

Dark Elf Strategy

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Dark Elves are the toughest, most in-your-face of the four elf teams, a defence-first team that combines an aggressive football philosophy with good characteristics and skills. However, they lack great speed or passing skills, have no ST4+ or Strength skills, and may suffer from money and Team Value concerns. Dark Elves are a team that's as good as its coach.

Why Play Dark Elves?

Dark Elves are a defensive team by nature, with the characteristic elf mobility, but without the fragility of Wood Elves or the skill deficit of High Elves. Dark Elves are positioned well for skill development, with access to most of the better skills in the game across all players, good blocking skills, and fair Armour to help retain SPP.

Solid Skills. Dark Elves start with a skill advantage, as four players start with Block and two with Dodge and Frenzy. Every player has access to Block, Wrestle, Dodge and Side Step. Dark Elf players are mostly AV8, too, so they have a good chance to survive and build more skills.

Awesome Agility. Dark Elves may be the slowest elves, but they are still an elf team. Every elf is a passable passer, a decent dodger and a reasonable receiver, so Dark Elves can still compete when down in numbers. Over time, Dark Elves can develop into all of the different elf games.

Designed for Defence. All that mobility and skill makes for nasty defence; Dark Elves are tougher than any team that is even remotely as mobile. Assassins and Witch Elves are superb in the backfield, while AV8 Line-Elves and Blitzers are good shock absorbers.

Neat Knacks. With a good base in Block and Dodge, plus some Frenzy, Jump Up, Shadowing and Dump-Off, Dark Elves are a good team for advanced development, rich with options for Diving Tackle, Nerves of Steel, Leap, Strip Ball, Pass Block, and other fun skills.

Why Not Play Dark Elves?

Dark Elves are a good team for a competitive coach with a little experience, but newer coaches often struggle to find an "identity" with them. Their low top speed and mediocre strength can be frustrating for a novice. To top it off, the high-priced position players lead to Spiralling Expenses and occasional big Treasury hits.

Low Firepower. Dark Elves have no access to Strength skills. All Dark Elf players are ST3. Dark Elves have a knack hand-to-hand combat and can pick a few battles to win, but tend to get washed out against real bash teams, and are always one bad roll away from a debacle.

Medium Speed. Dark Elves are a defence-first team with a lateral offense, lacking speedy Catchers or skilled Throwers. Dark Elves have to scheme to stay in scoring range, and can't always outrun a partitioning effort. This makes good positioning and scheming absolutely critical.

High Maintenance. Dark Elves are expensive. They have AV8 and some skills to keep them alive, but a few dead players can have a big impact on team development. Blitzers aside, the expensive players are also the fragile ones. To top it off, even if everything goes right, Dark Elf TV tends to skyrocket!

Where Do Dark Elves Thrive?

Dark Elves are a team for all seasons, popular in both league and tournament formats. A veteran coach can play a good game against any opponent with Dark Elves at any level of development. This doesn't mean that Dark elves are for everyone; above all, this is a team that must make its own luck.

Ready to Rumble as Rookies. Dark Elves are just fine out-of-the-box. The team can't start with everything it wants, but it's easy to have all the skills and stats needed to build a winner, and still take enough Team Re-Rolls. Most team races begin with obvious drawbacks and develop counters to them over time; versatile Dark Elves always have something to capitalize on against young opponents.

Livin' Large in the Long League. Dark Elves start strong, but they finish strong too. Having lower stats than other elf teams does work against them in long formats, but their huge menu of position players counteracts this nicely. Also, Dark Elves have no "point of diminishing returns" on skill development: Dark Elf players just get better and better until they're crippled or killed.

Totally Take 'Em to Tournaments. Dark Elves are perhaps the single-most-advantaged team in tournament formats where teams are given more than 1,000,000 gold to build on, and a limited selection of skills including one or two doubles for Guard. Dark Elves really get great mileage out of a few extra skills and a little more dough. But, generally, teams that play well as rookies also play well in tourneys.

Not Nice to the New Guy. There's one caveat. Dark Elves are not a friendly team to learn the game on. Early injuries can be hard to manage, and their lack of big advantages means they need a coach who can make the most of the team's mobility. If you lack blocking or decision-making skills, a season with these guys will drive you as mad as your twisted, deranged players.

What Other Teams Can I Try?

If you like some things about Dark Elves but aren't so keen on other parts, there are a few teams that have similarities to Dark Elves. You may want to check out any kind of elf team, or any "middle-ground" team, Like Humans or Necromantic. However, these three teams have parallels worth drawing out.

