarity to make use of. I did a couple of test models because I couldn't decide which arrangement of quarters I liked best – black opposite white, and blue opposite yellow are both strong contrasts, but looked at in another way they also create dark and light – or hot and cold – halves, so in the end I decided to vary the pattern and make a feature of it in the team's story!"

"After painting the test models (one of which I slightly repainted to fit in), I painted the team all in one go. I really like how amenable the models are to batch painting, but with plenty of details you can use to create a bit of variety. The box includes two of each model, but details like the kneepads, straps, cloths and ribbons can be painted in different colours from one model to the next without making painting any harder or more time-consuming overall. For instance, on some of the models you'll see the kneepads match the armour colour for that quarter. On others, they're silver or leather. Easy but pleasing – just enough variety."





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THE LAWS OF THE GAME

We've had letters from several readers on some of the thornier areas of the rules. So, we invited legendary ref Thoron Korensson to clear up a few of the most frequent misconceptions.

THE LAWS OF THE GAME

Those regulations known to the average spectator as 'rules' are properly termed the Laws of the Game, held to be immutable and handed down by Nuffle himself. Of course, these laws must be applied by mortal minds, and it's these interpretations or rulings that form the 'rules' of the game. The distinction is a subtle but important one as the Laws of the Game never change but these rulings, as applied by any given referee, necessarily vary owing to factors as diverse as personal interpretation, the influence of the crowd, hostility towards the teams and the receipt or otherwise of adequate bribes.

UNIFORMITY OF THE RULES

Numerous variations on the rules have existed over the years, some quite fundamentally different, as with the once widespread method of deciding the result of games on the number of injuries caused rather than touchdowns scored, or the practice, once popular with Dwarf teams, of not giving the ball back even after scoring. These varied forms of the game were long a source of frequent and violent disagreement. Today, the rules exist in a standardised form and most variations are minor and procedural, such as the unique half-time routine used by some Vampire teams where refreshments are taken in the opposing team's KO'd box, or the timekeeping variation used in some Halfling leagues where games are divided not into two halves but rather sixteen 'sittings', with breaks for cakes and pastries between each.

THORON KORENSSON

One of the longest-serving officials in Blood Bowl, Korensson was one of Roze-El's original apprentices. Thorensson has stayed meticulously up to date with the rules over the centuries, and has famously never made a bad call. Many a head coach has tried to argue with him over the years, only to be met with stony-faced silence and a glower that could melt gromril. The one time he lost his temper and gave a particularly troublesome Goblin coach an expletive-laden dressing down has gone down as one of the most replayed moments in Cabalvision history.

THE BALL

It's a common misconception that the ball must be made of a pig's bladder, as the original ball. The only absolute stipulations in the holy laws of Nuffle are that the ball must be of the specified (albeit approximate) dimensions and not be ambulatory. Should the ball become mobile at any point during the game (as has been known to happen from time to time with the Stegadon eggs favoured by some Lizardmen teams, for example) it must be replaced (and the infant Stegadon removed from the field of play) at the earliest opportunity.

FOUL PLAY

Many coaches and fans argue that the rules on fouls simply encourage players to spend too much time lying on the floor and that prone players should be fair game to prevent such laziness. Further, it can be hard for an onlooker to know where a legitimate block ends and a foul begins. The rules state that players on the ground may not block or be blocked, and may not attempt to tackle nearby players, but the distinction becomes unclear owing to the propensity of some players (Goblins, Halflings and others) to assist teammates by kneeling down behind taller opponents, causing them to trip over when pushed. Booting such players out of the way could be judged foul play but is generally considered the right thing to do. The most reliable definition of a foul, therefore, is the oldest and most straightforward one: it's only a foul if the referee says it is.

WEAPONS

Many fans are surprised that the Laws of Blood Bowl actually include a prohibition on the use of weapons, as appearances can be deceptive and many players, despite the laws, appear to be armed with knuckle-dusters, shivs and spikes. These are, in fact, forms of personal protection, explicitly permitted under current rulings in the same way as armour. Exceptions can also be made for family heirlooms, the so-called 'Naggrat Rule', named for Orc blitzer Naggrat Burzgurg, who was famously given to telling opponents and officials alike that the 18" double-edged, backwards-serrated blade mounted on his wrist was "the last thing my old mum ever gave me". Heartwarmingly, Naggrat once missed the entire second half of a game against the Oldheim Ogres, spending more than an hour trying to remove the treasured object from the body of a felled opponent.

MATCH REPORT

RATTENBERG NIBBLERS 1 - 1 GRIFFONS

The preliminary rounds of the Spike! Magazine Open Tournament kicked off this past week with the Rattenberg Nibblers facing the Griffons in a hotly anticipated match-up. The Griffons showed some real early season rustiness with a series of catastrophically poor blocks seeing the Nibblers take the lead with the first half barely underway. There was a comeback late in the half, and a touchdown for veteran thrower Chuck Longbottom, thanks to a carefully executed cage drive from the Griffons. The second half saw catcher Jordi Hamfist take the last bath after a huge block from Skaven blitzer, Throttleclaw. Early signs are that these two teams have work to do when it comes to scoring, neither team able to find the winning touchdown despite the presence of not one but two balls on the field for the final quarter. The Griffons came closest, with lineman Albrecht Wackner the intended target of a long pass into the end zone from Longbottom, the big lineman bobbling the pass and fumbling the ball into the end zone as time expired.



PLAY OF THE MONTH

This Month's Play of the Month is an all-Dwarfen affair, with the Dwarf Giants spectacularly 'running the seam' against the Grudgebearers. Unknown to the visiting Grudgebearers, Giants fans waiting in the stands before the game had found a particularly rich ore seam running under one end of the field. Suspecting nothing, the Grudgebearers, down 1-0 at the start of the second half, fielded the ball just in front of their own end zone and set off downfield in typically determined fashion. Seemingly breaking through the Giants' defences, the Grudgebearers were just yards from the Giants' end zone when some eager half-time mining by the home team's fans paid off, ripping open the deep seam across the pitch, stranding the Grudgebearers the wrong side of a gaping chasm. What a defensive play! We see a grudge match in the near future.



THE BLOOD BOWL GLOSSARY

THE LINGO

Away from the highfalutin talk of officials, coaches and players, there's also a wealth of parlance in use amongst fans…

Ballhog: A player reluctant to pass; or, a pig that is fattened up specially for the traditional half-time roast, beloved of Halfling teams and their fans.

Bang-bang play: The act of blocking an opponent into the path of one or more teammates for a second, even more ferocious hit.

Blowout: Originally, a heavy defeat to nil. Nowadays, more often the name for a sudden, unexpected dive taken by a speedster owing to a pulled hamstring, unfortunate stumble or carelessly aimed crossbow bolt from the stands.



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Amorica: The mystical land where Blood Bowl in its original form was once played and was probably invented, known only by its mention in the sacred book of Nuffle.

Apothecaries: A catch-all term for sideline medics, barber-surgeons and other self-proclaimed masters of anatomy who specialise in patching up players who suffer grievous injuraies. Unsurprisingly, Blood Bowl keeps them busy!

Armour: As laid out in the Nuffle Book of Amorical Football, each player who sets foot upon the sacred Gridiron must be attired appropriately. Although the first teams wore modifed battle plate, this made for some very slow games, and in recent years great leaps have been made in constructing lightweight (but resilient) sports armour.

Assist: The act of helping a team-mate get the boot into an opponent.

Assistant Coach: A right-hand-man (or woman, or orc...) to the head coach. Often a retired player, looking to keep one foot in the door.

Astrogranite: A hard playing surface which was briefly popular two decades ago because playing on it caused more injuries than the players could inflict on each other.

Ball: According to the guidelines laid down by Sacred Commissioner Roze-El, a regulation Blood Bowl ball must be "one-and-a-half spans long, one span across at its mid-point, and a prolate spheroid in shape". As no one is sure what a 'prolate spheroid' is, this latter part is generally held to mean 'sort of egg-shaped, but pointier'.

Blitzer: A player who mixes speed, agility and hitting power in equal measure and consequently is always a fan favourite. Often far too charismatic off-pitch for you to hate them for being so darned talented.

Blocker: The brick wall of the team. A blocker's job is to stop the other team's players from getting where they want to, even if that means ripping their legs off in the process. Occasionally, a blocker will notice that the game features a ball.

Blocking: The act of smashing into an opponent with the maximum possible force.

Blood Bowl coin: Each game of Blood Bowl starts with a coin toss. This used to be done with any old coin, but in the early 2480s the NAF realised it had a great chance for commemorative merchandise. It wasn't long before official Blood Bowl coins were being manufactured in their masses, each featuring the logo of a different team, event or player. Ironically, lots of Referees are staunch traditionalists and have carried on using whatever is in their pocket at the time.

Bob Bifford: Retired ogre player and commentator extraordinaire. One half of the famous presenting duo 'Jim and Bob'.

Bribe: Bribes are heavily regulated by the Referees and Allied Rulekeepers Guild. A bribe consists of a single payment of 100,000 gold pieces, made at least thirty minutes before kick-off to the appointed treasurer. In exchange, the head coach may request that, at a given signal, the Referee looks away from whatever is currently happening on the pitch. Many find it a shame that such a fine tradition has had all the fun taken out of it but it is generally agreed that bribe regulation is a necessity.

Catcher: A player who favours speed over armour, dodging past the opposition and heading up-field as quickly as possible in the hope of catching a pass and scoring touchdowns. Hilariously fragile, almost without exception.

Chainsaw: A brutal weapon which uses a clockwork or steam-powered motor to drive a rotating, bladed chain. It goes without saying that the use of a chainsaw is utterly, completely against the rules but Refs tend to wait until a drive ends before ejecting the offending player, for fear of losing a limb or two.

Completion: A pass which is caught by another player on the same team.

Daisy Palmer's Slow-acting Shoe Grease: This bacon-based gloop is sold through reputable houseware suppliers, and is covered in disclaimers stating that, despite the amusing name, it should not under any circumstances be used to grease the shoes of Blood Bowl players, no matter how good they are at running and how much they deserve to be taken down a peg or two. Halfling coach turned catering magnate Davvo 'Daisy' Palmer has refused to comment.

Drive: The period of time between a kick-off and the interruption of play, either by one team scoring or the clock running down.

Dugout: A trench-like enclosure on the sidelines of the pitch. Each team has one dugout, from which the coaching staff shout encouragement (and expletives), the reserves cool their heels and injured players take a well-deserved rest.

Dump-off pass: The act of throwing the ball to a teammate just before you get blocked. (See also dump-off face, the expression made by a player as they fling the ball over their shoulder in utter panic.)

Dungeon: The catacombs that can be found beneath most larger Blood Bowl stadiums. They are generally used for storage or for pulling injured players off the pitch by way of a handy trapdoor, but during Dungeonbowl season the tunnels are cleared out and a whole different version of the sport takes place.

End Zone: At either end of the pitch is a line, the area beyond which is known as the End Zone. If a player manages to make it into the End Zone while holding the ball, they score a point for their team! Sounds easy but the other team are generally pretty keen to stop it happening...

Exhibition Play: As well as participating in league play, teams will often play exhibition matches against old rivals as a way of drumming up support for a new season or making some more gold for the coffers.

Final: The last game of a tournament, between the two teams who have made it through the play-offs. Finals are always grand affairs, with all of the tie-in merchandise you'd expect.

Foul: A player who acts in an unfair manner, attempting to undermine the rules of the sport, will be called for a Foul by the Referee. Well, if the Ref sees it, that is.

Gridiron: The offical, ritually significant name for the Blood Bowl pitch. To be classed as a Gridiron, a pitch must be built in accordance with the Nine Regulations, as laid out in the Book of Nuffle.

Hail Mary Pass: A last-ditch, down-to-the-wire attempt to get the ball up the pitch at any cost. Most players are too sensible (or, more likely, terrified of their coach) to risk losing possession in such an obvious and flamboyant way.

