

BLOOD BOWL



DARK ELF PLAYBOOK

Excerpt from 'Vice and Viscosity', or Darkside of the Blood
by Jaid Oublette (Translated by Matt Brown)

"A right royal romp of truly epic proportions – and that's just his weapon!"

A. Nonnymus, Colleges of Magic

"A real page turner, I didn't have to lift a finger!"

Telekinetics Gazetteer

"... n' my fav'rite bit is where der woman-fing loses her clobber, Hur-Hur. No wait, dat wuz der diff'runt one."

Some idiot, in a street

"Soft, strong and very long. Perfect!"

Guild of Outhouses and Public Amenities

"Dark Elves are renowned for being evil and depraved – and that's just the Cheerleaders!". So begins the "Did you know..." for Hubris Rakarth, star blitzer of the Cowboys, and, as a Dark Elf coach of some time, I know the cruel fate that would befall me if I were to divulge too many of their secrets (not to say the number of games I would soon start to lose). However, the great God Nuffle (and his pet minion, Andy) doth compel me to speak, so speak I must. Here then are some thoughts on the Dark Elves. Of

course, these are not exhaustive and you may well, should in fact, find yourself developing a few tricks of your own – but this will certainly get you off to a good start. Enjoy... and if Rakarth comes looking for me, tell him I've joined the Khemri Foreign Legion.

... "I sense fear in you."

"I'm surprised you didn't smell it."

"Yes."

"Erm, I'm here to ask a few questions about Dark Elf tactics?"

"Well, we are a very 'flexible' race, I personally like it like this..."

"NO! I mean Blood Bowl tactics."

"Of course you did."

"Am I going to die?"

"...Yes. But don't worry – I shall enjoy it very much."

"Please, I am just a poor scribe, show mercy!"

"I already have. Welcome to the Darkside..."



INTRODUCING...

Dark Elves are infamous for their worship of weird and deviant violence so Blood Bowl fits into this very nicely indeed. They are a cruel and incredibly vicious race, combining high intelligence and natural grace with an intense hatred for all things living and dead. Needless to say, this makes them superb Blood Bowl players equally at home throwing the ball or running with it, or simply forgetting about it entirely and smashing the hell out of their opposition, which, due to their evil temperament, they are wont to do on occasion.

Well that sounds perfect! Unfortunately, though this is true up to a point, for a starting rookie team it doesn't quite work out that way and you really have to be in this for the long haul to see any effort on your part rewarded on the playing field. For coaches new to Blood Bowl, the Dark Elves can be tough to take as a first squad, but don't let early setbacks put you off. The more you play, the more you'll learn and that really is the only solution to



improving your understanding of their game. Also, learn the rules well – when the rules are second nature to you, you can focus more on what it is you want to do without having to worry about whether or not it's allowed.



MASTERS OF MISERY

As you will quickly discover, Dark Elves do not excel at any specific style of play. You could be forgiven for thinking that being Elves with an all-round AG 4 you have a fantastic Passing game – you don't. If Passing was the reason you chose Dark Elves you are best suited to playing a Wood Elf or High Elf team instead where your instinct to throw the ball will pay off more often. Nor can you stick to running with the ball (in the belief you have a vicious team), for as soon as you come up against a 'real' running team you will quickly find yourself on the painful end of a severe pounding. Any attempt to rigidly force one particular playing style onto a Dark Elf team (such as 'a Passing game') is sure to end in failure. What Dark Elves excel at is the ability to adapt to the strengths and weaknesses of their opponents and exploit them with near perfection. Dark Elves are truly the masters of misery.

As coach you must learn to be flexible in your approach to each game continually adjusting your playing style as each situation arises. Your players' ability to do so is their only strength. Flexibility is indeed the keyword to success with Dark Elves.

