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Winning Youth Football

Developing a Smothering Defense

Addendum

By: Dave Cisar
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Dear Coach,

Thank you very much for your interest in helping your team get better on defense, it is sincerely appreciated. I congratulate you on taking the time to make yourself a better youth football coach. When your players look back on their football playing days, they are going to remember you and it’s up to you as to what kind of experience that’s going to be for him. Hopefully this book will help you instill a love and appreciation for the game in every one of those kids by being great on the defensive side of the ball.

You will find this is a very easy to read book and an excellent resource for not only the new coach trying to get his feet set on defense, but the experienced coach looking to get better on defense both in technique and scheme. In the book you will gain access to our legendary practice plans, drills, schemes and techniques that will allow you to excel on defense. Our step-by-step approach will also allow you to successfully implement the skills, drills and defensive schemes. Don’t be afraid to print out and take some of the drill and scheme information with you to practice as a quick cheat sheet reminder.

Our hope is that this will be a tool to help you be a better coach. This book is dedicated to the all players whose lives we touch by coaching. It is dedicated to all the coaches that coach for the right reasons, to train our youth in “the ways they should go. Our prayer is that you will use this information to become a better coach and better leader. We hope that you use your leadership position to inspire your kids and help shape them into reaching their full potential not only as football players, but also as people.

Dave Cisar
Dave Cisar
Chapter 1

Developing a Smothering Defense

While many have purchased these materials based on our numbers and track record on offense, defense is number one in our priority list and we devote as much time to our defense as we do the offense. See the sample practice plans in the “Winning Youth Football a Step-by-Step Plan” for more details. Your opponent can’t beat you if they don’t score and they won’t beat you in youth football if you dominate on defense.

Don’t let that head coach or offensive coordinator bully you into stealing your defensive practice time because offense is more “complex” than defense. Perfecting defensive fundamentals and defensive team execution is every bit as important and time consuming as what happens on the offensive side of the ball. To be consistently successful in youth football you have to not only commit the practice time to defense, you have to have good defensive scheme that makes sense for the youth football equation. Once you have chosen a scheme that fits your specific situation, then it’s on to player selection for positions, fundamentals, block destruction, tackling, reads, base responsibilities, group and team execution.

Defense at this age is all about being aligned correctly against whatever offense you face, executing the base responsibility of each defensive position, correctly using the base technique assigned that position, block destruction, tackling well and having the mindset to be on the attack. We use the Wide Tackle Six for non-select teams and for “select” teams, the Offset 4-4.

When you excel on defense in youth football it can be downright demoralizing to your opponent. Going three and out every series, losing the football and having to deal with poor field position often times breaks the will of most youth teams. Many times this will lead to teams getting out of their rhythm, take teams out of what they want to do and make teams take chances they aren’t used to taking.

What Defense to Use

You are coaching youth football; sure there are lots of great defenses out there. Every Saturday and Sunday you see a plethora of 4-3 and 3-4 defenses on television. Those defenses are great, because they are designed so stop world class professional and college football offenses. In youth football you aren’t going to see teams that can consistently execute what the pro and college kids can and vise versa, you won’t see many NFL of college teams who’s biggest play threat to defend is the sweep, counter/reverse and off-tackle run.
The last time I looked, there was no emphasis or requirement for NFL or college teams to get every one of their players playing time. In youth football, that isn’t the case for most of us. You always have to ask yourself when choosing a defense; where will my weakest player play in this defense where he can add legitimate team value on every snap? That is the exact reason we run a different defense for our “select” teams than with our other teams. Our “select” team chose from over 150 players, our other teams just played whoever showed up or were left over after the “select” team was chosen. There aren’t any minimum play or un-athletic players on the “select” team, of course there are on the other teams. Where I coach at now, there are no select or “B” teams, all teams are divided up evenly.

Think of the NFL and college teams as the select of the select of the select of the select. Think of it like taking your very best player, increasing his athletic ability by a factor of 5 and then replication that player 25 times to make your team. Then think of multiplying that players comprehension and football knowledge by a factor of 10 to compensate for the fact the NFL and best college players have 10-20 more years of experience playing the game, not to mention the fact they at practices and meetings for 20-30 hours per week nearly year round. Top that all off with the fact that NFL and college players are by their age just physically and mentally light years ahead of your average 9 year old and you see why maybe the college and NFL schemes aren’t always the best choice for the youth football dynamic we live in. Show me a 3-4 or 4-3 defense in youth football and I will show you a team we score on nearly every possession and will wedge every single down until the team calls time out and switches defenses.

**Minimum Play Players on Defense**

Choosing a defense in youth football is a challenge. On offense you can make yards with double teams and traps and overwhelming at the point of attack even with less than stellar athletes. You can put weaker players in a few offensive positions and have them use techniques like crab blocking or running defensive backs off to add value on many snaps. But on defense it is a little tougher to do, as well coached offenses will exploit any wink link you have on the field. Put a weaker minimum player in at safety on a team I’m coaching against and I will show you an 18 sweep pass both that is going to be called the very next play for a score. We have a stat person whose main job is tracking the other teams minimum play players, when they go in, we go after them.

Many teams try to skirt the issue by putting ALL of their weaker kids on offense. Their mantra of “if they can’t score, they can’t win” while true puts too much pressure on the defense. Let’s say you have a team of 24 kids and you end up with 6 weak minimum play
type kids. If all 6 of these kids have to play offense, what type of productivity are you going to have on offense? Some teams even resort to putting all 6 of these kids in together on “wedge” teams that only run 2-3 plays in-between the tackles.

The problem with that approach is any well coached team is going to see this group of “second class citizens” coming onto the field and load up to stop those 2-3 inside runs. So you have a bunch of 3 and outs, which makes it very difficult for those kids to hit their minimum play standard, while keeping your defense on the field. I’m a big fan of MPR players, in many ways they usually get more out of the experience than their teammates. We all love seeing those kids progress and develop. But many of them aren’t going to feel part of the team or part of the action if they are relegated to a special team that only runs a couple of plays instead of being rotated in like the rest of their teammates. You’re setting yourself up for some parent problem issues with that approach as well.

**Why the Wide Tackle Six**

The Wide Tackle Six allows you to meet all the criteria listed and also allows you to rotate your six least mature players at the two “A” gap bear-crawler positions which we now call Nose Tackles. This defense was very popular in the 50’s and 60’s and even into the early 70’s at the college level. Why? Because then most college teams ran the ball a lot more than they threw. Now what do you have to defend that most teams in youth football can do consistently well? Even in today’s spread happy world what you have to defend that consistently works looks more like the college offenses of the 50’s and 60’s. It doesn’t compare to the teams we see today on Saturday television.

While you may run into a team or two every season that can throw the ball well, the pass is less consistent than the run in youth football. Even at the highest levels of play that is the case. I’ve attended 6 Pop Warner and AYF National Championships as well as countless tournaments. I’ve seen hundreds of the best of best teams in the country and have only seen a handful that can consistently pass to move the chains. Will you have to defend the pass to win championships? Absolutely, but even at the National Championship level, those teams were only completing an aggregate 28% of their passes. The Wide Tackle Six morphs into a very sound pass coverage defense, utilizing off-man coverage and for the older kids you can also use the Monster adjustment and play zone. After coaching this defense in about 150 games from age 6-14, there have been less than 20 games where the other team had more completions than we had interceptions, even in this day and age of the pass happy spread.

We know this defense can handle the spread as well as run heavy offenses, what about personnel? The Wide Tackle Six has the flexibility to be very attacking if you have a few athletic and aggressive players and use the stunts and blitzes we advocate, in the base it can also be more of a bend but not break defense if you are “blessed” with a less athletic team.

It allows for very simple and easy to implement adjustments to take away any youth offensive scheme. Using the base set, it shuts down the sweep as well as the bootleg and
reverse plays. In 2005 I think we had one sweep go for over 10 yards against our first team defense and maybe one reverse for more than 5 yards. In 2006 we had just one sweep for over 10 yards, no reverses of over 10 yards and just one bootleg for more than 10 yards. Many of those misdirection plays go for negative yardage in most years. If you have some of our game film, you will see very few teams even bother running wide misdirection plays or even sweeps after 2006, because those plays simply don’t work against this defense. We’ve been in our current league since 2005 and the games are well scouted. Even in a 100 team league, coaches share information and film and the word is out, don’t bother trying to run those type of plays. We still get to see those plays in out-state tournaments or out of league games where teams know far less about us.

Note that if you have a fundamentally sound defense like this there is little need to blitz. With the exception of one season in the last 15, we blitzed less than 10% of the time. I know many a youth defensive coordinator likes to puff their chests out and brag about how much they blitz. If your defense is sound, your kids execute their roles and you tackle well, there really is no need to gamble. Look at my teams scores, if we weren’t so generous and merciful we would have lead the leagues in scoring defense in 12 of the last 15 seasons. The facts are at the Pop Warner and AYF National Championships in the championship games, the winners of every game I saw in 2009-2011 blitzed less than us. Jeff Miret’s Pt St Lucie Pirate team that won the 2009 Pop Warner Junior Midget Pop Warner title and finished second at Midgets in 2010 would often times not blitz a single down during the tournament.

The 4-4 in this book is only used for our “select” teams. Do not use our 4-4 unless you are stocked with athletes and are not concerned with playing less mature or less athletic players on defense. The Offset 4-4 requires experienced or athletic players at every single position. If you aren’t choosing from a large pool of players for your team, this defense isn’t for you. There isn’t anywhere a less skilled player can play and add legitimate consistent value on every snap. Like many defenses, it simply is not a good fit for the average youth football team.
Why Run the Wide Tackle Six Defense?

The Wide Tackle Six defense we use is not the classic version, it is modified to help us to stop youth offenses and work within the youth football equation most of us youth coaches live within. There are many defenses to choose from, why would we choose a modified youth version of the Wide Tackle Six? When we have a non-select team this is our defense of choice. Our criteria for choosing defenses at the youth level were:

- Defend youth offenses and plays that can be executed consistently in youth football.
- Stop the sweep a big threat play for many youth offenses.
- Stop the reverse for negative yardage, the “big play” of most youth offenses.
- Stop the dive, a component of many youth offenses.
- Be able to start and play less mature players at several positions, where they can add team value on every snap, without significantly weakening the defense.
- Give your few athletic players the ability to make plays.
- Allow your athletic corners to play run support and pass cover with simple reads.
- Be able to stop the off-tackle with simple and aggressive run fits.
- Be able to generate turnovers when the offense decides to pass.
- Allows flexibility to use easy to install stunts or blitzes to take away the other team’s tendencies and key players.
- Defend the off-tackle, the mainstay of well coached teams.
- Puts your pass defenders in simple and easy to understand coverage.
- Not put you in the dangerous position of requiring you to play all of your minimum play or weaker players on offense.

The Wide Tackle Six, with a few “youth” modifications allows you to meet all of the above criteria and then some. Is it the worlds greatest defense? No, but in many ways it does maximize the equation many youth coaches are faced with.

Pass Coverage

Pass coverage is important in youth football. Just because most youth teams don’t consistently pass well, doesn’t make it unimportant. The best teams can beat you with a legitimate passing threat, heck even a poorly coached team might get lucky here and there, you know what they say about blind pigs finding acorns.

Choosing the style of pass coverage for your team will depend on a number of factors, your athleticism, the athleticism of your opponents, opponent offenses and the ability of your kids to perfect their techniques, responsibilities and scheme. There are some simple rules of thumb when it comes to zone and man coverage or a combination of the two like Cover 1 or Man-Free. In any case you always need to teach man coverage to start with, because even in zone, once the ball is in the air you are in man.
If you have unathletic teams you probably don’t want to be in press-man coverage. In press-man, no matter how you slice it your defender is in tight man on man with his opponent. Any quick move by a faster and more athletic offensive player is going to create a situation where the receiver can gain separation and will get behind the defender. While press-man may disrupt some slant style timing routes, it is very suspect against any type of rub or deep route. Most youth football teams are not throwing timing type routes, the better ones are working rubs and simple intermediate or deep routes.

Off-man where the man defender starts with a cushion and tries to maintain that cushion until the reciever declares for the ball is an option I’m a big fan of. By allowing for a cushion even an average player can have a chance at making a play once the ball is in the air. Remember in our defense we never put a minimum play type player into coverage unless the game is well out of reach. Those kids get in on offense and at Nose Tackle. When you are in man coverage no reciever gets “lost” in the shuffle, by alignment you always have every reciever accounted for.

Zone coverage is also one I’m a fan of in youth football. Zone allows your defenders to keep an eye on the Quarterback or other read players, allowing the defender to quickly read run or pass and thereby getting them easily into run support. Zone allows you to protect against the deep pass and if you play it correctly and to shut down some of the more popular youth passing plays toward the edge of the field. It’s weaknesses can be flood type approaches where there is enough seperation in the same zone with multiple receivers, teams that flood the zone. Some youth players sometimes struggle with the concept of defending real estate rather than defending a specific player. For my teams we only teach a zone concept after we have become very proficient in off-man. For nearly every team I’ve coached we taught both by mid-season, for some, not at all. Don’t worry about having both in for your first game, perfect man first, building the foundation for teaching zone later in the season.
Chapter 2

Tackling

Blocking and tackling are what wins you games at the youth level. While scheme and reads and responsibilities are important, fundamentals are what is going to win you games at the youth level, especially tackling.

It is very important that you emphasize safe and proper tackling and take the time to teach it and refine it properly. Read the warning sticker on the back of the helmet and remind players of the requirement of keeping their head up and knees bent. Always teach everything you do in progressions, add incremental steps on top of other perfectly performed incremental steps and you will have great tacklers on your team. Do each of these steps one at a time, explaining each, demonstrating each, then adding it to the previous step with the players, the classic progression teaching method.

This is how we teach tackling:

The Snug Drill

1) Start with two lines facing each other 1 foot apart all players on their knees. Make sure the players’ back is straight, knees shoulder width apart and the tackler’s hands are behind his back. The tackler makes contact just below the shoulder pads on the “ball-carrier”, with his head up just slightly to the side of ball-carrier with the shoulder just below the ball-carriers nipples.

2) On step two add in the wrap. Have the defender put his hands out in front, palms up, at about chest level. Once the defender makes contact as in step one, he now shoots the arms around the ball carrier and grabs cloth on the ball-carriers backside.

3) Start as above, have the defender freeze after step two so the coaches can inspect the pad level and head placement. Now the defender must roll his hips.

The Baby Step Drill

1) Have players snug up to each other, face to face, have the defender in a defensive ready position about 1 foot away, the offensive side of line (ball-carrier) is standing straight up.

2) Have defender bend at the knees, dropping his hips, always with the head and face up.
3) Have defender take one-step, stepping on the tips of the toes of the ball-carrier, with left shoulder making contact just below the ball-carriers bottom of his shoulder pads- just under the nipples- head up and slightly to the right of the offensive players body, head pressing up against offensive players side, with the left side of the defenders head. Feet widen to just wider than shoulder length. The defender wraps both arms completely around offensive players torso and grabs cloth on the backside. Upon “contact” the defender rolls his hips. When you are tackling toe to toe- not reaching and have dropped hips it is almost impossible not to naturally roll your hips upon contact. Both players then freeze until a coach stops by and taps the two on the helmet which is the signal they have done it correctly and can now move. Obviously you want to correct any mistakes at this point.

4) Make sure and demonstrate each step and walk through it, don’t add a step until you have completed the earlier step. Once through step 3, add some distance, about 5 yards and have them walk up to the offensive player and execute a form tackle, just going to a fit. Do not allow the defender to take the offensive player to the ground.

5) Once we are proficient at this, ask the defender to actually lift and carry the offensive player a foot or two. If the defender is in a good low stance, with his knees bent, he should be able to do this. To get the proper leverage here you want the tackler to push his groin toward the ball-carrier.

6) Lastly, do this nearly full speed, with the defender freezing after he executes the tackle fit, not taking the other player to the ground. Do not release both, until you make sure there is shoulder contact just below the nipple, head is up, feet apart, toes near toes, knees bent, both arms are wrapped around the torso, hands are grabbing cloth and hips are rolled.

After the groups have gone through and learned the entire progression, break down to a more individualized instruction. We usually have one coach at opposite ends of these two lines. They start at the outside and work their way in, starting and stopping just one two-player grouping at a time. When the two coaches meet near the middle of the group, they start again at the end. A better solution is to have each of your assistant coaches taking 4-6 players each. Once players are pretty consistent you can have the entire team do this in 1 lines facing each other. You can add this to your dynamic warm-ups if you feel tackling form is something you need additional work on.
**Angle Form Tackling**

Do this drill at each and every practice and every pre-game. It reminds your players to tackle properly and gets your kids blood flowing as part of your dynamic warm-ups at the same time.

If you have a team of 24, try and get at least 4 different groups going of 6 players each. The distance of the drill is 10 yards. Start in lines 10 yards apart, the coach is at the pivot point 10 yards down field. Both lines move in one direction, the right line is the ball carrier line, and the left line is the tackling line. In this case, you would be executing a right shoulder tackle. Make sure and have all the players rotate lines. Then switch so the left line is always the ball carrier and the right is always the tackler so you can execute the left shoulder tackle. Only after they kids go through at least 2-3 times do you switch the ball carrier line to the left and tackling line to the right and do left shoulder tackles.

Both players start in defensive ready-position, the designated ball carrier jogs straight up and down and provides no resistance. To perform the right shoulder tackle, the ball carrier is on the right line, defender in the left line. The defender and ball carrier jog towards the coach, when they intersect, the defender executes a perfect right shoulder tackle, head on the left in front of the ball carrier, shoulder just below the shoulder pads of the ball-carrier, arms wrapped around the torso, hand grabbing cloth, knees bent, feet wide, head up, shoulder just under the ball-carrier shoulder pad. Both players freeze on the tackle fit and are not released until they hear the word “go” from the coach. It has to be perfect. The players then release and run around the drill so the next two players can get started. This drill has done more to make our teams’ great tackling teams than anything we have done. Remember, the head of the defender is always in front of the ball carrier.

Make sure the defender doesn’t try to make contact until his toes are right at the tips of the toes of the ball-carrier. We tackle with our feet. If our feet are too far away from the ball-carrier when we lower our hips to make the tackle, we have to lower our shoulder and lunge to make the tackle. When a defender does that quite often his head is going to be down which is not only dangerous, but he also can’t see what he is trying to tackle. Attempting to tackle without working to make sure your toes are on top of the ball-carriers toes is going to result in a lot of whiffed tackles.

**Advanced Angle Form Tackling**

A more advanced drill is the fit and piston drill. It is performed just like the above drill, BUT once the fit has been made the tackler rolls his hips and runs his feet in place. The defender is simulating running his feet through the tackle with his feet moving as fast as engine pistons. After the fit he runs his feet in place with a slight lean on the ball-carrier. With the tacklers feet at the feet of the ball-carrier and his hips lowered, he should be able
to keep his balance well enough not to put the ballcarrier on his back. The running feet portion of the drill need only last for 2-3 seconds, ending in a whistle.

**Splatter Tacking Drills**

Splatter drills are a great way to work on tackling technique and explosiveness without taking players to the ground. It is the way we slowly introduce full contact to our players. It can be done with both blocking and tackling. It is always the last progression we do before we go to full live contact. We modified Hugh Wyatt’s pancake blocking drills and use them to help our kids perfect their tackling.

The drill is simple, lay out 3-4 long blocking dummies side to side to create a landing pad. Make sure and have a dad or coach stationed at the back of the landing pad to have his foot bracing the pads so they don’t come apart. Next have a player stand up with his heels up against the pad holding a blocking shield in front of him. This player is not to provide any resistance as the blocker or tackler takes him into the pad. Line up your blockers or tacklers about 5 yards away in the appropriate stance.

**Progression Teaching - Splatter Drill**

1) Have the tackler run up and freeze on the shield making sure he has the right footwork, his toes at toes of “ball-carrier”, dropped hips, bent knees, slight body lean, arm wrap, shoulder fit below ballcarriers shoulder pad, head up and correct head placement just to one side.
2) Next have the tackler go full-speed, taking the shield holder into the landing mat using these same coaching points, with the tackler landing on top of the shield holder. You are looking for hip roll and lift as well as explosiveness and acceleration through contact on this drill.

Do not rotate the shield holder every time, it will waste too much time. Have a coach help the shield holder up every time and rotate the shield holder after 10-12 reps. Concentrate on having the tackler hit through, not to, the ball carrier. Make sure the tackler is not lunging; he needs to start the tackle when the tackler’s toes are nearly on the ball carrier’s toes. Make sure the tacklers are bent at the knees, feet wide and feet moving through the impact. Have another coach or parent at the end of the landing pad to make sure the dummies don’t come apart. This drill should be done at a rate of one rep every 10 seconds or less.

Again, make sure the tackle is being made with toes on toes, you don’t want kids lowering their heads and trying to make contact from a distance. A common problem is players lowering their head and not rolling their hips. This problem is usually the result of poor footwork. If a player lowers his shoulder too early lowering the head and arm tackling are often the result. If the tacklers toes are nearly on top of the “runners” toes he will have no choice but keep his head up, make first contact with his shoulder and roll his hips on contact. When doing this drill make sure your tacklers aren’t sinking their hips for the tackle until they are on top of the toes of the ball carrier.

**Base Close Quarters Tackling Drill**

Start with just two players 1 foot apart with cones or tall bags setting a border just 1 yard apart. One player is designated as the tackler and one being the ball carrier, having a ball is optional. The closer the players are, the less violent the tackle, that’s why this is a good tackling drill to start with. After the first day of full contact tackling, we move the drill out to 1 yard of separation or so, then later maybe 2 or 3 yards. On the word “go”, both players accelerate to the middle of the bag, have the ball carrier stay low and drive his feet. Look for good form in the tackle, bent knees, lowered hips, head up, toes on the
toes of ball carrier, shoulder below shoulder pads, full leg wrap, wider leg base after contact and short explosive steps driving through the ball carrier. There are no moves by the ball carrier; this is a straight-ahead tackling drill. If you have a gross mismatch of players, realign the pair. Make them stay between 2 tall dummies stationed about 1 yard apart to encourage close contact.

This is a good drill to have winner-loser groups. Have 3 groups of players 1, 2 and 3. If you win you move to the right, lose go the left. At the end of 10 minutes all of your best tacklers should be in group 3.

3 Slot Challenge Tackling Drill

The 3 Slot Challenge tackling drill is a classic linebacker tackling drill. Four dummies are used to create 3 lanes for the ball carriers to run through. The coach calls the lane the ball carrier will run through by holding up the number of the hole with his fingers, so only the ball carrier can see it. Both players are facing each other and the defender is shuffling down the line making sure to not cross his feet, or to get ahead of the ballcarrier. When the defender sees the carrier commit, he must accelerate through the hole and meet the ball carrier at the line of scrimmage or behind it. This is a full speed drill and teaches the defender to run to the hole, not to over pursue, tackle correctly and accelerate through contact.