Half-time: A game of Blood Bowl is divided into two halves, as per Nuffle's holy decree. Half-time is a chance for players to rest and recuperate, and (in bigger stadiums) for match organisers to wow the crowd with spectacular shows.

Head coach: Whether a charismatic leader or a stone-cold tactician, a Head Coach is responsible for running a Blood Bowl team. It's not an easy job – you have to have business acumen as well as the ability to think on your feet and manage a team of frenzied nutters – but the draw of fame and fortune will always ensure there are plenty of candidates.

Inducements: Some call them lucrative sponsorship opportunities, others bribes. In truth, they're anything you can tempt a rookie team with to rope them into a game against a team that's entirely likely to kill them.

Jim Johnson: One of the greatest (un) living statisticians in the sport, and one half of the famous commentating duo 'Jim and Bob'. Oh, and he's a vampire but best not to think about that too much.

Kick-off: At the start of each drive, when the Referee blows the whistle, a member of the defence kicks the ball down the pitch to their opponents. Kick-offs are an explosion of action, usually accompanied by a roar of approval from the crowd (and the occasional thrown rock, but that's hardly worth worrying about).

Lineman: Either the hard-working, underappreciated all-rounders who form the backbone of a Blood Bowl team or the ones you feed to the other side's trolls, depending on who you ask.

Long Bomb: A pass made at to a player at least 45 paces away, generally used as a last resort. Not to be confused with 'Long Bomb' Luggins, backup reserve player for the Greenfield Grasshuggers, who got his nickname because he was also only ever used as a last resort.

Majors: A collective term for the four major open tournaments, which act as milestones in the Blood Bowl calendar: the Blood Bowl Open, the Chaos Cup, the Dungeonbowl and the Spike! Magazine Open.

NAF: Although it's simply known to its fans as 'Blood Bowl', the full name of everyone's favourite sport is Nuffle Amorical Football. The NAF was also the name of the governing body that was established to regulate the sport and which published the first full set of rules in 2409. Sadly, the NAF collapsed in 2489, leading to the rise of the Open Tournaments, but its legacy is still felt to this day.

Nuffle: The lost god of the ancient Amoricans, and patron deity of Blood Bowl. Various sects of Nufflite priests and priestesses have worked tirelessly to uncover more information about the mysterious god, but information is so rare (and contradictory) that a true picture may never be built up. Of course, most fans are happy simply to praise Nuffle when their team is doing well, and curse him (or her?) when things go against them.

Pass: The act of throwing the ball to a team-mate.

Penalty Shoot-out: A method for resolving tied games during league play. Although its origins have been lost in time – and are arguably the result of a mistranslation somewhere along the line – it's a firm fan favourite, especially given the tradition for the victorious team to throw their crossbows to the crowd in celebration.

Play-offs: The games played at the end of a Tournament between its highest-ranking teams, to determine which two will face off for the Final.

Pogo stick: An inventive secret weapon used by the less sensible type of Goblin.

Quick Snap: At the beginning of a drive, the offence are meant to wait until the ball is in the air before they start moving. Of course, 'in the air' is fairly subjective and sometimes a team will get running as soon as the kicker's foot touches the ball. Most Refs allow it, as trying to tell a mob of charging orcs to settle down and get back in line has its risks.

Referee: Often the most unpopular person on the pitch, but still undeniably necessary, the Ref's job is to ensure that both teams play more or less fair. (Bribes subject to current guild rates, all calls are final.)

Referees and Allied Rulekeepers Guild: We have been informed by our sponsors that we have to give the official definition of the RARG, which is that they are a hard-working bunch of officials who keep the violence at the right level and stop nefarious players from attempting to ruin what is an otherwise honorable and gentlemanly sport.

Sacred Commissioner Roze-El: The first scholar to study the great book of Nuffle after its discovery, Roze-El translated the ancient text and put in place the first draft of the Blood Bowl rules.

The Blood Bowl Open: One of the four major Open Tournaments that were founded in the wake of the NAF's collapse in 2489.

The Chaos Cup: The first of the four major Open Tournaments that were founded in the wake of the NAF's collapse in 2489.

The Dungeonbowl: The most unusual of the four major Open Tournaments that were founded in the wake of the NAF's collapse in 2489, involving subterranean play, a hidden ball and magical teleportation...

The Spike! Magazine Open: One of the four major Open Tournaments that were founded in the wake of the NAF's collapse in 2489. Sponsored by Spike! Magazine, the finals also play host to the Spike! Magazine Team of the Year and Player of the Year awards.

Thrower: A player who has a good arm

and loves to show off, pitching the ball down the field with stunning accuracy and making sure they look good while doing it.

Touchdown: The act of scoring a point by crossing into the opposing End Zone while carrying the ball. Always cause for celebration and only the occasional riot.

Weapons: The rules of Blood Bowl are very clear on the subject of weapons: they are outlawed, no ifs, no buts! However, 'personal protection equipment' is allowed without question and there's a bit of a grey area between the two which has led to lots of purely-defensive-honest spikes being affixed to armour plates. Some teams (particularly Goblins) are even more blatant, bringing everything from chainsaws to short-fused bombs onto the pitch, in the hope of causing some damage before they get sent off!

Wizard: Wizards are huge fans of Blood Bowl, the Colleges of Magic even sponsoring big events, in particular the Dungeonbowl. The game seems to turn these ordinarily reserved individuals into screaming maniacs, which can get dangerous for their fellow fans when the fireballs start flying!

Dugout: Formally, an off-pitch area for the teams; colloquially, the result of a forceful block into the turf.

Grease-Up: Repeated fumbling or failure to catch or pick up the ball involving multiple players, often from both teams.

Grot-lobber: A big guy with a penchant for passing (sometimes the ball).

Hall o' Famer: A living great. Less often, a player past their best.

KO: Kick-off; or, knock-out. A popular practice amongst spectators in the stands is to place small side-bets on how soon one will follow the other and which will come first.

Last bath: The big one. The final curtain. We ain't going to overtime. RIP.

Man-to-boot: A popular if partisan response to the suggestion of foul play; i.e. the prone player moved into an opponent's boot, not the other way around.

Mikki Finsson: A potion, elixir, peptic or similar of the invariably non-performance-enhancing variety, named for the rather unscrupulous owner of the famed Beard and Hammer tavern just down the road from the Oldbowl.

Stretcher filler: A casualty; a player with a known propensity for becoming such.

Twelfth man: The collective support; also, a riot or pitch invasion. As a result, many players dislike being the often overlooked (or unfairly blamed) actual No. 12 on the roster.

Walk-on: A player of such consistently good form they are almost guaranteed to start every game; alternatively, an instance of trampling, deliberate or otherwise.

STADIA OF THE OLD WORLD

GOOD AFTERNOON, SPORTS FANS! JIM JOHNSON HERE, BRINGING YOU ANOTHER GREAT ISSUE OF SPIKE! MAGAZINE. LET'S SEE WHAT WE HAVE IN STORE FOR YOU THIS MONTH!



Magazine's roving reporters were invited around the finest stadiums across the Old World. From the lowliest field to the glittering lights of the Old Bowl, we've seen them all. Except the Lowdown Rats' one – we don't pay them enough for that!

DOWN ON THE PITCH

In the distant past of Blood Bowl, it was the done thing for many a team to own their own stadium, with many of these structures becoming as famous as the teams themselves. But as can be expected, when the NAF collapsed, many teams were forced to sell off their digs to avoid bankruptcy (or buy a one-way ticket to Lustria to avoid their creditors!). Today, it's rare for a team to still own their own site – the few that do are either ludicrously rich or, like the Lowdown Rats, are in possession of festering deathtraps that they can't even pay investors to take off their hands. Typically, stadiums are now owned by the Colleges of Magic, nobility or municipal authorities, each taking a cut when a fixture is played there. That being said, some stadiums do stand out as firm favourites of both players and fans.

THE OLD BOWL

The home turf of no less a team than the Reikland Reavers, the Old Bowl is one of the finest stadiums in the Old World. Still in the possession of the Reikland Reavers, due to the prudence and planning on the part of the team owners (a rarity bordering on the mythical in the great game of Blood Bowl), it's stood the test of time for nigh-on a century of play.

THE DOOM DOME

The stomping ground of the Gouged Eye, the Doom Dome is the archetypal Orc stadium – the perfect blood-soaked altar to Nuffle, where Humans, Elves and even Dwarfs fear to tread (although the stunties would never admit to it!). It's still in the gnarled hands of the Gouged Eye in no small part thanks to the huge coffers of their owner, Emperor Skullcrush XII, and his even bigger armies of Orc warriors.

GREEN ACRES

This Halfling-run stadium is well regarded for the quality of its pie stalls, but it's earned something of a reputation amongst serious students of Blood Bowl as an example of forgoing logic, critical thinking and basic common sense in favour of a slavish devotion to the writ of Nuffle. The playing field is the requisite number of paces (100 x 60, as any true fan knows) but they're actually rather stubby Halfling paces, making it drastically smaller than the standard field. Nevertheless, it's popular with Ogre teams, whose bulk grants them an even bigger advantage on the titchy pitch – oh, and because of the pies.



DID YOU KNOW...

Despite the manifest proof of their existence (like all the wars!), a lot of people across the Old World are still convinced that the rat-like Skaven are little more than a myth fabricated by drunks and lunatics, – a fact that has put a serious dampener on the Skavenblight Scramblers' promotional tours season after season.

PLAY OF THE MONTH



This issue's Play of the Month details an impressive display of sure-footed dodging by the Rattenberg Nibblers Gutter Runner Heek the Sneek.

Having taken a pounding from the Griffons earlier in the match, the Nibblers were down to just seven rats on the pitch. Unfortunately for the Griffons, the ball-handling skills of both Arno 'Softy' Gottfried (No. 3) and 'Tank' Muller (No. 8) left much to be desired, and a disastrous string of fumbles left them standing near the end zone with the ball on the ground. And that was where Heek the Sneek stepped in. With no other players able to reach the ball, Heek (No. 11) performed five dodges, first past the Griffons' numbers 9 and 10, then past the tackle zone of Arno. He then picked up the ball while in Arno's tackle zone, threw the ball to Blitzer Kill-kill Sharpfang (No. 8), who then shoved his way through Lofty Tonks and onwards to the end zone before the whistle. What a beautiful display!

THE BIGGER THEY ARE...



Spike! Magazine casts its attention to the lumbering lunks known far and wide as 'big guys'. From bosky Treemen to nose-picking Trolls, they're the rock-solid foundation on which many a team is built.

COLOSSI OF THE BACKFIELD

Blood Bowl teams are typically drawn from members of a single race, with a handful of exceptions like the Goblin hangers-on in some Orc teams and the mish-mash of rotten acolytes found on Nurgle teams. Sometimes, teams will cast their net wider to try and fill gaps in their line-up – more often than not, they hire some big burly bruiser to put the boot in at the start of a match! These titans of the Blood Bowl field will usually be unable to form a team of their own, because Ogres and Trolls are not really suited to roles that don't involve bludgeoning someone to death with their own arms – but the brutal game has a home for everyone, so these 'big guys' will often play alongside whatever teams can stand their company. Just don't expect to be seeing a Treeman playing for the Dwarf Giants any time soon!

OGRES: BREAKING FACES

Despite regarding the whole 'ball' business as a bit of a faff, Ogres are natural Blood Bowl players, with many finding happy homes as the brute strength element of Human sides. Some Ogres, such as Morg 'n' Thorg, have even become beloved (and infamous) stars of the game.

TROLLS: CAN'T KEEP 'EM DOWN

Dimmer than a ha'penny candle, Trolls are employed by Orc and Goblin teams not for their tactical insight (because they haven't got any), conversation skills (because they haven't got any) or hygiene (ditto) – Trolls are used because they pack a punch even a Black Orc can respect and can walk off injuries that would see most players retiring to the great Dugout in the Sky, thanks to their strange quirk of regenerating – although a wise Orc coach keeps a Goblin near the team's Troll at all times to tell the hulking lump what to do!