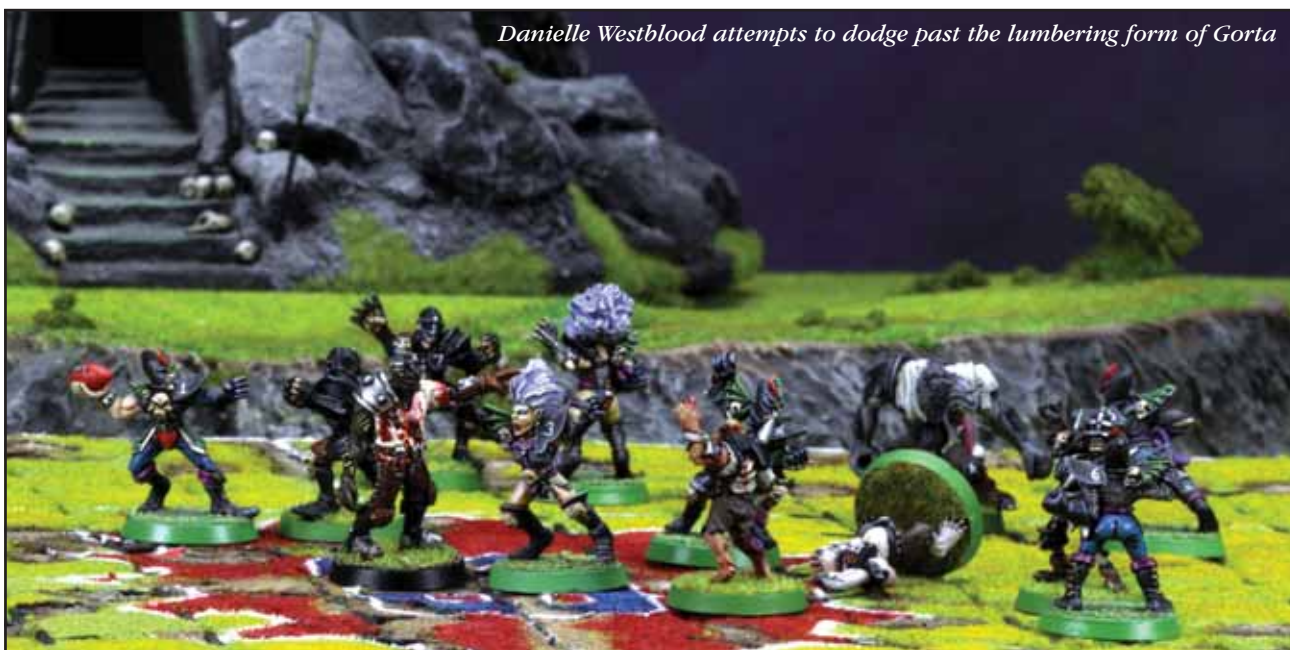
MONEY, MONEY, MONEY

I'm not going to tell you what you should or shouldn't do in picking a starting team, that would defeat the whole point of it being your team, (and there's no right or wrong) but there are a few points worth considering.

Regardless of how you envision your team performing in the future, you will quickly find your starting million just isn't enough to buy what you would like and, when you compare what you do buy with what you could get for any other team, you may feel short changed – and well you might, for yours is the most expensive team there is.

Your starting sum will struggle to buy anything more than a first eleven. The cheapest player, the lineman, costs 70,000 alone and eleven linemen will cost 770,000 gps. Adding to this 1 Fan Factor (ruled minimum) and one Re-roll brings this squad to 830,000 gps and any team that starts with only eleven players is sure to need an Apothecary. Even then this might not be enough to keep injury and death at bay whilst you try to build the squad.

Now, the Dwarfs and other Elf teams that suffer like you from such expensive lineplayers get to purchase their 'position' players (throwers, receivers, blitzers, etc) for around 80,000 to 90,000 gps. This makes it easy to drop a few of those linemen for better players, and thus generate the core of their game. Unfortunately, you can't do this. Not only does a Dark Elf team have no specific 'basic game' to aim for, your position players are extra expensive to boot. With your remaining 170,000 you would have enough for just one of your position players (and a second Re-roll), or two if you opt for both Throwers.



Danielle Westblood attempts to dodge past the lumbering form of Gorta



The Dark Elf potty-helmet joke didn't go down very well...