Amazons. Amazons and Dark Elves are very similar teams. Amazons have an even better skill base, access to Strength skills, and excellent economics, but lack any MA7 or AV8, with inferior ball skills, so they tend to peak out early. Amazons are a better team for a beginning coach, being easier to manage. One highly visible difference is in TV at full development: Amazons are cheap!

High Elves. These teams seem very similar at first, but the small-seeming differences are quite significant. High Elves are faster, with fewer skills. High Elves have an incredibly good passing game and slightly cheaper players, but must build their players from a generally lower level. In a perpetual or long format, High Elves can be developed to play like Dark Elves, but the reverse is generally not true.

Slann. Slann have the same broad ups and downs as Dark Elves, but come by them very differently. Both teams feature great coverage and cage-breaking, with a tempo-driven offence. Both are tough enough to fight back, but soft enough to have to pick their battles. Slann are even more challenging, with added risk management issues from Leap, funny ST matchups, and a lack of basic skills.

Beginning Your Dark Elf Team

Dark Elf teams have several different building options, a consequence of their overabundance of expensive position players. The truth behind all this choice is that the finished team is outrageously expensive, so many compromises need to be made at first.

How Many Re-Rolls? Dark Elves don't need as many Team Re-Rolls as most teams, as they have good skills and high Agility. This is fortunate, because Dark Elves can't afford many Re-Rolls, either. In a pinch, one Re-Roll is enough, but having two makes it easier to pass for SPP.

Which Players to Start With? Blitzers are the best, most reliable all-around players, so it's hard to go wrong with them. Runners are surprisingly useful, but need a couple skills to get good. Witch Elves are fun, but a rookie Witch Elf is an expensive liability. There's no room for Assassins on a million gold.

Some Popular Starting Teams

4 Blitzers, 1 Runner, 6 Line-Elves, 2 Re-Rolls.

This is probably the most popular roster, offering a full complement of Blitzers, enough Line-Elves to develop them all, and enough Team Re-Rolls to throw the ball around a little.

1 Witch Elf, 3 Blitzers, 7 Line-Elves, 2 Re-Rolls.

Witch Elves are powerful, fragile and expensive, the Ferrari of Blood Bowl. It's hard to support a Witch Elf on a budget and still have two Re-Rolls, but this roster shows that it's possible.

2 Witch Elves, 3 Blitzers, 1 Runner, 5 Line-Elves, 1 Re-Roll.

This build offers maximum impact in resurrection tournaments with provided skills. A pair of skilled Witch Elves can add a new dimension to the Dark Elf defensive game.

1 Witch Elf, 4 Blitzers, 2 Runners, 4 Line-Elves, 1 Re-Roll, 10,000 Gold.

This roster is very quick and has a Witch Elf, but may struggle to develop Line-Elves in a league format. Starting both Runners and only one Re-Roll makes Leader a tempting skill.

2 Blitzers, 2 Runners, 7 Line Elves, 3 Re-Rolls.

This roster sacrifices the multitude of Blitzers for a third Re-Roll, at its best in a seasonal league with a playoff tournament. It starts off weak, but saves money on Re-Roll counters.

Building at More Than 1,000,000 Gold

Dark Elves are a great choice in a tournament that starts teams at more than 1,000,000 gold. Any of the above rosters with one Re-Roll is even better with two Re-Rolls, and any roster with two Re-Rolls is even better still with an Apothecary. At 1,100,000 or more gold, an Assassin is also an option! Here are some 1.1-million gold tournament rosters.

2 Witch Elves, 4 Blitzers, 2 Runners, 3 Linemen, 2 Re-Rolls

2 Witch Elves, 3 Blitzers, 6 Linemen, 2 Re-Rolls, Apothecary

1 Witch Elf, 4 Blitzers, 1 Assassin, 5 Linemen, 2 Re-Rolls, Apothecary

1 Witch Elf, 4 Blitzers, 2 Runners, 4 Linemen, 2 Re-Rolls, Apothecary

1 Witch Elf, 4 Blitzers, 7 Linemen, 2 Re-Rolls (twelve players)

1 Witch Elf, 3 Blitzers, 7 Linemen, 3 Re-Rolls, Apothecary

4 Blitzers, 1 Assassin, 2 Runners, 5 Linemen, 2 Re-Rolls (twelve players)

Peak Development

Dark Elves have at least as many position players as any roster can handle, so a Dark Elf coach has some decisions to make. A full complement of Blitzers and Witch Elves is a must, and it's good to have enough AV8 to man the line of scrimmage, thirteen or fourteen players, enough Re-Roll counters, and perhaps some fun gimmick skills. Don't get too attached to one build or another; staying healthy leads to out-of-control Team Value, and in turn this lets your opponents induce "big guy" Star Players, increasing injury rates against your men, and forcing changes in team composition. Here are some finished builds to consider.