RAT OGRES: THE BIG CHEESES

It took years of selective breeding on the part of Clan Moulder before they created a Rat Ogre capable of understanding even the basics of Blood Bowl, with the first being utilised by the Skavenblight Scramblers – earlier attempts led to Rat Ogres rampaging through their own teams, the opposition, the crowd and even the city outside the stadium! Much in demand by many Skaven teams as extra muscle they'd otherwise lack, Clan Moulder's Rat Ogres come with an ever-growing selection of 'optional extras', including back-up arms, masses of tentacles and additional heads.

"GOOD EVENING, SPORTS FANS! JIM JOHNSON HERE, WITH ANOTHER GREAT ISSUE OF SPIKE! MAGAZINE - LET'S SEE WHAT OUR CRACK TEAM OF REPORTERS HAVE BEEN UP TO!"

DID YOU KNOW...

One of the highest-rated Skaven players of all time was the two-headed and four-armed Tarsh Surehands. Sadly, in a crucial game against the Kureshi Kobras snakeman team, a missed pass led to a furious argument between his heads, and before anyone could stop him, he had strangled himself to death – a great loss to the sport!

PLAY OF THE MONTH



This issue's Play of the Month just goes to show it's not only the players who are cunning – sometimes it's the guys on the sidelines who are really pulling the strings!

In the most recent league match between the Rattenberg Nibblers and the Loontown Looters, it looked as if Longtail Grit (Nibblers No. 10) had a clear run at the Looters' end zone. It seemed a touchdown was in the bag… until Theetzl Fast-claw (Nibblers No. 9), the team's other thrower came out of nowhere, tackled Grit to the ground and swiped the ball. Upon a Cabal-O-Vision replay, it seemed Theetzl's sudden indulgence in backstabbing followed the Loontown Looters coach making a complicated series of hand-gestures in his direction. Accusations of bribery have followed, especially as Theetzl's locker was later found to be full of warpstone stuffed into a Looters replica kit bag! Theetzl only saved his head from the (quite literally) rabid Skaven home crowd by scoring the Nibblers' winning touchdown himself!

WHITE DWARF
MAY
2017

QUESTIONABLE TACTICS?

Spike! Magazine has turned one eye on the world of secret weapons and dirty tricks. Our roving reporters have scoured the NAF *archives to find out just what the most popular 'player aids' are in the brutal game today.*

RULES ARE MADE TO BE BROKEN

Despite being a game of unrelenting violence, one of the ironclad statutes of Blood Bowl is that players are forbidden to bear weapons onto the field of play. The sport being the way it is, however, many players will play fast and loose with the rules, carrying knuckle dusters or just bolting stonking great blades onto their gauntlets. Some players go even further, making use of all sorts of so-called 'secret weapons', including modified blunderbusses to pitch the ball to the far end of the field, heavy iron balls on lengths of chain and even high explosives hurled around with abandon. Fans the world over agree it makes for a far more entertaining game, but referees tend to chuck such players into the dungeon beneath the pitch at the end of a drive – they'd do it sooner, but they're not getting close to those nutters if they can avoid it!

CHAINSAW WARRIORS

Developed as a labour-saving device for the logging industry (much to the consternation of Treemen), chainsaws have found a natural home with Goblin teams. Noisy, dirty, and dangerous, they're a perfect match, and it's usually assumed it was a Goblin players who came up with the bright idea of using a whirring mass of blades to make up for their own lack of upper body strength. Despite them being illegal by even the laxest standards of the game, players will still try to sneak chainsaws onto the pitch, with the aim of maiming big guys, star players or bright-eyed rookies with promising careers ahead of them.

SNEAKY SHANKS

Dark Elf Assassins in particular seem to find it hard to let go of their knives and have a tendency to be surrounded by dead players – the best of them have even perfected the expression of offended innocence whenever a referee asks them how rival players somehow managed to slit their own throats while the Ref's back was turned. Skaven take it one step further, as Skaven often do, by lacing daggers with warpstone.

DEATH COMES FOR YOU... SLOWLY

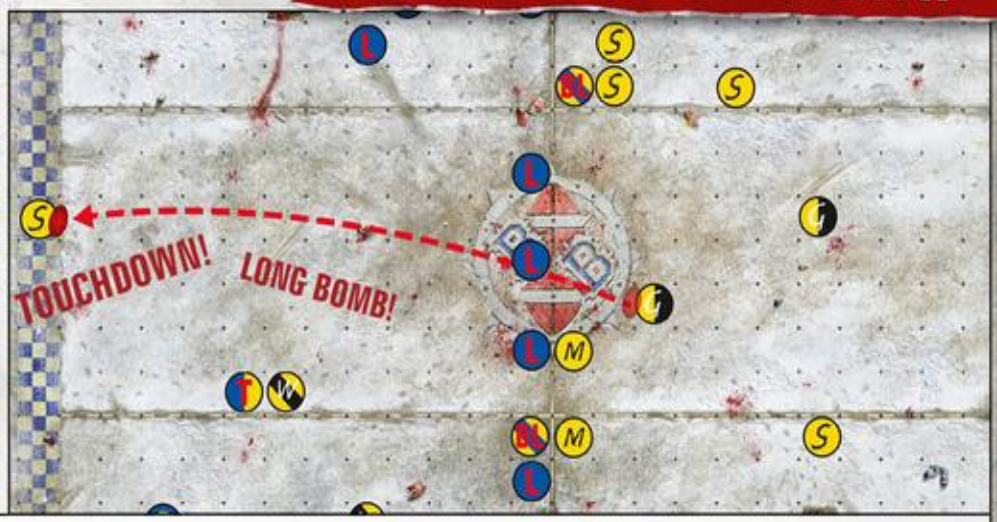
Unstoppable, indefatigable and utterly illegal, the Deathroller has been compared by some commentators to a weaponised lawn roller. Slow as Deathrollers may be, there's little that can stop one once it gets going, short of a Ref with a bee in their cap about trifling things like 'rules', 'regulations' and 'murdering the other side's starting 11 with a miniature siege engine'.

GOOD AFTERNOON, SPORTS FANS! JIM JOHNSON HERE, BRINGING YOU ANOTHER GREAT ISSUE OF SPIKE! MAGAZINE. LET'S SEE WHAT WE HAVE IN STORE FOR YOU THIS MONTH!

DID YOU KNOW...

Due to runaway use of secret weapons, the Chaos Dwarf Black Death team has yet to finish a season with any surviving fans. The Black Death players don't seem to care, though, as they proudly hold the all-time record for Most Spectator Casualties!

PLAY OF THE MONTH



Playing at home can be a powerful advantage. It takes real cunning to turn an opponent's own field into a liability, but that's exactly what Henrik Diettiler, head coach of the Undead Comeback Squad managed in his team's game against the Nuln Ironsides. With the Ironsides experiencing hard times, the team's games have been relegated to abandoned waste ground outside the city's walls – in fact the site of the closing engagements of the Siege of Nuln in 2104. Few now remember the siege, except the Diettiler, who happened to be around then. Recognising the hallowed turf, Diettiler gave careful instructions to his team to attack towards the city walls in the second half. Late in the game, one of the Undead team's Ghouls, Varekhizh Bor, seemed to have made a terrible error by launching the ball down the field towards the empty End Zone – until Diettiler, standing on the sidelines, summoned one of the city's long-dead besiegers to take the winning pass, fresh out of the turf! Like they say, a well-timed substitution can win you the game!

BLOOD BOWL

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PICK YOUR TEAM



CHOOSE YOUR STADIUM



THE BLOOD BOWL PLAYBOOK

With the latest season of Blood Bowl in full swing and a host of different teams now available we thought it was high time to revisit the Blood Bowl Playbook, so we asked renowned coach James Hewitt to offer up some pro advice to coaches everywhere.





JAMES HEWITT
James Hewitt worked on the latest edition of the Blood Bowl rules, making him something of a poacher turned gamekeeper, given his reputation for dirty tactics as a coach.

The rules of Blood Bowl are surprisingly easy to pick up, and by the end of their first game most coaches have a pretty good idea of what they're doing. However, getting good at Blood Bowl can seem quite a daunting task for new players, especially those who regularly find themselves getting trounced by more experienced coaches!

Even experienced players can struggle when stepping out of their comfort zone and trying out a different team for a new season, or coming up against an opponent or team that they've never faced before. Thankfully, there are a few things that every rookie can do to improve their game. Read on for a rundown of the basic strategies that form the basis of every good coach's playbook – pay attention, and you'll be racking up those touchdowns and winning games in no time!

EVERY TURN COUNTS

In a game of Blood Bowl, each coach has sixteen turns at their disposal. If you're new to the game, this might seem like a lot – after all, multiply that by the eleven players you have on the pitch, and that's a mighty 176 actions available between the first kick-off and the final whistle! Unfortunately, it's never quite as simple as that. For starters, it's incredibly unlikely that a team will have eleven players on the pitch for the whole game!

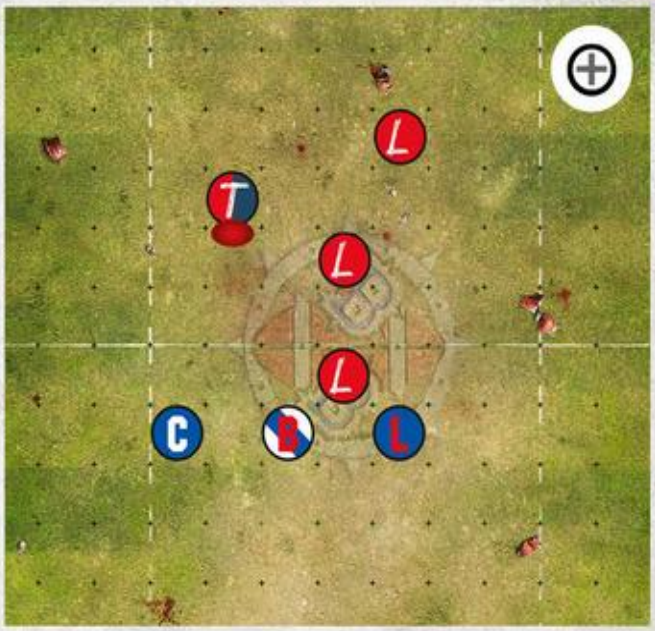
Once you explore the game a little deeper, it becomes clear that not every turn is created equal. In a best-case scenario, most teams tend to need at least two (usually three) turns to score a Touchdown if they are receiving the ball. That means that if a drive begins on the seventh or eighth turn of a half, the receiving team has little to no chance of scoring, meaning that the turn(s) making up that drive a lot less useful than the ones that took place earlier in the half. Add in Turnovers, which can potentially end a turn after only a single action, and a game of Blood Bowl can start looking rather short. Thankfully, it only takes a little consideration and forethought to avoid wasting turns.