For me, this is too big a sacrifice just to have a twelfth man on the squad, and plumping for the Throwers just to get a 'position' player onto your team just isn't what Dark Elves are about – and in any case you could currently start an identical side to this using High Elves for less cash!

But to purchase your Blitzers and Witch Elves straight away (and so make your team uniquely Dark Elf) you will have to sacrifice those all-important Re-rolls/Apothecary/substitute players, and as a consequence you are almost sure to suffer.



My only recommendation is to save any money you might put towards a substitute player and spend it on an Apothecary instead. The Apothecary is cheaper than a player, and could potentially save several lives many times over before you have saved up the cash to buy anything more. Unfortunately, where other teams can get a fine selection of both players AND Re-rolls, Dark Elves almost certainly have to sacrifice some element of their team to begin with.

What you choose really depends upon the teams you are to face and the league format you are going to play. The sooner you get players, the quicker they can start picking up SPPs for those much needed skills, whereas the earlier you purchase Re-rolls the more reliable your team will be in general.

In league play I opt for players over Re-rolls. Players can develop, and a Re-roll will never be more than a Re-roll no matter how early it was bought. The doubled cost of later Re-rolls is of no consequence to your future costs because if you bought several Re-rolls instead of players at the start, you would be short of those players and therefore require the same amount to be saved for each (approx 100,000) and end up waiting a very long time before you get them for your team. Which in reality means you would spend most of the season not actually playing a Dark Elf team at all, just a squad of generic Elf linemen.

However, things are different for short-term tournaments intended to last only a few matches where the teams won't be used again. You will want good performances right away, whereby the extreme case scenario of 100% lineman plus Re-rolls does have its argument despite being very dull – the reserve means you can soak up a casualty or commit fouls without fearing Sent Off results, and the extra Re-rolls help your team play with an amount of early reliability – just no cutting edge. There is no easy answer to this player/Re-roll shortage (beyond playing a pre-season match or three against Halflings and Goblins); unless the rules get changed you are just going to have to tough it out for a while and hope for the best.

THE PLAYERS

With an Agility of 4 and (future) access to Agility skills, such as Dodge and Catch, your team is/will be equipped to escape tackle zones and move the ball about, thus enabling them to refocus the attack or rebuild the defence. This also means that the lineman who has spent the entire half fighting away in the midfield can just as suddenly peel off and become an open receiver



downfield. In fact every player in your team is a potential ball-handler. The Dark Elf coach more than any other must get out of any idea that his players have a specific job to do, that some are stars and the rest make up the numbers. There are no makeweights on a Dark Elf team. That then is the basic principle to which Dark Elves play.

HOW THEY PLAY

But don't think you're invincible, far from it, Dark Elves can't actually beat anyone at their own game but have the ability to adopt the alternative and beat them that way instead. In general, Passing teams struggle to run the ball and Rushing teams will struggle to pass the ball. Your job is to break up your opponent's game whatever it may be and force him onto the back foot, otherwise if you find yourself settling into a 'shootout' with a Passing/Speed team, such as Skaven, Wood & High Elf, or any other team tooled up to throw, you will invariably fall short of victory unless you can produce a better game, which isn't likely – this is their forte, not yours. Similarly, trying to beat Orc, Chaos and Undead teams in a fist-fight will produce equally unsatisfactory results in addition to a casualty list the length of your Team Sheet.

Dark Elves are capable of slowing fast teams down and beating them to a pulp. Whereas you can outscore the power teams with finesse and passing plays. Your key strength lies in this ability to switch between playing styles at any moment. Unfortunately this switching of play is something that cannot easily be shown on paper, but has to be learned through experience. The more games you play and the more teams you face the better you will get at recognising situations and making this decision. We all learn from our mistakes.

FLEXIBILITY IS THE KEY

Now some might say stopping the opponent's game is an obvious tactic, everyone wants to play on their own terms, but then that's the whole point with Dark Elves – your terms are 'no terms'. As soon as you can make the game degenerate into a mad scramble, you're in your element. Reducing your opponent to desperation tactics (ie, trying anything) draws him into playing the Dark Elf way, with the exception that you can and he can't. Whatever defensive tactic your opponent tries you can switch attack. If they stop your run you can pass, if they stop your pass you can run, and if you've just broke their game, you'll be playing both styles better. Whilst his team look like fumbling idiots, your team glide about the field in complete control playing (18 certificate) 'sexy' Blood Bowl (evil snigger).