Circle the Wagons Tackling Drill

Circle the wagons is both a pursuit and a tackling drill. Take 10 players in a circle facing the middle and holding hands. Have them each take 3 large steps backward, unclasping hands. Put a tackler in the middle of the circle and a ballcarrier outside the circle. Have the ballcarrier circle the exterior of the circle as fast as he can and as tight as he can, no stopping or slowing down. On the coaches verbal command, the tackler must use the proper pursuit angle to tackle the ballcarrier in-between his circle of teammates facing him. Make sure to hold the tackler accountable to the coaching points from the angle form tackling drill, the concepts are the same.
Open Field Tackling Drills

Use a variety of open field tackling drills, but be careful to use them only after your players have mastered the form tackle and angle form tackling and have done well in the three-slot challenge drill. This is a good drill to put in a tackling circuit where only the more advanced players are allowed to participate.

One Move Drill

In the one move drill, let the offensive back make one move. You are working on your defender to not over pursue and keeping his head up and legs underneath him, many coaches call this “squaring up” or “breaking down”. The cone lines are 10 yards apart. We start by snapping to a ball carrier and having him run toward the far cone line, flattening out and then either accelerating or cutting back if the defender has over overrun the play. Make sure to emphasize the defender not to make his move and contact until his toes are on top of the ball carriers toes.

The defender must approach the offensive player on the go call taking short choppy steps as he lowers his hips and stays under control as he moves forward. When the defender is in position to make his cut he must come under control, drop his hips and take his angle to the ballcarrier. Again make sure the tackler is using his base tackle coaching points, toes on toes, shoulder to bottom of shoulder pads, head up and to the side.
As the season progresses you may want to modify this drill using just your Linebackers and Defensive Backs. Allow the ball carrier to make multiple moves.

10 yard Box Drill

Another simple open field tackling drill can be set up in a 10x10 yard square marked out by pylons. At one end is the tackler, on the other is the ball carrier. Allow the ball carrier to make as many moves as he wants with the goal of scoring by crossing the defenders end of the box. The only restriction is time, use four seconds as the limit and count it off loudly for both to hear.

Make sure the tackler is on the attack, approaching the runner under control, do not let him sit and wait for the ball carrier to make his moves. As the tackler is approaching the ballcarrier, once the 3 yard barrier has been broken, the tackler needs to lower his hips, stay under control and buzz his feet as the ballcarrier makes a move to either side.

30 Yard Box Drill

The 30 Yard Box is very similar to the 10 yard box, but you get a lot more players involved in the drill. Set up a 30 yard by 10 yard box with cones every 10 yards to denote the boundaries. At the 10, 20 and 30 yard lines you have defenders set up. The defender can not cross his line and attack the runner until has started his approach. Every time the runner is tackled, he gets up and starts against the next player in line until he crosses the 30 yard line. Start another runner after the first runner has started on the defender set on the 20. Once all the tacklers have gone through 3 attempts, rotate them out for other players. Same coaching points and rules for the 10 yard box apply.
Dummy Tackling Race Drill

It’s almost always a good idea to sprinkle a fun competitive drill into your practice plan that builds enthusiasm and develops solid fundamentals without being a grinder contact wise. The Dummy Tackling Race drill is a very good one for that. Divide your team up into groups based on how many tall dummies you have. Set the players in a straight line about 3 yards from the dummy in a good defensive ready position- or the player can align in the stance that is appropriate for the position he plays on defense.

The coach holds the top of the dummy from one side, just to keep it upright. The player on the whistle approaches the dummy at full speed and executes a perfect form tackle, to the ground on the dummy. As with all tackling you are looking for feet near the edge of the dummy, dropped hips, head up, pad level at whatever imaginary pad level you see your kids at against average sized players in their age group, head up and slightly to the side and acceleration through contact as they take the dummy to the ground and land on it. Once the dummy is on the ground the player gets up quickly and sprints to the back of his line. The coach quickly resets the dummy right where it’s laying and the next player aligns and does the same movement. The entire line moves with the coach and dummy as each group is racing each other in a 100 yard race to the finish. When you do this right the kids are all yelling and the coaches and kids are out of breath at the end. The losing teams have to do 5 pushups. This is a drill that usually enlivens the beginning of a defensive practice and gets the juices flowing, while allowing your kids to get a bunch of form tackling in a short amount of time.
The Gang Tackling Dummy Drill will help your kids get more aggressive and confident with gang tackling. Gang tackling isn’t intuitive and some players will shy away from making tackles when they think they see teammates with a firm grasp on the ball-carrier.

Set up 3 lines about 5 yards behind an imaginary line set up with cones. With defenders in the stance that they use in their position, on the whistle or ball movement if you have enough coaches, all 3 players converge on the standing dummy which is being propped up by a coach from behind and slightly to the side. It’s a race to make a proper tackle on the dummy to the ground but you want all 3 players to get their shoulder into the dummy. To help insure that all 3 players make contact make sure the middle line has your slower players in it.
### Tackling Circuit Drills

Every youth football team will always have players of varying degrees of athleticism, aggressiveness and maturity. Every player will progress at a different rate; this often leads to boredom and apathy for the very mature players and frustration and despair for those that are struggling. Mature players only get better by repelling against other mature players and doing advanced drills. Those that are struggling often give up and go into a shell if matched with a more mature player. The struggling player may blossom into a mature player if he you give him the proper instruction; he obviously needs more basic technique work to gain proficiency and confidence. The problem with most coaches is, we either charge ahead before every player has mastered a skill, hurting the struggling player, or we wait until nearly every player masters the skill, not challenging the mature player. Quite often, many of us have new players joining the team 1-2 weeks after the start of practice, how does that player safely come up to speed? If you have more than one coach, a tackling circuit may be the answer. We prefer a four coach staff and organize the tackling circuit as follows:

- **Open Field Tackling Drills**
- **Splatter Tackling Drill**
- **Three Slot Challenge**
- **Base Close Quarters Tackling Drill**

Start players out at a level that is appropriate for their ability and knowledge base. At each level, the groups are smaller and usually filled with kids of similar ability and aggressiveness. Each player must get the proper level of instruction and be proficient at that level before being forced to move to the next level. Make sure you have your most patient coach at the “Splatter Tackling Drill” level.

Most coaches find turning the “3 Slot Challenge” into a contest to be very motivating for the kids. Ask that the winner to stay in the drill until he is beat, the losers watch and encourage the new “challengers”. Your defensive coordinator should be running this drill. This drill helps you determine positions and puts your best against your best, maximizing the effectiveness of your valuable practice time. Tell the players ahead of time that this is the objective of the drill, so you get their best effort.

### Three Level Oklahoma Tackling Drill

This is a drill you can do later in the season after we have a good number of players proficient at open field tackling and the “3 slot challenge”. Set up three groups of players at a starting point, then spaced 7 and 15 yards from the starting point. The first group will
consist of Linemen and Nose Tackles, the second group will be Defensive Ends and Linebackers, the last group are Defensive Backs. Set up a “funnel” with cones so the beginning part of your drill is bounded at about 3 yards, the middle of the drill at about 7 yards wide and the back of the drill about 12 yards. Set up a boundary with cones so it looks like a funnel. Now line up a pair of evenly matched Defensive Linemen or Nose Tackles face to face at the starting point of the drill. At the second line of the drill at 7 yards have a pair of evenly matched Linebackers about 3 yards apart. At the last line of the defense set up two evenly matched Defensive Backs about 5 yards apart. Align a “running back” behind the starting line. On the whistle the defensive player of each of the three groups must try to beat the block of the player across from them and try to make the tackle on the ball-carrier. Encourage gang tackling and playing to the whistle. On subsequent reps rotate the players within each group to ensure reasonable matchups.

This allows you to get seven players involved at one time in a blocking and tackling drill while giving the head coach a chance to see who can make plays on defense. This is always one of the drills the players love to do the most. You can also put anyone in carrying the ball on this drill which is always popular with the linemen.
Chapter 3

Creating Turnovers

How Important Are Turnovers in Youth Football? In the 2011 Super Bowl, the Pittsburgh Steelers probably lost the game due to turnovers. In the history of the Super Bowl the team that has won the turnover battle has won 33 and lost 3 of those games. Important in the NFL? Yes.

But how important are turnovers in the youth game? The answer is they are more important than the NFL or College game. The reason turnovers may be even more important in youth football is the fact that there far fewer possessions in a youth football game. Most youth football games have just 10 minute quarters, while College and NFL games have 15 minute quarters. In youth football there are many more running plays compared to the prevalence of passing you see in the NFL and College games which also brings the number of possessions down.

Most youth team huddle and do not run plays at the same pace as most NFL and College teams, which means even fewer plays. The typical youth football game has just 74 total offensive snaps, while the number of offensive snaps in an NFL game can be nearly twice that. Now do you understand why you have to make every possession count in youth football and why turnovers are so important? When was the last time you saw a youth football team use up an entire quarter on a single offensive drive? I’ve seen it quite a few times. How many times does that happen in the NFL or College game? The answer is never.

Place a premium on protecting the football and creating turnovers in your program. In 2005 we had just 2 turnovers in a 11 game season, where we went 11-0 and won a State Title. In 2006 during an 11-1 season we had just 4 turnovers in 11 games. In 2007 just 4 in 11 games, and a 10-1 season. On the other hand turnovers played a key role in nearly every loss we’ve had in the last 149 games. We lost 20 of those games, in 18 of those losses we had more turnovers than our opponent. In 16 of those 18 losses we had 2 or more turnovers than our opponent. Ball security is key and has played a major role in the success of most championship level youth football teams.

There are a number of ways you can go about creating turnovers on defense. One is attacking ball security. Making this a priority requires you to walk a tightrope of sorts. The ball-carrier must be secured before you allow your tacklers to attempt a strip. If you don’t teach this approach, you will often times have kids attempting to dislodge the ball
while letting the running back make his escape. We always teach ball stripping is for the second or third player in, not the primary tackler.

**Tug Drill**

The tug drill is the basic ball stripping drill used to teach backs and receivers ball security as well as defenders how to strip the ball. It starts with a ball carrier facing a cone 10 yard away, with a ball in one arm. The defender is stationed directly behind the ball-carrier with his non-ball side hand grasping the middle part of the jersey of the runner. He gasps firmly on that jersey as the ball-carrier leans forward and runs with his knees high. The runner should be exerting just enough force to make the pile go slowly down the field. The defender meanwhile is using his ball side hand to punch the ball out from behind aiming between the elbow and the ribs. He can also try to come over the top, using his playside hand to come over the runner forearm and rip the under part of the football upwards and out. Once the ball comes out, the ball is live, both players use the safe fumble recovery technique to secure the football.

**Second Man in Drill**

If you are teaching second man in as your primary approach to developing turnovers, it has to be taught in drills. One of the easiest ways to do this is use a modified tug drill. As the primary defender tugs on the back of the ball-carrier and lets him slowly drag him down the field for 15 yards, add in a second tackler. This tackler is aligned to the ball side of the ball-carrier about 7 yards to the side of the ball-carrier away from the starting point. On the whistle this stripper attacks the ball carrier from the side using the punch and rip techniques described above. Again once the ball comes out it turns into a safe recovery drill for all 3 players in the drill.


**Gauntlet Drill**

The Gauntlet Drill is a classic ball security and stripping drill that also is a great tool for evaluating running backs. Line up 4-12 players facing each other in a line no wider than 1 yard apart from each other. Have the “running back” secure the ball about 3 yards back from the gauntlet to give him a running start. He must run full speed through the lines of players with both hands over the ball and with his hips lowered. The players facing each other are allowed to use just their hands to swipe, punch and rip the ball out. You will find the running backs often time get slowed up and even end up sideways or running backwards as the defenders swipes and rips take the running back off his intended course down the middle of the gauntlet. Once the ball is on the ground it is a live ball and everyone is encouraged to attempt a safe recovery.

**Safe Fumble Recovery Drill**

Recovering the football is something that most youth football players do not how to do intuitively. They either jump right on top of the ball with their stomachs on top of the ball or they like to scoop and score like they see on TV on Saturdays and Sundays. Neither approach probably makes sense for the youth football player. In youth football most balls that are attempted to be “scoop and score” end up being flubbed as well and end up back in the hands of the offense.

Teach all players the “safe” recovery to begin with. The safe recovery requires the player to approach the ball to the side laying down on the players side with the ball cradled into the stomach with the players shoulders and legs curling up around the ball. Think of a baby on it’s side in the fetal position. Once the ball is secured ask the player to have both arms wrapped around the ball with one hand covering each end of the ball, elbows in,
covering the ball with his entire body. If a player just plops on top of the ball, the ball will squirt out and the ball is also going to knock the wind out of the recovering player.

**Safe Fumble Recovery Competition**

Youth football players have to get used to scrambling and fighting for the football in live drills if you want your team to excel in creating turnovers. A great drill for this is the safe fumble recovery competition drill. Start with players aligned in 3 lines about 2 yard apart. The players can be in a 2 point stance or in their position stance, whichever you prefer. Align yourself to the side and slightly in front of the line of players. Toss the ball in front of them, in the middle, to the side, it doesn’t matter. Once the ball is in the air, it’s a fight to the finish for those 3 players. Don’t sound the end of play whistle until at least 2-3 seconds AFTER it appears one player has secured the ball. As we all know it can get pretty ugly under the pile and almost anything goes there. Kids need to get used to fighting it out and that includes what happens under the pile.

**Scoop and Score**

Scoop and score it what everyone sees on Sports Center and on highlight reels, but in youth football more than 90% of the fumbles are recovered via the safe recovery method. If a ball is attempted to be recovered on the run in traffic, most of the times it isn’t recovered by the defense. But there are times where scoop and score makes a lot of sense. On punt and kick blocks where the ball is behind the line of scrimmage, scoop and score is the way to go. In the open field on the perimeter, scoop and score makes a lot of sense if done by the right player. In most other instances it usually isn’t worth the risk.

On the other hand, if you have an athletic player who has a legitimate chance to score in the open field it probably makes sense to teach him how to scoop and score. An overweight lineman or un-athletic minimum play player is either going to blow the fumble recovery or he is going to be tackled very soon after he recovers the ball, it just isn’t worth the risk for the meager ensuing reward. In watching over 1,000 youth football
games I’ve only seen 2-3 un-athletic or overweight kids score on fumble recoveries, but I have seen hundreds of attempted scoop and scores where the ball went right back to the offense whereas a safe recovery would have easily netted the defense the football. Hence we only teach our Linebackers, Defensive Backs and Defensive Ends how to scoop and score and we rarely do so until midseason.

The proper way to scoop and score is to make sure you get square to the football, bend your knees, widen your feet, lower your hips and get your fingertips right at grass level. The players center of gravity must be lowered as the ball may take an odd hop. He must slow down, keep his eyes on the ball lower those hips, bend those needs, then seat the ball and sprint towards the opposite goal. As you will do with anything, demo the technique, have the kids jog to pick up a stationary ball, taking the ball to a cone and sprinting back. An efficient way to teach scoop and score and mix in some speed development would be the scoop and score race drill.

**Scoop and Score Race Drill**

Set up 2 lines of players matched up with their athletic equals. Set a cone 15 yards in front of each line. Toss 2 balls out, 1 in front of each line about 5 yards in front of the player. Throw the balls out simultaneously. As the ball is in the air each player goes to the ball on his side, uses the proper technique to scoop the ball on the run, seats the ball, runs to the cone to his side, touches it and races back to the starting point. Make a contest out of it, the first team to get 5 wins makes the losing team do 5 pushups. This is a drill that combines teaching how to properly scoop and score along with a classic football speed and explosiveness drill.
Attitude and Approach to Loose Balls

If you want your team to be a team that creates turnovers, it has to be something you emphasize at every single practice. Ball-hawking is not something you talk about on game days it’s something you make a part of your football teams culture. The first thing to do is make any ball that ever hits the ground in practice other than an incomplete pass a LIVE BALL. Anytime that ball hits the ground, everyone in the vicinity should be attempting a safe recovery and fighting it out for the football.

Too often I see youth teams practicing where a running back puts the ball on the ground and just shrugs his shoulders and jogs back to pick the ball up. You have to create a sense of urgency anytime the ball is on the ground in any type drill. This will not only make your defenders better, it will improve how well your backs protect the ball when they are on offense. You can add a “strip” component to almost any drill if you get a little creative. Once your kids see how important getting possession of the ball is and feel confident in their ability to cause turnovers and safely recover the ball, their aggression levels will go through the roof.
Chapter 4

Pursuit

Pursuit angles are something that all youth players need to be taught and worked on at every age level. As the players get older, the speed of the game increases and the players speed in relation to his peers may have changed. The simplest beginner drill is to align your defense into it’s positions across from an imaginary offense designated by cones. Put a running back type with the football about 6 yards behind the line of scrimmage and about 3 yards outside your Defensive End. On ball movement from a coach at the Center position all defenders go directly to the ball-carrier at an angle where they can touch him with 2 hands, preferably at the waist. Note that the defenders are not using their base technique, they are just trying to intercept the ball-carrier using a proper angle.

Sub in a new group of defenders after each rep as this is a drill where the kids get gassed pretty quickly. Once you have done the drill to the right, do it to the left, then make set up running backs at both sides and mix it up.
**Skeleton Backfield Pursuit**

Skeleton drills allow you to get so many more reps done in a shorter amount of time. During Skeleton Pursuit your Defensive Ends, Linebackers and Defensive Backs are working together to perfect their pursuit angles. With a skeleton offense or better yet some coaches and Dads, run “plays” at the skeleton defense. You only need a Quarterback and Running Back to get started. Later on you can add another running back or lead back or flanker etc, but when you are just getting started all you need is one Quarterback and one Running Back.

Have a set of 3x5 cards ready with the plays designated, sweep right, sweep left, dive right, dive left, off-tackle left and off-tackle right. We aren’t learning plays here we are learning proper pursuit angles.

On the snap all of the Defensive Backs are in their base alignment, check for proper alignment and stance. On the snap they are in their base backpedal technique. Once they read run, they should lower their hips, plant and accelerate along their proper pursuit angle, again which each player learns over time, based on his own speed.

If coaches are running the plays make sure they are running at a pace that is as fast as your fastest player. Mix up the speeds a bit so your defenders get a feel for pursuing players of various abilities. Once the kids get a hang of this drill we will do some of this live with lead blocking for very short durations with players only as this is a drill with a lot of space involved.
The coaching points and approach for the Skeleton Line Drill is the same as those for the Skeleton Backfield Pursuit drill. Start out with the plays on air, then add resistance in the form of a player with a tall bag or shield at Offensive Tackle against the Defensive Tackles. Eventually go live with the Defensive Tackles and move the bags over to Offensive Guards to be used against the frogging Nose Tackles.
Team Pursuit

Team Pursuit Drill is the same as the Skeleton Pursuit Drill, but you bring the entire team together as one. In this drill, every player is using their proper initial reads and steps, they aren’t going directly after the football. Players like Defensive Tackles can even practice or simulate their base rip or shrug technique on air or a stationary Offensive Lineman during this drill if you so choose. You can use cones for o-line and dads or coaches for backs. If you are short numbers you can use a player or two along with coaches or dads.

This is another drill that can help you condition without making your kids do gassers at the end of practice. We don’t use lead blockers or go live with these type of pursuit drills. This is especially effective if you pair it with subbing in a new 11 after every play and with defensive recognition- calling out formations that the defense must align correctly on. You don’t even need to have all the pieces of the offense in properly, that takes a lot of time. Call out twins right and look for a correct alignment, do the same with trips left, double twins etc If you are using some of the more advanced calls you can even practice your defensive plays and adjustments by calling in things like gunner, echo, Eskimo or Flip etc
Another effective way to train players to pursue aggressively and to use proper angles is the Second Whistle drill. When you are running fit and freeze defense or full scrimmage, have use a second whistle. The first whistle designates that the play is over, a tackle has been made, but that doesn’t mean the play is over. Every player on the defense must come and touch- and stay touching the ball-carrier after the whistle. Give everyone 3 seconds to make their touch and then blow the whistle again. Count it out loud, 1 one thousand, 2 one thousand, 3 one thousand, blow the whistle. Every player that gets there get very excited about, they helped with an imaginary gang tackle. For those that didn’t make the 3 seconds, they do a pushup or 5, whatever you think is appropriate.
Chapter 5

Wide Tackle Six Alignments

Base WT6 Defense

One of the most important keys to any defense is proper alignment. This youth version of the Wide Tackle 6 is easy to use and is very effective against most youth offenses used today, including the spread.

Versus Double Tight Wishbone or Fullhouse

When there are not two receivers to the same side, the strong side is designated as the wide side of the field. Safety favors that side. Corners are in man coverage on the widest receiver.
**Versus Double Tight Wing Right.** The Safety has cover responsibilities for the inside receiver on the two receiver side. Corners always have outside receivers in man coverage.

**Versus split with slot.** The strong side has two receivers, the Safety has the inside receiver. If the split end is wider than 15 yards and there is no slot, the Corner is shaded to the inside by about 5 yards. Obviously the base defense would call for a crash call by our Left Tackle in this alignment.
**Versus Trips.** The strong side is the three-receiver side. The Corner has the outside receiver outside shaded, Safety has the middle receiver and the Linebacker has the inside receiver inside shaded. The most athletic Linebacker shifts to over the Center. The Linebacker either jumps back in zone on pass, can take the back out of the Backfield or can spy the Quarterback.

**Versus Double Slot.** The Corners take the outside receivers, the Linebackers take the inside receivers, inside shaded. The Defensive Ends line up as Outside Linebackers over the Tackles, still responsible for contain and watching for the back coming out of the backfield to their side. If it isn’t a run and no back comes out and the Quarterback goes back to pass, the Defensive End rushes the Quarterback. The Safety moves up to 5 yards of depth and mirrors the Quarterback, he has to be coincident of a draw play. If the Quarterback gets deeper than 5 yards the Safety gains depth and plays the ball.
**Versus Double Tight Double Wing.** The strong side is the wide side of the field. We would go into Monster against this offense or go into our special Double Wing defense.

**Versus Unbalanced.** Strong Side is the unbalanced side and we call “shift left”. All Linemen and Linebackers would shift over one gap, with exception of the Defensive Ends.
6-2 Defense Basic Responsibilities

Nose Tackles

You can put any player at Nose Tackle that can follow directions. They can be big, tiny, its does not matter, typically your least mature players.

The Nose Tackles line up in the “A” gaps, between the Center and Guards. If the offense goes to an unbalanced line, tell the Nose Tackles to shift left or right to get to the true “A” gap alignment. The Nose Tackles are in four point stances, faces just one foot from ground. They frog into the gap, then bear-crawl on all fours through the gap with their butts low, exploding through the gap on ball movement. The goal is to not be pushed back and create a stalemate, create a pile in the middle.