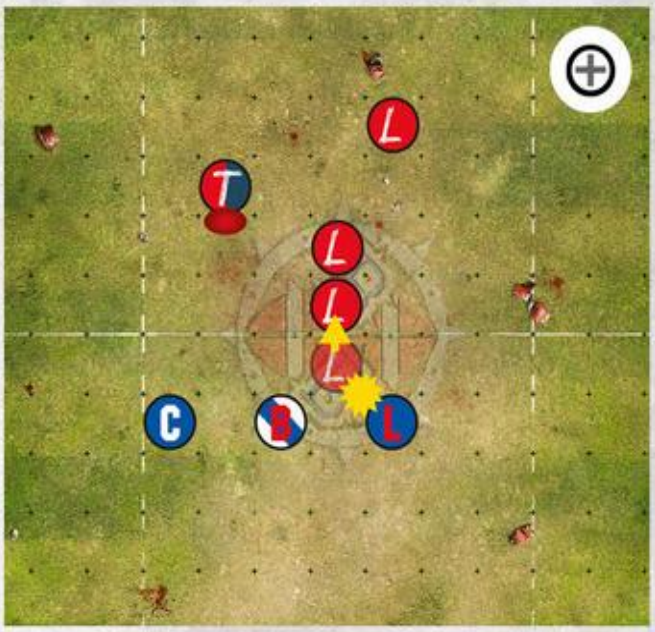
PLAYING THE ODDS

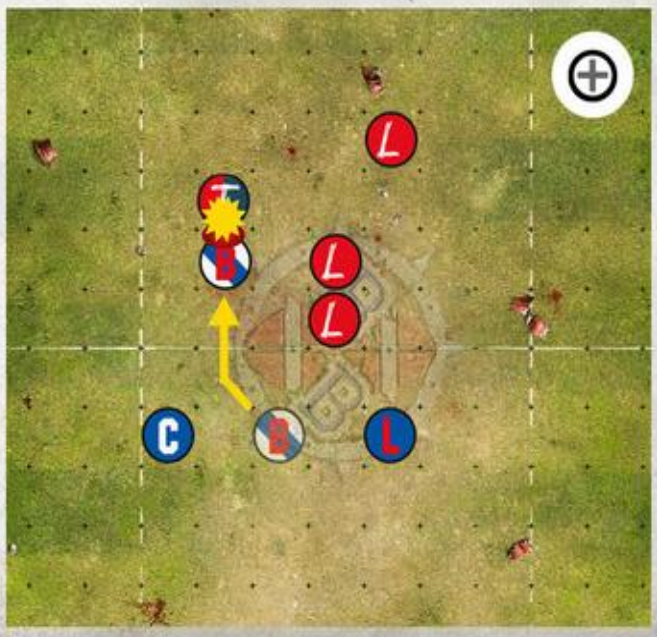
The best way to maximise the potential of each turn is to be aware of the odds. While it's true that there's a lot of luck in a game of Blood Bowl, it's a rare thing for luck to determine the winner. This is because a canny player will make sure they leave their riskier actions until as late as possible, reducing the risk of a Turnover and making sure that they get to make as many actions as possible during the game.

As an example, a Move action that doesn't involve any Dodge rolls or attempts to pick up the ball is a great way to start the turn; there are no rolls to be made, so there's no chance of it causing a Turnover. These actions should almost always come first, with low-risk moves coming next – those that involve dice rolls with good odds, meaning that the number required is low and/or the player making the action has a skill that grants a bonus or a re-roll. Once these low-risk actions are out of the way, it's time for the dangerous ones! This includes anything that involves Going For It – whatever else you're doing, the action has a one-in-six chance of ending your turn prematurely.

Of course, there are times when your strategy will force you to break this rule and go for a calculated risk early in the turn, but the important thing is to always be conscious of the odds – don't do this unless you have to!







DON'T FORGET THE BALL!

This may sound really obvious, but a lot of coaches – Orc players, I'm looking at you! – get so excited about crushing the other team that they forget about the ball. Remember, no matter how many players you stomp into the dirt, it takes a surprisingly small number of them to grab the ball and score. Casualties don't win games; touchdowns do!

KEEPING TRACK OF ACTIONS

With up to eleven players on the pitch, it can be easy to lose track of which players have already taken their action in a given turn. For years now, the traditional way for coaches to avoid this is to make sure all their players are facing forward when the turn begins, then turn each one around once their action is over. This might look a little odd – a casual observer might ask why that blitzer is running the wrong way – but it makes sure you don't forget to activate a player (or, worse, accidentally cheat and give a player two actions!).

USEFUL BLOCKING SKILLS

During league play, players will have the chance to gain new skills. Block is a no-brainer for most players, as it helps both with making Blocks and defending against them. What's more, it's a General skill, so it's relatively easy for most players to take it. Dodge is an Agility skill, so is rarer, but is another great skill to take, because it turns a Defender Stumbles result from a Knockdown to a Pushback. However, if the blocking player has Tackle, this is negated – which makes Tackle another good skill for players who plan on doing a lot of blocking.

EFFECTIVE BLOCKING

Possibly the most iconic Blood Bowl action is the Block – after all, it's the only one that uses special dice! All teams use blocking to some degree or other, whether it's to create openings in the opposing line or to whittle the other team down. As such, it's sensible to look at how blocking works in a little more detail. We're going to look at the odds here, but don't worry if it looks a little complicated – all you really need to know is that some blocks are more risky than others.

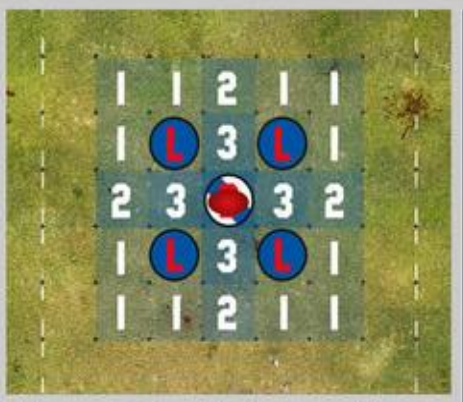
A one-dice block is generally seen to be a very risky action, especially if the blocking player doesn't have the Block skill. There's a one-in-three chance of the active player being Knocked Down (and a Turnover happening) – that's the same odds as knocking down the target! Having the Block skill halves the chance of a Turnover (because the Both Down result no longer affects the blocking player), but even then, a one-in-six chance of your turn ending is far from safe.

A two-dice block in your favour is better, but is still pretty unsafe if the blocking player doesn't have the Block skill – there's still a one-in-nine chance of being Knocked Down and suffering a Turnover. However, a two-dice block with the Block skill looks a lot more reliable, with only a one-in-thirty-six chance of misfortune (the dreaded Double Skulls, where two Attacker Down results are rolled).

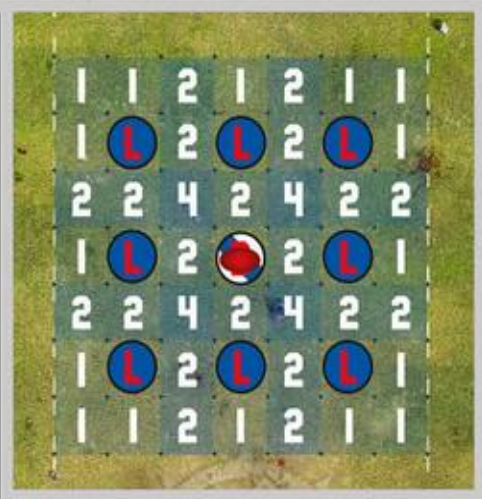
In practice, this means that it's always best to roll at least two Block dice (as long as you're the one choosing them!), especially if the active player has the Block skill. Single-dice blocks, and those performed by players without the Block skill, should come later in the turn.

THE CAGE

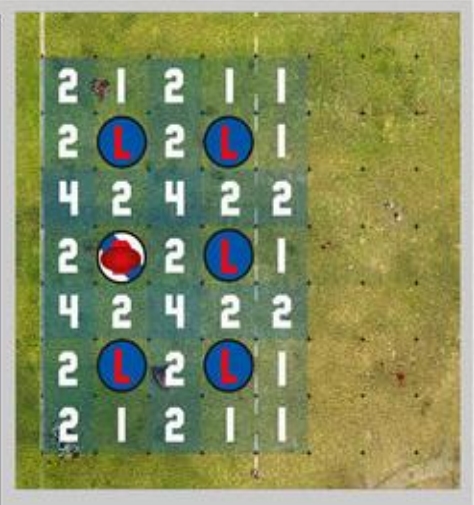
Once a player on your team has taken possession of the ball, it is vital that they are kept as safe as possible. There are several ways of doing this, but the most common is the cage. In essence, a cage is a formation in which players surround the ball carrier to prevent opposing players from easily stealing the ball. Some teams are renowned for their proficiency with cages, but they can be put to use by anyone.



This example shows the simplest, and most classic, version of the cage. The ball carrier is surrounded by four players, creating a field of overlapping tackle zones (the numbers in the squares show how many tackle zones are on each). Note as well that there are no enemy players adjacent to the cage. This means that if your opponent wants to disrupt the cage with a block, they will need to use their Blitz action on one of the outer players – meaning they can't use it to take down the ball carrier. Alternatively, they could Blitz into the cage itself, but as you can see, this will involve an incredibly tough Dodge roll, with at least a -3 modifier, and if they get there they are likely to be facing one or two assists during the block itself. In general, the sort of players who are able to make the Dodge will struggle to make a successful block without any assists.



Of course, there's more than one way to make a cage. This looser variant, favoured by White Dwarf Editor Matt Keefe, gives more room to manoeuvre – a common anti-cage tactic is surrounding it and preventing it from moving, but with this variant it's a lot harder to do so. And of course, if things go wrong, it's quite easy to close up into the tighter cage shown above. However, this variant does require a lot of players, and the space it takes up on the pitch can make it difficult to set up (especially if you're also trying to keep a square of space between the cage and any opposing players – which, of course, you should be!).



One way to fix this is to use one of the sidelines as an anchor for the cage, as shown here – this reduces both the number of players required for the cage and the amount of space it takes up on the pitch, while still leaving it open enough to move around. Attempting this with a tight cage isn't recommended, as multiple pushbacks (for example, from a player with the Frenzy skill) can soon see caging players pushed into the crowd. Of course, that's still a risk here, but having a clear row of squares between the caging players and the sideline improves your odds of staying in play.

BREAKING CAGES

Of course, cages aren't infallible, so if you find yourself coming up against one, don't despair! One of the weaknesses of using a cage is that is ties up several players, meaning that the caging team generally forfeits control of the rest of the pitch. The opposing coach can exploit this, using strength in numbers to pick on the rest of the players on the caging team. Then, by surrounding a cage (but leaving a one-square gap around it), they can stop it from advancing, forcing the caging team to either break the cage to move the ball, or to move up one square at a time, which is usually too slow to score effectively. Some skills are particularly useful when it comes to breaking a cage; Leap and Stunty, for example, both let a player get adjacent to the ball carrier without a very risky Dodge roll. And of course, Goblin teams with their Bombardiers and Fanatics excel at taking out such tightly packed groups of targets, as do certain special play cards, such as the Mine from the Random Events deck!

KICKING AND RECEIVING

In a game of Blood Bowl, each team will kick and receive the ball at least once each (in theory, at least). A common mistake among rookie coaches is failing to differentiate between the two. After all, playing as the offence – starting the drive with the ball in your half and taking the first turn – is very different from playing as the defence. Obviously, each team has its own particular strategies for both offence and defence, but there are a few tactics that work well across the board.

When receiving, it's important to determine whether you will attempt to run the ball up the field (perhaps using a mobile cage) or attempt a passing play. Running the ball usually has fewer risks, but is slower. Passing, on the other hand, is never a sure thing, but when it goes well it can lead to some incredibly swift touchdowns. Usually the team you play will dictate whether running or passing is the more sensible option; Dwarfs, for example, excel at forming a cage and slowly grinding towards the Endzone, while Wood Elves and Elven Union teams can pull off some spectacular passing plays.

One thing that is easy to forget to do as the receiving team is defending the ball. It starts the drive closer to their Endzone than the other team's, so if you forget to watch the ball your opponent will have the chance to score a touchdown in very little time. This is especially true when attempting a passing play; throw the ball from a safe square – such as from inside a cage – so that it won't be left in the open should your player fumble.

When kicking, you once again have two broad approaches: you can attempt to steal the ball and score, or you can do your best to slow the opponent down, preventing them from scoring while you try to remove as many of their players as possible from the pitch. Again, the team you have chosen should dictate which of these tactics is more appropriate. Ork and Chaos Chosen teams combine good strength and movement speed, excelling at this kind of defensive play.

Whichever path you choose, the most important thing to do is keep your eye on the ball. Put yourself in your opponent's shoes, decide whether they're likely to be running or passing, and look for how they might try to get around your defence – then plug those gaps! You don't want to leave them any routes that don't require at least one Dodge roll, preferably more. Also, think carefully about your setup at the start of the drive. A lot of rookie coaches set up a very shallow defence, all of their players clustered around the halfway line – but if you keep a couple of players (including at least one heavy hitter) in your backfield, it will act as a good deterrent against players breaking through and sprinting for the Endzone.