MIXING IT

But it is a good Dark Elf coach that knows when to change tack. Don't think just because your opponent has a running game you should pass for the entire match (that's



what Wood Elves try, are you a Wood Elf?). If your opponent drops back into deep coverage, you do not have the Throwing/Catching arsenal to beat it – but you could then run through the weak line and as your opponent sends help to reinforce (starts to defend the run) you whip a shorter pass into what would now be light coverage for a score. To execute this type of play efficiently, and capitalise on opportunities as they present themselves, you need the ability to coach all styles of play reasonably well and be comfortable playing them. It is no good threatening to run the ball unless you are actually capable of making good on that threat by running it in, else your opponent will ignore it and smash your receivers. This is the flexibility referred to on your part, and the reason why Dark Elves can be awkward for beginner coaches – you have to get an awful lot out of players that, on paper, don't look very deadly, and there's no Big Guy or Star to dig you out of trouble!

This is also why I have not included any starting formations (you need them all), as you're better off knowing and being able to apply the theory behind your team rather than being shown half a dozen formations that might be meaningless to you. But I recommend you read ALL tactics articles for other races and then apply their formations (be it passing or running plays) to your team.

KEY WEAKNESS

In a word, Numbers. This is partly where the cost of your players harms your squad. There is currently no way in which you can get those extra Blitzers and Witch Elves unless you've played for a good while and saved up the cash, in the meantime the other Elf teams can match you player for player and then outplay you with their affordable basic game. You have to wait for yours to pick up over time. But then, Elves improve with age... at least, they used to.





"Hey everybody, let's disco!"

A big problem faced by any Elf team is what to do about high Strength opposition. If you are to enjoy success with Dark Elves you are going to need to come up with something to stop Str4+ players bearing down on your End Zone, and more importantly, figure out a way to break a hole in a Str4+ defensive line.

Now, I'm not going to get bogged down in a long list of skills to take for several reasons. One; the skills you pick for your team should be to maximise your playing style or counter any weakness your game has, which you will be able to identify over time and will inevitably be dictated by the league in which you play – otherwise I would be forcing you to play in a style that does not come naturally to you and might be unsuitable for the league you play. Secondly, the development of your team is what will make it your team and there are so many possible permutations

that it isn't worth going into. Oh yes, and there's that little point that to write such a list would be a complete kop out on my part. Tactics should apply to every Dark Elf team. Giving coaches lists of 'must-have' skills does nothing to answer the basic need, "how to play that team better". Though having said that I will drop in a few pointers in case you haven't thought of them.

The problem lies in the fact that yours, despite being the 'mean and nasty, kick bottom' Elves, are the only team not to have access to Strength 4, or Big Guy players/Stars. In my opinion this is not an oversight. Dark Elves loathe anything and everything that isn't Dark Elf (and those are the easygoing ones) so you really shouldn't be looking for any non-Dark Elf players to add to your team anyway. You've got to do it with cunning and guile, or if that's not your thing, venom and cruelty.

Strong Teams are usually incapable of moving the ball about quickly, so against these you should be trying to spread the game out across the field and isolate pockets. You are more likely to survive (or even deliver) a beating if your opponent has his players split into two or more groups than when he has them all bunched together in support of each other. The diagrams below show this.