The Nose Tackles are not allowed to come off their hands until they have cleared the defensive front line. Keep Nose Tackles off their knees, something that requires vigilance by the coaches. We alternate your four or six least mature players every two plays at Nose Tackle, so you can have two and sometimes three “teams” of two bear-crawlers each. We have had some very small and aggressive kids cause havoc in the backfield and even make sacks or create fumbles from time to time. For the most part this is where you can play a weaker player where he still provides significant value to the team on each snap in a role where he can perform a technique he is capable of executing well.

One Nose Tackle in particular Jeff H, relished the role, often getting to the opposing quarterback just as he was trying to make the handoff. In 2005 Jeff caused at least 11-12 fumbles that year in his limited role as a rotating Nose Tackle. The following year Jeff started at Linebacker but begged to be back in his old Nose Tackle role. Our main goal with the Nose Tackle is to get less mature players into the game and create a pile in the middle by occupying 2 or 3 of the other teams best players on our two Nose Tackles. Trading your weakest players for the other teams 2 to 3 best linemen is a trade you are going to like to make on every down of the game.

Why would you want to play one of these weaker kids in space at Safety of Corner where they have absolutely zero chance of making a play or adding team value? It’s like playing 10 versus 11 football, a huge disadvantage for the team trying to get their weaker players snaps this way. Remember for the weak player, space is their enemy, they can’t change direction quickly or accelerate well, otherwise they wouldn’t be a weak player. Put that same weak player in a very confined area, with a very simple task to accomplish in zero space, they can do it. Then you don’t have to worry about having them get beat deep on a pass or sweep and end up being some kind of scapegoat who ends up hating the game.
On the “claw” call to their side, the Nose Tackle is lined up head up on the Guard and they frog and bear-crawl through the “B” gaps without making it obvious. They need to still be pointing into the “A” gaps, but go through the “B” gaps, making an opening for the blitzing Linebacker.

**Defensive Tackles**

The Defensive Tackles are your best aggressive and athletic big kids. Just because a bigger kid plays in the offensive line does not mean he is a Defensive Tackle. Aggressive big men play Defensive Tackle, non aggressive big men play Nose Tackle. We realize aggressive is a relative term, your two most aggressive big men are your Defensive Tackles.

The Defensive Tackle lines up on the outside shoulder of the Offensive Tackles, the “C” gap in a 3-point stance. He uses the swim move, shrug move, rip move, gets skinny or bull rushes to clear the offensive line and looks for the ball in the backfield as he penetrates to the inside no deeper than to the heels of the offensive linemen. If he gets too deep he runs past the play or is vulnerable to a trap block. His main job is to penetrate hard in the direction of the quarterback and look for the football.

On the “crash” call, gunner calls and cross calls the Defensive Tackle lines up a tad tighter on the Offensive Tackle and stunts through the “B” gap without making it obvious. The Defensive Tackle still needs to be eyeing the “C” gap to get the Offensive Tackle to take a step in that direction, but he stunts through the “B” gap.

**Defensive Ends**

The Defensive Ends do not have to be big or great athletes, they only need to do one thing for the most part, contain. The Defensive End does need to be very obedient, patient and smart. They need reasonable aggressiveness, but no monster is needed here. In fact a real aggressive defensive end will often hurt you more than help you. Aggressive undisciplined kids will often knife inside and try to make a play rather than staying at deepest back and squeezing the play inside.

In youth football every youth football coach that I’ve ever spoken with and I’ve spoken to thousands of them agree that the sweep is the number one play you have to stop. Our defense and defensive end play is designed specifically to shut down this play. We use a modified box technique to force everything inside of the ends to the Linebackers and Defensive Tackles.

The Defensive End lines up on the outside shoulder of the Tight End in a two-point stance. He gives the Tight End a shove as he comes off the line, but cannot get tangled up
with him in any way. If there is a tight Wingback, the Defensive End must align just to the outside of the Wingback to make sure he does not get hooked by the Wing. In that case the Defensive End would give the Wingback a small shove instead of the Tight End. After his “shove” the Defensive End goes perpendicular to the line of scrimmage to the deepest man in the backfield and does not let anything get outside of him. He faces 90-degrees inward once he gets to the deepest back level and makes sure to keep his outside arm free as he then presses inside. Both Defensive Ends should be looking at each other, facing the opposite sidelines when they get to the “sweep spot”. They have to keep their outside arm free, not letting anyone get deeper than their outside arm. The Defensive End must take on any lead blockers low and with their hands while keeping an eye on the ball carrier.

If the ball carrier cuts inside of the end, the end can then try and make the tackle by squeezing the play down. Once the ball comes inside the Defensive End, he can make a play for the ball carrier. Make sure your Defensive End doesn’t get deeper than the deepest back so he has a chance at making a play on the off-tackle run. If the play is away from the Defensive End, he pursues the play through the backfield; he does not directly pursue through the line of scrimmage from his “sweep spot”, but through the backfield again at deepest back level and looking for bootleg or reverse plays. This method of play will stop any reverse play and result in a big loss. The reverse is the kill shot play for most youth teams, taking that big play away every time can be devastating.

The Defensive End is responsible for the pitchman on the option since he is always outside the deepest back. On the “cross” call, the Defensive End blitzes through the “C” gap, right to the ball.

If you are having problems with your Defensive End getting hooked or reach blocked, you may want him to get wider by a step and have him discontinue his contact with the tight end. You never want the defensive end to get tied up with the tight end, just give the tight end a shove to take him off any quick pass intention. If you have a very athletic Defensive End he can line up tight and give contact to the Tight End. If your Defensive End is not very athletic he will need to play wider. It also depends on how athletic the Tight Ends are, the more athletic they are, the wider your Defensive Ends. Your Ends need to be coached my one coach who consistently adjusts their splits based on the Defensive End’s ability and the Tight End’s athleticism. You want to have them in as tight as they can possibly be without being hooked. If they are too wide, you are vulnerable to the off-tackle, so you have to maintain a happy medium.
**Linebackers**

The Linebackers are your most mobile and vicious tacklers and must be able to move to both sides and must have speed. They are usually your best athletes. They are winners of your tackling contest and need to be fairly durable and fairly smart.

Linebackers line up over the outside shoulder of the Offensive Guards at about 3 1/2 yards in a two-point stance. They key ball movement, and make the majority of the tackles in this defense. Since the Corners are “slow played” the Linebackers do not have to cross key, they can play full flow to the football. To get them from being flat footed can have them take a 6 inch read step forward if you like, but make sure they are not leaning too far forward on the read step so they can go lateral and backwards based on the read.

They are responsible for “B” gaps in the base defense and “A” gap if the “claw” is called to their side. On the “razor” blitz to their side, they blitz through the “B” gap. If they see pass, they go in a 45 degree angle away from the line of scrimmage in an 8-yard zone and look for the ball. If no player is in that zone and they see a back sneaking out into the flat Vary this distance according to age, the age 8-10 kids probably are at about 6 yards, the age 11-12 are at 7-8 yards and the older kids probably 8-9 yards.

If there are trips, the Linebacker to the trips side must cover the inside receiver and other backer shifts to over the center. The Linebackers are responsible for the Quarterback on option plays. On Corner or cross-blitzes to their side, the Linebacker slides over a step wider and back a step deeper and are responsible for the Tight End to their side when they read pass or feel the Tight End going out for a pass.

**Cornerbacks**

The Cornerbacks are your smaller linebackers with tackling skills. They must have speed and quickness and be able to cover. These guys finished second in the tackling contests and are your linebackers in waiting.

Corners line up in two-point stance shading the Tight End or Wing to the outside 4-5 yards deep and three yards to his outside. The Corner is in man coverage in the base defense and always covers the widest receiver to their side. Pass coverage is job one for the Corner. If a receiver splits very wide say 10-12 yards, the Corners play inside shade to protect against the slant. The Corner has run responsibility if the receiver blocks down or the ball passes the line of scrimmage to his side. The Corner’s run fit is inside the boxing defensive end on any sweep or off-tackle play to his side. He must fill aggressively like a linebacker into the backfield when his key shows no pass threat and a running play is to his side.
If the play is not a pass play and is flowing to the opposite side of the Corner, the Corner “slow plays” and takes three steps back all the while looking into the backfield looking for a reverse or bootleg. If he sees a counter/reverse/bootleg, he fills inside the boxing end, in the backfield. Once the Corner takes his three steps back and sees there is no reverse, he can take his deep pursuit angle to the ball.

On the “gunner” blitz to their side, the Corner lines up right behind Defensive End and blitzes through the “C” gap on that side directly to the path of the Quarterback. On the “cross” call to their side the Corner lines up on the LOS, penetrates to the “sweep spot” keeps his outside arm free and contains to the deepest back. The Corner does the Defensive Ends job on this call.

If a team consistently splits out a minimum play player to the far outside in the attempt to make the game a 10 on 10 game, call “split”. Have your Corner split the difference of the distance between the last man on the line of scrimmage and the Wideout. This will make it a 10 ½ to 10 game. Just make sure the other team doesn’t sneak in a stud out there, use this only when you know the other team has split out their weakest kids.
Safety

The Safety must have good speed and ability to change direction. It helps if he is relatively smart and aggressive. This is not a minimum play type player. Quite often this is the player that finished fifth in the tackling contest competitions.

The Safety’s depth depends on the age of the players and the legitimate pass threat. At age 7-9 he lines up at 7-8 yards in a two-point stance, age 10-11 9-10 yards, age 12-13, 11-12 yards. The Safety is in man coverage and have to cover the inside receiver on the two receiver side. He is to favor the side with the two receivers by splitting the distance between the Center and Tight End if the receiver is in tight. If his receiver is split (twins or trips), the Safety shades to the inside of his receiver by one yard. Remember if you see trips, the Safety has the middle receiver.
Chapter 6

Blitzes and Stunts

Blitzes and stunts can be used with this defense if that is your style of play. You can be as vanilla as you like our play higher risk. All of our stunts and blitzes are fundamentally sound. We don’t “bring the house” and leave large parts of the field or players undefended, hoping that the offense we play is weak. But in real life in real games we only vary from the basics when teams are hurting us or we look to exploit a weakness in the offense.

As amazing as this may sound in the last three Pop Warner and AYF National Championships I’ve attended, the teams winning the National Titles blitzed less than 10% of the time. Blitzes and stunts aren’t typically called until the alignment is determined and then are given verbally by the defensive coordinator.

Numbering

The stunts and blitzes can either be called out using a number system or a verbal cue. Some coaches like the numbers, some like the visual picture the verbal cue gives you. Pick the one that works best for your team. If you play on using the number system we start by numbering 9 of our 11 players from our left to right, with the safety being number 9. The numbers called mean the first player is going to the outside of his normal position, the second player goes to the inside of the gap he is normally going on. If there is a third number called, that player also goes to an inside gap. Below is a 576 Blitz or Robbie EAT. You can use a players name to designate right or left, Ron, Larry, Lonnie, Randy, Robert, Len etc
Motion

When a team motions you have a couple of options, you can stay with that player or you can pass him to the next player. When you follow the player in motion, teams can formation you away from where they want to go, they can run your best players right out of the play. Our preference is passing him off to the next player. For instance, lets say the blue player went in motion across the formation, the our Left Corner would scoot in and now be covering the Tight End to his side. The Right Corner would now have the Flanker who had motioned to the spot where the Flanker is now the widest player on his side. The Safety would now be responsible for the Tight End to where the Flanker is now, rather than the Tight End to the Left Corners side.
In the above diagram, the offense aligns in a double tight with a flanker and then moves another receiver out in blue to a trips set. In this example the Safety follows his rule and takes the man in blue, the Linebacker to that side slides over the Tight End. The Linebacker always has the inside receiver and the other Linebacker would move over the middle.

These are things you want to cover in defensive recognition. When you are repping the defense with your coaches as the backs, align in different formations and motions and don’t even bother running a play, just work on alignment. You can get a snap in every 15 seconds or so and that includes subbing in from the sidelines on every play. You can go as fast as the coaches can align. This is not as hard as you may think, even the youngest kids seem to catch on very quickly with it. The key is repetition, forcing a fast pace and not wasting time on frivolous things in practice that steal all your practice time.

**Soft**

If you face a team that throws the slant exceptionally well and like to run bubble screens or swing passes to their Running Backs, you might consider playing your Defensive Ends “soft.” Soft just means they are not going to scream to deepest back when they have a split end to their side. The Defensive Tackle to that side is now NOT on a crash, he is outside shoulder of the Offensive Tackle. If the Defensive End to the Split End side sees that the Quarterback is setting up to throw, the Defensive End gets his hands up and gets into the path of the slant. If the Defensive End to either side sees a back coming out of the backfield, he goes with the back in man coverage.

**Claw Right**-Right Nose Tackle lines head up over the Guard and bear-crawls through the “B” gap. He is still looking toward the “A” gap, he can’t give it away. Used in conjunction with blitz by that side Linebacker to the “A” gap. The Linebacker moves to the inside and shows the blitz. This is a blitz we use very sparingly beyond the age 7-9 age group.
**Crash** - When you want to crash the weak-side Defensive Tackle just call out his name and “crash”. He will move to head up on the Offensive Tackle and crash to the “B” gap. Do not use this when you call claw. **Automatically call it if the offensive end is split out wide to that side. This could also be called a 03 to the left or 05 to the right.**

**Double Claw** - Both Nose Tackles go through the “B” gaps, both Linebackers go through the “A” gaps.
**Razor:** Call left, right or double. That side Linebacker blitzes through the “B” gap. Below is a razor right call. Bear-crawlers go on their regular “A” gap path. Linebacker moves to gap before the ball is snapped. This could also be called a 40 to the left or 50 to the right.

**Combined call:**
Razor left, Crash Right or 40, 06
**EAT- End and Tackle Stunt**

EAT is short for End And Tackle Stunt. This is mostly used to the Tight-End side with no Wing or Flanker. If a team is hurting you off-tackle to one side, this can be a very effective stunt. The below example is EAT Ronnie or 567. To the left would be 431.

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**Squeeze**

Squeeze just tells your Defensive Tackles to move in a gap. This is used when teams are hurting you in the B gaps. You can use it out of the base set or even Monster. Some teams with very large numbers of minimum play players could also consider using this approach with Monster and have both the A and B gap players play low on all fours. I would only recommend that for the most extreme cases where you have 36 kids and 12-14 of them are really out of their league and you have to get them plays.
Squeeze
Squeeze Monster
**Stack**

A defense that is very popular in the youth ranks today is the Stack defense. Most are run out of a 3-5-3 type or 3-3 set. They feature a lot of players pressuring from a lot of different angles. These types of defenses have never caused our offense any problems, we just block every inside gap and kick-out the end man, but for many offenses it does cause them problems. Those without clearly defined blocking rules, lots of rookie players or kids not prepared for pressure from different angles do struggle with it.

You can allow your players to decide which side each is going. Just call out Stack Larry or Stack Larry and have the Linebacker pat the Defensive Tackle on the bottom of the side he is going to go. The Defensive Tackle goes the opposite way. Just make sure that your Linebacker doesn’t go the same way every time, otherwise it defeats the purpose of this blitz. The Linebacker aligns right behind the Defensive Tackle, as close as he can get without falling over him. On ball movement the Linebacker goes to one side and the Defensive Tackle to the other. Remember to coach both on blitzing under control, not penetrating deeper than 1-2 yards into the backfield and using their slide technique to get into position to make the tackle once they have cleared the line of scrimmage. The ones you see below are 34 and 56 if you are using the number system to call this blitz.
**Gunner**

Gunner is a Corner blitz. Only do this to the Tight-End side with no Wing or Flanker. This is very effective against full house backfields like Wishbone, Power T or Power I. The Corner creeps up to the C gap between the Tight End and Tackle. The Defensive Tackle to that side is on a Crash call. The Linebacker to that side slides back a step and over a step and has coverage responsibilities on the Tight End to his side. This would be a Gunner Lenny or 2,1,3 blitz.
**Gunner Cross**

Gunner Cross is a Defensive End blitz. Only do this to the Tight-End side with no Wing or Flanker. This is very effective against full house backfields like Wishbone, Power T or Power I or even to the backside a team that has a Wing or Flanker to the other side. This is also very effective against teams that like to sweep a lot.

The Corner creeps up to outside the Defensive End and is now the force player, he seals everything in going to deepest back, outside arm free. The Corner must be a disciplined player since he is now taking over the role of the Defensive End. The Defensive End crashes the C Gap, the Defensive Tackle to that side is on a Crash call as well. The Linebacker to that side steps back and over to cover the Tight End, should he go out. This would be Gunner Cross Lenny or 1,2,3 blitz.
Gunner- Zebra

Gunner Zebra is a variation to the Gunner call, the only difference is now the Safety and Corner are now in a 2 deep Cover 2 look. They both have deep half coverage. Again, this is a great way to bring pressure against a full house backfield while getting into heavier run support and protecting against the deep play action pass to the Tight-Ends.
**Gunner Cross Zebra**

This is same as the Gunner Zebra but now with a Cross call. The Corner again is taking the place of the Defensive End, the Defensive End and Defensive Tackle are crashing and the Corner and Safety are now in a 2 deep zone.
Zebra-Snug

Some stunts and blitzes are personnel dependent. Some teams have a stud player at Safety; some choose to put them at Corner. If you have a strong player at Safety and you are getting beaten to one side of a formation, you can use Zebra Snug. Snug tells the Safety to snug up as an extra Linebacker to the strong side of the formation. If he doesn’t know which side is strong just call our Ronnie or Larry. This is very effective against Power I teams or teams that tendency towards a side, Wing, Flanker, Tight End, etc. Zebra denotes now being in a 2 deep zone as both Corners rotate to their Monster alignments and coverages.
Zebra-Snake

If you have a real smart and disciplined player at Safety you may want to consider running Zebra-Snake. The Safety slides up to just outside the Defensive Ends outside shoulder. This is just like Gunner, but the Safety is taking the spot of the Corner. The Defensive End and Tackle to that side Crash and the Corners rotate into deep zone coverage just like in Monster.
Eskimo-Zebra

Once teams see how you are playing your Defensive Ends, they may start using G or kick-out blocks by the Fullback and run inside of them. If your Defensive End is properly trained and is squeezing once he gets to deepest back, he should be able to make some of those plays as well as forcing the play back to where his Linebacker, Corner, Safety and Defensive Tackles are at. But if teams are hurting you off-tackle and you have a smart and fairly athletic Defensive End, you might think about adding Eskimo. Eskimo tells the Defensive End to that side to run off the outside shoulder of the Tight End, directly to the ball. They are not the force player in this scheme, the Corner is. The Safety and Corner from the other side rotate into a 2 deep zone while the Defensive Tackle does his normal technique. This would be Eskimo Zebra Larry or 1,2 Eskimo. This is very effective against full house backfields.
Echo-Free

Some teams will try and spread you out and force you into bad matchups. You can counter this by going into Echo-Free. Echo just tells your Defensive End to that side to cover the second receiver in from that side in man coverage instead of your Safety. Everyone else is still in their man coverage with the Linebackers in zone underneath, but now the Safety is in deep zone coverage.

Use this when a team has a long way to go for a first down without going into Prevent. You can also match up on the other teams best player, having the low man play press man with a Safety right over the top over him. The Defensive Tackle does not Crash on this, as he is setting the edge now to his side.
Double Echo-Free

If you aren’t a fan of the base alignment against a Double Slot look, you can go Double Echo. You are manning up on both sides with Linebackers and Safety in deep Zone. Again, the Defensive Tackles are setting the edge.
**Double Echo Free Razor**

If you see a Double Slot alignment and choose to use Double Echo, you probably are going to want to bring a fifth man to apply pressure to the Quarterback. Razor one of the Linebackers, you still have 6 in coverage.
Chapter 7

Defensive Nuances

There are a number of situations where you may want to use some alternative formations based on down, distance, time left and field position. The simplest is “Heavy”, which just denotes you are going to go with your best 11 football players. Simply remove your two Nose Tackles and insert your next best available players in those positions. Obviously in leagues where minimum play rules are a concern, you need to make sure you are getting your kids those minimum plays before you rotate them out.

Goal Line

In goal line you certainly can go “Heavy”, but again if you are in a minimum play rule league you need to make sure those Nose Tackles get their plays. If you are confident they can get their plays and it’s early in the game and you feel that makes sense for your team, go for it. Personally I don’t rotate them out until they have their plays in. In a handful of games where we went warp speed no-huddle on offense, we would open in Heavy for the first series, knowing there were going to be enough possessions do those kids could get their snaps.

The Linebackers and Corners move up to 3 yards of depth with the Safety moved to a Monster position of about 4 yards. Make sure to play your Corners at a depth that is no deeper than the goal line, they want to keep all running plays in front of themselves.

The coverage is now zone, with the Corners having the deep thirds, Linebackers in the short Curl Flat zones and the Monster playing the middle zone. You are daring them to throw, while pressuring the run. Most youth teams won’t feel confident enough about their passing game to throw inside the 10 yard line. They don’t like the possibility of a turnover or wasted down.
Prevent

The common joke amongst television analysts is that prevent defenses prevent the teams on defense from winning. While that may be the case for teams in the NFL or College who go into prevent defenses too early, remember that NFL Quarterbacks, even the bad ones are very accurate when not pressured and they have a multitude of solid receivers who can all consistently catch and make plays. That simply isn’t the equation you are facing when you are coaching youth football. In youth football you aren’t going to face a Quarterback who can consistently drive the ball 80 yards in 90 seconds by completing a string of short and intermediate passes to different players. If he could do this, the game wouldn’t ever be close, they would be leading by a huge margin, hence no need for a prevent style defense.

In youth football you are going to face some situations where a team has the ball with 10 seconds left before the half and are at the 50 yard line. You may see a situation where it's 4th and 20 with 1:30 left with the offense on its own 30 yard line. These situations happen and later in the season you should have enough practice time to be prepared for it. Prevent should always be a situation either at the end of the half or end of the game. If you are in a minimum play league that better mean you have all your kids their plays. In Prevent, you put your 11 best players on the field. That means your Nose Tackles are out and you put a very quick aggressive player at the Nose, not your typical Nose Tackle.

The Defensive Backs and Linebackers are now in pure zone coverage, just covering real estate. You’ve added in another Linebacker and a new Nose Tackle. Put your best athlete who can cover in the deep middle spot. You want to reshuffle the deck a bit here to put your team in a position to defend a last ditch effort. The Defensive Ends can play “soft”, if that Running Back comes out of the backfield they can cover him in man.
Monster

Monster is something we came up with out of necessity during a game in which one dominant player from another team was hurting us pretty bad. About 85% of the snaps ended up in his hands and the other team didn’t seem to have any other weapons that we were terribly afraid of.

The base roles, techniques, reads and responsibilities are not that far off from the base defense. The Nose Tackles, Defensive Tackles and Defensive Ends don’t change at all. The Corners move back to 8 yards and are in a deep zone coverage, each has half of the field.

Their run fits are the same, but from greater depth, the difference is they now have help in the form of your best player at Monster is screaming downhill on all runs from a depth and position where it is hard to block him, especially when another Linebacker is already in the vicinity. The Corners job is pass first, his run fit is the same as in base and if the play is away, he again is slow playing, stepping back 3 steps, looking for the reverse,
counter, trap to his side. If he sees nothing again he takes a deep pursuit angle after he
senses the ball has crossed the line of scrimmage.