THINK IN FORMATIONS

One of the first things you discover when you start playing Blood Bowl is that your starting formation is pretty important! How you set up at the start of a drive can make a real difference to how well your team performs; each coach will develop their own favourite ways to set up, and there are some good examples in the December 2016 issue of White Dwarf.

TOP TIP: KICK OR RECEIVE?

This is not as simple a question as it seems. Specifically try to think about how things might unfold throughout the whole game, not just on the first kick-off. If you choose to receive, you'll have an opportunity to score first, then defend your lead – handy if you're a sturdy team like Orcs. Alternatively, if you win the coin toss and choose to receive, you might find it easier to 'manage' the game. If your opponent scores in the first half, they'll have to kick off to you again, giving you a few turns to equalise before half-time – and then they'll have to kick off to you again in the second half, giving you every chance of taking the lead. There key determinants here are how quickly your team can score versus how well you can defend. More fragile teams, like Skaven, have to balance their speed of scoring against the risk of having too few players to defend successfully late on in games, too, though.

TOP TIP: GET GUARD!

Veteran coach Matt Keefe says: "The first opportunity I get, I give Guard to a blitzer or even a lineman. It makes them a downright nuisance and makes it much harder for the opponent to orchestrate two-dice blocks. It gives the opponent a few headaches in their turn while the blitzers in my line-up (who already have Block) can do most of the blocking in my turn."



Risk versus reward. With nearby players having already moved, the Griffons' blitzer will only get one dice for his block, but as he has the Block skill, the potential reward of knocking down the ball carrier is worth it.

TOP TIP: REMEMBER WHO YOU ARE!

I played an Elven Union team for years, but with the release of the new edition of the game I've started playing with an Orc team. As a lifelong fan of greenskins in general, I couldn't resist those new miniatures! Unfortunately, I keep falling back on old habits and doing crazy things like passing the ball. Remember, folks: know what your team's strengths are, and stick to them…

However, a lot of coaches make the mistake of thinking that once the drive begins, they don't need to think about their team's formation any more. This is an easy mistake to make! After all, at the end of each of your turns, your team is fixed in place – what is this, if not a formation? Taking this into account and thinking about how your team will be arranged at the end of your turn forces you to look at the bigger picture. It makes you think not only about what you're doing this turn, but what your opponent is likely to do in their next turn. This big-picture thinking is key to playing Blood Bowl well; it's easy to get caught up in the moment and throw all your players at the ball, leaving big gaps in your line and giving your opponent an easy time in their turn.

When setting up a formation, there are two main things to take into consideration: positioning and players. Positioning refers to the overall 'shape' of your formation. This could be a cage (as described above), a screen (where your players are set up to deny your opponent access to a player or an area of the pitch), a refused flank (ignoring one wide zone completely to punch through the other, often favoured against slow-moving teams who will struggle to reposition), and so on. A lot of players only think this far, but it's also important to consider the players that make up the formation and where they are within it. It can help to split your team into groups based on what they're likely to be doing and where they are (so, for example, 'wide zone defence', 'forward offence', 'line of scrimmage') and make sure that each group has the players it needs. As an example, keeping at least one competent blocking player (one with good blocking skills and/or a high strength) in each group means that you're better positioned to take low-risk blocks no matter where your opponent goes during their turn.

LEARNING CURVES

Thanks to the huge variety of teams available to coaches (a mighty 23, including those available for download in the Teams of Legend

TEAM TIERS

Starting teams can broadly be divided into three 'tiers', as detailed below. It's worth noting, however, that as players start accruing Star Player Points and Team Values rise, these tiers are less relevant.

TIER ONE – THE SHOWBOATERS

Amazons, Chaos Dwarfs, Dark Elves, Dwarfs, Lizardmen, Norse, Orcs, Skaven, Shambling Undead, Wood Elves.

Tier one teams tend to have a good selection of players and starting skills, with few disadvantages, which combine to make them fairly effective even if you've never played with them before. In the hands of an experienced player, they can be almost unstoppable!

TIER TWO – THE CONTENDERS

Chaos Chosen, Chaos Renegades, Elven Union, High Elves, Humans, Khemri Tomb Kings, Necromantic Undead, Nurgle, Underworld Denizens, Vampires

Don't be fooled into thinking that tier two teams are 'worse' than tier one teams – rather, their learning curve is steeper. While a new coach might be able to muddle their way to a win with a tier one team, a tier two team is usually less forgiving, and using it inefficiently can lead to disaster! However, once a coach gets to grips with one of these teams, they can be utterly devastating. This makes tier two teams incredibly rewarding to play, if you're willing to put the time in.

TIER THREE – THE STUNTIES

Goblins, Halflings, Ogres

If you ever wanted proof that not all teams are created equal, try playing with a Stunty team! All three of these teams have rosters that are a mix of weedy, ineffective players and large, effective but unreliable ones. You'll find the steepest learning curve of all here, and it will take a monumental effort to get one of these teams to reliably outperform teams from the higher tiers. But that doesn't mean it's not going to be fun – and more to the point, there's a certain prestige in winning games with a Stunty team! In fact, many tournaments award special prizes for the highest-scoring Stunty teams. For many experienced coaches, playing with a third-tier team is a great way to have fun, not take the game too seriously, and (hopefully) prove your mettle. What's not to like?

bundle on www.bloodbowl.com), there really is a team to suit every play style. If you'd like to improve your game, it's worth finding a team that reflects your favourite way to play – if you're the violent sort and you love blocking, you'll be happiest running a team of hard hitters. Of course, once you're familiar with your team and you feel that you'd like a new challenge, you can step outside your comfort zone and try a team that focusses on another area of expertise.

Before you decide to start a team, you should do your best to identify its strengths and weaknesses. Look at the team roster; does it have lots of different positions or only a few? More positions means more flexibility, but it also makes it more likely that each individual player is less likely to function as a jack of all trades. Then, look at the positions themselves. Is there a good mix of skills on offer? Does the team obviously lean towards a particular tactic, such as running, passing or blocking? It's also worth looking at the advancement options for each position – which skill sets are easily available, and which ones are going to be a rarity in the team? It's also worth noting that some teams are more challenging to get to grips with than others – check out the box-out on Team Tiers, above.

Once you've chosen a team, keep these strengths and weaknesses in mind, and adjust your play style accordingly. If your team is made up of fast, (fr)agile players, use your mobility to outpace your opponent, and try to score as quickly as you can before they have the opportunity to reduce the number of players you have on the field. Conversely, if your players are high-strength, high-armour bruisers, you're looking at a much slower game, blocking at every opportunity and slowly moving the ball up to score.

TOP TIP: HAVE A PLAN B...

Generally speaking, it's best to stick to your guns – play according to your preferred strategy and don't change it too much out of panic when things go wrong. Don't change your overall strategy, but you should have a Plan B for individual components of it. If you're sending a catcher down the field ready for that game-winning pass, send another play to a different area of the field just in case.

WHITE DWARF DECEMBER 2017



RUNNING A SUCCESSFUL LEAGUE



JAMES HEWITT

James Hewitt is a games designer and part of the team that worked on the latest edition of Blood Bowl. He's also a League Commissioner in good standing, having run the first Forge Bowl league soon after the game was released. So, we thought there could be no one better qualified to offer up some top tips on running leagues.

Blood Bowl is the game of fantasy football and nothing brings it to life like setting up a league, where your team goes on the long, hard road to championship glory and your players set out for the Hall of Fame, an early death or both. Here's how to do it.

There are many ways to enjoy Blood Bowl, but one of the most rewarding is to organise a league. This is a series of linked games, played over a number of weeks (or even months), in which multiple teams battle it out in the hope of making it to the final and winning the league trophy!

In general, organising a league doesn't take that much work, daunting as it might seem. The most important thing to remember is that the League Commissioner (the person in charge) has the power to make things as complex or as simple as they like. Your first league doesn't need to use every single optional rule – indeed, it's best to keep it simple until you have a bit of experience.

Death Zone – Season One (and the Blood Bowl Almanac, released this month) contains all the rules you need to get a league up and running, but the biggest challenge for budding Commissioners can be figuring out just how to put it all into practice. This article breaks things down into a number of stages, outlining the League Commissioner's responsibilities and hopefully making things nice and clear. Read on, and you'll soon be wondering why you haven't started one sooner!

FIRST STEPS

There are a few things you need to consider before you organise a league:

Are people interested? This seems like an obvious one, but gauge people's interest before you get started. You need to have a group of coaches, each with their own Blood Bowl team, who know more or less how to play the game and are each interested in playing on

a regular basis for the next few weeks! Many new Commissioners make the mistake of organising a fantastic league, printing posters, creating spreadsheets and booking tables at the local gaming club… only to find out that people are already involved in other campaigns, are focused on other games or simply too busy to get involved.

What do your coaches want? While gauging interest in the league, take the chance to find out a few things about the coaches who want to get involved. How long might they like the league to run for? How regularly will they be able to play games? How well do they know Blood Bowl?

Where will games be played? If you meet regularly at a gaming club or store, this one might answer itself. Otherwise, spend a while thinking about where games will happen – most coaches will be happy to play at home or at another coach's house, but it might be a good idea to organise a regular space for gaming at a local pub, bar, church hall, scout hut, community centre or anywhere else that caters to this sort of thing. After all, one of the most gratifying parts of a league is coming together to play games! Half the fun is found in watching each other's games, checking out the best-painted teams and, at the end of the night, celebrating (or commiserating) as a group and swapping stories about how much Nuffle hates you all.

BEFORE THE LEAGUE BEGINS

Once you've had a good think and gathered some information, it's time to start planning the league. Here's what you need to do:

Set your dates. At this point, you want to think about how long your first season will be. There's no one right answer here, which is why speaking to your coaches in advance is so important. You want the league to run for long enough that everyone gets a chance to play enough games, but you don't want it to get stale and start dragging. If in doubt, keep it short (maybe six to eight weeks, depending on how often your coaches can play games). Remember to take the play-offs into account!

Publicise the league. At this point you need to solidify the league plans and make them visible to your players. You don't need to be an artist to make a great league poster – you can get away with nothing more than a scribbled A4 piece of paper, as long as it explains all of the following:

The start and end dates (including play-offs).

- Any optional rules that will be in play.
- Any limitations or restrictions, such as "Painted teams only!" or "Must be free on Tuesday nights!" (*or "Must bring own beer!" – Ed*).
- Each team's starting budget – usually 1,000,000gp, but you might want to change it.
- Who the Commissioner is and how to contact them.
- A cut-off date for signing up.

At this point you can start asking people to commit – social media event listings are great for this, but there's also nothing wrong with a sign-up list stuck to a wall. As the cut-off date for signing up approaches, don't be afraid to give people a poke and get them to make their mind up. A word of warning, though – don't pressure people into taking part. All you get from doing that is a team that disappears after a couple of unenthusiastic games.

Gather Rosters. Before the league can begin, each coach needs to select a team and give you a copy of their completed team roster. This does three things – it gives you a list of team names, it gives you a chance to go over each roster and make sure there have been no unfortunate mathematical errors and it commits players to taking part. Also, the very act of putting a team together is a great motivating factor to start playing some games and will generate plenty of excitement for things to get started.

Decide Divisions. Beyond a certain number of players, a league can begin to get a bit unwieldy. Splitting the league into divisions, as described in Death Zone – Season One (and the Blood Bowl Almanac), is a great way to get round this.

It is recommended that each division has between four and eight teams – as with everything else, though, this is up to you. Smaller divisions will mean the league can be shorter (as teams won't need to play as many games against the other teams in their division), but individual coaches will have less variety when it comes to opponents. Also, in smaller divisions, a single coach dropping out can really put a spanner in the works. However you decide to go, announcing the divisions should always be treated with a bit of fanfare! Getting all the players in one place then drawing team names out of a hat to split them up creates a great buzz at the start of a league (it can even be done at the start of your first league night, immediately before the first games are played).

DURING THE LEAGUE

Right, you've got a group of committed coaches, they've got their teams and they know

TECHNOLOGY TO THE RESCUE!

