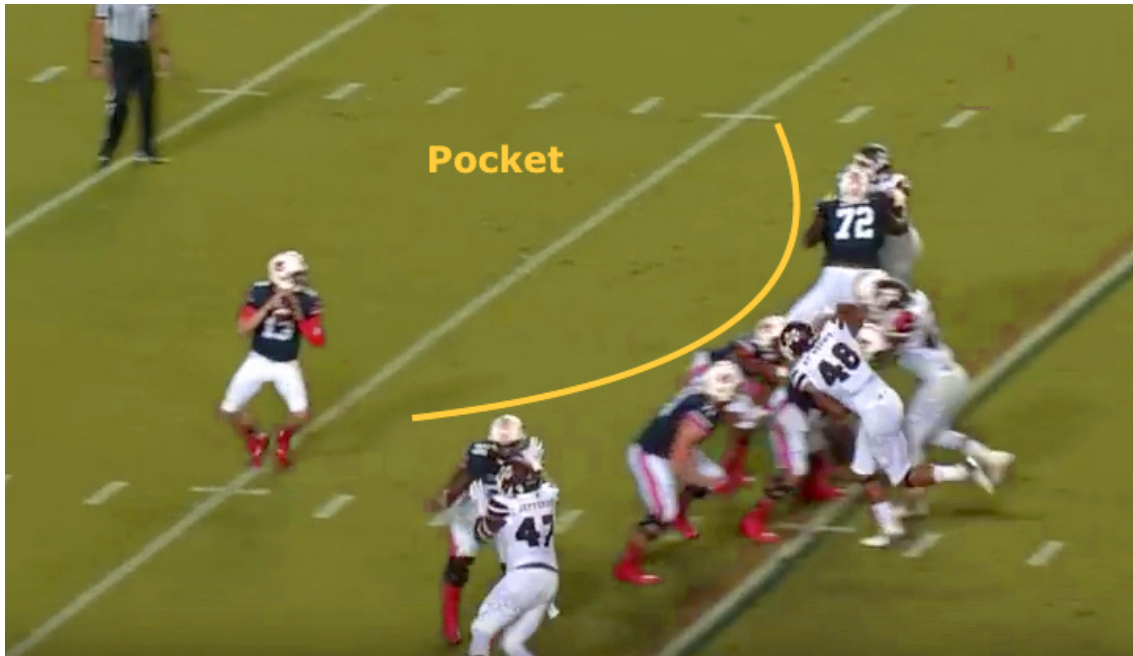




I. The Call

I probably first heard sportscaster Al Michaels describe a quarterback as “dancing in the pocket” on Sunday Night Football. I was awed not only by such an unexpectedly poetic sentiment, but also its surprisingly functional application. How could standing still be described with such complex subtlety? Sometimes that very undecidedness needs description and here, in a way, poetry becomes technical.

II. The Pocket

The pocket is alive. It is where the evolving strategy of conflict is executed, where skill confronts the unfolding of a planned for, but never fully knowable, reality. In the pocket a plan is set in motion, a best guess for achieving victory, trying to exploit a strength against a weakness. The plan springs to life in a chain of reactions.

In the pocket you are actively protected while you are actively hunted. What's more, you must learn to see all this only peripherally, through a sort of sixth sense operating the body while the mind plans. Because your attention must be elsewhere simultaneously. You have to analyze the best way to achieve your goals. Decision making and execution under extreme pressure.

The pocket is a circumstance, constantly reenacted and short-lived. It is dangerous. Three seconds is considered a long time. Everything hinges on maximal effort. What are your options here? Act quickly before danger arrives; protections fail and you are destroyed; abandon the

pocket, relying solely on yourself; or dance, lingering and shifting with the danger, gathering data, analyzing, and preparing to act.

III. The Dance

The danger of going too far with this metaphor is that Sport is a zero-sum concept. In that way, what makes it a great escape from the grind of daily life makes it a dangerous guide for your own actions. But think just of this bit of poetry. To dance in the pocket is to be steady and calm in the face of risk. It is trusting yourself and your community while you watch everything unfolding around you. It is a chance for the bold to be considerate. It is reconciling yourself as a possible agent between the present and the future.

I want to say dancing in the pocket is a state of grace. It is a perpetual condition. We are constantly called upon to make decisions, for better or worse, rushing from one to the next. For me, that is enough. The illusion, really, is the end zone: an objective outcome, victory.

One of the great curses of human consciousness is to never know all the answers. Yet despite the many different methods for attempting to breach the unknown and to eradicate it through definitions (science, philosophy, religion, etc.), one of life's beauties is that we are all constantly congregated at the border of mystery. Failing to define it doesn't prevent us from living with it.

IV. The Labor

Knowledge is sought, hard-earned, ignored, faulty. And above all, incomplete. The struggle of yearning for answers, the pain of repeatedly subjecting yourself to the unknown, the endless task of decision making. You must learn to take comfort in that process and space. I think one of the unique opportunities of Art is the allowance to contemplate failure. Much of the world demands a forward march. I myself yearn for a forward march. But not everything can be continuous growth. The dance goes forward and backward, a state of grace.

— Gabriel Slavitt, September 2026