Diagram 1: Bunched Up

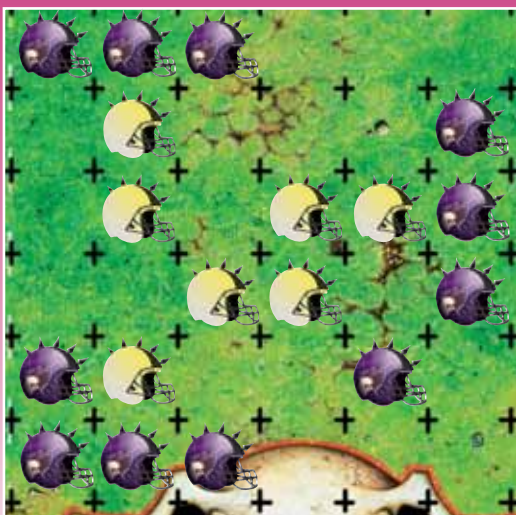


Diagram 2: Split Groups



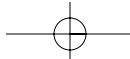
Opposing Players



New Assist Opportunities



Assist Opportunities





Note – Coaches of Strong Teams are gluttons for (delivering) punishment, so they'll often chase after your danger players in the desire to get big casualty numbers, relying on superior Strength & AV to protect them if they get separated.

If your team spreads its defence you will be able to single out such strays and pummel them, even if this means you are ignoring the ball. Your opponent will start to worry and send a few helpers, (he'll worry about not having the numbers to form his 'cage' in the next half, and if you actually clear these players he's done-for right now!) Tah-Dah! Split groups: one trying to score, the other is fighting. Now this is where your superior AG comes in (and Dodge when you can get it). Whilst leaving as few players as possible to tie the fighting crew in tackle zones (don't step every player out as you will nullify any advantage your AG gives you in that your opponent will not have to dodge to give chase) you refocus the assault against the now outgunned ball crew.

With a bit of cunning you should find an assist (or at least enough to cancel assists) and get fair blocks against the ball carrier squad (or force him into dodging).

Should the ball pop out, your opponent lacks the AG to win it back whereas you will be able to sneak it out (preferably with a Thrower) and with a swift pass upfield, or second manoeuvre of players, you'll be on the attack and your opponent will be in a mess. Without much in the way of Dodge, and very few Re-rolls, this does require a lot of luck from a rookie squad. So any skill that enables you to manoeuvre players or the ball are to be valued above others.

That's all fine regarding a high power, low agility team – but what about those one-off stars setting TD records on the ball handling teams? Well, one thing, you can just ignore them and focus your destructiveness on the weaker squad players. Remember, if your opponent can move well, he probably can't cope with many casualties and is focused on trying to outscore you rather than beat you up.

Anything that will give you a numerical advantage on the field (or the area of importance) will be a good thing, not only will this leave more space on the field to exploit, it gives you extra assists. With Frenzied Witch Elves you can push opposing players off the sidelines (or manoeuvre them to be pushed off) better than most other teams, just make sure you have an assist or Re-roll available for the blocks else you will find yourself flat on your face ("your woman-thing loses her clobber", you could say). If you adopt this tactic be careful not to leave your Witch Elf open to reprisal attacks – there is nothing more annoying than to watch your game plan get turned against you (Side Step and Block can come in handy).

A final word on Fouling. You are Dark Elves. If there was ever a race that should foul it's you (in my opinion they're Dirty Players at birth!). Even though the rules make fouling a very dangerous activity to take part in, especially for you as your game relies on keeping as many players as you can on the field, you should really try to get a few in, if only to play in character. Sadly, if you want to win the match with Dark Elves, committing Fouls is not a recommended tactic, as you will regret it much more often than not.

HAVE FUN

Dark Elf teams are late developers, expensive to start up and, due to the low skill/team Re-roll count and high casualty rate, slow to get going. But once your surviving players have managed to get a skill or two the deaths will be less common and hopefully you'll start to see the squad grow, and you'll be well on your way to enjoying some fine wins. But regardless of victory or defeat, and irrespective of tactics, if you're having fun with your team then you're playing it right in my opinion – it's a game, enjoy it!

Author

Matt Brown is a veteran Blood Bowl coach and has been writing for Blood Bowl publications since the late 90's. Matt (along with his brother, Carl) was the driving force behind the All At Sea (Blood Bowl on boats) articles.



Further Information

Dark Elf teams are available from GW Direct (See the How to Order pages).

More BB Website

Turn to page 52 for the Blood Bowl Rules Review. www.BloodBowl.com