Being rather technologically minded, if I do say so myself, I set up a questionnaire using Google Forms which coaches could use to report their results after each game.

I also set up a spreadsheet with several bells and whistles that imported the submitted information and turned it into a nicely formatted league table which I could print out and stick on the wall, but that was just me being flashy – it's really not necessary, and anyone could get the same result without any of the technical know-how.

DID YOU KNOW?

While there are countless independent Blood Bowl leagues in operation, most follow a similar schedule and run their season through the same part of the year, with the annual Spike! Magazine Awards ceremony regarded as the traditional end to the Blood Bowl year. There, honours such as Player of the Year, the Strong Arm Award, the Sudden Death Award, Most Blatant Foul and Scariest Game Face are handed out.

League year 2489-90 was particularly notable on the awards front, with awards in a record 17 of Spike! Magazine's 27 major categories made posthumously, including somewhat unfortunately, the year's Most Promising Rookie.



LEAGUE RULES

You can find full rules on running leagues in Death Zone – Season One and in the Blood Bowl Almanac, whichever you find most convenient. There's plenty of scope for variation, but if it's your first time running a league you might want to start simple.

who their opponents are. Now they can start playing games! The good news for you is that most of the hard work is now out of the way, and you can spend most of your time just playing games.

Update Stats Regularly. After each game, ensure that your coaches report result to you in a timely fashion. Keep track of these results so you know how well each team is doing; this will make your life a lot easier when it comes to the play-offs.

Keep Coaches Informed. The most reliable way of ensuring the league stays on track is to keep everyone updated on how things are going. There are plenty of stats that can be made available, as long as you are collecting them from coaches after each game. At a minimum you should include each team's League Points, total Touchdowns scored and total Casualties inflicted, as these are used (by default) to determine which teams go through to the play-offs. You can include other stats if you wish, such as team value, number of games played, most Casualties and Touchdowns achieved in a single match and so on.

Write a Newsletter. A regular newsletter (weekly seems to work best) is entirely optional but wholly recommended. A newsletter does not have to be a work of art and does not have to contain more than a summary of recent matches; however, ambitious Commissioners can take the chance to really go to town, writing in-character reports of the week's events. This is a great way to keep players entertained and interested! Ask your players to tell you of any stand-out moments in their games when they submit their results as an easy way to generate newsletter content, which can even stretch to impromptu awards such as 'Foul of the Week' and 'Unluckiest Player'.

THE END OF THE LEAGUE

In the last couple of weeks of the league, with the play-offs approaching, you should make sure to keep stats as up to date as possible, as players who are in with a chance of qualifying will start to take a great deal of interest in them! Make sure players are aware of the exact date and time that the league ends, and that any results submitted after this will not be counted. As soon as the league finishes, you have a couple of tasks:

Run the Play-offs. Determine which teams will go through to the play-offs and announce the



Below: Gavin Newton's Skaven team, the Silver Tower Slicey Biters, take on Keith Robertson's Lizardman team, the Quan Kn't B'Betan – two of the teams to have taken part in the inaugural Forge Bowl. Sadly, by the point shown, the Slicey Biters were short of their expected Star Player, Glart Smashrip (see 'Dream Debut, Not Quite…', opposite).

match-ups to the entire league. Coaches who have been paying attention to the stats might not be surprised, but it's still another chance to get everyone together in one place! Once the matches have been announced, it's in your interest to make sure they are played as quickly as possible so you can get to the final.

Prepare (and Award) Prizes. You don't have to have prizes for the winners (prestige is often enough!) but it doesn't take a lot of effort to rustle up a simple trophy and some award certificates and it's well worth the effort. Organising a little prize ceremony, taking some commemorative photos and having a post-league celebration is a great way to remind everyone how much fun they've had and to make sure they want to come back for the next season!

Talk to Your Coaches Again! Here's one that's easy to forget: have a chat with the people who played in the league and get their feedback. Was it too long or too short? Were the divisions about the right size? Was it fun? Were there any optional rules they enjoyed or that they missed? Use this feedback when planning the next season and you're sure to have coaches flocking back.

A CASE STUDY: FORGE BOWL 2017

Earlier this year I ran a Blood Bowl league in the Forge World studio. Blood Bowl is a game which has always had a strong following around Games Workshop HQ, and with the release of the new edition there was a real buzz. As the person responsible for writing the current set of league rules, it seemed only sensible that I should be the one to take up the mantle of League Commissioner. Here's how it went.

KEEPING IT SHORT

As we're all busy folks, I settled on a six-week season. This was quite short, so to keep things interesting I increased everyone's starting budget to 1,100,000gp and added a special rule – at the start of each team's first game, before setting up, they could make three MVP rolls (no player could get more than one MVP), meaning teams could get a little head start on their Star Player Points. Players receiving Improvements is a big part of the fun of a league, and I didn't want players to miss out just because of time constraints.

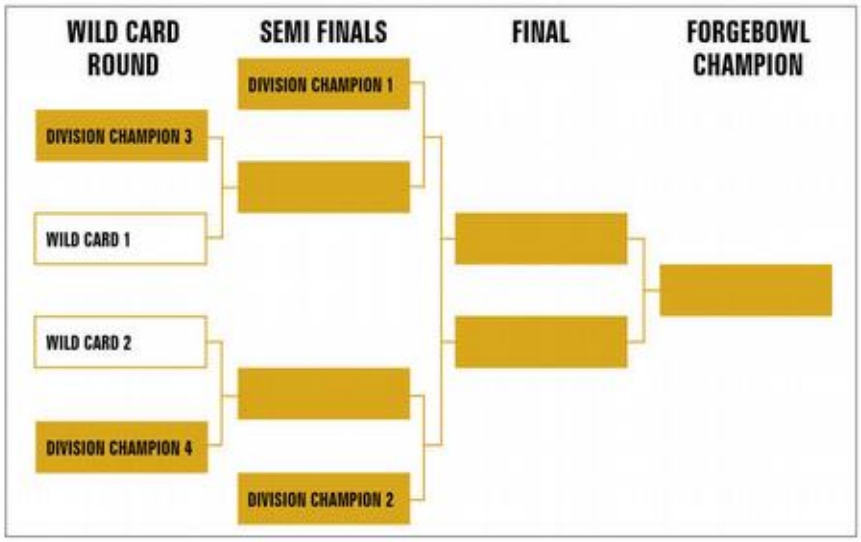
GETTING STARTED

I pinned up a sign-up sheet and rules poster a whole month before the league was due to begin, so everyone had plenty of time to get their teams together (and to cajole their colleagues into taking part!). Doing this meant we had a rather decent 16 teams! I realised that I could either split them into two divisions of eight or four divisions of four. A quick email vote from those involved led to the latter. Also, I took the opportunity to try something a bit different and decided that, instead of going by the book and sending the top four players overall into the play-offs, the top-scoring player from each division would go through (again, I put this to a vote, and everyone was happy to try it out). The divisions were determined by a random draw, and the league got off to a roaring start.

WILD CARDS

Owen Branham, a fan of various real-world sports, suggested adding a Wild Card system to keep things interesting. It meant that more than one player from a division could potentially make it through to the finals. (Sure enough, three players from South division ended up in the play-offs, causing everyone else to wonder if they knew something the rest of us didn't.)

The Wild Card system was easy to implement, and I'd recommend trying it out in your own leagues if you're looking to spice up your league. Here's how it worked: after all of the results had been handed in and collated, the top-scoring team from each division (League points, then Touchdowns as a tie-breaker with Casualties as a second tie-breaker) was named a Division Champion. The two remaining teams with the highest scores each became a Wild Card.



The two Division Champions with the highest scores went straight to the semi-finals, but before they could be played there was the Wild Card round. In this round, the Division Champion in third place played against the higher-scoring Wild Card team, and the Division Champion in fourth place played against the lower-scoring Wild Card team. The winner of the first match would go on to the semi-finals, playing against the highest-scoring Division Champion, and the winner of the second would go into the other semi-final.

DREAM DEBUT, NOT QUITE...

With the Forge Bowl league organised by the Specialist Games team and involving members of the Forge World Studio, the season saw a few notable debuts, with the participants being among the first to get their hands on new teams and new Star Player models.

Gavin Newton, who designed the impressively obese Glart Smashrip, became the first coach ever to use Glart when he debuted him in a league game, as part of his Skaven team, the Silver Tower Slicey Biters. Sadly, Glart's debut was a brief one, as he was killed by a rock thrown by the crowd at the very first kick-off.

WILD CARDS

The idea of a wild card system is to give runners-up a chance of making the play-offs, which serves to even out any differences in strength between the divisions. The Forge Bowl league allowed for two wild cards, so six of the 16 teams took part in the play-offs. This is a good number – generally, in bigger leagues, having half or slightly less than half of the teams make the play-offs is about right.

DID YOU KNOW?

Veteran Blitzer Malorek Doomgale of Undead team the Comeback Squad has appeared in a record 896 seasons of Blood Bowl. Doomgale played the first five years of his career as a Human Blitzer, before turning to the Dark Gods after a career-threatening knee injury. 48 seasons as a regular in the Nurgle Rotters' starting line-up followed before a 26-year spell out of the game owing to his own violent death – a niggling injury that has continued to trouble Malorek periodically throughout his storied time with the Comeback Squad.

In short, this meant that getting to the top of your division wasn't enough to ensure a place in the semi-finals. It led to quite a rush at the end of the league, with one team – the Rustbeard Razors, coached by Specialist Games Sculptor (and designer of the Deathroller) Chris Drew – squeezing in a rather phenomenal number of games, even challenging Middle-earth Manager Adam Troke's Red St*r Komets to a 6am match because the cut-off point for results was 9am. All in all, adding the Wild Cards really helped keep things interesting until the very end.

THE FINAL

When I mentioned I was going to write up the league for an article in this esteemed magazine, several coaches asked the same question: "Are you going to mention the final?" It's a tale of misfortune and hubris, but it's also a wonderful example of the kind of amazing stories that leagues generate, so I'm going to tell it here. The final of Forge Bowl 2017 was between two top players. Middle-earth Writer Jay Clare's terrifying Vampire team, Whitby Town, had gone from strength to strength in the league (quite literally, in the case of the multiple Strength improvements he'd rolled) and had even managed to smash my poor Thunda Valley Greenskins 6-0! In the final he came up against the Blitzburg Stealers, a Human team coached expertly by Tris Buckroyd. The game was a real nail-biter, as you might expect from two such masterful Blood Bowl players, and ended in a 1-1 draw after two halves. Overtime began and it wasn't long before Jay scored a Touchdown; Tris

THE FORGE BOWL ALMANAC

Every Friday, I created and sent out an edition of our newsletter, the Forge Bowl Almanac. I made a bit of an effort to make the first edition look vaguely nice (we're a studio, after all, and there were artists and designers among the players!), then each week it was simply a case of changing the text. The Almanac was written as an in-character gazette following the triumphs and misfortunes of the various players and was a great opportunity to highlight key events from the league and give them an in-world justification. For example, one team – the Dodgy Dungers, a particularly malodorous bunch of Orcs – failed to notice the cap on Fan Factor when purchasing a starting team, resulting in a frankly ridiculous 27,000 fans turning up to watch their inaugural game! The mistake was picked up after the match and their roster was adjusted, but the Almanac reported that eleven thousand Orcland Raiders fans had been mis-sold tickets (the Dungers, of course, denied any involvement).

FORGE BOWL ALMANAC

NEWS FROM THE SIDELINES

Price 3 gp | Friday, 17th February, 2017 | Est. 2496

Hello, sports fans! Two weeks in and Forge Bowl is still going strong. Most teams have registered at least one game now, although there are a few that (at time of print) still have yet to play! Enough about them, let's talk about the games that have happened!

...IS IT OVER?

According to unconfirmed reports, the match between the Ill Behaved and Quan Kn't B'betan (which, thanks to any number of stoppages, time-outs and breaks, has been running almost as long as the league itself) might have finally ended. This is great news for spectators who no longer care and just want to get home to their families, but bad news for the Cult of the Perpetual Drive, a bizarre new sect that's sprung up around the belief that the universe will end should the match ever reach its conclusion. Fingers crossed, eh?