Most youth teams don’t like to throw deep and to the middle, since most youth defenses
have a deep Safety playing center field, throwing deep there often times results in an
interception. The Linebackers are moved over the Defensive Tackles and at 4 yards of
depth, they are now full flow if the ball is to their side, if the ball isn’t to their side, they
have to look for a counter, trap or reverse coming their way before they can pursue.

The Safety is now at Monster, you may want to reshuffle the deck here as you want your
best athlete that loves contact and can move at Monster. For most of you, that means one
of your Linebackers moves to Monster, your best Corner moves to Linebacker and your
Safety moves to the Right Corner spot. Most teams like to run right and most
Quarterbacks are right handed and like to roll right, so Left Corner is for the weaker of
the remaining Defensive Backs. The Monster is at 6 yards of depth so he can get to both
sides of the field. The Monster has middle zone if he reads pass and is full flow to the ball
on a run play.
**Monster Follow**

Monster Follow tells the Monster to mirror the player who is causing you the most damage. If a Tailback is bludgeoning you and the other team doesn’t look like they have many other weapons you may want to consider mirroring him with your best player. While this may not be 100% sound, no one wants to get beat by a one man team; desperate times may call for desperate measures. You give up the middle zone and your Linebackers will be working overtime but in some cases you may have to resort to it. In 150 games, we’ve only used it 2 times and in those games we only used it for portions of the game, we wouldn’t dream of staying in it the entire game.

**Monster Load**

Monster Load is used when a team is hurting you to one side consistently. The Linebacker away from the load side aligns between the Defensive End and Defensive Tackle. While this does weaken the other side, you still have a Corner and Monster to play that side of the field.
Mirror

When you play extremely powerful Double Tight Power T, Wishbone or Dead T teams, Mirror may make sense. You start by being aligned in Squeeze Monster but the Linebackers align over the Tight Ends at about 2 yards. The Monster and Corners are aligned at about 7 yards and they are in 3 Deep Zone coverage, but playing downhill on any obvious running play. The Linebackers give a good blast to the Tight End, if the Tight End blocks down, the Linebackers fill off the Tight Ends rear immediately. If the Tight End is on an obvious pass route, the Linebacker gives him a good shoulder blast and then drops into his normal under zone coverage like he was in base. If the Tight End tries to reach, the Linebacker fills the C Gap immediately and stops the play in the backfield. If the Tight End continues to engage the Linebacker, he uses his shrug move to gain distance and looks for the football coming his way.
Chapter 8

Minimum Play Strategies

In today’s world over 80% of youth football leagues have some type of minimum play rule that says you must play your players X amount of plays during the course of the game. Even if you don’t play in a minimum play league, many coaches have their own minimum play standards to get kids playing time. In any event you can usually count on a team playing a number of weaker players on the offensive side of the ball during the course of most games. Coaches usually don’t want to play those weaker players on defense, because one mistake can cost them a score. On offense a mistake usually means a less effective gain.

In some youth football leagues there are designated minimum play counters on duty and a team must declare who their minimum play players are so their plays can be counted accurately. In other leagues you don’t declare before the game, but a count is established on the sidelines of those players who didn’t start. I’ve coached in leagues with minimum play rules and without. In any event I watch the other team warming up prior to the game. Every team but one I’ve faced in the last 15 seasons has run their first team offense and defense on and off the field for at least a few reps. Every team warmed up and did drills that often times included pass catching and even full contact blocking and tackling drills. I can tell in the first 5 minutes who can play and who can’t and just write down the numbers of the other teams minimum play kids. With some of the better teams of course we are going to scout or get film on and know well in advance which of their players are minimum play kids.

Some teams in an effort to get their minimum play kids snaps without negatively affecting the play will often times either split those kids way out away from the play or run opposite of them. In most cases it is a very wise strategy, a Corner, one of the better players on most teams is kept out of the play by aligning on a player that is not threat. It is a great trade for the offensive team, playing 10 on 10 and trading equal one of their worst players for one of the defenses best players. There are many ways you can address this situation to your advantage. In order for that information to be of any use, your coaching staff needs to know who these players are and what positions they play.

Just fill out a 3x5 card with each of the minimum play player’s numbers and what positions they play. Now the position coaches can help you find out when those players enter the game. The Defensive Backs coach is only concerned with the minimum play
receivers etc If you have a stat person, he can help you with this as well. When he sees one of those kids enter the game, he can tell you “red 12” meaning number 12 has entered the game and he is a minimum play player. Now don’t get me wrong here guys, I’m the minimum play players biggest fan, I think those kids get more out of the game than most anyone. But it’s not my job to make sure the other coach is in a scheme that is minimum play player friendly, if he isn’t he’s going to pay the price.

**Split**

Split tells your Defensive Back to split the difference between the minimum play receiver and the next player on the line of scrimmage. Of course you have to be alert as to when that minimum play player comes into the game. The Corner is now slanted in towards the Quarterback and reading him. If the Quarterback shows pass, he is bailing to cover the minimum play player, if it’s a run he is in a better position to make a play. This is putting your defense into a 10 ½ vs 10 situation. This is a half measure for the guys that like playing it safe.
**Igor- Corners Name**

Igor is short for ignore, it means that we are going to ignore that receiver altogether. Just call our the Corners name or code number and yell Igor. So in the below example if Johnny was playing Left Corner it could be “Johnny Igor” or “Igor 1.” I prefer this approach; it means we are playing 11 vs 10 football. So what if the minimum play player is thrown to.

Most likely the throw isn’t going to be on target, he’s going to drop it, if he catches it it’s going for a short gain or he fumbles. I’ve seen youth teams in National Championship Tournaments put a minimum play player in as a wide-out to both sides and play 9 versus 9 football for a few plays in an attempt to burn up a few snaps to get those plays in. For many youth football coaches they would prefer to try to stop what a team does best and bait them or force them to do something they really don’t want to do, like put the game on the backs of their minimum play players.
**Igor- Safety’s Name**

In the below example the minimum play player is the inside receiver in the slot. The Safety would be responsible for covering him. In this case the Safety is brought in tighter for run support as almost a third Linebacker. In the 2011 Junior Pee Wee National Title game I saw a team from Florida put minimum play players at both the wide-out and the slot and run away from them for 6-7 plays and the other team covered those kids with 2 good defenders.
Chapter 9

The Offset 4-4 “Viper” Defense

The Offset 4-4 defense is what we use for our “select” teams. As you will see from the below position descriptions, you have to have descent athletes at every position to run this defense. There is no place to “hide” a very weak player where he can provide any team value on the snap or have any reasonable chance at success.

Personally, I’ve not run the Viper Defense since 2007. Then we only ran it part time. We had a very small numbered team, we were fairly athletic and in most games we were able to get our minimum play kids their snaps fairly early. We always started in the base Wide Tackle Six and go to Viper later in the games. In 2003 I was able to run it full time as I was coaching a select team chosen from over 120 kids. Where I coach at now only has a single classification and we have been carrying 25 non select kids, so it has been impossible to run it. If you try and run this defense with a non select team, you will have poor results. Like many pro, college or even High School defenses, they don’t have to accommodate lesser talented players, let alone make sure they play.

In order to run this defense well, these are the player profiles you are going to need:

**Inside Linebackers**

Inside Linebackers are your most mobile and vicious tacklers in this defense and must be able to move to both sides and must have speed. They are usually your best athletes, winners of your tackling contest. They need to be durable and fairly smart, as they call the defense.

**Outside Linebackers**

Outside Linebackers are the same as above but they can get by with a little less ability to change directions. These guys finished second to the Inside Backers in the tackling contest.
**Defensive Ends**

The Defensive Ends do not have to be big or great athletes, they only need to do one thing for the most part, and do not need to be straight “A” students if you get my drift. They need reasonable aggressiveness; these are your Outside Backers in waiting. If you have a kid that is very weak mentally but is aggressive, this is the spot for him.

**Cornerbacks**

The Cornerback is your smaller but quicker Outside Backer with descent but not overwhelming tackling skills. He must have speed and quickness and be able to pass cover. He has to be a good overall athlete.

**Safety**

The Safety needs to have good speed and ability to change direction. He needs to be able to pass cover and to be able to be in position to cover the correct receiver; he has to have some smarts. Quite often this is a smaller Linebacker or Corner in waiting. This is NOT a place you can play a minimum play type weaker player.

**Nose Tackle (non-moving DT)**

The Nose Tackle is the more aggressive of your two defensive tackles. He is your strongest and most aggressive “big man”. He does not need to be terribly smart. He must be aggressive and want the contact.

**Defensive Tackle**

The Defensive Tackle is the smarter of the two defensive tackles. He will need to move and re-align to specific calls and tell the Nose where to go many times. He needs reasonable size and aggressiveness.

**The Offset 4-4 “Viper” Defense**

This defense is used only with our “select” teams. It requires very good players at the Defensive Tackle positions and allows for no “hiding” of less mature players. It also requires very good players at the four Linebacker spots and pretty good players at Defensive End as well. This defense was used by Canyon Springs High School to win 2 USA Today National Titles. It is an attacking defense that gets many negative yardage plays.
**Formation Settings**

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**Nose Tackle & Tackle**

Both Tackles plays head up over the Offensive Guards. He uses the outside route/outside swim move, penetrates and pursues to the ball.

**Defensive End**

The Defensive End plays to the outside shoulder of the outside offensive lineman. He mirrors their first step and jams the TE inside, maintaining outside leverage. He pursues very shallow down the line from the backside, he must stay home and pursue through, not across the backfield. He is NOT a contain end, he is a RUSH end.

**Inside Linebacker**

The Inside Linebacker plays head up on the offensive guards about 4 yards deep. He is responsible for making all of the defensive formation calls. He mirrors the first step of the guard, then locates and pursues the ball. He drops at a 45 degree angle on pass plays and then checks for backs coming out of the backfield.

**Outside Linebacker**

The Outside Linebacker plays three yards off the LOS and 3 yards outside the Defensive End. He has outside containment responsibility. He needs to commit across the line quickly and aggressively and attack from the backside. He has flats responsibility on the pass. If there is no receiver on his side that is split off the line or as a wing or flanker, the OLB shifts to next to the Defensive End, taps him on the rear and says, “We are on a go”. The Outside Linebacker is now penetrating the line of scrimmage to the deepest back and pursuing the ball. The Outside Linebacker has outside contain responsibilities and needs to be aggressive with his pursuit. On this call the Defensive End penetrates the “C” gap.
directly to the quarterback. See the diagram below. It is automatic; no coach’s call is required.

**Cornerbacks**

The cornerback plays on the outside shoulder, 7 yards off the outside receiver to his side. He jams the receiver and stays with the receiver until the ball crosses the line of scrimmage.

**Safety**

The Safety favors the strong side (tight end side). He is responsible for the inside receiver on the two receiver side. Pass coverage is released when ball crosses the line of scrimmage. The coverage for Corners and Safeties can be changed to various zone coverage’s, we prefer man at the youth level.
Strong Side calls (Tight End Side)

**Nose Tackle**

The Nose Tackle lines head up on the Center during any strong call. He plays the ball and penetrates to the “A” gap away from the strong side, he penetrates and pursues.

**Defensive Tackle**

The Defensive Tackle plays over the ”Strong Side” Offensive Tackle. He moves to the strong side with each new play and penetrates to the inside gap the ”B” gap.

**Defensive Ends**

The Defensive End plays on the outside shoulder of the outside offensive lineman. He mirrors their first step and jams the Tight End to the inside. He pursues down the line from the backside, he must stay home and pursue through, not across the backfield.

**Inside Linebackers**

The Inside Linebackers play head up on the offensive guards about 4 yards deep. They are responsible for the making all of the defensive formation calls. He mirrors the first step of the Guard, pursues the ball, drops at a 45-degree angle on pass plays and then checks for backs coming out of the backfield.

**Outside Linebackers**

The Outside Linebackers play 3 yards off the line of scrimmage and 3 yards outside the Defensive End. He has outside containment responsibility. He needs to commit across the line quickly and aggressively and attack from the backside. He has flats responsibility on the pass. If there is no receiver on the Outside Linebackers that is split off the line or as a wing or flanker, the Outside Linebacker shifts to next to the Defensive End, taps the End on the rear and says, “We are on a go”. That Linebacker is now penetrating the line of scrimmage to the deepest back and pursuing the ball. The Outside Linebacker has outside contain responsibility and needs to be aggressive with his pursuit, giving the Tight End a shot to the inside. The Defensive End penetrates the “C” gap to the Quarterback. See the diagram below, this is not a call by the coach, its automatic if you see no receiver split or flanked to that side.
**Cornerback**

The Cornerback plays on the outside shoulder, seven yards off the outside receiver to his side. He jams the receiver, stays with the receiver until the ball crosses the line of scrimmage.

**Safety**

The Safety favors the strong side (tight end side). He is responsible for the inside receiver on the 2 receiver side. His pass coverage is released only when ball crosses line of scrimmage. The coverage for Corners and Safeties can be changed to various zone coverage’s, we prefer man at the youth level.
Strong Left-Trips Left

Unbalanced Right
Should run a “go” on the left here.

Cross calls to both sides, defensive end and OLB switch jobs.
Inside Cross Linebacker Blitz:
Defensive tackles go to one gap inside their normal responsibility. Linebackers blitz the “B” gap.

4-4 Musts

- The players must understand their positions
- Have your players specialize in 1 position, 2 maybe later in the season for a very gifted player
- Repetition is the key to success, require perfection and be tenacious.
- If they “see” it enough, they will react to it. It’s hard to teach something during the game. Most kids aren’t dumb they’re just not prepared. Do lots of defensive recognition drills.
- Fit and freeze and first step drills are the best way to prepare your defense.
Chapter 10

Defensive Tackle Training

Get Offs

Defensive Players must be taught to move on ball movement, not cadence. So the first thing you should work on is stance and get-offs. The players are all in one line and facing a cone downfield at about 6 yards. The coach has the ball set on an imaginary line of scrimmage that no defender is crossing prior to ball movement. The stance is the same standard 3 point stance we use for all positions, but the power foot is set back to the heel of the non-dominant leg/foot. The coach at Center has the ball on the ground and just moves it slightly to simulate a snap. Use a cadence as you do these drills and try to get the kids to jump the count.

When a player comes out of his stance on the get off he has to come out low, stepping with the back foot. He can’t stand straight up and run, he comes up slowly like a sprinter. If you have players that are struggling with this you can get a piece of plastic PVC pipe and have a parent hold it up at each end just past the line of scrimmage at a height of about 4 feet to insure the kids come out low.
Getting Skinny

Sometimes the best method for a Defensive Tackle to gain penetration is to just get skinny. If he steps with his inside foot, dips his inside shoulder and turns to his side he can make himself such a small target that many times he can slide inside a gap, especially if the offense you are playing against has splits of 12 inches or more. To rep this technique stand 2 tall bags about 12 inches apart and static and use ball movement to get started. Next bring the bags in to just 6 inches apart and provide resistance with the bags. Once the player makes it through he sprints to a cone just 2 yards into the backfield, touches it and then sprints back to the end of the line.

Get Off Slide Drill

A common problem many Defensive Tackles have is running right by plays. They will penetrate too deep and create large seams in the defense. Defensive Tackles have to learn to play under control and be in a position to make tackles once they have shed blocks or made penetration. The Get Off Side Drill is a good place to get started in developing this skill. Set all of your Defensive Tackles up in one line looking in towards the ball set on the ground with the coach. On ball movement by the coach, who is also calling a cadence, the defender does his standard Get Off, but after 2 yards he lowers his hips and uses the Slide technique to move parallel to the line of scrimmage to his right.

The player will need to lower his hips as he moves into his slide. The slide is just 6-9 inch steps with feet never touching or crossing over. The head is up looking for the ball and the arms are lowered, at knee level. On the whistle the players stop sliding and get reset, they only slide for 3-4 yards. To spice it up to the other direction, have another coach stationed in front of the players point which direction to slide.
Another progression off of the Get Off Slide Drill is to add a form tackle freeze fit at the end of the drill. Just station a simulated passive running back to one side of the defender and about 2 yards behind the imaginary line of scrimmage.

**The Punch**

The punch is the first step in the shrug movement and must be taught and perfected prior to teaching the entire shrug movement. Step with the outside foot first, bringing the hands to the breastplate as you bring the hips upwards to gain leverage underneath the offensive player. Strike with the palms, then grasp the jersey, locking the arms out. Do this first with the defender in a stance and the offensive player standing upright and passive. Next move to defender in a stance and the offensive player in a stance, coming out passive. Then go live using ball movement to start the drill. You can also start this drill from the kneeling position and do as a group as well, until you get to the live portion.
The Shrug is a very effective block destruction method for Defensive Tackles, Linebackers and even Defensive Backs. It all starts with the punch, it is quick, with open palms into the middle of the offensive players chest where the jersey or breastplate is grasped. The strike and grab must be accompanied by a simultaneous step with the outside foot, hips lowered, head up. You attack with the hips in an upward strike at the base of the shoulder pads. Once you have established that movement on a stand up dummy and then a stationary and static offensive lineman, go live with the first step.

The next movement requires the defender to give up ground with his inside foot while letting the offensive players momentum take him past him. This is done by pulling the offensive player in that direction by the breastplate or inside jersey. Make sure the defender doesn’t lean too far back on the pull so he can remain in position to make the tackle. Remember to coach that the hands must be kept inside on this drill. Start this drill with a static and passive offensive player, then go live.
**Shrug Fit**

This is an added progression to the Shrug Drill. Just add a simulated static “Running Back” to the drill at about 2 yards behind the offensive player. Once the Defensive Tackle makes it past the offensive player using his shrug technique, he performs a form fit freeze tackle on the Running Back. You could also add in another progression by moving the Running Back to one side or the other and add in the slide technique prior to the form fit freeze tackle. Go live once the kids are getting it.

**Shrug Slide Fit**

Go live when you feel the kids are getting it. Or again you can simulate a runner and just “thud” tackle, not taking him to the ground. This drill just adds the slide movement to the Defensive Tackles shrug movement. Have a simulated running back align just a bit deeper, about 7 yards behind the offensive player and widen the cones to about 6 yards give the back more room to operate. On ball movement, start the drill and have the Defensive Tackle use his shrug technique. On a passive offensive player, once he has penetrated to the heels of the offensive player, he moves to his slide technique. On the whistle the running back makes a move to elude the tackle and runs between the cones. This can be a fit tackle to start with. Move to the next step of live shrug with fit tackle, then go fully live.
Swim

The goal of this drill is to teach block destruction and evasion using the swim technique. Start with 2 rows of player standing 1 yard apart face to face. In slow motion demonstrate the base swim punch and over technique. In the below diagram the left hand of the defender will punch the near side ribcage of the offensive player with an open palm. Demo this one step at a time and have the groups repeat that movement on a tall bag. The next step is to have the right arm come over the top just over the shoulder pad or if there is already separation, the near back of the offensive player. The second hand should come in quickly after the first and be used to push off of the offensive player to gain separation. Do this on a tall bag to start then move to a rep on a static player, then go live. Start with the left hand, then go with the right. This is primarily an outside in movement in our defense. Make sure the defender doesn’t get too deep into the backfield and overruns the play. If that becomes a problem, add in a slide component to the end of the drill.
**Swim Slide Fit**

This drill is just a progression to the base Swim Drill by adding in a static simulated “Running Back” to the mix. Remember to add in a slide component and move the Running Back if your Defensive Tackles are getting too deep into the backfield. Again, you can go live or to thud when you feel your kids are ready.

![Diagram of defense versus offense with players illustrating concepts like running back and slide component]

**Double Teams**

There are several ways to look at double team blocks. You can try and defeat them if you have a strong Defensive Tackle and your opposition is weak or average. If your guy is smaller and weaker than his competition it may simply be better for him to stay low and create a pile rather than getting driven into the Linebackers and creating a mess they have to run around. We call this grabbing grass. If you want your player to use this technique when he feels a double team, he just goes down to all fours, lowers his behind and tries to run his shoulder pads into the shins of those trying to move him. If he feels himself losing ground he simply goes to his knees, gets even lower and tries to create a pile with his feet still moving.

![Diagram of players demonstrating grabbing grass behavior and creating a pile]

On the other hand if you do have a strong player at Defensive Tackle who you feel has a legitimate chance against a double team block, he must use part of the Getting Skinny approach to pry an opening between those offensive players. He must first step with his outside foot between the offensive players and then “sit” getting perpendicular to the line of scrimmage and then using his back and bottom to create space between the two players. Demo this and then rep in between 2 tall bags about 12 inches apart, then go live.

Traps

In many youth football leagues your teams will never see a trap play or trap block. In some you may see them all the time. You need to determine how prevalent trap blocking is in your league before you invest a bunch of time in trying to defend it. The trap can be a very effective blocking scheme and if your Defensive Tackles are not trained to defend against it, they may end up playing very slow and passive. The key is for the defender to recognize there is something wrong if he isn’t blocked by anyone. When he sees this happening, he must first make sure he doesn’t penetrate too far upfield, 1 yard behind the rears of the offensive linemen is far enough. He must then immediately look to his inside and attack the pullers inside shoulder. If he attacks the play to the inside and “traps the trapper” the play will be bottled up and never get out of the backfield. Wing T and Double Wing teams make a living off the trap and you will even see Single Wing and a few Spread teams trap as well.

To rep trap recognition you have to align and simply run trap against your Defensive Tackle. Alternate double team blocks and trap and let your Defensive Tackle figure out how to counter both.
**Screens**

Screens are like traps and used mainly at age 12-13, some 10-11 age teams will use screens. The reason why many youth football coaches don’t like to run screens are you can’t always count on all the defensive players on a team aggressively getting upfield and attacking the Quarterback. Many times a Fat Freddy, lazy lineman or minimum play player simply won’t penetrate and they find themselves with the football. However if you do play in a league that screens a bunch or are coaching 12 and older kids you probably need to invest some time in the screen game.

Simply put if a Defensive Tackle comes through untouched and he looks to the inside and sees no one coming for the trap, no offensive linemen around and the Quarterback still dropping, it’s a screen. The defender needs to turn his back to the Quarterback and run in the opposite direction looking for the sole player with his body facing towards him, that is the receiver. You can use the same drill for above and insert a screen call where all the offensive players head downfield and the coach at Quarterback is backpedaling fast.
Chapter 11

Training Linebackers

While Linebackers may be your most athletic and aggressive players, they still have to be trained to read, block destruct, tackle and defend passes. Like all position training you must start with the basics. Don’t gloss over the basics, the teams that excel are the teams that do the ordinary, extraordinarily well.