The Maxed-Out Roster: 2 Witch Elves, 4 Blitzers, 2 Assassins, 2 Runners, 4 Line-Elves, 4 Re-Rolls, 1 Apothecary: 1,490,000 gold base cost. This roster sports an insane Team Value, takes a very long time to build, and is very difficult to maintain. But it is a wonderful aspiration. Most starting Dark Elf teams have more than four Line-Elves, but some will die, suffer permanent injuries, or fail to develop; these can eventually be replaced with Assassins. This roster is great in leagues with a lot of light, fast teams and few heavy-duty killers, and is not recommended for perpetual online play in open formats.

The Minimalist Roster: 2 Witch Elves, 4 Blitzers, 1 Runner, 6 Line-Elves, 2 Re-Rolls, Apothecary: 1,270,000 gold base cost. This roster is quick and easy to build into, at least as Dark Elf teams go. This is probably the single *toughest* elf build, sporting twelve of thirteen players with either AV8 or Dodge, and a very reasonable TV, letting the team induce an Assassin against other high-value, low-Armour teams, like Wood Elves and Skaven. Taking only two Team Re-Rolls is pushing your luck, and the one Runner becomes a big target; he should be built as a passer or carrier and fielded only on offence.

The Middle-Ground Roster: 2 Witch Elves, 4 Blitzers, 2 Runners, 5 Line-Elves, 3 Re-Rolls, Apothecary: 1,330,000 base cost. There is a lot of room for compromise between the two rosters above. Many coaches think the third Team Re-Roll and second Runner are the most important elements to add. Some coaches like to roster fourteen players, four Team Re-Rolls, or one or more Assassins, but those elements are less critical. Having both Runners is lots of fun, as it's easy to improve them on different tracks. The third Team Re-Roll lets the team play a little more loosely, with a more "elf-like" style.

Movement and Armour

All Dark Elf player positions begin with ST3 and AG4, so MA and AV are the major characteristic differentiators between the various Dark Elf positions. It's important to have enough of both on your final roster.

Armour Value. More than any other characteristic, Armour defines the role of a Dark Elf player. AV8 Blitzers and Line-Elves are the best choices to man the key pickets. Because they soak up a lot of hits, these players need skills to keep themselves alive: Dodge, Side Step, Block, Wrestle. AV7 players are fragile and need Dodge, but the objective is usually to keep them from getting hit in the first place, so they can build into specialists.

Movement Allowance. MA6 players are more likely to be useful at or near the line, as they have just enough speed for fluid horizontal play. An Assassin or Line-Elf may be used to hold the inside of a formation or cut off a route, while a faster Witch, Blitzler or Runner is better at rushing the carrier, playing deep safety and fullback roles, and holding the downfield positions of an offensive structure. MA7 players improve more quickly than MA6 ones.

Improving Your Dark Elf Players

So how does one improve all these players? Let's look at each position, one by one. Then we'll address the schematic considerations, the overarching concerns that dictate your development flow.

Dark Elf Improvements by Position

With most Blood Bowl team races, player position is destiny. This is slightly less true of Dark Elves, but even so, each Dark Elf position has its own general development guidelines.

Line-Elves: The first Line-Elf to get a normal skill should get Kick; this player is a dedicated safety. The team needs at least four true linemen, going for Side Step or Dodge. On doubles, Guard is the clear best option, with Grab an option on a second double.

Witch Elves: Witch Elves need Block or Wrestle right away. Side Step, Tackle and Leap all combine well. Good follow-ups are Diving Tackle, Pass Block, Pro and Strip Ball. On doubles, Mighty Blow and Juggernaut are good; Piling On is hazardous but powerful.

Runners: Runners are trick players, adding versatility and flair to the team. There are two Runner builds: passer and outlet. Passers should look at Pass, Dodge and Accurate, and outlets Dodge and Nerves of Steel. Catch, Pass Block and Block are great follow-ups.

Blitzers: Just like Line-Elves, Dodge and Side Step are the key skills for at least two Blitzers. Usually doubles or stats derail one Blitzer's development track, and one gets built into a hunter-type with Tackle to hold the team over until the Witch Elves start to improve.