A FRIENDLY IN NAME ONLY

This week saw an inter-divisional match between the Thunda Valley Greenskins and the Red St*r Komets (who will, we assume, be reimbursing us the cost of that red ink). The Greenskins' fans could never be called well-behaved, but they were positively saintly compared to the mob of lunatics that showed up to support the Komets. Speaking after the match, Thunda Valley #1 "Flashy" Skazwot said that he'd never played in front of a crowd that was so rowdy, so vindictive and so well-armed. Investigations currently are being launched to find out where that trebuchet came from.

YOU CAN'T HAVE IT ALL

It wasn't all smiles and sunshine for the Komets this week – they managed to flub a 3-1 lead against the Silver Tower Slicey Biters in the closing minutes of the game, which ended in a draw! Those rats might be ones to watch.

WHAT GOES VROOM VROOM ARGH! THAT MAIMED GOBLIN

When it was announced that Trolly Mother of Gob were going to be taking part in this league, fans were celebrating across the land. After all, who doesn't enjoy watching goblin teams? They're inept, but they're always good for a laugh.

Take their recent match against the frankly terrifying Scarlett Butchers this week. No one thought the Goblins would come out on top, but everyone expected it would fall to the Norsemen to maim the diminutive greenskins. Turns out the players of TMoG – Bubba in particular, who decided to sit on his chainsaw Mister Splitz – are keen to show that they can maim themselves, thank you very much. It's a refreshing take on a well-trodden formula, and we applaud the team for their dedication to comedy.

START AS YOU MEAN TO GO ON

It seems like this week, no matter where you are, you're never more than six feet from a Skaven fan – and who can blame them, when the rat-s are doing so well? Take the Rattsburgh Skitters, for example, who at the time of print haven't finished their first match but have already sent two players from... ugh... *Pinging Mundem* to the undertakers. Well, sort of. One of them tripped over a discarded wheel of cheese and landed badly. But it still counts!

SORELY MISSED

Let's take a moment to remember the players we've lost since the Forge Bowl began:
S.T. Slicey Biters #6, Snat Thumpflay
The Ill Behaved #2, Whatsisname

This list should almost certainly be bigger. Let us know if one of your players has gone to meet Nuffle!

LEAGUE RESULTS

NORTH DIVISION
No matches completed

SOUTH DIVISION
S.T. Slicey Biters 3 - 3 Red St*r Komets

EAST DIVISION
Scarlett Butchers 3 - 1 Trolly Mother of Gob
Quan Kn't B'betan 2 - 1 The Ill Behaved

WEST DIVISION
No matches completed

LEAGUE ACCOLADES

TOP TEAMS BY DIVISION: Thunda Valley Greenskins (N), Scarlett Butchers (E), Blitzburg Stealers (S), Bodymore Razors (W)
HIGHEST SCORERS: Red St*r Komets (S) – 5 Touchdowns
MOST DANGEROUS: Thunda Valley Greenskins, Scarlett Butchers (N) – 3 Casualties each
MOST VALUABLE: Blitzburg Stealers (S) – T.V. 1,230,000
SERVICES TO COMPLAINING: Coach "I Mov My Opre" Wylie, The Ill Behaved



followed up with a Touchdown of his own, leading to another draw at the end of the eight-turn period. Both players agreed to forego the penalty shoot-out in favour of a second period of Overtime. This time, the Blitzburg Stealers scored and Whitby Town did not. The final was over. Jay reported his loss and Tris took the cup.

Experienced coaches might be scratching their heads. After all, Overtime is sudden death, isn't it? The first team to score wins, right? Well, yes. It turns out Jay had forgotten all about that.

After some deliberation it was decided almost unanimously that the match had been reported as a win for the Stealers, and the players had agreed at the time that this was right – taking it back would have been no more appropriate than replaying the game because one player had unintentionally had a twelfth player on the pitch. Jay took the news rather well and will definitely not be getting that rule wrong ever again.

PRIZES FOR ALL!

At the end of the league, once the dust had settled, I gathered everyone around my desk one lunchtime and we had an award ceremony. As well as the rather lovely Forge Bowl trophy, the Events team had been kind enough to help me put together a series of certificates for other achievements in the league. There were certificates for the League Champion, Runner-Up and Best of the Rest (third place overall), Gallanté's Choice (best-painted team) and Morg's Mate (most sporting coach). The whole office joined in with the cheering and applause, photos were taken and the league was given an appropriate sending-off.

NEXT TIME!

Having spoken to the coaches after the league was over, I decided that another season should kick off in a few months' time. Several people had expressed an interest in getting involved, and most of the players who had taken part were keen to continue their teams' legacy.

One piece of feedback that several people mentioned was that the divisions were too small, and there was not enough variety when it came to opponents. Also, several coaches bemoaned the fact that the scoring system (League Points, then Touchdowns, then Casualties) rewarded fast-scoring teams above hard-hitting teams.

With all of this in mind, I decided that the next season would become a different type of event – the Forge Bowl Summer Slaughter, which would be a free-for-all with much larger divisions (or maybe even a single huge division!), where violent play would be rewarded more heavily. This will be followed next year by a return to the standard Forge Bowl format, making two regular fixtures in the calendar, each with their own feel. ☠

USING THIS ADVICE ELSEWHERE

This article has been about running a Blood Bowl league, but almost everything described here can easily be applied to other game systems. Necromunda is an obvious candidate (and has a rather similar system, with zones taking the place of divisions and turf wars taking the place of seasons… what a strange coincidence!) but Warhammer 40,000 and Warhammer Age of Sigmar could also be run as a campaign or league. The key points of this article – communicating with players, structuring the league, having a realistic end goal – are all entirely transferable. Even if you've never rolled a Block dice or thrown a football, it really doesn't take much to set up a series of linked games with your friends, and you should find that the rewards of doing so far outweigh your effort. Best of luck!

STAR PLAYER CARDS

WHITE DWARF MAY 2017

THE WHITE DWARF & THE BLACK GOBBO

"What's that, Bob, there's a new player on the pitch? Ah, it's the White Dwarf, one of the greatest legends of the Old World and, so we've heard, quite a keen Blood Bowl player. Let's hope his skulking friend the Black Gobbo turns up, too - that would be a real treat..."



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Cometh the Hour, Cometh the Dwarf: Grombrindal's reputation is almost mythological. Tales abound of his shrewd tactical advice on the field of battle; on the Blood Bowl pitch this translates to a mastery of team strategies and the ability to draw the very best out of the players around him. Once per turn, when another player on Grombrindal's team who is within 3 squares of him is chosen to make an action, their coach can declare that they will benefit from the White Dwarf's wisdom. That player gains one of the following skills until the end of their action: Break Tackle, Dauntless, Mighty Blow, Sure Feet, Sure Hands, Tackle.

Ancient Grudge: If Grombrindal throws a block against the Black Gobbo, his coach can re-roll the Block dice without spending a Team Re-roll.

Sneakiest of the Lot: The Black Gobbo is legendarily devious, as evidenced by his countless elaborate schemes to undermine the White Dwarf. Before he even thinks about setting foot on the pitch, it's a given that he will have already established a web of bribery, hostage-taking and other sneakiness that ensures the cooperation of the match officials. If the Black Gobbo makes a Foul action, this is not counted as the one Foul action that the team can make in a turn (in other words, another player on the team can still make a Foul action). Also, whenever a player from the Black Gobbo's team (including the Black Gobbo himself) is sent off for Fouling, roll a D6. On a result of 3 or more, they are not sent off. On a 1 or 2, the coach can attempt to use a Bribe or argue the call as normal. If the Black Gobbo is sent off or suffers a Casualty, this rule has no further effect.

Get da Git: If the Black Gobbo uses the Stab skill against Grombrindal, his coach can choose to re-roll the Armour roll.

USING GROMBRINDAL AND THE BLACK GOBBO

Grombrindal and the Black Gobbo are legendary heroes, almost mythical in status. They follow their own rules, and won't be tied down by such trifling concerns as 'league rules' and 'star player availability clauses'. As such, they cannot be hired in the same way as star players, and can only be used as described below. A note to Tournament organisers – we recommend that you don't allow these two legendary players to take part in your tournaments!

EXHIBITION PLAY

When drafting teams for an exhibition match (or any standard one-off game), if one player has a Dwarf, Halfling, Human or Norse team and the other has a Chaos Renegade, Goblin, Orc or Underworld Denizen team, both coaches can agree that Grombrindal and the Black Gobbo will turn up for the game – Grombrindal will play for the former teams, the Black Gobbo for the latter ones. Note that they never turn up individually – if one team has one of them, their opponent always has the other.

Neither player costs any gold. However, they do count as one of the players on the team's roster, so only 15 other players can be chosen.

LEAGUE PLAY

If the League Commissioner wishes, they can introduce the following optional rule to their league:

During league play, if a match takes place between a Dwarf, Halfling, Human or Norse team and a Chaos Renegade, Goblin, Orc or Underworld Denizen team, there is a chance that Grombrindal and the Black Gobbo will turn up to play (provided that their miniatures are available, of course).

When the coaches roll to see how many fans turn up at the start of the match, if either coach rolls 10 or more (before adding their Fan Factor or any other modifiers), the legendary rivals turn up and join their respective teams! Note that they never turn up individually – if one team has one of them, their opponent always has the other.

Grombrindal and the Black Gobbo do not add to their team's Team Value, and they do not cost any gold to hire. If either team already has a full roster of 16 players, the coach must choose one player to sit the game out – in effect, they are replaced by Grombrindal or the Black Gobbo for the duration of this match.

AVAILABLE FOR HIRE

The White Dwarf and the Black Gobbo will be available to purchase for the first time at Warhammer Fest, which take place on 26 and 27 May. After Warhammer Fest, you will also be able to get them at future Forge World events and at Warhammer World.



Below: The Dwarf Giants take on the Gouged Eye. With Grombrindal in the starting line-up, the Orcs could be in serious trouble, but the Dwarfs clearly don't know the Black Gobbo is lurking behind the Orc line.

OPTIONAL RULES: GOBLIN SPECIAL BALLS

This rule set allows Goblin teams to make use of their own special balls, and is designed to be used alongside the rules for other teams' special balls (which can be found in the March issue of White Dwarf). As with all optional rules, the use of this rule set should be agreed between both coaches in one-off games, and its use in league play is at the League Commissioner's discretion.

At the start of any drive for which they are the kicking team, a Goblin coach can declare that they will use a special ball. Goblin teams have access to three special balls and can use each one once per match. If they wish, they can use an Extra Spiky Ball (see the March issue of White Dwarf) in place of one of their three balls.

Before the kick-off, the coach nominates one player from their team who is on the pitch, is not in a wide zone and is not on the line of scrimmage to be the one kicking the ball. (Note that in some situations, such as using the Kick skill, a player will already have been nominated to kick the ball.) If the roll on the kick-off table is a double, the Ref calls the kicking player out for their flagrant rules violation, and they are immediately sent off as though they had committed a foul (before resolving the kick-off result). Note that even if the player is sent off, the special ball remains in play for this drive! If the team has already used a special ball this match, roll a D6 after the kick-off event has been resolved. On a 1 or 2 the kicking player is sent off as above.

For the duration of the drive, the special ball rules (as shown below) apply to the ball. Aside from those rules, it still counts as a normal ball in all respects.

EXPLODIN' BALL

There's nothing subtle or clever about a ball stuffed with blasting charges and gunpowder, but Goblins have never been fans of subtlety or cleverness. When the ball is placed, the Goblin player places a marker – a spare ball is ideal – on any space of their score track, to represent the length of the fuse. At the end of each player's turn, the Goblin coach rolls a D6. On a 1, the fuse goes out, and the Explodin' Ball is treated as a regular ball from now on – however, the Goblin player may spend a team re-roll to keep the fuse alight (the marker does not move this turn). On a 2-5, move the marker one space towards 0. On a 6, move it two spaces towards 0. If it moves onto the 0 space, it is removed and the ball explodes! Should a drive end while the marker is still on the track, it is removed with no effect.