First Step Drill

The First Step Drill helps your players work on their stance and first step. The stance is 2 point stance with feet slightly wider than shoulder width apart. The player knees slightly bent along with a slight body lean forward, hands are at the sides just above the knees and the player is weighted with to the balls of his feet. To help the player get in the correct stance, have him put his hands on his knees and just move them to just outside of the knee. He isn’t on his toes but on the balls of his feet, not his toes and his head is up to read his keys.

His first step is a lateral step to either side, let’s start to the left. The player would first lean in that direction with his right foot just a natural follow to the body. That right foot step is parallel to the line of scrimmage and about 6 inches. The second step would be with his left foot along the same line and length. On the second step the right foot shuffles along that same path another 6 inches. The 2 feet never touch each other or cross over and are quick. The shoulders and hips stay parallel to the line of scrimmage. You are looking for players to keep their hips low, heads up, quick feet, on balls of feet and feet not touching each other. The coach is facing the entire group from 5 yards away, he moves the ball to one side or the other to signify which direction the Linebackers first 2 steps will be.

Once the players have mastered the stance and first 2 steps in one direction, go to the other side and then mix it up so the players get used to reacting to the direction of ball movement to both sides.
Continuous Slide Drill

Once your players have the First Two Step Drill down, move on to this drill. On this drill the Linebacker will continue his slide on your ball movement until you move the ball in the opposite direction. When you change the direction of the ball, the Linebacker changes direction. This is all done parallel to an imaginary line of scrimmage, no ground is being gained forward or backward. You will need to spread the kids out about 5 yards apart so they don’t run into each other. Each rep of the drill shouldn’t last more than 6-7 seconds. Check for good stance, lowered hips, continuous eyes on you, short steps, no crossovers and acceleration off the outside foot on a change of direction.

Slide and Fit Drill

This is a combination slide and form tackle freeze fit drill. This drill will help the Linebacker with his slide, fill and tackle movement. A Linebacker and simulated runner are placed 6 yards apart facing each other, with the runner offset about 1 yard to the side of the Linebacker. Coach is about 5 yards from the Linebacker facing him with a football. The drill starts when the coach moves the ball simulating a handoff to the air.

As always make sure the stance is correct as well as the first 2 lateral steps. After the player has made that second step they accelerate forward to perform a form tackle freeze fit on a player standing straight up and offering no resistance. The Linebacker must lower his hips, plant on his outside foot and accelerate to the feet of the simulated running back to perform a form tackle fit using the tackling coaching points of toes on toes, hips lowered, shoulder pads under shoulder pads, head up, arms wrapped and head slid to the outside.

A change up to this drill is to make the tackle portion a splatter style tackle. You can also put a “runner” to each side and point to one side or the other in an effort to hone the Linebackers reaction skills.
This is a variation of the slide and fit drill. With a long dummy separating the Linebacker and simulated Running Back, the Running Back takes a side step about 1 yard to one side or the other. The Linebacker makes a quick slide 2 step to the appropriate side and executes a form tackle freeze rep.

**Linebacker Run**

The Linebackers won’t be able to make all of their run fits using just the slide technique. There are going to be times where he is going to have to run parallel to the line of scrimmage. The coaching points on this drill is the shoulders need to stay nearly
parallel to the line of scrimmage. As always you are looking for a good stance, lowered hips and eyes on you. The distance for this drill is about 15 yards, make sure to do it in both directions.

**Linebacker Run Fit**

This is an extension of the Linebacker Run drill where you now add a tackle fit. Place a simulated running back about 6 yards of depth and about 12 yards to either side. On the coaches directional ball movement, the Linebacker uses the Linebacker Run technique to run in that direction, on the coaches simulated handoff ball movement, the Linebacker proceeds to plant his outside foot and attack the line of scrimmage performing a form tackle freeze fit on the simulated standing running back who offers no resistance. Rotate the players left to right.
Slide Run Slide Drill

Linebackers need to be able to switch from run to slide as they try to maintain inside leverage on ball-carriers. The aiming point is the inside hip and many youth linebackers have a problem with overrunning the play, making them very susceptible to the cutback. The Linebacker also can’t always be in run mode as the running back will sometimes speed up, slow down, shake tackles and change his angle of attack. This is a drill that can be done in groups of 3-4 players on a verbal command. Start in a good stance and give the command “slide”, the players slide until you say run, then go back to slide and then run again. This is a 30 yard drill. Make sure the players keep their hips low, are on the balls of their feet, have their eyes forward, don’t cross their feet on the slide, accelerate to run off the outside foot and come back under control when they come back to slide.

Mirror Run Slide Drill

This is a variation of the Run Slide drill, with a simulated Running Back walking, Jogging and running along a 30 yard path to mix up the speed in which the Linebacker must use to stay in his position of just trailing the Running Back. Again make sure the Linebackers shoulders are nearly parallel to the line of scrimmage on his runs and that he
comes under control with lowered hips when he switches to slide.

**Mirror Run Slide Fit Drill**

This drill is a progression on top of the Mirror Run Slide Drill. All you are adding is the simulated Running Back making a move toward the line of scrimmage. The Linebacker slides and runs to keep his proper spacing then drops his hips and plants on his outside foot and accelerates to the toes of the ball-carrier performing a form fit freeze tackle. Make sure and run the drill in both directions.

**Tight Mirror Drill**

This drill will help your Linebackers develop good footwork, learn inside leverage and hip level. Put two players about 2 yards apart facing each other with cones as boundaries about 5 yards to each side of the players. Your Linebacker has his hands behind his back very similar to how we teach pass blocking. The offensive player moves from side to side between the cones. The Linebacker uses his slide technique to stay even but just inside of the offensive player. As the offensive player continues to change directions, the Linebacker must follow. Look for god quick slide steps, no heels touching, lowered hips, inside leverage and pushing off with the outside foot.
**Tight Mirror and Go Drill**

This is the above drill with a twist. Once the offensive player feels he has outflanked the Linebacker, he makes a move like a running back to advance past the imaginary line of scrimmage inside the cones. The Linebacker stays in mirror with his hands behind his back until he sees the offensive player make his move, then he makes a form tackle freeze fit tackle or live tackle, your choice.

**Slide and Lift Drill**

Similar to Slide and Flit, the Slide and Lift Drill adds the component of taking the tall dummy to the ground. In this drill the coach is holding a tall bag about 2 yards to the side of the Linebacker and about 5 yards in front. On the verbal command the Linebacker executes his slide step technique and tackles the tall bag but lifting it and running with it for 2-3 steps before taking it to the ground. The regular coaching points are stressed; stance slide step, lowered hips, head up, plant on outside hip, toes to base, lowered hips, head up, shoulder pad under simulated shoulder pad height, head slid to side, arm wrap and run the feet. You can also do this drill with a half round, but don’t take that dummy to the ground.
**Angle Form Bag Fit Drill**

In youth football we never have enough practice time, so we are always looking for drills that can help our football players develop in a multitude of ways, that is certainly the case with the Angle Form Fit Drill. It combines a classic speed development drill with a tackling fundamentals drill. Place the Linebacker in a line about 6 yards in front of a stand up dummy being held by a coach. Station a cone about 6 yards to either direction of the player at about a 30 degree angle. The coach signals with his hand which direction the Linebacker will run to. The player must accelerate to the cone, lower his hips, touch the cone, plant his outside foot, accelerate to the tall bag and execute a form tackle freeze fit on it. You could also have the player take the dummy to the ground if you prefer that approach.
**Side Lateral Fit Drill**

This drill will help get your Linebackers lots of slide and tackle fits in a short period of time line up your Linebacker about 4 yards away from a line of scrimmage with cones set up as openings about every 5 yards, the openings are only 3 yards wide and in each opening is a simulated Running Back. On command the Linebacker slides to the opening and performs a form tackle freeze fit on the simulated back. The back steps towards the line of scrimmage from a depth of 3 yards and provides no resistance on impact. Once the fit tackle has been performed the Linebacker runs like in pass drop then slides along the line of scrimmage at the same depth as he started until he gets to the next opening. When he gets to the opening he performs the very same movement until he has “tackled” all three offensive players.

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**Slam Drill**

The Slam Drill is a block destruction drill that will help a Linebacker defeat a blocker that is already on top of him. Align 2 offensive players in 2 point stances about 2 yards apart from each other, facing a lone Linebacker who is in-between the 2 offensive players at about 2 yards of depth. On command 1 of the offensive players fire out and attempt to shoulder block the Linebacker. The Linebacker attacks the block with his outside shoulder, keeping his inside arm free to maintain gap control. Alternate from side to side, until the Linebackers get the hang of it, then point to which offensive player attempts the block.

The Linebacker must be in a good stance, attack downhill with aggressiveness, with his hips lowered, his pads slightly under the shoulder pads of the offensive player and with that inside arm free. He must keep his eyes downfield toward the line of scrimmage, not on the offensive player. The blows are struck quickly, some call this a machine gun drill.
Hand Shiver

The base hand shiver starts with open hand punch. The punch is quick, with open palms into the middle of the offensive player’s chest where the jersey or breastplate is grasped. The strike and grab must be accompanied by a simultaneous step with the outside foot, hips lowered, head up. You attack with the hips in an upward strike at the base of the shoulder pads and establish leverage with your hips, feet underneath and short choppy steps. A simple way to develop this skill is on a stationary tall bag starting just with the punch, then moving to the punch and feet.

Once you have established that movement on a stationary and static offensive lineman, go live.

Hand Shiver and Rip

An effective method that if often times combined with the shiver is the rip. Rip means you are going to uppercut the near arm- the arm nearest the defender to the side you are going to underneath the armpit of the offensive player to gain separation. Teach it in the same progression you used for the Shiver. Start on tall bags, then move to an intermediate
level against a static offensive player, then live. Make sure to teach this move to both sides.

**Tight Shrug Drill**

The Shrug is a very effective block destruction method for Linebackers. This is a drill that is best taught after the Shiver Drill as the player will have already learned the base punch which is what must be taught first. The punch is quick, stepping with the outside foot while striking with open palms into the middle of the offensive players chest where the jersey or breastplate is grasped. The strike and grab must be accompanied by a simultaneous step with the outside foot, hips lowered, head up. You attack with the hips in an upward strike at the base of the shoulder pads. Once you have established that movement on a stationary and static offensive lineman, go live with the first step.

The next movement requires the Linebacker to give up ground with his inside foot while letting the offensive players momentum take him past him. This is don’t by pulling the offensive player in that direction by he breastplate of inside jersey. Make sure the Linebacker doesn’t lean to far back on the pull so he can remain in position to make the tackle. Start this drill with a static and passive offensive player, then go live.
**Spacing Shrug Drill**

Using the same technique in the Shrug Drill but this time do it from a distance. Set the players about 3 yards apart facing each other and in-between cones set about 3 yards apart.

**Spacing Shrug Fit Tackle Drill**

Same as the above drill, but now add a player behind the blocker who the Linebacker from tackle fit freeze tackles upon making the Shrug move on the offensive player.
Oklahoma Drill

The Oklahoma Drill is an old drill that has not gone out of favor, since it works. It is a perfect drill for your Linebackers once they have learned to tackle and shed blocks properly and are ready for full contact. A Linebacker is set about 3 yards away from a blocker with a Running Back set up about 4 yards behind the blocker. On a verbal command the blocker attempts to block the Linebacker to one side or the other, the Linebacker steps up to take the blocker on and uses one of his techniques to shed the blocker, the slam, shiver, shiver and rip or shrug. The Running Back reads the block and cuts to one side or the other to make it past the Linebacker, but inside the cones.
**Pass Drop Drill**

It depends on the type of coverage and defenses you will see as to which type of pass defensive drills you will run with your linebackers. In any event if your Linebackers are in man or zone coverage, they will need to learn a base drop. This is a drill you can do in mass or groups of 3-4 at a time. Start with the players in a line about 4 yards apart. Give them a run read to their left and then quickly go to a pass read, with the ball on your shoulder. The Linebacker starts in his good stance, slides to his left and then opens his hips to RUN at a 45 degree angle to his left. Start first with just the open step which would be with his left foot, pushing off with his right foot. Go both ways and make sure he is not backpedaling and running to his landmark. For us, our age 7-9 kids landmark is just 8 yards of depth- and they are already at 4 yards so they get just 4 more yards of depth. At age 10-11 we get 10 yards of depth and age 12-13 about 12.

**Pass Read Drill**

The Pass Read Drill helps the Linebackers understand how to read the Quarterback and move into the proper zone area. The red circles represent Receivers. On the snap the Linebackers get into their zones and sit, keeping an eye on the Quarterback. They are in a good snap, use the proper hip turn and sprint into their zone with their eyes on the Quarterback at all times. The coach at Quarterback turns his shoulder towards his receiver and throws the ball. The Linebacker responds to the ball and performs a form tackle free fit tackle on the Receiver.
Break Drill for 4-4 only: Have the linebackers read the guard through to backfield. If the guards and or QB shows pass, drop to zone. Have the quarterback throw the ball up in the flat to get the linebacker to break on the ball. For the 4-4 Linebacker.

**All Read Drill**

The All Read Drill helps your Linebackers read the Quarterback through the backfield. On the coach at Quarterback ball movement, the Linebacker reads off tackle run, sweep, counter or pass. He uses his proper slide steps and drops appropriate for each type of play. You can do form tackle freeze fits if you have the time and inclination. Stack all the Linebackers behind each other so they can all rep at the same time.
Blitz Drill

We like to show our blitzes and bring the Linebackers up to the A or B gaps right as the offense aligns. If you would rather time up your blitzes you are going to have to practice this. The reason we don’t like timing the blitzes is if you have a bunch of players trotting in and out of the line of scrimmage, eventually you are going to have a player out of position. It’s hard for most of them to concentrate on a key and time their movements on and off the line of scrimmage. No matter which approach you take, you do need to practice your blitzes. Call out the blitz verbally- Razor Randy or 50 and practice it. Just like the Defensive Tackles, Linebackers can’t overrun the play. They need to penetrate under control and lower their hips as soon as they get to the heels of the offensive lineman so that they may be in a position to slide, run or change direction to make the tackle.
Chapter 12

Defensive End Drills

Defensive Ends are your most disciplined players on the team. Training all of your players in every position is important, but properly training your Defensive Ends in critical to the success of your defense and team. Do this well and no one will be able to run a sweep, reverse or bootleg against you, the plays many youth teams count on to move the ball and make big plays. During defensive indys, this group is its own group. While they have a lot in common with the Linebackers and Defensive Tackles, what they do is unique and requires its own separate grouping.

Alignment and Stance Drill

One of the biggest reasons Defensive Ends in this defense are successful is alignment. The alignment changes based on the athleticism of the matchups. The base alignment is the Defensive End on the outside shoulder of the Tight End. The stance has the End in a two point stance, outside foot up, knees bent, hands just over the knees, at the sides, eyes looking through the Tight End into the backfield.

That base alignment is adjusted as the game progresses. If your Defensive End is more athletic than the Tight End, he can play tight on the outside shoulder of the Tight End, give him a little shove and get to the deepest back without too much of a problem. However if your Defensive End is average and the Tight End is athletic and your player is in danger of being reached, your man needs to widen out and forget about making contact. Obviously your Defensive End could widen 10 yards and never get reached, but then you have a huge gap in the off-tackle hole. You have to widen your Defensive End just wide enough so he will not be reached and no wider. The alignment has to be constantly monitored and adjusted as the game proceeds. You MUST have a dedicated coach that only watches and coaches the Defensive Ends during the game, he can’t be one of those daddy-ballers who is only interested in his own son, he has to be able to concentrate on and coach up his Defensive Ends on every snap.

The goal of this drill is to teach the Defensive Ends to use the proper stance, align correctly move on ball movement, get to the proper depth under control and to attack the correct shoulder. Defensive Ends are told to align normal or wide. On ball movement from the Center to the coach, each Defensive End gets to the deepest back, the Quarterback as quickly and under control as he can. Once they get to the Quarterbacks depth, the converge with the aiming point being the deep shoulder of the coach Quarterback. This is our base initial drill mainly to teach what deepest back and deepest shoulder means. Once they have mastered this initial drill, put a stand up coach with a bag or a player offering no resistance at the Tight End position.
**Depth Sweep Drill**

The goal of this drill is to teach the Defensive End to get to proper sweep depth. Unlike other levels of football, in youth football you have to be able to stop the sweep. The coach or Quarterback pitches the ball to a deep I-back set about 5 yards behind the Quarterback. The back tries to beat the Defensive End to the edge, if he can’t, he turns the ball back inside. The End must get to the deepest backs deep shoulder as quickly as he can while still being under control, turning his shoulders to the inside once he has gotten to the depth of the deepest backs deepest shoulder. The backside End pursues through the backfield at the depth of the deepest back. If the Quarterback fakes bootleg and he hands off rather than pitches, the Defensive End takes the Quarterback. Do this a time or two and if the Defensive End starts to ignore you as Quarterback, keep the ball and try and beat him to that side.
**Depth Off-Tackle Drill**

The goal of this drill is to train the Defensive End to be able to squeeze the off-tackle hole and get comfortable with being able to make a play there. One problem youth Defensive Ends have is they get too deep and out of control in their attempt to contain. They need to get a feel for how fast they can play while still being able to play under control, lowering their hips, planting their downfield foot and accelerating in the opposite direction. If they play fast, high and out of control they can’t squeeze the off-tackle and they often times overrun the play and create huge open seams in the defense.

Set up cones to simulate a double tight offensive line to help develop spacing and to keep it simple. With Coach at Quarterback align a player, dad or coach at 6 yards of depth to simulate a deep running back. Hand off to this deep player to simulate an off-tackle run and then boot out. The playside Defensive End should align properly with the assigned stance and come out quick, low and under control on ball movement. Once he intersects the running back at deepest depth, the running back has the ball and has made his declaration to run inside, the Defensive End lowers his hips, plants his outside foot and accelerates to the inside, still maintaining outside leverage and makes a form tackle fit on the running back.

The backside Defensive End stays at deepest back and squeezes in maintaining outside leverage. He should form tackle fit the booting Quarterback. You may keep every once in awhile to keep that Defensive End on his toes and prepare him for the Quarterback bootleg. I’m always amazed at how many successful naked bootlegs I see every year due to poorly trained Defensive Ends. Some very young teams use that play as their primary long run threat.
**Depth Choice Drill**

This drill will help the Defensive End learn how to maintain the proper depth, angle, speed and body control to defend both the sweep and the off-tackle. This will also help him get used to making a decision as to which play he is seeing and to react accordingly. To start with make the reads easy, it is a toss sweep or an off-tackle handoff. Then make the reads more difficult, it is either an off-tackle handoff or a sweep handoff. Again you are looking for correct stance, alignment, acceleration, depth to deepest backs outside shoulder, lowering of the hips and squeezing the off-tackle once the running back declares. Also don’t forget to coach up the form tackle fit and the backside Defensive Ends responsibilities.

**Depth With Lead Block Drill**

Obviously most off-tackle and sweep plays are going to involve a lead blocker or more. The reason we start with no lead blockers is you want to make sure the Defensive End gets comfortable with his stance, alignment, speed, body control reads and depth before we complicate things with a lead blocker. When attacking the lead blocker, the lead blocker will be coming to him, not the other way around. The Defensive End must keep proper depth, maintaining outside leverage to the deepest backs outside shoulder. He then uses his shiver or shrug technique to maintain that leverage and force the play inside.

Remember that this is the goal of the Defensive End, to force
the running back inside where help from his Defensive Tackle, Linebacker, Corner and Safety are waiting. In some games where the Defensive End grades out at 90% or above, they will have just a handful of tackles.

**Pass Rush Drill**

The Defensive End has a dual role on the pass rush, set the edge making sure the Quarterback doesn’t break containment to the outside and to put pressure on the passer.

In this drill the goal is to set the edge, keep maintaining and resetting that edge and then squeeze the pocket. Start with the coach at Quarterback setting up at various depths and staying stationary. Then do some half roll outs of various depths, then do some deep roll outs again to both sides. The Defensive End sets the edge and starts his squeeze, when he gets within a yard of the Quarterback he needs to get his hands up and either blocks the pass, does a form fit tackle or if he is in position, tomahawks the ball out of the Quarterbacks hand. Wrap up the drill by doing a few scrambles.
Reach Drill

The Reach Drill will help your Defensive Ends get used to and defending against a reach block. While you are always going to be adjusting the split of the Defensive End, he need to know how to defend himself against this type of block when he has put himself into a position to be reached. This is a live drill.

Crack Replace Drill

Youth football teams love to crack block. At this level more than any other, you see lots of crack blocks. Crack blocks are severe down blocks typically from wide players that are usually not seen by the intended victim. Often times these blocks since they are not seen and are done with a running start, at a good angle and from a good bit of distance are very physical and devastating blocks. They are often times very effective and are almost always used on wide plays.

There are several ways to defend against crack blocks and it involves teamwork. The first
point is to be aware. The Defensive End must be sure to be aware when he has anyone aligned outside of him who is within 6 yards or so, anything wider probably isn’t going to be able to make that block. Since in our base alignment the Corner has the outside receiver, he is usually the player that is making the crack. If there is a player in the slot to the two receiver side, then the Safety is covering that player. In any event, when we are in man or zone the Defensive Backs are responsible for alerting the Defensive End of a possible crack- by just yelling out, “watch the crack.” If the Defensive Back sees it happen in a game, they have to yell as loud as they can, “crack, crack, crack.” When the Defensive End hears crack, he immediately looks to his inside and attacks the cracker with a shoulder block of his own and then makes a beeline for the ball-carrier. This technique is called cracking the cracker. When in man, whoever is responsible for that receiver now must replace the job of the Defensive End. The Defensive Back must now get to the deepest backs outside shoulder, set the edge and force the play back inside.

For this drill set up players about 5 yards wide of the Defensive End with hand shields. Before the play even starts make sure the Defensive Ends yell out to themselves and the invisible Defensive Backs, to look out for the crack. With the coach as Quarterback, have the Defensive Ends come upfield to get to the Quarterbacks depth while the players with shields attempt crack back blocks. Have all the remaining players yell, crack, crack crack. Hold the Defensive End accountable to getting off on ball movement, then turning his head to the outside and attacking the cracker with a shoulder block to gain separation. The Defensive End must then attack the Quarterback and execute a form fit tackle.

To wrap things up you also will need to practice the motion man crack as well. Set up a man in motion with a shield and do the same drill. This is something you MUST practice during skeleton and team to get your Defensive Backs and Defensive Ends to work together.

**Soft Drop Drill**

As we mentioned earlier, it may make sense to use the “Soft” call when you are playing a team that is spreading you out and hurting you with plays like quick slants, bubble screens or swing type passes to running backs coming out of the backfield. In Soft the Defensive Ends are just reading the Quarterback and playing in Soft zone coverage. If it is a quick slant, they get their hands up, make a short drop and try to get in-between the Quarterback and the receiver. If the Defensive End sees the Quarterbacks shoulders get perpendicular to the line of scrimmage, look his way and sees a slot looping to get
depth for a screen, the Defensive End penetrates and gets in-between the Quarterback and the receiver with his hands up if he is shallow enough, if not, then he attempts to make the tackle. If there is no quick slant or screen and the Defensive End reads pass, he must be coincident of backs coming out of the backfield. If that is the case, they are in man coverage on the back coming out to their side only.