Assassins: Assassins improve slowly, but get good quickly, filling the same roles as Witch Elves: there are cage-breakers with Leap and maybe Dodge, and coverage artists with Pass Block, Dodge, or Side Step. Block and Jump Up are options. Doubles yields Multiple Block.

Dark Elf Improvements by Scheme

Winning at Blood Bowl is about having the right players in the right place at the right time. It's critical to build players who are good at doing the important things.

Kicker (1): The first Line-Elf to skill gets the most important one-off skill of all: Kick. After that, Wrestle or Block, then Dodge. This is the guy who makes the Witch Elves look good.

Defensive Line (4-5): Dodge and Side Step on the defensive line help the team take a lot less damage. Once you have a Kicker, the next Line-Elf gets Side Step to hold the middle, and the rest get either Side Step or Dodge. Block and Wrestle are alternatives or follow-ups.

Hunters and Ballhawks (3-4): Dark Elves live and die by surgical strikes. A Blitzer with Strip Ball, a Witch Elf with Wrestle, and an Assassin with Leap all fill the same basic role. It's best to have several hunter-types, as these players tend to die young.

Wing Defenders (2-3): The Dark Elf team does best with two Blitzers with Dodge and Side Step to man the sidelines; one can stick into the action, while the other puts a zone on the ball. These players are also great on offense, and can field a "backup" on the D-line, too.

Specialists (1-2): Most players should be built for defence, but it is nice to build a passer. Also, offensive doubles skills are nice: Guard is the best of these.

Dark Elf Philosophy

“Dark Elf” is a state of mind. Coaches play Dark Elves because they like the aggressive stick-and-move elf game, but they don’t like the offensive focus of the other elf teams. Dark Elf coaches have to be stout of heart and confident in their own abilities.

Live to Defend. Dark Elves are a defence-first team. Dark Elves don’t have the speed or offensive skill suites of other elves. Every single player is relatively mobile, has average ST, and can pick up most of the better defensive skills on a normal improvement. Most Blood Bowl coaches would do best to think defensively, but this is doubly true with Dark Elves.

Defend to Build. The great thing about defence is that every time it works, you get to do it again. By mastering the quick recovery score, the team can develop all its players very quickly. Once it has a Kicker and a few Side Step players, the proportion of rapid defensive scores will rise, and other players will improve that much faster.

Build to Live. For the most part, these improvements should be used to keep players alive: Dodge, Side Step, Block, Wrestle, +AG, +ST. This is because a Line-Elf with one of these improvements is less likely to be taken out than a rookie, and less likely to fail at important tasks like eating space, dodging into the clear, or getting pushes and knockdowns.

Go Against the Grain. Whatever your opponent is really good at, he’s probably better at it than you. Speedy teams are faster; heavy teams are stronger. So don’t let the other guy play his game! Your guys are mobile and hit hard; stick on the light teams and beat them up. When you go up against a mauler, stay just out of reach and pick a few key battles to win.

Dark Elf Strategy

Winning with Dark Elves is largely a matter of timing and real estate, rather than hammering down one advantage like Wood Elves or Orcs do. More than most teams, success with Dark Elves is mostly about your overall “sense” of the game, rather than just repeating what you do best.

Move Like a Butterfly. Your men aren’t fragile, but they’re not tough or cheap either. Dark Elves can’t afford to get mobbed by bash teams. Even against lighter foes, they can’t just beat on them; they have to be able to deal with breakaways, and are subject to sudden reversals. Keep your eyes and options open, and be ready to take whatever your opponent gives you.

Sting Like a Bee. Maybe Dark Elves can’t win every battle. Perhaps they don’t have the firepower to go toe-to-toe. They can still attack any one point of the field with a degree of precision that is very hard to find, rivalling their Wood Elf cousins at “making their own luck,” only with better support. After all, the best time to crack a cage is before it forms!

Manage the Pitch. Space and position are among the most important elements of Blood Bowl, and it takes a season or two to get a hang of the different structures and patterns common to effective play. Dark Elves have a lot of potential in the real-estate game, but don’t handle mistakes well, the kind of team that rewards good play and punishes mental errors.

Manage the Clock. Dark Elves are capable of sudden scores. The difference between an average Dark Elf coach and a good one is a sense of when to score quickly and when (and how) to hold off. Stalling on offence can make a huge difference against heavy teams that don’t have good hurry-up games, or against fast teams with several knockouts.