When the ball explodes, roll a D6 for each player in an adjacent square – they are Knocked Down on a roll of 4+. If they are already Prone or Stunned, make an Armour roll for them as though they had been Knocked Down. In addition, if a player was carrying the ball, they are Knocked Down automatically. Note that an exploding ball will not prevent a touchdown being scored, but the roll should still be made at the end of the turn to see whether the bomb blows up while the player is celebrating...

After the ball has exploded, as long as the drive is still going, a replacement is thrown in by a sideline official. Put a regular ball on the square where the exploding ball was, then scatter it three times – a player cannot attempt to catch it until all three scatters have been completed.

SHADY SPECIAL

The art of getting a ball to deflate in midair during the kick-off was pioneered by devious gobbo kicker Grom Shady, and is a common sight when Goblins come up against show-offs who love passing. Any attempts to throw a Shady Special have an additional -2 modifier. In addition, as there's very little chance of a Ref proving that the sabotage was deliberate (and not the result of shoddy kit maintenance expected of a Goblin team), the kicker can't be sent off for employing a Shady Special.

SNOTLING BALL-SUIT

Stuffing a Snotling into a crude approximation of a ball and instructing them to run for the other end zone is one of the most ludicrous (and entertaining) ways a Goblin team can cheat.

During each of their turns, the Goblin coach can make a Move action with the ball as though it were a player on their team! If the ball is being carried by a player on the enemy team, it must first try to escape. The opposing coach makes an Agility test for that player with a +1 modifier. If it is passed, they keep hold of the ball, and it cannot make an action this turn. Otherwise, it bounces once, using up one square of its movement, and can then carry on moving.

The ball has a MA equal to the roll of a D3, rolled each time it makes a Move action. For each square of the ball's movement, the Goblin coach places the Throw-in template over it facing up or down the pitch or towards either sideline. Then they roll a D6 and move the ball one square in the indicated direction; no Dodge roll is required if it leaves a square that is in an enemy tackle zone. Repeat this process for each and every square of the ball's Movement (it cannot Go For It). If this movement takes the ball off the pitch, it is thrown back on as normal and its move ends.

If the ball moves into a standing player's square, that player must attempt to catch it, as though it were a bouncing ball. Goblin players, who are adept at catching runaway Snotlings, get a +1 bonus to this roll.

It almost goes without saying, but we wouldn't be doing our job if we didn't clarify that a Snotling Ball-Suit can't score a Touchdown by itself...

MULTIPLE BALLS

If a second ball ever comes into play (for example, due to the Ball Clone special play card), it is always a normal, regulation Blood Bowl ball. Things are mad enough without multiple special balls on the pitch!







Note on modelling special balls: they all have a peg so they can be slotted into a player's base, but each team comes with two of the ball, so you can clip the peg off of one and use that for when the ball is on its own in a square.

NEW RULES: GOBLIN & HALFLING REFEREES

In Blood Bowl, the best referees are all but invisible. As long as they're doing their job properly, you should hardly notice they're there! The rules for referees in Blood Bowl were written with this in mind, keeping things nice and simple, with the miniatures serving as visual reminders that the rules for Fouling are in play.

However, it's understandable that some players will want to put the new Halfling and Goblin referee miniatures to more use in the game, so here's a set of rules that you can use, representing Refs who make up for their small stature with a complete lack of mercy. This is an optional rule, so both players must agree to use it before play begins.

GOBLIN AND HALFLING REFEREES

Before the first kick-off, the coaches roll off and the winner picks one of the Referee miniatures and sets it up next to the pitch. You can only ever use one special Referee at a time!

Each time there is a foul and a player is not sent off, the Ref will become increasingly frustrated at their impotence. After the foul has been fully resolved, one of the following will happen:

If the Ref is currently next to the pitch and is not on either team's Dugout, move him to the sideline area of the fouling team's Dugout, directly above the '1' on the Score Track. He's now got his eye on that team and is plotting revenge.

If the Ref is already on the fouling team's Dugout, move him one space to the right, so that he's above the next number. If he is already above the number 8, he cannot move any further.

If the Ref is on the other team's Dugout, move him one space to the left, so that he's above the previous number. If he was already above the number 1, remove him from the Dugout and put him back where he started, next to the pitch.

After the Ref has moved, if he's on the fouling team's Dugout, roll a D6. If the result is higher than the number on the Score Track that the Ref is currently above, there is no effect – but if it is the same or lower, the player who committed the foul suffers the consequences described below!

If a player on the team that the Ref is keeping an eye on is sent off, or if that team uses a Bribe to prevent a player being sent off, he calms down and is returned to where he started, next to the pitch. Note that if a drive (or the first half) ends, the Ref stays right where he is… these maniacs know how to be patient!

Consequences: Goblin Referees

It's never a good idea to get on the wrong side of a Goblin, let alone when they have the full backing of the Referees and Allied Rulekeepers Guild! The player is given a subtle reminder of the Ref's authority – place them Prone and make an immediate injury roll for them.

Consequences: Halfling Referees

The Halflings that make it through the Referee Selection Programme tend to be a few buns short of a basket and will go out of their way to maliciously disrupt the efforts of a team that's on their wrong side. The player's team immediately loses a Team Re-roll. If they do not have any Team Re-rolls to lose, the other team gains one instead!

Despite their natural lack of affinity for Blood Bowl, Goblins and Halflings are dedicated participants in the sport (Goblins for the countless opportunities for mischief, Halflings for the always-impressive post match feasts.) Indeed, some even go as far as becoming match officials – something which many players laugh at until they realise just how vindictive these diminutive despots can be!

Generally, becoming a Blood Bowl referee takes a very specific mixture of qualities. You must be, at the very least, slightly unhinged. You must have an encyclopedic knowledge of the rules. You must be bold and assertive, able to make yourself heard over the roar of the crowd and the screams of the injured. And – above all else – you must be able to remain impartial, never letting your own bias influence your calls.

Most Goblin and Halfling referees stop listening after the first few points.



OPTIONAL RULES: SPECIAL BALLS

MULTIPLE BALLS

If a second ball ever comes into play (for example, due to the Ball Clone special play card), it is always a normal, regulation Blood Bowl ball. Things are mad enough without multiple special balls on the pitch!









The rules below allow coaches to use team-specific balls, making use of the weird and wacky variant balls that are included on the Orc, Skaven and Dwarf team sprues. Just like any other optional rule, the rule should be agreed between both coaches in one-off games, and its use in league play is at the League Commissioner's discretion.

SPECIAL BALLS

Although Blood Bowl balls are usually provided by the stadium, many teams bring along several of their own just in case. Most of the time these are standard, regulation pigskins, but some teams like to sneak in a surprise once in a while…

Once per match, at the start of any drive for which they are the kicking team, the coach can declare that they will use a special ball. Any team can use an Extra Spiky Ball, but some teams have access to race-specific special balls as listed below – they should declare whether they are using an Extra Spiky Ball or their team's unique ball.

Before the kick-off, the coach nominates one player from their team who is on the pitch, is not in a wide zone and is not on the line of scrimmage to be the one kicking the ball. (Note that in some situations, such as when using the Kick skill, a player will already have been nominated to kick the ball.) If the roll on the kick-off table is a double, the Ref calls the kicking player out for their flagrant rules violation, and they are immediately sent off as though they had committed a foul (before resolving the kick-off result). Note that even if the player is sent off, the special ball remains in play for this drive!

For the duration of the drive, the special ball rules (as shown below) apply to the ball. Aside from those rules, it still counts as a normal ball in all respects.

ANY TEAM: EXTRA SPIKY BALLS

Sure, a lot of Blood Bowl balls have spikes, but this one takes things to the extreme!

Whenever an Extra Spiky Ball is thrown, thrown in or kicked off, it will not bounce if it lands in an unoccupied square. In addition, if the result of a roll to pick up, catch or intercept the ball is a 1 (after re-rolls, but before any modifiers are applied), the player making the attempt is treated as being attacked with the Stab skill.

ORC TEAMS: LIMPIN' SQUIG

Squigs have long been used as a ball in the Orc leagues, but lopping one of their legs off to stop them running away so easily is a recent innovation.

At the start of each team's turn, the Limpin' Squig will make a break for freedom. If it is being carried by a player, that player's coach must roll a D6. On a roll of 1, the squig breaks free and bounces one square in a random direction, following all the rules for bouncing balls. Note that this does not cause a Turnover. If the squig is not being carried by a player at the end of a turn, it hops 3 times, resolving each in the same way as a bouncing ball (see page 19 of the Blood Bowl rulebook). If it hops into a player's square and they fail to catch it, it bounces once then stops.

SKAVEN TEAMS: WARPSTONE BRAZIER

Filled with chunks of raw, steaming Warpstone, there's no way this 'ball' could be mistaken for one that meets regulations. Hey, when the Skaven cheat, they don't muck about.

Whenever a player attempts to pick up, catch or intercept a Warpstone Brazier and the D6 roll is a 1 (after re-rolls, but before any modifiers are applied), the player suffers a temporary physical mutation! Roll a D6 on the table below to see what happens – if a player is granted a duplicate skill it had no additional effect. The skill only lasts until the end of the drive, or until they are (un)lucky enough to receive another spontaneous mutation from the warpstone brazier.

Note on modelling special balls: they all have a peg so they can be slotted into a player's base, but each team comes with two of the ball, so you can clip the peg off of one and use that for when the ball is on its own in a square.

D6 Result

1. Spontaneous Combustion. The player is Knocked Down. Add 1 to the result of the Armour Roll.
2. Temporal Instability. The player moves out of phase with reality, gaining the No Hands skill.
3. Shrunken head. The only thing worse than a tiny head is the realisation that your helmet no longer fits. The player gains the Bone-head skill.
4. Massively Obese. The player expands in size until they are a hulking mass of flesh. The player's MA is reduced by 2, to a minimum of 1, but they gain the Thick Skull skill.
5. Leprous Flesh. Skin and flesh hang from the player in sickening folds. The player gains the Foul Appearance skill.
6. Thorny Carapace. The player's body sprouts a thick, spiked shell. The player's AV is increased by one, to a maximum of 10.

DWARF TEAMS: MASTER-HEWN BALL

What's wrong with a little ornamentation? Oh, it feels a little weightier than normal, does it? That must be the gemstones! The centre definitely isn't lined with iron. Not at all!

When the Master-Hewn ball is kicked off, it only scatters D3 squares rather than D6. In addition, it is not affected by the gentle gust of wind on a 'Changing Weather' result on the Kick-off table. When passing a Master-Hewn ball, long bombs cannot be attempted, and the Hail Mary Pass skill cannot be used. In addition, long passes have an additional -1 modifier.

Whenever the Master-Hewn Ball is thrown, thrown in or kicked off, it will not bounce if it lands in an unoccupied square. If it lands in a square with a prone or stunned player, make an armour roll for that player before the ball bounces. If they are removed from play as a result, the ball does not bounce.

If a player attempts to catch a thrown Master-Hewn Ball and fails, roll a D6 after the ball has bounced away. If the result is equal to or higher than the player's ST, they are knocked down.

ELF BALLS: SOULSTONE BALL

This glittering example of Elven ball-craft is studded with magical gems capable of entrapping the souls of dead Elves so that they might continue to affect the game even after their death. A player carrying a ball that has yet to be invested in this manner takes on the fearful aspect of an avenging reaper of souls! Elven Union teams have the option of using the Soulstone Ball, following all the rules for Special Balls featured in the Blood Bowl Almanac (or March's issue of White Dwarf!).

When a player picks up or catches the Soulstone Ball or starts their turn carrying it, the owning coach can pick a skill belonging to a player in their team's Dead and Injured box – the player with the ball has that skill until the end of the turn or until they are no longer holding the ball. Mutation and Extraordinary skills may not be chosen.

If there are no players in the Dead and Injured box, they gain the Disturbing Presence skill.



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