When you make the Soft call, the Defensive Tackle is setting the edge so he can’t be coming inside like he does on his crash calls. If the Defensive End sees that the play is a run to his side he does not set the edge, he goes right to the ball to make the tackle. If there is no slant, no screen and no back coming out of the backfield, he rushes the Quarterback.

Set this drill up with a simulated spread offense Offensive Line using cones. Also align a Receiver wide to both sides and a Running Back behind the Quarterback. Then just run the base passes the Defensive End must defend, the quick slant, bubble screen and back running a swing pass out of the backfield.

Other Drills

The Defensive Ends will need to develop their skills in block destruction, tackling and basic pass coverage IF you plan on using the Soft or Echo calls. That means you need to
look at some of the other drills in the Linebacker and Defensive Back section including Shrug, Shrug Tackle Fit, One Move, Backpedal, and Back Pedal Flip. Many teams don’t put in those calls at all, some do so later in the season which buys you some time before having to invest your precious practice time to develop those skills.

**Stunt Drills**

Stunts are to the Defense as plays are to the offense. When you run stunts you are running defensive plays. If you plan on running any stunts, they have to be practiced during defensive skeleton drills with the Defensive Ends Linebackers and Defensive Backs in place. Or with the Defensive Ends, at least cones in place for other players. All you need for most of these reps is a coach with a ball and 7 cones. These stunts need to be perfected just like you perfect your base plays on offense. Your players need to be trained to the point when they hear EAT Robbie, they recognize it, make the slight alignment change and execute it on ball movement. These group reps should be done at the pace of 1 rep every 12 seconds. This would include subbing in a new defensive group in on each rep. If you have the manpower and want to work technique you can always add in coaches, dads or players in with hand shields. If you feel the need to go live for a bit make sure you keep it very short, no longer than 5-10 minutes.
Chapter 13

Defensive Back Training

No matter what type of defense you choose to run, Defensive Backs play a critical role. They cover passes and provide run support. They must be able to read their keys, defeat blocks, make proper run fits, tackle and cover well.

First Step Drill

Like most things you teach youth football players you want to start with baby steps and perfect foundational building blocks that can be stacked one on top of another. The first step drill helps you teach the stance and the first 2 steps which for our Defensive Backs are backpedal steps. The stance is a two point stance with outside foot up. The players knees are slightly bent with the chin just over the knees. The hands are at the sides right at knee level.

This is a drill you can run your entire group at once with. Remember to spread your coaches out if you have them so each coach is watching and coaching the same amount of kids and each coach knows which kids he is coaching up. First check for proper stance. With the coach at Quarterback with the ball in his hands, he brings the ball to his shoulder using a cadence. You want to run drills with cadence and condition the players to be ready to move at any point in the cadence, do mix it up some. On ball movement the player steps back on the balls of his feet and MOVES his arms, keeping his hips lowered and a slight body lean forward, freezing in place after that second step so you can see where he is at and what he needs to work on. What the defender has to avoid is standing too far upright or even leaning back, which is a very common problem. If he does that, it is very difficult to control the body to make cuts or plant a foot and move forward to make a tackle.
Once your kids are pretty consistent with their First Step Drill, move onto the Backpedal Drill. Just like the above drill you can do this together or for more intense coaching go in small groups of 4 or so. Set cones about 15 yards behind the players who are facing you at Quarterback. On ball movement using a cadence, the players backpedal to the cones at full speed and jog back.

The coaching points are lowered hips, arm movement in 90s not across the body, chin over the top of the knees, running on the balls of the feet, slight body lean forward- not leaning backwards.

**Flip Drill**

The Flip Drill is another baby step to help your Defensive Backs to cover Receivers. Using the same configuration as the Backpedal drill but with the cones set at 20 yards, the Back gets into the proper stance, executes a proper first step, uses the above proper backpedal form, but then adds in the flip. The flip allows him to get out of his slower backpedal technique to run with the Receiver once the Receiver declares his intent or breaks the 3-4 yard cushion between the Defensive Back and the Receiver.

For the first rep have everyone open up with the right foot. The signal you can use to tell the defenders to flip and run can be a fake “throw” by you at Quarterback. On the signal the Defensive Back, throws his right elbow back and to his left in order to open his hips, he then steps high with the left knee almost over exaggerating the push off with the left foot in order to accelerate to a full run in the same backwards path. Once the players see the cones in front of them, the jog or sprint back. Vary the distance you have the kids flip their hips, sometimes it’s after a 5 yard backpedal, sometimes it’s after 15.
**45 Drill**

The 45 drill is very similar to the Flip Drill and will be used to help your Defensive Back develop skills to cover the post and corner routes. Same set up but with just 3 lines of players now. With you at Quarterback, bark the cadence end move the ball to your shoulder to start the backpedal. Now aim your shoulder to one side and use the fake throwing motion.

What you are looking for is good stance, good backpedal form and when he flips his hips, he doesn’t lean back too far, his elbow whip is less aggressive since he doesn’t have to rotate his body as much and that he plants his outside foot and sprints to the 45 degree angle using good running form. Once the kids have picked the drill up pretty well, alternate which direction you are throwing so they get used to reading your shoulders. Once you feel they have really gotten the hang of it, throw the ball up and let them go up and get it, with a full sprint return with the ball to you.
Backpedal and Out Choice

This drill helps your DBs to defend the out and square in routes. The Receiver runs either an out or square in route. The DB backpedals until the Receiver declares, then the DB gathers and accelerates to the outside hip of the Receiver, staying to the back but slightly ahead of the Receiver. The DB does not look back for the ball until the Receiver puts his arms out for the catch. The DB can either make a move for the ball or club at the Receivers hands as the ball arrives.
**Flip and Flip Drill**

For older kids the Flip and Flip drill will help them defend against the post corner route. On your command they backpedal, then go to a 45 using their flip technique, then on your command they flip again. On the second flip they are going to turn their back to the line of scrimmage. Trying to change from the front simply takes too much time and is inefficient. Add in a Receiver once the kids get the hang of it and make it a 1 on 1 live drill where the player is either doing a post or a post corner route.

- **Backpedal Run Tackle Freeze Fit**

This drill will help your Defensive Backs learn how to effectively come out of their backpedal to come up in run support and make a tackle. Align 4 Defensive Backs across from 4 other player face to face. The Defensive Backs should be about 5 yards apart from each other. With you at Quarterback make sure the players in on correct stances. On the cadence get them to backpedal just like you do on the Backpedal Drill, but now make a handoff type gesture with the ball after they have backpedaled anywhere from 5 to 10 yards. When you make that movement, the Defensive Backs lower their hips, plant their back foot firmly in the ground and bring the opposite foot forward with a very small 6 inch gather type step. Then he accelerates forward and performs a form tackle freeze fit tackle on this partner. Don’t release the players from their grips until you have inspected each one for proper foot placement, shoulder level, head placement and hip drop.
**Backpedal Choice**

The diagram for this drill isn’t quite accurate. What we are doing is giving the DB a different read for each rep. On one rep give a run read with a hand off simulation. On the next rep put the ball on your shoulders turn your shoulders to aim in one direction at 45 degrees and make a throwing motion. On another rep do the same but turn your shoulders the opposite way. For the next rep use a short out throwing motion to one side or the other to simulate a quick out, arrow or even hitch. Again as always look for proper stance acceleration and technique.
**Man Read Drill**

The Defensive Back is set 5 yards from a receiver. The Receiver does one of four things, down blocks, stalk blocks, reach blocks or runs a pass pattern. If the Receiver down blocks the DB comes up hard on run support.

If the Receiver stalks blocks- recognizing that the Receiver is slowing down, lowering his hips or flailing his arms to come to a blocking type position, the DB uses his hands to make a swim move, shrug move or rips move and moves past the receiver and gains outside leverage on the line of scrimmage.

If the Receiver reach blocks, the DB comes out of his backpedal using the proper technique and run fits inside the imaginary reach block.

If the Receiver runs a pass pattern the DB uses the above techniques to cover and break up the pass thrown by the coach. On the pass patterns start with a straight fly pattern and then move to posts, corners, slants, arrows and curls. As always make sure to coach the stance, proper backpedal, flip, plant and reading techniques. The coach is in-between both groups acting as the Quarterback. The Receivers come to the coach so he can tell them what he wants them to do, reach, down, pattern or stalk block. Once the DB has done a rep he goes to the back of the line and the Receiver becomes the DB. Once he kids have gotten into a grove don’t hesitate to throw the ball up for grabs for those going out on patterns.
Read and React Drill: The DB is set 5 yards from a receiver. The receiver does one of three things, down blocks, stalk blocks or runs a pass pattern. If the receiver down blocks the DB comes up hard on run support. If the receiver stalks blocks—recognizing that the receiver is slowing down, lowering his hips or flailing his arms, the DB uses his hands to make a swim move, moves past the receiver and gains outside leverage on the line of scrimmage. If the receiver runs a pass pattern the DB uses the above techniques to cover and break up the pass thrown by the coach.

M Drill

The M Drill will help your players with their backpedal, run read, gather and pursuit at an angle. With coach at Quarterback, align 3 cones about 7 yards apart with another player facing the defense standing 7 yards from the last cone on the line of scrimmage. On Quarterback movement the DB uses his backpedal technique to backpedal until the coach gives a ball read handoff. The ball read handoff should come from between 5 and 10 yards from the starting point. The DB lowers his hips, plants, gathers and sprints at a 45 degree angle toward the cone to his outside. When he approaches the cone, he lowers his hips, touches the top of it and goes into his backpedal at full throttle looking for the next run read from the coach.

Once the first DB has started backpedaling another player gets in line and starts his backpedal once the initial DB has touched his first cone. This drill should have 3 kids working once the drill gets going. On the last run read, the DB form tackle fits the player standing where the last cone should be. To spice the drill up you could also make that last “cone” a splatter tackling drill rep.
Cannons

Defensive Backs need to learn how to catch the ball and we expect most of them would be Receivers or Backs on the offensive side of the ball and going through our base pass catching progressions. One of these drills that you can add a DB flavor to is the Cannon Contact Drill. The DB gets into his stance next to a cone at an inside angle about 20 yards from the coach. On the coaches ball movement, the player executes his backpedal and then responds to the coaches shoulder movement. The pass is delivered in-between two players holding blocking shields. The DB attempts to make the catch and hold onto it as the shield holders make contact. The DB runs the ball back to the coach and places it at his feet.

This drill works the backpedal, zone read, gather, break, receiving, concentration and ball protection all in one drill. The coaching points on the catch are elbows in, ball caught above the waist thumbs touching thumbs, pointer finger touching pointer finger to create
the window. For passes thrown below the waist, pinkies touching, thumbs out and a good seat of the ball once the catch is made.

**Confusion Catch**

This is another pass catching and concentration drill for the DBs. Set up a group of 3-4 players set up in a mini gauntlet with about 2 yards of space in-between the players. They must waive their arms and try to distract the Defensive Back who is running straight through the gauntlet looking back at the coach at Quarterback making the throw from about 15 yards away. Once the ball is caught, the DB runs through the end of the gauntlet and runs to the coach placing the ball at his feet. Coaching points for the catch include elbows in and a good window with his fingers above the waist, pinkies together below, then a good ball seat once the reception has been made.
Half Hail Mary

Later in the season you will need to mix practice up a bit to maintain interest. While you will continue to build upon your base fundamentals, you will also need to prepare your players for some less common situations like Hail Mary bombs. One of my teams lost a game that broke a 30 plus game winning streak because an opposing team hit a Hail Mary play with just 2 seconds remaining before the half. The key to defending the Hail Mary is to make sure no one gets behind you and to knock the ball to the ground. Too many times see youth football DBs go up to make the interception only to have the ball bounce roll off of them into the hands of the Receiver.

The Half Hail Mary puts the defender at the top of the route, instead of running out an entire 30 yard route. The DB goes from backpedal to flip, makes sure to keep the Receiver in front of him at all times. The coach at Quarterback throws a high ball and the DB slaps the ball in a direction away from the Receiver.
Full Hail Mary

Full Hail Mary sends 2 Receivers about 5 yard apart from each other into the same catching point with a full 30 yard pattern. The DBs are at 18 yards in full prevent mode making sure the Receivers stay in front of them. Once the ball is in the air, the DBs are coached to bat the ball straight down, or if that isn’t possible far to the side away from the nearest Receiver.
Stalk Swim Drill

The goal of this drill is to teach block destruction and evasion using the swim technique. Start with 2 rows of player standing 1 yard apart face to face. In slow motion demonstrate the base swim punch and over technique. The right hand of the defender will punch the near side ribcage with an open palm, demo and have the groups repeat that movement. The next step is to have the near arm come over the top just over the shoulder pad or if there is already separation, the near back of the Receiver. The second hand should come in quickly after the first and be used to push off of the Receiver to gain separation. Start
with the right hand, then go with the left. This is primarily and outside in movement in our defense.

**Stalk Swim Contact Drill**

This simple one on one stalk defeat drill is often times part of our offensive segments, where our Receivers are working on their stalk blocking. This gives you a chance to work on your stalk block destruction at the same time.

Have the DB line up in a Corner man alignment only 3-4 yards from the Receiver. Get into a good stance and work the backpedal until the Receiver slows down and lowers his hips to stalk. Use your gather step and accelerate towards the line of scrimmage, attack the outside rib cage with the swim move and move past the defender to the line of scrimmage.

**Stalk Keep Away Drill**

This is a live drill that the kids really love to do. Put the kids into a circle about 15 yards in circumference. With a blocker lined up over the DB, the blocker must stalk block and keep the DB from tackling the running back. The only rules are there is no blocking from behind, everything else goes, all players must stay in the circle. Count to 10 and start a new rep once you get to 10 or the ball carrier is tackled.
Crack Replace Drill

Youth football teams love to crack block. At this level more than any other, you see lots of crack blocks. Crack blocks are severe down blocks typically from wide players that are usually not seen by the intended victim. Often times these blocks since they are not seen and are done with a running start, at a good angle and from a good bit of distance are very physical and devastating blocks. They are often times very effective and are almost always used on wide plays.

There are several ways to defend against crack blocks and it involves teamwork. The first point is to be aware. The Defensive End must be sure to be aware when he has anyone aligned outside of him who is within 6 yards or so, anything wider probably isn’t going to be able to make that block. Since in our base alignment the Corner has the outside receiver, that is usually the player that is making the crack. If there is a player in the slot to the two receiver side, then the Safety is covering that player. In any event, when we are in man or zone the Defensive Backs are responsible for alerting the Defensive End of a possible crack- by just yelling out, “Watch the crack.” If the Defensive Back sees it happen in a game, they have to yell as loud as they can, “crack, crack, crack.” When the Defensive End hears crack, he immediately looks to his inside and attacks the cracker with a shoulder block of his own a and then makes a beeline for the ball-carrier. This technique is called cracking the cracker. When in man, whoever is responsible for that receiver now must replace the job of the Defensive End. The Defensive Back must now get to the deepest backs outside shoulder, set the edge and force the play back inside.
For this drill set up players about 5 yards wide of the Defensive End with hand shields. Before the play even starts make sure the Defensive Ends yell out to themselves and the invisible Defensive Backs, to look out for the crack. With the coach as Quarterback, have the Defensive Ends come upfield to get to the Quarterbacks depth while the players with shields attempt crack back blocks. Have all the remaining players yell, crack, crack crack. Hold the Defensive End accountable to getting off on ball movement, then turning his head to the outside and attacking the cracker with a shoulder block to gain separation. The Defensive End must then attack the Quarterback and execute a form fit tackle.

To wrap things up you also will need to practice the motion man crack as well. Set up a man in motion with a shield and do the same drill. This is something you MUST practice during skeleton and team to get your Defensive Backs and Defensive Ends to work together.

**Other Drills**

The DBs can also do many of the other drills described in this book. The Shrug drill or Rip Drill for block destruction, extra open field tackling drills like the one move, box or 30 yard box make sense as well.
Chapter 14

Nose Tackle Training

If you are running a traditional defense, you can probably train your Nose Tackles much like you would your Defensive Tackles, but our version of the Wide Tackle Six uses Nose Tackles a bit differently. Nose Tackles perform a very simple but vital role in this defense, they clog up the A gaps and keep the Center and often times the Guards occupied while creating a big pile in the middle. While it is a very simple job that any player of any size can do, you have to teach it and coach it just like anything else.

While the common use of the language means our Nose Tackles are bear-crawling, that really isn’t the case. They are more like frogging into the gap, then bear-crawling and creating a pile.

This is a very effective progression for teaching the Nose Tackles:

1) Bear-crawl to a cone 10 yards downfield, around it and back. The Nose Tackle must lead out of his 4 point stance almost like a frog exploding. After his initial explosive hop, he catches himself on his hands and proceeds to bear crawl on his hands with his butt low, keeping his feet underneath himself. His knees can never touch the ground. Make a relay race out of it with teams. Make sure the crawlers stay very low, off their knees and heads are up. Have the losing team do 5 pushups to make it interesting.

2) Bear-crawl in-between 2 large stand-up dummies just inches apart. Have a coach with a ball simulating a snap and two other coaches squeezing these 2 large stand-up dummies together. The Nose Tackle must explode out of his stance with his frog hop, stay low and then drive his feet to pass through. The Nose Tackle can’t come to his feet until he is all the way past the 2 large dummies.

3) Next add in a stand up dummy 3 yards back and have the crawler execute a form tackle on the stand up dummy after clearing the 2 squeezing dummies.
4) Next set up the same exact drill but have the a player stand up where the dummy was at and have the player simulate either running the ball with the ball seated or simulating throwing the ball with the ball near his shoulder. The Nose Tackle reads run and form freeze tackles the runner or he gets his hands up and yells pass if he gets a pass read. You could also make this a splatter type tackle drill if that is what you prefer.

5) Lastly go live versus two offensive linemen, the goal is to stay low, create a stalemate or pile or split the double team.

Nose Tackle training is simple but important. It can be assigned to anyone, including your most inexperienced coach. Of course you are going to include the Nose Tackles in tackling circuit drills. Remember, those players will also have a traditional position on offense and will learn blocking and tackling just like everyone else.

Later in the season you may even consider cross training some of your better non starting players as Nose Tackles and see how they do in practice and games. Some players who may have struggled with a position that requires a bit more technique may end up thriving at the Nose Tackle spot. Back in 2005 we had a pretty athletic player we thought would do well at Linebacker. However he had a tough time reading the players and
mastering some of the base block destruction techniques needed for Linebackers. He also had a tough time tackling in space. Once we moved him to Nose Tackle, he thrived. He made countless plays in the middle, disrupted Center-Quarterback exchanges and was even able to cause a number of fumbles. We paired him with a weaker player and that Nose Tackle team was our most effective group that year.

If your Nose Tackle group has some kids that are progressing well and are getting penetration, you may consider doing some more advanced progressions with them. You could just take some of the Defensive Tackle drills and modify them. This could include teaching things like slide and slide and fit.
Chapter 15
Repping the Defense

What Do I Put In?

Which of these sets, drills and stunts make sense for which age groups? This is a very good question. Some of this makes sense for certain types and ages of teams and then some of it doesn’t. It’s a bit difficult to generalize just based on age group, because certain 7-9 year old teams have 90% new kids on them and some have 100% who have played 2-3 years together.

There are also personnel issues; you won’t be able to play the Monster Defense unless you have that one player who has the body control, athleticism, speed and aggressiveness to play the entire field. Then you would need to have 2 other kids that can fill in and play Linebacker, do you have 3 kids like that in your 16 player squad? Some teams carry 35 kids and may have an odd grouping where they don’t have those 3 kids and then 2 other kids that fit at Corner as well. Every team is different and your job is to figure out how to max out the potential of the unique team that you do have.

The general rule of thumb is to not implement more until you have perfected what you have in place to begin with. The reason teams aren’t doing well on defense isn’t because they can’t stop and prepare for everything, it’s because they haven’t mastered base fundamentals and the very basic scheme.

Here are some very general rules of thumb and I realize not all teams fall within these age groups or groupings:

Age 7-9 Half or more rookie players:
Base, Claw, Razor, Goal Line, Squeeze

Age 7-9 Experienced team, less than half rookies:
The above plus: Gunner, Monster, Split, Igor

Age 10-11 One third or more rookies:
All the above plus: Prevent, Squeeze Monster,

Age 10-11 Experienced team, less than a third rookies:
All the above plus: Soft, EAT, Stack, Gunner Cross, Monster Follow, Monster Load

Age 12-13 20% or more rookie players:
All the above plus: Gunner Zebra, Gunner Cross Zebra, Echo Free

Age 12-13 Experienced team, less than 20% rookies:
All the above plus: Double Echo Free, Double Echo Free Razor, Zebra Snug, Zebra Snake, Eskimo Zebra, Mirror

Repping the Defense

Just like offense, you need to do many first step and freeze and bird dog type drills to rep the defense. The first step is the most important one for your defense. You can start by just having a ball and some cones on a line representing each of the other team’s Guards, Tackles and Ends, the ball is where the Center would be. You just call out the formation, double tight strong left, double tight strong left, trips left, trips right etc. Then take the ball and move it slightly to simulate the snap and with you as the only offensive player there at Quarterback, you run sweeps, off-tackle and drop back to pass.

At first you may have to align cones or coaches in the backfield and receiver spots so the kids recognize what trips can look like with live bodies. Once the kids grasp that concept, then there is no need for the bodies, just call out the formation and let your players align on air. If need be you could have the formations written down on 3x5 cards and huddle with dads or players, but that is such a waste of time.

When doing this type of drill, first quickly make sure every defender is lined up properly and in proper stances, and then simulate the snap of the ball. Each of your position coaches should be quickly coaching his players up during these reps. You can certainly do it with a single coach if he knows what he is doing, but it is much easier letting the position coaches coach their kids up. Have every player freeze after their first step, and then have them run it out for 3 yards. Look for your Defensive Ends coming in shallow in the 4-4, or to deepest back in the 6-2 and your Defensive Tackles simulating their swim, snug or rip moves. This is a drill we will sub 11 in and out on every snap to work on conditioning and subbing. You should be running a full rep every 12-15 seconds.
Double Tight Strong Left or Twins Left
Trips Left

Stunt Drills

Stunts are to the Defense as plays are to the offense. When you run stunts you are running defensive plays. If you plan on running any stunts, they have to be practiced during defensive skeleton drills with the Defensive Ends Linebackers and Defensive Backs in place. They also need to be practiced in team as well. Razor, Gunner, Echo, Monster, Split, Eskimo, Zebra are all practiced and perfected during this practice segment. You run your stunts and blitzes on air just like you run your offensive plays on air when you are practicing team offense. Think of your stunts and blitzes as your defensive plays.
All you need for most of these reps is a coach with a ball and 7 cones. These stunts need to be perfected just like you perfect your base plays on offense. Your players need to be trained to the point when they hear EAT Robbie, they recognize it, make the slight alignment change and execute it on ball movement. These group reps should be done at the pace of 1 rep every 12 seconds. This would include subbing in a new defensive group in on each rep. If you have the manpower and want to work technique you can always add in coaches, dads or players in with hand shields. If you feel the need to go live for a bit make sure you keep it very short, no longer than 5-10 minutes.

When you first start doing this practice segment, you will need to set up bodies outside of the 5 cones you designate as Center, Guard and Tackle on offense. But once the kids connect the formation to the call. You can then move on to just making the formation call and the stunt or coverage call and have your players use their imagination to remember about where those offensive players were aligned. When you are in base and you call trips, the Corner should quickly widen, the Safety align in the slot and the Linebacker move to the inside “imaginary” receiver. Meanwhile, your best Linebacker aligns over the middle and the Defensive Tackle to the trips side is cheating in a little anticipating his crash assignment.

On ball movement, the entire defense responds to you at Quarterback with the football. The Defensive Backs are slow stepping their 3 backpedal steps, the Linebackers are in their stance either read stepping, slide stepping or dropping into pass coverage based on your movement. The Defensive Tackles are aligned on the outside shoulder of the simulated Offensive Tackle (cone) and use an imaginary shrug, swim or rip move and get to the imaginary heels of that Offensive Tackle and then get into a slide step mode. The Nose Tackles frog out and are on all fours into the backfield. Everyone yells pass on a pass read or makes the form fit tackle on you on the run read. The play ends on the whistle.

**Sub Repping**

You are going to sub on defense, so it is something that must be practiced. One of the most embarrassing penalties a coach can have is to be called for illegal participation, a 15 yard penalty for having too many players on the field. In youth football it happens a lot to the poorly coached teams, they will have too many on the field at a critical time in the game and get flagged all the while the parents are up in the stands tossing insults at the coaching staff. We all have knucklehead kids, no one is immune to the variances in players ability to focus and process information. But know this if you have too many or too few players on the field, it’s a COACHING ISSUE. You can minimize the chances of this happening by having a solid subbing process and practice it.

One way that works very well is, any player that subs in must run full speed to the position he is subbing for all the while yelling the name of the player he is going in for. The player he is going in for patiently waits in his position until the subbing player slaps him on the hand. Then the subbing out player sprints to the sidelines. It’s almost like a relay race, the subbed out kid is in his starting blocks getting ready to come off the field.
If you sub in this fashion, you never end up with too many or too few out on the field. In order for it to work the kids must sprint and yell. If a player is not sprinting and yelling he gets called back by the coach and he doesn’t get to go in for that play. If a player subbing out doesn’t sprint off the field, he doesn’t get to go back in. This is a discipline and effort thing that anyone can choose to do or not do, it doesn’t require any special athleticism. I prefer doing it this way to make sure a sub is going in for the right player and then he is going to align in the right position, since the defense is aligned on the field in their positions at all times, we don’t huddle.

A good way to practice this and get some good conditioning in is to sub 11 in and 11 out on every Defensive Recognition or plays on air reps in practice. Call out your formation, simulate the snap, have the players line up again and then yell “rotate.” A new group of 11 players comes in again, sprinting in yelling the name of the player they are going in for and slapping his hand not halfway- but in the position the player is supposed to be at. Yes it will look like a Chinese fire drill when you start doing it, but you will get great at subbing in and out, all the while running 20 yard sprints and getting some hidden conditioning in along the way.

Always start with your first team defense and then figure out what your subbing patterns are going to be. If you have 6 Nose Tackles, tell them what their rotation is going to be or let them figure it out and plan for it themselves, after you have done it a few times in earlier practices.
Correct:
Jimmy, Jimmy, Jimmy, Jimmy

Not Correct

Scout Offense

Once your players have that down, add in a “scout offense” and have the scout offense line up in various offenses. Just have the scout offense stand in place and have your defense recognize the call and take their first 3 steps on the snap of the ball. This can be done with an entire offense in place, but that makes it difficult to get lots of reps for everyone on defense. Also when you run a full scout offense of your left-overs against your first team defense, what kind of look are you going to give the defense? A very poor one that will consistently take 2-3 minutes to run a single play.
If you run a scout offense with coaches and or dads at the backfield spots with cones for linemen and maybe a player or dad at Tight End or Receiver you are going to give your defense a much better look than against your scrubs. Using 3X5 cards of your opponent’s offense or generic offenses for that matter you and your coaches should be able to get off 2-3 plays per minute including huddling if you hustle. All plays are run fit and freeze tackling with everyone penetrating to their designed depth and the Defensive Tackles and Nose Tackles only tapping 2 hands to the waist.

This is a good time to have your defensive coordinator call his stunts and blitzes. It’s good practice for both him and the defense. Make sure not to put in any new stunt or blitz in until the previous one has been mastered. Most of your reps as you add the blitzes and stunts, should be 3-4 steps and stop. Make sure every time your defense lines up against an offense that every defender lines up properly in the right spot and the perfect stance.

Twins Left, Gunner Right
Chapter 16

Practice Schedule

Youth football teams practice in so many different formats. Very few of us have the exact same rules or philosophies when it comes to the amount of time we practice, when we start or how much time gets allocated to defense. I’ve coached in leagues where there were no rules or guidelines. Teams we played against started their conditioning in May and would be in pads by the weekend after July 4th for a Labor Day first game date and they would practice 6 days a week. I’ve been in leagues that required everyone to start practice on August 1st for an August 30th first game and had rules that you couldn’t practice more than 4 days a week. I’ve also been in a season where the league had a rule of no more than 3 practices a week, a hard start date for everyone and had just 12 practices prior to the first game. The net is, we all live under different circumstances, but there is also a lot of common ground.

Almost all of us have a finite amount of time we can devote to practice. Even if we didn’t, does it really make sense to practice 5 nights a week when if you use the priorities and methods in the base book when it comes to practice organization and methodology, you can get more done in 2-3 nights a week than most coaches get done in 5 or 6? Please don’t give me that “we play in a tough league” mantra. My good friend Joe Cianflone, the AYF Coach of the year in 2010 and AYF Midget (7-8th grade) National Champion only practices 3 nights a week, then 2 once the season starts. He has won 6 National Championships coaching in 3 different states. My own teams have gone 139-20 and have never lost a tournament or out of state game in 16 seasons and we only practice 3 nights a week until game 1, then we go 2 nights a week. If you practice with proper priorities, a well thought out and set plan, coach on the run and have a sense of urgency it can be done.

If you run tight, fun practices where the parents and kids see the players and team making progress, you should have full attendance at all practices. Again look to the book “Winning Youth Football a Step-by-Step Plan” and the Practice Organization DVD for more information on how to make that a reality. In year 1 of using this approach I had 32 of 36 players have perfect practice and game attendance. That was an age 8-10 inner-city team where we often times had just 2-5 parents at games. My 2011 season I had 22 of 25 kids with perfect attendance and I now coach in a rural/suburban area and that was age 10-11. The reason I’m sharing this information is, if you have everyone at every practice, like you should, you can have full defensive days. I feel this is a more efficient use of time rather than practicing both offense, defense and special teams at every practice. Those coaches who don’t get their kids to practice, don’t have a choice, they had to use that approach. Those of us with “buy in” running great practices can have defensive days, which allow you to get more done, progressing from one progression to the next.
The following is a sample defensive practice plan for an entire 14 week season, using a 3
day a week, then 2 day a week plan after the first game. Remember this is just a base
template. The master practice plans are in the “Winning Youth Football” book. Adjust
the schedule based on the age group and maturity of your team. Also adjust it based on
how well your kids have mastered the prior building blocks. If you are losing games 36-35,
you don’t need to put in more stunts, blitzes and adjustments, you need to master the
fundamentals and base defense. Work on areas you are doing poorly in, if you aligning
really well and tackling poorly adjust the practice plan accordingly. Note that not all of
the scheme and stunts are included, you will need to add in if you choose to implement
schemes and stunts that aren’t in the base practice plan. Don’t feel like you have to put
everything in, do what makes sense for your team and your situation. Water your players
as needed and adjust the practice plan accordingly.

**Week 1- Assuming No Pads**

**Practice 1**
Dynamic Warm Up 15 minutes  
Snug Drill 15 minutes  
Baby Step Drill 10  
Angle Form Tackling 10  
Water 5- Tackling with the head.  
Evaluating Players:  
Deer Hunter 20  
Sumo 15  
Water 5  
Dummy Relay Races 15  
Towel Game 10

**Practice 3- Defense Gets Half of Practice Time**
Dynamic Warm Up 10  
Baby Step Drill 5  
Angle Form Tackling 10  
Water-5 Base Alignment  
Evaluating Players:  
Hawaiian Rules Football 20  
Dummy Tackling Race  10

**Week 2- First Week in Pads**

**Practice 1**
Dynamic Warm Up 10  
Angle Form Tackling 5  
**Nose Tackles:**
Bear-crawl Race 15
Squeeze Drill 15
Squeeze Form Fit 15
**Defensive Tackles:**
Get Offs 10
Get Skinny 10
Get Skinny Fit 10
Get Off Slide 15
**Defensive Ends:**
Alignment and Stance 10
Depth Sweep 20
Depth Off Tackle 15
**Linebackers:**
First Step 5
Slide 10
Slide and Fit 10
Slide Fit Choice 5
Linebacker Run 7
Linebacker Run Fit 7
**Defensive Backs:**
First Step 5
Base Backpedal 10
Flip 10
45s 10
Backpedal Run Tackle Freeze 10
**Team:**
Water- 5 Base Alignment- Double Tight
Baby Step Drill 10
Splatter Tackling 15
Close Quarters Tackling 10
Gang Tackle Dummy 10
Base Alignment- Double Tight Wing Right/Left, Full House 10

**Practice 3- 40 Minutes**

**Nose Tackles:**
Bear-crawl Race 5
Squeeze Drill 5
2 on 3 live 5
**Defensive Tackles:**
Get Offs 5
Get Off Slide 5
Get Off Slide Fit 5
**Defensive Ends:**
Depth Sweep 5
Depth Off-Tackle 5
Depth Choice 5

**Linebackers:**
Slide and Fit 5
Linebacker Run Fit 5
Slide Run Slide 5
Mirror Run Slide 5

**Defensive Backs:**
Base Backpedal 5
45s 5
M Drill 5

**Team:**
Tackling Circuit 10
Team Pursuit 5
Base Alignment- Double Tight Wing Right/Left, Full House, Twins Left/Right, Crash 10

**Week 3**

**Practice 1**
Dynamic Warm Up 10
Angle Form Tackling 5

**Nose Tackles:**
Squeeze Drill 15
Squeeze Drill- Form Tackle Fit 15
2 on 3 live 15

**Defensive Tackles:**
Get Offs 5
Punch 15
Shrug 15
Shrug Fit 10

**Defensive Ends:**
Depth Choice 15
Shrug 15
Depth Lead Block 15

**Linebackers:**
Mirror Run Slide Fit 10
Slide Fit Choice 10
Tight Mirror 5
Slam 10
Hand Shiver 10

**Defensive Backs:**
Base Backpedal 5
Flip 5
45s 5
Backpedal Out Choice 10
Backpedal Choice 10
Stalk Swim 10

**Team:**
- Tackling Circuit 10
- Safe Fumble Recovery 5
- Circle The Wagons Tackling 10
- Tug 10
- Base Alignment 10- Double Tight Wing Right/Left, Full House, Twins Left/Right, Trips Left/Right, Razor
- Scout- 15 With Coaches- Dive, Power, Sweep, Counter, Bootleg

**Practice 3**

**Nose Tackles:**
- Frog Jumps 5
- Squeeze Drill- Splatter Tackle 5
- Live 2 on 3- 5

**Defensive Tackles:**
- Punch-5
- Shrug Fit- Live 5
- Shrug Slide 5

**Defensive Ends:**
- Depth Choice 5
- Shrug 5
- Depth Lead Block 5

**Linebackers:**
- Pass Drop 5
- Hand Shiver 5
- All Read 5

**Defensive Backs:**
- Backpedal 5
- Stalk Swim Contact 5
- Stalk Keep Away 5

**Team:**
- 3 Level Oklahoma 10
- Scout With Coaches- 15-Dive, Power, Sweep, Counter, Bootleg, Drop Back Pass, Hard Count

**Week 4**

**Practice 1**

Dynamic Warm Up and Angle Form Tackling 10

**Nose Tackles:**
- Frog Jumps 10
- Squeeze Drill- Read 15
- Close Quarters Tackling 20
Defensive Tackles:
Get Offs 5
Shrug Slide 15
Shrug Slide Fit 10
Swim 15
Defensive Ends:
Depth Choice 10
Pass Rush 10
Crack Replace 10
Reach 15
Linebackers:
Tight Shrug 10
Spacing Shrug Fit 10
Mirror Run Slide Fit 10
Oklahoma 15
Defensive Backs:
Backpedal 5
Flip 5
45s 5
Man Read 15
Skeleton Pursuit 10
Crack Replace 5
Team:
Team Pursuit 10
Tackling Circuit 15
3 Level Oklahoma 10
Defensive Recognition- 10 Base Alignment- Double Tight Wing Right/Left, Full House,
Twins Left/Right, Trips Left/Right, Motion, Unbalanced, Double Twins, Razor, Gunner,
Heavy
Scout With Coaches- Live on Line- 15-Dive, Power, Sweep, Counter, Bootleg, Drop
Back Pass, Hard Count

Practice 3

Nose Tackles:
Squeeze Form Fit 5
Live 2 on 3-5
Close Quarters Tackling 5
Defensive Tackles:
Shrug Slide Fit Live 5
Swim Fit 5
Swim Fit Live 5
Defensive Ends:
Reach 5
Crack Replace 5
Pass 5

**Linebackers:**
- Slide Run Slide 5
- Tight Mirror and Go 5
- Blitz 5

**Defensive Backs:**
- Backpedal 5
- Backpedal Run Tackle Freeze 5
- Backpedal Out Choice 5

**Team:**
- Tackling Circuit 10
- Compete - 15

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**Week 5 - Assuming 2 Practices Per Week - 120 Minute Practices - 20 minutes set aside for Special Teams**

**Practice 1**
- Dynamic Warm Up and Angle Form Tackling 10
- Nose Tackles:
  - Frog Jumps 5
  - Slide 10
  - Squeeze and Slide 10
  - Live 2 on 3 - 10

**Defensive Tackles:**
- Get Offs 5
- Punch 10
- Double Teams 10
- Shrug and Fit 10

**Defensive Ends:**
- Depth Choice 10
- Shrug 10
- Depth Lead Block 15

**Linebackers:**
- Mirror Run Slide Fit 10
- Slide Fit Choice 10
- Slam 10
- All Read 5

**Defensive Backs:**
- Backpedal 5
- M Drill 10
- Man Reads 5
- Stalk Swim Contact 10
- Skeleton Pursuit 5

**Team:**
- Tackling Circuit 15
Defensive Recognition- 10 Base Alignment- Double Tight Wing Right/Left, Full House, Twins Left/Right, Trips Left/Right, Motion, Unbalanced, Double Twins, Razor, Gunner, Gunner Cross, Heavy, Goal Line Heavy, Prevent, Split
Scout With Coaches- 15 Dive, Power, Sweep, Counter, Bootleg, Drop Back Pass, Hard Count, Cross Buck, Hitch, Slant, Go, Option
Compete-10

Week 6

Practice 1

Dynamic Warm Up and Angle Form Tackling 10

Nose Tackles:
Frog Jumps 5
Bear-crawl Race 10
Squeeze Form Tackle Fit 10
Close Quarters Tackling 10

Defensive Tackles:
Get Offs 5
Shrug Slide Fit Live 10
Traps 10
Swim 10

Defensive Ends:
Depth Choice 10
Reach 15
Soft 10

Linebackers:
Slide 5
Tight Mirror and Go 10
Hand Shiver and Rip 10
Angle Form Fit Bag 5
All Read 5

Defensive Backs:
Backpedal 5
Second Man In 10
Backpedal Out Choice 10
Backpedal Choice 10

Team:
Gang Tackle Dummy 10
3 Level Oklahoma- 10
Defensive Recognition 15 Base Alignment- Double Tight Wing Right/Left, Full House, Twins Left/Right, Trips Left/Right, Motion, Unbalanced, Double Twins, Razor, Gunner, Gunner Cross, Heavy, Goal Line Heavy, Monster, Split, Squeeze
Scout with Coaches- Live On Line 10 Dive, Power, Sweep, Counter, Bootleg, Drop Back Pass, Hard Count, Cross Buck, Hitch, Slant, Go, Wheel, Option
Compete 10
Week 7

Practice 1
Dynamic Warm Up and Angle Form Tackling 10

Nose Tackles:
Squeeze Splatter Tackling 10
Squeeze Read 10
Live 2 on 3 10

Defensive Tackles:
Punch 7
Swim Fit 7
Get Skinny 8
Shrug Fit Live 8

Defensive Ends:
Depth Choice 10
Slide 10
Slide Fit 10
Pass 5

Linebackers:
Tight Mirror and Go 5
Slide and Fit 5
Spacing Shrug 10
Blitz 5
Oklahoma 10

Defensive Backs:
Backpedal 5
Flip 5
45s 5
Backpedal Run Tackle Freeze 10
Stalk Keep Away 10

Team:
Tackle Circuit 15
Defensive Recognition 10-Base Alignment- Double Tight Wing Right/Left, Full House, Twins Left/Right, Trips Left/Right, Motion, Unbalanced, Double Twins, Razor, Gunner, Gunner Cross, Heavy, Goal Line Heavy, Monster, Split, Igor, Squeeze, Stack
Scout with Coaches- 25 Live On Line Dive, Power, Sweep, Counter, Bootleg, Drop Back Pass, Hard Count, Cross Buck, Hitch, Slant, Go, Wheel, Trap, Smash, Option

Week 8

Practice 1
Dynamic Warm Up and Angle Form Tackling 10

Nose Tackles:
Bear-crawl Races 10
Squeeze Slide Fit 10
Close Quarters Tackling 10

**Defensive Tackles:**
Get Offs 5
Rip 10
Rip Fits 10
Screens 5

**Defensive Ends:**
Depth Choice 10
Shrug 10
Shrug and Tackle Freeze Fit 15

**Linebackers:**
Slide Fit Choice 5
Linebacker Run 10
Slam 5
Hand Shiver 10

**Defensive Backs:**
Backpedal 5
Man Read 10
Shrug Fit 10
Cannons 5

**Team:**
Tackling Circuit 10
Defensive Recognition- 15 Base Alignment- Double Tight Wing Right/Left, Full House, Twins Left/Right, Trips Left/Right, Motion, Unbalanced, Double Twins, Razor, Gunner, Gunner Cross, Heavy, Goal Line Heavy, Monster, Split, Igor, Soft, Squeeze, Stack
Scout with Coaches- 25 Live On Line Dive, Power, Sweep, Counter, Bootleg, Drop
Back Pass, Hard Count, Cross Buck, Hitch, Slant, Go, Wheel, Trap, Smash, Jet Sweep, Option

**Week 9**

**Practice 1**

Dynamic Warm Up and Angle Form Tackling 10

**Nose Tackles:**
Squeeze Splatter 10
Live 2 on 3 10
Close Quarters Tackling 10

**Defensive Tackles:**
Get Offs 5
Get Offs Slide Fit 5
Get Offs Slide Fit Live 10
Shrug 10

**Defensive Ends:**
Depth Choice 10
Depth Lead Block 10
One Move Tackle Drill 15

**Linebackers:**
- Linebacker Run Fit 5
- Slide Lateral Fit 5
- Tight Shrug 10
- Spacing Shrug 10

**Defensive Backs:**
- Backpedal 5
- M Drill 5
- Stalk Swim Contact 10
- Backpedal Choice 10

**Team:**
- Tackling Circuit 10
- Tug 10
- Defensive Recognition- 15 Base Alignment- Double Tight Wing Right/Left, Full House, Twins Left/Right, Trips Left/Right, Motion, Unbalanced, Double Twins, Razor, Gunner, Gunner Cross, Heavy, Goal Line Heavy, Monster, Split, Igor, Soft, Eskimo, Monster Follow, Squeeze, Stack, Squeeze Monster

**Week 10**

**Practice 1**

Dynamic Warm Up and Angle Form Tackling 10

**Nose Tackles:**
- Squeeze Form Fit
- Splatter Tackling
- Close Quarters Tackling

**Defensive Tackles:**
- Punch
- Shrug
- Shrug Slide Fits
- Shrug Slide Live

**Defensive Ends:**
- Depth Choice 10
- Shrug Slide Fit 10
- Crack Replace 10

**Linebackers:**
- Tight Mirror
- Hand Shiver and Rip
- Slide and Lift
- Angle Form Fit Bag
- Hand Shiver and Rip
Pass Read
Blitz

**Defensive Backs:**
Backpedal
Skeleton Pursuit
Skeleton- Slant/Arrow, Hitch, Go, Smash,
Crack Replace
Full Hail Mary

**Team:**
Tackling Circuit 10
Tackling Dummy Race 10
Defensive Recognition 10- Base Alignment- Double Tight Wing Right/Left, Full House,
Twins Left/Right, Trips Left/Right, Motion, Unbalanced, Double Twins, Razor, Gunner,
Gunner Cross, Heavy, Goal Line Heavy, Monster, Split, Igor, Soft, Eskimo, Monster
Follow, Squeeze, Stack, Squeeze Monster, EAT, Monster Load
Scout with Coaches- 10 Live On Line  Dive, Power, Sweep, Counter, Bootleg, Drop
Back Pass, Hard Count, Cross Buck, Hitch, Slant, Go, Wheel, Trap, Smash, Jet Sweep,
Where’s the Ball?, Option

**Week 11**

**Practice 1**

Dynamic Warm Up and Angle Form Tackling 10

**Nose Tackles:**
Frog Jumps 10
Squeeze Slide Fit 10
2 on 3 live with back 10

**Defensive Tackles:**
Get Offs 5
Swim 5
Swim Slide Fit 10
Swim Slide Fit Live 10

**Defensive Ends:**
Depth Choice 10
Depth Lead Block 10
3 Slot Challenge Tackling 10

**Linebackers:**
Slide Run Slide 5
Mirror Run Slide Fit 10
Tight Shrug 5
All Read 10

**Defensive Backs:**
Backpedal 5
Man Read 10
Shrug 10
Flip and Flip 5

Team:
Gang Tackle Dummy Drill 10
Second Man In 10
Defensive Recognition-15 Base Alignment- Double Tight Wing Right/Left, Full House, Twins Left/Right, Trips Left/Right, Motion, Unbalanced, Double Twins, Razor, Gunner, Gunner Cross, Heavy, Goal Line Heavy, Monster, Split, Igor, Soft, Eskimo, Monster Follow, Squeeze, Stack, Squeeze Monster, EAT, Monster Load, Gunner Zebra

Week 12

Practice 1

Dynamic Warm Up and Angle Form Tackling 10

Nose Tackles:
Bear-crawling Race 10
Squeeze Read 10
Close Quarters Tackling 10

Defensive Tackles:
Punch 5
Rip 10
Rip Slide Fit 5
Rip Slide Fit Live 10

Defensive Ends:
Depth Choice Drill 10
Shrug Tackle Fit 10
Pass 10

Linebackers:
Slide Fit Choice 5
Slam 5
Angle Form Fit Bag 5
Side Lateral Fit 10
Oklahoma 5

Defensive Backs:
Backpedal 5
45s 5
Backpedal Out Choice 10
Rip 10

Team:
3 Level Oklahoma 10
Tug 10
Defensive Recognition- 15 Base Alignment- Double Tight Wing Right/Left, Full House, Twins Left/Right, Trips Left/Right, Motion, Unbalanced, Double Twins, Razor, Gunner,
Week 13

Practice 1

Dynamic Warm Up and Angle Form Tackling 10

**Nose Tackles:**
Squeeze Slide Fit 10
3 Slot Challenge Tackling 10
Cross Train 10

**Defensive Ends:**
Depth Choice Drill 10
Oklahoma 10
Soft 10

**Defensive Tackles:**
Get Offs 5
Get Skinny 5
Get Skinny Fit 5
Get Skinny Slide Fit 5
Get Skinny Slide Fit Live 10

**Linebackers:**
Mirror Run Slide Fit 5
Hand Shiver 5
Hand Shiver and Rip 10
Oklahoma 10

**Defensive Backs:**
Backpedal 5
Backpedal Run Tackle Freeze 10
Stalk Swim Contact 10
Skeleton Pursuit 5

**Team:**
Defensive Recognition- 15 Base Alignment- Double Tight Wing Right/Left, Full House, Twins Left/Right, Trips Left/Right, Motion, Unbalanced, Double Twins, Razor, Gunner, Gunner Cross, Heavy, Goal Line Heavy, Monster, Split, Igor, Soft, Eskimo, Monster Follow, Squeeze, Stack, Squeeze Monster, EAT, Monster Load, Gunner Zebra, Echo-Free, Double Echo Free. Mirror
Compete 10

**Week 14**

**Practice 1**

Dynamic Warm Up and Angle Form Tackling 10

**Nose Tackles:**
2 on 3 live 10
Cross Train 20

**Defensive Tackles:**
Get Offs 5
Punch 5
Shrug Slide Fit 10
Rip Slide Fit 10

**Defensive Ends:**
Depth Choice 10
Reach 10
Crack Replace 10

**Linebackers:**
Slide Run Slide 5
Tight Mirror and Go 5
Side Lateral Fit 5
Slam 5
All Read 5
Blitz 5

**Defensive Backs:**
Backpedal 5
Backpedal Choice 10
Man Read 10
Skeleton 5

**Team:**
3 Level Oklahoma 10
Defensive Recognition 10 Base Alignment- Double Tight Wing Right/Left, Full House, Twins Left/Right, Trips Left/Right, Motion, Unbalanced, Double Twins, Razor, Gunner, Gunner Cross, Heavy, Goal Line Heavy, Monster, Split, Igor, Soft, Eskimo, Monster Follow, Squeeze, Stack, Squeeze Monster, EAT, Monster Load, Gunner Zebra, Echo-Free, Double Echo Free. Mirror, Double Echo Free Razor, Gunner Zebra Cross
Scout with Coaches- 20 Live On Line Dive, Power, Sweep, Counter, Bootleg, Drop Back Pass, Hard Count, Cross Buck, Hitch, Slant, Go, Wheel, Trap, Smash, Buck Sweep, Option
Chapter 17

Scouting

What is an efficient way to scout? I don’t scout every opponent; we play in a league with about 40 teams per age grouping. While we know which teams we will play on our regular season schedule, I’m not going to spend every Sunday scouting games when I have an entire Organization to manage. What I will do is look at the standings and scores and look for teams that are doing extremely well and scout them.

While it is always good to make friends in your league and gather information on upcoming games from your friends and teams you’ve already played, scouting information from others is notoriously inaccurate because most guys simply don’t know how to scout.

The easiest and best way is to get film from a friend, have a parent film the game or film it yourself. Make sure the angle is wide enough and you shoot as the teams come out of the huddle. If you can’t film the games due to league rules or lack of camera just come with a notebook with pre-drawn formations on it like this:

![Diagram of formations]

You just add the players in to get the formations and plays. If you aren’t quick enough to do that, just have something like this in place:

- Counter Left
- Counter Right
- Dive Right - 1, 4, 5, 6, 8
- Dive Left: 5, 6, 7, 8, 4, 9
- Hard Count
- Off Tackle Right
- Off Tackle Left
- Reverse Left
- Reverse Right
- Sweep Right
- Sweep Left
Then draw up the base formations they ran out of and any odd plays or one trick ponies and you should have about 80% of what you need. If you did get film draw up every single play they ran in that game and on that 3x5 card, write down how much yardage they got on that play. Some of the cards are going to have 5-6 yardage notes and some only 1. So in the above example, you would also do a card for every play they ran out of whatever formation the play was run out of and again with the yardage they got on each play in the upper right corner. This will help you understand which plays are their go-to plays and which ones you will need to spend the greatest amount of practice time on.

**Plays and Formations to Prepare Against**

That first game you obviously will probably not have a scouting report or you may not want to invest the time in scouting, so what do you prepare for? It depends on the age grouping and your league. This is a general rule of thumb and again this isn’t a perfect list for every age group or area, but it’s a start:

**Age 7-9:**

I Formation Double Tight Wing, Power I, Split and Slot: Dive, Power Off-tackle, Sweep, Wing Counter, Cross Buck, Play Action to Tight End, Bootleg

Wishbone or Straight T, Double Tight and Split: Dive, Power Off-tackle, Sweep, HB Counter, Cross Buck, Play Action to Tight End, Bootleg

Spread- Double Slot: Dive, Sweep, Jet Sweep, Hitch, Bubble Screen, Slants

**Age 10-11:**

I Formation Double Tight Wing, Power I, Split and Slot. Trips: Dive, Power Off-tackle, Sweep, Wing Counter, Cross Buck, Play Action to Tight End, Bootleg, Bootleg Pass, Power Pass, Tight End Dump, FB Trap. Speed Option

Wishbone or Straight T, Double Tight and Split: Dive, Power Off-tackle, Sweep, HB Counter, Cross Buck, Play Action to Tight End, Bootleg, Bootleg, Bootleg Pass, Power, FB Trap, Tight End Dump, Speed Option

Spread- Double Slot: Dive, Sweep, Jet Sweep, Hitch, Bubble Screen, Slants, Crossing Patterns, Smash, Power

Wing T- Dive, Power Off-tackle, Sweep, Wing Counter, Cross Buck, Play Action to Tight End, Bootleg, Bootleg Pass, Power Pass, Tight End Dump, FB Trap. Buck Sweep, Speed Option
Age 12-13

I Formation Double Tight Wing, Power I, Split and Slot. Trips: Dive, Power Off-tackle, Sweep, Wing Counter, Cross Buck, Play Action to Tight End, Bootleg, Bootleg Pass, Power Pass, Tight End Dump, FB Trap, Speed Option, Double Option, HB Pass

Wishbone or Straight T, Double Tight and Split: Dive, Power Off-tackle, Sweep, HB Counter, Cross Buck, Play Action to Tight End, Bootleg, Bootleg, Bootleg Pass, Power, FB Trap, Tight End Dump, Speed Option

Spread- Double Slot: Dive, Sweep, Jet Sweep, Hitch, Bubble Screen, Slants, Slant Wheel, Crossing Patterns, Smash, Shallow, All Curl, Power, Trap

Wing T- Dive, Power Off-tackle, Sweep, Wing Counter, Cross Buck, Play Action to Tight End, Bootleg, Bootleg Pass, Power Pass, Tight End Dump, FB Trap. Buck Sweep, Belly, Speed Option, Option Pass, HB Pass

Going Live

The last step is to add some near live play action to the mix. Have a coach play Quarterback and coaches at the running back spots to get the most reps in the shortest amount of time. Having a kid playing Quarterback with a new set of formations and plays he is not proficient with, is a recipe for wasting a lot of time and giving your defense poor looks. Just think about it, how good a look is a second or third team player going to give when he is running an offense he has very little clue or training on? Just think of how many quality reps you can actually get in with backups running the offense, going to the huddle, showing the play card, explaining the play, coming out of the huddle and then hopefully executing a reasonably close play to what the opponent is running. Remember your backups are backups because they can’t run your offense very well, are the magically going to be able to run the other team’s foreign offense well?

You just can’t get very many quality reps with your backup kids, not to mention how slow the progress is. Most youth teams get off 1 play every 2 ½ to 3 minutes using backups as scouts. By having coaches at the Quarterback and backfield positions, you can get off a snap every 35-40 seconds if you hustle in and out of the huddle quickly. Rep the sweep, off tackle power, reverse, dive, bootleg, play action pass and drop back pass. Use the base “I” and“Pro” set formations you usually see or others common to your area. Have the defensive players’ just wrap up the backs, not taking them to the ground and go 50-75% effort on the line. Alternatively, you can also go no contact at all, just fit and freeze 100%, no contact. After the first 2 weeks in pads, we live scrimmage with 100% effort on both sides of the ball just 20-30 minutes per week. Many weeks late in the season we do won’t scrimmage at all.
Make sure your coaches running the scout offense, look for specific keys and coach up specific positions as they run their positions. For the quarterback, he needs to always boot backside on any off-tackle, dive or sweep play and check to make sure the backside Defensive end is following him to deepest back making sure he doesn’t have the football. The Quarterback would also be checking to make sure the backside Corner was backing up 3 steps and spying the Quarterback to make sure he wasn’t running a bootleg/reverse via the “slow play” technique.

The coach playing Fullback when he is say kicking out the playside Defensive End on an off-tackle play would be coaching up the playside Defensive End by making sure he was maintaining outside leverage with his hands while not getting too deep and then coming off the block once the back has crossed his face and made a commitment to run inside the kick-out. The Running Back would be coaching up the foot, shoulder and head placement of those fitting on the tackle. Meanwhile the defensive coordinator is making his base calls and doing quality assurance on the base alignment, initial reads and run fits.

If the offense you are facing uses a unique approach, blocking scheme or technique on the offensive line, by all means rep it in defensive line group as well as live.

The “Compete Drill”

One of the many things youth football coaches have a problem with is having their team ready to play on game day. Many coaches tell me they see their kids coming to games lethargic and not ready to play. I’ve even seen some of my own teams in very early morning games maybe being less sharp than normal. This can cost your team, you can get down early, have a few breaks go against you and before your team finally wakes up out of its funk, the game can be out of reach.

The key is to be able to train your kids to be in “game mode” at the drop of a hat, hence the “compete” drill. At any point practice, blow your whistle and yell, “compete.” The team runs full speed to the 10-yard line (or designated area) and goes full speed, full contact for 10 minutes, with everyone yelling and whooping it up the entire time. On defensive days, that means your scout offense against the first team defense, or better yet the next age group ups second team offense versus the younger teams first team defense. Always remember to keep the matchups reasonable and safe. The kids always know where to line up on offense and defense when we yell compete, they sprint to the predestinated area and we get after it. We no-huddle with wristbands and go all out for those 10 minutes.

If you use those scrimmage caps that fit over the top of the helmet rather than scrimmage vests, you can get set up in less than a minute. When “compete” is yelled, everyone, players coaches etc run full blast to the designated area. For an added twist when you are running your first team offense against the remaining players, put all the remaining players on defense. If you have 25 kids, that would mean you can put 14 kids on defense. Just think how much better that makes the matchup.
The key is to run this drill when the kids least expect it. In the middle of individual instruction, in the middle of a water break, in the middle of our first little talk at the end of warm-up and even after they thought practice was over. We never tell them when or even if we are going to run the “compete” drill. What seems to help is to be able to get the kids mentally conditioned to compete at a moments notice, anytime, anywhere.
Chapter 18

Game Planning

Game planning on the defensive side of the ball includes depth chart planning, coaching duty breakdown, sub planning, adjustment planning and scheme preparation.

Coaching Duties

Going into the season in order to have an effective game day, you have to divide the game day duties amongst your coaching staff. One that has worked well for us is:

Defensive Coordinator- Calls out the defense, stunts. He also calls out the offense, twins, trips, double tight strong right etc Puts together the defensive game plan and has final say with the head coaches blessing on personnel and subbing patterns. It’s always a good idea to get input from all of your assistants before making those final decisions.

Nose Tackle Coach- Subbing Nose Tackles- quality control, can do “counts” if you are using that approach.

Defensive Tackles Coach- Defensive Tackles subbing, quality control, “crash” call reminders, offensive line- unbalanced- shift calls. He is the one that counts and makes the call if the offense is unbalanced. He can also do the counts if you plan on using that approach.

Linebackers Coach- Linebacker Quality Control, also usually the Defensive Coordinator-Formation Calls, Defense and Stunt Calls.

Defensive Back Coach- Defensive Backs subbing and Quality Control

Substitution Patterns

In every game you will need to have a subbing plan, no matter if you have a minimum play standard or not. Start with a depth chart, that shows realistically who goes in for who if you have an injury and who goes in for who in order to get players plays. For the real depth chart you may have you best sub listed as the backup at several positions highlighted in red. You can highlight in green the players who are going to sub in as part of the game plan. Put fractions next to each player representing how much of the game that player is going to play assuming it is a close game. Obviously that all changes once you have the game in hand, but the fractions will give your assistant coaches the information they need to make their substitutions.

In order to maximize the number of plays your backups get without seriously jeopardizing your teams ability to make stops on defense, be strategic. Let’s say it’s first and ten, the other team has the ball at their own 10 yard line and they are on the near hash. This might be a good time to sub your backup Corner in to the short side of the field, behind your strongest Defensive End. This may be for just a single play or more, depending on the down, distance and location on the field. Write that down and make it
part of your game plan. Jimmy goes in on plays to the friendly sideline and near hash. When you sub like this, those backups must follow their position coaches the entire game and be right at their sides. In leagues where you have minimum play rules, these snaps can be the difference in the game.

**Counting**

Some offenses flip their offensive line. You would be amazed at how many well coached teams just flip their lines to either put their 2 best blockers toward the side they are running or Double Wing teams who have a “pull” side and a “wall” side. Write down the numbers of the offensive linemen in the order they are aligned from Tight End to Tight End. If those numbers vary by play and they have not subbed in, something is going on. Look for patterns and adjust your defense accordingly, either blitzing into plays or making personnel flips based on the offenses tendencies. You will be amazed at how many teams do this and when you recognize it and respond it takes many teams and coaches out of their game.

**Flipping**

Lots of youth football teams like to run to the wide side of the field or to the right. Watch film and see how many teams go to play is to the right. Then look at when a team is on a hash mark and how often they run to the wide side of the field. Practice “flipping” your Defensive Ends. It makes sense to flip them with your better player to the wide side when the opponent shows tendency to the wide side.

**Flopping**

Flopping is moving your stronger Cornerback to tendency. Like anything you have to practice it. When we see trips we put our best Cornerback to the non-trips side, because most of the time teams go trips they are looking to isolate the back side with their best receiver. You might also want to do that to the wide side if you choose NOT to flip your better Defensive End to that side.

**Halftime Adjustments**

Halftime is a time where the kids get a breather and the coaching staff makes adjustments. These adjustments can include talking about technique, alignment or even stunts or blitzes you plan on calling in the second half. The problem many youth coaches have is they think they are dealing with College or NFL players and they draw things up on white boards or just verbalize what they plan on doing. When you ask a youth football player if he understands what you’ve just told him he will nod his head up and down. Now in the real adult world, that shaking means
yes. In the youth football world, that up and down shaking motion means yes, maybe and even no.

The best way for kids to get what you are trying to get across is to have them live it out. With the kids drinking water in the shade align your defense with kids sitting down in their positions. Now move the kids around as you enact the changes you have planned in the second half. If Billy at Defensive End is getting too far upfield, walk him through the path you want him to run. If your Corner hit the wrong gap on his Gunner Blitz, walk him through the correct gap. Kids will get what you are talking about if you walk them through it. When you make a 10 minute speech over the white board, they usually turn into glassy eyed nodding machines.

**Odd Outs**

Once you have the base defense and adjustments installed it makes sense to invest 5 minutes every week on oddball situations. These are things that you probably won’t see but are a real bugger if you do. While you will never have enough practice time to prepare against everything, here are a few that we will spend time with: Lonesome Polecat, Wrong Ball (illegal play), Throwback Pass, Double Pass, Statue of Liberty and Freeze Play.

**Conclusion**

Defense is key in youth football, don’t relegate it to the backburner and your team will have a much better chance at being consistently competitive. Remember that is coming from a coach that loves offense. Use the base scheme, drills and strategies in this book and DVD to the letter and your team will be able to stop most of the teams you play. They have been proven by my teams and hundreds all throughout the US at every age group.

Remember to go to the blog at [www.winningyouthfootball.com](http://www.winningyouthfootball.com) for more defensive tips and never hesitate to e-mail me at coachdave@winningyouthfootball.com to answer any questions you may have. I’m invested in you and your team and am always anxious to help you help your kids to have a special season.
About the Author

“Winning Youth Football, a Step by Step Plan” was written by Dave Cisar. Dave is the founder and President of the Screaming Eagles Organization. It was started in 1998 as a free program for at-risk youth in inner-city Omaha, Nebraska. In 2004 Dave started up the Lincoln, Nebraska area program and continues to coach there. The Omaha program became independent in 2007. His programs have served over 3,000 children ages 6-14 with programs in academic accountability, football, baseball, weight training and basketball.

He has coached over 20 years at all levels of youth football. His teams have played in 5 different Leagues in 2 different cities. Since moving to this system his teams have gone 139-20 and won multiple division, league and State Titles. He has spoken at over 100 youth coaching clinics all over the country including the Nike Coach of the Year Clinics and the Frank Glazier Mega Clinics. He has been on the same venue as Bobby Bowden, Les Miles, Ken Niumatalolo and Jeff Tedford to name just a few. He has worked with youth football programs in every state and several in Canada and has been brought on as a consultant to several High School football programs.

Dave is a former business owner in his forties and is a proud family man. He played college football at the University Nebraska at Omaha before transferring and graduating from Texas A&M University where he did not play sports. He gave his life to Christ in 1996.

Additional Materials:

To order additional materials go to dacisar@aol.com or www.winningyouthfootball.com

Installing the Single Wing Offense For Youth Football: $49.95
2 DVDs nearly 2 hours - White board instruction by Dave along with play clips inserted from his last 8 teams. You get practice tape clips, so you can see the plays and techniques in action as they are being discussed on the white board. Includes base blocking rules, detailed coaching points, implementation tricks and instructions to install the entire offense. Professionally developed by Reliant Video.

Winning Youth Football, a Step by Step Plan: $29.95
274 pages. This is the paperback book. We give you everything you need to succeed in coaching a youth football team. This isn’t written in “coach talk” and is easy to understand. We take you from the preseason coaches meetings through the last game of the season. This includes our practice plans and practice methodology as well as our drills, techniques and implementation break down steps. It includes our schemes and plays on offense, special teams and defense as well as the reads and adjustments. It is a
comprehensive guide to coaching effectively using the Single Wing Offense that anyone can use. It also contains some much needed team and program management material as well.

**Dominant Offensive Line Play in Youth Football - Step by Step on DVD - $39.95**

See how Dave builds his offensive lines step by step into cohesive aggressive units that gobble up chunks of yardage. You get the base blocking rules, stances, base block, down blocks, double teams, crab blocking, open field blocking, pulling and detailed wedge implementation. You get blocking rule implementation, adjustments, quickness development, advanced techniques, fun drills and more. Lot's of great practice and game footage included. 80 minute run time. Our best quality yet, Reliant Video product.

**2007 Games DVD: $29.95 on DVD**

See Dave’s age 10-11 team go 9-1. See the Jet Series in these DVD’s including all 6 plays in the series. This is an excellent resource with subtitles and with the games narrated by Dave. Produced by Reliant Video.

**2008 Games DVD: $29.95 on DVD**

See full games of all three of the teams Dave Coached in 2008. You get 3 full games of his age 7-9 team, 3 full games of his age 10-11 team and 1 full game of his age 12-13 team. Includes base, spinner, mouse, jet and burst series plays. All plays are subtitled, produced by Reliant Video.

**Game Day Management**

**Becoming a Good Game Day Coach $39.95 on DVD**

Learn how to effectively manage your game day, something that takes most coaches years develop. Learn how to effectively manage the pre-game, scouting, setting goals, spotting, making adjustments, managing playing time, play call sequencing, no-huddle methodology, clock management, coaching an effective halftime as well as a good post game wrap up. Included are Dave’s “Cheat Sheet” for effective play-calling based solely on his simple pre-count method. He reviews his easy to install game day scouting method to determining plays to be called and players to be coached up. Learn how to get the most out of your team and to “steal” games from more skilled opponents, through game day coaching. Includes both white board and game day clips of the 2006 season. Produced by Reliant Video.
The Practice Organization, The Perfect Practice $39.95 on DVD
Cut hours off your weekly practice grind using Dave’s practice methodology, while at the same time improving the skill levels of your players and team. See how he makes practices both fun and instructional so the kids beg to come to practice, not dread it. See his secrets to developing players and teams from scratch using progression teaching methods and his ease into contact approach. His player selection process and fit and freeze methods have helped his teams and many others make tremendous progress. These methods, games and drills make any youth coach look like a genius. Includes both white board instruction and lots of practice footage. Reliant Video product.

Single Wing 303- Advanced Single Wing Concepts : $44.95
DVD nearly 2 hours – Take your team to the next level with new plays, adjustments and game day strategies. Includes 217 page addendum with playside and complementary coach keys for every play. Includes the Spread Single Wing passing game, Buck Series and more advanced plays for the Jet, Spinner, Mouse and Base Series plays. Includes Hudl tutorial. For the advanced Single Wing coach who has had success and is looking to take your team to the next level. White board instruction by Dave along with practice and play clips inserted from his last 4 teams. Professionally developed by Reliant Video.

Developing Chemistry, Character and Confidence in Youth Football: $19.95
116 Pages CDROM – Learn how to develop the most important factor in your teams success, Chemistry and Character. Includes how to do it step-by-step with Dave’s tips and tricks along with coaching tools like the Link Program and 15 Character Lessons that you can choose to e-mail to your players and parents. See your team come together and play selflessly while your parents love you for caring beyond “football.”

Coaching Clinics
Go to the web site http://winningyouthfootball.com for more information about the Coaching Clinics Dave will be speaking at this year. He usually does about 20 public clinics at various locations across the US as well as a handful of private clinics.

Send checks to Dave Cisar, PO Box 274, Firth, NE 68358 or go to www.winningyouthfootball.com to order by Visa/MasterCard or Call 402-730-8151 to order by phone.